

A page of musical notation. The top portion of the page contains several staves of music. A large, dense area of the page is obscured by black dots, covering the middle section of the score. The text "COE REVIEW" is printed in the lower right quadrant, partially overlapping the obscured area. Below this, the text "Winter 1975" is printed. The bottom portion of the page shows the continuation of the musical notation.

COE REVIEW

Winter 1975

**masthead**

## **Number 6 • Winter 1975**

THE COE REVIEW is published by the Student Senate of Coe College, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and is assembled by the Fiction and Poetry Workshops. Special thanks to the following people for their labor and guidance:

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# UNTITLED

*P Mandel*

here in somewhere we also give warranties  
for each of our dear friends.

here in somewhere we also take trips  
inside each of our dear friends.

all hours salute us here  
driving past but never stopping  
overnight in our motels  
of meandering streams and pale rocks.

here in somewhere we lick rainbows till they are no more,  
here in somewhere we dig holes till there are no more,  
here in somewhere we say hello  
and eat our dead friends and lock their gnawed legs in our town jail.

**A PAGE FROM NOTES  
TO THE LUMPEN ADVENTURES  
OF MR. LAUREL AND  
MR. HARDY**

*Dow Mossman*

Paris was not gay for Mr. Laurel & Mr. Hardy in 1938, as they were living in the sewers at the time. Mr. Hardy's deal to sell opium plants to the Turkish ambassador'd fallen through, through no fault of his own he felt, and after several months of broken financial dreams Mr. Laurel collapsed in this environ and, although Mr. Hardy cared for him dearly, bringing him scraps of bread in paper sacks, in his fey fevers he took to a world of his own and nearly gave up his ghost, like a molecule. In his sunken state he finally developed the notion he was reading Hugo in a moviehouse, that lie was working on a doctoral dissertation called THE MATRIX DICHOTOMY OF CHARACTER IN SOCIAL MAN AS PORTRAYED IN JAVERT AND JEAN VALEAN, and Mr. Hardy got really scared. Only by promising that they were shipping out that very night, in July, as galley slaves on the U.S.S. Ticonderoga could Mr. Hardy coax his delirious compatriot from his nest. It was touch and go, but after Canterbury Mr. Laurel and Mr. Hardy were gauchos once more. Things got so bad for Mr. Laurel he took up dancing, which is post-malarial. After the buxom seniorita with the peacock father they traveled north. As Mr. Laurel was never given, by fortune, a pooltable of his own he always hung a full-color photograph of a Chicago Brass Pocket in the empty grain-cars whenever he and Mr. Hardy stole miles on the train. It was cool and shady, rattling in the high mountains like iron ticker-tape. If Mr. Laurel's life was the man that plays the blue guitar, things as they almost were, Mr. Hardy's was the green day itself, or things as they were generally assumed to be. Thus all that Mr. Hardy only supposed to be, Mr. Laurel lent depth and reality to. It was all much the same, and what Mr. Hardy could only guess at, therefore, Mr. Laurel could surely hum. Then some days Mr. Laurel could guess, and Mr. Hardy

could hum. Then at last, over the years, both Mr. Laurel and Mr. Hardy could guess and hum at once.

"At any given time," Mr. Hardy said in Ecuador, "you could, anyone, see anything in anything, or everything in anything for that matter, or everything in everything, or nothing at all, too."

Mr. Laurel agreed, but then near Panama City Mr. Laurel and Mr. Hardy were held up by three banditos who took all their clothes. With the picture of his beloved pooltable gone too, in his kit, Mr. Laurel declined and by Texas was feverish again. Near Waco he proclaimed that poetry had nothing whatever to do with the words, but the musics between, music that supports the noun on its molecules, music that makes the little dog dance. He said, in theory, he could say nothing and Mr. Hardy would yet lap his toot; but to say the sublime in a Laundromat would require that he concentrate. Though Mr. Hardy took great pains in humoring his friend, by Dallas he was quite out of his head and took to the street corners preaching his doctrines of Aesthetisms. He drank cheap whiskey as he talked and raved. In Cheyenne Mr. Laurel wrote the poem *IT IS IN THE NATURE OF THINGS*. In his profound acceptance of things Mr. Hardy was afraid his friend could see the end, and it was not until December in Dow City, Iowa, he began to take hope, yet this must be explained: Mr. Hardy, when well, usually read one book at a time, ponderously, like polishing an apple from the aspects of several geometric systems at once, turning the pages with his asbestos thumbs, balancing the work on the gently rolling couch of his gut, but when Mr. Laurel was well he usually had hundreds, sometimes thousands, of volumes going at once, scattered in the many corners of the world, like pans on a stove. Thus on that gray, denuded, December day, the trees bare and slick and black as rainy grandfathers under the hollow-white sky, all objects marooned by the freight, when Mr. Laurel found his old copy of *Bleak House* in the lending library of Miss Tetty Wickors and resumed his reading on p. 28, as if nothing had happened in eleven years, Mr. Hardy knew he'd finally pulled through.

All is transitory, mutable, brief gestations, pale eidolons, only time is final, however, and it was shortly after these episodes a part of Mr. Laurel broke for

good and he developed the somewhat manic idea the world could not be better until he succeeded in hitting Calvin Coolidge in the face with a pie--

**THE SCATOPHAGOUS AVATAR  
OF POETICS  
IN CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA:  
AN OBSCURE POEM**

*Mike Magrath*

1.

Cockroaches  
when scavenging  
scurry past obscure bits  
of meat and vegetable  
regarding them as obstacles  
to be avoided,  
returning to dusty cracks  
in walls and floors  
to digest the comfortable filth  
of more industrious creatures.  
Familiar odors of excrement  
make it preferable  
to unknown foods.

2.

The dung of rats  
the ordure  
skitan  
hair  
dreck  
wamlen  
blood  
even the rotting husks of other roaches  
too slow to escape teeth and claws;  
the carrion of cousins and brothers,

is said to be a favorite  
among cockroaches.

3.

The Sensory Cripples speak

The blind woman: I cannot see.

The deaf man: I cannot hear you.

The amputee: I cannot feel your hand, only the phantom shrapnel tearing  
through limbs long removed.

The leper: I cannot be touched. I am unclean.

The idiot: I think, I think, I cannot express.

As the Sensory Cripples reach  
the moment between  
death and life  
after the relatives and doctors  
say "He is gone,"  
and before the circle  
becomes a single point,  
each has the same thought:  
"it was all so obscure.  
Why could I not understand?"  
No answer is  
given, the question  
is too late for any reply.

4.

The older cockroach  
his decomposition Preceding his death  
intestines torn

by disease and poison  
intestines emetic and emesis,  
does not discourage the  
younger ones, He dies  
and is eaten  
by children and grandchildren.  
It is believed  
that knowledge is passed  
in this way.

5.

The funerals of the Sensory cripples  
follow death quickly,  
simply. They are not  
mourned.

The amputee's coffin is  
closed, to keep the  
pretenders from touching  
his stumps  
and saying, "It is  
as it was."

This does not matter.

Those who would touch  
his body fall to the earth of the graveyard  
arms and legs twitching  
uncontrollably in fits.

6.

The blind woman's darkened  
glasses are removed. Those  
who are living see her face,  
see her hand without cane,

without dog-harness.

It does not matter.

Her eyelids are closed, as  
they have been for  
years uncounted.

Those who pretend mourning  
gleefully pluck out their own eyes, that  
they might know the  
blind woman's blissful  
ignorance.

7.

The ears of the deaf man  
are relieved of  
the devices  
the horn  
the wires and batteries,  
that he might not hear  
the lie: "He is sleeping."  
This has no meaning.  
The prayers of the supplicants  
are directed to  
a deity without ears.

8.

The leper and the idiot  
are embalmed in the Negro funeral home  
buried at night  
without ritual.  
The ground beneath which they lie  
is unattended, overgrown

with weeds.

This, too, does not matter.

The weeds obscure nothing  
for their stones carry no names.

In years past  
they were nameless by choice.

9.

The lie of the pretenders is not:

"They are dead."

The pretenders deceive when they say

"They were alive."

The Sensory Cripples chose death, chose  
the means of death,  
and the bodies of the mourners are  
ravaged by maggots.

10.

The death of the cockroach

under shoe-sole,

broom,

newspaper

is the last

of its many deaths.

These means are unnecessary.

The deaths caused by refuse-meals

poison meals

are what the cockroach sought.

## from **THE TALKING EGGPLANT**

*Jerome Salzmann*

When the novelist discovered that the narcotics he was taking to arouse or stimulate his vision of life gave him the identical vision of all the other novelists who had taken them, he broke into a bacteriological laboratory to steal tubes and plates in order to attain the inspiration which disease might give him. Beginning with the common cold and working his way rapidly through snail rheum, truffle fever, elephant's quinsy, elm tree scale and starfish fever, he reached the final stage of parrot psychosis and wrote "The Life of a Guinea Pig."

Avakkum Porphyry Chameleonski (1877-1924), born Moscow, was the originator of the first method to train children from an early age for bureaucratic careers. In his classic text, "Buildingblocks not Blockheads or Stumblingblocks" (1910) he describes techniques, later adopted by Pavlov in his many experiments on the conditioned reflexes of dogs, which substitute prudence for curiosity, boredom for imagination, compliance for reason, anxiety for initiative, authority for originality, political influence for logic, catchwords, lip service and "rules" for truth. In 1921 Chameleonski fell ill of a rare disease which gave him the appearance of a man slowly turning to stone--hierarchoarteriosclerosis.

On Monday nights he attended meetings of the Society for the Worship of the Moon in All Its Phases; on Tuesday nights there was the Confederation for the Prevention of Cruelty to Mongooses; Wednesday nights he appeared at the Institute for the Meditation of Undeciphered Parchments of the Visigoths; on Thursday nights came the Symposium "On the Art of Eskimo Mosaics in the Sixteenth Century;" on Friday nights there was the meeting of the Lichen and Moss Tasters; on Saturday nights the Cat's Cradles Fanciers and on Sunday nights he attended the Society for the Propagation of Music for the

Xylophone. He believed in all of these activities with unshakable conviction and all day long, all week long he worked as a clerk in a shroud factory.

At the Shrine of the Perpetual Pessimists which is located many miles beneath the earth in an abandoned mine where one of the worst disasters is known to have occurred, the members have erected a small, pitchblack altar. Every year they make a pilgrimage to the sacred place and lower themselves into the mine on an elevator equipped with safety devices that are tested regularly by experimental animals. When the assembly is plenary the Arch Pessimist mixes and kindles a foul-smelling incense but never fails to add one sweet-smelling ingredient which is a symbol of the gloomy hope that all the members will be as fervent in their belief when they return for the ceremony at the Shrine the next year.

"We will now hear Black's 'Suite for Strings' or 'Melodia Triumphans' which is based on Smith's 'Sinfonia in E minor' which was transcribed from Brown's 'Sonata for Bassoon and Single Cymbal' which was arranged from Gloe's 'Country Air' which is a variation on a theme from Gray's 'Etude no. 5000' which is from an orchestration of Clark's 'Quartet for Four Right Triangles' which derives from White's 'Concerto for Alarm Clock and Hissing Oxygen Tank' which was formed from 'Composition  $ae^m \div be^n - ce...0$ ' by Electronic Computer 32 at the University of Southern California.

The scholar of law came to the question on his final examination asking "Whether a playwright has the right to sue an actor who by his interpretation of a role turned a tragedy into a comedy". His first thought was that one of the examiners had a sense of humor. His second thought was to imagine an actor who would risk the ruin of his career for the sake of a fantastic revenge. After reaching no decision on what would be a satisfactory motivation for such a crime other than madness and unable to remember a precedent for it in the history of law, the scholar concluded that the event might occur at a char-

ity performance by adherents of the same political party but nowhere else, and went on to the next question.

Long ago the x tribe had no spirit to worship and everyone was unhappy, evil and ignorant of how the x tribe came to be on the earth but one day there was a sign (a) that something significant was about to occur and miracle M did occur. Now the x tribe remembered (a), worshipped M and knew that it came to be that on the earth to remember and to worship and not to do evil. Many suns and moons later some member (s) of tribe x came to the conclusion that it was difficult no to do some evil and more simple to remember (a) and worship M, and other member (o) came to the conclusion that it was enough not to do evil and they forgot to remember (a) and worship M and tribe x divided into x and  $x_1$ .

After minute description of every street in Heaven including airs, aethers, auras, adjunctions and arcanas, the gems of decoration in the paradisiacal labyrinth and an explanation of what the seraphim do from ten o'clock in the morning until noon, the scholar of Swedenborg pursued the visions of the master in *The Pleasures of Insanity* until he reached the words "Who can know what is evil and false unless he knows what is good and true." The scholar was perplexed by this maxim more than he had ever been in his life and was convinced that he had achieved his first authentic pleasure.

In the nightmare of the psychoanalyst he dreamed that he had dreamed a dream which took place for ten years or more, In his nightmare he awoke and found that he could remember all of this long dream. At once he began to associate freely to the parts of the dream to put his mind and emotions within reach of its meaning. Hours passed, a day, two days, a week...He neglected his patients, his family, his manuscript "The Time Factor in Dreams" and his hobby of collecting unverified statements attributed to Sigmund Freud. In an effort to rescue himself he attempted to make notes of the dream in order to set it aside for his spare time. This was of no use since every detail was clear

in his memory and the dream obsessed him like the overwhelming passion of a Lermontov hero. Instead of freeing himself from the dream by analyzing and resolving its contents, he remembered more and more of it and began to dispose, elaborate and decorate its elements into episodes of a narrative. His career as a novelist had begun.

## FOR KATIE'S MOTHER

*Candace Bothwell*

*(for Katie's mother, the last of the Mandan  
Indians, who died last week)*

I'm always finding pearls  
in my coffee  
always finding some strange  
beauty in a dark-eyed night  
licking the late sun's  
blood from the hills  
forever seeing a power  
in my own small hands.

Katie, your mother is dead.  
There are no precious  
beads involved, no cash  
prizes in being the last  
of your tribe, No power,  
either, when your deer  
are slung from  
garage rafters, where  
your people camp  
in a children's park, surrounded  
by blue eyed Pontiacs,  
sightseeing.  
The sun soared and died  
within the day, and the night  
is just an unworthy survivor.

Here, Katie, I see no  
pearls, Power, or mysterious  
beauty, only my own white breasts  
and your blonde children.

# HORN

*Candace Bothwell*

Daybreak: Lucy: a winter sun penetrates the kitchen, exposes worn chairs and use-scarred table afloat on a sea of shadows. The last of the night anchors the cupboards harshly, pulls their wooden bodies downwind into darkness. She sits folded in a chair; with rocking motions she sets the shadows flowing, lapping against the heavy walls. Her hands, long-fingered and calloused, are pressed into her skin: seaweed binding her limbs together. Before her rests a cup of coffee, cool now so that the smell remains locked in the cup, releasing only a bitter taste.

\*\*\*

The crunch of massive black tires on smooth pale stones: Marshall drives in with gravel breaking beneath him. The parallel lights slice through the early night: twin beacons scanning familiar territory. The motor is stopped; the lights die; Marshall emerges. The odor of the man stretches out before him, the sharpness of freshly spilled blood lie a wild herb in the dusk. He moves heavily to the rear of the car; with measured motions the elk is exposed, its fur coarse and damp against the carpet of the trunk.

“Take the end here, watch for the points. Christ, Lucy, watch for his points. They’ve been promised to Michael.” The elk is pushed, pulled. Its gutted body is enormous in the weak light. Lucy strains against the stiffening body, with its drying blood caked and hardening onto the garage floor, forming uneven trails on the dirty cement, leaving dark traces to mix with the dust. Lucy leans against the wall, rubbing the blood into the paint with her small hands.

Marshall appears like a monolithic cowboy from the corner of the garage, a rope draped like a gargantuan lasso about his shoulders. Here, in the dark, he seems covered with the blood of the elk, his chest and arms encased in the deep red of his hunting jacket. Bending stiffly he grasps the front end of the animal, pulls upward. “Lucy, you’ll have to hold him, hold him up while I tie this on. Watch out for all that blood--there’s more on that side. Pull up now.”

The woman moves slowly from the well, keeping contact with her fingertips, smearing the bloody points as she draws her hands away. Marshall remains a Western image: the steer is down and roped, and the man moves above it with

an intensity of purpose. "Pull up, Lucy, up higher." The rope is stretched, tightened; taut and hard it pulls the flesh, rubbing bits of blood from the fur. Lucy waits, split by shadows, her skin meshing with that of the animal. The smell of blood grows stronger as the elk is hoisted upwards toward the roof, as the massive body moves through her hands.

\*\*\*

Lucy: a younger Lucy: Lucy in late summer moves toward the garden, fingers caressing a body rapidly stiffening. Through the torn cloth of the bundle fur protrudes, fur clotted with rivers of blood. The acrid smell escapes into the warm air: pungent waves blending with the garden breezes. The cat was an old one, a familiar weight pressing on the girl's hands, coloring her skin with its escaping wetness. Lucy stops, shifting the animal to her left hand, licks the blood from her right in a few quick movements. The fingers are pressed against her pants leg in a drying motion. The odor of both her skin and the cloth enclosing the car are that of hunting jackets, of wool and cotton, damp with spilled blood.

\*\*\*

"Tight enough." The rafters are creaking with the sudden weight, adjusting their limbs to the added pressure. Marshall moves about with concentration, pulling ropes, checking knots, his hands white against the hulk of the dead animal. The elk is swinging slightly from the grasp of the fingers, spreading drops of blood in random patterns on the floor. "I'm going in. Why don't you let the rest of this go until tomorrow?" Marshall retraces the trails made by the dragging of the body, mixing blood with dust. Lucy's hands find the antlers. Reaching into the heights of the garage and following their curves downward. The body is much colder now, the vibrations from the hanging nearly stilled.

\*\*\*

"Don't give the points to Michael. Please, Marshall...I want them. Alright, Marshall? Don't give them to Michael. This time I want them. Give them to me." Lucy faces him as she speaks, loosening her grip on her skin and clenching her fists. She strikes the breakfast table unconsciously, shaking the coffee, smearing the liquid across the wood. "Alright, Lucy. Alright. If it means that

much, take them. Go ahead. Why don't you eat something now and get some sleep."

In his absence Lucy prepares the cereal: milk is poured frothy and white onto the cornflakes before her. Dispersing shadows in quick motions she slices a banana, pulling back the yellow skin and cutting into the tender meat. The knife slips; soft white rounds mix with blood on the cornflakes, turning the milk a pale pink. Lucy holds her spoon awkwardly, and eats.

## **BURRS**

*Candace Bothwell*

the stars, the burrs  
on the belly of the evening  
we bleed  
dark light  
our skins torn  
thrashing through day  
I, too  
I shrink  
from the sting  
whimpering, the belly  
arches higher  
growling softly

## SEA REEDS

*Cindy Espe*

Brown sea reeds  
push up the sand  
in tufts. Rocks  
shiny from sea  
salt cling to  
the wood root  
stems.

The wind slips  
through the reeds  
like the child's  
blameless voice,  
lost and gained  
and lost, like  
the rocks that  
tumble to  
the sea.

They crack in  
unseen hollow  
places, drying  
cell by cell  
as corn husk  
in last fall  
dusk.

## MEETING A STRANGER

*Cindy Espe*

In the early morning  
I walk through the  
dusty dawning streets.  
The air is filled with  
the scent of harvest.  
The wind is strong  
from the north-west  
brushing the hair  
over my ears with  
his fingers  
enclosing me  
he gathers me  
into his burlap  
sack  
every lagging limb  
every cell scraped off  
on fences and roads  
even those left  
in old shoes.  
His palms are  
grey and smooth  
like clay  
inside them he  
unclothes me  
inside him  
I am naked  
he opens his sack  
and puts back all  
my missing cells

and limbs.  
Then he opens his  
palms, there is a  
great rush  
like the wings  
of birds  
as they pass.  
He leaves  
and I walk  
all put together.

# MOIST

*Cindy Espe*

The sun in its orange mask

is like metal today.

The icicles on my  
window are losing  
their points.

The water flows  
off them in  
small streams.

They trickle  
spiraling  
down the  
window pane  
bouncing off the  
slanting slate roof  
and down into the  
earth that is  
becoming  
more and more  
moist.

## DUSK

*Breckie Church*

I feel like the sun  
when it rolls down  
the atmosphere's side  
clinging to the sky.  
Like a buttery liquid  
I cover the tops of trees  
and drip down slanted roofs.  
My sunlight fingers clutch  
at the last shadows  
taking off cracked paint  
as they drool off the window pane  
and slide underneath the world's belly.

Like a big green candle  
my numbed forehead  
drips its heavy skin.  
The hot thick leaden tear  
rolls down its waxen cheek  
the tear runs off the body mass.  
It flows onto the table  
spreads thin along  
table edges  
plume...tumbles writhes oxygen  
slips the grip and loses self  
eyes slip too  
as my head melts into my chest  
and my chest melts my cobalt core  
that seeps from my vagina  
running down my naked shins  
running out between my toes.

## HILLS

*Breckie Church*

I have seen  
the rounded peaks  
of hills.

They are arched hips  
bending a red clay bodice  
to the sky.

Its cool leather beauty  
is slick wet  
with golden dew.

It coats each grass blade  
with the shiny juice.

The rays comb  
the mud pelvis  
with yellow fingers  
wiping the seeded morning drops  
that are frosty tears.

## MY STRUM FELLOW

*Breckie Church*

A strum fellow  
sits on my eyelids  
vibrating my head  
until dry mucous  
shakes loose from the sides.

Salty saliva  
sprays all over my breasts  
and thespians  
walk down the hall  
to see Ophelia  
throw up upon her knees  
and lady angels  
mop up the bile  
that is spread before  
her toes  
like Virgo stars  
singing to the tune  
of my strum fellow's pick.

# HOMINY

*Breckie Church*

Rocking cadavers  
sit on porch sags  
of sunbeaten wood beneath  
each creak wreaking  
sweat-soaked denim  
and stale flesh  
baked.

Sunken cheeks puff aloud  
decayed thoughts  
withered memories  
and soured tales.

Blue-veined hands  
once slapped sweat hogs  
slicked down shine-oil hair  
nimble rake and sweep sacred loins  
beneath faded white Petticoats.

Sweet budding pungence  
of Magnolia trees cling  
to nostrils kneading  
damp flesh dough.

Wizened air breathes between  
muddy tobacco  
and grit-filled cackles.

## **EARNIE**

*Breckie Church*

Earnie's name  
washed up on tar  
boy.

It knotted his heart muscle  
with loose gin  
left his mind  
on railroad irons  
while baptist patrons  
freckled his kinked scalp  
with goodness  
pulled every gray hair  
with their smiles  
stuffed his forty years  
into ten  
and hooked his arm  
in cadillac metal  
until his blood  
like his age  
spread thin along highway 1.

## **SKELETON**

*Breckie Church*

Above carcass  
window frames  
the flaking paint  
is a peeling husk  
exposing naked oak  
like an open wound  
salted and sore  
from dry heat

It houses corpuscle souls  
pumping with stinging arms  
purging cold sleep  
until the flesh coating  
can no longer resist  
the scraping  
of its plasmic cells  
with soot and age.  
Red-veined eyes  
will dry and shrivel,  
flake into moist dust  
and cling to cracks and grooves  
in black buildings.

**A WOMAN'S TALE**  
**Virginia Chase Sutton**

All they spoke of at night  
while the winter cried into spring:  
Africa. One by one  
they came to me, I listened  
to the words: tales of a woman  
and her infidelity to men.  
Each tapped up the stairs  
to be folded into my pale side,  
each spoke glistening phrases  
of his country; burrowed  
deeper into me  
singing songs of Africa.

## UNTITLED

*Virginia Chase Sutton*

You write to me, list all of my errors in columns  
direct my next course;  
I slept alongside you last week  
now your words pull me awake.

I tossed you out at 3 a.m.,  
it was to toughen you up for that cold walk home.  
My candle gutted--and your nose flat,  
eyes screwing shut became blacker, telling the truth:  
I am insatiable.  
Up from the floor,  
dropping change from pockets as you dress.

In letters you claim that I can't follow orders;  
I ignore your warnings  
for I have sent answers,  
my defenses laid flat across the page.

## JUST BEFORE SUNDOWN

*Virginia Chase Sutton*

In a corner of the scorched garden,  
up high against the shed-wall  
hidden in the eaves and bleached white by sun  
dangles their covered nest.  
Concealed and screened, the wasps  
bask in fevered light.  
Appearing in summer they camouflage  
home and keep their travels secret;  
branded in the white heat  
and sullen reek of high noon, they doze.  
Even they are sun-blind  
in the torpor of full day. They wait,  
covered and screened against the vast sun  
which blasts wild fire geysers  
that crumble the grasses of summer.  
Creeping into the curves  
that maze unrecognized, they slumber;  
wait, scalding until sundown.

## COUNTY ROAD F-12

### *Cat Burns*

She tapped open the glove compartment, unfolding maps, tracing with a finger the sharp corners of country roads. She imagined a squinting, lean man, the surveyor, methodically gridding the countryside with miles to become roads. --What Cheer--she said. He looked at her, mind still on the road, and delivered a patient smile. No hills or fences on the map. It looked like an exercise in crossword puzzling backwards, to figure out the clues from the completed pattern.

She tried to relax looking over the new map, the county map she'd just received, so that he wouldn't notice she'd added one to their casually acquired collection. She was cold though, the nervous cold that started deep in her womb, spreading aching to thighs and hands. On these dismal womb days, days when her body pulled her into anonymous femaleness, she was most uncertain of her femininity and dressed quickly in the morning, shy of blue jeans and workshirt, composing herself of a pale grey suit, rosed blouse, legs, and Windsong.

She folded her cold fingers together over the map. Looked at them quietly for some time. He was smoking. There was no warmth in the glowing tip. She looked out Past the stubbled field/hills into the coming winter shadows. She looked past the glutted river and its coughed up tree stumps as they drove over the reservoir.

--I need the car tonight,--she said.

--All right.--

\*\*\*

She couldn't decide whether to take the cat along. She would have to find it first and she didn't know if she could explain it. Shadow, she would have called it, a piece of night slipping through fingers. Or Black Star.

--I'm leaving-- she pulled on coat and gloves.

--Drive carefully. Be good.-- He waited for a kiss.

A kiss.

--Good-bye.--

--Good-bye.--

Cold. The cat? Waiting at the stoplight she decided to at least try.

She turned, parked out of the street light. She looked at the slim leather fingers on the wheel. The cat. She got out and walked the home-trimmed street. --Cat-- she whispered. --Come here. Shadow?--

The cat doesn't even know me. I've only seen it once. She panicked. It won't come. She wondered again if she should be going out at all. As she walked back to the car she saw the cat turn out of a shadow and back into one, gone.

\*\*\*

The city night drive was bleak and cold. She couldn't decide which way to go, and was helpless with the indecision. Finally she went Dubuque Street by familiarity, to 380. Easiest, she thought, I could drive right through. Right through to nowhere. She drove fast once she got on the interstate, needing to penetrate the sullen black sky and shrouded fields.

She kept a cigarette lit the whole way. Four cigarettes at 60 m.p.h. average equals 18 miles. Cigarette four was half down when she drove past the reservoir. She turned off the interstate at Shueyville and drove slowly along the road, counting off the miles carefully, She drove too far, not knowing how far. Backtracked and redrove the road. Stopped, turned to head east again. Two roads seemed likely . She smoked another cigarette sitting between them. She chose the east road and turned south on it.

Sign: ROAD CLOSED.

Good sign.

The road, closed in by maples, crept among few farms before it slipped into the valley. Farmhouses were dark although it was only eight. No stars, no moon. The valley was a void headlights swung on, were swallowed in.

Driving down she almost turned off the headlights but was afraid of wandering off the road, the loneliness. The lights should be out, she thought. No, I won't do it. A cigarette. Stop the car to light this one.

On the valley floor she stopped on the road, pushing the lighter and turning off the lights. An occasional car on 380 came and passed, its noise and light not touching the waters or the bridge. Cigarette lit, she walked to the first bridge, washed out to a V by the dammed water. To cross it she'd have to walk through the water. From 380 it had looked narrow enough, a step at most. It was only five feet and she was sure it wasn't deep, but to ruin her shoes and to get wet feet on such a cold night...

She finished most of her cigarette before she decided to take off her shoes and stockings to wade across. The stockings bothered her, to be undressing outdoors. But they were new, and it was dark, so she did. She sat on the long V to undress, waded, pulled shoes back on. Now on the island she walked, very alone, to the end of the road. She wanted to find out what really happened at the edge, not just hurtling off into a dark void, not just ending, not just the nightmare. She looked. She could hear the river lapping at her feet against the washed out road. She could see the near trees along the other bank (a shore now?) and a break where the road must come down from the other side. She could see the horizon in the direction of the city, which lightened the sky. It was cold. Nothing else.

\*\*\*

He drifted into sleep sprawled across her after making love. She lay looking at the ceiling's street-lit patterns, not thinking about the ride and not thinking about their barren love making. Cars driving by led a semicircuit of the room that fell across the bed. Sometimes she thought it would be best to put up heavy curtains to keep the traveling lights out, other times she welcomed their friendliness, their harmlessness.

Once, younger, she and a best friend had spent a night together camping. They'd talked about things they didn't know. It scared her a little. Cara had

always seemed ahead of her, and now in this too. She seemed sure, enough that she wanted to believe her. Cara laid out a deck of cards face down, pointed to them saying -Put these in two piles without looking at them. One for black, one for red.- She did. Cara had been excited. Her brother thought they'd fixed it. She didn't know.

Now she reached across the bed to the table where the cards, her solitaire deck, lay. She held them, prayer-like turning the deck on itself. From her last game she knew the deck was still sorted so in the dark counted it out separating the face cards.

She held them waiting for a traveling light, for the car that would illuminate, so she could read the faces. it came and went, the faces turning out of a shadow and back into one, gone.

# SYMPATHY

*Beth Gamse*

*(for Anne Sexton)*

oh definitely      murmuring sadness  
so sorry      scattering ashes  
passing away      rhythmic dances

underplayed words      low-key answers  
what do you want me to do?

                  i say      humming some madness  
from side to side      stinging the lashes  
                  looking away      catching the madness  
avoiding her name      shifting glances  
leaving too quickly      filling holes  
hearing the fading      rubber soles  
                  passing away      murmuring sadness

whispering goodbye.

# DAYBREAK

*Beth Gamse*

cloudy forest	somber dawn
behind dismal	darkened grey
thick and cold	piercing air
blinding battered	shattered rained
startled knocking	shocking drained

the tree stands solemn, empty  
living, lifeless: break of day

## ANTS

*Clerice DeChristina*

ants walk in tunnels  
pushing up the ground  
with workers constructing  
means to establish antdom  
in earth building chambers  
with high ceilings to store  
big eggs which hatch  
bigger ants who need larger  
tunnels to walk through since  
workers need room in which  
to build a palace for the queen  
who is large and the mother of  
large ants and who needs large chambers  
to store the corpses of her large  
lovers in order to propagate the  
race of large ants whose great tunnels  
expand the earth till it touches  
the sun.

## THREE UNTITLED POEMS

*Clarice DeChristina*

1

the screaming runs through  
my head still.  
looking up I found  
my mouth torn and bloody  
from extended contact with  
your hairy breast  
too long a supper  
overfed, I give it back  
wrenching up what I had taken  
while your noise  
drained through one ear.

2

Like creeping under a bed  
to find a lost shoe,  
sliding into me  
all I find is a ball of dust,  
stale pretzels and a  
candy bar wrapper.  
It isn't as if I haven't  
been looking,  
Hard and long like  
your enlightened cock.

3

If I reach my hand  
through this wall  
to my right  
I might touch you.

Solid white, it is concrete,  
If I crossed my eyes  
it would turn to milk white.  
Maybe.  
My solid hand might  
reach through a liquid wall.

## WINTER POEM

*R. Steven Schuler*

Sitting alone  
on the darkened stairs  
I can hear the tap drip-  
dripping in the kitchen.

Behind me, in the bedroom, you are crying  
in your sleep.  
You have a stomach-ache, and are dreaming  
of snakes,  
while

in the moonlight,  
I study the cold purity  
of a new razor.

Cedar Rapids, 1975

## SUNDAY AFTERNOON

*R. Steven Schuler*

Sitting sipping moondust  
tea with the swimmers,  
watching the clouds  
drift,            unfolding  
like the great-plains nations  
of the sky.

Lovers come & go  
on 2-stroke steel birds  
moving easily,  
lacking liabilities  
of passion,  
speaking the colors of eagles  
when they fly.

## TONGUE HAIKU

*R. Steven Schuler*

A honeyed pearl, your  
tongue slides out to greet my own  
from behind chaste teeth.

# ALL I REALLY WANT

*Lia McCoo*

All I really want mamma  
is that I should do good  
I don't want you to be 'shame mamma  
cause I won't do bad  
New I won't do bad no more mamma  
cause I know what it is  
Yeah I know what it is mamma  
and I know how to work it  
You see the Man mamma  
yeah the Man, well he got the points  
Yeah he got the bread mamma  
and I know how to get it  
It ain't gone be hard mamma  
cause he gone give it away  
Yeah he wants to give it away mamma  
and all I got to do is earn it  
Yeah I learnt it in school mamma  
don't do nothin they don't tell you  
Don't change nothin mamma  
an you get on just fine  
Naw I ain't scared mamma  
cause I know it now  
This' America mamma  
an there ain't nothin a girl can't get  
Once she knows the tricks

## **PREFACE**

*Kay Netolicky*

Sunny days.

White octopi clinging to the blue.

Fard McMillan has been floating

Highways in a Dodge.

## THE MASON

*Kay Netolicky*

Watching,

You shift as sheepish half-bond bricks

Plum in the wall.

Your mortar heartbeat

Invades the scaffold as you labor.

Dreaming,

You are the trowel:

Spreading wet cement

To hold the joint

In beds of man-made stone.

# UNTITLED

*Karen Davis*

I've learned to seek

The eyes that rein a 20-mule team heart.

It will drag me through hot, dusty brambles

Slow, deliberate.

The sand will tear my breasts into blood-sweating spheres,

Grind my belly like wheat under a millstone.

My hips will pulsate with feverish emptiness,

My eyes seal in painful apprehension.

It will parch my tongue, I will long for immersion.

And I will beg for more.

For death, for distance, for despair.

For dawn, when the beasts will sleep.

## ANGIE LEAVING THE ROOM

*Frank Urbanski*

Dreams are formidable things. Not the ones which are molded and recast in mental whispers, which live or perish on the muted force of a desperate sigh; but the ones which crouch on the black air, tremendous in their pressure like the lung-crushing depths of the sea, anticipating their own descent in the space between bed and ceiling. These are predatory, ravenous; enticing, perhaps, yet foreign and untranslatable. That is their safety mechanism. Ours, also. They come, however potent, however malignant, unvisaed--and are soon deported. Our conscious dreams are not formidable, do not transport us in a second, do not kink our entrails with an unyielding severity, They rise, rather, slowly, gleaming, slanting skyward in a graceful arc--the problem, dear God, is that they have no fire exits, no monolithic doors which can be securely bolted, no dam to wedge out the damned--and they fall quickly heavy like shooting stars burning their own substance to go crunch unheard in some barren place. Amen.

Arthur Stochasti thinks this before his awareness bleeds into sleep. Such thoughts are the results of his profession. He sells life insurance, or as he calls it, self assurance. In death, at least, there is certainty. He himself is well covered, so that a self-propelled, yet guiltless, ride into oblivion is not outside his grasp. Six years ago he would have made himself a teacher, a teacher of history, of the annual adulteration of The Creation, with a purview to curl the intellects of the world like spent matches, heads bowed. He would have had it that way if the economics of the world and the politics of the city had not sucked dry the stamina of his dream. Yes, and he would have been loved.

Author pencils these things in his mind, where they can easily be erased or smeared and misquoted, and sinks down next to his wife, a striped, gray hump in the semi-darkness that the street lamp lurking outside the window provides. Before the baby, this was the time when they would talk, love. But the child, spending his first few angry, cranky months in this same room detoured all that. The child, two now, sleeps alone, a silent piss-the-bed in the

adjoining room. The detour, however, still exists. Now Arthur talks to himself and makes love to the past. This rubs Stochasti, pulls his heart, his heart like the hair that sticks to the Band-Aid until it is uprooted.

Uprooted. Like a mandrake, his scream is something he cannot hear. Yet he is pushed, crowded by its unvoiced weight and he drowns in its vibrations, almost, always catches some air in weak, restless lungs, Lungs present-breathing, past-crushed. His body a single nerve, a fibril alive, tense. Waiting.

Perhaps he is mad--splitting hairs in the artificial twilight, categorizing dreams and resting on suicide as one would a fat chair. No, of course he isn't. Suggesting the possibility excludes its realization, robs it of vitality. Yes? This he has learned: thought, word, is not deed, but produces pleasure of defeat, in the failing well-trying. With that he can raise the cup in drink-hail to himself, a wastrel among the shards of his fragmented hopes.

He ploughs his head deeper into the white, plump pillow. He is facing the wall he cannot see but knows is there. He wants, vaguely (the thought itself seems hesitant to approach, to be comprehended, teeters, heavy with pregnability), to move his wife. Lift her nighty, perhaps, and rend the flimsy barrier of panties. Whack her bare ass like they used to do to babies after they were convulsed into this world. And, better--he'll take his thing and jam it far, deep into her. Into Angie, But he is tired. Has been. Wants to ponder reason or excuse. But he is tired. All our testicles are tied in knots, he thinks before he is sucked into the soft vortex of sleep.

He would be grateful--he does not dream.

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His toe, the big crooked one with the several hairs on it which make it appear even more bald and blotchily red, as if he had just slushed through snow barefoot, is being pulled, almost yanked from its socket it seems. And the pain is not so awful in itself; enduring it might deserve some small favor: a kiss, perhaps. Yes, he wants to be kissed. Not passionately, hot breathedly, but with a grace, a purity of intention that would reduce the act to a mere con-

veyance. Like some polite, wounded knight, he waits for the kiss that will make everything right and worthwhile. But then the feeling in his toe is too real. His nervous system short circuits with it, sparks erratically. PAIN. He thinks his wife probably likes the idea. She pulls like a bulldog at a tantalizing sheet. He feels her constancy duty-glued.

Not angrily or playfully, and certainly not bitchily at all, Angie's words seem uttered more as an incantation from some ancient text: "Arthur, get up. You'll be late, Arthur." His toe, glowing, pleads: please, please...

Late. For work. So? What does she know of that? Our community has not so much in common as we thought. And he would argue, also, that opposites do not necessarily attract, but may feign such motion while you watch, only to laugh, later, in the confines of their solitude, at the irrelevance of your blind theorizing...And is it important, really, his being late? Late. What is time? Why, he thinks, is my mind even bothered by such thoughts? Old men with beards should fondle such questions. He wonders what he would look like in a beard, with a preposterously thick mustache flying from either side of his elongated, ski-slope nose. At this moment, only foggily aware that he is even alive except that his mind is toying with him while pain jousts with sleep, he desperately wants a beard, a *real* beard--a Walt Whitman, or the kind that clung to God's cheeks in the old catechism books. So all the world could look upon him and think, "I've seen him before." But no. They've done away with all that, haven't they? That's the problem, he thinks. Nobody knows what God looks like anymore. Shit. His beard is too stringy anyway. More the face of a mangy dandelion.

"Arthur." Angie's voice comes to him like a child's cry when its toy, as if it had a will of its own, refuses to perform. Through Arthur's slit-like eyes his wife appears composed, thoroughly at home and familiar with this morning ritual. Yet he cannot help but wonder if she, inside, is not as frantic and disillusioned with what evolutionary path matrimony has taken: a banal sense of materialism that, in the future, would not be labeled as distinguished by History; a certain amount of conformity, of clinging to convention, for neither could bear "talk;" and, above all else, vanity. If he doubts everything else, he is

sure of that. How else could two personalities disintegrate with such composure? Anything. He'll settle for anything that even hints at life, thought, virtue. A change in tone. Or a scream, primal, unadorned, like from a woman whose dress has split among strangers who eye her comfortable light little bikini panties she loves to wear in the summer. *Some* sense of virtue. Something to hold. If he could hold his wife and feel genuine in the holding, he would be happy.

Stochasti does not move; this play-acting of resistance to anything his wife might propose is second nature now--or, perhaps, he is afraid, real. He must have at least twenty-five or thirty versions of their past together, from various angles, perspectives, Not one clicks, for he has no past, really, only his illusion that was smothered by pregnancy and birth, that he is constantly trying to seduce, regain. It was, if nothing else, pleasant. The Dream, the longing of the young American male for some position of consequence, authority, however small. Pick what version you will Arthur has lost them all. The shame of it being that he knows it, shaves a fool's face in the mirror. Yes, with the baby, Angie had apparently gotten everything she wanted, for now she has a life she can not only ruin, but do so totally by her own design. A shame, Arthur likes the kid, kids in general. But he is really quite out of the picture--anyone's picture. Oh, Angie performs her basic *duties*: tatters of conversation; occasionally relieves his animal tension. And that is all. At twenty-eight he is middle-aged and fearful of old age, the fact that others will outlive him before he has lived. To realize this, his invisibility, he thinks, could be a prelude to love. Or at least a kindness. It is a delicate wire to walk, being a spectre without guilt at having vanished. If Arthur can have no past save an imagined one, then at least he is certain of his future: it is non-existent. That might warm those envied people who had real pasts, pasts they had lived.

Arthur rolls until he is on his back and pushes a hand through his black Grunts. His tongue is caked plaster. The light, coming through the window with a vengeance, hurts his eyes. He is amazed at how such a totally dead thing as light could seem so alive.

"For Christ's sake, Arthur. Get moving." Arthur smiles. She could have said "For died snake, father. Pet mooing." It makes as much sense.

His wife is bent over him, her face close to his. It is a pretty face, really, dollish, with large blue eyes and blond hair that hugs the skull. The nose, like her breasts, is short, and, it seems, turned snobbishly upward. For Arthur, however, this face is as emotionally charged as a rear cover advertisement: it is pleasant to look at and never changes--you could touch it, punch it even, but it never changes. Like the way the mark on Arthur's finger will not go away, that flat white piece of skin that his "lost" wedding band has smoothed.

Arthur's body flows from the bed to the bureau. His mind does not necessarily move in unison with his body, does not necessarily move at all. He senses his wife's nakedness behind him, feels some primitive tickle in his groin, but does not turn, would take no pleasure in seeing her.

For a moment he studies the wallpaper with its symmetrical arrangements of pink flowers, attempts to locate where one sheet ends and the next begins. The paper hangers did a fine job--he cannot find the seam.

He dresses, Blue, flared trousers, shirt of a lighter blue, black shoes with stylish heels, a dark tie that wants pressing. He wishes that he could say that he felt uncomfortable, but that would be a--what was that? A feeling like something stalking about inside of him, plying the spaces between his ribs. A thrashing in there. Searching a way out...

Breakfast odors, coffee and eggs and bacon, flap their wings. He never hears Angie leaving the room anymore.

A warm, bright kitchen, clean, oak panels highly varnished and reflecting so much sunlight that he can hardly see what color they are. The coffee tastes like tarpaper and the kid is ugly. How else could it be: it bears Stochasti's name but it belongs to Angie. He likes it though. And it is a difficult task to like the thing that killed your dream. Or should he be genuinely thankful? Anyway, he would like to die ahead of his son, his son with the too-large head and the dark eyes bulging as if in constant fear. He does not want to see the baby grow from ugly to grotesque--and how else could it be? The child, as he

grew older, would perceive his parents' farce of a life and think *that* was living. No, as passive as Arthur is, he does not want to see that. One way to...

"You forgot to shave, Arthur."

"I couldn't bear seeing myself again."

"The policy-holders will think you're sloppy."

"And if they're lucky, they'll die."

"You know, Arthur--you don't have any heart."

"You're probably right."

"Sometimes I feel sorry for you. I think you're a little crazy."

"Absolutely. You think I don't know?"

Ah, why does she wake the baby so early? Indoctrination? My God, I don't want to see it.

Arthur slips into his jacket and waits by the door for, however ritualistic it may be, a kiss. It does not come. That is apparently no longer a part of the schedule. So? This attitude, he feels, should come with old age, when the walls mellow and fuzz at the corners and you don't care if your glasses are smeared because you can't see even with them on. God, to believe...

Outside, the March sky is bright, but the air is solid with cold, a still cold like inside a freezer. The silk lining of his jacket makes Arthur's arms tingle. That bold, bald sun and the stealthy cold seem incongruent to him but then, what isn't? When you live day by day, clock-bound, when such a life is the only alternative you could bear, no sun or cold or intelligent speech or any tradition are what they be: they are, rather, lost as the past diminishes with the rising day. The past exists only if you declare it. The sun makes him think of Easter. It will come at the end of this month. He feels like a gigantic hunted rabbit that would have all the eggs poisoned for no reason at all, save that he would be sadistically loved by the police, immortalized over morning coffee for at least a month. Arthur hates it when Easter comes in March. All the bright dresses, dresses that smile even when the women inside them do not, are hidden beneath frowning coats with fur. And everything is gray. If he goes to church early that day he'll only see the old ladies and it won't make any difference anyway--Easter would slip away, fluid undefined outside of its

being another twenty-four hours. But then Angie and the kid would go later (she always sleeps late on Sunday) and some poor slob would be sad over her wind-reddened face and gloves and scarf. Not to mention the sorry-looking kid. Arthur feels that, after all, he should at least share the pain. And it is a pity: Easter, if you take it seriously, is only a minute of the cycle, and you have only nails and blood to look forward to again. And there is already too much of that. No, Easter should never come in March.

As he starts the car he asks himself if it might not have been better to leave the kid unbaptized. For God's sake, he's ugly enough--doesn't need any more scars. Arthur's mother would have screamed blasphemy! Once she had come upon him in a quiet moment as he paged through one of his father's magazines. Arthur was only seven--it had been a real chore to quietly get up on that chair and sift through the collected debris on top of the cabinet until he found IT. Why was IT hidden? He looked through it and was confounded: why hide such a thing? He liked puzzles, they still intrigued him then without being tiresome, and was in a state of exalted wonder, the pure and unreasoning and infinite lack of knowledge that produces joy and fear and inspires awe, then his mother entered.

"Filth!" she screamed. "Dirty kid!" And she tore the wonderful book. "If I hadn't had ya baptized, I'd strangle ya! An' ya know what that would mean!"

Well, he didn't. And that, his mother's elusive threat, was beautiful too: he could imagine what it meant, but never know for sure, and keep right on dreaming. Even a nightmare is kind upon reflection. It sure beat the broken glass in Tyler's lot that bit your feet even through you had shoes on; or the old men who puked up in the playground, leaving a sticky mess for little boys to fall into; or the...But that was when he had liked puzzles--now he just accepted them, lived with them, within them as a beast born in captivity would its cage.

But then, hadn't the Church, some decrepit priest really, explained it all to him? Who cares, anyway?

The car is humming, which is unusual, and moving well, almost carrying Arthur along as if he exercised no control over it. It makes Arthur as close to happiness as he thinks circumstances will allow. He whistles and is not angered when the great moaning trucks, the cancers of the early morning rush, fart blue-gray smoke in his face. He lights a cigarette and blows smoke back at them.

Out of habit, Arthur checks his watch: There's plenty of time! Angie has fed him the same propaganda that he hears on situation-comedy TV shows: "If you don't hurry, You'll be late." Why? Why does she do that? Perhaps, Arthur thinks, she really believes it. She sounded as if she meant it, didn't she? God, if he could only know that Angie was really concerned. That would be something.

Arthur remembers that right after the kid was born Angie was always drained in the morning from being up all night with it. And that was fine! Arthur would just get up, late, and watch Angie's pink face, so much pinker then, like a frail tissue Valentine heart, and feel his love for her rush through him like a warm shot of whiskey.

Maybe he should get her a puppy--one that will whine and shit on the floor and make her tired from trying to keep up with it. But no. She might beat it. Besides, she spends all of her time with the kid. She doesn't tire, though. Seems to draw strength from it

Arthur slows the car and directs it to the curb. There has been an accident in the center of the next intersection. The cars, like the lovers who were parted only to reunite with a mortal intensity, are locked in a deadly embrace. The drivers, unseen, are inconsequential. The damaged cars are too expressive; they draw the crowds: Ohh. Ah. God. Uh. Jesus.

The traffic behind the wrecks is stretched out in an impressive snarl with Arthur at the tail end of it. The converging lines of autos, all blinking and flashing under the naked sun, look like the handiwork of some metallic spider--a sharp, dew-covered web, intricate and glistening.

Arthur's eyes are drawn toward the mess like a suicidal moth. He thinks it strange that so many people from so many places and going to so many different places should all end up in the same place And suddenly: that's it!

Arthur rubs his hands like a madman. He thinks, seeing that vibrant web before him, *I'm* here. No, God--*We're* here. Unalone.

He laughs, takes a loud breath and says it: "We're here." He'll get the little girl from next door to come over and watch the kid, and Angie and he will have dinner out, see a movie together--not as a peace offering, not because they used to, but because they are they are they are...

Arthur laughs again. "We could be so good together," he sings quietly, forgets the melody and laughs. And he knows why he laughs. Because he is strong adult incisive weak child stupid. Because he is: like the planets and their mysterious motions and the depths of the sea and its treasures unknown, he is.

He lowers the window and breathes in the cold air, smiling. Each second is history. The world flashes before him like a hand waving, fanning, making many hands, but from the conception of the motion unable to avoid the fact that there is only one hand and that all others must vanish like the mirages they are. He lights a cigarette and exhales the smoke in a long, confident, bass laugh.

A face is suddenly in the window, sharp, creased. "Well that's a hell of a sense of humor you got, you bastard, laughin' at people's misery!" And quickly, almost leaving the scrawny flat body behind, the old woman's face is gone.

Arthur could be no more impressed had he been hit from behind with a length of pipe at the base of the skull. Only his eyes move. His body is paralyzed and his mind is singing, then screaming, running scales so fast that he cannot keep up with it. The old woman's face was much like his mother's when she ripped the magazine--and both were wrong. He is trapped between his mother's image and that of the old woman: they weave a fretwork of guilt and sin. Forgive me...Forgive me for being innocent...

Submission flames into anger and anger caresses his eyes. The cars ahead of him are no longer neat converging lines but, rather, faceless clamoring heathens vying for favored positions, an undelineated blob with projectiles darting from it like viscous amoebae-feet, not from one point or angle, but from over its entire mass. Confusion reigns in the streets and Arthur is hard-put to defend his fortress, his mind, himself, the only thing he knows and he does know it now; how could he have been so foolish, so sentimental, as to believe otherwise--is not part of *that*.

He feels a great withdrawal like a young man might feel his first love, constant and ephemeral, yet so deliciously touchable that his viscera contract in reaction to it, caging with moving living walls that thing alive and thump-thump-thumping in his chest, clawing for escape. Can any man ignore his veins? Yes, yes, oh yes. And water is thicker than blood. And he wonders WHY he didn't know that as his brain clicks tica tica tica like a bomb in his head, a fantastic bomb that could shatter, plunder, ravage all. It is too much. Too heavy. He should be, he believes, searching out the point of intersection, that delicate Grail, of dreams.

Arthur admires the wrecked cars with the police and spectators milling about as if a parade were coming. More directly, now, he admires the invisible drivers. Perhaps, wherever they may be, they know the WHY of their deliverance.

Arthur is starting the car even before his mind has consented to the act of reversal. But he will back up. Go back not so much because he has things to do, though Angie's words are still dancing in his ears, but because there are things that were done. Yes, and somehow (he is not yet sure exactly how, or even if it is possible; or if it is just a notion flying on the sigh of a lunatic) he must reverse. He must go back.

The left-hand tires strum the curb and the car is moving backward, unopposed, since the police have erected barricades now two blocks away to detour traffic from the obstruction, and always gathering speed. Parked cars, homes, pedestrians, daily life, are a blur, a frenzied spectrum.

He passes one intersection without slowing and approaches the barricaded second, not so much seeing the cracked yellow wood, the faded blue lettering: POLICE LIMIT, as sensing it, as he would sense the sweet coolness of his home after a walk beneath an August sun, and simultaneously disregards its presence. He understands a detour as few men can.

The snap of splintering wood and the cry of tires as the car begins to rotate unsteadily come to his ears as separate and distinct sounds, unrelated. The car completes only one-quarter of the circle before it comes abruptly to rest on the blunt rear of a police van. The impact forces the door by Arthur's arm to bulge. Somehow past the jacket and shirt and tie, the steering wheel is not on his chest, but in it, he thinks--if not actually in him, then at least it has remodeled him much as the van reshaped the door of his car. Several men, police officers, he thinks, but he can't be sure because his eyes are not focusing properly, hardly discerning at all, but feeling awkward and heavy, have opened the opposite door and are trying to coax him to them with outstretched arms. He wonders if they can see the steering wheel, the wheel like a round table that is mostly space. If it wasn't for that steering wheel he could, if he wanted to, just slide over and fling himself into those arms that respond only to tragedy.

If he ignores the steering wheel, it is certainly pride that keeps him pinned. His strength is going. That animal thumping between his ribs is freeing itself.

And if he blots out everything, the blurred forms and indistinct noises, and concentrates only on the pain, the relentless and sweet pain, then he is happy. His spirit burns like the sharp cold fire in his chest. He does not have to be aware of the sirens, the footfalls and yells, the color and the form the activity outside his car may take, to know, without ever having to doubt it for a second, that *he* is the center of it all.

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Arthur wakes without feeling. He could be floating, but he is on a hospital bed. He assumes it is a hospital bed because the room is unfamiliar, smells slightly of scented disinfectant, and is not even faintly cheery enough to house anything other than ill-health.

Angie, who has been standing by the foot of the bed, now moves to her husband's side, takes his hand and seats herself on the edge of the bed. She says nothing, but squeezes his hand every now and again.

Arthur cannot speak. His lips, jaws, will not work. His eyes close involuntarily. Angie, her prettiness trembling, bends and kisses his cheek with the kind of faint, sexless kiss with which story-book princesses must have once returned favors. Then she leaves the room.

And Arthur, awake beneath his shut-tight eyelids, wishes he could call her back--not to explain, not to tell her anything at all, but merely, and perhaps selfishly, to feel her presence. But he can only hear the rain-like patter of her retreating footsteps. He listens until they are no more--then he hears echoes and echoes...

Yet he has the kiss! His mind fills with laughter. Real sleep overtakes him, he welcoming the gentle blackness, thinking that--because it is true; how else could it be--he would waken amidst cheers, a prince.

## UPHEAVAL

*EPW*

She has changed,  
gurgling out a warning  
and continuing to slide along,  
flowing and bubbling liquid,  
without committing herself to  
any overhanging willow or  
thrusting bank,  
never resting upon an emerging shoreline  
or waiting to completely surround  
an impressive, misplaced rock.  
With a bend in her current,  
she swirls onward.

## SHORELINE

*EPW*

I lie,  
canopied with drooping greens  
and rimmed in roots  
bared and worn bone smooth  
by the swells and sighs of water  
against my side  
within the harbor of my bay  
rushing eagerly  
toward the cool, damp shelter  
of my hidden cove  
as the sun  
spreads its liquid upon my belly.

# AUTUMN FUCKS DEATH

*EPW*

mellow

honey

flow

golden

through

black

cinder

womb

## TUMBLEWEED

*EPW*

Unquenched,  
I have scraped the grated wasteland  
over dunes stunted by the wind which robs them,  
as it has robbed me;  
broken my brittle branches,  
lashed and stripped me  
but for the oakish roots of my stem,  
and blown me to your mountain base:  
I climb  
strengthened by the promise,  
pregnant in white clouds  
which drag their cotton bellies over your peak,  
and whisper at the door of your mouth.

# MY BACK TO THE WALL

*EPW*

There is a mist  
untouching  
yet sucking me under  
in its lamplight glow.  
Figures lick each other's blackness...

You are my father:  
in his pyramiding jeans  
which block his waist  
and hurry  
directly  
to the tweed stockings  
and paint spattered loafers.  
You are the old men:  
the worn and raspy voiced  
tucked away under the eaves  
in the library,  
behind the pillars  
I look for your window,  
but you have drawn the drapes  
with your melancholy.

You reach for me  
I am the reddish fleck in your silver beard  
and with your blotched hand  
and your pipe-cruste'd teeth  
and your purplish nose  
you would like to make me a eunuch.  
you bring me incest

Through the mist,  
and I beat you with  
your own fists  
(fighting like the boy I had always wanted to be)  
and without your permission,  
mouth open,  
years of sandbox dirt  
vomited,  
I cry against a lampost,  
my face crossed like your suspenders

## **STRANGE VOICES**

*Dan Groya*

Pulled the hammer all the way  
back when I was young,  
once when fire extinguishers  
posed for my camera.  
The trigger was a wart  
on my finger,  
a slingshot in my pocket.  
My iron-on patch blue jeans  
felt like sheets,  
Lysol and hospital creased.  
There was no more need  
to listen again,  
I had heard the scream  
of the butterfly.  
Now that I am gone  
I hear everything.

# **BALLAD OF BRONCO P. NAGERSKY**

*Dan Groya*

R.P.M.: 1500 steady, red line at 9500.

Temperature: 180 F.

Intake Manifold Vacuum: -15 @ 9500 R.P.M.

Cam Lift: 4.AG.

Rear End Gear: 1 :4.11.

Helmet: OK.

Harness: OK.

Clutch Pull: OK.

Line Stance: Ready.

Red.

Orange:

Amber.

Blue.

Green.

Drop clutch, accelerate.

Posi-Traction pulling left.

R.P.M.: 8200, unsteady.

Power shift, 2nd gear.

Pulls to right.

Temperature: 192 F.

Speed: 62.4 M.P.H.

R.P.M.: 8900.

Half clutch to 3rd gear.

Second quad kicks.

Slight power drop.

R.P.M.: 9300.

No clutch into 4th gear.

Second quad opens wide.

Full gas.

Temperature: 212.6 F.

Speed: 139.4 M.P.H.

Flag.

Cut gas.

Chute breaking clean.

Elapsed Time: 9.846 seconds.

Pulse: 97 per minute.

Temperature: 99.4 F.

Hair: Brownish Red.

Height: 5', 8".

Weight: 136 lbs.

Chest: 35".

Waist: 26".

Hips: 36".

Shirt: 6 buttons.

Pants: Levi's, button and zipper.

No belt.

Age: 17 years, 4 months.

Liquor: Southern Comfort.

Suck Job: strong but slow.

Responses: neck, tits, inside thighs.

Elapsed Time: 12 minutes, 18 seconds.

Location: Kirk Road South.

Building: farmhouse, frame.

Cars: street/track.

Women: 8 open, 6 taken.

Men: mellow but hard.

Highs: cocaine and Jim Beam.

music: Grateful Dead.

Contact: Red Head.

Wet and wired.

Amber.

Blue.

Green.

Clutch slipping.

Hot, straight, normal.

Elapsed Time: 6 minutes, 21 seconds.

Cruising again.

Biker from Madison.

old Styler.

Temperature: 99.8 F.

Adrenaline: full release.

Autonomic System: standby

Amber.

Blue.

Green.

Clutch normal.

Right toot to balls

Left to collar bone.

Open wide.

Temperature: 100.2 F.

Hard clutch from driveway.

Rubber onto Kirk Road.

Clean shift, 1st gear.

2nd gear.

3rd, timing off.

4th gear steady,

Speed: 121.6 M.P.H.

Stop sign, Randall Road:

No time.

Run it.

## **HARD SWALLOW**

*Dan Groya*

The straight whiskey kisses,  
new wine blood  
of your proud wet mouth  
sucked the spittle  
of my guilt,  
swallowed the come  
of my fear;  
had you tasted the bitter almond  
among the salty swirls?  
Though you saw  
the skull and crossbones  
on my balls,  
you pretended  
not to notice.

## DANCERS

*Edward Gorman*

Ass stomach (nice tummy) tits neck hair. Her hair feels blonde. His fingers are very sensitive. But blonde, she could be one of several. His fingers are not that sensitive.

He is checking her out blind because between his hangover and his exhaustion, he can't get his eyes open. And besides, he enjoys the game. Plays it often. Seeing if by touch alone he can remember who he took home the previous night from this or that bar or party.

Then he withdraws his fingers, rolls over on his back again, and surrenders himself to his hangover. The worst of it is the dehydration. He once drank a six pack of Pepsi in less than an hour. He paid for it later on the john, with bright hemorrhoidal blood.

In his head, his hangover is like a tumor. In his stomach, like a virus. Even his feet hurt, inexplicable.

The worst of his hangover wanes, then, at least for the moment, and he starts to speculate again on the woman beside him.

He wonders if she is awake. He wonders if he knows her well enough (whoever she is) to fart. Really fart. He farts. Really farts. He feels much better. As if some tense introduction has just been gotten through.

Next to him in the bed, she snores. Lightfully. Peacefully.

Who could she be? There was the blonde who giggled and had buck teeth, There was the blonde who said that her preoccupation was art but kept mispronouncing Cezanne. There was the blonde who told him every ten minutes (and for no discernible reason) that she was originally from Los Angeles.

Probably she is one of them, this woman next to him.

And then he remembers a fourth blonde. The one who predicted that his son would end up on a shrink's couch clutching his balls. The one who told him that he was a pisspoor father and no better human being. The one who slapped him.

Now he can't recall how the episode started or finished. It seems he was just standing there, weaving slightly, talking to the blonde with the buck teeth, when for no reason this woman, who was actually nice looking, made her way through the party, and came right up to him. He recalls that her voice was hysterical and that for a long moment her otherwise lovely blue eyes were terrifying. And after she slapped him, he left. Or she left.

Then she slapped him. He can't remember which and now it isn't important.

Now what matters is opening his eyes, the hell with the little guessing game, the hell with this hangover, and see for sure who is lying next to him.

"Jesus Christ" he says.

Then, more roughly than he needs to, he begins shaking her shoulder. "Wake up."

As she struggles up through the fathoms of her sleep, he finds himself wishing she were bad looking. A dog. A pig. Instead, she is a doe.

She even has a more than perfunctory less than sincere smile for him.

"Let's get one thing straight, lady. I see my son every chance I get."

"Again she smiles. Her face is sensual with sleep. "I just asked the time."

"And I call him twice a week." He says.

"I thought we settled this last night," she says.

"We didn't settle anything."

"We must've settled something," she says, "or what would I be doing here?"

He tries to glare at her. With the trouble he's having focusing, he probably just looks silly.

"Do you have a hangover?" she asks.

He says nothing and rolls away to the other side of the bed, facing away from her.

His hangover is bad enough. And the day (whatever day it is) is ruined-- in this condition he'd have trouble jerking off let alone doing anything constructive. And now her.

"Are you hungry?" she asks.

"No."

"Do you mind if I use your toothbrush?"

"Yes, I mind."

"Look," she says, moving closer to him. He can feel the heat of her all along the back of his body. "Look. We really did settle this. I apologized for saying what I did and for slapping you. Then we came over here and had a nice time. Don't you remember?"

He says nothing.

"Don't you remember?" she asks.

"Of course I remember."

"Well then?"

"Well then, nothing."

"I only said what I did because I was drunk. Because for some reason you reminded me of my ex-husband. But you're nothing alike. I told you that last night. When I apologized. You're nothing alike. He only sees our daughter once or twice a year. You see your son regularly.

"Not regularly."

"You said you did. Last night."

"Then I lied."

"Oh" she says. "Well, you see him sort of regularly."

"What the hell does that mean? 'Sort of' regularly?"

"More than once or twice a year."

"I don't see him as often as I could and that's what matters. Not as often as I could."

"Well, you've talked to him then. On the phone."

"Not for three weeks."

"Oh" she says. "Then you've been busy and when you're not busy you'll start seeing him again. And phoning him again. Things come up from time to time. Women don't expect miracles."

He feels trapped now, hunched into a half-fetal, naked, cold, lonely as a monk, unable to remember her name let alone the crazy evening she's been

describing in bits and pieces, guilty about his son and suffocatingly sorry for himself.

So she slapped him, he thinks. Well maybe he had it coming. Maybe it was somehow his son slapping him.

"Women don't expect miracles," she repeats.

Now he rolls on his side the other way. Facing her. "Oh, really? Then what do women expect?"

She seems unimpressed with his hostility. "Women expect help. He could at least call her."

He says, "He doesn't call her?"

"Sometimes when he's drunk. And then he cries and that just upsets her."

"Maybe he's got a reason to cry."

"Of course he does. We all do. But he should think of our daughter before he thinks of himself."

He doesn't know how to deal with her. If she'd remained the woman who shrieked at him, who slapped him, maybe now they could have some mean sex and then he could kick her out. But she's not that simple,

"You want some breakfast?" he asks.

"If you'll let me use the bathroom."

"There's a new toothbrush in the medicine cabinet. I'll start breakfast."

He lets her get up first, With his hangover, he will dodder like an old man and he-looks old enough these days.

But she doesn't go into the bathroom immediately. She stands naked at the end of the bed looking down at him, combing through her blonde hair with her fingers. He guesses her age at thirty. She has small breasts and tender-looking thighs. And light freckles across her nose. About freckles he can get sentimental. He doesn't like women he can't get sentimental about.

"I really am sorry about last night," she says.

"I've done things like that myself. I'm a bad drunk."

He expects her to deny this. To say that she's the bad drunk, not he.

She says nothing.

"As a matter of fact, I can be a very nasty drunk."

"I'll be right back," she says and gives him a tricky, nervous smile starts off for the john.

He decides against dressing, not even underwear, though his stomach after thirty-six years is not exactly flat and his body is not exactly tanned. His first steps are painful. The tumor in his head expands. This morning he could drink a case of Pepsi, not just a six pack.

As he moves toward the little kitchenette concealed behind the lattice-work doors, he wonders again why she was silent when he said he was a nasty drunk. His stomach tightens. For the first time this morning, it occurs to him he has no real recollection of the previous night. For a moment he is terrified, thinking of all the things he might have said or done. But if he'd gone off, really fucked up, why would she be here?

He opens the latticework doors.

The stove top is gummy with the grease of three thousand eggs and ten strips of bacon, but not half as gummy as the pan into which he puts the fresh eggs and bacon. He coffee pot burned out long ago, so she now boils water in the sink and then gargling. He sets two slices of bread in the toaster. He hears her closing the medicine cabinet and opening the bathroom door.

He turns to watch her walk toward him. He is still wondering why she wouldn't deny that he's a terrible drunk. He looks at her face carefully. She looks happy enough.

"You need any help?" she asks.

"It's all ready," he says, coming away from the kitchenette with a sticky jug of orange juice in his hand.

"Not bad," she says after taking the first bite of her omlette.

"Not good, though."

She laughs. "Not bad."

"So how did we finally get together?" he asks after he finishes his first cup of coffee.

She looks disappointed. "You don't remember any of it, do you?"

"Some of it. Not all of it."

"None of it."

"Not all of it."

"It's not worth talking about anyway," she says.

"I'm just curious."

"There's nothing to be curious about."

"Well, why did you slap me?"

"Because I was drunk."

"How did we get from there to here?"

"You don't remember any of it, do you?"

He sighs. "Not much."

Now she sighs. "All right. All right, but then we drop the subject, ok?"

"Ok."

"After I slapped you, I left the party and went downstairs. I was so upset I couldn't even start my car. I just sat there crying. The more sober I got, the more embarrassed I got. Then I noticed you sort of weaving your way to your car. I decided to apologize. Which is what I tried to do. But you wouldn't let me."

The tumor is working on the front part of his brain now. He wants to tell her to stop. Why upset her more by making her go through it all again? Why risk upsetting himself by hearing about something he did or said while drunk? "You mean I wouldn't accept your apology?"

She smiles. "You didn't think I owed you an apology. You said that you didn't know who I was. At first I thought you were just being belligerent. How could you forget somebody who'd just slapped you ten minutes ago? But then I realized how drunk you were. You honestly didn't know who I was."

He tries for a smile. "Sometimes I drink too much."

"So I told you all about it. About what I'd said to you, how you were a terrible father and a selfish person. And about how I'd slapped you."

"Did I get hostile?" he asks.

"You tried to lay me."

"Right there in the parking lot?"

"Right on the car hood."

"That isn't funny. I apologize."

"At least I convinced you to get inside the car."

"We did it inside the car?"

"In the front seat. Just like high school. It was sad. But I thought it would settle our debt."

"So how did we get to my place?" he asks.

"I drove us. Your car is still in the parking lot."

"Christ," he says. He remembers none of what she's describing. None of it. He is terrified. "Could we get back into bed?"

"Into bed?" She looks surprised. "Why?"

"Why do you think?"

As a boy he played a certain game. He imagined that his bed was a life raft and that as long as he stayed in bed nothing could harm him. Not the sharks. Not the ocean. Now, as he makes love to her, he feels this same peace and security again. He watches her face. She looks at peace, too. And now he no longer worries about last night, or even about his hangover.

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"Thank you" he says afterward.

For awhile then he is silent, here on his life raft, surrounded by sharks and the cold eternal ocean.

But he knows his contentment is not permanent. He still has questions. What else he said, What else he did. He has to know. His raft is a bed again.

He says, I'd like to apologize for last night."

"We're not going to talk about last night anymore, remember?"

"But I do owe You an apology."

"For what?" she asks. "I was the one who slapped you."

"But for after that," he says. "For the parking lot. For that I owe you an apology. For that I apologize."

"Well," she says. "For the parking lot I guess I would accept an apology. A small one."

"A big one. I know what I'm like when I'm that drunk."

"A small one will be fine," she says.

"Is there anything else I should apologize for? About last night?"

"Please. Forget about last night," she says.

"Did I talk about my son?"

"Please."

"Well, did I?"

"You said he was very bright and very kind and that you loved him very much."

"Did I talk about visiting him?"

"You said you visited him regularly."

"Well, I don't. That was an exaggeration. I don't visit him regularly."

She says nothing.

He says, "I don't want You to think I'm like your ex-husband."

"He's not so bad," she says. Not really. It's just when he hurts Jennifer. But after being with you, I understand him a little better."

"Me? What did I have to do with it?"

"Why the hell do you keep pushing?"

"I want you to tell me. You're holding something back and I want you to tell me what it is."

"Please. I have to leave in an hour. I don't want to waste it talking about last night."

"You can always leave now.

"Maybe I will," she says.

"But before you go, I want you to tell me about last night."

"What you did is nothing to be ashamed of."

"I'll be the judge of that."

"Can't we just lie here?"

"What did I do?"

She says, "You tried to call your son."

"What?"

"You tried to call your son. it was three-thirty in the morning. I wouldn't let you. We wrestled by the phone over there."

"Jesus" he says.

She says nothing.

He says, "Why the hell did I try to call my son at three-thirty in the morning?"

"Because you felt sorry for yourself."

"For him."

"For yourself."

"Jesus Christ" he says.

"It's nothing to be ashamed of. All of us have reasons to feel sorry for ourselves."

"Jesus" he says.

She tries to put her arms around him. He leans back to make this impossible. Now he is sick of her, of himself. His hangover threatens to push his eyes out of his head.

"I suppose you feel really smug about all this," he says after awhile.

"Hardly."

"You know I could make a point right here."

"If it will make you feel better," she says, "make it."

"I could ask you where your daughter is at this very moment. And where she's been all night."

"At home. With my mother."

"With your mother. You don't think your daughter misses you when you're gone?"

"Of course she does."

"But even knowing that she misses you, you go out anyway? And stay out all night?"

"Yes."

"Well what kind of mother does that make you? Your daughter's at home missing you and here you are in some man's bed. What kind of mother does that make you?"

"I only go out one night a month," she says.

"Very noble."

"One night a month, she says. One night a month I have my mother watch Jennifer so I can stay out all night. So I can get laid, screwed, fucked, whatever you want to say. I don't have a steady boyfriend. This is the only thing I can do and I make no apologies for it. No fucking apologies whatsoever. Do you understand?"

He says nothing. What can he say? Then he says, "I'm sorry."

She says nothing.

He says, "I'm sorry."

"Of course you're sorry," she says. "Of course you're sorry. And I'm sorry. And Jennifer's sorry. And my ex-husband's sorry. We're all sorry."

"Your one night a month," he says. "You could've found somebody better to spend it with than me."

"Or somebody worse," she says. "There are lots worse."

"Not 'lots' worse," he says.

"All right," she sighs. "Not 'lots' worse."

# CRUEL CHICKENS

*Wanita Zumbrunnen*

My cruel chickens  
still cheep at night  
while scratching  
among the hairs  
of your chest.

They nest  
in the piano strings  
and bedtime pecking.

Daytime haunting  
the recipe box  
they eat  
all my bread and crumb  
as I cluck.

Their soft down  
reminisces  
from the big barnyard.

I feel them  
under  
my shaped wings  
feathered  
with hollowness.

## THE PICK UP AND CARRY

*Wanita Zumbrunnen*

Of most I remember  
the headache of upholstery  
the metal dashboard moan  
the screaming steering wheel  
the sick silk sky  
and myself, a frayed rag  
sorted out of the bundle  
and left flopping on the seat like a rag doll.

Then your sudden swoop  
you, a rejected remnant  
a flawed piece of patchwork  
warm, but warm to me  
and the pick up and carry  
held close against  
denim  
the grace of the denim  
and the sky folding us  
the love cover.

## MY STONE CITY

*Wanita Zumbrunnen*

I walked you to sleep  
on a Sunday afternoon.  
Did you know you were dying.  
There was no way to save you  
for the trees cried kill  
in the quarry of death  
and the stones moved  
and the green moss waited  
and is waiting still.  
I had to keep asking  
How do you like it  
and How do you like it  
as you moved with me  
up the cliff without answers  
and over railroad tracks  
I walked better than you  
and scattered your bones  
through the valley  
and stacked your hair  
in the barn  
while your words  
escaped like kites  
over houses you never knew.  
I had a hard time  
crossing the creek.  
It was young and deep  
and you were riding  
on my shoulders  
and I was tired

but could not stop  
and I left you there  
smiling at spring flowers  
in unseeing sleep.  
Left your stone heart sleeping  
and kept walking, walking  
away from your touch  
and waking, waking.

## THE DESERT IS AN ODD-SHAPED FRUIT ON THE EARTH

*Paul Young*

Our lives aren't beautiful,  
petty striving and still the  
ugliness erupts,  
the world is not a rock stricken  
with jewels.

I grow one thing  
in sand:  
a small terrified papyrus that  
I project into wet parchment.  
In a thousand years a papyrus swamp  
swallows everything I was,  
books to crumbs, bones to coal,  
7-Up bottles intact forever, sprouting  
fat rich papyrus in the crook  
of the neck of a bottle-fed earth.

Anywhere else the sand shifts  
according to politics and the wind.  
I am thinking of each grain as the  
meal of a culture  
so hidden and proud that hiding becomes  
the feast,  
hiding wets the parchment lips.

Stroking...stroking...stroking...stroking..  
our soft moist skins  
against the apartment brick,

cooling our heels and lives  
features sly with joy.

Cousins, my eyes be far away this time  
next week  
things I can only explain with pictures  
and not to you.  
wet green host send,  
brush across in a smear an immense  
scurrying crescendoing chorus,  
doom blather and fulfillment  
all at once,  
the oneness of time  
all my lives my moments  
all at once  
in a passionate red breathtaking bearhug  
of the finest breaths I've ever taken.

## WHEN MORNING RISES

*Barbra McNeel*

When morning rises  
and the earth shakes  
with the involvement of  
people upon its skin  
panting through a journey  
with bewildered eyes  
I awake to hear the sounds of sun  
rolling me out from the silence of sleep  
like a fawn upon loose gravel  
edging its way to water

## REFLECTION

*Barbra McNeel*

The man walked forward  
with soft regard for his steps  
with his living room shoved  
in his back pocket he turned  
the corner around the boulevard  
a kazoo voice was hanging out  
of the window hanging  
up her wash on the line  
puffed dreams blossomed in his  
head as he was walking  
and looking and hearing that voice  
gusty slippery notes formed  
a blue location in his head  
of a café with Polichinka  
of an evening at the Havelka  
of breathy Laura dressed in white flowers  
it was all the same night  
the same place  
it had all come so easy  
so very easy that even now  
it made him trip over the curb

# ADVENT

*Brian Rusche*

The other workers, careful not to break the rhythm of their machines, watched the foreman hand the week's paycheck to Ralph Novak. The foreman then reached for his back pocket.

"Sorry, Ralph." The foreman said this softly while craning his neck. Ralph's eyes followed the foreman's hand. Ash colored hair covered Ralph's grimy brow. It was impossible for the foreman to speak with eye to eye sympathy. He produced a pamphlet from his back pocket, which Ralph snatched, and then walked away.

Ralph stood alone, forming the words on the pamphlet. "What You Need to Know.." Ropes drew taut across the insides of his jaw. His head slowly pivoted until it stopped and held the cocked position of a bewildered dog. Ralph looked at the vacant stool in front of his solder press.

"You chopped too, Ralph?" Larry Conklin ran the press next to Ralph and also received notice that evening.

"Yeah," Ralph focused on Larry's pitted face. "One more week." Larry, unlike anybody else, always stood at his machine. He could work faster that way. Being a tall man, his body bent over the press in several sharp angles. The thick plastic safety shield, which protected the workers from the hot solder, fogged to zero visibility when Larry first assumed his unusual stance. His breath clouded the glass and his nose left oily smudges.

"God," Ralph thought out loud, "That was eleven years ago...Eleven years, Larry! Remember when you smashed the glass with the heel of your boot?" Larry nodded. His face was covered with small craters from the spitting solder. Ralph put the folded pamphlet in his shirt pocket, walked back to his stool and sat down. Larry had started his press again and the solder began spitting.

"The lousy shit told me last week I wouldn't get laid off." Larry kept his head over the press before he answered.

"Yeah , I know...me too." Blue smoke curled away from the hot surface of a newly printed board. Ralph started his press and both continued working, pausing a moment each time the foreman handed out a paycheck. No one received notice after Ralph Novak.

Ralph did a mental check to see if anyone with less seniority was being kept on the night Shift. As far as he knew the lay-off was strictly on seniority, but often the company made exceptions. Ralph found that everyone running solder presses was either older or had been laid off. The union steward wouldn't have the official details until next week.

Ralph began to wonder what had gone wrong. "Maybe I've been too slow." His Press came down with twice the needed strength. Then he pressed a dozen boards in a frenzy until his hands ached. "Maybe too sloppy." The press continued at a deliberate speed. Larry noticed that Ralph was squinting and his ears were red. Larry had never seen arteries in the neck pulsate with such clarity. Ralph stood up and slammed the press into one of the boards he had just printed.

"Hey Ralph, c'mon...take it easy. There's nothing you can do. We only got ten minutes left."

"I'm punching out...see you at the Blue Note." Ralph walked between the solder press and through the double doors as if he were leaving a mosquito-infested forest. Minutes later the foreman stood behind Novak.

"Conklin, where'd Novak go?"

"He went to the can, is that all right?" The foreman walked away and Larry, who hated to lie, went back to work thinking he had been real smart.

\*\*\*

Bob Kuntzel wiped down the bar, emptied the ashtrays, and lit a cigar. He had ten minutes before the shift changed and the regulars would stampede from the factory across the street. Kuntzel had done well since he bought the Blue Note. Vietnam called for more production as the factory and the voice echoed across the street calling for more beer. Rumors had been flying that a lay-off was certain and Kuntzel had heard of several contracts being canceled.

His business depended on the business across the street. Fortunately, for every rumor there had also been a denial.

Ralph Novak came through the door exactly eight minutes early. Kuntzel hadn't even punched C-7 on the jukebox.

"Where's my song, Kunt?" Ralph mounted a stool at the center of the U-shaped bar.

"Either you got canned or my clocks are off." Kuntzel took a quarter out of the register.

"No Kuntz, I got trouble."

"For me or you?"

"Both...the big lay-off came tonight." Kuntzel pressed C-7 and straightened up.

"How many?" His right eye closed and watered. Cigar smoke burned his eye whenever he leaned over.

"I only know five on presses...but it's got to be two hundred in all."

"Oh my God..." Kuntzel drew a beer and placed it in front of Ralph. Halt the glass vanished.

"Aaaah...Did you know, I was the last one to get it?" The other half disappeared and Kuntzel shook his head. "Well it's true. And Laura and I thought we'd make it through Christmas...we were hoping anyway." Kuntzel filled the glass. "Thanks buddy."

"How long's this going to last?"

"In-def-I-nit." Ralph fired this one down, paid for three beers and walked to the John. The jukebox played C-7 while Ralph pissed and Kuntzel set up another.

MAN: A hard day's work my feet sure smell,

WIFE: Sometimes I wish the kids were dead,

BOTH: We'll tell the world to go to hell,

And jump into our bed...jump into our bed.

\*\*\*

Larry finished his last board after the workbell rang, picked up his quilted jacket and weaved around the presses toward the double-doors. The foreman met him again.

"Novak leave or is he still in the can?" This time his neck craned backwards.

"He just went out the door." Larry moved on quickly, went into the john to comb the solder out of his hair, and stood in line at the time clock. The line moved quickly and Larry noticed that Ralph's card was still in the rack. When his turn came, Larry slipped both cards out of the rack, punched them, and placed them in the box marked OUT. He had covered for Ralph perfectly.

Snow was falling, or at least blowing off the roofs, and the flashing sign of the Blue Note looked particularly good as Larry left the factory. He hurled a dirty snow bank, dodged traffic and made it to the door before those on the sidewalk had even crossed the street.

"Novak owes me a beer, Kuntz," Larry's words echoed through the empty bar and mixed with Ralph's favorite song. "Where the hell is he?"

"In the can."

"That's hard to believe. Kuntzel drew a beer for Larry and went to the back of the bar to put out his cigar. Larry took the beer off the service platter and sat next to Ralph's favorite spot. Ralph emerged from the john adjusting his zipper.

"Punch me out?"

"Yeah." Larry sipped his beer. The first taste was a reward for the night's work.

"Kuntz, I'll take a shot of Daniel's...and one for Larry here.

"No...Kuntz! No thanks. Novak's buying my beer and that's enough."

"Ah, you're pussin out on me." Ralph drank out of his shell and noticed a change in the bar. He was drinking ahead of Larry and felt out of place. The rest of the shell vanished. "You know, Larry, it looks like a beer after work is gonna be a beer and a shot because there ain't no work." Novak did the shot

as dramatic as possible with the head flung back and elbow high in the air. The stampede of workers began to enter.

"Hey Novak, do it up!" Several men urged him on while he held the pose, elbow still in the air, and shot glass to his mouth. The men kept filing in and the voices became unified, "Go Ralph, go/Go Ralph, go!" The glass came down on the bar, and Ralph wiped his mouth on his sleeve for effect.

"How much you need, Kunt?"

"Dollar fifteen. "

"Jesus, what is this!"

"You're buying my beer." Larry spoke quietly, hoping that Ralph would get off stage.

"What for?" Ralph had calmed down and spoke directly to Larry.

"I punched you out...okay?"

"Oh yeah. Thanks. You know what I was gonna do?" Ralph reached into his shirt pocket and unfolded his paycheck. "Kuntz, wanna cash this and take out what you need for me and my buddy here? We need another...Anyway, you know what I was gonna do?" Larry shook his head and sipped the liquid underneath the foam. "I was gonna get my two boys five-speed bikes for Christmas. Sixty bucks each...can you believe it?"

"That right?"

"Yep. Boy, now I don't know what me and Laura are gonna work out."

"Well, if you look at the pamphlet you'll know everything you need to know." Larry and Ralph drank together, both noticing the other. Their glasses hit the bar at the same time. Ralph thought Larry was the best drinking buddy he knew since his army days in Saigon. Larry, six years older, drank to fill a pause in the conversation. He had missed the war.

Kuntzel cashed Ralph's check and a pile of change was stacked on top of several bills in front of him. Ralph played with the coins thinking about the difference between earned money and unemployment checks.

"I guess you can still afford to get drunk on unemployment." Ralph laughed through his nose ending with a grunt. The other workers were much quieter than usual, most of them having learned of the lay-off first hand.

When the Blue Note is quiet, all heads turn at the moment a voice begins. Ralph seemed to be the evening's spokesman and felt the urge to tell a joke.

"Hey Kunt, do you know how we're gonna get rid of all the Greeks in this town?" All heads turned.

"I know how to get rid of the Bohunks."

"That's a different one...gimme a shell and I'll tell you how to get rid of the Greeks...and a shot too...make it a double. If anybody's Greek in here just substitute Bohemia, I don't care...Y'see you round up a hundred Greeks, got a hundred loaded pistols with strings tied to the triggers, tie each string to the Greek's dick and hold up a picture of Jackie Onassis." The shot of Daniel's arrived at the punchline and Ralph downed it so he wouldn't have to laugh at his own stupidity. He wasn't embarrassed, but surprised. Most of the men laughed.

\*\*\*

George Popodopolis watched Larry walk away and knew that Ralph had left long before the bell rang. He was surprised that Larry had lied.

"Going to the Blue Note?" Another foreman who worked upstairs waited for an answer. He was holding the door open and was ready to leave.

"Later on. See you there." George had to wait until all the presses were vacant and throw the main power switch. He also had to fill out an accident report, figure the week's payroll and see if he met his productivity quota. After he threw the switch, shutting down the presses, George went through the double doors to get the forms in the office. As he passed the time clock he noticed that Novak's card was still in the rack and he was not in the line waiting to punch out. George kept moving but waited at the office door where he saw Larry come out of the john, wait in line and punch two cards.

"God, this next week will be hell," George thought. "More trouble than it's worth." He went into the office, sat at his desk and started the forms. He usually finished fifteen minutes after the bell, but on Fridays he was kept an hour or so later.

When he finished with the accident report, George thought about Ralph and Larry. Should he say anything? Both men had been with the company

over ten years. Hell, with one week left, he could pass it over. Besides, he wanted to go to the Blue Note without having to play foreman. The payroll and quotas took over an hour to complete, but George was extremely pleased. He qualified for another week's bonus.

George locked the office, said goodnight to the night sweeper, and met the wind outside. The street had emptied and three workers were already walking away from the bar. Their shapes were visible every time the Blue Note sign winked. "Must be late," he thought. "Colder than shit."

He finally reached the door, opened it, and raised a hand to Kuntzel.

"Missed a good joke tonight, Pops." Kuntzel poured coffee with a shot of brandy for George. "Too bad I can't repeat it."

Larry looked up and watched George come towards them until he was close enough that a greeting was in order. Larry then looked back to his beer. Ralph, shoulders slumped over the bar, played with the coins that he hadn't spent. George passed behind them and sat at the side of the bar.

"Quite a racket you guys got going with the time cards." George smiled and wanted them to know he hadn't been fooled and that he didn't really care.

"Suck me off Greek boy." Ralph, still playing with his coins, mumbled just loud enough for Kuntzel to hear. Nobody knew if George heard. Larry thought not.

"That's all tonight, Ralph." Kuntzel leaned over the bar to make sure he was understood.

"Alright...I won't say a word...Jus another beer."

"You've had enough, Ralph. How bout some coffee." Ralph downed the last of his beer, held his glass over the bar and before Kuntzel could grasp it, Ralph dropped the glass to the floor.

"Yeah...I spose I have...has enough." Ralph's nose was running. "Sorry bout the glass Kunt I'm really sorry...sorry. I've had enough. Three years in the jungle and leven years with Greek boy...Get Greek boy a beer...sorry Pops."

"Larry," Kuntzel whispered, "Can you get him home?"

"Wait Kunt! Larry! ...Larry, he don know shit...Larry! He don know where I live...I've had enough right? Right, Kunt?. Lissen Greek boy...I quit! I quit your lousy job...an that's my weeks notice you, you...you don appreshate shit. I quit."

"Larry, get him out of here, willya?" George had stood up.

"Yeah, yeah, I know I'm goin where...home." Ralph slumped over, head on the bar. He was still awake, but suffering. George sat down.

Larry propped Ralph into a sitting position and coaxed him into standing on his own weight. Larry's pitted face was red with embarrassment as he guided the drunk to the door. He had to apologize.

"Sorry Kuntz." Kuntzel nodded. "See ya later, George." George didn't look up. The two men stopped at the door. Ralph held on while Larry asked Kuntzel to call a cab.

"Sure no problem."

"Oh, and Kuntz, could ya get Ralph's check out of the register and copy his home address for the driver...it should be on there. I'm walking tonight." Kuntzel did this quickly and gave the paper to Larry.

"Thanks again, Kuntz."

"Be careful now."

The two men sat on the corner and froze for the cab to come. When it came into view, Larry curled five dollars and the address into Ralph's hand, and began his short walk home. Ralph called out but Larry didn't understand. He kept walking. Again the voice called out and Larry, nearly a block away, shook his head.

"I'll get those bikes! Five speeds, Larry! Five speeds!"

"C'mon buddy, let's get in the cab...meter's running. Let's go, it's way too cold for riding bikes."

## CONCRETE DREAM 270

*Guy A. Beining*

nothing now in this small town  
the country robs the skies of old autos  
& old Plows with the evil glow of dead faces.  
the olive moon in bins  
& sand scratching the feet  
cubes of cold cane punctures the skin  
as gaunt Postmen mark the spot  
where the leaves should be dropped.  
country folk turn loose  
& nip like angry she dogs  
at the blown up wrists.  
bad taste in this game  
rain on the neck & icicles in a heap  
& tin cans falling to the stomach,  
a plate of bad taste in all parts.

## CONCRETE DREAMS 271

*Guy Beining*

edifying the ability to eat up  
& consume the dangerous  
shark-finned atmosphere about us.  
damnable snowmen with abominable whiskers;  
dinner hands with meat factories on their chests  
tickets to the grave & marsh country  
screening the vacuous eyes.  
breakfast in the port town--  
the dishwasher wringing the waitress dry  
coins flying into big-lipped machines  
a demure bomb in the oven  
as hotrod troopers button up  
their stiff red necks.  
time touches their palates with broken thumbs  
& in the morning plot  
chamber music slips from churchyard.  
the troopers grin hate  
& far away the derlicks hum in cotton lofts  
ready to pick apart the mechanism of night.

## THINK BANDAGES

*Rick Adkins*

Which bank should I climb with this  
club foot and sagging trunk?

These dead limbs only add weight to  
an already long walk.

I drank another round in sentences  
bruised and plundered, then headed  
out with buckled knees that saints  
have cursed in bolder ways than I.

I clank of broken parts fastened  
twice with wire and tweezers.

Think bandages and handholds, but  
don't sink to panic thoughts of  
better times. (August '56).

## IT, TOO, WAS LONG AND NARROW

*Rick Adkins*

One last jab caught the corner of his left  
eye. It opened an inch long and narrow.  
Stretchers are long and narrow. Some said  
he bristled, others said he was bridled.  
Clumsiness stuck from his grin. It, too,  
was long and narrow. He nested in their  
hair. Bad enough. Worse, though, was  
his grin. Not betraying but seducing.  
He prodded them by dancing. Wouldn't budge.  
They brushed off his seductions with  
nevermind. He salved their bruises as they  
clattered on. A bunch of ravin' flag wavers  
he shivered. That shook them. The response  
broke down: 1. he submerged them;  
2. they flinched; 3. he ate them.

## HIS BROTHERS KEEPER

*James B. Hemesath*

The younger brother died from meningitis while in the marines at Cherry Point, N.C., and it was a great shock for the family because Roger had made it through Vietnam relatively untouched. True, Roger's feet suffered mildly from a mild strain of jungle rot, and he had put in six weeks on methadone shaking his addiction to heroin. But now he was dead from meningitis. Roger stood just over six foot two, had been that height since 10th grade. Lying down if he stretched, his feet hung over the end of the featherbed they shared growing up in their parents' house.

The older brother now owned the house and the parents when they visited from Florida stayed at the Holiday Inn. The mother did not like the new wallpaper in their old bedroom or the nervous blonde wife that had taken her place in the kitchen. This silly girl answered to the mother's name, Mrs. Darby, which annoyed the mother because it made her think that she'd not only lost her youth, but also her husband.

The day of the funeral Mr. Darby before breakfast drank too much vodka. The older son helped his father undress while the mother filled the motel bathtub. The father sobered quickly, but not before splashing water like the clumsy, senile man that he would be within a few years across the tile floor both when he got in and got out. She wrapped ice cubes from the tiny refrigerator that set under the TV in a towel pressing it firmly against his forehead, back of his neck, wrists; she wept.

Mr. Darby apologized.

For days the older son had thought only about his brother's feet. Roger had after his first 13 month tour in Vietnam spent a week of his leave at home. The older brother, and his wife, the younger Mrs. Darby, moved temporarily from their bedroom which once had been the brothers' into the parents' old bedroom though its walls were drab, stripped as they were of wallpaper. The wife said that she wished she could find time to repaper it.

Roger relaxed on the double-bed with its feather mattress. Now and then a feather poked through the mattress cover. It made Roger, the dead younger brother, consider the possibility that the mattress might be alive. During his visit he wore long-sleeved shirts, and hid his syringe and what-nots or why-nots, as he called the paraphernalia associated with his drug habit, between stacks of comic books that still cluttered the floor of his closet.

He woke up one morning to find his older brother standing at the foot of the bed staring down at his naked feet.

He pulled the feet underneath the sheets and said, "They're not mine. I lost mine, so I stole these off a dead hook."

The older brother said, "They are yellow, aren't they?"

It was a rhetorical question.

Cleaning out the closet a few days after the funeral, the young wife found the syringe. Her husband shook his head, commented wisely, "I'm glad Mom and Dad never knew about Roger's horrid bout with heroin."

He took the magazines, the syringe, and the paraphernalia from his wife, packed it in a cardboard box, and shipped the box by Fourth Class Mail to his younger brother's military address in North Carolina.

The parents stayed out the week after the funeral at the Holiday Inn so they could visit old friends. They spoke proudly about their two sons, The older son was now in the phone book at their old address and because their names were identical it was almost as if they'd never moved at all to Florida. The younger son having survived Vietnam decided that he would like to make a career out of the marines.

After they took his parents to the airport, the older brother and his wife made love.

They made love in the featherbed that he and his brother slept in as boys. It was sad for him, because she spoke about the single-bed in the college dormitory room that they'd first made love in, but all he thought about was this bed and his brother's feet. Often as a boy he thanked God he wasn't as tall as his brother who woke up on winter nights with complaints that his feet were cold.

The box he sent came back some months later marked--Delivery Refused and he wondered if he'd done anything to offend his younger brother.

Their parents and his wife said he hadn't so he put the still wrapped, but battered box in his brother's closet, then lay down to take a nap.

The younger brother, of course, had been right. The bed was alive. The older brother and the bed made love, and when his wife came to call him for supper she found not only her husband, but also the younger brother, with his feet hanging over the end of the bed. She looked closely at the two brothers and at the bed. Hundreds of feathers were scattered about the bedroom, and she wondered how it could be that just down the hall in the kitchen she had not heard it cry out during childbirth.

Two packed seabags set by the younger brother's closet. He got up from the bed, flicked the feathers off his uniform, and asked, "Have I forgotten anything?"

The older brother said, "Your feet."

He sat down again on the bed, and took off his yellow, decaying feet.

The wife said, "We'll throw these out."

Shortly the two brothers listen silently to the whirl of the kitchen garbage disposal.

When the wife came back the younger brother had already put on his old feet. Her husband said, "They look just like the feet you had in 10th grade."

They gave him a ride to the airport; just before the plane departed the two brothers embraced. She kissed the younger brother on the cheek, then the two of them waved until he disappeared inside the airplane.

Her husband said, "He's on heroin, but still he's my brother, so I'll do it again and again and again..."

And he did. It got so frequent, in fact, that the parents gave up staying at the Holiday Inn, it was just too expensive, and for the funeral stayed now at their old house, in their old bedroom, even though she was annoyed by the new wallpaper.

# THE MOON, SHE SHINES SO BRIGHT TONIGHT

*Douglas Crowder*

a cool blue bean,  
seeps thru mr. white's window tonight  
only to be lost  
in his hundred watt g.e. desk lamp

he sits in his wooden chair  
tonight  
    reading keats  
        drinking water

his feet  
    on nylon carpet  
he smiles  
    and remembers  
        that all is fine  
the moon, she shines so pretty tonite

mrs. white now lives with her mother,  
john lives in omaha,  
and kathy's moved to kansas city

she reads a postcard from him  
(john never did write too good)  
and lights another marlboro

"not much to do now days"  
her mother babbles to herself  
white sheets twisted in twisted hands  
dry as a fallen oak

the moon she shines so white tonite

time to put little johnny jr. to the crib  
karen slides across the room

as supple as warm putty  
flashing gleem-white teeth  
at her breadwinner,

lost in the latest *newsweek*

\*\*\*

bill, he looks thru sharon's eyes,  
bloodshot,  
catching the waning fire  
tony and susan harmonize "maria"  
as miguel's fingers  
stumble drunkenly across the guitar  
the pine smoke curls so nicely  
and the west wind blows so warmly  
and the moon,  
she shines so bright tonite

## THE CONNOISSEUR OF ABSURDITIES

*P Mandel*

One stab in the dark and you have missed.  
a field of weeds without a plow in sight,  
a broken foot and  
a broken shoe.

The middle eye opens to see  
an empty cavern inside the earth,  
a dragon swimming in an underground stream  
not filled with water.

A bottle-cap that is really a sea-shell.  
voyageur from another place  
listener working to hear  
a little man at a blackboard inside a head--pointing at words  
with a stick.

look at the fountains acting as a chorus  
to a solo aria of a  
Dali portrait by Rembrandt--  
flying from right stage to left.

## **DECAYING BIRD**

*P Mandel*

left in a puddle of paint thinner or on a porch  
a bird that has an open cavity lined by stiff edges;  
Tilted on its back with its beak calling to the clouds.  
the puddle is evaporating--and so is the bird.

little ponds in an open garden.

## SUNDAY'S POEM

*P. Mandel*

A tree living in the wind on Sunday,  
gazing at land anchored to the earth--  
from sailing on water,  
sleeping in a chair.

One leaf on a cold Sunday's hour,  
thrown in a castle, resting on a plain--  
from behind a mirror,  
looking through.

## NEXT YEAR IN THE PROMISED LAND

*Jon Sacks*

### I

He knew better than to ride the subways at rush hour, but he was anxious to recover his suitcases from the lockers at Grand Central Station where he had left them earlier in the day. It was the cheapest way of getting there.

The ride was hot and uncomfortable and Joel arrived at Grand Central feeling worn and shaky. He collapsed onto a bench next to a lady with a Bloomingdales shopping bag and closed his eyes. The noise and clatter of the station gradually blended into a soothing hum, and he felt himself drifting into sleep.

"Joel?"

His eyes popped open, unfocussed.

"Joel Kemper?"

A woman with long black hair was leaning close to him, studying his features. He stood.

"JOEL! When did you get back from Illinois?"

She hugged him and kissed his cheek. Her hair and neck had the faint scent of a familiar perfume.

"I've been back since July," he said. His mouth was dry and tasted bitter. He was certain that his breath was bad and he tried not to talk into her face.

"Well why didn't you call me?" she asked, pouting and feigning insult.

His mind seemed dulled. Perhaps he was still asleep. He remembered her face, but he couldn't recall her name.

"Let me look at you," she said, pushing him to arms length. "You look really good."

He smiled and nodded, trying to concentrate and come up with a name. He couldn't.

"So do you," he said with an approving nod.

A high school girlfriend. Patty? Susan, He thought it was Susan, but he wasn't certain enough to risk it.

"Hey," she said, looking at her watch, "Are you in town for a while, I've got a date now, but we really should get together sometime later this week.

"I just got an apartment," he said.

She reached into her purse and brought out a pen and a matchbook .

"Good," she said, scribbling her phone number on the inside of the matchbook cover.

"Why don't you call me tomorrow?"

She handed him the matchbook and gave him a quick kiss on the cheek. It was too late to ask her to write her name above the number so he would know whose it was.

"I really have to run," she said, turning. "Call me."

And before he could speak, she was gone, blending into the crowd.

"SUSAN," he called after her.

She didn't turn.

Joel got his suitcases from the locker and took a cab back to 232. On the way, he tried desperately to remember her name. It couldn't have been Susan. If it was Susan, she would have turned when he called her name. He was certain that it started with an "S." Sally. Maybe it was Sally. No, Sally was another, similar girlfriend.

He started listing every woman's name he know that started with an "S." None fit. He decided later that her name probably didn't start with an "S" at all, and began listing every feminine name he had ever heard, starting with Abigail. By the time he sat down to dinner he was through the "B's." By "D" he was giddy. He started making up his own names. When he got to Evelyn he felt a numb paralysis creeping up from his feet. His head throbbed. He finally admitted to himself that he would never remember her name, and he fell asleep on the floor, under the skylight, hoping for some divine intervention. All night neon names of women he had known floated before his eyes.

## II

Later in the week the landlady invited him down for coffee.

“I’m glad you could come,” she said happily, “We’ve got things to discuss.”

“Joel couldn’t imagine what she thought she had to discuss, but he was willing to spend some time cheering a lonely old woman. He supposed that she had already bored all the other tenants, and that he was her last hope.

“What do you take with your coffee?” she asked, setting a plate of danish pastries and a pyrex coffee pot on the table next to him.

“Nothing thanks,” he said, “I’ll just drink it black.”

“Black!”

He nodded.

“That’s murder on your stomach,” she warned, eyeing him sadly. “You’ll have an ulcer the size of a baseball by the time you’re thirty.”

“That might well be,” he agreed, laughing. “But I seriously doubt that drinking black coffee will have much to do with it.”

“”Laugh, she said. “You’ll remember I told you. When my ulcer acts up, I could die.”

She pushed a small pitcher of cream toward him and pointed to his coffee cup.

“Have some cream,” she said. “Just a drop.”

She indicated the amount of a drop by holding her finger and thumb an inch apart.

“A tiny drop,” she repeated.

To please her, he poured some cream in his coffee.

“There,” she said, satisfied. “That’s good.”

She filled her own cup, half with coffee and half with cream.

“My ulcer,” she said when she noticed him staring at her cup. “I need it weak because of my ulcer.”

She sipped her coffee and pushed the plate of pastries even closer to Joel.

“So tell me,” she said, looking very serious. “What is it you do for a living?”

Joel winced slightly. He had written on the lease that he was an unemployed teacher. Maybe she thought he was going to cop out on the rent. He couldn't face searching for another apartment.

"I just got back to New York, he said. "But I'm a certified teacher. I shouldn't have much trouble finding a job."

"No? The lady upstairs is a teacher and she had a terrible time finding a job. She was out of work for a year. Maybe she can help you. She teaches in the Bronx. I'll introduce you."

"Thank you," Joel said, knowing that meeting a lady who taught in the Bronx wouldn't help him at all. "I'd love to meet her."

"So where were you?"

"What?"

"You say you just got back to New York. Where were you?"

"Oh. Illinois. At college."

"Ach," she said, clapping her hands together. "Illinois. That explains it."

"Explains what?" Joel asked, shaking his head. He had trouble following the old lady's conversation. She didn't seem to follow any logical pattern.

"The accent. The American accent."

"Joel laughed. The American accent.

"Where's New York?" he asked.

"You have family in Illinois?" she asked, ignoring him.

"No."

"I wouldn't think so. You might talk like Illinois, but you don't look like Illinois.

Joel noticed that she had hairs growing out of her chin. He could only see them when she turned to the side.

"So where's your family?" she asked.

"Long Island."

"Ahh," she said, nodding her head. "Long Island. Fancy. Why don't you have a job in Long Island?"

Joel shrugged. He couldn't stand Long Island.

"And why Illinois?" she continued. "What's in Illinois?"

"Not much," he replied.

"It's a long way from the promised land," she said, laughing.

"It sure is," he agreed. He wondered whether she tormented all her tenants with these questions.

"So can't Your father give you work?"

"My father."

She was doing it again. He failed to see any connection.

"Your family's in Long Island. Why can't Your father give you work?"

He wanted to shock her by saying his father was dead or dying.

"He works for the government," he said.

"The government," she said, looking impressed. "Fancy...How about an uncle? You got no uncles with businesses?"

"No," he sighed, "No uncles."

He was very tired of her idle questions. Maybe it showed on his face.

"Forgive me," she said, reaching across the table and touching his hand,

"I mean no harm. When you're old, you'll see that there's too much time to think. You get nosy,"

"Oh, that's ok," Joel lied, "it doesn't bother me."

"You're not hungry?" she asked, pointing to the plate of danish. "A boy your age should eat the whole thing."

"No thanks...I have to get going."

He saw immediately that she was hurt. She looked down at the table and tore at her napkin.

"No, please," she said very quietly, "Have another danish. I can't eat much myself."

"One more," Joel agreed, reaching for the plate. "Then I really have to go."

Relieved, she pushed the coffee pot towards him.

"Some coffee too," she insisted.

"Thank you," he said, taking the pot.

He understood that when he left she would be all alone, and he didn't want to hurt her, but he couldn't very well spend his day in idle chatter to please her.

"And you'll take what's left with you when you go," she continued. "I can't use it. I'll only throw it away."

"No," Joel protested. "Keep it for breakfast tomorrow."

He wasn't going to permit her to buy him for a half a dozen danish.

"I insist," she said, "I don't really like danish anyway."

He saw that he could never win. Each time that he protested she would become more adamant. They could spend the day at it,

"All right," he conceded, "I'll take them up. Thank you."

"Good," she said, standing and taking the plate. "I'll wrap them."

She walked into the kitchen and he could hear her panting and shuffling around busily.

"Oh. . . I almost forgot," she said, returning with the plate neatly wrapped in aluminum foil, "The whole reason I asked you down in tire first place. I was wondering if you wouldn't mind helping around here. Painting, fixing the plumbing, vacuuming. Just until you get a teaching job, I mean."

Joel felt he was being patronized and he flushed with anger.

"I don't think so," he answered gruffly.

"Why not?" she asked. "You don't like honest work? You can work off your rent."

"It's not that.

"Or I'll pay you if you prefer."

"How did you handle it until now?" he asked, thinking that he might be able to force her into admitting that she didn't really need him.

"A boy used to come in on weekends," she replied, "But it wasn't enough. He went off to college last month. Before that, my husband did it. It killed him."

"I'm sorry," Joel said.

"It was best. He was an unhappy man, my Jacob. He was in a concentration camp in Poland."

Joel paled. He couldn't bear to hear another concentration camp story. He hoped that she wouldn't continue.

"He saw himself once on a documentary. The British were I berating the camp. He jumped from the couch screaming 'MY GOD GERTIE LOOK WHAT THEY'VE DONE TO ME, LOOK WHAT THE FILTHY BASTARDS HAVE DONE.' He ran into the bathroom and locked me out. If I stood by the door I could hear him sobbing and retching, He was in there all night long,"

Joel wanted desperately to leave. He was afraid to move, afraid she might become hysterical if he tried to leave her now.

"The next day he acted as if it never happened. He never mentioned it again."

Joel stood. The old lady's eyes were glazed and she didn't seem to notice him.

"The next week," she continued, impervious to the fact that he was walking towards the door. "I was at the butcher on the corner getting a chicken for dinner when there was an explosion. People ran onto the streets to look. Mr. Lazar, the butcher, called through the door. 'Gertie,' he said. 'Come quickly...It's your building.' I knew immediately. They said I ran down the street calling his name...I don't remember. But I knew, when I got there, he was dead. I didn't go inside to look. The firemen told me. They said he was smiling."

Joel turned the knob quietly, and eased the door open. He didn't know what to say.

She looked up, her eyes returning from far off to focus again on his face. She stood and leaned towards him.

"I tell you this for a reason," she said in a hoarse whisper. "Because we can never forget."

Joel stepped into the hall and started to close the door. She ran to him and caught him by the arm.

"Never forget it," she said.

He pulled free and rushed to the stairs, anxious to get away from her.

“Young man,” she called after him. “Don’t forget my offer...I need someone.”

He heard her, but didn’t turn around.

# IMAGINE

*Barbra McNeel*

Imagine a ghost of stars  
falling  
like flickering ashes  
like white manna  
like blue dreams  
upon an underground  
of singed bodies  
buried alive

fat chance.

