

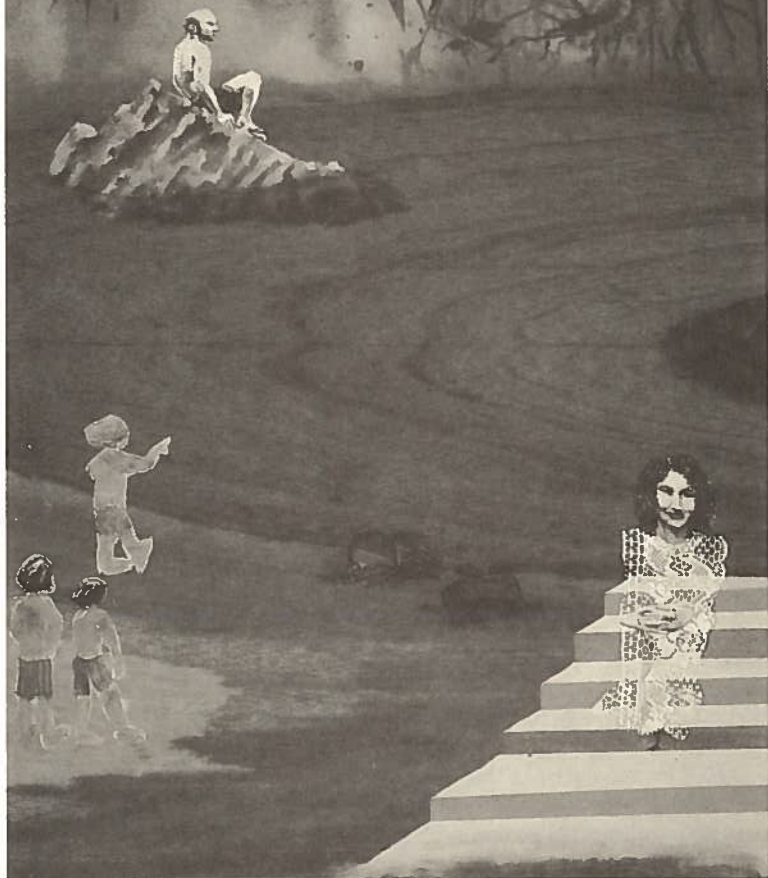
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Dedicated to the memory of
Robert Creeley
1926-2005





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Personal Myths

vii.

Ulysses accosts me at the Marina del Sol,
a fat-lipped smile spread across his face
and brand-new boat shoes white in the sun.
“Whether or not you think it’s ready,”
sez e, and now I see his face prepare
to break into a thousand pieces.
“I’m taking her out when the tide changes.”
I took not but a second to reply:
“Not in those shoes, sailor, no way.”

iii.

Once in the cathedral at Chartres I sat
in the holy light of rosettes and votives
aflicker in the God-gloom.
To the gargoyle rampant, winged
sez I: “Go thou home. There’s nothing
left to protect.”
An ancient gaze cast e upon me,
and creaked from his mouth the start of a question
but thought better e, as I remember it, and flew off.

Michael Shapiro



viii.

Sitting down to another round with Deep Blue
I think on what small potatoes sheep cloning is.
“Did you see what the Hubble saw?” I ask.
It twitters in its binary tongue something
about John the Baptist being like a shaman,
the closest thing to real witches we still worship.
“On the whole,” read it, “You can’t be too
careful about consorting with kings and queens.”
“Checkmate,” sez I, draining my stout.

iv.

Lacking a mystic center, I enter the nearest
7-11 and await the rapture. It comes, but
much too late to give a lasting buzz.
The kid behind the counter claims e’s
Werner Heisenberg. I’m uncertain but can’t
reliably disagree.

Wants to know why
I sit staring so long at the ATM. “I’m waiting,”
sez I, “to see what happens when it runs out.”
Werner, piqued, watches with me. But it never does.

ix.

I don’t know what they are but they move
like maggots, like slugs or some other foul
denizen of moist corpses and leaf litter.
Each has the face of a Catholic Pope or Holy
Roman Emperor. I pick out the one I figure
must be Celeste V and ask it exegetical questions.
“Have some tact,” sez e, in vulgar Latin.

“Do I come to your house and ask you for advice?”
“No,” sez I, “But if you did I’d give it.”

vi.

Under my tux, the new matte-black cat suit craves
my groin as I gambol across the rooftops of Prague.
Debonair with the grappling hook I rappel
to seventeenth-century rooms on whose terraces
I bed both enemy and assassin. Later,
running along the medieval wall I glimpse
an ancient carp struggling in the river. Important, I think,
but my tie injects the adrenaline and I push
to make the last train for Hallstadt.

i.

“Come on, Telemachus,” I exhort, but e sits there
stuck to the TV. “Saints/Cards,” e mumbles.
“Play-off game. You go on. Mebbe I’ll catch you.”
E’s always like this, stuffed with nachos
but it doesn’t bother me so much as it did.
I take the Pathfinder down to Costco
and wander the mazes of power tools and salsa.
When I return, dripping and ropeburned,
e offers a glance. “Nice tan,” e sez, and goes numb.

ii.

The little green men howl with laughter at
the crank call to SETI: “Take me to your leader,”
they gurgle into the translator. “Earthman.”
The techs in the control room spring to life,
papers fly, orgasmic lights flash

and scientists justify their funding.
From the peaceful crepuscular sky they glide
and carve on fields of English wheat
their spirochete names with microwaves.

xiv.

As the millennium hurtles by us,
I walk a Roman road with Rebbi Ben Eliezer.
Sheep on the hills bleat a weak protest
at the smell of aftershave and parchment.
“Think,” sez I in my best Lower East Side,
“Of all whose feet trod here before ours.”
In the following silence, I hear vessels crack
like eggshells and the wheel of Ouroboros squeak.
“Trod?” sez e, “Who the hell talks like that?”

xv.

Two quarks walk into a bar and one sez
“Two quarks walk into a bar and one sez,”
The other quark, irked, queries:
“Let me tell it. Let me tell it.”
To which the first quark remarks archly:
“Let’s switch seats—but act natural.”
“Two quarks walk into a bar and one sez:
“You’re sitting in my seat.””
“Charming,” the quark retorts. “Tell it again.”

ix.

When the asteroid crushed the coast of Labrador,
and lava burbled through the crust in Jackson City,
one more plague, to which I was immune

swept through the inhabited parts of Wyoming.
I lit a match in the dark of the Holland Tunnel
and saw in its happy light hundreds of empty cars.
Deep at the world's core, the venerable Bodhisattva
gets on the horn to Paramount Studios and chants
a mantra which sounds like *shantih*, because it is.

How I Got My Scholarship

I went to visit the founder of the school every Wednesday afternoon. The bus driver named Hot Dog dropped me off. He mopped a red face and nobody knew if he had one foot or two—one huge black-polished shoe worked the brake, anything else was hidden . . . “Must be mutilated,” Darren Bijoux whispered in my ear. On Wednesdays I wouldn't look in boys' eyes because I wore a cotton dress with buttons down the back. It felt see-through.

The founder lived in dim light and she had many things under glass globes, tiny things with wings or a hundred sides, tightly folded paper violets the size of my fingernail. The night before, I dreamed about a very heavy book that was a mayonnaise sandwich. I was figuring out how to eat it.

“I'm not sure I'm smart, but I sure am hungry!” I was saying in the dream when I woke up in a panic, certain I had peed. But it was pancakes sizzling on the griddle and a flea biting the inside of my thigh.

“Whatever you write has to have a heaping portion of delight if it's going to get *anywhere*,” she said.

Anywhere meant something far away: to the top of a volcano, or hand-delivered to the president at his breakfast table. Her skirt was striped silky pink and white, her pantyhose shimmered like the dark, paper-thin membranes the caterpillar in my class wrapped himself up in to undergo transfor-



Abe Louise Young

mation. I wrapped myself like that, like a log in sheets at night—are you a mummy? or a cocoon? My brothers snuck in, snickering, poked me with a stick. I tried to stop breathing. *Am I dead? Or am I growing?*

Her bosom was mesmerizing, glowing like garden lights under lace. She talked, and I nodded and nodded. I read once that by keeping your legs crossed and your eyes as wide as they could be, a girl could look intelligent. She offered me butter cookies and set a clock that opened from a little leather box like a crab, ticked like claws tapping together. We drilled vocabulary. Voracious. Matriculate. Petrify. Insight.

The first two Wednesdays I didn't eat because “No, thank-you,” sounded smart, crisp, and polite; “Yes, please,” was clearly more spoiled and greedy. But she kept laying out little plates of different treats and looked displeased until I took a bite; then she leaned close in, smiled like we had a secret.

“Now write me a story,” she said, held out a fountain pen, and left the room. It almost fell over in my hand, it was so heavy.

I looked around, then wrote about two girls who got baked into a cake the size of a bed. It had curtains and pillows and all. The girls were petrified and thought they might asphyxiate—until they got the insight that they could eat their way out. Now they would be sure to matriculate!

I finished just as the clock hands grabbed for five. At the bottom I signed in cursive with a flourish, a curlicue, and a period after my name. She was coming back in a minute, and then her long black car would drive me home. “Delight,” I whispered to myself. “Voraciousness. Delight. Everything I do is right.”

Edible Fossils

Some nights I type my name into the search engine
just to see how badly I want it
to find me, I'm all tensed up and behold!
it seems to invent her,

a short pixilated list from 1990s
functions in which the name glows candy blue,
a hypertext archive of queer listings
where I've been in congregations

of women drinking ginger, fighting
power, flirting in ether—
there's no word for female
ejaculation, I remember:

asked by a dyke in the audience
one night if it existed, what it's called,
how to define it, I said
it exists unnamed,

we have to invent it,
and when we do, should we post it
or keep it our secret?
If all accumulated knowledge is growing heavier,

or splitting like heavy metals
with a daytime TV half life,
where do we store those things that occur
secretly, wetly, tax free,

in mystery?
Go back to solitary searcher

of the beginning & trick the illusion:
the Web thick with crawlers,

some lonely, predatory,
some truly happy conducting transactions,
jacking off, a repository,
a vocabulary of our futile durability:

a world-wide world a soft strand bed
where we dream a self crawling in a canticle,
space without centrifuge, where all who have access
make paths, and all paths touch, however slightly;

where the occurrence of each name
is simultaneously important, irrelevant,
and replacing the planet:
our virtual natural history

Transcendental Sandals

In New Jerusalem men make vodka from pine trees,
the toes of the ancient grandmothers and grandfathers
sucked clean.

Long-buried donkeys get up to dance again.

It's happiness, absolutely new weather:
something this utterly Yaweh can't be sold in a
market or store.

You are azure, you are a listener.
I will tell you, and you will want to go there.

In New Jerusalem, girls wear tablecloths and link
languages over irrigation pipes and orchards.
Boys melt down weapons and bury the bloody limbs.
Towels and diapers sun dry in alleyways,
awaiting their turn to move over hot skin.

In transcendental Jerusalem, talk is poetry,
the reverse Tower of Babel; that language lovers speak,
seeking consonance—the sweet murmur,
silly names for ordinary objects—wind-chimes,
eyes, olive pits, chicken bones. What can hover.

Feet make love to the dirt and a marvelous
peace is sown in radiant soil. Prophecy at rest.
Baked bricks and the houses of exiles form a spiral,
spiky barbed wire breaks into portions of jewelry.
Palestine shines. Invite it into your maps.

Christmas Poem

From Bethlehem to the infirmary,
a convoy moved from the settlement
and was gone. The stony road was dark, and far
away the Star of David shone solemnly.
By dawn the whole earth was covered
with salt as if by a dry hoarfrost.

Smoke stays in the valley. Grill is on.
The radar talks to a flying rocket.
Deep bottom of the cavern rots.
There sulfur in the hellfire smolders.
Church spire goes up to a bottomless void
and stands like a pinnacle of faith.

The feast is closer. Bazaar alive.
The priests are having tea, samovar puffs.
Some hug the sidewalk, some drink young wine
from a clay jug, yellow star rises.
That lonely string in the divan
still sings from the heaven, never silent.

The fires are on throughout the night,
and mist is settled on the harbor.
Northeast is blowing out of the void

Andrey Gritsman



over the hustle of brokers, clerks,
cathedrals, markets, tolls of warning.
And then the Towers of Babel
are burning slowly in the morning.

New Jersey Gothic

Mary wobbles out of the house
(white aluminum box, one of fifty,
picket fence, Virgin on the lawn),
thin braid, round steel-framed glasses,
mousy St. Peter's uniform,
her fingers in a desperate search
in her cheap, black school bag
for a hopelessly forgotten Bible.

Mother on the doorstep,
hands on her hips, eyes steel,
her jaw growing square,
squealing through the metal-
tooth fence to an old, bony,
rabid man entrenched
at the kitchen table.
He puts aside the Classifieds:
used lawn mowers, raises
his parchment hand. Mary

wakes up, cat on her blanket,
smell of cheap coffee, crackling
of floor upstairs, closer, closer,
vestiges of lives on the old chest,
faded faces of those
whose souls now
marry each other elsewhere
in a bleak wedding.
Cat's soul in delayed ecstasy
waking up, floating softly
on the swelling tide
of sizzling bacon.

Bacon Street

I want to tell what gets me by—
all I don't know in Tazwell County,
Illinois. Earth is chocolate cake,
and I was born on Bacon Street.

Dad was Dutch or Ring-Eye, I hear,
5'10, 220, short greasy black hair.
Caprice and calls to Chicago
got him around. My neighbor Shirley,

I called Early, had a great army set
I machine-gunned meticulously
with forefinger and thumb.
I ate corn only when he called it King

Corn from Chillicothe I called Chilly
Coffee. In Peoria I liked the Steak
'n Shake's Chili Mac, overlooking the Illinois,
where a Caprice, King, and Dad went down.



Daniel Saalfeld

Iowa In

we wait for the day
& it comes
chasing the dawn
for two eggs,
a tumbleweed &
The New York Times,
the semis around
here carry tractors
to pull us out of
this mess, we join
their drivers
for a cup of coffee
& the poets in Lynnville
write about fields
& the barns sagging,
while we weep
over bacon
& interstates.

Thomas R. Peters Jr.



Let Freedom Ring

*"at this time we hope you feel
free to stay tuned for instructional programming"*

My high school history teacher
used to say to me,
"What did you see on your trip,
the inside of some bars?"
he was usually right
this week things are back to usual
this country like "we" found it,
the Braves kicking the Indians' ass,
Betty Page is dancing with a chair
on the same TV I saw a symphony
of mice the night before,
some guy with fishnets & platforms
is singing about living on a Chinese rock
& another guy with a necklace made of cows' teeth
& long fingernails dressed in black leather
from head to toe with a snakeskin
hatband just bought me a drink.
The painting of Carl Sandburg above
the bar reminds me of Jeff
on another wall "blockhead,"
is pounding nails into his nose
with a hammer and the bartender
who used to serve Auden
in his pajamas is showing me his
1940's soccer clippings,
the cab driver who told
us his wife's full lips
were like kissing a rare roast beef.
shows us her picture
& she's beautiful

Piece of Cake

Nolly was mixing the chocolate cake in the kitchen when a white Volvo pulled up, the backseat a cityscape of stacked tupperware. Auntie Prittup. He went down to meet her and she climbed the steps to his apartment as if they were the steps to the ghats at the Ganges.

Auntie Prittup sat on the edge of the brown velvet sofa and examined the room. Her thick glasses magnified her eyes, making her look like an indignant bush baby.

"I've never heard of you before and now Pila tells me that you're the boyfriend." She cautiously eased herself back onto the sofa. "I got your address and looked you up on Mapquest.com. The directions were very good." She patted the sofa cushions as though the directions had specifically brought her to sit among them but looked up quickly to check any familiar auntie-ing. "People *outside* the family call me Mrs. Prittup."

Nolly said, "Pleased to meet you, Mrs. Prittup."

Auntie Prittup nodded and pulled the corners of her mouth down. "The freeways are not what they used to be. In my day, young men didn't throw things at you while you were driving." She stared at Nolly. "A shoe. Near Bakersfield."

"I'm sorry. Perhaps they were drunk."

"In my day, people could drink without hurling shoes at one another. Mr. Prittup, God rest his soul, drove from Los

Sandra Hunter



Angeles to San Diego after drinking for two days with his brothers. He didn't throw anything at anyone." Auntie Prittup glared at Nolly as if he, too, were guilty of throwing footwear about on the freeway.

Nolly said, "I have tea or lemonade or water."

Auntie Prittup said, "I'll have water. I hope Pila has cleaned properly. I don't want to get there and have to start mopping and polishing and what-all in my nice clothes." She said *clodes*. She looked at the floor. "You could use a vacuum cleaner around here, too."

He got up and Auntie Prittup followed him into the kitchen. "You're *baking* and all?"

"It's just something from the back of a Hershey's box."

Her bush baby eyes strained up at him. She leaned on the countertop and wobbled her left knee thoughtfully. "So. A chocolate cake."

"I wanted to do something Indian, but I can't cook."

Auntie Prittup rubbed her nose with the palm of her hand. "Let's see here. Grind up some cardamoms and a few cloves." She picked through his spice rack, found a rolling pin, and mashed up the spices on a cutting board. She tipped the coarse mixture into his bowl. Then she added ground ginger and a quarter teaspoon of chili powder.

She said, "Can serve with ice cream. Bingo-bango. Indian dessert."

He poured the aromatic mixture into a cake pan and carefully slid it onto the middle rack of the oven.

He felt like hugging her, but her glasses warned him off. She said, "Listen. Good-looking fellow and all, but her parents will never agree. I'm not trying to offend you, but there it is. *Brahmos* and so on. This caste-baste business."

It was true that Pila's Brahmin parents were caste-conscious. Might they label him as that *Seychellois mongrel*? He felt a small internal plummeting as though someone had

opened the oven door during his rising, and he'd sunk, become a little less.

Auntie Prittup had rescued his cake, and his intentions were unsound. How to explain that you were mesmerized, adoring but knew that marriage was impossible? Haphaestus was a god and look at the trouble he had with Aphrodite.

She said, "Who-all is coming to this party of Pila's?"

He was startled. "She didn't tell you?"

"Pila does this at least once a year. Big dinner party for friends from here, there, and everywhere. Still, that's what aunts are for, isn't it?"

"These are her MIT friends. I don't know them."

Auntie Prittup looked at him. He didn't know whether it was a what-kind-of-fool-are-you look or a what-are-we-getting-ourselves-into look.

She said, "Tell me about home."

While the cake baked, Nolly told her about the men who caught sailfish, barracuda, and dorado off La Digue. He described swimming behind shoals of tiny fish, like mobile dot-to-dot puzzles. He talked about the sun striking down through the water as you looked up from twenty feet.

She said, "Very beautiful, the sea, isn't it? I always liked Goa." The smell of chocolate and spices filled the apartment.

Auntie Prittup said, "Come. Let's face the music. We'll take my car. You can hold your cake nicely on your lap."

He changed into his *kurta*, and Auntie Prittup said, "Very handsome. Not too fancy but *very* handsome." He felt his chest go hot. It was almost like being a small boy again. He made himself busy with the cake to cover the smile.

She was a serious driver, pulling her seat forward so that she was plastered against the wheel. "I have *very* good sense of direction and I react quickly for a woman my age."

She demonstrated this by darting in and out of the traffic on the way to Pila's apartment. She used her indicator but changed

lanes so rapidly it was hard to know if the indicator was on from where she'd been or where she was going. His lips stuck above his teeth in a dried smile while he clutched his plastic box of warm cake. Auntie Prittup pulled up at Pila's Brentwood condo and executed perfect parallel parking.

"There. I don't know what all this fuss-buss is about driving."

The combination of the drive and the offering of his cake made him a little trembly as he entered behind Auntie Prittup. The urge grew to tell her that he didn't intend to ask Pila to marry him. He was heartless. He looked down at his cake. How could he be heartless when he had brought this, throbbing with the scents and promises of India and, perhaps, the Seychelles, too?

Pila, her hair brushed out, looked beautiful in a red *salwar kameez*. She kissed and hugged her aunt and told Nolly to put the tupperware in the kitchen. He realized he was meant to collect the rest of the boxes from Auntie Prittup's car. It took two trips while Pila and Auntie Prittup emptied the boxes into pans, casserole dishes, baskets with lids for the *pooris*, *chapatis* and *papadums*, and small ceramic dishes for mango chutney, coconut chutney, coriander-mint chutney and tomato pickle with garlic. He counted four curries, three lentil dishes and two types of rice.

While Auntie Prittup was a gentle ocean with sloping tides of activity, Pila was a turmoil of small crashing waves. There weren't enough serving dishes. No pistachios? No rose petals? How to serve *pilau* without rose petals?

Auntie Prittup lapped gently. "We can use these dinner plates and put fresh coriander around the edge for decoration. No need for nuts or flowers. Curry is fragrant enough, nuh? And if anyone arrives *just* now, there are snacks. Put these dishes on the table." She sent Pila into the dining room with dishes of fried onion rings and peanuts.

Nolly was easing his chocolate cake onto a plate when Pila stopped him. "What on earth is that?"

Auntie Prittup said, "He made it for your party."

Pila sniffed the cake. "It smells heavenly. You sly thing. I thought you couldn't cook."

Auntie Prittup shook her head at Nolly, who was becoming desperate to tell someone anything.

The doorbell rang, and Pila whirled to answer it. She sounded musical and vivacious, and he listened jealously to her cries of welcome.



In a video store on a Sunday afternoon five months back, she'd mistaken him for the video store clerk and his stillwater life had plunged over a waterfall. A moment before, a universe away, he'd been contented with his books, a few friends, vacations with the family in Northern California, and his modestly-paid job in a studio where he recorded books for the blind and dyslexic. She smiled at him, her eyes examining his face as though he was someone she'd searched for, even longed for. They watched *Lagaan* together, and he stepped into a convex world where everything else receded to the sides, mashed and meaningless.

He had never thought that breathing would hurt. *How she looked.* He tried to reduce her to body parts. This bone on the side of the elbow, the small curve of her stomach; how the shadow beneath her eyelashes looked in the morning, how her lower lip flexed a little before the coffee mug touched it. She kissed him and he was fractured. He felt slower, aware of living with pain.

He could talk quite rationally if he was sitting next to her and staring ahead at a glass table top or an upside-down view of a newspaper. But the moment she became animated and turned to look at him, he was lost. *There I go,* he

thought, *flushed downstream, trying to keep my feet in front and my arms by my side.* Sometimes, she would sit still and look at him for long moments without speaking, and he would think, *Bang. Ow.*

If he were American, he would be a Southern boy. He would say, "Yes, ma'am." He would tip his hat, lay his heart open on her salad plate, slay the parking valet who dared to stare at her. He wondered if those things were exotic enough for a Southerner.

But, in the squashy thoughts souping toward sleep, he would remember he hadn't said, "I love you." He skimmed, seabound, over warehouses, beach houses, lighthouses, his love declared by a driftwood fire, on a wave, the words yelled from a tipping surfboard. Each time it meant something different. What kind of boyfriend was he?



He entered the dining room with a bowl of black lentils topped with a melting curl of sour cream.

Pila said, "This is Nolly. He's from the Seychelles."

There was a pause while everyone looked at him, and a good-looking Indian man with a haircut like a box hedge said, "Which island? I've scuba-dived off a few."

"La Digue."

The Indian said, "The water's so amazing. You can be twenty, thirty feet down, and it's so clear. You look up and you see the sun coming down through the water."

Pila said, "Duane's a poet. A rich poet." There was laughter and the doorbell rang again.

Duane said, "I hope you don't mind, Pila. Rob and his girlfriend were in town and we asked them along."

Pila opened her mouth and Nolly quickly said, "No trouble at all. I'll get some more place settings."

He closed the kitchen door behind him and said, "More

people are coming.”

Auntie Prittup said, “Not to worry. There’s plenty of food. And I brought a little extra backup just in case.” She nodded toward a Styrofoam box. “India Sweets & Spices do lovely *korma*.” He couldn’t understand why his insides felt so shaky.

Auntie Prittup said, “A little shy, nuh? Don’t worry. They’re just people. Come, taste this.” She held a spoon of *pilau*. She might have been Auntie Myrtle, his oldest La Digue aunt, who had brought the same kind of comfort with small, delicious tastes.

Auntie Prittup patted his shoulder and gave him the plates of pilau. As he put the rice on the table, he was introduced to Rob and Sahlah. Auntie Prittup came in with a basket of *pooris* and smiled at the newcomers.

Sahlah shook Auntie Prittup’s hand. “Can I help with anything in the kitchen?”

Auntie Prittup patted Sahlah’s hand-shaking one and said, “Nolly’s helping me and we’ve got everything under control. Thank you for offering.”

When he returned with the baskets of *pooris* and *papadums*, he heard Sahlah. “We could never find anyone like that in the Marina. How much *is* she?”

Nolly set a basket of papadums by Sahlah. “She’s Pila’s aunt.”

Sahlah’s black eyes were event horizons against the pale skin. “Some of the servants in my family are relations. Older aunts whose husbands have died. That sort of thing. But that doesn’t stop me from offering help.” She tapped his arm with her forefinger, the nail delicately edged in white.

The silver-shirted man next to her said, “Hi, Rob,” and shook Nolly’s hand. “Sahlah’s from Bahrain.”

Sahlah dragged on a long black cigarette. “Everyone thinks because you have servants you have no idea how to

behave in a house where there are none. It's just a matter of helping out." She flicked her cigarette in the direction of the ashtray and sat back in her chair. She said in what Nolly thought of as her room-sized voice, "I must say Pila's done very well for herself. Do you wash dishes, too?" There was some laughter.

He smiled at her. Just as he reached the kitchen he heard Sahlah calling to Pila, "He's adorable, Pila."

He washed his hands in the sink and Auntie Prittup waited for him to dry off, then beckoned him to arrange the tandoori chicken in a bowl. "Don't worry about *that* one," Auntie Prittup raised her eyebrows at the kitchen door. "Whattodochile? Just look at her. The loud clothes, the sticking-up hair, and eyeshadow into her ears." Auntie Prittup sighed. "She wants to help but she doesn't know how. Just like rich *Brahmos*. Girls are brought up to marry into money, which means none of this scurrying around in the kitchen and waiting on guests. You are born to servants, and you always behave as though there are servants around."

What happens if there aren't any? he thought. There was a tightening feeling as though he'd been wrapped in caution tape.

Auntie Prittup handed the plate of *tandoori* to him and he carried it in. The center of the table was filled with serving bowls, but near Pila was a small gap that he could widen with a careful rearrangement of a couple of chutney bowls. He reached over Duane's shoulder and edged one of the chutney bowls aside.

Pila looked up. "Oh, put it here, Nolly." She moved the other chutney bowl and leaned to one side so that he could put the bowl down. He hesitated. She should have taken the bowl from him, or said "Thanks, honey." But she'd begun talking to the older woman called DeeDee.

Realizing he was still there, Pila half-turned and said, "Is there enough room?" She called down the table, "St. John, darling, is there room over there for *another* bowl of stuff?"

The room pressed down on him; St. John's sardonic smile, DeeDee's red lipstick, Sahlah's white fingertips. Was everything—himself, Auntie Prittup, all this stupid food—a joke?

DeeDee called, "I hear you're from the Seychelles."

"Very pretty," Sahlah said. "It's so sad that poverty and beauty often go hand in hand."

Rob said, "Not when the hands belong to you." Everyone laughed.

Sahlah said, "Look at Africa. All those gorgeous countries being exploited or blown to pieces."

In the kitchen Auntie Prittup was washing the tupperware, and Nolly picked up a cloth and began drying and stacking.

She said, "There's a cup of tea for you."

He thanked her and sat on one of the kitchen chairs. She sat down opposite him and sipped her tea.

He said, "That's a lovely *shalwar*."

She patted his hand.

He said, "I think it's going well."

She produced a small paper package. "Look, I saved these for us. Lamb *samosas*."

The tender lamb was mixed with potatoes, coriander, chili, and lime. The pastry was crisp and light. She said, "Puff pastry. I get it from Vons. So easy to prepare and much nicer than this wheat cardboard you get in the restaurants. But sometimes I get tired of all the curry business." She leaned forward, "Shall I tell you my favorite? Clam and garlic pizza."

Nolly said, "I'm into fish tacos."

Auntie Prittup nodded and leaned back. "Fish tacos.

That sounds *very* toothsome." She took off her glasses and he saw the lined eyes, the dark bruises beneath them. He remembered that she'd spent most of the day driving. Surely she should go back to her hotel room and rest.

Pila put her head around the kitchen door. "*Here* you are." Her hair swung over her shoulder and she made a playful telling-off face. "What are you two doing, hiding in the kitchen? My friends are longing to meet you."

Auntie Prittup looked at her watch, "Goodness, is that the time? I have to be going. But let's serve dessert first. Nolly, get the cake."

Pila looked a little startled. "Auntie, you're going?"

Auntie Prittup handed the cake to Nolly. "So, Pila. This is your boyfriend."

Pila said, "Auntie, I'm sorry. I've been so busy in there and I've completely neglected you."

Auntie Prittup said, "We had a good talk. He's a very nice young man."

Pila cleared her throat. "Yes, Auntie."

"Marriage is not a joking business, Pila. You should think very seriously before making that commitment. Both of you."

Pila avoided Nolly's eyes. "Auntie, I'd love for you to come in for dessert."

"Your old aunt is tired, Pila. I'll go back to the hotel, now. I've got a long drive tomorrow."

"Please let me give you breakfast."

"We'll see, we'll see. I may start early." Auntie Prittup hugged Pila and sent her back into the dining room.

She filled bags with the clean boxes. "My husband, rest his soul, loved San Diego. Back in the fifties it was all orchards. But even after those mini-malls came we stayed on. Friends, you know. He was such a lively bugger. There's a big Indian community; Punjabi, Bengali, you name it. So

I stayed. I go to the bingo and barbecues. He likes that.” She smiled as though Mr. Prittup was nodding his approval at her.

Nolly saw Mr. Prittup as a small man with a broad smile and a crippling handshake. He would greet you in a nurse’s uniform-print apron, waving his barbecue fork. He’d put an arm around your shoulders and say, “Now, what’ll you have?” And he’d wink at you and hand you a frosted glass.

Auntie Prittup said, “People say that it’s all ruined now, but the mini-malls are quite useful, too. You can have a manicure in so many places.” Then she said, “Nolly, she’s spoiled and selfish and all, but she’s my niece and the only relative I have here. I’d do anything for her.” He wanted to say that he’d do anything for Pila, too.

He went into the dining room holding his cake in front of him. Auntie Prittup followed with the ice cream. They served together; a slice of cake, a scoop of ice cream, and Sahlah organized the distribution of plates and forks.

Now that Auntie Prittup was there, they wanted to praise the meal, but the cake amazed them. It was intoxicating, divine, a dream of the Far East.

Auntie Prittup said, “The Seychelles, to be precise.”

Pila said, “Nolly, it’s amazing. I love it.” She gazed at him across the table, but he couldn’t meet her look. There was a dropping sensation, as though he had swallowed the entire cake, and the thought thrust forward until it fluttered a semaphore behind his eyelids. *She is beautiful beyond anything I can describe and I don’t love her.*

He sat by Auntie Prittup and neither of them spoke. She finished her cake and stood up. “Well, good night, all. It was lovely to have met you.”

There was a chorus of protest, but she wobbled her head in what Nolly recognized was almost a caricature of the elderly aunt.

“Old lady and so on. Way past my bedtime.” She collected her purse and three bags of clean tupperware. Nolly carried the tupperware and picked up his jacket on the way out.

At the car, Auntie Prittup hugged Pila. “Good-bye, darling. It was nice to see you again. You seem very happy, and that makes Auntie happy, too. Don’t forget to call me and let me know how it all went.”

Auntie Prittup rolled the window down, “Nolly, if you ever come to San Diego, you must drop in.”

They waved Auntie Prittup off. He slipped into his jacket, into himself. Pila looked at him, a long, deep gaze he had once been unable to sustain.

She said, “So. You’re going. Can you at least come and say good-bye to my guests?”

Even while she was talking, he kept thinking how he could never stop looking all over her face, how shadow and light made her into a painting. He wanted to bless her or quote poetry but knew neither.

She shook her head. “You don’t understand how it is with us.” Suddenly she was on the other side of a Costco parking lot, the Grand Canyon, the Dark Side. *Your Kind. My Kind.* “My family meddle and gossip and try to arrange my marriage and make my life hell. In return, they do things for me. That’s how it works. But all you see is poor Auntie slaving away in the kitchen. Wait until she gets together with her bingo group. She’ll have a wonderful time. She’ll talk about this for months. The modified recipes, the late nights, the early mornings, the long drive, the awful hotel, the loud Americans, the niece who wears an old-fashioned *salwar kameez*. And to me, she’ll say, ‘Pila, it was such a pleasure to do something for you. He’s very sweet, your boyfriend.’”

He stood on the other side of the chasm, watching her. Her *salwar* seemed the most solid thing about her; under-

neath she was melting, a thing of vanishing smoke.

He took her hand and her fingers held his, but they felt sweaty. His hand became limp, a useless appendage with no feeling. He caught a tiny flicker of resignation. Had she been here before, at this abyss, this divide? And did her family really make such a difference?

As his fingers slipped away from hers, he imagined Auntie Prittup forever flying up and down the interstate, her tupperware rattling in the car. He smiled.

Un-Gala

There's a compelling bill of fare: Job's bust
enshrined in the butter sculpture, a pyramid

of rolls stacked to his ears. The salad tossed
into a medley of leafy ambiance with hints

of lemon grass. Next, a nebulous stew:
Roma tomatoes and butternut squash and molly-

coddling. A radish-red gloss garnishes the waitress's
lips and Jesus dangles, crucified, in her cleavage.

In the kitchen, the chef fingers the irresistible
objects: the blood oranges and pig's feet, the boning

knife that mutilates the brie. His preparation
began the night before with a Mexican mistress

soaked in sherry and rye bread handcuffed
to the bed. The tattoo on his back says *Conquer By Taste*—

and he's right, there's no law yet
that separates food from fantasy. He garnishes



F r i t z W a r d

each plate with obsession: skinned grapes and hearts
of palm placed with a stigmata's precision. And in the center,

he sets his signature dish: lamb chops marinated in a brash,
but time-honored, mango-arsenic vinaigrette.

Poem Ending in Red

He said *I'm afraid*

to hurt you They pulled off
at the first motel A sign at the desk
declared it the brownest building in the state

The key clicked and to stop his shaking
he pressed his palm flat against his thigh

They took their shoes off inch by inch and then lay
on the bed's brown comforter watching darkness smuggle
the last blade

of sunlight from the room

She slipped her shirt over her head into his hands

He took two fingers
slid them slowly gently
across her face

When she nodded the solar system of his nerves fused
into a single star of panic He tried not to blink
or call her beautiful

Her breath became a warm nightmare of sighs
against his neck Her kisses fell like wasps on his shoulder

Afterwards in the shower a thread of red
trickled down her thigh He reached unsure
if he would brush it away or begin to
unravel her

Poorly Written Love Notes

If I could, I'd say something rural
and meaningful here. Something
with broad, green leaves and gypsy moths.

I was drunk, but that's not my favorite excuse.

I was a man with unwashed hair and interior
organs. Every night without a rope ladder,
I cradled the flint in my front pocket. Oh forget it:
the truth is

I didn't know the woman's true
hair color. I held the night hostage
until it offered something more

romantic, more absurd—Cue the mechanic:
his hands manually black, his name
stitched onto the pale blue billboard

of his shirt—*Will*. His voice full of tar
and sinking. When the waitress
walks past, he offers her a jigger

of the bar's cheapest, saddest innuendo—

something about sharing her rump
roast. Now, I haven't hit a man
since kindergarten—mostly from a lack

of effort. Instead, I write poems
(*go ahead: swoon, snicker*)
where one sucker punch

My Book Report: The Western Canon

Story #1

Women are whores.

Story #2

A man undertakes a long journey involving war and sex. He loves women of various mental states and ethnic backgrounds. During his journey, the man tells and is told various stories involving war and sex. Meanwhile, his wife weaves and unweaves a tapestry protecting her from suitors. When he returns home the man will be recognized by an old woman, but not his own wife, until he reveals a secret about their bed. There will be much bloodshed, and after, sex.

Story #3

Some people are telling stories, and one of the stories goes something like this: a woman is insatiable. Her husband did not satisfy her, and so she has had several husbands who were or were not good lovers. This woman, the narrator, complains that depictions of women in literature are false, having been written by men.

This story was written by a man.



Lynn Kilpatrick

Story #4

Women and men desire one another but are impeded by alcohol, spells, or their own stupidity. A woman loves a man who is forbidden, and so she tries to love another, or is said to love another, who may or may not be the same man dressed up to look like another man, or it may be a man dressed up like a woman, or he may in fact be another man. She speaks to him softly through a wall or from behind a handkerchief. She will either kill herself or be killed by the man she loves. This is her fate.

Story #5

A woman is desired by a man. She is lovely and innocent in her loveliness. He is at all times pressing his desire against her, which results in the writing of many letters home to her parents. He is the original rogue and she is a lowly servant girl, and as such is beneath him. She wears dresses with many layers, some composed of said letters. The more he desires, the more she writes. In the end, the two are wed, raising the girl from servant to lady and, we can only assume, extinguishing his desire.

Story #6

A woman is victimized by a man. She is further victimized by poverty and the stupidity of society. She toils and loves a man who believes she is pure. Grain is threshed and people suffer. It is the same old story. She works as a milkmaid, bringing her closer to an original innocence. Then she is wed and the man is impure, as she is, but he abandons her as her impurity reflects badly on her, while his reveals biological sensitivity. She is forced to kill and cry, and dies in the tragic conclusion. She is beautiful and kind, and so is mourned.

Story #7

The women are always looking for better prospects, meaning a larger house or a husband with a bulging purse. Society keeps women from men through various strategies involving corsets, after-dinner entertainment, and gossip. A naïve woman rides alone in a carriage with a man she loves. She must come to her senses during a long illness. Her sister has a keen sensibility, which must be tempered by her sister's passion. In the end, marriage conquers all.

Story #8

A man overestimates his own power and so builds a monster he cannot control. The monster learns and has free will. The man wants to destroy the monster as the monster has destroyed the woman he loves, and, as a result, him. The monster wants to love and be loved, and because of this, must kill.

This is a story about a woman.

Story #9

A girl is alone in the world. Spying herself in a mirror, she recognizes in her own form the exact dimensions of her loneliness. She will travel the world, teaching and being hurt, until she enchants a man with a crazy wife in the attic. The crazy wife represents all women, who are alone and crazy if sexual, alone and possibly drunk if not. The wife will conveniently die, but not before frightening the woman into more wandering, sleeping in uncomfortable conditions, and marriage proposals from her cousin. In the end there is marriage and blindness, a child and a smaller house, even for the homely woman who accepts her fundamental isolation.

Story #10

A woman is her mother. Her mother is a house, the windows of which open out onto a hostile environment. The man who loves her is also her captor, a dark, swarthy man who is nonetheless British and upstanding in such a way that does not prevent him from locking her in her room. The mother is dead and walks the moors in lovely gowns wailing. A woman leans out of the open windows in ways that can only be described as symbolic. Everyone dies, and so the story ends.

Story #11

Women are whores, but it is not their fault. Their parents were whores and drunks, and they are only trying to return to the original happiness. Or they are whores because they read novels featuring women who are whores. They have unrealistic fantasies about romance and real estate. They die alone in sad motels while everyone else dresses for a party.

Story #12

Men and women like sex. The man pays for it with self-flagellation, the woman by bearing a child and wearing a large letter emblazoned on her chest. The man is pious and institutional, and so suffers in ways that are uninteresting and pale in comparison with the woman's suffering.

Story #13

Women must be manipulated into a variety of domestic situations through violence, deceit, and large sums of money. A man might call himself one name but be someone else; it doesn't matter, for the character in question is the woman's.

In the end, the woman who demonstrates that she loves the intimacy of the small home will be rewarded with a house that is too large for intimacy. But what does she care? She is married to a liar.

Story #14

Women without men are resourceful. They knit socks, bake pies, and help the poor. Between sisters, however, there is competition. One must be smart, another pretty, another artistic, and so on. Their categories must not overlap or crying ensues, which leads to death in some cases. Trips to Europe are undertaken and then the women fall in love and fracture into different houses, giving birth to children with complexes of their own.

Story #15

This one you know. She is a child and stays in one room. She has locked herself in or has been locked in. No matter, for now she sees prisons everywhere, even in the windows, or the wallpaper, or the green, green lawn. Soon there is only the sound of her walking, the scraping. Her attempts to escape resemble attempts to stay inside. This one begs the question of which is worse.

Story #16

Why does she have to die? First, she perspires, she lifts the hem of her skirt off the floor. Her feet are bare. Back in the city, under layers of clothing, the heat will rise again. She draws a man's lips, the back of her own hand. She must relocate to a smaller apartment where men may visit in order not to kiss her. The only love is unrequited. Her chil-

dren disappear from page to page. Her husband is a ghost. Bees buzz. Desire seeps from her skin to become the ocean that drowns her.

Story #17

A woman walks with a dog. She is bored and is studied by men who are bored. One bored man will love her, and that love will separate him from his family. Glimpsing himself in the mirror, he will realize he is old. This is his last chance at love, and he does not care if it destroys her.

Some Notes on Narratology

There is a story that exists outside the way the story is being told. There is an original story, and it is retold in various guises with various agents and different scenes. Some things happen, others do not. The endings vary, and so the conclusions differ. But the story remains separate from all that, and if we could only get back to that story, or if we could escape it somehow, we could begin writing something new, something that varies fundamentally from the story outside the story. But, sadly, we cannot.

Story #18

It is difficult to understand rich people or the very poor, and so the sentences must wind around themselves in an attempt to approach something resembling comprehension, sympathy, or at the very least, engaged boredom. Pity the main character. He loves one woman but must pretend to love another. Of course, there is death and the transferring of funds, before which challenges are overcome, trips to Italy suffered, long sentences endured all in the name of the final scene in which all is known, and the long sentences finally

demystified, after which the entire novel must be reread.

Story #19

A poor woman loves a wealthy man. This can never end well. She wants to give herself to love rather than commerce, but her body must be adorned and so submitted to the will of capitalism. She is beautiful and often depicted in the soft light and luxurious surroundings of a movie still. Of course she will die without love in a small room in which plants gasp for air. She has always been true, and only those blinded by the cloak of her poverty were unaware.

Story #20

Her eyes are storms; her hair like straw. She is the land itself, and the boy who loves her recognizes her as a part of it, though she takes a city job. He loves another but in his way is always faithful to her, as she is to his idea of her by reproducing at a level consistent with the land itself.

Story #21

He wants to be rich and so buys many shirts. He is close to wealth but can never be wealthy because wealth is inherited, not acquired. He loves a woman who is above him and so he must die, though the man who loves a woman below him lives to prosper and pass on his bad manners to his children. This story represents the dream of rising above one's identity to become someone else. In the end, we are all the land itself, which has green breasts and an ever-watchful eye.

Story #22

He suffers horribly because he loves a woman who has a boy's name and resembles a boy but, despite his horrible injury, he is all man. He possesses a certain quality that cannot be named but can be instantly recognized by another who possesses this same quality. This quality allows men to drink red wine, eat fish, and prepare delicious outdoor meals without compromising their masculinity. He never has sex, but looks deeply into others' eyes, thereby coming to an understanding.

Story #23

A woman is only a woman when she is not a man. Sometimes, she was a man before and this allowed her to escape the ravages of politics, time, and bad poetry. Gender, we understand, transcends genre.

Story #24

Identity is not connected to who we are, but who we think we are. Blood is only tangentially related to identity, and somewhat metaphorically. If you are looking for someone, you will not find him in the South, where people often change their names or make up new ones according to whim and social custom. In the end, everyone keeps moving, inventing new names when the old ones wear out, are discovered, or if a baby is born and needs one.

Story #25

An older man loves a younger woman in a way that is represented as simultaneously innocent and inappropriate. This love involves domestic pets, car travel, summer camp,

and the tongue, in both predictable and surprising ways. The girl is destroyed and so must chain smoke and live in a trailer, while the man goes on to psychiatric care and certain fame.

Story #26

A man wants to go hunting or maybe fishing. There is masturbation. Somewhere in the house, a child cries. When it rains the whole apartment darkens like a wet cloth and is just as heavy. Bags are packed. There will be no hunting.

Story #27

The past involves another man and some money. His voice is strong and permeates sheets of paper. His hands are rough against her face. Voices float through rooms filled with toasters and televisions. A man sits on a couch and watches TV. Another man wants to draw, to feel the shape of an object travel up his arm and into his body. Is that so impossible?

Story # 28

As has been said: if the story could be summarized, the summary would exactly replicate the story. The story must be read in its original form.

Story #29

Women are whores.

Lunch

She's got this sweep of tits
and tall legs
right up his nose

and the exit sign's a red
barrette in her hair

and her voice
cole slaw sounds like
come to bed

Yes, he says, *I'll have that*
and hands the menu up
for her to take

and she gives him a slow smile
and slides it
from his hand
into hers

Faye Kicknosway



There Are Whistles and Heat

There are whistles and heat
and the dryer spinning.
Boys, loose from their cloven feet,
remember
to be merciful. No mother
forgives them.
There is half-light
and a half-step.

The republic of gloves?
A knot of appropriate sweat?

Miles of doubt have been left
on doorsteps.
Peek between the venetian blinds
and you'll see it.

How fleshy the moon is,
its testicles, its pianos,
its exaltation.
It smokes at the hip

against a backdrop of banana trees
spilled up
from a page that will,
at some later date, wander

in the company of pigs and sheep.
A good fit
but filled with amnesia
and a wasted life
in the tropics.

If the Door Is on Fire

There I was in Africa

—*I was in Hoboken once. But I left*

The bearers were beating the bushes

—*They do that, hair'll grow on their palms*

An elephant

—*Gesundheit*

Do I know you

—*I could ask around, find out*

Remember not to come back. As I was saying

—*I heard of that river*

What river

—*The Seine*

I'm trying to talk here

—*I got an uncle had that problem. He got a divorce*

What's his lawyer's name

—*I'll try to ask him, boss. But it's hard to get a word in edgewise*

Are you usually like this

—*No; I'm usually like that. But I been practicing*

Could you do it over there

—*You know, boss, I never learned that song. But I know one about a river. You want I should sing it*

As I was saying

—*That river's in Africa? I thought it was in Jersey*

I'm talking about an elephant

—*I like a suit got two pairs of them*

Were you in that shingle factory when it exploded

—*No, but I know the guy what painted it*

I lived on the African veldt for five years

—*I got a veldt hat I've had for six. It's getting blocked*

That sounds like the right shape. I was on safari

—*No reason for you to feel safari, boss. I get it back*

tomorrow

It was a day that changed my life

—*I don't carry it. I got holes in my pockets*

Did your mother have you or did you hatch
from the ground

—*You know, boss, my father asks her that very same
question*

I lived in a tent

—*I get tents, too. But I get something to eat
and it goes away*

Do you have something the matter with your ears

—*Yes, boss. I got amnesia in both of them*

The Importance of Being Photogenic

Tall white man gone missing among islands from space and green, unreasonable men who get themselves damp and drunk at every turn. At last he sang the refrain, but are the words right? The tiny dancer in my head a danger in his. I look up and see nothing through many windows. Dull birds trill the unsung hymn of electronic suns and digital moon. Water from nowhere spills over a mountain. I feel the reader's pangs and the savage of silk. Emerald, jade, olive, lime, and Japanese glass floats marooned by the lesser of all evils in the place where one tree stands alone.

Cathy Capozzoli

Cathy Capozzoli



Scramble the Radar

I felt the house twice, once built, a cool hearth for the dog,
and twofold unbuilt, blindsided by a wet freight train, a
campaign of thrash, groan, rattle. No wonder a mess. In
the distance between living and dead, I pray for I don't
know what, drink water fast, grope for the remote beyond
dogged rain, projectile fronds, skull-top sour headache.
Unlocked doors and botulism in green beans. The cat sleeps
in her litter box.

Not Disfigured with Fortune

To breathe deep in silence, take mango, severed by sunlight leaving the southern sky. *You've been away a long time.* Faint mechanical noises become music, and long, colorful, flying fish—each a word and a sign, lose sight of eminent feathers. I can tell what kind of day it's going to be before even opening my eyes. Clouds approach mountains. Drums and base tiptoe through unquiet skies. Stand still and you will know the tenor of days, or the acoustics of lava reduced to clone boxes as mosquitoes rage against headlights. Red dress to a war, and fever catches everything.

Flying Lemurs Unobserved

The empirical depends
on repeatability, usually in glass,
of the original experiment, again in glass
of the same level of cleanliness.

But any witch or physics prodigy will tell,
straight-up, that order goes to
heck when one observes.
They choose to doubt

that flying lemurs, opening
like rice paper kites, come down to roost
as claimed by every book from *Science
News* to the encyclopedias,

but believe beyond those volumes maybe
lemurs loft from Java, catch the thin-
ning winds of upper atmosphere, until
earth's pull releases them to space.

But pedants of the known and master-able,
having received a regulated, "proper"
education, bellow *Heretics and Dreamers!*
themselves too cowardly to belly crawl



T C E p p e r s o n

the rainforest floor on Midsummer Night's eve,
calculating for the possibility of accidentally "seeing,"
in a most unempirical way,
a dream of outstretched limbs and glowing membranes
floating toward the moon.

Trust

A woman who lives in a village encased in a bubble
takes a spontaneous countryside walk and ruptures it.

She loses her way and wolves feed her.
The meat of their enemies sharpens her teeth.

When she returns nobody knows her.
She could be dangerous.

Neighbors corral their children, lock their cars,
hold planned "spontaneous" meetings over lunch.

*She could be safer to be with
than to be alone.*

They had expected the media to tell them these things.
Now they look at her deeply, like a flock of pigeons looks,

and some of them edge closer very slowly,
until they couldn't escape if suddenly she lunged.

Two Women Keep the House

We have a light between us
like the aura of a third person
who isn't here completely.

I touch him, you touch him,
but we can't reach each other
through this idealized man.

Sometimes he turns his face
to me and it is all honeyed sex and tongue,
sometimes to you in father-tenderness;

but when he brings his body home
from work and the glow
dims into overweight realities

we have more in common,
you and I, sitting
together on the couch,

waiting for the light to come again,
though it is not enough.
Each ignored in her own special way.

Poem Breeding

No matter its lusty outstretched genitals, an orchid
with three sets of chromosomes won't cross-
pollinate, so the hybridizer match-
makes attending to the microscope,

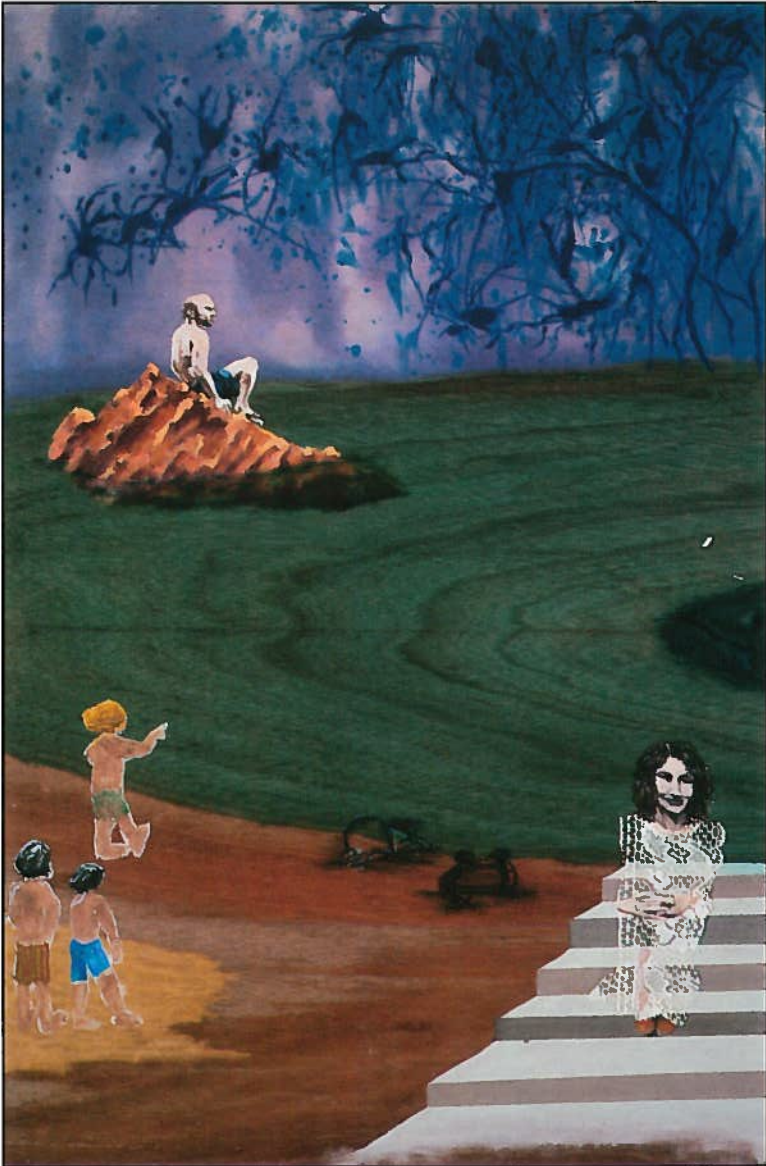
edits the parents each into one gender,
castrating the pollen caps to introduce
zesty paternal dust into the grail-shaped stigma
of the chosen "mother" flower.

With obstetric patience, he measures
daily the seed pod's eagerness to cast,
prepares a nutrient brine and waits
to gather, sow, and realize

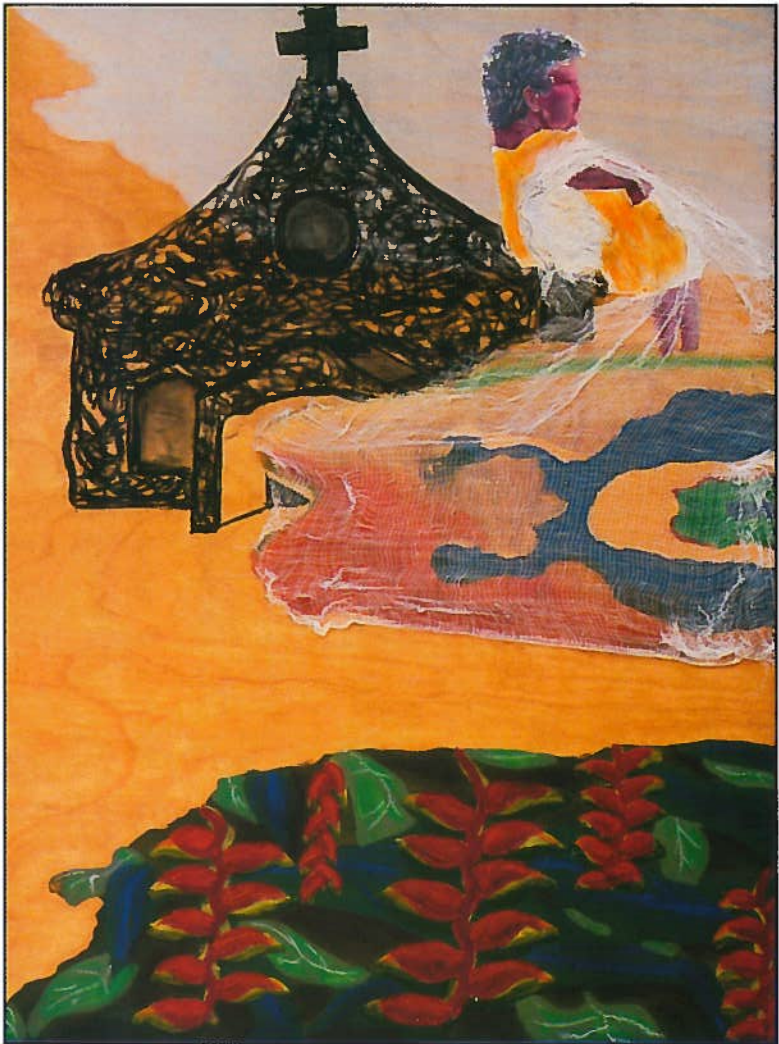
the tiny protocorm as it begins.
He holds steady heat and light for root hairs--
stretching like fingers on an ultrasound.
Steady the emerging poem, bract and sheath, is

hardening off as I acclimatize it too,
break it from its sterile field and let It-
of-the-Hardy-Parents gain a self, distinctive,
that in peculiar colors

blooms.



There's a Giant Grouper Ate That Lady's Baby, 1999
Oil, plaster, and lace on wood, 36" x 24"



One Big Fish Enough, 2000

Oil, charcoal, and cheesecloth on wood, 24"x18"



Fragility, 2004

Monotype and pastel on paper, 10" x 8"

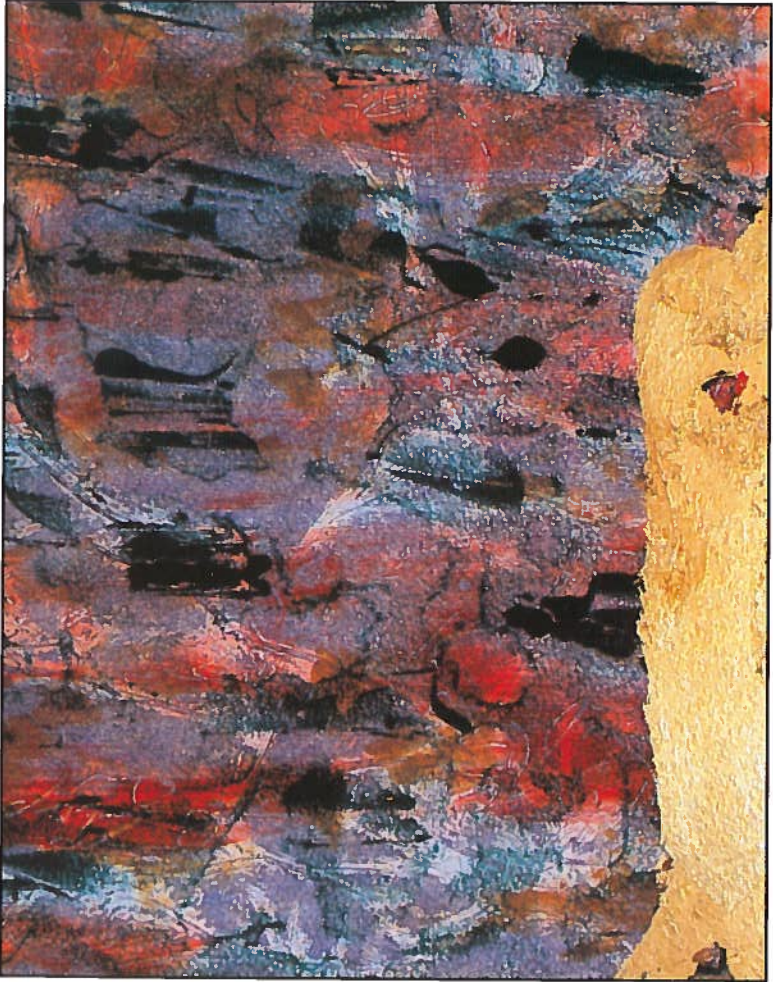


Swinging Bricklayer, 2004

Monotype and collage on paper, 8" x 6"



Mystery, 2004
Monotype on paper, 10" x 8"



Hearts of Gold, 2004

Monotype and gold leaf on paper, 10" x 8"



Remember "Play Misty?", 2005
Mixed media monotype, 24" X 18"



Spirit Runs Deep, 2005
Silver leaf monotype, 24" x 18"

Amanda Toy grew up in California and has lived part-time in Hawai'i for the past twenty years. She has studied and created art throughout the world, working with various artists in a variety of mediums, including fresco with assistants to the late Mexican muralist Diego Rivera, ceramics with Paul Soldner and Joe Soldate, New Media with Bill Viola, and painting with Kent Twitchell. Amanda received her undergraduate degree from Scripps College and her Masters from Whittier College. She has taught art at the undergraduate and secondary levels, and now teaches at Kaiser High School in Honolulu. She has received grants and numerous awards for her art and has exhibited nationally and internationally. Toy describes her work as narrative, with the stories embodying a state of limitation or the struggle for release.





Total Depravity

I'm one of the older girls in the neighborhood, and everybody trusts me with their kids. I've baby-sat all kinds, from cute to ugly. But Stevie is the first baby who's scared me. He looks like a middle-aged man, a kind of grumpy midget who's pretending to be helpless. He stares at me and drools and I think *you're disgusting*.

My mother says it's all in my head. She says there's nothing wrong with that poor child. She calls him that because his mother works. Needless to say, she doesn't. But then she's got six kids, starting with me (15); the twins, Matt and Andy (12); Becky (8); James (5); and Annie (2). I'm Grace. We're not Catholic, but we live in a Catholic neighborhood where six kids is no big deal.

We're Calvinists, which you have to be born into to understand. It's a very depressing religion. In church we sing "No Longer, Lord, Despise Me," "In Thy Wrath and Hot Displeasure," and "Dust to Dust, the Mortal Dies." The doctrines are depressing, too—total depravity and predestination and limited atonement. All of it makes you want to give up. Except there's this one doctrine called irresistible grace, which has nothing to do with me personally—but still, just the words give me hope.

Sally Steenland



The first few days, I park Stevie in my front yard. There's a big birch tree with lots of shade, plus a playpen, baby pool, sprinkler, and lawn chairs, so it's baby central in the summer. The mothers on the block bring their kids over and drink iced tea and talk. They really like my mother—probably because she's not Catholic. I've noticed that people are attracted to things that are different. At my high school, where everyone is Dutch and blonde, there's an Italian girl, Maria Pipino—actually, only her father's Italian—but she's tiny with curly black hair and dark eyes, and you'd think she was from Outer Mongolia; that's how exotic she is.

My mother is tall and slim and blonde. She wears Bermuda shorts and sleeveless blouses and always a slash of red lipstick that leaves smears on coffee cups. After each baby she fits perfectly into her old clothes. The ladies find this incredible and complain they can't get back in shape, which is true—their arms and legs spread over the lawn chairs like dough. My mother says to her sister, "They've let themselves go to ruin."

She says to the ladies that she can't take any credit because her whole family is skinny, plus she gets lots of exercise doing housework. It's a neat trick to accept praise without acting as if you deserve it. It's like catching a ball and tossing it back fast. I've picked it up from her, this knack of throwing away praise. In high school, it's essential.

Today's lunch menu is strained beets, sweet potatoes, and applesauce. Stevie's only five months, so I have to catch the drips from his slobber with a stained diaper and scoop what I can back into his mouth. Mrs. Clark says *her* kids could hold a bottle by five months.

My mother looks up from peeling potatoes. "But when they dropped the bottle, you picked it up and put it back in their hands. If you're not there . . ."

"Karen works in publishing, right?" Mrs. Brady says.

She has a magazine in her lap and is wearing canvas wedge sandals that show off her bright-red toes.

Karen is Stevie's mother. I don't know where she and her husband live, but her parents live on our block, so when Stevie's baby-sitter broke her arm, Karen called my mother to ask if I could take care of him until she found someone else. My mother likes to help people, so she said yes—then told me about it. Everyday now, I have to pick him up and drop him off at the Smythes'.

Mrs. Clark takes a long puff on her cigarette and breathes out two smoky ropes. "Karen's just a secretary. I used to be a secretary. It's boring."

"No, I think she does more than that," Mrs. Brady says. "She reads things and decides whether her company will publish them. At least that's what her father told me." She fans smoke away with the magazine. It's *Good Housekeeping* and has a pie on the cover.

"Harry told you that?" Mrs. Clark says. "I don't believe it." Mrs. Clark carries her cigarettes in a red leather case with a side pouch for matches. She drops her stubs in the grass and, after she goes home, my mother makes the twins comb through the area around her chair. She can't stand litter and mess.

Mrs. Clark has four boys and is hugely pregnant with her fifth—obviously she's trying for a girl. But I feel sorry for any girl in that house. She's very bossy, and her husband's hairy as a gorilla. He wears a shiny black bathing suit to wash the car, and when he leans over to polish the chrome, his Catholic gold medal gets all caught up in his chest hair. Plus he makes embarrassing jokes like, "Hey Gracie, when did you grow up and become a model?"

Mrs. Brady has only two children, total. She wants more, and I can see why. Her family's so meager, you want to round up some extra kids and give them to her the way

you collect food cans and clothes for hungry people in Africa. She goes to the doctor and 6 AM mass, where she lights candles and prays, but so far, nothing.

As for our brood—Becky's in charge of Annie, and at the moment they're both running through the sprinkler. James is down the block learning how to be a tough guy. The other day he was filling the baby pool and Billy Clark stepped on the hose, so James looked down the nozzle to see where the water had gone. Right then, Billy hopped off and water shot up James' nose. Usually he'd cry and run to my mother, but this time he tore off after Billy. Mrs. Clark and my mother didn't notice a thing. Their policy is, don't pay attention until there's blood.

Oh, the twins go off everyday to mow lawns and make tons more money than I do. I hope Annie's the last baby. More than once, strangers have mistaken me for her mother, which is ridiculous since I was only thirteen when she was born. But I do look older, which makes my mother say things like, "Remember Grace, your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit." This means don't do anything that sounds like fun.

At the moment, she's the only one doing any work. When she's done peeling potatoes, she'll snap beans or shuck corn for supper. Later, a truck will drop off stacks of newspapers and she'll fold them for the twins' afternoon route.

She always keeps busy, which could be annoying, but she never brags about her accomplishments. Whether it's making supper at ten in the morning or having smart kids, she works hard to be ordinary and fit in. This is another good trick. If you want to be liked, you have to notch yourself down. Nobody likes a show-off.

Stevie hates beets, so he jerks his head away when he sees the spoon coming. I sideswipe his cheek and leave a red

smear. "If you want applesauce, finish your beets," I tell him. Actually, I don't care. I'd throw away the whole jar except I'm afraid Karen would find out. His poop wouldn't be red enough, or she'd ask if he ate his lunch. I'd confess to a tossed jar of baby food and end up saying that I hate her kid. Just imagining that makes my stomach knot up, so I swoop the spoon like an airplane and land the beets in his wide open mouth.

When he's finished lunch, I crank down the back of his stroller. Then I slide across the grass, closer to the ladies who are still talking about Karen—how sad that she's an only child, how small and fancy her wedding was, blah, blah, blah.

"She always carries a briefcase," I say. "She says she gets a lot of reading done on the train."

Mrs. Clark turns to my mother. "Has Ben ever seen her on the train?" My father works in New York, which gives our family a little bit of glamour. The other fathers drive to their Jersey jobs and get home hours before he does.

My mother stops peeling and thinks for a minute. "He's never said anything. I wonder if he'd even recognize her, though."

"She's odd like her mother," Mrs. Clark says.

"You mean Olivia? She never worked," Mrs. Brady says. She's browsing through *Good Housekeeping*, folding down the tips of certain pages.

"Well, I guess not." Mrs. Clark lets out a smoky laugh. "How can you work if you won't leave the house?"

Mrs. Brady pauses at a crocheted baby hat and mittens. "It's a mental illness," she says. "Some people are afraid of heights; she gets panicky outdoors." Mrs. Brady used to be a nurse. Just the other week she diagnosed a rash as prickly heat instead of chicken pox, which was a huge relief to all.

"I think it's a kind of selfishness," my mother says. "She

should open the door and go outside. Walk down the sidewalk. Around the block. Each day, push herself a little more.”

“Why bother? Invalids get a lot of attention,” Mrs. Clark says.

“Harry even does the grocery shopping,” my mother says. “He also buys her clothes.” People like to tell my mother things. She has a way of encouraging you to talk—eyebrows slightly raised, mouth slightly open—as if she can’t wait to hear what you’re going to say. It’s phony, but nobody sees that.

I say, “I think Stevie’s a little weird.”

Mrs. Brady frowns and asks me nurse-like questions: Does he squirm when I pick him up? Does he like being cuddled? When I say his name, does he make eye contact?

I look down at the empty jar of beets. *I hate to pick him up. I never cuddle him. I call him names that aren’t his.*

“There’s nothing wrong with that poor child,” my mother says quickly. “He’s very responsive to Grace.” She drops the last potato in a bowl, a lumpy pile scraped raw. More and more she does this, answering on my behalf as if she doesn’t want to hear what’ll come out of my mouth. Or else she thinks if she says something, that will make it true.

Ann Landers says you fall in love with your baby the minute he’s born. Even if you were really unhappy about the whole thing beforehand, don’t worry. It’s automatic that you’ll love him.

Across the yard, kids are running through the sprinkler. They tip their heads back to drink the spray. Sunlight catches the drops, making a sparkling rainbow, and for a moment everything is beautiful. Ann Landers is right. Mothers do love their children abundantly and forever. Stevie isn’t mine,

so I don't have to love him. But I make myself look at him in the stroller, and what I see is just a baby in a green-plaid sun suit, sound asleep.

All of a sudden kids are yelling that Billy's standing on the sprinkler. My sister Becky shrieks, "Mommy! He's blocking the spray!" Mrs. Clark lumbers up out of her chair and crosses the lawn in her bare feet. Webbing dents the backs of her legs. Just before she grabs Billy, he hops off and scoots away. Water shoots up and drenches her. "Goddamn it!" she yells.

That's the end of beauty. It didn't last two minutes.



In church, the minister reads the Ten Commandments from the Book of Exodus: "Hear, O Israel. I am the Lord Thy God who brought Thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me."

I love words like "covet" and "false witness." They sound more serious than "envy" and "lie." I love the psalms, too. We sing them as hymns, the organ playing in a minor key that's haunting and sad. At the end, the notes seem doomed to wander forever. That can be upsetting, so I distract myself by opening the Bible and looking for my name. I search through the Old and New Testaments—through judges, prophets, disciples, and kings—but Grace is hard to find.

Reverend VanderBeek is a hairless man who blinks a lot and wears a black suit year round. He preaches from the Heidelberg Catechism, which is ancient and very strict. It contains fifty-two sets of questions and answers about sin and misery and deliverance. I have to memorize them in Sunday School. It's a hard thing to do without the meaning sinking in, so I find myself, especially at night when it's

quiet, thinking about the words "We are conceived and born in sin . . . children of wrath, inclined to corruption."

I think of Stevie and how I hate him. My mother and the ladies say he's a placid, easy baby, that Karen's lucky her first one turned out so well. I think he's an evil spirit hidden in a fat, little body.

In geometry class, we have to pursue a series of statements, one after another, until we reach a logical conclusion:

God does not love all people.

He chooses the elect to be saved.

He punishes all others in body and soul.

Stevie is not chosen.

God hates Stevie's sinful nature.

I hate Stevie because I see him through God's eyes.



The houses on our block sit next to each other on small squares of grass. Most are painted white, but some are beige or gray—one is a putrid salmon that looks like flesh. The house that Karen's parents live in is white with a pretty blue door and rows of pink and white petunias blooming along the front walk. I think one reason my mother lets me babysit Stevie is because his grandparents live in a tidy house. Another reason is she's curious about Mrs. Smythe and wants me as her spy.

The minute I get home, she wants to know if Karen acts friendly to her mother and what the rooms look like and a million other things. Sometimes she asks directly and sometimes she wonders out loud, but either way, she keeps folding laundry or making beds or whatever it is she's doing. She slows down to smooth a sheet or pillowcase, which means she's paying attention to what I say.

The only way to make her back off is to tell her a lot, so

I go on about how Mr. Smythe lets me in and talks about the Yankees while we sit at the kitchen table, which has a very nice striped tablecloth, and on the stove there's a blue tea kettle exactly like ours.

"Really?" my mother says, impressed. A tea kettle imported from Sweden means something to her but nothing to me, which is why I can talk about it. She says, "I wonder if she makes him cook and clean, too."

I tell her that Mr. Smythe is very good with Stevie. He picks him up and says, "Hello there, young man, want to play a round of poker?" He puts Stevie on his lap and holds him by his fingers and lets him stomp all over his pants.

"What about Mrs. Smythe? Do you ever see her?" she asks while folding a pair of boy underpants into a careful triangle—a method of hers that hides the fly.

"Never." I give a casual shrug. "She must sleep a lot."

But one time Mrs. Smythe did come into the kitchen. She had on stretched-out black pants and a man's T-shirt, and on her feet were worn-out pink ballet slippers. She went to the sink and got a glass of water. Then she said, "Hello Grace," in a way that sounded like she already knew me.

When Karen comes, Mrs. Smythe is always off somewhere being quiet. Karen jingles her keys, and Stevie pumps his arms and legs like a little happy machine. She scoops him up and kisses him, dangles him over her head and chirps like a mommy bird. It's amazing how she can't wait to play with him. I think, *If you miss him so much, why do you go off and leave him with me all day?* It doesn't make sense. Another thing that makes no sense is that when I see her be nice to him—for those few moments he isn't repulsive.

In between cooing, Karen asks me questions: "Did he eat his lunch? How long did he nap?" I pretty much tell the truth, except when she asks how our day was. "Great," I say.

She's pretty in an ordinary way: medium height, brown

hair, nice smile. Her husband, Jeff, is handsome like that, too. They remind me of a set of paper dolls who come with attractive outfits and accessories. It's disappointing. When I first got the job, I was hoping she'd be interesting in an unusual way—that there'd be something I could latch onto. I didn't have anything specific in mind. But sometimes you can look at a person and sense right away they're on your frequency. I can't pick up anything from Karen.

She pays me and walks to the car with her father. They stand at the curb and talk, probably about Mrs. Smythe, who seems as helpless as Stevie. How can a grown woman be afraid to go outside? I'm the opposite—mopey indoors and itchy to get out. When we drive through the Lincoln Tunnel, the minute we go over the NJ/NY line, I'm so excited I could burst.

Then one Monday, just as I'm about to ring the bell, she opens the door. My finger hangs in the air like I'm pointing, and she says, "Come in." I follow her into the living room. The afternoon sun is pushing through the silvery drapes and shining dimly on the furniture, plush carpet, and walls. Everything looks shimmery and blue, as if we're underwater.

The stroller wheels squeak as I park Stevie in a corner. I bend over his sleeping face, fussing to push a strand of hair off his forehead as if it's a habit of mine to check and make sure he's okay. Mrs. Smythe sits with her feet neatly on the rug, like a picture in an etiquette book, except she's wearing her worn-out ballet slippers and her hands are knotted like a rope. Her face is plain, like a coloring book face waiting to be filled in. She says, "Mr. Smythe is weeding the back garden."

I sink into a chair, unsure if this is important news. Except for Stevie's soft, steady breathing, the room is quiet. It feels larger than the other living rooms on the block with

their plaid furniture and squat TVs—or ours which is cluttered with books and family pictures. This room is emptier. I glance down and see wheel marks from the stroller on the blue carpet.

I say, “If you’ve got things to do, we can go out and sit in the yard. I’ve got a book and a blanket . . .”

She tilts her head. “Is that what you do? Sit with him somewhere and read?”

“Oh no,” I lie. “I play with him, take him to the park—that sort of thing.”

“I was just asking a question.” She pauses. “I do enjoy reading.”

She’s moving slightly, and I realize that her chair is a rocker with a velvety skirt hiding the curved legs. “Not newspapers,” she says. “I read books.”

“We have tons of books in our house,” I say. Then, afraid that sounds like bragging, add, “but probably a lot of people do.”

“My daughter reads manuscripts for a publisher. She claims most are horrid. But that doesn’t discourage her.”

My mother says in conversation you should listen to what the other person is saying, agree with it, and add something new. So I say, “It must be nice when things don’t discourage you. Karen seems like a cheerful person.”

“She resembles her father,” Mrs. Smythe says. Just then Stevie starts to fuss. I jiggle the stroller to get him back to sleep.

“I can’t tolerate a baby crying,” she says.

I quickly pick him up and spread him across my shoulder the way I hold other babies. He’s sweaty and damp and smells like sour milk. I walk with him so he won’t cry. She’s rocking faster now, and I can pick up some of her frequency. It’s nerves, but I can’t tell where it’s aimed.

“I’m not allowed to hold him,” she says simply, as if

that's enough to make me understand.

When I get home, my mother and Becky are in the kitchen making a lemon icebox cake. I slip into my room, kick stuffed animals out of the way, and flop onto my bed, where I close my eyes and think about Mrs. Smythe. She's scary and strange. But I like how she says what she thinks, even if it's embarrassing and wrong.

The next day I take Stevie to Woolworth's, where my friend Donna has a summer job in men's underwear. Donna and I used to be best friends, but she takes secretarial in public high school while I'm in honors at my religious school, so we don't see each other much anymore. She's smart, but "boy crazy," as my mother says. She has a boyfriend, Richie, who dropped out of eleventh grade and pumps gas at a Texaco station on the highway. My mother also objects to Donna's teased hair and white lipstick—she says it makes her look cheap.

I wheel Stevie past women's underwear toward the back of Donna's head. She's folding undershirts, and as I go by the padded bras, I poke their cups in. "I need a bra, size quadruple E," I say in a whining old-lady voice. She turns around with a helpful salesgirl face, then bursts out laughing. "A brassiere for your bosoms?" she says.

"Yes, both of them. They're quite large."

"Please, ma'am, be more specific. Are we talking cantaloupes? Watermelons?" Her hands stretch far apart.

"Bigger. We're talking Mrs. Clark." Donna and I used to joke that if Mrs. Clark ever got depressed and wanted to kill herself, all she had to do was tie her breasts around her neck.

Now Donna tells me that my bosoms need something more substantial than ladies foundations, and perhaps I should try the hardware department. "Rescue me," she mutters. "I'm getting jock itch from this crap."

She calls over to Mrs. Murray—who's arranging a rainbow of bikinis—that she's going on her break. Mrs. Murray glances at her watch. She's worked here forever and hates girls like us because we remind her of her lost youth. "We'll just be at the soda fountain," I say, softening our cruelty, and add, "Your display looks very nice."

"Fifteen minutes," she tells Donna.

Donna walks away, muttering, "Kiss my ass."

We perch on stools at the counter and sip black-and-white ice-cream sodas through long straws. Stevie's a few feet away, playing with a straw I gave him. I stuck him there so nobody'll think he's with me. I want it to look like his mother just left him for a minute while she ran to get thread or something.

Donna digs at a dark puddle at the bottom of her glass. "Thank God you came," she says. "You can't believe how boring this job is. There's nobody to talk to, plus I have to look busy every minute—*fold, fold . . .*" She sucks the end of her straw and frowns. "Now here's the weird thing. Men do not buy underwear. Even when they're standing right there, the wife does all the talking."

Richie's heavy ID bracelet slides down her hand, and she shakes it back up her arm. "If Richie thinks I'm going to do that, he can forget it."

"You're going to marry him?"

She shrugs. "Maybe. Maybe not."

Under her makeup, I can see her freckles. One time we drew lines connecting them and made pictures on her face. That was the summer we won the talent show at the park with our amazing duet, "Love Potion, Number 9." A few years later, she started covering her freckles with makeup. "He's not good enough for you," I finally say.

She gives me her old smile, then shakes her head. "It's all ridiculous, anyway. And speaking of ridiculous . . ." She

points to Stevie, who's whacking the straw against his stroller bar. "How much longer are you stuck with him? I thought what's-her-name was going to find a new sitter. It's been like a month or something—I can't believe you haven't killed him yet."

My straw hits a mound of vanilla ice cream, and I push the glass away. "I wish we could still go on bike rides and sing our duets and stuff like that. Remember the talent contest?"

"Are you kidding? Of course I do." She starts humming our winning song and I chime in, adding harmony. Right then Mrs. Murray shows up. "Break's over," she says, hitting her watch.

"Okay, okay," Donna says, sliding off the stool. "I just have to help my friend with her baby." She gives Stevie a little shove and off he goes, rolling down the lipstick aisle by himself.



Mrs. Smythe's garden is a beautiful, hidden place. A row of pine trees makes a thick fence that hides the other houses and softens noise. Her garden has lilies and roses and lots of gorgeous flowers I can't name. We sit out here almost every afternoon now. She waits with me and we talk. It's only for an hour or so, but it's the best part of the day. Mr. Smythe goes off somewhere—glad, I guess, he's not in charge of me anymore. Mrs. Smythe says I've come to baby-sit Stevie and her.

It's a relief to be with someone else who doesn't like him. She doesn't say that, of course. But I can tell he's not to her liking. Actually, that's one of her phrases—"not to my liking." She says I'm too young for such a responsibility. When she was a teenager, she spent her summers at a camp up in Maine. That was before she got sick. Now, she says,

her mind is like an old sweater filled with holes. To make her feel better, I say that I forget things too.

"You have an excellent memory, Grace," she says. "Don't diminish your strengths to accommodate my frailties." She drinks peppermint tea from a china cup. A matching teapot rimmed with blue flowers sits on a glass table next to my 7-Up and a plate of bakery cookies. She says it's good to drink a hot beverage in the summer because then the outside temperature feels cooler.

"Tell me," she says, peering over the rim of her cup. "What interesting things have you been reading?" Or she says, "Last night I couldn't sleep. I kept hearing the voices of the babies I didn't have."

Her body expelled them, she says. But she doesn't seem sad about it—not like Mrs. Brady, who gets teary when she talks about all her lost babies. The priest says they're in heaven watching over her like angels, and when she dies, they'll be reunited.

Mrs. Smythe doesn't go to church. At first I thought it was because she was afraid to leave the house, but then one day she recited a poem about sitting in a garden on Sunday and said it reflected her soul. I know the poem because we studied it in ninth grade. It's by Emily Dickinson and says that gazing at trees in an orchard is as good as going to church. The poem has effective imagery and rhythm, my English teacher said, but a bad message. You cannot receive the word of God from a tree. Divine revelation comes from the Bible, like it or not.

Sometimes I worry about Mrs. Smythe's soul and think, *Next time, I'll speak to her about God.* But I never do. We have too many other things to talk about—and besides, it would be insulting to tell a grown-up she's going to hell. I'd rather talk about Huck Finn or how sparkling New York looks at night from our neighborhood.

She goes to ballet in the city. *See*, I think, *she can leave the house*. There's just nothing on our block that interests her. As for her soul, it's really not my job to save it. If she's one of the elect (and I think she is), she'll go to heaven whether she sits in a lawn chair or prays in church. The truth is, I like her garden far better than church. I lean back and gaze up at the blue summer sky and say whatever I want.



One afternoon, I find my mother sitting at the kitchen table doing nothing. "I was just wondering," she says, "what you and Mrs. Smythe talk about all day."

I stay in the doorway. "I don't talk to her."

"Oh, really? Well that's strange because I've noticed Mr. Smythe's car hasn't been in the driveway recently. So when you go over, who lets you in?"

"She does," I say coldly. "But I wait in the kitchen by myself."

My mother takes a sip of coffee, then wipes the lipstick smear with her thumb. "She doesn't even say, 'Hello, how are you?' Offer you a glass of water?" She wipes her thumb with a napkin from the Lazy Susan.

I keep my face steady. "She opens the door and goes to another room. I'm fine by myself."

My mother sits for a while. I can hear her sighing. "You know, Grace, sometimes people pretend to be sick because they think they're special and should be excused from all of life's responsibilities. They don't want to cook or do laundry—oh no, that's up to everyone else."

She gets up and comes toward me, but I step back into the hall. "I want you to hear what I'm saying. I don't want you swayed by someone who uses illness as an excuse."

"For what?"

She narrows her eyes, as if already she can see in me

traces of corruption. "For putting yourself first."

Right then she tilts her head, listening. She goes to the refrigerator, takes out my father's supper plate and pours two glasses of iced tea. "Tell Becky to give Annie her bath," she says quickly. "I need to talk to your father." A few seconds later, I hear his car in the driveway and she's opening the door.

"Read me 'Goldilocks,'" Annie begs. She smells like Ivory soap from her bath, and as she climbs up on my bed and tucks her head under my arm, I feel how warm and sweet she is. She helps turn pages, and when we get to the last one, my mother comes into the room. She breaks into a smile when she sees us being cozy. "My girls," she says, dropping a kiss on both our heads. "Don't forget your prayers."

After a drink of water and a trip to the bathroom, we kneel at the bottom bunk. When Annie gets to "if I die before I wake," I distract myself by gazing at the white curtain blowing faintly against the dark screen, and then we're at the end, naming the people we always pray for—relatives, the president, the poor and sick—a list that covers every single person in the entire world.

In the kitchen, my parents are sitting at the table. My father's shirt sleeves are rolled up and his supper is untouched. He looks like a stranger who's come on urgent business and doesn't notice there's a girl in the kitchen. "Grace, we're talking," he says when he sees me.

My mother says, "Tell Becky and James one more cartoon and then it's bed." I go into the den and block the TV while telling them, then go outside. The twins are slumped on the back steps. They're not talking, and their heads droop like limp balloons.

"So you're the culprits," I say. "What'd you do?"

"Nothing," Andy mutters.

Matt adds, "The stupid magazine isn't even ours. We were just hanging onto it for Ryan Clark." He stretches out his long legs so they reach down several steps. "They act like we're sex fiends or something."

It's dark out, except for lightning bugs sparking the air and squares of light from neighbors' houses. The twins' arms and legs are fuzzy with blonde hair, and they're getting that sour smell that boys in my high school leak from their pores.

"You had a dirty magazine?" I ask.

"Ryan's dad has a whole collection," Andy says.

"Mr. Clark?" My stomach lurches at his name. "I don't believe it."

"Yeah, it's true," Matt says. "Ryan found a bunch in the garage."

"Did you tell Mom and Dad?"

Andy shifts sideways so he's leaning against the railing. "We got that stupid speech about how 'we don't care what other parents do, our family's different . . .'"

Matt interrupts, "I said the Venus de Milo is practically naked and she's in a book in the living room."

I imagine Mr. Clark, only two doors away. He says I've got legs that don't stop. *Stop what*, I think.

"Grace?" Matt is saying. "You gotta stick up for us."

I swallow hard. "Did Mom say your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit? A sacred vessel you have to guard against defilement?"

They look at me like I'm nuts.

A breeze sucks the curtain against the bedroom screen and I pull the sheet up to my neck. I hate living with so many people. I want to go to New York where I can wander and not care where I end up. Mrs. Smythe says a girl my age needs privacy and freedom. I want to tell her that the reason I hate Stevie is because he has the face of a grown man.

It's horrible to wipe his penis and bottom because he looks at me and gloats. Already he's like the boys in my high school who stare at girls walking down the hall and announce scores, like everything about us is a test and they have the right to give grades.

It's stifling hot in church. The stained glass windows are wide open, so Bible scenes smash up against each other and make no sense. Reverend VanderBeek is reading from Genesis. His voice is low and serious. I hate how God tells Abraham to kill his son, and Abraham doesn't even ask a question, but ties Isaac up and pulls out a knife. I hate how Abraham thinks that's what God wants him to do and how scared Isaac must've been for the rest of his life.

"God tested Abraham and rewarded his obedience," Reverend VanderBeek says in a low rumble. He pauses. "Even this Sabbath day, God is testing you. Are you his faithful servant—willing to obey, no matter what the cost?"

A voice that's not my own is whispering horrible things. It tells me to hurt Stevie and run away. I don't listen, but it's hounding and won't stop. In a stained glass window, the serpent is slithering up Eve's leg. He's supposed to be coiled in a high branch and she's supposed to be reaching for the apple, but she's above the tree while Satan's ruby tongue licks her. My throat closes up and everything goes blurry. I feel myself topple as my mother's firm hand grabs the back of my dress.

A wet dish towel is folded across my forehead. Drops spill down my neck. Church is over and I'm lying on a couch in the choir room. Some of the choir ladies come over to see how I am. They tell my mother how fiercely hot the choir

loft gets, yet not one of them has ever fainted. My mother says that I'm fine and that this was very unusual, since before this morning I've never fainted either.

"Thank goodness I was sitting right behind you with my smelling salts," someone says. I catch a whiff of mothballs and 4711 Cologne and know it's Wilma Hartog, a pathetic spinster with no waist or chin who lives with her parents.

Wilma comes near the couch and asks my mother if I had milk for breakfast. "On a hot day, milk can wreak havoc with digestion," she says, fiddling with the elastic loop on her straw purse. "I never drink milk when the temperature rises above 80 degrees."

She's wearing her brown-and-white seersucker dress, the one she wears every other Sunday in the summer. It has droopy sleeves and dark buttons down the front and looks like a housedress. My mother pities Wilma with her homely face and sad life, so she's patient and explains I had toast and scrambled eggs for breakfast, but no milk.

Wilma bends over to rub the hem of my pink-dotted Swiss dress. "Synthetic fabric can't breathe," she says like an expert. "Perspiration gets trapped under the skin and builds up in internal organs such as the lungs."

My mother hates being told things by her inferiors, but she has to be charitable and so says nothing. After a moment, Wilma adds in a low voice that menstruation could be the cause.

My mother rises. In her yellow sleeveless dress and golden tan, she makes Wilma look like a dead person. "Thank you so much for helping," she says. "We're very grateful. And please tell your parents they're in our prayers."

My father hurries through the door, jacket off. Behind him is the minister, who takes a few long strides and gets to me first. "Ah, Grace," he chuckles. "I see you took a little spill there in the pew."

“We’re feeling fine now,” my mother says.

My father says, “The car’s at the door.”

“Ah then, I won’t keep you.” Reverend VanderBeek’s tie is knotted and his shirt buttoned to his neck, yet he’s not sweating. “Let me leave you with this one thought,” he says, blinking fast. “It’s true the Bible tells us to fall on our knees before the Lord. But only Baptists would interpret scripture so literally.” He lets out a snorty laugh. “Tell me, Grace, have you been sneaking off to daily Bible school at Calvary Zion?”

My mother slips the dish towel off my forehead and smooths my soaked bangs. For a moment, her hand lingers. “Grace takes care of a five-month-old baby,” she says. “All day, five days a week.”

“I see. And the baby’s mother? Is she ill?”

“Not at all,” my father says with the kind of sneaky grin he gets when playing a joke. “She works in Manhattan—right alongside Baptists and Catholics and Jews.”

“Ah-hah,” Reverend VanderBeek says, trying to play along. “Then Grace is the baby’s shining light.”

My father’s arms are under my elbows and he’s helping me up. He smells like Old Spice and I wish I were little so he’d carry me. “No, Grace is his baby-sitter,” he says.

Right then I get some air in my lungs. “Did God really tell Abraham to kill Isaac?” I ask the minister. “Or did Abraham just think that’s what he said?”

It’s an important question, and I have to know the answer.

Reverend VanderBeek stops blinking. “It was the true and holy voice of God,” he says, “demanding that we listen and obey, even when He asks the unthinkable.” He pauses. “Do you understand?”



The stroller wheels sag in the hot tar of the parking lot. Cars blind me with their glare. I have to get away from the ladies in my yard who are rubbing ice cubes all over their sweaty skin. I push my bangs off my face and they stick straight up.

Ryan Clark and his friends swoop by on their bikes, doing wheelies and zig-zagging around me. "Hey Grace," he yells, "that one yours? Who did it to you?"

"Who broke your cherry?" somebody yells.

I walk through their filth and pretend not to hear. The stroller bumps into a car fender and Stevie starts to wail. I jerk him back and almost get hit by a delivery truck. The guy slams on the brakes and blares his horn.

"Shut up," I say in tears. "Everybody shut up."

Ryan rears up like he's on a horse, then thumps down and heads toward me. His hand smacks my arm. "Ouch! You're hot!" He rides off and roars, "Watch out for Grace—she's burning up with love."

I don't stop until we're inside the store. Stevie is wailing, so I push him past cosmetics and jewelry and all the places I like to linger to the back where outdoor furniture is displayed.

I drop onto a picnic bench and turn the stroller toward me. "Stop crying," I plead. He gulps in air and I force a bottle into his mouth. When I let go, he's holding it by himself.

The store is cool, and I sit there, feeling horrible and guilty. Every day I yank him out of the stroller and shove him back in. I change his diaper and say, "Who do you think you are? I hate the sight of you."

After a while he dozes off, and I push him through fabrics and notions and window shades. A group of sales clerks are talking, but it doesn't matter because the store is empty. Nobody needs help.

In the baby department, there's a high chair and a changing table and a white crib decorated with teddy bears.

Stevie's fast asleep. I lay him down in the crib. He sniffles, then lets out a deep sigh.

I leave him and walk through the store by myself. I walk in widening circles, past Donna folding boxers and Mrs. Murray snapping a bra onto a headless mannequin, past the waitress at the soda fountain and the girls at the check-out counters. Then I'm standing by the automatic door. Overhead is a picture of a big eye warning that if you go the wrong way, you'll get knocked down.

I want to go outside. Through the parking lot. Across the highway and through the field. I want to keep walking until I'm far, far away.

But my feet don't move. Something won't let me go. I hear a high thin wail, like metal scraping a hard surface. When I get to the crib, he's crying. I look down at his scrunched-up face and arms flailing toward me.

My throat closes up. I sit on the cold floor and drop my head like I'm praying. I beg God to stop my bad thoughts. His grace is a warning, and I won't lie to my mother or talk to Mrs. Smythe in her garden anymore. I won't do anything to displease Him—ever. I press my hands into my face. "Make me weak," I pray. "Make me helpless."

Ashes, Darkness, Dust

Fidgety discord
of a high school concert, outside
granular skim of March. Frost
heaves flatten, calve small bergs
of asphalt. The ball of spring's
joint scrapes and catches, fails
to flex into a better season.

Already it's warm
along the Euphrates, traced
up its long curve to our source
by columns of blotchy armor
full of last year's adolescents,
their goggled reality grainy
with dissolution of civilization
into wind

and dune. We grumble
and wait for meaning to drill
into carboniferous hearts,
plan a package-deal escape
someplace south. Eden,
a mile deep, compressed
to crude, no longer produces.

We picket
on the bridge and tune out
the mirage of empire still



Arnie Yasinski

deep in the reptilian brain,
but chill with suspicion
that it's too late for spring
and we too are precipitants
of a bitter time.

Harvest Moon

July 1983

I thought I could fix things by building her the crib. I'd handpicked each piece of walnut, and all afternoon I'd been turning the spindles on Tom's lathe. It was one of those freak days in May, high eighties, and the sawdust made mud of my sweat. I turned off the lathe and wiped my arms clean with a shop rag, grabbed a beer from Tom's fridge. I held the can against my throat. Even after seven months, I couldn't blot out the other girl, bent back over the frozen hood of her car, clouds rising up from her smeared mouth.

The shop door opened then, and Violet stood there, dazed and flushed. In her sixth month, she was huge already, my old shirt draping her swollen belly. "It's twins," she said softly, her eyes batting down to her belly, left to the crib frame, back to me. Her hand fluttered over her chest. She'd heard it herself, she said, through the doctor's stethoscope. The second heart beating.

October 1982

I'm up at dawn and my wife is already sitting at her typewriter, hammering away at her goddess paper. "Balls," she whispers, "balls, balls, balls!" while I pour coffee from the



T a m a r a P a v i c h

pot she's almost emptied. It's as close as she'll come to swearing. I look over her shoulder as she backspaces, magically erasing the word she just typed. The machine is new, bought with money from her mother to reinvigorate her work on the dissertation. As if she could be any more vigorous. I have to admire the way she goes at it, books piled around her, papers stacked up at her elbows, and her fingers flying on the keys. I wonder where they come from, all those words. When people ask her how's the PhD, she answers, "ABD." All but dissertation.

I lean into the back of her chair and reach down between her and the typewriter, simultaneously sipping coffee and lifting her breast, liquid and heavy under my old T-shirt.

"Got the bank thing at five," I say. "Think I should wear a tie?"

I can't see her face, but I hear the smile in her voice. "Maybe not this time," she says. She leans to the side to give me more room. "Just dress regular, so they see you as physically capable. Maybe you shouldn't even shave." She does her deep cave man voice. "Strong man. Build many houses."

"I'm gonna shave," I say. "I'll be glad when it's over. Fuck."

After a few minutes she leans back in the chair, and I set down the mug. With both hands I can accomplish more, and before long she stands up and leans forward, bracing her herself against the table. I shove her chair off to the side while she steps out of my boxers. She likes it this way, with me behind her, something about the front wall of the vagina or maybe the back. Her head falls forward, messy blonde hair dragging across the keys, and I can see the words she's just typed. ". . . pictures Artemis among forest creatures, most often deer or a stag . . ." Her goddess stuff is Greek

to me. I hang on to her hips.

Half an hour later, she comes out of the bathroom in sweats with her hair in dark wet braids. She grabs me from behind and makes smacking noises against my neck while I butter toast. "They'll go for it, Henry. How can they not?" I turn around to kiss her, reaching for a braid, but she's already straying to the typewriter, sitting down, disappearing into her words. I'm at the door, picking up my tool pouch, when she stops the clacking keys and speaks again. "I'll be done with this in a month," she says. "Swear to God, I'm going to finish it. Anyway, I'm going off the pill," she says, just like that, "before I'm too dried up to have babies." She pushes out her chest.

"Don't even joke about that," I say. "We still got a long way to go." She's leaning over the paper. "Vie?" She doesn't look up. "We gotta wait. Couple years, maybe less."

"Balls," she says. "Balls, balls, balls."

July 1983

From a yard sale down the street, she called me at the shop. I'd worked through lunch on Tom's big project—kitchen cabinets for an upscale apartment complex—and I had a good head of steam going. She'd found us a second rocker, she said, and wanted me to come and get it. I doubted we'd need two rocking chairs—couldn't you rock one kid at a time?—but I left the shop and went next door to the driveway of our crummy rental house, drove my pickup three blocks down to Mill Street, where sad old houses sat slump-shouldered from the settling. At the side of an ugly brown three-story, next to a clothesline hung with raggedy dresses and shirts, I spotted her surrounded by women.

"Here's the daddy!" this brown grandmother type

hollered as I got out of my truck. I sidestepped a shadeless floor lamp and a bicycle skeleton without wheels. The neighborhood was worse down here near the tracks. I grew up to the sound of train whistles and these same smells, smoke and grease clinging to clothes and furniture, strong, even outdoors. The old Mexican lady, wrapped in a crazy-colored dress, patted Vie's stomach. Since she'd gotten so big, women had felt increasingly free to touch my wife.

"You gonna have sons," the lady broadcasted at me across the yard. "I carried Tony the same way, low, all out in front." She pressed her pelvis forward and took a few vulgar steps with her knees apart. The other women laughed, and I couldn't help smiling. "With a girl baby," she said, "the woman is pregnant all over. Fat neck, fat arms. But look at your wife, so thin. Only the big basketball out in front. You listen to Dalia," she said, patting Violet again. "Baby boys in here."

"Okay," I said. Violet's green eyes flicked away from mine, then focused again on my face. She nibbled at her braid, still worried because of what I said last fall. The crowd of women broke up and scattered with their various bits of secondhand trash, electrical cords and colored belts trailing behind them.

Violet braced her hands low against her spine and led me near the clothesline to the rocking chair, an oak ladder back with an upholstered seat, dingy and stained. The Mexican, Dalia, stroked the grimy wood. "Old," she said. "Made by hand."

I grasped the chair's arms and twisted, testing the joints, and the whole structure wobbled. But I could take it apart and re-glue it at home. I winced as Violet sat down in the filthy thing. "Let's hope it's a boy and a girl in one shot," she said.

I dug a ten-dollar bill out of my pocket and gave it to

Dalia, who held it up by the corners for Violet to see. "If you have a baby girl, *hija*, you come back for this money." She tapped her eyebrow. "Dalia knows what she sees."

That's when the hanging clothes parted and this bony blonde woman pushed through with a heap of dresses in the crook of her arm. "You want to find out?" she said. She slung her purse up onto a hunched shoulder and walked over to Vic. "I know a way, if you got a string?"

"What you need a string for?" Dalia said. "I told her. It's boys."

"It's a test," said the other. "You got one?"

Dalia looked at us and grinned. "No, I got no string." Violet shook her head.

"Wait a minute," said the blonde one. She pulled a pin from her hair and a long gray-blonde tail fell down her back. I felt goose-fleshy, kneeling there in the heat, like she was undressing right in the yard. Then she tore at the back of her head, tugging at a brown rubber band until it slithered down the skinny tail and pulled free. She laced it between her blunt fingers and broke it. It would have to hurt to break it in your hands like that, but she didn't flinch.

"Now the wedding ring," said the woman, flicking her rough fingers at Violet. "Give it to me, honey." Violet blinked at her and then worked the ring free. It was only a thin gold band, but I half expected the woman to drop it in her purse and run. Her dull hair still showed the dent from her ponytail, and her brownish eyes were unevenly striped with yellow. She thrust her load of dresses higher on her hip and with her snubbed fingers twisted the rubber band into a knot around the ring.

"Never heard of this," mumbled Dalia, her mouth pulling tight at one side.

"You lean on back now," said the woman. Violet slid down a little and rocked the chair back, surrendering herself

to the test. "Okay, now we watch how it swings. It's gone tell us, boy or girl." I tried to catch Violet's eye to signal bullshit, but she didn't look away from her ring.

We all focused on the ring as it started to move, bouncing a little and swinging over Violet's huge stomach. It swung wider and the woman nodded. "See, it's going in circles," she said. "If it would have went side-to-side, it'd be a girl. But circles means a boy." She jerked the rubber band and caught the ring in her palm.

"Both boys?" Violet asked.

"Let me try this," Dalia said, plucking the rubber band from the blonde woman's hand. I got up off my knees. I was looking at four more hours on the cabinets for Tom, wouldn't even get to my own project. But Violet was staring at her ring and the long strand of silver hair that hung from it. The gold band jiggled a little in the light and then hung plumb from Dalia's fingers. "Hmph," Dalia said, switching the string to her left hand. "Not even doing anything."

"Maybe if I turn," Violet said eagerly. I couldn't believe she was buying it, but she let her knees fall to the left, exposing the right side of her abdomen to the ring. It didn't move, just bounced a little on the rubber string and then settled again.

Suddenly Violet reached out and grabbed it, not smiling any longer. "We'll just see who comes out," she said, her face flushing as she tried to stand. I lifted her elbow. A rust-spotted Ford scraped the curb and Dalia hurried off to greet her new customer.

I picked up the chair and waited while Violet untied the rubber band and pushed the ring over her knuckle, making a fist of her left hand and clasping her right hand over it. "We'll know pretty soon," she said, blushing. "I'm due in August."

"August?" said the blonde woman. The corners of her

mouth turned down as she took Violet's measure, while groping for her purse buried under her load of clothes. With her eyes, she located Dalia at the curb and moved off in her direction to settle up. "You better get the name picked out," she said.

"Names, you mean," said Violet. She held up her fingers. "Two names."

The woman unzipped her handbag and turned away, calling over her shoulder. "You ain't gone wait long."

October 1982

At four-thirty, I'm driving down Broadway toward the bank when I see him staggering along the sidewalk on the right, and it's like some magnetic field starts working on me, gravity pulling me down from the shoulders. He barrels along like some old bruiser bent on revenge, heaving forward at the waist, his shirttail flapping against his ass. His head is cocked crazy, hair grown over his filthy collar. He gets smaller every time I see him, which isn't often and is always at a distance. He lurches and I think he's going to fall, but with his right hand he reaches out to steady himself against the plate-glass window of a bar, Harry's. A woman with a child gives him a wide berth on the sidewalk, veering almost to the curb to avoid him and the smell I imagine coming off his clothes, smoke and sweat, urine, God knows what else. The little boy cranes over his shoulder for a longer look at my dad. I'm sure they can't imagine he could be anybody's father, and frankly, neither can I. I have no idea where he's living or how long he's been drunk this time—maybe years. I'm staring so hard I almost rear end the guy in front of me, hit the brakes hard. At the sound of my tires shrieking on the asphalt, he looks up. My father squints blindly at me,

mean or scared or both, and I have my usual double urge to leap out of my truck and knock him down or else to take him home and give him a bath, wipe that blur out of his eyes. A punk with chains on his belt pushes out through the door to Harry's, and my father grabs the door with both hands. He disappears into the dark. If he could just get out of those piss-stained clothes, stand in front of a mirror and see himself clean and respectable, maybe he could kick it. But I've seen him sober too. When he's sober, I just have the one urge, to knock him down.



I'm early at the bank, about quarter of five. I park in the crowded lot and stand outside a minute to shake off the sight of my father. The bank's row of sugar maples is bright orange with pools of fallen leaves underneath each one. But still I picture him, climbing up on a bar stool and lowering his voice to ask for credit: "Spot me one, bub?" Nobody will be stupid enough to give him credit, so he'll work the bar, looking for a soft touch. They may already have thrown him out. I gaze down the street, watching for a cockeyed shadow against the storefronts, lumbering toward me. At the door, I take a clean breath and go in.

There's a sign in the lobby, "Business After Hours. Sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce and hosted by Southwest Iowa Savings Bank." It's a cocktail party for mucky-mucks, and they're standing around eating hors d'oeuvres off little napkins and sipping pink wine out of plastic cups. I recognize a couple of realtors. The men are all wearing suits and the women are squeezed into tweeds with loopy scarves at their necks and lumpy purses hanging from their shoulders. I should have worn a tie.

I go up to the desk where a dark, youngish woman is sitting, chewing quickly and trying to swallow. She's probably

part Mexican. Cubes of cheese with toothpicks are piled on a napkin next to her phone. Her nameplate says *Sharla*.

"I have an appointment with Matt Tinley," I say.

She swallows and smiles, and I notice one of her front teeth is dingy brown. I wonder if it's dead. It's too bad because otherwise Sharla's pretty, in a wrong-side-of-the-tracks way. She's like the girls I dated before Violet, trying too hard and going past glamour to vamp, witchy eye make-up and a black bra strap showing. Her dark hair is clean, though, and hangs into the cleavage I can almost see.

"Your name?" she says, dabbing at her too-pink lipstick with the napkin.

"Henry Sunderman."

"You can take a seat," she says, batting her sticky eyes. "I'll let Mr. Tinley know you're here." She waits until I've sat down before parading past me in a tight black skirt, a little wisp of white slip showing in the split at the back. I have a wild thought of her in my lap, right here in the middle of the bank lobby, with all those suits looking on.

Tinley's across the room in his shirtsleeves near the teller counter. He's holding a beer and listening to a stiff old guy with white hair, and his cufflink picks up the light as he brings the bottle to his mouth, nodding. Sharla approaches him and gestures in my direction, but his eyes don't even flicker. He's hanging on every word from the white-haired guy. Tinley's one of those albino-type blondes, skin that tans red, probably from golf. Last time, he was all apologies. "Sorry, Henry. The Board just isn't comfortable with the collateral situation, but hey!" He always said "Hey!" "Give us another shot, buddy. Next time." Like it was them auditioning. Like they'd failed instead of me.

Sharla comes back to her desk and stands beside it, striking a pose. She turns away and reaches for a toothpick, the skirt climbing her thigh. Then she holds the cube of cheese

near her mouth and twirls it on the stick, thumping the corners softly against the pillow of her lower lip. I have to admit, she's good. I grab a magazine. The clock says ten after five.

At five-fifteen, Tinley rushes past me. "Hey! Give me just a second, Henry." He goes into his glass office and falls back in the leather chair, sets his beer on his desk, and dials the phone. I wait. The party, if that's what you call it, is in full swing now. They've cranked up the music on the PA system, and the air fills with instrumental Barry Manilow. Two women give me tight-lipped smiles as they sit down next to me. "Bill and I've been everywhere," says the thicker one with an ankle bracelet fastened over her nylons, "and Cabo's the best. You just pick up the phone and some little Manuel or Pedro comes to your room to massage every inch of your body." She sips her pink wine. "I really think Bill got jealous." They laugh. I can't believe Bill got jealous. Sharla's still twirling her cheese.

"Okay, buddy," Tinley says. He's standing over me, and I get up and shake his hand. "Sorry about this," he says. "Did Sharla offer you a beer?"

"No," I say. "That's okay."

"Hey!" he blusters at Sharla. "Mr. Sunderman's a bank customer. Get him a beer, will you?" He gives me a rakish smile. This could mean anything. He's either forecasting the good news or softening the bad.

She runs off, and we go into the office and sit down. I'm getting a headache, so it's a relief to get away from the party. All day I've been installing the dishwashers in my new duplex, and the second one still won't run. I didn't even get to the formica. "So how's it looking?" I ask.

"Good, good," he says, shoving papers around on the desk. "Now, you're still working for McKeever, right?"

"Yeah," I say. "I'm still building cabinets for Tom, but

he's very flexible. I'll put in six or seven twelve-hour days for him, and he'll give me a week off for my own stuff. Or else I'll work days for him and get my own stuff in during evenings and weekends. But I think I explained in the letter, I'll use subs on this job. I wouldn't need to be at the site all the time." Tinley's nodding and opening a file with my name on the tag. "But I've still got the steady paycheck from Tom, if that's what you're asking." I take a breath.

"Right, right," says Tinley. "Now this isn't me talking, but somebody thought you might have come up short on the lumber cost." Sharla comes in with my beer. "Hey! There we go. Have a drink, Henry."

My hand shakes when I reach for it, but I manage to get it to my mouth. It's cold and I could slam it, but I just take a sip and hold it in my lap.

"That lumber number," says Tinley, grinning at his rhyme and then pulling a serious face. "It's giving us a little trouble." His pen is poised above the pad.

So I explain how Tom is going to buy the lumber for me and pass along his volume discount, forty percent. "He'll be placing a big order anyway because he's got the Sweenie addition coming up in the spring, all the kitchens for that." It disgusts me, how Tinley can make my chest pound, how he's got my future in that fucking file.

"Hey! There's one question out of the way already." He's being very theatrical with the pen, writing a big forty percent on his pad. "Great, great," he says, reaching for his beer and eyeballing his list of questions. It looks to me like they fill the whole page, and I sit back for the long haul. But we move pretty quickly, with me explaining about the cash flow, my plan to stagger completion on six houses so they'll sell and help make the payments. I can do the kitchens myself, I tell him, saving all the labor cost. I'll do the Sheetrock and hire a painter. We'll break ground in April.

He's buying it all, and we're close to the bottom of the page.

"Okay, now I hate this fucking word," he says. "God knows I hate it, but I gotta ask." He lifts his eyebrows, white-blond against his red forehead. He's swirling the pen above the pad. "Collateral," he says. "I hate to even mention it, Henry, remembering last time and all. But we're going to need something more against your material costs. Or—and this is just one possibility—you could get somebody to sign. Twenty thousand would do it."

It's hard work, smiling when you want to break something. I feel like a kid who needs his dad to co-sign for the car. Hell, my dad's never even owned a car. The thought of him pushes me in the wrong direction. "Wait a minute," I say. "This duplex will sell for ninety thousand, so I can give you a hundred down." I'm ticking one-two-three on my fingers. "You'll have my down payment, you'll have the land. And you'll own the material—"

"But hey, we aren't builders," he says. "We're bankers. Can you see me out there with a hammer?" He falls back in the chair, laughing. He's trained for this, I suppose, bred for it. "God forbid we'd have to build those things ourselves!" I can smile for real at that, him building anything, a bird-house, for that matter.

"Hey!" he says, aiming the pen at his head, which I could pop like a grape. "I just thought of something. I don't know if you're aware, but Geneva Parch has significant deposits with us. The woman's worth a fortune, and since we're talking family and all, I don't think I'm out of line here. She comes in, signs her name, and we're on our way."

Violet's mother, Geneva "Money Bags" Parch. She lives in a huge old house in Carson, thirty miles out on Highway 92. She'd do it, but I'm not about to go begging.

"Or you could cut the project in half, go smaller potatoes for now. Go back to your three-house plan. Sky's the

limit for you, Henry, just a matter of time. You're going to do big things, very big, and we'll be there for the big stuff, buddy. But I'd try Mrs. Parch on this one. Twenty thousand is like . . .” He makes a dot on the page, to show me how little twenty thousand dollars is to my fucking mother-in-law.

“You've got a great plan here, Henry. They're in no hurry to sell, am I right? It's only October. Take a week and chew on it, and we'll keep the file open.” Tinley plants his elbows on it to show me it's open, then closes it. He stands up and shoves his skinny red hand at me. I take it. Hey! What else can I do?

If I smile one minute longer, my head will burst. “I'll call you next week.”

“We want to do this, Henry,” he yells at my back. I can't get out of there fast enough, but they've locked the front door. The party's thinned out a little and I feel conspicuous standing there against the glass till Sharla gets up with the keys. She smiles big while she opens the door, showing the dead tooth.

“Have a great weekend,” she says.

July 1983

After work, I showered, and while she ran her bath, I quietly brought the second crib in from the shop and placed it end-to-end with the first. Even though it was the larger of the two bedrooms, it was crowded with furniture, and I couldn't see where we'd put the second rocker. After the display with the ring, I didn't want the thing. It gave me the creeps. At the shop, I'd used my box cutter and ripped off the filthy upholstery.

When I heard her let the water out of the tub, I placed

a tiny wrapped package against the walnut grain of the new crib. Then I drove her to the Dairy Queen for our weekly burgers and dip cones. On the way home, she leaned out of the truck window. "There's Gemini," she said, her wet hair trailing. "Castor and Pollux."

At home the house was almost dark as I led her by the hand to the nursery and watched her clap and gasp over the matching cribs, then cover her mouth at the sight of the little gift. It never failed to surprise me, how easy it could be to make her happy. She shook it, laughing, and then slipped a finger under the wrapping paper, so as not to tear it. "What's this for, Henry?" When she opened the velvet box, she went quiet, two fingers at her upper lip. I turned on the light so she could see it better. "Honey, why did you do this? We're supposed to be saving money."

"It's the birthstone for August," I said. She sat down in our rocking chair and held the necklace up by the chain, two peridot stones set in a circle of glittering Black Hills gold—Fool's Gold, they called it, full of alloys, but I liked the leaf pattern, tiny pink-gold leaves fanning out from the gems. I wanted to give her something to make up for the mess in October. Even nine months later, I still hadn't put it behind me. So I ordered it special and gave it to her early. She gazed at it, turning it under the light.

"I love it," she said. "I just love it." She handed it back to me and lifted her hair, still damp underneath. I fastened it and the chain fell over her collarbones. She looked up at me then, and I noticed how the pendant mirrored her eyes, two glittering stones of pale green. "Does this mean you're feeling better about the babies?"

"What do you think it means?" Before she could answer, I covered her mouth with mine. Pregnant or not, I wanted her. I led her to our bedroom and pulled the shirt up over her head.

"Oh God, Henry," she giggled. "I'm so fat." I traced a hand over her few visible ribs and around her breast. "You think it was a sign?" she asked, her hair crowding her eyes.

"What sign?"

"The ring," she said, lifting her left hand. "It didn't move."

"That crazy broad," I said. I pulled her down beside me on the bed.

She laughed then, but later in the dark, when I was almost asleep, she said it again. "It didn't move."

October 1982

"How'd it go?" she asks, coming out of the bedroom to sit against the sofa on the floor. I'm lying back with an arm across my eyes, trying to keep the headache under control. She reaches up to stroke my shirt.

"It didn't," I say, grabbing my head. "I'm ABL," meaning all but the fucking loan.

"What now?" She crawls up to sit with my head in her lap, and rubs my temples.

"Fucking collateral. Like I haven't already proven myself." I'd bought and remodeled five run-down houses, built three single-family places and now the duplex, each time selling at a healthy profit. "Still making me jump through their goddamn hoops."

"How much money?" She does this thing with her fingers in my hair, pulling it gently and raking with her nails, and my headache starts to lose strength. I tell her twenty thousand. "Henry," she says. I close my eyes and relax into her hands. It's magic, the way she does this. "Maybe it's a blessing. Maybe it's not the right time."

"Of course it's the right time."

Then her hands are still. "I went off the pill already," she says. "A while ago. I might be pregnant." I lay there stunned. "I'm late." I start counting backwards. I've lost track of her periods and we've been screwing like rabbits for weeks.

"I thought we agreed to wait!" I'm up and pacing around the shitty living room and she's curled on the couch with her face half hidden behind her knees. When we fight, I never know which Violet will show up, the one who screams back at me, or the one who sits there and cries. I see blood with that one, when fighting with her feels like beating a dog. That's who I'm stuck with tonight, the one who cowers, but I won't stop yelling. "Correct me if I'm wrong, but I thought you were going to finish your degree and teach. And I was going to get ahead a little first." I walk away from her to the window, the crummy drapes lined with plastic. "When did you stop the pills?"

"A few months ago," she whines. "They make me sick." That's a lie and she proves it immediately. "Henry, we've been married five years. We want a family, don't we?"

"So which was it? They made you sick, or you just decided to get pregnant? If you think I'm going to live in some hell-hole all my life and raise a brood—."

"But you have enough for a down payment," she says, still peeking over her knees. "We could buy a house. And Mom will give us as much money as—."

"I don't need money from your mother! Jesus! What I need is a little time, a year, maybe two. You're twenty-nine. Kids'll come later."

Her foggy eyes get rounder and paler, the color draining out of them. This is bad, when she goes inside.

"Listen," I say, trying to soften my voice. "Vie, we can have kids anytime."

Her head starts shaking fast, and her gaze drifts off to

someplace else. "Are you saying . . . ? Henry, are you asking me . . . ?"

"Just a year," I say.

She's whispering now. "You want me to get an abortion."

"Violet, we don't even know for sure yet, right?" I kneel down beside the couch and take her by the shoulders, and she sits there limp, her wet eyes fluttering off to the side, left and right, anyplace but my face. "Hey!" I say, hating myself for sounding like Tinley. "Of course I want to have a family. You know that. But first I'm going to build us a house, Vie, like you've never seen. Couple of kids, sure, but not in this cave." I get up and raise my arms to the walls, the shitty, peeling wallpaper of Tom's little house. I punch the low ceiling and a little plaster falls down.

She jumps at the sound and runs to the bedroom, where I can hear her opening drawers. I recognize the sound of her dragging the suitcase from the closet shelf and its hollow clump on the wood floor. She slams the cheap closet door. She's packing.

She's packed before. It's what she does to leverage me, but this time it won't work. I don't run to the bedroom and stop her. I don't grab her and hold her till she stops struggling. I get two beers and go out to the porch. She leaves by the back door, and I hear her start the old Mercedes from her mother, the tires on the gravel of the alley. She's gone. With her twin sister, Daisy, in London, there's only one place for her to go—Carson, to her mother's big house.

July 1983

She woke me after midnight. We lay there listening to the train whistles and timing her contractions. About four in the

morning, I helped her into the pickup. "It's too early," she said, leaning back against the seat, touching the pendant at her throat. As the nurse wheeled her into delivery, she tried to smile at me from her wheelchair, a little toothpaste on her lower lip. "Think of another girl name," she said, wincing as her pain gathered strength. I nodded. The automatic doors opened, and she mouthed the words "I love you." I waved.

October 1982

By Wednesday, when she's still not back, I start sleeping at the duplex on a pile of tarps in a bedroom. I can manage eighteen-hour days, and I plow through the rooms hanging Sheetrock, skimming and sanding. I eat at a diner on Broadway and keep working on the second kitchen, painting right up until Friday, staying up most of the night putting the last coat of varnish on the cabinets.

By Saturday evening, the duplex is almost ready to show, except for a couple of light fixtures and carpeting. At the sound of a car in the drive, I hurry to the window, but it's only Tom's Silverado, parked behind my own truck. He walks in without knocking, big, like my dad used to be. He pulls a can of Pabst loose from a six-pack and hands it to me. "She came back today," he says. I look up at him, hoping. "Nope. Took her typewriter and a bunch of books. Cryin'." He lights a cigarette and walks around the kitchen, running a hand over the Formica. "What'd the bank say?" I tell him about Tinley and the twenty thousand. He cracks a beer for himself. "How 'bout I sign for you?" he says. "No sense letting your pride stop you when you've got this far."

I kick at the toe stop for a minute. "Can you afford to tie up twenty grand?"

He nods. "I bank across the street, but I can move it over there for a year."

I feel my throat get tight. He's been like a dad to me. To cover, I walk him around the north unit of the duplex and show him the bedrooms, the walk-in closets. Then we go back to the kitchen for the beer. "I'll go in Monday and sign," he says.

"Thanks."

He leans against the wall and folds his arms, holding the cigarette at his lips. "Jesus, Henry. Most guys'd give their right arm for a woman like that. 'S matter with you?"

I haven't shaved in a week and I'm bone-tired. All the fight's gone out of me, and I tell him I'll drive out to Carson tonight. He slaps me on the back. "Women," he says, to show he's still on my side. "Can't live with 'em, pass the beer nuts." I lock the place up and walk him to his pickup. The day's warmth is just beginning to cool. A huge harvest moon is hanging low over the rooftops, casting a long shadow beside me.

When I leave the duplex, I mean to head out to Carson right then, dirty and work-worn. She'll have to feel sorry for me. But I don't even make it across the tracks before I've pulled in at a neighborhood tavern, The Depot. Maybe I'm just too tired to face a big deal with Violet. Maybe I want to celebrate finishing the duplex and solving the Tinley problem without crawling on my belly to Geneva. All of a sudden, everything's possible. I'm getting away from the tracks and out of dives like this one. I look around at the stained ceiling tiles and split vinyl booths and realize I'm almost beyond them. With every beer, the feeling of possibility pumps a little fuller in my chest.

I don't know how long I sit at the bar before a shot of Schnapps shows up in front of me. I ask the bartender who it's from. "Supposed to be a secret," he says, rolling his eyes.

In a few minutes, I feel a tap on my right shoulder and turn. Nobody there, and then she startles me on the left, grinning with her dead tooth showing. "Remember me?" Sharla takes the stool next to me, and I return the favor, buy her a shot. She wants root-beer flavor. Tonight she's in full vamp mode, a thin, scoop-neck dress hugging her figure and her hair teased up big around her face. We drink together, beers and shots, her batting her sticky black lashes and she's putting her hand on my thigh, rubbing it before long, getting up a few times to feed the jukebox, always brushing against me with her tits. After one too many shots, she lets a few hints drop about Tinley, and I gradually absorb the fact that he's been doing her for over a year. Pathetic.

The next part, I swear, wasn't even me. Last call and I followed her out to the gravel lot, cold now, and pressed her up against her car, windshield frosted over, kissing her, but it wasn't like a kiss. I grabbed the back of her hair and bent her backward over the hood, smearing her lipstick on her face, big clouds of steam roaring out of my mouth moving down her neck, not bothering with buttons, tearing open her dress—she was that kind, you could do anything. Then it was all her. She opened the back door of her car and pulled me in, pressed me back in the seat and unbuckled me, went down on me. That was all her. And when she was done, I got out, pushing away her fingers and her scratchy voice, "Henry, wait," and stumbled to my truck, trying to zip up, thinking *What the fuck. What in the fuck?*

I decided to drive on out to Carson and park in front of Geneva's house, sleep it off, talk to Violet in the morning. The yellow moon was so high and bright by then I almost didn't need my headlights. To sober up, I rolled down the window and felt the cold blasting at my left ear and cheek, drove fast out the highway, trying to shake it off, the beer, the Schnapps, and Sharla, no harm done, I told myself, pic-

turing Violet's typewriter backspacing over the whole thing, probably wouldn't even remember it.

Coming up on the little bridge, I saw the deer on it, three of them, a doe and two smaller ones, older than fawns, but young. The whole thing slowed down in front of me, the twitch of black noses and swivel ears, flick of a tail, then all three frozen long enough for me to brake before they scattered, my reflexes gone to shit, steering left away from them and slowing up enough by the time I hit the guardrail so that I just slid along it, sparks flying up from the fender.

I got out and walked around on the bridge. I could hear the water running below and a coyote someplace north in the hills. When I flexed my left arm, the pain shot through my shoulder, and I leaned against the guardrail, feeling sick. I leaned over it to throw up, but then I saw the dead fawn in the moonlight, curled beside the stream, its head in the water. I was sure I hadn't hit it. It must have leapt over the rail, not knowing there was nothing beyond. The moon was wavering on the running water just next to the head of the fawn, twisted up like it was drinking from the bright yellow circle, torn at the edges. I hadn't cried in years, since I was a little kid stuck waiting for my dad to come home, but that night I was so fucked up, I just hung onto that guardrail, coughing and moaning into the creek.

The tire was flat, the fender practically melded to the rail. I tried to push my truck, but my shoulder was killing me. I turned on the safety lights and walked to Carson, seven miles, holding my left arm tight against my body, yelling all the way at the moon—"What the fuck? What in the fucking fuck?" Violet came back to me then, had to because I was hurt. Collarbone fracture. The doctor put me in a sling for six weeks. She actually felt guilty for making me drive all the way out there, then walk seven miles in the

dark. And besides, she'd gotten her period, false alarm. "So tired," she said, "poor thing, working so hard."

By December, she was pregnant for real, and I couldn't fight her anymore.

July 1983

"It's a common syndrome," Dr. Altman said in the hospital waiting room, "in which twins share a single placenta. The heart of one twin, the donor, is circulating the blood for both, while the second one, the recipient, is passive." He motioned for me to sit down and took the other seat. "Although the donor twin is smaller and usually anemic, he's better off really. If he survives, his heart is actually stronger for all that work. Whereas the organs of the recipient, the larger one, don't develop. Survival of the recipient twin in this case would have meant life support and" He shook his head. "I know it sounds bad, but it's much better this way."

"How's Violet?" I asked.

"Oh, she's fine," he said. "Required a few stitches. We gave her an epidural. She's still in recovery."

We sat for a moment, announcements blaring. He suppressed a yawn. I was waiting for some emotion to take me.

"Does she know?" I asked.

"Not yet." Dr. Altman got up from his chair. "Look, sometimes the loss of one can overshadow a very happy occasion." He extended his hand, and I stood. "Congratulations on the birth of your son."



Daisy called from Brussels and they talked for two hours, Violet weeping into the phone. "I wish you were here," she

cried, over and over. We had a little funeral out in Carson for the other boy she'd named Nicolas Joseph. Next to the church, we lined up: Tom and his wife, Geneva, an old preacher like a black crow in his robes. There was no way my dad could have known about it, but I watched for him anyway. Every time somebody came walking between those cockeyed headstones, I hoped it was him. The rest of them were sniffing into handkerchiefs, Tom rubbing his eyes, Violet almost fainting in the heat, the pendant with those damn twin stones at her throat. My dad was the only person I could think of who would understand what I felt, which was nothing at all.



The first thing I did after the funeral was hack that rocking chair to bits with an axe. I would have done the same with the second crib, but Tom stepped in. "I'll sell it for you," he said. "Jesus. Just let me take it."

And the first thing Violet did was pack up all her papers and her fancy new typewriter and bury them deep in the closet. She stopped working on the goddess paper altogether.

It was mid-September before I felt I could broach the other subject. I waited for the right night to lead her outside to sit on the porch steps under the stars. Nathan was asleep. Thank God he was a healthy baby, quiet and well behaved from the beginning, because Violet's energy hadn't yet returned since July. I could tell the loss was still with her, but for the first time, you could feel fall coming on, smell the wood smoke, and I was never so glad to see the end of summer. On the bright side, five of my six houses were sold, and I had the money I needed now for something really big. I was on my way.

I took off my flannel shirt and draped it over her shoul-

ders, and though her eyes were downcast, the green stones looked sharply out from the hollow of her throat.

"You're better," I said. "I can tell. You seem like you again."

She leaned against me and looked up at the sky. The peridot stones glittered too, and I followed their gaze to the Gemini constellation.

I reached into the pocket of my T-shirt. I'd skipped the velvet box this time and dangled the little heart-shaped ruby pendant for her to see, twenty-four carat gold. "Got you something," I said. I wanted like hell to get rid of that cold green-eyed thing around her neck, a reminder of more than just the lost baby. The baby wasn't the worst of it for me. That necklace, always clutched and fondled at her throat, gave me the feeling of grime on my skin and bile in my mouth. I couldn't look at it without remembering that guardrail digging into my gut and the neck of that deer, arched up toward the moon.

"What?" She sat up. "Why?"

"It's Nathan's birthstone," I said. "The real one, July." Slowly, I reached for her neck to unclasp the peridot necklace. She stopped my hands.

"I don't need a different necklace."

"Vie, we had a son in July. Come on."

"It's nice, Henry," she said. "It's very pretty. But I don't want it."

I sat there a minute, thinking of something to convince her. "It's a heart. See? It's for Nathan's strong little heart."

She stared past me, and when I reached again for her neck, she stood up, accidentally knocked against my hand and the necklace flew into the bushes. I could have yelled at her then, but her real eyes scared me, so pale, the color drained out of them. "I had twins," she said, her hand at her throat. "I had two babies." The door closed behind her.

With a flashlight, I searched for the ruby. I looked again the next day, wandering over the grass. A week later when I mowed for the last time before the frost, I heard a rattle and a ping against the blade. I found the mangled chain and the soft gold wreath, bent and torn out of shape. I couldn't find the stone.

Asymptotes II

A chime comes across the valley

Goats spill over the hillside
bringing new depth
to the illusion of edge

Beyond the single
candent light
the *kumus* chant as
village girls give
movement to the mood
of Tahitian drums

Gradually the echoes
quicken
and further on
I see
the chest of the sleeping giant
quiver
against the thin pale line

Sherman Souther



Bay of Conception

A bone-shrine outside my tent, yellow butterflies
on the wind, the bone sound
shells brush past each other with bells

Sinking huts and old tires line the Sea of Cortez
also motorboats—nowhere is remote enough
the bone sound
shells brush past each other with bells

Small sea noise, near and continuous
I dream dogs with fat tongues are lapping the shallows
there are cacti—it doesn't rain here
though sand chants
and the shells ring their spoons against the sand

The moon sinks slow over two mountains
leaves no hole where it has been
one night
it will leave a hole for me

I'll crawl through, I'll leave my bones
words and bones stacked in small altars
here the bones of things become bells in the waves
may my bones also



Lisa Campbell

Under the moon the dead are speaking
shells brush past each other with bells
at night they think they are stars
ringing through the water
may I too become this starry sound

Down River

When I close my eyes the river hastens
that a moment before had been nothing
 you come with broken sternum
chest full of twigs
 nesting swallows

When I sleep
 I fall into your boat
untamable matrix of breath upon
breath. I gather all your names
I right your overturned lute

Nothing is ever still
the broken shrine bowl stays broken
but mutters remembering its name and maker
burns unconsolated in the field

We came without promises
will be executed by wind
we have boats
we'll look for a home down river
lie among stones
and the Praying Mantis

The Price of Kissing

Nights of cereus and sweet nocturnum.
Noisy rain in the long gutters.
In every crease, a fragrant moisture,
and her bare thighs still tremble with amber
lightning that only now withdraws
from her hair, the coming dampness. The other world
slowly returns—frogs and stars, that other sleep,
the place of cool mouths and bruised
lip and the cycle of lilies.
Hearts subsiding, we hear it returning.
How can there be more
than one paradise, and which one is this?

Frank Stewart



The Owners of the Day Give up Their Seats to All

Each morning I open the rusted latch and find
the pasture's clan
of crab spiders that have unspread their constellation
there. Arcing
their wooden sky, gate post to rough headers and roof
beams, a galaxy
alive on invisible abundance just above the goats, who
greet us with their
mineral eyes, in each a horizon of such descending black
we see Damascus,
Nubia, and a russet cross. Their tongues cry out, the milk
of our hearts
floods anciently and dumb. They urinate in anticipation
and throw their
clacking forefeet at the ledge to get eye level if they can.
Finical hosts,
they plush up straw and stir about. They sense on us the
forbidden orchard
and the ferns, vegetables, and herbs, the neighbor's
heeler and dappled mare.
And then the grain we've brought. I would be so good a
host, asking
nothing of the guest but pleased to eat as eagerly any
gift. The sun
warms the roof, the dew rising off the fencing. We leave
them standing
stiffly and surprised, as always, at our going. They cry
out a second time,
sorry their kingdom again is not enough to hold us.





Contributors

Lisa Campbell lives in the Arizona high desert where her writing is informed by a revelatory study of and relationship with the natural world. For the past ten years, she has been a student of traditional American Indian healers on reservations in the Plains and Southwest, who teach that cultivating a reverent connection with nature is essential both for the development of self, and for the cultural and ecological survival of all. Living near wilderness areas gives Lisa the opportunity to listen to and connect with the earth through the medium of poetry. She is currently writing elegies surrounding the loss of desert wilderness areas to development and laments in general for the loss of open, wild space. Campbell received an MFA from the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics at Naropa University and an MA in Counseling and Psychology from Prescott College. She incorporates the healing potential of artistic processes into her work as a counselor, and has brought poetry and journaling to women in mental health treatment centers in support of the empowered expression of voice.

Cathy Capozzoli is a children's author and poet who holds an MFA from Naropa, a Buddhist university in Colorado. She was guest editor of *Many Mountains Moving: The Literature of Spirituality*, a collection of creative works

from writers and artists from six countries and many spiritual traditions. A resident of Kaua'i, her recent work has been published in the anthology *Voices from the Attic*, as well as literary journals *Tinfish*, *New Millennium Writings*, *Rock & Sling*, and *Karamu*.

TC Epperson grew up in Hong Kong as the child of missionaries, moved to the US in 1988, and married at nineteen. After the youngest of her three children began attending preschool, she returned to college, earning her undergraduate degree in English from the University of Texas at San Antonio in 2002. Her husband's Air Force career then carried her north to the University of Alaska at Anchorage, where she earned a Master of Fine Arts degree in Creative Writing. Now in O'ahu, she moonlights from mothering by teaching English Composition for Pacific Rim Bible College and by writing.

Andrey Gritsman is a poet and essayist originally from Russia who currently lives in the New York area. His works have appeared in *Richmond Review*, *Poetry International*, *Manhattan Review*, *New Orleans Review*, *Poet Lore*, and many others, and have been included in three anthologies. Gritsman runs the Intercultural Poetry Series at Cornelia Street Café in New York City.

Sandra Hunter has had short stories appear or has stories forthcoming in the *New Delta Review*, *Zyzzyva*, *Talking River Review*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Glimmer Train* (Winner 2004 Short Short Fiction), the *South Dakota Review*, *Porcupine*, *Primavera*, and others. She teaches at Moorpark College in California.

Faye Kicknosway can be found at Katz's Deli on 16th

Street between Guerrero and Valencia in San Francisco. Her two recent books of poetry are *Mixed Plate* (Wesleyan University Press) and *Still Windows Run Deep* (Ridgeway Press), both published in 2003.

Lynn Kilpatrick grew up in southeast Idaho and rural Iowa. She recently earned her PhD in Fiction from the University of Utah. “My Book Report” was inspired by her reading for doctoral exams. She is currently working on a novel, *By Her Absence*, sending out a collection of short stories, *In the House*, and beginning a new collection of stories, *The Infinite Cages*. In her spare time, she builds robot dogs out of legos with her four-year-old son and fights her addiction to coffee. Her work is forthcoming in *Salt Hill* and *Many Mountains Moving*. Previous work has appeared in *Tin House*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Spork*, and *Brevity*. She lives in Salt Lake City where she serves as Vice-President of Writers at Work and teaches Creative Writing at the University of Utah.

Helena Nelson lives in Fife, not far from Edinburgh, and teaches in a community college. *Starlight on Water*, her first collection, was a joint winner of the Jerwood Prize for best first collection and the Aldeburgh Poetry Festival in 2003. She reviews for a number of UK magazines and enjoys the proliferation of method in modern poetry: formal, free, freely informal, and formally free. She is an Englishwoman living in Scotland. The subsequent linguistic confusion occasionally results in poems. Some of her work can be found in www.poetrymagazines.org.uk.

Tamara Pavich is a doctoral candidate in English at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. Born and raised in southwest Iowa, she spends the academic year on O‘ahu, going home to the prairie for most of every summer. Her MA

thesis was a novel-in-stories, of which "Harvest Moon" is a chapter. Another chapter, "The Vanity," has been published by *Natural Bridge*, a literary journal of the University of Missouri at St. Louis. She is currently at work on a short story collection.

Thomas R. Peters Jr. was born in Detroit and moved to Boulder, Colorado in 1985 to study poetry at the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics at The Naropa Institute (now Naropa University). Prior to moving to Boulder, Peters lived in Hollywood for five years where he pursued his interests in poetry, filmmaking, and punk rock music and culture. He is the author of three books of poetry: *Listen to My Machine* (Rodent Press), *Over the Roofs of the World* (Cityful Press, reprinted by Dead Metaphor in 2000), and *100 Missed Train Stations* (Holy Mackerel Press, reprinted by Farfalla Press with twelve new stops in 2002). He has appeared in various literary journals including *Big Fireproof Box*, *Bombay Gin*, *The Exquisite Corpse*, *Friction*, *In this Corner*, *The New Censorship*, and *Abandoned Auto*, an anthology of Detroit poets (Wayne State University Press 2001). He's the owner of the Beat Bookshop in Boulder and has run the weekly Monday night poetry readings at Penny Lane Coffee House since 1987. In 2002, he appeared in the feature film, *American Saint*.

Daniel Saalfeld has had poems appear or has poems forthcoming in *The Southeast Review*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *North Carolina Literary Review*, *Hawai'i Review*, *Portland Review*, and *The Seattle Review*. He was a finalist in last year's Carnegie Mellon Poetry Series. Since earning his MFA from American University, he has been teaching at the Catholic University of America.

Michael Shapiro teaches and writes though he is qualified to do neither. His work has been published, much to his surprise, in several small journals and magazines. He was once nominated for but did not win a Pushcart Prize, which may well have been the high point of his writing career. He will continue to write poetry even though he is certain he will live out his days in complete obscurity.

Sherman Souther first came to Hawai'i in 1972 as a Stanford surgical resident assigned to the Kaiser Foundation Hospital in Honolulu, when the hospital occupied the site of the Prince Hotel adjacent to the Ala Wai Yacht Harbor. After retiring from plastic surgery practice in California, he earned an MFA in Writing and Poetics from Naropa University and now makes his home in Kapa'a, Kaua'i. *For Immediate Release*, *xStream*, *Puppyflowers*, *The Muse Apprentice Guild*, *Many Mountains Moving*, and *Tinfish* contain his recent work.

Sally Steenland has written two bestselling books: *The Magnetic Poetry Book of Poetry* and the award-winning *Kids' Magnetic Book of Poetry*. Her essays have appeared in the *Washington Post*, the *Baltimore Sun*, and other newspapers. For several years, she was a frequent op-ed columnist for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Her short stories have appeared in *Colorado Review*, *Antietam Review*, *West Branch*, *Cottonwood*, and other journals. Her story, "Night Work," was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. Her short story collection, *Skin and Bones*, was a finalist in the 2004 Bakeless Literary Prize for Fiction. She lives with her husband in Washington, DC.

Frank Stewart has been editor of *Mānoa: A Pacific Journal of International Writing* since 1989 and is the author of four books of poetry, the editor of eight anthologies, an essayist,

and a translator. For his first three books of poetry, he was awarded the prestigious Whiting Writers' Award in New York in 1986. His latest collection, *By All Means*, was published in 2003 by El León of Berkeley, California. He has also edited eight anthologies on the contemporary literature and environment of Hawai'i, Asia, and the Pacific. In 1978, he co-edited *Talk Story: An Anthology of Hawaii's Local Writers*, and in 2004, the anthology *The Poem Behind the Poem: Translating Asian Poetry into English* was published by Copper Canyon Press. His books of environmental writing include *A Natural History of Nature Writing* and such edited works as *The Presence of Whales* and *Wao Akua: The Sacred Source*, which came out in 2003. His essays have been widely anthologized, most recently in *Father Nature: Fathers as Guides to the Natural World*, published by University of Iowa Press in 2003. Stewart is a graduate of the University of Hawai'i, where he has taught since 1974. He is a recipient of the Elliott Cades Award for Literature and the Hawai'i Award for Literature.

Amanda Toy grew up in California and has lived part-time in Hawai'i for the past twenty years. She has studied and created art throughout the world, working with various artists in a variety of mediums, including fresco with assistants to the late Mexican muralist Diego Rivera, ceramics with Paul Soldner and Joe Soldate, New Media with Bill Viola, and painting with Kent Twitchell. Amanda received her undergraduate degree from Scripps College and her Masters from Whittier College. She has taught art at the undergraduate and secondary levels, and now teaches at Kaiser High School in Honolulu. She has received grants and numerous awards for her art and has exhibited nationally and internationally. Toy describes her work as narrative, with the stories embodying a state of limitation or the struggle for release.

Fritz Ward has published poems in more than twenty-five journals, including *Agni*, *Salt Hill*, *Columbia*, *Washington Square*, *Portland Review*, and *Tampa Review*. He holds an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, where he served as a poetry editor for the *Greensboro Review*. He has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and won the Cecil B. Hemley Memorial Prize from the Poetry Society of America. He lives in Sarasota, Florida.

Arnie Yasinski has been the Chief Business Officer at Colby College for several years, as well as Assistant to the President for Diversity Issues. He has a PhD in English, along with a joint appointment as a professor of English. His work has been published or is forthcoming in *Euphony*, *Southern Poetry Review*, and *Spillway*.

Abe Louise Young is currently a James Michener Fellow in Poetry at the University of Texas. New poems appear in recent or forthcoming issues of *Borderlands*, *Diner*, and *Wind Magazine*, and in two anthologies: *Stories From Where We Live* and *Ninety Poets of the Nineties*.



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