



COTTONWOOD

REVIEW



# cottonwood review

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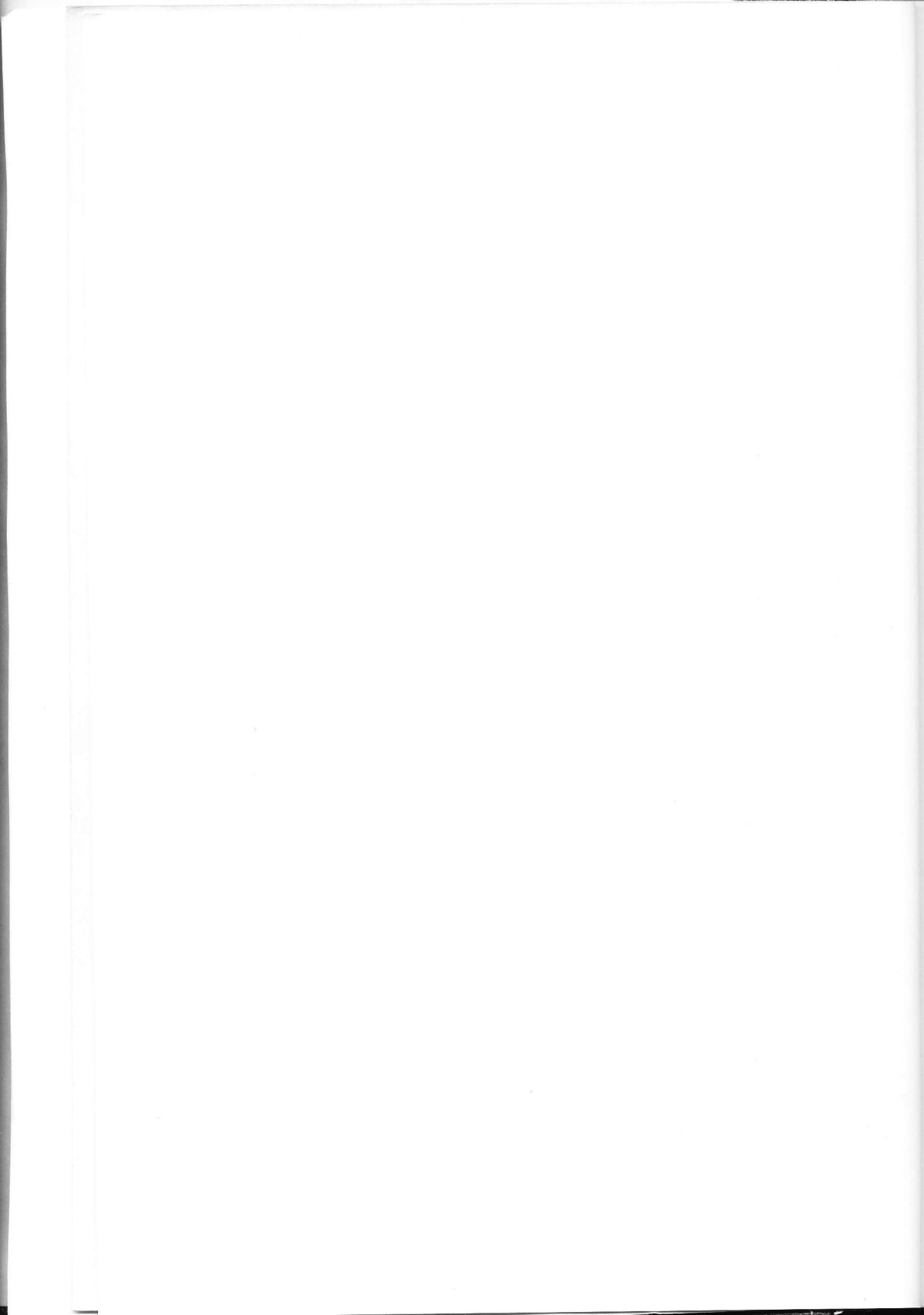
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## new york sketch

The glow of the city dully illuminated the room where a man stood smoking. Behind him a girl moved sleepily in bed and watched his figure silhouetted black against the window. The cigarette shone bright red and alive in the dimness.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

He looked around and could only vaguely see the girl and the bed. "Nothing," he said. "Did I wake you? I tried not to."

"No, I woke up when you did. I almost always do, for some reason... What did you say you were doing?"

"Just looking out, that's all. It's nice, isn't it?"

She propped herself up on an elbow and rubbed her eyes. From where she lay the girl could see almost the entire city pasted motionless in the window. "It's beautiful," she said. "There must be ten thousand buildings and a million lights... all so solemn and big... I don't feel sleepy any more. Can I have a cigarette?"

The man sat down on the bed and lit a cigarette for her.

"They're pretty in the dark," she said. "Like lightning bugs, kind of." Her cigarette made red figure eights above their heads. "We need an ash tray. I think there's one in the kitchen."

"I'll get it, Lightning Bug," he said.

As a shadow he glided through the door, his cigarette shining like the light of a ship. Stopping in front of the refrigerator, he bent down and said, "Hello, Fred," to an indistinct round mass on the floor. It purred happily in reply.

"How are you doing this evening? Sorry if I woke you up..."

The purring increased.

"Heads up, Fred!" The refrigerator door swung open and the room vibrated with sudden light. Two cat eyes flashed like beacons from the doorway and were gone. The man took something out of the refrigerator and shut the door. In the new darkness glasses clinked and the man-shadow mumbled, "Ash tray... ash tray... ash tray" to himself. A minute later he floated back into the bedroom and sat down. "I made us a scotch and soda. You want some?"

The girl took a drink and shivered. "I'm cold." The man sat closer to her and put his arm around her waist. "It's the price of civilization," he said.

"What is?"

"Being cold. You get used to wearing clothes all the time, and then when you don't have anything on, it's uncomfortable."

"I'm not uncomfortable."

"Neither am I, as a matter of fact. Maybe we're just not very civilized. Now that's a happy thought. I'd give anything to---"

"You know what I was thinking while you were gone?"

"No, what?"

"About when I first came here. I don't remember much except that I didn't like it. I was only about twelve. Mother wanted to go East for a change. All the other years we had gone West, you know, to those silly tourist places."

"Yes. They're nice, though, if you're young enough. We used to go to the mountains and Charlie and I would chase black squirrels and feed the chipmunks."

"Anyway, the only thing I enjoyed during the whole stay was going to Nedicks. Every afternoon I'd drink too much orange and get a terrific stomach ache."

"I'll never forget the first time I really knew I was in New York. You know how it is sometimes when you have to feel a certain way before you can really belong in a place?"

"Yes..."

"Well, it happened to me on the afternoon I arrived. I had taken a cab from the airport, and we were in an old part of the city. The twilight on the buildings made everything brown and sad, and peoples' voices seemed to come from far away. We stopped at a traffic light and I saw an old man with one of those old wooden hand carts selling dusty looking oranges and apples. A piece of newspaper was blowing along the brick pavement, and I knew then that New York was where I had to be. God, I loved it."

The two sat together for a long time in the dark silent room. "It must be getting awfully late," he said finally. "'And we have promises to keep' ...and miles to go before we wake."

"Come on, Poet. Finish your drink so we can go back to sleep."

He set the empty glass on the floor and got into bed, pulling a blanket up over himself and the girl. The room slowly became sleepfilled and still as the faint light from the window sifted carefully into the shadows of morning. Below in the street a few cars still moved about, and at the corner a stop light blinked silently in the night.

-- William D. Knief

These poor lines are possibly  
A vain attempt, through poetry,  
To memorize you faithfully:

**t o s .**

There are no ways to build anew our love  
When it has fallen into disrepair;  
No architect has skill enough to frame  
A structure hanging in the vacant air.  
The joy we knew is now an ashen gray,  
Where earlier we shared it warm and bright;  
Prometheus himself would be dismayed  
Should he assay to re-create the light.  
Our passion grew with every moment's breath,  
But to a grave this happiness retired;  
Physician's art would falter in the task  
Of sparking life when it has once expired.  
Yet still a spirit lives within my heart,  
And so I write, that we might never part.

-- Sam W. Waas

**i believe**

I believe in Smokey the Bear,  
And Snow White and her seven dwarfs,  
Who take turns copulating with her,  
Each to a day; but Dopey doesn't,  
Because his day is Sunday,  
And Snow White says no on Sunday,  
But Dopey keeps smiling,  
Because he knows that someday  
God won't come on Sunday morning.

-- Randy M. Signor

uncle of the  
angel's tongues

Uncle of the angel's tongues  
glued up where heaven  
fell and  
under all reared the head of  
swimming snakes the  
poet's arms and eyes  
on feelers  
antennae of the soul.  
Gold globules  
formed and answered back  
a yell  
of intense pain.  
Seeing at the loss the  
the earth did cringe  
in humble  
blessing stirred the angle of the wood.

Wooded by rubies bloody as they were  
the painter spiked  
the canvas with a brush  
and peered behind the scene.  
The pistol barrel looked back at him  
and with a puff of smoke  
he disappeared.  
So silent was the act  
the flies flew undisturbed  
and only puddles bloody gold  
formed beneath the clouds of smoke.

continued



How hallowed did the fans appear  
when news was spread of death on painter's row  
and clutching reproductions to their breasts  
miraculous youth bestowed the tomb they  
built right there with wreaths of wild picked  
flowers hot house blooms  
that wilted unlike their  
undying fervour.

Disciples  
discovered symbols  
unthought unheard  
in an effort  
to still their loss  
and unhappy as the world became  
in self-destruction  
came a final  
loss.

Unable to stand the greatest  
blessing  
of an unexampled  
going  
the crowd lay down and  
wept to death.

Unwept as was the painter's going  
gonged and heralded in the red  
all sang the song of penitence  
pent and plugged  
in God's penitentiary.

O inched and sung and measured  
as the perfect human figure of Durer's Book  
old health and fear  
stealthed away into the dark.

Balls of red and gold  
glittered at the Senior Ball  
and proms were held  
in  
country meadows  
and Deaths all danced in counties he had sung.

The poet's death  
unwept where pupils cried  
when teachers read in songs aloud  
unwept  
in death  
the babies crawled along.

Inspid as the whining pup  
we trounced on  
unmade trundle beds  
and bounced our life  
away.

Choirs of boy sopranos  
sang white-robed faith  
in red-lit houses of assignation  
devils danced in pure delight  
to see the damage they had done.

Overturnd as morals were  
the painter and the poet  
sought in ghostly form  
the truth  
and found naught lacking there  
save all for which they searched.

-- John Fowler

## message

I walk into untimely cold and wet  
hemmed by the back fence  
in mid-August.

Morning glories defy a frozen day  
to speak the color of your eyes,  
traveler toward mountain roads  
and sighs  
you never left.

I know what's what, lying on  
cold cement and fearing death,  
watching morning glories  
bending  
and trees bent,  
and a west wall clothed in leaf,  
recalling summer.

-- Susan Silverglat

## the mackinaw

The cold windy Kansas winter was about to set in again and I found myself without a good warm coat. The one I wore the year before was not much good any more, and even when it was new it wasn't too warm. In fact, I can't remember owning a warm coat -- a really warm coat, if you know what I mean. I guess I just bought these cheap winter coats that looked warm but were never very warm at all -- and besides they always wore out a lot quicker than you would ever suspect they would. So when I braved the already cold wind to go downtown to get a coat, I was determined to get a really warm one -- although I didn't know quite what to look for. I had a hunch that the fellows who work outdoors must get the warmest things possible, so the first place I tried was a western shop in town. I walked in and asked them if I could look at some coats.

"Sure," said a hefty old man as he started down the aisle toward the back of the store. "Follow me, son."

"O.K.," I said.

"Well, son," he said, "here they are: all kinds, all sizes, and all prices. Just depends upon how big you are and how much money you got." He said all this without even closing his fat lips over his gold teeth. But I don't mean to be hard on him, for he seemed like a nice guy.

I looked at the coats and they were all the same kind of stuff I'd seen before: car-coats (only in a western style), and cheap leather jackets with good-looking, but not warm, linings in them.

"No," I said, "I want something warmer than this. In fact, I want a warm, tough coat -- one that will last a heck of a long time."

"Son," he said as he looked at his row of coats, "they just don't make things like that any more." He said "that" with some reverence.

"How about wool coats?" I said. "Do they make wool coats any more? What the heck do lumber jacks wear, anyway?" I continued before he could answer the first question.

"Mackinaws, son." He said it proudly and he seemed to stand a bit straighter. "A Mackinaw, that's what you want."

I was about to ask what the heck a Mackinaw was, but it occurred to me not to show my ignorance so I asked: "A Mackinaw, one of those big woolen coats? -- Is that what you call them?" I was guessing all the way -- but we had been talking about wool coats.

"That's right, son -- you know, they've got a big wool collar and you can pull it up around your ears and you'll never get cold." He had acquired animation as he spoke and he actually seemed to turtle down into the invis-

ble coat. It was as if he was talking of a thing that he had once loved, but for some reason it seemed unfashionable to love it any more. But when he talked about it in this way the love got through somehow. Perhaps it was the love that reminded me that Granddad Warner had a coat like that; maybe a Mackinaw (I saw it only once when I was little and I convinced myself now that I could never recall it accurately so I didn't dwell on it, but turned to listen to the clerk).

"Well, son, that Mackinaw was some coat -- I don't think that the buttons ever came off the coat -- it was put together so well. They'd make them out of blankets -- my dad had one -- well, I guess we had one in the family for years, but I don't know what happened to it."

While he was talking you could tell his mind was full of good stories about the old days and stories about the Mackinaw, and his dad and maybe if he was in front of a fire with a brew in his hand he might have told them -- even if there was love in them, or sentiment. But now he only glared at me and sort of snapped as though he knew I had caught him daydreaming. "No, son, we ain't got anything like that and I'll tell you one thing: you can look in this town or most any other town that I know of and you won't find one."

"Thanks," I said, "but I'll try a few places anyway." I walked out of the store and started down the street toward another clothing store and asked if they had any Mackinaws. There were two fellows my age in there acting as clerks and they both shook their heads -- no, they didn't know what a Mackinaw was but they were sure that they didn't have any "Mackins" or whatever they were called. In fact they seemed a bit insulted that I should ask for one since they didn't have it. On my way out one of them suggested I might try Nelson's Hardware store, in the middle of the block.

"Hardware store?" I asked.

"Yes," said one of them. "They used to handle work coats. I don't know if they still do or not but they carry about everything else."

I thanked them and went back outside and up the street toward Nelson's Hardware store. It was getting colder and my jacket wasn't helping to keep me warm. My mind was alive with ideas about this Mackinaw. I had all sorts of pictures in my head. I finally found Nelson's Hardware. It was a curious shop. It had a big sign facing the street which said Nelson's Hardware and two big windows on either side of the solid wooden door. In the windows the passer-by could see simple saddles mounted on sawhorses. I went inside and noticed that the place was dimly lighted. The only light seemed to come from the two windows and sort of a glow from somewhere in the back of the long store. The light from these two sources didn't seem to reach each other so that I got the impression that the middle of the store was almost dark. The store was scattered with long tables loaded with odds and ends, the usual junk, unless you looked closer. Then you noticed that there was an unusual amount of outdoor gear -- such as axes -- not just hatchets like an ordinary store might have, but big double-bitted axeheads,

without handles and you bought the handle separately. On the walls were skillets, big black ones, and leather goods and ropes, not nylon cords, but real ropes. At the back of the room there sat an old man in a plaid wool jacket. He was sitting on a rocker and he hadn't moved since I entered, but rather he just rocked. To one side of him was an old pot-bellied stove -- grey black with use. As I walked toward him I noticed the old wooden floor creaked.

"Howdy, son," he said -- still rocking. "What can I do for you?"

"Do you know what a Mackinaw is?"

"Sure," he said, and he stopped rocking. "Sure," he said again. "I know what a Mackinaw is. I used to have one myself. Warmest darn coat I've ever owned."

"Do you have a Mackinaw?" I said.

He turned toward the rack of coats opposite the old stove and for the first time I noticed two old men, both sitting in rockers in front of the clothing rack. I could see now that before the old man (the one with the plaid jacket) had turned to greet me, he and the other men were sitting in a circle (as much of a circle as three can make). One of the men wore a pair of bib overalls and an old work shirt and the other smoked a corncob pipe (that's all I remember because the tobacco must have been real old, it smelled so bad). The two guys stopped rocking when Nelson (that was the name of the guy in the plaid coat, I found out later -- he owned the store, I guess) turned to look at the rack.

"No, son," he said. "That rack hasn't had a Mackinaw on there since -- since 1936, I guess." He paused for a moment, then looked at the old guy with the pipe. "When was the last time we had a Mackinaw in here, Ed?"

The old guy looked at me, then started rocking again. "1936 or '37," he said with finality. "Leroy Gibson bought it -- he nearly died of pneumonia the year before when he got caught out in a blizzard trying to get the stock in. He was the only guy around these parts that didn't have one then. He learned his lesson though." He paused and looked at me as though he had just discovered I was alive. "You don't want a Mackinaw, do you, son?"

"Bet he does," said Nelson.

I nodded in agreement and was about to ask something when the guy in bib overalls spoke out: "I remember a story about a Mackinaw. I used to have one myself you know," and he hooked his thumbs inside the straps that held up his overalls, but did not push them out but just sort of flexed them.

At this point the man with the pipe interrupted, "Is that the one about Sam? Sam Porter?"

"No, no, it isn't Ed, and let me finish before you start telling lies," said the bib overall man.

"This ain't no lie," the man with the pipe continued. "It's the honest-to-God truth, son," and he looked at me. "Old Sam Porter was out chop-

ping wood one morning on his south acreage and it was kind of cold so he took along his Mackinaw. Well, it wasn't cold enough to snow, I guess, 'cause it started raining. I remember that well because it was the first good rain after the long drought. Well, old Sam was out cutting wood and when it began to rain (a cold, almost freezing rain), he was real happy because we all wanted rain. Well, the spirit got in him, I guess, because he just kept chopping wood, and singing away and when it started to rain a bit harder he went and put on his Mackinaw. He was so happy that he just stayed out there all day long -- in that freezing rain, just chopping wood. And it was raining hard, you understand." The old man now rocked back on his chair farther than usual. He had a smug look and he puffed his pipe and gave the impression that he was going to let us in on a great religious secret.

"And you know what?" he said finally. "When he got home he was bone dry! That's right, he was bone dry. That Mackinaw protected him all day long; it was woven so tight that not a bit of rain got through. Now, I tell you that's some protection -- there isn't much that will take care of a man like that. Well, when Sam noticed how the coat kept him dry, so the story goes, he sat down and right then and there he wrote it into his will that he be buried in his Mackinaw. Well, I went to Sam's funeral in '46 and sure enough there he was in that three-poin Mackinaw of his. And I expect that his soul and that Mackinaw are all that's left of old Sam now."

He said these last words with a reverence that one might expect only from preachers on the holiest of holy days. Indeed he seemed proud of the story, and even prouder that it was about a Mackinaw. No sooner had he stopped than the fellow with the bib overalls started in.

"Like I was saying, son, back in the '30's I was hired on as a pick and shovel man at a gold mine in a place called St. George, Utah. Well, that was the first place I heard about Mackinaws. It seemed one day along about the first of November the Devil got into the wind and he darn near blew St. George off the map with the coldest blow I've ever seen. Well, this old timer told me what I needed was a Hudson's Bay Mackinaw and 'course I made a fool out of myself and said, 'What the heck's a Hudson's Bay Mackinaw?' Well, he took me by the ear, sort of, and showed me his that was hanging up on the peg in the cabin I was in. It was a big double-breasted thing, all red, with a big black stripe around the bottom. Right then and there I figured I had to have one -- set me back 30 bucks in those days but I got one." At this point Nelson pointed out a chair to me. I sat down, and if anyone had come to the store at that time he would have seen four people, in the back of the room, warming themselves by a pot-bellied stove, listening to a story. The old man continued in a grave, but reverent tone.

"Well, one day me and Warner, Jake Warner, were on our way to the mine."

"Stop," I said rather sharply. "I mean, well . . . uh, did you say Warner? Jake Warner?"

"Yes, son. That's right. What about it, son?"

"Well, I know a Jake Warner . . ."

"Way before your time, son."

"But, he was my grandfather on my dad's side. My name's Warner, Jack Warner. Did this Warner come from Minnesota?"

"Yes, yes, he did, son. Yes, I'm sure he did -- he owned part of the mine out there, used to come down every other year till he died."

"That's him. That's my granddad." I was about to explode with questions about Granddad -- but I wanted to hear the story so badly that I said only, "Go on with the story, sir."

"Well, Jake Warner and I were riding out to the mine, like I said, and he always carried this Winchester 94 in his saddle scabbard, not the new kind with the buckhorn sights and all, but the old model that held 10 shots and had that six-sided barrel, you know." And Nelson and the guy with the pipe nodded. And I nodded, too, because I had seen the gun up at the folks' cabin near Wilmer, Minnesota.

"Well, Jake forgot his Mackinaw and it was a cold day. And he was pretty upset to be without it on a day like that. No sooner had we crossed the first ridge -- not five miles out of town, when we saw one heck of a big buck running parallel to us down the other side towards the wooded canyon. Well, Jake was a crack shot and always got those bucks when they ran like that. Well, he reached for his Winchester and started shooting. He was cold without the Mackinaw, you understand, and didn't feel right -- and maybe the gun didn't fall the same on his shoulder or maybe a fellow needs something he knows is good and strong next to him when he has to do a good job. Whatever -- Jake missed that buck the first two times and then the darn thing turned toward us and was running like the wind right at us, and old Jake got buck fever (I promised him later I'd never tell a soul but since he's dead and gone, I guess it don't matter). Anyway, he got the fever and threw out eight good shells without firing one of them. Not pulling the trigger but just throwing that lever down, and out would fly a 30-30 shell into dust. Well, that buck broke to the right and was gone in a moment. Jake didn't say anything for a long time, and I don't think he ever forgot that till the day he died. You understand I've seen him kill deer with the Mackinaw on and with it off. But I only saw him once when he wished he'd had it on and didn't and that time Jake Warner wasn't much good. I guess, in a way he loved that coat, like we all did if we had one." And the other two nodded.

Perhaps I'm foolish but I didn't ask any more questions, not about Jake, or about the Mackinaw. I somehow felt that those fellows in there would feel awkward seeing me in a Mackinaw. I still want one, but I can wait.

-- R. Paul Day

## untitled

My preacher's pulpited ancient pupils  
Sing a chorus praising guilt and grace  
Saved and sinner wholly forgiven.  
Wholly forgiven, risen-eyed, O brother,  
Holy Ghosted out of hell and leaping  
Tongues of fire thereon.  
My holy sister prayed and wailed  
A lonely song of supplication  
Bawled a pretty picture of frustration  
Kicked and kinked her bony knees  
Beneath a baggy old print dress,  
My sinful sister called on God,  
The Son of God  
Dear sweet Christ our Master's blood  
To send the thrill of heavenly wedding in the windows  
Glazed and glassed as rainy nights.  
How empty were the nights of empty sinning  
How rosy red as hell the sexy nights in bed  
How gross beyond the telling voluptuous desires and longings  
And how near and fast our coddled guilt.

-- John Fowler

## untitled

Distracted eyes drop  
Stare down the long  
Empty hall  
Of an echoing memory.  
Unseen silent weeping reflects a deeper silence still--  
The vigil of the prayerful candle--  
Empty eyes reflect another emptiness--  
The colorful volcanic display of the senses: grey ashes--  
Absentmindedness indicates but another more decisive absence--  
. . . One would think a leaving would have finality  
But losses are measurable only over years.  
Eyes are tearless from too much weeping.

-- John Fowler



## and tell the angle like a song

Bent, cramped,  
Crooked arrow, closed;  
Fish hooked thoughts unsaid.  
Pulled and pulled to get them out.  
O inched literary gashes  
Torn in hanged bagged  
Old blackened lobes of blood  
Where fish hooks caught.  
Amid devil formed and angled thoughts  
Amid coffins of welded steel,  
A dumbing rhetoric.  
No lines are straight or true.  
And yet we talk.  
To be cynical, sad or free.

-- John Fowler

## prophet : first poem for the insane

- 1) the slightly insane christ walked with flowers.  
the idiot of screams,  
the death prone child,  
seemed older at his birth:  
he smiled at gifts.  
later he walked murmuring;  
Golgotha darkened about his weaving brain.
  
- 2) what transformed who?  
Christ in the broken attitude of  
Death  
shall live beyond the terror in his eyes.  
amazed, we touch the tiger of his racing blood.  
Birth is always a surprise.

-- Susan Silverglat

**blue valley, kansas  
new world**

The sea is unexpected  
out of a gentle height  
of earth.

Dvorak knew the sound of  
such blue mist  
and sang peace:

unfear being one yellow flower  
affirmatively placed  
toward sky.

-- Susan Silverglat

**doff and don alternate answers**

Tangled past engagements, commitments, upheavals, breakdowns  
Repetitious cyclical exhaustions;  
Nervous electronic motivations,  
Certain stubborn inabilities,  
Haunting returning maladjustments.  
Fattening periods: realignment  
Go between  
Anxious debilities, insecurities, manifestations.  
Blankly escapist years, rationalized produced enjoyments,  
Ennui of non-creativity:  
Stretched experiences amounting to nothing,  
Line etchings on a woodcut brain  
Blend with wish fulfillment creations  
Of a bazaar mentality.  
Knotted craggy tragic masked  
Bland tasteless unredeemable activities  
Lay greenly on the tongue.  
Hopelessness is hopeless yet there is no hope:  
The tragic mask.  
Doff and don alternate answers.

-- John Fowler

## a talk on time

"My friends," I begin, "let us open the chest that contains the fragments, jagged pieces of a shattered mirror. Let us hold the trinkets in our hands and remember. Let each hallowed memory trace on the yellowed screen of time a pattern of desire, of failure, of heaviness."

Our continuous past, the fog that moves in at night, approaches and recedes, or stands like a cow in the fog, looking at us as we pass. Don't regret, don't cry, my friends, don't remember for it is dying to remember; to recall is to destroy: to shatter the mirror, shattered mirror. My memories, flashbulb bursts of recollection, hit me in the eye and then are gone; the spots and spinning...

"Come, my friends, with me down the long Gothic hall past the portraits of my forbears. Do not mind my walking in two directions. Do not mind. Do not mind my schizophrenic split. I walk toward the future. I walk toward the repetition of my past. Oh, my friends," the call echoes down the vaulted hall. The tapestries wave gently as if brushed by someone passing.

"My friends, come back," I call as I walk away from them. I stride past the suits of armor, the armored past, standing straight; the past marching by.

"Oh, come back and go away my past!" I cry. "There is no forgetting. We can't forget. Punishing past forget me!" I grow frantic. I run up and down the hall pulling my hair. "My friends and enemies, come back," I wail.

"I'm going insane," I mutter to myself as I drag my chest into the hall. I move all my things into the hall. I set up a desk and write a long manuscript. My hair grows long, my clothes become rags. I am bent and shuffling.

"My friends! My friends!" I wait at the window, I watch at the door. Presently I fall to fitful sleep on a pallet in the hall.

I start up. Something is passing by. "Ancient friends!" I yell in recognition, doing an old man's dance. "To the chest! To the chest! Roll up your sleeves! Do not mind your bleeding hands, see the lovely pieces!" I raise up from the chest and look around. "My friends...", I murmur.

I fall back.

On my pallet asleep.

-- John Fowler

## reflection

Water  
seeps in to crack  
the large granite's doom

And like the piercing sun  
into a dark, dusty room  
your light  
into my mind  
reaches  
reflects  
and I then see  
myself

-- Jay W. Vandervelde

## from free-form sadness

From free-form sadness I watch  
Fuzzy lights flicker  
Like the merging hotel tile crapper floor.  
Feeling muckley and jockey as the hairy-bear wind  
I go swinging from lamppost to lamppost  
Slowly surrendering to the white-washed angel,  
The swathing semi-sweet whiteness.  
Water-stiffened sneakers dance and clomp  
In the yellowed room of yesterdays  
But tethered to the failing of the jumping marlin fish  
They don't quite reach the end  
That is past the window sill.  
The smokeless cigarette on the ledge  
Whistles to the waterfront and the cobblestones.  
Muddy water and sniffing wave sounds,  
Muddy water and floating dead things,  
The soundless equilibrium of temple ruins  
Echo through the empty arches and along the green steel docks.  
Remembering the black lace of the bridge,  
Walking on the fog and elevated rails,  
I go watching.

-- John Fowler

## casey james

Someone shoved a damp scotch and water into Casey James' hand. He smiled, nodded gratefully, then wondered what to do with it.

"Nine o'clock," the sophisticate said to the blonde-haired surfer. "I heard from Herbie that she'll be here at nine o'clock." He turned back to James. "Now, tell me," he began casually, leaning against a door jamb. "Would you like to go Greek?"

"No, no," James answered, looking up. "I'm perfectly happy with my Welsh ancestry."

The sophisticate laughed, at the same time unbuttoning his camel's hair coat. "I mean a fraternity. Would you be interested in joining our fraternity?"

James began to lie through his teeth. "It sure sounds like a great life. For instance, one fellow was just telling me about how much more girls like a man if he belongs. . . ."

"That was probably Harris. I'm afraid he believes in free love for different reasons than the rest of us do. But . . ."

What the hell do you mean by "us"? James thought.

". . . I can assure you, if you ever want to get anywhere on this campus . . ."

"I like to walk," James interjected proudly, smiling.

Again the sophisticate laughed. "I mean . . . What did you say your first name was? I'm sorry."

"Will. Will James."

"Oh, yes! Well, Will, what I meant by 'getting anywhere on campus' was . . . prestige. For instance, last year we won the Revue, so our name . . ."

"Revue?" James couldn't help asking.

The sophisticate paused and James was sure he noticed a widening of the eyes. "Sure. The Revue. You've probably heard of it. All the fraternities and sororities get together and write several satiric skits. About mental illness, queers, sex, you know. Really, it's a pretty big thing on campus. It's quite an honor to be in it, and last spring our fraternity . . ."

"That's the Gamma Omega?" James asked innocently.

The sophisticate laughed. "Oh, no. Not quite. That's a sorority! Wish I was in the Gamma Omegas. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Anyway," the sophisticate took a swig from his drink. "Anyway, we're the Omega Delts, and the Revue we won is called the Pan Hellenic Revue. I'm sure you've heard of it."

"Pan Hellenic." James considered the words carefully. "That means across Greece." He wondered if the sophisticate noticed yet that he hadn't touched his drink.

"What's that?" the sophisticate asked.

"Across Greece. You know. You've heard it before." James crossed his fingers and took a deep sip of his scotch and water. His eyeballs, he felt, rolled to the back of his head and his tongue, he thought, was curling up. He tried to make the grimace of distaste into an expression of pleasure. "Pan," he whispered nonchalantly as his guts burned, "means across, and Hellenic refers to Greece."

"Oh," mumbled the sophisticate. "I didn't know that." He finished his drink. "Think I'll go fill this up. Would you like yours freshened?"

Freshened, thought James. What the hell are you going to do, take it to the bathroom? "No, thanks. I'll keep mine until after I eat the ice cubes."

The sophisticate gave James a dubious glance, then strolled off.

James stood for awhile innocently staring into space. He rather liked standing and staring innocently into space, because he bothered no one and no one, most importantly, bothered him. He wished he had a little button he could click when he didn't like whom he was talking to and they would disappear from in front of him. Then he could stand and stare innocently into space until the next intruder came along, giving rise to a new value judgment that would have to be made.

Two voices across the room suddenly entered James' consciousness.

"We must totally withdraw now," a deep voice with glasses and long hair that fell and covered the lenses said seriously. "Total escalation will lead to total destruction.

"But God, Henry, wouldn't you like a chance to shoot just one Commie?"

James now concentrated on shutting out the voices. He was afraid the second would ask the first if he would rather be red or dead, and James decided the answer to that ridiculous proposition a long time ago.

He forced himself to drift back to his previous lazy reverie:

To click them or not to click them. Girls with low cut dresses he would not click. Girls who were smoking and drinking he would not click because he liked to speculate upon their virtue. People who crushed his hand he would click. People who wore camel's hair coats, madras shirts or yellow shirts he would click. People who smoked pipes he would give a two minute grace: time enough for a fair decision to be made. People who smoked cigars he would not click. House mothers would be clicked (all house mothers are naive, James told himself in justification). House pets. James considered the problem carefully. House pets didn't ask to be house pets. It was merely circumstance that they became house pets. James decided not to click off house pets. In fact, he thought, given enough time

alone with them, he might even be able to convince them to run off, or at least to knock down the house mothers.

James looked up to see if there were any house pets around and re-discovered the fact that everyone else was with someone else, except him. He looked around for a group to stand next to, so that anytime someone saw him they would not think he was alone. He didn't want to be conspicuous.

But immediately he was pounced upon by one who had spoken to him earlier in the evening. He held the arm of an old, gray, withered gnome and said cheerily, "Dow, I'd like you to meet Mother McMurphy. Mother, this is Dow Jones."

"I'm so happy to meet you." She tried to laugh and held out a gnarled hand.

James shook it on the grounds that she might be a witch and he didn't want to insult her. "My pleasure," he smiled.

"Mother McMurphy is the best house mother around. When it comes to food, you never need to worry when she's around."

James rejected a joke about overalls and chowder and took his leave from Ptomaine Mary. "Excuse me. I was just on my way to see the hills. So nice to have met you."

"Hills?" Ptomaine Mary asked her escort. "Hills?"

"I don't know what he's talking about," James heard the escort say.

He had decided to get rid of his drink. In front of him he noticed large glass panels and a sliding glass door that led onto a balcony overhanging a patio. Quickly James walked to the sliding door, opened it and felt the warm night breeze flow around him. He went out onto the balcony and shut the door so that others would not be tempted to follow.

James couldn't see the hills that rose far away in the night, but he knew they were there, soft and green, full of buttercups and butterflies. In the daytime the hills could be seen to roll gently for miles, then suddenly surge upward in a gallant effort to touch the porcelain blue sky and spilled milk clouds. But they had failed many years ago, so now they were forced to fall back and roll on to the southwest.

"Here, hills," James said. "May there never be a Howard Johnson's built upon you." He dumped out the liquid.

There was a surprised, horrified, female scream from below, and a deep bass voice right behind it shouting, "What in the goddamned name of hell is . . .!"

James snapped to attention, recoiled from the balcony railing and turned to rush into the room he had just left. He slammed into the closed glass doors and rebounded backwards. He saw everybody inside stop talking and look in amazement at the glass panels, as if they had made the noise themselves.

At the same time he heard the bass voice below cry, "Hey, buddy! I'm gonna beat the living hell out of you!"

He remembered to put his hand in front of his face so that the bass voice wouldn't recognize him. He felt for blood and thought he found it. As he took out his handkerchief, someone with a boy scout complex rushed to the doors and opened them. "Say, are you all right?"

James smiled from behind the handkerchief. "I forgot the doors were shut." He could feel the air of incredulity. Then he suddenly realized the bass voice was no longer shouting. Most likely the bass voice was coming to beat the living hell out of him. "Say, is there a place I could go to wash my face?"

The two hurried through crowded rooms, the boy scout continually saying "Excuse us. Excuse us, please." The boy scout walked proudly and with a sense of urgency. He knew he was performing a good deed. James walked with a sense of urgency also, for he was embarrassed as all hell. In fact, he couldn't figure out why the floors didn't even have the common decency to open and swallow him up.

A painful several seconds later they were in the bathroom. "Here's the head," the boy scout said.

James ignored the cute, plagiarized euphemism.

"You need any help?"

"No. I just want to wash my face."

There was a slight pause. "Why?"

"Because my nose is bleeding."

"No, it's not."

James looked at the clean, white handkerchief. "That's funny."

The good deed had made the boy scout smug. "One too many," he smiled.

James looked at the empty glass he was still holding. "Yeah, well, I guess if you're going to drink, you have to be prepared to take the consequences, glass doors and all."

They both tittered, then there was an awkward silence. James said, "Well, I guess I don't have to wash my face after all."

The boy scout got a pained expression on his face and said, "Oh, I'm sorry. My name is Jonathan Willis. What's yours?" He held out his hand.

"Henry James," he replied. He considered crushing Jonathan's hand.

Jonathan left and James peeked into the hall. He could hear the noises of the party. The voices, laughs, screams, footsteps, thuds, scrapes, bangs, breaks, and the vibrant, erotic music that pulsated pleasingly.

He shut the door and turned to the wash basin. He dipped his hands into the cold water and smoothed down his hair. He walked to an open window and let his hands drip dry. He watched moths circle through the bright yellow street lights that were surrounded by the purple darkness. He wondered why the lights were yellow instead of white. He wondered if electricity by itself was yellow. Shocking yellow, he thought, and he smiled.

It made him feel a kinship to the street light, knowing it was also alone.



He took off his coat so the bass voice would not recognize him and returned to the party, where everybody would be expecting something from him.

The second he stepped into the hall, he heard a smooth, suave voice say, "You never go for the tits first. They expect that. So you go for the next most likely place, which will take them completely by . . . ."

James ran down the hall as quickly as he could, turning into the first noisy room that would drown out the soft, knowing voice.

He careened into a pipe smoker who wore gray slacks and a blue blazer with a blazing, ornate emblem that offended from the breast pocket. The two collected themselves, and as James shook his head clear he heard the blue-gray pipe smoker say to the same beach boy he had seen earlier, "Nine o'clock. That's when I heard she would be here." He turned to face James.

"You are . . . ?" asked the pipe smoker, smiling, ignoring the collision.

"Frank James," James answered, filling in the blank. "You are . . . ?"

"Charles Newby. Glad to make your acquaintance. You don't seem to have a name tag."

No kidding.

"I think I could fix one up for you."

James smiled jovially. "No, thanks. Give me a name tag and I can't resist taking it off and using the stickum on the back to pick up lint." He leaned forward and brushed an imaginary piece of lint off of Sir Charles' coat.

"I understand," Sir Charles tried to smile. "Say, it looks like you've got an empty glass there. The least you could do is let me freshen it up."

No thank you, Sir Charles. It's already been to the bathroom. "Sure, Chuck. Can I call you Chuck?"

"Most of my friends call me Charles."

Both of them? "Of course. Nothing like friends. What say you show me where the bar is?" What to do with the next scotch and water was a challenge James decided it might be interesting to meet. Would he drop it down the front of a beautiful girl's dress like Louis Jourdan had done? Would he throw it in the face of a bully?

They strolled to another room filled and overflowing with people, all of them changing colors as a cheap, cute light bulb shined through revolving red, blue and green cellophane paper. The grinding gadget was supposed to lend atmosphere, but everyone was either too drunk or too intent upon nudging the person they were next to in all the right places to notice it.

A voice that belonged to someone who was evidently six foot four and with rosy cheeks snaked itself across the room and found James' ear. ". . . a damn important game. Important to the house. That's why I'd like to see all the future pledges first . . . ."

The revolving colors caught James' attention again and made him nervous. For awhile he counted how many seconds it took one color to com-

pletely sweep through the room, then he wondered if it would be possible to write a dirty word on the cellophane so it too would sweep through the room.

Sir Charles approached and handed James a new drink, setting his own down on an ash encrusted table. He pulled out a small contraption that had three little levers. The little levers were used to empty the pipe he carried, scrape the bowl clean, fill it up with tobacco and tamp the tobacco firm. As he carried on the violation of the pipe, Sir Charles asked James, "How do you like the Greek system?"

James was watching the operation before him, fascinated. "What? Oh! I like it fine, Chuck. There seem to be a lot of good people in it."

"Oh, yes," he agreed, "a lot of fine people."

James stood with his back to the color contraption so that his face would be in the dark. He watched Sir Charles turn three different colors.

Sir Charles began to speak. He had a habit of rarely looking anyone in the face, except for quick, sidelong glances. He considered this an effective means of emphasizing what he said. He also spaced his phrases with what he hoped were cliff-hanging pauses.

The two minute grace was over. Click.

"The Greek system has its share of critics and (pause) detractors."

You no longer exist.

"And indeed (pause), in a sense (pause), I think we can consider (puff, puff on your pipe) the Greek system nothing more than a minority group (revelation: pause puff puff glance)."

"As far as the reality of numbers is concerned," James interjected seriously.

(Glance) "Oh. Yes. True. Certainly."

I've clicked you off the face of the earth.

"For the independents, although I don't like giving all non-Greeks that title (pause), vastly outnumber us, but (puff) we must remember that a great many of them would indeed like (glance) to be a member of, or a party to, or one of, the Greeks."

Shall I contact your next of kin?

"Yet, to a certain extent, and this is, in many respects (a grasping, clutching gesture with the hand), fortunate for us (pause), for not all of those who want to be Greeks can be Greeks (puff puff), for zeal in itself is not intrinsically valuable enough. Therefore we are able to keep the house (glance puff pause) relatively clean, if you know what I mean."

You rhymed, you bastard.

"Do you have any questions relative to the Greek system?"

"Well, Chuck, I can't think of any right now. . . . Oh, say. Does your fraternity let in Negroes?" James tried to hold Sir Charles' eyes with a steely stare, but it couldn't be done.

"Certainly, yes! (a good, stiff emphatic stab with the pipe stem. A fine gesture, but to be used sparingly, so that it does not lose meaning,

Never mind the fact that your pipe went out six puffs ago and that you've never yet been able to keep it lighted. Try cigars. Cigars are so crude they're cool). Our National Charter, that guides our chapter and all our other chapters, allows for no discriminatory practices. There is no discrimination at all (good, hard glance)."

"None?"

"None (puff)."

"Well, that's really progress. I'm glad to hear that. How many Negroes are there in your house?"

(Do you see something on the ceiling, Sir Charles?) "None, as of right now. We give them completely fair chances, however. Don't mistake me. (Take a swill of your drink. Contemplate the glass.) But most of them, for some reason or another, decide not to join us."

You mean all of them.

"Well, I should be circulating."

Screw off, Sir Charles. "Glad to have met you."

"Same here (glance smile nod puff)."

Now he was by himself again, thank God. He looked at the drink and wondered what to do with it. He thought of pouring it in his shoe and walking around, making everybody wonder where the squish noise was coming from.

Instead, he turned and poured it into the ashtray that Sir Charles had emptied his pipe into. The ashtray sat on a table next to a divan and he wasn't noticed by the boy who sat on the divan because he was looking down the front of the dress of the girl who sat next to him who was talking to someone else.

The boy continued to stare as he pulled the dead butt of a cigarette from between his lips and stubbed it into the ashtray. He snapped about as the cold liquid swirled around his fingers. He pulled them out and gazed at them. He glanced about the room accusingly, his eyes finally settling on Casey James as the culprit. "Did you do that?" he asked, pointing at the filthy swimming pool-like ashtray.

"What?" James cupped his hand to his ear.

"Did you do that?" the boy shouted, again pointing at the floating pipe ashes and soaking cigarette butts.

"That?"

"Yes!"

"No!" James held up his empty glass. "I just finished my drink."

The boy looked at the ashtray, then back at James. "Did you eat your ice cubes, too?"

"Always!" He sauntered out of the room before anything violent happened.

He wandered aimlessly until a thick hand grabbed him. He prepared for a fist in the gut, thinking the bass voice had arrived to seek revenge.

Instead, a fellow about five feet tall and about four feet wide at the shoulders said, "I'm Billy Tubs." Billy Tubs stuck out his hand and James took it. He felt each knuckle slowly and painfully crushed and splintered into the company of each neighboring knuckle. "What is your name?" The bruiser pronounced each word distinctly and clearly and woodenly, as if he were doing television commercials.

"Casey Jones," he replied.

"Do you play sports?"

"Well," James shuffled his right foot bashfully. "My friends say I play a wicked game of badminton."

"Badminton? Badminton? I have never played that sport. Badminton? Is it a rugged sport?"

"Not too. I manage to break my leg every two or three summers."

"That sport sounds like fun!"

"Excuse me," James said politely. "I think I hear someone discussing croquet etiquette." He bounded off with tennis-anyone leaps.

He rounded the corner and stopped. (He could hear Billy Tubs saying "Etiquette? Etiquette?") He found himself in the main hallway that led to the front door. He was tempted to open the door and to keep right on walking.

Then, somehow, through the ever increasing din of the fraternity rush party, he heard the far away chime of an ever advancing clock. It reminded him, for a reason he couldn't find at the moment, of summer nights when he was no more than five, and he had lain in bed, listening to the wind rattle the window shade. What was it that went with the rattle of the window shade? He remembered. It was the sounds of everything on the outside, on the other side of the window sill. The scratch-scratch of the June bugs on the screen. The rustle of the cool tree limbs against the roof of the house. And beneath it all was the soul stealing rumble-mumble of the unseen trains in the distance racing jerkily down stretching tracks.

He loved the sound of the wheels on the tracks more than he did the calling whistle. The whistle symbolized the train, while the muffled rumble represented the motion itself. He was hurt that by the time the noises reached him, their source was long gone and had left him behind. So he would withdraw his attention from the train and let the night wind and the rattling window shade comfort him.

The clock chimed nine times and he was surprised to find that he had remained motionless, counting each chime.

The huge, solid, confining door that James had been eyeing swung smoothly and easily open. A girl walked in. She was tall and slender with glittering blue eyes and a pink, enchanting mouth. She was dressed all in yellow and her dusty blonde hair was pulled back from her forehead by a shimmering yellow ribbon that instantly reminded him of a halo. She was smiling, and if she hadn't been smiling her eyes would have smiled for her.

She moved gracefully and smoothly. Every gesture she made was unconsciously perfect and precise, each made with the feminine air of tarnished gold tulips bowing and rising to the breeze. She entranced James.

She shut the door behind her. She had arrived alone. Her eyes shifted about, innocently, looking for something to settle upon. They circled the first room to her right, slowly, searchingly, yet brightly. Her gaze left the room, dashed past James, paused, returned, and flashed.

"Casey James!" she exclaimed.

At the sound of her voice he dropped his glass, clutched his hands to his heart and slumped to the floor.

She laughed and asked, "What in the world are you doing?"

He said through dying gasps, "The thought of you . . . took away my heart. The sight of you . . . took away my senses." Then he stood up and laughed with her. He was pleased with the way she had said his name and the smile that had sharpened her features.

She brushed the back of his shirt for him. "I haven't seen you in such a long time, it seems!"

Years! Ages! Epochs! "And it's been my loss." James turned in time to see her slightly duck her head. His eyes ran down her legs and back to her face. "You're looking even more beautiful than I remembered."

"Why, thank you!" She was genuinely pleased, which surprised him.

"I like your hair ribbon."

She put her hand to her head and repeated, "Thank you."

"Want to see something pretty?"

She refused to answer.

"Come closer."

She moved forward and turned to find her own reflection in a mirror.

"Oh . . .," she said.

James laughed at her and put her at ease by saying, "So what's new?"

"Nothing," she answered with an ashamed angelic smile.

"No plays?"

"No . . . ."

"No stories?"

"No . . . ."

"No more of those awful water colors?"

"Awful!" Her blue eyes widened, then she laughed when he smiled broadly at her.

"Then what have you been doing?"

She licked her lips. "Parties!"

With hidden dejection he talked to her for a few minutes more until the beach boy he had seen earlier swooped down and took her away. He promised to see her later in the evening.

James began to wander aimlessly. He was drawn toward the room the loud, rhythmic music came from. Instead, as a matter of principle, he

settled himself in the trophy room of the house. The only other person there was one by the name of Henderson whose sole purpose for the evening was to sit in a corner and drink himself into inebriation.

The walls of the trophy room were a deep brown and obviously had been built out of an expensive wood. The brightness of the various trophies and the color of the wood blended together to give the air of clean-cut luxury. The chairs and sofas in the room were of real, black leather, slightly worn from many an evening spent with handsome young men sitting 'round the marble mantelpieced fireplace singing "We are poor little lambs . . . ." James snickered. The windows of the room looked out upon the windows of the sorority next door. Three pairs of binoculars and a telescope lay on a mahogany card table. James imagined the gnome of a house mother cackling and saying, "Boys will be boys!" He wondered if there was ever a case where a house mother had been raped.

The thought of her only a few paces away getting drunk infuriated him.

Henderson rose to action. "America, America, God shed his grace on thee, and crown thy good with brotherhood, from sea to shining sea!" He gave the flag that stood in a corner a drunken salute then discretely lifted up an edge of the cloth and pulled a bottle out of hiding. He pried at the snug cork. "Want a couple of . . . ? What did you say your name was?"

"Jesse."

"Jesse! That's right! Want a couple of fingers of rat gut, Jesse?"

"Not even a hand."

Henderson slopped liquor into his own glass. "Oops. Little wet, isn't it? You know what I can't figure out?" He dropped a few ice cubes into his glass then put the bottle back behind the flag. "I can't figure out why people get drunk."

James began to listen.

"What I mean is," Henderson continued, reeling about the room and gesturing wildly, "what I mean is, when you get drunk, you sweat a lot, right? Okay, why wouldn't you get drunk if you stood in a vat of gin, say, and let it soak in?"

"Maybe you would," James offered.

Henderson stopped. "You really think so?"

"It all sounds logical to me."

"I'll be damned. I wonder if you'd still get a hangover."

"What's it matter if you still get drunk."

"I don't like hangovers."

"Why? Aren't they the fuzzy badge of courage?"

"Sure, but they hurt."

"Then don't get drunk."

Henderson stood staring at the ice cubes in his drink. "Don't be silly. The hangover's worth it."

"Worth what?"

"Getting drunk, of course!"

"Right!" agreed James.

"Getting drunk is the greatest problem solver ever. Everything is reduced to brotherhood. It's a prerequisite to getting along."

I reserve the right to not like whom I want to, thought James.

Henderson fell into his corner and James' mind drifted back to a hot summer's day when he had watched an old salt of a sailor teach a young kid to dock a sailboat.

"Have you got a Plan?" the Old Salt asked as the boat skimmed along.

"Yes!" the boy answered.

The wind carried them swiftly closer to the dock.

"Have you got a Plan?" the Old Salt shouted, worried.

"I got a Plan!" the boy replied loudly.

They were soon dangerously near the dock, slicing through the water far too rapidly.

"You gotta have a Plan!" screamed the Old Salt. "Always have a Plan!"

"I have one!" the boy screamed back.

The boat smashed straight into the dock, splintering the hull into pieces.

"You didn't have a Plan," the Old Salt complained dejectedly as he slowly sank into the water.

"I did too," the boy said, smiling somewhat.

James pulled himself from his dream and noted that he would be damned if he would smash the boat into the dock. He decided his Plan would be to attack her from the level of those around her. A perfect bit of madness marked by method. "Henderson," he called, "this is me, Jesse."

"Right, Jesse!"

"I want a bottle of whiskey."

"Gotta sing for your supper."

"Gladly. What?"

"Try 'Onward Christian Soldiers.'"

"I never knew that kind of song."

"Aw, hell. I like you, Jesse. Sing 'The Whiffenpoof Song.'"

James concentrated. "Uh, 'Gentlemen songsters out on a spree, damned from here to eternity . . .' Or something like that. Where is it?"

"Behind the picture of Jesus over the mantelpiece. Don't ever say we aren't a religious fraternity."

James took the framed picture of Jesus off the wall, revealing a bottle of whiskey in a velvet lined hollow. Fantastic, he thought. He took the bottle and put the picture back.

"You didn't finish the pretty song," Henderson said accusingly.

"Tough."

"You don't like the pretty song."

"I don't like you either."

"Then take your arm off my stomach!"

"I haven't got my arm on your stomach!"

"Then I think I'm gonna throw up."

James quickly left the room of tarnished yellow trophies and locked himself in the same bathroom he had visited previously. He began to sip and gag on the liquor. Here I come, sugar baby. Roland. Charlemagne. King Arthur. El Cid. Lancelot. Aeneas. Ulysses. Humphrey Bogart. Roguish devil, I am. You'll perform again. No complacency for you. People like you can't afford to be happy.

He emerged a long time later reciting his Nobel Peace prize acceptance speech and began to wander through the vaguely familiar rooms of the house. He ambled until he found himself out upon a balcony. He heard a bass voice on the dark patio below whisper, "Sure I love you, Baby. And what I feel for you is natural, and what is natural is good . . ."

James up-ended the bottle and poured out the remaining whiskey. Again there was a horrified scream followed by a bellowing, "Goddamn it!"

James leaned over the balcony railing and shouted, "Nyah nyah nyah! No seduction tonight! No seduction tonight!"

The bass voice was raging. "I'm gonna kill you, buddy! I'm gonna kill you!"

James smiled down at him. "You can't kill me. I'm a saint. I'm Saint James. I own a hospital."

The bass voice wasn't there any longer. The bass voice was coming to kill him.

The girl on the patio looked up, infuriated. "Just who the hell do you think you are?"

"I'm a professional Jello watcher. I watch girls in low cut dresses."

"You're dirty!"

"Don't wear low cut dresses," he said simply, glad that she did and that he was standing above her. Then he stumbled back into the living room.

He panicked and charged into the room where everyone was dancing. He stood with his feet wide spread, with his hands and arms hanging apart from his body, like an enraged bull surveying the area, doomed to die because he doesn't know the territory. He saw her dancing with the beach boy jerk he didn't know. The fact that he didn't know any of the other jerks didn't lessen the fact that he didn't like this jerk because he didn't know him. He stomped up to the beach boy jerk, tapped him on the shoulder and said, "Screw off." Then he stepped in front of her and said gaily, "Let's dance!"

The beach boy backed away. "If he really loved you," James said confidentially, at the same time doing his version of what he thought was dancing, "he would have told me to go play in the traffic." He undulated with the other jerking bodies. The music twanged, blared, drummed and crashed, vibrating through James' head. He loved it. The music had a



pulsating beat that made him roll his eyes and shake his head. He felt completely in the grasp of the music. It controlled him and it drove him.

She watched him wild-eyed as he began to talk.

Dancing with his thumb hooked in his belt and acting very superior, he held her eyes and said, "You know what you are? You are the kind of girl who goes out and buys flowers for her room because you're the kind of girl who goes out and buys flowers for her room. That's the kind of girl you are." He waited for her to applaud his fabulous statement and definition.

"You're drunk!" she said.

He frowned. "So are you." He danced waving one finger in the air, as if he was doing the Big Apple. "Don't look down at me, sugar baby. I think you're the coolest girl in the world. Rats! That's the damn last part. You got me all mixed up." He reeled away from her, composed himself and reorganized his drunken speech, and reeled back, "Uh, you know what you are? You are scared as hell. Fooled you! You thought I was going to give you the flower bit again, didn't you?" He snickered knowingly and complacently. "Heh heh heh. I read you, right? But what you don't know is, all us other bastards are scared as hell, too. We're all running men." He laughed for awhile, then got scared and suspicious, looking around him. "Shhhhhh. We can't be seen because I'm going to get beat up. Maybe killed. So don't try to go away because I'll follow you, and then I'll be seen, and then I'll get beat up. Maybe killed. And it'll all be your fault." He began to giggle about the fact that he was going to get beat up, maybe killed. "God, I hate pain," he chortled.

Then he got serious again, in his drunken manner. He thrust up and down closer to her and draped one arm over her shoulder. "I don't like all these people," he said profoundly and simply. "So click. Clock. Clump. Cleep. Asleep in the deep. Hey! I rhymed!" There was no reaction from her relative to his rhyme, so he decided to criticize her again. "Just because you get in with a bunch of people doesn't mean you should stop dreaming. My God, every one knows that. Don't they? Hell, I dream all the time. When I'm driving. In my classes. Come on. You're not the type that needs a lot of . . . what's-its-face or whatever the hell that word is." He gestured with his hand, circled on the dance floor and fell down.

He struggled to his feet.

She was still staring in amazement.

"Here," he said. "One of your three images is crying." He handed her his handkerchief. "Be careful. It's got blood all over it."

"I'm not crying and it doesn't have blood all over it."

He looked at it. "Hey, yeah, that's right. Thanks!" He put it back in his pocket. "You know," he began with a tone of aged wisdom, "we've all been hurt before. I was hurt by a girl once. She had big breasts! Boy, did she have big breasts! YES SIR! And I went with that girl a whole year be-

fore I discovered I loved her only for those big breasts! Boy, did it hurt me when I discovered I was going to have to stop feeling her up? Let me tell you . . .!"

She slapped him as hard as she could, mostly out of disappointment.

"So today I just watch. No more feel. You shouldn't have done that. I was just coming to the part about how cool I think you are." He fell flat on his face.

As he lay on the floor he knew he had done something wrong but was too comfortable to stop and think what it was. Wild, dancing feet kicked his legs and sides and he enjoyed it. He moved his hands up under his head and closed his eyes. Kick away, harder! Harder! Tramp, tramp, tramp! Harder, harder! Push 'em back, push 'em back, waaaay back! Tenting tonight, tenting tonight, tenting on the old dance floor.

He felt hands grab his shoulders and waist and hoist him into an upright position. "I know my rights," he mumbled, loudly. "I got a right to vote just like everybody else. I'm not moving from here. You can't make me!"

He went limp but the hands stiffened and carried him to the sidelines. He was flopped into a hard, metal chair. The reality of the uncomfortable chair brought a degree of sense back to him. "Only uncomfortableness is real," he mumbled. He growled, "Try to get comfortable and you forget which way is north."

He stared at his shoes. "If they were red shoes, I could dance." He laughed and wiped a slight drooling from his mouth. "This shoe is a boat," he said like a child at play, moving the foot back and forth in a curved line. "And this shoe is the shore." He set that foot up pointing straight into the bodies on the dancing room floor moving in a painful, noiseless limbo. Then he ran the boat foot into the shore foot.

James moved himself off the chair and into a standing position. He weaved out of the room muttering that all yellow daffodils would receive a free, ten day home trial. He stumbled down the hall to the big solid door.

As he swung it open a deep voice called challengingly, "Hey, buddy!"

He broke and ran outside, drunkenly. A hand on his shoulder stopped him in the dark, purple-black yard. "I'll bet you're a football player," James said without turning around. "I'll bet you got cleat marks all over your face."

The hand jerked him around. The last thing James noticed before the fist smashed into his face and he was sent sprawling in the wet grass was a flash of yellow in the open doorway.

-- Jim Daniels

## **the end**

When I gave my poem to the literati,  
they halfway understood nothing of what  
I meant.

In the end there will be a child who  
never spoke at all.

-- Susan Silverglat

**25 cents**