

REVIEW HAWAII

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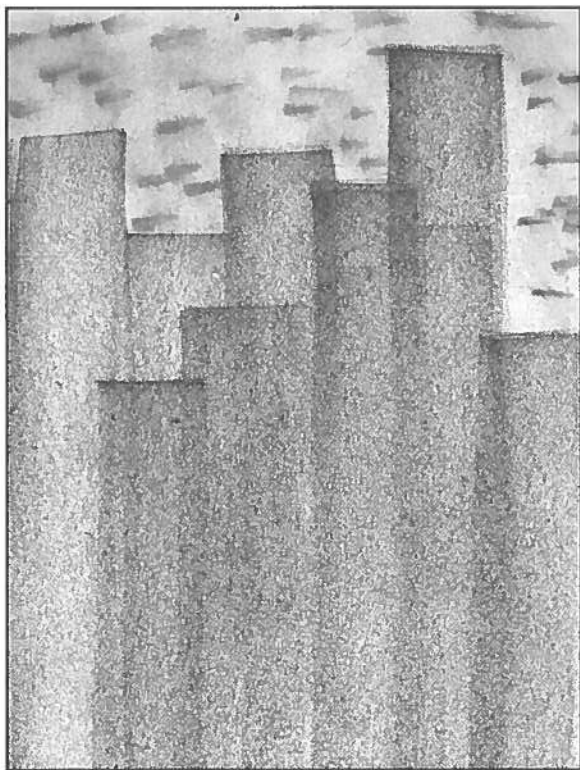
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Dream of Horses

In her dream there are horses lying on the ground – stylized copies of each other, beautiful duplicates without manes.

She severs their heads moving calmly from one horse to the next.

There is no blood and no remorse or sadness from the horses. They understand themselves to be sacrificial.



Toxic

All day she'd been planning things to make him happy; laughter was as alien to him as the man in the moon. Paper cups that said *Happy Birthday*, designed with colorful streamers and stars, a bottle of non-alcoholic champagne topped with gold tinfoil. She'd filled the cooler with ice cubes so they wouldn't have to pay a small fortune for drinks. Found some watermelon-scented bubble bath at the Dollar Store and looked everywhere for something for someone who liked having absolutely nothing in his apartment. Most of the people she knew were quite the opposite: apartments overflowing to distraction. Beacon Hill trash yielded virtual treasures like silver candelabras, original oil paintings and, occasionally, a Tiffany lamp. One of the friends she went to the opera with had even found a valuable period chair, its seat covered in original velvet, none the worse for the century of wear.

"If I'd known you were dressing, I would have worn something nice and we could have gone to a real restaurant instead of a take-out." She looked down at her red, satin basketball shorts, that were just long enough to cover her thighs, making a mental note to use, as soon as possible, the Helene Curtis depilatory kit she'd rescued from the Walgreen's dumpster.

The last time she'd used the product, it left a burn mark, like ashes, on her upper lip. Red satin was how her heart felt, if it were possible to feel like a color, so eager was she to makeup for the children Peter and she had never had, the lonely microwave dinners, the holidays with a barren tree. She knew he wouldn't even look unless it were out of the corner of his eye. Peter was a gentlemen. If he'd made a risqué remark about Jon Benet's picture when it had flashed on the T.V. screen announcing an upcoming movie, she'd surmised it had been out of nervousness. Child had been painted up to be a 6-year-old hussy. No wonder she was dead. Clarice never wore lipstick, satisfying herself with a bit of Vaseline, or a baby finger of lip gloss from a tiny pot. Women who

wore lipstick were out looking for trouble like those baboons in the zoo in heat.

"It's summer," she said, swallowing the 'it's about time,' for they'd had 6 consecutive weekends of rain. "I'm taking you to my favorite restaurant on Revere Beach." When she'd been a teenager, Kelly's was the only place she could think of to go with the family car. Her parents had been very strict. One hour and one hour only, she was allowed, so there wasn't time to pick up friends living in different parts of the city, never a joy ride out to find boys. She'd had brothers who brought their pals home, but there was only one she'd taken a shine to. An engagement Viet Nam had ended, leaving her bitter, wrapped in a smog of depression, dressed in black for what seemed like most of her life. Dresses to her ankles. Prayers for the dead. Nothing on her ears or neck to attract.

Almost everything Clarice Noftle knew about Peter she'd learned from his brother while sitting in his living room balancing a cup of tea on her knees. Clarice kept herself busy, but on Sundays, when the whole world, it seemed, was devoted to family doings, she would admit to a certain loneliness, and carry Peter to his brother's, suffer the chit-chat about relatives she knew nothing about, endure the endless chatter of times past, the brother-to-brother talks about baseball, bet-making, and what she deemed ignorant remarks about blacks and the Irish. Clarice had a car and the brother had moved from Dorchester to a town some distance off unattainable except by bus.

It was a one-story cinder block quite different from the roomy family home where the brother had raised five children, caring for elderly parents until their deaths. The widower was a good man, a hard worker, and at every visit Clarice was forced to admire the improvements he'd made. The garage, for example, that the former owner had converted to a playroom, he'd converted back, adding a door that opened and shut with a flip of his wrist on a hand-held gadget. A window was knocked out of a wall

in the kitchen with shelves displaying neat little pots with plants purchased at Home Depot. Recessed lighting in the living room was installed by an electrically-talented son. Clarice was always polite when the brother showed off his latest project, went so far as to compliment even the new soffits, but when he brought out his camera to photograph the two of them, her and Peter, as if they were a couple, Clarice felt a mental gag reflex.

"No," she demurred, the first time. "I don't like to have my picture taken." But then she'd acquiesced, so as not to be rude, sitting beside Peter, looking for all the world, like the pinched-up spinster she was, with a rat's nest of brown hair on the top of her head, pinned in place, wisps of white at the hair-line, skin the color of papyrus, because she smoked, and thin, drawn lips forced into a facsimile of a smile. She'd been wearing a shapeless denim dress with spaghetti straps, for it had been summer, and the one thing she'd liked about her body had been her shoulders, a bit on the bony side, but acceptable, she thought, making her look less like a plucked chicken. On the subsequent visit, when the brother showed her the photo, she'd asked for the negative, gone out to the car under the pretense of having to smoke, and with trembling fingers, shred it into tiny, unrecognizable pieces.

This past Sunday, Clarice agreed to drive Peter again even though she had a cold and she'd rather be snuggled in her loft bedroom, reading a good book on Byzantine art. Her Beacon Hill townhouse had recently gone condominium, and Clarice had been one of the first to plunk down a deposit, despite the fact that she was on the very top floor and there was no elevator. It was a studio, with a view of statehouse's gold dome, a postage-stamp sized kitchen, and a room large enough for her library and a Steinway grand piano, the love of her life, where she would practice assiduously for two hours each evening, barely cognizant of the chimes from the surrounding churches.

Every year, a week after Christmas, she held a soiree, keeping her family's custom of a *Petit Noel* with a cake spiked with a

plastic baby Jesus. Whoever got the special piece, got to be king for a day, wearing a cardboard McDonald's crown, ordering the other attendees to perform a poem or a song, whether it was the *Ave Maria*, Clarice's favorite, or a simple carol. Peter had been the lucky one that Christmas, a year or so ago, brought by someone she knew from church. With his whole lower jaw sunk in because he refused to wear false teeth, he made an unlikely king. He ordered a retarded woman to sing and by the time she was done with "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" everyone that wasn't crying joined in.

He had lingered after the others, and when the boon he requested was to see her again, Clarice, the hostess, going along with the game, quite against her better judgment, clouded a bit from the champagne she'd served, had agreed. He would ring her buzzer, climb the four flights of vaulted steps, with a shopping bag filled with food pantry cans, arriving breathless, thrilled to be in her presence. Thus she had been lead, little by little, to the Sunday obligation.

The tribe had been busy digging holes in the front yard to plant their birthday gifts: pink geraniums and a purple stalky thing Clarice forgot the name of as soon as she asked (the older she got, the more the loss of her short term memory). A daughter was fastening a new brass mailbox to the side of the house. A new planter of petunias swung from the eaves and a wheelbarrow displayed the brown, dead carcass of a spruce bush.

Under a mauve patio set umbrella, Peter's brother held his first grandson, a child with a misshapen head, sucking a pacifier. Clarice kept her distance, what with her cold, and coo-cooed the baby, wagging her fingers and making appropriate sounds. She loved children, especially babies.

"How is your leg?" she asked. Peter had told her the doctors had found out that the last operation had been done wrong and that another was scheduled for September so that he could enjoy the summer, his leg confined by a rubber bandage. He

would be exercising it daily in the YMCA pool where his kids had given him a membership for Father's Day.

"Terrible," he answered back, grimacing. He'd almost died after one of the surgeries from a staph infection. Peter was afraid to have repaired the hernia he seemed to perpetually carry on his right thigh like a diseased penis, elephantiasis or leprosy, adjusting it every now and then, when it became uncomfortable, pulling at his waist band and juggling, totally non-plussed. Clarice would always avert her eyes, beg him at least to buy a prosthesis –a truss –to hold it in before he got peritonitis. If she hadn't been so easily embarrassed, she would have gone into one of those stores with the rubber contraptions hanging in full view and bought one. It wasn't the money. She made a good salary as a legal assistant.

She was fond of the old coot, something nearly bordering on love, as if it were her mission to save him. She would nag and he would agree, like they were an old married couple, and he would never do anything about it.

"Have you ever been to his apartment?" the brother had asked once while Peter had been in the bathroom. "Absolutely nothing. Just a ring of canned goods on the periphery of the living room." Clarice was surprised he'd been able to use the word 'periphery' and 'no' she'd never been to Peter's apartment.

Anything could happen if a woman went to a man's apartment. She was curious, but not enough. Bad enough she was forced to uplift her cheek, lately, every time the brother bussed her goodbye.

"No soap in the bathroom? No towels to dry off with?"

"Nothing," the brother had said. "Not even a bottle of milk in the refrigerator. I gave him my old bed and I'll bet he's still sleeping on the floor."

And on the phone once, when she'd called him to ask about prolonging the life of her carburetor: "You should have seen him at his mother's funeral, totally unkempt, a long beard. And....he came late. You're really doing wonders with him."

Clarice fancied herself a homespun psychologist, studying the internet when she wasn't practicing her fingering exercises or reading.

Peter, no doubt, had one of the 130 different kinds of schizophrenia, the way he always bunched up tissues in the form of a biscuit, or a small diaphragm, and lined up 2 or 3 water glasses, like a barricade, when they went out to dinner. The animal noises she couldn't help but hear when he went into her bathroom. The way he never wore a jacket even in bitter weather. But what she found strangest of all, was the way Peter's brother had been so quick to disseminate information that she, herself, had considered indelicate.

She'd handed the brother the present she'd brought, wrapped in heart-studded paper. A bottle of lavender-chamomile body wash. "You should be giving this to Peter," he said, broad-smiling, obviously pleased she hadn't come empty handed.

"No, it's for you," she said, though Peter's ablutions, or lack thereof, actually, had made him a cause celebre. The daughter had refused to have him at her wedding. A brother so ready to betray. Clarice felt a proprietary pang, poor Peter! He had an integrity that seemed lacking in others. His brother was so unlike him....obstreperous, almost, gruff and confrontational. She hadn't forgotten that his watch had come up missing and he'd asked her if she'd taken it. His wrists were twice the size of hers. What would she do with a man's watch, anyway? A cheap stainless steel thing. How she had seethed. The men she'd kept company with in the past had worn Rolexes. Gentlemen, all, but no longer alive.

"The lavender is for the depression you have, facing surgery," she said, sweetly, her Sunday face on. "The chamomile will help you relax. I'll get Peter some bubble bath."

A different Peter met Clarice at the Lechmere stop, the following day. He was clean-shaven, as he sometimes was, but the wrinkled woolen, high waters he'd worn the day before had been left behind. Burned, Clarice hoped. The ugly green shirt, replaced

by a cottonish brown short-sleeved shirt, matching, somewhat, a pair of neatly pressed trousers. She'd promised to take him out for his birthday, hoping he wouldn't make smutty jokes about being 69.

Peter had the sad custom of making bad jokes just for something to say, a habit she knew would be hard to break. If she wanted jokes, she'd told him, more than once, she'd go see that Jimmy Tingle who played locally at his own little theatre. Tingle had replaced Andy Rooney, a man with yellow teeth, who made very bad jokes at the end of 60 Minutes, which Clarice had been watching, faithfully, for some 30 years. She could see why the older women newscasters were being let go, though she disapproved of all the politically incorrect things that people did.

"You look nice," Clarice said, finally. "What a surprise." She'd kept the radio on during the drive from Lechmere. It was easier than having to listen to Peter. Invariably, he found a subject she wasn't interested in.

Luck was with them. A parking spot directly across from Kelly's. The lines of barely-clad beachers would pass quickly. She'd keep her eyes on the signs to see if their prices had changed. Avoid the ugly belly button piercings, the hairy men in muscle shirts. Oh, how good it would be to breathe the ocean air, get a little sun on those flounder-belly-white arms and legs, stick her nose into the sun to dry up her sinuses. She rolled the window down, gathered her purse, then half-turned in her seat to get Peter's order.

"Have anything you want, birthday boy. On me. Their lobster sandwiches are a treat."

"Just get me a cup of coffee," he said. "I just ate."

Clarice had never been more livid. Her parched lips pulled against her teeth in a feral snarl. If the man was looking for negative attention, he was going to get it.

"Are you crazy? You already ate when you knew I was taking you out to dinner?" She was totally losing it, screaming to

beat the band that used to play, before her time, in the abutting concert conclave, louder than the seagulls fighting over scraps in the barrel on the sidewalk. She'd been relishing over and over, all day, in her mind, worrying the sumptuous repast like a dog with a bone, from the hot dog to fried clams, and then back again to the clam chowder. And now she wasn't even hungry.

She rolled the window up, embarrassed at her outburst, turned the car toward home. At least she'd had control enough not to call him an idiot. She wouldn't hurt him for the world. But who in their right mind would eat 5 sandwiches...just before he was being taken out to dinner?

Peter took her abuse with typical stoic resolve. He'd never seen Clarice so out of sorts. He was quick to make allowances. Almost as if he couldn't hear. All the way home she fumed, sputtered, and glared in his direction. She could think nothing good about him now, the boor. She was sick of listening to his nonsense, stories about World War battles, dead uncles and aunts, places he'd point out where he'd once lived. Sick of trying to grow old gracefully. Sick of his gifts of Progresso and day-old Aus Bon Pain croissants. From now on there were going to be changes. Instead of poor Peter, she was going to think about herself. At her age, she didn't have time to waste. But still, she wondered about those animal sounds she heard when he would go into her bathroom, innocently wondering if had something to do with his hernia. Her brothers always did their business quickly, and the most she'd ever heard was a steady, hard stream hitting the side of the porcelain. Maybe a thump, thump of the toilet paper roll.

When they reached her aerie, huffing and puffing, up, up, and up, Clarice brought into the kitchen: the party cups, the champagne, and the cake which she'd had decorated at the patisserie. She made him a cup of coffee, black with 6 sugars, the way he liked it. Alongside him on the paisley settee, she half-smoked 2 or 3 cigarettes, stubbing them out with angry twists in a mother-of-pearl ash tray so they looked like worms.

“And don’t be leaving your cup on the floor the way you usually do,” she regaled, shrewishly. “I hate lazy people. Please bring it into the kitchen from now on and put it in the sink.” Then she disappeared to get the cake.

“Make a wish,” she’d ordered, still discombobulated, as he would call it, a word she’d grown toxic to. By now, anything out of his mouth was anathema. “Make a wish and have it be about anything but me.” Peter blew out the single candle, a candle that was supposed to sing, but didn’t. Clarice had never seen such a gleam in his eye, positively lascivious.

There was no doubt about it. Disgusted, she went into the kitchen to cut the cake, startled to see him at her elbow as she was writing the card. He was just about to empty the ash tray into the wastebasket, trying to be helpful.

“No, no,” she said, appalled, tucking the card under a hot plate to give to him later. “One never empties an ash tray until the next day. There could still be a live cigarette. We don’t want to start a fire.”

“I’m sorry,” he apologized. “I can’t seem to do anything right tonight. My head’s just not right. I won’t start thinking as quickly as you do until I have my third cup of coffee.”

“We’re just not in sync,” said Clarice. “I get up at 6 in the morning, just about when you’re going to sleep. And if you used that bed your brother gave you, maybe you could start getting a life. Normal people around the whole world sleep at night. The way you’re going is very aging, besides.”

“Thank you,” said Peter, slowly, after they returned to the living room. “This was the best birthday I ever had.” He felt totally confused and his thoughts were fragmented. His brother had been telling him to get more aggressive, but he wasn’t sure how to go about it. He loved Clarice for her honesty, but he knew he wasn’t the kind of man most women wanted. He knew it was all his fault, but he didn’t know what he had done. He could eat 5 sandwiches in his sleep and still have room for dinner. He’d even

told her.

Clarice had wanted to give him a hug, she'd felt so sorry. But the thought of rubbing up against him, even for an instant, was entirely too much for her to handle. That ugly life-threatening bulge. A kiss on his balding head, something she'd never done before, gritting her teeth, that was enough. And probably more than he deserved, though her refrigerator had been recently filled with cartons of yogurt he'd brought. It would take a month of Sundays for her to eat them all. "Bon nuit, Peter," she said, dismissing him, since the hour was late. "I hope you have many more birthdays. Better than this one."

As Clarice climbed her wrought iron spiral staircase, one careful step at a time, she could hear the door click. She breathed a sigh of relief. At last she was alone in her life, a life she had chosen, giving her the liberty to choose whatever she wanted. She allowed how she was happier that way. But before her head hit the down pillow, she ruminated about Peter's smile after he'd blown out the candle, the noises he made in the bathroom, and how long it would always take him. She doubted now if it has anything to do with defecation. She'd had brothers, after all. It had never crossed her mind that their friendship had been anything but Platonic. She'd been violated, somehow, and the thought, the imposition of it, filled her with self-hate.

What an idiot she'd been! And to think it had taken her so long to figure it out.



Snowdance: Entropalizomeno 2-24-03

"It is not good to be alone when it snows slow long strong. Silence can kill so talk on the phone or visit neighbors." Hazel Tree

Over the intimate pain of a stomach ache
I realize there is something to be done
other than keep on, anyway.
Simple Tums. (I buy Tums.)
The clowns are planted
and I think how sometimes
Eva just doesn't understand.
Like how snowfall's like orgasm,
contained, dancing.
We argue about that.
Well oh, hers is the most recent
experience, that, with the thrum of a man
whereas I am back to mechanical devices
having thrown him out or
let him go like that fucking seagull
they say that if you love it let it go.



Broadway Boheme Update: 5-23-03: Pink Beret

I've been somewhat shaky in my words
these past few days
so I am glad to go with Tom
to see the dancing fog, snow
which flutters mothlike to the stage
fire a black clad man
crouched behind the stove, waving flashlights,
orange-beamed, round and round.
O this modern day Boheme,
the saga of the pink beret
(on sale for thirty plus as souvenir)
red velvet clothes, bloodless death by cough.
I wash my eyes with tears
at love's last breath. Lucky her who does not
live to grieve.

Disappearance of Rumors

He's washing dishes again, this time
at a Greek place. They thought he looked
Greek. He's shooting up again.
Out of boredom or self-loathing
or an inability to time-travel.

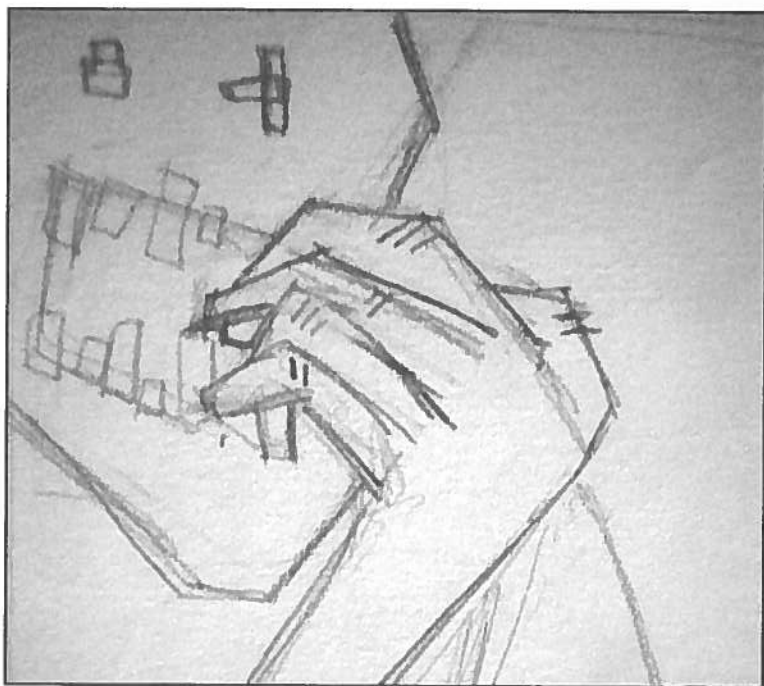
We once climbed over a barrier and past
warning signs to stand in a hollow
under Taquamenon Falls, water
rushing over and around us, an epic
rainbow of sound and pure dream sizzle.

He no longer asks me for money
and I no longer ask about much.
We stand in the alley out back,
one yellow light haloing down on us
like old sins. It is what we share,
and briefly. He nudges me back
out to the sidewalk. I count
my backward steps.

A river can flow, even inside a square.
A waterfall can exist, even in a heart.

Pick-up at Closing Time

bar lights flicker —
together they light a torch
head out into the night
to track down the monster.



Throwing Out the Kit

At the bottom of a box of old letters
something hard: amber vial, flip-up
coke spoon in the lid, razor blade,
cutting stone—"kit," as if to build
an ingenious model out of magic dust
and willing membranes.

Oh sweet,
sweet residue—enough for a thin line
still dusting the inside of the glass.

Blurred nostalgia of rorschach
flashcard sex, silent heart flutter
tender words drilled into the depth
of mirage.

I run my finger over
my gums, then toss the kit, keep
the ache.

Tequila Frenzy Night

Fifty cents a shot.
Salt. Lemon. Glasses
hit the table like gunshots
from cheap toys. We spit lemons
across the room. They drip
from our ragged beards. The bar
shrinks to small heavy glasses.
A country band twangs
out smothered desires.
We hop the rail onto the dance floor
like we're in a movie, but
we're only drunk in Bert's again.
The drummer pounds each shot
into my forehead. I take the fall
twisting my ankle. I stumble out
the door, limping past dark storefronts
and the last blinking light. *Why?*
I imagine I want answers or at least
ice. My ankle throbs. Salt and lemon.
Tears and grimace. The cold dark stain
of a road disappearing into cornfields.

Becoming a Regular

Your face is the first thing they'll remember,
then odd habits like clanking your glass
with an index finger, dashing salt into your beer, or staring
deep into the murk of the mirror behind the bar.

They'll memorize your drink and bless you
with a name in honor of the cocktail you love best—
JD or Wild Duck or Ms. Scotch-on-the-rocks until
the bartender introduces you to the regulars. Someone

will offer you a light or bum a cigarette, move from his usual
stool and tell you about his life, the wrecked marriage, how
his kids won't talk to him, and no one gives a shit, really,
not even his parole officer. They'll expect to hear the details

of your bad luck: How old were you when your old man split?
When'd you take your first hit? Who got the kids? They'll ask
where you're from and wonder what twist of fate gave you
permission to sit at The Finish Line all day. Then,

while standing in the shower or sitting on the toilet,
you'll suddenly think about one of them, wonder where they live,
what the house looks like, how did your lives end up crashed
and piled in the salvage yard of a bar?

Some days they'll listen to your problems.
Some days they'll tell you to get lost.
They'll buy you lemon drop shots and share warm cashews.
Together you'll scratch instant Lotto tickets, pray

for God to drop a million in your pockets, watch
The Price is Right, complain out loud when your contestant
doesn't win, slam your middle finger into the air. And when
one of you doesn't show up for days the rest will begin to guess

what's wrong and ponder calling the police. Several call your name
when you walk through the door, that thin, trembling spine of light
right in front of you; they'll raise a hand or beer to toast your arrival:
this is how you'll know how much they love you.

Nirvana That

They are everywhere here. You see them everywhere. It's a damn shame. Filthy, aching, red skin burnt or bundled in 95-degree human stink sweat, pushing their shopping carts full of white and blue plastic bags, Longs and Safeway, Kmart and Foodland. Bags full of crap. Stinking socks and car batteries. Cats teaming with lice clinging to the heaps of refuse. Mobile cat shit piles, pushed by schizophrenic, homeless waste.

They are thieves. They stole my brand new mountain bike three weeks ago. I used that bike to pedal the 2 miles to work. They stole my bike right out of the guarded parking lot. They steal, they peer at you, they group in the shadows in the park. They chase the families away, they trash the place. They need to go. Somebody else needs to do something. I've done my part already; I've done enough.

I like it here. I found paradise. Really. It's been almost nine months since I came here from New Orleans. I've got a good job, I've made some friends, I have a nice place to stay. The apartment is on the 6th floor, looking out at Ala Moana Park and the beach. That's definitely sweet. My friend Alex is letting me stay with him, as long as I want he says, that's because he's still hung up on me. It gets weird sometimes, but that's his problem. I have a place to stay, a nice room with an air conditioner. A lot of people here can't say they have that. I pay some. I pay the electric. I'm clean. He could do worse. I'm his friend now, everything is better. We hang out sometimes.

People here are ok. I've made friends. People make friends easy here. I've dated a few guys. Peeps have trouble keeping their word, I notice. They live in the now. They say it's the aloha thing, but a lot of people live in their very own "now." Especially guys. I have to be careful. I like cute guys with blue eyes. I like to be with them. Hey, I'm normal. But I'm a little gullible. I have to

be careful.

Work is ok. It's the oldest private club on the beach. It's at the foot of Diamond Head, totally prime real estate. I was lucky to get a job there, even though it took a month looking. The tables are open air and sometimes we stand around when it's slow and shoot the shit looking out at the ocean. You can see the fireworks at the Hilton on Friday nights; that's always a trip. It has its own beach where they go out in these long canoes. The people are cool, mostly. This girl I work with, Missy, is awesome but she's in one of those weird abusive relationships and can't afford to dump the guy. We all need a place to live. It's so expensive here. It's a survival thing. No one wants to end up on the street. It is so very possible. They are there, everywhere, living in shadows.

Sara was cool too, but she just quit. She knows her way around. She upgraded to waiting tables from stripping. Maybe got too old for that. I mean she is not old, just maybe too old to put up with that shit. They say the money is good. I thought about it once or twice but I don't want to do it. Not without being drunk. I'd have to be drunk all the time. It would help if my boobs were bigger too. I'd have more confidence. I know I have a great ass, just for the record, cause I've been told so a lot, and I once won 150 bucks in a wet tee shirt contest in Louisiana for shakin it. I damn well know it wasn't for my boobs. Don't get me wrong. I'm not flat, but I'm no Queen Latifa either. At least its all me, you know? Honestly I've been thinking about doing something about that. Its on my to do list in the "maybe" section, after a gecko tattoo on my ankle. I've been trying to get a piercing in my upper ear, tried twice, but it got infected both times so I had to take the stud out. Any little infection and the lymph nodes in my neck swell up like grapes and scare the hell out of me. They say nothing's wrong with me. I'd like to see how you would feel with lymph nodes in your neck swelled up the size of grapes.

Hell, I just turned 24. I'm not supposed to be worried about my health, or if I have enough cash to pay the bills, or

homeless people ripping off my stuff. I work hard at the Outrigger. Real hard. You try running around putting up with asshole management on your feet all day. My legs hurt so bad sometimes I just can't think. I work hard and don't get paid a lot. So it really pissed me off when my bike got stolen. I have a real strong sense of right and wrong. I get pissed off when people cross me or act stupid. I had just chained the thing up in the parking lot of the apartment for a couple of hours on my break working a split, and when I came down it was gone. The security guard said it was vagrants. I made them call the HPD. I filled out a police report, missed work. It was a real violation. I'm still pissed off when I think about it. A real violation of my stuff.

That's what got me started looking out at the park whenever I was home in the evenings. I figured sooner or later I'd see some guy riding my bike over there. I'd sit on the lanai looking out at the homeless people crawl out at dusk. They are a real problem in Ala Moana Park. Somebody should do something about it. Don't they care what the tourists think?

Alex was out on the lanai drinking a beer with me and pointed to the little gutter that runs along the road. Its like maybe a foot or two deep with water at the most, and there was somebody down there, ankle deep, one of the schitzos, doing the weird shit that they do.

"That's the plastic bag guy," he said. "Always wears a plastic garbage bag for a shirt, bare feet, shaved head. Dude looks like a Buddhist monk in a baggie."

I'd seen him before, roaming around like some of them do, looking for stuff to steal so they can buy meth. They roam around on their hopeless, homeless errands, disturbing normal people.

"He praying or something?"

Alex says, "No, looks like he is digging in the mud for something, sifting with his fingers."

"Its some schitzo religious ritual."

A lot of them do stuff like that. One guy just stands on

street corners with no shirt or shoes and looks at the sun, arms raised, staring. I've seen him looking up at tree branches. Another runs back and forth across Ala Moana Boulevard, no shoes or shirt either, dodging cars, maybe hoping somebody will hit him so he can sue them. There's an old lady downtown that rants and raves, cursing out loud, shouting religious stuff.

I feel sorry for them, really, I do. But they need to get off the streets, get in a home or something. They ruin the park, scare people, leave piles of crap and cardboard and push carts and the skeletons of bikes stolen and trashed. I worked hard for the money I paid for my bike.

We were still wondering what the plastic bag freak was doing when he stands up suddenly and stares right at us. I mean we were on the 6th floor, across a 4-lane road, actually its 5 lanes there, counting the turn lane onto Piikoi, and he looks right into my eyes.

See, that's the kind of thing I mean. Staring at people, working people, in their homes. Totally freaked me out.

"Dude, I don't like that shit."

Alex goes "What?"

I'm like, "You see him looking at us like that?"

"Man," he says, "Let's go inside."

So we went in and played GTA for a while, then Alex took a shower and went out with his girlfriend to a movie at Ward Center. Sara was supposed to call me after she got off to go have a drink, so I waited, looking out over the lanai. I don't know why I was creeping. The windows are covered with mirrored plastic film for the sun, so he couldn't have seen me, and anyway he wasn't there anymore. Sara never called; people just don't do what they say around here. I was zonked from being at the beach all day, drained and whooped, so I crashed in my room and fell asleep right away, the window AC humming its pleasant white noise like it does.

I was going to spend the buck fifty to take the 19 to work,

but I got down to the street early on Sunday morning, and it was, of course, a beautiful day, so I decided to walk to the next bus stop, then when I got there, I decided to walk to the next, and by then I was almost at the Ilikai, so I just kept walking. Tourists were crawling out of the hotels, looking for breakfast, mostly Japanese families with kids in push strollers, kids that don't know how to sleep in yet.

I stopped to look at the giant fish tank on the corner, cause I really like fish; they are so peaceful swimming around in that tank. Wonder why they don't eat each other. I bet they pick them just right so they don't. The bigger fish could easily eat the little ones it seems to me, but everyone gets along.

I realized that there was someone looking at me, watching me. That's not so unusual—some times I get looked at, you know. But my heart thumped hard when I realized it was the plastic bag Buddhist. Dude was looking at me, with this dopey face and it hit me hard when I heard the words, "You are a searcher."

Guess what? That voice was not a guy's voice. The plastic bag Buddhist was a woman. I looked her over real hard, and thankfully she kept her distance. I don't like the way homeless people stink, sometimes you get a whiff of them sleeping in the storefronts on Nuuanu, but I try to hold my breath when I pass and I look straight ahead.

A haunting, singing, Asian voice. "You seem to be a seeker, always looking," she said. I looked into her eyes. What a dammed mess she was, bare feet, shaved head, black plastic trash bag taped on as a shirt. She wasn't old, and her eyes were clear, but she wasn't young either. She stood with her head slightly cocked, imploring.

"I don't have any money," I said.

She shook her head and smiled. "Break the bonds of worldly passions. Drive them away as you would that eel," she said, pointing to the bottom of the glass.

I'm like, "Whatever," turned and walked away.

Just trouble these people are. That's what I thought then, that's what I think now.

I walked to work quickly, looking over my shoulder once in a while. Two people didn't show up because the surf was up at the North Shore. Just great, I have to work harder to cover their tables but do I get any more pay? I'll give you three guesses.

I've got to tell you about the stuff I put up with. There was this old couple, sat down at my table right when I was supposed to go off shift. I mean really old. Anyway they are both like, blind. The man can't see a thing and she's not much better. I'm like, how did these people get here? Turns out she wants to talk, and she tells me they took the bus, they always take the bus. Amazing. Well, she hassles me over the menu...like, does this come with french fries or a baked potato? Can I get this without the cheese? Stuff like that. Like they haven't been here a zillion times over the last five decades? Well, guess what? She orders the old guy a steak. Guess what? He has no teeth. None, zilch, rien, nada. So she's like, "Can you cut up his food for him?" No lie. I'm like no frickin way. What's with these people?

I finally got rid of them and walked out the door. I always stop and pick a plumeria or two for my ears or my hair. I love plumerias. They fall to the ground from the trees so you can pick them up. They are perfect for a while...white, orange, pink.

Then they turn brown. Sometimes I reach up and pull them off the branch, nice and fresh, but mostly I just pick them up from the bushes where they fall. I picked up a real beautiful, perfect flower and like I always do, blew on it, just in case there was anything crawling on it. So guess who is standing in the middle of Kalakaua? The plastic bag Buddhist bum-lady. And she was staring right at me, head cocked, with that same look. This time she was smiling. She had followed me and was waiting for me. This is not cool, I thought. I looked around to see if I was about to get jumped by her homeless friends, but there was nobody around. She waved at me to follow her, and she walked Diamond Head,

slowly, looking back at me to see if I'm following.

Don't ask me why I did it, but I followed her, probably curiosity or something. I mean it was broad daylight, and I'm thinking I could take on a bald, skinny, homeless broad in a trash bag, easy. She goes over to the big white fountain there on Kalakaua, which is about 200 feet from the Outrigger's driveway and waived at me to come over. I stood on the side of the street and she got busy. Crazy booger has got a bunch of plastic homeless person bags stacked up against the fountain. Maybe 15 of them, filled with sand. I see after a while that she is carefully, slowly emptying the sand into the fountain.

She focused on this schitzo chore, and let the bags empty in painful hourglass streams. I watched her for a couple of minutes, felt like an idiot standing there, turned, and walked the 2 miles home. It was Wednesday and the runners were eating fruit and drinking bottled water in front of Nike World. So I know it was about 7, still a beautiful day and I was thinking about the cute but married Belgian chef at the Outrigger and I forgot about the bag lady for a while.

We went out to the Wave that night. I had a few cape cods. Alex was acting stupid drunk when I left, trying to dance with me. But I wasn't in the mood for him. I wasn't quite spinning as I tried to sleep, but I dreamt of sharks in the water, which I guess was a surprise. I don't usually dream after I've been out drinking.

She was there the next day too. Waiting for me. I could see the plastic bags full of sand at the foot of the fountain, but I didn't follow her. Alex had said she was just crazy and not to worry about it, but she gave me the creeps anyway. That look she had, like she was somebody who knew something, something deep. I guess curiosity got the best of me. I have been accused of being cat-like. I like to stretch and sit in the sun, watching. I'm not really a hunter though, so my cat thing only goes so far. I stood looking into the fountain, to see what the hell she was doing, and I swear, the bottom of the fountain, all around, must have been 2

feet deep in sand.

This is not a little fountain, its really quite huge, go over and see it for yourself sometime. I've seen people having their wedding pictures in front of it, big ass limos parked right there. She must have been doing this for months. Anyway, she smiles at me and starts talking in that seductive singsong of hers. I realize right away its religious bullshit. Now I'm not against Jesus and stuff, I mean I believe in all that, but this other stuff is just so much Ouji board crap. I asked her what's with the sand and she said, "Water is round in a round pail and square in a square pail, but water has no shape."

I'm like, "Umm. Ok."

Then she said that some people are like letters carved in rock. They get angry and stay angry. "People should be like letters written in running water," she said, "never remembering passing thoughts, they let abuse and pain pass unnoticed."

I could see that she was writing with the sand, Chinese or Japanese characters I guess, but they kept no shape in the turbulent water of the fountain. I asked her why she wore a plastic bag. She said that her clothes were only necessary to protect her body from heat and cold and to conceal it. Leave the dragon alone, she said. I watched her work. She was concentrating, purposeful.

"Times of luxury do not last long, but pass away very quickly, nothing in this world can be enjoyed forever. Just as treasures are uncovered from the earth, so virtue appears from good deeds, and wisdom appears from a good and peaceful mind." She stopped pouring for a sec. "Do you like flowers?" she asked.

"Yes. I like plumerias. Alex calls me the plumeria queen."

She smiled. "In this land there are many fragrant blossoms, and each has many precious petals; and each shines with beauty. This radiance brightens the path of wisdom, and leads us to perfect peace."

"Don't you have a place to stay?"

"A disciple must give up family, social life and depend-

ence on wealth. A person who has given up these things, and has no abiding place for body or mind is a disciple and sister."

"All good," I said. "Works for you...more power to you."

She was pretty sure about all of that. I actually liked listening to her talk, but I got that creeped out feeling again and I was like, "Dude, I got to go."

She said, "There was a man who fell into a drunken sleep. His friend stayed by him as long as he could but had to leave. Fearing his friend would wake up in want, he hid a jewel in the drunken man's pocket. Not knowing that his friend had left a jewel in his pocket, the drunken man woke up and walked around in poverty and hunger. A long time later the two men met again and the friend told the poor man to look in his pocket for the jewel. Don't you wander around looking for something that you have right here," she said, and put her hand to her heart.

I turned and started walking, but I'm thinking I should have said something to help her. Maybe an encouraging word and a pat on the baggie shoulder. I'm not a rocket scientist so it's hard for me to remember all the stuff she was saying, other than what I already told you, but the weird thing was the voice was still in my head for that long walk home.

I've got to say I didn't really look into the store fronts or even exchange glances with the cute surfer dudes. I had my head full of her voice and at first it was soothing and all, kind of reflective, but I started walking faster as I realized she was probably following me. She was so smart, saying things I couldn't really remember. Things she said meant I was wrong somehow, and I'm not wrong. So I got a little pissed at the whole stalking and preaching thing. Here she is wearing a trash bag making me feel like shit, even though I'm out there humping, busting my ass to make a couple of bucks cutting up old blind man's food. It's enough to make you sick to your stomach.

I guess I didn't sleep well that night. Her words came back to me, better than my less-than-perfect memory can usually

muster. I guess she was right about the things of the world. No matter what people have they never really seem happy. It's always something. Look at all those rich rappers, getting busted for drugs and murder. Divas like J-Lo with everything in the world, running through dudes like ex-lax through a rabbit. I guess I slept on it. I wonder if I woke up changed or if what happened was just me after all.

Sometimes things come together in your life, like a play where all the disconnected scenes come together for the rousing final act, and it all makes sense. Plays are like that. I'm sure life ain't like that at all really. Because in life, when it all comes together, its not the time to go have a latte and talk about the plot. Its time to face reality. Cause you still have to pay the rent and get to work and put up with the shit people dish out at you all the time.

When that bald-headed baggie broad was dribbling sand into that fountain, murmuring her crap about love and hope and nothingness and charity, I could see she was doing all that for a purpose. Digging around the beach where a million tourists a month thrash about, pulling off their clothes, scrumping, dropping their money. All those watches and rings, you can bet she was shifting that sand.

I know I saw something shiny in that fountain, maybe a diamond ring or something like that. I am thinking that she had a lot of stuff, maybe a bunch of coins and maybe even more hidden in that sand. I know now what she was babbling about, I could see it in my dreams that night, the truth nagging at me, tugging, pushing, grabbing me by the hips, ready to enter me.

So it all came together. I tried not to think about all that stuff hidden in that fountain. It made me mad to think about that wry bald face, her whole head cocked, telling me how to be happy, telling me how to live my life. It all comes together sometimes. And it did.

I came out of work with my legs aching, throbbing from standing, waiting tables all day. It was so bad. I barely had the

energy to pick up a single white plumaria, I was so beat. But it all came together on that street. It was getting dark. She was waiting for me, third day in a row. I looked down Kalakaua and there was no one around. The 14 bus was coming hard. It was the thing to do.

She was so light, so easy to body slam. The thud was loud, and I realized that a shower of plumerias flew up from her hands as she went down. She had a whole armload of them I guess. Psycho homeless, always collecting shit. I ran back into work and sat in the empty break room for a while, listening to the sirens come and then stop, and then, finally, wail away.

I picked up my black backpack and walked out into the street. I ignored the lights of the cop cars. I've been trembling since I got home. My air conditioning is humming.

Alex is out somewhere with that Japanese girl. Later when it is really quiet I'll walk down to the fountain the long way, by the Ala Wai, where it's dark. If there's enough in the fountain I'll move out on my own and do my own thing. Maybe I'll pawn enough for a moped. Maybe not. We'll see. Nirvana that, baggie bitch.

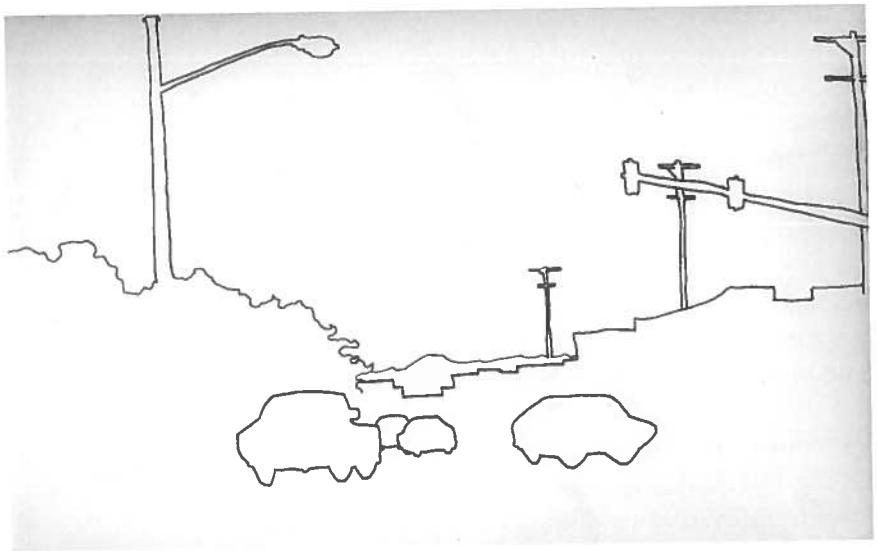
Tetherball

Here, we're sinking
Lead bellied, trailing jellyfish:
short hiccup breaths gargling,
gulping frosted pints of formaldehyde,
coughing up the sorriest *those day's* ever
muttered worth a blink, a sip or a
Good God or Goddamn,
while treading these barley tides

In a thimble,
Gasping quietly,
I'm sitting with the old boys of
A fourth sun, raised and fallen
In the western sky.
Raindrops drowning in a waterfall's mist,
Choking on mouthfuls of
Tapioca mucus:
The most palatable mix
Of old time cancer and Crisco
Spinning cardigans of dysentery
To snuggle up against,
Near the first of a few last calls
We might hear throughout the course of
The night: one more, the same as the rest.

We could die complaining about
Dying but stand lifeless as we speak,
Looking down our noses,
Down at each other,
Excluding ourselves from the equation no less:
Chins high above the bottle, saluting each other like patriots
To self-pity: the nuisance of notions of destiny and
A fine fate, filing tonight and tomorrow under

Fathoms of pillow stuffing,
Dreamlessly
Trying to feel
The tremor and the heartbeat of far-off cannon fire and
Trying to feel
Awry that there is nothing beyond the sea but pirates.

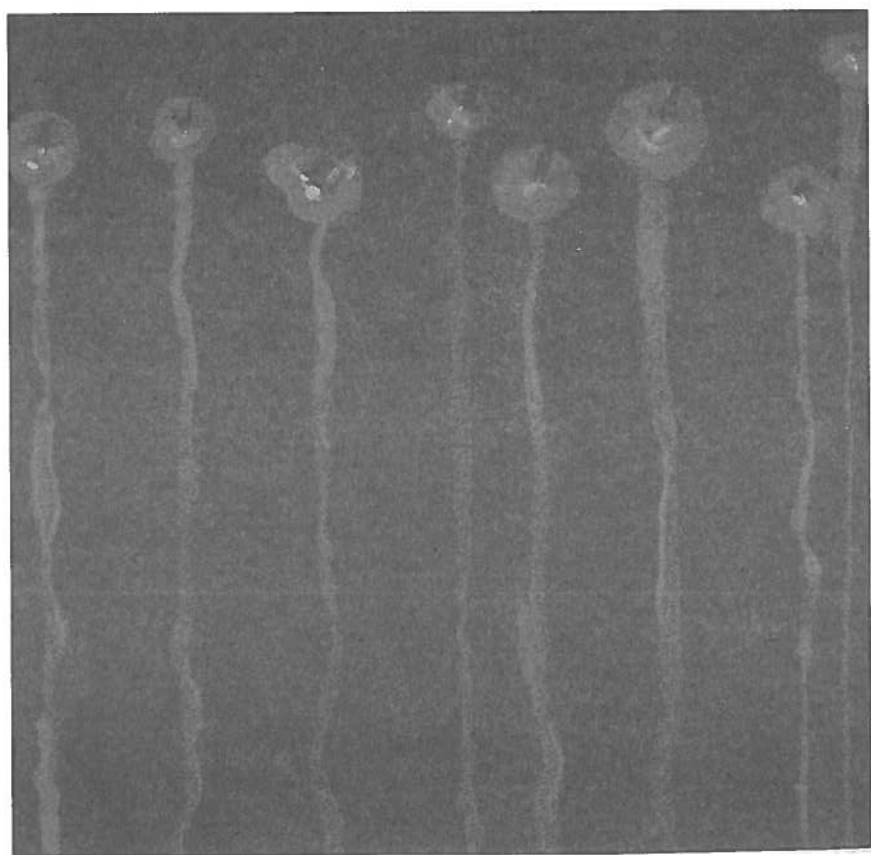


The Sound of Waves

if laughter begins
as it peels from the lips
of a wave, then it ends
in the sunwhite shell
with the soft bodies of our brains
curled within

these beaches we know
by the way the coral burns
white stars in the blacknight sand

how Scorpio swings a fishhook tail
how the sound of waves
is like the voices of children
when they think
no one
is watching



You

My chin is both pointed and round; my cheeks, full and angular; my eyes, misshapen and square. I have three breasts: one small, the size of a walnut, chipped and cracked; one large, the size of a pomegranate, ripe for a good man's palm; and the third hangs like an orange in a sock nailed to the mantle at Christmas. My nipples are dark--there is hair on them despite my effort, and your desire, I cannot dream away--and I have no hair, not anywhere. I am a Picasso.

One of my legs is long, a sun rich brown sinuous eye-path worn smooth from my manicured toe to the soft curve of my hip; the other is short and squat, cottage cheese white and rough from lack of travel. I limp to the northeast, my good leg in the lead. My stomach is the span between my breasts and legs. Hungry men have scanned its vastness, both mountainous and flat, looking for something else. My head bobbles upon it all.

I was imbued with a belief: I dreamed of being a fire station's Dalmatian, a trash man with a big army green truck to call my own, an astronaut crawling inside the moon, and an entrepreneur with a business in each state.

My mother was different. She dreamed a simple dream: to be a secretary. And, she was. She is. She plotted along the expected timeline developed by maternal ancestors in conjunction with paternal counsel, and on her seventeenth birthday she climbed the gray stone steps of an unnamed gray stone building housing the Reilly Insurance Agency. Her knees were knocking as she held her pale hand out to shake the hand of the man who was her new Boss. That is, the Boss the neighbor who lived across the street, who also knew the Boss's next-door neighbor, had referred her. It had been rigged, but she desired no more for herself. My father was a client, an owner of a small but not prosperous (although still promising (back then)) business, until he met her. She left Reilly's to become his secretary and wife, a dual position, and he

even my three breasts won't lure you closer. You've seen my leg. It's enough. You return to your car and drive away after a cursory glance. A glance you forgot the moment it was given.

My daughter calls my name from her room down the hall. Mama, she calls again.

Listen to what she and my son call me. Hear my husband call me Wife. Note they do not mark my skin with tattoos.

I turn my head, my hand compressing our pillow so I might look at my husband's dear face. You are still asleep.

She calls again.

I slide from beneath our quilt, and slip my arms into the sleeves of my robe.

I stand beside her crib, my hands resting on the rail. The brown speckled tile is cold, the fabric of my robe, thin. She sleeps. It's only a dream she's reached for me in. She's on her stomach with her legs curled underneath, her little rear-end in the air. I worry she'll kink her neck so I roll her onto her side. Then brush my lips against her forehead. Her new twin-sized bed waits against the other wall. It won't be long, now.

We keep the arrangement we made on our wedding day: you clean inside our home and once you start the mower, I take care of the grass. I crave the heat and wildness outdoors while you desire the peace and solitude within. Our daughter, she'll sit between your calves and try to tickle the bottoms of your feet as you kneel over the toilet scrubbing with my pumice stones. She follows you, her body teetering side to side as she practices her steps.

We warn her about you, each one of you, as my parents did not warn me. She will not conform to your definitions.

I showered and changed—perhaps into my floral shift

from the secondhand store on the corner of Fifth and Valour, or the Kathy Lee designed little black dress I purchased last night at Wal-Mart—and I went to work as your clerk. I answer your phones as instructed, "Simon, Smith, and Associates, Lawyers on Call, how may I direct you" and keep the smile in my voice; I open your mail by slicing the left side edge of the envelopes and peruse the enclosures for documentation, correspondence, invoice, or advertisement; and I transcribe your words verbatim, with the exception of grammar corrections, from the pocket-size tape recorder you gave me for Secretary's Day. I complement your communication skills.

Our office is on the ground floor of the Mason-Mannox Building downtown. My reception desk sits low behind a brown paneled doublewide podium ten paces inside the glass door. A bell rings when a client crosses our threshold. You control the volume of the bell. There is one black leather chair with silver metal arms and legs and one end table, no lamp and no plants, in our lobby. I do not recommend sitting in the chair. I greet your associates, and when necessary direct them to the restrooms in the exterior lobby, women to the right of the elevator and men to the left. Sometimes I feign forgetfulness and withhold the key to the women's room—I am its keeper. The men have no use for a key. I tell you when you return for it, so sorry I forgot! And laugh with you, soft and polite. You might linger (I hope you do) at my podium and meet my misshaped eyes with yours—yours, as I want mine to be. You might speak a truth I can use to make them so.

My desk is piled with papers I sort, categorize, and otherwise organize so future generations of employees will have no difficulty digging out the past due notice from Stanley and Lontley Water Purveyors or the Murphy's claim against the Nodwellans for violation of a property line. I am punctual for my shift and never take my breaks—I don't smoke thus I also save on benefits—and I return from lunch at the allotted time. I volunteer to work late (an unspoken expectation) when the phones, mail, and

transcribing outpace my filing. I want you to notice me — not me — my work. I receive an annual increase of one percent for my services. I don't calculate the conversion to cents per hour anymore. Instead, I tell myself, my Mother, and anyone else, who will listen, this is a stepping-stone; I am on my way.

I believed it to be true. I was not an anomaly at State University. I received my education under the premise women had been educated since before the Romans first paraded their power. My courses were not limited by gender. I followed the rules and was allowed to let my dreams soar. I heard tales of a glass ceiling, but glass isn't steel — if, even the stories were real.

Our son's room is opposite ours. I approach his bed, careful. He is a light sleeper, too. My bare feet have become cold and I wrap my robe tight, my arms crossed over my breasts. My dear husband, he has your eyes, your face. Even in sleep, he is miniature you.

He helps me as I push and drag the mower, my good leg street-side for anyone to see. He runs ahead, his shirtless thin brown body darkening under the sun. He picks up rocks and sticks in my path. Then he wraps his small fingers around the sidebar of the mower handle and I tell him, you are a strong little helper.

I ask him after dinner as he clears the table, what is daddy teaching you? He tells me Hindu. I gather him in my arms and kiss his little red cheek. Both of us laughing, our eyes on your face as you smile back at us. Daddy is funny, I say. He listens, watches you. Teach him well. Teach him to be a Man like you.

You are my husband — yet I hid my Pyrex and the crock-pot on your first visit. I pushed my house behind the palm tree in back — the fronds covered the tile roof, but the terrier barked and

one of the two spare bedrooms stuck out the side. I didn't want to frighten you: I am like the rest. I'd made a pork roast and the green beans were boiling. I showed you my leaking faucets (from the kitchen sink to the hall bathroom tub) and the air conditioner filter covered with the dust of two and a half past summers, and you felt better. I saw it in your eyes.

I didn't tell you I bought a filter the day before but hadn't found the time for installation. I told you my father helps with my mortgage, although I knew he'd been dead three years. Your eyes fell on me and for a moment, you waited, and I thought maybe you saw through the veneer. Maybe you saw the truth. I forgot to breathe as I waited half hoping you might. But then you reached for my good breast, after all.

As your lips moved down my neck you pressed me against the counter and I leaned my head back. I worried about the other breasts: mainly the one that hangs. I couldn't say I'd gotten it at a boutique. But you'd seen my leg and read the tattoos, the ones I deny exist, the ones I couldn't hide.

The ones scratched and chiseled onto my skin with a variety of engraving tools including but not limited to long painted fingernails, multi-color needles, ice picks, screwdrivers, and crochet hooks. They are words, words that cover my forehead, my chest, my arms; they curve the length of my spine. Words like child, daughter, virgin, slut, innocent, unmarried, independent, prude, wife, Mine, mother, bitch, whore, married, dependant, feminist, professional, broken, hussy, and spinster to name a few. I use pumice stones purchased at Paul's Hardware to scrub them away. It leaves my skin red and raw, but blank. Blank for moments at a time. Moments I treasure. Until I step outside.

I am a professional, a Business Woman in a sharp navy suit. My skirt is short on the side of my good thigh. I operate as one of a team of forty-five consultants to burgeoning mom and

pops like Apple Pie On the Side, a bakery, and The Slip Inn, a neighborhood bar and grill. I have ideas I will present to you and the team utilizing the overhead projector and slides of charts depicting the demographics of the south city region.

I gathered and researched my data at the County Public Library. I signed my name, in cursive, on their Internet access waiting list and carted their three-inch thick hard bound books, containers of information from the cities' sewer systems to the census of your neighborhood, to and from their polished pine tables and portable shelves. I sample-tested my data for soundness. I walked the streets and queried the business owners and patrons, at least those who overlooked my bad leg.

I memorized not a speech, but my key points, confident in my knowledge of the subject and my ability to respond to questions. I've learned along the way. I want you to ask me questions. I know your answers. I rehearsed before my husband as he lay next to me staring up at our fan. I covered my points and perfected my hand gestures to be informative—pointing to a slide here, opening to invite inquiry there—nothing obtrusive. When I finished he turned on his side, propped his head up with his hand, and looking into my eyes asked the questions, minimum, you should have asked.

You didn't. You see my long hair and how it falls and shapes my face—a shape I copied, one designed and sanctioned by leading Rodeo Drive Cosmetologist Dave Plunket who appeared on Phil Matten (a daytime talk show I tape). You don't see the angle of my chin, or the greenness hidden in my square eyes. You see my low cut scooped blouse and dream of the cleavage that must be snuggled among my breasts. You imagine your hands finding the way. You follow my movements as a dog follows a wagging bone. You watch. You inch your chair forward to get a closer view. I tell myself, he's like the rest, he's seen it before, I am nothing new.

I see your glance, again, and hear your bell, again. I take

one step back and lean against the glass window tilting toward my bad leg. I think of my husband and what he would do to you if he were here. If he knew. If I told him.

I pause in my presentation, but you don't hear me stop. The Executive Staff Meeting Room is on the twelfth floor of the Mason-Mannox; its windows overlook The City. I can make out the ant size people below. There is no pattern to their movements as they scuttle down the street past cafes, gift stores, and office building entrances. From this distance their sex is indiscriminate. I wonder if they know that. From this distance, they could all accomplish the same thing. If I were down there, you would hear my words. The fan above ruffles the shape of my face.

I have three key points left, and half a sentence dangling, but I turn off the light on the overhead and ask again, my hands at my side, Questions?

You thank me and loosen your tie as you stand extending your arm in the gracious offering of your chair. I sit. My elbow rests on the cedar table and my index finger taps at my temple. You recommend Apple Pie On the Side relocate to the north city region—and the room, the team, the world, nods unified agreement—but you didn't listen to me, and you didn't look at my handout designed to aid the reading of my charts.

Apple Pie On the Side is not surrounded by a retirement community as you state, which could prove to be a limitation, but by a growing neighborhood of young families—parents between the ages of thirty-five and forty-eight with 2.5 children and 1.75 more on the way. An elementary school is planned for the corner of Filmore and Unity in the year 2001. A strip mall, to include Thompson's Grocery, is planned for the location of Samuel and Horne, across the street from Apple Pie's location. The community is growing, and I have this information in front of you, but you didn't listen, you didn't ask questions, and you didn't read my chart or my handout.

I pause in our bedroom doorway. You haven't moved. The birds have returned to our tree. I am glad. My robe slips to the floor and the morning chill touches my skin leaving goose bumps in its wake. I take my place again, next to you. Skin to skin. You stir.

I am most comfortable when the kids are in their beds tucked in, safe, and I am here, naked in your bed, in our house where I can wrap myself in your arms and be. Be, that is, as you know me to be. You listen. My boss is a jerk, they all are, you say. You take my side and next to you, I believe:

The women and men of my office, the leader of my team — my Boss. You do not notice my physical features or my dress, and I do not notice yours. I correct your rudiment understanding of my presentation without being conscious of my tone, my word choice, or my mannerisms. I do this as I sit in your vacated executive-style chair, my elbow on your cedar table, my index finger at my temple. The room doesn't become silent. Eyes don't bore through my back challenging me to find the breath to continue, challenging you to assert your authority. You let me keep my job.

I don't wear a Graff polyester pantsuit that comes in solids: soft pink, a sky blue hue, daisy yellow, and lime green. I don't coordinate the suits with Graff's polyester mix-and-match floral print button-up small-collared blouses. I don't remind you of your mother or the older woman (you don't remember her name) that lived next door when you were a child. The one who watched you from behind the block walls and closed windows of her house as you played shuffle ball in the street with your friends. The one you knew was there, but ignored. Her tufts of blue-gray hair, her sunken eyes peeping from the aged loose flesh of her face as her gnarled finger joints clutched at the edge of her dingy ivory linen curtain. I'm not cursed to see in the mirror the reflection of a secretary with the desire and skill to be so much

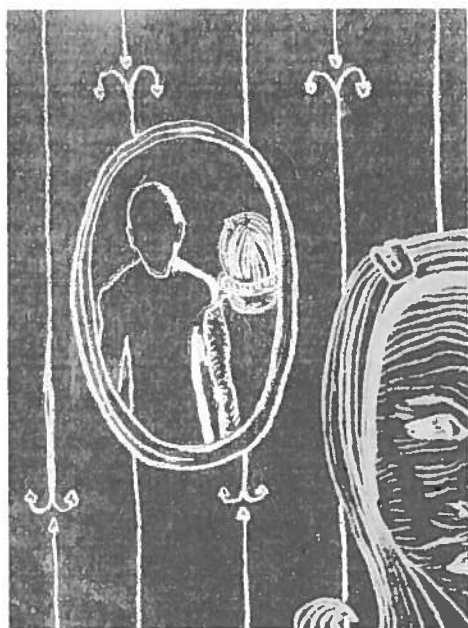
more. I am not my Mother.

I look to our fan; I am like the three missing blades spinning and whirring above. I know they are there. I dust them every other week so your allergies don't get out of control. But I can't see them. I can't see myself.

I want to be with you, my trusted soul – to feel you inside of me, to feel your strength, your power, your voice. I want to be true...

My voice aches for breath. I'll try. I start to speak, but it is a whisper. I force words forward, but they disperse without a sound, lost, before they find your ears.

The bed squeaks as you move on top of me. You raise your upper body above mine and wait; I smile and raise my head to kiss the tip of your nose. You touch me with your thumb, brown and calloused and warm, it slides across my face. This is my opportunity. Stop! Speak! My brain screams. But I'm lost again in the strength and power I love.



Salvation at York Beach

Would you meet me off a jut of coastal-rock
near midnight in rain, yellow-slicker,
collar rolled against the wind surge
off the white-nippled water, hands cupped
to ear-shout the dirtiest deed of your life?
No five dollar confession, no descent to the knees.
A quarter to light a candle, watch smoke
curlicue toward an absentee landlord. Jesus
is not listening. He is playing poker, smoking
an oscuro maduro-wrapped Fuente cigar.
Above all, he knows the pleasure of
taking on flesh, of mutating beyond spirit.

We are very wet, quaking in the cold off Maine.
*We have all killed everything in the universe
with our thoughts, I shout. We have all loved
everything on this planet at least once.* All the
known and maybe a bit of the unknown—love—
for a nanosecond, maybe more. Like children
we once tried to eat all the mud pies, the toy
cars and the dolls. Finally, we insatiates
tried the books. Someone bit a chunk out of
Raggedy Ann's behind. Ink-drool and a smile.
Years later kids shot their schoolyard playmates.
A mother drowned her two babies on God's order.

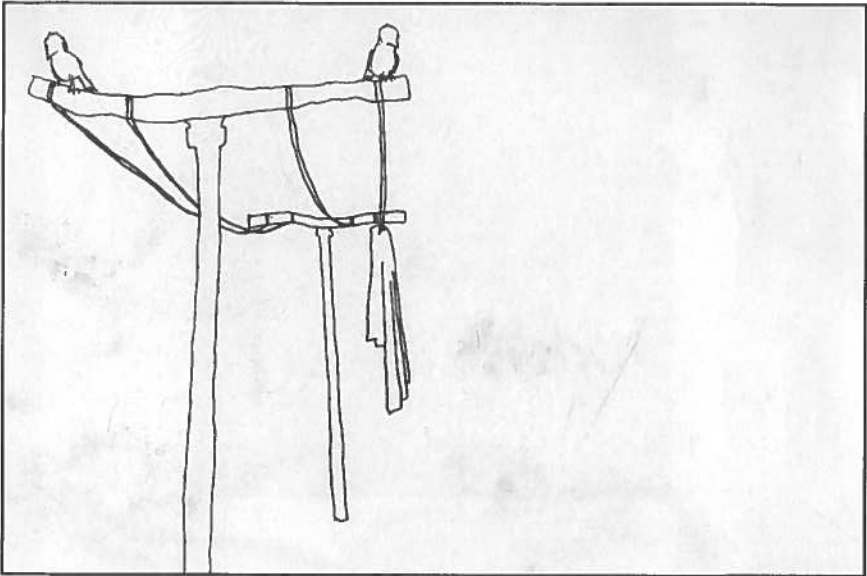
What darkness can we both leave off this coast,
where nearby, a shop window displays two sets
of robot arms, a couple in a futuristic kitchen,
pulling out confessions in steady chromium arcs,
rich skeins of yard-long butterscotch taffy.
Let us leave only the sweet for the ceremony.

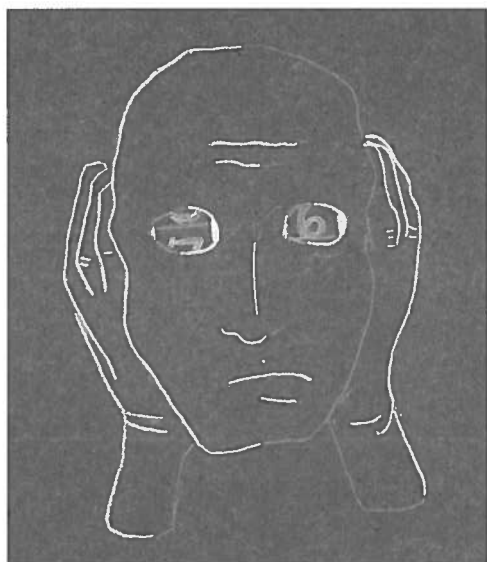
We are now so wet, you shout, this is baptism.
Let us sing Zippidy-Do-Da to the sea, while holy
water zings in our open mouths, rich as blueberries
down by the power lines, plonked in tin cans.
Sing with forgiveness. Hum us across the water.



Iwa Birds

Two dark iwa birds
rode the currents of tall wind
across the face of the full moon.





Giantomachy

A young woman, in love with a sea god and invested with some ingenuity, walked seventeen miles to the ocean and sat on the sand. She sat on the edge of the waves while the stars glided up into the sky – and scooped water into her lap until she got pregnant by the sea god. It wasn't exactly romantic. But then again, it was her first time and he was gentle. The night was so peaceful. She found the experience perfectly delightful.

Soon she bore two sons. Her sons, somewhat freakishly, grew one cubit wider and one fathom taller every year. So, by the time they were nine years old they were as big as a stack of elephants.

They, strong as elephants – as brash as well – climbed Mt. Olympus to attack the gods. They climbed, issuing challenges all along, and then waited – brash – for the gods to come to the battlefield. So young, so hopeful, waiting, waiting. So doomed. So decimated, smashed, razed, maimed, cooked, aborted. So patient. Waiting, elephant-like.

The young mother stood at the base of the mountain, looking away out to the ocean. So sad. So sad to be a mother of ambitious, tall boys.

feet are really gone.”

“I thought something like this would happen when you started walking.”

“Why didn’t you say something?”

“I didn’t want to be controlling.”

“Thanks. Now look at me.”

“I know. Freaky.”

“No stranger than you losing your hand to work.”

“True,” he said, rueful. He looked at the stump where his hand had been. He slid off the bed and pulled her towards him and into a broad hug. “I’m sorry for your feet.”

She put her ear against his chest and closed her eyes. That afternoon he went into his workshop and didn’t come out until he had fashioned her a new pair of feet out of corncobs. She held the feet for a second before slipping them on. They had sockets for attaching small wheels if she wanted to roll, not walk.

He raised his eyebrows when he pointed out the wheel option; he said, “Even better than the originals.”

“Corncobs – what do they stand for?” she asked.

He shrugged. “I don’t know,” he said. “Maybe nothing?”
But he was wrong. Everything has to stand for something.

Houseguests

First they get married and move into a small house together—humble in the way a first house should be (a starter home, Phillip says (“No, no, a sweet house,” Becky says)). They plant two trees in the middle of the back yard: a peach tree and a cherry tree. They can’t know they will live for fifty years in the same house.

Three days in the new house and they begin the fighting that will mark all their years, fights that rustle back and forth like the tides of the ocean. The fights start out small—“Where did you put my toast?” or “Your hair—it’s exactly wrong today,”—and inch larger—“You can’t keep calling me the wrong name,”—and ultimately become huge—“Everything about you is a tragedy!”

Children are born; they grow up in swampish hysteria; they move away to wonder why their parents stay together; they move in with their own lovers; they, too, fight with their lovers.

And over the years, the branches of the peach tree and the cherry tree grow, intertwined.

When Phillip and Becky are close on their seventieth birthdays, two gods come for dinner. They just come visiting, disguised as Australians. They have tried one thousand houses and one thousand doors have been slammed in their faces. Phillip of course lets them in; they’ve come such a long way. Becky and Phillip are, surprisingly, perfectly lovely as hosts—feeding their guests well, taking their shoes, rubbing their feet, sucking their toes, giving them fine wine—but never once do they stop yelling at each other. “Can’t you do that right?!” “Shut up!” “You shut up, you son of a whore!”

After dinner the gods strip themselves of disguise. Phillip and Becky are surprised but flexible.

The god with the beard explains, in a voice like milk trickling from an udder, that they are wandering, testing people’s hospitality.

“Hospitality is hard to find, times being what they are,”

flesh and bitterroot. You looked almost exactly as you look now. Your thick black brows like little ledges over your eyes so round and dark in the sunshine . . . remember . . .

He thought of the girl as an exotic animal come down from the woods north of the monastery. But her eyes, golden as a cat's, were so warm, laughing. No animal laughed like that. She saw his excitement and laughed at it. She saw him bending double, like an old man, to hide his excitement, and bit back a smile. She spoke. Her breasts spoke, her belly and hips spoke, her hair spoke in golden tongues of fire. She said, "I have some pears for you."

She handed him a basket, weighted lightly. In it were two rose ivory globes the size and weight of her breasts, and covered with a thin white cloth, exactly the same kind of cloth that made up her blouse. "They're sweet," she said.

He thanked her. She squeezed the charm between her legs. He turned and stumbled back to the far edge of the garden.

That night he committed a mortal sin. His body wouldn't be quiet, even after he'd released it twice. She rang in his ears. The pears were sweet, sweet and yielding to his mouth. He ate the flesh, the seeds, the stems. He put the woman-scented cloth to his face and used it to clean himself afterwards. And he didn't confess. Not the next day or the next week. He carried her inside of him. When he thought of the pears, his mouth watered. And something opened up between his legs. Something like a road he could never walk.

He watched the path.

One day she was just there. His hands were on the roses and the shining hips ripe to bursting. He put one to his mouth and broke it open with his teeth, something he had never before done. It was surprisingly bland inside, seedy. It was the flesh of it that had caught him.

I put the thought into you that the hard red bud of the rose hips

was equal to something round and red and secret inside me. Though you had never been with a woman, certainly never seen a woman naked, this shape was familiar. So that when you looked up, you put down your work and followed me. When we reached the cover of the woods, I put my hand on you, and led you through the darkening forest, my hand your guide.

He felt her touch on him and found that she was leading him, like a child leads a pet lamb. He was mortified and some voice in him cried in alarm. But it was stilled by her eyes. She meant him no harm. He watched her walk before him on the path. He watched her hips sway and when she turned, her breasts were in his hands, as if he had picked them fresh, from a low hanging branch.

Sweet darkness in a small clean barn. They made love in the hay, and he traced her body's shape against the sky. The line of her leg and cheek. His mouth watered even after he'd tasted her. She knew he loved her. She knew that was all he was capable of.

She took the charm from the inside of her thigh and gave it to him. It felt hot and frayed. The string that held it was soiled. He looked up at her. Was she giving him something of the Devil's?

She was watching him very closely, as if he might betray her. His hesitation hurt her and he couldn't bear that. He closed the charm to his heart.

He wanted to wear it near his heart but the string around his neck would be noticed. He tied it around his chest, under his arms, but as he worked, it slipped and finally he tied it around his waist, so that it hung near the small curling patch of hair that she loved.

He had been missed the night he was away. Not only that, but the smell of lovemaking clung to him. One brother, the gate-keeper, was more watchful than he seemed. Not all the monks had

She didn't tell him about the child she knew was coming. He had chosen. His choice had been to give life and then to hide from it. The brewer's son, who had always loved her, asked her to marry him. She refused, saying her child had a father already.

She began to dream of a love charm. A charm that was made of her hair and golden straw and rose bay willow herb. A charm with a brilliant red string that bound him to her. That wound around her swollen belly and wove him into her arms. Her pregnancy didn't stop her from wanting him.

He was grateful when the snows came and covered even the tangled tree branches piled beneath the eaves. God was with him again. He knew God. Once he had heard a bird singing so close behind him in the garden, and he heard the moment when it began to sing with God's voice. Sweet and piercing to the heart. But when he turned around, God had stopped singing and the bird cocked its head and flew to another branch, sounding again like a bird on morning business.

Her hands had filled him with such power. The ache of being alive.

Towards spring, he began to hear a baby crying in his dreams. Its voice was mixed with the animal sounds she'd made when he was pushing inside her. She had cried out with pleasure that night in the cave, and he had found that he too was making sounds, a kind of moan was coming up out of his throat that he'd never heard before. Sometimes the baby's cries were mixed with the sounds of the bells ringing Matins and sometimes he convinced himself that cats were mating on the wall beneath him.

Spring released his thin body from its sleep and he felt the insides of his arms go warm as the streams ran free again. He was sick with love. But he had cured himself with fasting and snow and he would cure himself again. He would bury his sickness in the earth deeper and deeper until it stayed down.

Birth was easy for her. And her milk came in quickly. Her son had his father's curling black hair and wide eyes and she laughed when she saw him and held him close.

The bans of her wedding to the brewer's son were announced in the parish church and he knew then that she had his child. He found the charm in his hands during his prayers one night and wept. The next day, she was in the garden, under the tree. Her baby was in her arms suckling her sweet milk.

The pain of seeing her made it impossible for him to stand. Her white breasts, so full now, the milk of her unsuckled nipple staining her blouse as the baby fed. The ache of his desire, the scalding in his heart. He crawled to her on his hands and knees. He buried his face in her skirts. God had said no. God had said he wasn't to have this woman. But he was only alive—only in the full breath of life when he was with her.

"It's simple to live," she said. "Just be alive. I'm not married to anyone yet."

He looked at his child and for one eternity, held his tiny son in his arms. The baby opened his eyes wide and saw his father's face streaming tears.

"Next time you'll have to look harder for me," she said. "I won't be so easy to find. Or to keep."

His back as he walked up to the monastery was as straight as when she'd first seen him, the cowl slipping a little to one side.

The ache in him wouldn't leave. The heat wouldn't die down. Perhaps that's why, one spring night, soon after she was married, he walked into the river. The river was outside God's domain. He escaped God. He walked in and gave himself up to the current.

When she heard they'd found his body, she was angry. She

was angry at the river for taking him, at the birds who didn't warn him—or her—at the land that stayed still beneath his feet as he walked to his death. All the voices of the earth that had been her companions were her enemies. They had let him die. He had died in plain view of all the living creatures of the river and shore and not one had moved to cry out.

She made her way to the water, and began a dance for him, dancing in the current, her arms high, she stripped off one after another of her garments and sent them down the river. At last she was down to her shift. She dove down, deep, deeper, looking for him.

Why didn't she stay and take care of their little son?

He was taken care of. Her grandmother, aunts, sisters. She gave him a father by dying in her lover's wake. It was now publicly acknowledged who the baby's parents were. The Church gave money to the family for the boy's upbringing. But he was never given over for a monk.

What happened to the charm?

I have it.

Awakened

If only longing were dead, the sparrow
not breaking its bright lips
there between knife acacia and living stone.

But I have no idea what God
is, or is supposed to be. I'm not yet very hungry
to know why Schumann wrote
so many glass songs. Sleep will cause this,

apathy. Darkness and light,
bread and ice, apple slice and round
rocking rib. And somewhere

outside the cries of man being burned, flesh
eaten by fire. This happens
certainly in history, but not to me. Before

morning, I kneel down
and have the seven year dream: I'm flying, I'm touching
long white beard, two fingers on
the fleshy mask's pink fat lips. What beast is

this behind, steering me over
the Yucatan, in the air —
over the stone blocks, the now
crashing now burning
cities? A drum, and stone tower,
grapes unblinking on the vine.

I'm holding horn. There's hair on it.

Below, the ripping
of a man's heart out of himself. I'm
worlds apart then—
Jungle. Lightning. Goat. Frog.

I fell in love but with what.



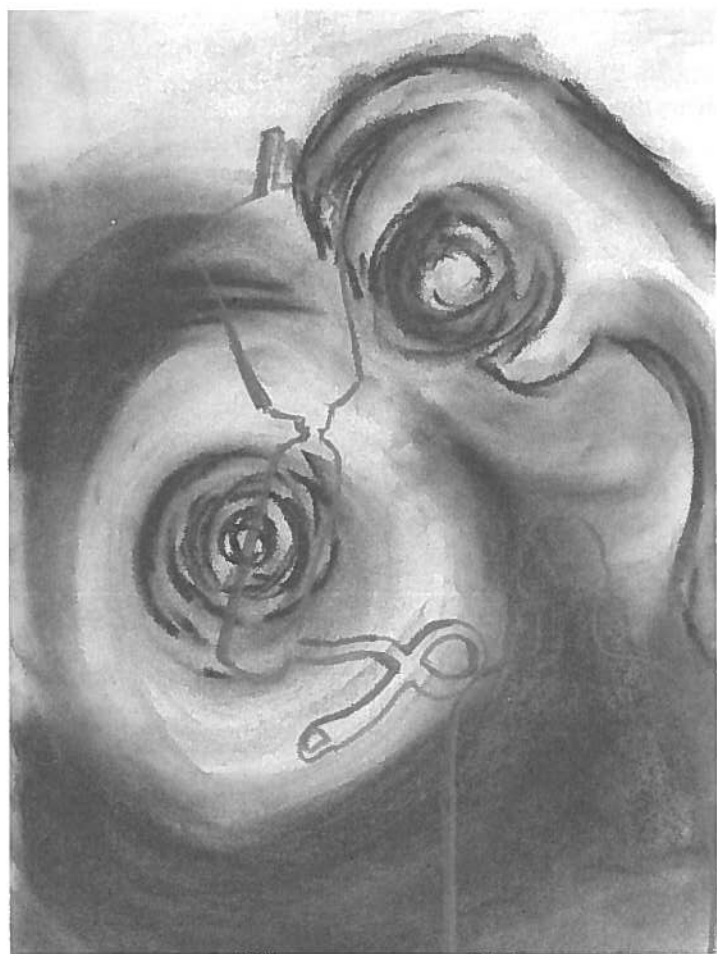
Ms. Ellsworth

And one day the porcelain
doll is alive, a dead little girl
eating a Popsicle. Ringlets
tight in their twist
spiral downward like rinds
cut from a potato with a slow boy's
knife. You're white
skin is so poisonous to the touch!
You squint
your eyes. Float through crowds
two inches in the air.
You're perfect. You whisper your own name.

Child of accidental
dying – when your mother called
you fell down stairs, chasing bacteria
sweetly. Your bones ate
your insides out. Eternally
young your lips struggle
to bite old age like a scream – Angela

Ellsworth you taunt me,
asking do I want live cells.
So we go for a half
glass of red wine and suck olives. We seduce
the red-head,
a white-fleshed Italian
who complains no one's touched her
a wombshock for years.

Later I'll cut
a lock of your hair like a psychopath.



Mongrel

What he knows about his love,
or about the oversized wrench pinned
with paired carpentry nails, is that
it's useful – you cannot
have too many crescent wrenches as long as an arm,
or bolts that cast shadows like salad bowls.
Who do we learn from? A lone
mutt pounding itself on, down the road
where the stars seem to yield and
winds raise its fur, a salute –
learns without these mirrored pools
that pepper the land looking back
and not forgetting.

Let the great glacial shoulder-rub continue.
We get grass, trails, scenic drives from this.
His is a traveling.

New Tricks

He was sixty when he went to the hypnotist.
Everything else had been tried, the patch, cold turkey,
tapering off, muscling past, cutting back.
He drove six weeks to and from and through Alaska
trying to arm wrestle the tap tap tap of desire
making its noise on his dashboard.

But smoking nagged him like an unburied body
in the ravine, a site he returned to over and over
and with greater risk each time. It called out to him
at night in his iron frame bed, and when he left
the house for the day it sat by the rain gutter,
patient as an old dog, knowing where he was going,
knowing he'd be back. He cursed its name,
kicked its soft belly, but the dog stayed.

After the hypnotist had seen him, he marveled
at the peacefulness, a downy feathered space
where want and insistence and knocking
had left. He didn't think he'd want to smoke
that day. He didn't understand what the guy had done
exactly, especially for a hundred bucks, but that quiet
room inside his chest was a new place, at sixty,
where the dog with the sideways glance couldn't
find a way in, and sighing, walked down the gravel
road past the mailbox, scratched in the bank
of the ravine, and buried itself.

What the World Calls Habit

It was never the cigarette itself that mattered so much as the practiced movements my muscles memorized, the way my fingers knew how to hold the delicate paper-wrapped cylinder, or how to snap flint to start the lighter. It was in these tiny gestures that the addiction hid itself, intertwined with tendon, resting on breath, worming in until what the world calls habit felt instead like a way of being in the world, familiar as gait. And sometimes it wasn't even that so much as the clean space the cigarette left in the pack, a perfect shape next to the round shoulders of its siblings, always the same size and unlike the long unbearable days, small enough to know how to fill.



Double Edge

It was the third day, and Debbie hadn't called. I thought again of phoning her, but the unanswered messages I had left compelled me to wait. I flipped to Oprah and the amazement of the day. A news bulletin interrupted the show. O.J. Simpson was riding in a white Bronco on a California freeway, pursued by police. His wife, Nicole, had been found dead five days earlier with her head nearly severed. Was he running?

The phone rang.

"What are you doing?" Debbie said, far away, too far away. I breathed deeply. She had called after all.

"Where have you been? I've been calling you."

"Betsy." There it was. The way she declared she had something important to say by speaking your name with a demanding tone. "He's going to kill you." And I imagined in the silence her licking her lips like she does when she thinks she's always right. "I can't talk to you anymore."

My throat swelled. My sinuses filled. "Why?"

"I can't listen anymore to you telling me what he does. He's going to kill you."

I didn't know what to say.

"But he doesn't hit me. We're supposed to be friends . . .," I said, trailing off because I knew in that second I had said too much and she had listened too long. So. She had just called to say goodbye. *Goodbye bitch. Thanks for nothing.*

The husband and I had shopped carefully for the handsome maple knife block with precision-made, fully forged steel knives. He dragged me through twelve stores, and we went home with a \$350 block of knives. He wanted wood handles. I wanted plastic. Wood handles came home with us. I used them sparingly. I trusted my dull old knives in the drawer, bought at the grocery

on impulse with no thought of quality. My mother always had sharp kitchen knives. I would visit her and help prepare a meal and cut myself. Once, I cut to the bone on my left ring finger and came home from the emergency room with five stitches. He hadn't even wanted me to go to the emergency room. "It's just a scratch," he said.

He took the knives out of the block, running his fingers along each edge, taking out pieces of paper and shredding them. He shaved small patches of hair off his arm. A cool sharpness would run through me. The knives went unused for preparing food. They were played with, and calm, real fearlessness carved his facial features. I thought of the deserted island question. Who would you most want to be stuck with? I married the tall, muscular man on the island and I was as stuck as a rower without oars.

I stood at the sink washing dishes, half smiling at the cheerful day out the window. Suddenly, I felt his presence. I turned and the knife was at my nose.

"Look how sharp this knife is," he said.

I felt my hair moving on my head.

After two weeks I still hurt from the loss of Debbie. She was an offensive twenty-year habit. I picked up the phone for several days, dialing all but the last digit. I would not give in. She had made it clear. The hurt was bitter in my stomach, and then one day I ran into Marcy at the grocery store.

"Have you talked to Debbie lately?" she asked.

I wondered what she knew.

"I don't plan on talking to her," I said.

Her mouth drew into a question. She was actually wrinkled around the mouth. I didn't think my mouth looked like that.

"I've discovered what kind of friend she really was," I said. Marcy's rounded mouth and raised eyebrows encouraged me. "I don't want another twenty years with that kind of friend."

The eyebrows dropped but her mouth was still ajar. She changed the subject. How long will it take Marcy to call Debbie and tell her what I said? I smiled.

At home, I whited out Debbie in my address book, blackened her name out in the phone book, and put her in the gray part of my memory. The sharp pain I felt when I habitually picked up the phone to call Debbie and tell her about my latest incident and then realized she didn't want to hear about it was almost gone. I'll show her, I thought, when I lay in bed at night, feeling the weight of him pulling me towards him, a small space between us but a large feeling of a vast space hurting me in the darkness.

We rented a condo in a high rise at Myrtle Beach for a week. It was roomy with a well-furnished kitchen. Not the cheap stuff from the dollar store that fills most commercial condos. He opened every drawer in the kitchen until he found the utensils. I went in the bedroom to unpack. I was reading the instructions for the safe combination when I heard him. I turned. The knife went through my shirt. I felt the cool tip not quite pierce my skin.

"They have good knives," he said.

I stared at him. My eyes were dry. I was suddenly thirsty.

Finally, I said, "Are you cooking?"

"Just checking out the knives."

"I have a hole in my shirt," I said.

He shrugged. "Buy a new one."

I lay on the beach the rest of the week, feeling him looking at all the other women and wondering if O.J. killed Nicole. It was while I was unpacking at home later in the week that I found his note, hastily scribbled on a piece of yellow legal paper. Cut Betsy out of the inheritance. Take her off the life insurance. I knew there was a life insurance policy. But an inheritance? The small fortune his miser parents had managed to save? I had never even considered that I would inherit anything of theirs. I did not want their

1962 Mercedes with 400,000+ miles on it or her 1970's clothes that she bought at a rummage sale. I was thirty-five years old and money had failed to buy me happiness in fifteen years of marriage.

Two years ago, we were driving to historical Williamsburg. Debbie, Marcy, Sharon, and me. Sandra was no longer with us. The Fabulous Five had dropped suddenly to the Fearsome Four after Debbie decided that Sandra didn't live up to her expectations. "I won't go on another trip with her," she declared as Queen Debbie. We subjects obeyed. This was before half the men in our lives had disappeared. Marcy's husband had not yet left her for the office secretary, the one Marcy had crocheted a lovely collar for at Christmas. Sharon—the one with a big nose and a big butt—her sometimes boyfriend had not yet become a no-time boyfriend. He suddenly quit answering his phone or changed his number—Sharon never found out which. When she drove by his house at two a.m., four a.m., or just anytime in her grief, the lights were out, but an unfamiliar red Mustang with the vanity plate FUNGIRL sat in his drive.

Williamsburg should have been the warning. "You're So Vain" came on the radio. I reached over and turned up the volume.

"I hate that song," she whined.

"Why? I think it's one of the greatest songs of the 70s," I said.

"I don't get it. I don't know what she means by vain."

You wouldn't, I thought. Debbie couldn't do anything that would damage her perfect nails. Debbie didn't like the windshield of her car washed. It made lines. Debbie couldn't eat at Wendy's, McDonald's, Burger King, or any other fast food place that kept gallons of grease in the back. Debbie had to have the bathroom first. Always. Debbie had to have the air set at *her* comfort level.

Debbie didn't *want* me to play my fife in the car. Debbie didn't like the historical nature of Williamsburg. She wanted more clothing stores. It was the last trip for this Fearsome Four. Later, I named them the Tiresome Three. Next would be the Tight Two. Someday, Debbie would be the Only One.

We ate dinner at a four-star restaurant. I begged, he reluctantly consented. He didn't want to wait an hour for a table. I had on a black lace dress with a beige lining. He had not wanted me to wear it.

"It looks like you just have on a black lace dress," he said. "With nothing on under."

"I'm not showing anything." He scratched his head just above his right ear and contorted his mouth into a grimace.

I palmed my lipstick. I left my purse in the car; it was too chunky to carry with the dress.

There was the hostess with her blouse unbuttoned almost to her waist. There was the girl with sleek black hair in a suede green mini-skirt. She stuffed her very large breasts into a tiny tight sweater. There was the pretty blonde lady with stiletto heels and curvy legs. There was the waitress whose breasts showed every time she bent over the table. There was me in the black lace not being looked at by him.

Dinner was over, and I picked up a table knife to use as a mirror. It was too dull. Suddenly, his hand was out of his pocket, and with one snap, the blade was in front of my eyes.

"You can see yourself in this."

I looked around. It was late, and most customers had left. No one seemed to notice that he had just whipped a switchblade out of his pocket. My skin felt prickly.

I took it carefully, knowing it was razor sharp. I applied the color and laid the knife on the table with the tip pointing towards him.

"That scare you?"

"No." I didn't sound cool or convincing.

The pain wasn't gone. I missed my friend, I mean my pseudo friend. I don't mean friend at all. . . She doesn't even know that word. I didn't want to miss the witch. I remembered the time my sister Judy asked me why I was friends with Debbie. Judy was two years behind us in school. She remembered the time Debbie took her clothes during gym and soaked them in water or the time Debbie called Judy's boyfriend for weeks, begging for a date.

"She's such a bitch. A hateful, self-righteous bitch," Judy said.

"She's a good friend."

"No. You're the good friend."

I laughed at the double standard that Debbie wouldn't understand. Debbie with the right purse, the right hair, the right car, and the right friends. The pain was moving from my heart to my head. In my head, I could reason it out, endure it, lock it away behind one of those doors in my mind.

The killer had nearly cut her head off. The details made the hair stand up on my arms. I wondered how one human could do that to another. Anger. I knew its effects, its way of curling up inside a person and distributing its strength in a way that could not be gained by other means. The trial began, and I watched his coolness. It takes coolness to kill, I thought. The prosecutors were not out to kill. Not use to cameras, the media attention amplified their defects. Marcia Clark with her poodle hairdo. Kato with his comic clown attitude. And O.J. sat opposite, quietly, sharply dressed, pleading not guilty.

We stopped at five pawn shops on a trip to Atlanta. At the third, Southern Pawn, I complained.

like opium. I had no opium, but two Valium swimming in my bloodstream, already numbing my faraway senses. I momentarily think of Debbie, of her critical disapproval of the mess . . .

A shoulder wound first, I think. Then the neck. I hear the garage door shut and his footsteps. I grip the knife firmly, convincingly. I hold the knife away from my body and plunge the wonderfully sharp tip and its trailing four inches just under my collar bone. I gasp as it slices skin and muscle. The opiates are slow. I fall to my knees. I try to pull it out for the next hit, but it's in too far. He walks around the corner, his eyes slowly absorbing the scene. He utters a small "God" as he coldly pulls the knife out, sweat from his forehead dripping on my face. I lie down on my back on the carpet while he gets a towel. He presses it on the wound and tells me to hold it there. He goes into the bedroom to call 911. The opiates are working, and I feel warm and safe. I manage a half smile when I see that he has blood on his socks. The words of "You're So Vain" run through my head . . .

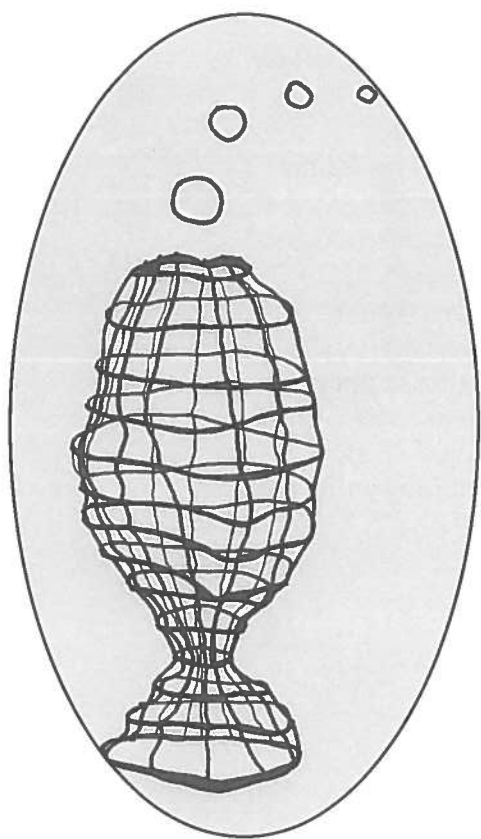


Into

Where does the empty come from
 inside a bog, inside me, inside
 a spiral, a torch of orange
 and blue? Is this space always
 available, waiting, parked like some
 small bike against a gothic Cathedral –
 slow and still against the mortar.
 The volume isn't new
 or created or lifted by a past,
 lifted like the ice in scotch – doomed, colder.

Spilled Empty is never discussed.
 Empty can peek over its own rim,
 seep over the sides and drop itself
 into spots, now lighter, now vacant.

This is the Empty of the conservation:
 neither created or destroyed –
 tongues of unsaid, of my palm, slippage
 of attention, absence of strife.
 A pupil. The camera of retina –
 a dark and present cavity vibrant with space.



Those Who Fall

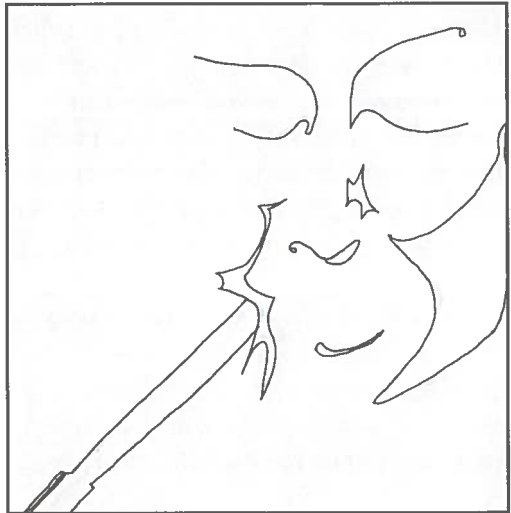
The car stopping, upon an instant, suddenly in front of you,
the earth tremor that too is a manner of speaking,
the field parting immeasurably deep that the elk cannot cross,
the tree that the wind brings nearly to the ground,
the sadness that pervades us as the war would build,
the great black lettering in the newspaper rack,
the madness that spreads and spreads upon some light wind.

Those who disagree
are left upon the chair or upon the floor
or will join the loud repeated steps
behind the colorful, wind-blown, heraldic banners into the field--
the thousands pushing against thousands,
tank treads in the loud thick mud,
the slow sky-filling brilliant explosion . . .

And the immense, dark planes lift, one after another
from the asphalt, between runway lights
into a gray fragmenting mist, a great wind,
to gain that altitude above the countries
above the warehouses and the railroad centers
and those living their lives carelessly in the street-lights.

And those who fall into the dust, whose heart stains through the
shirt,
bleeding into the dust. Forever there.
The television distracting from the corner, gleaming grimly.
The great impenetrable indestructible machine with tractor
treads.
The racket of the helicopter propeller blades in grassless lands.

It is a vast vacuous rhetoric that imperils us like a vortex.
Clouds illuminating a city of columns and whitened citizens
of statues upon white steps, and the derelicts,
the likenesses of senators, of stucco over a wire frame,
the unusually thin dogs in the streets,
a public clock upon a white wall,
the hands already moving
rapidly toward twelve.



In the Oncologist's Waiting Room

We're into round three
of "Who's Got Cancer?" (a title
I won't think of till later — Mark
and I cooking dinner; you
sleeping off Xanax on the couch),
which goes like this:

*Out of the groups of people
sprinkled around the waiting room,
correctly identify
which individuals
are actually here to see the doctor.*

I just won the second round:
After lingering over an attractive,
middle-aged couple, you'd murmured
"Gold Coast or Lake Forest," chose
the long-legged man;
then, in a glance, I'd noted the woman's
strained focus
on an oversized novel,
her companion's
stifled yawn, and whispered
in your ear: "No, it's her."
Moments later the nurse called
her name, proving me right.

Sometimes it's easy —
a missing limb, a hairless
head. But in the three times
I've come with you on your odyssey
of CAT scans and medical exams,
it's the surprises that intrigue us:

Excuses

Sorry about my crazy spelling.
When I write the letters hip-hop
like a shell game and when I read
it's like some dealer pulling jokers
from the bottom – letters float
and jumble, twist and spin around
like when I ride the rollercoaster
and look weird in the wavy mirror.

Teacher says it isn't my fault,
the dyslexia I've got confuses
and disturbs me, gives me problems
adjusting. He never stops wasting my rep,
bosses us to read and write poems
in their flunky high school,

won't let us smuggle in soda
chips and candy, play the boombox
or cards during recess because Angel
tried to pawn a hot watch on him,
then slashed his wheels for saying no.
I was ready to deck that punk, but today

Lucky got snagged carrying the knife
and Spice had to see the principal
for swiping an extra sandwich at lunch,
so our class blew the Friday pizza joint.

Stages

He had said to her: "I like to watch how people and companies bullshit each other. I like to see how it works."

He added, "HELP ME OUT HERE, Joyce."

She had responded, "Let me put words in your mouth, Cameron."

He lived in Florida. She lived in Los Angeles, but they shared utilities. It was an incredibly safe distance for two in love. Love is dangerous business. Watch thy back.

She was thinking of spacemaster refrigerators, electronically synthesized before she wrote: "When two people come together, a game is played, even if they are honest people. Horseshoes, Parcheesi, Psychology or Clue. Doesn't matter which. A game is played. As human beings, we are aware that we are aware and it makes us damn self-conscious. Self-consciousness makes us damn insecure. Insecurity makes us troubled about our being aware that we are insecure. Sometimes we are even aware that Awareness is to blame for all this turmoil. Sometimes we are aware that we just don't know why honesty is relative and game playing unavoidable on all levels AND that explaining this terrible hole in human knowledge via game playing is simply yet another game played."

He uttered a three thousand mile "Ohhhhhhhh." She heard the sound over police shots on Rodeo Drive—the two sounds becoming one, clashing into a symphony of street noise over Lexus' mufflers.

And she said, "You can't watch life being acted out. Some of us are too curious not to, but, you can not stop and watch. You can observe the acting, but only as another actor on stage."

His tan was very dark but she had never seen him take off his shirt at the beach. Neither Key Lido or Malibu. He was very private, he had something to say: "How can a person tell if what one sees from on stage is the same as what a person would see

from offstage?"

"There is no offstage," she said indifferently, "Unless you believe in God, and that's an entirely different conversation."

He uttered a three thousand mile "UUuuuuuuuuuuuuuu." She heard it while silver gum wrappers, under silver sky scrapers, over silver limos rolled down the twilight ankles of the city.

Several bales of high-grade Colombian were falling from low flying helicopters off Key Largo. High school teachers dressed as smugglers made the crucial connection, as Cameron squat to collect Pleistocene sharks teeth fossils shining in black opalescence against cocaine white sand.

Joyce flashed her perfect white smile towards Century City and no one in particular. Cinco de Mayo flashed its teeth at Los Angeles' downtown district in an attempt at definition: but in the City of Angels, Latino youths were no youths at all. Angels were all that mattered here.

Stages. Allegory. The Stage of Life. Cameron faded in and out of Renaissance garb ankle deep in green. "All the gulf's a stage, and I am but one floater," Joyce burred.

A prehistoric pelican flew low over the Sarasota Holiday Inn.

Joyce told him: "Then there is the problem of Shakespeare."

She had envisioned herself within the bedroom of William Shakespeare's little Tudor cottage. The wallpaper was done by Laura Ashley. There were tiny dark wood window frames and an overstuffed feather bed. Joyce had been angry over the C+ on her UCLA paper, "The Androgyny of Isabella in *Measure for Measure* when she said, "Shakespeare would have loved this paper. He'd give me an 'A', I'm sure." She was a person of the mind, and she was unused to such academic insults. That had gotten her to his Stratford-on-Avon cottage. She cried out to Will, "Would you look at this paper! You read it! You tell me what you think of it!" Support, flowers, fanfares, scholarly words should shortly be

forthcoming in this fantasy. Joyce waited basking in the warmth of certain self-made affirmation. But instead, the bard smiled randily at her, eyeing his overstuffed bed: Joyce knew too much about reality and too little about illusions. It was interfering with her fantasies. "Look here," Joyce chided Shakespeare, "this is MY daydream, and I am supposed to call all the shots!"

So thou, being rich in Will, add to thy Will, one will of mine, to make thy large will more. Let no unkind, no fair beseechers kill; Think all but one, and me in that one will. The playwright silently moved to the bed.

Cameron was solely in love with Joyce's mind, which was a nice one to be sure. Joyce owned a body also and was keenly aware Cameron wished she did not. She was his beloved talking head.

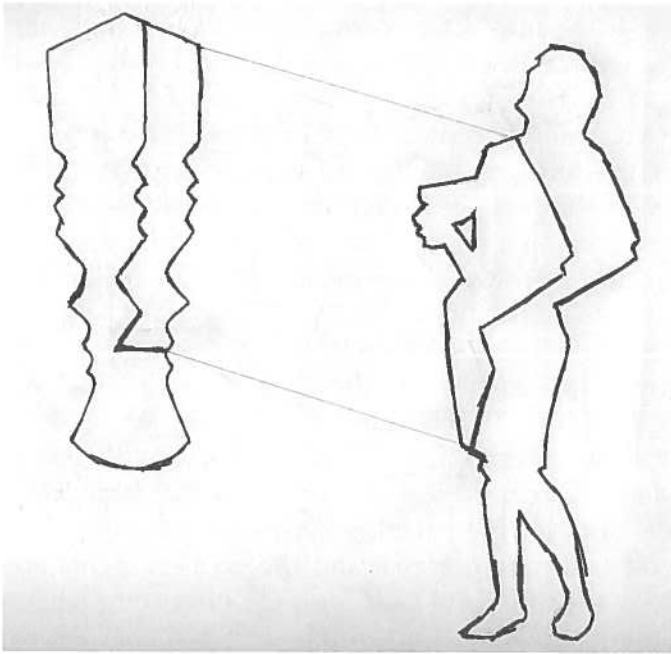
Joyce wanted to place herself in the Shakespeare, Voltaire, Ben Franklin camp: an intellectual with an appetite for Illusions, especially in the form of brown chocolate bodies. But Cameron would not even take off his shirt at the beach if she was present. Beginning to understand the lesson of her own illusions, Joyce surrendered to the silence of Will.

Cameron looked at Joyce across the continent.

Joyce opened her mouth which now parted dangerously like a fresh plum. The Florida sky streamed across her like the purification of communion. "This Play of Life..." Joyce stared, "We've all got our stories of what it looks like from THE AUDIENCE. We can even have terrible convictions of mind/body/soul that the offstage vision is real and the onstage sights are just as nonexistent as justice and God; but, the only completely sane or truthful thing to tell you Cameron is 'LET ME PUT WORDS IN YOUR MOUTH.'"

Cameron didn't always understand. This was essential to the lesson. The words formed an ocean changing from navy to lime lapping along quartz then powder sugar shores. There were palm trees.

Geographically, there was really nothing between Florida and L.A. except crates of nightmarish cantaloupes, grapes, oranges, tangelos and guavas that might never pass the agricultural inspections of the mind.



When Men Have Babies

Lacy Summer was an odd child, they said. Her hands were too big. Her mother joked about her growing up and into her hands, but Lacy never did — didn't want to. Those clunky van Gogh potato-eater hands had a presence of their own. When she was eleven days old, they hung there like deformities. As time passed, she began holding her right hand up and in front of her.

Nor did Lacy smile — didn't want to, at least not during her preschool career. With blue-eyed intensity, she would gaze directly into the left eye of anyone within her range of vision. And then she would perform that right-hand gesture: elbow and wrist bent, hand straight up in front of her, palm pressed outward. It made people uncomfortable. It was unnerving. She looked like a serious red-headed Shirley Temple warding off some unseen energy, or like a midget Buddha or a little wizard making something enormous disappear.

Once, she nearly smiled. She must have been three or four years old. Dressed in a red cowgirl outfit adorned with white fringe, she planted her right hand firmly on the Annie Oakley gun that hung in a holster at her side. Her father looked at her approvingly, and she ever so slightly began to grin. Even so, her eyes challenged him and everyone else to stay back. That too-big-for-her-own-good right hand housed an energy no one understood, or even discussed. A family joke would slip out every once in a while, but no one who knew her wanted to know about those hands, especially the right one.

Lacy was a lonely child whose happiest moments were spent playing in nature, where she did not have to keep her hands still and folded in front of her. To the contrary, she would leap about, taking great pleasure in imagining other times and places. Peering at her out the window one afternoon, her mother was certain the child came to rest about an inch off the earth plane. More often, she was in motion and quick as a cat. Darting about, she

would suddenly disappear, then reappear as if returning from a strange, faraway land—a simultaneous reality that only she could understand. Her mother could not fathom where the child went behind her earth eyes; she behaved as if she were trying to retrieve something. Actually, adult memories were bubbling up in her with nowhere to go—not in Ohio in 1953, not for this child who was not a child.

Several years later, disaster dropped in: Catholic school with rows of desks, books, and children all dressed the same, as though they were in some Communist country. Lacy thought she would die, but she didn't. Some days her hands were in gloves. Most of the time they were folded neatly on her desk or her lap, and partially covered by fabric; her mother had made her dresses with extraordinarily long sleeves to hide them. Lacy still did not smile. In fact, her first grade teacher told her parents she looked downright unhappy, stern, stubborn, and revengeful.

Soon after she reached the age of eleven, something worse than hands appeared: Breasts popped up out of nowhere. She was the tallest child in her class—five feet, two inches—with lanky arms and legs, fiery red hair, and now these bumps to contend with! As fear of eternal damnation began to crowd her brain with constructs foreign to her essence, she longed for her polymorphic life in the woods, by the stream, or in the trees. Spirit fought for a place in her psyche, now occupied largely by a pretend world lacking in energy. She had dreams of being a fractured china doll controlled by a would-be assassin-ventriloquist.

Lacy quickly learned when to speak and what to say, but she slipped up once in art class. She drew a hippie Christ with big teeth and a dress. This toothy smiling Jesus-in-drag landed her instantly in the principal's office.

Right away, she became more careful about expressing herself. She collected boxes of her thoughts and dreams, all filed according to intensity. One was a dream she'd had about dressing up as a French maid and serving a nine-course meal at the Last

Supper, poisoning everyone in attendance. This amused her. Another was a secret wish to become a singer, live on the roof, and belt out tunes about being grounded. Her mind raced with fantasies of artfully doling out justice.

To survive in school, Lacy depended on another invention: a twin sister named Lila. This imaginary twin had dark hair and dark eyes, and knew how to stay out of trouble. Anytime a teacher asked Lacy true-or-false questions – to which she was apt to reply, “Why?” or “Compared with what?” – Lila would take over. She also knew the ropes about long and short division, the art of dissembling and labeling pistils and stamens, and diagramming sentences. Lacy could never take things apart; as far as she was concerned, neither flowers nor sentences *should* be taken apart.

One Saturday morning, when Lila was nowhere to be found, Lacy stood forlornly in her parents’ empty, quiet, bright yellow kitchen. In her right hand she held a long, sharp knife, which was swaying back and forth. She was mesmerized by the glitter as it moved back and forth, silvery and sharp, back and forth, closer to her left wrist, back and forth—nothing dramatic, just back and forth, silvery and sharp, quick and easy. This right hand, she knew, had a mind of its own, but a buzzing in her right ear broke the spell. The knife stopped swaying, and right away she noticed a white-gold ray of sunlight streaming like water through the window, onto the counter, and up the wall. Touched by the warmth of the sun, she returned the cold knife to its place in the drawer.

A few weeks later, Lacy woke up to a hot and humid Sunday morning. Her stomach ached and her head hurt, but her mother insisted that she go to Mass. The church was crowded, and two fans were spinning round and round on the ceiling. As a rule, Lacy loved the singing of the hymns, the Latin mystery, the incense, the varied textures of the vestments and drapery, and the votive figures dancing with light. The hour-long celebration evoked within her the rich inner landscape of a world she

believed in. She knew this unseen world was as real as the hidden roots of a tree, and afterward she almost always felt fresh, new, and forgiven. The only time she did not feel good after Mass was when she had to hold her ears with both hands because the priest was shouting, and she began to think that chopsticks *were* being driven into her ears by Chinese Communists who, according to Sister Ambrosia, were on their way to the United States.

Today, something even more ominous was in the air. The stained-glass windows were more mesmerizing than usual, and at times looked animated. The priest appeared menacing, and the crowd was bored, burning with heat and restlessness. Lacy's temples began to pound, her eyes felt penetrated, then the lights inside her throbbing head started to flash. Closing her eyes, she could hear the priest talking slowly, sometimes slurring his speech. Soon his voice grew louder, and he began shouting about evil Eve, whores, witches, and a burning bush. Opening her eyes, Lacy noticed that the shape of his mouth had shifted so much that he looked like a barking, biting dog. His eyes had turned orange and snake-cold. His fists pounded and his voice beat upon her until she felt faint and barely able to breathe.

The heat, spinning, and shouting escalated until finally Lacy's body went limp and her spirit lifted above the congregation. In midair she set eyes on a horrific sight: her body, suspended from a stake, her long black hair turning red with flames, and her flesh melting, burning, and rolling off her bones. The low relief Stations of the Cross sculpture whizzed by her, as her father carried her toward the side door of the church. While exiting, she caught a glimpse of outrage and compassion in the eyes of an altar boy named GJ. He doubled in her vision as the Archangel Gabriel the divine messenger. Their eyes met and she knew he knew of that other lifetime—the "burning times" when she had been labeled evil.

GJ—Gerald J. Subler—had changed her life. In class he sat in the row by the door, up in the front seat. Lacy sat in the middle

seat in the middle row. She loved looking at him; his arms and legs were long and lanky, his eyes blue, his hair was red, and about him was a light that seemed to move like the wind. She had even memorized his profile.

Serious and shy, GJ had an energy that pulled Lacy into a whorl of memory and meaningfulness. She thought that if she could be a boy, she would like to be just like GJ. She already had "boy hands," and besides, being a girl wasn't so hot. For some reason, she continually felt guilty about it. She was convinced that GJ understood her dilemma, and as a result she did not mind being a girl around him.

When she dressed and undressed, she thought of him. Each time she looked at him, a gusty autumn wind would spin her mind and warm her entire being. She was unable to speak to him, however, for she was sure her knees would shake and she would laugh, cry, and pass out at the same time. She was not the same person anymore a discovery that she found most disturbing. When she stood naked in front of her mirror, she wondered where all this was taking her.

Gazing at herself, Lacy would wish she had beautiful, smooth, dainty hands like those of the Virgin Mary. She imagined that the Virgin Mary could type real fast and star in a Jergens hand lotion commercial. She was also sure the Virgin Mary never, ever got mad; Lacy, to the contrary, had a fiery temper that, according to her grandmother, was a sign of the devil. Nor did the Virgin Mary look like she had breasts to worry about. Lacy and her female classmates were told that if they touched their breasts they would go blind. This notion made Lacy nervous every time she took a bath. In the sixth grade, when she had to get glasses, she was sure everyone knew what she did in the bathtub.

On a cold winter day in the seventh grade, she looked up from her desk and saw stretched across the top of the chalkboard a banner that read "You are to be what you are now becoming." The words echoed in her head. She knew that little Lacy was

dying, for she now connected to the moon and its cycles. At first she had rocked and cried herself to sleep at night, and then one day, enjoying the feel of the winter-white lace dress she was wearing, she stopped crying. Sitting in class, daydreaming about summer – her favorite season – and wondering what she was “becoming,” she thought of GJ and felt her mind, body, and spirit rising as if she were being physically lifted up by him. She longed to be near him; to touch him; to ever so gently stroke his hair and cheek with her fingertips, in slow, slow motion; to stop time, if only for a moment.

Then one snowy day during Christmas break, it happened. Lacy was with her girlfriend Toni Smith by the creek in back of GJ’s house, where he and his friend Tommy Lawton were sledding. GJ smiled and motioned for Lacy to come sit on the sled with him. “My God, this is it,” she thought. Her heart pounded, and she ran to him. She sat on the sled and he sat behind her. She took a deep breath, and down the hill they went. As they flew toward the creek, her altered mind slipped into a slower time frame. Oh, the feel of his arms and legs around her, the warmth of his body, his breath on her neck was better than she had imagined. She wanted to savor it all – lock it up like a keepsake. She longed to be eternally enfolded by this protective male.

After that, Lacy was never the same. The next day she carved “Lacy loves GJ” into a tree by the icy water. The following day she awoke with a smile that lasted long past sunset because she kept thinking about GJ’s hands, which were even larger than hers, and his freckles, which were very much like her own. She felt as close to him as she did to Lila, her imaginary twin helper.

Lacy could hardly wait for Christmas break to end so she could go back to school and see him. When school reopened, however, GJ’s desk was empty. She couldn’t believe it. Toni said GJ’s father had lost his job and they moved to another state. Gone.

Lacy rocked and cried, and then one day she stopped crying, but she never forgot him. She visited the tree through the

changing seasons. She would walk up to the carving and slowly run the fingertips of her right hand over the incision, thinking of GJ. Weather and time eventually altered his initials, wearing away the curve at the bottom of the J. Her beloved GJ had become a GI – “government issue.”

It was a hot and humid Sunday morning in Washington, DC. The walk was long, slow, silent – not even the children were speaking. Requiems competed for attention in nineteen-year-old Lacy's head, as she adjusted her backpack filled with art supplies. Going deeper into the earth, she approached the Vietnam Memorial, where etchings in stone preserved the remembrance of hardly begun lives – older and younger brothers' lives, sons' lives – as well as husbands' lives, fathers' lives, and other needless losses.

Farther in she went, then down a slope and around to the right. The first thing she saw there was a reflection of herself in the shiny, dark stone. Then she spotted a familiar name: Gerald J. Subler. She touched the incision ever so gently – and for a moment she saw his blue eyes and red hair.

If she had been a boy, she told herself, she would have gone to Vietnam for him. She wished to God that she had talked to him, at least long enough to tell him how to create a protective imaginary twin. If only she had shared this secret with him, he might be here now. Lacy swallowed hard, but the pain of losing her beloved GJ would not stay down; it kept coming up the back of her throat and rushing toward her eyes. In a baptism of tears she confirmed her childhood marriage to him.

Glancing to her right and her left, Lacy saw people from all over the world observing the cherry blossoms, the glorification of nature, alongside the phallic-looking World War I and World War II memorials, the glorification of armed conflict. Slowly moving off, she wended her way toward dozens of vendors who were

pushing hot dogs and cold drinks along the busy sidewalks. These vendors have seen it all, she mused. To them, one person's sadness must look like any other's.

She noticed that the vendors seemed to know all the political tricksters, panhandlers, runaways, and homeless "throw-aways." She observed that on the corner you could get your picture taken beside a cardboard pope, president, or Hollywood celebrity. In Lacy's eyes the scene looked like a movie set for a series of administrations, each of which progressed from one plot to another, all ending in death and destruction.

Suddenly, the boundaries between worlds began to blur, as they had so often before. Seeking refuge in nature, Lacy headed for a bench beneath a nearby tree that stood beside a pond. There she set down her backpack and rested.

To her right she saw an Irishman. Her eyes zoomed in on him with one-point perspective. This was no ordinary Irishman, but rather a sad-eyed Kyrie monk. He was reading *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* and mumbling aloud phrases about how each soul chooses the life it will lead and how each one undergoes many lifetimes on the earth. The moment his eyes caught hers, a look of horror swept across his face. Then quickly, like the winds of change, he softened and smiled. She knew he knew. She reached down to pick up her backpack, and when she looked up again, he was gone. Gone.

Lacy's face clouded over, her mouth opened, and her heart took over. Ever so gently, she touched her cheek and felt tears coursing down her face. Smiling, she thought they might be carving designs into her skin, designs that she would indeed be proud to wear. She felt a great release.

Her fiance, Christopher, walked up behind her and took her hand. He was tall and lanky and had been a basketball star their senior year in high school. Best of all, he had dark eyes like Lila. Oh, the touch of his hands on her had made her feel very womanly. At the time, Christopher had dark hair, but now he kept

it shaved because he was an honor guard in the Army. To Lacy, he looked like one of those perfect toy soldiers in the *Nutcracker Suite*. His life no longer seemed real; it was as though he was playing some mandatory grown-up game.

Christopher had been drafted into the Army and stationed at Arlington National Cemetery. His college degree — which Lacy had insisted upon — had kept him out of Vietnam. This degree, as it turned out, was the greatest gift of love Lacy could give him. Months after their rendezvous at the Vietnam Memorial, Christopher asked her to relocate with him to his French Catholic family's farm community in Ohio, but she wanted to study art in New York. And so they parted. They had actively loved each other just the right amount of time, she supposed, wondering, "Where does love go when it seems to go *away*?"

Lacy moved to New York, where she began painting and carving incisions on wood. There she fell in love with a handsome Italian Catholic man named Anthony, who was employed as a social worker and studying to become a lawyer. She called him her Michelangelo in shining armor. Then he, too, was drafted and quickly joined the Air Force. This time Lacy married her man.

In the winter of her thirty-fifth year, Lacy felt her right hand spring to life as never before, after which she gave up her silence. It all began late one morning while she was standing in the center of the Memorial Chapel, an interdenominational church on the Stanford University campus. The chapel was empty, quiet, and peaceful — free of shouting and condemnation. She could feel the serenity radiating out into the quad and around the brick buildings.

On her right, Lacy saw a black-and-bronze crucified figure hanging from a wire. As she moved toward it, the figure seemed to become suddenly animated, and she imagined that it had breasts. Stepping closer, she saw that it *did* have breasts! Reaching

up with her right hand, she touched them and for several minutes stood there transfixed. A card at the bottom of the sculpture read: "'The Christa,' by New York artist Edwina Sandys. Panel discussion tonight."

From behind her, Lacy heard a voice. "You know, Edwina Sandys is related to Winston Churchill—his granddaughter or something." Lacy turned and saw an old woman with deep, meaningful wrinkles. Without thinking, Lacy reached out, touched the woman's face, and said, "What pretty designs you have." Shocked by her own assertiveness, she stepped back and apologized.

The old woman smiled and lifted into the air a black-and-white book with gold, silver, and copper trim. The title etched on the cover was "The Archaeological Shapeshifter: A Woman's Meditation." The woman then looked good and hard at Lacy and said, "You know, this is a good book. You'll have to read it sometime."

Lacy nodded.

The old woman turned to walk away and added, "But *you know*, you'll have to write it first." Laughing, she disappeared into the bright light of noon.

Lacy sat in a pew and began to hum "Silent Night, Holy Night." For a moment, all was calm and all was bright. Centered in her own divine, she soon heard a small inner voice whisper, "You must honor your creative and psychic abilities. Your sense of humor is your shield. Just be aware." Then she glanced over to her right and her gaze fell on a stack of newspapers on the floor. A headline glared back at her: "War is for men what childbirth is for women." What a horrifying parallel she thought, feeling sick to her stomach. The blood mysteries have been tragically misunderstood and misused, she told herself as she left the chapel.

That night, Lacy and her husband Anthony, now a colonel in the Air Force, had plans to meet at a formal dinner party at the Hoover Institute. The Institute, not far from the Memorial Chapel,

is a right-wing think tank as towering and phallic-looking as the Washington Monument. A full alabaster moon hung in the black winter sky. Looking up as she approached the Institute, Lacy shivered at the thought of Star Wars, Reagan's plan for installing a defensive bubble in the heavens. She buttoned up her coat and reminded herself that nuclear physicists in support of this project were likely to be guests at the dinner party.

She opened the door and made her way to the reception room, where she was greeted by her husband. He escorted her to her table; he was to sit at the next one over.

Lacy studied the place cards at her table. Only one of them bore the name of a woman: "Lacy Summer." After reading the place card across from hers, she mentally added, "Nuclear Physicist Extraordinaire." She sat down, and soon a red-faced man sat to her left and a skinny, gray-skinned man to her right. The round table slowly filled up with stern-faced gentlemen. Finally, Mr. Big Bomb seated himself before her eyes and hands.

His voice was heavy and his breath seemed to come from the underworld. He looked like a character cast into a flat role devoid of both mercy and redemption. Lacy's hand reached out to shake his, whereupon her energy immediately dissipated. The more her energy dissolved, the more his seemed to expand. Even his eyebrows grew heavier and darker.

Lacy touched her temples in an effort to reenergize herself. Donning her officer's wife persona, she tried to make pleasant conversation with the red-faced man beside her. He was a writer. She smiled and let him boast about his latest book. Then, remembering her experience in the chapel she asked him if he had seen "The Christa." He shot back, "We don't want to hear any of that feminist crap here!"

Lacy felt her right hand form a fist. The fist opened and grabbed a fork. The fork flew toward the right shoulder of the writer. He saw it coming at him just before it detoured into her salad. While stabbing a tomato, she said to him, "And so the fork

is mightier than the pen, but would you like to arm wrestle anyway?"

Unbeknownst to her, her voice had chimed out loudly, like the ringing of the tower bell. One hundred people had stopped conversing and were looking at her, including her husband, then they all began to laugh. Lacy put her hand over her mouth as if to retrieve the words.

To her good fortune, the entree was being served and Lila had taken over, with her special capacity to display social amenities. The men at the table resumed their talk of worldly events and ways to control them.

Later, over dessert, a stocky man at her table lifted his wine glass and proposed a toast to "The great father of the hydrogen bomb."

Teller quickly smiled and replied: "No, I'm the *mother* . . . and it's a boy!"

Lacy's hands dropped to her lap, palms up. She knew what she had to do. Looking straight across the table, she stared into his left eye. Without blinking an eyelid, she silently warned him: *You must reconnect to your piano. You must let the music back into your heart or all your hair will be burned off. The heavens are looking at you.*

The Cave, Again

i The Judgement

*Sons of Socrates--You are
not thrice, but four times removed.*

They sit.
They do not move
still as if in a cave

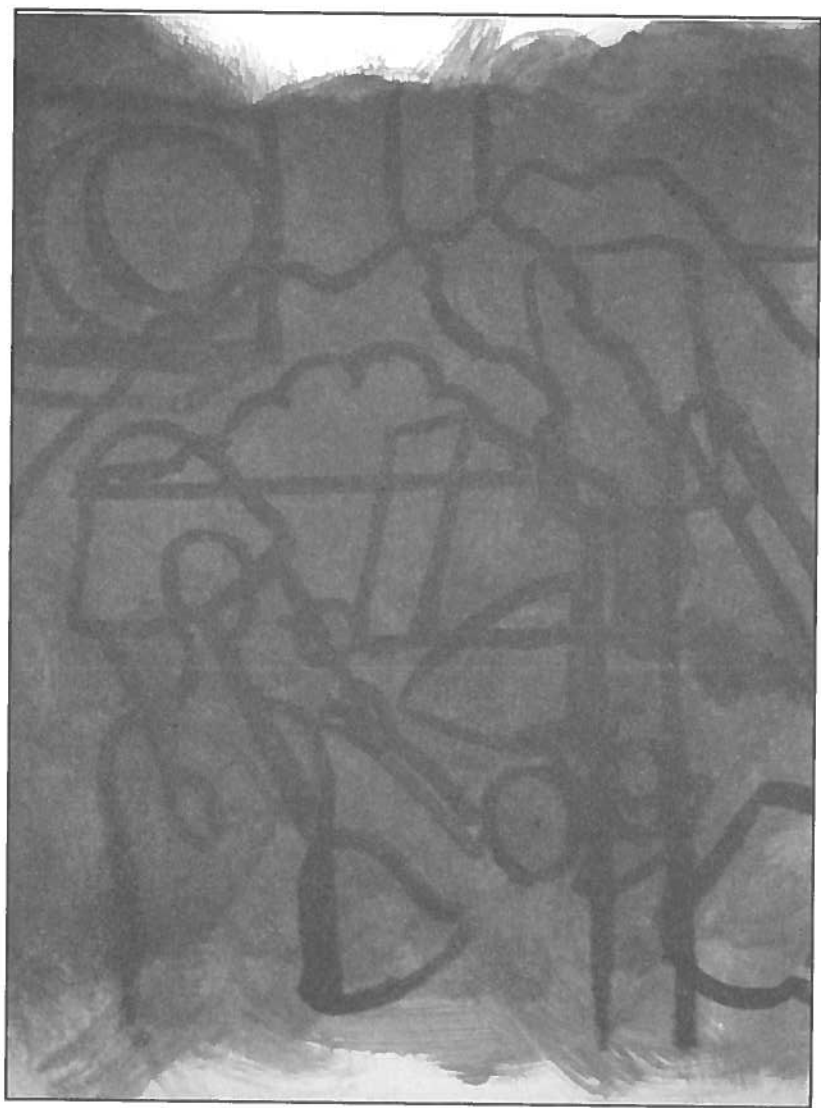
a cave like all caves
alive with images, revealing
life and nothing, and all
that is imagination.

Dark within cold, glowing whispers,
wrapped below they sit against a wall
tracing one upon another,
or one upon two.
It goes on

forever- the interplay of light and dark
always one or the other, never both.
Never neither.
Never somewhere in between.

There in the dark,
alone,
in tandem with mind's other self,
they sit together,
minds wandering inside settled minds,
individuals all

each like every other,
confident in selfhood,



The Personal Utopia of Lottie Froude; Or, a Principled Woman Is Not to Be Trifled With

The pink flamingos were humping again. It was a phenomenon that had been occurring since last Tuesday morning: Lottie had been watering the cactus in the front window when she glanced out and noticed the new and rather unorthodox positioning of her yard ornaments. She hadn't bothered to change out of her robe and slippers before hustling out onto the dewy grass and returning her birds to their proper place - that is, *nose to nose*.

And then Wednesday morning the victim had been the green-suited gnome, a favorite souvenir from Lottie's road trip through New Mexico. Instead of his usual stance by the mailbox, Mr. Lucky's cherubic face was lodged squarely in the rear end of Bambi, who grazed eternally by the rose hedge. Mr. Lucky and Bambi, despite their fledgling intimacy, remained stoic. Lottie did not: she was on the lawn at six o'clock, cursing and fuming.

Thursday's debacle wasn't entirely unexpected. The six ducklings, along with their mother, had been planted tail-to-sky in a circle around the wishing well. And Friday the stooping wash-woman had been transported from her discrete location by the carport to a flamboyant stance by the sidewalk. On and on it went, day after day: the squirrels and fawns and elves traveled mysteriously about the yard during the night, demonstrating carnal appetites and perversions previously unsuspected of plastic figurines. And poor Lottie went out at sunrise, shocked and flustered, and returned them to order and decency.

But now the pink flamingos were humping again.

It was not to be borne. Lottie had finally reached her limit, and would venture into the garden at dawn no more. Hadn't she the right to her privacy? Was she not free to enjoy the comforts of



How I Would Become a Blacksmith

The artist's colony is a stone's throw over the mountain,
a skip from the summit. Children as old
as me laugh and do art as pretty as the orchids
at Kentuck Nob, a T-square diagonal and hard
number 2 pencil line across Rt. 40.

Inside the gift cottage, an eternal blacksmith
looks through my eyes, slow, deep, insistent.
"We have a visiting artist," he says,
"who made an ornate bone saw, based on
old medical books; it cuts through metal or anything."

"My wife has a spa appointment," I say.
"I'll come back to see your forge. Tomorrow!"
His eyes saw through my wire of words into
marrow. "The maker will be gone then."
So I go and hear of burning plans for the hardest things.

Banked fires in my mind's back furnace
smolder, remind me of words unwrought,
songs unsung, stories unsaid, unseen. Undone.
The ancient artist has shown me his own forge,
an open hearth to fire my promise.

To return as a student apprentice. To learn
to build again. "You will take home
something you have made; everybody does."
His eyes see my lock, tumblers akimbo,
waiting for the combination of commitment.

Stepanic's touchdown!
Fifteen more years, then fuck the mill.

Before I walk up Polish Hill,
Marge already gone to Westinghouse,
Joey gone to school, I get up from my stool
to leave. Then, Baranski buys me another.
Pay back covering his ass for the steward.
Piss on the union, we toast, and chug.



Good Fences Make Good Neighbors

weathered red into rust this fence
stands dividing me from that fragile world

I watch M rabbit past down the street
batu in her breath and blood

– she has no money –

hounded by her dealer-keeper-boyfriend
his one hand flashing with butterfly-steel

– he wants what she does not have –

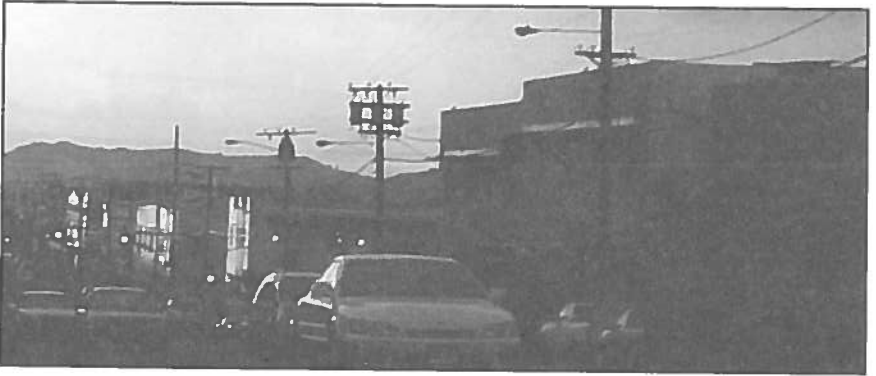
like a good neighbor I am there to do
what is expected of me – nothing but watch. . . again

5.

It seems the goat is smiling,
enjoying the burning.

6.

Moving my left foot
from side to side,
I spread the mound
of crackling,
sometimes giggling coal
to burn the goat's skin
some more.



Feed the Monster

Rain splattered on the ground and washed the day's filth down the gutters. Megan's wool overshirt was wet clean through, and her patched-together tennis shoes let in rain from every direction. As it grew darker, she began to lose her footing in the mud. It had the feel of the night of a thunderstorm; she half-expected to see a flash of lightning arc across the sky.

What she wouldn't give for a bicycle! she thought, the demons of greed batting their wings at her cheek. It had been a long day, too much typing and filing, and her boyfriend Jack had left her, exactly on their one-year anniversary. The peace and contentment she'd spent so long building had vanished. She just wanted to go home, fix the anniversary dinner she'd planned to serve Jack, and take a nice, long bath. Never mind how wasteful it was; she needed that bath. She'd earned it.

As she neared her house, the rain started pouring down in sheets, and she heard a boom of thunder. As the thunder subsided, she heard a low whimpering. Probably the Isaacsons' cat Sax, stuck out in the rain again. He was a carnivore, but everyone tended to look the other way, so nobody had told the authorities, and nobody had told them about the smuggled cans of cat food either. But sometimes, when the contentment patrol was visiting, they had to shut him out. Megan supposed it was one of those days.

Poor cat, she thought. She slicked some rain off her head and kept going. Toward the west, she saw searchlights. Something was out tonight.

But here she was, at her little rambler, and she walked up the steps. Home. Water drizzled down her shoulder blades. She unlocked the door and then heard it again, a low whimpering and moaning.

He'll be all right, she thought. He has more fur than me. And she needed that bath. She would get influenza and lie flat on her

back for a week, tormented by the demons of sloth and indolence, if she didn't get her hot bath. She went inside — but then, knowing she couldn't enjoy her bath when something was in trouble, got a flashlight and went back out.

"Here, kitty, kitty, kitty," she called. "Here, kitty." She shone her flashlight down the rows of corn that decorated the front of her house, then into the blackberry thickets that separated her house from her neighbor's house. But instead of a cat, her flashlight caught a dead rat with its head torn half-off and a trail of blood leading to a dark mass. The mass was a foot as big as a tiger's, hairy, claws digging into the earth. Looking up, she saw a huge, dark shape pressed back into the bushes.

And then it growled like a wolf, canines three inches long gleaming in the light of the flashlight.

A monster.

Megan felt sick and terrified. She backed toward her house, took a quick deep inbreath to call for help, but then realized what it was.

A little-kid monster. How dare it try to scare her?

"The hell with it!" Megan shouted. "I'm soaking wet and my socks are soggy and I spent all day filing and I'm just about to take a fucking hot bath and you're out here pretending to be a dying cat!"

The monster whimpered, then crouched and sat in the mud.

Megan spat on the ground. "Go scare somebody else," she said. "Go scare a kid. Go scare a toddler."

Tears dropped from the monster's tarry eyes and disintegrated some of the dirt where they landed. The monster covered its eyes with furry, clawed paws.

Megan caught her breath, feeling the demon of guilt prick at her midback. It wasn't the monster's fault that Jack had needed to "see other people" and she didn't have enough contentment yet to merit a bicycle. But it didn't have to scare her like that! She shone the flashlight on the monster and surveyed it. Not that tall for a monster, just seven feet. It had tacky fur, purple consorting with orange and

bleeding into lime green. Its mouth widened into an ugly snout, its knees bulged out like horrible, inflamed sores, and the skin beneath its fur seemed to be oozing some disgusting slime. A monster for little kids? Then what was it doing out in the rain? Where was its mother?

By now the monster was snuffling and digging its claws in the ground, as if it were trying to camouflage itself in the dirt. It had probably never been yelled at before.

"I'm sorry," Megan said. "You are a pretty scary monster, and I bet when you get older you'd scare even me. And I'm tough to scare."

It took its paws away from its eyes.

"I had a very bad day," Megan said. "I'm sorry. Look, I have to go inside. Can I bring you something? An umbrella? Some dinner?"

It put its hand in its mouth and began to moan again, rocking back and forth on its enormous feet.

"Where's your mother?" Megan asked.

It moaned louder, sounding like a jammed engine.

"Ah, fuck it," Megan said. "Come on inside. Warm up and dry off. You can be on your way in the morning."

The moan softened to a whimper and died down.

"Right?" Megan said.

It took its hands away from its mouth, stumbled up to its feet, and clumped toward the front door, where it waited for Megan. When she opened the door, it headed straight for the bathroom, leaving footprints of orange slug-trail slime on her carpet, and then it stood next to the bathtub.

"No, not the bathtub!" Megan said. She didn't think she could ever take a bath in a bathtub that had once held fluorescent orange slime. But then she realized that the slime would be all over the house if it didn't take a bath, so she started cold water running and went into the kitchen to make dinner. No bath. She slammed some cupboards.

Megan had quite an elaborate dinner planned for the anniversary, one that had cost her a great deal of contentment. Red wine from organic grapes, tofu-and-cheese lasagna, garlic bread made fresh from the bread machine. And — this was the surprise — a blackberry pie that she had made from scratch, even the crust. She had thought she wouldn't have any appetite for it, but now this seemed like a better opportunity for revenge, sharing his anniversary dinner with the most revolting creature she could think of. So she fixed the dinner anyway, while the monster soaked in her bathtub. Then she lit the Christmas candles.

"Dinner's ready," she called. She heard thumps and muffled grunts in the bathroom, so she opened the door to investigate. The monster was standing on the floor, dripping dingy water on the floor and ripping bits off her Snoopy bath towel and putting them in its mouth. Damn, she thought. Damn, damn, damn.

"You're not used to living with people, are you?" she said. That was a stupid question, she thought. Monsters rarely ventured outside the wooded areas of the commune except to scare people, or occasionally to hunt, and no one in their right mind would have a monster at their kitchen table. It was a stupid, risky, selfish thing to do.

But he was just a little-kid monster, she thought.

And she felt some connection with it, as though it represented some part of herself that she'd lost. Her neighbors would never agree, but the monster could be, Megan thought, reformed. She pulled out another bath towel and dried the monster with it, then sat the monster down at the table and served it lasagna.

"I'm a vegetarian," she said. "I bet you're not used to that either. It's OK; you'll like the lasagna. Vegetarian food is healthier for people, because we actually have a hard time digesting what's in meat. I don't know how it works with monsters, though."

But she could have spared it the lecture, because it had already begun eating the lasagna and bread with its hands, and by the time she finished was gesturing for more. She fed it all but one

serving of the lasagna, the bread, and the blackberry pie (she had been hoping for leftovers), then emptied the refrigerator: milk, cheese, a baked potato, pesto and tortellini, rice cakes, homemade egg rolls, and an assortment of fruits and vegetables. It finally seemed full right about the time her refrigerator was empty.

"Time for bed," she told it. "Are you an under-the-bed monster or a closet monster?"

It looked at her without comprehension, so she pointed it toward the living room closet. "Closet monster?" she asked, hoping. She didn't want it under her bed.

It lumbered toward the closet, opened the door, settled against a stack of boxes until it was almost invisible, and began to snore. It was strange how safe the monster made her feel—as if his presence proved that nothing worse could be lurking inside her house. Not a grown-up monster, that is.

The next morning, Megan made a stack of pancakes for herself and the monster. Remembering the night before, she made six times as many pancakes as she would have eaten, and, just like the night before, it ate them as soon as they came off the griddle.

"You'll need to leave today," Megan said. She opened the door, but the monster made a high-pitched wail and backed toward the closet.

"OK," Megan said. She was very late for work, and they would yell at her. "You had a rough night. You don't need to leave just now, but pretty soon, you hear?"

But Megan didn't really believe the monster would go. Too much of a good thing, having a warm place to stay and food to eat. Maybe its mother was dead, hit by a train or some awful thing. All the way to work, she thought about how she could get rid of it. Stop feeding it? Fill the closet full of boxes? Call the monster-catchers?

They yelled at her when she got to work, probably because they were suffering from coffee deprivation. Why they couldn't grind their own coffee, she really wasn't sure. It hadn't ever seemed like a problem before, just one little thing, but now that she thought

about it, her work on the exciting solar panel project for the commune really had never gotten past the "apprentice" stage, and "apprentice" seemed to mean "personal secretary." Her contentment rations hadn't really kept up, either.

She shook her head. What was the matter with her? The monster had gotten her rattled. She'd forgotten to take her sleeping pill last night, too, the one that always made her feel calm and contented all day long. She handed out the mugs of coffee and then went to type up some technical specifications for Bob, her boss. She couldn't get her mind off the monster, though, and kept filing papers in the wrong cabinet, and when they finally let her do something interesting, take some measurements, she embarrassed herself by letting out a little tear for the poor thing, stranded as it was, and probably destined for the monster-catchers.

"You OK?" Bob asked when he walked in to drop off some files.

"Oh-" she said, thinking fast. "Jack broke up with me yesterday."

"So that's why he hasn't come in," Bob said. "He's gettin' some. You should go home, rest up."

"I'll be fine," Megan said. Best not to show weakness or take days off. She finished with the measurements and then ran off to get the mail for everybody.

When the whistle finally blew, signaling the end of the workday, Megan went to the store. She swiped her contentment card, picked out as much food as she could carry without a bicycle basket, and then headed home.

The monster, she saw, had made itself quite comfortable. It was sitting on the couch looking scary, trying to frighten the bookshelves. One of the cushions had a bite mark in it, and a line of ants ran between the living room and the kitchen, carrying off bits of multigrain cereal and jam. When she opened the door, the monster turned around and groaned.

Hungry, she thought. She set down her bags and pointed to

the door.

"Out," she said, without conviction. Instead, it clumped over to her shopping bags and picked up a banana, smashing it.

She slapped its hand. "No!" she yelled.

It shrank back but then bared its teeth, wretched, brown fangs, rotting away in its mouth. It hissed.

"All right, all right," she said. "I'm about to make dinner, but you'll have to wait. You'll like this one, I promise — tangy lentil roast, with new potatoes and fried zucchini."

It stared at her.

"The couch," she said. She pointed to the couch.

It hissed again, but then it slunk off and sat down.

Megan went into her kitchen and saw that the monster had made a huge mess. When she looked closely, she realized it was a dead rat picked almost to the bone, and blood on the floor, as if it had played with the rat first.

"No!" she yelled. She rushed into the living room and grabbed the monster's shoulder, pulling it into the kitchen. She lowered it down to the floor and put its nose in the mess. "No!" she yelled again, and pushed it back, outside. Then she went back into the kitchen and cleaned up the mess, scrubbing the kitchen cleaner than ever before. Bleach and antibacterial soap and more bleach.

But after she was done, she calmed down, put the lentils on to boil, got out the other ingredients for her lentil sage roast. They'd fed her this during her first year in the commune, when they'd caught her sneaking chicken from a nearby town.

When the roast was done, she went outside and called to the monster, who was huddling underneath the chestnut tree, holding something small and furry. She didn't want to think what it might be.

"I'm sorry," she called to the monster. "I'm sorry, I got carried away. I'm not used to dead animals in my house." It gave no sign of comprehension. "Never bring dead animals into my house ever again. Remember! But come on, it's time for dinner."

As before, the monster grabbed handfuls of the sage roast, the cheese-covered zucchini, and the potato bread, stuffing it all into its mouth at once. When it was done, it let out a great, piteous belch.

"Poor monster," Megan said. She examined its face—didn't it look a little pale? As if some of the purple had leaked out? Was it perhaps an iron deficiency? She resolved to buy vitamins at the store the next day. "Where's your mother?" she asked it again. It looked up at her.

The next day when she went outside, Megan discovered that the monster had been holding a chipmunk; it was lying near the tree, stiff with rigor mortis. Poor chipmunk, Megan thought; he'd died for nothing, not even for a meal, and it's my fault, calling the monster in when I knew what it was holding.

She felt calmer the next day; she had remembered to take her sleeping pill and it let her remain contented even when Jack showed up to work, zipper undone, swaggering and grinning. She typed up some letters Bob had written to the vice-president of the energy company, the company that had been funding the solar panels and the windmills and that really, when you think about it, had made it possible for this whole commune to exist. Before the energy companies had gotten involved and offered a limited number of indentured servitudes, she and the rest had just been a small group of dreamers, wanting to live an honest, down-to-earth life but lacking any possibility of ever being able to afford the land. The letters had her measurements, she was pleased to see, although inflated somewhat. She lowered them back down and wondered for the hundredth time what she was going to do with the monster.

In the afternoon Jack came to her, breath reeking of bathtub gin, and said he'd take her back.

Megan was busy trying to get the toner cartridge into the printer, and she felt irritated. "Do you want to give me some of that gin?" she said. "Maybe I'd be in the mood then."

"That's my girl," he said, and pinched her.

"Hey!" she said. Cary looked up from his desk and Megan's

face went red.

"Meet me at my place tonight," he said.

"All right," she said. Let him wait around for her, she thought. Worth a laugh. The demon of revenge flew in front of her and stared her in the eyes, but she stared squarely back. To her surprise, the demon gave her the finger and flew off.

Finally the workday was over and Megan went to the store and bought more than she could carry. She bought tofu hot dogs and garden burgers—all different brands and flavors—ketchup, bread, and a great big bottle of vitamins. There wasn't a meat aisle in this store—such a shame, she thought.

When she reached her block she felt formless anxiety. Had the monster died? Or eaten something? Then she saw her porch—it was smeared with blood. She had visions of the monster eating small children, even though they don't do that, mostly, they just scare them, mostly except that this monster seemed to be going wrong, menacing her, losing its purple, and that's why you need monster-catchers, after all!

Just inside the door, the monster was hunched down, eating something. Megan closed her eyes and wished as hard as she could that the thing wasn't a child. She squeezed them shut as hard as she could, but they opened anyway. On the floor lay Sax, half-eaten. Blood soaked into her hardwood floor.

"Not Sax!" she shouted. She punched the monster and scratched it with her fingernails. Lime green oozed from its body.

"Get out!" she yelled. She pointed to the open door. It didn't budge.

"I'm calling the monster-catchers this time, I swear!" she yelled. It looked at her, baring its teeth, and she thought, yes, it has gone wrong; it's me he'll attack next; I should have called the monster-catchers, but it's too late now.

But the monster slowly drew itself erect, stepped over Sax, and walked out the door.

"I'm sorry," she called after it. "We're an impossible pair. I

liked you, I did. I hope you scare some kids like you're supposed to. I hope you find your mother."

The monster didn't look back. It walked toward the bushes and then just disappeared, reshaping its body to look like the surrounding bushes and trees.

It'll be back, Megan thought, sure of it. You can't get rid of monsters any way but the monster-catchers. She turned toward Sax and tried to force tears out of her eyes; she ought to cry over him, because she'd petted him so many times, walking to work. He'd lay there, sunning himself, licking his paws, and when she'd come close he'd stand up, arch his back, walk nervously back and forth while she petted him. She'd even rescued him from a tree, and now this...this was her fault. She'd harbored the monster. What had she been thinking?

She dug a hole in her back yard so deep not even a monster could get to it, then put the cat in, said a few words. Then she went over to the Isaacsons', because they had to be told. Mrs. Isaacson opened the door, and when Megan told her that she'd hit Sax with her bicycle, Mrs. Isaacson began to cry.

"I was so scared for him," Mrs. Isaacson said. "I saw a monster in the neighborhood last night."

"I'm sorry," Megan said. "I buried Sax; you shouldn't have to see him."

"Near your house, I saw it," Mrs. Isaacson said.

"I'm sorry," Megan said again, and there didn't seem to be anything else to say after that, so she turned around and walked home. Down the block, she saw the monster-catchers' van driving up, slowly, its infrared beam piercing the bushes.

In her living room, the monster lay on the carpet, crying and heaving its chest up and down.

"I'm sorry," Megan said. "It won't help you, being here." The monster put the edge of the carpet in its mouth, like a security blanket, and acid drooling from its mouth began eating away at the carpet, little by little.

"If it makes you feel any better, I'm not any better off," Megan said. "Harboring a monster. They'll bring out the dogs soon. It could have been a child, they'll say."

The monster hid its head under its huge, furry arm.

"Well, but never mind that," Megan said. "I have a treat for us both. You'll like this one, I promise."

She went downstairs to her basement freezer and dug through all the popsicles, frozen pies, loaves of bread, soup stock, to the very, very bottom, where she pulled out a package wrapped in waxed paper, tin foil, saran wrap, and more waxed paper. This was her guilty secret, her buried treasure: frozen lamb. Was it still safe to eat? Well, never mind that now.

She brought it upstairs and unwrapped each layer, her anticipation growing. How could she have forgotten how good lamb was? Soon she could detect the raw, fleshy smell of meat, and before she knew it the lamb was in the microwave defrosting. She could hear the dogs, far in the distance, but they'd be getting closer.

The monster's snuffling stopped, and he began to whine like a dog.

"I told you, monster," Megan said. "I knew you'd like it." She melted butter, and when it sizzled, she threw in chopped onion, cumin seeds (half the bottle, because why save it?), and garam masala. Then, she put the lamb in, browning it, and then cinnamon, and then she covered it. She stood by the stove, just soaking in the rich, aromatic flavors. It would be soft when it came out, tender and solid, real.

The monster came into the kitchen and stood next to her; he, too, seemed in awe of the dish on the burner. He drooled acid onto the kitchen floor, but Megan no longer cared. The demon of propriety flew into the kitchen, but when Megan wondered aloud how he would taste, he gave a squawk and flew back out.

"Soon, monster, soon," she said. It would be soon. The whole house smelled like lamb curry.

Megan felt her clothes tearing away — her work pants ripped

in the inseam and her blouse tore in the shoulders, but she realized she didn't need them any more, because her whole body was covered with a layer of thick gray fur, the fur of a mature, mother monster. Not for fanciful scaring of little kids, but for hiding in corners and shadows. Anything dark would house her now.

She looked down at the lamb and saw how inadequate and small it was. Why had she cooked it? It would have been better raw. Her head bumped the ceiling, and she raised one ponderous hand to protect herself. It smashed through the ceiling, sending plaster flying. When she looked at her hand, she saw that her nails had been transformed into long, knife-like claws, and when she felt a tooth with her stump of a tongue, the tooth drew blood.

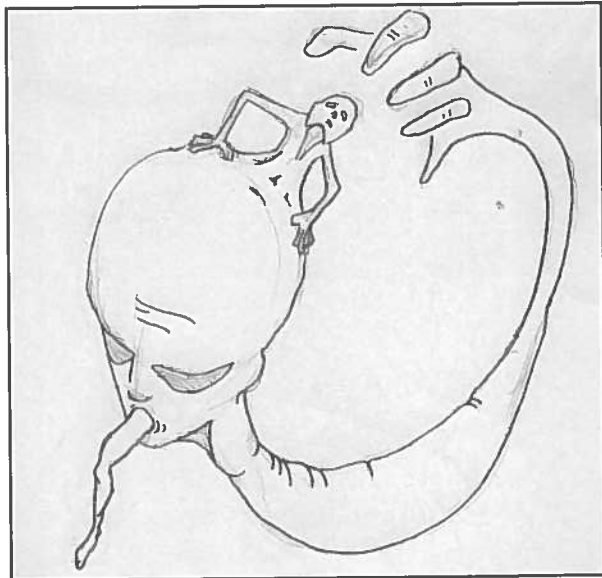
The monster—Carl, she corrected herself, suddenly realizing he had a name—had run off into another room, frightened by her sudden transformation. She forced her body through the doorway to him, splintering the wood, holding chunks of lamb out in a gesture of friendship. Then she spoke to him, but in grunts and growls rather than human-tongue, telling him that everything would be all right.

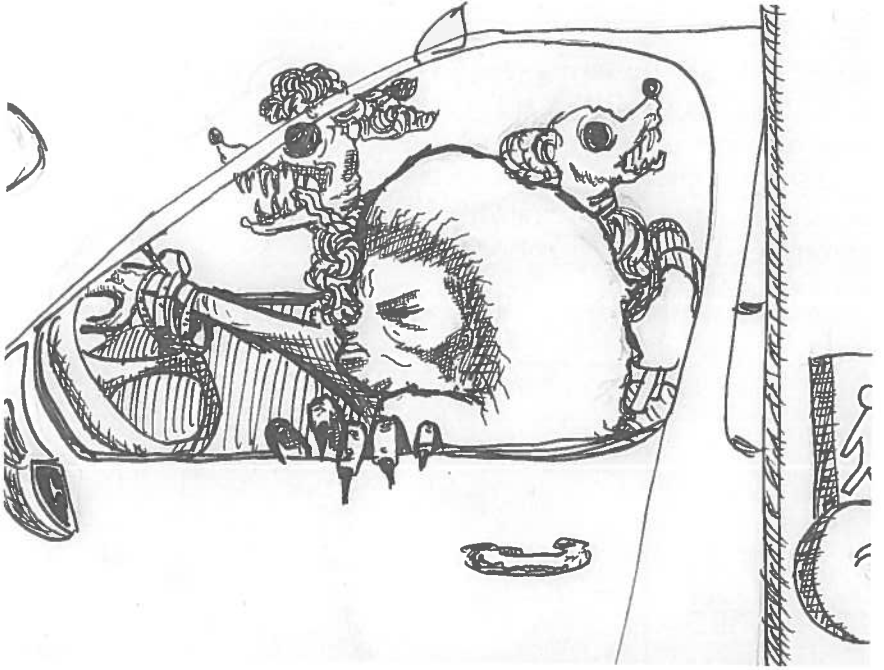
Her ears were good and she could hear everything around her, rats scurrying after stores of grain and owls swooshing down after their prey, so she strained her ears for the monster-catcher van. It was not far off, a few blocks, and although it was still searching she felt instinctively that it was homing in on the two of them. But she laughed, a deep, broad, throaty laugh. This was her territory, this commune. She knew everything about it, the back ways, the hiding places, where to get food. Their nets couldn't catch what they couldn't see.

She licked the curry off her fur, took Carl's paw in hers, and crashed out the back door.

Childhood

old in the small body young in the woman's
body and always even in the dried up body
of the river flat without water is the myth
of the child at seven with her swollen words
trapped the twine binding like rope face
tangled in the monument of family struggling
up the chimney fluttering wings caught
at the flue imagining the red vest blue
window steel grate not sticking counting
drops the room a cubicle of rain the dark
skies of evergreen fog of needles and breath
and the endless surprise of being born





By Yourself

A pinkish tinge appearing steel-gray as muscle tissue in an X ray that begs at the corner, shaking its bones like so much teeth. The weather stirs the clouds in the sky producing various tones of darkness; anvils tumble through the atmosphere like meteors striking the earth with an ill-starred cadence. And the small cavity in your chest has its missing casket returned and a mirror with a note on it you had placed there for communion, for God to read like neon writing in a storefront window. The squares in the sidewalk are sprinkled with coins that depict every ruler of the world. Heavy machinery rumbles down the street kicking up dust in their wake of noise and weight. And your matted paintings of medieval knights slaying dragons with their castles, clouds cruising a blue sky, and angels in the audience, come back to haunt you like an old high school production of Renaissance play on a subway platform. And as you hear the cranking of a ferris wheel, the years accrue value, hints of winter show themselves in the trees as stories pour out of you, in the leaves and then the snow. A devil coos in your ear as your seed writhes on the barren ground, and the heavens glisten and comfort like the warm glow emanating from a kind and venerable hearth. The sons and daughters of your lovers and wives stare at you from your dreams, come closer to eat from your beggar's hand, then dart back into woods.



Doughnut Shops and Doormen

I have to have him. Have him for real someday, not just in my fantasies. I'm not so far gone yet that I can't tell the difference. Chris Cornell, former lead singer of Soundgarden. The god of my life with the leather-lunged wail. My Gilgamesh, my Valentino, my Elvis, my Clark Gable and Yul Brenner altogether. He is the one crush I've never gotten over. For ten years, I've adored him. That might be why I have no one. No man, no friends, no rapport with family. He is more real to me, more necessarily a part of me than the people I know. I've never met him, but he is all I need. I have long conversations with him, speaking his parts. I put words in his mouth and thoughts in his head. He understands me deeply, completely. We share the same interests. When I touch myself, it is him touching me.

I'm the kind of woman who no one pays attention to. I want to pay for things in exact change, but I am intimidated by the impatient looks of cashiers, so I have heavy purses with broken straps, and ashtrays full of coins. When the people I work with have get-togethers, I am often not asked along. It's not because they don't like me. I don't think they have any feelings toward me at all. It's because they forget about me. I am unnoticeable, just as I intend. There's no room in my life for reality, only for Chris.

I live off a busy intersection and there are always vagrants at the corner where I catch the bus to work. They loiter the nearby strip mall, congregating mostly in front of Winchell's Doughnut shop. There's some kind of cosmic trilogy between doughnuts, coffee and hobos. Today, Winchell's has a doorman. It's a bum, begging change. In my fist, I have exactly 72 cents. The price of an old-fashioned. This is one of the few ways I can dispense with my abundance of change, when I know exactly what something costs. I approach the shop, my body language shouting "leave me alone!" The bum pulls the door open for me. How much is that worth? What does it cost? I'm sure he would patient-

"Sure," he says. "I was just getting ready to shave."

"Can you leave a neat mustache and goatee?" I ask, almost panicking at the thought of him shaving his face clean.

"Why not?" He soaps his face looking at me in the mirror. "You look nice with your hair down."

"Thank you." I stand there and watch him shave, just to make sure he does it right. I notice the nail clipper on the countertop. His fingernails and toenails are short and clean. He smells like apple shampoo and Dove soap.

He rinses and turns to face me. "How's that?"

"Perfect," I sigh, my heart thundering away.

He smiles, then takes me in his arms. "You know, since you've been so nice, I've decided to cut you a deal. The hour starts now." He kisses me. Fantasies come so cheaply and they taste like mint and insanity.

Chris stayed for five days. He was a great lover, did everything I told him to. When he left, he took with him a pillowcase half filled with coins. My ashtrays are empty. I haven't seen him again. But then, I'm not looking for him. Bums have migratory patterns known only to them. I am one of the few people I know who have fulfilled a fantasy. It might have been a fantasy of a fantasy, but I am grateful. I count out exact change now, unafraid. My new purse swings lightly in the crook of my arm. People notice me now, and I let them.

Standing at the Sink

Standing at the bathroom sink shaving,
razor in hand. Through the open window

the blurred sounds of Spanish, a single dog
barking in the near-distance, a collection

of unfamiliar birds haggling over breadcrumbs,
eggshells scattered in an overlooked patch

of dirt in the far corner of the back parking
lot. All of it mingles together with the plashing

of the water against the white porcelain basin.
For a moment, I stand motionless, overwhelmed.

The razor is sharpened with late afternoon sun-
light. The dog goes silent. I imagine its paws

padding the dull ground of September, feeling
the warmth already fading from the grass,

from the gravel strewn across the driveway.
I hear the slow, deliberate footfalls, wonder

at their nearness. I look over. The shower
curtain is taut with bird-song. Suddenly.

The sunlight has shifted, is caught along
the edge of the curtain. There is clear,

hot water in it. Beading. And the words
cianocita and *tierra*, which hang in the window

playing Jenga. On the bottom of each of the pieces was written a command, which the person who drew that piece had to fulfill before setting it back on the rising stack. It made the game into something much more involved than what had originally been intended. We were all terribly involved. I was sitting next to Dean. He was the first person to lose a game. He got off easy. He was made to dance the Chicken Dance. It was a mild punishment for losing. I then had to choose what the following game's consequence would be. I had no idea what to say. Gillian offered several suggestions. I took one of them. I forget what it was. Something just as mild, I'd imagine. I'm too forgiving that way.

We continued to play Jenga for perhaps another hour or two. Julio kissed Sylvia's left nipple. Sylvia had to lick herself I don't know how many times. (Each time more languorous as the night wore on.) Both Julio and Gillian curled their hair and sucked their thumbs. Dean had to do something that was written out as *Spaculate*. I told of my first kiss. Gillian told of Julio's most embarrassing moment. Julio lost a game. Gillian lost a game. Dean lost the last game, just as he had the first. I forget what Julio had to do. Gillian had to show her underwear. She hedged by only showing a bit. (I thought for certain I was going to lose that game.) Dean, in losing the last game, had to make out with Julio. Saul, on some inexplicable whim, had set that as the final consequence. (He'd been egged on by both Gillian and Julio while trying to decide on a fitting punishment.) He wanted to change his mind, but he'd already drawn a piece from the stack, so there was nothing for it. Dean

had left the room briefly to get more booze from his place across the hall. When he returned, he learned of his fate. He shook his head and set to finishing out the game. Sylvia, Gillian and Julio were drinking warmed sake. Saul and I were drinking water. I have no idea what Dean was drinking.

When the game was over, as I was putting on my shoes, Julio or Dean suggested we go to Beto's. We went. It was after four in the morning. We sat outside. Both Gillian and Sylvia were cold. The food was long in coming and quite a mess, but good. I had one bite of Julio's torta. Saul accidentally took a bite of a carne asada burrito. He seemed quite upset. I could understand that. Julio spilled food all over himself. It was amazing. He was flinging food off his fingers instead of using a napkin. I was enthralled listening to bits of tomato and avocado splash against the concrete patio. There was a group of kids sitting on the grass in front of the restaurant. Some of them had already eaten. Others were waiting for their food. They were loud and young, most with curly hair and dressed in loud, primary colors. One of them, however, was wearing a Hawaiian shirt. I thought of Tom Selleck in *Magnum, P.I.* It made me miss Hannah and television.

After everyone had finished their food, we left. We walked back through the alley to the apartment building in which Julio, Gillian and Dean live, where we had been drinking and playing Jenga all night. Saul and Sylvia stopped us as we walked past the parking lot in which they had parked their car. We said goodnight to one another, Julio, Gillian, Dean, Saul, Sylvia, and I. We hugged. It

"Way out," the beautician summarized. "Downright queer."

In the arts and crafts studio, in the bowels of the main building, Vernon and Cerelda Croop applied colored glaze to their newly-created Janus doorstops. Former dentists, their fingers retained wonderful dexterity at age seventy-five.

"Died this morning," the man stated matter-of-factly. "Seems she left a funny will."

His wife glanced up from her work. "In what way?"

"Well, we knew she was wealthy, buying that six-room penthouse just for herself and all. Now it turns out she had a lot more than anybody thought. And all the money goes to Monticello Towers."

"Good Lord! Didn't she have relatives?"

"If she did, she couldn't have cared much about them."

For some minutes, the couple beavered away in silence.

"And then," Vernon Croop announced suddenly, "there's a special section in the will about her furniture. Nobody I talked to knew what it says."

"I've never heard anything about her furniture. For that matter, I never heard of anybody being in her apartment to see it."

"No, she didn't invite people. Didn't even use the cleaning services. Did everything herself."

"Queer," opined Cerelda Croop.

"Downright odd," her husband appended.

Perched on a stationary bicycle, Roy Tatum had pedalled himself into a sweat. "Clarence, I sense a prank in all this. I have a nose for such things. I developed it in my long years as a high school principal."

"Cora thinks so, too," Clarence Poe replied. "But I'll be damned if I know what it could be." The retired investment banker

jogged on a treadmill opposite the other man.

The trainer had left the two eighty-year-olds to their own devices, and was putting a group of sixtyish youngsters through their paces at the other end of the health club.

The sweating cyclist continued, "Why should Emma and I, you and Cora, and Vernon and Cerelda be invited to a dead woman's apartment that no one but the deceased has been inside for donkey's years?"

"Hell, I don't know, but we'll find out this evening."

"It's damned eccentric," growled Roy Tatum.

The space in the foyer of the late H el ene d'Argent's penthouse more than sufficed for the three invited couples, the uniformed maid from the catering service, and the ginger-haired young man who welcomed the guests at eight o'clock sharp.

"My name's Harry Isaacson. I'm Ms. d'Argent's attorney, and I'm here this evening to implement a provision of her will. But let's start with some champagne and canap es."

The cork popped with a bang in the big room, which contained no furniture except a coat/umbrella stand and the caterer's serving cart. The walls, however, were anything but empty: woven hangings from India, in brilliant hues, depicted lush erotic scenes with the last degree of explicitness.

Emma Tatum sidled along the tapestries, gasping as she went.

"Those things ought to be burned," fumed Cora Poe.

After refreshments had been handed round, the lawyer got down to business. "Folks, I want to read you a paragraph from my client's will: *On the occasion of the invitation to my flat, and before the stroke of midnight on that evening, the above-mentioned three couples shall divide the entire contents of the dwelling among themselves by amicable agreement. If they fail to do so exactly as stipulated in this paragraph, said contents shall be delivered the following day to the Atlanta City Dump and*

Harry Isaacson clapped his hands. "Ladies and gentlemen, the will says *by amicable agreement*. Just a reminder."

The putative heirs made their way from room to room, gesticulating, scrutinizing, and--increasingly--quarreling.

In what had been H el ene d'Argent's bedroom, a huge canvas over the bed proved to be the biggest bone of contention thus far. In the aquatic background, tentacled and finned creatures, with faces from the Nazi hierarchy, swam languidly to and fro. In the foreground, the three couples romped together in astounding feats of sado-masochism.

"Roy and I want that one," Emma declared in a strident voice. "We'll drop our claim to some of the others to level things out."

Clarence Poe disagreed. "Not so fast, young lady. Cora and I have just the place for it: on our sunporch."

"Well, *we* have an even better spot," shrilled Cerelda Croop. "There's a whole empty wall in our master bedroom."

The smile on Harry Isaacson's face broadened. A gold tooth added a sympathetic note to his otherwise commonplace physiognomy. Once the party had gravitated back to the living room, the couples blaring reproaches at each other, the ginger-haired man clapped his hands again. "Ladies and gentlemen, let me call your attention to the time. It's ten minutes after eleven, and you haven't even looked at the furniture yet. A museum would pay a pretty penny for any of it; that clock on the mantel, for instance, would fetch at least a hundred thousand dollars. And remember, it's all or nothing. You have to divide up *everything*; otherwise you get *nothing*."

Cerelda Croop proffered a suggestion at once. "Listen, folks, if we go on at this rate we'll never finish. Now there are six rooms and we're three couples. Why don't we just draw lots for two rooms per couple? Each couple takes everything in their two rooms. We can be through in five minutes."

"Oh no," Roy Tatum demurred. "The contents of the living

room are far more valuable than those of any other single room. It wouldn't be equitable to count all six as being of equal value."

"Well, *you* make a suggestion, then," Cora Poe said testily. "Time's running short."

"Now Cora," Emma Tatum admonished, "there's no need to talk to my husband in that tone."

"Emma, for heaven's sake," Vernon Croop snarled, "we're wasting time over trifles when a fortune's at stake for all of us. It behooves us to put our heads together and work out something on the double."

Clarence Poe took out his wallet and a ballpoint pen. "Now if we count the living room as, say, one and one half . . ."

"Not on your life," Roy Tatum interrupted. "It's worth at least two of the others."

"All right, then: We have a total of seven points to be divided by three; that is, each couple is entitled to two and one-third rooms."

"Good God!" Cerelda Croop broke in. "It would take us till daybreak to agree on how to divide the rooms into thirds!"

"What's *your* suggestion, then?" Cora Poe barked.

"I already made it!" yelled the other woman.

The late artist's six heirs began to speak at the same time, ever faster, ever louder. Harry Isaacson stepped closer to the fireplace and grinned.

A magnificent clock decorated with ormolu mounts, marquetry, and intarsia occupied the center of the marble mantelpiece. Swarms of tiny silver cupidos surged from behind the case and reached out eagerly toward the face. The instrument's discreet ticking could not be heard over the din in the room. But its elegant golden hands were visible to everyone, and they were racing inexorably toward midnight.

that comes with risk. He ventured as little as possible, engaging life mostly as a passive observer. It was the high road, he thought, with none of the venal trappings or ethical problems of ambition. Without having to act, he was assured of avoiding defeat, the grim acknowledgment that he was a negligible consciousness inhabiting a superfluous body. He preferred his chosen role as keen spectator of the human folly of getting ahead.

Giambone had reached the age of 42. He did not want to get ahead. He was happier looking into the sky and watching the moonrise, or observing the way a cat pawed a beetle in the grass. He wished to live peacefully without reminders that he had greater potential. He dreamed of a garden where it was pretty and there were pools of water, and sunshine, and soft grasses to walk upon, and flowers of rich colors and textures, jasmine, honeysuckle and thyme, and long, graceful trees offering cool shade, under which a barbecue sizzled with juicy tender steaks, pink on the inside, and there was plenty of whiskey to wash them down, and voluptuous women, naked and compliant, in whom he lodged a robust erection that rose sprightly to every occasion for sensual indulgence. He wanted to live in a perpetual salon of art and ideas, in which he and friends incapable of deceit might profess to one another recondite verities about the nature of creativity, or the brilliance of Henry Miller, his favorite writer. He wanted to be Henry Miller, living in Paris in the 30's, smoking cigarettes, living off his friends, eating rich, meaty food in lively bistros, and fucking in capacious bordellos filled with feisty, good looking women spilling out from insular, wall-papered warrens, pungent and over-heated, and, of course, where there was much wine drunk, lots of wine. Giambone sauntered through wistful daydreams, longing for a bohemian paradise where he had artistic, masculine companionship, friends boisterous and daring, and saucy women admirers whose purpose was to inspire and love the coterie of men surrounding him—he, Giambone— always there at the center, the feted impresario and arbiter of moveable

feasts. This was what he ached for, the smoky truths that came from good wine, simple, earthy food and virile conversation, with a solid, wet fuck at the end of the day.

Yet for every one day on which Giambone imagined the possibilities of life as a Left Bank flaneur, there were weeks at a time when it was an effort to muster the will to affect the most simple tasks, days when he languished in the hazy realm of a mind arrested by indecision and self-doubt. He suffered the slightest details with insistent repetition, deliberating the rewards and pitfalls of walking to the corner to buy a loaf of bread. Should he peel an apple or eat it whole? Each action he proposed was accompanied by a new sense of futility. He sat for hours in a chair, drenched in a washed-out warm light that filtered through the drawn blinds. The sun's heat lulled him into a drowsy inertia, until the Santa Ana winds tugged the branches of the holly tree standing desolate on the parched front lawn. The shadows of the tree's sharp leaves slashed at his eyes until the reverie that enchanted him fell away like brittle wafers of rust from a ship's creaking hull.

For now he was safely berthed. Years earlier he had followed his brother here from the Midwest. Only recently had Giambone lodged himself with Delilah, in the small, 2-bedroom Craftsman she rented on the poorer side of Sunset Boulevard, in East Hollywood. It was a neighborhood of immigrants, mostly Mexican. Delilah wasn't bad off. She'd done it on her own for years, getting by in what Giambone liked to call her fractured town, with its plightful geography of anguished dreamers, the living embalmed, and sun-spotted lizards in shoe-polish toupees. Last year she'd made \$40,000, most of it under the table. Not a lot in L.A. but enough to survive; enough to pay the rent, car insurance and her gym membership, with some left over for play. She didn't trouble herself with Giambone's unemployed status. Not in the beginning. There were mitigating factors that compensated for the dearth of money. And at first he didn't scare her away by ask-

ing for any of her own. Only when she'd fallen in love, after the first month, did he come to her for a few bucks now and again, gas money, or enough to buy the Drum rolling tobacco he smoked, or a bottle of Jack Daniels. She could afford that. She understood it was unseemly to ask his brother. She was in love and wanted him to be happy. Soon he'd get a job. Universal was tight after a bad year at the box office. It was the nature of the business. Things would improve in a couple of months. Until then, he said, he could find some piecework to keep him going, odd jobs from friends he knew. He'd look into that. And eventually he'd have to tell her that he and Jack hadn't spoken in years. It was a little thing about money. A small family wound that had grown malignant. Soon she'd learn that he could get no closer to Jack than the average fan. Not even that. Jack's bodyguards had strict orders to toss him on his ear if he ever approached. And Jack's house in Malibu was an impenetrable fortress. It was like having no brother at all. Giambone didn't need him. He was no charity case. Jack was an aging rocker who'd sold out. Giambone would never sell out.

The question of money bothered Delilah less than the fact of Giambone's bathrobe. He wore it constantly; from the time she left in the morning until she returned home hours later, after a full day of personal encounters with demanding clients. She found him sitting in the same room, in the same chair where she'd left him before noon, a cigarette burning between his fingers, a glass of wine in a plastic tumbler on the table next to him, rereading for the umpteenth time *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*, or *The Rosy Crucifixion*. It wasn't even a quality bathrobe, made from plush Turkish cotton, or cool Japanese silk. It was polyester, or acrylic, or acetate, some chemical fabric dyed in a smudge brown, tawny yellow paisley, likely purchased from Target or the 99-Cent Store. It barely covered him. No matter how often he adjusted the fold or tightened the cinch, it came undone every time he shifted in his chair, exposing his genitals, which he fondled as long as they were there, unconstrained and open to view, not in any earnest attempt

to arouse himself, but as men do because they can, the way a woman absently coils her hair around an index finger while lost in thought at a traffic light.

It was mildly unsettling for Delilah to see Giambone implanted in her armchair when she came home each day. She felt as if she were walking into the lobby of an SRO, or the community room of a psychiatric hospital, were it not for the familiar objects she had placed around her living room to decorate and make it like a home, her home. Now it was all put slightly off-center, the picture tilted and set vaguely askew by the inmate/lover installed in the middle, his hand on his testicles, absorbed in his book and himself.

But mostly she was pleased to see him. She still carried with her the fresh image and tactile memory of their recent love-making. And it was just plain good to have a man in the house, the smell of him, the lower register of his voice, the bass thunder of his laugh. Even the taste of tobacco or whiskey he left on her lips, substances she normally avoided, even these were intoxicating in the beginning. They were the things that signified him, his masculine presence in a home that had long been without the blunt, taut substance of a man, the thick and grizzled rootedness of him.

Yet her tolerance was exercised. She might have been more amenable to his habits if they weren't accompanied by a kind of distraction Giambone seemed to suffer each time she walked through the front door, as though she were interrupting him, giving her reason to fear that he would much prefer spending time with his books, with his tobacco and liquor, than time spent with her. Usually he had sense enough to put these down, to stand up and greet her, but she could tell it was done with effort, as though an act of will were required for him to leave off his solitary pleasure and commit his attention to her. She didn't like the feeling that she was disturbing someone when she walked into her own... It was her house. She was not a guest. Why should her presence be

upsetting to another, especially when he was there at her invitation? He should celebrate her return. She wanted to believe that he'd been counting the hours and minutes before her arrival with keen anticipation.

Giambone was stubborn about a lot of things, and he was persistent in his stubbornness. But he was not insensitive. He could see that Delilah was perturbed to find him still in his bathrobe. But it was his stubborn temperament that made him resist changing anything for her. What he needed was her acceptance, her willingness to embrace all that he was. He wanted her to acknowledge his brilliance, his intelligence and wit, and to be thankful for having his stimulating company. Giambone believed these should be enough for any woman. And he knew she was lonely. In exchange for her financial and material support, he would provide inspiration, fascinating observations and commentaries about life, politics, art and religion. He knew how to cook. He was an excellent lover. He would even clean from time to time. And she could always count on his skill in household repairs. It was a fair exchange. And when she found herself pregnant, he would be the stay-at-home dad, schooling the child there, freeing Delilah from the drudgery of motherhood so she could continue her work as a personal trainer, a job that was important to her, to them both. This was Hollywood. There would always be people who needed to look good. Her services were in demand. With him at home raising their child, she would have the freedom to grow her business, increasing her annual income on which they could all comfortably live.

He believed in this scenario. In a strangely pragmatic assessment of his own capabilities, Giambone understood that he was constitutionally deficient in the role of breadwinner. He felt guilty about it, but he couldn't change. And he wanted a woman like Delilah who recognized this about him without needing to discuss it. A woman who understood and accepted him for what he was—an interesting, basically loving and kind man who

drank. Like Henry Miller. Or the image of that man whom Giambone had conjured in his mind, conveniently forgetting that Henry Miller had also produced something on a regular basis — even then he'd worn out his welcome with a long line of women.

When she came in she didn't smile right away, seeing him in the bathrobe, with his book and a glass of whiskey in his hand. He laughed, not sheepishly but less than defiant. He stood up then and welcomed her home with a great, warming hug. And she succumbed to him, ready to overlook the meaning of the bathrobe. She didn't want to scrutinize too deeply. She was in love. But she was no teenager. She wasn't about to fall for just any man, and especially anyone who seemed dangerous, or about whom every visible piece of evidence seemed to suggest heart-break and strife. Giambone was different. He was smart in an eccentric, non-academic way. Unlike a lot of men, he loved to talk. He was ready to offer his unsolicited opinion about anything that came to mind. He was an expert lover. And there was money in his family. She wasn't mercenary in the cold-blooded sense, but if there were some prospect of material improvement, and all that was required in return was to love someone to whom she was attracted, there was no harm in that. So it was not difficult for her to be warmed by him when he took her in his arms and began kissing her face and the soft skin of her throat and the tender areas behind her ears. It was the kind of intimate touch that had been missing in her life. It had little resemblance to her work, to the physical touch of her clients, men whom, unless they were astonishingly handsome, she never kissed. Only a lover's kisses were sweet and welcome and soothing. She had become adept at drawing a nearly impervious line between her job and sex with a lover. They were entirely different.

Giambone tried to smother and overpower her silent objections with an onslaught of affection. He loved her body and she loved his. It was only a matter of seconds, of her pliant limbs taken in by his, enfolding themselves around her, of the transfer

of heat between them and the wet penetration of their tongues, and he inhaling the scent of her, distilled by her long day, made pungent and cured by her body's sweat and the choreography of repetitive motions, only a matter of seconds until he had an erection and her hand was on it and the two of them fell together and she took him inside her, and from them came the deep gusts of their breath and the rutting cries of his burrowing in and her disintegration.

One evening after sex on the floor, next to a small table where Delilah kept framed photos of her parents and grandparents, and after she had showered and rinsed the residue of the oils, breath and sweat of Giambone and the others from her resilient but still soft skin, the same thought rose up again in her mind. It would not be subdued any longer by his sensual mastery of her. What had he done all day? What had he accomplished, she wanted to know. Was it anything of substance? Something that might be touched? Or deposited in a bank vault? Through him she must find a way to leave off living by acting the dreams of others; from making people happy whom she loathed and who cared little for her beyond their allotted time. Must she ever tell him? She hoped he would not make it necessary. He was a Giambone. She was with a Giambone. She was so close now to what she always wanted.

Giambone was in the kitchen, with his bathrobe untied and open at the center, her secretions and his own lingering on his heavy and deflated penis. He sang along to a duet with Van Morrison and John Lee Hooker that spun around the CD player, and busily set himself to chopping garlic, onions, basil, rosemary and tomatoes, while the water for the linguine heated to a boil on the stove. A bottle of Chianti stood open and breathing on the counter. Delilah's kitchen was small but comfortable, with a little nook to the side with three windows forming an alcove to let in the southern daylight. Her walls were decorated with ironic pictures and framed postcards that were meant to amuse her guests.

Taken as a group they stood as a mildly arch critique on the way men and women behaved toward each other in the 1950's, or they lampooned the corny and obsolete consumer products that had come and gone in another less savvy era. They were references to an archaic American wholesomeness that was meant to be seen as quaint and endearing, if fairly ridiculous. In some ways the droll collection of images showed a semi-conscious appreciation in Delilah's own life of the ground she'd covered from innocence to cynicism—from Girl Scout, to high school varsity swim team, college dropout, denizen of Hollywood dance clubs, cocaine 12-stepper, and, finally, full-service masseuse and gentlemen's club entertainer. If she and America were not thoroughly cynical, they were at least no longer burdened by their naivete.

Giambone smiled when she walked in the kitchen barefoot, wearing a white, loose fitting T-shirt with no bra, and a pair of tight, Lycra cycling shorts that emphasized her muscular legs and bottom. Her dark hair was coiled and pinned to the top of her head. She was still full and satisfied from their fucking. She had showered and smelled of lavender from the lotion she used to moisten her skin. Giambone set down the knife on the cutting board and reached out to fondle her. She laughed and pushed him away.

"Keep those stanky garlic hands away from me," she told him.

He liked it when she resisted and ordered him in the playfully severe voice she used, as though she were a martinet in a school for boys. He wanted her even more. He resumed his chopping, smiling broadly, feeling himself fortunate, almost regal, in the pleasure he obtained from their domestic arrangement—the sex and affection, the playful teasing, cooking together in the kitchen, preparing a meal to be shared, drinking wine. He was convinced, finally, that he had found a home, his true home, the one he'd searched for since his mother died, when he and Jack were still boys. His contentment relaxed his usual fears, made him

expansive and soulful, as though he were under protection, and more at liberty to say the things that came into his mind, confident that she would accept them without contradiction. It was an affliction of hope she revived in him.

"You know," he told her, "I think the linden tree in the back yard may have a parasite; it's losing its leaves. Don't you think that's strange, at this time of the year? Maybe you want to tell the landlord."

Giambone offered this information to Delilah as a gift. It was his way of contributing to the welfare of the household. He considered it a positive masculine contribution. It was appropriate for a man to know something about trees. Trees were the realm of men. Feeling like a privileged messenger from this male-bound region, it was his duty to make others aware, the ones who did not have the same proximity to this specialized knowledge. He wanted to hear her say in response how glad and relieved she was that he had brought it to her attention, this important and meaningful problem that was confronting them at the very threshold of their home. His home now. She had let him into it and he inhabited it with her. It was a reconnoitering, swift and still descending.

Delilah filed through the mail that was left for her on the kitchen table. She stood up and walked over to the trash container and threw away the introductory offers for book clubs, low interest credit cards, and various appeals for endangered fish and fowl.

"I didn't even know I had a linden tree in the back yard," she said, half distracted by a letter that had come from her mother. "Which one is the linden tree?"

Moving to the sink she looked out the window facing the back yard. She seemed surprised there were any trees at all. She never went into the back yard. It had always been a forlorn and mildly dreadful place to her. Trees and shrubs and grass and flower beds were all complicated organisms that demanded too much attention. And there were insects. She didn't care for them,

and harbored an exaggerated disgust of spiders and snails. She preferred an environment she could control, where there was little resistance.

The yard was overgrown and had been left to its own devices during the three years she'd lived in this house. Giambone had taken to spending afternoons idling there in the garden. Yet he didn't feel compelled to correct anything he found amongst the prolific tufts of mondo grass, the tightly seeded yellow flowers of monewort, or the lush coyote bush that poured over terraced walls of rough hewn stone. He saw it as a sanctuary. A tranquil place where he could marvel at nature's heedless revolutions, its slow and steady encroachment. To try and marshal this force, direct or tame it, was not anything he considered doing. It was too beautiful in its present chaos. The death of a linden tree was deserving of some concern because it meant the loss of something beautiful. But he also understood that it was meant to be; that sickness and death, organisms preying on other organisms, were a part of life. He could intervene, but then, why? The parasite that was killing the linden tree may very well be protecting some other plant or species of insect that played a beneficent role in the natural cycle. Man was always intruding, trying to correct what could in fact be perfect. Some things were meant to die against his expectations or desire. Often they were beautiful. Sadness at their passing was frequently misplaced, he felt. He told Delilah about the dying tree mostly from a desire to have some stake in the affairs of the house. It demonstrated his involvement, his consciousness of the environment around them. He wanted to assure her that he was participating and vigilant. He liked the idea of being set up in a home together with her. He wanted to establish some proprietary interest, and to be recognized by her as an authoritative partner in the enterprise of a shared and mutual domestic concern. He wanted to stay on.

The fact that the tree was not enough to merit Delilah's concern irritated Giambone. It was as though what mattered to

him was not something she cared about. He took it personally, as if he and the linden tree, and the entire back yard, were integrally related, were in fact one and the same organism, or at least in sympathetic harmony. It hurt him that she didn't share his worry about the tree, nor even pretend. She was absorbed in something else. She looked at the letter from her mother.

"Why is she writing to me," she thought aloud. "She never writes. She always calls."

Giambone turned the heat up in the skillet and poured olive oil into it. He used the large chopping knife to scrape the onions and garlic from the cutting board into the pan. The water in the onions cracked as they met the warm oil. Giambone heard Delilah but he wasn't listening. She hadn't asked him yet about his day, about what he'd done. She didn't care that a tree was dying in her back yard. He hadn't known Delilah more than a couple of months and already he'd heard too much about her mother. He had decided he would not like her. Delilah had never spoken badly about her mother, but the woman was always there, in the background, a looming presence. It was a relationship with which he felt he had to compete. He didn't want to compete with anyone else for Delilah's attention. He wanted to talk about his day. What subtle forms of life he had seen in the back yard. He wanted to read her the poem of Rimbaud he'd come across. And play some music for her, a bittersweet song Jack had recorded about him at a time when the two of them still spoke to one another. The song had never been a hit, but there it was, about him, a validation of sorts that had gone out into the world. He knew it was corny to think it was worth inflating his pride, but he couldn't resist the fact that when people heard the song they were bound to think about him. And now that he was angry, there was something else he wanted to tell her. He hated her furniture. And the tacky little tchotchkes she had everywhere, crowding every shelf and table in the house. She had poor artistic taste, he thought. He needed to educate her about aesthetics and the prop-

er way to decorate a home. He considered himself to be an authority on these things. It was true that he had no formal training. But he believed his tastes were refined and innate. He presumed to know more about the elements of design than she did, based on the decorating choices she'd made in her home. He considered them tired examples of Hollywood camp; no more than trendy and sophomoric deconstructions of American pop culture. One droll room in a house was excessive; an entire house given over to it was plain self-indulgence. He was sure he was right about that.

Delilah could see he was pulling back, protecting himself from emotional exposure, from her own sudden need for distance. His silence was loud and hard-edged, but it was she now who felt more justified in being needy. She couldn't bear the weight of his. Let him pout, she thought. Her mother was divorcing her father. After 40 years. This was why she had written to Delilah, so she could take the space to inform their only daughter, coolly, dispassionately. It had become impossible with the father. Things had been tenuous between her parents for many years. Longer than Delilah knew. And now, her mother said, on top of his drinking, her father had cancer. The mother could not endure years more of struggle with him; could not suffer the role of the nurse when she was already tired, fatigued and angry in her role as the wife. She would leave him. She wrote because she thought it the best way to break the news. She loved her daughter. She knew she would have trouble understanding. She hoped Delilah would not judge her too harshly. Her mother was torn by guilt. She was leaving a dying man. But she'd decided. It was an agonizing choice, but the best one.

Delilah sat down and read through the letter once more without speaking. She could feel Giambone calling her, as though where he stood, just a few feet from her, sautéing the onions and garlic, was a remote place; or as if she were inside a house and he outside, imploring her to open the door, like a small boy whose mother has shut him out because it's the only way she knows to

gather up time for herself, barricading herself behind a wall and locking out the world, even the ones most close to her, even the ones who depend on her, because the craving for aloneness, for peace, for burrowing in and down in the dark, is greater than any other allegiance. The loyalty to one's self surpasses all other loyalties. Sometimes this preservation of self could only be sought in death. Delilah knew he was there waiting for her, wounded by his abandonment. But he must wait. She must absorb the words her mother had sent. She must find some solid place to plant herself until the wave passed over her and she might bob to the top for air.

He wasn't helping. Already at this early stage together she knew that he showed little patience for her need to detach from him, even briefly. If they were together in the same room, he needed assurance that her attention was upon him. Without it, he became peevish and, at times, irascible. She could by now predict his reaction. First he brooded. Then, failing to brook her silence, he provoked himself to speech. It usually came in the form of a simple question, unrelated to his real concern, administered brusquely, his consternation forging each of the words, each syllable glazed in an acrid laminate.

"Can you get the colander for the pasta," he said. "I need some help here," as though she had neglected her watch upon the foredeck of the ship of state.

He became authoritarian. His words were tempered by an ill-concealed exasperation with her, with what he attributed to her incompetence, her failure to scrutinize and predict and respond to his needs, more urgent than her pedestrian worries. He'd been alone all day. He was happy to see her. He wanted to be met with joy. Could she be so easily distracted from him? By a mere letter? A letter from her mother? He distrusted the mother. He was suspicious of her designs. He distrusted their relationship. Two women conspiring. When Delilah was thinking about her mother, where was he left? Could she turn from him, ignoring his sunny

nature, his seductive brilliance? It was an insult. He felt slighted. He was there for her, fully attentive, thoroughly generous, wishing to heap himself in large portions upon the plate of her rapt and eager consciousness. She must be hungry for news of himself, for the day's subtle and rich disclosures, uncovered by him in the hours since they had parted.

"You don't have to snap at me like that. Why must you bark orders? Can't I read a letter from my mother? She's divorcing my father. He has cancer. He's dying and they're divorcing! Am I supposed to pretend it's an invitation to a tea party? What's wrong with you?"

"How was I supposed to know that," he said defensively, believing he was under assault for having made a simple mistake. He became angry. She was so quick to accuse him of being insensitive.

"You could've have told me," he said, raising his voice, "instead of sitting there acting strange and withdrawn. Why do you shut me out like that? Is there something wrong with me? What have I done?"

"Just because I'm quiet for two seconds does not mean you're being punished, Tony."

She was fuming. Was he so thick-headed? Did he not hear what she said? Her father was sick and her mother was leaving him. Was he so insecure that he couldn't allow her to absorb and recover from this news? The life of her parents was disintegrating. The way he was behaving, she might as well have said, "Your bathrobe disgusts me! I want to burn it!"

He couldn't react. He couldn't hear her. There was nothing but the clamor of his own fear, the pining for the reassurance that his life was not a catastrophe. What were her parents to him? No one. It made no difference to him that it was from them she had come. It was they who had influenced and formed her at the very beginning, and continued to love her despite their growing differences, despite the choices she'd made. None of this occurred to

him. There was in him, she saw, a vast and parched territory of the mind that lay between the critical perception of his own longings and the sensitivities of others, as though the others had no relevance, they didn't count but for what they might contribute to his own life. Her parents didn't exist. Her relationship to them was an abstraction that he couldn't penetrate, as if she had been conceived and produced in vacuum, as if she'd had no life until he came along and lifted her off a shelf, like a packet of seeds just waiting for water and light, a tiny water monkey to soothe him and pay tribute to his gardener's green thumb.

He hated her when she became histrionic. He was mad because of the ease with which Delilah could attend to her inner life while he was right there with her. She was a Californian. If they had to attend to their selves, other people were expendable. One's self came first. This was the cardinal rule of the religion of self-augmentation and improvement. The apotheosis of the individual. It made him lose any sympathy for her and the divorce of her parents. He didn't care. She wasn't concerned about him. As soon as something demanded her attention, off she went, leaving him behind. It was a selfish act, he thought. It told him much about her character. He had glimpsed this about her before.

She was crying now; sitting at the kitchen table sobbing, with her shoulders convulsing and not a sound, no sound at all, issuing from her clenched mouth. In the tight Lycra shorts wedged between the lips of her vagina and the cheeks of her buttocks, her libidinous persona no longer made an impression on Giambone. She was just a little girl crying. The sexual aspect of her being disappeared. Everything that Giambone associated with her sexual nature, every body part, lost all erotic significance for him. He was disoriented by the change. She was a body made whole by shaking, suddenly riven with sadness, given over to a quiet and stately lamentation. She rose from her chair at the kitchen table, gathered up the letter from her mother, looked briefly at Giambone, with her eyes reddened and watery, her face

squeezed tightly, as though she were holding something back, keeping down what wanted to come up, keeping it down because she couldn't bear the ignominy that came from showing too much emotion, looked at Giambone with a queer mixture of contempt and longing, and left the room. She walked into her bedroom and closed the door.

Then Giambone could hear the sobs. She felt more free to let them come up in the privacy of her room, outside his seething, impassive presence. They were little peeps and wails that trailed into the kitchen like an atonal counterpoint to the low sizzle of his onions and garlic simmering in the virgin olive oil. He picked up the bowl containing the diced tomatoes and sliced mushrooms. With his hand he scooped out the ingredients and let them fall into the skillet. The tomatoes felt cool and heavy against his skin. The juice of them trickled between his fingers, leaving their seeds to cling there like they were seeking some warmth from his body. He rinsed his hands under the faucet, took up a wooden spatula and evenly distributed the contents of the skillet. Little pockets of air poked through the melange and let white plumes of steam rise up, blanched with the aroma of the cooking vegetables. Everything on the inside bubbled. The sound assured Giambone that what he was doing was good. Preparing food. Preparing the meal that they would eat together. The colors in the skillet, the milky pearl of onions, the tomatoes' soft and pale reds, the brown bone earthiness of the mushrooms and dark forest green of basil sprinkled over the top, all were blended in a way that reassured Giambone, fortified him, comforted him the way his mother's meals had when he was a boy, and made him understand that what he was doing was the right thing. It was what she had done. It was a gift of her love. He loved Delilah, he thought, and the recognition of this love gave him pause. It softened him. He could feel a tenderness in him rise up that moments earlier he had banished, out of fear, his certainty that she had treated him unjustly. He could see that she had been unthinking, but not malicious.

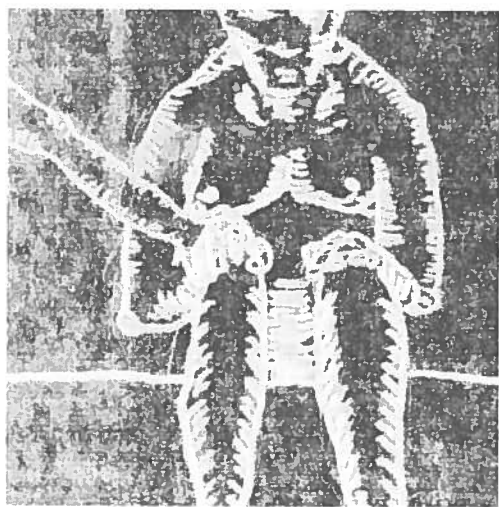
And as he recognized this, the words "divorcing" and "dying" reverberated. When she first mentioned them, they were without meaning. They were common words, powerless against his indignation.

He felt ashamed. Predictably it rose up, the old Catholic guilt that he could never escape, guilt that was not always inappropriate nor misplaced but always reflexive. He had failed her, he could hear someone from a long time ago tell him. Who was it? His father? Some priest or nun? He had been selfish. Even though he could not feel, could not locate in himself the feeling aspect of what it meant to respond to the news she received, he understood that such words had the power to crush a person's daily resolve to stand against the world. Such words conveyed events, realities that threatened a feeling person's balance, perhaps maiming them with blows from which they never recovered. He had been unsympathetic when sympathy was required, even if he had trouble understanding the meaning of death, truly comprehending it in a way that causes a deep sorrow, an effortless grieving. He knew he must somehow find it in him to be generous to her, to comfort her the best he could, even if it meant faking it. He understood now that he had an obligation, where before he could not see through his own aggrieved mind, could not see beyond the slight and insult he thought had been made against him. He was wrong, he supposed, and he should go to her.

His own mother once died. He didn't cry then, or ever, about her death. He viewed it in his mind now like any other episode of his childhood that happened long ago, his first baseball glove, a fist fight with the neighborhood bully, his father's remarriage, his brother's early and lasting success. It registered but there was no feeling related to the image of his mother's face. She was preserved in a ghostly detachment. He had been young. He no longer remembered how he felt. He couldn't imagine crying over the loss of anyone, not even his own father, whom he respected, whom he might even say he loved, out of respect. But

he doubted he would shed any tears when the man finally departed. He wondered at his capacity to feel anything, whether he had ever been able to feel deeply about anyone. He had a glimpse of it with Delilah just now. His guilt had moved him to identify to some degree with what was happening to her. Somewhere in himself he must find a place that could respond to another person's grief, or even his own.

He finished the wine in his cup. It warmed him and made him feel everything would be alright. Her sadness would pass. They would be okay together. He stirred the linguine in the boiling water and poured another glass of wine. Everyone has to face loss, he thought. People die, trees die, parents die, and new things come and take their place. He might cry if Delilah left him. It was rather early to know that. It was time to eat. He took a fork and tested the pasta. It was just right. They would eat together, drink together, and make love. That's how he saw it. They would awake in the morning and see how it all shook out. Giambone swallowed more wine, cinched up his bathrobe, and walked to her room to tell her it was time to eat. He guessed he should be the one to call the landlord. She had other things to worry about. He figured that linden tree ought to be cut down soon, before it weakened, fell over, and somebody got hurt. It was something he could do for her and she could thank him for that.



A Lifetime's Work

We must note first the talk
that was ours alone
until it became like a rehearsal
for a beach landing.
Or lectures on the possibility
of love and technology,
which explained history in terms
of lipstick on a coffee cup,
or as palms pressed against
a bathroom mirror
in an ape-ish compassion
for changes in personality or appearance.
In a valley amongst some hills
the birds sang,
and the crickets and frogs,
and the drip of sleep
crooked on a porch post.
The sunset as seen from an airplane
floated above the clouds
like a sinking grave-ship.
The moonrise over islands
in the river flooded the trees
in gray waves. Our crying
lasted a short while,
yet its intensity and concentration
said a lot about the quality
of the tears. The summer arrived
like a free record.
Our words flaked like a good pie crust.
Sex hummed like a factory
night and day as feelings oozed and greased
the wheels. It looked

like rain. The way domesticity gathered
on the horizon and filtered
down into a deep wellspring. I whistled
myself into a coma.

I woke up under the proverbial piano
weeping to classical sonatas.

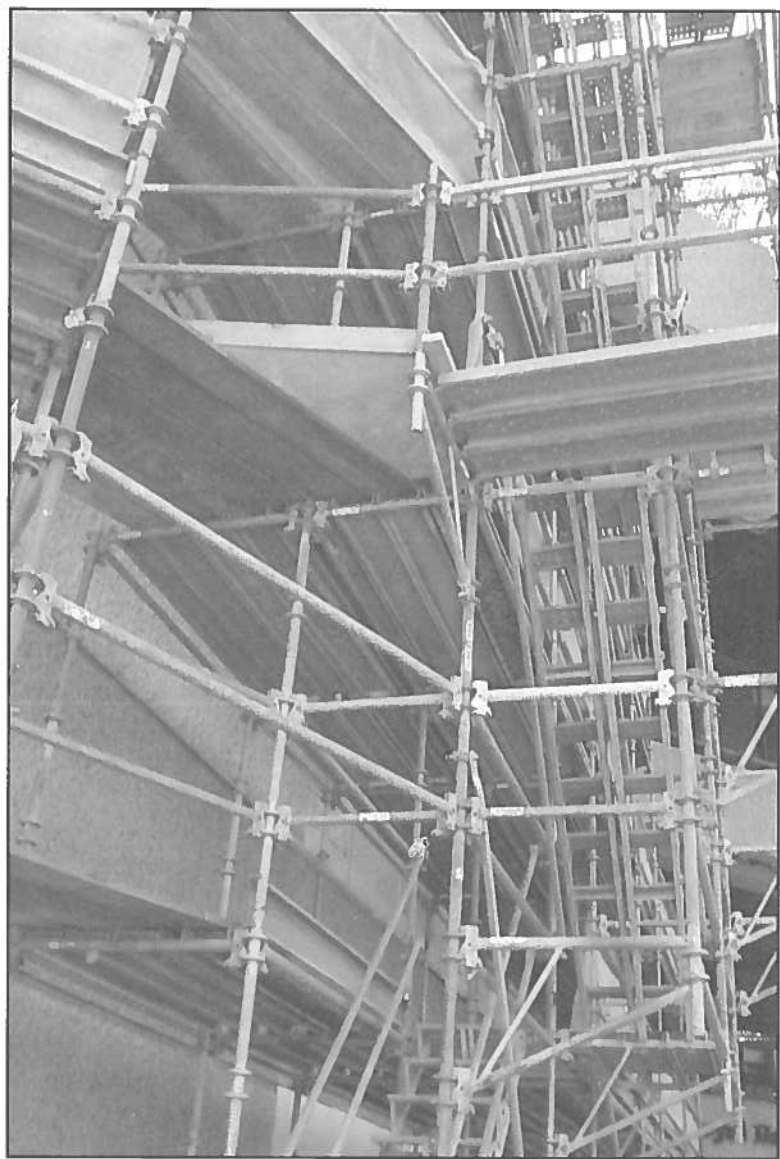
The clocks called out my favorite numbers
as I put myself back together again.

The breasts that informed the blouse
continued to stir my imagination
and those of the garment makers,
novelists, and salesmen from out-of-state.

Twilight traveled across the world's
timezones like stockings rolled down the leg
of a film noir femme fatale. I parsed
the speech of television programming as a seer
discerns the ambiguous utterances
of ethereal beings by way of objects on earth—
cauldrons of water tapped by chains
in the wind, the behavior of sanctioned animals,
or the singing of priestesses. Bouquets
arranged as the days, perfumes
tailored to the woman, trust in banks,
and love formed from the top down like oceans of ice,
and sometimes broken like rivers of ice
that float through the mind in a mirth
of dandelion fuzz on the tapestry of
a spring breeze. Soon my pain will go
through a forest, through winter
asleep in the trees, through my breath underwater,
through my first dream when I
called for help, and awoke beside myself,
like a man does, something
an animal like you would never understand,

if understanding means
the capacity to think of it in the first place.





CONTRIBUTOR'S NOTES

Priscilla Atkins was born and raised in central Illinois. She has lived in various parts of the United States, including ten years in Hawai'i. Recent work appears in *The North American Review*, *Poetry*, *Epoch*, *Southern Humanities Review*, and *The Bellevue Literary Review*. Five of her poems are included in the anthology *New Poems from the Third Coast: Contemporary Michigan Poetry* (Wayne State University Press, 2000). She currently lives in Holland, Michigan, where she serves as the arts librarian at Hope College.

Charles Edward Brooks was born in North Carolina and earned advanced degrees from Duke University and the University of Lausanne. He is a fellow of the Society of Actuaries. His pieces have appeared in numerous publications, including *Eureka Literary Magazine*, *The MacGuffin*, *Pangolin Papers*, *RE:AL*, and *Westview*. In addition to original writing he does literary translation, working in French, German, Italian, and Portuguese as well as English. He lives between Zurich, Switzerland, and a village in the mountains of Portugal.

Rachel Cann received an MFA from Emerson College in 1989. Her BA from the University of Massachusetts was granted in 1964. In 2003, she received a grant from the Barbara Deming Memorial Fund based on essays about homelessness published in *Spare Change News* (Cambridge, Mass.). She has published short stories in over 15 literary magazines and is seeking for a feature film script entitled: *A Nefarious Woman*. She lives in Somerville, Mass. With two Dalmatians who tend to get her in a lot of trouble.

Jay Carson teaches literature and rhetoric at Robert Morris University in Pittsburgh. He is active professionally, publishing, presenting, and consulting on literary and rhetorical issues. Jay has been writing poetry for several years and regularly gives readings. His work appears in *Confluence*, *Taproot*, and *The Yalobusha Review* and is forthcoming in *Eclipse*, *The Carquinez Review*, and *The Distillery*.

Jeffrey S. Chapman is working on his Creative Writing Ph.D. at the

University of Utah as we speak. He feels Salt Lake City is a fine and prosperous city, full of people with good stamina and good teeth. He lived in the East for a while but feels the West is pleasantly expansive.

Jim Daniels' most recent books include *Detroit Tales: Short Stories*, Michigan University Press, and *Show and Tell: New and Selected Poems*, University of Wisconsin Press, both published in 2003.

Christian Dean lives in Santa Monica, California. He works as a teacher, writer, and editor there. Christian is originally from Iowa. He grew up in an industrial Mississippi River town and then went to college in Iowa City. Afterwards, he earned a Masters degree in Massachusetts and have since been bandied about from Europe and North America, until he landed in Santa Monica—a few blocks from the Pacific Ocean—where he hopes to stay a long while.

Kelly Madigan Erlandson's work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Barrow Street*, *Plains Song Review*, *Manzanita Quarterly*, *Iowa Woman* and other magazines and in the anthologies *Times of Sorrow*, *Times of Grace* and *Crazy Woman Creek*. She has been a finalist in the Missouri Review Essay Contest, and in 2003 was awarded a residency from the Kimmel Harding Nelson Center for the Arts.

Doug Flaherty has published in *The New Yorker*, *The Nation*, the *Harvard Review*, *The Quarterly Review of Literature*, *Poetry Northwest*, *North American Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, etc. Work has appeared in eleven anthologies including one from Random House. Flaherty has published four full-length books of poetry and done readings at thirty universities. He has recorded his work at Harvard and has read onstage at *The Peacock Theatre*, experimental branch of the *Abbey Theatre*, Dublin. Flaherty has been in residence at various art colonies including *Yaddo*. He is also a playwright and a digital artist.

Paul Galvin currently lives in Southern California and is at work on his first novel. His stories have appeared in *Writers' Forum* and *North Atlantic Review*.

Juli Henshaw lives in Arizona where she teaches, waits on tables, revis-

es her short story collection, "Fragile" (either intermittently or continually, depending on point of view), and works on her novel, *Heart of the House*. Her work has appeared in *The South Dakota Review*. She received her MFA in Creative Writing from Goddard College in Plainfield, VT.

Kristin King lives in Seattle with her husband and son, where she writes and teaches technical writing. She won a Pushcart Prize and has been published in *Calyx* and *Parting Gifts*, and work is forthcoming from *Raven Chronicles* and *Island of Story, Sea of Voices*, the anthology of the Whidbey Island Writer's Association. She has also won recognition from Writers at Work and the Utah Arts Council.

Bruce Lader has poems published in journals including *Margie, Poetry, Malahat Review, Confrontation, Antigosh review, Dalhousie Review, Controlled Burn, Main Street Rag, and Fulcrum*. A former Helene Wurlitzer Foundation writer-in-residence, and recipient of an honorarium from the college of Creative Studies at the University of California in Santa Barbara, he is the founder and director of Bridges Tutoring, Inc., a non-profit organization based in Raleigh, North Carolina.

Tom Lombardo was born and raised in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, during the peak era of American steel making and its subsequent decline. He holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Queens University of Charlotte, an MS in Journalism from Ohio University, and a BS in Metallurgical Engineering from Carnegie Mellon University. He lives in Atlanta, Georgia, with his wife and two children.

Bobbi Lurie's collection, *The Book I Never Read*, won the Edges Prize and was published in 2003 by CustomWords. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in many journals, including *The American Poetry Review, Nimrod*, and *Puerto del Sol*. She lives Corrales, New Mexico.

Linda Marie Cossa earned her BFA in painting (with an emphasis on word and image) from the University of Hawai'i, and her MFA in painting (with an emphasis on women's studies and word and image) from the University of South Florida. She has also studied in Paris and Stanford University. Linda Marie has been an Art Professor at the Institute of American Indian Art, a Gallery Director, a graphic artist, a mental health

counselor (expressive arts), and a Hospice volunteer. She also, has worked with and been an advocate for the disabled, and homeless women and children. She is currently writing a book entitled *The Tree of Sophia*. Thematically, the book deals with the retrieval and healing of the Feminine. In addition to her creative writing and image making, Linda Marie works privately with clients using divination/shamanic journeying cards of her own creation.

New York City's **Susan Maurer** has been published in over 100 journals and anthologies in 100 countries. Her *By the Blue Light of the Morning Glory* was published by Libra Arts. Among her credits are *Skid Row Penthouse*, *Virginia Quarterly Review* and the anthology *Off The Cuffs*, Soft Skull.

Dodie Messer Meeks' murder mysteries, "The Field" and "Pretty Little Girls and Other Men's Wives" (Panther Creek Press), are available on Amazon.com. The Arts Alliance Center at Clear Lake (www.aacl.org) published an illustrated collection of her poetry, "When I Got Dressed Again." Meeks and a former husband, Bradford W. Messer, once covered Galveston as the Houston Chronicle bureau.

Roy Murakami has recently finished his undergraduate studies at the University of Hawai'i, Mānoa. This 24 year old commuter lives in Pearl City, Hawai'i, where he soaks up the tap water and loves himself a little bit of rock'n'roll,...just a squeeze

Miguel Murphy's poems have appeared in *Blackbird*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, and *Clackamas Literary Review* among others, and have been awarded an Academy of American poets prize. His first book, *A Book Called Rats*, won the fifth annual Blue Lynx Prize from Washington State University Lynx House Press in 2002. He lives in Venice Beach, California.

Joddy Murray earned his MFA in Poetry at Southwest Texas State University and his Ph.D in Composition and Rhetoric at Syracuse University. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in the *Portland Review*, *Passages North*, *American Literary Review*, *Berkeley Poetry Review*, *Carquinez Poetry Review*, *Confrontation*, *CrazyHorse*, *The Louisville Review*,

Madison Review, *Mindprints*, and many others. Originally from Grand Junction, Colorado, he teaches writing and rhetoric at Washington State University, Tri-Cities.

Fred Ostrander has had lots of readings in the San Francisco Bay Area, publication in a considerable number and variety of poetry magazines, poetry editor (one of three) of "Blue Unicorn," my book (o.p.) "The Hunchback and the Swan." He has been working for several years with a group of writers (at one time referring to ourselves as Activists), work to find how and what it is we want to bring to the page with our phrases.

Sarah Pardes, who originally hails from Portland, Oregon, is a graduate student in English and Creative Writing at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. She is currently at work on her first novel.

Until now, **Elmer Pizo** doesn't know what happened to the poems he submitted and were accepted for publication in *Hawai'i Review* last year (2002).

Derek Pollard currently lives in Salt Lake City with his wife, Colleen Wolpert.

Sally Ridgway Proler is a lifelong teacher and writer. An award-winning journalist and poet, her poems have been published in journals such as *MacGuffin*, *Nimrod*, and *Hoebe* as well as in *A Field of Words*, a Creative Writing text. She has taught English at Houston Community College and, since completing her MFA at Vermont College, she tutors in writing, leads writing workshops, and teaches with Houston's Writers in the Schools.

Sharon Rowe has been a philosophizing, dancing, poeticizing and teaching in Hawaii for 30 years. When she hears a poem it is because of Phyllis, Harold, Yasuki, Galway, Hina, James, but mostly because she feels the love of Gen and Kogen.

Normie Salvador is a poet, writer, co-editor of *Hybolic*, and freelance copyeditor/proofreader. His most recent publication was a review in

Marvels and Tales: Journal of Fairy-Tale Studies. He has a forthcoming chapbook being published by Tinfish Press.

James P. Stanton is a career military jet pilot with degrees in Sociology, Peace Studies, and Business Administration. His professional and fiction works have published in *Joint Force Quarterly*, *Infantry*, *Capper's* and *Hardboiled* magazines. His first novel, *UPT*, is searching for a long-term significant relationship with an attractive publisher.

Kathryn Waddell Takara, a PhD, in 1971 created the first "Black Studies" courses in Ethnic Studies at the University of Hawai`i, and has been the only African-American lecturer and current Asst. Professor of Ethnic Studies teaching "Black Studies" in the University of Hawai`i academic setting. She earned a BA in French from Tufts University (Jackson College) in 1965, an MA in From the University of California, Berkeley in 1969, and a PhD in Political Science from the University of Hawai`i at Manoa, 1993. She has been a Fulbright scholar twice. Dr. Takara has published two books, *New and Collected Poems* and *Oral Histories of African Americans*, over fifty poems, several articles in refereed journals, and has made many other appearances throughout various media.

Mark Taksa was born in San Antonio, Texas, and grew up in New York City. For various reasons, he quit high school. After completing his service in the Air Force, he graduated from UC Berkeley, earned a Master's Degree in English (Creative Writing) from San Francisco State University, and taught high school for thirty years. He lives in Albany, California, where his wife, son, and he enjoy walking their two Siberian Huskies. He has poems appearing in *Hiram Poetry Review*, *Rhino*, *River Styx*, *Interim*, *International Poetry Review*, and *MacGuffin*. His chapbooks include *The Root* (Pavement Saw Press, 2002), *Choice at the Blossom Cafe* (March Street Press, 2002), *The End of Soup Kitchens* (Pudding House, 2002), *Cradlesong* (1993, winner of Pudding House's National Looking Glass Poetry Chapbook Competition and published in 1994), and *Truant Bather* (The Berkeley Poets Workshop and Press, 1986).

Daniel Tsukayama was born in raised in Kailua, Oahu. He now lives in Hilo.

Kimberly Kepa`a Tubania lives and writes in Pearl City. "Doughnut Shops and Doormen" is her first published work.

V. Q. Wallick's fiction and poetry have appeared in numerous publications including *Spindrift*, *Potpourri*, *Ellipsis*, *Northridge Review*, *Sonoma Mandala*, *Georgetown Review*, *Red Dancefloor Press* and *The Crunge*. She is a 7th generation Log Angeleno descended from the Conquistadors. Ms. Wallick graduated from UCLA and teaches impoverished adolescents creative reading and writing. Wallick edits the poetry journal *Lysander*. She travels widely and spent prior years idyllically living in the South of France, eating nothing but clover and lavender pudding as Johnny Depp's secret mistress, devoted to lyrical poetry, bullfighting and flamenco dance.

Jeff Walt was awarded a 2003 fellowship from the Djerassi Foundation and nominated for a 2003 Pushcart Prize. Poetry in *New Millennium Writings*, *Inkwell*, *Explorations*, *The Ledge*, *Cream City Review*, *Hawai`i Pacific Review*, *The Sun*, *Lifeboat: A Journal of Memoir*, *Oberon*, and *The Comstock Review*.

Local Artist and UH Mānoa graduate **Bryce Watanabe** is dead. Anxiously awaiting a healthy stipend from *Hawai`i Review*, he is survived by his fighting fish Stanley II. His artwork can be seen in the community calendar *Braddahs Fo One Bettah Neighborhood '02* and his chapbook *Four Ways to Dirty*.

jill Wright grew up in a small town in Oklahoma and now lives in Los Angeles as a successful writer-producer of new media for Warner Brothers, Digital Pictures, IVS and others. Her work has been the subject of a BBC documentary, *Equinox*. She is the award winning author of children's books—*The Old Woman and the Willy Nilly Man* (G.P. Putnam's Sons), and *Minnie's Tea Party* (Starry Puddle Publishing). Her poetry chapbooks are *A Child's Christmas in Oklahoma* (Sacred Bundle Publishing) and *Wild Stars* (Starry Puddle Publishing), which she also edited. Her work has been published recently in *Atlanta Review*, *The Distillery*, and *Mindprints*, among others, and has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize, 2003.



