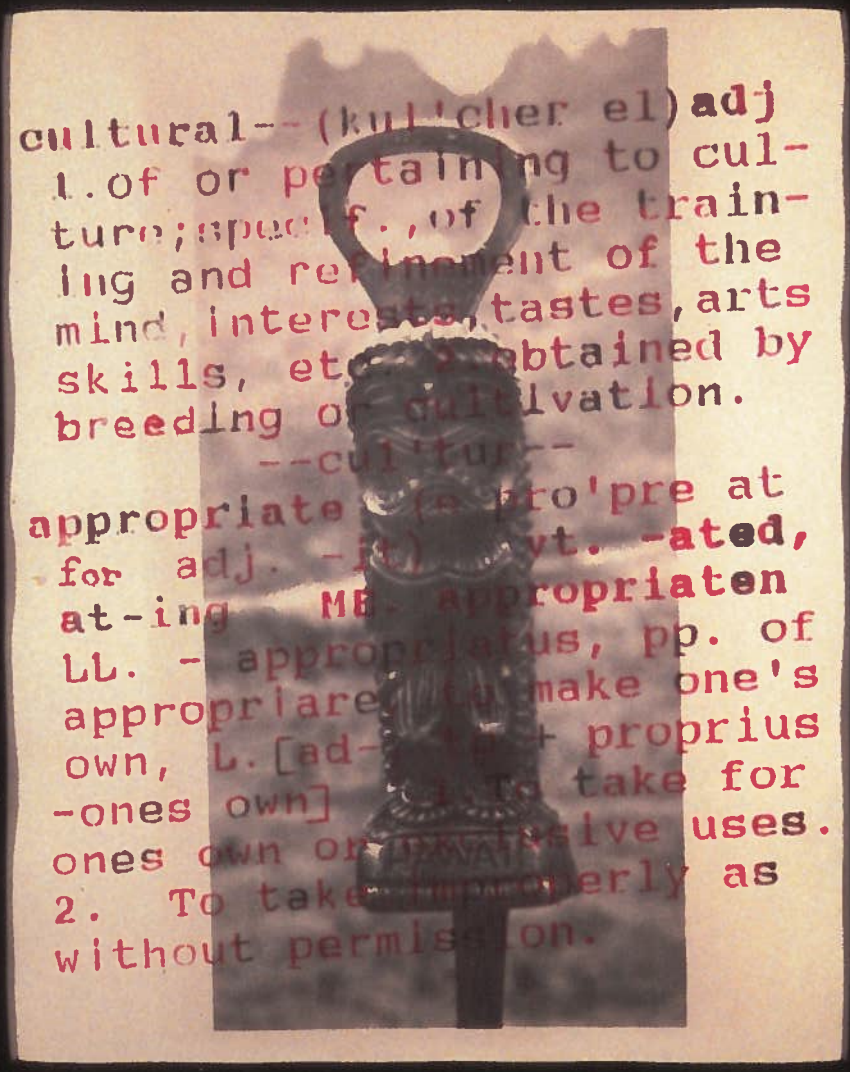
cultural--(kul'cher el) adj
1.of or pertaining to cul-
ture;spec.,of the train-
ing and refinement of the
mind, interests, tastes, arts
skills, etc.; obtained by
breeding or cultivation.
--cul'tur--
appropriate (a pro'pre at
for adj. -it) vt. -ated,
at-ing ME- appropriaten
LL. - appropriatus, pp. of
appropriare, to make one's
own, L. [ad- + proprius
-ones own] 1. To take for
ones own or exclusive uses.
2. To take improperly as
without permission.

Hawai'i Review

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Contents

Fiction

Mark SaFranko	The Man in Unit 24	12
A. Papatya Bucak	Maymun	37
Robert Mullen	To Be a Pilgrim	54
Scott Herzer	The Alley	83
Kirk Nesset	Hot Water	104
Ryan Senaga	A Little More Time	110
Judith L. Kendig	Johnny the Baptist	124

Poetry

Heather Brittain Bergstrom	Eastern Washington	5
	Ten Months: 1962-63	7
	The Bather	10
David Starkey	Angkor Wat	35
Robert Coles	Maine Vacation	49
Grace Sage	Even the Regional Ballet	50
John O'Meara	In Irons	52
	Looking at Harbor	53
Deborah Elliott Deutschman	Traveling	79
	On the Eastern Shore of Maryland	81
Gregory Pardlo	Cat	91
Colette Inez	Friday at the Institute	94
	Tara's Deliverance	96
	Merwinized	98
Ruth Berman	Wicked Caretaker	100
Cynthia Warryn Leffner	Franklin and the Yellow Kid	102
Kelly Lee	Vanity	108
	Newton's 3rd	109
Rosemarie Caruso	Like a Diner	120
Ian Lamberton	President Lamberton Recalls His Air Force	144

Eastern Washington

Heather Brittain Bergstrom

I could tell you stories
that would bring you
so close to its dirt
round ants would crawl
on your arms,
bite at your fingers.

Stories of my grandfather
and his woodpile,
how he made his sons
and their sons
move it to a new place each week:
against his shed,
to the left of the house,
stacked right up on the porch
so you had to walk around it.

Stories of my grandmother—
an old woman among men and boys—
whose kittens always died
on a highway that ran
less than twenty feet from the front steps.
And the big Toms
who ate and purred
their striped bellies full
on scraps she left for them in pie tins.

Stories of the saw-filing business
my uncle, two years home from Vietnam,
started in their side shed.
The large mill blades he sharpened,

the piles of metallic dust he walked through
dragging one foot in a leather slipper.
The old Army trunk nailed to his closet floor.
The way he held his wife down, the way
his father held him down . . .

Stories of an orchard in winter,
leafless trees
that stuck up like hands from the soil.
The place my grandfather
took his youngest of six, my mother,
his *lily-white-thighed girl.*
The taste of her skin
like soda crackers and soap.

Stories of a barn
and a brown rabbit with long ears
that my aunt watched slam itself
against a wire door
until her father hung it from a tree.
Drops of blood like red ants on her shoes.
At supper the meat was too tough
for even him to chew.

Stories of grandchildren
who played in a field behind the house,
chasing each other with cattails,
beating them hard against each other's legs.
Fighting like warriors over mounds of dirt
left by the tires of their grandfather's tractor,
mounds of dirt that became bodies:
a burial ground of sorts.

Ten Months: 1962-63

Heather Brittain Bergstrom

After the barbecue at his mother's
and the clean up—corn cobs, chicken bones—
I rest on cool sheets. It's evening:
the sound of firecrackers and the smell of sulfur.
He climbs on top of me,
my nipples hardening to pebbles in his mouth.
I listen for the children, three boys.
He leaves for sea tomorrow.

The lake water is warm this time of year.
When the children sleep, I go down to the dock.
I am naked and my breasts sag; I hold them up.
The first week he is gone is the longest,
but I don't cry. His mother will visit.
When she leaves, I'll cry,
folding her words away like starched linen:
Germans . . . stupid people the lot of you.

My period still has not come,
the warm flow of blood
telling me there will be no baby.
I call Sears, order coats for the boys
and that's when I feel it, not sharp,
a dull pain like a thumb on my spine.
Three months: it's too soon for movement.

I eat lima beans with butter,
slices of wheat bread to keep them down.
Today I'll start a fire in the wood stove
burn birch logs until spring.
I've stayed away too long.

Tomorrow I'll make the journey
up the mountain to his mother's house.
We'll sit on the porch though it's cold.
I'll tell her of my pregnancy;
she'll curse me to a poverty worse than her own.

When he first brought me to West Virginia,
we lived in his mother's house,
making love often; then, too often.
His mother stared with round eyes at my large breasts,
mimicking often my thick accent.
When the baby was born, we moved to a trailer.
I held him all night, a doll against my chest.
His warm breath smelled of milk.

My belly is large, the round back of a bowl.
The snow is up to my knees,
but I am strong, the shovel not too heavy.
Inside me—something not like the others
pushes against my ribs. If only it were a girl,
I would name her Johanna.
But my babies, even the ones I've lost, all boys.

I fill stockings with walnuts and oranges.
He calls twice from different ports
surrounded by waters I will never know.
Patterson from up the street brings a tree as planned.
The roads are too icy to go to his mother's.
I take a warm bath. It helps me sleep.

On the way to the doctor's I pass coal trucks
bringing loads of black fossil to the power plant.
The dead deer on the sides of the road frighten me.
The nurse with her bun of red hair
helps lift my wool sweater over my stomach.
I explain as best I can the spots of blood,
the pain in my back that keeps me awake,
the numbness of legs that holds me in bed.

His mother comes to the house to stay;
the bleeding continues. I say it's stopped and she leaves,
taking the two younger boys with her.
The oldest stays to help around the house.
At night I cry for my boys like I once did for him.

From Baltimore it takes three hours for him to get home.
I curl my hair, clip it back—
my dress pulling tight across my stomach.
The baby should come any day.
I can't sleep in bed with him.
I rest on the couch with the glass door open.
He takes me for drives over bumpy roads,
but the baby doesn't want to leave me.
He returns to sea on Thursday.

I jump off the back step,
drink a bottle of castor oil,
put hot towels on my stomach
then between my legs to stop the pain.
The warm air of spring makes me dizzy.
Who is this beast inside me?

The delivery room has blood on the floor.
Not mine. The nurse swats flies on the wall.
My water broke fifteen hours ago
and now the doctor reaches into my dry womb
to turn, then pull the baby out.
I feel the rip; a baby's scream silences my own.
He is taken from the room and I am glad.
Ten months I carried him inside me.
I don't want to know him.

In the dark kitchen I make bottles,
listening for his cry.
My breasts sting with new milk.
I wrap them tight stopping the flow.

The Bather

Heather Brittain Bergstrom

Who is this woman who comes
three times a week to my mother's side
and early—before I can get the children
off to school?

Thirty miles from her own house
she arrives at a quarter-to-seven to bathe
my mother whose hands and feet curled in
with cancer won't let her leave the bed.

Three times a week, while I'm at home
packing sandwiches and combing back bangs,
she pulls the sheets from my mother's
body, slides the pants from her large hips.

Lifting sweat-stained T-shirts over
her shoulders and head, she uncovers the
bandaged left side of my mother's chest.
With warm rag in hand, she washes

the folds of her neck, inner cups
of her arms, creases of thighs and vagina.
After repeating the journey, she rubs lotion
into the bridges between her toes.

I have never met this woman named Nancy—
Hospice volunteer who claims only
the desire to give loved ones a break
from the diseased bodies of wives and mothers.

Only once did I see her car backing out
the driveway at my mother's house.
From the side the hat she wore looked
too large, hanging in her face like a child's.

And I wonder who the loved one was she *had*
to bathe: mother or grandmother whose body felt cold
in her hands, husband whose withered sex she washed
while he looked through the glass at trees they planted in
Spring.

Arriving at nine, I sit with my mother
till noon. Her body hidden beneath
clean sheets, only her head and neck
are bare; and even those I am slow to touch.

The Man in Unit 24

Mark SaFranko

It is a fleeting glimpse, nothing more.

Of a man's face, straight on, followed by the raptor-like outline of his profile. In the background a slate trimmed with a long series of uneven block letters and numbers, and the name of a county jail.

Amy Whitehall was waiting in line at the cash register in the hardware store in Lunenberg about to purchase a bag of nails when those stark images, piped in from an American television program, flashed across the screen of the small color unit perched in the high cabinet behind the counter.

She thought, *There's a resemblance.*

Well—it had to be nothing more than a resemblance. People could resemble each other. In fact, they *did* resemble one another, everywhere you looked. Everybody looked at least a little like somebody else. That was one of the mysteries of the world.

The man had been living in unit 24 for almost two and a half weeks now, seventeen days to be exact. That room faced eastward, toward the asperous coast only a mile or so away, and the wild sea, where all journeys begin and end.

Laid down cash in advance, he had. Very unusual. Signed in as Wallace Thorne. Hometown, Vancouver. Room desired on an open-ended basis.

That was all the registration card had revealed. There was a telephone number, too. What was he doing here? she'd inquired casually, as she did of all her lodgers, more for the sake of making conversation than for the purpose of prying.

Sightseeing, he'd said. Vacationing. If this remote pocket of the province turns out to be pleasant enough, who can tell—

I might stay on for a while. He was looking for a new place to stay on.

She'd noticed his eyes—sky-blue holes like gas flames, spattered with pinpricks of gray and gold—a rather unique combination, she remarked to herself after he took his key. As he walked away, she'd noted his slenderness, as if he were in need of a few good meals, or . . . or something else.

He seemed to be wearing the same clothes—rumpled jeans and dull russet bomber jacket—those first couple of days, whenever she happened to run into him in passing, walking back and forth to his car, a nondescript late-model Chevrolet with a punched-in rear fender, until she didn't see him so much anymore. That was all she knew.

She was certainly not going to complain about the arrangement. In the past couple of years, fewer and fewer people showed up during the off season. The downward trend, she knew, had to do at least to some extent with the paucity of snow in these parts recently. When there was scant accumulation, the skiers stayed away. She heard complaints about the fishing, too. But there was something else as well, and she knew it. She'd allowed the motel to go to seed just a little. More than a little. The place had begged for paint both inside and out for a long time now, and she hadn't lifted a brush. Even the sheet metal sign sticking out of the stanchions on the front lawn which bore the words "The Osprey's Nest" had grown increasingly paint-flecked, until the ugly vertigris undercoating showed through here and there like diseased patches on a leper's face. Inside the units conditions weren't much better. The heating and cooling systems were unpredictable at best. Half of the TV set's remote control functions were broken. The bath towels had worn paper thin. The suites themselves had taken on a patina of dusky gloom, of creeping death. Had Amy Whitehall been a traveler herself, she'd have been less than enthusiastic about forking over ninety-five dollars to spend the night.

Those first days his vehicle seemed to not move at all. What had he been doing inside that room all the time by

himself? It occurred to her that perhaps he'd gone off after being picked up by someone else, but she'd seen no evidence of it and so she couldn't be sure. Whatever. She wouldn't look too closely. She was grateful for the business, no matter what Wallace Thorne was up to.

On the fourth evening, he rang the desk bell. When she came out of her small apartment in back, he was staring out the picture window at the parking lot, his hands shoved deep into the pockets of his jeans.

"Hey," he said with the vocal scrape of a man afflicted by shyness.

She'd smiled. Their eyes met again, and now their gazes remained locked for a quantity of time that seemed to her somehow meaningful, until finally he looked down at the pockmarked desk surface.

"Could use some extra towels," he half-whispered, with the inflection of a question.

"Of course," she answered with secret embarrassment, and immediately swung around to the closet beneath the counter and rummaged for the thickest, heaviest pieces.

"If you need anything else, just pick up the phone and I—someone will bring it to you."

It was an awkward, portentous moment, the kind she'd not experienced in years of dealing with visitors to The Osprey's Nest.

"What's your name?" said Wallace Thorne. "In case I have to call."

"Amy Whitehall. Just Amy."

He moved to the door, his arms balancing the stack of towels like a hot tray.

"Hey—those plastic flowers faked me out good," he grinned over his shoulder. "I thought at first they were real."

Amy had replaced the living geraniums in the pots which hung above the balustrades of both floors of the motel so long ago she could no longer remember when they'd *been* real. All

she could recall now was that their maintenance had been one less chore after her husband had left—disappeared—and that nobody except Wallace Thorne ever seemed to notice or care that the petals and stems which adorned their rooms and doorways were not the genuine article.

She hardly ever thought of Lyle anymore. That spring night when he'd gone out for a six-pack of ale and never bothered to come back seemed like another lifetime. At first she'd made all the requisite efforts to locate her husband, but when they failed and year after year passed without his turning up, the fissure in her brain created by his absence closed up like the mouth of one of those flowers she'd once doted on.

In one way, she'd never even been all that surprised by the event. After all, Lyle had had it in him from the beginning. That was the truth. And that was, after all, how they'd ended up here in the first place. What nettled her like a thorn after he vanished was whether or not he'd planned the whole thing, as he had their exile from Missouri when the war came calling those many years ago. "If they ever get close to my lottery number, we're heading north," he'd declare as a challenge as they sat evenings in his car, that damned ugly yellow VW Bug, at the curb in front of her parents' house in suburban St. Louis. And she'd said yes, all right, I'm going with you, I'll go wherever you want, and for years they'd had something of a life up here in Nova Scotia, at least as far as expatriates went, until that fateful evening in late April when he donned his coat, grabbed the keys to his Land Rover and called out that he was heading to the Old Barge Pub on Main, never to be seen again. . . .

Had she detected signs? She realized in the intervening years that there had been signs everywhere—from the remarks he once made over dinner with friends—"Wouldn't it be something, to change your name and be somebody else for a year or two?"—to his sudden loss of interest in upkeep of the motor court they'd gone into the financial quicksand to mortgage . . . and yet, on the other hand, that there never *was* such a thing as a sign of any reliable heft whenever you weighed the evidence and balanced the disparate pieces of a situation

against one another. For example: he'd made love to her the night before, hadn't he? And hadn't he planned an island vacation in a matter of days for the two of them? Finally, there was always the prospect to this day that Lyle was dead, that he'd been killed that very night or shortly thereafter, that he'd been in the wrong place at the wrong time, and when his life was taken, he'd been the victim of a ruse so perfect that no trace of him would ever be found. Whatever the case, when someone close to you vanished, you could never quite forget, you could never fully grieve, you could never put the person behind you once and for all. And sadly, when you considered all possibilities, they never added up and made sense. At the very least, Amy could never force them to lead somewhere. And that was another of life's mysteries: a trail that led to nowhere.

What was never in dispute for her was that something between them had changed. After nineteen years together they'd no longer felt the same about each other. There had been a natural erosion of passion after the wildfires of youth. That whole thing about the war—his opposition in principle—had ceased to be important in any way. They'd only come up here, she concluded after a short time in Canada, because he had not wanted to go to Southeast Asia. And yet she would have stayed with Lyle, but. . . .

Over time her family back in the States had died off or moved away, and after a few early visits north of the border, the lines of communication had slowly broken down. And like a rat gnawing at a block of cement, time and distance wear away the homing instinct. Amy had even become a citizen of the north country. Sometimes in the night she wondered with powerful curiosity if not emotion whether anyone with blood ties to her still lived on certain streets in University Park.

On the fifth night, Friday, she'd visited unit 24 for the first time. "Do you need anything?" she asked when he opened up. "Why don't you come on in?" was his answer. What took her by surprise was the neatness with which Wallace Thorne

kept his room. The bed was perfectly made, the towels in the bathroom folded (she could see through the open door) with precision, and not an empty cup or dirty dish to be seen. The television screen flashed silently in the far corner, near the window which gave out onto the field that stretched to the cloudy gray horizon.

What made her cross the threshold, she had no idea. There was an inevitability to the gesture, she felt, but she could only be certain of it from her side of the equation.

She sat in the chair which tucked into the small desk facing the wall, and from where she could conjure an endless stream of faceless tourists filling out their picture postcards of the spectacular surrounding coves and inlets.

The tenant, in tee shirt and jeans, hunched forward on the edge of the bed, that same twitching smile she'd noticed earlier playing about his thin white lips.

They talked. About nothing at all—maritime weather, the anemic crowds in the province at this time of year.

"So what do you think? Have you found what you were looking for? Are you going to stay on here?"

He dodged each of her innocuous questions deftly, she noticed, pulled them onto different, less definite ground, chatted quietly and steadily until it seemed to her that something between them was sealed. She got up from her chair and wished him a good evening. Whatever had been agreed upon remained unspoken as she went to the door, a visitor now on her own property.

And no, he was in need of nothing.

When the bitter, hawk-like gusts flayed the desiccated plain behind The Osprey's Nest that night, Amy Whitehall lay in her bed and ruminated over what had become of her life. Not that it had ever been something of exceptional promise (she'd been a drifter during college, interested pretty much only in Lyle), but the years of her ripeness had disappeared into a nebula of meaninglessness, empty toil, the necessities of daily existence, vague disappointments. An exile, she was staring

down the age of fifty—an unthinkable number—as if it were the maw of a savage animal. The town where she'd found herself stranded was a way station to nowhere, a false oasis at the fringe of the world where the populations of mankind begin to thin out. The spectral figures who occasionally played the old opera house in town—the erstwhile drummer of a legendary rock and roll group from thirty years ago, for instance—were long-forgotten jokes, burn-outs, bad dreams. Her own dreams, once rich and hazy and sensuous, had become violent, bloody, vivid, like something from a cheesy horror movie, the stuff she had viewed as a child back in the quiet suburbs of America.

Throwing back the heavy comforter, she slid off the mattress and stripped off her nightgown. In the full-length mirror fastened to her bedroom door, she took in the spectacle of her middle-aged body and determined that it was still good, like a pear about to bridge the distance between hard and soft. Her breasts, in particular, were a revelation. While gravity had tugged at them, they retained a buoyancy which made the pink nipples jut out and upward like those of a much younger woman.

She knew why. It was because she had never borne children, had never had to produce milk. Because Lyle had escaped—which is what she really believed at bottom—in the last days of her fruitfulness, and no man had come along in time to prevent her from parching on the inside. At the time it hadn't mattered. One thing is the same as the next when life is a business of keeping one's head above water. Once in a while she had brushes with stray males, but they'd never amounted to much, and the cruel winds of fate and time had blown the world as dry as the thistles that scaled the trellis in her tiny garden out back of The Osprey's Nest.

When she climbed back into bed, she put her hand down into the wetness of her thatch and made herself come, as she had on so many nights before. The difference now was that the object of her fantasy was Wallace Thorne.

* * *

Through the open door of number 24, she could swear that he was seated in the exact position as he had been the evening before. *What was he waiting for? Did he know she was going to come?* This evening she'd brought him a chicken sandwich wrapped in cellophane and a bottle of Canadian beer. Instead of talking, he merely nodded when she crossed into the room, blocking out the late western rays of the cold spring sun. Then he rose, walked to the door and shut it, throwing the dead bolt as a final punctuation mark.

He turned and stared at her. At first she didn't know what he was going to do. In the flash of an instant, it actually occurred to her that he was about to strangle her—kill her. Instead, he grabbed her with decisiveness, but not roughly, and pushed her onto the bed. Strange, how two human beings who didn't know each other could understand that something was about to happen between them without giving voice to it. She could hear him sniffing her as one animal sniffs another, taking in the berry scent of the shampoo she'd used on her long brown hair. Instead of waiting passively, she pulled his tee shirt over his head and pushed the tips of her long fingers into the taut skin of his chest, felt the protrusions of his boyish ribs, stared at the small, steel-blue butterfly tattoo which adorned the inside of his left pectoral muscle. Before she knew it, he'd found his way inside her. . . .

No words were uttered, only primitive grunts. In the past, with the others, Lyle included, words had always been passed back and forth, words which she seemed to need at the time to decorate things, but which had the effect of destroying a certain atmosphere of anonymity and razor-edged danger that she now realized she'd craved all along—or was it, she wondered as he moved on top of her like a giant piston, that the only way she was able to feel something was through bestial silence?

Like a recurrent, indelible picture from a powerful dream, she saw that face now as it appeared on the TV screen in the hardware store.

It couldn't be—it was sheer madness to think—

What that man—whatever his name was—was wanted for was a series of vicious sex crimes against women and girls; she'd gathered that information from the talking head on the broadcast while she waited to pay for her nails.

No. Ridiculous. Couldn't be. She didn't want to think about it.

What was said when the act was over was disjointed, halting, like the gnashing gears of a malfunctioning machine.

Well. . . .

Yeah—

That was something, all right. . . .

The dead seconds were awkward, but unless something untoward came to pass, she would be back again the next night, this much she knew.

Just as suddenly there was the fear that he would go away.

God, let him be here. If he's not here, then—

A dirty brown luminescence passed through the threadbare apertures of the musty drapes. *Are we lovers? Is this what's called love? It's been so long, I can hardly remember.* She allowed the urge to laugh aloud from a rush of well-being to pass.

No. It's nothing. It is what it is.

The man rolled away and took hold of the sandwich from the nightstand. As she lay there in her lassitude looking into the spectrum created by the expiring daylight, she could hear him chewing on it, and the pop! of the cap off the beer bottle.

She no longer wanted to know anything about him. Her earlier curiosity was dead. If it could go on in this silence, she would accept it willingly, gladly. There would be no questions about further payment, about tomorrow, about what Wallace Thorne thought, or felt, or wanted. None of it mattered in the least.

He was standing naked before the television set, his member hanging like a dead snake, when she finished dressing and stepped to the door.

"Hey—thanks for the food," he said calmly. "I get kind of hungry in here sometimes."

She was about to ask why he didn't just go out and buy himself some food, but thought better of it and went on her way.

The quaint town of Lunenburg is large enough—population three thousand something—for some of its citizens to not be known by every single person who lives there; still, if you resided in or near Lunenberg long enough, and Amy Whitehall had, it was impossible to not have at least some portion of your business known by your neighbors.

It was the next day when Amy ran into Hannah Choyce just outside the doors of the supermarket in town, Amy going, Hannah coming.

"How's business out there lately?" Hannah asked, with that characteristic Canadian elongation of *ou* which Amy'd never quite gotten used to.

"Slow. But I've had a few here and there," Amy said evasively, noting that Hannah had grown even more stout over the long winter.

"I hear there's been one vehicle in your lot over a week now."

"Oh . . . yes, I think so," she answered reflexively, before thinking over Hannah's question. "How did you know that?"

"Your girl happened to mention it to me night before last."

Hannah Choyce was owner of the pizza parlor that overlooked the inlet, and Amy's part-time chambermaid Victoria did waitress duty there several nights a week. Information about a lodger who stood out of the ordinary in any way would be impossible to suppress, Amy ruefully realized at that moment.

"Oh, sure, that guy. . . . Visiting relatives outside Halifax or something like that," she blurted without forethought.

"Is that so," Hannah smiled. "Not a very close-knit group, are they?"

"Who knows. . . . I only happened to talk to him once in passing. Maybe I have it wrong. I wasn't really paying close attention."

Amy was always undone when she lied. She could feel a cool film of sweat erupt above her upper lip.

"Well, I should be getting along. . . ."

"If that fellow of yours has the craving for pizza, make sure you steer him to the best in town."

"I will," Amy said, mustering up a modicum of false conviction. "You know I always do."

From that point on, without fail, Amy visited unit 24 on a daily basis, but only after the veil of darkness descended over the littoral which clutched the Maritime lobster-farming and fishing villages in its rocky fingers, and the remnants of winter's Arctic winds powered down from the Cape Breton highlands and drove a chill straight into the bones with the pain of a frozen spike.

"Who are you?" she asked when they lay side by side after the fourth or fifth time.

"What do you mean?" said the man, whose face was shrouded by a thin, hairless forearm draped over brow and eyes.

"You know. . . . What's your real name?"

He let out a long sigh. "Why would you ask a question like that?"

"Because . . . I mean, you haven't set foot outside this room in so long. It doesn't add up to me. Not that I want anything from you. . . ."

And it was true. It was just that intimacy seemed an invitation to know certain things.

Wallace Thorne—or whoever he was—smiled.

"It's all the plastic flowers in this joint, like I told you before. I love 'em."

"No, really.

He rose up on an elbow. "You want me to leave? Is that what you're trying to say to me?"

"No. God, no. I just had some idea that maybe. . . ."

She did not complete her thought. In fact, she didn't know what she wanted to say, what her thought was, exactly. All she understood was that she did not want to go on without him.

He said: "You better be straight with me."

"I'm being straight with you."

"It don't mean a thing to me anyway. I can come and go as I please. And whenever I want. I've done nothing to you. If I want to sit inside this room forever, until I'm dead, what's the harm to you? If I got the money to pay, what's the problem?"

"I didn't say there was anything wrong with anything you've done."

"Then what do you want out of me? What?"

She did not have an answer to his question. And so they lapsed once again into silence, a silence as profound and depthless as the black Canadian night all around them.

But by the following week she could no longer resist the powerful pull of her own desire to know. She jumped into her Jeep and drove along the water into town, where she parked in front of the library. At first she was at a loss for what to do. She hadn't been in the place since the days of Lyle, when she'd borrowed novels out of the sheer boredom of the long, viciously cold nights. Really, where did you begin? Did you approach the person at the desk and ask for information on wanted men? On serial rapists? Obviously she couldn't proceed in that manner, it was absurd.

She wandered through the stacks nodding skittishly at anyone she encountered. When a small girl addressed an indecipherable something to her, she nearly jumped out of her skin. Finding herself near the newspaper rack, she plucked a few and thumbed through their pages half-heartedly. Endless headlines, stories, advertisements, photographs. Here and there she began to peruse an article. After the New York editions, she went to the pile that originated in Toronto, then to the one that came from Montreal, then the stack from Ottawa. The whole thing was impossible. What was she ever going to find

out this way? She'd be here forever at this rate! And if the man in unit 24 was guilty of crimes, who was to say *where* they were committed? What if he'd perpetrated evil deeds half a world away? If so, there would be no news of them in this pocket of the globe where the populace learned things days, sometimes weeks after the fact, if ever. As far as the photos on the TV screen were concerned, she couldn't even say now what program had run them. . . .

And what if these misgivings were just a figment of her imagination? They were, in all probability, nothing more . . . nothing more than the guilty meanderings of a lonely, middle-aged woman who'd taken it into her head to throw herself at a stranger who happened to be passing through for one reason or another.

Somewhere inside her, she realized, she did not want to know about the man in unit 24.

Nevertheless, she proceeded downstairs to the area which housed the magazines. She leafed through as many as she could, in particular the American issues, but the result was the same—a jumble of print and color that amounted to an overwhelming sense of how great, how vast, how unmanageable the world had grown in her absence.

Before she knew it, a loud voice was informing her that in fifteen minutes it would be time to close up for the day, and would you kindly bring all your checkouts to the front desk. . . . Amy Whitehall looked around and tried to imagine where she might start tomorrow in the event she decided to return and carry through her search. But upon viewing the mountain range of paper and cardboard, she understood that she'd been defeated, and resolved on the spot to give up her pursuit.

The next morning when she went out back to the little garden behind her apartment to toss a handful of bread crumbs to the famished birds, Wallace Thorne's car was gone. Her heart lurching, she went out the gate and walked past unit 24, where the *DO NOT DISTURB* tag dangled from the

doorknob. They had spent the earlier part of the night together, as they'd spent the night before and the night before that, and he'd mentioned not a word about leaving. Nevertheless, it had been an extraordinary night: he had insisted on keeping the lights off and binding her hand and foot with the threadbare towels to the bed, which she was at first reluctant to submit to, but which she went along with when he grew impatient.

"You need this as much as I do," he'd hectored her with an admixture of gentleness and fury, with that maddeningly elusive accent which she'd failed time and again to pin down.

"No, I don't. . . ."

"You don't know what you need, bitch, until I show you. . . ."

Like that first time, she was overwhelmed by the feral panic that people who were about to lose their lives must experience. But again nothing of the sort happened, and she found herself snared in the odd vortex of an experience in which pain is a component of blind pleasure, and it left her feeling like the giddy survivor of a tragic trek up a steep mountain.

When it was over, he let her go with the indifference he'd displayed on all the other nights.

"Why?" she asked.

He said nothing, did nothing but shake his head.

Had she been lucky, or not? Was this bizarre bend in the water the natural destination for the matrix which had sprung to life between them?

Whatever, this morning Wallace Thorne was nowhere to be seen. A single question tormented her—was it the end? Was it already over, before it had truly begun?

Her limbs quivered with anxiety. Anger and relief surged simultaneously through her belly as she walked. She could hear the vacuum cleaner running on the upper tier, where Victoria was doing the units which had been commandeered for the weekend by a rowdy group of outdoorsmen. She hurried into the office, yanked the double to unit 24 off its key ring, draped her parka over her shoulders and rushed down the walkway,

stopping only to glance up and down the lot before knocking softly on the moldy wood beside the faded brass 2 and 4 of Wallace Thorne's room.

No answer. She thrust the key into the lock and turned it over. That simple discovery—that the door had indeed been secured from the outside—was sufficient for her to conclude that he had every intention of coming back.

Her heart rammed against the insides of her ribs as she stood in the doorway trying to make sense of the dark chamber. She was able to detect her own scent from several hours ago, and his, too, that unique masculine fusion of evergreen and laundry detergent and sweat. Over the years she'd become adept at determining approximately when a tenant had vacated a unit, but this morning she wasn't so sure. It was a kind of warm undertow that usually led her to believe a person had departed within the last twenty minutes or half hour, but there was a still coolness in the pit now, as if the hibernating beast had gone away to hunt and forage a long time before.

If she was looking for telltale signs of something—anything—if she was scouting for *evidence*, she was destined for disappointment. The bathroom was clean except for a purple toothbrush in the stand, a tube of Colgate Tartar Control, a plastic double-edged razor, and a can of shave cream. The paper-thin towels—her bindings from the night—had been draped over the racks with precision; it was as if Victoria or one of the other girls had serviced the room. The closet was completely empty. The only clothes Wallace Thorne owned, apparently, were the clothes on his back, unless, of course, he had things stored in the trunk of his vehicle.

A business envelope lay on the desk. Before picking it up, she noted its exact position. In the upper left-hand corner was the engraved address of an insurance company based in Springfield, Illinois, USA. She brought the envelope close to her eyes. It had been sent to one Mildred Covington of Portland, Maine, 17 Ocean Street, and had been sliced open. With her thumb and forefinger, Amy parted the leaves of

paper, only to find nothing inside. On the back, in a crude pencil scrawl, were calculations:

16,005	7508
-579	+991
15,426	8499

Money, she thought nebulously. What else do people add and subtract?

In the lower right-hand corner were the words *Terry, Houston.*

Terry. Houston. . . . Someone's name, obviously. An appointment in that faraway city? *Some event to be remembered?* She rummaged quickly through the drawers, but all she came up with were two yellow-at-the-fringes postcards featuring the coves at The Ovens and, in the nightstand, that last-ditch life buoy for the hopeless, the Gideon Bible.

She heard a car door slam and immediately her ears pricked up. She looked around hastily, reassuring herself that everything was in its proper place. Stepping outside, she shut the door behind herself, turned the key and pulled it out of the lock. She retraced her steps in a hurry, just in time to greet the oncoming figure of Wallace Thorne, paper sack in hand, as he made his way to number 24.

Amy had always felt that Hannah Choyce held a subtle resentment toward her for not having to work quite so hard as she did in order to earn her daily bread, despite the fact that Hannah was the one with the faithful husband and brood of children and extended vacation in Florida every January, February, and March. Amy could never quite figure out where that animosity originated, since anyone who has worked in the motor court or restaurant business understands that neither is a bed of roses. Nevertheless, it seemed that Hannah could never pass up an opportunity to get under Amy's skin when their paths crossed in town.

"Ever find out something more about your tenant?" Hannah asked outside the patisserie in Lunenberg, just as she was about to climb into her 4x4 one bright day near the end of the month.

Flushing, Amy shook her head. "Afraid not. . . ." She did not think to inquire why her neighbor was keeping tabs on Wallace Thorne, caught off guard as she was.

"Don't you think it's a bit strange?"

"I don't know. I figure 'live and let live.' As long as he minds his own business, I'll mind mine," Amy said evenly, tossing out a message along with her explanation.

"Well, it's not every day that sort of thing happens up here."

"What sort of thing?" asked Amy.

"A fellow pulls into your motel and shuts himself up in a room. Victoria thinks it's peculiar, anyway. . . ."

"Oh, does she?" said Amy, when what she really wanted to tell Hannah Choyce was that it was none of the chambermaid's goddamned business.

"I guess I should check it out then," she added anyway.

Hannah's smile seemed ornery in some indefinable way. "Yes, maybe you should."

Amy intercepted Victoria when the chambermaid was stashing the industrial-sized Hoover in the storage closet beneath the archway that separated the office from the motel units.

The chambermaid had never been in Amy's apartment before, and the latter watched the girl's eyes dart around the ambits nervously while she took her hair down from the tight bun it had been tied in since she'd reported for work that morning. She was an uninteresting thing, Amy mused, fat and homely and not particularly intelligent—like so many of the women up here. If she stayed in Lunenberg, it would be a life of endless work, tedium and freezing cold. And Amy had never witnessed the slightest indication that Victoria's destiny was to be anything but run of the mill.

"Something I did wrong, Mizz Whitehall?"

"No, Victoria . . . I just . . . I was just wondering what you make of Mister Thorne in number 24."

The girl stared straight ahead through her thick glasses, and at first Amy doubted whether she'd even heard the question.

"Ooh, he's really *weird*," she answered finally, as if she were granting an evaluation of a boy for a schoolgirl friend.

Amy willed the muscles of her face to impassivity. "How do you mean?"

"For one thing, he won't let me in to clean. When I told him that he'd like it better in there if I cleaned, he got very upset. Why would anybody get mad about having their room cleaned?"

"Yes, that is—"

"There's just something about him. He's creepy. It's in his eyes. And the way he never comes out of that room. Ugh." Victoria shivered. "Does he come out at night?"

Amy blinked. "I . . . I wouldn't know. I don't really monitor his movements."

"Why are you asking me this?" the girl demanded with what Amy felt was a put-off attitude.

"Oh . . . I was just curious, is all. I mean he's paid his rent, and. . . ."

"You're not the only one who's curious."

"What do you mean?" said Amy tentatively.

"At the restaurant Mrs. Choyce is always asking me whether he's checked out yet."

"Really. Why do you suppose she's so interested?"

"Mrs. Choyce is always interested in you. I think it's because of what happened to you, you know, with your husband and all."

"You've heard about my husband?"

"Oh, yes. I just thought—well, you know."

"No, tell me."

"That everybody knew."

"I see. . . ."

"Maybe Mrs. Choyce is just worried about you, having this guy here at The Osprey's Nest, and all."

"Worried?"

Victoria shook her head.

"Mizz Whitehall, I don't feel right talking about this, I really don't. Besides, I'm due at the restaurant in half an hour, and I have to go home first and change clothes. It's supposed to be really busy tonight. Fridays everybody seems to want to eat pizza."

Victoria got up. "I don't have a good feeling about that guy in number 24, if you want to know the truth."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing. It's just a feeling. I have lots of, like, psychic feelings about people. They're usually right, too. See you tomorrow?"

Amy Whitehall felt like an animal caught in a trap. Why did Victoria not want to talk about the man in unit 24? There was only one possible answer: because he was being talked about at the restaurant—and so was she. She knew enough about human nature to understand that they were being watched by at least some of the citizens of Lunenburg, and that her nocturnal relationship with her renter might also be a matter of common knowledge, discreet as she'd tried to be all along. It was incredible, how something so private by nature could seep through the walls of a closed motel room. Then again, in an outpost of this size, it had to be expected.

But as with all things as of late, she was only guessing.

That night Wallace Thorne seemed less interested in her than usual. She detected a new agitation in his movements. Instead of drawing her onto the bed right away, he stood before the windows and peered out, as if trying to come to a decision about something.

"What is it?" she asked. "What's bothering you?"

"Nothing you need to know about."

"I can't talk to your back," she protested quietly.

"Then don't talk."

Even though he was being obdurate, Amy knew this was the time.

"You're being chased. . . . I saw you on television the first week you were here."

A long silence ensued. Then Wallace Thorne laughed.

"That what you think?"

"Yes. . . . I mean, can you deny it?"

"You ever been lost?" he asked. "Like when you make a turn and you know you're not on the right road, but you keep driving anyway? You keep driving because you're thinking that it's going to turn out to be the right road. . . . That's where I am. I'm on that road."

"You haven't answered me."

"What do you want me to say? That I'm John Smith from St. Louis, that I'm a traveling salesman, that I'm clean—"

Her breath caught in her throat.

"Why did you say that?"

It was as if she'd been slapped across the face. Wallace Thorne did not understand. He shook his head. "What?"

"St. Louis? Why did you say St. Louis?"

"What are you talking about?"

"St. Louis. You said St. Louis. . . ."

"So? I said St. Louis. I coulda said Phoenix. It's just some place on the map to me, like all the others. . . . What's it to you?"

Suddenly she was overcome by longing. "It was home, a long time ago. . . ."

"What the fuck you talking about?"

Before he had the chance to catch her, she'd jumped off the chair and bolted, leaving the door open wide behind her, not because she'd not wanted him to touch her, but because under no circumstance did she want him to see her tears.

The telephone call came late that night, as Amy Whitehall sat at her desk making out paychecks for Victoria and the other chambermaids, the laundry service, and Sally and Martha, the women who cooked the breakfasts and dinners at the Osprey's

Egg, the small coffee shop attached to the south side of the building.

"Amy Whitehall? Davis Slocumb here. . . ."

For many long seconds the idea that the police were on the other end of the line refused to register in Amy's brain. The only time she'd ever talked to the police in her life was when Lyle disappeared.

"We've had an anonymous tip that one of your lodgers may be wanted for several felonies down in the States. I'm going to send a unit over to check him out. In the meantime, I want you stay calm, keep away from him, and tell us what you know about the fellow. . . ."

As her lips moved, she was taking in the accumulations of her life above the northern line: moth-eaten stuffed animals, the quaint carvings of local craftsmen, her own half-finished paintings of the implacable sea. . . . Her quandary was deeply unsettling. As she dutifully doled out information the cop was asking for, misleading him whenever she could, she was simultaneously arriving at the epiphany that her life, in the absence of the man in unit 24, was about to revert to what it had been for so many years—a solid, impenetrable block of Canadian granite encrusted in Arctic ice.

That notion was suddenly crushingly unbearable.

Then she thought about time, its passage, its quantity. There couldn't be much left.

The cop was still going on. "In the meantime. . . ."

Those words—"In the meantime"—indicated that the process was already underway. Slocumb thanked her, informed her that his men would be there soon, as soon as certain papers had been prepared, just in case of an arrest.

After hanging up, she ran out of her apartment and around the building to number 24. When there was no quick answer to her knock, she rapped again, harder.

"It's me, Amy! Let me in! You have to let me in. . . !"

The cigarette that dangled from Wallace Thorne's lips was burned to nearly the filter. His tee shirt had been torn beneath the left arm, and there were reddish, ketchup-like stains down

the front. His hair stuck up in short, thinning black tufts, like the coat of a mangy cur.

"A policeman called, asking about you. They're on their way—they're coming for you. . . ."

She rushed in, pushing him aside, and locked the door.

"What did you tell him?" His eyes had narrowed and his nostrils flared.

"What could I tell him? I don't know anything to tell him, or anyone."

The frightened expression of hunted quarry stole over Wallace Thorne's indistinct features.

"What the fuck did you say to them?"

"Nothing! I wouldn't say anything. You know that."

He did know, he had to know. . . .

"I gotta get out of here. . . ."

He grabbed his jacket, which was draped over the arm of the dilapidated chair near the window.

"Get out of my way," he shouted, coming at her. But she wouldn't give so much as an inch of ground.

He halted abruptly, and they stood looking at each other for what seemed to be a small eternity.

"I'm going with you." It was the strongest declaration of her life.

He snorted out a derisive laugh. "Yeah? . . . Why? What do you want with me?"

At a certain point in life, nearly all things cease to have meaning. Anxiety and fear, hunger and danger, are less than nothing in the face of eternal boredom and emptiness.

That was precisely where Amy Whitehall stood one evening in early May in her fiftieth year.

"Maybe I can use you. Bring all the cash you got," he said, making his way around her. "Do what you want to do—it's up to you," he called over his shoulder as he threw open the lock.

There wasn't likely to be much cash in the register. She tried to decide whether she should return to the office and shut off the lights and lock up before following Wallace Thorne.

She did not. The passenger door of the Chevrolet was standing open when she crossed the lot. Before she knew it, they were speeding along a highway, the fugitive flicking the ashes of a fresh cigarette out the open window. In the distance, between the tops of the low-lying evergreens, she caught clusters of surly whitecaps on the roiling spring sea. It occurred to her as the broken line disappeared beneath them that she was going into exile all over again.

And she wasn't coming back for a long time.

Angkor Wat

David Starkey

In January, in Chicago,
when freezing winds
swirl back off Lake Michigan
or snow squalls down from Wisconsin,

I think of Cambodia,
the temples of Angkor.

As my children sleep, the heater
in the basement ticks and burns,

I feel the fire of morning sun
shine on the billion leaves,
the orchids and ferns and yellow grass.
Sunlight ripples
across the virgins' breasts,
full lips and big stone teeth,
across the bas-relief
of five-headed cobras,
lions and demons.

As the last dim light on my street goes out
and my wife turns in our bed,

the sun arcs above a farmer
patiently whipping his ox.
His women slush through fields of rice.
A hint of humid breeze, then
shadows tumbling over blocks of stone,
over pink-blossomed lilies
floating in their scared pools.

In January, in Chicago,
there is nothing but a long
dull vista of commuting,
tasteless meals, gray
snow and metal desks beneath
buzzing fluorescent lights,

while the sun sets red
on the sandstone pavilions
of Angkor Wat. It yields
its last warmth to the toppled headless gods,
to the soil that feeds the vigorous roots
of silk-cotton trees, the tentacles
of the strangler fig
which overturn the temple steps
and rip apart the towers.

Maymun

A. Papatya Bucak

I am the kind of person whose passport is ready for emergencies and so I am the only American at the funeral. Truthfully though, my mother felt too old, my brother could not go for fear of being drafted into the military, my sister would not. My father is dead, but this is not his funeral. It is his father's funeral.

The mosque is crowded, loud, wet with tears and wails I cannot believe to be real; but then, I did not know the deceased, my grandfather. Above me, between me and the domed ceiling, there is too much air, emptiness and I suppose, Allah. It is easy to believe that their God exists and Allah is there, just not for me. We, the women, are upstairs where we are meant to cry while down below the men pray. They, too, are crowded, but quiet.

This trip is both my reward and punishment. I despise funerals, but I have wanted, though I wouldn't admit it until today, to travel here for a long time. Turkey is a country of holy wars and political prisoners, a country of things that are unfair, and of things that are old. On the flight over I noticed muddy footprints on the wings of the plane.

Upstairs in the mosque, my feet are stepped on repeatedly by women flailing with tears. At first I thought my grandfather must have been an important man to attract so many mourners, but my cousin Tamay, too young and too modern to wail, explains that this is also a regular prayer service, one of the five held daily at the mosque. Most of the men are there for their regular prayers. Tamay tells me this in the resigned voice of an expert, as if she is the unwilling collector of funerals, but I do not ask who else she knows that has died. She is only eighteen.

We left the body outside. It rests on a marble altar in the courtyard with our shoes, as if it were too good to come in and witness our hysterics, the bumping and the shouting. I think funerals are a release for these women, a chance to reach the top of their lungs. They are like teenagers at a rock concert. Tamay says Turkish women are just like American women, that our old are as traditional as theirs. I suppose she is right, but my American grandmother's tradition is to sit quietly in a black suit in a pew with a handkerchief ready to displace potential tears. To me that seems like an absence of tradition, one I am continuing. In the mosque, though I want to try, I am afraid to wail for fear someone will hear me and think I am being disrespectful. They must realize that I do not mourn my grandfather. I do not remember him.

I traveled here for the funeral because I thought someone should, because I felt sorry for my father when nobody flew across continents to mourn him, to make sure he was truly dead. Tamay said there were services here. That they were very large and many people came because my grandparents had lost a son. That seems funny to me, that maybe the services should have been when he flew with his pregnant American wife to California, or when he had children, two girls and a boy, who stopped him from seriously considering a return. My parents met in Istanbul, where my mother, who had only planned to stay a year, taught school. I am the oldest child, the one that caused them to move so that I could be raised in an American educational system. They moved so that I could know things. We visited Turkey once, as a family, when I was six, but all I remember is the blunt-tipped dagger my parents bought me at Topkapi Palace as a souvenir. I remember that because I still have it.

My Aunt Fatma's apartment is covered in *kilim* patterns, like the ones on Persian rugs, like the ones I've seen on cushions in my mother's house. Tamay sits with me on the sofa. Its pattern is different from that of the pillows, the walls, the cloth that covers the television. The deep reds, yellows and blues on

every surface make me feel as if I am swaddled in the dark center of a rolled up carpet, as if the room has captured me.

The apartment is full of people from the funeral, though now nobody is crying. Instead they stand around, talking and eating. Tamay tells me she wants to go to America. I think she wants me to adopt her, though she is too old, and I am too young. It is my thirtieth birthday, but I haven't told anyone. I tell Tamay to go to school in America, but what she wants is to be an adult there, to have a job and an apartment all her own. She lives here with her mother, my aunt. Her father does not live here, and there is no evidence that he ever did. There is a story there, but I do not know it.

In the center of the crowded living room a five-year-old, another cousin of mine I think, counts to ten in English to the applause of the adults that surround her. I laugh because my Turkish is equal to the child's English. We can each count to ten in the other's language. Then the girl breaks into "Happy Birthday" and I try to remember more Turkish: *dondurma*, *maymun*, *eşoğlueşek*. Ice Cream. Monkey. Son of a Donkey. Still the vocabulary of a five-year-old. In my purse is a book of Turkish phrases I bought at the airport and which includes a section on dating with phrases like "Would you like a cigarette?" and "Do you live alone?" Even in English these phrases seem foreign; the idea of dating a man whose language I don't speak seems laughable. Of course, I will only be in Turkey a few days.

"I hate my apartment," I tell Tamay when she asks about it. It is on the first floor of a building on the West Side of New York. People always respond to this in the same way, "No stairs." That is true, but New York seems safer from a few stories up. I do not like living at street level.

"You don't hate it," Tamay replies. She has a tendency to do this, to deny what I say. We met for the first time yesterday when she brought me from the airport to this apartment. She knew all about me while I knew nothing of her, except that she existed. I did not even know her name until a few days earlier when she phoned my mother with the news of my

grandfather's death and my mother told her to phone me, the Turkish one, as if her other children did not share the same blood. In America, I have tried to be Turkish, but in Turkey, it is clear I am American.

I did not know it but for the past five years, since my father's death, my mother has been sending letters to my grandfather telling of our lives, and he had been passing them on to my Aunt Fatma for translation. Tamay has them all. She has promised to let me read them. My mother knows Turkish, but she won't speak it anymore. Not even when I ask. Once in New York, I took a class on Turkish history, but I never had time to study and so could never keep all of the Mehmets straight. People only know I am Turkish when I tell them.

"I do hate my apartment," I say to Tamay who is holding my hand. She does this often; it makes our conversations feel intimate no matter what they are about.

"Tomorrow I will take you to Topkapi and show you the Harem," she says. "Then you will see some bad apartments." At the cemetery Tamay showed me graves with turbans of stone on them. Old fashioned, she said, stupid.

I look at Tamay next to me on the couch. Her skin is not as pale as mine, but is untouched by any sign of age, not the blemishes of youth or the wrinkles of time. "I doubt the Harem is worse than my apartment," I say. I do not want her to come to America. I do not want her to change her life for something she doesn't know.

"You'll see," she says. She is a tall girl with thick, brown hair that ripples over her shoulder blades. American boys will like her. Her accent is British from the teachers at her school. From the adults in the center of the room comes more applause; the little girl has switched to Turkish songs. "Besides, Vahap loved America," she says. Vahap is my father's name.

"I don't think he did, Tamay."

She sticks her tongue out at me and then immediately squeezes my hand in apology. "He said he did. He always said he did."

During my life my father returned to Turkey every few years to visit his family. We only went with him the one time; soon after, my parents divorced. I think if we had not grown apart, my father and I, I would have liked to have traveled with him. He liked to take pictures; he liked to have things to remember with. I can only remember the things I have. When he died I had not seen him in three years and had talked to him only on holidays from my mother's house. After the divorce he stayed in America, which perhaps had become, by then, something of a home.

"When did he say he loved America?" I ask. Everyone around us is eating; their fingers continually rising towards their mouths. I do not know what they are talking about. Every few minutes, Fatma goes into the kitchen and returns with some new delicacy which she offers to me before the other guests. Tamay and I are the only ones sitting, and with my inarticulate hand gestures I, not wanting to be seen as rude, offer my seat to anyone who approaches the couch.

"Well, maybe he didn't say it, but whenever he was here, he wanted to go back," Tamay says. My father was like that. When he was here, he wanted to be there; when he was there, he wanted to be here. We are all like that in my family. My father was in exile wherever he went. The only way he could have remained a Turk was by remaining in Turkey.

"I liked your father," Tamay says. She twists sideways on the couch so she can look me in the eye. "You look like him, you know?" I know. Every year, in a voice of regret, my mother admits to this, I look like him.

"Are you sad about your grandfather?" I ask.

"Of course," she says, letting go of my hand.

"What was he like?" I pick up a red and black kilim pillow and place it on my lap.

"Grandfather was like your father, his son." Tamay was thirteen when my father died of a heart attack. I was twenty-five. Neither of us were with him; nobody was. He died on a sidewalk in Cincinnati and strangers phoned for his ambulance. Tamay knows my father more as a recreation of his parents'

memories than as a real person. She knows him as a son who died before his parents. I do not want to know what she thinks of my father.

"Why didn't you come when Grandmother died?" Tamay asks. That was a year after my father. I did not even consider it.

Before I can answer there is knocking at the door, people fall quiet and the little girl is hushed. Fatma puts down the tray of *borek* she is holding and quickly moves to answer the knock. Everyone but me is expecting someone. Three men, looking like college students, walk in wearing dusty suit coats that do not match their pants. Though all of the other guests arrived with food, these men—they look like boys but everyone clears a space for them as if they are important—have not brought anything. Tamay rises from the couch and with her hand gently directs me to rise also. We look for empty space in the room and go stand behind the television which I notice is unplugged.

The men seat themselves in a row on the couch, taking up only two-thirds of it, the edges of their jackets lapping over one another. They put their hands on their knees as if about to push up and stand again. Instead they all three look down at their laps. One begins to chant. Usually to me, Turkish sounds like someone telling a joke, but this is different. It is a prayer, but the velocity with which the man reads, and it is clear he is reading, though from memory, makes the sound a current rather than words. He chants on one long breath until he can go no further and the next man takes over while the first inhales deeply like a runner at the end of his race. When the second man cannot continue the third begins. This cycle repeats several times until finally the men are done and everyone is silent for a moment until Fatma comes forward and hands the first man a wad of bills, a lot of money. The men nod and leave without ever having said anything other than their chant.

"What was that?" I ask Tamay, who rests her hands on top of the television as if she were at a podium and about to speak.

"The Koran," she says with an unusual degree of seriousness.

"All of it?"

She nods.

"In five minutes?"

She smiles and I feel relieved. I am exhausted by ritual. The room grows louder again and I wonder what everyone else is talking about. Here where I can only understand the people who accommodate me with English, I feel like I am missing. Sometimes Tamay forgets that I cannot understand other people's conversations and she comments on them. Each time when she realizes, she laughs like I am a child who has done something silly. As a foreigner, without language, I am ageless; I have lost wisdom.

As Fatma again returns to the kitchen, she gathers Tamay and I up from behind the television and whisks us along with her to help. A large-hipped woman with thick, black hair, Fatma was what I expected.

"Mehmet and Ayşe brought baklava, but it isn't good," she says huddled with us in the small kitchen. There is no door so she speaks softly, in English for me. "I want you to go out and buy some so I can serve it." We nod and start to head for our jackets by the front door. "Without telling them," she calls out after us. Several people look up from their conversations. I do not know who Mehmet and Ayşe are, but probably we are family since I seem to be related to everyone I have met in the past two days. Until now I always thought of my father as being without family. On holidays, unlike in my friends' families, there was never any conflict over whose side of the family to visit. The only question was would we go to my mother's family or would they come to us.

At the door Tamay and I put on our jackets and slip into the hall. From behind us the little girl yells something, probably "where are you going?" or "can I come?" I am glad to leave the party which has grown noisier and more festive, as if someone had put on music. Walking ahead of Tamay, I step out of the building and do not know which direction to turn

in, do not even know where north is, or south. In my pocket is a slip of paper with my aunt's address written on it just in case. The city streets, which are gray and dusty with coal pollution, feel more somber than the funeral we have just left.

"This way," Tamay says, pushing ahead of me and crossing the street during a break in traffic. In Istanbul the cars look cheaper than in New York, more like they could be crushed against your forehead with a strong hand. Here drivers honk more, with more desperation, as if they are saving lives. While we are walking the call to prayer comes over the loudspeakers. "I hate that," Tamay says. "It is embarrassing." She seems to pick and choose the traditions that bother her.

"I think it's beautiful," I say walking faster to keep up with her. She would do well in New York, better than I.

"To you it's music," she says. "To me it's a demand." She is right. To me prayers are nothing more than classical music, mysterious and soothing. Something that has been around longer than I.

"Will you marry an American?" she asks. Her hands are deep in her pockets as it is almost evening and the sun has faded.

"I suppose so. If I marry," I say.

"You'll marry," she says. I am used to people telling me this, though usually I do not believe it.

"Will you marry a Turk?" I ask.

"No," she says. "An American." If I were a man, I expect she would propose to me right then and there. She is that kind of girl. Everything American she swallows whole.

We have made several turns and walked a number of blocks already, passing more than one pastry store. Istanbul is full of opportunities for dessert.

"Where are we going?" I ask.

"I know a place," she says. If she were not family I would not trust her like this. I am not sure that from here I could find my way back.

The city is familiar in ways: peopled with men, women, and children who, though generally shorter and with darker hair, look almost American. Their clothes, too, look almost

American, but less comfortable, scratchier, coarser. The men wear mustaches. Many of the women wear scarves. Most people are in business suits, and rarely do I see a woman swamped in black, hiding herself. The sidewalk is tiled, laid in stone rather than cement. Everything here has a history.

We pass store after store selling products that while not American, could be. Shops selling the most Turkish items, the heavily decorated carpets and pillows, seem to exist for the sake of the tourists since the signs in their windows are written in English. I ask Tamay if *indirim*, a word I see in many windows, is a popular brand; she replies that it means *sale*. She does not to stop to look in any windows and I find myself wishing she would hold my hand like before and lead me.

"I would have married your father," Tamay says as we stop at a street light.

"Why?" I ask.

"He seemed very sad," she says and I nod. "I could make him laugh," she continues, again walking very fast, looking straight ahead.

"You were just a child," I say. You are still just a child, I think.

"So. I made him happy. We liked to play Monkey."

"Maymun," I say. It is one of the words I remembered earlier. I do not know why I remembered it or who taught it to me. My coat is too warm and I am sweating.

"Yes, did he play that with you, too?"

I do not know what she is talking about; I was only reciting a word I recognized, but I lie, "Yes, but maybe differently. How did he do it with you?"

"He carried me on his back. That was all. He carried me around and called me a monkey."

"Oh," I say. "Is it a Turkish game?"

"No. He made it up. Sometimes he made noises. You know monkey noises."

I smile; I cannot imagine my father making monkey noises. I can only imagine him alone, dying on a sidewalk. We reach the bakery Tamay has been looking for and go in to place our

order. It is ready quickly; the people in the store are trying to close. Wrapped in tissue and tied in a ribbon, the box of sweets looks like a gift and I am reminded again that it is my birthday. After the divorce my father stopped sending birthday gifts. My mother said he couldn't afford them since he was unemployed, and that because he was embarrassed about not having a gift, he didn't call. I was not supposed to know it, but my mother sent him money every month. Don't forget he's Turkish, she used to say, as if it explained him. When I was a child, I used that as an excuse for my worst behavior. "I couldn't help it. I am Turkish," I would tell my teachers. They always laughed.

"Do you think my father was very Turkish?" I ask.

Tamay emits a single laugh. "I don't know what that means. To be Turkish." We are outside again, walking back the way we came even more quickly than before.

"So why wouldn't you marry a Turk?" I ask.

"I want to leave here," she says, handing me the box of sweets. Refusing to carry the box is the first teenage thing she has done to me. When I tease her she immediately offers to take it back.

"Why would you want to leave here?" I ask. "There are so many things that are Turkish. There is nothing that is American."

"You are American."

Only half, I think to myself, but I do not answer and we fall silent. Through most of the shop windows that we pass I can see a picture of Ataturk, the father of modern Turkey, on one wall or the other. In two weeks he changed the country's language from Arabic to Turkish. When I think of this I imagine a country of people with puzzled expressions paused before newly minted street signs, holding dictionaries of their new language in one hand and scratching their heads with the other. Actually then most Turks could not read. I watch Tamay a few steps ahead of me leading me back to my temporary home. In America she would stand out; she would look foreign, darker,

different. All during the walk I watch her. I think maybe there is a resemblance, that to others she and I look like family.

This has not been a usual trip; I have not bought postcards or mementos for the people back home. I have not paid attention to the scenery. During the ride from the airport Tamay drove along the Bosporus so I could see it, and from the car we smelled the fish being sold by the side of the bridge. But without any pictures I am afraid I will forget what was there. I am embarrassed by this lack of memory; I know it to be an inadequacy in me, perhaps a sign that I do not really see things. I try to memorize what is here, yet when I get home I will not know what to say about what I saw.

Finally we reach the apartment building; it is dark out and street lights have come on. Inside the entryway, Tamay reaches for a switch to turn on the bulb over the stairs. It is on a timer and will give us only a few minutes to reach the next bulb. We walk swiftly from bulb to bulb, landing to landing until the fifth floor. There is an elevator but Tamay has told me she likes the exercise, and besides it is very slow. All the way up the stairs in the dark and in the light, I watch Tamay. She walks steadily, never checking to see if I am behind her, never checking to see if she is about to misstep. The land she walks on is hers and she knows it. I want her to carry me on her back in a children's game. I want to know if it was she that made my father laugh, or if, in Turkey, he simply became the kind of person that laughed.

Finally we reach the door to Fatma's apartment and Tamay opens it. "What?" she asks as she turns and sees me looking at her. I swallow, as she smiles at me. Inside, people are still there, still talking and eating. The little girl has disappeared, probably for a nap, or for her supper. We step inside and despite the light and noise, I cannot look away from Tamay for fear that unpinned by my eyes, she will, in an instant, leap into exile, into America. She does not know about leaving home, how it dissolves behind you. I want, with my eyes, to hold her to her country.

"What?" Tamay asks again in response to my stare. I don't turn away. It is how she greeted me yesterday at the airport and again and again after—she stared. I caught her staring at me fifty times that day. Each time she did not look away, she engulfed me.

What I want is to be able to go home and recite from memory, like the long chanted Koran, what it is that makes me Turkish. What that makes me. I want to be my own souvenir, and I think, if I look long enough at this Turkish girl, maybe I will remember her and maybe I can bring her back with me, the way she is, happy.

Maine Vacation

Robert Coles

For two weeks we lived
near Jonesville,
in someone's summer cottage
with its Bible and family photographs,
scent of pines,
tombstones hidden in the grass.

Swimming in Lake China,
I shivered in the afternoons
floating past—
I wished those days wouldn't end.

At night by the fire
my father popped corn,
the silver lid rising,
his chin dripping sweat.

Daybreak on Sunday,
my mother awake
in the kitchen
frying apples.

Even the Regional Ballet

Grace Sage

Late in winter
there are so many days the same
and people
and what is said

that dying seems closer to life
than not. Yet rebirth comes
and not only in spring
or on holy days

but in small ways
we come to new beginnings:

the world shifts,
imperceptively,
but enough.

Enough once was to see you
far and away in that dark hall;
the house lights dimmed
the music began
and you came onstage,
one by white delicate one.

February vanished then
and the kid kicking my chair
from behind

and all that was present
were the pristine lines

of your young backs and arms
moving slow again and slow
in perfect, harmonic
and endless lines.

In Irons

John O'Meara

All the china and porcelain is intact.

(homeward)
The paper under the books, under the hat,
is dated precisely, yellow and sharp,
like a well-known row of empty faces,
or a frowning court of bricks.

(outward)
Hiked out, a ponderous, dimpled body
surprises itself with every breath and atom,
skims a tactile minute on the surf, and turns
often, upwind, quick eyes in a tacking sail.

Looking at Harbor

John O'Meara

The not-so-easy efforts of early mid-afternoon
stumble and walk around a sunny, new place
with the awkward name of Aloha Marketplace

and ratchet thoughts down, into root canals
that have left the morning talking-numb
sipping on the invincible ellipse
of an unfinished suture.
A single vacant stare blooming like new-bought tools
and my size nine shoes, screwed down
into the concrete pier, single silent tongue,
always minding what the water hides.

To Be a Pilgrim

Robert Mullen

1. The Witches' Craft

His dream, that night, is of madness. Isn't it madness to imagine what he knows can never exist? In his dream the witches appear in the shape of great black birds, scavenger birds, birds with bloody beaks but with the white faces and the bare white breasts of women.

"No," he thinks. "You can't be. I won't allow it."

Why is he alone? Where's Jacopino? Where's Beelzebub? The beaks of the witches drip blood; they waddle obscenely on short spindly legs. Is there a lesson here? Witches are darkness, witches are filth, mere shadows of should be—and yet, with his mind's eye, he sees them.

2. Like To Like

Like to like, the light of consciousness came to Donnolo just as the first rays of sunlight appeared to illumine the day. Once more he was lying beneath the single ragged blanket which he shared with Jacopino the tinker, a mender of pots and pans. Before disturbing the old man, Donnolo arranged his shirt, pulling it as far down as possible over his legs.

"Wake up, friend. Open your eyes. What a dream I just had."

"Who? What? Get off me! Oh it's you."

The old man sat up and turned his back in order to pull on his trousers.

"A dream? Is that all? Hasn't anyone ever had a dream before?"

The old tinker felt in his pockets and finally found some dried biscuits.

"Here. Eat something. You'll feel better. Probably you were just hungry."

"Yes. I am hungry. So you dismiss dreams as easily as that?"

"What else? After the heat of the day, I like a good night's sleep."

The old man took a drink of water from a goatskin bag, swished the water round in his mouth, and then spat it out again.

"Let's not argue," he said. "It gives me a headache. Either we go on side by side, or let's part as friends."

"But I wasn't arguing . . ."

"Good. That's settled then. I wouldn't like people saying that I threw you to the wolves."

3. Little Lord

His first dream is of being in a strange room, a room which he has never seen before and which, in order to frighten him, is growing steadily larger. He tries to call out. He can scarcely draw breath. And this goes on until his mother at last bends over him with a candle.

"Silly child! Why should you have nightmares? Have you forgotten that your mother loves you?"

Her hair is long and loose and her eyes are still languid with sleep. And through the thin gown he can see clearly the swell of her breasts, the dark shadows of their tips.

"Poor little fool. Aren't you Donnolo? Aren't you my little lord?"

She musses his hair only in order to smooth it again.

"What was it, wild animals? Bad men? Were you surrounded by Saracens?"

"I don't know. I can't remember . . ."

"Well then it couldn't have been so bad, could it?"

"But I was only a tiny speck . . ."

"So you did forget that I loved you!"

4. Beelzebub

Beelzebub the donkey was decrepit and gray with age and only the strongest of persuasion could get him to his feet. Ahead of them the road beckoned, but not to Beelzebub. While Donnolo yanked on the animal's neck with a rope, Jacopino delivered sharp blows to its flanks.

"Why are there men at all, Jacopino? Have you given that any thought? Why are there not just beasts?"

"So that there can be thieves, I suppose. So that there can be wars."

"Surely that's no answer. You've chosen just the worst examples."

"Have I? That's strange. I didn't mean to."

The day was moving on. The sun was once more burning in the sky and this, in turn, caused the air to be filled with birdsong.

"Isn't there another answer? Think, friend. If there were no men, who would strive for the good?"

"Oh that," said Jacopino. "I guess that must have slipped my mind."

Without men, would horses have shoes? Would bees have hives, or oxen carts? Or Beelzebub the donkey, for that matter, a straw hat with two holes cut for the ears?

5. Eufemia

Eufemia the maid, in summer, goes barefoot. This he finds interesting. He begins watching her more closely. Whenever he needs something, he makes sure he asks for her especially.

"Well? What is it, Donnolo? I'm busy."

"I was just wondering . . ."

"What? Do I have to guess? Why am I the one you pick on?"

"I don't know. I don't. You shouldn't talk back."

"And you shouldn't order me around. Not yet. Not at your age."

"Well I'm not. I don't mean to. I was just thirsty."

"Don't I get ordered around enough? If you're not thirsty, you've lost something."

But she brings him the water. Her feet slap on the cool tiles. He stares at those feet, at those legs of hers. In summer she goes barefoot nearly to the waist.

6. The Dead Father

Before they had gone far that day they began to smell a terrible smell. Stones surrounded them, with only here and there a few wild fig trees whose stunted fruit only the birds could eat.

"Now what?" Jacopino said, shading his eyes. "Who's that ahead? More to the point, what's that on his back?"

They soon found out. The poor man was bent nearly double and what he was carrying, what was tied onto his back with a rope, was a corpse. Not wanting to make too much of this, Donnolo called out cheerfully.

"A fine day for it, friend. Have you far to go?"

"Far? How far is far? I shudder to think."

What could be the meaning of this? Mere murder? The corpse was not hours or days, but weeks old, and the eyes were missing, perhaps having been plucked out by crows.

"And your crime, friend? I suppose everyone must ask."

"As a matter of fact, they don't. Not since the old boy started to stink."

The man bent lower, allowing the feet of the corpse to rest on the ground.

"I killed him, didn't I? I was provoked, but there you are. That's a father for you. And I'll tell you something else, he's not one bit lighter now then he was when we set off."

"Well I've never carried a corpse myself, friend . . ."

Donnolo looked more closely and it was even worse than he had guessed. The rope had worn the man's shoulders raw and maggots from the corpse had thus found their way into the living flesh as well.

". . . but you should be thankful. The day your father lightens your load will be the day that he ceases to love you."

7. Little Priest

Why, his mother demands, has he placed pebbles in his shoes? What is he thinking of? What will his father say? The pebbles, Donnolo explains, are to remind him of his sins.

"Such as? You can't say, can you? So the pebbles don't work."

He knows more than he can tell. In the evening, when Eufemia comes to put him to bed, before she blows out the candle, she opens her dress and allows him to touch her breasts. And for this he pays her with the small coin which he's given each day to buy himself a sweet on the way home from school.

His mother empties his shoes. Then she makes him turn out his pockets. Doesn't she know that he can find pebbles anywhere?

"Little priest!" she mocks him. "Oh yes you are, Donnolo, that's exactly what you are."

"And isn't a priest celibate, mother?"

"And aren't you, you little idiot? And how do you know that word anyway? Sometimes I wonder if you haven't got pebbles between your ears."

8. Only The Darkness

Only the darkness descending halted their progress on that day and even then, had there been as much as a sliver of moon to see by, they might have continued on their way rather than risk going to sleep again in such a desolate place. But that was where they were and not somewhere else; and while Jacopino prepared the evening meal, Donnolo fed Beelzebub a handful of grass.

"I've been thinking about that man we met. He's luckier than he knows. At least his sins fit onto his back."

"Enough of that. What good does it do you? Come and eat."

They ate their simple meal under the stars. Their roof was heaven's roof. Donnolo heaped his plate with chick peas and lentils and some greens which the old man had noticed growing in the bottom of a stream.

"Say what you will, my friend. What's more delicious than what suffices for one's needs?"

"A nice ham crisped up with honey? A leg of lamb on a bed of rosemary?"

Once they had eaten, they settled down once more for sleep. Was the ground hard? Was the blanket thin? What greater aid to sleep was there than fatigue? For a pillow, Donnolo folded his arms. After walking, rest; and after the stones of the day, night's soft shadows.

9. Passion Play

Once a year processions move through the streets with banners, to the slow beating of drums. Hooded figures pass, and giant candles, and barefoot penitents bearing great crosses.

"God loves us, Donnolo, that's why. Pain in this world means joy in the next."

"Yes I understand now, mother. God loves us, but not as we are."

The flagellants carry their own scourges. They wear their shirts reversed, open at the back, and trailing after them are women in white dresses, with disheveled hair, who soak up the blood from their wounds with sponges.

"It's not God's fault, Donnolo. Some people don't know when to stop."

"It's not God's fault if people are no better than He made them?"

Last of all come the afflicted—the blind, the mute, the mad, the lepers with their clappers, and those who walk like crabs. Can this, too, be what God intended? What puzzles and what delights Donnolo most about Easter is its cruelty.

10. Interrogation

Our own two pilgrims, once daylight had returned, walked on, keeping to their road, and before long they reached a cottage. Here, in answer to Jacopino's cries, a strange figure appeared which, on closer scrutiny, turned out to be that of an old woman twisted by age, her tendons having so contracted

that her knees were now fixed firmly to her shoulders. This poor creature walked on both hands and feet and was thus forced to view them backwards, and upside down, looking out from between her legs.

"Pots mended, did you say? Pans mended? That's all right for some."

While Jacopino set to work with his tools, Donnolo followed the woman into her house, where she at once went back about her chores. And as she was cleaning out the hearth, they had the following conversation:

"Tell me. This affliction of yours. Have you been suffering from it for long?"

"How long is long? Long enough, I'd say. Ever since I lost my poor Guiseppe."

"Your Guiseppe? Your husband? And before that?"

"Fit as a fiddle. Strong as an ox. And always a little left over for bed."

"So you were a woman like any other? Perhaps even beautiful?"

"Why deny it? A certain person seemed to think so."

"But now that's over. Now you must see yourself in God's eyes."

"In God's eyes? Why? Is God blind?"

"Blind, perhaps, to what men see. Can't God see what's in the heart?"

"And couldn't my Guiseppe?"

11. God's Lamb

For his first confession, he must make a list of his sins. He sits with a pen and paper but he writes nothing. What's the point? All of his sins are but one sin, the sin of Eufemia.

"Never mind, Donnolo. You'll think of something. Meanwhile we must decide what you'll wear."

"The more one wears, mother, the more one is hiding."

"I can see it now, Donnolo. My little lamb of God in a nice silk shirt."

"Mother, I beg you . . ."

"You'll be so handsome, Donnolo."

"Then I'll have to add the sin of pride."

"But you'll be forgiven it! That's what's so wonderful. God knows that we can't help sinning. You'll just have to say a few more prayers."

12. Not Much Later

Not much later that day and not much farther along their way our pilgrims came upon a curiously decorated wagon parked beside the road. Donnolo rubbed his eyes. Instead of being covered with canvas, the wagon was covered with rich but faded tapestries, as if a room of some old castle had been turned inside out. Then, just as they drew alongside, a man's head suddenly appeared.

"One moment, gentlemen, please. Just a moment to put myself to rights."

The head vanished back between the folds of material but a moment later the entire man appeared and leapt down from the wagon wearing only a pair of trousers.

"Don't jump to the wrong conclusion. We're never shut. Can you beat this heat?"

"Hell is hotter, friend," Donnolo said.

Jacopino frowned in disapproval, but the man in trousers merely laughed.

"Now there's a thought. What do you call that, philosophy? Looking on the bright side?"

"I meant it as a warning, friend."

"Look here!" Jacopino said. "What's got into you? Why go around frightening people?"

The half-dressed man came closer then, and he lowered his voice.

"Or do you prefer them frightened? In that case, I'd recommend Angelica . . ."

Donnolo said nothing more at all until that evening, and even then he might have remained silent had Jacopino not insisted that he eat something.

"No, my friend, I've no appetite. You must think that I've never encountered such wickedness before."

"Maybe you have and maybe you haven't, but you shouldn't get such people mad."

"Yes, of course. You mean that we should leave it to God."

"I mean that you shouldn't get such people mad."

13. Pillow Talk

At night, after everyone else is asleep, Eufemia slips back into his room and lies down beside him in his bed in just her shift. This he pays her for with money taken shamefully from his father's strongbox.

"Well? Now what? Now that you've got me here?"

He's not sure, so he begins by rubbing her legs. She moans, softly, and her shift soon rises over her hips. And she begins to secrete a strange sap.

"Have I wet myself? Is that what you think, you fool child?"

"Well how am I supposed to know if you don't tell me?"

"Isn't it obvious? It's what happens when you get a woman in a good mood."

"Then you must not be sorry that you're here."

"Of course I'm sorry! This is filthy. Especially for money."

"Then if you were to give the money back . . ."

"Then I'd be as big an idiot as you are!"

14. Hebrews

Beelzebub, as they set out next morning, was first to notice dark figures ahead and, as though having some understanding of what this portended, the poor animal began frothing at the mouth.

"Jews," said Jacopino. "He always does that. They murdered our Lord."

"These ones?" Donnolo shaded his eyes. "Are you sure of that?"

The party of Jews, seeing two Christians approaching, halted their own progress and moved to the side of the road.

From the youngest to the oldest the black-clad Jews touched their black hats and made stiff little bows.

"Peace, friends," Donnolo said. "It's a wide road. There's room for all."

At this one ventured forward, an old man with a white beard who seemed to be holding something behind his back.

"Best wishes to you, sir. Great happiness. Every success . . ."

"You overwhelm me, friend. But let's not hope for more than we deserve."

The old Jew muttered something in his own tongue, upon which the other Jews smiled and began stroking their beards. Then, from behind his back, the old man produced a small package wrapped in a silk cloth, carefully folded back the cloth, and so revealed—a small piece of charred wood!

"Doubtless, sir, you're familiar with the Bible. And you'll no doubt recall how God once spoke to Moses from a burning bush?"

"You don't mean to say . . ."

"Is it hard to believe? All the harder, then, to have invented it."

"But such a treasure, after all this time, would surely be beyond price."

"Beyond price? Indeed it is. But so, too, sir, is forbearance."

15. Liar! Liar!

There can be but one solution. If temptation cannot be resisted, then temptation has to be removed. Having once made up his mind, Donnolo waits for her day off to raise the alarm.

"A thief? No, Donnolo. Our Eufemia? I suppose you have proof."

"Of course I have. Just count the money in father's strongbox."

The evidence is clear. The missing money is found hidden in her room. Her belongings are at once packed and put outside the door so that she never need enter the house again.

"A thief, mother. A dirty little thief . . ."

"All right, Donnolo, that's enough. What's come over you?"

He wants to stop, but how can he? He has never felt such a rage.

"A cheap little tramp, mother. A thieving little whore!"

"Stop it, Donnolo. I won't listen. A whore now as well?"

"Isn't she? Won't she be? What else can she do?"

"Well I really don't see how that's any of our affair, Donnolo."

16. Raking Old Coals

Truly the best sauce was hunger. Donnolo, although not usually a hearty eater, attacked the bowl of boiled potatoes which Jacopino set before him that evening with the greatest relish and would even have complained afterwards at their being no more had he not noticed that the old man was still sulking.

Cautiously, sheepishly, as they were preparing for sleep, Donnolo unwrapped the precious bit of charcoal.

"I know what you're thinking—that I've been cheated."

"Cheated? Is that all? You let those Christ-killers make fools of us."

The fire was dying. Beelzebub the donkey was chewing contentedly on the skins of the potatoes. Our pilgrims lay down as always, back to back, beneath the old man's worn blanket.

"Tell me then. How could they do it? How could they kill God's son?"

"How? What do you mean? Everyone knows that they did it."

"Yes, so it would seem, but just tell me how."

"What are you trying to do, trip me up?"

"I merely asked a simple question."

"Well maybe they stoned him. Maybe they shot him full of arrows. A man can't be expected to remember everything."

17. Street Scene

Still he is not free, still temptation pursues him. Day and night he thinks of her, and of nothing else, and this leaves his

own body throbbing in agony. Where is she? How is she living? What has he done?

He begins taking long walks, from which he returns home exhausted.

"The boy's dreamy," his father complains. "I, myself, was never dreamy."

How will he find her? The city is so large. He asks in taverns, in cheap restaurants, even at the grid of a convent. As much as she may have tormented him in the past, this new torment is worse.

Then one day someone steps from a doorway and seizes his arm, digging her fingers in right to the bone.

"Well, well, the little sneak. The little liar. Now what's on your mind?"

Her clothes are bright, but shabby. Her eyes are painted. Her lips are painted. Her cheeks are caked with powder.

"What's on my mind? Well for one thing you could wash your face."

"Or else what? Or else God won't recognize me at the Resurrection? Well all the better if He can't!"

18. Will That Do?

The next day, having traveled for many leagues more without incident, they at last reached the walls of a city and, at the sight of these, the old tinker gave Donnolo the following warning:

"Take care here. Think before you act. It's not always obvious that you mean well."

The beating of drums drowned this out. From the gate of the city a priest of all things appeared carrying a jeweled cross and behind the priest hobbled a wretched figure in shackles, a prisoner, a condemned man with the bundle of straw already tied on his back, a poor unfortunate on his way to be burned.

"And his crime?" Donnolo cried out. "Which of us can be sure that his own is not worse?"

With this he rushed forward, taking by surprise the line

of soldiers and so, before he could be prevented, coming face to face with the man they were guarding.

"There's only this, friend. Just one hope. The next world may be better."

The poor creature's coarse features were for just a moment lit up in surprise.

"Better? Do you really think so? Well perhaps you'd like my ticket then?"

Then, without warning, Donnolo found himself on the ground. Soldiers were glaring down at him and yes, soldiers being soldiers, there were also kicks and blows.

"Will that do? Had enough? Going to keep your nose clean after this?"

Jacopino helped him back to his feet. Donnolo felt his ribs to see if any had been cracked. The old man then handed him his hat which had been knocked off.

"I warned you, didn't I? Did you listen? Did you hell!"

19. Daybreak

Day after day, before anything else, he climbs the dark dingy staircase to the miserable little room where he knows exactly what will be waiting for him.

"Donnolo? Lover? Is that you? Is it morning already?"

Instead of answering her, he throws open the shutters.

"Aye, Donnolo! Why so much light? What must I look like?"

"Never mind about that. Just don't go back to sleep."

He lies over her. He pauses now and then to shake her in order to make sure she hasn't drifted off.

"Aye, lover, aye! Why so rough?"

He leaves her some money. He closes the door softly behind him. Knowing that he can never be her only lover, he has to content himself with being her first of the day.

20. No One's Fool

The blows which he had received left Donnolo feeling uneasy and what was more he now found himself surrounded

by things that were dead. Rabbits and geese, pheasants, peahens, hams and sausages and great steaming baskets of offal—everything he could see in the crowded marketplace of that city spoke to Donnolo of gluttony and of greed.

"That's all very well," Jacopino grumbled. "But how else are people to live?"

"Yes. Exactly. That's been troubling me as well."

Looking around, Donnolo at last spotted a fountain. Sure enough there were a few small coins in the fountain which a person in desperate need could easily enough fish out. And at once Donnolo's spirits began to improve.

"God provides, my friend. God provides providing you keep your wits about you."

A few steps more brought them to the Egg Market, where eggs of every shape and size were stacked in careful pyramids. There were white eggs, brown eggs, speckled eggs, but still the old man grumbled.

"So you're for charity, is that it? You're against a good day's work."

"A man should keep his eyes open, that's all. Why see things only as they are?"

"And don't things have to add up? Suppose everyone lived by begging."

"Well? What of it? Would birds lay any fewer eggs?"

"Birds? No I suppose not . . ."

Still, though, the old man wasn't convinced.

"But suppose there hadn't been any coins in that fountain."

"But why on earth shouldn't there have been?"

21. A Flickering Flame

He stays away for one day, and then he stays away for two days, and finally he is able to remain away from her for a whole week. But now he must defend himself against her tears.

"Am I old? Am I ugly? Please tell me, Donnolo, before someone else does."

She's become lazy. The room is a shambles. She picks nothing up. This is what he tells her instead of the truth.

"So that's it! You're still not happy. Now I have to become a maid again."

This time, after surrendering herself to him, she remains awake, and pulls him onto the filthy mattress beside her.

"Don't be angry, Donnolo, but I've been sick lately."

"You mean with some woman's disease?"

"Yes, lover, of course. What else would I mean?"

"Then you'll get better."

"I suppose so. I don't know. If only, Donnolo, you could make yourself look at me again as you once did . . ."

22. Evensong

The howling began just as the sun was going down. Something was in agony, in torment, and Donnolo had to look twice to be sure that this terrible sound was coming from a human being. A man, a naked man, was crouched outside the city wall, having been chained there by his waist to a metal ring.

"What is it, friend? Is this something new? Doesn't the sun go down every day?"

The mouth gaped. The eyes stared. Had a demon been at work here?

"How did this start? Don't you know, friend? Can't you figure it out?"

The mouth moved silently. Only the eyes were able to rage now. Donnolo had never seen such eyes. How might such rage be subdued?

"Pay attention now. I've something here that may surprise you. You've heard, I suppose, of the Burning Bush?"

Somehow, defying the dark power which possessed him, the demoniac managed to reach out his hand.

"That's it. Take it, friend. Keep it safe."

There was a reason for everything, and everything had a use. The disturbed man clutched the dubious bit of charcoal to his naked chest.

"That's better, isn't it? There'll be no need for howling after this."

Old Jacopino was by this time peering gloomily at the sky. Dark clouds seemed to be gathering. Nevertheless, despite the clouds, Donnolo could once more see quite clearly that he was on the right path.

23. Bitter Medicine

The conflagration begins just where it ought to begin and from that spot it quickly spreads itself until Donnolo feels his entire body being consumed by flames. He can no longer remain silent. Realizing that the disease will soon begin consuming him from within as well, he goes down onto his knees before his mother, intending to pour out his heart.

"No, Donnolo, don't. I don't care to know what you did to deserve this."

The physician explains what must be done. The cure, he warns, will be long and expensive, and also the woman will have to be apprehended. Unless such women are stopped, the entire city could become infected.

"But I can't. I don't know. She just stepped out of a doorway."

"Then you must think carefully. It's the law. Which doorway?"

"But I wasn't watching. It was dark . . ."

"Tell the truth," his father orders. "What was the address? No one expects you to remember her name."

24. Cold Comfort

Thunder rumbled as they left the city behind. Distant lightning split the sky. The storm seemed to be coming straight for them. Then, just as the first fat drops of rain began to fall, a farmhouse suddenly appeared out of the gloom.

"And not just any farmhouse," Donnolo was thinking. "What happens just in time is surely no accident."

The farmer who came to the door was angry at being disturbed; in one hand he held a lantern and in the other a menacing stick.

"Pilgrims? Caught by a storm? Well I didn't send it, did I?"

The fire was already out. The hearth was stone cold. The eggs would have to wait. The farmer's wife gave them a few hard crusts of bread to eat and a bowl of water to soak them in while the farmer himself sat watching from a bench with the stave now resting across his knees.

"And what if you're not pilgrims? What if you've come to rob and murder us?"

"And what would we take from you, friend? Your misery? Your misfortune?"

"What do you know about it? Why did this house have to be in your way?"

"I know only that we're here for some reason. Perhaps that's what surprises you."

"What surprises me is that you're here at all."

"Well isn't surprise the beginning of wisdom, friend?"

25. A Change Of Skin

Nothing can cool that burning, nothing which the physician can think to prescribe. Donnolo swallows the medicines and rubs on the salves but the disease refuses to let loose. The fire rages on.

"There must be some reason," the physician insists. "Some other reason."

The physician prescribes sleeping on the roof. He prescribes the shade of a garden, with the sound of a cool splashing fountain. There are facts of the world, the physician explains, and there are facts of the mind.

Then one day Donnolo notices a shop selling material for sacks.

"A shirt?" says the sackmaker. "Certainly. But I'm not much good at sleeves."

Relief comes at once. The coarse material, which by the facts of the world should but increase Donnolo's agony, instead

lies upon his ravaged skin like a caress. And the shirt costs less than a sack for potatoes.

"Anyone can put on sackcloth," Donnolo's father shouts. "Anyone can give his clothes away to the poor."

Donnolo stands calmly, no longer burning, determined to bear this patiently.

"Do you want to help the poor? Shall I tell you how to help the poor? Or perhaps you'd rather I spared you the details."

"I'd rather, father, that you didn't always think the worst of me."

26. Away In A Manger

The storm had done its work and could now subside and in the calm that followed the grim-faced farmer began relating to Donnolo how a sudden and unforeseen turn of events, occurring in the blink of an eye, had left him in the sad state of always expecting the worst from life.

"Oh yes, I once knew what it meant to hope. No one's born disappointed. And then, when our marriage was blessed with a child . . ."

The farmer stopped, and clenched his fists, and he was now shaking in fury.

"Go on, friend. I see no child here."

"And yet we have a daughter. Or should I say that we used to have? Or perhaps you'd like to judge the matter for yourself?"

"Isn't that the best course? One's own eyes deceive one the least."

The night was pitch black. They crossed a farmyard to a byre. The farmer drew a bolt and, as he was opening the door, began making a low clucking sound.

"Friend, that's the way one calls to an animal."

"Judge me once you've seen her."

The light of the lantern revealed nothing but a heap of straw, which the farmer began to prod at with his foot.

"Eat shit!"

"You see?"

"Eat shit! Drink piss! When my monthlies come you can lick my . . ."

Two things. First, Donnolo realized at once that the girl was faking. There was more to this than demons. This was not the voice of someone possessed. And the second thing?

"Shut the door, friend. Bolt it. Things have certainly gotten off on the wrong foot here."

27. Memento Mori

He knows, in the dream, just where he will find her. The illness was already too far gone. Her debt to nature had been repaid. He finds himself surrounded by fine marble tombs and statuary and shadows which seem more like deep dark pools.

"Donnolo? Lover? Is that you? The living are all starting to look the same to me."

She's in white. She drifts towards him, but he's not in the least afraid.

"I would have come sooner. I hope you know that. I've been ill myself."

"And now that you're better? Now that you know the way?"

It's a strange light, this pale light by which she is visible. The ghost of Eufemia appears, in the dream, to be lit from within.

"It's peaceful here. It's quiet, Donnolo. I can sleep late. There's no rent to pay. And all the beautiful flowers that people bring I can pretend are for me."

28. Eggs And Bacon

There had been no warning. Never before had the girl given them the least trouble or done anything other than what was expected of her. There could never have been a dearer child or a more dutiful child.

"Go on, friend. Life seldom runs so smoothly. When did things change?"

"Didn't I say? Weren't you listening? Just when we least expected it."

"But from her point of view . . ."

"What point of view? Since when? Doesn't every father deserve to see his daughter a bride?"

A fire was glowing in the hearth now and the farmer's wife, along with the eggs, had fried up a few scraps of pork fat. Donnolo, before getting to his feet, wiped up the last bit of egg yolk and grease from the frying pan with some bread.

"I'll go alone this time. I'll tell you why—because she won't be expecting it."

The girl was sitting atop the straw this time, in the darkest corner of the byre. She still wore her wedding dress, although it was filthy by now and torn along both sides and left her legs exposed and much of her breasts.

"Good day," Donnolo said casually. "Perhaps you remember last night . . ."

"Who are you? Why should I remember anything at all? Go and bite on a turd!"

"That's really not necessary. You're wasting your breath. Shall I tell you why?"

"Go away! Please. Take pity. I can't help myself. Go fuck your mother up the . . ."

"Yes I know. I understand. This is what worked for you before. But that doesn't mean there's not a better way."

29. To Be A Pilgrim

The dream leaves him in no doubt. His life there is over. As in the heavens, so on earth: whatever has a beginning must run its course. Thus, having given away all of his clothes to the poor, he must now go out and buy himself a hat.

"But why, Donnolo? You're not well yet. For what is this my punishment?"

"Nothing has changed, mother. Have you forgotten? Wasn't I once your little priest?"

"But that was a joke! I never meant it, Donnolo, I swear!"

Too late. The time for jokes, and even for tender kisses, has passed.

"But you can't be a pilgrim, Donnolo. I forbid you! We're not the sort who wander about aimlessly."

"To be a pilgrim, mother, to go from what is to what's better, it's not necessary to know the way."

"Then we're ruined! All is lost. How will I bear it?"

"As best you can, mother. As your woman's strength allows. The way you bore me the first time."

30. Benvenuta

Benvenuta—for this was the girl's name—sat calmly now and told her story. The day had been fine. She had been pleased with her dress. After all, she would only be moving to the next farm. Then, just as they were approaching the church, she had noticed a cow in the field beside the road being mounted by a bull.

"Go on," Donnolo prompted. "That's not all. You would have seen such things before."

"Yes. I suppose so. But that's when it occurred to me: this is just two pastures being joined."

Panic had seized her. They were already drawing up to the church. She was being handed down. And the next thing she knew she was tearing at her clothes and exclaiming lewdly and kissing all and sundry on the mouth.

"So you happened upon the solution purely by chance?"

"How else? I was using words that I didn't even know I knew."

There was no demon here, only confusion. The mind cornered was at once wondrous and wondrously devious. Donnolo was certain now that the way out of this was much the same as the way in.

"That's all very interesting. In fact I believe every word. But what you need now is a needle and thread."

"What for? Haven't you heard? I'm out of my mind."

"No. I don't think so. Otherwise why is your dress ripped only on the seams?"

31. Jacopino

Best of all is the dawn, the cool of dawn when the new day is still damp with dew and the only sound in the ears of the solitary pilgrim is the careless chatter of birds. How can the pilgrim, having once more survived the darkness, not feel that he, too, has been renewed?

Then one morning, over the chirping of the birds, Donnolo hears a new cry.

"Pots repaired! Pans repaired! Try me and see!"

To Donnolo, the significance of this is at once apparent. What the pilgrim lacks, the world will soon send.

"Friend! Wait!" Donnolo cries. "Not so fast. I couldn't help but overhear."

At once the sun seems less hot, the hills less wearying. Each time they reach another hamlet, the old tinker unpacks his donkey, taking down a small anvil and the leather bag containing his tools.

"This is how I do things, not some other way," he says. "Too bad if I'm holding you up."

"Don't give it another thought, friend."

"I do what I do. I go the way I've always gone."

"If only everyone could be so sure, friend."

"Well the rest had better please themselves."

32. Bread And Cheese

While the girl sewed in the byre and Jacopino banged away with his hammers in the farmyard, Donnolo explained to the farmer the sacrifice which would be required if his daughter was to regain her senses. The farmer's hands, his thick red hands, once more closed into fists.

"So I was right the first time," he said. "You've come here to rob us."

"That holds no water, friend. That dog doesn't bark. How can you be robbed of what you've already lost?"

"Robbed all right! In broad daylight! Some throw sand in your eyes, others fine words."

"Unlock the door, friend. What will it cost you? You'll not get her to market again."

The farmer narrowed his eyes. His brow furrowed. The farmer, the canny farmer, then called to his wife to bring more bread, and some cheese as well this time, and a bottle of wine to wash it all down.

"Perhaps you're right. Perhaps I've been going about this in the wrong way."

"It's not too late. Even if she blames you now, she'll soon learn not to."

"Never mind that. She can blame who she likes. But there's one thing you haven't mentioned yet . . ."

The bread was set down, and the cheese, and the farmer poured out two cups of wine.

"So tell me. Just in case I agree. Where exactly is your own farm from here?"

"My own farm? Yes I see. I'm afraid you'd better prepare yourself for another surprise, friend."

33. First Aid

The old tinker remarks just as they are entering another village that this one is famous not for its olive oil or its wine or its truffles but for its witches. Scarcely a night passes without the witches attacking someone, usually a child, consuming the person's flesh, and replacing what was eaten with rotten wood.

"How curious," Donnolo says. "Not the witches, but the rotten wood."

In the very first house, he's shown a victim. The child is pale and clearly weak, but also strangely furtive. Donnolo feels the poor creature's stomach, which is full, even distended, all of which suggests something else.

"Tell me. It was dark, wasn't it? How do you know it was witches?"

"Because. It's the truth. I saw it. Witches are filthy."

Wood is the key. What comes out of rotten wood? The child saw worms, not witches. The dream of witches would have come only afterwards.

"Listen. Here's what we'll do. First we'll get all of that rotten stuff out of you . . ."

34. From That Mud This Dust

The day was fine. The mud left by the storm was dried hard again as Donnolo brought Benvenuta slowly out of the dark byre and into the farmyard, step by small step.

"What a light! I seem to have forgotten. Is it always this bright?"

"It can be. It often is. Don't try to see things all at once."

Jacopino was already waiting with Beelzebub. Even the donkey, for once, seemed anxious to be on the move, and the farmer and the farmer's wife, who had now put on their best clothes, could but watch disconsolately and wave.

"What a shame," old Jacopino muttered. "Another passenger. Another mouth to feed. While you were at it, you should have talked them out of a cheese."

The sun blazed down. The girl's small bosom heaved. There were beads of perspiration on her lip. Though barefoot beneath her bridal dress, the newest pilgrim was before long walking with firm purpose.

"A good beginning catches the eye," Donnolo observed. "But you'll also need endurance."

"Why complain before there's a reason? What I need, I'll find."

"And another thing," Jacopino chipped in. "We do as we do, young lady. We go where we go."

"And who are you when you're at home, you dried up old pile of . . ."

"That will do," Donnolo declared. "That will do nicely. I think we all know where we stand now."

35. Si Non E Vero

More remains to be said. Robbed of one prey, witches invariably seek another. Even though the village is now behind them, the old man warns that the matter may be far from over.

"And what exactly is a witch? Whom should we expect? Can you describe one?"

"No, as it happens, I can't. I stick to what I know. Not like some."

"So as it happens you've never actually seen a witch?"

"Nor a Chinaman either, for that matter."

"Therefore, since Chinamen exist . . . Yes I see, you certainly have me there."

They make a wall of brush that evening and, before lying down, the old man throws a few more sticks onto the fire. *Si non e vero, e ben trovato*. What isn't true still makes a good story. And doesn't every good story begin with a dream?

36. Possessing The Earth

That evening, without his even asking, the girl helped Donnolo gather firewood.

"I'm sorry I was rude before. I still don't know sometimes what comes over me."

"Yes. I could say the same once. But you know what? I think that's what we're here to find out."

Night was falling and the sky above our pilgrims was soon filled with stars. And Benvenuta, who was accustomed to covering herself with straw at night, could now only huddle inside her dress.

"So night comes with lights. I remember now. But don't stars sometimes fall?"

"Yes," Donnolo said carefully. "I believe so. But it seems to make no difference."

"Mad!" the old man exclaimed. "The pair of you! The pot's found its lid."

"Yes. Perhaps. Either mad, my friend, or else surrounded by madness."

Night had fallen. Night fell on the mad and the less mad alike. And night had fallen and Beelzebub the donkey was grazing on a tuft of grass, and the stars shone down precariously from the firmament; and man, and woman, possessed the earth, even while possessing no more of it than they were made from; and not to know the way was not necessarily to be lost.

Traveling

Deborah Elliott Deutschman

And then it is evening again, in another city,
wherever you are, this lost year.
Somewhere between arrival and departure.
Barely here, where you tune out
the atonal din of rush hour traffic outside
the slightly opened window of the hotel room,
overlooking the square
of bare trees and leaves in flight.
October's brilliant defeat.
In the foggy infirmary of dusk,
pale, faded-out colors are raw wounds through gauze
and streetlights blur like acid flowers off focus.
It could all be an amnesiac's dream.
You lie here, immobile,
as if frozen by your own life.
Guidebooks and paperback classics on the bed,
maps folded out, revealing other places
you have gone or are about to go to.
You hear the drifts of TV shows and hit songs,
conversations and sexual exertions from other rooms.
And then, the codes of footsteps on the pavement
advancing and retreating.
The foreign night plays back
its tapes of sounds and silences.
And you keep waiting,
as if for something or someone.
When you know by now how nothing is ever enough.
You want the runways of the skies, to take off forever,
to wander through the rose-tinted ruins
of the palace at dawn

and piece together the fragments.
The dry, compressed, parchment-dust heat
and pure translucent sunlight of antiquity.
Tablets of lost worlds.
The wild, rich, overpowering scent
of pine and honeysuckle
and the wine-dark sea crashing below.
But only absence follows you,
with its impossible dreams,
wherever you are, wherever you go.

On the Eastern Shore of Maryland

Deborah Elliott Deutschman

Here, where the autumn geese sweep across the sky,
I walk the abandoned grounds
of this old Colonial house, where I once stayed—
long closed down.
What had been the lawn, reclaimed
by the wilderness that was centuries before.
The mirrors of thin ice on the hardened paths
strike sparks of stars in the early morning sunlight.
Here, where I walked as many years ago
as there are lives in a lifetime—
another autumn, when it was all still a dream.
When the world was nothing but images:
the sky at dusk, a desert on fire with feverish colors,
the invisible countries of the wind;
the code transmitted by the hordes of leaves in flight.
Images from lost, unknown languages.
And poetry was the torch
that was to be passed on,
as if it were life, life.
And certain lines by certain poets
immortalized the fleeting moments.
Where now I walk
really no more than a weekend traveler—
having driven out here
simply because I happened to be nearby,
by coincidence, for the first time in all these years.
I now walk past the empty barns,
filled with the gray, hollow sounds
of animals no longer there;
as I head down to the water,

even the mostly leafless trees seem symbolic
of the hard religion that is life
we come to believe in—
whether we want to or not.
And as I stand here,
on this cold shore in the marshes—
acres of pale faded-out stalks,
tall yellowed grass and small ragged weeds—
everything bends in the wind.

The Alley

Scott Herzer

Myers sits on a bench at the mauka end of Fort Street Mall, surrounded by the lunch-time crowd. He watches the young woman, watches her bare, dark arms swing like a soldier's, watches her leave the alley and stride toward the huge arched and shadowed doorway of Cathedral of Our Lady of Peace, on the other side of the mall. He's watched her for about a week now and sees that she wears the same white sleeveless dress she'd worn the day before; it has yellow plumeria printed on it, and curves from her shoulders all the way down to the taper of her calves. When she disappears into the church, he knows she'll be gone at least half an hour. He wonders how she could possibly have so much to pray for, to confess, day after day, a woman as young and innocent-looking as she is.

He sits there, his feet at right angles, the right one pointed toward Wong's Place for Noodle, where he always has lunch, the left foot pointed down the mall. He looks down at his feet. His wingtips are shiny and black and almost new, and the sound they make when he walks gives him pleasure.

He wonders what she thinks of him. He wonders if the door to her work room is unlocked, like it was yesterday. He wonders if he will have the courage, this time, to go in. He wonders what he will find there. He stands up and the crowds stream around him. He waits, longer than he needs to, longer than is comfortable. He likes this discomfort, though. He likes the busy sidewalk, the noisy street, the oblique angle of sunlight hitting his face, and the tradewind that seems to be leading him down the alley.

* * *

A week ago, the only thing he knew about the alley was the music he would sometimes hear when he passed by, as he had done countless times during his lunch break from his accounting work at Verbatim Consultants at the other end of the mall. He would go to Wong's and have a hamburger, with a side of tomato salad, and a Pepsi or a glass of red wine. He had no idea what the other stuff on the menu was. *Vermicelli*, *pho*, *cafe sua da*. While he ate, he would dab his mouth with his napkin as if he were deep in thought. But he'd actually be thinking of nothing except whether to walk back to work along the mall or take the extra time to walk around the block. This was a big decision for Myers. The longer route would be sunny, hot, maybe even make him sweat. But he would be able to duck into the church for a quick confession, which was something he liked to do now and then. The other route was cooler, in the shade, dotted with open air stalls where merchants sold fruit, freshly grilled meats, fish, and leis, and there was always the music coming out of the alley halfway down the mall.

Myers knows he is old-fashioned. He keeps a picture of his wife and daughter and son on his desk, where they hover over him like protective icons as he does his work. He no longer loves his wife, but she doesn't annoy him, and for that he considers himself lucky. His daughter is in her senior year, worried about college, and seems to know more combinations of swear words than a relief pitcher having a bad day. His son, a freshman, breaks his heart almost every time he looks at him, so he has stopped looking. He has wearied of seeing himself so often.

Sometimes, at work, he will close his eyes and imagine his family the last time he knew he loved them, on a wild trip to Alaska. His wife had wanted to drive—she hated flying—but Myers told her there were no roads there. The kids sided with the mother. The flight into Juneau was rough and the pilot told everyone to grab their ankles. Meyers looked out the window to see the waters of Juneau Bay, whitecapped and close. He looked at his family next to him, each of them

dutifully bent over, their backs arched in hope or resignation, and felt helpless, which he was, and peace, which he'd never felt before. But he knew then he loved them, if only for the blind trust they had in the pilot.

After the plane landed safely, his wife looked at him, her eyes wide in shock, and asked him what they should do next.

"Us?"

"You and me," she said.

"I'm staying."

"Then the kids and I, what should we do next?"

"Whatever you want."

She took the kids, caught the next ferry out of Juneau, and took it all the way to Seattle, where she took the train the rest of the way home. He stayed in Juneau and fished. He caught a 92-lb halibut and gave it to the ship's captain.

A week before, the woman surprised Meyers. He'd been on his way to lunch. He got to the alley. He heard the music. Guitar music. Slack key. He heard a voice singing. It didn't sound like a recording. He decided to look. The music came from an open door several yards down the alley. As he approached the door, street grit crunched under his feet. Paper cups and aluminum cans rolled around in the breeze. He smelled urine and teriyaki chicken. As he neared the door, the singing faded but the guitar music did not. He walked slowly, started to tiptoe. He did not want to give himself away. The door blew gently back and forth in the wind.

Myers looked through the doorway. The young woman sat at an old sewing machine in the middle of the room, about twenty feet away. She was bent over a beatup tape recorder at her bare feet, nodding her head in rhythm to the music. He saw the long, wiry, black hair tucked tightly behind her ears, the white dress with the yellow flowers on it covering her body like a sleeve. She kept tucking her hair behind her ear with one hand, as she stopped the tape with the other. She tried, with some difficulty, to put a new tape in. She flipped the tape one way, then the other, pressed the play button, and nothing

happened. She ejected the tape, switched it around some more, shook her head, and tried again. Black earrings, shiny as glass, glinted in the brassy fluorescent light.

She was still having problems with the music. He wanted to help her but felt foolish. How could he enter this scene? He decided he couldn't so he thought about walking away. The woman sat up but did not look toward him. He saw that she wore glasses with big heavy black rims. They made her look like she never had to consider a decision in her life; she just made them, sensibly, one after the other. A neon red tape measure hung around her neck, curving around her breasts like upside down question marks. Her hands were big, like a man's, all knuckles and rough skin and choppy fingernails.

When he finally decided to leave, to go to Wong's and enjoy his lunch, she sat up and he thought she saw him, a rumpled, harmless–looking man with thinning gray hair, a round mellow face punctuated by a nose too straight and true to be believed. She arched her eyebrows as if in a question. He shrugged his shoulders, turned his palms up, and gave his head a little tilt. Who knows? he thought.

He walked back out the alley toward the bright, shining mall, the tall buildings glaring, then shadowed in the clouded sunlight. The breeze blew stronger and a mist drifted over the mall and into Myers' face and made him lift his face to the sky for more.

After lunch he walked to the church and sat in the dark, cool sanctuary. He thought about the woman, her passive face, her wondering eyes. She was too old to be his daughter. He thought he had shown more alarm than she had when she had caught him staring at her. He prayed that he would not go down the alley again. When he left the church, he looked along Beretania Street. The woman walked toward him, too far way to see him, he thought. He turned quickly and went back to work.

The next day he ignored the alley at lunch time. He went directly to Wong's and almost ordered what he always did but

the thought of a hamburger bothered him. So he ordered pho, something he couldn't pronounce, from a waiter he couldn't understand. It was spicier than he thought it would be and he ate too fast. His stomach hurt when he went to the Cathedral for confession.

Father Paul was hearing confession. The Father was a halfhearted priest who liked to talk football in the fall, and whose absolution would always be couched in cliches.

"Forgive me, Father."

"When was your last confession?"

"Three weeks ago."

"Myers, is that you?"

"Yes, Father."

"How about those 49ers?"

"They did well?"

"Well? I was born last night? They were fabulous."

"Father Paul."

"God in heaven, Myers, but this could be their year. All spit and vinegar, brother, that's what they were."

"I have looked upon a woman with lust in my heart."

"Yessir, this could be their year, God willing, and the creek don't rise."

Myers abruptly asked for his penance. Father Paul didn't seem to notice. When Myers left the confessional, he almost stumbled into the woman from the sewing room. She had a scarf over her head and was wearing the same dress. She kept her head down as she walked past him, and into the confessional. He heard Father Paul clear his throat, and then he left the dark sanctuary, stepping into bright sun glaring off the sidewalk before him. He walked to the center of the mall and sat under a big tree on a rusted, green park bench, out of the noon sun, and watched the door of the Cathedral. The mall was crowded with people enjoying the warm day. He was glad he had gone to confession. He had not felt calm since the day before. He waited until the end of his lunch break and as he made his way back to his office, he looked back over his

shoulder at the doorway into the church. He looked inside but he did not see the woman.

Now, the tradewind draws him down the alley. He hopes the door will be unlocked again. He walks quickly to the door and turns the knob to the left. It doesn't unlock. He turns it to the right and it still doesn't unlock. He pulls straight back and the door opens. This is a mystery to him but gives him the resolve to go in the room, which is well lit, about forty feet square, with several doors along its walls. He looks for an inside latch on the door but the lock hardware only has a keyhole and, since there's no key, he lets the door swing open.

He looks about the room. Garments—aloha shirts, muumuus, short and long—hang in a jumble of colors and sizes from wire hangers on heavy metal racks with wheels. A pile of clothing in one corner, at least six feet tall, sits like a mound of hay.

He moves to the sewing machine and sits in the simple, metal folding chair. He checks the cassette tapes, which lie in several shoe boxes on the floor. The tapes are all copies and the handwriting on the labels is ragged, with big, crooked loops and punctuation that looks like jagged slashes of a knife. The ink is green and purple and red. No blue or black. He does not recognize any of the band names—the letters all look the same, *K*'s and *L*'s and *A*'s. He is very hot, even though the room is cool. A distant siren sounds to him as if it were right outside the door. A faucet drips somewhere. Flies tangle together against an open, screened window high on the wall near the door. He plays the tape in the deck. Someone chants in a language he has never heard. This surprises him; he'd been expecting music. There is a rhythm to it—at least the man speaking seems to be using a rhythm—but it is not truly music. Meyers stops the tape, opens the machine and pulls the tape out. He puts it on the floor, finds a tape with a guitar drawn on it, and plays it. Slack key fills the room.

He studies the sewing machine, an old Singer double-stitcher. It is glossy black with shiny silver accents; the word

Singer is in big, elegant, gold script. The sewing machine's body curves like a thin woman's calf, and Meyers puts his hand around the top and squeezes gently. The shape is smooth and cool, and he holds it until it warms to his touch. He slides his fingers the length of the body and down the end where the needles are side by side, like two tiny swords. The wheel is big, at least eight inches across and the belt, which runs from it down into the nether regions of the machine's table, is as wide and thick as a truck's fan belt.

On the wall behind the sewing machine hangs a small bulletin board with what looks like a work schedule, some hand-drawn designs of clothing, and a photo of the woman sitting next to another woman about her age. They are dressed modestly and laughing at something, their heads tilted back as if their faces were trying to get closer to the sun. The second woman wears a canary yellow dress, her legs folded under her, her feet out of sight. She has auburn hair, wavy as cornsilk, and is pretty in a Middle-Eastern way. Her hand is on the seamstress's shoulder.

He goes to the door, looks down the alley and sees no one. Across the mall, he sees the open door of the church. The woman is not in sight and he goes back into the sewing room. In one corner he finds a closed door, narrow, shiny white. He can still catch the scent of paint. He opens the door, reaches along the wall for a light switch, finds it, flicks it on, and walks into a long, narrow closet that is full of bolts of white fabric. He runs his fingers over the cloth. It is smooth, almost like satin but with a denser texture. He brings it to his nose—it smells of vanilla. He finds a six–foot piece of fabric and drapes it around his neck. He likes the way it feels and he walks about the room like a runway model. He takes another piece and drapes it over his head.

The door to the alley slams shut. He looks at his watch. He should still have ten minutes. He goes to the door and pushes on it. It won't move. He turns the knob to the left, then the right. Nothing happens. He breathes shallowly, and bends down to the knob. The fabric on his head falls to the floor. He

swears. He tries the knob again. It still won't move. He gets so close to the knob he sees his own grotesque reflection in it, until his breath fogs the brass. He thinks of pounding on the door, but decides against it. He looks up at the screened window. It is too small to offer escape. He checks all the other doors; they lead only to other closets, each with different colored fabric, blue, green, yellow, red.

He moves to the sewing machine and sits in the chair. He turns the machine on, steps on the pedal and watches the needles dance and the wheel spin. White thread flies out of the needles, tangles around the shiny hardware. He's seen his wife sew, but all he knows about is the pedal. The whirring sounds calm him. The mess of thread grows. He doesn't care.

Myers puts the tape back in. The chanter has a deep voice, and even though he doesn't understand a word, he closes his eyes and concentrates. The silent spaces between words match the length of the words themselves and he tries to match the speed of the sewing machine to the rhythm of language. It takes him a few minutes but soon he feels a pattern. He nods his head to the music, and moves his foot to the low lilt of language. He imagines his family, waiting for the plane to crash, their backs arched in fear. He sees the seamstress bent over the tape recorder. After a few minutes he turns off the tape recorder, then the lights, and sits in the chair, waiting in the dark, with the scarf around his neck.

Cat

Gregory Pardlo

I.

She loved that cat so
much she'd lock
it in the bedroom when
ever her son began
to wheeze. Don't worry
Baby, she'd say. I'll
get that draft fixed.
And she'd fidget with the
sliding glass window over-
looking Riverfront Prison,
the Ben Franklin Bridge.
The Philadelphia skyline,
a reminder of
the stories Ms. Gloria told
about her husband
the steel-worker.
Built most the top floors of those buildings.
Only job you could get back then
cause wouldn't none of they folk go up that high.

II.

And she'd think about how that
man would climb through the sky
like her cat on the back of the chair.
Chile that man could dance,
bless his heart. She'd smile
and turn in gentle temerity, looking over
her son toying with the futile paw clawing—
catching the nap of the carpet—

from under the door of the bedroom
where that cat would lie at night
on her son's chest in bed, would climb
into his mouth, down
his throat and nestle among
the wet fur of cilia within
sharing his dreams
of a superhero who
could melt into the night.

III.

Seventeenth floor, yes and the city
won't fix the drafty glass door, she'd
tell the doctor at the clinic. If
she had tools she'd fix it herself, of
course. But maybe he's allergic
to something at daycare, she'd
suggest. And the doctor wants to listen
at his back now, deep breaths
and she recalls with each slow
draw of air his laughter at his own
voice after he sucked from the balloon
she'd untied the string from for him
as it escaped through
his surprised fingers
into the corners of the room.
And catching herself smiling again,
she couldn't clear her mind
of the times she'd find him sitting
up in bed stretching the slack
cat from his tattered bedshirt
like pizza cheese.

IV.

One morning her son,
with the cat in his lap, sat

on the balcony—legs dang-
ling over the ledge like a seventeen
story swing set overlooking the sandlot
directly below, face framed
between the steel bars
he held in either fist
imagining the clouds as hot
air balloons inhaling like great
big cotton candy machines
so close you c'd sniff
at 'em, listening to the music
from Ms. Gloria's next
door, wondering how to
make him
come back and save
them all.

Friday at the Institute

Colette Inez

Under the figure of Our Lady
in the lopsided O of the moon,
I turn in an L-shaped ward.
Near me a boy dragged from sleep
spits out a dream
of a great trench.
Red leaves. Bloody snot.
Piss. A kick in the rump.

We queue up to the sink,
give our teeth a slap
of cold water, brush them with salt.
I name each tooth after a letter
tacked to the schoolroom wall,
the A-my-loose-molar,
B-abscessed . . . alphabets rehearsed
in soft books marked by nuns.

At midday after the blessing
we spit tiny bones on white plates,
wipe our lips with the backs
of our palms. We say the tables
up to twelve times twelve,
file in line to pray.
Legs apart like the lower half of "X"
or an open ladder, the ashen-faced

priest makes the sign. *Allelujah,*
that boy with spooky dreams and I

rub our eyes with smudged hands,
pick bits of fish from back teeth,
our fingernails rosy as Mary's breast
suckling the Blessed Child.

Tara's Deliverance

Colette Inez

Locked in the closet again
the girl tugs at her mother's clothes.
Hems sway as she glides
her hands over cool linings
in an odor of camphor and potpourri.
Her dusty purple cell is framed

by light where the mother swells
like a venomous frog.
Soon an invisible bird
prods a secret in Tara's ear.
She hums with stories:
Once there was a pocket

that held the key to the forest;
a smoke-colored sleeve has disappeared.
Something sighs when the garment bags
gather. A zipper's huzzah
as Tara slips off to a silver glen
to learn the art of spells.

Blue Heron teaches her:
Garumpa. Garrup. Bind. Blind.
Mother be confined in a quagmire of lies,
mottled skin to wither and thin,
lashing tongue to catch no flies.

This story rises and subsides like a river.
A husband and two sons who count Tara
as their queen, watch her thoughts fly
to the far side of the woods.

And the mother? Sometimes she puffs hard
inside her daughter's dream
of Heron-hood, of elsewhere's healing balm.

Merwinized

Colette Inez

W.S., how happily I'm enjambing
this poem-start,
and praising whatever makes
your seamless opalescence

a rampant flowering
after the desert rain:
ocatillo, saguaro blossom,
elsewhere Hawaiian palms

and Nene geese marked
against a horizon line
drawn by my eye
that wants to append

heaven and earth, heart, head,
liana vines swinging in the underbrush
to the count
of sand grains in a tidal pool

likening that sum
to the number of novae
in the Milky Way, our galaxy,
as you know, Merwin,

when you gaze up at a squib
of moonlight on a meander whose river
couples with red mud and clouds
reflecting the sky's vast shrug

at desire or a trick of birds
circling without mishap
in perfect stanzas
unfolding like forms

that face their undertaking
to the end
knowing words are tireless and travel
out of nothing to a vacancy of stars

Wicked Caretaker

Ruth Berman

Wicked Stepmother's father
Has moved in.
He smokes.
He drops ashes all over,
And Ella isn't there
To do the floors now.

(They don't call her
Cinders anymore—
Lèse majesté is still
On the kingdom's books
As a crime,
Though young Charming says
It really ought to be repealed,
Maybe, but, then,
It's easy talking when you're not
The majesty in question.)

It's hard,
Having old Dad there.
He isn't well,
And he was never nice.

Wicked wanted so much
To give her girls
The love she never got,
And then people couldn't help
Liking Ella better,
And she couldn't help
Taking it out on her,

And she can't help
Resenting it now
When Ella tries to sympathize.

Wicked's old Dad
Doesn't quite follow
The ins and outs of
Sibling rivalry and step-relations—
Assumes they've outgrown all that
And all forgiven each other.
Forgave him,
Didn't they?

He looks at Ella's baby
And pats his daughter's hand.
"You must be so proud,"
He tells her.
And the worst of it is,
She is.

She hugs the baby at visit's end,
Wishing happier lives
For what's left,
Short or long or
As the case may be,
To all of them.

Franklin and the Yellow Kid

Cynthia Warryn Leffner

1.

For a long time, they didn't take him seriously. When he put on the yellow suit and bought the yellow LTD, they thought it was funny. That he was just being a comedian. Not long after that, he bought the military shirts and said he was Hitler. I imagine it was kind of funny before the Hitler thing. After that, they began to get worried.

2.

Years earlier, he fell in love with a stripper. Her name was Marla and she practiced her act using Elvis' gyrations. Marla drove his Mother crazy. Her dresses were always red and always too short. And, she smoked Virginia Slims all the way to the end. According to his Mother, Marla wasn't good enough for her son. After all, they had the money to afford real Coca-Cola and get their clothes tailored. All the kids had music lessons and regular dental appointments. But Franklin didn't seem to care about that. He wanted to show his Mother he didn't need her anymore. Then, Marla shot herself and things started to get weird.

3.

After that, Franklin started asking everyone to call him Rhett. He slicked his dark hair back and darkened his eyebrows with sable hair-dye. He spent hours in the mirror practicing Gable's sardonic look. No one paid much attention. Franklin was always hamming it up. They actually looked forward to *who* he would be when they saw him. Of course, his Mother wasn't telling anyone what he was like at home. The days of dark

melancholy. The weekends he sat all day in the movie theater, obsessed with picking his new persona.

4.

She must have been glad to get rid of him. Sent him packing to St. Louis, with a new white suit and $30 in his pocket. That is when he met Mary Kate. She was *his* Scarlet, he said, laughing, raising one dark eyebrow and puffing on a Dutch Master cigar. Odd, how I recall the exact way he said the word cigar, like two separate words, *see gar.*

5.

There really was no Franklin, Mary says bemused, absently fingering her cheek where Franklin's ring left a puckered scar one violent night. *I never really did know him; I don't think anyone did. He sure paced a lot though. I remember that.*

6.

Now, when I think of him, I imagine him dead. I imagine him at peace. I almost wish it because I still see him sometimes. He drives down the road in a beat-up Cadillac, selling real estate. He reminds me of a person who has somehow survived a terrible accident and should be on life-support. Just a vegetable with no discernible, conscious thought. Some days he is a tomato or Rhett or a carrot or Wallace Berry or a potato or Richard Nixon. He is never a person. I know this because I stopped him one day on his way to the post office and I said, *"Hello Dad, how are you?"* All he said was, *"Quite well, Scarlet my dear;"* his distant eyes focused on some big movie screen only he could see.

Hot Water

Kirk Nesset

Rosie leaned between the Coke-maker and plastic pie rack. Priss, she called to her workmate. Priscilla looked up from her newspaper. Bugs caressed the tall windows—moths, gnats, kissing bugs, neon green beetles. The men shuffled in. The bearded one, Slightly, and the friend, pink-nosed and -cheeked, sarcastic face, the one he called Gary.

Coffee? she asked; headshakes. Beer. She uncapped two bottles, set them down on the counter.

Hot springers these were. Here to soak their shapely butts in Hot Creek, its steaming tributaries—many did. Well, not that many. The place appeared in select guidebooks only, appealed to the dire hot water set, true heat-pilgrims; most thought it too iffy.

Here for the water? said Rosie.

Yep, they both said. Checking out her ketchup stains, her girth. Rosie was large. Large was okay in this town.

Miss Priss moved across from her booth, aproned also, stained also, sighing—she too was large—eyeballing the asses in passing. She navigated past Rosie, the pie rack. Blackberry, salmonberry, rhubarb, chocolate cream, apple; the choices inviting, cut or uncut. She tipped her head toward the parking lot.

Whose RV? she asked, and winked.

Mine, said Mike Slightly.

She winked at the other one, the one called Gary.

You boys homosecutives?

Rosie laughed. The men glanced at each other. Too unkempt they looked to be fruity. The shorter one, Slightly, had a forehead like no other she'd seen. Cranium like that, a man had to be smart. Did calculus, thought about tax laws,

the cosmos and things. She'd rub her right breast on a forehead like that. Pour half and half onto his fuzzy chest, smooth it in. She liked her men hairy.

People die in this creek, she said.

Boil to death, said Miss Priss.

We heard, the one called Gary remarked, appearing ironic, or constipated, if downright good-looking. We're careful, he said.

Slightly, the short one, the forehead, said, What is all this, turning, indicating the street. The congestion, he meant: pickups cruising 5th to Pinecone and back, foot traffic on sidewalks, people lining lawns and driveways along the drag on chaise lounges, waving, shouting at whoever went by.

It's Friday, said Rosie.

Weather's nice, Miss Priss said, winking.

The men turned, stared out the windows again. The cruisers, mainly, were oldsters; young folks in this town moved away. Zip Johnson revved his classic convertible Mustang at the stoplight, bald head aglow. At his bumper—pushing 70 also—Dave Dixon gunned his newly cherried-out Pinto, arm dangling, stereo cranked; Dave Gum sat with Mildred, his wife, in their Ranger, behind. Locals milled on the sidewalk, gesticulating. Whoops, wild-boar hollers. Somebody was singing—the song had a barbershop sound.

When Rosie arrived a decade, no, twelve years ago, she'd wondered at this, summers especially. Fine, tests had been done on the water. Some said high potassium and bromide could and had done things to people. Most didn't care. Volcanic activity and minerals were natural. The mining ended here early century, say what they might about leeching. So the fish still hadn't come back; so tadpoles wriggled onto dry land now and then, legless, miscalculating frog-time. So what? Better this than Spokane, Rosie's old city, all clotted streets and winos and knifings, nobody talking, no eyes interacting.

You want food with your beverage? Miss Priss asked the men.

Slightly opened his menu. The one called Gary opened his to find his blank, the girls hadn't stuck the sheets in the plastic. Rosie pulled out another. Somebody yodeled outside. A june bug clunked the window. She set silver and napkins on the counter, water glasses. Then poured, tilting the pitcher.

California? she asked—half the skin-scalders coming through were from there. Arizona, Mike Slightly said. The one called Gary finished his beer. Priss slid a full one alongside the empty, ready to swallow him whole. Slightly finished his, took up a fresh one. They didn't want food.

Priss here's lived here forever, said Rosie.

Hometown girl, Miss Priss confided.

Oh, the men said.

She knows what's what here.

Fucking A I do, said Priss, nudging the counter. You at the campgrounds tonight?

A pickup peeled off at the stoplight. They were, they told her.

Don't answer your door in the morning. They'll be knocking.

Who will, said Gary.

Christians, Priss said, whispering almost, leaning toward him. They're into it here. Anything to save heathen ass.

Conrad from the bank walked by in his bumblebee costume, smiling like he'd swallowed an auto parts store. Priss poured water for herself, drank from the glass.

You sure you're not faggots?

The problem with Christ, Rosie began—pushing things toward the more or less intellectual—is Christ never laughed.

Laughing, Priss said, That's what they say.

Mike Slightly affected a cough. He could have been Christian himself, unkempt or not. Hair tufted up from his collar, under the cuffs; his beard split two ways, like the tail of a fish. He exchanged glances with his friend, gulping his Bud. They'd be gone in minutes, it was obvious now. Priss noticed too, wiping the salt shakers—Rosie could see her gearing up for a biggie. Finally she spoke.

Prissy's tip of the week, she announced, arms crossed, in front of the men. Ready to hear it?

Sure, the men said.

A few seconds passed. Don't lie, she said slowly. Don't sneak. Don't judge anyone. Keep your ass out of hot water. And you, she said to Mike Slightly—whispering again, pointing, leaning across, an inch from his face—you watch it. The soul takes any chance it can get to slip out of the body. Let it go one too many times, that's it. Gone. You hear me?

I hear you, said Slightly.

Then they were gone, out the door and in the RV, snailing north on the highway, off to parboil like the rest of the world. Priss cut pie for herself, poured coffee, moved across to her booth. Rose wiped the counter, vaguely unsettled, though humming.

Later, Old Racker—author of *How To Be a More Talkative Lover*, self-published—pulled in in his van with his thermos of tea and silver Old Testament beard; he parked where the RV had been. His van was metal-flake blue, iridescent, blue as the dust of the universe, raked up in back. He flung his double doors open, stereo blaring, gnome-leapt to the pavement and danced, chin, hips and elbows wagging at Rosie, aflame with rock music.

Rosie paused, sighed, surrendered at last. She flowed to the doorway, to the gnat-covered glass, and let herself sway. Miss Priss looked up from her paper, watched for a moment, laughed, made a lewd comment, all the while chewing.

In a month the snow would start flying. Down it would sift on the town, on the mountain, the silent shuddering pines, freezing the creek, all but the hot spots, drifting, piling up white, not reddened by blood as in Kirkland, Cleveland, Beersheba. The town would grow still. But for now it was summer, Friday, the weather was nice. Rosie swayed, indulging the ritual, unfurling, old Racker flailing like Adam, creaky, his overalls gold and maroon, forehead all furrows atop the gyroscope body.

Vanity

Kelly Lee

I love those curves
Not the fleshy or fatty
more celebrated ones,
but the smoother lines
of bones; harder, cleaner:
The clavicle's hollows
The small of back
Instep
Nape of neck
    that spot right
    where the wisps of hair end
    where you shiver when the wind blows too cold
    where strange men in alleys can
    grab with fingers and thumb
    where a lover can fit his hand to its slow arc
And that place where the shoulder curves up
towards the neck
when you look to one side. Or the line
of hips. to waist. to ribs,
    the inward lilt
    and then the sweet lift upwards
    of skin stretched taut
    against bone
The taper of a forearm
into a thin spare wrist
splaying out into fingers,
these curves heavy
with intimations of deftness
and pleasure.

Newton's 3rd

Kelly Lee

I want an algorithmical relationship.
I want to put equal signs
between the standing ones
of people.
I want if-thens
In every sentence
What I mean is—
if I said I loved you,
then would you balance
our equation?
It's not a request, really.
It's the law.
For instance,
take the law of gravity.
We all fall.
Newton said that.
He also said
That I could push you, and naturally
you'd push back, but
if I pulled,
then you'd meet me halfway.
It was perfect back then.
Newton was a genius.
Then that lunatic, whatsisname—with the crazy hair
Ruined it all.
Does anyone give a rat's ass
that $E=MC^2$?
Does anyone care that my energy fades
when your light speeds away, or that I'm left
with memories of our special relativity
And the great empty spaces of zeros

A Little More Time

Ryan Senaga

Bryan Chong came out of the bathroom of a room in an Anaheim motel, the Castle Inn. He wore only a towel around his waist. He took off the towel and began drying his hair. A bright red, green and yellow Chinese dragon was emblazoned on his left bicep, snaking up the round arm muscles and onto his shoulder.

"Put some clothes on," Karen said. "The fucking window's open."

"Who cares?" Bryan said. "Not like I know anyone here."

Karen began drawing the sun-yellowed drapes closed. "I don't know why I bother. You obviously don't give a shit who sees you naked anyway."

Bryan sat down on the edge of the bed and stared at her. Karen Nakagawa was mixed, Japanese and Chinese. She wasn't nearly as tall as Bryan, and she was still slender even though she stopped going to the gym with him months ago. He wiped his hair with the towel.

"What?" Karen asked. "Am I wrong?"

Bryan shook his head. "Come on already . . ."

"What?"

"Nevermind."

Karen sat down at the desk and chair in front of the yellow drapes and lit a cigarette. "Why didn't we just cancel this trip? We should've just canceled it."

Bryan tossed the towel towards the bed's headboard. "So what den? You wanna just go home? Let's just fucken pack up now if you're gonna be like this."

Karen exhaled smoke. "Don't go acting like I'm the one that ruined this trip. In fact, the trip isn't the only thing that's ruined."

"Why you gotta be like this? I told you I was sorry."

"How am I supposed to trust you? I don't even feel comfortable around you."

"Why you gotta be like this?" he asked again. "What you want me to do? I can't take it back."

She stared at the yellow blinds and tapped her cigarette in the ashtray. "Do you still think about her?"

"No."

Karen turned her head and stared at him.

"I'm not lying to you," he said.

She continued to stare at him.

Bryan got up from the bed, took one of Karen's Bensen and Hedges and lit it. He exhaled and sat back down on the bed.

"I thought we were just gonna try and enjoy this trip," he said.

"I can't stop thinking about it. Why did you do this?"

Bryan went to the bathroom and grabbed an ashtray. Back on the bed, he held it in his hand and flicked ash into it as he exhaled smoke. "I thought we talked about this before we left the island."

"Did you expect me to bring it up on the plane?"

"Come on already . . ."

"It's not like I'm the one that did something wrong." She stabbed out her cigarette in her ashtray. "Don't try and act like I'm causing trouble 'cause you're the one that started this. We wouldn't be talking about this if you didn't do it."

"So what do you want me to do? I can't take it back already. What do you fucken want me to do? We agreed that we'd do this trip. Come on. . . . Let's just try and have fun together."

"What's going on between us, Bryan?"

He inhaled off the cigarette and blew smoke. "We said we were still gonna try, right?"

"Well I'm having a hard time trying." Karen got some clothes out of the suitcase on the bed next to the one Bryan was sitting on. "The park closes at midnight. That'll give us about five hours. Get dressed. We should go soon."

"'Kay," he said.

Karen took her clothes into the bathroom and shut the door.

Bryan and Karen stood in line for the Pirates of the Caribbean. Since school had started the previous week, Disneyland wasn't very crowded but the line still moved slowly. It was a hot night and Bryan wore a Billabong tank top and denim shorts. Karen wore a fitted yellow tee and white Bongos.

"The air is different here, yeah?" Bryan said.

"It's a drier heat." She turned and looked across the park at Tom Sawyer's Island, its green forest area lit up with torches and a large white steamboat passing in front of it. "She took those pictures of you by that stream, right? The one we used to go hiking at, by Nuuanu?"

"Yeah."

"So you guys went hiking?"

"Yeah."

"How many times did you take her hiking?"

"Just once."

The line moved into the dark entrance of the ride. A musty chlorine smell mixed with the air-conditioned air as a boatload of people bumped past.

"You notice Disneyland has a smell?" Bryan asked.

"Yeah," Karen said, nodding. "I almost forgot about it. It's suddenly really familiar."

"Yeah," he said.

They moved forward a little more and stood at the gates, waiting to get on one of the boats. In the gates next to them were a bunch of laughing teenaged haole boys, at least six years younger than Bryan and Karen. Each of them was dressed with ripped jeans, lots of piercings, and black T-shirts. They swore and pushed at each other before laughing and starting to push and swear all over again.

Bryan stared at them. "Fucken skater punks."

"Stop it," Karen said. "Stop giving them stink eye. We're in Disneyland for God's sake. Don't go starting something."

Bryan shook his head and kept staring.

"God," Karen said, looking around at the people in line. "Sometimes I think I'm the only Asian in this place."

"It's not that bad," Bryan said.

"Look around. I'm the only one."

"What about me?"

"You're hapa. People can't tell as much. They probably think you're Mexican."

Bryan turned to her and smiled slightly. "Ho, so that's how it is."

"You know what I mean."

"Come on," he said, leaning in close to her face. "We go on the riiide, *esse*."

"Stop it," Karen said, tilting her head and pushing him away. "How old were you when you first came here?"

"I think I was ten or something."

She nodded. "Me too. It seemed so much bigger back then."

"Still better than Disney Store, right?"

"Yeah," she said and gave a small smile.

The boat in front of their gates finally unloaded its passengers, and Bryan and Karen got into the back row. The teenagers occupied the front rows. As the boat slowly took off, the teenagers raised their arms in *V*'s and whooped and yelled.

"Fucking idiots," Bryan said.

"Knock it off," Karen said to him.

As the boat entered the darkness of the ride, they passed a candle-lit restaurant set up on the edge of the water. Diners ate as white-shirted waiters moved in the low, orange light.

"Wow," Karen said. "That's pretty neat. Getting to eat in a ride?"

Bryan nodded. "Pretty trippy, yeah? You wanna eat there tonight?"

"No. . . . It's probably too expensive."

"So what? We're on vacation. Not like we can come back next week."

Before Karen could say anything, one of the boys up front, dark-haired with a silver ball-stud poking out beneath his lower lip, began yelling at the people eating in the restaurant.

"Hey!" the kid yelled. "We're hungry, man. Throw us food!"

His friends laughed and they all began high-fiving each other.

Bryan began staring at them again.

They passed a swamp scene with fireflies and a rotting wooden cabin before slowly going up a steep incline and dropping suddenly. Water splashed everyone in the boat and the kids in front began yelling again.

"I wish they would just fucken shut up," Bryan said.

"Just knock it off," Karen said. "It doesn't seem real crowded here. Why don't we just ride this again after?"

The ride went on, moving past gothic scenes of pirate skeletons lying in glittering jewels, shipwrecked ocean vessels in thunder and lightning, animatronic human pirates pillaging a village, and cannons firing from a pirate ship with water splashing all around their boat. Bryan and Karen were silent throughout as the kids up front hollered the whole way.

Towards the end of the ride, another boat filled with people came into view. Bryan and Karen's boat bumped it and stopped in front of a prison scene. Three mechanical pirates tried to get a mechanical dog to bring them the keys to their cell.

The boy with the pierced lower lip yelled, "Traffic jam!"

The other boat seemed to be waiting for yet another boat in front of it to start moving. The boy got up and jumped onto the edge of the ledge near the prison cage.

"Whoo-hoo!" he yelled as his friends cheered. He walked up to the pirates in the jail cell, put his arm around one of them, and smiled goofily as his friends egged him on.

The ride started to move again and the boy swore loudly and jumped back into the boat, jostling the vessel and splashing water on Bryan. Bryan stood up as the boy sat down. The ride only moved a few yards before stopping like the other boat.

"You fuckah!" Bryan yelled.

"Bryan," Karen said, pulling at his arm.

"Dis fuckah's pissing me off," Bryan said, staring at the boy.

"Dude," the boy said, turning around at Bryan. "Just chill, okay?"

"Fuck you," Bryan said.

"Bryan, knock it off already."

"Dude, I'm sorry all right?"

"Fuck you. You like throw? We go— Right now."

"Hey, sorry, all right?"

"Come on! Let's go."

"Bryan."

"Come on, man. I was just messing around."

"You tink you hot shit? Come on."

"Bryan!" Karen yelled. "Sit down already!"

Bryan and Karen were seated at a candle-lit table in the Blue Bayou restaurant, overlooking the pseudo-swamp area of the Pirates of the Caribbean. Mixed with the hushed sounds of clinking dinnerware, diners talking, and waiters bustling, was the soft sound of slapping water as boats with occupants drifted by on their way into the ride.

Karen stared at the menu.

"What you gonna get?" Bryan asked.

She shrugged and continued staring at the menu.

Bryan stared at his for a little while more. "I'm gonna try the crab cakes."

A waiter wearing a white shirt and bow tie appeared and asked if they were ready to order. Karen didn't look up from her menu.

"We need more time," Bryan said.

The waiter left.

"You got a cigarette?" Bryan asked.

"You can't smoke in here," Karen said from behind the menu.

"You still pissed? You are, yeah?"

"What do you think?"

"Aww come on already. That fucker pissed me off."

She put her menu down. "What the hell is wrong with you these days?"

"Nothing. The fucker just pissed me off."

"Quit blaming the 'fucker' from the ride. You got some serious problems."

Bryan ran a hand through his hair. "Fuck, I'm sorry, all right?"

Karen stared at him. "Why did you do it?"

"I told you, the fuck— The guy pissed me off."

"That's not what I'm talking about."

Bryan sipped his water. "I don't know."

"Did you think she was pretty?"

"Yeah." He looked at her.

Karen stared at him.

"You're pretty when you smile," he said. "You haven't smiled for a real long time."

"Are you saying this is my fault?"

"Why it gotta be somebody's fault?"

"This is not my fault," she said. "This is your fault."

"But it's true. You never want to do anything already. You almost canceled this trip even."

"Do you blame me?"

"I mean, before you found out."

"Hey," she said. "I fucking work, alright? I went to school for a real long time and worked real fucking hard to get this job. I can't go having fun all the time like you."

"I work too."

"Your work is totally different from mine."

"So you're saying my job's easier?"

"Don't try to turn this around, Bryan."

"I'm not doing that. I was just saying, I get tired too but I still. . . . You know?"

Karen shook her head and picked up her menu again.

"So what den?" Bryan asked.

"What?" she said, putting down her menu.

"I don't know." He shook his head. "Nevermind."

The waiter came and asked if they were ready and Karen told him that she was. They ordered dinner and spent the meal watching the boats go by with the faint sound of crickets playing on the hidden speakers somewhere.

When the check came, Bryan took out his wallet and began counting bills.

"Don't," Karen said, digging into her purse. "I'm just gonna put it on my card."

"I thought you said you wanted to stop charging stuff."

"I just want to leave already."

"Hey," Bryan said.

Karen kept sifting through her purse.

"Hey," he said. He reached over the table and touched her arm.

She stopped and looked up at him.

"I'm sorry," he said. "Okay?"

She looked at him a bit longer and finally nodded.

"You want to go on the ride again?" he asked.

She nodded. "Okay."

It was almost an hour to closing and the crowds were dying down in the park. Pirates of the Caribbean was practically empty. Bryan and Karen got to sit in the first row of the boat with only an elderly haole couple behind them. The man's wife was wearing a puffy pink windbreaker and he wore a yellow fabric fisherman's cap. He had a camera around his neck and the couple held hands as they sat down in the boat.

"First time in Disneyland?" the man asked Bryan and Karen. His wife smiled at them.

"No," Karen said, turning around. "Our second. We both came a long time ago."

His wife leaned forward. "It's still neat, huh?"

"Yeah," Karen said, smiling. "It is."

"Stop it," Bryan said to Karen. "You're smiling."

"Shut up," she said.

The ride started, and they passed the restaurant again and the house on the edge of the bayou swamp.

Karen gently tapped Bryan's arm and pointed at the house. "Did you notice the fireflies over there?"

"Yeah," he said, nodding. "Trippy, yeah?"

The ride went on, except this time, the occupants in the boat were much quieter. They came up to the scenes of skeleton pirates again, slowing around a skeleton lying in a gold-sheeted bed with jewels and cobwebs. Bryan looked at it and the rock walls that nudged the boat on its course.

"You ever thought about how old this ride is?" he asked Karen.

"I don't know," she said.

"I mean, like Indiana Jones, Haunted House. All those have, you know, those safety bars and seat belts and that kinda stuff. This one . . . Small World maybe. . . . Those don't have anything strapping you down."

"True," Karen said.

The boat slowly started to pass a shipwrecked vessel in the storm with a skeleton trying to navigate.

"Let's get off."

"What?"

"Hurry up," Bryan said, looking at the rock walls slowly going by. "This is probably the best ground footing."

Bryan grabbed her hand and stood up, pulling her with him.

"What are you doing, Bryan?"

"I want to see what it looks like up close."

The couple behind them stared in confusion as Bryan hopped onto the ledge. He supported Karen by the arm as he helped pull her off the boat.

"What the hell are you doing, Bryan?"

"Just take a quick hop," he said to her. "Just like when we were hiking by the big rocks by the stream."

The elderly man cleared his throat. "You should probably stay on the ride."

"Don't worry," Bryan said, as he helped Karen balance

on the ledge. "We'll catch another boat back."

Karen stared at Bryan, her mouth slightly open. "What is wrong with you?"

Bryan waved to the elderly couple as the boat drifted by.

"Let's look around," he said.

They walked by the old, dusty bed with the fragile, threadbare sheets, the plastic skeletons and glass jewels scattered everywhere.

"I don't believe we're doing this," Karen said, looking behind her. "We are gonna get so busted."

"No worry," Bryan said. "They just going tell us to get out or something."

"Let's just get on the next boat, Bryan!"

"We still got time."

They saw the sprinkler system dousing the shipwreck with water and the strobe light bulbs that created the storm. There was a door, painted gray to match the rock walls, off to the side of the ship. Bryan put his finger to his lips and Karen just shook her head. He quietly opened it and they found themselves in a dimly lit control room, with panels of switchboards that worked the lighting and the motion effects in the area.

"So that's how it all works," Bryan said.

In the center of the room was a folding linoleum table with a chair, a black tin lunch box, and a small portable radio. Bryan flicked on the radio and Anita Baker's "Sweet Love" played out of it.

"Hey," Bryan said. "That's the song from Michelle and Harry's wedding, right?"

"Yeah," Karen said. "That was the first time we slow danced."

Bryan put her arms around his neck and his arms around her waist. "At least I never step on your feet."

"I don't believe this," she said as they began to slow dance.

He kissed her softly on the lips.

"Bryan," she said, trying to pull away. "We better go. We gotta find a boat. Hell, we're gonna get caught."

He kissed her again. "We still got a little more time."

Like a Diner

Rosemarie Caruso

If Langston Hughes can say that
life is like a broken-winged bird,
then I can say that
marriage is like a diner.

That said,
here's the thing
I think,
the thing that people mean
when they talk about marriage
I think,
in that way they do
when the men slap each other
on the back and say,
ain't it the truth,
and the women,
slide out of the booth,
roll their eyes
and say, *they're hopeless*,
and everybody laughs
in that way they laugh
when couples
get up together
after the check's been paid.

This is what I think they mean,
when they talk about marriage
I think—
that one day,
you decide

for no particular reason
to take a long drive
and so for a long time
you drive and talk
and point out the scenery
and then you arrive,

a little hungry,
at the counter of a roadside diner,
and you decide to stop
for no particular reason
except you're tired of looking around,
and the food's good,
and you like the way he spins around
on the stool while you're finishing
your burger
so you decide to stay for a while,
just to see what it's like.

Seasons pass
and there you are,
still twirling around on the counter stools,
watching people not talk,
or watching them order
and talking about the road,
and you yourself are getting
kind of an urge to go,
when you remember
you bought the place.

Children appear
and grow quickly
on homemade bread pudding—
chef's best—
and today's special.

Someday, when you least expect it,

someone leaves a magazine
on the counter
when you're taking a cigarette break,
even though you quit smoking long ago,
but you yell to your husband,
cigarette break (an old joke)
and you open it and it's of a girl
on her knees, naked
head tossed back,
holding her breasts,
and you're stabbed with memory
of long ago
when your stomach was flat,
and you could move your legs like so
without getting a crick
and everything you did was done
as if somebody were watching you,
and it's so sweet and sad a longing
to be there again
when the door jingles,
(as it always does during thoughts like this)
to let you know
customers have arrived,
the daily specials have to be changed
and a new dish washer hired.

Now, here's the thing
I think,
the thing that people mean
when they talk about marriage
I think—
that on rainy days you gaze out the window
and wonder where all those cars are going
and why you're stuck here,
and how you're tired of the same old views
and how maybe it's time you joined
the lonely-looking bus passengers

and go somewhere where you can
try getting in a look at yourself
without having to yell
over the crashing dishes
or do it
between breaking in a new bus boy
(again)
or saying for the fifty-millionth time
will that be for here or to go,
and then resolved to buy a ticket
out to somewhere
you hear him make a crack to the cook
and all the waitresses laugh
and the morning smells of burnt toast
and coffee
and you know you're in deeper
than you even knew you were,
and you ring up another customer
and say, have a nice day,
and know that you
really
really
mean it.

Johnny The Baptist

Judith L. Kendig

"Well, Johnny, it looks like a real good day for a baptiz'n, don't it?"

"Yessir," I said, although I kept my eyes glued to the ground.

I was nine years old and about to be baptized by my maternal grandfather, Luther Casteel. Not in Cross Creek Independent Baptist Church where my grandfather preached, but in the Clinch River. It was 1959, and few country Baptist churches had baptisteries inside. Even though my friends and I swam in the river, being dunked in it to be made a Christian was going to be a whole new experience for me. And I was scared to death. Especially after Harley Quillen told me the story of some girl he heard about who had been drowned on purpose by her own granddaddy while he was baptizing her because he claimed he looked into her eyes and saw the Devil.

"And they found her," claimed Harley, "all tangled up in some bushes on the bottom of the river and her face was all swolled up blue and purple."

"That ain't the truth," I yelled, hoping that I wouldn't throw up in front of Harley.

"Yeah it is," swore Harley. "My daddy knows a guy who knows one of them rescue people who pulled her in the boat. And her eyes was open, too. Just the sockets of course, since the fish had done ate her eyeballs."

Then I saw her, too—in a week's worth of nightmares. I decided, after one particularly rough night of trying to kick her swollen blue and purple face as she tried to catch my feet and pull me under the water, not to let my grandfather get a good look into my eyes when he baptized me. While I was pretty sure he wouldn't see the Devil in me since my mama

was the kindest person I knew and my daddy had been a good soldier killed in Korea right before I was born, I wasn't about to take any chances.

"This is a real big day for you, boy," my grandfather said as we walked. "We're all proud of you. Your granny and me hopes you'll get the call yourself one of these days."

I had heard my grandfather preach many times about "the call" but had not paid too much attention to these sermons unless he used some pretty dramatic examples. My favorite was about Moses and the burning bush, a story which my grandfather made especially exciting:

"Moses was lookin after the flocks of his father-in-law Jethro, and he seen this here bush that looked like it was on fire. He run over to it and saw that yes it was on fire, but the fire never burnt it up. Then he heard the voice of the Lord God Awmighty speakin to him outta that bush. First the Lord told Moses to take off his shoes cause he was on Holy Ground. Then the Lord told Moses that he was bein called to save his people. Moses wasn't too happy bout this since it was such a real big responsibility with Pharaoh in charge and all, and he kept on arguing with the Lord. But the Lord never takes 'no' for an answer when he gives the call. So Moses finally said 'Yessir' and promised to do his best to save his people."

My grandfather's own call was not so dramatic, but the story had always impressed me a lot because the call had come to him on the banks of the Clinch River when he was only eight years old.

"I had just put a nice big fat juicy worm on my hook and had throwed the line in the water when I seen this big old shiny bass chomp down hard on that worm. I was reelin him in and thinkin how good he was gonna taste after my mama fried him up good when I heard this quiet voice, like somebody was whisperin in my ear."

Luther Casteel, do you want to be a fisherman or do you want to be a fisher of men?

"'Oh Lord, make me a fisher of men,'" I answered. "And I was so excited that I dropped my fishin pole, and the last

time I seen it that big old bigmouth bass was pullin it cross the river as fast as a streak of summer lightnin."

I found myself thinking a lot about that story that morning as my grandfather and I walked toward the river. Since my grandfather was only eight years old when his call came, I knew he was expecting my call, if I was to get one, fairly soon. Maybe he, like I, was thinking that it might just happen this morning. My thoughts were suddenly interrupted by the sound of voices close by.

"Looks like we've got ourselves a real crowd, son," remarked my grandfather as we rounded the last bend before the river came into view.

As soon as I saw the crowd I straightened up some. As nervous as I was, I still liked knowing that I was the center of attention. My grandfather tightened his grip on my hand, which hurt a little, but that was okay because my hand didn't shake so much anymore.

"Oh, here they come, Pearl. Don't he look just precious?" cried my Aunt Dot. "Janice, where did you get that darlin outfit?"

My grandmother, Pearl, and my mother, Janice, stood with my mother's sister at the edge of a crowd of about twenty-five of my grandfather's church members. When my eyes met my mother's, she smiled and winked at me, and I felt a little bit better. She had made my white cotton shirt and pants herself, and my grandparents had bought me my first long tie—a handpainted one mostly black like my belt and Sunday shoes, with some flecks of light blue, grey, and white which reminded me of a summer sky. I didn't really want to get these clothes—the nicest I had ever had—wet, but granddaddy had insisted: "Johnny, when you're about to become His disciple, Jesus expects you to wear your best."

I hoped he thought I would become a good disciple like James or Matthew. If he had any thoughts about me ending up like Judas, I was as good as drowned! I had known my grandfather's opinion of Judas for as long as I could remember,

mainly because of a painting which hung in my grandparents' living room. It was the most beautiful painting I had ever seen—the Last Supper painted in vivid colors on soft black velvet. Granddaddy had hung a brass lamp over it so that it would show up better at night. He used to turn on that lamp and point out the disciples one by one. When he came to Judas he got a strange look on his face, a kind of anger mixed with sadness.

"He betrayed our Lord, Johnny," he would say in his quiet voice. "He was of the Devil, son."

Thoughts of the Devil jumped back into my mind just as I noticed Harley and my other best friends, Wayne and James Overby, standing right next to the river, snickering at my grownup outfit. None of them had been baptized yet; my grandfather said they weren't ready. I thought we were pretty much all the same, none of us any meaner than the others, except that the three of them did use some words that I'd never said out loud—yet. But if granddaddy thought I was ready then I must have been ready. I never argued with my grandfather and always did just what he told me to do.

When we reached the water's edge, my grandfather loosened his grip on my hand and started to pray out loud: "Lord, we just thank you for this beautiful day. We thank you for these friends and neighbors and all these others who've come out here today. And we thank you most of all for Johnny who's about to start his journey on the King's Highway. Forgive his sins and all of ours . . ."

I knew my grandfather always closed his eyes when he prayed, so I took this opportunity to look around. It *was* a beautiful day. The sky was a brilliant, cloudless blue. The river was so calm and so clear that it was hard to tell where the river ended and the mountains began. Tall, thick trees stood in small groups all along the river bank. The bright July sun was trying its best to find an open spot through the branches of one particularly dense group of trees.

When I heard my grandfather's prayer winding down, I quickly closed my eyes.

". . . And bless us all and keep us all. In Jesus name, Amen."

I bowed my head just as if I had been praying all along.

"You ready, son?" asked my grandfather.

"Yessir," I said, hoping that he wouldn't notice my voice was shaking worse than my hands and knees and that he wouldn't look into my eyes.

"Well, come on in here then. Take this hanky, put it on your mouth and nose, and hold it with both hands. And keep them eyes closed."

My grandfather and I walked into the river until the water reached my chest. I closed my eyes so tight that they hurt, and I held onto that handkerchief as if it were a life preserver. I didn't want the cold river water rushing into my mouth and up my nose when my grandfather put me under. I can still remember the strength of my grandfather's big hands, one covering my small ones and the other one at the base of my neck and the initial shocking sensation of cold river water rushing all over me as he bent me backwards into the water. All of a sudden I had the same urge to pee as I did every time I jumped into the river. But before I could even think about peeing, I felt my grandfather gently pushing my body underwater and saying things I could only half hear about the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost. People on the bank were shouting "Amen" and "Hallelujah" and "Praise God" and "Thank you, Jesus." Some even applauded when he finally stood me on my feet. I was so glad to be upright again that I hardly noticed that the colors of my brand new tie were running all over my new white clothes.

Afterwards we all went to my grandparents' house where some more people showed up for a big picnic in my honor. Lots of people I didn't know came by to shake my hand or to give me a hug. Some even brought presents. My grandparents gave me a beautiful new Bible with my full name—John Luther Carter—stamped in gold on its black leather cover. My mother gave me a small wooden cross, hand carved by my father and carried with him in Korea, and my Aunt Dot gave me a heavy white

ceramic cross lamp decorated with green leaves, blue flowers, and some Biblical references, like John 3:16, in black script.

"I made this myself, Johnny, in Miss Laura Davis's ceramic class over at the high school last winter. It's to light your way in the dark of night. Be sure to keep it plugged in right beside your bed so you can turn it on the minute you get scared in the dark. And guess what, honey, if the electricity goes out, the cross glows in the dark! Don't never forget, Johnny, that you can always count on the cross."

I started feeling pretty good about being baptized, even though I hadn't gotten my call that day. I also felt pretty good getting out of my wet clothes and into my play clothes. It was the best picnic of my life because all my most favorite foods were served: golden brown fried chicken, potato salad with sweet pickle relish, fresh green beans boiled with smoked ham hock, buttered corn on the cob, crispy fried okra, fresh tomatoes, deviled eggs (which Harley called egg devils and refused to eat), cucumber pickles, pickled beets, homemade biscuits and cornbread, watermelon, peach cobbler, blackberry cobbler, strawberry shortcake, chocolate cake, and homemade vanilla ice cream (which my grandmother actually let me help churn). It was obvious to me that all these people thought I had done something great. Some even asked me about my call. I just smiled at them like I thought it wouldn't be too long now. I was really enjoying all this attention. Even Harley, Wayne, and James treated me differently. It was the only time the four of us were together at my grandparents that we didn't end up in the barn hiding from each other in the hayloft, chasing the chickens, or bothering the horses.

Since it seemed really important to my grandparents, I started expecting my call to come any day. I found myself hoping that the Lord would whisper in my ear while I was fishing so I could get my call exactly like my grandfather did. But Harley, James, and Wayne were always around, making so much noise that the Lord would have had to use a loudspeaker to be heard over them. Every time they got quiet

or wandered off somewhere, I would cock my ears, first one, then the other, up toward Heaven. At first they didn't notice; then one day I felt Harley staring at me.

"Exactly what are you doin, Johnny?" he demanded to know. "You tryin to tan your eardrums or what?"

"You best be careful. Some bird's gonna shit in your ears!" said James.

"Yeah," chimed in Wayne. "Then when somebody asks you a question, you can just say, 'I can't hear you for shit!'"

Harley and James thought that was the funniest thing they'd ever heard. All three of them rolled around on the river bank laughing like that silly bunch of girls in our Sunday School class. I was too embarrassed to laugh, even though I thought it was probably the funniest thing Wayne had ever said.

I became obsessed about my call. Since the Lord didn't seem to be in as big a hurry as I was, I decided to help him out. I thought about Moses and his burning bush and wondered if maybe the Lord needed some kind of signal from me that I was ready to be called. Maybe if I prayed real hard and set fire to a bush myself, I could get his attention. I found a perfect small bush in the woods behind my grandfather's house. I had taken a couple of my grandmother's big wooden kitchen matches, which I was never supposed to touch, to start the fire. I went barefoot all summer so I didn't have to take off my shoes; I did, however, wipe off some of the dirt before I started to pray as sincerely as I knew how:

"Lord God Awmighty. It's me, Johnny Carter. I'm here waitin for my call. When you see the burnin bush, Lord, it means I'm ready to talk to you. Okay? Thank you, Jesus. And Amen."

Then I struck one of the matches on a nearby rock. August had been a little dryer than usual, so the bush was engulfed in flames in no time. It was scary at first because the bush actually looked like it was burning up. But my plan had worked: I could hear the Lord yelling my name:

"Johnny? Johnny?? JOHNNY!! JOHNEEEEEE!!!!"

I fell to my knees and yelled back, "Yeah, Lord, I hear you!"

The Lord's voice suddenly took on a familiar tone. I looked around and saw my grandfather running toward the bush with a big bucket of water in each hand and a look of panic on his face. He quickly doused the fire, then turned his full attention on me.

"What in the name of God are you up to, boy? Your mama and your granny and me's all told you never to play with fire. You could've burned yourself and this whole farm up. What was you thinkin of? Answer me, boy."

"I dunno, Granddaddy. I'm sorry," was all I could say.

"Well, you oughta be. You done scared the life outta me. I oughta whip you good for this, but I think I'll just let your mama take care of you."

"Yessir," I said meekly. I let him take me by the hand and lead me to my house. My mother was very upset with me and gave me a long lecture during which she cried a lot. I would have preferred a spanking to the disappointment I saw in her face. She sent me to bed early that night after I promised her that I would never, never touch matches again. Her face was still wet when she kissed me goodnight.

As I lay there wide awake, partly because of guilt and partly because it was not yet dark enough to go to sleep, I planned what I was going to do to get the Lord to talk to me. I thought about all those Bible heroes, like Moses and David and Joseph, and what they had done to get noticed. Then I remembered John the Baptist and sat straight up in bed.

"That's it," I thought. "I'll start baptizin people." I had learned at Sunday School and from my grandfather's sermons that although John the Baptist was a preacher, the most important thing he did, the thing he was most remembered for, was baptizing Jesus.

"I can do that. I can learn to be the best baptizer in the whole wide world, even better than John the Baptist," I vowed. The more I thought about it, the more excited I became. Then, right in the middle of my excitement, Aunt Dot's cross lamp turned on all by itself.

"It's a sign! It's my call! God wants me to be a baptizer! Mama, Mama!"

My mother came running into my room. I was tearing around my room like something wild, screaming, "I got it. I got it. I got it." She grabbed me and held me tightly, saying, "Calm down, honey, it's just a bad dream."

"No, Mama. It ain't no bad dream. It ain't even a dream at all. I got my call, Mama, I got my call!" I told her what had happened, and she began to cry all over again. She rocked me back and forth for a long time and then stayed in my room until I went to sleep.

We told my grandparents the next day about my call. They were both thrilled, especially my grandfather who was sure that God meant that I would be preaching too. I supposed that preaching would be a part of it, but mostly I knew God meant for me to be a baptizer. My Aunt Dot nearly fainted when she found out that the Lord had spoken to me through her cross lamp.

While my grandfather began my "preaching" education by giving me weekly scripture passages to memorize and discuss with him, I began my own baptizing education. I took my rubber soldiers and my cousins' dolls and whatever I could get my hands on to the river for my own baptismal services. I ruined all of my stuffed animals and nearly drowned one of granddaddy's cats in the process. My baptismal service was pretty simple; it followed the one my grandfather used when he baptized me: "I baptize you, Miss Shirley Temple (or Mr. Tom Cat or Private Second Class G. I. Joe), in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen."

One day I asked Harley, Wayne, and James if I could practice on one of them. They answered by jumping on me and holding my head under water until I nearly passed out. They made so much fun of me—calling me 'Johnny the Baptist'—that from then on I kept my practice sessions at the river to a minimum.

When the weather got too cold for baptizing at the river, I shocked my mother by volunteering to take a bath every day. I was cleaner than ever and soon owned the most baptized bathtub toys in the whole world. A few years later when I read about Pat Boone baptizing people in his swimming pool I wondered if maybe he had practiced in his bathtub, too.

* * *

By the time I was a junior in high school, I had preached several sermons in my grandfather's church. Although I could probably quote more scripture than anybody my age in all of Scott County, Virginia, I preached mostly about baptism, with special emphasis on John the Baptist. The congregation always described my sermons as "wonderful" and "inspired." The more I preached the more I liked the attention I got, especially from the girls in my Sunday School class who, though they still giggled a lot when I was around, seemed a lot less silly to me.

There was, however, still something important missing in my life. I still wanted to be able to baptize somebody human, so I could show everybody how great a baptizer I could be. My grandfather had let me assist him a few times at the river, but he never let me actually put anybody under the water. I'd stand there watching, with my hands just itching to take over. I begged my grandfather to let me be in charge of a baptism. He just smiled at me and said, "All in good time, son. You ain't quite ready for that yet. God and me will let you know when the time's right."

In the meantime, Floyd Beasley's wife Irma had died, and Floyd wanted to memorialize her in a big way in granddaddy's church. So he offered to give the church its first baptistery. My grandfather wasn't too keen on the idea and got the deacons to put it to a church vote. The baptistery won hands down. Granddaddy didn't like the idea that his pulpit had to be moved from the middle of the chancel to one side every time someone was to be baptized and that the choir benches had to be permanently divided and placed vertically instead of horizontally so that the baptistery would fit next to the back wall.

The baptistery itself was made of the finest Tennessee white marble and measured seven feet long by five feet wide and five feet deep with small marble steps leading into the pool on both sides. It was built into a raised platform so the congregation could see the baptisms. When not in use, the baptistery was covered with a heavy oak lid that matched the pulpit and choir benches.

Elvira Honeycutt, the high school art teacher, was commissioned to paint a religious mural on the church wall right above the baptistery. The church members thought she did a wonderful job with her painting of John the Baptist baptizing Jesus in the River Jordan. Jesus wore a beautiful long white robe which perfectly accented his long reddish-brown hair and blue eyes. John had a beautiful black beard, short black hair, and piercing brown eyes. He was bare to the waist and wore rich animal pelts. I loved the mural, especially since it was plain to me that Miss Honeycutt had used me as a model for John, although I couldn't convince anybody except Janey George, a high school freshman with a major crush on me.

"Oh, Johnny, it does look just like you. He has the same beautiful black hair and brown eyes, except you're even more handsome. Even without a beard. And you're even better lookin than Jesus himself."

I don't know which made me more uncomfortable, her comparing me to Jesus or her standing so close to me. I wondered what it would be like to baptize her.

The day after Thanksgiving, after the baptistery was in place and the mural was dry, my grandfather gave me the best Christmas present ever.

"Johnny, the deacons and me has talked it over, and we think you're ready now to baptize on your own. How would you like to be the first one to use the new pool? Mildred Shetterly and Eddie Dingus want to be baptized on Christmas Day, and you're to be in charge."

"Wow! Sure! Thanks, Granddaddy!" I shouted.

"Just remember, son, that this is a very special occasion for them. Mrs. Dingus has been tryin to get her husband to

accept the Lord ever since they got married, and he finally agreed. Mildred Shetterly's been livin in Bristol for a long time and just came back to take care of her sick mama. Mildred's never been a Baptist, so she ain't never been put under the water. She wants to do this for her mama. Both Eddie and Mildred decided Christmas was just the right time to be baptized. Are you up to baptizin both of them, son?"

"Of course, Granddaddy. I've been waitin for this for a long time."

I knew I had to talk my grandfather into letting my mother make long white robes for Mildred, Eddie, and me to wear. The robes, which would be like the one Jesus wore in the mural, would add just the right touch to my first baptism service. But my grandfather didn't share my enthusiasm.

"Now, Johnny, there just ain't no reason for y'all to have robes. That's just way too fancy for this church. I don't like that idea none at all."

"But Granddaddy," I whined, "it would just look so much better and mean so much more if we all wore robes. Mama says she'll be happy to make them. She knows my size, and she can have Eddie and Mildred come by for measurements. Please, Granddaddy, this is really important to me."

"Son, it's just too cold fer them two to wear them wet robes back home in the cold after the baptiz'n."

"Oh, no, Granddaddy, they can change into them at the church and then back into their other clothes after the service."

"And just where do you plan for them to change?"

This was a very good question, one for which I did not have a ready answer. The church itself was one large room, with no side rooms. The only access to the basement where some Sunday school classes met was from the outside.

"I'll take care of that problem, Granddaddy. You did put me in charge of the service. Please let me do it the way I want to."

"Okay, it's all yours, boy, but you be sure what you're doin is all for the glory of God and not for the glory of Johnny Carter."

"Yessir." And off I went to tell my mother she could start on the robes. She was as excited as I was. My Aunt Dot and my grandmother had promised to get their ladies' circles at the church to help buy the material. Then I went to the hardware store which Harley's father owned and where Harley worked part-time. Mr. Quillen had always helped us with our tree houses and tire swings, and I was sure he would come up with the perfect solution, which he did.

"I think if we just run us a couple of heavy wires from the wall on each side of Miss Honeycutt's picture, down the aisle and attach 'em above the door and then run another wire from left to right above the windows and high in front of the pool, we could hang up some nice white sheets on the wires and make a dressin room on both sides."

"Great!" I said. "Just great. And I'll use Eddie's dressing room to change into my robe, too. This is a real load off my mind, Mr. Quillen, thanks a lot."

I bragged to everybody I saw in the neighborhood and at the high school about how I was going to be in charge of the first baptismal service using our new baptistery, about how robes would be used for the first time, and about how this would be the most wonderful service in the history of my grandfather's church. I invited everybody to be there for the service and for the festivities afterwards. The deacons had rented Sue Widener's Gateway Café for a big church-wide Christmas dinner.

When the schools closed for the holidays, I spent practically every day at the church. Mr. Quillen, Harley, Wayne, James, and I had fixed up the dressing rooms. Granddaddy thought it was a good idea but suggested that we might want to cover the window in each dressing room to give Mildred, Eddie, and me more privacy. Granddaddy's feeling was that "you should always keep your private parts as private as you can."

I called Mildred and Eddie and asked them to come by the church a couple of days before Christmas so I could show them the dressing rooms and explain what the service was going

to be like. My mother had finished all the robes, and Mildred and Eddie had taken theirs home.

Mine hung on my closet door, and I put it on and took it off so many times that my mother threatened to hide it so I wouldn't get it too dirty to wear. I practiced looking pious and holy until I had perfected the perfect expression—turning my eyes toward Heaven at just the right time, an expression guaranteed to bring tears to the eyes of the congregation.

When Mildred and Eddie met Granddaddy and me at the church, she looked very nervous. She told me she was concerned about wearing her robe in the service: "The night I was trying it on for the first time my mother asked me to bring her a glass of water so she could take her medicine. In my haste to get her the water, I spilled the whole glassful all over the front of my robe." Then, blushing, she added, "And the whole front part just clung to my body like a second skin! I just can't let the congregation see me like that. I'd be too embarrassed. I'll have to wear my regular clothes, Johnny."

I nearly panicked; she just had to wear that robe. I looked wildly at my grandfather who, bless his heart, came up with the perfect solution:

"I say you should just baptize Eddie first, even though we usually do the women first, then help Miss Shetterly down the steps and into the pool. After you get her baptized, she can just stay in the pool until I give the benediction. Then we'll just wrap a towel around her shoulders and have some of the church women hep her up to her dressin room."

"What a great idea, Granddaddy!" I said. Mildred agreed and seemed as relieved as I was.

With every problem solved and every important detail taken care of, I spent the rest of the time until Christmas Day practicing, both at the church and in my bedroom in front of the mirror. I was also working on a little surprise to make the service even more dramatic. Nobody knew about this part of the service, except me. I didn't even tell my mother, so she would be as surprised and pleased as everyone else. I couldn't

remember being this excited about Christmas Day since I had stopped believing in Santa Claus.

I was up at dawn on Christmas morning. There was a fresh layer of snow, and as the sun came up over the mountains, the countryside shone as if it had been dusted with diamonds. I hurriedly ate my breakfast, showered, dressed, grabbed my beautiful new robe, my Bible, and my secret surprise, and practically ran to the church. It was nice and warm inside; my grandfather had been in earlier to get the coal furnace going. Several of the ladies had been by a couple of days before to decorate. There was a large, beautifully trimmed Christmas tree in the back, and heavily berried holly branches, red velvet bows, and white candles graced the window sills. Red and green velvet bows were attached to the ends of every pew. A large basket of red poinsettias covered the top of the upright piano.

Everything was perfect. This was to be the most wonderful day of my life. I hurried into the dressing room I was to share with Eddie and changed my clothes. Just as I finished zipping up my robe, I heard someone at the door. My grandfather came in, stomping the snow off his boots as he unwound the heavy wool scarf from his neck. He hung up the scarf and his coat and then turned to look at me.

"Well, Johnny, it looks like a real good day for a baptiz'n, don't it?"

I was instantly nine years old and on my way to the river with him. This time, though, I wasn't scared. Just terribly, terribly excited.

"Yessir. It's gonna be a great day, Granddaddy."

"Just remember, boy, this is all for the glory of the Lord, and don't you be forgettin that."

For a split second I imagined that he was looking into my eyes to see if he could see the Devil in there. About that time the door opened, and Mrs. King, the church pianist for as long as I could remember, came bustling in.

"Oh, I didn't think anybody'd be here. Mornin, Preacher. Mornin, Johnny. This is a really big day for all of us, ain't it? Do y'all care if I practice a bit?" she asked.

"Of course not, Lucille," said my grandfather, rushing over to help her with her coat. Granddaddy sat down on the front pew and read his Bible and prayed silently. I wandered around the church listening to Mrs. King and fussing with the decorations. My grandfather saw how fidgety I was and asked me to light the candles in the windows. Soon people started coming in, and before long the church was so packed that the deacons had to bring in extra chairs from the Nelson Funeral Home just up the street. We sang some beautiful Christmas songs, and my grandfather preached a wonderful sermon that I only half heard. I was sitting in Eddie's dressing room, lost in my own thoughts. As soon as I heard my grandfather talking about the baptistery and how much we all appreciated Brother Beasley's wonderful memorial to his wife, I straightened up and prepared to make my grand entrance.

My grandfather turned his attention to me: "This is a big day for our family. My grandson, Johnny Carter, who got the call to preach a few years ago, will be in charge of our first indoor baptiz'n. Come on out now, Johnny. We're real proud of you, son."

I stepped into view of the congregation in my beautiful robe, holding my Bible high over my head in my right hand. I had seen some evangelist do this on television, and I thought it would be just the right touch. I had asked Mrs. King to play some stirring hymns upon my entrance. As the strains of "O Come, All Ye Faithful" swelled around us, I unzipped my robe and let it fall from my body. Underneath I wore nothing from the waist up. With the help of some fake fur and imitation leather that I had found in my grandmother's attic, I had made myself a John the Baptist outfit just like the one in Miss Honeycutt's mural. The congregation gasped in awe. I looked at my grandmother, my mother, and my Aunt Dot, whose mouths were hanging open. I could swear that my grandfather had that same look on his face that he did when he looked at that picture of Judas. Even the little children who were on their Chirstmas "high"—much of it caused by candy pilfered

from their Christmas stockings when their parents weren't looking—shut right up.

I noticed Janey George, the girl with the crush, looking up at me as if any minute she would fall on her knees and begin kissing my feet. I had the very unchurchly feeling that the kissing probably wouldn't have stopped at my feet, which would have been fine with me. I quickly regained my composure and began the long-awaited baptismal service.

I charged back and forth in front of the congregation, gesturing wildly and shouting the words of John the Baptist: "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Make straight the way of the Lord' as the prophet Isaiah said. Come forth, Eddie Dingus, and be baptized in the name of the Lord!"

Eddie looked pretty shocked when he saw my outfit but climbed down the steps anyway. He was duly baptized with as much drama as anybody had ever seen in the Cross Creek Independent Baptist Church. I sat him on his feet with so much fanfare that he almost went under the water again. Quickly he climbed up the stairs into his private dressing room, accompanied by a few "Amens" and "Praise Gods," and the moving strains of "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing."

Mildred shyly emerged from her dressing room and started down the steps of the baptistery. She took one look at me standing chest-deep in the water, with no visible clothing showing, turned bright red, and started backing away and up the stairs. Eddie had gotten the steps very wet, and Mildred immediately began slipping on them and grabbing frantically in the air. I rushed over to help her just as she caught hold of one of the sheets with enough force to bring down all the wires and all the sheets, leaving poor Eddie standing stark naked in full frontal view of the entire congregation. Some little kid yelled, "Mama, that man's nekkid!" Then I heard my Aunt Dot yell, "Oh, my good Lord," before she fainted in the aisle where she'd moved to get a better look.

By that time Mildred had landed on my back, with one leg on each side of my neck. She was screaming at the top of her lungs and beating me on top of my head as hard as she

could. The entire congregation was on its feet. Somebody managed to grab one of the fallen sheets and wrap it around poor Eddie who was frozen in place with his hands covering his no-longer-private parts. His wife was crying, and his children were hiding their faces in her lap. Mr. Quillen, Harley's dad, grabbed his coat and ran toward Eddie. In his haste, Mr. Quillen knocked over a couple of the window decorations, and the candles caught some greenery on fire. Somebody yelled "Fire," and Aunt Dot, who had come to just enough to understand, yelled, "Get me the hell outta here." In her hurry to leave, she ran over eighty-year-old Beulah Barnes and her eighty-five-year-old sister, Gladys, who were trying their best to get out of their pew. Miss Beulah yelled, "Watch where you're goin, you cusser, you!" Aunt Dot turned around to yell something back at Miss Beulah just in time to dodge a well-aimed walking cane. Aunt Dot took off out the door with Miss Beulah still waving her cane. Folks around her were ducking, and a couple of men fell to the floor and crawled toward the door. Miss Beulah actually hit Mr. Steadman, the high school coach, hard in the stomach before he got her calmed down enough to lower her weapon.

Mr. Quillen threw the coat at Eddie, grabbed a half-empty bucket that my grandfather had used to fill the baptistery, and put out the fire. In the process he doused Mrs. King who had continued to play a medley of joyful Christmas carols, including (and I swear to this) a thinly disguised rendition of "Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer." She screamed, jumped up from the piano, slipped on the wet floor, and fell into the lap of George Collins who was trying desperately to put a snowsuit on his squirming daughter, Carolyn. Mr. Collins and Mrs. King ended up in the floor, leaving little Carolyn sitting on the edge of the pew screaming like she'd been kicked in the head. My mother and grandmother, who had finished helping the Barnes sisters out the door, ran over to see about Carolyn. A lot of people had left, but some lingered to take in all the details of the worst day of my life so that when they told their Methodist, Presbyterian, and Church of God friends and neighbors about

this memorable religious experience, they'd get the facts right. But I think most of them just wanted to hang around to see what my grandfather would do to me.

After Earl French and his son-in-law had gotten a sobbing Mildred off me and into the arms of her also-sobbing mother, I realized that both of them kept turning around to glare at me. I hung my head and started to pray really hard that I'd soon wake up from this nightmare. Since nobody had offered to get me out of the water and since most of my John the Baptist outfit was circling me, I decided to stay put.

Mr. Collins had helped Mrs. King back on the piano bench, and she was playing more carols, though not nearly as joyfully as before. I saw my grandfather at the church door trying his best to shake hands with a congregation bent on escaping. He was yelling as folks ran by, "Merry Christmas," "Thank you for comin," "Tell your Mama hello," "See you over at the Christmas dinner." My mother and grandmother were gone, and I was really hurt that neither of them had come to see if I was all right. But I knew my grandfather had probably sent them on over to the Gateway to welcome the crowd he hoped would still be there.

Then, I heard laughter. I couldn't believe it. Whoever was laughing in my grandfather's church would have to be a bigger sinner than I was. I looked around, but the church looked empty. Then I saw them, climbing up from behind the back pew: Harley, James, and Wayne. They continued laughing as they strutted up the aisle toward me. They soon surrounded the baptistery, and I felt as helpless as I did when we were kids and they ganged up on me.

"Well, Mr. Johnny the Baptist, loved your costume," said Harley.

"Yeah, Johnny, you were great. You should take that show on the stage," said James.

Wayne chimed in with, "Yeah, there's one comin by here any minute and from the looks of your granddaddy, you'd better be on it!" They started laughing harder than ever.

In spite of how bad I felt, they almost had me smiling until I noticed that the front door had just slammed, and my grandfather was stomping snow off his boots and heading our way. And he didn't look as if he had much Christmas spirit left.

"Awright, boys, you better get on outta here."

"Yessir," we said as the three of them began helping me out of the water.

"No, boys, leave him be," my grandfather ordered. "We'll be along directly."

They left without a word or a backward glance. But I could hear them laughing all the way down the street.

I just stood there, half naked, soaking wet, and sick at heart. For a moment, I almost wished my grandfather would hold my head under the water instead of looking at me the way he was. He must have stood there for at least five minutes, with his arms folded, looking me straight in the eye. Then he turned around, picked up a towel, and handed it to me.

"You better get yourself dressed, boy, we got us a dinner to go to."

That afternoon, my grandfather and I had a long talk about the service. We went by to see both Eddie and Mildred. I apologized, and my grandfather promised each one a private baptism service whenever they were ready. They both agreed, but only if he did the baptizing.

President Lamberton Recalls His Air Force

Ian Lamberton

In some deep chamber of my mind
a warning light was flashing:
those paper airplanes
Johnny and his friend were making,
that stack of scratch paper
I had given him for his drawing—
the other sides contained
old copies of my poems.
What strange words might vault
out of the folds and violate
their prepubescent minds?
I tried to recall all the poems
I had written and decided
that the odds were small.

And then I sighed. I sighed
at the abandoned mine of publication.
How many copies of those poems
had I made—and who for?
There was some solace in the thought
that if they didn't give the pleasure
they intended, there was still some joy
in how they'd be discarded:
folded up and flung by children
down the tunnel of now into
the warp of history.

I went back to whatever I was doing,
probably writing another poem,
only late in the afternoon inferring

the grandeur of my error
from the siren voices of the children
blaring outdoors: the neighborhood
had suffered an invasion of my poems,
an entire air force had the street
in its possession, making runways of driveways
and airstrips of front yards.

It was not neighborly concern
that got me out there at once,
giving orders to the boys
to bring the airplanes home,
but fear—fear that someone
should actually read them,
and have me pegged
for something squirmy and alone.
That teenage girls would
read their secret cargo of failed loves
and hallucinogenic visions, told
in the gooey argot of twenty years ago,
and make life miserable for my kids,
or that the elders, my peers, who wondered
why I didn't leap to use their power tools
when proffered—well, now it would all be clear.

You should have seen me running
through the dusk, scouring the neighborhood
for sonnets crashed in shrubbery
and stanzas nosed into garages, in dread
lest any be left behind. Yet all the while
a certain glee, a gleeful irony played
through my head. What a way to launch a book,
these jets of turgid verse on the well-groomed
volumes of my neighbors' lawns. Finally,
here was the chance for all to read me,
the chance I never had, and suddenly
I didn't want publication all that bad.

Contributors Notes

Heather Brittain Bergstrom is currently a senior at California State University, Chico in Northern California. She has had poems published in *Watershed*, the university's literary journal, and has recently had two poems accepted by *Permafrost*. She has worked as a chapbook editor for Flume Press and is the mother of two.

Ruth Berman's poetry has appeared in many magazines including *Saturday Review, Toronto Life, Jewish Currents, Great River Review, Kansas Quarterly, Lake Street Review, Poet Lore, Poem,* and science fiction/ fantasy magazines *Amazing, Analog,* and *Asimov's*. A non-fiction book she complied, *Dear Poppa: The World War II Berman Family Letters* was published by the Minnesota Historical Society in 1997.

Born in Istanbul, Turkey, **Ayşe Papatya Bucak** graduated from Princeton University and is currently enrolled in the MFA program at Arizona State University. She is a fiction editor of *Hayden's Ferry Review* and has a story forthcoming in *Clackamas Literary Review*.

Rosemarie Caruso has published two volumes of poetry, "Braving Traffic" and "Moving Through Time," and lives in New Jersey with her husband, Alan Myers, and their ten-year-old daughter, Elena. Raised in Newark, NJ, she received a BA at Valparaiso University in Indiana and continued her theatre education at New York University. She has taught playwriting to children in New Jersey, New York, and Jamaica.

Adam Cobeen has been involved and in love with photography from an early age. Thanks to the influence of his brother Tod, he is currently working to complete an MFA in photography and a certificate in Hawaiian Language from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. His work has been shown in many student shows as well as those of the Hawai'i Photographic Society. Awards include a first place in the black and white division of the 1994 Outrigger photo contest. Upon completion of his studies, he intends to seek a teaching position within the Hawaiian Language Immersion Schools.

Robert Coles is a poet and teaches African American literature at Hampshire College, Amherst, MA. He has recently published a poem in the *Wisconsin Review*.

Deborah Elliott Deutschman has had poems and stories published in a number of places, from *American Writing* to *Carolina Quarterly*

and *The New Yorker.* Her novel *Signals* was published by Seaview/ Simon & Schuster and Playboy Paperbacks. She has done a number of original screenplays, as well as adaptions.

Scott Herzer works in Honolulu, where he lives with his wife, Jann Terada, and their son, Kai.

Colette Inez has authored eight books of poetry, the most recent of which, *Clemency*, is just out from Carnegie Mellon University Press. She has taught poetry at Cornell, OH and Bucknell Universities, Kalamazoo College, The Cooper Union, The New School, and Naropa, and is currently an associate professor at Columbia University's Writing Program.

Judith L. Kendig: "My husband and I moved to Honolulu 12 years ago from East Tennessee, where we were both born. I received a Master's in English from the University of Hawai'i in December 1996. I work as a Writer-Editor for the National Marine Fisheries Service and have one son, Jay Beasley, who is an aspiring actor living in New York City."

Ian Lamberton was born in Hawai'i in 1950 and attended Kai-lua Elementary before shipping to the cold of Connecticut. He served in the Peace Corps in Senegal then spent two years in Minneapolis. Transcending the warm/cold dualism, he settled for a climate of compromise in the Pacific Northwest, where he has lived for the last twenty years. His poems have appeared most recently in *The Raven Chronicles.* He is manager of advertising for a global investment firm and writes in the wee hours of the morning.

Kelly Lee was born and raised in Honolulu. She graduated from Punahou School and is currently a freshman at Columbia University.

Cynthia Warryn Leffner studied English and Creative Writing at St. Louis University and Southern Illinois University. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Whiskey Island Magazine*, *The Distillery, Eureka, Medicinal Purposes, Flying, Riverrun, Curriculum Vitae, 360 Degrees, Half-Tones-to-Jubilee, Sheila-Na-Gig,* and *The Poet's Guild,* among others. She is also founder of the new literary magazine, *The Orange Willow Review*; P.O. Box 768, Island Lake, IL 60042.

Robert Mullen lives in Edinburgh, Scotland. His short fiction has been published in North America, Great Brittain, and Spain. His first short story collection, *Americas*, is published in Canada by Coteau Books. A second collection is forthcoming.

Kirk Nesset's stories and poems have appeared lately in *Paris Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Gettysburg Review*, *Iowa Review*, *Prairie Review*,

ZYZZYVA, *Witness*, and elsewhere. He teaches creative writing at Allegheny College, and sings and plays guitar in the rock band Cousin Stanley.

John O'Meara is originally from eastern Massachusetts. He is a teacher and lives in Kai-lua, on the island of O'ahu.

A recent Cave Canem fellow, **Gregory Pardlo** is Associate Editor of *Painted Bride Quarterly*. He lives, writes, and studies in Camden County, NJ. His poetry is forthcoming in *Amaranth* and *Black Bear Review*.

Mark SaFranko's stories have appeared in dozens of magazines and journals throughout the country. His published works include two novels, *Hopler's Statement* (1998) and *The Favor* (1987). His screenplay *Something in the Water* was recently shot for the independent film market. "The Man in Unit 24" is part of a recently completed collection called *Just Next Door*.

Grace Sage was a West Pointer's bride at 19 and a Viet Nam War widow at 25. She earned her BA at Goddard College and her MA at Penn State. About "Even the Regional Ballet," she says: "This poem began itself at a poetry reading I attended and gained momentum at a dance concert I saw that same winter. I worked on the poem off and on for over ten years and was never wholly satisfied. What I finally realized was that it isn't just the poetry or the dance performance—no external force—that causes joy or harmony, but some inherent capacity human beings all have and just aren't quite sure how to use."

Ryan Senaga is currently employed at the web magazine *Spunker* (http://www.spunker.to).

David Starkey teaches creative writing at North Central College, and is the editor of *Teaching Writing Creatively* (Heinemann-Boynton/Cook, 1998) and co-editor of *Smokestacks and Skyscrapers: An Anthology of Chicago Literature* (Loyola, forthcoming 1999). His poetry has recently appeared or is forthcoming in *Flyway, Folio, Massachusetts Review, The Nebraska Review, New Orleans Review, Oxford Magazine, Sycamore Review, Writers' Forum*, and others; he has also published several collections of poems with small presses: *Koan Americana, Adventures of The Minor Poet, A Year with Gayle* and, most recently, *Open Mike Night at the Cabaret Voltaire* (Kings Estate, 1996).

ʻŌiwi: A Native Hawaiian Journal

December 1998 Inaugural Issue

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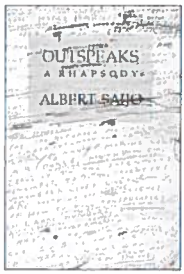

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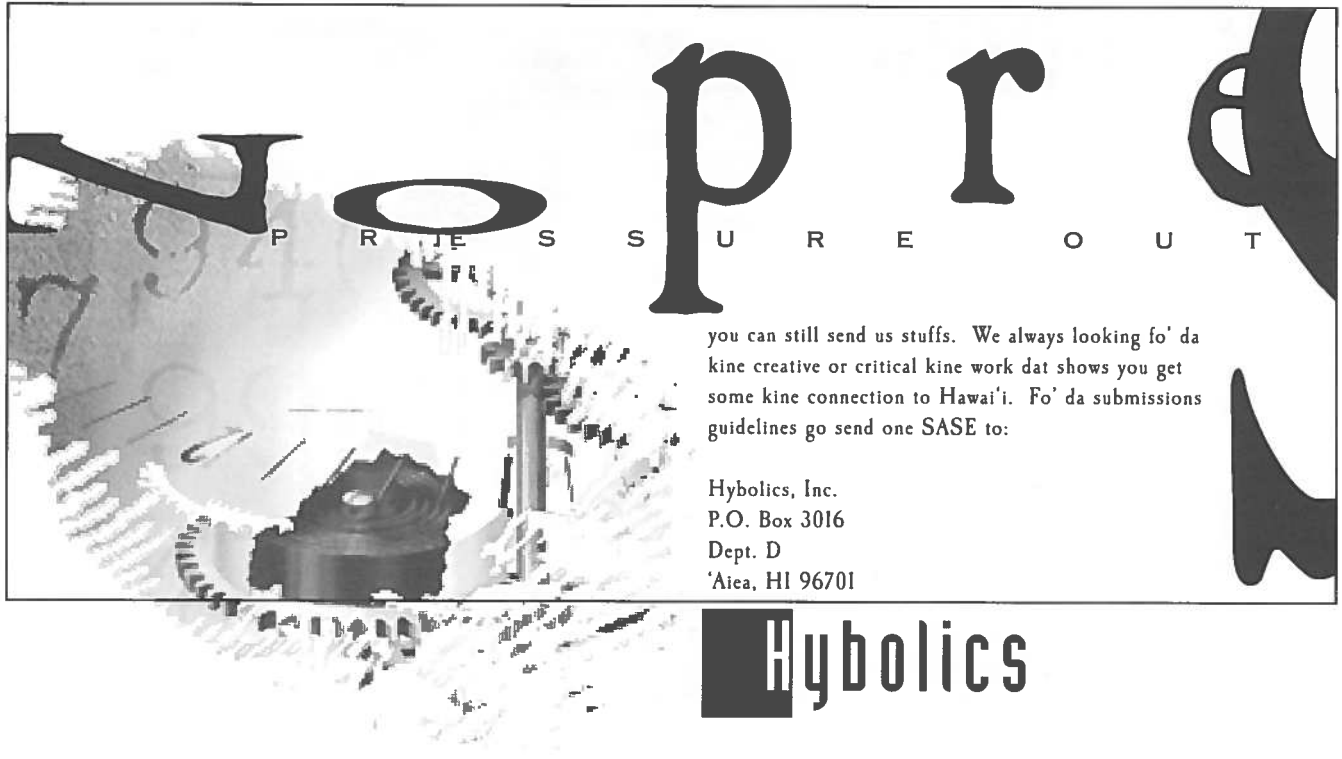
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Upcoming Issues: #53 - The Hawai'i Issue, Spring/Summer 1999
#54 - The International Issue, Fall/Winter 1999

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