CutBank

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On the front cover:

Michael Smith
Aegis, January, 1995
myrtle wood, 44”x 24”x 18”

On the back cover:

Michael Smith
Bent Verve, 1994
maple wood, 26”x12”
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**Paintings and Sculptures**
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The Editors of CutBank are pleased to present . . .

The 1995-1996
RICHARD HUGO MEMORIAL
POETRY AWARD
to
Michael Palmer
for his poems
"Anode (20 XII 94)" & "SB"
published in CutBank 44
&
John Yau
for his poem
"Counterpoint"
published in CutBank 44

Judge: Jorie Graham

The 1995-1996
A. B. GUTHRIE JR. SHORT FICTION AWARD
to
Michael Byers
for his story
"Maxfield"
published in CutBank 43

Judge: Deirdre McNamer
SHIRLEY STEPHENSON

WOLF LAKE

Her head is smaller—green scarf, mosquito netting wrapped closer to smooth scalp. Silent, the lake and my father sleep, cabin door eased over its hinges as I watch my mother wheel the tandem from the shed, pedal past a row of cedar, 5 a.m.’s empty seat trailing. She rarely sleeps now, feels too much like practice. Last summer she’d let the screen door clap, waking me to ride behind her. Synchronize. Let us build a fire. Haul branches. Let us visit. This year she moves past my door, slips rosaries between our sheets. I wake to their snaked imprint across my thighs, stomach—impression of beads recalling a Belizian winter. Each morning rash coiled our wrists, ankles, throats— redness traced veins toward the heart until we found the right tablets—antibodies foaming water into champagne. We stayed three weeks after my father left for Maracaibo.
Exhausted, trailing always three, four phrases behind. Too slow to catch humor, the final nod. We rolled our r's, lilted, trilled until our tongues ached

and the Bolivian cattle rancher, his hand on her hand, said he had a cure for sore tongues, grinning at mother and daughter. I thought we should be offended or at least look it, but she wasn't sure. After all, _tongue_ and _language_ share the same Spanish. _La lengua_. She smiled. Maybe he was offering to help us.

But here, this sequestered week, we lack such uncertainty. There are no gaps in meaning and my mother cannot assign preferred truths to the words _three more months_. She returns from her ride, insists we all portage to Spider Lake. A pair of dragonflies rests on the anchor. _They mate in flight_, she explains,

_the male hovering above the female until she flips upside-down, catches the sperm in mid-air_. I will dream about my mother this way, head tilted to the sun. What is it like?
My father turns and for a moment
I wonder if I’ve spoken aloud.
I resent this, that she will be
outlived. In the yellow light
of a kitchen she tries to reassure,

but still I’m certain some loss must
be traced back to me. *I’ve decided,*
she tells us, *I’d like to wear the blue
dress. Blue silk with white flowers.*
My father nods, crumpled hat bent

over the tackle box, then leans
and slips off her scarf, brushes
the patch of dull hair. It’s coming
back auburn. Different. His hand
pauses, cradles the globe of her

skull. She wants him to catch
a fish and they talk of strategy—
banana slugs and double-hooked
frogs and fear strewn across his lap—
golden, barbed, translucent.
It was the summer I choreographed roller skating routines to Abba. The same year my mother taught me how to dilute my father's bottles of scotch and I couldn't get the chorus out of my head. When we returned from the market my brother's pick-up was already loaded and mother dropped her carton on the garage floor. He knelt on the lawn and said *kiddo, I'm leaving for California and never coming back*. All the neighborhood girls were there and I thought: what if we had matching costumes. The milk ran through an oil stain and under the mat. My mother said *please* and *money* but he had already turned the corner. You can't fool anyone with an upbeat letter. I took his Book of Lizards for myself. It was two days before the Fourth of July, *a holiday like any other*. Now I was in charge of counting how many drinks he had before the guests arrived. *Boys got the muscles, teachers got the brains*. All the neighborhood girls had just one face.

It was the summer he set aside his plate of Hawaiian casserole and said *You'll always be my little girl, my little virgin*. It's never really safe to breathe. The chameleon is most adaptable. He said the view of the fireworks would be better from the boat so we piled in the orange Oldsmobile and drove to Monroe Street Harbor. I thought: what if we pinned string to our leotards, like fringe, like flappers. In the car my mother held a tray of cupcakes on her lap and whispered *five at home and two for the road*. The most versatile. One morning my father saw me in my nightgown and he cried. *My God. You've stopped eating*. He wrapped his arms around me and held my
bones. He said we both needed help. No he didn’t. But girls got the sexy legs so we win the game. I could barely remember the color underneath the new wallpaper. There were millions in Grant Park and firecrackers waited on the barges. I thought: what if we made stars out of silver duct tape and stuck them to our chests? From my bedroom window, I watched him pad down the driveway in his yellow robe and stoop for the paper. I felt thinner after sleep. Two for the road and five at home. If mornings could last all day. My mother took their friends to park the car and he held my hand in the crowd. Blood never guarantees a pleasant dinner. My father slid the rowboat off the pier and said hold it steady but I knew I couldn’t and when the hull flipped his head banged against the steel pilings. It was a holiday like any other. Sometimes changing color two or three times per minute, if necessary. The second time he surfaced, I dropped to my stomach and grabbed for his hands. In summer, all the neighborhood families traveled to landmarks. His head opened. The air exploded, sulfured. My brother knelt on the lawn and said kiddo— No one could hear me over the foghorns and water taxis. It was the summer she wanted to change everything to neutral tones. Blend, calm. When they pulled my father from the lake he said look, she’s trying to kill me. Only one person on the pier laughed. I thought: what if we had matching everything.
Charlotte Andrews is 13.
She watched television today.

Today in American History, Mr. Delacy gave us a big lecture about how we're all beautiful people and the trouble with beautiful people is that they never really have to learn to hold a conversation. You're lazy! he said, all of you! stomping his little foot for emphasis. But I'm not beautiful, I thought. Neither is Mr. Delacy. He wears sandals with socks. He is small, old, crooked and excitable. He once told us that he washes his hair with a bar of soap. He seemed proud of that. After those opening comments he lectured about Manifest Destiny for half an hour. It's a dumb idea, and it goes like this: Westward expansion of the United States was meant to be. As if God had anything to do with it. As if? That's all I wrote in my notebook today.

When I got home, Dad was on the couch watching the nature channel like always. He likes the nature channel much more than he liked having a job, I am beginning to think.

Until a few weeks ago he dressed for the job he no longer had and spent his days listening to classical music and staring out the window. Then when I got home, he would talk to me quietly about my attitude problem, which I really don't think existed. He called those "family conferences." We would face each other across the kitchen table. He would talk calmly and I would try my hardest not to yell at him. He usually had
a list he referred to in order to make sure the information he presented was complete. It was all very businesslike. Things like “failure to take adequate care in stowing your possessions” and “playing the same song over and over” were on the list. Noise was always a big issue. I can’t help it if I talk loud. My mom talks loud, so loud that even though she is two-thousand miles away in Alaska I have to hold the phone away from my ear sometimes. She gets really worked up about the lack of good role models for me here in Stanton.

I lost all my “privileges” in the course of those family conferences. The first time it was no phone, no allowance, no friends for one week; the second time it was two weeks, then three weeks, and so on. He used a red pen to mark them off on the kitchen calendar at the end of each conference. By the time he got turned on to TV, I’d “earned” thirty-nine weeks of punishment and had started to develop a very bad attitude. I felt that I should do something truly wrong, something that would make me feel deserving of this punishment. I wanted to make Dad lose his cool.

So, on the last morning of this terrible time, I got up early and programmed the CD player to play Santana’s “Oye Como Va” thirteen times. I love that song. Before I started the music, I hurried around the house turning on the blender, the mixer, the vacuum cleaner, the dishwasher, the metronome, the washer and dryer. The whole house hummed. I picked up my coat and paused in the front hall to take it all in. I clicked on the CD player and, as an afterthought, I turned on the television. On the nature channel turtles were laying eggs on a warm beach far away. I put the remote control in my book bag and stepped out the door. I was high on life.

All day long, I imagined my father running around the house turning things off. I pictured him
disheveled and untucked and so angry that he couldn’t possibly form a list. I could practically see him turning the house upside down looking for the remote. I knew he would look for it, even though back then he didn’t watch TV, because with him each thing has to be in a certain place.

I couldn’t keep it to myself; I told two friends. At first they just thought I was nuts, but as I explained my reasoning and gave more details, the beauty of what I had done became clear to them. They told others, and now I am a minor celebrity. Soon I hope to be a ringleader, guiding small groups of my peers on ne’er-do-well capers.

I loitered for a long time after school that day, putting off the family conference that seemed inevitable. At six I walked in the door and discovered my dad still in his pajamas, watching a show about peat bog ecosystems. The metronome ticked slowly on the piano. Everything else had been turned off; I guess the TV distracted him before he reached the metronome. He didn’t notice me. He reclined on the couch, calm in a fuzzy absent way. I only knew his tense variety of calm, and couldn’t quite believe that this was different, so I stood in the entry hall, waiting for his lecture, watching a time lapse of moss growing in a Canadian bog. Five minutes passed like that. Then there was a commercial break and he looked my way. “Oh hi, Charlotte,” he said, yawning. “A show about cheetah society is on next. Should be great. Pull up a chair.”

I shrugged and sat down like it was no big deal that his personality had completely changed after just one long day of lying around blissed out in front of the TV. Since then, our conversations rarely last longer than a dozen words. We only talk about food, drink, and whether that last one was a good commercial. I think we
deserve a Nielson box. Yesterday I tried to explain to Mom how great it is that Dad and I can agree to sit quietly on the couch and watch grass grow and slick furry babies being born. That sure made her talk loud.

Today when I walked into the house and dropped my books on the table, Dad said, “Shhh! This is a good one.” I sat down. He was right. The show was called “Pitcher Plants of North America.” Pitcher plants are brightly colored, tall, narrow vessels that grow in the acidic soil of bogs and crave the sweet blood of living things. Each pitcher plant has a leaf flopped over the top opening to keep rainwater out and to trap its victims. A pool of enzymes inside the pitcher digests them. It takes three to five days for the plant to digest each insect. When the plant is full, it closes its hood flap and rests.

For one hour we watched ants march in lines up the nectar-coated sides of pitcher plants. They would reach the top, peek inside the hood, and fall in, one after another. One variety has hundreds of white spots on the side of the pitcher, like windows, so that when the ant peeks inside the hood, it’s not dark or scary at all. It looks like a cathedral. It looks like Manifest Destiny to the ants, I suppose, and so even though each ant sees the ant before him fall in, he leaps to meet the light.

Dad has chosen life on the couch. Today I decided that’s not the life for me. I’m not sure what to call my choice, but my first course of action is clear: early tomorrow morning I will call two friends and run down to the freeway. We’ll sprawl out on the embankment and pretend to be dead. At first the Sleepier commuters will cruise by, oblivious. The less sleepy commuters will slow down, rubbernecking to see us. Then one drowsy driver — that’s all it will take — will rear end one of the rubbernecks, and somebody else will run into that person, and who knows, maybe’ll cause a ten car or even twen-
ty car pileup. And all the while I'll recline by the side of the road, my mouth sagging open, my eyes closed, imagining my future: stealing from bad people, rigging elections, killing my enemies one by one.
PITH

Your subself circles
on her bike,
then your three mothers call

—Come home
     —go away
     —damn it, sister

Each asks

     —That you, dear?
and kisses you
probably because
you’re learning
to swim.

One mother plays the piano
scientifically—measure by
measure—a sonata divides
inside like a fevered language

     —Listen, you cannot dream
         sans mal-aria

Nights she reads

     —On a train forever
         they get accidentally killed.
Which one’s the story? you ask, which one’s me? How about a way, or hill, or numbers to divide?

—Here, she says
wear this face.
BRENDAN GALVIN

THE OWLS OF ‘23

Sepias of an old winter: a man standing
full height under a berg like a grotto
deposited on the beach, behind him
the marshes a frieze of no color,
spiky with terrors, a northeast wind
you can almost feel in the photo.
Months of snows off the polar cap,
with spook flights floating down
to cut in and fuel yellow eyes
on the backs of rabbits opened and left.
All night the houses complained
around stoves, the cold beaking entry,
and the stories were of a coastguardsman
stumbling along his beach route upon
an owl untying the mysteries of a cod,
of fish sealed in the river like sequinned
slippers, as if the world’s integument
had turned inside out
and warmblooded life went on down there.
A white owl in November means weather
you’ll remember, a saw new-minted that year,
when, watched by snow, a man learned
to look about him for a pair of gold eyes,
and looked beyond mud season for something
like a stump leaning sideways as if
hanging on in a gale,
and beyond the sepia crew of the Hannah Rich
caught waving on deck as though reprieved of mortal duty, a joyride of breaking ice that kept them and left for the horizon.
Books Evangeline Read

Books he read and then gave her that she got more out of than him. When friends seemed to intimate to him she was pretty or beautiful but not too smart he said “She’s a much better reader than I. You should see her. Books I had trouble with, sometimes had to work hard to finish, she winged through and had insights into I never approached. Her intelligence is instinctive, natural; she’s shortchanged herself in not going past high school, but you can’t say she doesn’t speak well.” She said she couldn’t stand poetry, it wasn’t that she didn’t get it, though some of it no one could get; it was that most of it was useless and precious and made for fairies or textbooks and she was ashamed whenever he took a book of poems along with him when they went out, except the ones in both English and German or French or Spanish, because then people would think he was just trying to learn the language. “As for the others — keep them in your pocket, read them in the car in secret or when you’re alone on the bus or just at home, but don’t take them out in restaurants while we’re waiting for a table or on the movie line. If you have to read anything at those places, why not history or good fiction, though to really please me I wish you’d take to books on investing money or how to repair my house.”
Getting Evangeline Dental Things

Brons wanted a dry cereal the New York halfway house didn’t provide and Evangeline said they were out of toothpaste and dental floss and while she was at it they could also all use new toothbrushes and he said he’d go out to buy them and she said “I didn’t mean you had to do it tonight,” and he said “Ah, I want to take a walk, this house is sometimes like a prison.” At the market he got the cereal and a box of animal crackers for Brons, went to the drug section and saw that except for the floss, the dental stuff was expensive. He held three toothbrushes, put back the one he’d chosen for himself, dropped the floss into the basket with the cereal and crackers and then thought “Screw it, do it, you just don’t have the cash and Evangeline will like you got everything she needed,” and after quickly looking up and down the aisle and only seeing an old lady facing the other way, slipped the brushes and toothpaste into his side coat pocket. Oy, God, what’d he do? why’d he do it? and looked up and saw the woman staring at him, hand to her mouth as if horrified at what she’d just seen, or maybe not and she was only staring that way because of how he looked: messed-up hair, rather shabby clothes, face which for a few moments must have gone pale and looked sick and frenetic — but she seemed to have seen him, he was almost sure of it — now she was turned away facing shelves with cleaning and diaper things for babies and feminine hygiene — the look one has when catching someone in the act like that but one you’d never do yourself, but if she did see him he didn’t think she’d tell anyone in the store while he was still there, she was old, frail-looking, very thin and short, she’d be afraid, for instance, she’d by chance bump into him on the street.
one day and he'd recognize her and knock her down, something he'd never do but maybe his appearance to her said he might. Should he put the brushes and toothpaste back? — "Oh look at me," he could say to himself aloud, hoping she'd turn around so he could say it half to her too, "I'm so absentminded, I don't know where my head is today, excuse me," putting the brushes and toothpaste back in the racks, "I don't know if you saw them with me before, but if you did I hope you didn't get the wrong idea, it was just a stupid mistake," or say all this but first look befuddled and slap his pocket and say "Holy shit — excuse me," and take the things out and put them in the basket and then walk around casually for a while, get one more thing — cheap bag of chips — and pay for all of it. No — something about what she was doing now, keenly interested in a row of different shampoos on the top shelf — she didn't see him and he had an idea and said "May I help you, ma'am?" and she turned to him and looked a bit startled but didn't back away, which he should take as a good sign — it was just his appearance; he also needed a shave — and he smiled and said "Sorry, didn't mean to startle you, but I was just thinking, you need any help there . . . reaching?" and she said "No thanks, I was only comparison shopping," and he said "Prices better here? Where else do you shop? I thought this was the only large market in ten blocks," and she said "Associated on Ninth Avenue, two blocks west, but they're much more expensive on almost everything and the quality isn't as good," and he said "Oh yeah? That's good to know; I'll tell my wife," and from the way she smiled and said good-bye — neither seemed fake — he was almost sure she hadn't seen him but he'll still, just in case she did and only tells them after he leaves, not go by the front of the store for a week or in it for two or three, or he might never have to go in again, since by
then he and Evangeline will have their own place uptown. He got a bag of chips, two oranges on sale and went to the shortest checkout line, one with only one person on it. Everything seemed all right, business as usual, till he noticed the checkout man eyeing him sort of suspiciously while bagging the groceries of the customer who’d just paid, and turned around and saw a man behind him without a coat and holding two loaves of bread — what was the man doing coatless when it was so cold out? ... snow was predicted tonight, temperatures dipping into the teens and there were already freezing winds. Maybe he worked in the cafe a few doors down, or the one on the next block and he didn’t bother with a coat because he was so close and was buying the loaves because they’d run out of the bread they had delivered early each day — Gould had seen the tall bags of them lying up against the cafes’ doors at seven or so when he went out for the paper or a run ... or else they got him, and his stomach went cold. Well, shit, Jesus, too late if they did have him, for what could he do now, take the stuff out of his pocket and drop it into the basket? But wasn’t he only imagining the worst again, which he often did, for he already explained the suspicious looks: his clothes, appearance, and he wasn’t a regular here — had only been in the store three times in two weeks and always for just a couple of small items, and in this city, or just this kind of poorer neighborhood, if they don’t know you they don’t trust you, or something like that, but nobody’s going to jump him just because he might fit the profile of what they think’s a potential thief. He was fine, so long as nothing dropped out of his pocket or the pocket flap didn’t open and someone could see right inside, and once out of here and around the corner he’ll stick the stuff into his supermarket bag and go home, maybe even run with the bag he’d be so relieved, and in
the room have a glass of wine or shot of scotch, even if Evangeline complained about him drinking late at night— said it did something to his stomach, made him toss around in bed, keeping her up. "Next," the checkout man said, and he put the things in the basket onto that rubber runway, man rang everything up, wasn't looking suspiciously at him anymore, guy behind him was looking at the clock above the front window, the old woman was now on the next checkout line, three customers away from being taken— his would have been the best line to get on: just he and the guy with his two identical loaves, and he was almost done, and one of the people on her line had a shopping cart of maybe fifteen items. She didn't look at him when he looked her way, maybe that was why she didn't get on his line: didn't want to talk to him anymore, felt their conversation — attention he gave her in the health-care aisle — was too much or had gone far enough or else she didn't want to be on his line because of the trouble she expected on it... but then she wouldn't have gone on any line, right? She would have stayed away from the checkout area, wouldn't have wanted to be seen and eventually blamed by him. The checkout man said what Gould owed, he paid, his stuff was bagged and handed to him, he said "Thanks," man said nothing and looked hard at the guy behind Gould in a way that suggested "What do we do next?" and Gould thought "Oh shit, get out of here," and started for the door and just as he had his hand on it to push it open, someone grabbed him from behind — the coatless man — the checkout guy ran around the counter and shoved his hands down both Gould's coat pockets and Gould said "Hey, what the hell you doing? — get off me, get off," and tried slapping the man's hand away from the pocket with the things in it but his arms were held tight, tried wriggling out of the grip and got one arm loose,
checkout man yelled “Cliff . . . Hugo,” and two young men with store aprons on ran to help the coatless man hold him, and he started dragging them all through the front door, wanted to get outside, once on the street they couldn’t touch him, or was it the other way around, they couldn’t grab you inside? — but he wrenched and tugged and grunted and lunged them along with him till he was past the door, on the street, still holding the bag, he suddenly realized, and dropped it and got his other arm free and slashed his hands in the air, whirling round and round as he did till there was nobody within fifteen feet of him, then felt his pocket — wait, the guy already took the stuff, but one of the brushes was still in it — and the checkout man said “You bum, you thief, these what you looking for?” and held up a toothbrush and the toothpaste. “You’re lucky we don’t hold you for the cops. Don’t ever come back here, you creep, and take what you paid for,” pushing the bag of groceries toward Gould with his foot, “that’s the last you’ll ever get from us,” and Gould kicked the bag and said “Stick it up you know where,” and the coatless man said “Up our asses? Up yours, you dope. Feel good we didn’t bash the bejesus out of you, which we could have — we’d the legal right to — defending ourselves against a bona fide thief. You’re worse than a fucking street hooker,” and Gould said “That so? I am? Well you forgot this, mister,” and took out the other toothbrush and threw it on the ground to them and the checkout man said “Oh, bravado, or bravo — whatever they call those heroics — but just what we needed from the jerk. Forget him. We got work to do,” and picked up the brush: “Every little bit appreciated,” and laughed and they all went in, the two young men laying dirty looks on Gould before they went through the door. People on the street had stopped and were looking at him but keeping their distance and he said to
a group of them “It was for my kids . . . I didn’t hardly have the money for everything,” in an Irish brogue and what he thought were the words and the way the Irish would use them, though why he went into it he didn’t know. “The big store’s gotta make its inordinate profit, that it? So what’s a poor father to do? And three kids, not two, and I wanted them to have clean teeth after they finished their overpriced store cereal, they’d have to be sharing a single toothbrush between them anyway, but have you seen what even the cheapest toothbrush and toothpaste cost today? An arm and a leg it is, an arm and a leg.” By now everyone but what looked like a bum had walked away, some shaking their heads at him and giving him that expression and he yelled “Where you going? Why you running? It’s the godawful truth that I’ve been telling ya, but what am I wasting my breath on you for?” and started down the street to the house — maybe so they’d have more trouble pointing him out some day later: “No, couldn’t be the shoplifter; that one was dressed like a beggar and was loony as they come and had this thick Irish accent” — a few large flat snowflakes were now slowly falling and he thought “Perfect, just what the scene called for,” and slapped at the flakes and said “Fuck it, I don’t care if any of the store people are there, what’s mine’s mine and like they said I paid good money for,” and ran back for the bag. The bum was standing over it and he said “That’s mine, sorry,” and picked it up. It was wet and torn, an orange had rolled out of it to the curb and he stuck it into his side coat pocket, put the other orange into the other pocket, folded up the bag best he could with the rest of the things he bought, had to hold it from the bottom so it wouldn’t split apart. When he got back to the room Brons was asleep in his cot, Evangeline was sitting up in bed drinking tea and reading, he wasn’t going to say anything about what had hap-
pened but she said “My goodness, look at you, you’re a mess,” and he said “It’s beginning to snow, flakes falling so lazily, but sort of a cross between snow and rain — more like floating slush, if that’s possible — so I suppose my hair got a little wet,” and she said “It’s not that. The collar of your coat’s torn, you have a scratch on your forehead that’s still bleeding, you look roughed up — what did you do, get mugged, fall?” and he said “No,” patting his forehead with a tissue, “but do I have those?” and looked at the tissue and said “Ah, it’s more slush than blood. I didn’t even know. Though I actually got close to being mugged, but didn’t want to say anything,” and told her what happened, didn’t embellish or hold back, right down to the Irish brogue: “Don’t ask me why; maybe to get them off my trail and so they wouldn’t think the thief was Jewish,” and she said “Oh stop. And the whole thing’s horrible. Why’d you ever do it?” and he said “I could make up a lot of excuses but I just didn’t think I could afford all the things you wanted or that I’d get caught, even if I knew how dumb it was,” and she said “Was it ever. Suppose they had reported you or held you for the cops? You’d have gone to jail, it would have disrupted our lives so much that I’m sure I would have had to quit school for a few weeks, and we would have been thrown out of here, since the landlady has this rule about that kind of behavior — it’s written right up there on the common dining room wall — and then where would we have lived till we get our place? I couldn’t have slunked back to your parents; and also think what it would have done to them and to Brons,” and put her finger over her lips. “If we needed toothpaste that bad,” she whispered, “we could have borrowed someone’s here, though we still have enough in the tube to roll it up and get a couple more brushings from it. And I only said we needed new toothbrushes, not that we were out of them,” and he
said “This will sound stupid too, and I’m not saying it to elicit any sympathy, but I thought you’d like that I brought everything back that you asked for,” and she said “I would have if you had paid for it. And a brogue. You’re not an actor. You can’t even tell a story in two different voices. Let me hear it,” and he whispered in what he thought was close to the same brogue “For my poor kids I did it, my three little dear ones and their sweet mother, whose teeth are rotting to the quick because they’ve no toothpaste to use and I can’t afford a proper dentist,” and she said “It stinks. You were probably as bad at fooling them with it as you were at taking their goods. Please, I beg of you, for Brons and me and yourself too, and because shoplifting’s wrong, all wrong, no matter how bad the situation gets — don’t ever do it again,” and he said “I hate this life — here, this freaking craphole and so little money. But you’re right; I’m a flop at everything I do — I know you didn’t say that — and I never want to be forgiven for it. And whatever you do don’t tell Brons till he’s all grown up, and then only if you have to, for some reason,” and Brons said from the cot “I already know, Gould. That was real dumb what you did. It’s the only good store around here. Now I won’t be let in because of you,” and he said “Yes you will. I’ll just have to stay outside.”

Evangeline Peaks

She had orgasms where she said she saw heaven. In one she said she met up with her dead brother on a cloud and there was a great light all around them and he put out his hand and she looked surprised at it at first but then shook it and he grinned as if he was in total bliss
and then the scene ended and Gould said “Was his arm straight out when you shook it?” and she said “Yes, the way people shake,” and he said “What could it mean then, except for the immediate obvious? Anyway, I’d be suspicious of it,” and she said “How, suspicious? And what do you mean ‘the immediate obvious’?” and he said “I don’t want to talk about your brother in regard to it. He’s dead, and that, if what I’m saying about the dream’s right — ‘dream is right,’ I mean —” and she said “It wasn’t a dream. I wasn’t asleep. I was in ecstasy here, mentally removed, yes, but not unconscious,” and he said “Well, it was like a dream — you were put into this almost otherworldly or immaterial state — so I’m looking at it as one. And to me it was just typical dreamlike projection, innocent because you were in this state, of what any sibling, same sex or different, but especially the opposite sex, would dream of if it was a dream or have images of if you’re in this ecstatic displaced condition,” and she said “What, though, what? You started it, so say, and not just that I-don’t-want-to-go-into-it gibberishness and then more unintelligibleness piled onto it,” and he said “Okay. Did your brother — you know — do certain things physical to you when you were a girl, like get you to masturbate him or try to or fingerfuck you or hint at one of those or both with the hope you’d do it or allow him to or even just expose his erect dick to you or just expose himself, erect or not, but where you knew it was just for exposing?” and she said “I’m sure he didn’t on most of those. The hints, naturally, I wouldn’t remember, but I don’t think any of what you said happened. Though he was two years older he was sickly almost from birth, so always, once I was seven or so, around six inches shorter than me and then, when I was twelve and he was fourteen, which is when he died, almost a foot shorter. And he was always very immature for his age, not only phys-
ically but emotionally — that’s what my folks have said and sort of what I recall — my younger brother, I used to think of him as, starting when I was around eight — that he might have died long before he was old enough to get erections he was conscious of or know what to do with one to get relief, though I could be wrong. Maybe in the secret of his room, it was his only pleasure; I’d like to think he at least had that, but I doubt it because I don’t even know if he was strong enough to do it. No, I guess anyone could, if the hands aren’t paralyzed and the genitals are developed and the nervous system’s working, but what I’m saying is I don’t think the last two were for him. He barely had hair under his arms and no little sprouts on his chest and face. And once I saw him getting out of this special sitz bath installed for him in the bathroom and when he was... well, this might have been a few months before he died and there was only the tiniest of mustaches there and his penis, if it hadn’t been tremendously shrunk by the heat of the bath, was more like a boy’s half his age,” and he said “That bathroom scene —” and she said “Don’t make anything more out of it. I walked in by mistake. He was as embarrassed as I was and quickly covered himself up with his hands. Do me a favor and don’t refer to him in that way again or try to analyze my orgasm-making something like mystical experiences right after we’ve had sex. Your judgment’s impaired because your mind’s still fixed on the sex subject. Also because he was the dearest person there ever was to me, always so sweet and mild-mannered and shy and self-insulting and so on. But the most loving of boys — he used to clean up my room for me when I was at school and he was home getting special ed, take my dinner dishes to the sink, follow me around whenever he could — so the person I miss most and feel worst about and appreciate meeting up with any way I can. And if
you put too unseemly a meaning to my encounters with him it might do something to my head where I never see him again, not even in my dreams,” and he said “Okay, will do, but one more thing, if you don’t mind, and this may be way off . . . in fact, maybe I shouldn’t say it,” and she said “Better you don’t then, if it concerns him,” and he said “It’s mostly about you. Did you, maybe, ever try to fool around with him? . . . oh that was dumb, wasn’t it, as you already said how embarrassed you both were at that sitz bath scene. But you’ve also said you’ve been sexually aware since you were eight and active since you were thirteen, so I thought there might be a slight possibility — is this really too off the mark?” and she said “Yes, though it’s not one of your worst questions, given what I’ve said about myself and the reasonableness of looking at this sex thing from both sides. But I told you: after awhile he was like my younger brother, to be protected and not taken advantage of, besides that I’d never do anything that perverse, even then when my morality code wasn’t quite formed. All right? But enough,” and he nodded and after about a minute she said “So what do you think, you’re rested yet? Because I feel I could reach that plateau again, or come near. I’d like to at least try to and then who can say what I’ll see if I get there. Maybe my brother again who I can apologize to for our little chat before,” and he said “Honestly, I must have turned some irrecoverable corner in my sex life, if that makes any sense, but I’ve been feeling the last few weeks I need more time between them and now with this one that maybe what we did could be my limit for the day,” and she said “Don’t tell me; all any girl has to do is wait half an hour and then play with you,” and he said “I don’t know, but that’s how I feel now.” She screamed during some orgasms, even when Brons was home though asleep, and cried after about every fourth one of them
and then usually clung to him, sometimes all night, face burrowed into his neck or armpit till he had to force it out if he wanted to get some sleep. "I don't know what it is with sex and us," she once said, "but it's certainly a major plus in our arrangement and it could be the thing that keeps us together most along with your love for Brons. I don't like that but I'll take it for the time being.

I got off with lots of other guys, of course, or did till you moved in and will no doubt do again once you're gone from here. But with you, I don't know what it is but like with no one else I actually see things like the birth of the universe or a disconnected star field forming into a constellation I can recognize like a dog or a crab and other phenomenal or historical occurrences. Whole Mayan or Aztec villages — I forget which culture was the one in Mexico and which not — with ceremonial dances and drum-beatings and men in spooky headdresses and codpieces and women with their big boobs showing and kids at their teats and huge beautiful buildings and entrance gates and those things they call ziggurats, I think, but no one on top of them getting their heads chopped off. Sea creatures, for instance, one time, a pair of them slithering out of the sea and in quick time developing teeny legs to walk on land with. And a couple of times — all right, once — I touched but just barely the hand of what seemed like a gentle God, though He had a twinkle in his eye, the old geezer, knew what we'd just done and what I was still in the midst of and that He might even be interested in having a turn with me Himself, so maybe he was only one of God's more trusted helpers — I was going to say 'advisors,' but God wouldn't have that — a couple of seats down from the ones who sit on either side of God's throne. It could be that our genitals are a perfect match, in spite of the differences in your length and my depth. And maybe also
something about our respective ages and health and the area we live in and this great California air and that my house sits next to an enormous church and the feelings we have for each other at the time, like the last one — I felt very good about you before and during it. And where we both are in our general all-around sexual development, or just I am, since you never seem to have these incredible comes and highs after, unless you mute them and control the body quakes. It's possible I'm at my absolute peak in all this, that the last one or one of the near future ones will be the highest I'll ever reach and then they'll slowly start peaking lower, though I'd hate to believe it. But I'm even worse at figuring these things out than you are, my dear dummy, so why should we try?"

**Evangeline & His Friend**

Years later he was standing at a bar with a friend who said "You know, you might not want to hear this. But since you brought her name up before ... or maybe you do, now, or wouldn't mind, when it's so long after the fact, but I never knew what you saw in that California broad — Angel, or Evangel, or Angelina. She wasn't —" and he said "Evangeline. She never liked it shortened or would tolerate any nickname," and his friend said "Evangeline, then. But just that, that she wouldn't, with such a mouthful of an uncommon name. But she wasn't smart or sharp or good-looking. Her body was like a board. She didn't like one person you knew, me most especially, I think because I was your closest friend. She in fact looked on everyone we knew as if she wanted to spit great wads on top of their heads. She hated the city, was afraid of everything, and treated you like shit. She wouldn't even cook part of the dinner
when Beverly and I came over — you had to do it all because we were your friends, not hers. What possibly could have possessed you? Usually your taste in women was pretty good,” and he said “You sound like my dad there, may his soul, etcetera, and the rest of him . . .” and his friend said “Then your dad was right. He knew a looker; look at your mother. He also knew — I could tell, even sick as he was the last times I saw him and with not much use for talking because of his paralysis problem — what was up and who was phooey and what in life was hype or gauze or fake.” “There was something between her and me that can’t be explained. But I’ll try, right? That’s what I usually do. If you don’t think she was good-looking or smart or anything like that . . . Wait, did you say anything about her not being smart?” and his friend said “She wasn’t, was she? — not too much.” “Anyway, nothing I can do about that. Eyes, taste, your own handicaps or prejudices or just that you never engaged her in a deep conversation, or that she didn’t fill your bill in the bones and flesh categories . . . But we had lots of fun together. I mean, where I really went hysterical with laughing, both of us together, and not from pot. And she had a very good mind. Would read a difficult novel, poetry, or as much as she hated the subjects, an article on philosophy or some literary criticism I handed her — unlearned, you see, never got through high school — but would understand it more incisively than I most times and more than lots of scholars could. Why? Intuitive knowledge, instinctive, common sense, saw through things and could read between the lines and so on — incisiveness, as I said, all easy and natural. So we discussed things like that — long discussions, no fancy words or references or quotes from literary bigshots or other books — and movies and plays we went into too. And we both adored her son. Another plus. You don’t
have a kid or want one so you’re shaking your head it’s nothing, it’s nothing, but you don’t know what you’re missing,” and his friend said “The art bullshit sessions don’t interest me either,” and he said “I know, it’s not what you appreciate — movies, you do, even talking about them at length. She also made a nice home for us. Very nice things; she had great taste, picked up treasures in Goodwill and St.Vincent de Paul; I felt very comfortable there. You’re a slob so this doesn’t mean anything to you, stinky jockey briefs in the kitchen sink, greasy pots piled high in the toilet bowl,” and his friend said “Thanks a lot; you really know me.” “I like things neat and attractive and a house in order and uncluttered, with serious paintings or prints on the wall, nice light fixtures, and that’s what she did, with a little help from me. In ways our tastes in many things were almost identical; that doesn’t hurt a relationship. And she was good in bed. Now your eyes light up. ‘Good, bed, fuck, ug,’” and his friend said “Looking at her, I wouldn’t’ve thought it; but knowing how much you like sex, it sort of makes sense.” “She always put out for me when I wanted — not something every woman did — or most of the time. Handed me her body almost, or turned around with her backside to me, as if saying ‘Here, I’m sleepy, not even up to performing, do what you want with it’ — but with restrictions of course. Though I think I have her mixed up with someone else. Sorry. She, actually, couldn’t be persuaded to do anything she didn’t want to. And sure, she was a tremendous ballbreaker too and we wouldn’t do it for weeks at a time sometimes because we loathed each other and wanted to live any way but together and even did the separate rooms bit,” and his friend said “So why didn’t you leave? Something like that happened to me with some girl, I’d say ‘Man overboard,’ and jump,” and he said “Good question. I never understood why, several
times, I didn’t leave absolutely and indisputably and unre-
turnably for good. It was during my needy way-down-
on-myself period, maybe. Maybe I got too comfortable
in her house and with her kid and in being to other peo-
ple a much admired pretend father. The pleasures of pre-
dictably recurrent sex once the enmity ends. That I was
a poor lonely schmuck but at least had a nice house and
some family life. Also, I was going nowhere so at least for
the time being was somewhere, and so on — you need
more reasons? When it was good it was almost okay,
blah-blah. She needed me lots of times too and when I
was out of her life no one missed me more, till the last
time when she was giddy about my being gone and
stayed that way. ‘Aren’t we better off now?’ she’d say on
the phone — I forget who called, probably me with
some lame excuse for calling. ‘Isn’t life really better for
you now that we’re split?’ If I said ‘Well, I guess so but
still . . .’ she’d say ‘No, it is for me and if it isn’t for you
yet it will be. Wait, my new beau wants to talk to you.’
But sometimes, before that, I thought we broke up just
so we could get back together again in a month and for
a few days, or a day or two, have the wildest most unin-
hibited and saddest — cries, tears, whoopees — time a
couple could. In other words — well, in other words
what? I can’t think; Elephant beer we had to order. But I
found her beautiful — I shouldn’t forget that as a reason
for staying. I’d look at her nose, eyes, the lips, everything.
Tout la face. The most gorgeous I’d ever seen in a woman
I was close to,” and his friend said “That’s nuts,” and
reeled off names. “And they had tits, these women, gigan-
tic to big to medium to only a little bit small, but some-
thing there you could squeeze or push your face into,”
and he said “Tits. Why’s it matter so much? You need
them to feed off of? But I’ll never win on that with you.
Some guys are like that and some — a few — could care
less. None could care nothing, I suppose, but you have to understand there are many other things in a woman, physical and emotional and so on, to supersede if not go way way beyond them. Just as if one guy has an enormous dick and the others don't, big deal, there are so many other things in those men that should be important to a woman, or one would hope they'd be there. Believe me, after the first few days with Evangeline, they didn't — ” and his friend said “Bullshit.”

Evangeline Escapes

For the first month after they left his parents' apartment they couldn't find any other place to live in New York but a single room in a halfway house. To pay for their room and board he did odd jobs for the woman who owned it: washed dishes, bussed tables, painted rooms, applied some sulfuric acid solution to the five flights of marble steps to take out the stains in them from about fifty years. Then they got an apartment and the woman claimed they owed her eighty dollars in back rent and he said he'd worked off the entire four weeks’ room and board and she even owed him some dough for all the hours he put in at minimum wage and the woman said she'd take him to small claims court if he didn't pay and he said “Okay, I don't want any trouble or bad feelings between us, I think you're wrong, but I'll come up with the money some way,” and back in the room Evangeline said “Like Hell we'll pay. What do I have to do, teach you how to talk back and get what's due you? Your father, for all his ugliness to Brons and me and his cheap picayune ways, would have known what to say: 'Eat pig meat, you bloodsucking bastard, and all the junk carts you rolled in on.' Because she's cheating you blind.
You worked hard, at slave wages, scarred your fingers through the gloves on that lethal acid and maybe your lungs too, when she could have got a much safer but more expensive cleanser. She knew a jellyfish when she caught one but she’s not going to bulldoze me,” and he said “Better we go along with it than risk a court case and have to pay double, is what I heard those judgments against you can be,” and she said “Horsecrap. This is what we do,” and they told the woman they’d pay the day they left, “Say around eleven or noon we should be all finished,” he said, and Evangeline asked an actor friend to drive by at six that morning, there was a blizzard going, ten or so inches already and the actor was an hour and a half late and could barely get his car down the street through the snow, the woman was shoveling a path on the sidewalk and she said “Mr. Bookbinder?” when she saw him carrying some things to the car and he said “Just loading up for the first trip, Mrs. M. I’ll see you when I get back if I can make it in this snow,” and she said “No funny business now. I’ve seen all kinds, you know,” and he said “Don’t worry, I’m leaving my family behind as collateral,” and after the car was packed and the actor was at the wheel and motor was running he went back to the room and said “This is terrible and really bad for the kid to see, let’s just pay her,” and Evangeline said “No, we’re going. Just keep walking and I swear, if she tries stopping us I’m going to push that woman, I don’t care if she slips and breaks a leg,” and he said “No pushing,” and they left the building and started down the long stoop, which Mrs. M. had cleared but it already had what seemed like a half-inch on it, she was at the second story window and threw it open and yelled “You come back here, Bookbinders; I’ll have the police after you by the time you get there,” and as they drove away he said “Let’s go back; I’ll write her a check. It’ll be my money, not yours.
She’ll find us through our new phone number and we can be thrown in jail for beating out on the rent. Or I can — you, they’ll say you’ve got to take care of your boy,” and she said “She’ll never chase after us for eighty smelly bucks. And serves the greedy Yid right — I wish she had come at me and broken a leg,” and he said “She isn’t Jewish; what is it always with you? This is New York; you’re not in the foothills. And she’s Irish or something, maybe Welsh or Scottish, judging by her name. What’s Macreedy?” he asked the actor and the actor said “Could be anything like you said but Italian,” and she said “Jewish, don’t tell me. Maybe not the name, but she is. Macreedy’s probably her husband who ran away from her like us, and in a hateful snowstorm also, but thirty years ago. Or she took the name out of a phone book so she wouldn’t be known as Jewish. But who can’t see what she is by that big flabby nose and the Shylock way she treats people, pound of your foreskin or half pound of your balls,” and he said “I don’t know who I dislike more now, you or her . . . I’m sorry, Brons, and I’m sorry, whatever your name is, driver, actor,” and the actor said “Go ahead, say your spiel, don’t mind me. What I’m doing today’s a favor I owe Ev, so what’s between you’s between you,” and he said “Why, what’d she do for you?” and the actor said “Another favor, friend to friend, but enough for me to stick my car’s neck out in this blitz . . . Gray,” and shook Gould’s hand and Gould said “Gould,” and to Evangeline in back “Anyway, you’re going to have to tell me you know how wrong it is what you said about Mrs. M. and that particular religious thing in general,” and she said “You don’t know what you’re talking about now, so why should I?” and he said “You mean you’re saying you don’t know what I’m talking about,” and she said “Yes, subject closed.”
PATRICIA TRAXLER

THE HUNGER

Near land’s edge the moon is up
And a hunger’s settled in. Do you think
You need me? Nothing lasts here, nothing
Can, not even the vigilant light

Casting things in archetype, inhabiting
Surfaces as if it had the right, as if it
Could bring the relief of meaning
To sand, to amber nipples of seaweed,
Sprawling starfish, the polemics of a hand.

I’ve heard that in a violent wind
A single strand of straw can pierce a rock
Through some momentary reconfiguration
Of molecules, maybe—matter conspiring with time.
If you touch me now I know I’ll always

Need you. Don’t touch me now. I’ve seen
The way the waves rise singly from the body
Of the sea and each bends to the land like
Love’s lie, spreading violet and then like love
Retreating to the larger lie of history,

Voluptuous comfort that lets us disappear
Still clutching part of what we held
In hungry light, what we took, what
We knew was real, was permanent.
WHAT WE KEEP

In all of this, the flowering impatiens, elm and laurel, a lark, the worm on the leaf, the call of a redbird, call of the evening news,

and then after a long darkness
the pressure of skin on skin, breath's urging,
the ring of a blade through grass, that

sweet breaking, a scent of loss and having (Love bears all things, believes all things...). And now, past God's body an empty table, shadow verging, the worm

on the tongue, and the sun the dark the sun (...hopes all things, endures all things). The child in the tree sings on the wind, barely visible,

shivering limb to limb, eucalyptus
at nightfall, dark canyon, an open eye and a word in the air, then no words, only desire's

evernal unknowing, and a name to keep near at hand on the earth, in place of birth or touch, just this, all this All, while the days spin down to dust.
Everyone was talking about insects, how this summer there seemed to be more insects, and more kinds of insects, but before long you managed to change the topic of conversation to incest. You had a way of taking a conversation to the forbidden, and moving it there in a hurry, making the most of sudden and arbitrary transitions. It’s hard to disagree with transitions — they seem to appear naturally, never because of any one person. But suddenly, because of you, we were talking about incest, and it was your idea — hardly surprising for anyone who knew you — that there was no excitement in anything not forbidden; that anyone who claimed that a cousin, say, was fair game was taking away from the impulse whatever spark there’d once been. What you wanted to do was desire your cousin, or your sister, or even your stepmother — bask in the desire, stew in its juices, but never act on it. I waited for you to tire of the topic, as I knew you would; I waited for you to come up with another transition, to shift to another topic of your choosing, fooling everyone into thinking it wasn’t your doing. I waited and watched, and I couldn’t help loving you.

We were arguing, on the way home in your car, about whether Carolina was cute or whether she went to any
effort. She had been wearing one of those hats of hers—a military camouflage cap, I think, a size too large—and she had the bill flipped up, slightly askew, and our discussion centered on that hat, on where it was bought, exactly when the bill had been cocked upright and why, whether she knew it was askew, whether it was deliberately askew. Carolina was her hat for all intents and purposes. We’d been talking about her in more general terms, but soon enough we started in on the hat: we tried it out and couldn’t agree on anything about that hat—not one thing—and that made it a good and useful topic of conversation. You gave Carolina slack. I remember liking that word because it expressed the uncharacteristic attitude you had toward Carolina. She was special, or at least at that point she was. There were too many impostors in the world, you said, but Carolina was different, original, without affectation. In your mind there were people who thought and then acted, and others who acted and never paid it much thought, but Carolina acted and thought all at once, in the same moment. For you it was never about being natural; it was about a way of moving across a room that didn’t come instinctively and yet wasn’t predetermined, put-on, decided upon even so much as a second before the actual steps were taken. That was how Carolina moved.

My father told me you were the only person he’d ever met who made life more complicated than it already was, which meant more complicated than he’d found it. After that first meeting my father took me aside and said he liked you and thought you should see a psychiatrist. I told him that you were seeing a psychiatrist, that you’d
been seeing one for most of your adult life, mulling over what had led to what and what had led to nothing. I wasn’t there for most of that conversation between the two of you; but I remember how later my father seemed confused as he repeated your side of the conversation, which amounted, I could tell, to another of your meditations on pain. What was it? Something about mental and physical pain and how they worked essentially the same. Hit your thumb with a hammer and you’d get the pain but also the consolation that this pain would not last forever. And when you committed the faux pas of forgetting an important person’s name, you’d feel a pain so real it was almost physical, and then came the knowledge that the day would come when you wouldn’t any longer be able to remember not remembering the name, let alone the pain that followed. Time heals. Of course what you didn’t say, what you never said, was that there are also memories that don’t ever go away — little mistakes that eat away at us, sit all the while on the other side of the door; and when we want to, for whatever strange reason, we can summon one of these past mistakes and feel immediate, intense regret. When I think of the two of us, for instance, and if I’m not thinking of the good times, which were most of the time, I’m left with a regret that makes me wish I’d chosen instead to smash my thumb with a hammer.

Right off the mark you could make a person feel wanted and worthy of being your companion in conversation. Never wanting only a listener, you asked that someone accompany you out on the dance floor, so to speak, and then move with you, never the one person before the
other — both of you inventors of whatever ideas got spoken, whatever humor carried you away. After we would stop talking, I'd always feel confronted by the sudden silence, the absence of words — like a challenge to say nothing. Also I'd feel silly for having lost all track of time. On the night we met, you finally drove me home in the wee hours of morning and we sat in your car, in my driveway, and talked for an hour-and-a-half. Like silly kids, we couldn't stop. No one else I've known has been as interested in or as capable of the sheer speed of conversation. I always felt lost in all of it, like a dog sticking its head out of the car window. Everything at full throttle. And yet for all that speed, the talk never reached any real destination, never traveled to that place where words get shy and come out slowly, painfully, one at a time, as if each mattered more than anything else in the world.

5

Do you remember Carolina's father? You never had much of a memory, and we saw him only for a minute. He had bushy eyebrows. He was wearing a black silk shirt. On our way to a movie, you decided that we had time to pick up an umbrella you'd left at Carolina's. We argued about that, of course, about whether we had time, but you won out. I remember she answered the door in polka-dotted capris, blue or black on white, the same ones you'd talked about earlier in the car. Her father, visiting from Spain, was sitting at the kitchen table with a glass of wine, looking very much like someone visiting from Spain. He was older than she'd described him. She introduced him, and then you went off and found the umbrella exactly where you'd left it. Carolina said, You better go, you'll miss your movie. She was right, but it
seemed silly to leave so quickly. Almost rude. Two weeks later her father was dead, and for once Carolina showed what she felt, or maybe it was that she felt something she could show. We'd barely met him, but what struck me, even then, was how his singular gesture — raising up his wine glass in greeting, in a kind of salute — seemed practiced, polished to the point of habit, and yet he'd done it just for us, it seemed, in a spontaneous motion of hand and arm.

I admired your resilience, the way you kept on looking for whatever it was you wanted. You anticipated the worst, expected the best. You were, at least from an outsider's point of view, tolerant and forgiving at the start of a friendship or romance, enthusiastic to the point of making the other person feel special, almost chosen. You didn't see it at the time, and it would have changed you to see it, to admit it, but your enthusiasms were produced by none other than you — by your blindness, by your imagination — as much as by the other person. You imagined that this had simply led to that — friendship like a gift unwrapped. At the beginning you were always on your best behavior, a gentleman in every respect, especially in your willingness to accept the other's differences. Your willingness was temporary, of course. Once the gift got unwrapped, you were always a little disappointed. With romance, there was a limited number of times that a woman's clothes could come off and produce the same thrill. It was the process of getting to know someone, of revealing things and having them revealed to you, that interested you. If a person continued to withhold, or gave things away only reluctantly — I'm think-
ing of Carolina, of course — then your interest held on longer. When you asked for so much and so quickly, some of us naively figured that you'd be happy to have what you said you wanted. Pronto. That was foolish to assume, wasn't it?

7

Whether you knew it or not, I was always nearby, watching you as you talked to people and took on opinions that weren't really your own, moving your mouth as though words were as physical as any shove, any punch. You contradicted yourself as well, on purpose, setting out the discrepancies for those stupid enough to take the bait. But there were other times, I want to remind you, when you were much different, when the particular group of people stopped you, intimidated you, forced you to try to come up with an idea, an opinion, something to say. Anything. In the presence of so-called important people, you changed. Do you remember? And when you thought too much, or became frightened, those people became even more important. In those social situations where you weren't intimidated, you must've felt an upsurge of relief that made you giddy, so that you talked more than you should've talked because it was easy. You'd be saying one thing and resting confident that in a moment you'd be saying something else, something equally compelling. You'd be in a groove, tasting your articulateness, manipulating words as though it took no effort whatsoever. Whereas at those other times you'd either say nothing at all or run into a verbal maze where you had no choice but to keep talking with no clear way out of any given sentence or topic. You'd be lost before you'd even begun.
Carolina was tall, I remember. Brown eyes and olive skin, a perfect nose, and a mouth that seemed poised for no reason. I still have the picture — the one you liked, the one I stare at. We disagreed on why or how she was attractive, whether she'd stumbled upon it or just what, but I was under Carolina's sway the same as you. She was the most alluring person either of us had ever met, even as she gave off no hint of sexuality. Not innocence on her part, but indifference — enough of it to make you want her. Carolina's power existed in absentia, in her silence, in the expressions that never came across her pretty face — the ones that typically give us away. And what you liked about me, whether or not you could admit it at the time, was that I was nothing like Carolina. Never silent. I always had something to say, disagreeing with you on the smallest points. What you wanted was a woman who'd tell you you were wrong, even when you weren't. I knew that, even if you didn't. You resented me, but you liked what I had to say, how I wouldn't let you be right, and for that I had respect for you and couldn't help desiring you. You were the one man I knew who not only fought with me but played by the rules and gave away points when they were mine to get. You could even take pleasure in defeat, but for me, it was always a pleasure that came with a cost.

You couldn't remember my name. We'd been together for a week when your friend came up to us in the market and said hello. You couldn't remember my name and out of embarrassment you asked me. I had a notion to
tell you a different name, a wrong name, to invent one on the spot, to remain still nameless by having a collection of names, one for every occasion. I thought of doing this in part because already I had the sense that names were important to you. Others accepted a name, but you saw it as a choice, like the color of a sweater; and maybe I was insecure then and worried you couldn’t remember my name because you didn’t like it, or because you didn’t like me. You never said one way or another, but then you weren’t one to go out of your way to tell people that you liked them even when it was clear that you did. You told me that you loved Carolina, as though I couldn’t tell, but I can’t imagine that you ever told her. Those words never escaped. He loves me, Carolina probably told herself. You gave all the signs of loving her, just as you were in love with me that day in the market when any reasonable person would’ve been able to remember the name of the woman he loved.

10

You were larger than I’d expected from seeing you when you’d first undressed — you hadn’t been excited then, I guess — and there was a playfulness in your expression when you were above me, looking down. The look of a boy up to no good. What I liked most about you was your way of getting lost, which showed up in your eyes — a way you had that touched off something of the same in me. You lost that look after a while. Without knowing exactly what I was doing, I asked for it back. I asked if you could get back the look, and you tried, but by then you weren’t entirely sure what I was talking about. Maybe it was silly, but I was thinking you maybe could get back the look of being lost. And then you might get
over again and I wouldn’t have to feel that you were only going through the motions, seeking excitement somewhere else, in the back rooms of your mind. Carolina was there, in your imagination, and so were other women, convenient characters in the stories you liked to tell yourself. Your imagination confronted you, I think, but it also comforted you. My own worked much differently. When I tried to think of something good happening to me, the idea would spin off in the wrong direction. The fantasy would get changed, made more real than I’d intended or wanted. I envied you is what I’m saying — I had no other world where I could retreat. I had only you, our conversations, and that look.

11

What you needed but never quite managed was a major setback to sink you for a spell but ultimately set you right, put you on your feet, give you a new, more modest set of expectations. Instead, you thought of your reversal on Carolina, her fall from prominence, as an individual case of disappointment: she was either flawed, never living up to expectations, or it was all along your mistake, an error of judgment that in no way meant you couldn’t get things right the next time around. And you’d keep trying to get things right — I was sure of that. Whether or not you were willing to admit it, Carolina was for you never more than a dream, something made up in your mind, someone who we together used in order to say what we couldn’t to each other. And now I use Carolina for my own purposes, tossing her name around the way we did with her hat that day in the car. Carolina was a real person with hopes and disappointments of her own, though we couldn’t see that, and even
now she’s nothing more than an idea. We should be ashamed of ourselves. But neither of us could ever keep from seeing people as ideas — least of all you.

12

We talked for an hour before you excused yourself. You said, We have to stop talking or I’m going to go home having met none of these people, and you made a sweeping gesture with your hand to indicate the people in the room next to the kitchen. At the time I might’ve been hurt by the way you ended our conversation — I can’t remember. Back then all comments made about me, toward me, were potentially hurtful. And yet I’d liked our conversation, and I figured that it had meant something to you as well, that you didn’t make a habit of talking with women in sixty-minute bursts. I believed in how we’d talked to each other, what we’d revealed almost in spite of ourselves, and so later I wasn’t surprised when you came back to the kitchen. I was still there, leaning against the refrigerator, and you suggested we go to a restaurant. At two in the morning? You knew a place, you said, and it wasn’t a Denny’s. We drove for almost an hour and went inside and sat down a table away from a prostitute and a baggy-eyed businessman. I’d never seen people like that. I ate the best latkes I’ve ever had, before or since. You spilled sugar on the Formica table and dragged your finger through it to write my name, first and last, as though to remember it, or to proclaim it for the same reason that boys, very unlike yourself, carve initials and hearts in the trunks of trees. Then, and later, it never struck me as strange that you referred to me always by both names, as my mother had when I was young and I’d done something very wrong or very right.
White Knuckle Christmas, 1996
oil on wood, 12" x 17"
EDGAR SMITH

Doctor's box, 1994
mixed media, 12" x 20"
MICHAEL SMITH

Julianna, 1991
bronze, 9” x 15”
MICHAEL SMITH

untitled, 1991
clay, 24" x 5'
PAULA PAYNE

*Amicus Adulescens Omnis Naturae - Barbara, 1996*

oil on canvas, 54” x 50”
PAULA PAYNE

Amicus Adulescens Omnis Naturae - Sumba, 1995
oil on canvas, 49” x 60”
MICHAEL SCHULTHEIS

Puddles of Joy I, 1996
monotype, 81/2” x 11”
MICHAEL SCHULTHEIS

Sealth I, 1996
monotype, 9" x 3"
Nights, we lie apart in bed
not creasing the sheets.
I watch you dream of strangers.
You hunch your shoulders
and hide your face.
Headlights climb our curtains.
Mornings, we are the stolid planets
our daughter whirls around.
She balks and jitters through the days
too young to notice
how we circle,
and do not touch.
Normally, whatever’d jar this iceberg house would be just divine. Tornado sirens at three a.m.. Grease fire in the kitchen. Scandal. But a hawk hitting the bay window a breath away. Full speed and my heart clucked. The window, which might have been shot into my skin, a rubbery wubba-wubba, reverberating through the room in dangerous waves, still threatening to fall apart, release into seams. And Tom’s dad, out of his study with the response time of a Cabrini-Green ambulance and just as accusatory — “What the hell was that? What the hell was that?” No. I did not throw something at your bay window out of sanity, something dropped from the sky and I screamed.

It was weird and cloudless outside. Weird — because Tom left me alone in the house with his dad while his mother and he went to his sister’s house. They were going to pour over some estate figures and practice being taciturn. Tom’s dad, meanwhile, was going to drink Black Velvet at home in crystal glasses like he didn’t have a problem and work on another novel about men trouble. I sat in the living room and listened to the dust settle and read a magazine with the quiz torn out. I had stopped to sniff at Casmir when the bird hit, and now that fragrance and the event are the same to me.

As we stepped outside a hot, dirty gust of wind took my hair and tied it in knots. I’d almost quit wearing make-up one day into our trip and my Western look was now complete. The hawk lay on its back, its beautiful saffron-yellow feet clutching at nothing and releasing noth-
ing back again. Each eye rolled about like a child under a sheet, and its mouth ticked like chickens do. Hawk-speak. "What happened? What hit me? What the hell happened?" "What do you usually do when this happens?"

"This never happens," Tom's dad said, certain, and then paused, recalling something. "With hawks anyway. Shook you out of your little Athenaeum did it?"

Something came to him with the word 'Athenaeum.' "Did I ever tell you about the time Tom tried to catch a goose?"

Jesus. "No."

"When he was about twelve, a goose, a Canadian goose, landed in our front yard on a foggy Sunday morning. Tom never did take to a gun until he was in high school, but he wanted to corral that goose, under the aegis of my watching him from the window. The kid thought it might be injured and he could save it — make it a pet, I think. I let him go to it."

It gave me the chills to hear him call Tom a 'kid.'

"What about rabies?" I asked. In Chicago we didn't touch anything because it had rabies. Tom's dad looked at me. His way, Tom says. Pretentious, I say. Tom's dad has a pedigree of such mannerisms that genetically damned Tom's sister Deb, but are fortunately, at worst, latent in Tom.

"He stalked that goose, sneaking around by the fence and then — " He crouched and crimped his fingers like he might get me, "— jumped it from behind!"

I hated Tom's dad's stories because he told them with all the fervor and insincerity of a crackerjack. He was so accustomed to being listened to and heard that he knew he could project whatever he wanted onto his stories and that they would stand up as conscientious even if they were as subjective and suspect as everyone else's stories. I suppose I admired that in him as much as I

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feared it.

I worked as a storyteller only once in my life, right out of high school, selling light bulbs over the phone. When I applied for the job, the woman interviewing me asked me if I were handicapped and I said No, of course not, I didn’t know I had to be, and she laughed at which point I should have run out the door. She produced a long checklist of questions: Have you ever had allergies? No. Ever had asthma? No — is this, like an AIDS test? Have you ever had fainting spells? No. Have you ever broken any bones? Well, my foot once when I was twelve. Did it require a cast? Yes. Okay, you were handicapped then, sign here. Loose interpretation and I was employable. I was too young to feel properly disgusted.

The grift was that we were supposed to be handicapped people selling bulbs over the phone to help provide for people like ourselves. I think about one penny of each bulb went to the handicapped. And one penny to whomever sold the light bulb. It wasn’t terribly lucrative unless you could put the guilt off of you and onto the management.

There was a guy there named Lou who sat next to me and asked me out about every hour-and-a-half: We could hit that new movie, hit that new club, hit this party I know about. And he liked to look down my blouse. Lou was gross that way, but he treated me nice, and five minutes of flirting with him meant five minutes away from the phone.

Lou sold more light bulbs than anybody else because Lou didn’t feel the slightest shame at acting retarded. “Hi. I’m Timmy and I’d like to be your friend,” he would say in a garbled, vulnerable and impotent voice.

I broke down and went out with him. He poured
me drinks and slid a hand down my pants, under my panties on his parents’ couch. I was drunk enough that I might have let him go on, but I kept hearing that voice from work: “Hi. I’m Timmy and I’d like to be your friend. Hi. I’m Timmy and I’d like to be your friend.”

“Were you watching all of this?”

“Oh yeah. From right in there,” he said and pointed to the window where I’d been sitting a few moments prior.

“Shouldn’t we call the vet or something? I don’t want to pick it up or anything.”

Again, Tom’s dad gave me a look that seemed to go beyond what I said and into something of myself. Something between Tom and I that he knew something about and was taking Tom’s side. Like I gave Tom crabs and Tom was at the clinic right now. Like I was pregnant with Tom’s best friend’s baby.

My best friend Sarah told me that Tom’s family would be this way. She saw something in Tom that I missed and that I’m still missing. But she and Tom never got along. I think Tom knows the trouble Sarah and I used to be into. But all things said and done, Tom and I wouldn’t be together if it weren’t for Sarah coming onto him at the bar.

Sarah had ended up too drunk and it was me who took Tom home that night. Even though — and here it gets sticky — I had another boyfriend at the time. David. A cute boy from near the Lake who I’d met the summer before: green eyes like a beautiful cat and he smoked and wrote poems. I went away, from Chicago to Wichita State every year, and came back in the summers to David. The third summer, I met Tom.

David transferred to Wichita State the year before
I broke up with him, so we could be together, and stayed and graduated ahead of me and with a real sense of where he was going with his life. Engineering. I went back to Chicago, to Tom.

David and I used to be able to talk about anything, even after. But as the months piled up, Tom became something between us that we couldn’t talk around. It wasn’t Tom’s fault — I don’t think he even knew — but that beautiful intimacy crushed itself. When we see each other now, at weddings and reunions, we’re lives apart.

“It’ll be all right. It probably just saw the shadow of a bird across the glass. If its neck is broken, there’s nothing we can do anyway. Birds hit that window all the time. Most live.” He pushed the hawk with the toe of his sock, and it slid across the cement in quiet, awful sounds. “That goose bit Tom so hard on the ear it bled and then the goose smashed him against the house with its wings and ran down the road, honking, flapping its wings, and into the fog. You should ask him about it sometime. He hates geese. Did you know that? Did you know he hates geese?”

I faded about then. Like the goose into the fog, only without flapping. I felt like one of them. Tom’s family, which slips into some kind of collective minor epilepsy when things get uncomfortable. They don’t talk it out, talk it through, pull it apart. Nobody’s right, and they walk away from things happy about that.

I had a boyfriend like that once, who would let everything slide right off his back. I should have known. We met at a party in college and the first thing he told me was that his penis was two inches long and covered in scabs. That was his line. We smoked dope and made
out in someone's bed. He called me three weeks later and told me I could come over and watch *Thirtysomething* at his place if I'd bring beer. It's strange, the way things seem when you sound them out later, how I could have overlooked those matters to see a funny, sexy guy who played in a band. He played without passion. He was just bored.

Tom's dad cut in on me: "Once when we were traveling back from a ski trip to Idaho, I came up over this hill and there was a hawk, like this one, feeding on the carcass of a rabbit. It struggled to take off and I slowed a bit, I suppose, thinking that it would, but THWACK!" He slapped his hands together for effect and I jumped.

"Could we go in, if we're not going to do anything?" I asked. It was rude, and the fact that I cut into *his* story seemed to genuinely wound him. I felt guilty. "I'm sorry," I said. "That was rude." Rude but bootless.

"It went right through the headlight into the engine block. The only thing sticking out was its feet. We had to drive all the way home with those yellow hawk feet sticking out of the grill like we were feeling our way across Idaho." He opened the door for me. "If that hawk had hit the windshield, we all would have died."

We sat together in the front room; the reverberations of the window had stopped, and everything was as silent and unconcerned as before. The couch, the carpet and the sporadic curios returned to their brooding, the lot under the exacting quietude of the study. An unwritten rule of Tom's house seemed to be that Tom's dad told the stories, anecdotes, jokes, and news of the world; there was no competition of expression. And if he wasn't speaking, Tom's mom, Tom and Deb fell into stasis until the next time.
I can’t live like that.

“That scared me to death,” I said. Sincerely. I had the hideous feeling of veins throbbing in my throat.

“I’m surprised the window didn’t break. That’s an awfully big bird.” He offered me a cigarette. I decided to indulge.

“I heard somewhere that between every bit of conversation there averages thirty seconds of silence.” That thought popped into my head whenever people stopped talking, and I thought Tom’s dad deserved the same curse of information.

“Is that all?” he laughed to himself. “I’ll bet you’re not used to silence. Being from an Italian Catholic family.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“Just that I always picture Italian Catholic families rousting it up. Not much use for counting past five or six.” He flicked his ash into the ashtray.

I nearly screamed. Nineteen, twenty, twenty-one.

“Jesus,” he said, “now I’m doing it. Counting betweens. That was a dirty trick.”

“I thought you’d appreciate that. Being from an agnostic family.”

He laughed again, to himself. “I understand what Tom sees in you.” Read: He could have done much worse. “That hawk’s up now.”

It wasn’t flying, or even walking around, but it was standing and looking through us with one of its eyes. Two distant, blurry and shadowy objects behind the nothing from nowhere that knocked it flat. Indubitable but illegible people. I worried it might feel we were mocking it, and I stepped back from the window.

Sometimes I thought — I thought and Tom worried — that Tom’s dad saw Tom and me skinny dipping one time. Tom was in the water and I was standing by the
edge, the cool of the night holding me from the safety of the water for just a second longer, a heightening dare. I saw myself, reflected in the window of Tom's parents' room and I whispered, "Oh-my-God-somebody-just-saw-us." It wouldn't have been so dreadful to me. My naked body in front of my husband late at night, and someone knew. But the alleged silhouette of Tom's dad was too little to be vexing and too much to go away. And I couldn't ever just bring it up — "Did you or did you not see me naked at the side of the pool?" Anyway, if the worst that Tom's dad ever knew about me was that I took my clothes off and swam, furtively, in his own backyard, so what then? So what?

Ever since, though, Tom has been funny about my nudity. Even when I walk around the house — our own fucking house. What is the point of owning a house if you can't walk around naked, picking your nose and singing to yourself? I think Tom feels violated, even though we've talked about it and I've told him that I feel violated by his feeling violated.

The hawk flew away, over the roof, so we couldn't see it soar like I thought we ought to, under the circumstances.

"Well it's gone," Tom's dad said and walked to the kitchen to pour himself another Black Velvet.

I lit another cigarette and stared out the window. There was a grease spot where the hawk had hit, or maybe just a smeared place where somebody rested their sweaty head against the cool glass. I couldn't tell if it was inside or out and I didn't want to touch it either way.

Tom's dad came back to the living room and looked at me. "I'm going to get back to work." And he was gone, back to the study. I could hear the slow, reluctant click of the lock on the door. I wondered when Tom would get home.
I sat back in the chair I had been sitting in when the hawk hit the window. People in the west have the spacious luxury of putting their kitchens in the east, their living rooms in the glow of the sunset. The sun was beginning to set and would be in my face in a few moments. The shadows of the trees, still leafless this time of year, across the street were creeping towards my feet. I felt as though something inside of me was pulling the shadows of the empty branches underneath me, and I was too ruffled and warmed-over to resist.
he steps out on the sandy gray between the cages
the face of the lab assistant who hangs his chicken neck
each day on a scarf the color of a drab sky
who keeps check of the dials’ unmoving faces
by now the rat’s paws are killing him and dead on the launchsite of a tramstop
stands an empty tramcar all instruments out the arm
sticks up to the wires like a hand left from some unknown battle
the rat scratches his head and finds they forgot to close his skull
after surgery—with great distaste he flings off the sticky residue of an unknown neurological salve
looking into the haughty eyes of windows the rat bows his head
and slowly measures the city only now realizing he can never get out at the end of the corridor
the dirty curtain of the sky hangs and with a slight gust of air
he sees behind the scaffolding of the laboratory cages
a broken down mechanism naked as day
the twinkle of instruments in cabinets like the milky way
the derricks and instruments the silly snout
of the moon nodding on a long metal stalk the red
clammer
of dials as they sink below the horizon the darkening of
dust
swept with a brush under the rug of night beyond the
edges
of the table the unknown menace of the ever-expanding
lab
That evening, a fried tender turkey and sautéed potatoes were the first dishes that Gasendakenshi, the guest house’s cook, brought to the dining room where Father Gafuku was entertaining his guests with martinis and passion fruit punch for Father Gilbert Murasi. Gafuku had been telling them another story they had never heard — how a month before, during his Majesty the King of Belgium’s last visit to Rwanda, the Patriarch was dishonored by a hawk in the eyes of the Belgian monarch and his queen. Having taken them on a safari in the national park, the one-hundred-eleven year old Father of the Nation talked non-stop to impress his dignified guests who rode with him in an armored Mercedes all the way from the capital to the distant savanna. For hours on end, he proselytized with an accomplished actor’s gestures about his own epic prowess which had redeemed the country from the fangs of colonization and about his immortality, ratified by God, because the country still needed him. “I have leaped over sixty-seven coups, your Majesty,” the Patriarch stated.

They reached the park three hours later. They then got out of the car and penetrated the wilderness, while body-guards stalked them. The Patriarch and his guests had not been in the park an hour when, as he was still voicing his torment at not having in the whole country a single soul with enough charisma to take over the tough reigns of presidency after his death, a myopic old hawk that mistook the Father of the Nation’s purple
hunting beret for a meat loaf, plunged from the torrid sky and swept up the hat with a lightning's stroke. The Father of the Nation's endless blustering and swaggering came to an abrupt end. In one second, he dropped his shotgun and bolted for shelter, crawling to escape from what he thought to be the sixty-eighth attempt to topple him.

Glimpsing the seasoned gigantic turkey on the platter in the cook's hands, Father Gafuku cut the story of the hawk and the Patriarch short — abandoning the latter down the creek, still hollering to the king and queen to take cover — and started instead on an anecdote about Cardinal Mario Gigglione who died due to a turkey. Father Joseph Gautier and Father Murasi had heard this story from Gafuku more than once before, but a good storyteller is like a good chef; both know how to play tricks on people by serving them the same dish and making them believe it's different thanks to a simple touch of additional ingredients. And so they let Gafuku begin his yarn about how Cardinal Gigglione of the Vatican died of a heart attack in the archbishop's dining room in Kigali one week before Pope John Paul II landed at the airport on his visit to Rwanda.

Having received sacred instructions from the Archbishop himself about the eminence of the visiting personality, the Archbishop's cook put to use all of his culinary creativity and thirty-seven years of experience to prepare a dinner that would impress the Cardinal's palate. The cook, who had all his career looked for such an opportunity to exhibit his skills, expressed his joy with confidence:

"Your Excellency," he said to the Archbishop, "I have been training to cook for the Supreme Pontiff himself at least once before I die."

The Archbishop frustrated his illusions: "No, you
will not have the honor of cooking for the Supreme Pontiff, but for his emissary."

Bigeragezo — for that was the man’s name — spent half an hour delving deep into the layers of his knowledge, figuring out how to please the palate of the Archbishop and the Pope’s personal emissary. Before long, he was struck by a vision that nothing could impress them more than a fried, unbutchered turkey that he would put on the table with all its feathers and wings, all its talons, as well as the intact beak, wattle and eyes. Having seen the dish in culinary magazines from Europe, with a man dressed in the garments of a bishop, ready to assail the turkey, the cook considered the dish to be the peak of culinary mastery. He even imagined that white people live forever because they eat animals that look alive.

The Archbishop and the Cardinal had not finished their aperitifs when Bigeragezo appeared from the kitchen in his special butler’s costume, and, with a wide smile on his Bantu lips, set a huge, covered platter on the table three meters or so from the two personages. With a calculated wave of his hand, the Archbishop signaled his guest to rise and move on to the table so that they could, while eating, keep on talking of the touristy corners of Italy and the Vatican — the Via Appia, the Cosmatic cloisters of Saint Paul-Without-the-Wall, the Swiss guards and the stray cats in Trajan’s market. As both men prepared to sit at the table, the Archbishop remembered that he needed to go to the bathroom. “Feel at home, and help yourself.” He blessed the food with another wave of his hand.

A short moment later, standing in the bathroom and looming above the toilet bowl, the Archbishop had hardly lifted his stole and started to unzip his fly when he was startled by a shrill squeal coming from the monastic
quietude of the dining room, and he was almost raised from the floor by a loud noise and an eerie yell that shook the whole house like an earthquake.

"Oh my God," he said, recognizing in the yell the voice of his eminent guest. The archbishop did not even zip his fly again before he rushed back to the dining room. He nearly collapsed when he found Cardinal Mario Gigglione breathless, lying on his back on the floor, in the regalia of his purple habit and cap, his legs in the air pegged by the tilting chair he had been sitting on. The archbishop knelt on the floor, leaning over the cardinal, and touched his heart in a quick, amateurish medical checkup. The Cardinal was dead.

"Bigeragezo, my God," the Archbishop called.

"Present, your Excellency." The cook had rushed all the way from the backyard where he had retreated to let the personages enjoy his experimental dish. No sooner had Bigeragezo arrived in the dining room and seen the tragedy than he'd dropped down near the table, his hands clasped. He was in such a confusion that he could not hear the Archbishop screaming at him.

"What did you cook? Satan?!"

"Turkey, your Excellency," he stammered.

That's when the two men turned their eyes to the table and saw no shadow of turkey in the casserole. The Archbishop was about to ask the cook whether the Cardinal had eaten up the whole turkey in less than a minute when his eyes were caught by a trail of sauce the color of the Cardinal's robe that went from the casserole to Gigglione's face, continuing along the floor all the way to the corridor leading to the bedrooms. Almost paralyzed by the scandal, the Archbishop summoned up courage and followed the trail, wondering whether it was the Cardinal's own blood. He zigzagged through the labyrinth of the mansion until he found the adolescent
turkey seeking shelter in the study under the shelf stacked with old copies of Saint Augustine’s *Les Confessions*. Although it had been incapacitated by the infernal two hours heat in peanut oil, the animal was still alive, wagging its monumental wattle and cackling.
I

Sitting under an elm during the first snow
I wanted to freeze there, like everything else.

I dare you to stand like a tree in warm spring rain
and keep from melting, like everything else.

When I die, cut off my fingers and rub them lightly
over your body so I can pretend that I loved someone.

A deer in the woods runs to the river for a drink
and doesn’t stop to see her mother’s face reflected.

When I was young I wanted to grow a straight spine,
keep my family in a house with marble floors.

I keep summer wrapped in a piece of linen
I can turn over and over like a story or a curse.

II

Some songs are for singing and some songs are
for crying
and what do I do with those songs only my body
remembers?

Somewhere in Alaska my childhood friend Celeste is
sleeping.
Celestina, ma cherie, you never told anyone about the
closet.
I gathered arrowheads with my grandfather once and had nightmares of his wrinkling skin for years after ward.

On the news I saw a mother turn into a ghost for her six year old son, Jeremy who went to the water.

All things flow cold or warm. My father was never very good with books, but taught me how to read a river.

Winter lowers a white hand, black ice all the way to Polson. One Sunday drive and mother would never have to say “suicide.”

III

Bent over the wood stove in winter, she throws on another log, face cast down to cracked wood floors. She smiles tonight.

There’s a star in the sky that’s dead and a distance inside even this bottle can’t mend. Wild wild wild turkey.

A woman with wrists thin as stems sews a corduroy dress, each stitch, a name she wears for warmth.

Tell me a story that will bring dear Heloise to life, make Abelard a man and I’ll tell you a love story.

I have an offering for my life, two grouse in a fine glaze
and an old truck that can't run far enough.

On the highway in Wyoming I started to believe blue was the only color I'd ever know.

IV

On a street corner at night, a man in a hard-hat preaches religion in a language no one can understand.

I stare at the sky and try to memorize the color of storms so I will know them when they come again.

In a cemetery under the new moon I recited dead poems by a dead poet to dead people I had not known.

Night grows longer and covers us all like a cold blanket. Curled inside, dreams thicken in spaces that once held sleep.

In the lake last spring, two men drown in a homemade submarine. “Mayday” I cried, standing on the bank in white sun.

My grandma was hit by lightning, my uncle a tractor, brother in jail and I’m caught in the branches of an oak at twilight.
I want to go to Arizona to see a cactus or eat enough Mexican food to give my eyes a reason to water.

In the desert, they say, there are women who can drink sand like wine.

One day my parents will close their eyes to sleep and not come back.

My brother believes I write songs for him. He has twenty tattoos that tell better stories.

A long rain, then snow. Hard snow, and rain. When I am fifty I hope to birth rabbits from hats.

In the barn, a cold light burned all night and said “Father found two good things: kerosene and a flask.”
Here, the streets of this lovely village are lined with ginkgo trees (*Ginkgo biloba*). Native to China, the trees, the oldest deciduous species in the world, were planted in the hundreds by the Harmonites, the first of two utopian settlements to occupy the town. The Harmonites believed in a multiplicity of times spending theirs in the precise measure of diurnal, lunar, tidal, seasonal, gestational cycles and their intersections with this place they call New Harmony. Notice the many ruins of their famous moon dials and inspect, in the museum (slight charge) the many menstruation logbooks. Today's town bustles with modern unreligious inhabitants routinely setting their wristwatches via a phone call to a recording, ignoring the seemingly irregular blasts emanating from the ancient automated Harmonite steam whistles. Every autumn, the town celebrates its festival. Bus loads of tourists, some coming from as far away as China, gather to witness the spontaneous falling of the ginkgo foliage. This phenomenon, still unexplained, cannot be predicted accurately. One can only estimate the narrow band of time when the slant of the sun, the temperature, the duration of starlight signals in the prehistoric trees, the simultaneous and complete release of every fan-like leaf.
McNALLY JUNCTION

Here, the visitors center (First and A Streets) traces this town’s unique history. To protect the information copyrighted on their maps, mapmakers often label imaginary places in their renderings. Thus, a quick review of a competitor’s charts will reveal whether the whole design has been copied wholesale when the bogus town appears there as if real. Located on the site where a “McNally Junction” was supposed to be, McNally Junction was hastily settled by a colony of cartographers after their company was sued by a rival firm which planted the trap. Nearby, (Second and B Streets) a plaque commemorates the judge’s on-site inspection to ascertain the veracity of the claims. By then, the cartographers had hurriedly constructed a clutch of houses, five identical shells each newly painted one of the five colors used to tint countries. The smell of paint drying is, therefore, important to the residents who grow, in their formal map-colored gardens, flowers which produce, when dried, an odious potpourri mixture capturing that heady scent. A gift shop is located in The Sienna House (Third and C Streets) where one can also buy a variety of maps of this, now, most mapped spot on earth.
Here in the last century, extensive deposits of iodine ore were discovered near an unnamed, sleepy crossroads village. The discovery started the Tincture Boom of 1869 and led to the naming of the resulting metropolis of wooden shacks and Civil War surplus canvas tents known as Gas City. The name was inspired by the many violet plumes of pure iodine gas which continually hung over the town. The gas, a by-product of the smelting process which utilizes the sublime property of iodine to metamorphose from a solid to a gas when heated, was often so thick as to force the lighting of the halogen lamps at noon. The resulting purple atmosphere was said to have medicinal properties and toward the turn of the century, its iodine mines played out, the city enjoyed a brief revival as a spa, catering to visiting wealthy elites who would take the airs. The grand hotels of this era and the palatial mansions of the iodine barons, many now renovated as bed and breakfasts, line Antiseptic Avenue. Each summer, using the traditional methods, Gas citizens still cut dry ice from the Dioxide river, loading the steaming blocks in box cars for shipment to ice cream vendors of major cities.
Here, as elsewhere in this region, the inhabitants of Rising Sun have placed their factories on the village's eastern boundary — all the better to allow the effluent of their industry to flow downstream, so to speak, in the prevailing wind. However, here the natives serve an immediate market by manufacturing, each morning, the day itself and construct the special apparatus necessary to levitate the daily details of light and color above the town. The nation's third largest consumer of helium, Rising Sun is famous for its fleet of cloud-camouflaged blimps and squadrons of transparent zeppelins which lift the dyed gel flats of sky into the sky. Wingwalkers on jump-jets spot-weld each afternoon's I-beamed dome of heaven; gyrocopters tow V-strings of simulated waterfowl in migration; helicoptors hover, hanging the bright, first-order Fresnel lens which counterfeits the evening star. Not to be missed are the quaint cyanine works (tours daily) where the invention of a new blue is routine. The craftsmen of Rising Sun build into their work an obsolescence. Each night the remnants of the day can be seen drifting overhead as odd-shaped shadows shift beneath what is thought to be a real though often disappointing moon.
ABOUT THE AUTHORS
AND ARTISTS

Daniel Bourne spent two years in Poland on a Fulbright fellowship for translation. *On the Crossroads of Asia and Europe*, his book of translations of Polish poet Tomasz Jastrun, is forthcoming from Salmon Run Press. He is also the author of *The Household Gods*, an original book of poems. He teaches at the College of Wooster in Ohio, where he edits *Artful Dodge*.

Darren DeFrain is earning his Ph.D. in creative fiction at Western Michigan University. His story, “Under the Aegis,” is from a collection of linked stories called *First Person*. Other stories from this collection have appeared in *Cream City Review* and *Weber Studies*. He is the coordinator for the Third Coast Writers’ Conference and lives in Kalamazoo with his wife Melinda and their Shar Peis.


Stanislaw Esden-Tempski’s collection of poems, *Perversely I Develop All Bad Tendencies*, won a first place award at the Warsaw Poetry Festival in 1981. Since then, he has published numerous collections of poetry as well as novels, the latest of which is *The Orchid Hunter*. He currently splits his time between Chicago and Gdansk, Poland.

Daniel Hayes has published stories and novel excerpts in *Triquarterly, The Massachusetts Review, Story, Glimmer Train, and The Los Angeles Times Magazine*, among others. His work was selected for The Pushcart Prixe XV collection. He lives and writes in Los Angeles.

Daniel Kanyandekwe is a Rwandan novelist who has recently completed his Ph. D. in American Literature at SUNY Buffalo. *Buttocks of the Almighty* is his second novel. He is currently at work on a new novella.

Jill Marquis earned her M.F.A. in creative writing from the University of Montana this spring. Her article, "Mime Workshop," is forthcoming in *AWP Chronicle*. Jill is originally from Portland, Oregon.

Michael Martone is the author of three books of short stories, including *Seeing Eye*, published by Zoland in 1995. He lives in Syracuse, New York, with his wife and two sons.

Kevin Elliot Milam is the mother of Clare (6) and Frances (1) and has recently completed her B.A. in English with an emphasis on creative writing at the University of Washington. Her poetry has been published in *Seattle Review, Mothering* and *exhibition*, among others.
Paula Payne is originally from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She graduated from Cooper Union in New York City and will begin earning her M.F.A. in sculpture and painting at the University of Montana in the fall. The paintings published in this issue were inspired by her travels in Asia.

Emily Pestana graduated from The Center for Writers at the University of Southern Mississippi in 1993. Her chapbook, Circles, was published by March Street Press. Her other publications include poems in Hawaii Review, Puerto del Sol and The Quarterly (forthcoming).

Michael Schultheis currently lives in Seattle. His artwork has been shown at Marrowstone in Port Townsend and in the 1995 Bellevue Art Museum’s Pacific Northwest Annual Exhibition. When he is not painting, he works for the Microsoft Corporation in multi-media software development. He is also an enthusiastic gardener who grows everything from fennel to rhubarb with equal aplomb.

Edgar Smith grew up in Michigan and graduated with a degree in sculpture from Ohio University. He moved to Montana to escape midwestern allergies and now makes his home in Missoula.

Michael Smith was born in River Forest, Illinois. He attended the University of Illinois and later earned his M.F.A. in sculpture at the University of Oregon in Eugene. He is currently showing his work at the Art Grotto in Eugene.

Melissa Stephenson graduated from the Interlochen Arts Academy where she studied creative writing, and
now she is pursuing her B.A. in English at the University of Montana. She is at work on a collection of essays about growing up in suburban Indiana.

**Shirley Stephenson** works as a legal advocate for a women’s shelter and is the editor of *Indiana Review*. She has poetry forthcoming in *CRAZYHORSE*.

**Patricia Traxler** was the 1996 Hugo Poet at the University of Montana and is the author of three books of poetry, most recently *Forbidden Words* from the University of Missouri Press, 1994. She has been named the 1997 Thurber Poet at Ohio State University in Columbus and is at work on her fourth collection of poetry, *A Measured Sea*. 
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