CutBank

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Spring 1993

CutBank 40

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CutBank 40
Crossing the Divide

Twentieth Anniversary Issue
CutBank 40: Crossing the Divide

Published in celebration of
The University of Montana's Centennial
1893-1993

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The University of Montana Foundation and
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CutBank

where the big fish lie

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

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- No. 27/28: Russell Chatham, Michael Dorris, Louise Erdrich, Melanie Rae Thon, Robert Wrigley.
- No. 29/30: Lowell Jaeger, William Kittredge, Greg Pape.
- No. 38: James Crumley, James Galvin, Rodney Jones, Montana Visual Arts Sampler.
- No. 39: Pattiann Rogers, Walter Pavlich, Jim Harrison, Gary Gildner.

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Spring 1993

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are pleased to present the 1992-93
A. B. Guthrie, Jr. Short Fiction Award to

Earl Ganz
for his short story "Momma Yo Quiero"
published in CutBank 40.

Judge: David Cates

The 1992-93
The Richard Hugo Memorial Poetry Award
is presented to

M. Earl Craig
for his poem "Some Lilac From My Mother"
published in CutBank 39.

Judge: Dara Wier

The Richard Hugo Memorial Poetry Award and the A. B. Guthrie, Jr. Short Fiction Award are granted once each year to work published in CutBank. Submissions are accepted from August 15 until February 1. Please send a stamped, self-addressed envelope for writers' guidelines.
Respectfully Dedicated to
Richard Hugo
Believe in this couple this day who come to picnic in the Faery Glen. They pay rain no matter, or wind. They spread their picnic under a gale-stunted rowan. Believe they grew tired of giants and heroes and know they believe in wise tiny creatures who live under the rocks.

Believe these odd mounds, the geologic joke played by those wise tiny creatures far from the world's pitiful demands: make money, stay sane. Believe the couple, by now soaked to the skin, sing their day as if dry, as if sheltered inside Castle Ewen. Be glad Castle Ewen's only a rock that looks like a castle. Be glad for no real king.

These wise tiny creatures, you'd better believe, have lived through it all: the Viking occupation, clan torturing clan, the Clearances, the World War II bomber gone down, a fiery boom on Beinn Edra. They saw it from here. They heard the sobs of last century's crofters trail off below where every day the Conon sets out determined for Uig. They remember the Viking who wandered off course, under the hazelnut tree hating aloud all he'd done.

Some days dance in the bracken. Some days go out wide and warm on bad roads to collect the dispossessed
and offer them homes. Some days celebrate addicts sweet in their dreams and hope to share with them a personal spectrum. The loch here's only a pond, the monster in it small as a wren.

Believe the couple who have finished their picnic and make wet love in the grass, the wise tiny creatures cheering them on. Believe in milestones, the day you left home forever and the cold open way a world wouldn't let you come in. Believe you and I are that couple. Believe you and I sing tiny and wise and could if we had to eat stone and go on.
The day was probably cloudy. Little did I know how fateful the moment was, thirty years ago, in the fall of 1962, on a flight of stairs at Portland State University where I was a first-year instructor, following in Richard Hugo’s wake on the way to his poetry reading. I overheard a student behind me say, “He doesn’t look like a poet,” and I looked at him and agreed, remembering from recent readings Robert Frost and Stephen Spender, all splendid white hair and solid, thinking also of Leroi Jones (not yet Amiri Baraka) and not yet thinking of Carolyn Kizer or Adrienne Rich because I had not yet heard a woman poet give a reading.

I remember the fateful moment, but I can no longer visualize the staircase nor the young woman who thought she knew what real poets look like. Nor can I be sure my memory of a wide back in a denim jacket, of short brown hair and a trail of uproarious laughter dates from that moment or from all the others which were—surprisingly—to follow. I can be sure that my notion of what “poets” look like was never so clear again.

Hugo would later tell his own “you don’t look like a poet” story: In a bar, a guy on the next stool asks, by way of making conversation, “What do you do?”

“I’m a poet,” Dick replies. The guy turns away, looks into his beer. Silence.

“I’m a truck driver,” Dick says after a bit.

“I thought so,” the guy says. “You don’t look like a poet.”

Not long ago I read that the best way to forget something is to repeat it. It sounds crazy, but my superimposed memories of Richard Hugo—colleague, friend, neighbor—have blurred that
early reading from *A Run of Jacks*, his first book. The only poets I had yet heard wrote of “universal” things—that is to say, things British or Eastern or otherwise remote from the green and cloudy region I called home. From Hugo, I remember fish and the strange familiar names of our region, the roaring lilt of his voice, and an elation that the ordinary counted and persisted. Subjects that might depress soared on those words, in that voice. I ignored the fact that he worked for Boeing. What I heard was poetry that sounded like my world, my language.

Poets became a part of my lived world. I finished my Ph.D., moved to Missoula to teach Comparative Literature at the University of Montana, and married a Hugo student and poet. A Ripley Schemm moved back to her native Montana, taught composition in the Forestry school, turned out to have worked on Hugo’s first book at the University of Minnesota Press. She and Hugo were married in 1974. Professor and poet Warren Carrier, who had arranged the reading in Portland, became head of UM’s English department, started up the MFA degree and hired Hugo.

In the giddy early days of the new program, Hugo could never believe his good fortune as students turned in poems that sent him up and down the hall saying, “Listen to this, isn’t this great?” The colleagues—James Lee Burke, Earl Ganz, Bill Kittredge, James Crumley, Madeline DeFrees. The MFA students—James Welch, Rick DeMarinis, Ed Lahey, Roberta Hill, Elizabeth Libbey, Quinton Duval, David Long, Neil McMahon.

Most of all, I remember his reading in the lovely old theater in Main Hall, his triumphant reading in May of 1979 after his return from that Guggenheim year on the Isle of Skye with Ripley and stepdaughter, Melissa. He was at the peak of his powers, and happy. That night he was triumphant. He read that title poem,
"The Right Madness on Skye":

Now I'm dead, load what's left on the wagon and have the oxen move on. Tell absentee landlord driver, Harry of Nothingham, slow. I want my last minutes on earth filled with this island. For a long time my days were nothing. My remarkable late surge I attribute to fanciful chefs: clouds in the salad. My dramatic reversal of fate insists on this will read aloud in this poem this day of my death. Have the oxen move on. Tell Harry of Nothingham, slow.

Do I remember his concluding with a triumphant upward jab of his fist and a big laugh—or do I import that gesture from other readings? Do I remember a tide of delighted applause? I wish we could squeeze out of the oak dining table at 2407 Wylie Street all the stories and poems and poetics and merriment that transpired there in those eight happiest years of his life. A night, for example, in June 1980, when poets Madeline DeFrees, Paul Zarzyski, David Steingass and Jonathan Holden (also a critic) sat with Jim, Dick, Ripley and I—all of us so delighted to see one another that conversations vibrated like taut strings across the table, news of new poems and reading trips—and Holden's professional questions for the book he was writing.

The excitement, that was it. Nothing in those years was more exciting than poetry. Though creative writing had been taught at UM since 1919, the MFA program had just started up and was thriving, and President Carter invited Hugo to the White House. And the president of the university paid his way. It's hard to remember how vibrant the culture of this country was before these
twelve Reagan-Bush neoconservative years took their toll, now
that so much effort has to go into defending the very existence of
the arts.

It was nothing particularly grand, either, the excitement of
those days, though the stories passed from one generation of
students to the next have become legend. That he was uproarious,
intimidating, vulnerable. Too heavy. He drank and smoked and
ate too much ice cream. Great storyteller. Self-pitying. Lover of
baseball. Depressed. All true. All that and more. A man who loved
poetry and playing softball, who loved fishing and jazz and big
cars and big blonds.

Richard Hugo taught at UM from 1964 until his death in
October 1982. He always felt lucky to be teaching. Over his desk
hung the etching from 1614 Boren Avenue in Seattle, saved from
the wreckers, the trigger for the poem of the same name. On his
desk, a few well-sharpened No. 2 pencils, but not the cup full of
them one remembers from Kicking the Loose Gravel Home, Annick
Smith’s film of Hugo’s life and work. He’d slit his mail open with
a shiny letter opener, deftly, from the left because he was left-
headed, with the same tender efficiency as he cleaned fish. I
would overhear him talking with students. Take someone through
the poem. Put a crocodile in it. Solicitous. Frowning. Always a bit
amazed that they came to him with their concerns. I think he
never knew how good he was, how he got students to write good
poems. His essays in The Triggering Town both show how he did
it and how uncertain he was about everything except his love for
poetry.

As I write, the first CutBank lies on the desk before me. Editor:
Whatever their strong ambitions, Bill and David didn't start this fine magazine with their eyes on its future collectibility. Their eyes were on strong writers: Gildner, Stafford, Carver, Plumly. All their fine works still lay ahead of them.

Twenty years have passed. The University is turning 100. Since 1985, I have run the Creative Writing program with the help of Patricia Goedicke, Greg Pape, Bill Kittredge, Earl Ganz and numerous part-timers. This is CutBank 40: Crossing the Divide, a double issue of writers from Alcosser to Zarzyski. The excitement goes on. We read now with post-modern eyes. We are more at ease with loss and absence, those Hugo-esque themes; we have learned we all live on the margins here—and it's great. Editor Judy Blunt says no writer can live in the West without knowing Hugo's work. Each of the writers in this fine centennial issue of CutBank attests to that.

Dick, we are making certain it goes on.
Introduction

True Beginnings at CutBank

When I came to teach at the University of Montana in the fall of 1969, Earl Ganz soon handed me the job of advising the student literary magazine, *The Garret*, which published only student and faculty writing. It was easy that year. The editor was Jon Jackson, who had come to Montana from upstate Michigan to study ornithology. He turned to writing, he claimed, because the students were more interesting, not more interesting than birds but more interesting than ornithologists; you can only spend so much time with birds, and they never want to go out for a drink afterwards.

Jon, who lives down the Bitterroot and has since published a number of first-rate police procedurals, did a terrific job with *The Garret*, printing among other things the most complex short story I've had the privilege of encountering, "Seagreen Incorruptible," a sort of palimpsest by an impossibly brilliant undergraduate named Edmund Apfell (who went on to the Writer's Workshop in Iowa City, published a novel, and, I think, now works in the medieval section of the Oakland Public Library).

But Jon left, and the magazine turned into a problem, mostly because of funding. The Associated Students at UM were putting up the money, and the Publication Board couldn't see the point of funding a magazine which was only interesting to a couple of dozen writers on campus.

By 1972 David Long, Gary Thompson, and I decided we should reinvent the entire wheel, and start a new magazine—we proposed to publish student and faculty work mixed with that of nationally established writers, and we promised to print art, a major selling point. In short, we proposed a "national" literary
magazine, one the entire student body, and the University, could regard with pride.

Surprise, we got the money. I remember the three of us in David Long's living room, trying to pick a name for the magazine. The name had to be one word, it had to be easy to remember, and it had to begin and end with a consonant (I'd been reading up on Ezra Pound at the time), and it had to have Montana connections. I went out to the car and got a map of Montana. I'd read a town name and we'd laugh. But after a while we settled on "CutBank." Maybe I forced the issue. I don't know that David or Gary liked it (or my "standards") too well. But I was the faculty advisor, and got my way. Which was the end of my influence. Some brilliant person, years later I think, added the subtitle, "where the big fish lie."

The next year I was gone to California. David, who has gone on to publish regularly in The New Yorker, and Gary, who teaches poetry writing at Chico State University in California, got the magazine published. Since then, students have done the work, trained their successors, and held things together.

That's the story so far as I understand it. It makes me swell up and act prideful.

—Bill Kittredge
Letter to CutBank from Kalispell

It was late fall of 1972, and we were convened around the table in the front room of that funky turquoise house Susy and I were renting near the fairgrounds. Bill Kittredge, Gary Thompson, Steve Christenson, and some others—the proto-editorial board. We were brainstorming names. (Kittredge had made us aware of H. G. Merriam's ground-breaking *Frontier* magazine—later *Frontier and Midland*—defunct since 1939, but we had no notion of resuscitating it.) We wanted something identifiably Western—muscular and resonant, non-hokey. We had the map spread out, I think. "Bitterroot?" somebody said. Nope, already was one of those.

"Face it, you guys were flailing," is my wife's recollection. Understand, she's not the least bit fuzzy about this. She walked through from another room, frowned indulgently at us, said "Cut Bank," and walked out.

So much for that problem. (What exactly was a cut bank, I wondered, but kept my mouth shut; I looked it up in a book.)

It's hard to remember these things without remembering how gloriously unreal my life seemed to me then. Susy and I had only been in town a matter of weeks. I'd grown up in Massachusetts, but more recently had done a stretch of time in southern Michigan. Missoula felt like a long airy dive into cool water. Susy and I cruised around in our Jeep, gawking and delighting, amazed that our flimsy hunch had come out so right.

Meantime, at *CutBank*, we launched into the preliminary busy work—got the word out, had the stationery printed up, dunned our writer friends and former teachers for their very finest stuff.
Before long we’d stumbled onto the First Law of Magazine Editing: *Many wish to publish*. And its discouraging corollary: *Nearly everything goes back*. We vowed to show a higher quality of mercy than we’d gotten from the misanthropes we’d submitted our own work to. We’d be timely and good-hearted and wise. (Here’s a nightmare: all the rejection slips I authored come parading back in all their appalling earnestness.) Abruptly, that lovely, liberating autumn gave way to a ferocious winter. The first week of December the temperature barely broke above twenty below; pipes burst, everyone’s rig quit. Down on Higgins Avenue, an old flophouse burned, taking with it an elderly gent named Longabaugh, said to be the son of the Sundance Kid.

Gradually, like crystals in a jar of sugar water, the first issue began to assert itself. It finally appeared in the spring of 1973. Across the cover stretched a line of old-timey cowboys, all horseback except for one taciturn youth on crutches (the original photo had hung on the wall of Eddie’s Club downtown, one of the editorial board’s branch offices). *CutBank* 1 it declared. The paper stock was five shades more *orange* than I’d expected. Inside was an amiable hodge-podge, hard to classify. If you weren’t a reader of contemporary poetry, some of it must have sounded head-poundingly bizarre. A few years later, Kittredge would write in an essay, “The art of a region begins to come mature when it is no longer what we think it should be.” I’d like to think we were part of that foiling of expectation. How many subscribers were there, how many copies did we pass out to chum the waters, or actually sell? I have no idea—but the second issue announces in minuscule print: *Copies of CutBank 1 still available.*

For all our relief at having gotten *CutBank* out, we didn’t know what we had exactly, or where it should go. We gave thought,
briefly, to unmooring it from the University. We could see the perils of having to justify its existence to new batches of student representatives every year. One night we brought our heavy artillery with us to the ASUM budget hearing in the person of Dick Hugo. Dick was our hero, our laureate. He'd survived some rough water in his life a short while before this, and was an odd mix of comic bluster and self-effacement and tender-heartedness. His collection *The Lady in Kicking Horse Reservoir* had just been nominated for the National Book Award. We sat, we waited. It was readily apparent that no one in the room had the least idea who Hugo was.

"Who's the fat guy?" someone was heard to ask. Dick stood up, rocked on his bad hip and spoke his piece; then we hauled him out of there as fast as humanly possible.

We survived that particular funding crisis, and decided to roll the editorship over to the next crew of MFAs. I'm happy it worked out that way. Editing's a great crash course for writers on the cusp of going professional—the whole business suddenly stops being so theoretical. You see how damn much less-than-urgent writing there is; you get so you can put your finger on where pretty good stories or poems go dead; and you learn how it feels to champion those rare pieces you're crazy about.

After that first issue, the second and third were more designed, not so randomly stuffed. Considering the times, I'm sure we debated about whether to be a smart little boat or a big gregarious pleasure craft, but I don't recall much rancor among the editors. The fiction seems flavored by Tom Robbins and Garcia Marquez; the poetry reminds me how in thrall we were to the "deep image." I remember Gary Thompson reading aloud lines of Rex Burwell's poem that opened *CutBank* 2, charmed by its inef-
fable logic: “Nothing expires except the light like a spoon/ that falls onto the dish of evening nouns....”

Keeping company with these issues again after twenty years is a pleasure spiked with recognitions, names and faces that had slipped away—Jane Bailey, Quinton Duval, Milo Miles, Ann Weisman, Andy Grossbardt. And pieces of writing I once loved—for instance, the gentle goofiness of Ed Harkness’s “Are You Thinking?” After I left CutBank for a stint of Poets in the Schools, I would rattle it off from memory in dozens of classrooms. This afternoon I close my eyes and find I still can:

Are you thinking, as you read this, that poetry has gone straight to the dogs, the cats, the terrible apples that drop year after year to rot near the tires and molding heaps of newspaper in Mrs. Roat’s orchard, Mrs. Roat, who never let you throw bricks in her goldfish pond because she was a witch whose charred face nobody quite saw, not even Ronnie Triplett, the strongest kid on our dead-end road, who actually pried up a manhole cover one time in the grass behind the bowling alley and fell to the bottom of a cold sewer pipe and just stayed down there kissing the cold slime, who was singing The Star Spangled Banner in a voice delicate as a bat’s eyelash when the cops pulled him out, is that what you’re thinking?

Friends, what I’m thinking is I wish you the absolute best. See you in another twenty.

—David Long
Robert Wrigley

A Cappella

for Marnie Bullock

Sensitive fellow and bellower of brimstone, our two preachers warred until the younger—married, soft-spoken—suffered what the congregation called "a nervous breakdown." We mulled this over and knew a line had been drawn. Benny left for the Methodists, flushed with luck and liberalism. Mark muled off with his homely sister, Sunday school and two church services per week, a lost soul sure to sell insurance. So there I was, child of equal time, compromise-kid, left to face the abyss alone, the rib-rattling, stentorian doom of the right Reverend Mr. Christian J. Kuhlman. But I could sing, so worked undercover, robed, a godly doo-wop a cappella spy dreaming of revenge.

How I found it, slim trap-door in the furnace room closet, I don't remember, but shinned up through every Sunday for a month to squat among the organ's pipes, doxologically drunk and reeling with the heart-rattling air. Through lattice I could see the congregation chewing their gristly hymns, heads bobbing in the battle with sleep. I could see the righteous and the wretched, the plump girl I'd talked out of her blouse
in the sacristy, the boy who would die in five more years, in a jungle
the rest of us had yet to learn.

And so it is the way with spring, old
Dionysian horniness afflicting the lewd
and lonely alike: This is your seed!
the Reverend Kuhlman roared
to the catechismal boys, who knew better
than to giggle, but half-believed
the church filled up on Easter
for the bulbs of gladioli, gratis and fraught
with the mysteries of fertility.
We made our glum procession,
junior choir in robes of angelic white.
Christ was risen again, one thousand
nine hundred, sixty-six times—an avalanche of rolled-away stones,
a gangland, machine gun massacre of nail holes—but we sang "Today! Today!" a cappella,
from the steps below the altar
while the Reverend Kuhlman beamed
for the seeds we'd become.

After the singing, the procession back out,
most of the choir hung around the flowery foyer,
where crates of bulbs sat like arks,
but not me, easing off, sprinting around the building,
my robe and stifling suit coat flung in the bushes.
I leapt down through the basement door,
the furnace room, and up the trap door hole.
to the place of held breaths, the forest of pipes. All the while he raged through a sermon on sacrifice, I sacrificed my one white shirt and plucked up pipes and switched their holes, untuning an instrument seventy-five years old, stuffing a pile of rags in the heavy basses, sweating, wild to be back in time and beaming, my hand held out, hearty, hilarious, smug as the saved.

Lucious Hart, the organist, went apoplectic at the first chord. I slid back in time to see him, aging, kindly, effeminate, fluttering down the stairs behind the altar, his undone black robe arcing out like insufficient wings. And if I guessed the Reverend Kuhlman would blame the Jews or the Catholics, it was an honest mistake, the Crucifixion, cards, whiskey, and the Communist Party all blamed on them before. But he didn't say a word, only stood at the pulpit, his head to one side, chin slightly up. He looked like Jesus, shaved and beatific, neither bellowing nor braying but waiting, until the wave of chatter washed against the church's back wall and returned as silence, then waiting a moment more before closing his eyes and singing of God, from whom all blessings flowed, in our church, almost a lament.
So we sang, and for a moment
even those of us who had vowed
never to give in, gave in
to so many ordinary voices trying
to make up for fiasco, to believe in real wings, to sing.
Through all the handshakes after, the hugs and mugs
of aunts and great aunts and grandmothers,
no one noted the smudge of coal dust on my cheek.
I was, after all, almost a child, dirt magnet,
dog-tailed, my voice barely lower than soprano.
The Reverend Kuhlman’s hand on my face
was a tenderness I might have known him by.
“Young gift,” he said to me, “is music,”
and there was Aunt Betty, snapping our picture,
the one so many years on the wall,
then in the album, for years spoken of
humorously, then ironically, then worse.
It was the day—Easter it was!—
when the Reverend took back his earlier prophecy.
No, he said, I wouldn’t preach after all,
but would find another way to make my peace
with music.
Flying Home in December

for Dick

If a creek ran quick through this meadow
of cloud, if you and I made a picnic
up here, tuna on white bread, an olive,
a pear, would we have to be careful,
sit on our coats, not bounce around?
We could hold hands as we fell.

Below is the Yellowstone—I can see
when clouds open, my face pressed flat
to glass—where we rode the train
from Billings, going East. That trip
it was chicken, on white bread again,
cole slaw, Mars Bars, coffee—lots
of coffee. And stories the miles unwound.
Kisses and jokes in a private compartment,
love for the country we owned
with our eyes, for the moon
that made silver of aspen.

Up here in the 747, I forgot
what you always told me: get a seat
on the right side heading West
so you won’t have sun in your eyes.
Clouds close again. I’m nearer home,
nearer the creek and the great red stone—
the stone that could hold us both.
This is December, too cold for a picnic.
But now that I think of it, ours
was a picnic that worked.
Ripley Schemm

Retelling the Story

The moon rides fast
these new black nights
and walking's cold. You can
click your teeth and head home
or stalk your shadow the length
of its legs backward—to mornings
you've already loved, to a story
you've already told.

You tell it again:
you're taking the trail
that climbs to the Pass.
An early morning. A two-year-old
rides your shoulders, an elf
in her dark blue hood.
A five-year-old's tawny thatch
bobs before you, the only warm color
in the low autumn sky of gray sky.

There's bounce to the sturdy trudge
of the boy up ahead. The mountains
take shape as you climb, step after step
on the trail's gray rock, rock broken
by wind and by cold. You're nearing
those clouds with their promise
of storm when a flutter
in the boy's thatch blurs orange,
is red, is black: a butterfly clings to the gold of his hair, the only warm color riding the mountain.

You call out, “Son, a butterfly’s resting in your hair!” He stops, turns back to you slowly, wonder blue in his eyes, his smile sly with caution. He turns again to the Pass, his head held still so his stride won’t jostle his lovely burden. And the last long mile to the wind at the top the butterfly clings to the boy’s gold thatch, to the only warm color rising.
The two F4-B Phantom jets came in low, real low, at about two hundred feet, probably traveling at somewhere around five hundred miles per hour. For the twenty months I had spent as a combat engineer on the outskirts of the DaNang air base in Vietnam, as a member of a Marine Air Wing, the fighter bombers had always been on my side. Now we were not on the same side.

On February 27, 1993, it will have been twenty years since members of the American Indian Movement, in concert with a grassroots organization named the Oglala Sioux Civil Rights Organization, took control of the village of Wounded Knee, S.D. The takeover of Wounded Knee village was the result of a century of maniacal oppression by white society; it was the first armed resistance by natives since the Seventh Cavalry revenged Custer's debacle and wiped out nearly four hundred members of Big Foot's band in 1890. My daughter, Dameon, was born the evening—at approximately the same time in the evening—that the village was overrun.

That term, overrun, is used deliberately. It is a term I became familiar with while reading the military newspaper, Stars and Stripes, during my stint in Vietnam. To hear that a village or an outpost had been overrun by the Viet Cong was bad news. Ultimately, though, that's what Wounded Knee was about, being overrun; native people being overrun by white people.

We—myself, another Blackfeet who during the Wounded Knee siege would not talk to reporters and still does not want his name mentioned in print concerning Wounded Knee, and Rudy Thunder Hawk, a Lakota from Pine Ridge reservation—were in the bunker when the fighter bombers came over that cloudy af-
temoon. At the low altitude and high speed I could appreciate the terror the North Vietnamese must have felt being on the receiving end of the sleek, dangerous planes that carry more than a million dollars worth of radar in their nose cones. That's what was claimed in 1965 in Vietnam, and those were 1965 dollars. The price today must be absolutely astounding.

1965 was the year I went to Vietnam. I was nineteen years old and believed we were fighting communist aggression. I went to school first grade through twelfth grade in Cut Bank, Montana, and we learned a lot about how communists were trying to take over the world. Dangerous bastards, them communists, it was parroted in the backwater town of Cut Bank. Cut Bank sits at the edge of the Blackfeet Indian reservation where I am an enrolled member.

Like all border towns, Cut Bank had some ideas about Indian people that later had a lot to do with what I would come to think about American society in general. Cut Bank's wealth had come from the land that had been wrested from the Blackfoot Confederacy, land that had wealth the Blackfeet knew nothing about, oil and gas, rich arable land that produced bumper crops of wheat and barley, land that had felt the great weight of the migrating buffalo herds pass over it and that now supported the domesticated breeds of European cattle.

In Vietnam the attitude of Cut Bank was evident in the arrogance of the American soldier toward the Vietnamese people. The Vietnamese, like the buffalo-culture Blackfeet, were a non-technological people, and the Americans had utter contempt for the ways they lived. At some point during my time in Vietnam I realized that this contempt and hatred for the Vietnamese people was the same hatred and contempt that had moved without conscience throughout the American West for the past century.
A specific instance can be culled from the 60 days I spent in the 3rd Marine Amphibious Force brig a few miles outside the city of DaNang. I had been imprisoned for what the Uniform Code of Military Justice called “fraternizing with Vietnamese nationals.” I did fraternize. She was about 25, with long black hair and the extraordinary dark and light beauty of the half-breed French-Vietnamese. We fraternized regularly. One night we were particularly careless in our fraternizing and were picked up by the military police as we zig-zagged down the street of Hoa Phat village—Marines called the village Dog Patch—drunk on Johnny Walker Red that had come from the Air Force side of the DaNang airstrip; fly boys were crazy over the Marine K-Bar combat knives and would trade us whole gallons of whiskey to obtain one for a souvenir.

While in the 3rd MAF brig, we were sent to load the cement chunks of an old French bunker that the Americans had knocked down for whatever reason—probably to give us something to do under the rubric of hard labor, which sentence had been pronounced upon us. We loaded the cement chunks, many of them weighing over a hundred pounds, onto the back of a six by six; then we all climbed aboard and rolled a joint of Vietnamese marijuana. While we were loading the cement chunks, the ubiquitous Vietnamese children had come close to watch us and, ultimately, covertly, out of sight of the guards who were our keepers for the day, make a deal. We traded two military field jackets for some smoke. We could always go to company supply and get another field jacket but they didn’t give joints out there.

The guards varied, some not giving a damn whether we smoked a joint while we were away from the brig area. There were some others who would only let you drink from your canteen of water when they told you to drink. They had authority in the form of
shotguns. The guards on this day were liberal, letting it be known that we had to smoke it all up before we got back to the brig area. The brig area guards were all hard core. They would check inside your mouth, your armpits, between your ass cheeks, in your ears, to make sure you hadn’t concealed some smoke inside a gum wrapper for later use inside the brig.

The day was hot sunshine as we started to cross a rice paddy. The road had been built up by Navy Seabees to handle the heavy military traffic that ran day and night. From the roadway to the rice paddy was a drop of approximately fifteen feet. A burly red-headed Marine was sitting in the front of the load of concrete chunks, looking ahead as we traveled over the rice paddy. Suddenly he reached down and grabbed a chunk of concrete that must have weighed at least fifty pounds, bringing the concrete chunk to arm’s length over his head and coming down with the chunk over the side of the truck. I was sitting on the side over which the chunk of concrete disappeared and immediately leaned over to see what the Marine had thrown the chunk at. An old Vietnamese man and his bicycle were tumbling down the side of the built-up roadway toward the rice paddy. Some of the Marines guffawed. Some, when they realized what had happened, sat silent, knowing that the act was uncalled for, that it had nothing to do with the war, that it was an overt act of racial hatred.

I knew that attitude. That attitude was in Cut Bank. It was the same attitude that had made me ashamed of my folks because they were Indians and materially poor, living in a white man’s town. Though I was employed by the United States government to fight what they called communist aggression, the aggression of racial hatred for a pastoral people who were hated because of their race, their color, their beliefs, would have much to do with why I was in Wounded Knee a few years later.
In Vietnam we loaded bombs twenty-four hours a day, three eight-hour shifts with Rough Terrain fork lifts, hydraulic M-60 cranes and bent backs. As a combat engineer I didn't have to take part in the hand-to-hand battles that the grunts did. However, the bomb revetment, we all knew, was not the safest place to work. In the next revetment to the bomb revetment was the fuel dump for the jet fighter bombers. Tens of thousands of gallons of JP5 jet fuel was stored there. JP5 is more volatile than gasoline; the Viet Cong knew it was more volatile than gasoline; once Lance Corporal Seeley made the wry observation that if the Viet Cong ever hit the fuel dump with mortars or rockets it would be sayonara fuel dump, sayonara bomb dump, sayonara jarheads. Nobody refuted his observation but the looks he received were enough for him not to mention it again.

Later, when my friend, John Pinkerton, arrived in Camp Pendleton, California, from DaNang, he told me that during the Tet offensive of 1968 the fuel dump had been hit by rockets. Our building that housed heavy equipment was more than a mile from the fuel dump. The building was flattened by the concussion. I was very happy to be in California and not DaNang when that happened.

And now, here, on the plains of South Dakota, the fighter bombers that I had kept fed day and night were being sent to look for me.

The Blackfeet man who must, by his request, remain nameless, had been in Vietnam, so the fighter bombers were not a new sight to him. But Thunder Hawk hadn't been too far from the Pine Ridge reservation. When the noise of the jets subsided and they disappeared in the west, he turned to us with an astonished stare. “Looks like they’re going to bomb us,” he said.

The nameless Blackfeet told him the planes didn’t have bombs

Kipp 27
attached. He explained that these were fighter-bombers, with the
bombs attached outside, under the wings, visible.

"They're just trying to psyche us out," said the Blackfeet. "They
didn't have bombs or cannon loaded on 'em." Psychological war­
fare. In Vietnam the military played upon the superstitions of the
Vietnamese people, dropping playing cards from airplanes by the
tens of thousands over what were suspected Viet Cong strong­
holds. One kind of playing card was dropped—the ace of spades.
The ace of spades is considered extreme bad luck by Vietnamese.
The other way was to tack the ace of spades to trees along jungle
paths thought to be used by Viet Cong. The psychological war­
fare of sending the fighter bombers over Wounded Knee didn't
have much effect; whoever sent the planes didn't understand the
level of commitment that had been made by the people who came
to Wounded Knee. We knew that, militarily, we could be wiped
out before Bob Dylan could finish singing "The Times They Are
A Changin'." We knew that. Psychological warfare doesn't work
too good on Kamikaze pilots. When people are ready to die for
what they believe, it is hard to threaten them with the forces that
are totally in the realm of the living who want to go on living.

The Phantoms made another pass a few minutes later, higher
this time, the pilots calculating, figuring the Indians wouldn't be
so shocked the second time; the second time they might turn their
deer-hunting rifles to the sky and fire.

The word had been out since the previous evening that by five
o'clock today if we hadn't laid down our arms and surrendered
the federal troops were moving in. As the day wore on five o'clock
was on everybody's mind. The Phantoms accentuated what five
o'clock meant.

At about two o'clock in the afternoon an Indian came to our
bunker, telling us to go to Crow Dog's tipi one at a time. I went
first, walking the half-mile leisurely, knowing the federal troops
in the nearby hills, scrunched down in their armored personnel
carriers were undoubtedly watching me as well as the rest of the
camp, knowing, too, that with their high-tech Starlite scopes they
could even monitor us in the dark.

Crow Dog’s tipi and sweat lodge sat at the bottom of the hill di­
rectly below the Wounded Knee Catholic Church. Behind the
church lies the mass grave of the Wounded Knee Massacre of
1890. Crow Dog, along with several other of the male members
of the occupation force were at that minute taking a sweat bath,
purifying themselves, calling upon the Great Mystery for deliver­
ance from these white devils He had created. During my early
years in the movement I had concluded that all white people,
given their actions since they had landed on this continent, surely
were possessed by the power of Satan himself.

The occupation was more than a week old by this time. Dur­
ing that time media teams had been barred from further entry to
the Wounded Knee area. Some of the more daring journalists had
made arrangements to be guided into Wounded Knee village by
locals under cover of darkness. Some were foreign journalists,
flown halfway around the world to capture the essence of this
strange and highly incongruous uprising, American Indians
armed with deer-hunting rifles challenging Uncle Sam to a duel
on the prairies.

I waited for Crow Dog to finish his prayers in the sweat lodge
and emerge to take care of the task for which we had been sum­
moned: Crow Dog was going to paint us to die at five o’clock. Ear­
er, I had attended a rally at the federal building in Missoula,
Montana, in support of the Indians in Wounded Knee. As I stood
waiting to be painted I thought of the sign I had seen a teenage
Indian girl carrying at the rally: Better to die on your feet than live
on your knees. In Missoula it had just been a militant slogan.

Many of the foreign journalists were waiting outside the sweat lodge, waiting for AIM leaders Crow Dog, Russell Means, Vernon Bellecourt, Clyde Bellecourt and Carter Camp to emerge with quotes for the publications back home, in Japan, France, England. A very pretty French woman journalist was close to the door of the sweat lodge when the door made of blankets was opened. Eager to see what an English journalist had termed “hocus pocus,” the woman journalist leaned into the door for a better view. Traditionally, sweat lodges were participated in by members of the same sex, without any clothing whatsoever. This was a traditional sweat, all male, all nude.

The crush of journalists trying to see inside the sacred lodge pushed the French woman forward, causing her to lose her balance as she tried to protect the lens of her camera. She fell. She fell nearly under the knees of the man sitting directly inside the door, sitting with his legs drawn up. She had to fight her way out of the crowding journalists and once outside, she stood a way off, looking stern and a bit perplexed by her initiation into the sweat lodge ceremony.

I knelt before the buffalo skull altar in Crow Dog’s tipi and he prayed in the Lakota tongue while he applied the paint. With my face painted for war I started back toward my bunker. The weapons used by the Indians in Wounded Knee were what are found on any reservation, what are found in most American homes where the men hunt: .22s, .30.30s, .30.06s, .270s and at least one .300 H & H Magnum that, somewhere, my nameless Blackfeet friend had acquired. I wasn’t so lucky. My weapon, bought for forty dollars at a secondhand store in Missoula, was a snubnosed .38 caliber. A gun like that is only accurate for a few yards, so I figured the war was going to have to get into pretty close quarters.
before I could participate. I longed for a rifle as five o’clock approached. I had accepted that we might die if the federal troops started moving in; if they moved I wanted to be able to shoot at them when they started coming; the .38 had seemed a good idea in Missoula—it could be concealed; but I wished for something I had heard a black Marine talk about in Vietnam when asked if he had ever engaged in hand-to-hand combat.

“Nope,” he said, “I don’t want none of that shit. I want to be able to bark over here and bite way over there.”

The wild killing frenzy that had happened here in 1890 crossed my mind several times that afternoon. It was frightening and at the same time it was reassuring. The white attitude of killing Indians, Vietnamese, anybody who wasn’t white, was why we were here. There were a lot of other reasons, too, but that was a main reason. The white attitude. The white technological power, a power so great the only defense against it is to declare yourself ready to die in an attempt to get the leaders of the white power to listen.

We were painted to die that day. There was no visible way of getting out of it once our faces had been painted. There was no way out if our faces hadn’t been painted, unless we were willing to surrender to the federal marshalls before five o’clock, before the deadline. We held no illusions of winning militarily; the only victory we could imagine as five o’clock crept upon us was the thought that if we were killed the media would report what had happened to the world, and that world opinion of the atrocities committed against native people might work to bring about change in Indian Country.

The scenarios we imagined that day in the bunker were bleak. If the armored personnel carriers moved in it would undoubtedly be with their .30 caliber machine guns spitting death in all direc-
tions. In 1890 the cavalry had positioned Hotchkiss guns above the Lakota camp, mowing down people indiscriminately as they tried to fight back or flee. Maybe in the interim since the Phantom fighter bombers had appeared they had been loaded with 20 millimeter cannons at the air base. Possibly a helicopter assault; the people who had been designated to run the show, we found out later, were recent returnees from Vietnam, the smell of Viet Cong blood still strong in their nostrils.

Nixon was president and though he would fall from grace due to Watergate, he was the only president in recent memory who had given land back to Indians. He returned the Sacred Blue Lake to the Taos Pueblo in 1970, a small piece of land, yet one with great spiritual significance to the Taos Pueblo. At least he knew there were still natives in the country; unlike many of those he led who thought that John Wayne had exterminated the last wagon-burning hostile. We knew that with all of the media attention that had, worldwide, been focused upon the occupation, the decision would come from high up as to how the deadline maneuvers would be carried out.

In the final hour the accumulating fear turned to adrenalin and was fear no longer. When five o'clock came and the armored personnel carriers remained silent we began to look for the Phantoms. They didn't come and soon it was six o'clock. Then the messenger Indian came around and told us the deadline had been extended and that we would live for at least one more day.

The one day turned into a lot of days, the occupation lasting for seventy one days, during which time some men were killed and others wounded. It was the first time in the history of the United States that regulars in the U.S. military were used against a civilian population.

It was not a popular war. But it was a war.
Every June 15th out at North Precinct, “A” relief and graveyard shift started killing dogs. If they were asked about it, the police brass and local politicians smiled, shook their heads, and said it was one of those old myths about the precinct that just wouldn’t die.

The cops at North Precinct called them “Night Dogs,” feral dogs, wild and half-wild, who roamed the districts after dark. Their ancestors had been pets, beaten and abandoned by their owners to breed and give birth on the streets. Some paused only long enough to eat the afterbirth before leaving their newborns to die. But there were others, gaunt and weak, who suckled and watched over their mewling litters. Yellow-eyed, their gums bleeding, they carried them one by one to some new safe place every few nights, out of instinct. Or out of love. You might call it love, but none of the cops at North ever used that word.

Survivors were lean and quick, Pit Bull and Doberman in their blood, averaging fifty or sixty pounds. Anything smaller eventually starved to death if it wasn’t run down and killed by larger dogs, cornered by children with rocks and bats, or caught in the street by flaring headlights after the bars closed. A quick death the only good luck those dogs would ever know before they were plowed into reeking landfills or dumped in the “Dead Animal Bin” behind the Humane Society gas chamber.

Night Dogs carried a scent of fear and rot in their fur, and the cops at North Precinct said they could smell them in the dark—stalking the chain-link fences of restaurant parking lots on graveyard shift, prowling supermarket dumpsters or crouched, ears back, in the shadows of McDonald’s dark arches. When the
winter rains came, and food got scarce, they ate their own shit and each other.

They waited for night in fire-gutted houses and boarded up cellars, abandoned buildings the neighborhood used as garbage dumps before setting them on fire.

Most of the cops would have let the dogs live their wretched lives, but too many were crazy, vicious from inbreeding, putrid food, brain damage. Some thought just the stress of everyday survival made them that way. Everybody had a theory, but in the end it didn't matter.

When radio sent a patrol car on a dog bite, to "check for an ambulance," they usually found children, lying absolutely still, trying to distance themselves from the pain that hurt them worse if they cried. Their eyes gave away nothing, the pupils huge and distant in their bloody faces, as if they had just seen a miracle.

Sometimes the dogs attacked grown men, even cops, as if they wanted to die, growing bolder and more dangerous in the summer, when people stayed out after dark, and rabies began to spread. It came with warm weather, carried by the night wind and nocturnal animals gone mad—prehistoric possums with pig eyes and needle teeth, squealing in the alleys. Rats out on the sidewalks at noon, sluggish and dazed. Raccoons hissing in the nettles and high grass along culverts and polluted golf course creeks. Bats falling from the sky, and dreamy-eyed skunks staggering out of the West Hills, choking on their own tongues, their hearts shuddering with the virus they carried, an evil older than cities or civilization—messengers perhaps, sent by some brooding, wounded promise we betrayed and left for dead back when the world was still only darkness and frozen seas.

Late one night at the Police Club, some of the cops from North
were talking about it. They'd been drinking for quite a while when a cop named Hanson said you couldn't really blame the dogs.

Well hell, who do you blame then?
Someone back in the corner slammed his beer down.
Fuck blame. You just kill 'em.

APRIL 1975

It had been raining all week. The night before there had been a thunderstorm, unusual for April, but on Thursday afternoon it was the normal Oregon drizzle, and neither of the two cops bothered to wear a raincoat. Hanson was wearing the yellow "happy face" pin that he'd taken off the body of a kid who'd OD'd on heroin back in December. He'd found him dead in a gas station bathroom, long blond hair and gray skin, sitting on the toilet, the needle still in his arm. The pin was a little sun-face of close-set eyes and a mindless smile that seemed to say, "I'm harmless and nice." He'd noticed the pin in the bottom of his locker before roll call that afternoon, and had stuck it on his shirt just above the gold police badge.

The two cops walked around to the back of the house and tried the door: The dispatcher had sent them to "check on the welfare" of the old man who lived there, to see if he was dead. One of the neighbors had called and said that she was worried. She hadn't seen him in a week.

A row of bug-eaten rose bushes bordered the house. They had grown over and into one another, forming a ragged hedge. The blossoms had been battered by the thunderstorm, half their petals fallen, frail pink, veined and translucent as eyelids on the wet grass. The whole yard smelled of roses.
Dana, the big cop, knocked on the door with his flashlight and shouted, "Police." Hanson picked up a rose petal, smelled it, then put it on his tongue. "Police," Dana shouted.

They found an unlocked window, and both of them pushed up on it. Layers of old paint cracked and splintered off the frame as it broke free. They muscled it open three inches before it wedged to a stop and the sweet stink of a dead body rolled out on a wave of hot air.

When Dana kicked the back door, the knob fell off and the little window shattered, sucking a greasy curtain out through the splinters. He kicked again and the door shuddered. A shard of glass dropped onto the concrete stoop.

"Maybe you're too old for this," Hanson said.

Dana smiled at him, a little out of breath, took half a step back and drove the heel of his boot into the door. The frame splintered and the door swung open in an explosion of glass and paint chips, dust and splintered wood.

A burner on the electric stove in the kitchen glowed sullenly, its heat touching Hanson's cheek through the rancid air. Dirty plates and bowls were piled by the sink, and in one of them, something that had once been red was turning green. A pair of pink-and-yellow dentures waited beneath gray dishwater that rippled with mosquito larva. "Police," Hanson called, "Police Officers," breathing shallowly, the sweet air like fog on his face.

The room beyond the kitchen seemed very long, narrowing and murky at the far end, and as he held his breath, he felt like a diver working his way through a sunken ship.

Thousands of green flies covered the windows like curtains, shimmering in the gray light as they beat against the glass.

The old man was in the living room, lying on his back. He'd
been dead for days, and the body was ripe. His chest and belly had ballooned, arching his back in a wrestler’s bridge, as if he was still struggling against death. His eyes and beard and shaggy hair sparkled silver-white with energy, boiling with maggots. Broken capillaries highlighted his features with a tracery of dried blood, shadowing his forehead and nose and cheekbones like brutal makeup. He was wearing a set of one-piece underwear, the kind that buttons up the front, and he was so swollen that all the buttons had torn out, ripping open from neck to crotch.

The old man’s chest and belly were translucent as wax, mottled with terrible blue bruises where the blood had pooled after he died. One foot had turned black as iron. The two cops stood over him, breathing through their mouths. The furnace hummed beneath the floor, pumping out heat. Flies droned and battered the windows. Something coughed behind them and they spun around, hands on their guns.

It was a small black dog. He was very old, his muzzle gray, the fur worn off the backs of his legs. He was trying to growl, shivering with the effort. He looked up at them without fear, with the dignity that old dogs have. Both blind eyes were milky white.

“Look here, old dog,” Dana said, “it’s just the Po-lice.” He knelt down and slowly moved his hand to stroke the dog’s head. “Been hot in here, hasn’t it?” He went into the kitchen and brought back a bowl of water that the dog lapped up slowly, not stopping until it was all gone.

They turned off the furnace, then beat the flies away from the front windows and opened them. Hanson saw the envelope taped to the wall above the telephone. Where the address should be were the words, “When I die please see that my daughter, Sarah Stockner, gets this envelope. Her phone number is listed below.
Thank you.” It was signed, “Cyrus Stockner.” Beneath his signature he’d written in ink, “I’d appreciate it if you’d look after my dog Truman.”

Hanson called the number and a man answered. “Hello,” Hanson said, “this is Officer Hanson from the Police Bureau. Is Sarah Stockner there?”

“That’s my wife’s maiden name. It’s Sarah Jensen now.”

“Is her father’s name Cyrus Stockner?”

“Right. What’s the problem? My wife isn’t here.”

“Mr. Stockner is dead. We’re at his house. On Albina Street?”

Hanson thought he could hear a radio transmission in the static. He checked the safety snap on his holster, out of habit, as he did dozens of times during the shift.

“Sir?”

“Some nigger junkie did it, right? Son of a bitch.”

“It looks like a natural death. There’s an envelope here addressed to your wife. We could bring it by if you’d like.”

“I’ll come over there and get it. I don’t want a police car in the driveway.”

“Mr. Jensen, he’s been dead for quite a while. It’s kind of unpleasant here.”

“Lovely. That’s just great. I’ll be there in ten minutes. Is that okay?”

“Sure,” Hanson said. “We’ll be here for a while.”

He looked at the phone for a moment, then hung it up and walked across the hall to the bedroom. The covers on the bed had been thrown back, and he wondered if the old man had gotten up just so he wouldn’t die in bed. Books filled the wall-to-wall glass-fronted book cases and magazines were stacked on the floor beneath them—Science American, Popular Mechanics, National
Geographic, something called Science and Design, published in England, many of them dating back to the thirties. Hanson picked one up and thumbed through it. The old man had bracketed paragraphs and underlined sentences in pencil. Down the margin of one page he'd written “This kind of easy ambiguous conclusion is the heart of the problem. They're afraid to make the difficult decisions.”

Some of the books went back to the 1800s. Hanson picked up one with the word “STEAM” embossed in gold letters across the leather cover. A golden planet Earth spun beneath the word STEAM, powered through its orbits by two huge elbow pipes, one sticking out of the Pacific Ocean, the other rising from North Africa, both of them pumping golden clouds of steam. The book was filled with flow charts and numerical tables, exploded diagrams of valves and heat-return systems, fine engravings of steam boilers. It was as if the book contained all the rules for a predictable steam-driven Universe, a World of order and dependability.

Photographs covered one wall, old photographs where the hands and faces of people passing in the background were streaked and blurred by their movement. The old man, alive, looked out at Hanson from them, his age changing from twenty to fifty, a mustache there, a beard in one, looking out from the beams and pipes of a power plant, standing by a Ford coupe on a dirt road, holding a stringer of trout, looking out from each one as if he had something to tell him, something that Hanson had been trying to figure out for a long time. A double-barrelled Winchester shotgun with exposed hammers stood propped in the corner next to the bed. Hanson picked it up, brought it to his shoulder, then lowered it and thumbed it open. Brass-cased buckshot rounds shone in the steel receiver. When he closed the
gun, the action clicked shut like tumblers in a lock.

Hanson looked out through the bedroom door at the old man. He thought of the thunderstorm the night before, and imagined lightning, like flash powder for old photos, blazing through the house, lighting the room for an instant, freezing it in time. The old man, the dog, and the green-and-gold curtains of flies swarming the windows.

Dana's voice came up through the floor, calling him down to the basement.

"He made this," Dana said, spinning the chrome-silver wheel of a lathe. "Hand-ground those carbon steel blades. Look," he said, slapping the cast-iron base, "the bearings, the bed, everything. The best craftsmen make their own tools.

"That's a forge over there," he said, pointing. "He could melt steel in that. In his basement. And come on over here," he said, "look at this work bench...."

"Hello? Are you down there?" It was the medical examiner at the top of the stairs, his face flushed, wearing a wrinkled gray suit. He looked like a salesman down on his luck. "It's a ripe one all right. I just hope we can get it in the bag intact."

The three of them went out to the M.E.'s station wagon. The sun had come out and the grass was steaming. Dana helped him unfold the aluminum gurney and Hanson pulled out the body bag. He prepared himself for that acrid smell of rubberized plastic, like the dead air leaking from a tire.

They had known that the North Vietnamese were planning to attack the launch site. The agent reports, radio intercepts, recon sightings, everything pointed to a battalion-size force. They were
out there, building up, waiting for the right night to blow the wire and overrun the camp while C-120 transports brought in supplies during the daylight hours. They low-lexed the stuff, afraid to land, coming down only long enough to touch their wheels on the little airstrip, kick the aluminum pallets out the back as the engines roared, then take off again.

Hanson remembered the sound of the engines straining for altitude and the pop of small arms fire coming from the jungle beyond the wire, the thud of the pallets when they hit the runway and skidded to a stop through clouds of red dust. Most of the pallets contained ammunition and canned food, but one morning, when they drove the old deuce-and-a-half truck out to the runway, they found a crate of body bags.

“Body bags,” Hanson had shouted as he drove, skidding and bumping, back into the camp. “Who the fuck cares? They want us neat and all bagged-up when we’re dead.”

They were stacking the bags in the shed where they kept the red wooden coffins when Hanson proposed the body bag sack race. “Like a 4th of July gunny-sack race,” he said.

They marked off a fifty-yard course along the inner perimeter road, then Hanson, Quinn, Silver and Dawson each climbed into a body bag and zipped it up chest high. “Now,” Hanson shouted. “Get ready. For God and America. Hop!” The four of them hopped down the dirt road in the sun, pulling the bags up to their chins, the hot rubber smell pumping up into their faces with each hop. Silver heat shimmered above the road. The dog, Hose, his deformed head tilted to the side, ran alongside, wheezing and barking. Hanson won the race and they all fell down, out of breath, laughing as the dog ran from one to the other licking their faces.
Silver was dead two days later, and three weeks after that Hanson watched Quinn die.

They tucked the body bag under and around the old man, like a rubber sleeping bag, and zipped it closed. Hanson slipped his hands beneath the bloated shoulders and the M.E. took the feet.

"Real easy now," the M.E. said, "easy..."

As they lifted the body there was a sound like someone sitting up suddenly in the bathtub, but not exactly like that, as the weight shifted, and they dumped the bag on the gurney where it quivered like a water bed. The M.E. said, "Damn."

"Damn," he said again. "What a week. Monday I had to police up a skydiver whose chute didn't open. That's a stupid so-called 'sport' if you ask me. And the next day there was the son of a bitch—pardon my French—out in the county, who shot himself in the kitchen and left the stove on. The body popped. It exploded before anybody found it. One hundred and nineteen degrees in that trailer house. That's official. I hung a thermometer. I mean, is that some cheap, thoughtless behavior, or what? People just don't think. If you want to kill yourself, fine. That's your business. But show a little courtesy to others. The world goes on, you know."

A supervisor had to cover any situation involving a death, even if it was a natural, and Sergeant Bendix was out in front of the house, standing by his patrol car, nodding and listening to the man in khaki trousers and blue dress shirt who had driven up in a grey Mercedes. The M.E. drove off in his county station wagon as Dana and Hanson walked over to them. Hanson's wool uniform was still damp, heavy and hot in the sun. It would be at least another month, he thought, before the department switched over
to short-sleeve shirts. Bendix watched them come, tapping his own chest as he looked straight at Hanson. "The happy face," Dana said.

Hanson glanced down at the yellow face that smiled from his shirt as if saying, "If you like everybody, everybody will like you." He took it off and dropped it in his breast pocket.

They nodded to Mr. Jensen as Bendix introduced him.

"Not much doubt it was a natural," Dana told them, "but the body's been in there quite a while."

"The end of a perfect day," Jensen said. He looked at the house and shook his head. "He was a smart man. He'd secured patents on a few of his inventions. Nothing that ever made money. A smart man, but his own worst enemy." He looked at Hanson, and Hanson nodded.

"We had the money to move him out of this neighborhood and put him in a home. I mean a nice place. Not a nursing home. Where there were other people he could relate to. It was the only sensible thing to do, but he wouldn't even talk about it," Jensen said, looking at the house where a seedy robin in the front yard cocked his head and studied a patch of dead grass with one eye.

"In denial," Sergeant Bendix said.

The robin pecked the grass.

"A refusal to come to terms with his own mortality," Sergeant Bendix said. "Quite common at his age."

The bird flew off as Aaron Allen's Cadillac pulled out of an alley in the middle of the next block, the radio thumping bass as it rolled across the street and disappeared into the mouth of the opposite alley.

"He said he'd shoot anyone who tried to move him," Jensen said.
“Where’s that envelope?” Sergeant Bendix said.
“Still in the house,” Dana said. “What about the dog?”
“Dog?” Jensen said. “What dog?”
“An old black dog. About this big. Sir.”
“Is that dog still alive?”
“Correct. That’s why I mentioned it.”
“Thank you, Officer. Having done that, could you call the appropriate agency to dispose of it? Put it out of its misery?” Jensen said, looking at his watch. “Sergeant,” he said, turning to Bendix, “can you people take care of that for me? It’s not a major problem is it? I have to go home and deal with a hysterical wife. I have a funeral to work out. I’m going to have to think of something to do with that house and all the shit in it....”
“We’ll take care of it, Mr. Jensen," Sergeant Bendix said. “Can we do that?” he said, turning to Dana and Hanson.
“Sure,” Dana said.
“I’ll get the envelope,” Hanson said.

The envelope was taped to the wall just below a large framed document that declared Cyrus Stockner to be a member of The International Brotherhood of Machinists. It was printed in color with gilt edges. The fine engraving in each corner showed men at work—turning a silver cylinder of steel on a lathe, measuring tolerances with calipers, others standing at a forge, yellow and gold clouds of heat and smoke rolling over them. The center of the document was dominated by a huge black and silver steam engine tended by powerfully built men wearing engineer’s caps.

“Do me a favor and get the rest of that asshole’s information? I’m afraid I’ll say something that’ll get me some time off.”
“Okay,” Hanson said, peeling the envelope off the wall. “You’re gettin’ awful sensitive in your old age.”
"You know what's gonna happen to that?" Dana said, looking at the document. "You know what he's gonna do with that, and the tools, and the books? All of it. If the neighborhood assholes don't set the place on fire first. After ripping off anything they can sell to buy dope."

He turned and looked out the door at Jensen and Bendix. "He's gonna shit-can it. He won't even take the trouble to give it away. He'll just pay somebody to haul it to the dump."

The dog stood staring up at the cops, listening to Dana.

"Shit," Dana said, kneeling down to stroke the dog's head. "You can come on with us. We'll work something out."

After Jensen and Sergeant Bendix left, Dana took a hammer and a handful of nails from the basement and began to nail the back door shut. The dog followed Hanson as he walked through the house, closing and locking the windows.

He took one more look around the bedroom, kneeling at the bookcases to read the titles on the lower shelves, touching some of the books. He paused at each photo, half hoping for some revelation, but the sun had moved and thrown them into shadow.

After several false starts, the dog hopped stiffly onto the bed and curled up. As if it was just another day, Hanson thought, turning to shut the window, as if things would be back to normal.

It was the second time Hanson had seen him walk by. Out on the sidewalk, looking at the house now. Motherfucker with a ratty Afro and the knee-length leather coat he must have bought out of the trunk of a car.

"Just looking," Hanson said to the dog, as the guy on the sidewalk lit a cigarette. "They're always looking. Something they can just walk off with. A woman with a purse. Maybe some old man they can knock down for his Social Security check, break his hip"
and he dies of pneumonia alone in his goddamn bed. So they can buy dope and not know who they are. Lookers. Don't know, never knew anything about work or doing something right. Fuckers everywhere after dark, parked in cars, smoke coming out the windows...,” he said going through the doorway where he turned and looked back at the dog.

“I'll be right back.”

“Hey,” Hanson called. “You,” pushing through the screen door, as the guy was walking away. “Come’re.”

“You looking for somebody, my man?” Hanson said, walking up on him. “You lost? New in town?”

“Naw, man. I'm...”

“Maybe I can help you find an address.”

“I...I'm takin' a walk.”

“I know what you're doing.”

“Say what?”

“What's your name?”

“I...Curtis. My name Curtis.”

“Curtis what? You got a last name?”

His throat worked like he was going to be sick, choking up his name, “Barr.”

“Let's see some I.D.”

“I.D.? For a...to take a walk?”

Dana's hammering, at the back of the house, echoed through the neighborhood. Hanson stepped in closer until their chests were almost touching, smelling marijuana smoke and sour sweat, looking him in the eyes.

“You want to show me some I.D.,” Hanson said, his eyes on him now, “or you want to go to jail?”

“Jail? Man....”
Hanson studied his head like he could split the skin and set his hair on fire with his eyes.

"Always gotta be fuckin' with somebody," he said, bending down and pulling up one leg of his bell-bottoms.

"I mean, I...shit." He unzipped his boot, pulled down his sock, and took out a wallet.

"Photo I.D.," Hanson said.

He peeled off a driver's license, damp with sweat and gave it to Hanson.

"This is expired," Hanson said, holding it with the tips of two fingers. "What's your current address?"

"Fifteen, uh, fifteen. Same as it says there."

Hanson copied the information in the little brown notebook he kept in his hip pocket, and handed the license back.

"Walk somewhere else. I don't want to see you on this block anymore."

"You telling me...?"

"That's right. Not on this block. A friend of mine lives in that house," Hanson said, nodding toward it.

"Don't even look at it. Look at me. If anything happens to his house, I'm gonna come after you. Curtis."

Curtis opened his mouth, his throat working.

"Goodby," Hanson said. "Have a nice day. Sir."

Curtis stumbled over his own feet turning away. Halfway down the block, he glanced back.

"That's right, motherfucker," Hanson whispered to him.

The old dog seemed unconcerned when they put him in the patrol car, as if he had been expecting them all those days and nights alone in the house with the body.
The dog sat up in the back seat of the car, behind the cage, as they drove through the ghetto, past the porno movies and burned-out storefronts, the winos passed out in doorways, junkies wandering, dreamlike, in the sun.

Hanson took the happy face out of his pocket and smiled down at it. "Mister Happy Face says, 'If you keep smiling everything will turn out fine.'"

He pinned it back on his shirt.

"Jesus," he said, gesturing out the window where black and red graffiti spooled along the broken sidewalks and the windows of abandoned stores, "look at this shit. I don't even notice most of the time. And when I do, I wonder what's gonna happen. You know? What's gonna happen next?"

"It's just gonna get worse," Dana said, his eyes on the street.

"Yeah," Hanson said, as they passed a bag lady screaming at the sky, "I know. But then what happens?"

"Then it's the end of the world. The cockroaches take over."

Norman, his foot in a cast, was working the desk at North, watching the little TV he'd brought from home. As Hanson reached to open the precinct door, he saw Norman watching him in the silver convex mirror across the hall from the desk. Like all good cops, Norman watched everything, all the time.

"You looking for the animal control office?" Norman said, his back still to them, as they walked in. "This is North precinct. We just shoot 'em up here," he said, pulling the sawed-off double barrel shotgun from beneath the desk.

Hanson heard the sound of distant helicopters, the unmistakable shudder of Hueys.

"Norman, that broken toe's got to be healed by now. I think
you're milking disability," Dana said.

"Hey, the doctor knows best. I'm just a dumb cop."

"Getting paid eleven dollars an hour to watch TV. My tax dollars at work," Hanson said, glancing at the TV.

"What's with the mutt?" Norman said.

"How about taking care of him till end of shift?" Dana said, setting the dog down on the dark red tile.

"He better not shit on the floor."

"If he does, I'll clean it up."

The TV volume was turned down, almost drowned out by radio traffic from North and East precincts. The early news was on, footage of helicopters rising from the American Embassy in Saigon, Vietnamese civilians in white shirts trying to hang onto the skids, dropping back to the roof, one by one, as American soldiers, shadows in the chopper doors, drove rifle butts down on their hands.

Norman pulled himself out of the chair and looked over the counter.

"Fuckin' dog's blind," he said.

"I think that's against the Geneva Convention," Hanson said, nodding at the shotgun.

"Over there, in-country maybe, but back here in The World you can use it on civilians. No problem. Why don't I call animal control to come and get him?"

"We'll pick him up at the end of the shift."

"Okay. If you think you can handle the desk for a minute—in a professional fucking manner—I'll go see if I can find a blanket for Barko there."

On the TV, a reporter looked into the camera, shouting over the roar of helicopters.
"They been showing that same footage all fucking night," Norman said.

Delicate women on the roof raised their arms to the departing helicopters, the rotor blast tearing at the folds of their silk *ao d"ai*, whipping their long black hair.

"Shit," Norman said. He punched the TV off with the muzzle of the shotgun and limped out from behind the desk. He bent down to look at the dog, and shook his head. "He's gotta be over a hundred, in dog years."

"Helen's not gonna let me keep that dog. Not with that cat of hers," Dana said as they pulled out of the lot to cover Crane at a family-fight, on the way out to their district. "You on the other hand...."

"I got no use for a dog."

*Five Sixty-Two*, Crane said over the radio, people screaming in the background, *can you step it up a little?*

Hanson snatched up the mike. "On our way," he said, flipping on the overheads and the siren as Dana blew a red light and accelerated.

"They eat 'em in Hong Kong," he said.

"What?" Dana said, rolling his window up against the siren.

"Dogs. People eat 'em in Hong Kong."

That was the week there were so many moths, millions of them. Word at the precinct was that they swarmed that way only once every seven years, though someone else said it was because of the new nuclear plant up north. A long stretch of road back to the precinct was lined with a monotonous, evenly spaced row of new streetlights, those big brushed aluminum poles that rise, then
bend over the road like a hand on a wrist. The moths covered those lights like bee swarms, throwing themselves at the yellow bulbs again and again until they crippled a wing and fell to the street so that the puddles of light on the asphalt below the streetlights were heaped with thousands of dead and dying moths.

Each time the patrol car passed beneath one of the lights that night, on the way back to the precinct at the end of shift, the tires made a fragile ripping sound, as though the street was still wet with rain. The sweet stink of the old man’s corpse hung in Hanson’s wool uniform the way cigarette smoke hangs in the hair of the woman you’re sleeping with. Dana kept their speed steady, and the ripping sound continued as regularly and softly as breathing.

Hanson adjusted his handcuffs where they dug into the small of his back and looked out at the night. He reached down and touched the leather-bound book he had slipped beneath the seat of the patrol car, the one that showed the earth spinning itself through golden clouds of steam.

“I can take the dog,” he said.
Because We Are Not Separate

Morning. Here on the calm bed waking
smoothly, almost as if there were no difference

between the center and the outer edges, those thin fringes
most of us race around in

and can't get out of, trapped

like cars on the expressways, with the hot
breath of exhaust on our necks, frantic

as scuttling crabs, with the sea drawn back from its margins
retreating, leaving its brittle frill on the beach

no wonder there's no faith we can feel, not permanently,

* 

except behind the eyelids drifting.

Idle as dust motes, quiet
now, here in the dark of the self

where everyone lives, hidden

in the blessed secular smoothness
every once in awhile of no crime, no criminal,

first to return is the skin, exquisite
as a hummingbird, the swift kick of its
tiny feathers flickering

almost too fast but slow down,
here are the legs, I can feel them!

*

In the empty rain barrel what has hardened

over the years squeezed dry, tossed in a waterless corner
is blossoming now, unfurling itself like a sponge,

as white sheets slip along the calves
like a cool breeze, iridescent

the foot like a leaf flexes
and then relaxes, such lightness

I can hardly believe it, floating in my bones

with nothing to weigh me down, connected
to the hairbrush on the floor, to the humming telephone lines

outside my window there is sunlight, there is water
and a thousand bittersweet cries,

*

for in spite of the harsh traffic,
the bleeding houses, the smoke
or because of it, who knows because we are not separate,

by accident sometimes it really is possible to join our own edges:

with luck and a long sigh moving

soft, wild, familiar as a wet flower, gardenia pearled in its leaves,

the self that is no self contracts and then expands, the boat that is no boat takes over

* as the ship that contains nothing disappears far back in the head, it sinks below the horizon to a sea full of tiny strangers who are not strangers, deep as the world is small among gray land masses, vague memories moving like lazy swimmers, here in the shy dark of our own pillows, pieces of all we have ever met or not met, easy as feathers come sailing into each exquisite pore of the skin entire oceans going out and then returning, meeting themselves coming back in.
Losing Eurydice, Neutrinos & Quarks

This story of Orpheus & Eurydice, for example, same plot as quantum mechanics. The energy applied to observation—(the slow turn of the head, the electron microscope, suspicion) changes the loved one forever.

This active measure alters the elements, busts couples up and creates a lag time from event to perception. Phone calls from a bar somewhere, the ghostly trail of light shattered by the bombarding eyes of electrons until all we are sure of moves backwards in time, as abstraction, answering only to names like Truth, Beauty, & Grace.

There is first the impulse just to look, then, to touch. An impulse like that next breath, heartbeat—and she is flying down a windy sound her dress straight out like a flag disappearing down the yawning tunnel into a bottomless yellow grim.

Here is the shape she would've been—arms out, ashen, a look of relief & disbelief. Looking starved to death on the probability of love in hell. The absolute absence of choice. A single red fruit bulging with seeds in a barbed wire garden.
First, she reached out a hand to him, then, covered her face. As though he’d caressed her, indifferent as fire.
When you recognize a thing, and name it, it loses what it was.
You looked at her. The world moved to cover everything.

So you try not to look, and to keep love in sight without ever touching what she really was.
Somehow, keeping her alive without looking, without ever trusting your eyes, which are what we choose with, how we arrange things, how we try to believe in each other.
During January and February of 1991, after we got Auntie moved over to the Villa Villekula, during those weeks that she sat rocking back and forth in her wheelchair with her eyes fixed inward, waiting while the sedatives slowly drained out of her system, Elizabeth and I stared each other in the face like survivors of a wreck. What were we to do next?

Elizabeth had lost more weight, and her eyes were as white-ringed, her neck as arched and tense as a nervous mare’s. She wasn’t feeling well, nothing seemed to stay on her stomach, and she shied away from the reports I brought back from my visits to Auntie. Both of us were haunted by the specter of an Auntie who, somehow ascending back up through the black hole of her mind, would demand accounting from us. Where is everything? My dog, my life? Why have you done this to me?

What to do with my aunt’s possessions that we had packed in Port Angeles only last June and carted back to Idaho with us? My attorney had advised me not to sell her house as long as there was the faintest chance of her returning to live there, and while I knew at heart that there was not the faintest chance, it was advice I wanted to follow. So Elizabeth and Brian would go on living there for the time being. Eventually, maybe, we would clear it out and rent it out. And so for the second time in seven months, Elizabeth and I sorted through Auntie’s clothes and books and junk while Rachel carried armloads to the trash or out to the trunk of the car to haul down to the Salvation Army.
Finally, postponing decisions, trying to pretend we were actually accomplishing something, we rummaged through her desk drawers.

“Did you know that she kept a diary?” Elizabeth asked me one morning.

“No,” I said.

“Well, she did. I found her diaries last night.”

At first I didn’t believe her. Elizabeth went and got a cardboard box from my aunt’s bedroom and set it down on the kitchen table, and I lifted out the little diaries. Leatherbound five-year diaries, the kind with clasps and locks. They started with the shiny and gold-stamped ones on top and went down to the small and scuffed ones at the bottom of the box. Eleven of them.

“I read a little, here and there,” said Elizabeth.

I was still feeling disbelief. “How far back do they go?”

“Fifty years. To 1933. I don’t think she ever missed a day.”

“From 1933 until—”

“Right up to the day we moved her here. That’s where she stopped.”

I picked up one of the little books at random and opened it. The closely written lines in my aunt’s familiar handwriting leaped out at me, and I shut it again. Diaries? In all the times I stayed with her, did I ever remember her writing in a diary?

A flicker of a memory, once, when we were traveling together—a brief jotting—don’t turn the light off yet, I want to finish this—

Of course that would have been her pattern. The few lines, last thing at night, written in bed. But how could I not have known about that pattern in a woman I thought I knew so well?
“I felt so sad, reading,” Elizabeth was saying. “She was so unhappy. I never knew she was unhappy.”

The words chased themselves around my brain. What could Elizabeth mean? Auntie unhappy? Until the cruel blows of the past seven months, she had always seemed to me the merriest, the stabllest woman I knew. All those late nights in Port Angeles while a log fire shot reflections against the window that looked out on the dark strait, while I poured out my grief to her and took comfort from the rising haze of her cigarette, her dark ironic eyes as she listened, always sympathizing, always on my side—what had she really been thinking? Of course she had been happy; otherwise, what about my secret belief that if only I tried harder to be like her, to pare my life down as she had to its essentials of teaching and gardening and love of children, I would be spared pain?

Elizabeth, unaware of my disquiet, was talking about something—about birthdays. “Auntie always seemed so pleased with each new baby in the family. Always seemed to love us so much. So I started looking up all our birthdays to see what she said when we were born. And I was so surprised! She never says a word!”

“Oh really!” I said.

Pulling myself back into the present, I found Auntie’s diary for 1939, turned to December 10, then leafed over a few pages to December 14, and read the entry aloud to Elizabeth. Got a card from Doris that Mary Rebecca arrived last Sunday—weight 8 lb—15 oz. I am so excited I can hardly wait.

“She had to wait a few days until the letter came in the mail,” I explained.

Elizabeth looked blank. “Letter?” Then she caught herself, realized what she was saying. Well, of course they wouldn’t
The old barbed wire neighborhood lines were pretty much inoperable by 1939, and Bell Telephone didn't run its lines out into Fergus County until after World War II, and even then nobody was in the habit of spending money on long distance telephoning when they could stick a three-cent stamp on a letter.

I looked up Elizabeth's birthday—September 28, 1961—and then showed her the entry for October 4. *Baby card from Mary—Elizabeth Mary. Born the 28th. I'm so glad...Oh I wish I could see her!*

Elizabeth took the diary from me and reread the entry about her birth, while I thought about the distance between my generation and hers, whose vital news arrives on a long distance line and fades so quickly.

"What do you want to do with her diaries?" she asked after awhile.

"I suppose I'll read them," I said.

How can I read her diaries when she is still alive, after a fashion? But like a voyeur, drawn by something stronger than curiosity, I rifflle pages, reading entries that evoke what I already know.

Late June of 1947, for example: *Sun. Took Mary swimming...Current swift but Mary is not at all scared...Jack showed us a good swimming hole. It is fine—good bottom—deep—not too fast a current...Mary floated at last.*

I was seven years old in 1947, and I was a little dryland girl. I had never been swimming, never seen more water than the Judith River, which I'd been told to stay away from, never even taken a bath in anything bigger than a galvanized washtub, and now here I stood in ankle-deep current while Spring Creek sparkled over the gravel in the sun and reflected its light back into my eyes. I knew that my father's uncles used to swim in this hole, and that
they had tried to teach my father to swim, but he had refused. Solid ground was for him. Now Auntie stood up to her waist in her black bathing suit and white rubber cap in the deep hole under the willows, calling to me. The dark green water concealed the lower half of her, cutting her off at the waist and reflecting back her top half, white cap and black suit, as though she had been rejoined as a woman with two heads and four arms.

Even with two heads, she didn’t know that I was terrified? Probably not. I had been taught as surely as she had not to let on. Wade in and try to float, even if you’re scared to death.

What about her own fears?

Here is her entry for June 16, 1942. This is a day I’ll never forget. Jack’s birthday. We planned cherry pie & rice pudding for supper. I got thrown into the wheel of the mower & badly cut. We handled the situation calmly.

Imogene’s mowing machine accident. My father used to tell me his version of that morning. It had shaken him profoundly. He and my mother were young, in their twenties, and I think now that Imogene’s accident may have been their first real awakening to inevitability.

Imogene had gone out to mow hay with my father’s team of flashy sorrel colts. Socks and Babe, a bald-faced gelding and a blaze-faced mare, still flashy and still spooky-eyed in their old age, when I remember them. Their names evoke a lost life along the Judith River, where the war on the other side of the world was forcing up prices and making scarcities, but where the Montana-born boys and girls like my father and mother were scratching a living out of the gumbo that had worn out their parents. Imogene had closed her school that spring and come to help get the hay in. She had braided her hair that morning, and worn Levis and a
white shirt—I know, because one of my earliest memories is of her propped in the back seat of her own car with her foot packed in towels after the sorrel colts had run away with her and pitched her off the high seat of the mowing machine and down, somehow into the sickle bar. Those shining iron teeth had bitten into her ankle, nearly all the way around in a deep gouge to the bone that would leave her crippled for months and scarred for the rest of her life.

We handled it calmly. My father, raking hay in another field, glanced across the coulee and saw that Imogene hadn’t finished her round. He unhitched his own team, jumped on one of his horses bareback, and tore the quarter of a mile across cutbanks and hayfields to find Imogene sitting in bloodsoaked grass with her own shoelace tied around her ankle for a tourniquet—“and a damn good thing she knew what to do, because I sure the hell wouldn’t have got there in time.” She had even managed to catch the sorrel colts and tie them to a fence post.

My father galloped back to the house and got Imogene’s car. He and my mother packed her foot and lifted her into the back seat to drive her the thirty miles over a gravel road to Lewistown—not before I had climbed into the front seat to look over it, confused by the adult voices and the smell of blood. Auntie laughed when she saw my face. “Look what they’ve done to me, Mary!” Then somebody, perhaps my mother, lifted me down from the car and set me howling inside the wire fence.

My father and mother drove Imogene the thirty miles to Lewistown. It would have taken an hour on bald wartime tires with dust rising and settling and the song of indifferent meadowlarks floating behind them from fence posts along the highway. She and my parents would hardly have spoken. They all knew what the
worst was likely to be. But at the cool sandstone archway of little St. Joseph's Hospital the nuns ran out to meet them and carry Imogene inside. Sister St. Paul and Dr. Solterro went to work with sutures and, against all their own expectations, saved her foot in a desperate operation that returned to her nearly fifty years later when, hospitalized for an arteriogram, she wandered into a time warp where those sensations and fragments of detail still lived as fresh as they had seemed in 1942.

From the perspective of years, I always thought the crucial point about the mowing machine accident—This is a day I'll never forget—was that it forced Imogene to leave a dead-end life of teaching for seventy or eighty dollars a month in the rural schools of central Montana. It was an uncertain life—the school boards, unwilling to grant tenure, rarely kept a teacher more than a year or two—and an isolated and strenuous one. The country schoolteachers could hope one of the neighbors remembered to bring them their mail or give them a ride to town for groceries, and meanwhile they were expected to carry their own coal and water, sweep out their schools and dust and clean their blackboards, and get out in the schoolyard at recess and play baseball or pom-pom-pullaway with their kids. Who'd hire a teacher with one foot?

"I couldn't get a job close to home that fall. Everybody in Fergus County had heard how badly I was hurt, and none of the school boards would even look at me," my aunt always told me, "so I applied at schools where nobody had heard of me." Out in Washington, where the war industry was rolling at full speed and teachers were leaving their classrooms to take the new high-paying jobs in the shipyards, she found a school superintendent willing to take a chance on a woman from Montana on crutches.

But in the immediacy of that moment, she saw what mattered

Blew 63
at a closer focus. This is a day I'll never forget. The reason why everybody always remembered the date of Imogene's accident was that it was my father's birthday. Cherry pie was his favorite, and they had been planning to have cherry pie for supper that night.

The precious trivial. My aunt's diaries are filled like a ragbag with the daily doings that make up a life. She hardly ever writes more than a line or two, but she notes which night she made muffins for supper—they were good—what the children fought about in school—kids were mean as dirt today—or which exact evening in 1939 she finished crocheting the wool afghan that even now lies in tatters in my back closet while I try to make up my mind to throw it out.

To read the diaries is to experience the absolutely linear. A plot of sorts emerges, like a river, continuous, with apparently unrelated details bobbing to the surface and then submerging. Names of characters appear in these pages without reason or description, then disappear in the same way. I learn to read between the lines, filling in with what I already know. Faces loom up, voices speak from the margins. What is most compelling is the immediacy. She is writing right now. She is twenty-three, and my mother is nineteen, and they can't see ahead the way I can when I glance down the page.

What she could see was the past. How could she bear it? She used the five-year format, so that a given page contains five entries for five consecutive years; she could take in at a glance what she had hoped for the year before, or the year before that, or what she had dreaded.

She is place-specific. I could draw a map of that thirty-mile radius, recreate its textures out of memory. I want that pink suit I
saw in Power's size eighteen, but I can't afford it—and instantly I see the main street of Lewistown, Montana, the way it descends down the cottonwood-shaded hill, past the old junior high school and the courthouse to the two or three commercial blocks, the six-story white marble Montana Building and the overpainted sandstone building presently occupied by a chain clothing store whose racks of marked-down western wear and special-order blue jeans exist simultaneously in my mind with the dignified clerks, the gracious aisles, and the moulded tin ceilings of the old T.C. Power's Mercantile Company.

Or—going home, we got stuck on the bottom last night, and I could walk to that precise mudhole, even at night in a rainstorm; I know just where the dirt road leaves the highway and curves across a treacherous stretch of gumbo toward the cottonwood log house where my father and mother lived during the early 1940s, and where the neighbors, the long dead, reappear in a context where getting stuck, getting high-centered, getting a flat tire is a commonplace of every drive in a car—saw Art and Ester, they were stuck—saw Sid and Carrie Killham—just as I could walk to the precise swimming hole my father showed her—good bottom—deep—not too fast a current—if it still lay under that willow-shaded bend in Spring Creek.

But it doesn't. The land has been sold and sold again, and the creek has been bulldozed and straightened, and the willows gouged out, and the current has overflooded its new banks and turned meadows to bogs. Nothing is still there, not the swimming hole, not the cattle crossing, not the woman in the white bathing cap who calls to the child in the shallows. We have lost our connection with the landscape just as we have with the neighbors.

Other entries trouble me. I will never know their context. On
August 11, 1949, my aunt apparently is planning a vacation trip back to Montana. Letter from Ma. She wants to meet me in a hotel for a day. Damn it, I hate my family to just tear me in pieces.

So I had thought I knew something about my aunt’s life, and about that certain place in Montana, closed among the low mountains and straitened by the circumstances of the 1930s and the early 1940s, when she came to young womanhood. Now I wonder what I do know, and how much of that is my own fiction, and what connection my fiction has to these inexorable lines, written day after day for fifty years, in my aunt’s diaries.

But I now believe that, during the late 1930s and early 1940s, another event in my aunt’s life drew her deep into an emotional attachment to my father and mother and me. Her diary entries for the last two or three years she lived in Montana increasingly note the details of our lives.

Stopped to see Doris & Mary & promised to come down for dinner on Sunday...Doris & I wrangled horses & watched the men break horses...Got the pictures of Mary. Must start an album soon...The men did not find the horses & we are worried about them...It rained all night & day. Jack had to drive my car up to the road for me. I rode Pardner for him to ride back.

And with what abandon she loved me, her sister’s baby! Doris gets breakfast & I bathe Mary. When she got tired she brot me her bottle & held up her arms to be taken...Mary sure likes her Aunty Gene...Mary was sure glad to see me. She gives little snorts of pleasure & satisfaction.

I now think I know why she turned to my parents and me for emotional support, and I think that perhaps the most profound effect of the mowing machine accident—a truly accidental one—is that it severed her bond with my mother and father as surely
as it nearly severed her foot, and that it freed her—from what, for what?

But I am interrupted in my deep reading by Elizabeth, who has made an appointment with an internist. She thinks she may have an ulcer.

Between the strain over Auntie and the uncertainty of her application to veterinary school, Elizabeth has quivered between tears and anger all winter. I walk with care around her, thinking before I speak, unwilling to risk an explosion. Could I have been so driven at her age? So racked with frustration?

My friends exclaim at how much Elizabeth looks like me. "Unbelievable! Like twins!" She and I both try to see the resemblance and fail. I recognize only her eyes; we both inherited my father's blue eyes. But though Elizabeth is an inch taller than I, she is much finer drawn, and her wrists and ankles are narrower than Rachel's at age eight. And her coloring is subtler than mine. I could never pick out clothes for her, even when she was very small, until I realized that she preferred the hazier shades, would never wear my bright reds and blues.

Elizabeth. Thorn in my side. When I was the age she is now, I was divorcing her father, and she was ten. Tears rolled down her face when I told her about the divorce, though she never cried aloud. And so she was part of the price I paid for myself.

But now she telephones me, sobbing so hard that at first I cannot understand her. "I'm not ready for this!" she keeps choking out, until at last she manages to tell me that the internist she consulted about an ulcer gave her a routine pregnancy test that has turned out to be positive.
What am I to say?

What was I to say to the ten-year-old? Did I understand enough in those days about the force of my own submerged currents to explain to anyone, let alone to my daughter, that I would have exploded if I had stayed with her father? How could I have possibly told her about the recurring dream in which he took me in his arms, smiling fondly, and squeezed and squeezed until, still smiling fondly, he had cracked my ribs and choked the breath out of me?

Thinking of these things, and about the resentments that have kept Elizabeth and me apart for so many years, I take a deep breath and speak the truth.

"If it were me, I'd certainly rather have a baby than an ulcer."

"But what about vet school?" she sobs. "How am I going to do this? This is my best chance, I've got to be accepted this time, and if I am, I'll be starting in late August. That's just when this baby is due. Mother, I'm not ready for a baby!"

What does she want to hear me say? All I can think about is late September rain and the slick stone steps behind the old St. Joseph's hospital in Lewistown, Montana, at two in the morning. I am twenty-one again. I hold a suitcase in one hand and a textbook in the other. My mother has just dropped me off at the curb and turned around to drive back to the ranch to stay with my two-year-old son. I start to climb the flight of steps toward the light over the door.

Who is ever ready? "Your first baby?" says the night nurse who signs me in.

"No, my second."

Her manner changes instantly. "How far apart are your pains? Oh God! Where's Sister?"
A few minutes later I hear her calling down the corridor: "Where's Sister? This baby is coming, and I can’t find Sister!"

All I care is that apparently I am not going to have to face another twenty-four-hour labor on my own. What I mainly know about birthing is that it is lonely. Last time they told my young husband he might as well go back to the ranch and get some sleep, and then they gave me an enema and a shave and left me alone all night in one of those echoing high-ceilinged rooms where the only distraction was the occasional rumble of gurney wheels outside the door with another woman groaning, or a nurse glancing in to check my dilation and leaving again. This time I've come prepared; I've brought my book.

I really do need to be reading, because I'm missing my first week of classes at the University of Montana to have this baby. It's my last year of undergraduate school, and I hate getting off to a bad start, but I've sent my husband around to all my professors to explain my absence and pick up my assignments. The professors do a certain amount of tsk-tsking, because this is 1961, and they don't yet know a thing about the women who, in another twenty years, will flock back to college with their children slung on their backs or dropped off at the day-care, or who, like one of my sisters, will go into labor during registration at Montana State University, run over to the hospital, have her baby, and then run back to the field house to pay her fees.

But in 1961 I'm an aberration, which is no bad thing; it means I'm easily overlooked. I'm invisible. I can dive in and out of class and swap babies with my husband in time for him to get to his night job at the lumber mill, and nobody notices.

"Oh, your poor husband! How does he stand it?" groans my advisor when I bring him my class schedule with my twenty-two
credits to have him sign, but we both know his groan is only a matter of form. After all, it is 1961, and I won't come across a copy of *The Feminine Mystique* for another five or six years. I agree with my advisor that it is my husband's education that matters, that it is I who should be working nights to support us both, that this sideshow act of mine with babies and twenty-two credits is, at best, beside the point, and, at worst, a hazard to everybody's peace of mind. I agree, I agree! It's just that I can't seem to stop.

But why, I might well ask myself as, my belly a contorted knot, I lean against the admissions desk and gasp and listen to the frantic nurse running up and down the corridor—"Where's Sister? Where's Sister?"—why am I having this baby? The first baby, okay, a bad mistake, my husband and I were teenagers in a stranglehold of lust and impatience and ignorance. But a second baby? Come on! I'm twenty-one years old now, soberer than I will be at fifty, and besides, I've got a diaphragm.

Why? The only reason I can come up with is that I want her. As I will want still another baby, only it will take me twenty-one years and another man to have the next one.

What to say to Elizabeth, who simultaneously sobs over the telephone and rushes to be born so fast that I'm not going to have to endure the indignity of an enema, won't have to grow back the itching, prickling stubble of my pubic hair after the shave? Does she want to get rid of it? Is that the sensible decision? Is that what she wants to hear from me?

My heart is in my mouth. The truth is all I can think to speak. "A new baby. I feel so happy."

*I'm so glad...I can hardly wait to see her.*
And so Elizabeth rushed into the world after an hour's labor, and she has never slowed down from that rush, though her tiny footprints inked on the hospital's fancy certificate are narrow as a bird's, half the size of Rachel's birthprints. She slept in a hamper with handles that her father often carried with him or left on the back seat of the car while he fished the trout streams around Missoula and occasionally ran back to the car to check on her. Soon she was standing behind him while he fished. She grew up to adore him.

When she was fourteen, I met the man who would become Rachel's father. "If you don't quit going out with him, I'll leave home! I'll go live with my father!" she hurtled at me.

I didn't. She did.

How long has Elizabeth wanted to be a veterinary? Ever since I can remember. "An animal doctor," as she said in second grade. Animals around the house, always. The little old beagle we got while her father and I were in graduate school in Missouri. The Siamese tomcat named Grinch that a man named Pete Daniels gave me after we moved back to Montana, to Havre. A mama cat named Victoria, because she was so fecund.

Screams in the night—I turn on my bedside light in a panic. Elizabeth stands in my bedroom door with blood in her hair.

"The cat's having kittens in my bed!"

I follow her across the hall and into her bedroom, and sure enough, there's Victoria sprawled across Elizabeth's pillow in a mess of blood and mucus and wet kittens. The last kitten spurts out from under her tail just as we get there.

"Here's the one I threw." Elizabeth brings a tiny blind kitten from across the room. "She was having them in my hair. I felt
something wet on my ear, and I put up my hand, and it was alive. And I just threw it.”

We return the kitten, mewling but otherwise undamaged, to Victoria. She licks it off along with the other four, then coils around her litter while they nurse. She purrs up at us, as proud as if she were the first cat in the world ever to think of having kittens.

We decide to let the cats have Elizabeth’s bed for the night. I take Elizabeth into the bathroom and wash her hair and let her curl up, toweled and damp as one of the new kittens, in my bed with me.

As a child Elizabeth is fearless. (How can I be so sure? I remember that diary entry—Mary not at all scared.) Well, certainly Elizabeth seems fearless. She climbs a fence and from the fence to the bare back of a neighbor’s grazing horse, from which she has to be plucked, howling, and threatened with bludgeoning if she tries it again. After my divorce she starts spending her summers at the ranch, training a 4-H colt under my father’s testy direction. My father has never forgiven me for my defection from the ranch, and this small granddaughter reminds him too much of his ex-son-in-law for him ever to be gentle with her. He demands more and more of her—longer rides, wetter saddle blankets, blue ribbons, championship trophies—but withholds his praise. Try harder is the message she gets.

So she never learns from my father the lore or the names of horses that evoke the generations, although to this day she keeps his picture on the front of her refrigerator, the one where he poses with Pet, the big-boned sorrel mare with the blaze face and the sweet temper who nearly died in the sleeping sickness epidemic
of the 1930s. In the snapshot Pet’s rein is over my father’s arm, and she is saddled, humped with cold and furry with winter hair, and he is grinning, proud of his snuffy saddle horse.


She shakes her head. “I never heard those names from him.”

After a year of living in Helena with her father and his new wife, she asks if she can move back to Havre and live with me again. She says she misses her friends, who have all started their second year at Havre High School without her.

All right, I tell her, but I feel pretty tentative. She has grown a foot, or so it seems, since she has been away, though she is still as slim and wavery as a wand. I hardly know her. I don’t trust her at all. Any ill-considered words of mine are likely to be carried down to Helena and then carried back, complete with inflammatory commentary, whereupon I will explode in anger and set off another, worsening cycle. So I will try for no ill-considered words.

Our distance comes to seem normal. Maybe we even forget it’s there. She gets A’s in high school, avoids getting arrested for anything, otherwise pretty much comes and goes as she pleases. I’m busy, have a lot else on my mind, don’t pay much attention. When she goes to work for a local veterinary, I enjoy the stories she brings home as she progresses from cleaner of cages and carrier of food and water and disposer of the stiffened corpses of animals to the more skilled tasks of administering shots and assisting with surgery. The jokes that circulate through the veterinary clinic are the best—worst, really—in town; they keep us in stitches. The only one I remember now is the one that asks, do you know what a delusion of grandeur is? A gnat with a hard-on,
lying on his back on a raft in the river, yelling *raise the drawbridge*!

In her senior year she spends longer nights with her friends than she does days in school. Girls I’ve known since they were second graders drift through the house in a daze, hardly recognizing me, caught in the delusion that only this last year of their lives exists, that high school graduation will alter them so unimaginably that only this soap-bubble time is real. I know about the keggers out at Beaver Creek Park, of course, everybody knows that free beer flows in the dark for the seniors all night, every night. The kids pass the hat for another keg or they get one of the local businessmen to spring for one. Nobody thinks much about it, Havre’s a hard-drinking town. After all, it’s only beer, at least Havre kids aren’t on drugs!

On this particular night it’s past twelve and I’ve gone to bed when I hear voices, Elizabeth’s and my husband’s, in the kitchen. Then he opens the bedroom door—“You’d better get up and talk to this kid.”

The light doesn’t seem to be on, and I don’t see her face clearly. She just stands there in the hall, she doesn’t make eye contact. Just the monotone of her voice, telling me that she and her friend Celeste were coming home from tonight’s kegger when they rounded a bend in the Beaver Creek Park road and saw, in their headlights, the overturned Cherokee Scout and the four girls who had been headed back to town at high speed to pick a fight with somebody’s boyfriend—

*God no.*

Dry-eyed, she says their names. Lynn, Sandy, Sarah, Jody—Jody is still alive.

*God no! Not Lynn B——? Not Sandy W——?*

Yes. In that inexorable monotone Elizabeth tells the rest of her
story. "Sandy was still alive when we got there. She'd been thrown out of the Scout—she was hanging on the fence. I could see her"—and for the first time her voice falters—"I never dreamed barbed wire could cut you open like that. I held Sandy's hand. I don't know if she knew I was there. She just kept saying, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Celeste had called the sheriff on her dad's CB, but for a long time, forever, it was just us there in the dark. After awhile Sandy was quiet. I kept holding her hand. Then all at once there were lights, and noise, and all the people in the world were there, and somebody told me to let go of Sandy's hand and go home."

She doesn't cry. She keeps her arms folded across herself, looks away; and I, caught in my first ignominious reaction—at least it wasn't my child—

"Where are you going?" I ask when she sidles away.

"Over to Saint Jude's," she says. "A lot of the kids are going to be there."

What I am thinking about, as I watch my daughter disappear from the reach of the streetlight, is the widening distance between us as her experiences soar into a zone of pain beyond any of mine. What will not occur to me, not during the parents' meetings and the guilt, the crackdown on the keggers and the knowledge that only by the grace of God it wasn't my child, what will not occur to me for another ten years is that not once did I try to touch my daughter that night, nor she to touch me.

"We're not a family that shows our affection," Auntie used to tell me. "When I drive down to see Ma, she looks up and says, 'I see you got here,' and I say 'Yes but the ferry was late,' as though I'd been gone half an hour instead of two or three months. Some people might think we're a little cold."

Blew 75
In the fall Elizabeth goes off to Montana State University as a pre-veterinary student. The problem is, men start happening to her. Auntie and I hold our breaths, neither of us daring to say a word, when she gets engaged to an individual whose fraternity brothers call him Thumper. Finally she breaks the engagement, but microbiology is a casualty. Getting accepted into vet school looms more and more insurmountable to her; three hundred miles away, in Havre, I wonder what happened to the fearless child, but she comes home less and less frequently.

She's met an engineering student, for one thing, a real Montana boy like her father. And my home is not a place anyone wants to be. My husband has just been diagnosed with pulmonary fibrosis. Rachel is a year old, and I can deal with little else.

Elizabeth decides to get married in Bozeman, close to her university friends and to her fiance's family. But will I sew her wedding dress?

I will. All that spring in the early mornings before I go to work, I will sip coffee in the first sunlight while the folds of white slipper satin spill off my lap. Plying my needle, letting my thoughts wander, I will embroider sleeves, bodice, hem, with white satin-stitch roses on a dress she will not even come home to try on.

My daughter plans to change her major to zoology and pick up her teaching credentials. After graduation she will go to live in a small town in southern Idaho, where her fiance already has a good job near some of the best elk hunting and trout fishing in the world. He'll fill out his hunting license every year and drink with his buddies in the little jukebox bars in places like St. Anthony and Ashton and bring home most of his paychecks. She might do some substitute-teaching. She'll settle down.

Sure she will.
So now here we both are, Elizabeth and I, farther to the west than we have ever lived, with our backs to the Continental Divide and our faces turned to the confluence of rivers where the Snake opens out into its roll to the Columbia and the Pacific. And I speak the truth to her, for once: “A new baby. I’m so glad—” and by some miracle the truth is the right thing to speak.

By the next day, Elizabeth is explaining to Brian that nobody is ever ready for a baby. Of course she won’t give up vet school. With a good babysitter and support from Brian she’ll manage both.

In May she is accepted into the Vet Med program at Washington State University. And, as Elizabeth will tell the story later to friends, in August the baby pops out, and she says, “Here, Brian, catch,” and rushes off to class.
The Sawmill Road

We got our town supply
of cripples on the sawmill road
it wasn’t a year or a season
went by that somebody didn’t get
mashed up one way or another
on that road

it started about a mile
out of town and went straight up
to blowup where the 1st sawmill was
and the boiler exploded years ago
killing 2 men and one
they never found
either blowed all to hell
or left without sending word
it’s not a flat place on that road
youn speak of anywhere
hard going up or down
and dangerous
a lot of people got killed
and their bones busted
on the sawmill road

back then when wagons
was what we had
it was always a runaway
or a accident about to happen
somebody got ruint for life
Charlie Ivie was coming
downhill loaded with 2 ton of cutwood
for a barn when his neck yoke busted
wagon rode up on the horses
pushed them ahead of it
going straight down
and this drag he made
out of some logs he chained up
to the back
to slow it down come loose
his brakes wouldn't hold
wagon pushed the horses
off the road heading right for a cliff
Charlie Ivie give it up
jumped off but caught his foot
in the brakerope
it throwed him under
crushed his legs
where one had to be cut off
other one wouldn't bend
he's a sorry dam mess from then on
but the wagon turned on its own
the horses wasn't killed
they saved the wood
but he had to sell it
he couldn't build no barn after that

Ray Evanses' daddy took a load
uphill to sell it to the mill
he had Ray with him
he's about 14 back then
horser stumbled
wagon started to roll back
so his daddy yelled
jump down off them logs where he's sitting
and block off the wheel
Ray couldn't find no rock close by
quick so he shoved his foot under
he said he wouldn't do that again
mashed it flat like a duck
waddled like a fat woman
on that side from then on

the one we's all scared of
 got Clarence Murphey
the pole strap that fits
over the neck yoke fastened
to the britchens on the harness
to keep the wagon from rolling ahead
and for backing it up
finally broke
and his brakes wouldn't hold
he jumped and got tangled
wagon went over his chest
left him splattered all over the road
turned sideways and rolled
killed one horse and broke the other
he had to be shot
nobody got crippled though
they had to get him all in a cotton sack
to bring him down
it was right below that place
my brother and me
found that branch
and the still where
he got his finger chopped off
in the leaf springs of a wagon
stealing sugar
but it didn't make him no cripple

my uncle Elwood was going up
tandem with Cletus Young
to the sawmill when he seen
this wasp nest hanging on a tree limb
he got up and crawled back
along the reach and whacked it
with a axe handle
whipped them horses with a rein
for a ways and pulled off
the side the road
here come Cletus Young standing up
on the double tree of his wagon
them horses running belly to the ground
with a string of wasps following
like he's dragging a plow
went right on past
when he outrun them he come back
hit my uncle Elwood oncet
so hard he's knocked out
busted 2 teeth but he sed
it was worth it
Cletus got stung in his ear
sed it got him down deep
and he couldn’t hear out of it no more
but we never believed him

had a lot of hunting accidents
on that road where we’d go
for turkeys and deer
R. B. McCravey’s 1 boy was hunting
on his horse with R. B.’s rifle
without permission
this deer run out
he had that rifle in his lap
lifted it up and fired too fast
without sighting he shot
that horse in the back of his head
when it fell down it trapped him
his one leg broke
where he limped from then on
and his hand with the rifle in it
was under him and the horse
and the saddle
smashed it up where it never did
work right after that
he wore a glove on it
couldn’t even hold a cigarette
or write his name

Cephas Bilberry was hunting
rabbits up there
when he thought he seen
these turkeys out of season
he climb't through this fence
to get them and poached hisself
shot off half his chin and part of his face
a handful of teeth and 1 eye
on that side
he walked down that mountain
all the way home
sed he was afraid he might of
bled to death
but it never got a good start
figured mebbe the heat off the shotgun
sealed it off shut
he was a sight after that
couldn't even let him
pass the plate
the contribution would go down
ever Sunday he did

after we started driving cars
it was about a wreck a month
at 1st till we got used to it
then down to a few every year
some dead
like the Clarys that went off
Left Hand canyon
or old man Benson that run
into a logging truck
he was too old to drive
should of known better
when he's young
before he got blinded by lightning
Harold Wayne Johnston was up there
on a Saturday night
in the back seat with Marva Beth Williamson
the hand brake must of slipped
or they got to rocking
it come out of gear
that car rolled a quarter of a mile backwards
hit a tree and broke her back
she's so skinny she could of
walked up to a flagpole
and bit a piece off
without turning her head sideways
so it might not of hit that hard
Harold Wayne sed he never known
a thing till it hit
sed he was amazed by it all
she's paralyzed for a while
but got better
walked like a goose from then on
but she's so skinny
we never noticed it
we didn't look at her that much

there's not a foot of that road
don't remember somebody by name
Carla Prowst got 5 unmarried kids up there
named every one
after its daddy
we lost a banker and a Baptist deacon
and a deputy sheriff over that road
every time she went up
we'd watch to see
who left town

when the ambulance come from that direction
we known it was a bad one
we'd wait a day to see
if Edna Mae worn her golden shoes
then we'd call the hospital
to see who and how bad
the whole town got infected
by that road
it wasn't hardly nobody
man or womem who grew up there
who didn't lose something sometime
on the Sawmill Road
we even wondered once
if we oughta close it off
but the town board decided if we didn't have
our Sawmill Road cripples
we'd be too perfect
and that's a load
that's too heavy to carry
from *City of Trees*

Ash Flooding

Early March. The mornings were raw, damp and smoky. Ice fog hung in the canyons and coulees. Alex drove to Helena, a hundred miles through snow-squalls and black ice, to bid the pruning contract on the State Capitol grounds. Only three other treemen in the state bothered to show, and they all looked scruffy and winter-bit. With their styrofoam coffee cups and estimate pads, the little group shuffled along behind a sour-looking Fish and Wildlife ranger, pulled up their collars to the wind, craned their necks to the low flying snow clouds as they went through the whole job, tree by tree. There were fifty or so Marshall ash, stringy and brushy and broken up in the tops from the big storm of '82. There was a handful of sorry-looking box elders, and three big American elms, specimen trees that apparently had never been pruned. The ash trees ranged small to medium in size and were easy to get up, but the elms were massive and full of dead wood and Alex knew a climber could spend a full day in each.

Alex was thinking about his prospects when he found himself walking abreast of the sour-looking ranger. They passed a towering American elm, and in passing the ranger said, “Think your cherry-picker can reach all the way up there?”

“We don’t have a cherry-picker,” said Alex. What the hell, he thought. Why not tell him now, eliminate all the damn suspense.

“You don’t?” said the ranger. “Why not?”

“We don’t believe in ‘em,” said Alex. He didn’t know quite where he was going with this one but he never missed a beat. *He*...
sure wasn’t going to be the guy to tell the little bastard AM couldn’t afford one.

The ranger stopped, scowled. “What’s that mean—you don’t believe in ’em?”

“Well, the way I see it,” said Alex, “any fool can work a big tree from a cherry-picker.” He paused, scanned the top of the elm again. “But it takes a real fool to work one off a rope.”

The ranger spat thoughtfully and said, “To tell you the truth, I never looked at it that way.”

On a Thursday morning with three trees left in the contract and the motel room packed, Alex woke to a steady drizzle. The streets were glazed, the trees were sheathed in ice. He went out to start the trucks, slipped and fell flat on his back. While the trucks idled he chipped the ice off the windshields, watched them freeze back up. Water ran off the gutters and froze in midair. He went back inside and drank a cup of coffee while Stukes sat in front of the TV, still in his long johns, waiting for a forecast. They sat there till eleven o’clock, watched part of Summer Lovers, parts of Jaws and Patton and finally Alex realized what he was really doing was watching Stukes, watching how every time Stukes spit, he would hit the channel changer. It seemed to Alex to be the dumbest kind of reflex imaginable, and it dawned on him that after nine straight days together, this hard-working, good-natured, uncomplaining man was really beginning to get on his nerves. The forecast said it would only be worse by nightfall. Jesus, Alex thought. We’ll be stuck in this room forever with three trees left in the contract. The next commercial he put his boots on and without a word, Stukes dressed too. They chained up the trucks and drove back to the capitol.
The trees were slick as popsicles and Alex spurred them all and climbed gloveless, in case there was an ice knob or edge of bark he could grab with his fingernails. On the next to the last tree, he slipped out of his stance in mid-cut and brought the chain saw down hard, bouncing the sprocket-nosed bar off his leg, just above the kneecap. Alex gasped, killed the saw and looked down in disbelief. His jeans gaped open and inside he could see a three-inch gash—gristle, flaps of skin. There was no pain yet and like most bad luck, it happened so fast Alex could scarcely believe he couldn’t somehow reach out and snatch the moment back. He clipped the saw to a carabiner, leaned back in his harness, looked horizon to horizon beneath the heavy grey sky, looked back to his knee to see if it had still happened. This time he could see bits of long johns, oil and wood chips floating in the gore. A grey squirrel sat in a branch, the next ash over, looking down at him. “You little shit,” Alex said with disgust. “You saw this coming didn’t you?”

The squirrel flicked its tail, peered down. “Zeeep!” it said. “Chick chick chick.”

Alex spat, cursed. He could feel his boot fill up with blood. Stukes had shut down the chipper and was looking up at him. Finally he said, “You okay, Alex?”

Alex sighed. “No.” He’d nicked himself before but he had always been able to finish the day. One time he’d closed the wound with butterfly bandages. One time he’d used a strip of electrician’s tape. He’d nicked himself before but this time he was cut.

Alex drove himself to the emergency room in the pickup. It had an automatic so he wouldn’t have to clutch and this way too, Stukes could finish with the clean-up. The debridement took over
an hour. The intern was a woman about Alex’s age. She had a big square chin and watery blue eyes. She wore cowboy boots and she chattered away about the weather and the skiing at Bridger while she sewed him up. “Hey,” she said finally. “How the hell did you do this, anyway?”

“I was pruning trees,” said Alex.

“Looks like you got a little carried away,” she said.

For a solid week it rained. The trees shone bare and slick and the power lines hung dripping against the leaden, smoky sky as the rain pounded away at the snow, the ice, and finally at the rock-solid ground. Alex sat in his office, tried to keep his leg elevated, watched the rain pour down, watched the long-legged spiders at play on his ceiling. After what seemed like a flying start to the season, the phone had stopped ringing altogether. But it didn’t matter anyway, it was too wet to work and even if it wasn’t, he was an invalid. He tried to see this as a form of good luck, the two things coming together at once, but it was too great an effort. He was embarrassed for getting hurt, especially in front of Stukes, and he worried about his business to no particular end, and he found himself thinking about Tom Sweeney, that big strange fool. If Sweeney’d been there, they would have been out a day earlier. They would have missed the rains and Alex wouldn’t have sliced his damn leg. Alex spat. If only Sweeney this, if only Sweeney that.

On a drizzling Tuesday afternoon, Alex found himself searching in the back seat of Sweeney’s Dodge, rooting around with a kind of feverishness in the potent, smoke-tainted stillness, looking for the journal. He tried to think of what it would be he’d tell Chris if she were to show up just then. Really, what the hell would

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there be to say? Jesus. The things you have to go through, once you start sneaking around.

Seven years pass. I turn thirty in the treetops. I work for World Tree branches in Portland, Natick, Cos Cob and Peekskill. I can't stop moving. For a time I work alone in the hurricane season, follow the low pressures down coast, from Cape May all the way to New Smyrna Beach. I work the big storms, when the streets are littered with branches, shingles, downed power lines and the great live oaks heave over, splinter the roof tops like matchwood. I live in trailers and cheap rooms, climb a thousand trees. I'm up them when they flower, so they wrap me in blossoms, garland my beard. I'm up them in full leaf, so they rush and whisper with a sound like water. I'm up them when they're hard and bare, knocking bone to wood while the north wind cuts through the twiglets with the hollowed-out sound of a chord that's struck and fading on the strings.

Alex rolled the piece up, jammed it in the cookie tin, locked the Dodge and went back to his little TV.

The sixth day of rain, in a fit of boredom, he rolled up his pantleg and snipped his stitches with Chris's cuticle scissors, picked them out with her eyebrow tweezers. He salved the scab with a bee pollen ointment he bought at the health food store, covered it with gauze, wrapped the whole business with an ace bandage and walked stiff-legged out back to his shop. He opened the door and stood for a moment in the damp gloom before he switched on the light. The far wall was hung solid with harness and bull-ropes, snatch blocks and come-alongs and a half dozen tightly coiled nylon climbing lines. He shivered, split up a larch
round with a couple whacks of the maul and lit a small fire in the sheet metal stove. The shop warmed quickly and the heat brought up the smell of parts cleaner, tree systemic and the acrid tang of high-nitrogen fertilizer. He walked to the Stihl calendar on the wall above the workbench, ripped off the month of March and studied it for a moment. It had a picture of a chesty young woman in a hardhat and hotpants, stroking the handle of a long-barred chain saw. The month of April featured a chesty woman with a flannel shirt, open to her navel, ogling the new top-of-the-line brush hog. Alex had to laugh. In all the ways that counted, the calendar was just about the dumbest thing he'd ever seen. It was amazing, he thought, the way it seemed to fit right in to everything.

He lined up his saws on the bench, broke them down, blew them out with the compressor. He kept his saws running crisp, with fresh carb kits and performance plugs so they started on the second pull and rapped out high and clean. He kept his rakers low, the cutters razor sharp, so they pumped out clouds of big square chips. He loved the weight and feel of them, loved the way a good running saw felt in the cut. He even loved the way they looked, so sleek, businesslike and lethal. It's just too bad, he thought, the way they tended to turn your hands to mush.

He dropped Emmylou Harris in his Radio Shack tape player and set to work dressing his chains. The saws had fared well in Helena, except for the one Stukes dropped nose-first out of a box elder. Alex had been right underneath it when it fell. He could have reached out, fielded it like a pop fly if it hadn't been running at full throttle. Now it was “parts.” It lay in pieces in a box at Alex's feet. After fifteen years in the business, Alex had a whole lot of “parts.”
He was looking out the window when there was a sudden break in the cloud cover and the back yard seemed to blossom with light, and it struck Alex that while he was down in the basement, staring at the walls and talking to spiders the ground had thawed, the snow line had risen and the forsythia was green at the buds. It would soon be spring, he thought. At least, it was a real possibility. Alex had a picture of Chris stuck in his mind—a picture of her standing in the driveway by the caragana hedge, about the time the seed pods were bursting. It must have been July. She stood, sweet and cool-looking in her rough-out boots and snap-front shirt, her skinny hip cocked, talking to Sweeney. Girlishly, she'd swept a long strand of hair from her eyes while the carageena pods snapped and burst like popcorn behind them.

Alex stood at the bench a long moment, paused with the file and shook his head. He couldn't get the picture out of his mind. What the hell had they been talking about, he wondered. Though Alex was nearly five foot ten, next to the flamboyant Sweeney he felt small. He felt balding and dull. He felt clean living. He had never been what you'd call a lady's man. As far as Alex could tell, he'd never been anybody's kind of man at all. The only people you could say took an interest in him were old guys, for whom he possessed a kind of supernatural attraction. All he had to do was arrive at a job and light up a chain saw and it seemed that any geezer within a ten block radius would beeline to him like a long lost father and proceed to tell Alex whatever happened to be on his mind. It was starting to get to him. He was starting to believe that they saw him as one of them.

The phone rang and Alex stuck the file tail-first in the workbench and lunged for it.
A man identified himself as Randy DeLoach and asked: “Do you folks handle emergencies?”

“Sure,” Alex said. “What’ve you got?”

“A bird in a tree.”

Alex paused. Was it a goof? It got hard to say. Finally he said, “Okay. What’s the emergency?”

“It’s a pet bird.”

“Uh-huh, okay.” Alex waited.

“A two-hundred-dollar one,” the man said, impatient.

Alex took his address, but after he hung up he was doubtful. How the hell’d you get a bird out of a tree, he wondered. And what would you charge for that?

He wondered if he should read a book on them or something but he figured he’d better get over there before it flew away. He put on his Ben Davis jeans and a hooded sweatshirt, grabbed a handful of sunflower seeds, drove up Hellgate Canyon, turned off into East Missoula. At winter’s end the yards were littered with deer bones and loose sticks of cordwood. Log trucks were parked up on the curbs like great, mud-spattered beasts. Mongrel dogs roamed the streets in twos and threes and the air was heavy with wood smoke and the smell of frying meat. There was always something about the east side of town that reminded Alex of the set from a Barbarian movie. He drove a block or so to where a heavyset man on crutches stood by the road, flagged him down at the mouth of a trailer court drive. He wore a camouflage duck hunter’s jacket. The crutches looked fragile, stick-like beneath his heavy body. Alex got out and without exchanging a word, the two of them walked over to the west side of the one-story prefab and DeLoach showed Alex the cockateel, sitting toward the end of a branch, halfway up a stubbed-off cottonwood.
Alex tugged his hat down on his forehead, buried his hands in his sweatshirt pocket and studied the situation. DeLoach stood next to him, wheezed, coughed, lit up a True, squinted into the smoke-streaked afternoon. He had a flattened-out nose and he was missing an earlobe and Alex got the idea things weren't going that well for old DeLoach. Just then the big man spoke.

"What's your line of attack?"

Alex scowled. "I was thinking I'd bring him down alive, Mister."

"What's your plan?" said DeLoach.

Alex brightened. "Oh," he said. "That. Well, I'll kind of sneak up the backside, climb up over his head, sneak back down on my rope and scoop the little pecker up with this"—he reached in the back of the truck and pulled out Chris's landing net. He hadn't really thought to bring it—it just happened to be there.

DeLoach looked skeptical. "Ain't that for fish?"

"I'm open to a better plan," said Alex. Really, he hadn't a clue how to get a bird out of a tree, but being a professional, he was determined not to let on. He knew what he was looking at here—a no-win situation. He didn't like the man, he didn't like the set-up and he'd only been there a minute.

Finally DeLoach pawed the air with a huge knuckley hand. "Have at it," he said, and stumped off back to the house.

"What's his name?" Alex called.

"Petey," said DeLoach.

Alex slipped into an old down vest and his shooter's mittens, hooked the landing net to his harness and quietly as he could, spurred up the back side of the cottonwood. He reached the top, tied in and descended till he stood lightly on the same branch as the cockateel. The bird's feathers were a dingy white. There were
clownish spots of orange on its cheeks and its topknot was flat, sulphur color in the late afternoon light. Alex thought there was something sad and cheap-looking about a tropical bird roosting in a trailer park cottonwood. Like a drag queen in a cowboy bar. When the bird saw Alex, it cocked its head, stared at him with bright black eyes. Oh God, he thought. Please don't let someone I know drive by and see me up here with this trout net and this stupid-looking bird.

Alex dandled the net behind his back and began talking. "Hi Tweety!" he said in what had come to be his rescue falsetto. "How ya doin', little guy? That's a good bird. A real good bird. Everything's gonna be all right. Everything's gonna be okay."

Alex slipped off a mitten, dug in his pocket for a sunflower seed. "Hungry Tweety? You want a snack, little buddy bird?" He ate a couple himself, smacked his lips, rubbed his stomach. "Mmmmm," he said. "Nummy-num."

"Up yours, Gomer," said the bird.
The seeds spilled from Alex's palm, spiraled to the ground. "Jesus Christ, you talk," he said. "Nobody told me you could talk."
The bird balanced on one foot, scratched its beak like a dog and ignored him.

Alex dropped the falsetto. "Let's try it again," he said. "Let me spell things out for you. Are you listening? You're in a jam. Life is cheap out here. For birds that look like you, it is, anyway. I'm risking my reputation trying to rescue you so just try to show some class, okay?" He flipped the net around behind his back, tried to practice his move. For a while he watched the bird watching him and then he said in his high cheery voice, "When the ravens get a load of you they will peck your sissy face right off."
"Jam it, Hank," said the cockateel. "Shove it up sideways."
“You know that it’s rude to insult people who are trying to save you?” Alex snapped.

Just then the breeze died and it grew quiet. There it is again, he thought. One of those funny holes in the day, a kind of back eddy when the traffic noises die and the wind drops away and people stop talking and even the birds go silent. In that silence, the cockateel turned its head to Alex and made a low clucking sound. Alex was struck by the idea the bird was laughing. It watched him with unblinking eyes, as he began to bring the net around. The cockateel flapped its wings and hovered briefly above the branch, then dropped easily back down.

Alex began to sweat. He backed away, got ready to make another move. Suddenly the wind blew up again and the bird tightened its toes on the branch. From below him he heard DeLoach holler something.

Damn it, thought Alex. If he flies, he’s gone. He looked down, put a finger to his lips.

DeLoach stumped around the yard, went back into his house, slammed the storm door behind him. “Asshole,” Alex muttered. “Asshole,” said the bird.

Alex took another handful of seeds, held one out to the bird. “Come on,” he said, “live a little.”

The bird studied it, finally took it in his beak, worked it all around. Alex squatted in the crotch, bracing his back against a piece of solid-looking deadwood. He drew his knees up to his chest and flipped up the hood of his sweatshirt. Finally he said, “Can you really talk or do you just mimic folks?”

The bird continued to work the seed to his crop, made a clucking, belching noise and turned away.

“What a pair you are—you and your fat pal down there.”
There was another shout from down below. Alex was fast losing his temper. “Hey,” he shouted. “Lay off. I’m trying to grab your stupid bird.”

“You’d best not be calling that bird stupid,” said DeLoach.

“All right,” said Alex. “He’s a genius, then. I should have known he was smart. Name like ‘Tweety’.”

“His name’s Petey,” said DeLoach, “and he’s probably a lot smarter than you.”

The bird turned to Alex, made that snickering sound again.

“Shut up,” Alex barked and in an instant, snapped the landing net around and over the bird’s head.

Frantically, the cockateel beat its wings in the string mesh. “Asshole!” it squawked. “Help! Help!”

DeLoach was waiting with a check when Alex got back down. “Well you got him down, Munday. I should tell you thanks though I don’t much care for your methods. Hang on a second.” He went inside, stumped back out with an insulated sack. “I want you to have this, too,” he said.

“What is it?” Alex said.

“Paddlefish steaks. I caught ’em last summer.”

Alex drove home in a bad mood. He’d forgotten to look at it, but the date on the check was wrong, the written sum was for forty dollars and the figure sum was for fifty, and Alex knew in his gut it would never clear anyway. From now on, he thought, it’s cash on the barrel head. In advance.

When he got home the back yard bounced with robins while Chris worked the leaves from the beds with a bamboo rake and the dogs romped in the piles, fought over a stick.

“Where you been, Munday?” Her eyes were bright. Something
looked different about her, he couldn’t say what, but just then he
loved her with all his heart and he grinned foolishly as he ap­
proached. “You may call me a liar but I been up the Blackfoot on
a bird call.”

Chris grinned. “A bird call, is it?”

“Yeah.”

“Okay. You’re a liar.”

Alex laughed. “It’s for real. I went up and got a bird out of a
tree. For this human badger of a guy.”

“Munday, you’ve got it all over Orpheus.”

“Who?”

“Orpheus. He’s the guy who charmed all the animals.”

“I don’t know that you’d say I charmed this particular bird.”

“Well then you charmed the customer. The human badger
guy.”

“I got his bird down. That’s about it.” He kept thinking about
the way the cockateel stared at him. Something about it got to
him. The sky was pale, bright, streaked with blue and a chinook
whistled in from the west, bellied out the bedspreads hung up to
air. He felt suddenly weary and heavy.

“What’s in the sack?”

“Frozen paddlefish.” Alex turned, hook-shot the bag into an
empty leaf barrel. “I got a smart-mouthed bird out of a tree for a
rubber check and a sack of old mudfish. I hope Orpheus made
out better than that.”

Alex knelt down, peered at the earth where she’d raked it clear,
touched the green spikes of crocus. Chris grinned, leaned on her
rake. “I’ve got news for you, Munday. Tom Sweeney’s back in
town.”
Take Two, Hit to Right, and Lie About Your Batting Average

The world thinks of Dick Hugo as a fine poet who played softball. That’s jake. It lets me remember him as a fine softball player who wrote poems. Each spring, for decades, the English Department of the University of Montana has fielded an intramural men’s softball team. The years I played we called ourselves the Stark Ravens, and we more than held our own. A collection of undergrads, grad students, faculty and strays, we fended off squad upon squad of grim, too-muscled, flange-headed fraternity boys and off-season intercollegiate football and basketball players.

Though cunning and innate ability played no small part in the Stark Ravens’ success, we might well have been relegated to mediocrity had it not been for the more-than-occasional advice—both practical and abstract—from Dick. He would stand on the sidelines, scowling and grumpy, cigarette in hand. He would thrump and mutter at our miscues and thrump and mutter praise when we played well. We drank his mutterings, never slaked.

The roster ebbed and flowed, of course, and eventually enough alumni existed to form a team that began playing in the Missoula City Leagues. That team’s name has evolved over the years: Eric’s Hippies, Construction Concepts, Eastgate Liquor Store and Lounge, The Carousel Lounge, Arrow Graphics, and, for the last eight years, The Montana Review of Books.

Free agency has long been in place, as all good fans know, and the rosters have reflected that, but always they have included MFA students and former MFA students, Lit majors, newspaper reporters, magazine writers, novelists, poets, essayists—as a
French journalist once decided, “wild penmen of the plains.” We suited up, always under our *noms de guerre*: Doctor, Coach, Suds, Pa, Moon, Hi-Test, Tweed, Gabby, Scooter, Buddha, Vegas, Batman, Rojo, Barn, Lasko, Bez, Guntz, Flash, Zoop.

One mystery for the ages: Why, generally, do poets station themselves in the infield, while the prose writers prefer the greensward?

Dick has attended the majority of these city games—a few from the dugout, a few from behind third base, usually with colleagues and friends from town—Kittredge, Welch, DeMarinis, Ganz—a few with visiting firemen. But most of them he has watched from his vantage point in St. Mary’s Cemetery, across Turner Street from the home field, Northside Park.

The clobberings, the surgeries, the upsets, those games that end without having established a form at all. The blown eleven-run lead in the bottom of the seventh in 1987; the eight-run comeback in the bottom of the same frame in 1990; the rat-eyed grounders that slip past the nets; the mangled relays; the missed signals; the double plays—*snap snap*, fast as the eye; the hurrah-tally squibs from the bottom of the order; the pennant races over within a fortnight; the pennant races that weren’t over until the last week; that championship season, 1984, when gasping and sore, we beat our old rival, Eight-Ball Billiards, under a punishing August sun.

Do the dead speak to us? I think not. But we have, over the years, received communications, suggestions that sometimes solve those “ancient problems” that, Dick knows, come to focus in the heat: *Move right field over and in, this chump is peeking; Second breaks right every pitch, he’s a slave; First is a statue, poke to the hole; His cannon’s gone stone, move the cutoff man out.*
And after: Nice grab on that shot to left. Good game. Good game. What is a team without an editor? Not too damn much.

Oh, 1980 was one long year: the first win didn’t come until the afternoon Mount St. Helens arrived; the last win made five in all—and this a thirty-game season, plus another dozen or so practice and tournament contests. Three of us—two players and a loyal fan—patched together a poem, read it at the post-season party. A moment of silence, a raised-beer hurrah and a lone cry: “Wait’ll next decade!”

Ha!

Soon enough, we got the poem to Dick. He scanned it. Scowled. Thrumped. Not too much damage here. Hung on to it.

Ah!

Degrees of Gray at Northside

You might come here game day with a hangover. Say your arm went dead. The last good hit you had was years ago. You run these bases laid out by the fit, past fielders who never err, cans of corn, the tortured try of huddled fans to accelerate their lives. Only appearances are kept up. The left fielder turned forty this year. The only sub is always on the bench, not knowing what he’s done. The principal supporting business now is rage. Hatred of the various teams the car agencies send, hatred of the ump,
the Infield Fly Rule, the street-smart fans
who leave each game by the 6th. One good
liquor store and lounge can’t wipe away the tears.
The 1980 season, the three-game winning streak,
a diamond built on slag—
all memory resolves itself in daze,
in panoramic blue the entire team in despair
for thirty games that won’t quit finally trying.

Isn’t this your life? That fall-short rally
still burning out your eyes? Isn’t this defeat
so accurate, the cemetery simply seems
a pure announcement: lose and everyone watches?
Don’t empty bases wait? Are grit
and faith sufficient to support a team,
not just this roster, but bleachers
of towering blondes, good jazz and booze
the world will never let you have
until the team you came from makes the last out?

Say no to yourself. The whole team, twenty strong
when the season started, still laughs
though their lips collapse. Someday soon,
they say, we’ll go straight home after a game.
You tell them no. You’re talking to yourselves.
The cooler you brought here still chills.
The money you buy drinks with,
no matter where it’s mined, is gone
and the sport who serves you dreams
is softball and her memory melts the snow.
Mama came in from smoking a cigarette right when I was asking my dad if he knew where Jules Bart lived. She was heading for the kitchen but she stopped and stood right next to me. Listening. So I asked my dad where Lena Twitchell lived, where Helen Singmaster used to live, where the Clatterbucks would be moving to, where Tater Master grazed his best horses. I even asked him to tell me where the old Reether accident had happened, to throw Mama off track. Dad went back to reading his farm report. Mama went back to the kitchen.

I thought I’d take a walk up to Jules’ place. I could turn around if I chickened out. I didn’t see the harm in having a look. I know Louise used to spy on a man she liked over in Charlo. I didn’t see the harm. The closest I’d come to spying on anybody was when I used to try and find Thomas Kicking Woman and Louise. But that doesn’t count. With them, I just didn’t want to be left behind. They were always doing something or going somewhere. Their whole lives seemed exciting. I decided I would look at my hike to Jules’ as a new adventure.

I packed some sandwiches and a jar of water. I put on my overalls and tied my hair back with one of my dad’s kerchiefs. Chances are Jules wouldn’t see me. I liked the idea of finally seeing where he lived. I imagined he had a good setup for his rodeo roping. I imagined I would sit in some bushes, unnoticed, eat my sandwiches, watch him rope, watch him. There couldn’t be anything wrong in that.

When I left the house, the clouds that had been in the distance
were moving in fast. The trees were creaking with wind. I grabbed
my coat and my mother’s straw gardening hat. The hat was the
color of weeds, which made it all the better. And then I ran. I ran
with my bag of sandwiches, with the cold wind lifting the hair off
my neck. I ran so fast it seemed the wind was carrying me. I was
lucky that neither my mama nor my dad had seen me leave. I
wouldn’t have had a chance if they would have seen me. Now I
was free. I let out a hoot.

The rain pelted me like hail. I could feel the wetness through
my pants. So I kept on running to stay warm. I crossed the high-
way and followed my old trail to Dixon. It cut a mile or so off the
highway. When I reached Miner’s Hill, I stopped running. I
walked under the pine trees to get out of the storm but the wind
drove thin needles of rain down through the trees so I ran again.
I knew I was just past milepost 107. I was surprised at how fast
I had come up on the land where Jules Bart lived. I sat down to
catch my breath but I was out in the open where anyone could see
me. I looked around. I saw his fenceline first and I followed it, a
curve that dipped down to a wide corral with high fences. I saw
a white barn. I wasn’t sure if I was at the right place. The house
was old and hadn’t been painted in years. I stood on the hill and
looked for mean dogs. There were only a few horses, five maybe,
in the corrals and they were running the far fenceline. I sat down
on the hill and watched them. The storm was purple over the hills
and moving fast. Wind pushed at my back. Wind laid the grass
down and the horses ran hard. I felt if I stood up I would have
rolled down the hill. Rain dripped off my face and hands.

I looked around to see if I could spot something that belonged
to Jules but I didn’t know what to look for. The storm was clos-
ing in, growing darker. The house was quiet. There were no lights
on anywhere. I looked around to see if I was the only one stupid enough to stand out in the rain. I decided to get closer. I hunched over and made my way down the hill with my teeth chattering. I could smell the dry dirt and the rain and it made me hungry. I found a little juniper tree near the barn that I could crawl under. The tree was stickery but I didn't care. The branches curled over me like an umbrella. I was beginning not to care if I ever saw Jules Bart. I sat down and opened up my lunch bag. I was sorry I hadn't taken a few more sandwiches with me. I heard someone in the barn and I pulled my hat down over my face and kept eating.

I heard someone moaning, a deep throat moan. Scared me. I looked up. Someone was in the barn. Someone hurt. I squinted in the distance and could make out two men. I was sure one of the men was Jules. I wrapped half a sandwich up and snuck down the hill a little closer. They were in the barn. I saw Jules. Jules and Antoine Pretty Chief. I stepped a little closer. Antoine was kneeling in the dust in front of Jules, crying. I saw him pull his shirt off over his head. I saw Antoine half-naked, his face bleeding, one side of his ribs slit. I saw Jules unstrap his belt and yank it out through the loops of his pants and for a second I thought he was going to beat Antoine. But when I saw Jules' smooth butt bared, his work pants at his knees, and his boots still on, I wanted to laugh. I pulled back a little so I wouldn't be seen but still I kept watching. I saw Antoine's dark hands on the stark, white halves of Jules' butt, mouth open and Jules...and then I ran. I ran. Praying they wouldn't see me. I ran so hard my side ached. My breath was tight in my chest so I lifted my head up to get more breath but I didn't stop running.

I couldn't have seen it right, I kept thinking. I couldn't be right. I half-wanted to go back because I was sure I was mistaken. I

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remembered the time I was seven and peeked through the crack in my dad's workshed only to see my dad and Dolores Newhauer. She had her panties down around her knees and my dad was looking at her up close. My dad told me later he was helping her lance a boil. That was all, he said. And I wanted to believe him even when I didn't. I wanted to believe that Jules Bart had a story too.

I was running so fast it felt like I had caught my foot on a rock and before I knew it, I was falling. I couldn't catch myself. I saw the wet grass come up at my face. I heard the water jar shatter and I felt the bone in my hand. I lay still in the cold grass for a while, listening to the sound of my breath. My knees were hot. I looked at my hand and it had been cut clean through to the white bone. I started to cry. There was a big piece of glass in my palm. I could feel a hot spot on my forehead, a hot spot that was scorching. The back of my head stung. I wanted to close my eyes, go to sleep. But I had a ways to go to get home and nobody knew where I had gone. I rubbed my good hand on my overalls. I could feel the little stinging rocks buried in my palm. I pulled the kerchief off my head and wrapped it around my hand. I could feel a deep throbbing pulse. I stood up and headed for home. My knees were tight and it was hard to walk. But I decided I had to get myself home. It all felt like a bad dream. Jules. The hard fall. I decided I would never tell anybody, not even Louise. Maybe it would all go away.

I felt my sides heaving. I didn't feel sick to my stomach but my whole chest was quaking. I could smell something sweet. It stayed in my nose sweet, sweet, like my dad's shaving cream and my mama's marigolds. I saw a big rock I could sit on and headed for it. It took me a while to make my way to it. My back was stiff. I sat down on the rough rock and looked at my pants. They were
torn at the knees and bleeding too.

I felt crazy. I thought for a second I could go back to Jules' place. He was closer than home. I felt like my mother's sister Norma who was put in Warm Springs. I wanted to laugh. The storm was whipping the bramble and I was surprised that it was still raining. My hair was dripping water. I could feel the rain water in my toes. I took off my boot to pour out the water and saw something in the grass. My heart shot to my throat. I looked again.

Something was laying still in the grass. "I hope it's not a dead deer," I said, aloud. Hoping it was a dead deer. Hoping it was a deer or a big beaver. Hoping it was anything than what it was. I saw a woman. I saw a woman with her eyes wide open to rain. I saw a woman, an Indian woman with her black hair caught in the weeds like cobwebs. Her arms stretched back above her head. I stood up. I could see the dirt under her fingernails. I felt the muscles in my back curl up to my neck. All the trees nearby, a long dark stretch, were good places to hide. There was a dead woman in the field and somebody probably put her there. I didn't want to but I yelped. And even though my legs were throbbing, even though my hand was bleeding bad, I ran. I ran again, so fast the hard ground flew past me.

When I got to the highway, I kept running. I heard a car coming up from behind me and I wanted to hide in the ditch. The blood itched in my tight fingers.

"Please, God," I kept saying, surprised I was saying it.

The car pulled off on the shoulder behind me. I could feel the scream in my throat. I made a tight fist with my good hand and looked for rocks. And I turned to see Antoine Pretty Chief looking at me from the open window of his truck.
“Hey,” he said, “are you okay?”

I looked back at him. The left side of his face was swollen and there was a cut on his lip that was still bleeding. I wanted to kick at his tires. I wanted to slam my good open hand on his dirty windows. If it hadn’t been for him, none of this would have happened. The whole thing seemed like a dream. “Bastard,” I whispered, “damn bastard.” I walked over to his truck and climbed inside.

“There’s a dead girl up on the hill,” I said, “right up there.”

He looked at me. “Up there,” I said again, pointing. He looked at me again as he was getting out of the truck and I was locking the doors. When he came back from the hill, I decided to let him in. He started the truck up and turned to me.

“Looks like things aren’t going so well,” he said.

Indian Officer Charlie Kicking Woman—Reservation Death
Perma, Montana
September 1946

I could not believe the way we found Hemaucus Three Dresses dead. It had rained hard for a couple days and the nights were winter cold. We woke that morning to a bitter frost steaming off the fields. Summer coming back like a sickness. The mud ground felt dead in the sudden heat. You could stick a thumb in the thaw to the first finger joint and hit hard ground. The season was something like a mock spring because in a mock spring, people will shed their winter coats and step outdoors, flapping the chill away, the last welcome to winter sickness ripe in their lungs. But this was September.

It wasn’t an Indian summer. And it wasn’t a mock spring. It
was the first day of the trickster, the way death weeds out the 
weak. It was the mock return of hottest summer and people 
stepped outside barefoot and smiling, believing since the cold had 
already come, the rattlers were set in the ground for winter. Like 
a mock spring, there would be death from this trick change of 
season. I had learned this lesson from Thomas. He recognized the 
seasons and he was never fooled. He knew when the chinooks 
were coming, the clean warm wind. When he was little, he would 
get up in the middle of the night while we were all sleeping and 
open the windows and doors with the snow still on the ground. 
And every time he did that we'd wake to sweet birds and fresh air. 

It was in a mock spring that Annie White Elk, the mother of 
Louise, had hiked up Magpie Creek to find her father. She was 
gone for two days with only a shotgun and a sack of jerky. There 
was a warm feeling in the air. It was a dry spring but she came 
home chilled and fevered and dreaming of a white root cellar 
filled with yellow apples. The day they buried Annie the winter 
came again. A long winter we still remember. Nothing good ever 
comes of a mock season. Nothing good ever comes of trickery. 

Myra Vullet, a white girl from Perma, stumbled on Three Dresses. 
She actually caught one foot under Hemaucus and fell headlong 
over the body. She ran home to her folks and we went out there 
with the mother tagging along to where Myra said she'd found 
her. When Del Thrasher pressed his foot to her side to turn her 
over, I grabbed his leg.

"Matter with you?" he said. "She's dead."

I swallowed hard. Thrasher used his shiny black boot to rock 
her over. Hemaucus Three Dresses, the first girl I ever had a crush 
on. Hemaucus was not yet dead to me. I looked down at her face,
her long, loose hair shiny and thick as horse tail strands threading weeds. A hole in her back straight through her shattered chest bone, a single blood stain, round and dry as a quarter, her mouth open, her lips split by cracks of blood. I could see one breast exposed. And I saw too that she was already returning to the mud cradle that held her. The weave of grass stamped on her soft skin held a warm, sweet smell that made me uncomfortable. It was early morning. A mist was rising off the river, rising off the fields. The sun was so bright the back of my eyeballs ached. The top ground was thawing and we packed the grass like straw as we lifted her out.

And I knew then who had killed her. We all knew, had known for years it could happen. By the time I got home two hours later, all the Indians knew. Emma chewed on fried chicken with a slick, almost pretty stain of grease on her cheek and told me about Hemaucus, how Hemaucus had been cooking and left the table set. The dough for the fry bread was rising on the counter, a pot of eggs boiling on the stove. The small, daily particulars of her life were story now.

The man she had kept house for over at Dirty Corners had a "thing" for Hemaucus. He used to wait around the schoolyard to see what boys she talked to and where she went. Hemaucus was never pretty. She had a plain, almost handsome way about her that seemed to come from her quietness. Whatever it was, Sam Plowman wanted it in a bad way and I remember when we were kids we thought it was funny. It had something to do with shame, with wanting so bad it didn't matter to be forty-three years old with a facial tic, with bad breath and body odor. In fact, that seemed to be a big part of it all, an undesirability that was beyond appearance. He'd been born with unmistakable grief. It was
something you couldn't love out of him, something no white or Indian medicine could cut from him. He was flawed. Loneliness quivered in him and we could see it.

The only thing that saved him was money. His mother's endless supply. And he had connections too. Harvey Stoner once paid a visit to him in jail on a barn arson charge and the man walked free. If it would've been me, I would've been strung up by my nuts. But something is going on here. You can't tell me these deals aren't funny. One day I'm going to find out what's going on and put an end to this nonsense. I'm going to nail Harvey Stoner. He'll get what's coming to him.

I had a hard time in school. The kids would make fun of me. Call me pansy and pussy. But when Sam Plowman came along, I could laugh at him too. When I was eleven, Sam Plowman was a joke. For a short time I could feel like I belonged. I wasn't the brunt. I was part of the group. Then the feeling changed. The more I called him names, the more rocks I threw at him, the more I felt connected to him. It felt like I was making fun of myself. So I threw even more rocks at him. I stood beside all the other boys. I threw rocks fast and hard, a sling to his stooped shoulders, a quick tight nip to the ear. We'd sting him bad. I'd run away, laughing, with the sound of his grief roaring in my ears. I turned once to see him rubbing his knees, sitting on the Mission steps and no Hemaucus in sight.

It wasn't until I got older that I began to see he wasn't funny or one to be made fun of. Like the time he beat Hemaucus up outside of school when we were fourteen. We stood in a circle, maybe fifteen of us boys, our hands in our pockets, all of us vaguely embarrassed because we did nothing but watch. His fists were grinding. When he finished with her, her eyes were small,
red-rimmed as a sow's and bleeding. Nothing was ever done that I know of. We didn't know who to tell. Hemaucus walked home alone, snuffling through a fist-sized nose. And that was the last time Hemaucus came to school.

Lately, I'd seen her around Mission with a Hidatsa cowboy from Wolf Point. He'd gone to rodeo days over in Ritzville. He'd been gone awhile, I'd heard. I knew it was Plowman. I could feel it. I figured he must have shot her first and then moved her body to the field a few hours later. I was thinking I'd go out to search around his house, check out the barn and the cleaning stalls about the time the Feds showed up. It was a dead end, they said. They weren't going to be able to do much. They estimated she'd been shot in the field about ten o'clock the night before. They'd been asking questions and all the leads were cold as Post Creek. They'd keep working on it, they said. The matter was in their hands now. I looked at my supervisor, knowing this was shit. When they left, he grabbed my shoulder hard and said it was best to drop it.

They picked up Samuel Plowman three days later, apprehended him at the Dixon bar. They held him less than thirty-six hours. His mother had found a stern alibi for him. That's my theory, anyway. He was let go. He's walking free today in South Dakota or Wyoming. I think about the other Indian girls, listen to the moccasin telegraph and hope nothing else happens. I don't know, maybe a person like Sam has only one obsession in a lifetime. But I hate to speculate on bullshit. The asshole will probably rape twenty Indian girls in one way or another. I'm not doing my job. I'm letting things slide if a man like Samuel Plowman can be set free.

I lied to myself about Hemaucus, like I lie to myself about Louise. I had a deep desire to be with both of them at sometime
or another. I wanted Hemaucus in small ways, probably in some ways as bad as Sam Plowman had wanted her. I wanted to touch her skin. I remember wanting to press behind her at the water fountain, feel the muggy heat of her. When I found her dead, I wanted to touch her forehead, cool as clay, bend down to hold her. But I let a white man press a mud-boot to her side and talk about bullet trajectories and possible motives.

Louise is different than most all the other women on the reservation. For the color of her skin she can pass for white but chooses not to. She’s run away from school, broke loose from police custody on the way back from Missoula to the reservation. She’s fooled me more times than I can remember. She doesn’t take crap from anybody but Lester Black Road and she even keeps him guessing. I’ve chased every sighting of her. When she was a kid, just fifteen years old, she pissed the BIA Superintendent off so much he had us pick her up on sight whether she’d done anything or not. And that got old fast. She got good at running away. Once she ran away from the school in Thompson Falls. I caught up with her at her grandma’s. Louise was thin and her clothes were old. Mr. Bradlock, the social worker, came along for spite, I think.

I saw her run out the back of the house toward the hill. It was cold, the kind of cold that makes your ankles ache. I chased after her, feeling stupid with my gun rubbing my leg, my wool pants scratching, and slick leather soles. I could see her just ahead and Bradlock was yelling at me. And I quit. I just stopped and tromped down the hill with wet shins and cold feet. Let him chase her if he wanted her so bad.

Bradlock made us wait at the bottom of the hill until nightfall, waiting for a skinny Indian girl who was smarter than us. She
never came down. Least not while we were there. And I thought of her as the shadows swallowed the pond, thought of her with the car running heat to our bones. She was probably standing near the trees, blowing thin breath into the pocket of her cupped hands and I wanted to wring her scrawny neck. I got out of the car a couple times. I saw the grandma peeking through paper curtains at us and felt embarrassed for us both. Every now and then Bradlock would ask me to get outside of the car and call her. I jumped the barbed fence just to be doing something, lost my footing and slid a long length of thigh in steaming cow shit. And I was sore at her skinny ass, her smart, tough looks. Sore at myself to be believing this would amount to anything but more humiliation.

I'd been thinking lately I'd gotten pretty lucky to leave this life behind. But Louise is my biggest reminder. I'm always chasing her back to my own past. I'm not even chasing her in the official sense anymore. I chase her for myself, I guess, like a bad habit. I look for her. Tell myself she needs to be looked after. Maybe I never should have given myself into the whole situation with Louise. I should have backed off a long time ago. Because something has happened to me that feels like love with her. I don't know. There's a point in love where we all can choose to be in love or not to be in love. Maybe something deep in our lives beyond instinct and hope makes us weary and too damn wanting, the slow time when we look out our morning window and we don't see the new sun or the grass shine. We only see that something is missing in our lives, something we're not quite sure of, like the feeling of losing a good, deep breath to restlessness. I've jumped on the hope of an easy solution and it turns out to be love again which in my opinion is just more wanting, the worst kind of wanting after you've
already stood at the altar with a shit grin on your face that doesn’t look like a happy glow after five years.

I’ve been thinking that maybe I’d try to move off this reservation for awhile. I’ve been wondering what it might be like to move to California. But deep down I know I’ll just be staying here. Staying here with a wife who loves me a little too much and a woman who thinks I’m some kind of idiot. A woman I feel myself pulling in my breath for, my soft gut. A woman who sees only that my boots are polished and holeless, the leather on my holster has a nice sound, that I always have a good meat sandwich in my jockey box. I guess maybe that’s all the Indians see in me. It’s what I see in myself, a whole lot of nothing everybody else doesn’t have.

I’ve come to hate this place. And it’s hard to give up something you hate. Impossible. Hate stays with you. I’d walk a fast road any day to kick ass. But I wouldn’t get out of my truck to peck my wife goodbye in the morning. It’s too much work. Love is work. It’s hard work to try and hold on, even when you want to. Hate is different. Hate drives like hornet venom. And I’ve learned to hate the side of the fence the Indians are on. I pull back from the smell of being poor, of wood-smoked clothes and old beans and Indian women who have been eating fry bread so long they look like buffalo. It’s a shame in me like oil under my fingernails. It’s everything I am. I can’t pick it out.

I caught Louise drinking in the bar last night. She’s too young to be drinking and Indians aren’t supposed to drink by law. I’ve hauled her out of the bar a hundred times and a hundred times more I’ve let her stay. But I didn’t have an official reason why I wanted to stop her. I didn’t want her to know I just wanted to see her home. I went up behind her, thinking I might chase her out
the door if she saw me too soon but I was wrong. She turned to me with her wind-sweet smile and leaned so close to me I could smell the sweat in her hair. She put her head on my shoulder and said so low I almost couldn't hear her, "Where would you like to be?" And I didn't expect her to say that. It caught me by surprise. I'm not sure what it means even now. I suppose it could have meant a lot of things but what it meant to me last night was more than I wanted anyone to see. It was, I thought later, a question that drew me to her. And standing there in my uniform with the threat of getting tossed out on my butt, with the threat of losing my job and losing my standing in the community, I slipped a tight arm around her waist. We were quiet together for a long while. And I left the bar alone. About the time I got close to my home my belly was shaking and I was grinding my teeth, thinking there was a stupidity born in me I could never escape.
A boy thrilled with his first horse,
I climbed aboard my father hunkering in hip boots
below the graveled road berm, Cominski Crick
funneling to a rusty culvert. Hooking
an arm behind one of my knees, he lifted
with a grunt and laugh, his creel harness creaking,
splitshot clattering in our bait boxes.

I dreamed a Robin Hood-Paladin-Sinbad life
from those shoulders. His jugular pulse rumbled
into the riffle of my pulse, my thin wrists
against his Adam’s apple—a whiskered knuckle
prickly as cucumbers in our garden
where I picked nightcrawlers, wet and moonlit,
glistening between vines across the black soil.

Eye-level with an array of flies, every crayon
color fastened to the silk band
of his tattered fedora, the hat my mother vowed
a thousand times to burn, I learned to love
the sound of words in the woods—Jock Scott,
Silver Doctor, Mickey Finn, Quill Gordon, Gray
Ghost booming in his voice through the spruce.

At five, my life rhymed with first flights
bursting into birdsong. I loved
the piquant smell of fiddleheads and trilliums,
hickory and maple leaf humus, the petite bouquets of arbutus we picked for Mom. I loved the power of my father's stride thigh-deep against the surge of dark swirls.

Perched offshore on a boulder—safe from wanderlust but not from currents coiling below— I prayed to the apostles for a ten-pounder to test the steel of my telescopic pole, while Dad, working the water upstream and down, stayed always in earshot—alert and calling to me after each beaver splash between us.

I still go home to relearn my first words echoing through those woods: I caught one! Dad! I caught one! Dad! Dad! skipping like thin flat stones down the crick—and him galloping through popples, splitshot ticking, to find me leaping for a fingerling, my first brookie twirling from a willow like a jewel.
With his red-hot grimace of teeth
glowing like a blast-furnace grate,
with lunacy blazing in his pizza-pan pupils,
and his nose the size of an *homo*,
this 40-foot marionette could be my clone,
my dismal spitting image, my kindled
kindred spirit. Burning in effigy
for the sixty-first time, he kicks off
Fiesta de Santa Fe—the year’s woes
up in smoke, they say, as Zozobra,
flailing his triple-jointed arms, groans
and explodes. We’re talking hot-foot
gone hubs-of-hell wild, the tipsy crowd cheering
this inferno, this animated Roman candle, and the Fire
Dancer, who torched my somber compadre,
leaping like a maniac-Tinkerbell
dressed in red leotards
beneath a hot shower of debris. Is this Salem
and the Hindenburg revisited? Is this
the gloriously torrid dream
of that Texan daredevil, Red Adair,
OR WHAT! And what in flaming Hades
is wrong with a modicum of melancholy
anyway? Old Zozo—my morose amigo,
my fellow double-Z, fellow last-in-liner
for life’s ration of happy-go-luckiness,
my hibachied hombre in black
bow tie and billowing white cassock—
although my gloom does not yet hold one luminaria
to yours, I'll join you in this toast
the day my Polack-Dago bones and blood
spontaneously combust: here's to our home
in the doldrums; may our ashes,
blowing together as one
dark cloud across the cosmos, drift
down on fiesta-goers
everywhere; may they all burn
from their boisterous, joyful bowels up, hot
tequila-sangria hangovers, long-
smoldering into the heat
of another wonderfully sullen year-after.
Gloria White Calico, *Still Waiting*, mixed media, 18" x 24", 1992
Gloria White Calico, The Wedding, acrylic, 18" x 24", 1992
Gloria White Calico, "...of the 173 dead, 33 were men," mixed media, 4' x 5', 1992
Gloria White Calico
Coyote and His Wife
acrylic, 24" x 36"
1992
Jenny LaPier, *Mother Blackfeet*, watercolor, 30" x 22", 1992
About the Artist: Jenny LaPier

Born in Browning, Montana, in 1955, LaPier began drawing and painting in early childhood, when abstract and surrealistic images first captured her imagination.

Although she received basic art instruction in public schools, LaPier recalls “frustrating years of knowing that I had to paint and not knowing what to do with it.” Oil was her medium of choice, but she became as creative as the situation demanded. “I would use anything in my house. I had shelving paper with wax on one side, and I used that. I used my children’s crayons, I used make-up and make-up brushes.” Five years ago she began to study art technique, first on her own, and later in art classes at Flathead Valley Community College. The results were immediate. After completing two paintings a day for six months, LaPier found it was no longer possible to set her work aside. “It brought everything into focus. For the first time I could have an idea and come out at the end with that idea in front of me.”

An enrolled member of the Blackfeet tribe, her work reflects that culture as well as her own spiritual and emotional growth within it. In paintings such as “Mother Blackfeet,” LaPier addresses her own struggle to come to terms with a blended Blackfeet, Cree and French heritage: “I didn’t want her, the French girl, to sit like she is; it seemed to happen unconsciously. But there she was, and I could see her shame, I could feel her shame.

“Being an artist has freed me up unbelievably. There’s a place where strong old ideas from the white world are set in stone, and being able to move in that, to express the anger and frustration—that’s a real powerful place for me to be.”

LaPier maintains a working studio, Renegade Art, at 200 E. Center Street in Kalispell, Montana, where she displays her own work, as well as that of other Native American artists. She chairs the board of directors of the Northwest Inter-Tribal Center in Kalispell, and serves as docent at the Hockaday Center of the Arts. Her paintings were recently featured at the Native American Art Show in Great Falls, and the Native American Cultural Institute in Billings.
About the Artist: Gloria White Calico

Although she calls herself an "Urban Indian," Gloria White Calico maintains strong ties to both the Blackfeet culture of her grandfather and the Alaskan heritage of her grandmother, an Athabaskan Indian whose tribe fished along the Yukon River. Her grandparents met while attending the Chemawa Boarding School, and later moved to her grandfather's home on the Blackfeet Reservation in northwestern Montana.

White Calico's dual heritage is reflected in her rich variety of subject matter, and has influenced her love of bright colors and her experiments of adding such media as buttons, beads and feathers to her paintings. Color, she says, carries as much power as subject matter and composition. For White Calico, the overlapping of these elements in multi-media collages "emulates how reality and myth overlap and sometimes merge."

"Color and texture are strong sensory and tactile media, and my interpretations of life revolve around them. As an only child who frequently moved, sometimes to a new school every year, art became a source of escape into a world of imagination. Painting and drawing became my means of survival."

Born in Browning in 1960, White Calico lived with her mother and grandmother in Great Falls, Montana, and Sacramento, California, before finally settling in Seattle, where she lives today with her two sons. She began study at the University of Washington in 1979, graduating in 1990 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Painting and a Bachelor of Arts in Native American Studies. Her interests in Native American history and tribal stories of the Blackfeet, and her ties to the northwest coast, are brought together in her work, as she strives to combine tribal history, stories, people and nature into a cohesive structure.

Since 1989, she has participated in many group exhibits in the Seattle area, in addition to a recent showing at the Museum of the Plains Indian in Browning, Montana. White Calico's work is available directly from the artist at 2718 NE 130th Street, Seattle, Washington 98125.
The sky had gone black at sunset, and the storm had churned inland from the Gulf and drenched New Iberia and littered East Main with leaves and tree branches from the long canopy of oaks that covered the street from the old brick post office to the drawbridge over Bayou Teche at the edge of town. The air was cool now, laced with light rain, heavy with the fecund smell of wet humus, night-blooming jasmine, roses, and new bamboo. I was about to stop my truck at Del's and pick up three crawfish dinners to go when a lavender Cadillac fishtailed out of a side street, caromed off a curb, bounced a hubcap up on a sidewalk, and left long serpentine lines of tire prints through the glazed pools of yellow light from the street lamps.

I was off duty, tired, used up after a day of searching for a nineteen-year-old girl in the woods, then finding her where she had been left in the bottom of a coulee, her mouth and wrists wrapped with electrician's tape. Already I had tried to stop thinking about the rest of it. The medical examiner was a kind man. He bagged the body before any news people or family members got there.

I don't like to bust drunk drivers. I don't like to listen to their explanations, watch their pitiful attempts to affect sobriety, or see the sheen of fear break out in their eyes when they realize they're headed for the drunk tank with little to look forward to in the morning except the appearance of their names in the newspaper. Or maybe in truth I just don't like to see myself when I look into their faces.
But I didn't believe this particular driver could make it another block without ripping the side off a parked car or plowing the Cadillac deep into someone's shrubbery. I plugged my portable bubble into the cigarette lighter, clamped the magnets on the truck's roof, and pulled him to the curb in front of The Shadows, a huge brick, white-columned antebellum home built on Bayou Teche in 1831.

I had my Iberia Parish Sheriff's Department badge opened in my palm when I walked up to his window.

"Can I see your driver's license, please?"

He had rugged good looks, a Roman profile, square shoulders, and broad hands. When he smiled I saw that his teeth were capped. The woman next to him wore her hair in blond ringlets and her body was as lithe, tanned, and supple-looking as an Olympic swimmer's. Her mouth looked as red and vulnerable as a rose. She also looked like she was seasick.

"You want driver's what?" he said, trying to focus evenly on my face. Inside the car I could smell a drowsy, warm odor, like the smell of smoke rising from a smoldering pile of wet leaves.

"Your driver's license," I repeated. "Please take it out of your billfold and hand it to me."

"Oh, yeah, sure, wow," he said. "I was really careless back there. I'm sorry about that. I really am."

He got his license out of his wallet, dropped it in his lap, found it again, then handed it to me, trying to keep his eyes from drifting off my face. His breath smelled like fermented fruit that had been corked up for a long time in a stone jug.

I looked at the license under the street lamp.

"You're Elrod T. Sykes?" I asked.

"Yes, sir, that's who I am."

"Would you step out of the car, Mr. Sykes?"
"Yes, sir, anything you say."

He was perhaps forty, but in good shape. He wore a light-blue golf shirt, loafers, and gray slacks that hung loosely on his flat stomach and narrow hips. He swayed slightly and propped one hand on the door to steady himself.

"We have a problem here, Mr. Sykes. I think you've been smoking marijuana in your automobile."

"Marijuana...Boy, that'd be bad, wouldn't it?"

"I think your lady friend just ate the roach, too."

"That wouldn't be good, no, sir, not at all." He shook his head profoundly.

"Well, we're going to let the reefer business slide for now. But I'm afraid you're under arrest for driving while intoxicated."

"That's very bad news. This definitely was not on my agenda this evening." He widened his eyes and opened and closed his mouth as though he were trying to clear an obstruction in his ear canals. "Say, do you recognize me? What I mean is, there're news people who'd really like to put my ham hocks in the frying pan. Believe me, sir, I don't need this. I can't say that enough."

"I'm going to drive you just down the street to the city jail, Mr. Sykes. Then I'll send a car to take Ms. Drummond to wherever she's staying. But your Cadillac will be towed to the pound."

He let out his breath in a long sigh. I turned my face away.

"You go to the movies, huh?" he said.

"Yeah, I always enjoyed your films. Ms. Drummond's, too. Take your car keys out of the ignition, please."

"Yeah, sure," he said, despondently.

He leaned into the window and pulled the keys out of the ignition.

"El, do something," the woman said.

He straightened his back and looked at me.
"I feel real bad about this," he said. "Can I make a contribution to Mothers Against Drunk Driving, or something like that?"

In the lights from the city park, I could see the rain denting the surface of Bayou Teche.

"Mr. Sykes, you're under arrest. You can remain silent if you wish, or if you wish to speak, anything you say can be used against you," I said. "As a long-time fan of your work, I recommend that you not say anything else. Particularly about contributions."

"It doesn't look like you mess around. Were you ever a Texas ranger? They don't mess around, either. You talk back to those boys and they'll hit you upside the head."

"Well, we don't do that here," I said. I put my hand under his arm and led him to my truck. I opened the door for him and helped him inside. "You're not going to get sick in my truck, are you?"

"No, sir, I'm just fine."

"That's good. I'll be right with you."

I walked back to the Cadillac and tapped on the glass of the passenger's door. The woman, whose name was Kelly Drummond, rolled down the window. Her face was turned up into mine. Her eyes were an intense, deep green. She wet her lips, and I saw a smear of lipstick on her teeth.

"You'll have to wait here about ten minutes, then someone will drive you home," I said.

"Officer, I'm responsible for this," she said. "We were having an argument. Elrod's a good driver. I don't think he should be punished because I got him upset. Can I get out of the car? My neck hurts."

"I suggest you lock your automobile and stay where you are, Ms. Drummond. I also suggest you do some research into the
laws governing the possession of narcotics in the state of Louisiana."

"Wow, I mean, it's not like we hurt anybody. This is going to get Elrod in a lot of trouble with Mikey. Why don't you show a little compassion?"

"Mikey?"

"Our director, the guy who's bringing about ten million dollars into your little town. Can I get out of the car now? I really don't want a neck like Quasimodo."

"You can go anywhere you want. There's a pay phone in the poolroom you can use to call a bondsman. If I were you, I wouldn't go down to the station to help Mr. Sykes, not until you shampoo the Mexican laughing grass out of your hair."

"Boy, talk about wearing your genitalia outside your pants. Where'd they come up with you?"

I walked back to my truck and got in.

"Look, maybe I can be a friend of the court," Elrod Sykes said. "What?"

"Isn't that what they call it? There's nothing wrong with that, is there? Man, I can really do without this bust."

"Few people standing before a judge ever expected to be there," I said, and started the engine.

He was quiet while I made a U-turn and headed for the city police station. He seemed to be thinking hard about something. Then he said: "Listen, I know where there's a body. I saw it. Nobody'd pay me any mind, but I saw the dadburn thing. That's a fact."

"You saw what?"

"A colored, I mean a black person, it looked like. Just a big dry web of skin, with bones inside it. Like a big rat's nest."

"Where was this?"
“Out in the Atchafalaya swamp, about four days ago. We were shooting some scenes by an Indian reservation or something. I wandered back in these willows to take a leak and saw it sticking out of a sandbar.”

“And you didn’t bother to report it until now?”

“I told Mikey. He said it was probably bones that had washed out of an Indian burial mound or something. Mikey’s kind of hard-nosed. He said the last thing we needed was trouble with either cops or university archaeologists.”

“We’ll talk about it tomorrow, Mr. Sykes.”

“You don’t pay me much mind, either. But that’s all right. I told you what I saw. Y’all can do what you want to with it.”

He looked straight ahead through the beads of water on the window. His handsome face was wan, tired, more sober now, resigned perhaps to a booking room, drunk-tank scenario he knew all too well. I remembered two or three wire service stories about him over the last few years—a brawl with a couple of cops in Dallas or Fort Worth, a violent ejection from a yacht club in Los Angeles, and a plea on a cocaine-possession bust. I had heard that bean sprouts, mineral water, and the sober life had become fashionable in Hollywood. It looked like Elrod Sykes had arrived late at the depot.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t get your name,” he said.

“Dave Robicheaux.”

“Well, you see, Mr. Robicheaux, a lot of people don’t believe me when I tell them I see things. But the truth is, I see things all the time, like shadows moving around behind a veil. In my family we call it ‘touched.’ When I was a little boy, my grandpa told me, ‘Son, the Lord done touched you. He give you a third eye to see things that other people cain’t. But it’s a gift from the Lord, and you mustn’t never use it otherwise.’ I haven’t ever misused the gift, either, Mr. Robicheaux, even though I’ve done a lot of other
things I'm not proud of. So I don't care if people think I lasered my head with too many recreational chemicals or not."

"I see."

He was quiet again. We were almost to the jail now. The wind blew raindrops out of the oak trees, and the moon edged the storm clouds with a metallic silver light. He rolled down his window halfway and breathed in the cool smell of the night.

"But if that was an Indian washed out of a burial mound instead of a colored man, I wonder what he was doing with a chain wrapped around him," he said.

I slowed the truck and pulled it to the curb.

"Say that again," I said.

"There was a rusted chain, I mean with links as big as my fist, crisscrossed around his rib cage."

I studied his face. It was innocuous, devoid of intention, pale in the moonlight, already growing puffy with hangover.

"You want some slack on the DWI for your knowledge about this body, Mr. Sykes?"

"No, sir, I just wanted to tell you what I saw. I shouldn't have been driving. Maybe you kept me from having an accident."

"Some people might call that jailhouse humility. What do you think?"

"I think you might make a tough film director."

"Can you find that sandbar again?"

"Yes, sir, I believe I can."

"Where are you and Ms. Drummond staying?"

"The studio rented us a house out on Spanish Lake."

"I'm going to make a confession to you, Mr. Sykes. DWIs are a pain in the butt. Also I'm on city turf and doing their work. If I take y'all home, can I have your word you'll remain there until tomorrow morning?"

"Yes, sir, you sure can."

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"But I want you in my office by nine a.m."

"Nine a.m. You got it. Absolutely. I really appreciate this."

The transformation in his face was immediate, as though liquified ambrosia had been infused in the veins of a starving man. Then as I turned the truck around in the middle of the street to pick up the actress whose name was Kelly Drummond, he said something that gave me pause about his level of sanity.

"Does anybody around here ever talk about Confederate soldiers out on that lake?"

"I don't understand."

"Just what I said. Does anybody ever talk about guys in gray or butternut-brown uniforms out there? A bunch of them, at night, out there in the mist."

"Aren't y'all making a film about the War Between the States? Are you talking about actors?" I looked sideways at him. His eyes were straight forward, focused on some private thought right outside the windshield.

"No, these guys weren't actors," he said. "They'd been shot up real bad. They looked hungry, too. It happened right around here, didn't it?"

"What?"

"The battle."

"I'm afraid I'm not following you, Mr. Sykes."

Up ahead I saw Kelly Drummond walking in her spiked heels and Levis toward Tee Neg's poolroom.

"Yeah, you do," he said. "You believe when most people don't, Mr. Robicheaux. You surely do. And when I say you believe, you know exactly what I'm talking about."

He looked confidently, serenely, into my face and winked with one blood-flecked eye.
Bluebunch wheatgrass, Indian ricegrass, tufted hairgrass, slender wheatgrass, blue grama.

Junegrass, squirrel tail, foxtail barley, prairie cordreed, sand dropseed, rough fescue, little bluestem.

The grass in 1910. It wasn't high everywhere. People like to say that, but it isn't true. It was deep in places, though, and it had a silvery sheen to it. The texture was different than it is today—very smooth and dense; not bunchy and harsh. You could walk it barefoot.

The buffalo, of course, had been gone for thirty years. Entirely. The last of the unshot were traveling the country, mangy and punch-drunk, in Wild West shows. But you could still see their wallows in the grass that spring, caves in the grass, big as rooms. And their big white bones too.

Somewhere in eastern Montana, passengers in a westward train huddled at the windows to watch two children ride a sled down a hill of that grass. The sky had no ceiling.

A solitary homestead shack, the sledding children, the hard clean sunlight, nothing else.

They rode the tawny grass slowly to the flatness, their small backs very straight. Then one of them waved a brown arm at the train and it was as if the wave sent something to the people in heavy clothes who crowded around the windows, and the ones who stood smoking at the rail of the caboose, because they all
laughed happily and at the same time. *This is how we are now. This is how we get to be.*

They came in droves that year. Some of the freight cars contained entire transported farms, minus only the land. Bundled and stacked fence posts, a flanky milk cow, a dismantled house. Stoves, dogs, washbasins, children. And soon, very soon, land to put it on—three hundred and twenty acres of it for the asking, the taking.

Other train cars held other kinds of homesteaders, the ones in city suits and hats. Young men, young women, from Minnesota, Illinois, Wisconsin. Teachers, clerks, realtors, maiden ladies who had decided to be farmers now because the railroad had told them they could. The only illness in Montana comes from overeating, the railroad said in the brochures it sent to Europe. Bumper crops, year after year. Land for the asking.

There is a list of the previous occupations of fifty-nine homesteaders in a northern Montana township. Twenty-three had been farmers. The rest included two physicians, three maiden ladies, two butchers, two deep-sea divers and six musicians.

Which one is a deep-sea diver? The ruddy drunk one with the dirty shirt?

Six musicians.

These were second sons and second daughters, the ones with dimmer prospects, more to prove. More than a few had spent the Sundays of their childhoods in lace-doiled parlors with heavy dark furniture, growing up during those musty decades that flanked the year 1900 like large, black-skirted aunts.

Now they had brilliant brochures in their vest pockets and
valises. A smiling farmer glided his plough through loamy soil, turning up gold pieces the size of fists. The farmer's house on the edge of the field had a picket fence and bushes and a garden. Everything was unblown, well-watered.

Get it now before it's gone; your own free home! They came in waves. Olly olly oxen, all home free!

And the big aunts speaking too: Child, improve yourself.

Jerome changed his name to Jerry the day he stepped on the train. He rolled up his long white sleeves and made notations in a small leather notebook with his new fountain pen, looking up from time to time to watch the grasslands flying past.

On that day in 1910, he wrote a sentence about the weather. *Fair and warm.* A sentence about the terrain. *Much land for the having and the grass appears to thrive.* He was, after all, from a generation that logged the days in dry, one-sentence reports. It was as if they recorded some ideal emotionless self; a self not subject to despair or transport. Maybe they thought if you could write it neutrally, you could keep living it, keep stacking the days.

Sometimes, though, a small cry broke through, and it all seemed to tumble. On September 11, 1959: *Vivian slipped away today, 4:15 p.m.* On Christmas, 1959: *One long day since September 11.* And then he would put down the pen and try to make his own body go as quiet as hers.

What must they have felt when they looked back on those dry little sentences piled up for the big fall? When they saw the entries on the days before unexpected disaster. *Bought two dozen chickens at Halvorson's. Strong wind from the east.* Did they read it later and feel tricked?
A young man in a dirty black suit began to play "Red Wing" on a mouth harp. He had colorless patches on his skin, dark girl's eyes and filthy hair. He was slumped in the corner of his train seat, one thin leg crossed over the other, his entire upper body a tent over his harmonica. Still learning the tune, he played it over and over, repeating phrases, stopping, starting again.

Jerry knew the melody and it gave him a queasy feeling that he tried to shrug off. The other passengers seemed to like the sound of it. One man whistled quietly along. A mother with a child in a blanket hummed it to her baby's head.

The Reverend Franklin Malone and his wife Hattie gave a tea for their son before he ventured West. The deacon's twin daughters—teenagers with orange hair in ringlets—sang "Red Wing." They sang without harmonizing, so they sounded like one person with a very loud voice. It was raining. His kindly Calvinist father presented Jerry with the fountain pen, telling him proudly what it had cost. Mrs. Shea passed a plate of her famous Lemon Swirls. All the women commented on the Lemon Swirls. All the men and children chewed quietly. He could have wept for the deadness of it.

Everyone at the tea was careful with him because of the problems he had developed the last time he left St. Paul—a bad dark time that brought him home from college weeping, and then silent, and then refusing for a few weeks to come out from his room because he had, in every way, come to a halt.

He doesn't know, as we see him on the train, precisely what went wrong, what shut him down. It had to do with tall doors opening wide on a cosmos that was not being made; it was finished. Fixed and airless for all time.

A membrane away from horror, that thought. What was the
point of doing anything? What protection did a person have from the most terrible of fates, or the most mundane?

Hints of those flung doors had come upon him early, which may be why he developed a habit of refusing, in the small choices of childhood, to do what seemed to be expected. He resisted. He bent his response.

But the world began to fill up with people who expected things of him—first family, but then teachers, coaches, friends, girls—and to refuse to cooperate became an increasingly vast and complicated undertaking.

By the time he went to college, the expectations of the entire world seemed laid at his feet and all he could do, finally, was stay in his room. He could not move an inch without cooperating. And he could not cooperate with a plan that wasn’t his.

Sometime during the third week in his room at home, he had a thought: If I can feel myself to be at real risk, that may be evidence that free will exists. If I can feel myself chancing something, perhaps that means the outcome was not fixed, after all. Perhaps that is a pale clue.

And so he decided to behave as though he were making real choices, and he would measure the success of the effort by feelings of being in danger. It didn’t feel authentic at first, this pretending. It felt like putting on a costume to see if you could fool yourself in the mirror.

But, for much of his long life, he would continue to do it. He would pretend he was a gambler, an adventurer, a person given to hazard. He would pretend that life was not accomplished, that it could still be made. It was the only way to feel hope.

And so, naturally, when a friend handed him five pamphlets from the Great Northern Railroad—get it now!—Jerry Malone was on that train.
As a young man he had reddish unruly hair, pale blue eyes, a full mouth; an unconscious glower to his eyes and forehead, which perhaps made others more brusque with him than they might have been otherwise. The brusqueness stung him and deepened the glower he didn’t know about, and so it circles.

He was still new to his life, though, and the guarded, pained expression wasn’t constant. Sometimes he looked soft and hopeful, as he does now, resting his head against the chair seat while the train pounds west, the thin sound of a sentimental song from the previous century wafting from its open windows.

The harmonica player raised his head to look carefully at the tawny, unpeopled, unfenced place they were, pushing through. A place that seemed to own itself.

By now, he had been playing “Red Wing” for hours; starting and stopping and starting again; ignoring requests for something new or for silence. Whenever the train stopped, everyone in the car looked at him hopefully. He didn’t leave.

In a twangy Appalachian accent, he spoke his first words of the trip. “This?” he barked, amazed. “Why this ain’t nothin’ to be satisfied with!”

They looked around them.

Somewhere, the train had pulled away from towns, from roads, from rivers, hedges and people until it reached a point—at night perhaps, when no one really saw—where it had catapulted onto this taller place that was scoured and glowing and as ferociously innocent as a new-laid egg.

They passed through Shelby almost four days after leaving St. Paul. Clouds had moved in and given the sky a ceiling. It was late afternoon and drizzling.
Almost the end. Sixty miles to the fence that began the Blackfeet reservation. Then the Rockies. This was it. Jerry got off in Shelby, thinking he might get located there. Then he thought, I choose to go on. He felt the verifying trickle of fear as he stepped back on the train and went another twenty-five miles west to Cut Bank, to the very edge of the available plains.

Shelby looked too provisional and unlit. The previous evening, a large fire had started in the outhouse behind a barbershop and spread to the warehouse and mercantile of one James A. Johnson. Johnson's store was destroyed, though the contents were saved. It would have been worse, far worse, without a snappy bucket brigade and the beginnings of a soaking rain. As it was, Johnson lost thousands.

Smoke mingled with drizzle in the flat afternoon light, giving little Shelby the look of a kicked-out campfire.

It did not look like a place that would be famous throughout the entire country in thirteen years. And James A. Johnson, resilient and flamboyant as he was, did not seem like a man who would be on the front page of the *New York Times*.

These are some of the names they would give their twelve by sixteen foot shacks and their 160 or 320 acres: Kubla Khan, Scenic Heights Farm, Peace Valley Ranch, Dulce Comun, Experimental Farm. The publisher of the *Cut Bank Pioneer Press* asked them to name their new homes and send the names to the paper for the record. Clonmel Ranch, Meadowbrook Heights, Boomer's Retreat, they would write. Only a few seemed to guess what might be coming: Grasshopper Ranch, Locust Hell, The Bluff Arcade.

The shacks had tarpaper roofs, most of them, and you could buy the pieces pre-cut at the lumberyard in Cut Bank—homestead prefabs for all those young people, men and women, mar-
ried and single, who didn’t know the first thing about building a building, farming a farm. So many of them had never set plough to earth at all, much less earth that had never been turned.

How was it possible for them to look around at where they were—treeless wind-straфed prairie—and call a shack Kubla Khan? Maybe they were wittier than we give them credit for.

The walls of the shacks were papered with newspapers. You could read your walls for recent news. The Unitarian Church Quartet, a day away in Great Falls, had performed “In a Persian Garden” by Liza Lehmann. A man who claimed to be a dentist from Bozeman had been arrested for joyriding. Peruna was the medicine of the day for puny girls, Clemo for arthritis, Electric Bitters for female troubles and Dr. King’s New Life Pills for those times when a lazy liver and sluggish bowels made a man so despondent he wanted to die.

In San Francisco, Jack Johnson, the Negro with gold teeth and a scarlet racing car and white women, trained for his Independence Day prizefight with James Jeffries. Poor Jeffries had been coaxed out of retirement to pound his 320-pound body into something white that could silence the yappity, cuckolding black man, but it wouldn’t work. He would lie bruised and bleeding at the end, and white men would race out, all over the country, to redress the insult by spilling blood.

In Colorado, a fifteen-year-old white brawler named William Harrison Dempsey was bathing his face and hands in a secret putrid brine, making them into leather for the days ahead. This wasn’t in the paper.

When Jerry stepped off the huffing train in Cut Bank, the first
person he spoke to was Vivian McQuarry, the woman he would live with for forty-seven years.

She stood near a tall democrat wagon, the locator's wagon, in a white shirtwaist and long slim skirt. Her chocolate-colored hair was in a puffy chignon and she had a flat straw hat perched atop it. She held the hat against a stiff little breeze. A slim-shouldered man wearing wire-rimmed spectacles bent with her over a map.

"Are you here to be located?" Jerry asked them. They looked up. The man nodded. The woman gave a happy ironic smile. "I'd give a lot to be located," she said.

They laughed together at the strange new word, made introductions all around. Vivian McQuarry and her brother George, from Cleveland. Jerry Malone, from St. Paul.

The locator was a rabbity man with a big official plat book. He wore a suit and gumbo-crusted work boots. He collected their twenty dollars, made pencil notations, explained that today's trip would be north of town, prime country closer to the border.

A decade later, during the bad time, Jerry and Vivian would both wonder if they would have been so instantly alert to each other if they had not been new people in a new place.

Vivian would think that perhaps she would not have noticed this Jerry Malone had she seen him first on a trolley in Cleveland, say, sitting with his legs crossed, reading a newspaper, dressed exactly the same. They would both think that perhaps they had been predisposed to be exhilarated by each other because they were still travelers then and were seeing everything with the seizing eyes of adventurers.

Jerry became, the moment Vivian saw him, as enchanted and clear to her as her engraved dream of her long-dead father, which
was actually just two impeccable images: One of him lifting her laughing, aproned mother a few inches off the floor. The other of his strong young hand on a straight razor, drawing the edge along his stretched jawline.

Vivian struck Jerry, the first day he knew her, as the very antithesis of the ordinary, a ravishingly odd woman who could keep him surprised the rest of his life.

It would occur to both of them later that the whole clue to the kind of love that beats the heart is to somehow keep yourself, in your mind, a traveler. That way, you don't make the mistake of wishing for an earlier version of your husband or wife, when what you really want is yourself when you moved.

In creaking voices, homesteaders tell their stories to earnest young people with tape recorders. Sometimes you will hear in the background, as they pause to pick their words, the restless whine of someone down the carpetless hall.

Most of them had arrived with travelers' eyes, in that charged-up state when other people have particular power to alter the course of your life.

Will they tell you what the countryside looked like, or the train station, or how many people were at the train station, or what the weather was? No. That is for us to imagine. They will tell you instead about the smell of a neighbor woman's perfume at a country dance, about a Gros Ventre man in braids and a Stetson at the Havre station, or the smell of burning cow chips on a fall day. They will remember the glowing newness of a neighbor's hand pump, the pretty pink gums of their young dog, a copper wash boiler filled with the bread they had baked in Minnesota. And a hot plate wrapped in woolen underwear for a father's rheu-
matism, the way a cook spit on a restaurant stove to test it, oil of
cloves on a wound, strung cranberries on a Christmas bush,
thousands of tiny red bugs in a pail of reservoir water, the taste
of a rabbit pie.

They might write in their logbooks: *Planted twenty acres of flax
with help of Johnson boys.* Or, *Copper wash kettle arrived today.* But
a woman might remember the way a neighbor kissed her before
he went back East to retrieve a young wife. A man might remem­
ber digging a well and going so deep that stars appeared in the
tiny circle of daylit sky above.

The sound of a wolf. The uncanny greenish color of oncoming
hail. The smells: raw lumber, tarpaper, cut flax, the exhaust of the
store owner’s automobile, the wet scent of a warm chinook
emerging from an arch of dark clouds in the west.

For Vivian and Jerry, that first day, it was bare ground that finally
stood still, a wide vault of sky, some small new buildings with
large spaces between them, the smell of raw lumber, and a car­
toonishly high wagon with two long, wobbly benches.

The locator pointed north toward the line that separated vast
ground from vast sky.

“I’m here to locate you,” he promised.

The locator’s horse nudged Jerry hard in the back as they all
huddled over a map, and knocked him against Vivian and
George. Jostled them all for a minute. The map crackled. Jerry
smiled and gently pushed the horse’s head back. “Beasts,” he said
gallantly. “Brain the size of a gopher’s.”

They ate at the Beanery, a long raw building near the station.
Long-cooked, stringy beef, mashed potatoes, beets from jars,
bread, pie. Jerry and George bent their heads over the maps again. George's face was flushed with excitement.

Vivian and George took rooms at the raw-boarded Metropolitan Hotel, where they put all their boxes and crates, and then, in the late afternoon, they met Jerry again and the three of them rode north in the high-seated wagon with its wheels that were almost as tall as they were and its two long seats, high up there overhead, spectator seats constructed for the long view.

The cart lurched and moved, and the horses quickly fell into a brisk walk that kept everything bobbing and moving. They headed north, leaving the scramble of Cut Bank's buildings behind. North and north in the bleached light for six miles. They kept to the grass along rutted wagon tracks. Occasionally they passed or caught sight of a shack out there on the grass. Occasionally they passed a field of blue flax. But mostly they saw prairie, prairie, tinged green, moving blankly in the breeze.

Jerry told the others about the children he had seen sledding down a long slope of grass.

They stopped, and the locator affixed some stakes to the ground and made a notation in his book. And they moved farther east and he affixed some more. One half section for Vivian. One half for George. One half for Jerry. They looked at each other and burst into full laughs.

Jerry had brought a picnic hamper, and they had dinner in the growing dark in the grass. The wind had stopped, a moon would be out, there were lanterns for the buggy, there seemed no huge hurry. They were located.

They returned in the silver-lined dark to the tiny winking gas-lights of town. Not a dense line of them. Just there, there, there.
The homes of their childhood were planted and close. Old brick and painted wood. Shade trees. Cats like small pieces of furniture instead of flickers in the corner of your eye. Here, the moon rode the sky, the stars shivered, Halley's leapt across the horizon.

The wind bent the tops of the grass, the clouds moved in small, liquid herds, breaking and reforming. All of it was light and silver and moving.

They trapped rainwater and bought the rest in Cut Bank for fifty cents a barrel. George hauled it out once a week in the wagon. It was straight from the Cut Bank river and the color of pale rust by midsummer. A Russian thistle grew by the back door of Vivian's shack. She thought it was handsome so she drew a cupful of her precious water every day and watered it—the tall spiky, purple-topped thistle that would make all the farmers so miserable in another few years.

Looking back, Vivian would see that she had been a fool about a simple weed. But at the time, the thistle was a discovery. Bending to trickle copper-colored water over it, she thought to herself, I shall make the desert bloom!

George got a typesetting job at the Pioneer Press and spent weeknights in town at the Metropolitan. He brought Vivian a cat she named Manx. Manx had begun his life as a cat named Cotton, with a tail. A year earlier, Cotton's nine-year-old mistress had cut off the cat's tail with her mother's butcher knife. Not all at once, either. In inches. He left the house shortly after that and hung around the Beanery where they fed him, and then he went to live with Vivian in her little ship on the grass.

She strained her fifty-cent water, boiled it, boiled her clothes
and rinsed them and blued them and wrung them and hung them to dry. The boards of her shack began to shrink and she stuffed the cracks with catalogs and rags against the winter. She cut up the rabbits George brought her, cooked some of them and canned the rest. She made soap in the early mornings when it was still cool.

She helped Mattie Newcombe, three miles north, thrash her crop of navy beans. They stood on the roof of the chicken coop, two women in their twenties, and poured the beans into a tub on the ground below so the wind could comb the chaff away.

She named her homestead Flax View because Jerry Malone had planted a huge field of flax and she liked to watch it waving blue in the sun.

They didn’t know anything then—had no idea what the soil and the weather and the fates had in store for them. They lived in their shacks on the edges of great patches of soft blue flax, a shade of blue that remained, for Vivian and for many others, the color of possibility.

On the last weekend in August, George and Vivian McQuarry, Jerry Malone, and scores of other homesteaders and townspeople drove their buckboards and wagons to Round Lake, fourteen miles northeast of Cut Bank, for a big picnic. The lake was the only substantial body of water for many miles in any direction. It was perfectly round, about a quarter-mile across, without a bush or tree on its banks. It glimmered blankly, naked and prehistoric.

These were the kinds of people who looked at such blankness and saw something green, planted, producing. There was talk of building a pavilion for shade, and it wasn’t hard to imagine that pavilion on a summer night not so many years hence, when the
sky would be the color of lilacs and the band would be playing and the sound would carry through air made windless and soft for the occasion. They would have earned something like that; music on a soft summer night.

The air held the smoke of burning pine trees a hundred, two hundred miles west in the mountains, and of the grass fires in the eastern part of the state. The fires would burn themselves out, out of sight somewhere. No one was panicked. Today was a picnic. It had been a good summer for those who planted crops, and the crowd was buoyant.

Look at them. How young they are! How rosy and cheerful. The men still have their city slouches. They wear the suits they wore on the train west. They don't know how to handle their horses or their farm equipment. Everything is still an experiment. Some of them politely scan the crowd for possible wives; for someone's sister who may have come out on the train. Everyone, man and woman, wears a hat.

Ten miles to the west, a fence runs along the Blackfeet reservation. The Indians have been put behind it somewhere.

A few children duck between the adults, ice cream smeared on their faces. A six-piece band sets itself up. Blankets are spread on the slick grass, the corners anchored with hampers and rocks. The women carry parasols. Their hands are still smooth.

Roderick McAdam has brought a couple of cases of his homemade beer, and some of the men are drinking it. One of them climbs into the wagon of a buckboard and offers a toast to the first summer in God's country.

The band is a little rusty at first, but smooths out. It's the first music most of the crowd has heard in months. They play all the familiar tunes.

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When they start “Red Wing,” a few people raise their heads quizzically, trying to think why it makes them pause. Then someone mentions the boy on the train and his infernal harmonica and a small cry goes up. Stop! they plead with the band, laughing. We’ve heard enough “Red Wings” to last us the rest of our earthly lives. The sun is red.

Jerry Malone stands with two other men smoking. Vivian watches him. He lifts his head to watch her too, and they wait a few moments to turn their heads away.

They look around at the crowd and all the space stretching beyond them, the wind-ruffled lake and the children wading at its edge. They keep their eyes away from the sun, which looks like a wound through the smoke, and concentrate on the people around them. On how happy everyone is.
On a late June day of 1974, my wife and I were eating lunch in the back of our Volkswagen bus at the Custer Battlefield National Monument. The sky was a cloudless pale blue and the wind which buffeted the bus from time to time was hot and dry. We had parked in the shade of a medium-sized evergreen tree, one of a grove of medium-sized evergreens planted on a strip between the parking lot and the National Cemetery with its orderly rows of gray grave markers. These stones mark the graves of veterans of many wars—including the First and Second World Wars, the Korean War and Vietnam—since the Battle of Little Bighorn. But other stones, bone-white, are scattered all over the battlefield, marking the original burial sites of the Custer dead, about fifty of them closely grouped on Last Stand Hill. Each of the simple white stones reads: U.S. SOLDIER, 7th CAVALRY, FELL HERE, JUNE 25, 1876, with the exception of the officers' stones, which are inscribed with their names. The remains of the enlisted soldiers were later collected from these locations and moved to Custer Hill, where they were buried in a large trench at the base of the obelisk. (Recently, the bones of an unknown Seventh Cavalry soldier were found buried in the bank of the Little Bighorn River. On June 23, 1991, one hundred-fifteen years later, he was re-buried in the National Cemetery with military honors, including a rifle volley from his old enemies, the Northern Cheyenne.) Interestingly, the remains of the officers were disinterred in 1877 and shipped east for reburial. Only one officer, a Lieutenant John
J. Crittenden, remains buried where he fell—at the request of his parents.

As we ate our sandwiches and drank our pop, trying to mentally and emotionally digest all that we had just seen and heard at the visitor center, we were interrupted by a large voice outside the open sliding door. "Do you know this is a national monument?" We looked up and saw an older well-fed man in the green and gray uniform of the National Park Service. He had one hand on top of his Smokey hat and the other extended as though he wanted to point at us but thought better of it. "Do you know this is a national monument?" he repeated. I said yes. "Then you know you're not allowed to eat here." Why not, I asked. He looked at me and I could tell he thought I must be crazy. There could be no other explanation for my question. "Because," he said, "this is a national monument." My wife and I understood immediately and put down our sandwiches and pop and stared shamefacedly at the floor of the bus. This caused him to soften a little. "Look around, enjoy yourselves, but after this pay a little attention to the rules." We thanked him for pointing out our sacrilege and when he turned away to attend to other duties I gave him the finger. I was young then.

That was my first visit to the Little Bighorn battleground and, in truth, it didn't do very much for me. Like any kid in America I had grown up with Custer's Last Stand. I had seen the movies, notably They Died With Their Boots On starring Errol Flynn as Custer and Anthony Quinn as Crazy Horse. I had read about Custer's Last Stand in history books and comic books. I can't think of a hero who has taught kids more about dying in mock battles than General George Armstrong Custer. I had even been Custer once, standing on a small sandy hill in the backyard when
I was six or seven, suddenly clutching my chest when one of the “Indians” shot me, falling and tumbling down the hill to lie motionless while the battle raged on about me. Of course we didn’t really know who Custer was—he was just one of those mythical figures like Casanova and Davey Crockett that get passed from generation to generation.

What made this particular reenactment different was that it was played out in the town of Browning on the Blackfeet Reservation in Montana and the “Indians” were Indians. I, Custer, was an Indian too, a member of the Blackfeet tribe. We also played cowboys and Indians, no particular cowboys and no particular Indians, just a lot of galloping around on make-believe horses, dodging from house to tree, shooting our cap pistols from behind garbage cans. The fact that I was a “breed,” part Indian and part white, did not determine which role I would play. Or maybe it did. I suppose I could play either role with validity. But nobody seemed to find it strange that a little “full-blood” kid could play a cowboy emptying his cap gun at an advancing wave of Indians.

Maybe we were influenced by the movies we saw in those days. This was in the late forties and early fifties and the Browning theater showed more than its share of cowboy and Indian movies, cowboy without Indian movies and settler/cavalry/Indian movies. It was this latter formula that interests me now because it elicited the strangest response from the audience. It should be kept in mind that virtually the entire audience for these movies was made up of Blackfeet Indians, ranging through all ages, but mostly teenagers and little kids like me. The theater would be dark and fairly quiet throughout most of the movie, as the settlers arrived in Indian country, put up their cabin and barn, turned their cattle out onto the far-as-you-could-see grasslands, hugged

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each other, fought off a few curious but menacing Indians and continued to work the land in a responsible fashion—but as the Indian problem worsened, maybe a few cattle, or even a neighbor killed, the audience began to grow restless and tense. And eventually in the big showdown, the settler (or maybe a group of settlers) had to fight a gigantic mob of Indians. As their wives reloaded their guns and the children attempted to put out fires caused by flaming arrows, the men emptied their guns out windows, doors, through the roof where a menacing savage had crawled, apparently to attempt a descent down the chimney. But soon it became clear that they were fighting a lost cause. One or two of them had been killed or wounded, the ammunition was running out, the cabin was burning out of control, the wives and children were praying or singing “Nearer My God to Thee.” Suddenly one of the men, in that eerie silence that always occurred when the Indians were regrouping for the final onslaught, would say, “Did you hear that?” and the audience would tune up their ears. And sure enough, it was the faint notes of a bugle blowing “Charge” and the camera would pick up a cloud of dust, a glint of steel, an American flag, and then it would be on the face of a furiously riding Errol Flynn, John Wayne, Randolph Scott or Joel McCrae, grim and sweaty under a sweat-stained white hat with its crossed sabers, and the next shot would be of a large number of cavalry troopers, the thunder of hooves growing deafening—and the audience would cheer! Just like thousands of audiences all across America, the audience would cheer this lovely spectacle of these men in blue atop their sweat-streaked but beautiful horses, stretched flat out, bugle blaring, guidon whipping straight behind them. And why not? These guys were going to rescue the poor beleaguered families, and in the process, give these savage miscreants the beating of their lives. And that’s ex-
actly what they did.

It was only after the cheering stopped and the lights came up that one became aware again that all these faces smiling in relief were Indian faces. Of course, in those days no one noticed or no one cared. The Indians in the film had been portrayed as the very embodiment of evil, and Hollywood had staked its existence on the notion that whipping the forces of evil (Indians) made people feel good, even Indians, who would pay their money and eat their popcorn in anticipation of the happy ending and when it came it was like the sweet contentment after a good orgasm.

It took the consciousness raising in the 1970s and 80s by activists and traditionalists for many Indians to really notice the perversion of Indians rooting against Indians. And it was only during this time that Hollywood made a couple of blockbuster efforts to portray Indians sympathetically, as people. I remember watching *Little Big Man* (1970) with awe, for not only was Custer portrayed as a vainglorious fool (which he was not), but the Indians, the Sioux and Cheyennes, were human beings—they made love, had babies, had strong family and tribal ties; they worked for a living and lived well within their environment. The point of the interaction between whites and Indians was not how tragic it was that Custer and his troops rode to their deaths but how tragically the Indians, whose tribal names were invariably a version of “the human beings” or “the people,” were treated during that period. It is a well-known propaganda tactic to reduce your enemy to “animals,” rats, mangy dogs, snakes. And the United States government, the army and the media were not above using such a tactic against the Indians. And they were very successful. One of the popular phrases of the day regarding Indians was “Nits make lice,” and therefore, it was perfectly okay to kill not only fighting Indians but their wives and children as well.
They were all less than human.

Little Big Man accomplished the feat of humanizing Indians by depicting individuals living in a society, with its own special structure, mores and values. It succeeded by showing the variousness of the individuals within that society. The other major film about Indians from this consciousness-raised period was Dances With Wolves, a movie that on the surface seemed much like Little Big Man in that it portrayed a Plains society of American Indians, its day-to-day life, its ceremonies, its concerns. But the main group of Indians in the film, the Sioux, were too homogenized, too nice. One would think that the Sioux were a peace-loving group of people who only fought when their enemies, in this case the Pawnees and the whites, pushed them to the brink. The fact is that the Sioux were the most numerous and powerful tribe on the northern plains who thought nothing of removing other Indians from their traditional territories by force. Black Hawk, a Lakota warrior, explained it: "These lands once belonged to the Kiowas and the Crows, but we whipped those nations out of them, and in this we did what the white men do when they want the lands of Indians." He might have mentioned many other tribes—Pawnees, Arikaras, Mandans, Hidatsas, Iowas, Omahas and others—who were whipped out of their lands by the Sioux. The Sioux did not forge alliances with other tribes, the exception being the Cheyennes, and sometimes the Arapahos.

But the main problem of Dances With Wolves is the homogeneity, the interchangeableness of the Indian characters. Graham Green is fine as Kicking Bird and Rodney A. Grant does a good job as the rebellious Wind In His Hair, but the other Indians were so much background in their buckskins and robes, in their clean camp, even in dramatic scenes such as the feast after the buffalo
hunt. Too much camera time is spent loving Kevin Costner’s face. It is also worth pointing out that Costner’s character, Lieutenant Dunbar, falls in love with the only other white—a captive woman with wildly teased hair and a thick tongue—in Indian country. It almost seems that Costner kept a shrewd eye out for what America would want (and wouldn’t want) in an Indian movie. That Costner did create a few temporary jobs for a few Sioux Indians should be recognized. That *Dances With Wolves* created a lot of false hopes that more movies would be made in Indian country should also be recognized. In the flush of the Academy Awards triumph, in which *Dances With Wolves* won every important Oscar available, Costner and screen writer Michael Blake professed their immense love for Indians and virtually predicted a steady stream of feature films about Indians because of their success. It hasn’t happened.

In truth, I didn’t know much about the participants in the Battle of the Little Bighorn that day in 1874 when my wife and I were caught red-handed eating lunch at the battlefield site. I had certainly heard of Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse and Custer, and names like Rain In The Face, Gall, Reno and Benteen seemed familiar, probably from my movie-going youth, but I didn’t really know much about the Sioux, the Cheyennes, the Crows and the soldiers of the Seventh Cavalry. Furthermore, I didn’t know why the battle occurred. I knew that it had to do with whites moving west—the infamous Westward Expansion—to claim the lands that the Indians occupied. I knew that the soldiers had been sent to the frontier to protect the whites, to tame the Indians. But I didn’t know about the financial collapse of America in 1873, the desperation of the railroad tycoons to move settlers and material west on their new trains, the discovery of gold in the Black Hills...
in 1874. I didn’t know that the Indian “problem” on the plains began in the 1860s and that Red Cloud, the Sioux chief, had successfully (for the moment in historical time) closed the Bozeman Trail and negotiated a decent (largely ignored) treaty with the whites at Fort Laramie in 1868.

All I really knew in 1974 was that a large battle had occurred and that the Indians were triumphant. They had whipped the United States Army.

So why was a white man in a military-style uniform telling me I couldn’t eat lunch here? Shouldn’t this have been an Indian monument dedicated to all those brave souls who fought off an enemy attack and in the process protected their wives and children and old ones from great harm? Shouldn’t an Indian be able to feast in peace and savor one of the few victories by Indians over whites?

Custer Battlefield National Monument. Some say it is the only national monument in America named for the loser. It is the only one named after a person. It’s easy in this case to put two and two together. But where is the monument recognizing the bravery of the Indians who fought and died there? Wait a minute. Things have changed. In June of 1991 Congress voted to rename the battlefield the Little Bighorn National Battlefield Monument. And as soon as the political bickering in Congress ends and a design is picked, there will be a permanent monument recognizing the Indians. One hundred-fifteen years later, almost to the day, there will be an attempt to recognize that the Indians were human beings, not simply “hostiles,” not simply strangers in their own land. It goes without saying that the name change and the erection of the Indian monument met with fierce opposition. One of Montana’s two congressmen (now reduced to one due to popu-
lation readjustment), Ron Marlenee, fought tooth and nail to prevent such heresies. The Little Bighorn Battlefield Association (formerly Custer Battlefield Association) was strongly opposed. Custer buffs all over the country weighed in on the side of bigotry.

Happily, Marlenee was defeated in a runoff with Montana’s other congressman, Pat Williams, in the recent general election. The Battlefield Association was now successful in influencing the congressional vote and the Custer buffs will have to learn to live with the changes.

On my first visit, the official monument, a blocky obelisk bearing the names of the fallen soldiers, and the visitor center were the most significant features on the landscape. A road led past the center, past the obelisk and on for another mile or two. Now the road has been extended the five miles or so to Reno Hill, where Major Marcus A. Reno and Captain Frederick W. Benteen and their troops were held under siege for a day and a half after Custer’s soldiers were killed. From here one can look to the east to the Wolf Mountains, the Crow’s Nest where Custer’s scouts, Crows and Arikaras, first saw the immense encampment along the Little Bighorn. Custer couldn’t see it—even with a spyglass offered by one of the scouts. Another scout told Lieutenant Varnum, Custer’s chief of scouts, to “look for worms.” That would be the immense horse herd grazing on the west hills above the valley. The scouts could also see smoke rising from where the lodges would have been. But the lodges themselves were hidden by stands of trees and a tall embankment. Finally they convinced Custer that there was a camp there and it was the very encampment of Sioux and Cheyennes they had ridden hundreds of miles to attack. Custer trusted these scouts and agreed that the Seventh Cavalry had finally reached their destination.
What the scouts saw from the Crow's Nest was a wide green valley marking the course of a meandering river called the Little Bighorn. The river course was flanked by cottonwoods and the valley was, or probably had been, covered with many types of native grasses and bushes. The thousands of horses had probably grazed it down to virtually nothing in the earlier days of the encampment. On either side of the river valley, green-hued hills rose up and rolled away to the skyline. Even in late June the hills in that part of the country maintain a spring color. It is only in July and August that the hills turn the golden tan that one associates with eastern Montana. So it must have been a very peaceful, lovely valley that Custer gazed down on.

Now only the hills and the cottonwoods along the river look much the same as they did to Custer and his scouts. The valley has been leveled, seeded into alfalfa, bluejoint grass, some grain, all irrigated. Ranch buildings in various states of repair are scattered throughout the valley, sheltered by cottonwoods, Russian olives, poplars and willows along the nearby irrigation ditches. Many of the ranches have small dome-shaped structures made with willow frames covered by blankets and quilts out behind the buildings—sweat lodges. This is now the Crow Reservation, a reward bestowed on the Crows for their service to the government during that period of conquest. To be fair, this was Crow country until the Sioux and Cheyennes beat them out of it. The Crows knew that the only way they could get their country back was by throwing in with the whites. And it has worked out for them. The Crow Reservation is one of the more prosperous reservations in Montana, while the adjoining Northern Cheyenne Reservation is one of the poorest (by most standards, both reservations—all reservations—are doing poorly in spite of government paternal-
ism). It has been a tender point with the Cheyennes and Sioux that the battlefield site, a popular attraction visited by hundreds of thousands of American and foreign tourists each year, is located on the Crow Reservation. But the Crows themselves have not found a way to take advantage of this serendipitous arrangement. There are two trading posts across Highway 212 from the entrance to the battlefield. Although both do a nice business during the tourist season, it is unclear how much of this profit goes into the Crow coffers. A very large motel complex, built not too many years ago by the Crow tribe, sprawls on the edge of Interstate 90, abandoned, vandalized and falling down.

Interstate 90, which runs the length of the Little Bighorn valley, is the most intrusive element on this historical landscape. There is a railroad track alongside it, but the track has been there for years and years and has managed to blend in by circumstance of longevity. A visitor hardly notices it, and the periodic freight trains remind one that the railroads became a part of the wild west early on. But Interstate 90 is a long double strip of bleak concrete that parallels the battlefield less than a mile away at any given point. In one place it is built over the skirmish line set up by Major Reno after his famous charge into ignominy. In other places it cuts through the outer edges of the Indians' enormous village. In one sense it makes travelers and tourists on their way from Chicago to Seattle a part of history for a few seconds.

Unlike my first visit in 1974 when visitors were few and far between, many of these tourists turn off at the suggestion of large green freeway signs, drive the half-mile east on 212 to the entrance to the monument and park either in the parking lot or along the access road, wherever they can find room. Today, motorhomes as long as battleships crowd the parking areas.
Tourists in all manner of dress, from bluejeans and cowboy boots to brightly colored and lettered shorts and t-shirts, mill around the parking lot, some going to the visitor center, others leaving, still others bypassing the visitor center to walk up to the top of Last Stand Hill where Custer and the troopers under his direct command perished under a rain of arrows over a hundred years ago. The moods of the visitors vary. Some are resolutely upbeat, caught up in the carnival atmosphere of large numbers of people, making jokes about Arrow shirts and Sitting Bull's tonsorial parlor (haircuts, two bits); others are solemn, as though this were a sacred place, sort of a Notre Dame under the Big Sky; others still are downright grim and these are the hardest to figure out. Are they grim because of what happened to Custer, or because of what happened to the Indians before and after this minor victory?

Languages you might hear around the visitor center include French, Dutch, German, Japanese, Spanish, Danish, Lakota, Salish, Navajo. Tourists come in large numbers from Europe and Japan, sometimes traveling hundreds of miles on tour buses from the nearest large cities. Indians come from all over America, many on the powwow circuit, because this site represents a moment of glory for Indian people and they can stand on hallowed ground walked on and ridden over by some of the most noble "hostiles" ever assembled in Indian country. It makes Indian people proud to point out to their sons and daughters and grandchildren that here something good happened. It suspends for an hour or two all the bad things.

Interpretive lectures are conducted every half hour or so by park rangers on the veranda of the visitor center. Often these rangers will dress up in the long johns and blue wool pants that the troopers wore on that hot (one hundred degrees) day. Often
they will show one of the 45-caliber Springfield single-shot carbines that the troopers used very ineffectually in the close range combat. They will point out the markers where Custer and his troops fell on Last Stand Hill. They will talk about Calhoun Ridge where the soldiers panicked, Medicine Tail Coulee where Custer did or did not try to ford the river to get at the village, Weir's Point four to five miles to the southeast where some officers looked this way and saw what they thought was a cloud of dust but weren't sure, the Reno-Benteen Hill beyond Weir's Point where the defeated Reno and the fresh but tardy Benteen managed to outlast the Indian sharpshooters who were picking them off one by one. And finally they will point down to the cottonwood-lined Little Bighorn and where the village was said to have stretched for three miles. Unfortunately, from the visitor center vantage point, it is difficult to imagine the village or the people in it. Tourists will interrupt occasionally to ask questions that they hope are intelligent. "Was Sitting Bull really a chief, or just a medicine man?" "Is that really Custer's jockstrap in there? Was he wearing it that fateful day?" "Was Reno really a chicken? Didn't he get court-martialed later for window-peeking?" But the canned rap goes on until finally the tourists are left to go into the visitor center, into the bookshop where Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee is not sold because it is too favorable to the Indians. They can buy approved "as told to" accounts by Indians who were there. And they can find any number of books on Custer, on military strategy, on the Indian "problem." They can buy posters, reproductions of the famous Anheuser-Busch painting of the Last Stand, maps. They can go downstairs and watch a twenty-minute movie which essentially reiterates what the park ranger told them on the veranda. And finally they can wander into the museum wing where they
will see buckskin outfits worn by Plains Indians (as well as a white buckskin suit similar to one worn by General Custer), military uniforms, weapons from both sides, old photographs of the period, some of the battlefield, and finally Custer's jockstrap.

The road that winds from the squat cinderblock visitor center to the Reno-Benteen siege site is interesting in that you are driving slowly over plains country that would normally be missed by the tourist in a hurry. Here you see the tough grasses, the sagebrush and the almost startling clumps of yucca along the roadside. From Custer Ridge you see the ravines, that look almost gentle from the valley floor, but now are as deep and ominous as they were on that June day in 1876. If it weren't for the other cars and motorhomes crawling along the paved road, you could almost imagine yourself riding a horse, along with the other troopers, and wishing you were back home in North Dakota, New York, or Ireland, or Germany, where many of the soldiers came from. All around, scattered in clumps, are the white stones where the soldiers fell. One marker, different from the others, is right along the roadside between Custer and Calhoun Ridges. It is easy to miss because it is so near and your eyes are accustomed to looking into the distance. But it is the only marker that shows the location where an Indian was killed, a Southern Cheyenne leader named Lame White Man. Another marker is so far in the distance that you might miss it too. But if you look far to the east from Calhoun Ridge you will see it, all by itself, near a barbed wire boundary fence. There is a story attached to it, a story not too old. It concerns a park ranger, an Indian man, who pointed out the marker to a group of tourists, "See that stone way over there? They say that one of the soldiers almost got away. He was running hell-bent for leather when an Indian rode him down and killed him. If he'd have just got over that barbed wire fence, he'd have
made it.” It is said the ranger was later fired.

As you wind down from Calhoun Ridge, you see off to your right Greasy Grass Ridge. Here the Indians pinned the soldiers down with long-range shooting, while hundreds of other Indians were crawling through the long grasses, sage and yucca near Deep Ravine to get near enough to the soldiers on Last Stand Hill to leap up and surprise them, a tactic that worked perfectly. It is worth mentioning because the Plains Indians do not get enough credit for such strategic moves on the battlefield.

Eventually the road descends to a point near the river where Medicine Tail Coulee, a dry coulee most of the year except for spring runoff and violent rainstorms, empties into the Little Big-horn. It is here that some historians hypothesize that Custer and his troops attempted to ford the river to get into the encampment. Others say that only two out of the five companies came down to look for a ford—or to draw fire to divert the Indians from Reno’s troops who were engaged in a deadly struggle at the other end of the camp. Indian accounts mention soldiers here. Lame White Man had been taking a sweat bath and only had time to wrap a blanket around himself and gather his rifle and moccasins. It is clear enough that no whites crossed the river. They were driven back by a rapidly organizing force of Cheyennes and Sioux.

In June of 1992, a group of Indians, led by Russell Means and other activists, held a Sun Dance on this spot, a kind of counter-demonstration to the anniversary of the battle. Because it was also the 500th anniversary of Columbus’ journey to the New World, the Sun Dance took on added significance to the Indians. To add even more significance, or controversy, the Indians blocked the road to the Reno-Benteen siege site for four days, the time it takes to complete the traditional Sun Dance. The road at the Medicine
Tail Coulee is on Crow Reservation land and is privately owned. Any other time of year this activity would not have created such a stir with the Monument personnel, but the anniversary of the battle brings in hordes of tourists, especially Custer buffs who use the occasion to pay homage to their fallen hero. (A short time later, the buffs held their own demonstration of a sort. They set up a card table near the obelisk, just outside an iron picket fence that holds the stone markers of those killed on Custer Hill, and placed a white table cloth and a pitcher of water and paper cups on it. A large bearded man in brown slacks, white shirt near to bursting and suspenders, presided over the ceremony. Then the buffs, one at a time took a paper cup of water and poured it over the fence, to give the parched spirits of the soldiers one last drink.) To block the road to the other important sites renders a trip incomplete, and therefore unsatisfactory, for serious visitors. The blocking of the road was especially troubling to Barbara Booher, the Superintendent of the Little Bighorn National Battlefield and an Indian woman of Cherokee/Ute descent. Her appointment to the position created a firestorm of protest from politicians and others who believed the monument was to whites and only for whites. Her appointment was praised by as many people, both Indian and white, as a long overdue recognition that Indian people had as much to do with that piece of ground as the soldiers—in fact, her presence might help to balance the equation. She weathered that controversy by determination and diplomacy and she has weathered many controversies since, none of her own making. She has described the superintendency of the monument, her first position at that level of responsibility, as "boot camp."

So the closing of the road by the sun dancers was only the lat-
est in a series of confrontations. The year before, again during the
anniversary, a group of Indians marched to the beat of a drum
from the visitor center to Custer Hill. There they made speeches,
feasted and round-danced very peacefully. Barbara Booher joined
the dancing. She must have felt greatly relieved because the ru-
mor was going around that Russell Means was determined to
show up with two hundred mounted warriors to “take over” the
battlefield. The ever-controversial Means, incidentally, has stated
that only two hundred warriors were involved in the Custer fight.
The numbers were inflated because whites at the time could not
believe that Indians could win a fair fight. Perhaps it was the pre-
sence of several patrol cars from the Crow Reservation, the county
sheriff’s department, the park service and the highway patrol and
a bunch of cops walking around with walkie-talkies that deterred
the present-day warriors. Whatever the cause, a crisis was averted.

And now the closing of the road by the activists was certain to
create a pressure-cooker situation again, and again Barbara
Booher stepped up to deal with it. She talked to Means and the
other leaders and made the determination (surely with the aid of
her superiors in the National Park Service) that the Indians could
close the road to hold their four-day Sun Dance since both the
road at Medicine Tail Coulee and the ceremony were on Crow
land. The visitors could learn about the Reno-Benteen site from
exhibits and literature and interpretive programs at the visitor
center. Undoubtedly this decision did not sit well with many of
the tourists, but it was the fair one and was accepted as such.

In her three years as superintendent, Booher has had to walk
the fine line on several occasions. But she is a strong, calm woman
not given to caving in to pressure. In many ways, in these chang-
ing times when many of the old western myths are being reas-
sessed, she is the perfect person for the job.

From the low point where the mouth of Medicine Tail Coulee empties into the Little Bighorn, you begin an ascent up a ridge just west of the coulee. This ridge reaches its apex at a notched hill called Weir's Peak. It was at this high point that Captain Thomas B. Weir, and later Captain Frederick Benteen, and others looked across to the Custer fight. Weir and his subordinates determined that a fight was in progress but they didn’t know it was just about finished until the Indians looked back and saw the soldiers and began to gallop toward them. Weir and three companies dug in to form a skirmish line, but Benteen, declaring that “this is a hell of a place to fight Indians,” and his company took off, riding at a fast clip back to Reno Hill. Weir and the other companies soon followed him, having determined on their own that the high hill was not the most strategic place to fight a large number of circling Indians. In fact, had they stayed the circumstances would have been identical to Custer’s. Reno himself was heading at a rather reluctant pace toward Weir’s Peak when Benteen met him and told him that Reno Hill would be the best spot to make a breastworks and stand off the Indians. Reno quickly agreed. And that’s where Reno and Benteen and their companies underwent a day and a half siege. Had not Generals Terry and Gibbons and their troops arrived from the west it is quite probable that the soldiers on Reno would have been wiped out too.

Reno Hill is the last stop on the road across the battlefield. It is a little more than a mile southeast of Weir’s Peak. One can still see evidence of breastworks, small semicircular depressions in the earth that make an arc from north to east to south. In the middle of this arc, horses and pack mules were picketed and a doctor and his assistants tended to the wounded. To the west is the steep
descent down to the Little Bighorn River. It is up this bluff that the remainder of Reno’s 140-man battalion climbed in their flight from the Indians in the valley after their ill-fated charge of the village of ten thousand people, two thousand warriors. Reno lost roughly one third of his men in the valley fight. Several others were wounded.

During the siege, lack of water became the main concern of the troopers. A few volunteers made the descent down to the Little Bighorn to fill canteens, some made it back. Others were picked off by Indians on the ridges around them. Those that did make it back were given medals of honor in recognition of their extraordinary achievement. But the sniping continued throughout the evening and all of the next day. The Indians mainly took up positions on a long ridge northeast of Reno Hill. This ridge later became known, appropriately enough, as Sharpshooters Ridge. Several soldiers were shot, as well as horses and pack animals. But Reno Hill offered a defensible position as long as water and ammunition would last. Toward the end of the second day, the Indians got word from scouts that other longknives were coming from the west. That night they packed up their village and fled south to the Bighorn Mountains. The Battle of the Little Bighorn was over.

From Reno Hill you have a clear view, to the east, of the Wolf Mountains, over which both the Indians and later the cavalry crossed to get to the fatal site. If you look through a small hole bored into a pole you see the exact location of the Crow’s Nest, where Custer’s scouts first saw the signs of a large village. You can also see, halfway between the Crow’s Nest and Reno Hill, the location of the famous “lone tepee” on Reno Creek where one of Crazy Horse’s warriors died from his wounds and was buried with

Welch 165
his possessions after the Indians' attack on General Crook's southern column on the Rosebud, effectively putting Crook out of the Indian wars for an extremely crucial period of time—and more importantly, out of the Battle of the Little Bighorn. Had he triumphed and continued north, and the timing was right (which it might well have been), the battle might have had a very different outcome.

To the south from Reno Hill you see the Little Bighorn River valley and farther on, the snowy Bighorn Mountains where the Sioux and Cheyennes split up into separate bands. Most of the reservation Indians went back to the Great Sioux Reservation in the Dakotas; the other "free" Indians scattered to pursue the buffalo—and to get as far away from the Little Bighorn as possible. The Indians all knew that the battle had been a great triumph; they also knew that it would bring many more soldiers determined to make them pay for their victory.

So that is the route of the road through the battlefield. It is a good route for it takes you over the terrain where most of the fighting occurred, the only exception being Reno's valley fight, the location of which can be clearly seen from the hill. Unfortunately it takes you backward in time and event so you do a near reversal of the battle as it unfolded. But the battle was more complex than that. It was essentially two battles, the first being Reno's valley charge and retreat to Reno Hill, the second being Custer's movements from Medicine Tail Coulee to its mouth, up Calhoun Ridge, across to Custer Ridge, and finally Custer Hill, with a short stopover in Deep Ravine.

There is considerable overlap in the two movements of the Seventh Cavalry. Things are going on at the same time. Although Reno engaged the Indians first, his troops from Weir's Peak
watched the demise of Custer and his five companies, then had to deal with the Indians who had killed Custer. Even then, they were not certain that Custer had been killed. That night of the 25th of June there was much grumbling as they lay under siege, dug in against the cold and the sniper fire, many of them asking, "Where's Custer?"

It wasn't until the morning of the 27th when Generals Terry and Gibbons led their command to the battlefield and the deserted village that Reno and Benteen learned the news. Custer and the entirety of his battalion had been killed and the Indians were gone.

So this is the battlefield, which is described in most literature on the subject as "bleak" or "barren," as in the "bleak hillside," the "barren landscape." Having grown up in country similar to this in northern Montana, I find it anything but bleak or barren. In fact, the Little Bighorn valley reminds me a lot of the Milk River valley on the Fort Belknap Reservation where my family had our ranch. And we considered that valley a beautiful place to raise families, to run cattle, to grow alfalfa and bluejoint, to ride double on a big white horse.

Perhaps it's a matter of perspective. The whole tour is designed to show the battle from the white point of view. In describing the battlefield, I have placed the reader in Custer's shoes, in Reno and Benteen's shoes. This is the perspective that the tourist gets. The road follows the various positions of the Seventh Calvary. The manifold literature is told from these positions. The tourist is encouraged to look down from these rolling hills, these ridges, and imagine what it must have been like for these soldiers to be completely overwhelmed by half-naked, yipping savages.

If by chance you cross the river and drive a road paralleling the
river on the reservation side, you get a much different perspective of the battlefield. In fact, you might even forget that you’re here because a battle occurred on those hills beyond the river. In most places, you can’t even see the hills because of towering cutbanks that block your view. What you see on this side is flat, green valley floor, a slow-moving, small river and cottonwood trees and wild rosebushes. If it’s a hot June day, you might walk down to the river and sit in the shade of the cottonwoods and listen to the faint swirl of the water (I don’t suggest you try this without permission because the land is privately owned). Stay there for twenty minutes, an hour. Imagine that it’s a large camping site and families and friends are picnicking, working on crafts, putting up foodstuffs, conversing, maybe gambling. Imagine that it’s an immense campground filled with ten thousand people and that relatives have to walk or ride two or three miles to visit other relatives—if they can find them (as one Lakota elder put it: “It took them maybe four days to find their relatives someplace among different bands”). Imagine children playing in the water or kicking a ball made of rags and skin or riding their ponies through the camp. Imagine young men flirting with young women; boys having a contest to see who’s the best archer; girls playing games with sticks and hoops, or playing make-believe with dolls; mothers cutting meat into thin flat strips to hang on the drying rack or going out to look for berries; husbands cleaning their muskets—the lucky few their new repeating rifles—or making a new bowstring by rubbing and twisting wet rawhide through the eye sockets of a buffalo skull. Then imagine old ones, the keepers of the stories, as they visit with one another, recounting war honors or joking or teasing a young one who is too full of himself.
All the while it is a cloudless hot day, but down by the river, under the cottonwoods, there is a breeze and it is cool, even peaceful.

Then you hear a shout from far off. It is faint at first, hardly distinguishable from the general camp hubbub, but soon it begins to echo as more people shout. And finally you make out the words: “Soldiers are here! Soldiers are here!” And you see an old man standing in front of his lodge, crying “Young men, go out and fight them! You have only one life!”

But you are sitting on the bank of a slightly off-color river and what you really hear are magpies and an occasional meadowlark, or a cow calling her calf to remind you that you are here, now, nearly in the twenty-first century, a long time from that day that the alarm was raised among the lodges of that camp.

It is a different perspective. And as you look up at those cliffs across the river you can almost imagine the terror that visited the peaceful village. You can almost imagine that you are here.
Tiffany Midge

Iron Eyes Cody

An Indian famous for his rainwater eyes, blazed through Wolf Point Main in a shiny white Cadillac, smiling & waving like President Nixon, tossing Tootsie Pops like the Pope might toss rosaries. Brown-skinned kids snatching a little of their own Independence Day glory, congregated the street, abandoned their mothers, fled toward the famous Indian seen on TV.

All my life the planet has cried for a savior. My grandmothers ensure their P.O. boxes in heaven, spend their last few years preaching me the gospel, their mouths deliver a tongue of living testimony, proof that their grandmothers prayed to the wrong spirit.

Who was Black Elk? Who was Wovoka?

Armageddon lays heavy in the tallest of steeples, in the grandest of state capitol suites, in the steam that curls around an old one's pipe.

Iron Eyes Cody consecrated my first communion, on the day America celebrated liberty from a monarch, during a year when a war was being forgotten, in a time when TV was more important than kings, than grandmothers, than preachers & prophets, than politicians, than real Indians.
Kevin Miller

Reunion on the Northfork

This November winter pansies make as much sense as a car that runs. A wall of leafless blackberries covers a field and hides pheasant. In Fristad's neglected orchard, windfall apples spoil three black bear. A dying wife smokes knowing the smoke won't kill her. Four men walk the dry path of Racehorse Creek to the Nooksack's bank. They kick rocks in a fall so dry salmon carve angels in stone. No answers rise from barren beds and the spawn red creeks they recall. One man uses fish as his hook to force words where no one wants to go. Another man feels the cold minestrone at Graham's is his fault. No one blames the girl who looks like the man in the kitchen. She deftly ladles and chats. McGahern says 'She was as far from ugly as she was from beauty,' and they smile as she praises them for bussing their dishes. Four men pack into the small car. They drive Road 37 past the snowline. They set foot in winter and return like the boys who teased the dog, boys who no longer believe they have escaped for good, for good is measured differently, like beauty, apples and smoke.
The Ani

October, November, December, I've forgotten
the month, but I remember the moment
I first saw the Ani

perched on the limb of a young tree
planted in the divider strip of a parking lot
in South Florida, North Miami, Bay Vista'

where they used to dump toxic waste
in the mangroves, then paved it over
and built a university. I worked there
two years. The limb was so slight
and the Ani so heavy it bobbed
up and down in the breeze.

Clouds loomed above the sea.
Tar-black and shining in the sun,
its big grotesque beak

in profile, it looked straight at me
with one eye glinting like a black pearl.
I am the Lord God of this exact place
it said. Who are you?
Remember the Moose

She must have come down from high mountain meadows where bear-grass blooms had dried and fallen, paintbrush put away its colors, and mud-wallows begun to freeze and stay frozen past noon, down along the creek through aspen, alder, and willow thickets to high grass along a road leading to town.

Why she kept on coming you can only guess. Rich green smell of cemetery grass, muted bellow of a distant bull, old path imprinted in her genes, deep doubts, simple curiosity? Maybe she was lost, or came as a reminder of something lost. A moose grazing among the graves on Sunset Hill is an image one might hold for years, turning it over and over, working it into a story or finding it, strangely lit, inverted in a dream.

Remember the moose outside the tent in Idaho, the moonlight and mosquitoes, how she looked like a boulder in the creek until she lifted her great head from the water,
big worldly angel, and turned to look
at you with ropes of weeds
hanging from her mouth.

By day she strolled among the park's
swingsets and jungle-gyms, stopping
to sniff the dull shine of a slide
or stopping, high as a house, in some child's
eye. Parents, sensing danger, tried to shoo her away,
but she followed her own calling.
Nearly blind after the sun went down,
street lights and house lights surrounded her—
a confusion of moons. She must have picked
one to lead her on. They found her
on the Newsomes' front porch, snout pressed
against the wall, back legs splayed. Terrified,
someone said, as neighbors gathered to watch
the wildlife officials load their darts
and end her urban visit
in a sudden blur of drugs.

Think of Golden Gate Park half a life ago,
a day of dancing and chanting, thousands
of hairy kids, men, women,
dogs with beads and dirty bandannas,
a fog of breath and marijuana pulsing
around black banks of speakers blasting
the twilight with drumbeat and guitar shrieks.
Someone smiling hands you a hit of something.
You walk off across a baseball diamond
toward some tree or siren or patch of grass
looking for your country. A shock-eyed man
marches barefoot mouthing a manic recitation
like a fuse burning. You walk and walk
into dark and lie down and stare at the moon
until it comes down and covers your face
with its bowl of white light.

After the drugs took hold the drugs wore off.
They loaded her on a truck, gently as they could,
drove her out of town on dirt roads,
lifted her down into high grass,
waited to see her waken.

Think of leaving and coming back.
Think what you have nurtured and betrayed.
Think of the towns and cities you changed
with your absence. Think of the country.
Remember the moose turning away, lowering
her head into the water, leaving you
the afterimage—unspoken words, weeds
hanging from your mouth. Remember waking
in a colder place, glad to breathe
and see your breath.
Libby A. Durbin

Metabolism

The thickets shake
with kinglets
they appear in a flock
between squalls
the males
keep their ruby intentions
to themselves
under cover
small enough to rest
in my hand
they never rest
smaller than elderberry leaves
the same olive-green
their flit-choreography
twirl of unattached leaves
alive to every windshift
tumbling
back onto the branches
film in reverse
they inspect
all in less than a minute
have to keep moving
they're gone
flywheels ticking away.
Sitting at his desk in the police department, Ray Bartell decided it was a hell of a deal, you got right down to it. Here was a man, the former leader of the free world, who would soon be standing behind the podium at the Rozette Civic Arena, singing the praises of Merle Puhl. None of this high stakes campaigning seemed very likely, when you thought about it. Well, Puhl did. Who else could the Party have tempted into running against an incumbent who'd been United States senator from Montana since the days when money was backed by real gold and silver, and going to war was thought of as something more than a slick campaign tactic, a way to boost the market for yellow ribbon? Puhl had spent an equally long time wading around in the mire of state politics. He was an old standby in the Legislature, who could always be counted on to oppose just about everything that had transpired since the closing of the frontier, a quality that many people seemed to find endearing in politicians.

In private life, Merle Puhl had made a modest pile of money developing real estate and selling Chevrolets. Now he was semi-retired on a gentleman's ranch outside Rozette, where he had gone into the ostrich raising business, an enterprise that turned the spread into something of a local attraction, the target of many weekend drives with mom and the kids. People were used to seeing Puhl's ruddy face on TV selling used cars, so it figured to be an easy jump to listening to him hawk the dual virtues of free enterprise in the heartland, and Merle Puhl in the nation's capitol.
Puhl—"the Chosen Man from God's Country." That was the campaign's tag line. You had to admit, it had all the resonance of "Tastes Great...Less Filling," all the substance of "You got the right one, baby."

But the former President of the United States, that was something else again. This was the man whose Surgeon General had convinced the United States Olympic Committee that if synthetic growth hormones were good for cattle, what harm could they be to athletes? The humanitarian saint who masterminded a food boycott of Ethiopia, and walked away with the Nobel Prize. And most amazing of all, the man who, upon retiring, cut a blockbuster deal for the film rights to his office tape recordings—a deal that not only gave him a screenwriting credit, but points on the producer's gross. At least that's what People magazine said, and People was never wrong. Yes siree, the former president was clearly a world-class politician, and to have a man of that caliber in Rozette, Montana, well, it was enough to make you get a haircut and shine your cowboy boots.

Ray Bartell stared at his feet, which were propped on the edge of his desk. He shook his head, trying to remember if he owned any shoe polish. He could use a haircut, too. He looked at his watch. Five minutes till his meeting with Arnold Zillion, who was driving over that morning from the Secret Service office in Great Falls. Zillion was new in Montana, and this was his first visit to Rozette.

A couple of days before, Captain Vic Fanning had briefed Bartell on the former president's complete itinerary. First, you had your arrival at the airport, followed by your motorcade into town to the Civic Arena. Then, after the speech that afternoon, the traveling road show moved out to Merle Puhl's ranch, where the
former president would spend Friday night, maybe get in a photo opportunity with some of those great big birds, before leaving at noon on Saturday.

Transportation and crowd control. That was the name of the game. Archie Phegan, the new Captain of Uniform Patrol, was in charge of transportation. Puhl's ranch was out in the county, which made it the problem of Sheriff Riley Saulk and his band of deputies. And Vic Fanning would see to it that the Arena was well covered by detectives working in plainclothes.

But always, there was the potential for shitheads, and shitheads were going to be Ray Bartell's personal turf. While this was of obvious importance, Bartell was given to understand that among all the array of brass and heat, he was a grunt. Fine. A grunt on the lookout for shitheads. Perfect.

Across the office, Billy Stokes, another of the detectives, and Linda Westhammer were both muttering into telephones. Ike Skinner was using his index fingers on a computer keyboard, poking keys with all the finesse he would use to poke a drunk in the chest.

Bartell was thinking about phoning his wife when Red Hanrahan walked in, carrying a thick file in one hand, and a cup of coffee in the other. Hanrahan had been a detective longer than anyone in the Division. He was getting ready for the start of a homicide trial, a tough case that had kept him bogged down for over a year.

Hanrahan dropped the file on his desk. "This guy ought to hang himself in the jail," he said. Hanrahan was a loosely constructed man, with wild red hair and a soup-strainer mustache. His green pants were baggy, and his shirt tail wagged over his hips. His green and yellow necktie was crooked. Hanrahan
slipped out of his shoulder harness, then hung the rig from a hook behind his desk.

"Guys like that," Bartell said, meaning guys who took you to trial, "they never do the stand-up thing."

Hanrahan stretched his back, then sat down. "Justice," he said, thumbing through the file. "It sure takes us a lot of moves."

"No shit," Ike Skinner said from across the room. "So many assholes, so few bullets."

Bartell lowered his feet to the floor, sat up, and surveyed his desk. Paper. Nothing but paper, scattered all across his desk like the residue of a typhoon. Mostly burglaries, forgeries, and car break-ins. There were a couple of child molesting cases, too, but those had been around for nearly a month, and no matter which way Bartell tried to steer them, they were turning up inconclusive. The best thing about this gig with the Secret Service was that he could use it as an excuse to slough off the pile of trash on his desk.

Overhead, the plumbing from the upstairs men's room belched and strained above the low ceiling, and one of the long fluorescent lights flickered. Bartell gritted his teeth and waited. Some day, unspeakable ugliness awaited the detectives.

A moment later, Bartell's phone rang, and Vic Fanning summoned him into the inner sanctum.

As he sat in Vic Fanning's office, Arnold Zillion, a large, fit man in his late forties, clasped his hands behind his head and leaned back in the straight, metal chair. Vic Fanning, trim and brittle in his starched white shirt with French cuffs, sat behind his desk, while Lieutenant Frank Woodruff and Sergeant Sam Blieker, Fanning's two immediate subordinates in the Division, stood on either side, like bookends. Woodruff, tall and aristocratic, with a
pleasant, unlined face, adjusted the lapels of his camel jacket, and stared straight ahead. Blieker, on the other hand, shoved his glasses up onto his high, wrinkled forehead, then began a series of shrugs and rumples, as though trying to rearrange his body inside his baggy, brown suit.

Fanning introduced Bartell to Zillion, who leaned forward slightly, and offered his large, soft hand, which Bartell shook briefly. Zillion had a crisp, big city air about him, a friendly, business-like manner, which said he knew some things, but wouldn't bore you with them unless it became necessary.

"I've been doing this job since the seventies," Zillion said to Fanning, apparently resuming a conversation that Bartell had interrupted. "And I've always been lucky." Zillion laughed self-consciously. "Lucky enough to be somewhere else whenever there was bad trouble. No need to change the pattern now." Zillion wore a blue blazer, a pale blue, button-down shirt, floral tie, gray slacks, and cordovan Bass loafers. His full, brown hair, graying at the edges, was sprayed in place. "I'm sure Detective Bartell—Ray, is it?—I'm sure Ray and I will get along fine."

Bartell realized that he was the only guy in the room without a necktie. But the deficiencies in his wardrobe were even messier than that. Besides his battered ropers, Bartell wore black jeans, and a baggy black shirt, with hula girls dancing around the tail. Bartell wore the tail out, a practice that both kept his gun and handcuffs covered, and gave full effect to the hula girls. While technically within policy, the shirt did not exactly endear him to Fanning. Linda Westhammer liked to claim that compared with her, the dancing girls were, at best, mediocre.

"By the way," Zillion said, pointing to a large, sterling silver loving cup, which sat prominently on a bookcase shelf behind Fanning. "That's quite a memento."
Fanning’s pasty face flickered with a sign of life. “Competition shooting,” he said, reaching back for the cup, which he handed across the desk to Zillion. On the computer stand to Fanning’s left, the monitor displayed the vivid colors of a solitaire game in progress.

Zillion accepted the cup, and eyed the inscription. “Combat courses?”

Fanning nodded. “Nothing but combat courses. That’s the only true test. State Champion three years running.” Then, when he saw Banell eyeing the computer screen, he reached quickly for the keyboard, and punched Escape. The screen went blank.

Woodruff looked over Fanning’s head at Blieker, and shook his head. Blieker lifted a hand to the side of his face, and violently scratched away a grin.

“I’ve got a cup similar to that,” Zillion said, giving Bartell a sly, eloquently hasty glance. “From a tennis tournament in Palm Springs.” Now he looked over at Fanning and smiled. “Almost the same size as yours.” His grin was tight with false modesty, but it was clear from Zillion’s tone that almost the same size meant bigger.

Bartell said, “You play polo, too?”

Fanning closed his eyes and shook his head.

But Zillion didn’t mind playing straight man. “Not anymore.” He passed the cup back to Fanning.

Bartell nodded sympathetically. “So hard to find a decent horse.”

Ignoring the exchange, Fanning set the cup back on the shelf, then adjusted his lapels, and shot his cuffs. Blieker lowered his glasses back down to his eyes, as though adjusting a pair of goggles for the work ahead.
“Well,” Fanning said, “down to business. Ray Bartell here is the best we’ve got,” he said, with too much conviction. “He spent a lot of years on the street, and now he’s a topflight investigator. Believe me, nobody knows crazy people like Ray Bartell.”

Zillion peered up at Bartell. “Just by looking at him,” he said, “I can see that if I ever needed a crazy person, Detective Bartell is the man I’d come to see.”

So much for the roll of straight man.

Bartell knew, of course, that the reason he’d drawn this assignment was that there was bound to be a Command Post in place when the former president arrived. Fanning, Woodruff, and Bieker, along with anybody else on the department with any weight, planned to be there, and not out fingering asswipes in the crowd. Beyond that, Bartell’s selection was just the luck of the draw.

“We’ve talked this over several times,” Woodruff said, “here in the office. To be honest, none of us came up with anybody we believe might really be a threat.”

Zillion’s voice was a model of patience. “I’m glad to hear that.”

“Just the same,” Fanning said, hustling to reclaim his city’s place in the pantheon of mean streets, “anything can happen. Anything.”

“That’s right,” Zillion said, smiling again. “But not until after I retire. The trouble is that there are always nutcases in these crowds. And Ramrod always attracts his share.”

“Ramrod?” Sam Bieker said.

Zillion explained. “Presidents, they pick up code names. handles, you know? The former president, he’s called Ramrod. And you’re probably right, Frank. Most of the wackos are harmless. Still, local officers are always helpful in sorting those folks
out. But I'm afraid..." Zillion crossed his legs, and smoothed his
tie, "there's something here in Rozette that has us a little more
concerned than usual."

Fanning scowled, and adjusted his cuff links, which were
miniature gold replicas of bullets. "You don't say..."

"Taxpayers," Bartell said. He felt the weight of four pairs of eyes
slam into him.

Fanning opened his mouth to say something, but Zillion waved
him off. "I like a man with a sense of humor," Zillion said. "Makes
the interface that much smoother."

Interface. God, Bartell thought, I love it when they talk Federal.
"Especially an upgraded interface like this," Zillion added.
"And just what is it," Bartell wondered, "that's put the upgrade
on this interface?"

"Not a what," Zillion said, "but a who. A man named Henry
Skelton."

"And who is Henry Skelton?" Vic Fanning asked.
Arnold Zillion covered his mouth with his right hand as he
coughed lightly, clearing his throat. "Henry Skelton, as I under­
stand it, is a terrorist."

2.

Henry Skelton squatted on his heels over the embers, and listened
to the small, unnamed creek that was fed by a spring farther up
the mountain at his back. He poured another cup of coffee, then
set the soot-blackened pot on a flat rock beside the remains of the
fire. He groaned softly as he tried to stretch the cold out of his
hips.

In the bulldozed clearing below, perhaps a quarter of a mile
away, a red pickup truck pulled to a stop near the large, twin-
rotored helicopter. Not long now, and the logging crew's day would be in full swing. We got a lot to do, Skelton thought. Because he had come to consider himself one of the crew. Everybody's got a job, the way Skelton saw it. There was the helicopter pilot. And truckers. Sawyers. Guys who set cable. These were the official guys, those who got paid. And then there was Henry Skelton. Skelton worked for free. He was the witness. The person whose job it was to see the whole fucking mess, and make sure somebody remembered. The witness.

The wind was a little gusty, now and then swirling ashes out of the small fire pit, drawing them back into the shallow cave at Skelton's back. There were small caves scattered throughout this part of the canyon, all of them scooped into the seam between beds of heavily folded limestone, and the weathered granite intrusion that was the mountain's heart. Skelton's cave, where he had camped regularly since late spring, was maybe fifteen feet wide, ten feet deep. All of the caves contained animal beds, but at the deepest recess of this particular cave, Skelton had made the discovery that settled him here: tufts of bear fur.

Far across the way, the morning sun continued to inch deeper and deeper into the canyon, warming frost from the mountaintop, and lighting the broad, ragged expanse of a clearcut, an area of maybe eight hundred acres from which all the trees had been logged several years ago. Even from several miles away, you could see the gullies cut into the bare ground by rain and snow runoff. You could also make out the scorched remains of five large slash piles, where brush, branches, smaller trees and treetops, all the residue from the logging job, had been burned.

Hundreds of feet below, Cradle Creek flashed intermittently through the cottonwoods. The cottonwoods followed the canyon
floor, until they gave way to cedars as the canyon narrowed and the elevation increased. The white road, surfaced with decomposed granite, followed the creek. Farther up the canyon, the higher elevations were checkered with more clearcuts, and countless roads zigzagged back and forth like sutures across the mountainsides. And finally, at the head of the canyon, loomed the huge, barren expanse of Red Wolf Peak, which rose to nearly eleven thousand feet, and separated Cradle Creek from Red Wolf Canyon, the next drainage north.

But it was the clearcuts that kept grabbing at your attention. The clearcuts always reminded Skelton of the felony time he'd done at Lompoc. Or was it the other way around? Was doing time like a clearcut slashed across your life?

Skelton took a sip of coffee, let it sit on the back of his tongue. Gone cold. He began to swallow, then spit the coffee into the fire.

Once in a while lately, there had been light snow instead of frost in the country above Skelton. One night soon it would begin to snow in earnest. His sojourn ended, he would make the last hike of the season out to his pickup, which he kept hidden off an abandoned logging road about three miles to the east. Then he'd be able to spend more time back in town with Gina. Gina, who had waited through those months in prison, and now continued to wait out Skelton's obsession with this damned mountain.

With a kind of aching nimbleness, Skelton got to his feet, and ducked into the cave. When he came out a moment later, he held a 7mm Sako rifle cradled in his left arm. He moved up the hill, then circled back onto the top of the limestone overhang above the cave, where he dropped to his belly and crawled ahead to the edge of the overhang. From there, he could see down into the clearing below.
Shouldering the rifle Skelton focused his right eye through the nine power scope, a fine piece of optics, that did a good job of gathering light. He could just make out the contours of the right seat inside the cockpit of the helicopter. As he watched, a man appeared from back inside the helicopter, and fitted himself into the seat.

Although he generally tried to avoid being seen, Skelton had never made any secret of his presence in Cradle Creek. In fact, last spring, he had climbed down to the helicopter one night, and taped a paper target over the cockpit glass, right there in the pilot's line of sight. Just to prove a point.

Well, there was no doubt he'd succeeded. The crew boss had made a big deal out of it, calling in a Forest Service investigator, pointing his finger straight up the mountainside at Henry Skelton's camp. Skelton knew what was coming, so he took time to stash the rifle and ammunition under some rocks well away from camp. With the felony conviction on his sheet, simply having a firearm was enough to buy him some more time. They made sure you understood that before they kicked you.

For a while that day, Skelton listened to the investigator, fat and breathless from the climb up to the cave. The investigator talked a lot about Federal crimes, and Forest Service regulations. Skelton listened patiently—so patiently it still amazed him. Although the timber sale had been planned and publicly debated for over a year, he had found his cave, and settled in it for his own purposes, weeks before the loggers started ripping out trees. So what bureaucrat did he look up to lodge his complaint?

After about twenty minutes the investigator left to continue his investigation, without even checking inside the cave. Over the next several days, Skelton entertained himself watching the For-
est Service investigator's pickup prowling the logging roads up and down the canyon. Then the guy stopped coming around.

The crew boss also called the *Free Independent*, Rozette's only daily newspaper, and a reporter named Robert Tolliver showed up. Tolliver climbed the mountain, too, and talked to Skelton.

"Are you affiliated with some group?" Tolliver wanted to know. He was younger than the Forest Service investigator, and not wheezing from the climb.

"Group?"

"You know. Earth First! Sierra Club." The Red Wolf sale had generated a truckload of controversy, Tolliver pointed out, so it was easy to suspect that Skelton's presence on the scene was simply one element of a larger protest. "Most activists," Tolliver said, "are part of some organized group."

"Activist?"

"Isn't that what you'd say you are? Some kind of activist watchdog?"

"I'm a camper," Skelton said.

Who was this guy Tolliver, that Henry Skelton should trust him to tell Henry Skelton's story? He had too much at stake to give up anything of importance just so some raggedy-assed reporter could glom on to a couple more inches under his by-line. Gina saved Tolliver's piece for Skelton, and he was surprised to see that Tolliver, citing "unnamed sources in the Forest Service," had mentioned his prison record. Skelton wasn't pleased about this, but his anger was more for Gina's sake than his own. He knew what she'd gone through with friends in California, when his troubles started down there. Everybody was polite, Gina said, and oh so supportive. Friendly enough it made you want to puke. Why would things be any different here in Montana?
Soon after the target incident, the logging company took on a nighttime security guard, but a couple of weeks ago the company's sense of economy overcame its caution, and the guard was canned. Skelton missed skulking through the woods at night, spying on the guard as he read *Penthouse* in the cab of his pickup.

Six hundred yards, Skelton thought, as he peered through the scope. What would happen if he put a few rounds through that big Chinook helicopter down there? How would the steep, downhill trajectory affect a shot? Hard to say until you tried it.

Maybe that's what he should do. Try it. Some morning just like this, while the logging crew was going about what they thought would be a perfectly ordinary day. Just for fun. He could pick a spot on the broad, smooth fuselage, then start busting caps. See how the shots grouped. The least he'd do was provide renewed job security for the miserable shit who'd just been laid off.

But if he got too crazy...got that crazy...somebody was sure to come looking for him with more in mind than earnest chitchat. And Henry Skelton wasn't ready to start making more headlines. Not yet, anyway.

Skelton continued to scan the clearing through the scope. There were maybe half a dozen pickup trucks now gathered, all parked between a silver-colored fuel tank, and a large yellow machine, like a backhoe, but with a claw on the end of its long, jointed arm. This was the machine they used to load logs onto the trucks that hauled them off to a mill somewhere. Earlier that morning, the helicopter had flown the logging crew across the mountain into Red Wolf. Now, it looked like the pilot was getting ready to start flying logs from the job site back to the clearing.

Skelton took the rifle back into the cave, and slid it inside his sleeping bag. Outside again, he poured what was left of the cof-
fee into the fire pit, and kicked dirt in after it, making sure the fire
wouldn't flare back to life while he was gone.

About fifty yards below the ridge top, Henry Skelton paused to
catch his breath. Just ahead, the trees fell away, and the country
opened into a broad, grassy park, which saddled the divide. For
the last half hour, he had been climbing through dense timber,
detouring several times to avoid being exposed to view from the
air. Twice now, the big Chinook had passed overhead into the
next canyon, then returned with a log dangling from a long cable.
As always, Skelton had left his rifle behind in the cave.

Leaning against a thick larch tree, Skelton thought about his
burning thighs. The day would come when his legs would no
longer carry him up and down these mountains. As it was, his
only goal today was to get from one place to another. He didn't
need his legs to hunt or to escape. But if he were a primitive
man—a concept he had come to feel uneasy about applying to
Indians—he might walk these hills until his legs no longer served
him sufficiently, and then he would die. Simple as that. Sure,
others might provide food for him when he got old. And he could
substitute stealth for fading speed. But even with help, there
would always be a minimum pace demanded to sustain life, your
own life, and sooner or later, if you were lucky enough to survive
into old age, sooner or later you would be unable to keep up and
you would perish.

Magpie meat. Gina had a lot of synonyms for being dead. And she
had used plenty of them that day over a year ago, when he'd first
taken her to the small meadow down below, the one about half
a mile upstream from where that gypo logging outfit later carved
out the landing site.
Early the previous summer, Skelton had driven up the Cradle Creek road to spend the afternoon digging for quartz crystals, sapphires if he got very lucky. The surrounding canyon was on the edge of a batholith, and it was there that, millions of years ago, when the batholith was still molten, water seeped into the mass, forming gas pockets. Then the trapped gasses crystalized as the mass cooled into granite. Skelton wasn't under any illusion that crystals had mystical powers, as some people believed. But he did think of crystals as the mountain's teeth.

"I saw this spot marked on the map," he'd told Gina that night. It turned out that Cradle Creek was on one of the traditional migratory routes used for centuries by the Nez Perce, when they made the annual journey from what became Washington and Idaho to the western valleys of Montana, hunting buffalo. What Henry Skelton had seen marked on the map was a burial site used generations ago by the Nez Perce. Not that you could tell that about the place just by looking at it. No, as far as the eye could tell, the small meadow, maybe ten acres, was just another meadow.

"Thick with grass," Skelton said to Gina. They were in bed. She lay on her belly beside him, her head turned away, near sleep. He played the tips of his sun-darkened fingers slowly up and down the small of her back, over her hips. "And ringed with lupine." The flowers were a perfect blue, like the sky directly overhead just after dawn. Skelton closed his eyes and thought about the lupine. He felt the sweat cooling on his shoulders, and he pulled Gina close again. "You'll see," he said.

Gina turned onto her side, and threw her leg over his thigh. "I can imagine," she said. She was a compact woman, with dense black hair, and eyes that were improbably blue. Lupine eyes, now
you thought about it.

“You walk out across that meadow,” Skelton told her, “I don’t know. There’s nothing there but all this thick grass. The grass, and the woods all around. And the wind. Nothing, really. But I kept hearing something.”

Gina raised her head and rested it on her hand. “Like what?” Then she kissed him.

Like what?

Well, Henry Skelton didn’t exactly know. But he couldn’t shake the notion that he’d been drawn to that meadow for a reason, that he’d come away with a task. It had all gotten confused since then, of course. Sometimes, he wasn’t sure how much his sense of Cradle Creek had to do with that afternoon when he found the meadow, and how much with that night, when he’d held Gina close, and tried to explain. The next afternoon, he drove her to the meadow. She said it gave her the willies.

Maybe she was right. It was all pretty mush-headed, you thought about it too hard. Pretty California. And if there was one thing Henry Skelton had given up, it was thinking California.

Fuck California. Just fuck it, all of it.

Nowadays, Skelton was content to let his legs do his thinking for him. He pushed away from the tree and started uphill, reminding himself that he was still alive.

The logging business, Skelton figured, was like cancer, most damaging of all when it worked its hidden way through the body. At least with clearcuts, you could take one look at the patient, and tell she was pretty fucking sick. A month or so back, Skelton had hiked over the saddle to the Red Wolf site, which was about two hours from the cave. Within an hour, he could hear the whine of
the chain saws. If not for the Chinook, though, the site would remain deeply hidden in the backcountry. As logging jobs went, this kind of selective, isolated cutting was considerably less damaging to the forest than conventional methods, which seemed more like search-and-destroy missions than what the timber industry delicately called a harvest. Why was it, then, that the voices Henry Skelton heard echoing up from that Nez Perce meadow, measured whispers that, really, might only be wind, why was it those voices would not be still? Skelton had enough sense to worry about people who heard voices, worry like hell. Now here he was paying some kind of demented attention, grasping for a diagnosis.

As Skelton neared the ridge top, the trees grew more stunted and windblown, the canopy overhead more sparse. He stopped frequently now, and listened for the helicopter, making sure that he had time before moving across open ground.

“Fuckin’ idiots,” Skelton huffed. He was thinking about those people who claimed it was a waste of money to use a helicopter, since the Red Wolf sale was in a remote area you couldn’t even see from a highway. If there isn’t a road into a place, some seemed to think, and people can’t drive there and see that the forest is gone—just fucking gone—then it’s okay. A Forest Service bigshot even had the brains to suggest that this whole timber harvest crisis could have been avoided if his predecessors had just been smart enough to eradicate forests without ruining the view.

Skelton’s legs were on fire, but he refused to let up his pace. Above his breathing, and the blast of wind drawing over the saddle, he heard the first, rising wail of the chopper. Caught in the open, he forced his legs to run the last fifty or sixty steps to the crest, at the eastern margin of the saddle.
Skelton fell to the ground near a group of granite boulders. When he looked back down into Cradle Creek, the chopper was just rising into view. He scrambled for cover behind the rocks, and wedged himself under a clump of juniper.

As the helicopter climbed toward him, Skelton caught some movement at the tree line along the lower end of the park, the area through which he had just passed. He looked closely at the patch of brown, and realized that it was a bear. A moment later, the bear stepped completely clear of the trees, and stood broadside to Skelton just over a hundred yards away. Even from that distance, Skelton could see the hump at the base of the bear’s neck, and he knew it was a grizzly. A big, nasty goddamn grizzly bear, and it was between Skelton and his camp.

His camp. Shit. Like that cheesy cave was going to be some kind of shelter from a bear.

But the rifle. That was something else.

No. He wouldn’t kill the bear. He didn’t want to kill the bear. That was the whole goddamn point.

If the bear now had Henry Skelton’s full attention, the same seemed to be true of the pilot of the helicopter. As Skelton watched the bear, he noticed that the trees and grass around it were beginning to whip under a powerful, unnatural wind, as the chopper descended to within forty or fifty feet of the ground, and hovered over the bear.

Rather than run, the bear looked up, studied the machine, then all at once he stood on his hind legs, extending himself to his full height. The bear reached his forelegs above his head, swatting at the end of the cable that hung from the chopper. The grizzly’s mouth was open. Skelton knew that the bear was roaring, but he couldn’t hear it, not above the thumpa-thumpa-thump of the
rotors.

A few moments later, the helicopter gained altitude as the pi-
lot pulled away and dropped on over the ridge, heading for a
load.

That left the bear. The bear and Henry Skelton.

After being distracted briefly by the helicopter, Skelton realized
that, while the machine might be an irritation and his ultimate
enemy, an enraged grizzly bear was an immediate jolt of heaving
life on the hunt.

When Skelton looked back down the slope, he saw the bear
running uphill with sickening speed, chasing after the chopper.
And heading right into Henry Skelton's lap. The bear's brown fur
was thick for winter, and tipped with silver, which gave the bear
a liquid shimmer in the sunlight as he moved.

Skelton took a very deep breath, and began drawing further
back into the junipers, hoping for the best, which in this case
might only come down to being killed quickly, rather than
maimed.

But the grizzly pulled up short, lifted its snout to test the air.
Then he shook his huge shoulders, and ambled back down to-
ward the trees, looking harmless now, like an oversized brown
dog. Sure, a big brown dog with claws large as a man's fingers,
jaws powerful enough to munch a Buick, and an attitude that was
just that, a real fucking attitude.

Henry Skelton had to take a piss. He reminded himself to start
breathing again. He closed his eyes, and ground the sweat from
them with the heels of his hands. And he tried not to think about
how badly he had to take a piss.

Throughout the summer, he hadn't seen any bears at all, to say
nothing of a grizzly, and he had begun to have doubts about the

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meaning of the tufts of fur he'd found inside the cave. Some old scat, he'd come across that. But no living, breathing bears. Now, maybe he'd been right after all. Maybe it was those caves, and the need for a place to settle in and sleep out the winter, that had drawn this bear into Cradle Creek.

Skelton was nowhere near an expert on grizzly bears, but it struck him as odd that one would venture into such close proximity to the logging job. Still, he knew that it wasn't uncommon in the country north of Helena and Missoula for grizzlies to roam out of the Bob Marshall Wilderness onto nearby ranches. That happened, too, west of the Mission Mountains on the Salish-Kootenai Reservation south of Flathead Lake. It was a lot easier to treat ursus horribilis like some sort of fragile icon, when one wasn't charging up the hill toward you, maybe on the verge of ripping your guts out. Especially when you had to take a piss.

Had to take a piss while you're huddled in a clump of brush, scared to death of a giant, man-eating beast, that's between you and anyplace you need to go. Between you and your camp, you and your truck, your camp and your truck.

Skelton's teeth started to chatter from needing to take a piss.

Finally, the bear passed out of sight, his movements through the forest now completely unpredictable. Skelton at last eased out of the junipers. After relieving himself, he decided that his best bet was to cross the saddle, then get back into the sparse trees along the upper flank of Red Wolf Peak. From there, he could make his way farther up into the canyon, and loop down to his camp from above. That would take several hours. But what else did Skelton have to do? At the camp, perhaps the lingering stench of the fire, along with the activity in the clearing below, would divert the bear to some distant part of the canyon. And if not, there was the rifle.
Skelton didn’t like to think about that, but he was getting closer by the second to seeing the rifle as not a bad alternative. He wasn’t ready to be magpie meat. Not hardly.

The chopper would return soon, this time with a log dangling from the cable. All day the chopper would be crossing back and forth. With luck, the chopper would keep the grizzly from noticing Skelton. Who knew, maybe the bear would even keep Skelton from noticing the chopper.

No, there wasn’t that much luck to go around.
"Open this, please."

As soon as Alex saw the x-ray screen, he knew what he’d done. Yet he couldn’t believe it. How could he be so stupid? Instead of checking his mother’s bag through, he’d checked his own.

“I can explain,” he said.

“May I see your ticket?”

Usually Alex flew with only a single carry-on. He hated waiting for luggage. But his mother insisted. It’s your inheritance, she said. It’s all you’re gonna get! That was true. She’d sold her antiques, the things she once said would be his. She had to. Because she wouldn’t take anything from him, she needed the money. And it was a way of getting back at him.

“I can explain,” he repeated but the security guard was using the wall phone.

So Alex stood to one side as travelers passing through x-ray gawked at him and his open suitcase. Filled to the top with trays, candy dishes, cake servers, vegetable tongs, napkin rings and other paraphernalia of fine dining, it must have seemed a treasure to them. You had to get close to see that the silver was plate: dented, pitted and worn in many places to the copper base. Secondhand stores are full of this kind of junk, he thought when she first offered it. He’d almost said it.

“Officer, I can explain.” But the man was reading the information on the ticket into the receiver.

Alex looked at his watch. Was there time to go back and exchange bags? His crossword puzzle book was in his carry-on. No, he thought. It had to be on its way already. He looked down at the silver. Can’t you use any of this? he had asked. Where I’m
going, she answered, I won’t need it. It was gallows humor, a joke
old people must make all the time. Yet there was something in her
voice. She’s eighty-six, he reminded himself. She’s thinking about
it. And, out of respect for that, he took the stuff.

“IT’s all right, Mr. Garth.” The security guard was off the phone.
“They told me who you are.” He closed the case and pushed it
toward Alex. “IT’s good to go First Class,” he said. But he held onto
the ticket. “Did you really write that book?” he asked after a
moment.

“Which one?” Alex was alert. He knew which one. Though his
third novel had won a Pulitzer Prize and though he’d written a
dozen since, they always asked about the same one, the first one.
“The one about your mother.”

“Flatbush Floozies?”

“That’s it!” The man smiled. “I saw it on TV the other night! IT’s
terrific.” No, Alex thought, the movie’s only pretty good. IT’s the
novel that’s terrific. “Did she really do that?” The uniformed man
drew closer. Alex noticed his dark hair and swarthy skin.

“Do what?” Again he thought he knew what the man was re-
ferring to.

“Ride an elephant....” The guard’s eyes darted to the x-ray ma-
chine and the two black women working there. “Across a
stage....” He leaned forward as if he was going to reveal a great
secret. “Naked,” he whispered.

“Yup,” Alex answered in a normal voice. “IT was in 1925, a
show called Bombo starring Al Jolson.”

Though he offered the information matter-of-factly, as a way of
ignoring the cop’s prurience, Alex knew there was also an element
of boasting in it. Why not? If truth be known, he had always been
proud of his mother, the showgirl, the Follies beauty whose ca-
reer had climaxed with that daring ride on the ponderous pachyderm. Who else's mother had done that?

"You must'a made a mint," the guard said with a mixture of cynicism and admiration. Alex looked at the man. Miami International's finest. Then he looked at his watch. He had less than fifteen minutes.

"Gotta go," he said and with his left hand he lifted his mother's suitcase while with his right he snatched his ticket. Then he was by the cop and hurrying down the crowded corridor toward his gate.

In a sense Alex didn't have to hurry. Just as the plane rolled onto the runway, the sky let go and they had to wait on the ground while the storm raged. At first he didn't mind. On the ride to the airport he'd seen storm clouds building in the west so he wasn't surprised. And the sound the rain made on the plane's aluminum skin was not unpleasant. But, as time passed and it got hot, he began to worry about making his connection in Denver. So he pressed the overhead button requesting a Flight Attendant.

"We'll make up the time in the air," she assured.

As if to add credibility to her promise, the plane began to move. She smiled, went to her safety demonstration position and Alex relaxed. But he didn't open the book he'd bought until they were airborne. He preferred crosswords. They were part of his flight ritual. They relieved boredom and gave an illusion of accomplishment. Unfortunately, the magazine shop near his gate didn't have a decent puzzle book and, in the rush to get something to do, Alex chose a novel. It was Norman Mailer's latest, *Tough Guys Don't Dance*.

Though the reviewers damned it, Alex, an old Mailer fan,
thought it couldn’t be that bad. Yet, from the very beginning he had trouble concentrating, and, after a couple of hours of disembodied heads and Provincetown malevolence, he had to admit the reviewers were right. And because the book wasn’t doing its job and they were so late taking off and the mix-up with his bags, he became anxious again. This time, in an effort to relax, he pressed the button on the armrest, leaned back in his wide, first-class chair and closed his eyes.

But the conversation with the security guard kept coming back. Alex knew he’d been flippant about his book. *Flatbush Floozies* isn’t to be taken lightly, he thought. After all, it was the reason he and his mother didn’t speak for seventeen years. He never dreamed she’d get that angry. All her life she’d been an exhibitionist. He actually thought she’d like being brought out for one last ride. But she never even got to that chapter, never got by the first one, the infamous “Hall of Mirrors” that appeared in *Esquire* two months before the novel’s publication.

That’s where *Flatbush Floozies* begins, in Brooklyn, 1937, at Sophie Loehmann’s first store on Bedford Avenue. The Hall of Mirrors was her name for her upstairs try-on area. That’s where Lily Garth and friends, the ex-showgirls and models, the women who helped Mrs. Loehmann when she was just starting by wearing her bargains around town and telling everyone where they got them, received their after-hours reward, first crack at her latest acquisitions. Whad’ya think, Ali? they asked as they paraded by the four-year-old boy still in his pajamas. Is it me?

At first, sitting on Sophie Loehmann’s lap, he would enjoy the attention and nod shyly. But, as they traded clothes, as they squealed and helped each other into and out of garments, they stopped using dressing rooms. and no matter where Alex looked,
there they were: fleshy breasts, thighs and buttocks. At home he'd seen his mother naked and thought nothing of it. But at Loehmann's it was different. The women became strange to him, frenzied, drunk on the clothes, screaming and laughing as they zipped and unzipped, buttoned and unbuttoned. And his mother's metallic clack was the worst.

So that's how he'd done "Hall of Mirrors," as if he were the sacrifice at a peculiarly New York Jewish bacchanalia. We were never naked! Lily Garth had shouted over the phone just before she hung up on him for seventeen years. It was your own dirty little mind! Of course it was. That's what the novel was about, his own dirty little mind. For Flatbush Floozies repeated the scene several times as adult orgiastic sex farce, each variation triggering the hero's cry for help. And that cry became a howl of laughter for a whole generation of Americans.

But that generation was growing old. Now their children wrote sex farces. And after awhile Alex began to think the silence between him and his mother had gone on too long. Not that they'd lost contact. While his children were still living with him, she'd call and talk to them and he would fly them to Miami once a year. Yet it wasn't until two years ago, after the death of her second husband when Alex phoned to offer condolences, that she invited him down. He came but they didn't really talk. He tried but she wouldn't.

"Good evening." Alex was startled by the male intercom voice. "This is Captain Grady." It was the same voice that told them the reason for the delay as they waited on the runway at Miami International. "Please return your seats to the upright position." Alex pressed the armrest button and the back of his chair came forward. "We're going above this rough weather." He looked at his
watch. Shouldn't they have begun their descent? He'd never make his connection now. "Flight personnel, take your seats."

A flight attendant paused beside Alex and he was about to ask if they could radio ahead to hold the Montana plane when he saw she was looking past him. He turned. Outside, white billows were rising with explosive speed. He looked down at where they were coming from, a line of darkness which, except for constant flashes of lightning, seemed as solid as earth. The line stretched as far south as Alex could see. He turned back to the attendant to ask about the weather but she was already up front in the jump seat belting herself in. And the man in the aisle seat looked worried.

Then the plane began a steep climb that jammed Alex into his seat. When it leveled again, it banked to the north and he leaned forward to look across the aisle and saw flashing darkness down in that direction too. Then they were climbing again. They seemed to be racing the billows. Alex thought of Vietnam and what he'd read about evade tactics and what Margo, his ex-wife who had a pilot's license, told him about thunderstorms and the phenomenon of wind shear. She knew he didn't like flying. It was part of her winning ways.

Then they were climbing again and he realized he could see the already set sun. How high are we? he wondered and turned to ask the man in the aisle seat. But now the man was saying his beads, something he hadn't done since their take-off into the thunderstorm at Miami International. A miracle, thought Alex looking at the rosary, two weather fronts in one trip. Again he looked at his watch. Over a half hour late. I'll never make it, he thought. I'll have to spend the night in a hotel in Denver.

Then the plane dropped. In the middle of banking to the south, the left, it slid off its slanted table of air and began falling sideways.
toward the black anvils where the lightning flashed. Alex heard screams and sensed things flying around, things hitting him in the face. What was the matter? Was the plane falling apart? No. It was the man next to him. He’d broken his beads and they were flying around like BB’s. Catholics shouldn’t be allowed in First Class, Alex thought as he covered his eyes with his hands.

Then he was forcing himself forward and away from the window, forcing his forehead down against a placard of seemingly happy cartoon people using their seat cushions to float peacefully on a squiggly-lined ocean that was at least a thousand miles away. He closed his eyes and clung to the back of the seat in front of him. We’re going down, he thought. This is it. We’re going to die. And that thought seemed to anger Alex. And with all his might he fought the G-forces that were pulling him from his life raft.

The moment they touched down at Stapleton, the Catholic man apologized and offered to buy Alex a drink. “No,” he told the man, “I’ve got to make a connection.” But he knew he’d already missed it.

At the Continental counter they told him he was lucky. There’d been so many complaints, they decided to put up free all First Class passengers who’d missed their connections. Continental had just bought Frontier and was having trouble with the transition. “We don’t have to do this,” the girl said. “It was an Act of God.” God again, Alex thought. But he was grateful to the airline. The pilot, he judged, had flown the shit out of the plane.

So, after calling his housekeeper in Bozeman, and riding the shuttle bus to the Airport Hilton and eating the free meal in the hotel restaurant, he found himself on a king-sized bed looking at a king-sized TV. But all it had to offer, beside the usual network
garbage, was a Playboy channel full of tits and ass on a Mediterranean cruise. The movie seemed to make no sense and he switched it off. I'm still tense, he thought and was about to get undressed and take a shower when there was a knock on the door.

It was a bellhop with Alex's suitcase. At the baggage counter they'd told him it had been sent on to Bozeman. How can that be? he'd asked. That plane left twenty minutes before we landed. The man winked, said luggage was handled quickly, and gave him a complimentary toiletry package. Alex had used the toothbrush, then spent ten minutes picking bristles from between his teeth. Grateful now but with only a hundred dollar bill in his wallet, he handed the startled boy Tough Guys Don't Dance and shut the door.

Then he lifted his bag onto the luggage stand and saw that side by side, the cases didn't look anything alike. How could he make such a mistake? He opened his. There, on top of his sport jacket, was his book of English crosswords. He took it, closed the case, got undressed, lay back on the bed and began solving. But the clues made even less sense than the tits-and-ass movie. I'm tired, he thought, and listened to the rain. In the air he hadn't thought of the rain. It was steady now, no wind. He put the crosswords aside.

And, forgetting a shower, he reached over and turned out the light. It was remarkable what he'd seen, a line of black clouds a hundred miles long, pulsing with lightning. And he thought of his mother's fear of storms that he'd always dismissed as phobia. What was she really afraid of? he used to ask himself when he was writing Flatchu Floozies. He thought if he could get at that fear, he could understand her better. But he never did. So this visit he'd
come right out and asked her. She'd looked at him as if he was crazy. Everyone's afraid of storms, she said.

He remembered the storms of his childhood and the games of solitaire she played to stay calm. But wasn't she always playing solitaire? Lily Garth, the show girl with no one to show to. Did he sense how bored she was? Why else would he take on the job of entertaining her? Those where his first stories, the ones he told his mother, tales of Mrs. Petrella, his fourth grade teacher and Elmer Quist, the world's dumbest boy, and the black Thompson twins who looked nothing alike and Enthusa Christadoulou and Concetta Frisoni, names that never failed to get a laugh.

So he was the jester for her boredom and that was the beginning of his life's work, stories for a bored world. And he remembered that once in a while she'd entertain him. She didn't mean to. She was doing it for herself. But he'd come home from school to find her dancing to music she heard in her head. Momma yo quiero, she'd mime, arms out, hands blessing the air with that funny samba motion. Momma yo quiero. And sometimes she'd even have on that turban she'd bought at Loehmann's, the one with the fake fruit.

Carmen Miranda was the rage then, the culmination of the Good Neighbor Policy. There was something about Latin music. Maybe it was just that it wasn't a part of Hitler's murderous Europe or Japan's oriental treachery. It was three minutes of a good time, a vacation that promised the innocence of Eden. Who knows? Perhaps for his mother it was the Follies and her youth brought up to date. Sing Ali! she'd order, hips swaying. Sing! She knew he could do it. She'd heard him in his room singing along with the radio.

So he sang. But it wasn't just to entertain his mother. It was
Carmen Miranda herself. Alex loved her. For one thing, she sang in Portuguese, a language he'd never heard before. For another, no matter how fast she sang, no matter how complicated her tongue and lip movements, no matter how quiet her voice, you could hear every word. But you couldn't understand them. So the words became music and the singer a magic, musical instrument. It was like speaking in tongues. Alex sang and his mother danced. Then one day he stopped. Sing, Ali! she pleaded, but he wouldn't. Not any more. How old was he? Nine? Ten? Why? Why did he spurn her? In Flatbush Floozies he gave a Freudian answer. She was seducing him. It was all she knew how to do. And his father was sick. Of course Alex felt guilty. But they never talked about it, not then, not now. Last year when he tried, she refused. I'm so ashamed of that book, she said. All your books. My friends say you're an anti-Semite, that you make fun of Jews because you hate them.

This morning, unable to sleep, he'd gotten up at dawn and gone into her bedroom and stood by her bed. Angry, he wanted to answer the charges brought by her friends. It's what his critics always said. And he might have awakened her were it not for her face. It startled him. In the half light, on her back like that, her features were once again distinct. She looked almost young. He knew it was a trick of the dimness and gravity and the mask of cold cream he smelled. All her life she'd used it instead of soap. My stage training, she explained when he was a boy.

He just stood there studying her face. That's when he noticed that her once perfect nose had a bump at the bridge. And he remembered a time she wanted to have it fixed. No one could figure out why. But this morning Alex saw what she must have seen years ago, and he saw it only because her flesh was now so
loose, it seemed in sleep to have fallen away altogether. She was eighty-six. He was looking into the grave at a skull. Yet the skull appeared young, beautiful. Mom, he wanted to say, Mom, I....

Damn!

Alex switched on the light. He’d promised to call as soon as he got in. He sat up, looked at his watch. Ten thirty, mountain time, twelve thirty, eastern. She might still be waiting. He picked up the phone from the night table, dialed the long-distance code and then the Miami Beach number. In a moment it was ringing. He thought of hanging up. It was too late to call. She’d complained of late-night crank calls. They just breathe, she said. And she must have taken her sleeping pill already. She must be asleep.

“Mom,” he said when she finally answered. “It’s me.” And he told her his situation. She sounded so sleepy he wondered if she understood. “You take your pill?” he asked. She said yes. “I won’t keep you then. I’m all right. I’ll get into Bozeman tomorrow. I’ll call you then. You understand?” She said she did. “Mom??” Anxiety welled up again but he couldn’t think of anything more to say. “I’ll call you tomorrow,” he repeated. “Goodbye.”

Alex hung up, stood, walked around the king-sized bed to the window, circled a large table and four chairs and headed back toward the door. But before he reached it, out of the corner of his eye, he saw his image in the dresser’s mirror and turned to it. All he had on were bikini undershorts. He stood admiring himself. Fifty-six years old. His father had died at fifty-five. Her gift, he thought, strength. And he struck a weight lifter’s pose, bent at the waist, fists in front, shoulders, chest and neck flexed.

But he couldn’t hold it. He sat down on the edge of the king-sized bed and looked at the phone. Now or never, he told himself. But what would he say? How could he justify himself to her?
How could he explain *Flatbush Floozies* or why he lived so far away? How could he tell her that he needed the forests to walk around in, the rivers to fish, the isolation to write in? Then he remembered a paraphrase of Sartre a critic once used to describe him. For Alex Garth, the man said, hell is other Jews.

Was that true? Alex looked at the phone. He wanted to talk to her, to tell her why he made fun of Jews. It was the same reason he made fun of her and himself. He wanted everyone to be better, more loving, more tolerant. But what could he say that he hadn't already said? She wouldn't listen. Still, he had to try. So he dialed again. This time she answered quickly. But she sounded just as sleepy. Alex hesitated, still didn't know what to say. And that's why he began as he did, because he didn't know what to say.

"Momma yo quiero," he whispered. He was only speaking the words, not singing them. "Momma yo quiero." Then he paused. For he could hear her short gasps as if she were frightened. He didn't want to frighten her. "Momma yo quiero," he began again, this time with melody and in a voice that was crooning and intimate. "Momma yo quiero," he sang. "Mommaaa mommaaa momma yo quiero!"

And as he sang, he realized it wasn't gasps of fear he was hearing but laughter, the same metallic clack he'd always hated. It wasn't bad at all. Over the miles of copper wire or whatever they used now to carry the human voice, it seemed somehow softer, as if under water. A trick of the connection, he thought and went on. "Da shupata, O da shupata. Dadadaa deda da da deda da da da da da da."

"Ali?" she asked into the receiver when he was done. "Is that you, Ali?"

He knew he should answer. But he so enjoyed hearing his old
nickname on her lips, and she just wanted to make him acknowledge what he was doing, acknowledge her power. Sing for me, Ali, sing! He rose from the bed's edge.

"Ali?"

Still he didn't answer. Instead, he began to hum and he found he was dancing now as he'd seen her dance, his hips moving to an insistent samba beat that had somehow become, for the moment, the rhythm of his life. Yes, it was just the way she danced. Sing for me Ali! Sing! I'll dance. You sing!

"Momma yo quiero!" he began again and heard her laughter. He didn't even know what the words meant. Momma, I want you? Momma, I need you? "Momma yo quiero!"

And Alex realized that what he was doing had all the elements of an obscene phone call. But he didn't care. In the hotel room mirror he could see himself at the end of the cord, moving to the accompaniment of her metallic gasps. Yes, there he was, Alex Garth, satirist, Pulitzer Prize winner, and author of the infamous *Flatbush Floozies*, singing and dancing his way into his mother's heart.

"Momma yo quiero! Momma yo quiero!"

"Mommmaaaaa, Mommmaaaaa,"

"Momma yo quiero!"
Like Leonardo, Like a Dog

I'll sit by the ditch this morning like Leonardo da Vinci
and celebrate water come to nurse the thirsty rubble.
I have neither the painter's eye, nor the patience

of an engineer, but I'll sit on these ten acres
one erratic at a time, not to own them, but to know
the game trails where timothy's broken

by cloven feet, the stumps dismantled by bear,
the riparian zone where aspen huddle near river birch
that cover the rumbling thumping grouse.

I'll follow the counsel of hawk and crow,
of grain-grinding grasshopper, repetition's pleasure,
inadequate personality, the steady wisdom

of flow and flow again. I'll drink a bowl of coffee
among the secretive rocks, soak away the meanness
of a year's duplicity. No one can reach me here—no human voice.

Do other animals tire of their own kind?
Sometimes even singing wears me out.
I'll wash my long legs and crooked toes in frozen water

let it rivulet down hairy flesh. Oh the power of the body
to refresh, to lie down at night and wake again
among the harebell and bees, the ten kinds of clover,
the lichen-speckled boulders. Wading upstream on hands and knees, I'll bite the icy percussion like a dog. Once, before we become pets each animal has sharper features, our complex behaviors are more complex, and those of us least afraid of being eaten—sleep best.
Throughout the Duration of a Pulse a Heart Changes Form

Tonight as you return
to our blue sea cottage, see
how the rosewood horse gleams.
I have touched everything.

The white hibiscus
hover against the window,
their red stamens craned like candlewicks.

Winter in this rain-soaked village

and still the fleshy roses bloom, evenings
sweeten with the smoke of eucalyptus.

I put out a bowl of pecans. I sweep
the white tile floor one, two, three times.

How nervous your absence
makes our friends, as if by marriage
we were blown into a single figurine.

After many weeks alone, we will turn

our simple lives toward each other.

I bathe my limbs carefully.

I perfume the blood beats.
As the yellow spider crawls
into the mouth of the yellow lily
or the butterfly brushes against the blanketflower's eye—
drinks there—so too I've flourished
with each stroke of the body.

Though nights when I could not find
even a kind voice on the radio, outside my window
starlings filled the pomegranates, starlings filled the figs.
They ripped open everything. They spit out the seeds.
I could tell you how he came
from that water, pressed his cock
against my belly and licked
my eyes like salty stones.
Beyond us, the drowned boy
he had thought to save
rode the deep current, pulled
by waters I'd never known,
the only tide of my life
a swirl in my hips
for the one left at fifteen.
And if he did not lay me down,
if I have only dreamed him slick
as a dolphin, have forgotten
his guilt, the emptiness he swam through
to clasp the cold hand of his friend,
then let me say I desire him still,
would suck every breath from his mouth
and teach him the ways of water—
how an open palm can float a body
through nights moonless
as sea caves, can trace the heart's ebb
and flow to its coral roots.
Laredo, the strong swimmer. Laredo.
Listen. Laredo, his name
like a pearl. Judge its weight
and tell me it is not worth the drownings.
we rise to, the surface a wet kiss.
Tell me I cannot carry him home in my arms,
call him lover, cannot wrap him in sheets
and rock the sin from his soul.
Laredo, the life you lost has made another.
See how the water moves on.
I. Let's bury them face down, the thieves and cheaters among us. Those who have taken our husbands and wives, who have spoken ill of us and not paid their debts. Imagine them with bedsores, trying to turn. This much we know for certain. If we don't help them they will stay like that forever. I like to think of them forever staring back into the empty socket of their skulls, thinking the porcelain shine they see is the moon. It is the rim of what's left when what's left is nothing.

II. The ones who died sick with sickness still inside, let's give a second chance. Say we bury them with water and food. If resourceful, they can heal themselves and go whole into the next life. Isn't the next life the one we want to be healthy in? Let's pray now for no temptation in the hereafter. Grind our cigarettes into the ground, let the good earth's water run gold with our whiskey. We won't care. We have forsaken all that kills us.
We are dead and buried
with our water and our good wheat bread.

III. Those of us who were saints in this life,
or wanted to be, let’s cover their faces
with dishes from the ancient tribes.
Let’s make a hole in each dish, let’s make
them no good for water. Where saints go
they don’t need water. They don’t need
the invisible, the see-through,
what they’ve already got. It’s what
they’ve always wanted. Give me the bowl
I like best, the one with two hands
at its center, spreading apart earth’s lips.
Let those hands be mine. I want out
while getting out is good.

IV. Isn’t each one of us a saint and sick
to death of it? The one same cheater
guarding his necessary lie? Ignore us.
Bury us anyway you choose.
It doesn’t matter. We’ve given up the game.
We’re each of us already dead and buried
in the grave we dug our whole lives long.
We call it the heart—that empty place
we carry inside, the one we’ve tailor made
until it is the fit we try on for size.
We slip in easy. We learn to live there,
unafraid of any thief but ourselves,
who ends by leaving us nothing.
We slip in easy. We learn to live there.
Teenagers rode ropes from cliffs above a summer pond. At the final rising instant they kicked free and fell, windmilling their arms through leaf-dappled light. A boy and girl in cutoffs plunged hand in hand toward the glassy surface of water; laughing as they fell, they let go of each other the moment they hit. Their friends on the bank cheered and raised soft drinks to smiling lips.

I shook the ice in my glass and stood. Outside, wind drove snow against the trailer; the windows hummed, and the curtains quivered in cross-drafts. The kids in the commercial cannon-balled from overhanging rocks into the graceful slow motion of endless summer fun.

I turned off the set. The television was new, but reception this far out was seldom clear. A satellite dish would be the ticket, and I smiled to think of my folks' place down in the Big Hole Valley with just a radio.

At the breakfast counter I parted the curtains. Our Christmas tree rolled across the yard, bits of tinsel whipping in the frozen boughs. Snow had drifted to the third cinder block in the tractor shed wall, but it wasn't snow that got you up here, like in the Big Hole. It was wind. And even if this was still Montana, I felt like a stranger so far out in the open.

Cody had started the next day's bread at the sink, and her dark arms were dusted white to her rolled sleeves, her jeans already spotted with flour. It seemed unlikely, a woman who looked like that, baking bread in the kitchenette of a mobile home, and as I watched her, I felt again the mild shock of finding myself on leased dry land with her. The difference in our ages alone had
been reason enough for doubt, but as time passed, I found that I was willing to believe.

"Twenty below riding a thirty-mile-an-hour wind," I said. "We should have sold the steers in October instead of waiting like the bank wanted." Snow sifted across the yard, rising like smoke through auras of mercury-vapor light above the feed lot.

"The bank is the boss, Pard." Cody folded the dough back on itself and looked at me. "Relax. It could be worse, old man." She blew strands of her jet-black hair away from her face and shook her head. I reached over and brushed her hair back with the flat of my hand, then put two fingers in the flour on the counter and touched her cheek, leaving white dots on her mahogany skin. She ducked away from me with that look of hers and tried to rub the flour off with her shoulder. The smile lingered, though, as she reached up and smudged my nose. "You're a worrier is your problem," she said.

I slipped my arm around her and found her ribs with my fingers. "Worry about this," I whispered and felt her body fill with electric strength. I put my face in her hair and held her just off the floor until she began to relax. The last time we got going we broke a chair in the kitchen set.

After ten months we still played with each other, as proof, perhaps, that we'd be all right, that the distance to town and the fifteen years between us wouldn't matter. But in spite of the teasing, an early winter on a leased place seemed a hard way to start all over.

It might not have been the telephone but wind in the trailer skirts that woke me. The bedroom had gone cold, and it seemed we'd slept most of the night. I could hear Cody's voice down the hall
in the spare bedroom we used as an office. The clock radio's luminous digits said 4:37.

I turned up the electric blanket, closed my eyes, and found myself standing in an irrigation ditch, shoveling mud onto a canvas dam and watching the metallic progress of water as it flooded my father's fields. Cottonwoods flanked the river, and under the trees, I could see the Percheron Norman teams we used for haying, lazing in tandem through the shade. The water in the ditch was so cold it cramped my legs.

"...up," Cody said. "Wake up, Clayton."

I shielded my eyes from the ceiling light with my arm and looked at Cody leaning over me. Her robe fell open, and I slipped my hand inside the terry cloth and let it ride the length of her back. At her thigh, I turned the robe aside to see the rose tattooed on the inside swale of her hip.

"Come have some coffee," she said, taking my hand and pulling me up. "I need to talk to you."

She pulled until I was sitting, then gathered her clothes and went off barefoot down the hallway toward the bathroom, walking hard on her heels. I put my arms on my knees and my head on my arms; I closed my eyes and tried to go back to the ditch. My right knee made a lump under my arm; a knee the size of a grapefruit. It always would be, the doctors said, and it ached if I didn't use the brace.

The smell of black soil soured by water lingered from the dream. It came to me at odd times, that odor of place and youth. The smell of home. My old man had married again at seventy-four. His bride owned the black mud now.

The Mr. Coffee was going when I got to the kitchen. Cody leaned against the counter, standing with one foot on the other as
she smoked a Camel filter. She was wearing a pair of slippers that looked like mallards. Execuducks. I’d ordered them as a joke from an ad in one of Cody’s magazines because she did our books. The slippers were for successful people who already had everything.

I pulled back the curtain at the sink. Pellets of snow struck the window like shot. I couldn’t even see the diesel tank, twenty yards away. As I stepped back, I saw my reflection on the glass, my sleep-straightened sandy hair standing as if in comic fright.

“Honey,” Cody said. “That was TJ’s mother on the phone. Are you awake?” She drew on her cigarette as if she needed it to breathe.

“I’m awake.” I took two porcelain cafe cups from the drainboard and watched the coffee rise in the Pyrex pot. “TJ’s got a mother?” I said.

Cody turned away to snub out the butt, and I looked at the clean lines of her back and legs, the currents of black hair spilling off her shoulders. In profile the blood really showed: Plains Cree and French, although her father, she thought, had been a Harp. I wondered how TJ Rountree, a person we did not often mention, had managed to get me out of bed.

With him it could be anything. I’d known him when he was just starting out on broncs, a skinny kid, who at first took a hell of a beating. But he toughened in his twenties, getting hard and limber as a bullprick whip. Over the years, I’d helped him off some winners, and for a while in the early 80s, it looked like he could be somebody. On his way down, he met Cody, and they ran together for a couple of seasons, until I found her one night passed out in the grass behind the horse trailers at the Last Chance Stampede, lying there where Rountree left her. I got some help and took her to the hospital. After she took the cure, we
started seeing each other. When we got married, we acted like
Rountree had never been born.

“He’s in Missoula,” Cody said. She filled our cups and put
cream on the table for hers. She lit another cigarette. “In the
hospital.”

The coffee was strong, although it would have been better the
way I used to drink it, with half a shot to the cup. I couldn’t do
that anymore, living with Cody. I had two drinks a night and put
the bottle away. Cody claimed that having whiskey around the
house didn’t bother her. When she’d been drinking, she went
mostly with wine. Still, I kept the bottle out of sight. “He drying
out or what?” I asked.

Cody nodded. “Bleeding shits, shakes, scared half crazy. His
mom is there with him.”

“Now it’s Mom,” I said. I sat down at the chrome and Formica
table. Like the rest of the furniture, it had come with the trailer
and had no connection to the past. “So what does Mom want
from us?”

Cody stared at her slippers, cigarette smoke boiling from her
nose. The one thing you notice right off about reformed drunks
is the cigarettes and coffee. “He just waited too long,” she said.
“He thought he could cowboy up and go cold turkey. He was in
some kind of shock by the time they got to him. He’s asking for
me.”

“Well kiss my ass and call me Mildred,” I said. “That takes
guts.” I started to stand, my knee popped, and I almost went
down. But in that instant of vertigo before I caught the table, I
understood something that had been there all along just under the
surface. I saw why we’d never had a real fight, Cody and I. We
called it love, but we knew we’d kill each other if we ever got
started. As I looked at her I saw that we both understood it now.

“I’ve got to go,” she said. “He’s hurting and he’s scared.”

She walked around the table and put her hand on my arm. I didn’t know what to do, and I knew whatever I said would be wrong. I touched her hair. “I’ll be needing the truck in the after­noons to feed,” I said.

“Maybe the bus then,” Cody answered. She slipped her arm under mine and hugged my waist. “If you’d just drive me in.”

When it was light enough to see outside I started the truck, fed the horses and checked the stocktank heaters. The wind tapered off at dawn and morning broke clear, not a cloud from the Mis­souri to the Rocky Mountain Front. Smoke from the idling truck rose in vertical white contrails against a sea-blue sky. I thought about taking Cody into Great Falls for the bus, and I didn’t be­lieve, when it came right down to it, that we’d go. She would change her mind, or I’d say no, or, maybe Rountree would do the right thing for a change and either improve or die before we left.

Cody’d been through a bunch of men when she was running, but I could never understand why she’d ended up with him—a man so obviously out for himself. Winning a few in a row can turn your head, although when I’d been riding saddle broncs I hadn’t lasted long enough to discover how I’d act on a roll. A chute post got my knee my second season, and riding pickup was about as close to winners as I got on the summer circuit.

We didn’t have much to say during breakfast, and I tried for some restraint. It didn’t work. Finally I said, “Okay. Tell me why.”

She looked up, butting those black eyes on me. “Just don’t,” she said with a twist of her mouth. “Just don’t you start.”

“I need an answer,” I told her and heard in the sound of my voice how much I meant it.
"Because," she said and took her dishes to the sink where she started to wash them, then one by one smashed each piece against the divider. She had to hit the cup three times before it broke, but when it did, chips cleared the drainboard and ricocheted off the microwave. When she finished, she took the porcelain handle from her fingers and put it on the table. She looked outside at the glare of sky on empty space. "Because he tried to love me," she said. "It wasn't easy for him, like it is for you, but he tried."

"And you drank yourself stupid, it was so good."

Cody turned her glistening eyes back to me. I'd never seen her cry, and she did not cry then; she stood at the sink, gazing at me through cataracts of ice.

"That's right," she said. "It was good. I just did not know how to face it sober."

I stood outside in the concrete forebay until the driver closed the luggage compartment doors and climbed aboard. Cody looked out the tinted window. Her face was green, her loose black hair clasped behind each ear by a beadwork barrette. A green Indian on her way to town. The driver ground gears and released the brakes, and Cody raised one hand. I shook my head and she looked away.

I went inside and walked around until I could feel my leg. The people waiting on the benches seemed to have been abandoned there in their winter clothes. Three bums sat together by the wall lockers, not going anywhere, just sitting quietly, sharing warmth until someone threw them out. A woman from Rocky Boy or Harlem held a sleeping child—a grandson perhaps. Leaving the reservation or going back; she could have been Cody's mother, the child, mine.
Cody was in motion. As I walked to the truck I knew I had a choice: I could drive home and talk to the cows and wait, or I could move too. Momentum seemed the only answer.

Rising exhaust and river steam yellowed the frozen midday sky. Alone in the lanes of traffic, I felt somehow freed, opened to all the possibilities of so many people moving at such a pace. I drew five hundred dollars in cash at the branch bank on 10th Avenue South and drove on to Holiday Village where I walked the mall looking in all the windows.

At the Westerners' I found a pin-stripe Fenton and a pair of gabardine slacks that matched. The fitting room was tight, but I managed to change without removing my brace. I topped off the shirt and pants with a black scarf and a pearl-gray Resistol Sundance. The clerk put my work clothes in a Westerner's sack. I felt dressed and ready; the sack suggested purchases in reserve.

I was surprised to see kids on every level, crowding the record stores, buying clothes, clowning on the escalators. Some of them wandered in pairs, holding hands. Some embraced in darker passageways near the theater, waiting for the matinee. Most seemed bored by the presence of so much merchandise.

Posters in the windows at Adventure Travel showed mossy castles in the Highlands, high-rise hotels in the Caribbean, an airliner in flight above white-domed clouds, and high-breasted girls in bikinis. I went inside and looked at more posters, at casinos in the desert, at tanned skin fronting white sand beaches, at coconut palms silhouetted against atomic skies. All the places I would never go.

When the travel agent came over, I pointed to an aerial shot of some islands off Santa Cruz. "How much one way?" I asked.

She figured up a flight schedule to Guadalajara by way of
Denver and El Paso. "For one?" she asked without looking away from the terminal.

I told her yes and she touched more keys.

"One way, coach, is three hundred and sixty dollars—during our Winter Traveler's Special," she said.

"That's not that much, is it?"

She looked up. "My boyfriend and I went down last year. We stayed on the beach at Teacapan. We fell in love with it." She smiled. Her green eyes were bright as bottle glass in the glow of the screen.

I drove out to the Tropicana Club near the front gate of Malmstrom Air Force Base and went in to plan my future. The place was already in full swing, mostly airmen in civvies, a few wheat farmers in town for the day, a cowboy or two, and some poker machine apes—everyone drinking loud or watching two strobe-lit women who danced in wrought-iron cages swinging from the ceiling on chains. I walked to the end of the bar, as close to the cages as I could get, and put my Carhartt coat on a stool. The bartender gave me a napkin. I noticed a blender on the backbar. "Pina colada," I said. "Make it a pitcher."

The place could have been a warehouse: black cinder block walls with palm trees painted here and there in day-Glo greens, a tequila sunset mural backing the bandstand. Music throbbed from the darkest corners. Overhead spots threw multicolored cones of light on the dancers. The closest girl took off her top, twirled it and rotated her small breasts in the opposite direction. The guy next to me squirmed and grinned. He was wearing a mesh cap that read: Ford Tractors and Equipment. "She really puts out," he said and I turned back to love her.
She was oriental, Korean maybe. She looked into the colored lights and bopped away without seeming to notice the music. The other girl was very white, with dark red hair flounced into lazy curls. She seemed a little stiff, as if, perhaps, she was new to the cage.

The bartender put a fishbowl on my napkin and filled it with froth. "You want the umbrella?" he asked.

"Sure thing," I said and put a fifty on the bar. I rested my weight on my elbows and let the one leg hang.

He left the pitcher beside my glass and put a pink and blue bamboo umbrella, two candied cherries, and a lavender straw in my drink. He raised his eyebrows. "Just right," I told him, and he shook his head and smiled.

I was toying with the umbrella and thinking about Adventure Travel when it came to me: Green Indian. One of the illegals who irrigated for my father used to say that. Anything he didn't like or understand was an Indio Verde. Used to call my old man that behind his back, and son of a bitch, if he hadn't been right. I could see his face, the Mexican, but I had no idea what his name might have been. The old man called them all Manual, as in shovel.

I tried the drink and it was so cold it hurt my heart. It seemed almost perfect. All it needed was more fruit, more booze, and more light. I tried to imagine the perfect pina colada, freshly wrung from the jungle, to visualize the dancers' cages hanging from palm trees that fronted a white crescent beach with breakers coming in and sails like shark fins marking the horizon. One girl would be Polynesian, the other, old-country Irish. I was alone on the beach—the jungle at my back—dressed in a white terry cloth robe and Panama straw the color of cream, drinking the
perfect pina colada and watching the waves churn to foam at my feet. In this state of mind, I owned the beach. I owned the dancers.

The music ended, the lights went down, and several airmen struggled to help the women from their cages. They got the job done, handing the dancers down like frozen beef. I closed my eyes. I wanted to stand centered between palms and watch the sea. I wanted it all: salt winds and sea warmth, sand burning the soles of my feet, the glow of endless ocean seared by sky.

I took out my wallet and flipped through my cards. Nothing on American Express or the Discover Card so far this month. The Visa looked good too. The MasterCard could stand another fifteen hundred, and there was my bank card, like an ace in the hole. I took them from their plastic pockets and spread them on the bar like a poker hand. I had some money tucked away at a bank in Butte. I could do it. I could be a wanderer in the world. I could go to the swimming hole every day.

I wondered if Cody was there yet, and how long it would take Rountree to straighten out once she found him. I wondered what she had hoped to accomplish beyond trying to do the right thing. I wondered what she would do if TJ cleaned up his act.

The dancers came along the bar, teasing the drinkers. The girl with red hair stopped to toy with my friend in the Ford cap. He was having fun now, all wiggly on his stool, making signs with his hands. She smiled with her teeth, a thirsty dust-bowl look of accommodation. She nodded at what he was saying, cut her eyes to me and noticed my drink. I watched as he pulled his wallet to show her something. She looked down the bar at my plastic full house and smiled again.

Her outfit was mostly moccasins and strings of black leather
torn into a vampy Mohawk motif. I took my Carhartt from the stool and held it out for her by the collar. She slipped into it like a cape, and the coat made her seem small. “Are those hot?” she asked, looking at the cards.

“Not yet.”

She bent over the bar to look closer and pulled the coat tighter from inside, hiding her arms. “I don’t get it,” she said.

“It has to do with green Indians,” I said. “My wife took off this morning. I’ve got three hundred head of black cattle to feed for the bank and a trailer full of new appliances. If I don’t get drunk and kill somebody I might catch a flight to Guadalajara.”

“I’m from Omaha,” she said. “I know just how you feel.”

“A couple weeks on the beach, drinking these beautiful drinks, and watching the water roll in.”

“Yeah, right,” she said. “Like Jimmy Buffett there.”

“Just exactly like Jimmy Buffett, frozen concoctions and all.”

She took one arm from inside the coat and fanned the cards with the tips of her fingers. “Are you nice?” she asked.

“Oh, goodness yes, and quite wealthy, too.”

“Come on. I mean, are you straight up or what?”

“Maybe if you’re not so straight you don’t lose so much,” I said.

She shook her hair back with a quick movement of her head. “You won’t go,” she said. “You want it all back. I see guys like you every day, a handful of plastic and a plan. It’s talk. It’s a country song.”

“Maybe you’re right,” I said, “but I’d lie to you for your love.”

“You’ll do more than that,” she answered.

We laughed. She was on the road where I felt I should be, and the truth was I did feel better. I held out the fishbowl. “Here, kid, try some of this and we’ll see if you’ve got what it takes.”

230 CutBank
She raised the bowl like a giant shell to her lips and held my eyes as she drank. She closed her eyes then drank again. When she handed it back she said, “My name is Danny....” She picked up a card, tipping it to the bar lights, “Mr. Delaney.”

“Clay,” I said. “Mr. Delaney died.” I refilled the bowl, adjusted the umbrella. “One other thing.”

“Right,” she said and threw back her hair again. “I just knew there would be.”

“I am going. I’m just not going alone.”

Danny wiped the mustache away with the tip of her third finger and asked for the bowl again with her hands. “Of course you’re not,” she said.

At Holiday Village, I put the tickets on my American Express and drew a thousand in cash with the bank card. We drove on across town in the blinding late light of afternoon with an accelerating sense of impending joy. From Airport Hill, where the sky cleared, Great Falls was lost beneath a sea of haze the color of sand.

The lady at the American Airlines counter tore our tickets and explained the flight changes at Denver and El Paso. She barely looked at the tickets as she talked, and it worried me that she might make an error. I could just see us boarding the morning flight from El Paso with hangovers, an attendant saying, “Excuse me, Sir, but there seems to be a mistake.”

“...luggage?” the airline lady asked.

“Just carry-on,” I answered. “We’re buying everything new.”

Danny had an overnight case with her dancing costume and a tub of cocoa butter for the beach. Between us we didn’t have a toothbrush. “I can’t believe we’re into this,” she said on the escalator to the boarding level. She laughed and gave me her palms
to slap. I laughed too and slid my hands over hers. We'd been laughing so much the last couple of hours my face had started to stiffen.

"Believe," I said.

We had twenty minutes to kill. At the bank of international clocks in the concourse mezzanine, I told her I had to make a call.

"I'm thinking rum coladas," she said.

"Get some with all the goodies. I'll be right back."

I left her in the flight lounge and found a row of phones. I dumped some bar change on the phone tray and got the operator to ring McDonough's, our closest neighbors, three miles south. The youngest boy, Alfred, worked for me sometimes, when he could escape his old man.

Mrs. McDonough answered, and I asked for her son. When he came on, I said, "Something's come up, Al. Cody and I are going to be gone a while, and I need you to feed for me."

After a silence so long it seemed we'd been disconnected, he said, "Just a minute." Away from the receiver I heard him call: "Daaad." He sounded like a calf. Alfred, the slow son who would stay home.

"What's going on?" McDonough said in my ear.

"Like I told your boy, something has come up short notice, and I need him to feed for me. Cody and I are going to be away." I heard him breathing on the line. "So would it be all right? Can you spare him?"

"Are you drunk?" he said.

"No. I'm in Great Falls."

"Well, I don't know," he said, "what's going on with you people. That's your business. But I can tell you this: I picked up your wife at Bowman's Corner after she called here this afternoon."
I went and got her and took her home drunk as seven hundred dollars. She ain't gone, she's out there with a case of Wild Berry.”

“Hang on,” I said.

“We get to your place, there's no tracks, no truck. She starts pulling her hair, for Christ's sake. You want my boy to walk into a jackpot like that?”

“You sure she's still there?”

“She's there. It's twelve miles to Augusta.”

I felt myself sag. “Sorry about the trouble,” I said.

“I've got more to do than ferry....”

“Thanks again,” I said and hung up.

I went to the wall of east-facing windows and looked out. I could see my one-ton in the lot, and off south, the slope-shouldered rise of the Little Belt Mountains—lit, like a memory of mountains, with alpenglow.

Above the escalators hung a mural of Lewis and Clark making their portage around the Great Falls of the Missouri. The men in the painting looked like Hulk Hogan as they strained to drag their pirogues up on to the prairie. The sky behind them suggested midsummer and high adventure.

Danny was watching the American Airlines 737 join an accordion tunnel outside. She'd killed both drinks. I leaned into the bar behind her and looked out through the floor-to-ceiling windows. I touched her hair.

“I've been all over,” Danny said. “But every time I see my ship come in I get real goosey.”

“Me too,” I said. I paid for the drinks, and we walked into the mezzanine toward the boarding gates. Outside, the last direct rays of winter light stoked the Little Belts like bedded coals.

She put her overnight bag on the conveyor at the security
check. I emptied my pockets and took off my belt buckle. Danny went through, no problem. The machine went crazy on me. One of the uniformed women behind the counter raised her hand.

"My brace," I said and pulled up my pants leg for her to see.

Danny held the tray with my things, looking at the iron on my leg. The security lady came around the counter with a hand-held detector and ran it all over me. It liked the brace. "Okay," she said. "Sorry."

"It's all right," I said. "I'm not boarding anyway."

Danny fingered my buckle. When she looked at me it was with the dryness I'd first noticed at the bar. "Most guys just want to take you to Heaven at the Paradise Inn," she said. "But you, we get to go to the airport first."

I stuffed my pockets with change and put my buckle back on.

"You know something?" she said. "The last time I made it to the airport with a big spender like you we went to Reno."

"How nice for you," I said and took her arm.

"What are you doing, man? I mean, I quit my job! I've got maybe three hundred dollars and no place to stay. It's January, Jack. Just let go, okay? I've had about enough for one shift."

I held her elbow until we got to Gate 4 where a line had formed at the podium for the flight to Denver. An attendant spoke into a red phone. He hung up and began taking tickets.

"Just great," she said. "Now we get to watch the nice people take off before you dump me here. This is getting creepy, you know?" She jerked her arm and I bore down. People leaving the plane glanced at us as they passed.

I took the packet of tickets from the cigar pocket in my coat and let go. I put some one hundred dollar bills inside the folder. "I've got to go home," I said. "The beach is no place for a gimp."
You can go for both of us."

"Oh, come on!" she said, her palms out, warding off the tick­ets.

"And get a good Irish burn. And watch the water come in. And
drink some real pina coladas."

The line ahead had shortened to three people. "Cash my ticket
to get home. Stay as long as you can. Here," I  handed her the
folder.

"You don't need to rescue me," she said, her eyes beginning to
shine. "Do you think I need you to leave town?"

"All you need is a white robe and a Panama straw and some
shades. This isn't that complicated, and you'll make me feel bet­
ter. Go."

"Take a break," she said. "Give me a minute." She stepped into
a ladies' room and I walked down to a window to look at the
plane. My leg ached. I  was beginning to feel the first waves of an
afternoon hangover, and I realized that I  was hungry. I drew a
heart in the condensation on the glass and put a palm tree inside
and shot an arrow through it. Cody would be passed out by now.

Danny took my arm. "Listen," she said. "What's going on?" Her
hand was deeply freckled, and it was warm in the way of a
warmth I  needed. In the hard light of the concourse she looked
about my age.

"I called home," I  told her. "My wife came back. She's a drinker
and she's drinking again."

"If you hadn't called, would we have gone?"

"Yes, we would have gone."

"It would be sweet," she said, "the frozen concoctions and all." Then she handed me the tickets and walked her dancer's walk back the way we'd come. At the security station she glanced
toward me, shook her head, and kept going.

I waited until the engines gained pitch and the tunnel withdrew from the plane before I walked back to the bar, where I bought a pack of Camel Filters. I asked for a cup of coffee and smoked the first cigarette and watched the plane taxi north, its wing lights bright in the growing dusk. The cigarette made me dizzy.

I sat down and thought about having something to eat before I headed back out to the new place that except for Cody would never be home. I could not go home. But that meadowed valley with its beaverslide stackers and hayrake teams was always waiting in me. I could close my eyes and smell it; I could turn my head, and it was there.

I smoked another cigarette and drank my coffee and watched as the plane left the earth, leaping south into a winter sky that was turning with slow certainty toward summer.
...when I got back I showed the pictures to my karate instructor. He’s a mean old Korean, about sixty-five, head like a bowling ball...anyway he looked at the mountains and said, “Are tigers here?”

“No sir,” I said. “We got deer and elk and black bear and mountain lion. Used to have wolves, and jaguar, and bigger bears. No tigers.”

He looked at me like I was a little slow. “Looks like tiger country to me.”

—excerpt from a letter

Prologue

Think of a dry plateau the size of Connecticut...maybe a little bigger, with an average height above sea level of, oh, seven thousand feet. That’s right—the flat ground is “higher” than Vermont’s mountains. Brown plains, nappy and dry like a lion-colored pool table.

Add the following: not just a few but many mountain chains, most north-south; one going more like east-west; all reaching above nine and some ten thousand feet, blue with pine and fir and spruce. No ponds or lakes, natural ones anyway, but lots of snow in the winter, especially above eight thousand feet. Vertical weather. A day-night temperature difference of forty degrees, winter and summer.

People never made much impact here. The paved roads run around the edges; only one goes “through” so to speak, and it's
two cars wide and twisty as a snake. There are two thousand people on the plateau today, more or less, most of them in towns where the only pavement is the road through.

The size of western land, and the distance you can see across it, baffles by its apparent openness. East of the Mississippi you can drive almost anywhere on paved roads and find signs of human occupation anywhere you go. You bring these assumptions west as surely as the first European settlers brought theirs. One of the hardest preconceptions to throw off is that, because you've seen the west from the interstate, you've seen the west. That forty-mile stretch between exits may be forty miles without a single paved crossing; or, the interstate exit itself may give out on to a dirt ranch road. It may be one hundred miles at right angles to that exit before you hit a paved crossing. What you've just defined by its edges is a block bigger than Rhode Island or Delaware, with no pavement in it.

The interior of this block is likely to be rugged, impassable, and, except in Texas, owned by the federal government, a.k.a. you and me. Any place where there are real mountains is likely to include National Forest; places without forest will be owned by the Bureau of Land Management; around the edges of these blocks, or mixing inextricably with them, are the ranches. There are more than a few big ranches, big because it's so dry. In most of the west ranchers own bottomlands and springs. But in order to have enough year-round pasture to make a living, they lease vast tracts of BLM and Forest Service land. Nobody here is getting rich.

This part of New Mexico is still the real West. It's a long way from Santa Fe and Taos, from tourists and New Age entrepreneurs and crystal miracles, from silver 'n' turquoise everything and

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coyotes with bandannas and Neo-Native American art. It's a long dry drive to the nearest ski slope, Mercedes Benz, or Arab horse.

It's a long way from most regular western history, too. It's a five-hour drive over mountains to the high plains and all their romantic ghosts — Comanche, buffalo, lobo wolf. It's the same distance to Four Corners and the Navajo nation. It's a fair drive even to White Sands and its interesting legacy of stolen ranches, Oppenheimer, and the Bomb. It's a whole nation away from the Spanish land-grant north, that strange mix of Europe and America, with its sheep and Penitentes and trout streams and little churches with peaked tin roofs.

Most of its history is prehistory: Pleistocene, the Old Ones, the Anasazi (a Navajo name — we don't know what they called themselves), were here for a good part of their cryptic history, and left one famous ruin and hundreds of smaller ones, many still undisturbed.

The Apaches followed. For a while they were invincible in these, their woods and mountains. The horse soldiers under General Crook finally beat them with superior numbers and strategy; the soldiers held the waterholes and harassed the Indians down into Mexico. Crook never beat them on tactics, though.

The miners flourished after the Apaches. They made a lot of holes and took away various things that were useful to them. But, except for the open copper pit at Santa Rita, way down south, and a bunch of what look like caves, the miners' traces are fading faster than the Anasazis'.

Finally, there were the ranchers. They were good tough men and women, and we should not dignify the craven attacks on them that are part of the historical moment's required attitudes. But all of the "Old" Spanish and New Anglo alike were of Euro-
pean descent, and they did exactly what their ancestors had done: they fought what they thought was a necessary war against their competitors, animal and human.

A few held on. Black bears, some black and shiny, others the color of Irish setters, adapt pretty well to humans, especially by their standards. They raid beehives and garbage cans and climb telephone poles when they get confused. They are wonderful animals, but they often act more like pretty pigs or giant raccoons than Real Bears. The Plains tribes knew the difference.

And there are cougars, still. (You should prefer that name to lion. It's American; besides, there's nothing lion-like about them.) Deer are their fodder, and we still have plenty of deer. Besides, the cougars are invisible.

And, of course, coyotes are everywhere. They are smart and sophisticated, have a sense of humor and know what to fear. They are so little threat to cattle that cowmen, as opposed to sheepmen—"woolgrowers" they call them now, which says something about domestic sheep as animals—treat coyotes with a mixture of affection and contempt, at least when they don't feel a need to test their rifles. Besides, coyotes can live on juniper berries and mice when the going gets tough.

But the real competitors are gone, or changed beyond recognition. The Apaches have achieved at least one small victory: on their reservations they now charge rich white men and Japanese industrialists the price of a small car to shoot carefully-nurtured and pre-spotted bull elk, a ritual that these clients honestly think is hunting rather than a sort of decadent agriculture.

The Real Bears—Plains Indian for grizzly—and the real wolves, and the "tiger"—what the Mexicans call the jaguar—are just gone. Europeans never did get along with wolves and brown bears, for
good reason. In our own Dream Time, bears competed with us for housing and meat, and wolves lived lives so much like ours that we made up stories of their exchanging shapes with us. When we began living in one place and keeping prey as our property, the war began in earnest. We brought it across the ocean with us, north across the Big River, west across the Plains. Wolves ran hit-and-run guerilla strikes on us, just like the Apaches did. Contemporary accounts, trying hard to insult both tribes, are full of comparisons.

The bears, though they didn’t constantly run off young stock the way the wolves did, were even more frightening. A grizzly could, and would, kill a human. In the fall, when winter sharpened their appetites, they’d raid down out of their mountain fortresses like goblin kings, like Grendel. A big one could carry off a full grown longhorn steer if that were his notion. If you chased him with hounds, he’d run ‘til you couldn’t hear the dogs, then turn and kill them all. If you caught up with him on horseback, he might charge faster than the horse could run. If you dismounted to shoot, there was no guarantee that a puny nineteenth-century black powder load would so much as slow the bear down before he mashed you to a pulp.

The pioneer stockmen were not people who expected, asked, or gave quarter. They hunted down every grizzly and wolf they could find, though “hunted” has a sporting connotation that I doubt many of these warriors ever felt. Government agents like Ben Lilly made their cause a religious crusade against servants of the Devil; Lilly considered defenders of predators to be heretics. Empathy is a grace rarely granted to foot soldiers.

One government agent had a change of heart. Aldo Leopold himself, patron saint of the modern conservation movement, was
once a hired gun, an ace predator-controller. But right here in the
heart of this country he saw certain things in a dying wolf’s eyes,
and it changed him. When they killed the last grizzly on Escu-
dilla he dared to see and speak the heretical truth: that it was only
a mountain now.

The last Real Bear in the southwestern United States held on for
a few more years; his skin came out of the high Magdalenas on the
plateau’s eastern edge in 1930, on the back of a burro. The last
jaguar in New Mexico died in the snows of the Continental Divide
here in 1903, victim of an alarmed ranch wife with a bucket of
poisoned milk. The wolves, with their social intelligence, hung on
longer. Their bands retreated across the Rio Grande into Old
Mexico, as the Apaches did before them. The government mopped
up the survivors with traps and poison in a campaign that lasted
until the sixties. And don’t think that such methods weren’t used
against wild humans, in crueler or at least less sentimental times;
or aren’t elsewhere, today....

The country still does look real, though.
Annick Smith

Mother and Me

How do you speak truly about your mother without deceit, with open loving eyes? Why speak at all? I am a child who was born in the Great Depression, came of age under Eisenhower, and was born again after age forty into the wide open spaces of widowhood and choice.

My parents are immigrants who arrived in America to start a new life, carrying the baggage of the Old World. Family was primary, patriarchal, powerful. We lived in a house full of women—Mother, Grandma, three sisters and my father. He was the star around whom we revolved. He was the person I identified with, wanted to emulate. I thought I was his clone until I grew old enough to understand that the person I most resemble is my mother.

When I tell tales about my mother, I’m telling tales on me. It’s a way to free myself in some degree from the family myths that helped shape me, and gave me cause for a lifelong struggle. I want my children to be part of new myths, in which Mother and Father are not godlike in their largeness. In which women are equal players who don’t have to resort to the old feminine deceptions that ultimately diminish and degrade.

Mother comes from Transylvania. When she lived there in the early 1900s it was a place of vineyards, feudal estates, and peasant culture—rich, rolling farmlands in the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains. Transylvania was Hungary then, Rumania now. Who knows what tomorrow.

Before the era of politically correct language, Mother identified
herself as a “white Jew” because of the German blood on her father’s side. White Jews, like light-skinned African-Americans, enjoyed a higher status than the swarthy “black Jews” from Russia and the Near East. She has always been proud of her even features, soft light hair, and unlined skin, which could allow her to pass for Aryan any place on Earth. If you ask the secret of her skin, Mother will laugh and say, “Pond’s Cold Cream.”

My mother’s real name is Ilonka Beck, which should be translated Elaine. Her first name, and at least one year of her age (a fact she too-vigorously denies), were left behind when at eighteen she got a visa to emigrate to France. To the Hungarian-hating Romanians who had taken over her country, Elaine sounded like Helene, so what the hell, you’re changing countries, you may as well have a new name.

My grandmother Beck called her Ilush. My father calls her Petite (pronounced Peti). Mother is petite, under five feet. At 86, humped from the common female calcium deficiency, osteoporosis, the child she once was has emerged like a small white butterfly from the trappings of adulthood. I see a petted, laughing child, capped these days with milk-white hair. Other women may become what she disdainfully refers to as “old ladies,” but she, never. A son-in-law used to call her Bride of Frankenstein. When we want to get Mother’s goat, we call her Zsa Zsa.

After a long day at the hospital where my father has undergone surgery to replace a useless and arthritic knee, Mother and I sit in the living room of my parents’ apartment in Chicago. The couch where we lounge and the padded Eames chairs have been upholstered by Mother. We look out the bay window to Lake Shore Drive and lights glinting off Lake Michigan. In her old age and my middle age, Mother and I have come closer than ever before—she
less strident and willful, and me less rebellious and strident and willful. We have come to accept who we are, and thus can accept the reality of the other.

It is an intimate moment, a time for storytelling, and if Mother likes anything better than cooking and eating, it's telling stories of her childhood. She spins tales, I ask questions. We talk about Transylvania. When they were my age and had been divorced and remarried, my parents took to traveling the world. They went back to Hungary. The streets of my father's home in Budapest were somber under Soviet rule. Liberation had been hibernating at that time, but the reconstructed stones of the city remained familiar. You could walk amid memories.

Not so in Mother's home town of Nagyvarad (meaning Big Fortress, after the ruined towers which once held back the Turks). Mother's birthplace was beyond recognition. It had become victim to Romania's destruction of all things Hungarian, Catholic, old. Victim to a Soviet-inspired idea of progress.

"I tried to find the house we lived in," she said. "I could not even find the street. They have built cement apartments there. It is ugly."

There were tears in Mother's eyes. Ugliness is sin number one. "The beautiful river where we swam—I wanted to show your father."

A river ran through Nagyvarad, a town I imagine as an Old-Country version of Missoula, Montana, where I have lived some thirty years. Mother used to go swimming in the town pool, which had been built into the river. You could dive into the clear waters and see boulders on the sandy bottom. The river was so swift, she says, only the strongest could swim upstream. In winter my mother and her friends would skate on the river.
"It was gone." Mother's voice drops as she remembers. Age diminishes all things. It has softened her voice to a whisper. "Brown. There was oil, like rainbows on the top. The trees are gone. The fish. It is polluted."

I barely hear her last words. "Destroyed...destroyed, destroyed."

The Beck family lived a bourgeois life in a spacious house, near a park. My grandfather, Henrik, managed an insurance brokerage, but because he was Jewish, he could not own it or advance in the company. Still, the Becks were middle class as anyone and they always had a maid. Each room in the Victorian household held a hand-painted tile stove. My great-grandmother Beck would sit in her rocking chair in front of the stove and knit. She told Bible stories in German to my mother and her older brother, Jean.

When I try to imagine my mother's childhood I see it in embroidery, fine and delicate, like the lace tablecloths my grandmother stitched in our living room in Chicago—those long evenings before television, when we gathered around the hi-fi to listen to Bach and do our homework. I see hand-sewn ruffled dresses and long curls, an image to match the sepia photograph that hung in my mother's bedroom: young Ilush in her party gown—pretty, pristine.

I imagine my grandmother's white-washed kitchen redolent with odors of her fine Hungarian cooking, like the kitchens she ruled in my childhood: chicken paprika; veal goulash; stuffed peppers; apple strudel; and a fragrant yeast bread something like American Indian fry bread, which Grandma Beck called langosz.

"Now, eat." A litany passed from generation to generation. It must have been a gentle, overstuffed, sensual life.
Mother's best friend in Nagyvarad was Catholic. The girls attended the gymnasium (private high school) and spoke fluent German. They ran with a crowd my mother calls "the golden youth"—children of doctors, lawyers, businessmen, the intelligentsia. In the 1920s, Jewish children were accepted into this crowd, but in the wider culture there was a cruel edge of discrimination. My mother recoils from two Jew-baiting incidents that touched her.

"I used to sleep over at Maria's house," she says, "just like the other girls." But one evening, when a visitor arrived, Ilonka Beck discovered to her everlasting discomfort that she wasn't quite like everyone else. Maria's mother pointed to my mother. "That is Maria's little Jewish friend."

Nearly seventy years later, Mother's hazel eyes light with triumph. "You know," she says, "Maria married a Jewish doctor."

Mother doesn't know what became of her friend. I don't speak my next thought. I wonder if Maria and her husband met their liberal-minded ends in Auschwitz, with the rest of the 500,000 Hungarian Jews who were rounded up in 1944, during the last days of Hitler.

The second incident involved a boyfriend. Mother was a charmer, and she had many boyfriends. As she tells it, her one great lapse in taste was to fall for a tall, dark, handsome Romanian. "He was very attractive. Very sexy." Mother has always been drawn to good looks.

"He thought he owned me," she shrugs. "Once he said to me, 'You are my little, freckled, Jewish girl.'"

"I told him," she says with a self-satisfied grin, "I told him, 'You are a big Romanian lout.'"

That was the end of that romance. Mother hates her freckles.
She hates being called little. And most of all, she hates being patronized as Jewish.

My sister Kathy and I used to speculate about the sexual life of our mother and father. We played out scenarios with our paper dolls, whispered and giggled, trying to figure out the secrets of married life, figure out what a woman should be. We wanted to be sexy, like our father.

He slept naked. I remember staring at his genitals those mornings I caught him walking down the hall from bedroom to bathroom. When he kissed me, I pulled away, the touch too dangerous. All my friends had crushes on my father, Stephen Deutch, the photographer who took pictures of long-legged models and movie stars, also voluptuous nudes. When we were teens my sisters and I came to believe he had affairs with some of those women. We didn’t know how our mother could stand it. And when we were grown, he confirmed our suspicions by running off with a blond named Zee, who had southern accent.

I never could pin down my mother’s sexual nature. There was a kittenish, playful side to her—teasing rather than sexy. At the cocktail parties we had at our house, I could see that men were attracted to her. Sometimes our parties ended in drunken dancing, my father wild as anyone, my sisters and me getting high on left-over Scotch and sodas in the guests’ forgotten highballs. But I can’t remember Mother doing anything rash or indiscreet. She kept her admirers at a safe, admiring distance.

Mother’s personal daintiness made her seem squeamish and Victorian to a liberated daughter in worn jeans and white men’s shirts and bare feet. I couldn’t imagine her abandoned in the sweaty, smelly contact of sexual passion. Still, photographs from
her Paris high-jinx days, and photographs my father took, show a young woman with a come-on look—a woman who flaunted her round breasts and flashing legs. What do I really know about that woman? Nothing.

What I do know is that my mother was fearful of male genitals. Her fear goes back to a day when she was five.

"I was playing with my cat," she tells me, as we continue to talk about Transylvania. "The cat ran into a small shed behind our house where the man lived who tended our yard—the gardener, you know—that kind of man. He was always nice to me. But he was old and dirty. And he smelled."

Mother wrinkles her freckled nose. If ugliness is sin number one in her lexicon, bad smells are sin number two.

"I did not think. I followed the cat. The man was sitting in a chair right in back of the open door. His pants was open. He was pulling his penis...up and down."

Mother stops a moment to catch her breath. She makes a terrible face. "It was big. And sticking up out of his pants, like a snake. It was moving. He called to me. 'Come here,' he said. 'Come and touch it. It won't bite you.'"

Eighty years later, she shudders, the fear tangible. "I ran away. I never forget that."

Sex may have been ugly to the girl, Ilonka, but death was a greater horror. Mother has always been haunted by mortality. Her father died of sudden kidney failure when she was thirteen. She has witnessed the deaths of friends, two sons-in-law, the slow arthritic crippling of my father. When her ninety-three-year-old mother lay dying in the hospital, Mother stayed faithfully at her side until the nurse and doctors and my father convinced her to go home and get some rest.
Grandma Beck died in her sleep that night. "I let my mother die all alone," she says, the guilt so strong it makes her weepy. The question in Mother's eyes makes me want to look away. You won't do that to me, she is asking. You won't let me die by myself, with no one to hold my hand?

All her life, Mother has struggled against the domination of others. She resorts to female strategies of the powerless, passed from mothers to daughters in the old days: charm; humor; manipulation; willfulness; hysteria. She perfected these weapons in an underground war first against her mother. Then against her husband. Finally with her own girls.

Before and after my grandfather Henrik died, Grandma Beck was in charge of raising my mother and my mother's older brother, Jean. Grandma's name was Serena, but she was a far way from serene. A widow at forty, she was still handsome at ninety-three. Her mind was quick, her hands skilled. She bundled her long, white hair in a bun, and died with her natural teeth.

The one person I cannot imagine Grandma trying to boss was my stolid and studious Uncle Jean. After his father died, Jean went to France to study at the Sorbonne. He earned a doctorate in biology. He married a French girl of peasant stock and had a daughter named Helene, after my mother. Jean Beck would become a Frenchman and a professor of science.

As soon as Mother finished high school, Grandma Beck packed all their belongings and set off with her daughter for Paris, so they could be with Jean. They went poor because the Rumanian government had cheated my grandmother out of most of her husband's insurance; and money from the sale of their house was not allowed to leave the country. With her small savings and a hat
full of bitterness, Grandma left her homeland and never went back.

Mother went to the Sorbonne for two years. She loved student life; she had boyfriends; she skied in Switzerland and was a white-water canoeist. Then she discovered photography. There was a chance meeting with a Hungarian photographer friend of her brother's. The young man needed money to start a business. My grandmother invested 5,000 francs. When no profit came of it, Mother was sent to La Place d'Etoile to investigate.

The business failed, but during her inspections, Mother learned about cameras and lighting, developing and retouching. Retouching would be her specialty. Mother was a retoucher for Vogue during its Paris heyday. At twenty, she worked under the fashion photographers and became an assistant, then a full-fledged shooter. She posed models in Chanel suits; retouched negatives to create the illusion of perfection.

Beauty has been my mother's specialty. She is a master of beautiful surfaces. I remember watching her bend over a print; she used a magnifying glass. With a fine brush or pen, she could white-out wrinkles, the blemish on a woman's face. Her hand never faltered. Mother taught my father the art of photography and they opened the first Studio Deutch in Montparnasse.

Grandma Beck could have married again. Many widows remarried. But for her, such a choice was unthinkable. I remember the day she lost her gold wedding ring down the bathroom drain in our Chicago apartment. I was eleven. Grandma Beck held my hand. Her skin was soft as butter. I remember liver spots.

"I wish you could have know your grandfather, Henrik," she said. "He was so nice to me." This was a reprimand. My father, my sisters, and me—we were not so nice. I tried to pull my hand
away. Tears ran down her wrinkled cheeks. Fifty years had passed since Grandma’s husband had died, and still she wept when she spoke his name.

“Annickam, I miss him always so much,” she said in her broken English, but there was little sympathy I could give her, for my heart had already hardened. A precocious eleven-year-old bookworm, I despised sentimentality, thought Grandma’s nostalgia was a poor excuse for real emotion. I vowed never to fall into that trap.

Looking back, I’m afraid I judged my grandmother too quickly and too harshly, but I thought then, and I still believe that it is safer to weep for the past than to risk the changes and disappointments of creating a new persona—taking charge of your life. If Grandma Beck wanted to remain faithful to her husband’s memory and live celibate, well that was all right, but she could have done something more fulfilling (say less frustrating) than being a live-in nanny, cook, and manager of her daughter’s household for over half a century.

Now I realize it was not so easy to declare independence when custom and experience dictated such caretaking was the proper role for a widow. Mother explains that from the moment I was born she depended on her mother for support. Mother worked with my father in their photographic studio in Paris. When they came to Chicago, she continued to work. Grandma, who lived in her own apartment in Paris, came to live in our home in Chicago. She traded independence for security and connection—a lifetime of being the third wheel in our small contentious family.

Grandma Beck should have been an entrepreneur. I think of her running a dress shop—buying and selling, bossing the young girls. I think I’m a bit like her—bossy by nature. I bossed my
sisters. Tried to boss my mother. I can hear Grandma’s nagging to this day: “Come here, Annick. Pick up your socks. Wash the dishes. How can you go out, like a gypsy—in blue jeans?”

Seren-nani (Aunt Serene) swore in Hungarian. We learned good stuff. Oy oy Ishtenem (Oh my God); bidush kutya (you are a stinky dog). When all else failed, she put us in the broom closet.

At dinner Grandma quarrelled with my father, and losing whatever battle it was that day, would run to her room, weeping. Then Mother would quarrel with my father over his fight with Grandma. The quarrelling extended into their work. Mother had her ideas. My father had his ideas. Mother was not like Grandma Beck. She might turn hysterical, but she couldn’t be boss. When she became pregnant with my sister, Carole, her third child, she made a deal with my father. Mother would quit work if he bought a big house and moved us to the suburbs.

From the middle of my eighth-grade year until I went away to college, I lived in Wilmette on the North Shore of Chicago—part of the first Jewish family, I’m told, to break into that exclusive lily-white burg. My little sisters joined the Congregational Church. I was a stubborn outsider who found it impossible to join anything. Mother had worked all her life. Now she devoted her considerable energies and creative talents to living the suburban life of the 1950s. She learned to garden, play bridge, to cook and to sew; and she decorated our three-story white stucco house in high modern style, with hand-woven fabrics and Danish furniture.

Mother wanted us to fit in, too. She sewed our clothes from Vogue patterns—designer dresses we could never afford to buy at Marshall Fields. Her stitching was immaculate, but I always felt different from my blond classmates in their cashmeres and
pleated plaid skirts, so rich and so casual. I wore braces to bring my jaw forward and push back the slightly buck teeth I'd inherited from Mother. She had her teeth fixed, also. Then she started in on my large Deutch nose.

"You should get a nose job," she said. I was obstinate. "If you fix your nose, you'll look like Elizabeth Taylor."

Elizabeth Taylor had blue eyes and big boobs. "Don't touch me," I said. I did not want to be improved.

My sister Kathy was a dancer. She wanted to be an actress. Before she went to college, Mother convinced her to have the nose job. With her streamlined nose, Kathy was perfect enough to be a model, but never felt perfect enough to fit into the myth of the beautiful family that my mother created in place of self-esteem.

Maybe it was part of the immigrant experience in the aftermath of World War II, this wanting to fit in—the desire to look like your blue-eyed neighbors. Or fear of being persecuted by Senator McCarthy and his Red-baiting minions. Fear of being liberal and Jewish and vulnerable. Until my father fell for another woman and divorced my mother, causing the family myth to come crashing down on her, she believed in the story she'd created. And so did her children.

For years I ran away from my mother because, like her mother before her, she had wrapped her life in mothballs for the sake of her children—for me. A person who perceives herself as the object of someone else's sacrifice cannot bear the responsibility inherent in that obligation. I knew I could never be the ideal daughter Mother needed me to be, or deluded herself into thinking I was. I ran away by marrying at nineteen, having my first son at twenty, moving to Seattle at twenty-one. I had to live my own life.
Now I have grown children and know what it is to live in your offspring. I understand Mother’s desire for sacrifice, although it’s not my *modus operandi*, and I am able to appreciate—even express appreciation for—the help she has given me and my boys when we needed mothering care. I see myself in her—the virtues as well as the faults—for the first time in my life, and I can smile at the likeness.

Mother has lost both her breasts in radical mastectomies. Her heart is over-worked. She has high blood pressure. She sneezes. She takes dozens of pills and sees doctors for every ailment. She loves to walk beaches and woods on her strong and shapely old legs, like I do, and she has become wiser. Mother is more passive now, more honest, more resigned. She accepts life with a shrug, and is still scared to death of death.

When I look at the pictures my mother created in her Paris days, I forgive her the excesses of willful love and self-serving denial: there is a nude, like a doe in deep grass; and my father’s backlit Egyptian profile; and a bald baby (me) in a wicker cradle, the lawn starry with daisies. My mother has always been an artist. Her people float in sunlight. When she goes, I hope to be there to hold her hand.
That the writing of poems is valuable, important work, sometimes valuable important play, I have come to accept as a given. The long history and pre-history of the song, the story, the poem support me in this belief, prime my desire, and give me confidence. But where does a poem begin? Partly with desire. I want to write a poem, to borrow the words of Eudora Welty, "of beauty and passion, some fresh approximation of human truth." Of course desire and confidence wax and wane. I've been at it for about twenty-five years, and it still seems that after I've written a poem I forget how to write poems. But I remember the usual process—the feeling of struggle to overcome inertia, the doubts, the cross-outs, the dead ends, and then the relief, as if a gag or blindfold has been removed, turning to excitement when an image or phrase or line or sentence begins to ring, and some rhythm sets in to lead me on. I want to get to the good part, but I've learned to value the struggle. Sometimes the whole process is so subtle and enigmatic that what seemed to be the good part at the time turns out to be illusory, and some random thought or notation that seemed like a dead end begins later to ring and connect. Where does the poem begin? Which poem?

Welty, currently my favorite writer on the subject of writing, said in an essay written in 1955, "All writers speak from, and speak to, emotions eternally the same in all of us: love, pity, terror do not show favorites or leave any of us out. The tracking
down of a story (or poem) might do well to start not in the subjective country but in the world itself. What in this world leads back most directly, makes the clearest connections to these emotions? What is the pull on the line? For some outside signal has startled or moved the story- (or poem)-writing mind to complicity: some certain irresistible, alarming (pleasurable or disturbing), magnetic person, place or thing.”

I’ve found that a good place to begin is in the country of the noun, or in the land out of which nouns are born. I have a basic mistrust of abstraction, theory, philosophy, even my own, especially concerning writing. I realize these are tools of thinking that can be used well, as well as abused. Here’s a quote from Whitman I copied into a notebook: “Perhaps indeed the efforts of the true poets, founders, religions, literatures, all ages, have been, and ever will be, in our time and times to come, essentially the same—to bring people back from their sickly abstractions, to the costless average, divine, original concrete.”

The first word of that quote, ‘Perhaps’, is important because it shows an awareness of the potential of any passionate idea to blind as well as light up the world. Still, I am an advocate of passion and obsession to overcome inertia. I believe in revision too, but as wise writers have noticed, we can’t revise what isn’t written. Revision may or may not improve your work. It usually improves mine. It may be secondary or primary labor. It may be just questioning, testing, editing, but it may bring you closer to your experience and draw you deeper into your work where there is a potential for real discoveries to be made. Of course, the discoveries you make may not be the ones you wanted.

A friend of mine once called me a “hopeless optimist,” and I don’t think it was a compliment. So before I get carried away, let
me plug in a warning here. "Poetry, like the grizzly bear, is good for its own magnificent selfness and is not a utilitarian cog to improve someone's lifestyle. Poetry may very well help you get behind. Your legs might grow downward into the ground in certain locations. You will also turn inside out without warning." Jim Harrison said that, and he should know.

A writer should have a few simple rules to follow, such as: give in and honor the impulse; be specific and clear, even when you feel confused; write with images; make every word count; make good sentences; and pay attention at some point to sound and rhythm, which is the mystery of the heartbeat in language. Or, a writer should have an elaborate and complex system of rules and techniques he or she invariably challenges or forgets in the process of actually writing. In other words, you have to find what works for you.

I can talk endlessly about craft and technique—ask my students. I've learned how to do this in order to make a living, and, of course, the subject is interesting to me. But when I actually sit down to write I forget all that stuff. I want to think about other things. Actually I don't want to think at all. I want to work. I want to be absorbed in a dream state. I want to be carried beyond thinking to where there are no fences between the word and the thing, to where feeling is seeing and seeing is feeling. Goodbye, adios, I'm gone. But if I'm lucky, I'll return with something I can show you, something you might find interesting, or even useful. I write in order to work my way back into that intense state, that feeling of being alive, resourceful, responsive to experience, to the world. Ideally in that state nothing is too small for my reverence, and nothing is big or bad enough to intimidate me.

I remember a passage from Harriet Doerr's novel, Stones for
Ibarra: “It occurred to her this evening in Ibarra, with rain at the window and Richard four months dead, that nothing ever happened on either numbered or unnumbered roads that could be classified as unimportant. All of it, observed by dark, observed by day, was extraordinary.” Such a feeling can seem overwhelming, but that’s better than being numb. One can learn to make something out of experience and imagination.

But you have to start somewhere. Why is it sometimes hard to give in and honor the impulse to write? After all, the TV says, “Just Do It.” Well, sometimes we feel unworthy, and we stop ourselves before we begin. Of course the demands of daily life offer us all sorts of real and imagined barriers and distractions. As I was writing that last sentence my three-year-old son came bursting into my study and slammed a big dirt clod down on my desk. “Daddy, look what I found!” The dirt fell away to reveal a little toy Jeep he unearthed in the garden. And that’s not all. There was a small wooden chicken and a black plastic wheel, and a big smile that had the satisfaction of discovery and accomplishment written all over it. If I had said, as I often do, “Outta here you little runt, I’m busy,” I would be denying the very spirit I’m trying to write about. So I try to include the obstacles in the process. I can always cut them out later.

Stanley Kunitz said, “In order to make any sort of affirmation, you must begin by affirming the value of your own existence.” My own existence is not an isolated phenomenon. It’s a web of connections and responsibilities. Starting with a big abstract idea or powerful feeling, we can be overwhelmed with conflicting voices before we begin to hear our own. An old Zen saying: “On the path to enlightenment, the first step is to lose the way.” Sometimes we don’t recognize our own voices because we have defined
the notion of voice too narrowly. Artists are supposed to be original, yet when we listen to ourselves we sound like parrots.

If we try to force the issue of originality, we fool no one, except maybe ourselves for a while. Forget all that, and start somewhere with something. Craft has no meaning without something to work on. Art begins with focus, bringing the still and open gaze into alignment with a point, a person, place or thing. Welty says, "Focus then means awareness, discernment, order, clarity, insight—they are like the attributes of love. The act of focusing, itself, has beauty and meaning; it is the act that, continued in, turns into meditation, into poetry. Indeed, as soon as the least of us stands still, that is the moment something extraordinary is seen to be going on in the world."

Some years ago I became fascinated with prehistoric ruins in the southwest, and I have been writing or trying to write out of that fascination. I had lived in the desert outside Tucson as a child. My mother was newly married to, and still in love with, a man named Stanley Woodman, who at the time was making adobe blocks for houses. I remember it as a happy time. I helped in the adobe making, or played solitary games in the desert around the work site. In the evening after dinner our family ritual was to ride out the gravel road on our balloon-tire Schwins to see the sunset. We would ride to the end of the road, park our bikes, and walk together into the desert. Our sole purpose was to take some time to notice the world around us. I learned the names of things: saguaro, paloverde, ocotillo, cholla. I watched the ground I walked on so I wouldn't step on a rattlesnake or disturb a gila monster. I learned to distinguish the calls of the big white-wing dove and the little inca dove. I learned that the ubiquitous chattering we always heard was the cactus wren, and that it pre-
ferred to make its nest in the spiniest chollas. The sunsets were often dramatic, not at all the fixed cliches of postcards, but the big and powerful light of the sun that earlier in the day would have been life-threatening without plenty of water and shade, now softening, changing moment to moment, diffusing the clouds and the land and our faces with surprising light and color never to be exactly repeated.

That happy time passed. The adobe business failed. The marriage fell apart. Stanley went off to Mexico and disappeared. He was a big guy with a gap between his teeth. He looked sort of like Arnold Schwartznezger. I loved him and forgave him long ago. The rest of us spent the next several years on the outskirts of L.A. I fought, ditched, and yes-sirred my way through the public schools. I could have used more poetry. My joy and solace was the beach and ocean, which had a strange affinity with the desert. The world inside was a mess, like looking inland to the smog-choked city, but looking down at the sand and the small things washed in by the waves—shells, globs of tar, which I thought were a natural phenomenon—or out over the waves at that clear line where the sky touched the water gave me a sense of stability and goodness.

I want to say my fascination with prehistoric ruins began with the discovery of a potsherd, but I think the potsherd only brought into focus some deep feelings and connections with the land and its relationships that began in childhood. Poems like Elizabeth Bishop's "Sandpiper" serve as a kind of link for me between the ocean, the desert, the southwest ruins, and poetry. When I sit down to write the world is often a mist or a smog. Then gradually, sometimes, as I become absorbed in something other than myself, the world is minute and vast and clear, for a while. If
poetry is like the grizzly bear, then the poet, or this poet anyway, is like the sandpiper.

In part, my pleasure in Bishop’s poem is that I can identify with the sandpiper and with the poet who observes and sees so clearly and in such detail the “dragging grains” of sand, and hears and evokes so carefully the sound of the place: “The beach hisses like fat.” But the deeper pleasure has to do not with identification, but with the poem’s power to evoke, in such a quiet, unpretentious way, a particular place and a set of living relationships from the minute to the vast, so that as I read I feel I’m being put in touch with an essential on-going mystery of daily life. The poem doesn’t really tell me anything I didn’t already know about obsession, but for a moment it turns me into a sandpiper, something I am not, and transports me into the mind of Elizabeth Bishop, someone I am not, and draws me into intimate contact with this place. I have been transported, refreshed, and left to puzzle my way along, but maybe a bit more intensely.

My friend, poet Larry Levis, wrote an essay a few years ago called, “Some Notes on the Gazer Within,” in which he says, “To write poems that come back out again, into society, to write poems that matter to me, I must become, paradoxically at the moment of writing, as other as poet as any animal is in a poem. Then true craft, which is largely the ear’s training, can occur. Before this, my ear can hear nothing—or it plays back whatever rag of a tune it caught that day since its true desire and purpose is to thwart the world and hear nonsense, which it will in the end. Unless this absorption into the other occurs, I am condemned to be immured within the daily ego, the ego that lives in the suburbs.”

It’s probably not fair to quote him out of context. I can hear
someone thinking, "What's wrong with the suburbs?" I think what he means is that any place we live without imagination, and imagination's power to focus and transform, can become a deadening trap. Levis goes on to say: "Gazing within, and trying to assess what all this represents, I find I've been speaking all along, about nature, about the attempt of the imagination to inhabit nature and by that act preserve itself for as long as it possibly can against 'the pressure of reality.' And by 'nature' I mean any wilderness, inner or outer. The moment of writing is not an escape, however; it is only an insistence, through imagination, upon human ecstasy, and a reminder that such ecstasy remains as much a birthright in this world as misery remains a condition of it."

I returned to Arizona to go to graduate school. It was a homecoming, and good for my work. I got into the habit of taking long walks in the desert to regain a sense of focus after a day awash and adrift in ideas at the university. Jim Harrison mentions this beneficial effect of walking: "When I walk several hours the earth becomes sufficient to my imagination, and the lesser self is lost or dissipates in the intricacies, both the beauty and the horror, of the natural world."

After graduate school I got a fellowship to the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown at the end of Cape Cod. For two years I spent hours every day walking the beaches and shores. By focusing on the sand like the sandpiper, absorbed in the intricacies of the natural world, I began also to find fragments of the historical past—broken pieces of ceramic pipes used by the whalers, parts of tiny porcelain dolls lost in the sand by children of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Once you see a tiny porcelain hand reaching up out of the sand, it's hard not to look for them.
The acts of walking, focusing and writing became strongly associated for me. After the fellowship ran out I had to find a way to make a living.

Again I returned to Arizona, for what I thought was a job, but what turned out to be an essential part of my education. For two and a half years I lived and worked in rural communities and Indian reservations in Arizona. I was a poet-on-the-road, under contract with the state arts commission and the BIA. During that time I became more aware of a different way of looking at the world. The traditional Native American wisdom that the land and all things are endowed with spirit, and that rather than possess the land, the land possesses us, helped me to understand my own deepest feelings. I also saw poverty, disease, despair—another third world country within this country. I saw modern ruins and I visited pre-historic ruins. I went as a guest to the Kachina ceremonies at Hopi, where the descendants of the builders of those prehistoric ruins work to keep their traditions, language and dignity intact against incredible odds.

I left again for a series of temporary teaching jobs: Virginia, Missouri, Alabama, Kentucky. I was feeling a powerful homesickness for the west when I got the chance to teach for a year at Northern Arizona University. Mamie and I found a house to rent on a little ranch out in the "pj's," the pinon-juniper country east of Flagstaff. My writing had slowed way down, and I think now it was partly homesickness and partly because I had quit walking. I started walking again, and my fascination for ruins revived with the discovery of a potsherd, a broken piece of pottery with someone's fingerprints pressed into the coils in a pattern of repetition around a thousand years ago. When I picked it up and looked at it closely, I felt an instant connection and complicity.
with that person who left those fingerprints. Time stopped or did a radical swirl. I felt an odd mixture of elation and humility, the pleasure of a small discovery and a heightened sense of my own impermanence, what I think of now as a sense of validation, a moment in which I took a small but deeper step into basic human endeavor. Had I seen that potsherd through the glass of a museum case with a classification and date typed neatly beneath it, my sense of connection to it would not have been the same.

Once I had found that potsherd, my walks in the pinon-juniper country and cinder hills took on a new meaning and a new focus. My writing got going again. I began to look more closely and carefully at everything. A slight glint among the cinders and dirt at my feet might turn out to be an arrow point, beautifully crafted by some ancient inhabitant of this land. Or it might turn out to be a bit of broken glass from a wine bottle. Either way it sparked my curiosity and drew me into connection and complicity with lives other than my own.

Now what does all this have to do with craft? Well, as I understand the word, craft means skill and power. But there is something at once deeply personal and purely impersonal in the way craft functions in relation to language. The word heals and restores. The word wounds and disillusions. I think each of us develops a set of habits, procedures and practices, consciously or unconsciously, that derives from our deepest feelings about ourselves and our relations. If we think of craft as partly a set of inherited procedures that can be learned, and partly an approach to work that we each develop as we go, then the whole subject makes more sense. Craft has meaning only in relation to what it serves. I've found it helpful to think of craft as respect: respect for the self, the medium, the subject, the audience. For poets, that last
part may be the hardest, trickiest notion of all. Who is my reader?

Dick Hugo said, "Look over your shoulder while you're writing and you'll see there is no reader." True. But when I think of a reader I sometimes think of a potential friend, maybe even an enemy, who is at least as smart as I am. Sometimes I think of the person who made the pot and incorporated a pattern of fingerprints into the design of a lovely and useful thing, and after the pot was broken and discarded and no longer apparently useful, how that potsherd lay out there in the dirt through hundreds of years of weather. Who is the audience? God? I don't know, I can only guess, but I'm part of it, just as the fingerprints of the potter are part of the pot, and the potsherd. The act of focusing leads to connection, and connection makes everything possible.

Writing a poem is a way of paying attention to experience, a way of concentrating and organizing experience. It can be "a momentary stay against confusion," as Frost said, or it can be a step toward what Rilke called "a deep confidence and the feel of a big time."

In a prose poem entitled, "A Reply to Matthew Arnold on my Fifth Day in Fano," James Wright focuses on a small thing and presents an alternative to the stance embodied in the following epigraph from Arnold: "In harmony with Nature? Restless fool...Nature and man can never be fast friends...." James Wright replies:

...Briefly in harmony with nature before I die, I welcome the old curse: a restless fool and fast friend to Fano, I have brought this wild chive flower down from a hill pasture. I offer it to the Adriatic. I am not about to claim that the sea does not care. It has its own way of receiving seeds, and today the sea may as
well have a flowering one, with a poppy to float above it, and
the Venetian navy underneath. Goodbye to the living place,
and all I ask it to do is stay alive.

I love that poem for its humility and good humor, for its clar­
ity of thought and expression, for the respect it shows “to the
living place,” and for the simple yet profound statement, “I am not
about to claim that the sea does not care.” It seems to me it took
courage and imagination to write that poem, and not just because
James Wright was dying of cancer when he wrote it, but because
it embodies both a refusal to participate in deadening abstraction
and a quiet but clear statement and enactment of hope. Offering
the sea a wild chive flower before he dies and asking the living
place to stay alive is a modest private ritual, a small symbolic act.

Writing a poem so that others may participate imaginatively
makes it a political act as well. I think Auden was wrong when he
said poetry makes nothing happen. Poetry can allow us to partici­
pate in experiences and insights which can change our relation­
ships to each other and the world of which we are a part, and
poetry can turn us inside out.
With *The Secret of Cartwheels*, a new collection from Graywolf Press, Patricia Henley comes into her own as a storyteller. Mature, heartfelt and heartbreaking, these stories resonate, thanks to Henley’s accurate take on human confusion and her unfailing attention to detail.

Even peripheral characters come alive through details—like the old neighbor down the road in the childhood story “Cargo”: “Growing up the way we did, not knowing from one day to the next what to expect at home, we learned to get what we needed—attention or sameness—from our neighbors. Mrs. Higginbottom played her 78 RPM records for me, those heavy ones: ‘Pistol-packin’ Mama.’ ‘The Old Lamplighter.’ She sat smoking Lucky Strikes in an overstuffed chair whose nap had long been slicked down. The smell in her house was an accretion of sweat, old paperbacks, wet dog, and chicken feed.”

This attention to detail characterizes Henley’s first book of stories, *Friday Night at Silver Star*, also from Graywolf and winner of the 1985 Montana Arts Council First Book Award. But that collection seems to me to rely more on unusual situations than on depth of character: swingers at a Montana hot springs in the title story; commune life where women with names like Sunbow garden bare-breasted; ambiguous sexual arrangements. In her new book, Henley continues to chart the lives of marginal characters, but with a deeper exploration into the psyche, and with greater sympathy.

I have to admit I approached Henley’s work with a certain prejudice. As a native Montanan seeing more and more people come from elsewhere and, for a variety of reasons, claim the region’s psychic and physical landscape as their own, I was a bit suspicious on read-
ing the book jacket and press releases—maybe defensive is a better word. The blurbs and bio place a great deal of emphasis on Henley's connection with and authority on the American West (in capital letters).

After reading the book, however, I decided this emphasis was more a gambit on the part of Henley's publisher—an attempt to hook readers because the American West is enjoying an unprecedented chic right now—than any contrivance on Henley's part. Although she grew up in Maryland and Indiana and now teaches at Purdue, Henley has spent a good portion of her adult life in the West and most of her stories do take place in various western locations from the Washington apple orchards to northern California, to western Canada, to Bozeman, Montana. Yet the story I find strongest in the collection, "Labrador," is set entirely in the Midwest, Henley's home ground. In any case, her concerns seem to me less geographical than generational.

The Secret of Cartwheels is an accurate, moving, composite portrait of a portion of the generation that came of age in the sixties. Her characters don't become mainstream yuppies but remain on the margins, often by choice, sometimes by hard luck and circumstances beyond their control. In "Aces" a not-so-young narrator finds herself living in a garage, out of hope after her boyfriend is busted for manufacturing speed: "We'd given up on getting anywhere, having credit cards, owning anything besides our pickup and chain saw. We wanted to survive with as few hassles as possible. Sometimes I try to remember when it was that I ran out of aces. I think it happened a long time ago, in Santa Cruz, and I just realized it when we were busted." In "Deep Creek" the male narrator who's finally found what he hopes is a good life realizes his wife is of another mind: "That's the key, giving up wanting more. Living what is instead of bemoaning what isn't. I thought we should stick it out—focus on the positive, the view of glaciated peaks outside our kitchen window,
the good salary I earned, my first-ever decent salary, the summer free—and Kath thought we should leave at the end of the school year.” These people have difficulty sustaining relationships; they long for love, for connection, in a world that has turned its back on the idealism that enticed them to step out of the mainstream in the first place.

In this book, more than in her first, Henley moves back in time, to the 50s Catholic childhood that so many of those later idealists seemed to share. And it’s these childhood stories I find the strongest, the most affecting of the entire collection. Each of them is an unsentimental, clear-eyed evocation of the adolescent and pre-adolescent psyche and its take on family pain.

While settings, names, and circumstances vary, we’re given essentially the same childhood in “Cargo,” “Labrador,” and “The Secret of Cartwheels”: the father is absent or nearly; the mother is alcoholic and unstable; the children are numerous, closely-spaced and closely knit; the narrator sees herself as an adolescent forced too early into adult responsibility and bitter awareness. An adult narrator’s voice weaves its way through these three stories, trying to make sense of the past in a way that sometimes strikes the reader as forced and preachy, but most often works well to chart the longings, confusion and deep love that make up the marred fabric of a failing family. The final passage of the title story illustrates these conflicted feelings with a delicate accuracy that leaves the reader breathless, devastated:

“I didn’t want to forgive her for being the way she was, but you have to forgive your mother. She searched my eyes and tried to make some long-ago connection, sweet scrutiny, perhaps the way she’d looked at me when I was a new baby, her first baby. I looked away. Jan Mary gnawed delicately at her cuticles. Christopher came around the corner of the house swinging his Mickey Mantle bat, his leather mitt looped on his belt. The new spring leaves were so bright they hurt my eyes.”

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Contributors’ Notes

Sandra Alcosser is a professor at San Diego State University. Her second book of poems, *A Fish To Feed All Hunger*, was selected by James Tate as an AWP Award Series Winner.

Kent Anderson teaches creative writing at Boise State University. His novel-in-progress, *Night Dogs*, is a sequel to his first novel, *Sympathy for the Devil*, which was recently issued by Editions Gallimard in French.

Kim Barnes lives above the Clearwater River in Idaho. She is co-editing an anthology of contemporary writings by women from the West, which is due out from Viking in early 1994.

Ralph Beer and his wife Margaret are rethinking their attachment to cows.

Mary Clearman Blew grew up on a ranch on Montana’s Judith River, and now lives in Lewiston, Idaho, where she teaches at Lewis-Clark State College. Her new book, *Balsamroot*, will be published by Viking Penguin this fall.

Stephen Bodio lives and works in Magdalena, New Mexico. His most recent book, *Querencia*, is a memoir published by Clark City Press. His novel-in-progress is entitled *Tiger Country*.

James Lee Burke lives and writes in Missoula, Montana, but often returns to Louisiana, his native state. He is the author of ten novels; the most recent, *In The Electric Mist With Confederate Dead*, will be issued this year by Hyperion.

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Libby Durbin has published poems in *Calyx, California Quarterly*, and *Poetry Australia*. She lives near Devil’s Lake on the Oregon coast.

Debra Earling is a member of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai tribes of the Flathead Reservation in Montana. She teaches at the University of Montana.
Kate Gadbow directs the Writing Lab and co-directs freshman composition at the University of Montana. She has published fiction in *Epoch*, *Northwest Review*, and *CutBank*.

Earl Ganz has taught fiction writing in the University of Montana writing program since 1966. He is currently working on a novel entitled *Jefferson's Jews*.

Patricia Goedicke's most recent book of poetry, *Paul Bunyan's Bearskin*, was published in 1992 by Milkweed Editions. She teaches poetry at the University of Montana.

Fred Haefele's stories have appeared in *Epoch*, *Missouri Review*, and other magazines. He has recently received fellowships from Stanford University and the NEA.

Woody Kipp is a member of the Blackfeet tribe in northern Montana, where he grew up in the town of Cut Bank. He writes a weekly column for the *Missoula Independent*.

William Kittredge still teaches writing at the University of Montana. His most recent book is *Hole in the Sky*.

David Lee teaches at Southern Utah State College in Cedar City. Previous collections of poetry include *Porcine Canticles* and *Day's Work*. "Sawmill Road" is from a new manuscript, *My Town*.

David Long is currently working on a collection of stories called *Attraction*.

Deirdre McNamer grew up in northern Montana and now lives in Missoula. She is the author of two novels, *Rima in the Weeds* and *Eating Air*, which is forthcoming from Harper Collins.

Tiffany Midge is an enrolled member of the Standing Rock Indian Reservation of South Dakota and lives in the Seattle area. Her work has appeared in *Arzanella*, *The Ark*, and *Chrysalis*.

Kevin Miller lives in Gig Harbor, Washington. He has poems forthcoming in *Crab Creek Review*, *Jeopardy*, and *Yankee*.

Sheryl Noethe lives in Missoula, at the foot of Mt. Jumbo, when she's not working at schools in Idaho or the New York School for the Deaf.
Greg Pape's most recent books are *Storm Pattern* (University of Pittsburgh, 1992) and *Sunflower Facing the Sun* (University of Iowa, 1992). He teaches in the writing program at the University of Montana.


Robert Sims Reid received his MFA from the University of Montana in 1977, and has since published five novels, the most recent being *The Red Corvette*. He has also been on the Missoula Police Department for thirteen years.

Ripley Schemm lives in Missoula and teaches poetry for the Montana Arts Council. She has worked in the Poets-in-the-Schools program in Montana and Idaho. This winter she has been taking care of a sick horse in her backyard.

Annick Smith is a filmmaker and writer who lives in the Blackfoot Valley of western Montana. She was co-editor, with William Kittredge, of *The Last Best Place: A Montana Anthology*.

James Welch's most recent novel is *The Indian Lawyer*. His previous novels include *Winter in the Blood* and *Fools Crow*. He recently co-wrote a documentary film entitled *Last Stand at Little Bighorn*.

Lois Welch is Director of the Creative Writing Program at the University of Montana, where she has taught in the English Department since 1966.

Robert Wrigley co-edited *CutBank 4 & 5* in 1974-75. He is Poet-in-Residence at Lewis-Clark State College and lives at Omega Bend, near Rattlesnake Point, on Idaho's Clearwater River.

Paul Zarzyski is the one and only Polish-Hobo-Rodeo poet of Flat Crick, Montana. He recently partnered up with Justin Bishop to produce a recording of cowboy poetry and song called *Ain't No Life*. 

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Frank Cady taught literature and writing at the University of Montana from 1971–1973. Cady published two volumes of poetry and had numerous poems published in a variety of literary magazines. The selected poems are reprinted here in memoriam by several friends.

MUSTARD

Such yellow brilliance, and the blooms straining upwards, sucking the light then nodding into the grip of bees, wavering as if of two minds, and I shake my head, trying to throw off the weight of memory. Am I still disputing the philosophy of Joy? Asking if it is only the idea of yellow that brings me to the edge of my senses or just this yellow imprinting itself through my eyes into the blank cave of mind? I blink and nod into the grip of my ponderings. That clears up nothing: only yellow within and without. But ah, these are the best arguments, the ones in which neither of us need change, and I congratulate myself on my cleverness to be standing amidst this field of yearly reconciliation, like two lovers who came to know that, apart, a child is only an idea, but together, after they nod into each other, then watch themselves yellow in the morning light, that child demands attention yes, me, now, rushing into the forest of blooms and stumbling in awe, baby-talk on my lips-yellow, look -- and for whom the words will forever evoke just this: bees and so bright.

Glacier Park Elegy

1
I taste the unripe chokecherry.
All fruits give hope, in season.

Death too should have its season, but it enters this poem unripe, hard and bitter. It is a poor wine I make this year. And unnecessary.

2
Dare I talk about eternity in this fragile meadow, this spiked carpet of glacier lily? where we climbed snowbanks, careful to test our steps, and summer melt still rushes to the blue-green lake below? These are hanging gardens. Where hoary marmots preen like cats before rut. Where two-hundred year firs and lichens crack the edge. And shootingstars pulse to wind.

3
Let me come around again. Death waits at the center. I am lucky to come around again. My response is unsure. I want a monument to someone who loved and knew the fragile edge of things. She could die now, she thought, her life’s work was done. This poem helps, it moves to a pulse larger than memory. In limestone crags wind blows on the lichened edge of lilies. That vision without end. In a limestone butte, she saw Indians, dead and going to the sun, wind carving the form that contains us all.

4
I say goodbye. I let the land say goodbye. But she could not. Screaming rubber and metal on metal are still loud at the center. Death should be mannerly.

When you died, you should have grabbed the wind and gliding down to your valley, cried, “We love you! We love you!”

Sentimental, true, how many times did you write those words? You were old enough to know the need to die and to cry, and we were too young to ...

except in a picture and memory, memory so fragile it lives only on a few sunny days when the wind swims warm and we can hear limestone carved to marble and say cryptic words of water, wind, rock and lily-star.

Published in Western Humanities Review XXIX, 2 (Spring 1975)
WALKING
The field slowly escapes the sounds of a careless city, as car horns give way to the improvisations of yellow-breasted meadowlarks who play their arpeggios down the wind. Yellowbells begin at 3600 feet, and my feet slowly take hold and find their way through air that is its own master and ours down from a sky piled high over the northern range, brilliant in sun and silence that’s breaking up.

For days, it doesn’t speak, just broods, waiting until the fragile plants are strong enough and I can walk to the place my field opens, bathed in the orange chalk of evening light, the patches of purple pasqueflowers, the delicately veined waxed petals, yellow-clumped on high stamen centers that survive snow and wind and rain, and climb to timber line from its underside, greet windsong in silver firs and calm surprised birds: the isolations of air are safe, I come in peace to walk a windy light, and turn with lichened rocks into a setting sun, follow it over the spine of a ridge to a valley I didn’t know was there, the distance caressed by its watershed, and stop at a shootingstar, wavering between sun and a full moon that stretch the sky as wide and taught as it can be.

Frank Cady — c 1973
Published in Poetry Northwest XVII, 2 (Summer 1976)

FOR US, APPROACHING FORTY
A small poem.
One I can begin in my book-lined room, a private joy. As if framed by the northern window, January sun brilliant off the shiny leaves—

a perfect picture to fool the seasons.

As I sit, I notice new aches. Sipping coffee, I am warmed only to my waist. I limp to the dining room, dog and cat already there, curled in their animal sun.

What I write for you is a proposition, saying only, it’s sunny today, and if we curled together, we could be one.

Tomorrow, I will write about how the media cloaks our age with words, how I then tear at them with questions, mend them with theories, and how I dream about being savagely stripped by radiation.

But today, I let myself be undressed by the sun. It leads me to our bed. I can’t tell you what joys I feel while alone, waiting.

When you come home, I will be curled lightly around the pillows. Slip in quietly, after you have shed the world.

Frank Cady — c 1982

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