COTTONWOOD REVIEW

WINTER 1974-75

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The Cottonwood Review is a national literary magazine with its home at the University of Kansas. Our goal is to make national poetry, fiction, and photography available to readers in our area of the country and, at the same time, to make the best writing and photography in our area available to a national audience.

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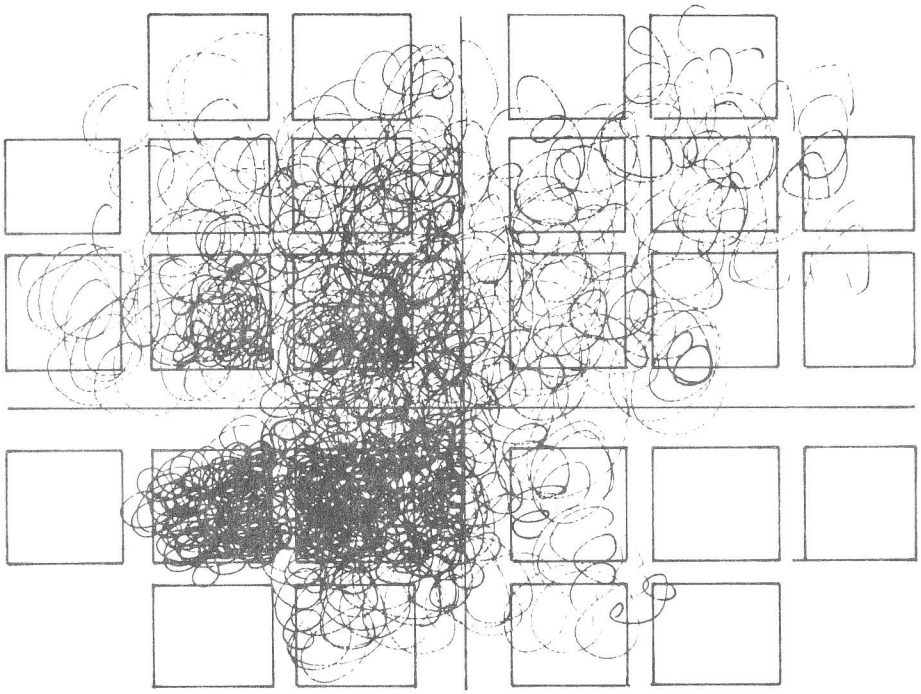

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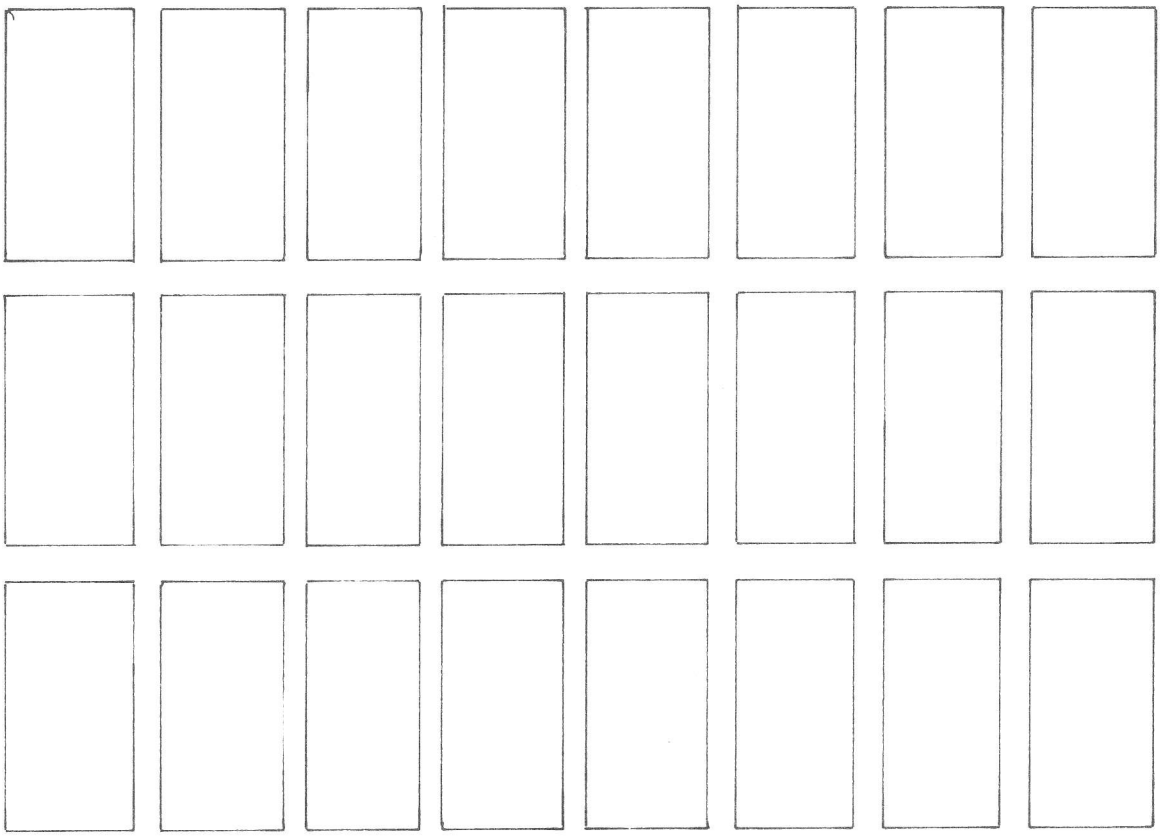
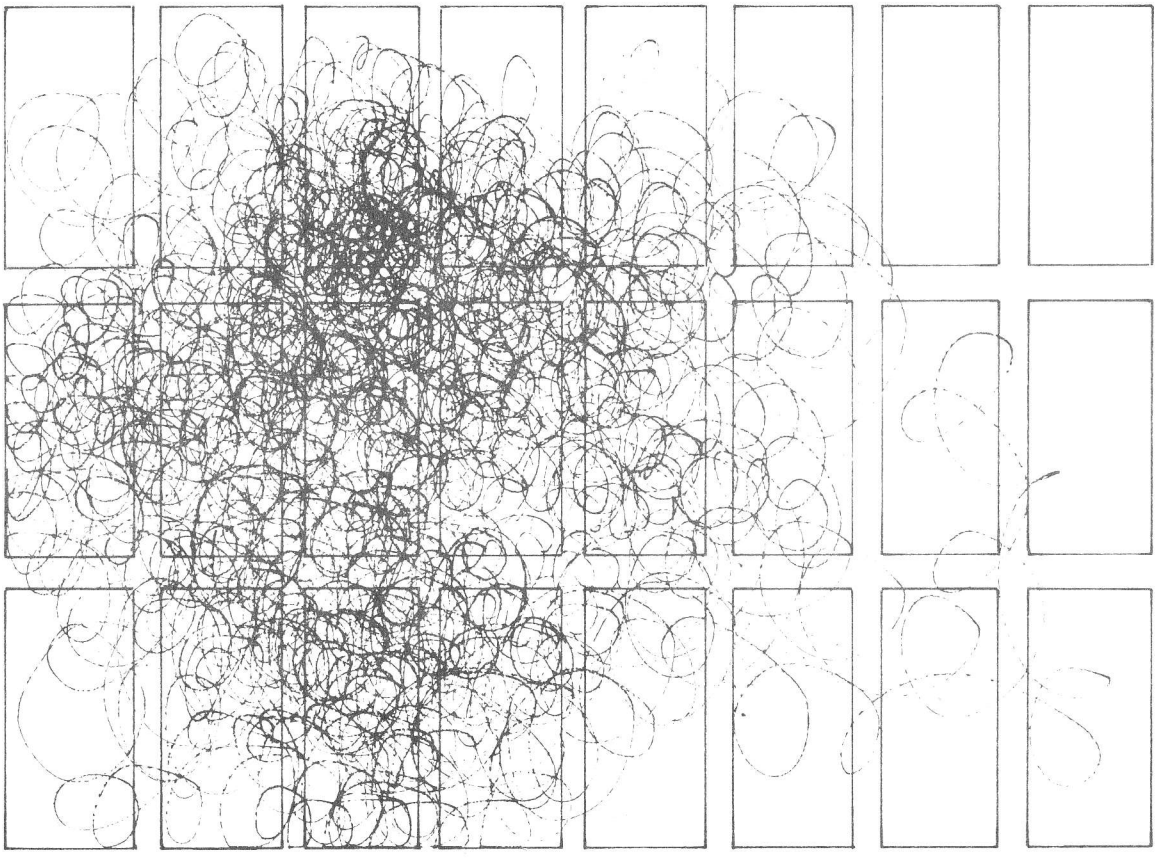




William Whitman

THE SWALLOW

this morning Brahim
the widower

brought me a bird
cupped in his good hand

wings
exquisitely curved

righteous shell and sea-signs
on its head

it crouched in my palm
too weak to fly

I've set it on a ledge
out of reach of cats

from time to time it gazes down
through filmy eyes

now and again
it shudders

alone in that stately process
it droops

toward a parting
of its selves

William Gallagher

TREE PLANTER

In bed on Saturday morning I listen on the radio
to gardeners phoning in their symptoms,
trying to save a $5 house call
or the tree that's rooted in their sewers.
The garden shop men slurp coffee
and speak with casual authority of sodwebworms.

The sourfruit trees I knew as a boy
were cut down for a high school years ago.
Now when I want a tree,
a spruce to cut the backyard wind,
a cherry to blossom for my spring,
I dial a phone number;
a man writes my name and address on an index card
beside a price,
tells another man to pick up a shovel and go.
He meets my wife, accepts a cup of chocolate and a brownie,
gives my boy a toy shovel,
and leaves a twig in the grass,
pruning shears and a bag of chemical mulch in the garage.

Michael Smetzer

SALAMANDERS

When I was twelve, I caught a spotted salamander
in our yard
and took him in a jar to school.
When I appeared with him in science class,
the teacher stood above me at a loss,
"Why did you bring it here? We've all seen
salamanders."
This hadn't occurred to me.
Because it delighted me to have caught him,
I brought him.

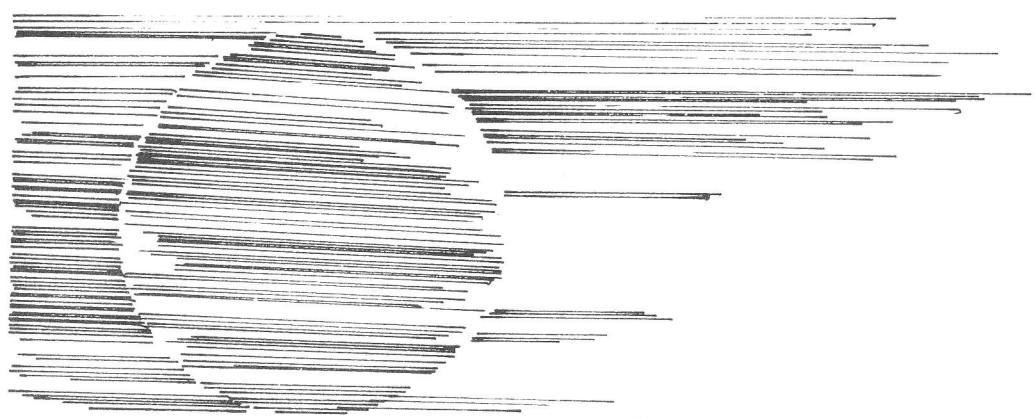
Michael Smetzer

THE WHISTLE

I could never whistle when I
was a boy.
Once, while I was sitting
at my desk
absently forcing air through
my lips,
a beautiful whistle shredded
the class.
The teacher turned from the
blackboard
like a startled Day of Judgment.

When the bell rang she lined us
up at the door
and demanded of each--
"DID
YOU
WHISTLE
?"
"i don't even know how, " i
pleaded.

I still can't.



Willie Cromwell

CYCLE

"The birth of Lupe Velez"

The fullness ripped
from the arc of her belly
with a shriek,
flung to the void;
like Lazarus
she goes forth,
stands upon the sand,
watches the birds
fly away from the shore,
turns from the sea;
its million tiny lights
the broken reflection
of a radiance
too bright, too bright
to bear.

"Lupe Velez learns to fly"

Perched like a bird
on the tree of her thought
she leaps,
falls to love --
her frail bones shatter;
Washed free by her blood
she rises from the dust
with the wings of a hawk,
rips flesh from bones
of love;
leaving the carrion,
she ascends, secure.
Her outstretched arms
weave bare branches
of her nighttime tree
into the patterns of dream
and flight.

"The death of Lupe Velez"

Terns and gulls above
circle and wheel,
the carrion fed
scream her elegy.
Lupe Velez is dead,
drowned
in a sea of mirrors.
A coal-black rose
she blossoms
from the dead-white soil
of her bed,
breaks through reflecting walls,
scatters shattered glass like tears
on swirling, sea-salt
gardens below.

Guy R. Beining

lost in discovery

86.

the dwarf
caught
the misers ear
black appeared
not blood
a toneless crack
& he chanted
with polite blue eyes.
the miser screamed
white & sudden
it was all
he could afford.

Richard Caram

Lullabye

my daughter climbs on me
in search of sleep--
school comes soon

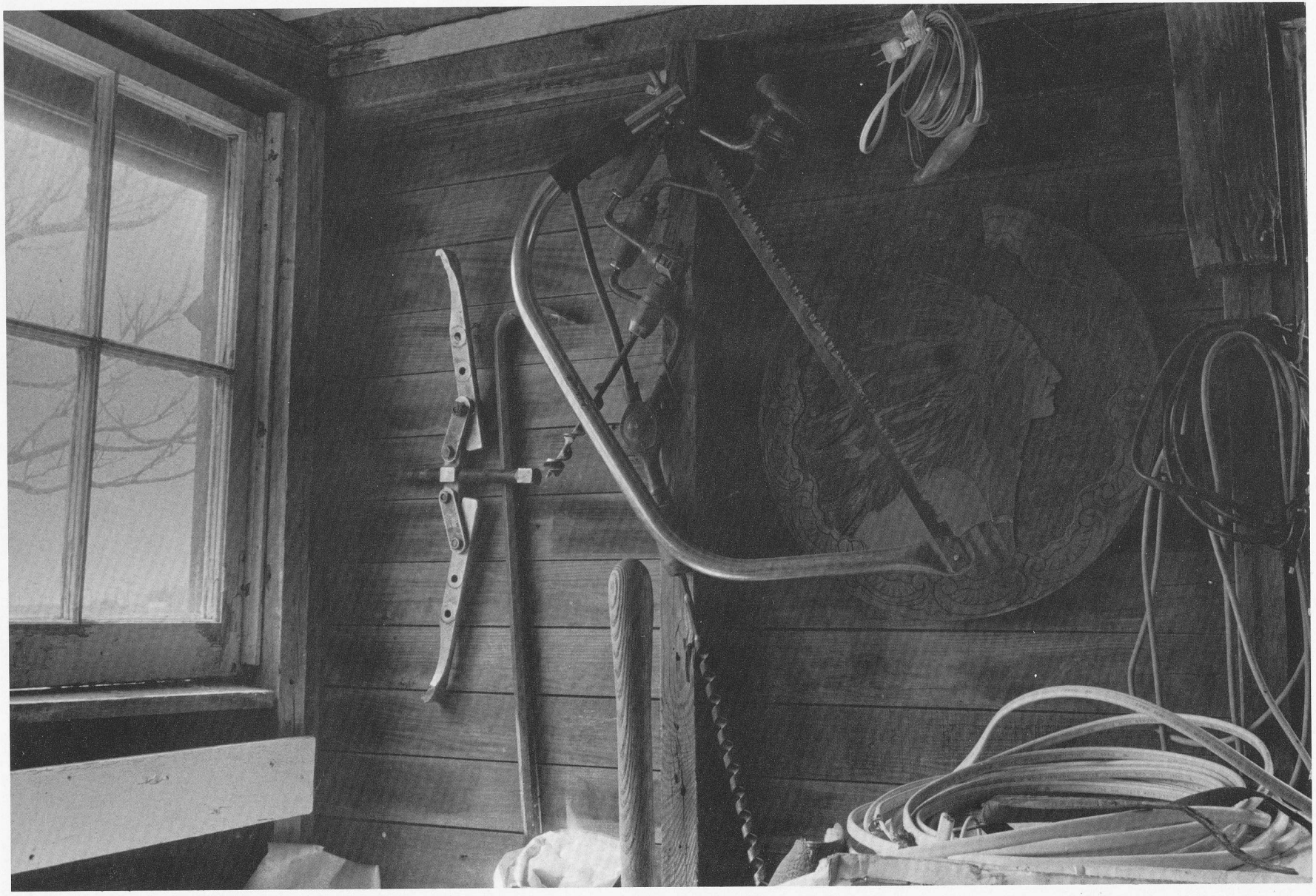
she lies like bright flowers
in her Chinese pajamas
and shifts her sleek head
until she finds that music in my chest
her mother
in the making
also played for her

that sound
in time
will put us both to sleep

Mark DeFoe

My Uncles: Memories from the Age of Five

They were more hunters than fishermen: gruff,
impatient, plaid-coated. The ducks before
their long blue-barreled guns fell so much fluff
for pillows. I touched those guns, shyly, more
in awe with every bird they buckled down.
My Uncles ("Stay back, " they boomed, "and way clear")
let me crouch in the corn-stalk blind. A frown
for every twitch or shiver and a leer
and chuckle when I begged to take a leak.
Let me, numb-nose, squat by their noon-time fire
and scalded me with vile coffee. Let me seek,
for globes of flame, tumbleweed, snared on the wire.
Let me pluck a mallard I feared would moan
and sleep against their shoulders driving home.



D. R. Nusbaum

Larry Schwarm

Muriel Lamb

A SMALL AFFAIR

Raymond Beck was short and pear shaped. He had a ruddy complexion and large moist blue eyes. The few strands of blond hair that remained to him he combed carefully over his sunburned head. Mr. Beck was a traveling salesman of ladies lingerie. He was one of those people who seemed to be middle aged all their lives. Raymond had been brought up in a large Catholic family. He was a foster child who had stayed on. Nobody seemed to have ever noticed whether he was there or wasn't there, so he stayed on.

Prudence Bliss was fifty-six years old and proud of it. She always held her head high. She was also proud of her tall thin body. Although nobody ever told her she was pretty, and she had never married, she thought herself to be quite attractive, even beautiful. She prided herself on the way she controlled the disgust she felt when she surveyed the white, thick, gross bodies that she assisted into brassieres and girdles in the back of her little corset shop, La Petite Femme.

Prudence was an only child, the issue of homely, dull, and indulgent parents who saw in their daughter a second chance for the social status they had wanted but had never achieved. As a child her laughter had a shrill sound to it, and as she grew older it sounded like the barking of a small angry dog. She tried desperately to be popular. In high school she was constantly frustrated by the need to work to earn money for the nicer clothes that she required and the compulsion to join every club in the school that would have her. At the end of her junior year her father had died and she had a little breakdown that resulted in her having to rest the entire summer. Her senior year everyone was much nicer to her and she managed to push herself into the office of class secretary.

Mr. Beck arrived at the Atlantic City Boardwalk at precisely ten o'clock that Monday morning in mid July. The sun was already baking young hot bodies on the broad mud colored beach. Raymond smiled nervously at the young female bodies, thinking in spite of himself how this one or that one would look in his new line of "Seduction" lingerie. He shook his head like a huge dog just emerging from an unwanted bath, shifted his suitcase full of underwear and nightgowns to his other hand, and not too hopefully began trudging along the wooden boardwalk looking for lingerie shops.

He passed tawdry five and dimes, hot dog stands, souvenir shops, and old hotels whose faded lobbies were peopled by ancients who, for indeterminable periods of time, rocked or simply sat quietly staring out at the life passing before them. Mr. Beck did not reflect upon the circumstance of these old people, but continued on, looking in the windows of each business he passed. He paused briefly before a shop

that carried lingerie, but still lacking the courage to enter because of the customers, he walked on until he found another, La Petite Femme, unoccupied.

Above the door a bell tinkled softly as Mr. Beck entered the female domain of thick pink carpeting and tinted glass showcases filled with lavender, pink, and lime-green nighties, as well as brassieres, panties and slips of every hue and shade both plain and capricious. When Miss Bliss entered the room from the back of her shop Raymond was immediately struck by how attractive she was. She wore a bright yellow knit dress on a tall straight figure, her lips and nails were painted red, and her black hair, well-laced with grey, she wore in an upsweep. Raymond thought that without her clothes on she would look like "Lilly, the Lingerie Lady," a personage whom he saw frequently at Leyman's House of Burlesque--then he blushed furiously at his own cheek.

Miss Bliss, noticing this stranger's admiring glances and blushes, tried to put him at his ease.

"Good morning. Can I help you with anything?"

"Oh, yes. No! What I mean is...may I introduce myself?"

"You certainly may," Miss Bliss answered with a smile.

He extended his hand which Miss Bliss took briefly.

"Raymond Beck. I'm with the firm, Lingerie by Lisa."

"Oh yes. We don't carry that line, but I've heard of it," she replied pleasantly as she moved behind one of the glass counters.

Suitcase still in hand, Raymond looked around the room. "This is a beautiful shop, Miss..., Mrs....?"

"Miss Prudence Bliss."

"Miss Bliss," he repeated beaming. "Well, you've certainly got good taste. A fine location too."

"Why thank you, thank you very much."

Raymond didn't want to leave.

"I mean all your displays are so pretty. You can tell a lot about people by their shop, you know."

"Yes?"

"Well, I think so," he said firmly. He put his suitcase down and nervously began patting his wet forehead with a wrinkled handkerchief.

Miss Bliss looked at his suitcase. "I'm a little overstocked now, but perhaps later you could show me something?"

"Oh, yes. I'd be delighted--anytime." Mr. Beck drew a small lavender card from his jacket pocket and handed it to her. She smiled at him again.

"Could you have lunch with me?" he brazened.

"Yes, that would be nice. Twelve o'clock?"

Raymond floated out of the shop. When he returned at noon Miss Bliss suggested that they eat lunch at The Four Seasons, a nice restaurant on the Boardwalk just a block or so from her own shop. Miss Bliss had a tomato aspic salad and iced tea and Mr. Beck had a hamburger and a glass of milk. Mr. Beck tried to eat slowly and carefully so that Miss Bliss would not object to him on that account. By the time they were halfway through their lunch Raymond had explained that his home was a rented room in the City.

"That must be lonely sometimes. I've always lived with my mother. She's all alone, you know." She looked thoughtful. "Maybe if I'd had brothers and sisters things might have been different... but we're very content, mother keeps house and I keep shop."

"I think you're wonderful to look after your mother," Raymond replied with admiration in his voice. And later when she confided what she paid to rent space for her little shop Raymond was dismayed and a little angry and said that he "just didn't see how anyone could take advantage of such a lovely lady." Prudence smiled happily and lowered her eyes. As they were leaving the restaurant she commented upon the beautiful bowl of yellow tulips sitting on a small mahogany table near the cloak room. When he left her at the door of her shop an hour later they had made plans to have lunch together again on Thursday.

Thursday morning Raymond got up at seven a.m., an hour earlier than usual. He polished his well-worn brown shoes before he showered and shaved twice. He took an extra half hour dressing and drenched himself lavishly with the aftershave lotion, one of those advertised on television, that he had purchased the day before. He hurried to his car, got himself all in a sweat, and had to return to his room to change his shirt.

The yellow tulips cost Raymond twenty-five dollars but Prudence loved them. She had smiled gaily and said, "Why, aren't you thoughtful!" Lunch was delightful; they went back to The Four Seasons and this time they each had a cocktail before lunch. After she had scolded him twice for having called her Miss Bliss, Raymond felt encouraged to invite her out for a weekend date. "Oh, I'm awfully afraid I won't be able to do that," she replied. "Thursday nights I have Bridge, Friday nights after dinner I have my hair done, and you know I must spend Saturdays in the shop, and then Saturday night is fellowship night at church. And oh, Sunday mornings I sing in our church choir. We belong to the Episcopal Church you know," she explained in a superior tone, "and Mother always expects to spend Sundays with me." Raymond looked down at his plate.

"You do understand, don't you Raymond?" she asked softly, briefly covering his hand with hers.

He managed a small smile, "Of course I do, Prue."

Prue and Raymond saw each other nearly every day during the week for coffee or lunch. The truth was that Raymond did not even like coffee but he disguised the fact as well as he could by adding copious amounts of sugar and milk to the bitter black liquid. Each time Raymond saw Prue she would let him know when next he could see her so that he was continually juggling his appointments around to meet her schedule. But Raymond never seemed to mind this minor inconvenience for he was only too happy to make any arrangements that she wished.

At Prue's suggestion Raymond stopped eating in cheap cafeterias and began having dinner in a better class of restaurant. She had spent all of one lunch hour explaining the importance of his health and well being and he had felt immensely happy and flattered at her interest in him. Along with this he began an exercise program. Every day when he arrived home after work he stripped down to his boxer shorts and ran in place for five minutes, then he stood under a long cool shower, his heart still thumping madly, while he thought about his new physique and what a surprise it would be for Prue.

During the fall evenings and weekends, instead of sleeping or going to a burlesque show as he had formerly done, Raymond began a cleaning campaign. First he cleaned out his room thoroughly. Stacked in the corners of his closet were tall piles of erotic magazines which now rather startled him. He had stopped buying them after he had met Prue, and since then had forgotten that he had them. Raymond looked at the blazing covers of Fabulous Females and Girls of the World, which mainly featured shapely young women in skimpy negligees. Then imagining how upset Prue would be to think he would read such things, he furtively stuffed them all into his neighbor's trash can. After that he repainted his beige room a pale green and bought himself a soft white cotton bedspread from Macy's. He even straightened out the boxes of lingerie samples in the back of his station wagon, and after moving the damaged boxes to his room, had his car washed and waxed.

Raymond thought about Prue all the time. He bought her presents: a cashmere sweater, a platinum wrist watch from a wholesaler he knew, a hand painted silk scarf. Although he didn't know when he would be able to give these gifts to Prue he couldn't seem to stop himself from buying them. Feeling guilty, but determined, he even visited the Episcopal church one Sunday morning. He found a seat in the rear of the church and watched Prue while she sang in the choir then hurried out at the conclusion of the service so she wouldn't see him.

Prue sat at the bridge table among the M&M's, cashews, pink and green mints, napkins, iced teas, cards, score pads and pencils, and her three unmarried middle aged friends. Prue had felt uncomfortable all day. She didn't want to tell her friends about Raymond just

yet, but Dorothy, the owner of an expensive dress shop, a highly developed sense of social rank, two divorces and a marked propensity to gossip, had seen them together the day before. It wasn't until the last round was being played, and Prue was beginning to believe that Dorothy had forgotten about Raymond, that Dorothy, still arranging her cards and not looking up, commented: "Did you girls know that our Prue has a secret admirer girls? A male secret admirer."

"It isn't any secret, Dorothy."

"Oh, isn't it? But you weren't going to tell us were you?"

"Of course I was."

"How long have you been seeing him?" Dorothy asked. She snapped her card down and picked up her trick.

"Oh, only a couple of months."

"A couple of months!" shrieked Clarice, her small hand flying to her mouth.

"What does he do? How did you meet him?" Charlotte asked leaning forward, her face alive with interest.

"He represents a lingerie company and I met him in the shop." Prue explained in a little voice, her face flushing hotly. She just couldn't help feeling ashamed and embarrassed about Raymond's job.

"Oh Lord," Dorothy said laughing. "A sales rep! And he looks like Porky Pig to boot!"

Prue sat stiffly in her chair while they all ate their lime chiffon pie and drank their tea.

The next morning Prue thought about Raymond while she changed the lingerie displays. If he only had a better title everything would be so much easier. He just doesn't know how embarrassing it is for me when I have to explain his job to everyone. The best thing is just not to tell people about him, that's all. It really isn't any of their business anyway. Having made this decision Prue felt considerably lightened and when Raymond came by the shop at noon carrying a bouquet of yellow roses she gave him her prettiest smile and motioned for him to come in.

Later that week, as they strolled back from lunch on the Boardwalk, Prue took Raymond's arm and casually walked him over to a pale blue sports jacket in the window of a men's specialty shop. "You'd look so handsome in that Raymond," she had said to him, her face serious and sweet. After he had seen Prue to the door of her shop he went back to the men's shop and ordered the jacket in his size, plus a pair of navy blue slacks suggested by the clerk, a plain navy knit tie, and two shirts: a plain white and a light blue stripe.

Raymond left the shop feeling happy and expansive, but he hadn't walked fifteen feet when an obese woman, heavily made up and clothed in a bright red pants suit, stared at him belligerently as she was

pushed along the Boardwalk in a large cart by a tan and well muscled young man. Although Raymond offered the woman a friendly smile, she allowed her small white poodle to continue yapping and nipping at his heels for a full block and a half down the Boardwalk.

In late September, two days before Prue's birthday, Raymond decided to buy her a string of genuine pearls from Tiffany's. It seemed to Raymond, as her birthday drew near, that somehow the other presents he had bought for her did not seem quite adequate. Gifts which now included not only the watch, scarf, and sweater, but a pair of pink satin slippers and a bottle of Chanel No. 5 perfume as well. Before he had met Prue he had never spent much money on himself; he had neither friends nor expensive vices so over the years he had accumulated over sixteen thousand dollars in his savings account.

The next day, shaken but happy, Raymond emerged from Tiffany's two thousand dollars poorer; he had seen a pearl ring that he thought Prue would like too. While the pearls were being wrapped, Raymond spent two hours in a drug store looking for the perfect card to accompany the pearls. The pearl ring, he decided, would make a nice Christmas gift.

The following afternoon Prue decided to take an extra long lunch hour because it was her birthday. She directed Raymond down the shore to Arby's Sea Food Inn for a leisurely lunch beside the ocean. They indulged in a before dinner glass of champagne to celebrate her birthday and he presented her gift to her.

"Oh Raymond, you shouldn't have. Really," she gushed happily.

"I wanted to. You are a very dear person," he answered solemnly.

"Well thank you Raymond. I can't imagine what it is." She opened the card first and pretended not to notice the verse that included 'I love you.' When she opened the brown velvet box and saw the pearls and the Tiffany in gold script her eyes filled with tears.

She looked into his eyes and pressed his hand warmly. "Raymond, this is just about the loveliest gift anyone has ever given me."

"I'm glad you like it Prue," he answered softly.

"Raymond," she said impulsively, "I've made arrangements for you to come for dinner on Sunday. Can you come?" Raymond smiled happily and said he could indeed.

When she returned home from work that night, after having removed the pearls, she praised her mother's birthday dinner lavishly then broached the subject.

"Mother, I would like to invite a gentleman friend of mine over for dinner this Sunday."

"What gentleman friend, Prudence?"

"Just a friend, mother. He's a very nice man and I think it would be nice if we had him for dinner, that's all."

"Where did you meet him?"

"In the store mother, he came into the store."

"Really. Buying lingerie?"

"Of course not. He's with one of the lingerie firms that supplies our store."

"What do you propose to do about Mildred?"

Prue hadn't thought about that. Mildred was the boarder who lived upstairs and she took her evening meal with the Bliss ladies. She had moved into the upstairs apartment fifteen years earlier when she had become widowed. She didn't hear well. Prudence had had to buy her a set of ear phones for her radio as Mildred's daily Baptist Bible Hour had just about driven Mrs. Bliss to what she had called "a premature grave." Now Mildred was almost the perfect tenant, very quiet and unobtrusive except that she wore the ear phones all the time now, even during the evening meal. What was worse she giggled sporadically throughout the meal as if she were still plugged into her radio. She ate rapidly though, stabbing little pieces of food with her fork, and with a last little fit of giggles would turn and rush upstairs and slam the door behind herself not to be seen nor heard from until the next evening meal.

"Perhaps she could go ahead and eat at two o'clock and Mr. Beck and I could have a glass of sherry in the living room while we're waiting for her to finish."

"All right Prudence, if you think it's that important," her mother answered, looking annoyed.

"It's not that important mother, I just thought it might be nice, that's all."

On Sunday Raymond arrived a little early so he sat outside in his car for a few minutes looking at Prue's house. It was a good sized house, white with a large screened-in front porch and a postage-stamp sized front yard. The house was squeezed in between other white two-story houses with screened-in front porches and tiny yards. An elderly lady seemed to be trying to play peek-a-boo with him from behind lace curtains in an upstairs window. Raymond got out of his car with his two pound box of chocolates and went to the door.

Although Raymond did his utmost to be correct in every way and to make friends with Prue's mother, Mrs. Bliss remained aloof and hostile all afternoon. She repeatedly referred to Prue's shop as "our shop," and "our little family," and "one's responsibilities," throughout the meal. She seemed shocked to learn that Raymond had been brought up in a Catholic family although he quickly tried to amend this by saying he hadn't attended church in years. From the kitchen

Raymond heard Mrs. Bliss ask Prue if she knew "what sort of people he had come from originally." After the dishes were done Mrs. Bliss disappeared and Prue and Raymond sat alone in the living room without saying anything and pretty soon Raymond said he "had better be going," and Prue had answered, "Oh, don't mind mother, she just isn't used to guests." Raymond said he "guessed he'd better be going anyway," and Prue got up and walked him to the door. As he stepped off the porch Prue called out, "See you in the morning for coffee?" By the time he got back to his room he had a terrible headache and he felt nauseated. He was afraid he had ruined his chances with Prue. He went to bed at nine o'clock and lay in the dark thinking about the day and what he could have done to make it better. He even considered writing Prue a note of apology but he couldn't decide what to say. He wasn't able to get to sleep until four o'clock in the morning.

When he met Prue for coffee Monday morning she was her usual cheerful self and didn't seem to be at all mad at him. Raymond felt greatly relieved. Prue never invited him back for dinner but in all other respects she was sweet to him, and thoughtful. They decided to see one another on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday for coffee, and Tuesday and Thursday for lunch. It took a great deal of self-restraint to keep from telephoning Prue on the weekends, but Raymond reminded himself that he must respect her consideration for her mother.

One Wednesday in mid-October, while they stood at her shop door, Prue said, "Raymond, suppose I skip Church Fellowship this Saturday night, there's a play that I want to see in the City. Do you think we could go?"

"That would be wonderful Prue, if you think it's all right?"

"Oh, just this once. I'm not a prisoner, am I dear?"

"Of course not. Shall I pick you up at home?"

"No. I'll be here all day, why don't you just pick me up here after work?"

On the way home that night she sat right next to Raymond on the car seat and put her head on his shoulder and fell asleep. It was the first time she had ever done this and it made Raymond feel important. He drove very slowly and carefully so he wouldn't disturb her. When he stopped the car in front of her house she wakened with a little jerk.

"Oh Raymond, I'm sorry. Did I go to sleep?"

"Yes, for a little while. You must be exhausted," he said sympathetically, "working all day then going out at night."

His arm was around her shoulders lightly. She did not move away. They both stared out into the darness.

"Raymond, do you mind that I'm a little cold?"

Raymond looked baffled. "Are you cold Prue?" he asked as he began removing his jacket.

"No, no. I don't mean that," she replied laughing a little. "I mean that we never make love or anything."

"Oh that. I never expected that Prue. Besides, you're not cold, you're one of the warmest most wonderful human beings I've ever met."

"Thank you Raymond. I knew you'd understand. I guess I'm just too old--past that sort of thing."

"I guess I am too. Don't think about it much."

They sat for a moment longer, his arm still about her shoulders.

"I guess I'd better go in now. Mother thinks I'm still fifteen years old."

Holding hands they walked to her door.

"I had a lovely evening, Raymond. Thank you."

"So did I."

She gave Raymond an odd look then reached up and kissed him lightly on the mouth. It was better, nicer than she had expected. Not wet and demanding, but warm and gentle. His breath smelled of peppermints.

Sunday morning, however, everyone seemed to have noticed her absence the night before.

"Were you ill, Prudence?"

"Well, where were you?"

"We missed you dear."

"Didn't you remember that you were group leader this week?"

"We do so depend upon you don't we?" and

"Well, see that it doesn't happen again, ha, ha." By the time she reached her car Prue felt scalded.

Raymond began to spend a lot of time thinking about diamond rings. He went into a small shop off Third Avenue and came out with some literature on sizes, shapes, and colors. Raymond took the pamphlets home, spread them out on his bed, and studied them diligently. He decided to purchase the ring at Tiffany's and he concluded that a gold band, a solitaire setting, and a three-quarter size carat diamond would be about right. Not small, but not garish either.

Bob Forbes, Lingerie by Lisa's Regional Manager, called Raymond in the middle of the week and congratulated him on the three new Atlantic City accounts he had added in just three months. A raise would be coming through for him on the first of the month. Raymond felt so expansive that he told Bob that he might be getting married soon. Bob sounded genuinely pleased at this new turn of events and promised him a party if it came off. By the time he had hung up the telephone Raymond was near tears. A party for him. Imagine that. No one had

ever given him a party--not even when he was little. He tried to imagine what it would be like and couldn't.

That same evening Prudence and her mother sat in the living room doing their needlepoint among Mrs. Bliss's antique furniture and overstuffed chairs, when Prudence announced quietly:

"I think that Mr. Beck is going to propose to me mother."

"What!" Mrs. Bliss quacked.

"Well, he's a wonderfully sweet man and I like him very much."

"Marry you, marry you," her mother sputtered. "What on earth for?" She stared hard at her daughter. "What prospects has he? At his age, a sales representative. Why he's almost as old as we are!"

"Well, he's saved all his life and he just got a raise. If we did get married it wouldn't have to change anything, mother."

"Not change anything!" Mrs. Bliss shouted, and then trying to recover herself, "Why I'd probably never get to see you again."

"No. Really mother. We could move right in here with you. We could live downstairs and you could have the whole upstairs to yourself," she said enthusiastically.

"Move in... here? And I'd go upstairs? Prudence, I just can't believe my ears." Mrs. Bliss put a hand up to her throat. "Well, young lady, I can tell you this: I will have no part of this and neither will my half of the shop," and saying this Mrs. Bliss stalked out of the room.

Prue didn't feel much like playing bridge the next night. She set the table and arranged the soft drink glasses in silence. Her mother wasn't speaking to her. She felt lonely and ill-used so when the girls came in laughing and chattering she felt encouraged. They were talking about winter vacations. They talked halfway through the evening before anyone noticed that Prue hadn't been included in the conversation.

"Are you going to Miami next month, Prue?" Clarice asked.

"I don't know."

"Don't know!" Dorothy exclaimed in a loud voice. "Isn't your mother counting on it?"

"Well, maybe I'll do something else this year."

"Like what?" Dorothy asked, her interest sharpened.

"Maybe I'll get married," Prue answered quietly.

"Married!" they all chorused in astonishment.

"Not to that sales rep! I thought that had all blown over," said Dorothy, sounding incredulous. Then looking into Prue's face for affirmation, and finding it, she immediately registered an expression of disgust.

"At our age, Prue?" asked Clarice in an embarrassed voice.

"Well, I never thought you were the type to be interested in sex," Charlotte added, looking at her cards.

"I'm not!" cried Prue, getting angry.

"Then why get married?" asked Charlotte. "Besides, what about your mother? You do have other responsibilities, Prue."

"I didn't say I was getting married, I just said that I was thinking about it."

"Oh, is that what you said," Dorothy replied sarcastically, "well, take it from one who knows and don't."

After the girls had gone, Prue, still dressed, lay on her bed in the dark with her arm resting across her forehead. I've been such a fool, she thought. Everyone can see it except me. Why have I let things get to this point? We couldn't all live here together--mother would never accept Raymond, never. And my shop, what about that? Even if I bought mother's half of the shop with my savings we couldn't live on what Raymond makes, and I can't give up my savings. I can't. I would be throwing away everything that I have and for what? He doesn't have anything. Not a house, not furniture, not even a good job. I must have been out of my mind to even consider it. We would be starting out with nothing. Nothing. I don't want to start all over. I'm fifty-seven years old and I want to be comfortable. Besides, he's a Catholic and we wouldn't even be able to go to church together! Prue rolled over on her stomach and began to cry softly. Why did I do this? Poor Raymond. So sweet. But I can't give up everything, I just can't.

She got up and changed into her nightgown. I'll tell him tomorrow. Before he gets a ring or something. I hope he won't be too hurt.

Friday morning Raymond picked up Prue's diamond ring from Tiffany's. He was very excited about the ring and his hand kept returning to the small velvet box in his sports coat pocket. He was wearing a brand new shirt, pink, with the folds still in it. His face was fiery red from the close shave he'd given it, and he reeked of Old Spice aftershave lotion. He didn't know how he was going to ask her. He thought about staging it this way, and then that way, but nothing that occurred to him seemed to be just right. Maybe if he asked her, just this once, she'd skip her hairdressing appointment and he could take her to dinner and for a drive afterward. That would be nice.

When Raymond reached the shop and saw Prue he wished he'd thought to pick up some flowers because she didn't look very happy. He was glad when she suggested that they go for a short drive instead of going out for coffee. Now that he had the ring he could hardly contain himself he wanted to give it to her so badly.

Prue sat huddled on her side of the car as Raymond drove along the ocean. They had a long lonely stretch of concrete road to themselves. It was an overcast day, grey, and it was getting cold There wasn't another soul around.

Prue had been very quiet. Raymond was beginning to wonder if he had done something wrong. Prue motioned to an area off the side of the road, "Raymond, why don't you stop here so we can talk?"

"Okay." Raymond brought the car to a stop and looked at her. She was staring at the car floor. Suddenly, he felt apprehensive.

"Can I get you anything, Prue? Do you feel all right?"

"I'm fine. That's not it." She took a deep breath. "Raymond, I've been thinking about us, and I don't think, I just don't think there's any future for us so I think it's best if we don't see each other anymore."

Raymond stared straight out the windshield in front of him without seeing anything. He felt as if he had been kicked in the stomach.

"It's not your fault, it's mine. I know I just let things go too far. I knew I had all these responsibilities and I just didn't stop to think." She looked at Raymond and saw that he was completely crushed by her words.

"Oh please. Raymond, don't. I'm so sorry." She couldn't look at him now so she turned her head and looked out her side window. There was a long silence when neither one of them spoke.

"Can I do anything, Prue?" he finally asked.

"No," she responded gently. "We can't go back. It's too late."

Raymond felt sick. He just didn't know what to do. He looked at her again, his face sagging. "I have... a gift. May I give you a gift... to remember me by?"

"Raymond, please don't. I have the pearls. They are enough, more than enough. I just couldn't take any more. Really."

After he had returned Prue to her shop, Raymond drove back to his apartment without remembering how he got there. He parked his car and forgot to pull the garage door down. When he reached his room he sat down on the edge of his double bed. Bent over, with his face in his hands, he began to cry; the tears ran in rivulets over his soft red cheeks and through his fingers. His chest hurt inside and his head began to ache so he lay back on his bed. He cried for a long time before he went to sleep.

Since the moment Raymond had left her at the door of her shop Prue had felt at loose ends. At noon she decided to call Dorothy to tell her that she wouldn't be seeing Raymond anymore. But Dorothy only said, "I really don't know why you're calling me about it, Prue. It's really none of my business." Prue felt strangely deflated as she hung up. At three thirty she couldn't wait any longer and she called her mother to give her the news.

"Mother?"

"Yes."

"How are you?"

"I'm fine Prudence, but you woke me up from my nap."

"I'm sorry mother, but I wanted to tell you that I broke off with Raymond this morning." She waited, holding her breath, for her mother's praise.

There was silence on the other end of the line.

"Oh. Well. I hope you're not going to mope. Will you be home at the regular time?"

"Yes, mother. I will."

Prue put the telephone down slowly. Why, she wasn't even surprised, Prue thought. I thought she would be surprised and glad, and she doesn't even seem to care. All at once Prue felt completely empty. For a moment it occurred to her that she had made a dreadful mistake, but she tried to push the thought from her mind. I don't know why I feel so terrible, she thought. I'm sure I did the right thing.

When Raymond awakened it took him a minute to remember what he was doing on the bed. He hadn't slept during the day in ages. The late afternoon sun pushed against the drawn blinds. Raymond got up from the bed and walked into his little bathroom. He stared at the reflection in the mirror above the sink. I know what I'll do, he thought. And after removing his shirt, tie, and undershirt, he began washing in the small sink. First he soaped his hands and rinsed them, then his face, then under his arms. When he had completed this washing he dried himself thoroughly. Closing the bathroom door, he left the hot water rage into the tub for a bath while he took off the remainder of his clothes.

When Raymond emerged from the bathroom he was nude and bright pink from his feet to the top of his head. He stood in the middle of the room for a moment as if trying to collect his thoughts then he walked over to his bureau and pulled open the bottom drawer. Squatting on the floor he rummaged around in the drawer, holding up one negligee then another apparently unable to make up his mind about which one he wanted. He finally settled upon a pale pink satin gown which he took over and spread out carefully on his bed. He gazed again, took out some men's white cotton pajamas and put them on. Picking up the gown and holding it close to his body, he then opened the blankets and crawled into bed. Covering himself up with the blankets he caressed and stroked the silky garment, "sweet Prue," he crooned, "dear wife." In a little while he went to sleep again, a smile on his lips, his arms gently cradling the empty negligee.

Gregory Vogt

TO ANNE SEXTON

Anne, I fling the moon
back before I knew
you died
and still
I see your death rising
and rising
but shining, Anne,
shining in the teeth
of the bad dreams
shining in the bones
rattling in your closets
shining in the eyes stabbed
with the straight pins
in your world, Anne,
stabbed like a pincushion filled
like a yellow moonscape
with the heat and cold
of your lonely ride
through a silent night

would I have had you be
the grinning cheerleader?
queen of the shopping center?
the minister's red-cheeked wife?
the lady at the counter
of the gift shop?

no, I need your mean love
I need your hate and your self-pity
and your house full of hexes
and people with no ears to hear
nor mouths to speak

the moon flies back into place
the moon skims on and on
I read your poems and shine
and shine
I fill the air with your words
watch them arch out
and settle like tiny spiders
in a black box
where pain's bony fingers don't reach
and the moon comes up with its eyes closed

Pureza Canelo
[Trans. Bonnie Brown]

Pureza Canelo was born in Moraleja (Caceres) Spain in 1947. She has published three books of poetry: Celda Verde/ The Green Cell (1971); Lugar Comun/ Common Place (1971); El Barco de Agua/ Water Boat (1974). She lives in Madrid, where she is very active in poetry circles.

I HAVE SLEPT A LOT, AND I WANT TO GET UP

My dawn is very close to this place
so I may speak to it
and so all the windows which I am making
may be true.
My senses are at my bedside
and they are my company in the silence,
inside of the air, and that which the air holds.
Because of this I do not want to quit doing what
awakens me now;
and I tell myself "somehow you might..."
although perhaps I do not exist here
even with all this,
but my writing is faithful and resolves to support me
on a veritable pendulum.

My time is here;
here like the rays of one's inner self;
the same as the rain that leaves the sky
because it can,
falling downward, without escaping from the sky in
midair,
and nothing has been lost.
This is the only goodwill that I wish to share,
at the expense - I do not know how much the road is worth -
of what I am living.
No one comes to lie by my side,
and throw his arms back, back
if they are for me,
in a quarter of an hour of hope,
in love's quarter hour.
But my land, caught in the patience
that I wear
has already kissed my glance,
because it fell asleep quickly, and now
wants to get up...

I am myself; and the trees and the senses
that I have
I have seen bundled up, jumping like that
many times,
next to a heart soaked in their blood,
next to some stones detained at the edge
of some destiny
that I cannot glimpse rapidly,
so as to continue asking myself the familiar question
about where you are, all of you;
and to you whom I give no name
I can refer from this dark affair
that I carry
at the hour I begin to walk tranquilly
through my house.
All instants exist as I do
at the hour of speaking.
My mouth is dark, like the snake
it awakens solitude, my back, in the morning
and under its water it can already sow its eyes...

I can also say in this little chat
that the M has three little legs
and I can remember the grimaces of the
righteous St. Teresa.

I have no fear about taking my senses
to the fountain
from where I come to find you.
Fear for the children;
for a little girl who left her hand and braids
hanging from her swing;
pardon me, those short curls that I had,
like now,
and my mother not contradicting me.
My hope in verse is a visit for someone;
and no one, I know it, is going to guard my pieces
of crystal that I alone am breaking.
Since I know, that if you don't let me, I have never loved;
I have loved nothing I tell myself daily, among you,
and I enter and leave like now through my house;
opening doors like clothes that enclose me,
and now I cannot master myself better.
When thus my feet become those of a blind babbler,
it seems easy,
but she shrinks me;

her breasts that will never spring up again
encircle me;
she ties me about the waist like a boat,
I burst one day into that sea and no one realizes it
that morning,
and I already gorged myself. Nourishment? I don't know
I long for hope and not to die..

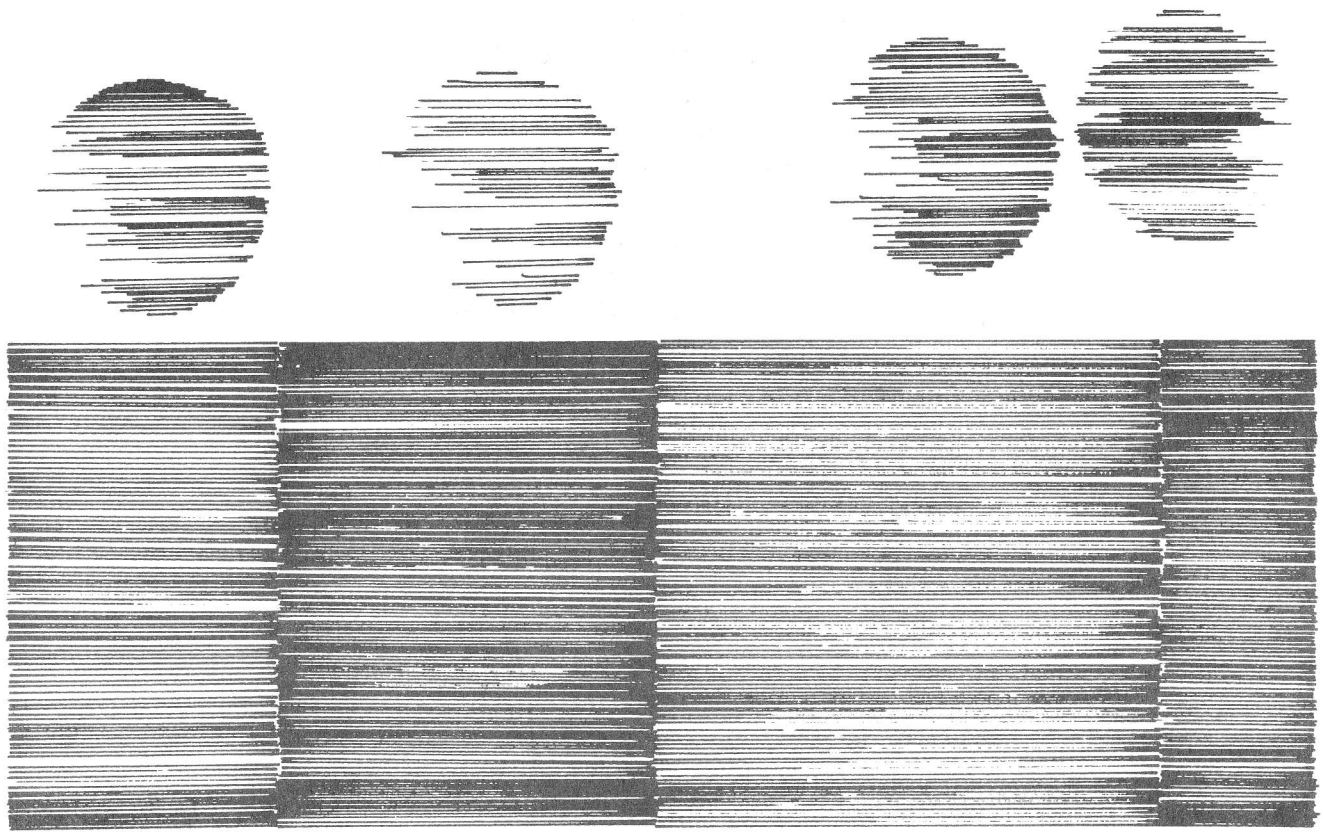
Now I have a fever of some thirty odd degrees
by shadow, by name;
I have not just gotten to know myself for all of you,
least of all for you;
so my wish each day is for less violence
with everybody,
which is why I always went around without those fat tears
that are seen and slide away like a lost sample.
I do not love you; I love you outside of myself
and I can disappear if you so wish,
so that you may establish the route I am supplying,
if that can be,
and so that you may load up what I want to
carry well with this same tenderness
but I don't know what to do with the one in the very center
of my mouth.
With these sudden changes of sensations,
where will I go so slowly?
If the lobster moves his claws in front of me
and the morning looks at me face to face,
it is not to immediately tell me that
I can stand some sadness.
I want to be awake, and I am here for that;
and when I see uneven faces I am not going
to die of fright,
and thus love that is lost serves as training for me.
But I know that the sorrow of some pain returns
without knowing from where,
and I encounter it like a chick pea that has rolled
to my side
and not to yours.
And then, many times, the mirror refuses,
simply, and I speak by myself and I speak for all of you.
And so goes every day,
even though I may telephone
and the air inside may be moody.

On this slope this morning I have already gone out into the street.
It is the awakening I merit after sleep.
I refer to any sleep whatsoever,
to the street that has never been freed from my eyes.
Sometimes, like today, I feel like living and walking
and using the finger machine,
buying myself countless stockings,
saying to everything "yes," "no," "good,"
and getting up after those arms flung back,
that I have already mentioned before.
And through these doors my entire body advances
towards the hill, my sense's eyes, time,
an open book because it was never closed,
and then to cleaning the lamp
and the lint which from nobody in heaven falls.

You now see that I am trotting slowly;
I write very slowly because of some doubts.
I note two knees together and a foot talking
on the brick.
The life that I carry is tired of not lying to me.
And where might I comment on what I do not completely have
but which ausculates me for all of you.
Because to show my slowness I alone suffice,
I withdraw into the morning,
I open the door thinking about leaving,
and I put up with my heart at my side.
How long will I linger in this usefulness which although
it may be with me daily
I do not master?
why my land below, above, nobody's arms,
most certainly, nobody's,
where I can sleep no more
and I play a chord in my own way
because in any other form I do not know how to touch all of you?
and how each day was a blow more of grief than of force.
Whoever listened to me quit looking at me,
and opened his mouth in order to not kiss this song
that does not quit running;
because I was compromised to the very bones,
and time was flying.
The street. The morning. All of you without seeing me,
as I likewise have not seen the "esparrzurrado"
foundation on the floor,
the wax taper painted with abandon, with a bald crown.
But I am still here and I have soaked my grief

in the same thing as always:
in walking like a bird on tiptoe,
and tears on the feet which meet me each day
because I do not let a tear fall.
And I continue being nobody, in terms of time;
and I have a coin purse in my handbag which I can jingle.

I am going to say it again:
there is a dawning every day in me
for whoever wants to catch me.
I have left on the light in the stairwell,
and I do not abandon my word.



David Alleyne

MADAM X

he withdrew
from her
after the abortion
decided to stay
with the wife & kids
for a while
at least
well Jean had a rifle
not hers
lying around
& took it to their place
to let off some steam
teary mad eyes
through the picture window
from behind a tree
across the street
they were all
watching television
she isn't the type
to savour the moment
as the trigger is squeezed
just closed her eyes
& fired a few shots
to keep them from being
so comfortable

Judy Natal

Lech Mazur

Bill Norris

ACHTUNG!

You might ask who is Rolf Steiner but you've seen him a hundred times, especially if you watch all the treasures Hollywood has sold off for latenight TV. He once showed me his list of credits. I've forgotten how many he had, but it would have put Roy Barcroft to shame. He started out as one of those faceless rearrank privates and worked himself up to fieldmarshal--not bad for an immigrant's son.

I like his early roles best, even if they were small. He's usually the runty blond kraut with nasty sneer and pale blue (in technicolor) eyes always cocked on the officer in the scene, the private who snaps his head back as he clicks his heels and howls "Jawohl!" when the prisoners are to be taken out and shot. Did Rolf ever like to say Jawohl! I can hear him now, practicing it over and over on his Uher tape recorder. When he got promoted up to officer he got to give the Achtung, which was even better. I've seen him wandering around the lot in his uniform--he always wore a uniform, even if he wasn't on call--all of a sudden pulling up with a furious heelclick and a yowling ACHTUNG! He developed a brilliant way of saying it, hawking the ACH up from deep in his throat and then letting the TOOOOOOOONG trail longly away like a ricochet in a Grade C oater. They never let him say it that way in a movie though. He tried it once and the director (Larry Gold, I think it was) raised all kind of hell. Rolf sulked off muttering things like "untermensch" and "Herr Goebbels vould haf taken care of you." He was tough, that Rolf.

He was a genuine Nordic type with those eyes and that pale skin and hair. That's why he never could get me any good parts--I just didn't fit. I hated to be anything except Germans, but that's how it goes in show biz, as we say. Afterwards Rolf felt the same way and he was lucky because we all are fascinated with the Germans and make more movies about them than anybody except the Indians. Class shows, I guess.

It's funny how Steiner got his big break. There he was in the ranks, just another $12-a-day wehrmacht man answering the Fuehrer's "Sieg" with a "Heil." But in the screening room somebody saw something about him--you know, like Fellini--and in the next day's shooting Rolf was up in the front row and got a Medium Short Shot from one of the big Mitchells, with maybe a second and a half cut into the finished film. And after that the director would say, "Get me that little kraut who was in our Düsseldorf scene, the blond-haired ratty-looking one." Five pictures later he was an officer and it was he giving the "Siegs" and a dozen pictures later he got a real speaking role--three "Jas" and a "Das ist goot" to Curt Jurgens as Reichmarshal Von Rundstedt! He was at the beginning of a great career, and before long the word

would go out to casting: "Get me Rolf Steiner."

So he really didn't start out to be Germans--I guess he had enough of that at home--but the casting people saw it and after awhile Rolf saw it too and accepted it. And that's how he started up through the ranks.

He tried to stay in the Wehrmacht when he could because that was what he liked best. Every now and then he'd get a more exotic role in the Gestapo or SS--and he was good, too--but the plain old Wehrmacht was his favorite (though you never caught him as one of those "I vas a goot Churman" toadies. Those he flat refused to play). And it wasn't because the SS and Gestapo died more often, either, since he got killed off in most of his films anyway. Casualties in Hollywood's German brigade are always high. The Germans are a perennial favorite in the movies, but they die young, like we're raising demons only in order to exorcize them. It's ghoulish, but it's just what you'd expect from the bunch who run things out here. So Rolf got used to dying five or ten times a year, and what the hell, didn't Der Fuehrer always say "Sieg sonst Tod"?

After he'd become a name he got other parts too. Swedes and Danes and Norwegians even. He didn't like those very much, but by then he had started gathering his memorabilia as he called it and that cost so much he'd do just about anything. That's how I met him--his collection, I mean.

Fox was selling off a bunch of properties from the old days and Rolf and I were both bidding on the pistol that had killed Oscar Werner in Decision Before Dawn, one of those late 1944 types that really wasn't any good except as a relic of how cheap German ingenuity could turn out a marvel without any raw materials to speak of. Rolf outbid me--you can't go very high on the pittance my parents give me to stay away--and afterwards he came over and we got to talking. He liked my accent. He should have too, since it took me six months of Herr Kuppler's three dollars an hour German classes to acquire. We almost didn't become friends though, because he said, "That's funny--you don't look Churman" and I told him it wasn't so goddam funny because I couldn't help my parents. For nothing I ask them. Only to be left alone, after what they had done to me. Only for a little money now and then. He was very apologetic about it and so I said it was all right. He promised he would never mention it again and would even call me Fritz, which was his favorite German name besides Rolf, and he even leaned over and patted me on the head. He was all heart.

I told him about Herr Kuppler and he started coming to the class. He never was regular, what with shooting schedules and rehearsals and being on location. Sometimes he would show up in costume (though after a while I noticed that he wore a uniform even when he hadn't worked that day), and he would sit up there in the front row

with a jackboot cocked over one knee where he could run his riding crop or marshal's baton along its side. I thought he studied hard for he was very good in German (this was before I knew about his dad).

Whenever Herr K. called on him he would tilt his head back and carefully, in the approved underhand European fashion, take his long cigarette holder from between his teeth and roll out those grand German polysyllables, catching the accepts perfectly. Herr K. was absolutely delighted with him and after reciting Rolf would stick the cigarette holder back in his mouth and make a production of unconcernedly polishing his monocle. But I wasn't fooled. He always made a sly, kind of stiff-necked little turn so he could cut his eyes in our direction and see how we were taking him in.

When we had been friends for a while sometimes after class we would go up to his apartment. It looked like a Nazi war memorial museum. He'd swiped a big swastika flag from Universal and had it made into a pair of draw drapes for the big window in the living room. When the sun was right you could pull the drapes and the whole room turned red and on the opposite wall there would be this huge swastika shadow. Rolf never put anything on that wall since he figured it would spoil the effect. But on one of the walls he had his weapon collection--mausers and lugers and genuine SS kommando knives from the Black Forest--all pilfered from the armories of a half-dozen studios. I still don't know how he got the panzer-faust out the gate. Maybe one of the guards was a fifth column. On the other wall he had his picture gallery, all the gefallen heroes rayed out around a 3x4 oil of Hitler. The dead ones were framed in black crepe, but the ones like Bormann and Skorzeny had red crepe. Rommel and the rest who had been suspect gave him a headache. He had seen The Desert Fox so many times he knew Rommel was a hero but he didn't know how to handle the July plot. He ended up putting him and Von Paulus and the others like that on the left fringe.

I was up to see him the day after they got Eichmann and he was in a sad way, red-eyed and weeping as he replaced the red crepe with black, damning wildly the Jews and Argentines. You could hardly hear him over the mournful strains of "Once I Had a Comrade, " which he kept playing over and over on an old fashioned victrola, the windup kind with a big horn. He was still weeping when I put him to bed that night, all Schnapssodden.

Rolf wasn't always so serious, though. He had a lot of fun with a VW jeep he picked up from RKO, one of those Pkw. 1 (type 82) Kubelwagens. He would go bathelling along through the neon of Sunset Boulevard, all dressed up in some German uniform, making a stir even on a street used to seeing strange and wonderful things. He liked to drive it himself, with a great flourish of elbows and horn, until a

cop got him one night when he barely missed a blind paraplegic tragically negotiating a crosswalk. The little staffcar ended up twowheeled on the curb against a lamp post and when the cop tried to bust him Rolf climbed out over me and onto the hood and flailed him with his swagger stick, sharp vicious little whacks that maybe stung but didn't hurt too much. The cop stepped back and took a good look to make sure he didn't have a drunk star--it seems he had arrested Flynn one three AM and sweated the next six months reading meters in a Watts parking lot--and then he popped Rolf a real good one with his billy, high up on the cheekbone just under the left eye. Rolf went down like a wounded Stuka. But he got a nifty scar out of it that later landed him a role as a Prussian dueling teacher, so he didn't mind. Probably put it down as splendid combat experience.

He didn't take to the wheel much after that, instead volunteering me or hiring someone to drive him. From some studio wardrobe he foraged up an Oberleutnant's uniform, including steel helmet and oval dogtags, and he loved to garb us in it and be chauffeured around while he stood up majestically in the back, insane with sandgoggles and black leather overcoat in a California July afternoon. He didn't let me drive too much in the daytime, though, because the uniform was so big I had to roll up the sleeves and legs, and I looked kind of funny sitting on the two Coke cases so I could see. But that really was for the good, because by then Rolf's face--if not his name--was known pretty well, even if that dumb cop hadn't recognized him, and I had to take care about being seen with him. I mean if the word had gotten back to my shrink or my parents that I was still into the Germans they not only would have cut off my allowance but it would have been back to the Restful Palms farm for sure.

So I missed out on some of Rolf's adventures. Like he used to picket the German Embassy every VE day, goosestepping back and forth on the sidewalk out front with a "Free Adolf Speer" sign crudely lettered in black gothic. But I was with him for one that I won't forget--the time we went to join the American Nazi Party. That didn't work out. He turned up in a full Reichmarshal's uniform and sat in the back of the hall listening for a little while. Their lack of spirit depressed him. It didn't take him long to see that they had no concept of true Nazism, which he had gotten by working in the movies and seeing the films about the war and all. He stood it as long as he could and then he started twitching a little, his head tucked down toward his shoulder as if he were listening to soft whispered voices no one else could hear.

The next thing I knew he was marching up to the speaker's platform, kicking the cheap slatback folding chairs out of the aisle and swatting the goons if they didn't move fast enough to suit him (swatting gently--he didn't forget his training), finally rapping his

baton on the lecturn and quieting the hall to order. He harangued them incoherently in broken English for maybe ten minutes before ending up with some stiffarm salutes and a couple of sieg heils. We roared off in the little army model VW, he very stiffly erect in the back seat as he fought his tears, they staring glassyeyed at each other in mute and mystified silence. So far as I know, he never went back.

I'm not sure about his sex life. Now and then I'd see him with a fat Brunhilde--God knows where he found her, Central Casting maybe--dressed up like a Valkyrie, chain mail, breastcups and all, garlanded with (naturally) blonde braids two feet long. Sometimes Rolf had her tie off the braids with Iron Crosses and they looked like kite tails streaming out in the wind and over the back of the Kubelwagen. I chauffeured them to a drive-in move once, The Enemy Below, I think, where they lolled in the back gorging themselves on popcorn and the liebfraumilch and wienerschnitzel we had picked up at Torheit's deli.

But Rolf's first love was his work. By now he could be somewhat choosy about his parts, especially with TV. He did Blue Light and Combat and 12 O'Clock High pretty often--and even one Hogan's Heroes. They liked him a lot and actually offered him a semi-regular spot, but he couldn't bring himself to take it. (After all, the Germans are clowns on that series. They finally settled on a Rolf Steiner type.)

He could afford to refuse them because he had branched out into technical advising, sometimes contracting for equipment as well. By now he had acquired so much war materiel he had taken the apartment next door to store it in.

Being a tech adviser was just what Rolf thrived on. Maybe his greatest thrill and honor of his acting career was when a young kid extra whom Rolf was instructing in the finer points of the goostep-mit-arm-locked-in-Nazi-salute (as Steiner called it) asked him if he had been in the German army. Rolf, dumbfounded, looked at him for a minute and his face got real tight and I could see tears in his eyes even behind the green lenses of the wire-frames he was wearing. He bit his lower lip and sniffed, and said "Der Vermacht? . . . Ach! I fights mit Siegel in der Caucasus," bobbing nodding his head up and down, his hands behind him slowly twisting his swagger stick. Which goes to show you how much he really knew. Siegel wasn't anywhere near the Caucasus--he was stuck up near Riga dam near the whole war with the Third Panzer SS. But that was Steiner; I mean, like he could advocate using dumdums without knowing what they were.

Still, the tech adviser job turned out to be his Stalingrad, though in his case it was the Battle of Berlin that finally got him. (Russia was always Rolf's weakness. He kept a big map scarred with the battle lines in all the campaigns on the bathroom wall opposite the

commode. "Mein Gott, Fwitz," he would moan, shaking his blond head sadly as he pondered the map and strained. "If only I could haf been dere for Der Fuehrer!" He was firmly convinced that if Germany had taken Russia everything would have been all right, that even if England and America had then invaded Europe Hitler would have moved--for Christ's sake, moved--Germany onto the steppes where he could guard her forever and keep her forevermore intact, like a demented lover protecting his loved one from the eternal fires.)

Anyway, he was happy to be working in a real movie again (he was playing a diehard General in the Zoobunker as well as being tech advisor). For a long time he had been working the series and the made-for-TV quickies, and their atrocious negligence of details had almost destroyed him. Probably he would have stayed away from such shit altogether if he hadn't been so dedicated to keeping up his memorabilia. And maybe too he felt someone had to fight to keep up the standards of professional Germanism.

It came the day they were staging a tank attack. The take called for a Red behemoth to rumble over a shell hole and crush the second male lead. Rolf was in a rage because they were using a Sherman--which Rolf knew should have been a T-34--but nobody paid any attention to him. That could have been what finally did it, though I suspect it was just battle fatigue.

They had been shooting for three weeks and poor Rolf had been wrenched past endurance, what with the Russians raping and looting and murdering and the Germans hiding and running and surrendering. Rolf had conned the director into letting him supply the tankers--I guess he thought Rolf deserved a sop of some kind to make up for all the advice he refused to take. From somewhere--Rolf claimed Mexico--he had scrounged up a screwy looking trio for the tank crew. Supposedly they were all genuine ex-Panzer men. Only one of them, the driver, a squat and square-faced man with grey stubble hair and beard, spoke English. Steiner had the whole scene charted out for them on an easel and had a grand time waving his marshal's baton around and showing them how they were to turn the corner and where to traverse and elevate and lower the gun. Karl, the one who spoke English, would follow it all with his beady black eyes, kind of like a snake watching movement. Whenever Rolf would run down for a minute, Karl would very carefully spit a little juice from his cud and translate for the other two, who would snicker a little and grin slyly.

The shooting started out ok, the tank trundling around a corner in a Medium Long Shot, then clanking down the street and over the rubble toward the shell hole where the second banana was desperately trying to patch up the hero's girlfriend. She had been first raped and then flagellated, showing the perils of the godless Red Russians. The

prop people had bombs exploding and guns firing and it all looked pretty good.

Then suddenly Rolf charged out in a rush smack into the middle of the scene. He fell down into the shell hole, but then scrambled up the side to stand with one leg on the dirt piled around the top, the other down the inside of the hole, rallying the loyal troops that existed only in the celluloid that was his mind, urging them forward with an arm-sweep as he had seen countless heroes do at Tarawa and Iwo Jima and Bastogne, firing his Luger wildly at the tank. He was even careful to fake in the kick, a point on which everyone marveled when we looked at the rushes later (it all happened so fast that no one thought to cut the cameras). He was shouting "Deutschland über alles!"--or at least that's what the two in the shell hole said, though after what happened they weren't exactly what you'd call reliable witnesses--when the big tank rolled over him.

After it stopped we ran around behind and all that was left was a squishy mess from about the waist up. The tread had got him.

Karl climbed out and stood there with blank in his eyes and said, "I vas not responsible. I vas chust following orders." He had thought it was a last minute addition to the script, since Rolf was in uniform and everything. It was some end for Steiner. He had been the best of the professional Germans, and worth the whole damn bunch of them put together.

But that wasn't the last of him. We forgot about the funeral.

It was a strange affair, strange as only Hollywood things can be. Some lawyer arranged all of it, following instructions as meticulous as those for a Guderian panzer blitz that Rolf had included in his will. They couldn't open him, but what was left of Rolf lay in state for three days at St. Christopher's in a massive gold casket crusted with a plethora of silver eagles and swastikas. There were more flowers than at Monroe's--all of them native to Germany, the masterpiece an eight by ten foot representation of Adolf Hitler made from pink and black tulips, with tasteful bouquets of forget-me-nots surrounded by little white bachelor buttons for the eyes.

The pallbearers were a dozen of the extras who had played Germans with him. They were all dressed in different uniforms of the major branches of the service: wehrmacht in grey-green, luftwaffe in that gentle pale blue adopted late in 1944, the navy in their red-striped black pants, the Hitler Youth, the Werewolves--even the early Brownshirts and S. A.'s were there.

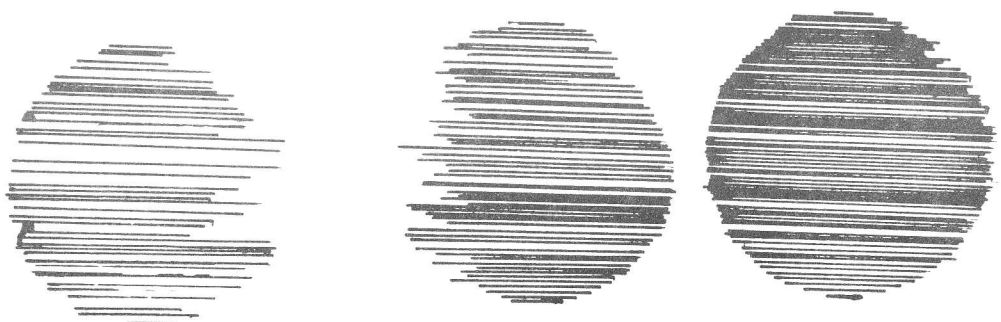
Instead of a hearse Rolf had rented Fox's huge Skf. K7. Halb-Treck, the one Lee Marvin used for the escape in The Dirty Dozen. (Steiner had been the third from the left in the dungeon scene--a lieutenant, I think--clutching his pistol and sneering up at

the roof.) Everybody else in the cortege rode in Mercedes except for a Hell's Angels motorcycle unit hired to escort the procession. They wouldn't wear the uniforms Rolf had laid by for them--just the steel helmets and iron crosses--but a few of them had deathheads and swastikas on the backs of their jackets and that helped somewhat. As the parade headed out to Forest Lawn you could hear amazed bystanders asking, "Who's Rolf Steiner?"

He was cremated (of course) to a band playing selections from Der Gotterdammerung. He had wanted an open-air pyre at graveside, but they thought that was going a bit far even in Hollywood. Rolf's father was there from New York, weeping piteously and moaning over and over about what a "goot boy" his son had been. I don't know why he was so upset, since he was the sole beneficiary of a $250,000 insurance policy.

I was the one who really missed Rolf, for he was my comrade. After that one time when I first met him never did he make jokes about me, and even if the only roles he got me were deskjockey Italians I at least know he cared and tried. And he left me the memorabilia. Which I should have suspected, as close as we were. It's hard paying the rent on two apartments, but I've sold off the Kubelwagen and that has helped.

When I went through the treasures I found a play he had written about Der Fuehrer and sent it on to his father as a memento. I got a garbled note back a couple of months later. Apparently Willi had somehow gotten it produced off Broadway--though as near as I could make out he didn't think Rolf would have liked it. But that's no matter. Rolf left enough monuments behind him. In fact, there's probably one on the tube right now, somewhere. Just watch for him.



Robert Bowie

THROUGH THE BONE DOOR

it was easy
fitting
birds danced on
the lips
all hearts were to
dove as dove

the kiss drew you
to it

you were its own

so why do things get
separated like moth
wing and wing

how does one fly then

you see the kiss walk
away through the
bone door

you run after
tossing your eyes like
roses

John McKernan

ON HEARING OF THE DEATH OF KAREN ROSE

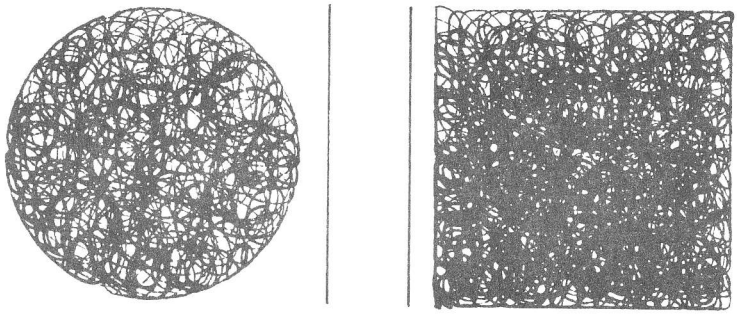
Karen, my wishes staple time
but the moon struts across
the dark and it is noon again

always in Omaha in the back yard
on the swings after a morning
of rain and we had walked the street

you ten and I immeasurably
older at thirteen
pulling worms from the warm pools

of mid-morning Omaha
rain water and you asked
"What do the worms eat, Jack?"

and I, knowing everything,
as was my glory in those days
I said, "Worms and grass, Karen."



John McKernan

MATHILDA CROCKETT BRIEFLY ANSWERS A QUESTION PUT TO HER BY THE TRAILWAYS MAN WHO JUST SOLD HER A TICKET TO FRESNO CALIFORNIA

because on my way home from the candy store
they threw snowballs
at my hat

because the water pipes have frozen solid
for thirteen years
in my house

because no one shovels their iced sidewalks so
I fall right down
on my head

because I'm afraid my arms and legs take
longer to warm
than they did

because I have no one after my cat got
caught in the snow
with some help

because this is no place for an old woman
who hates those brats
down the road

because my precious daughter Annabel Mae
has a family
in Fresno

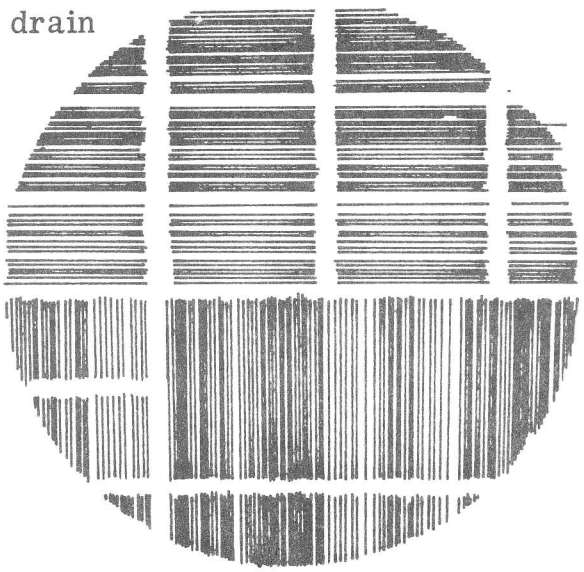
Because a woman can get sick of a place
where she has spent
sixty years

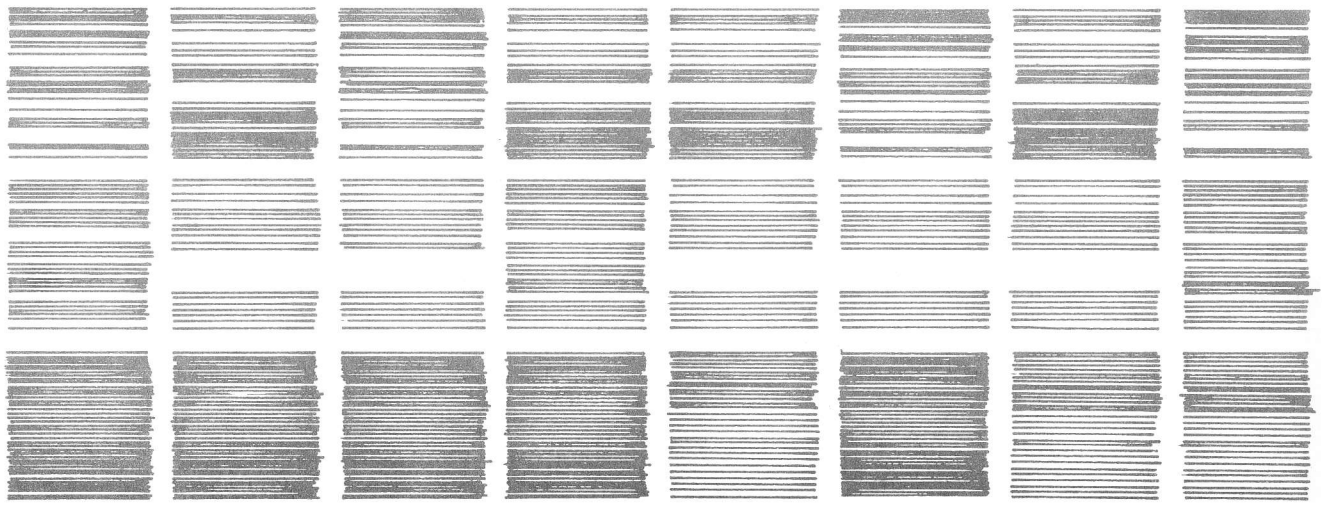
Gary David

the sunbathers

Go
when there are no
vacancies on the beach
and watch
the immaculately
naked colony scantily
suited
out to suck upon
the glaring sands, quiescences of
lusts; as
the mechanisms of
cinnabar bodies languidly
lift their limbs
and voluptuously and sluggishly
grease
them down. Stare
through their condescensions of horn
-rim shades. If you dare
speak to them speak to them
in low sultry plain tones.

And the sun will drop all day
tons of its sudsy
barbiturate heat on
everyone, and finally drain
their heads like tubs.





David Shevin

LOCATING THE VICTIM

When I look in the closet
my assassin is not there.
I should have granted him that much cunning.

He was not outside my office
window today, although I itched under
his crosshairs. He was not in my morning

coffee. He was not wired
to the ignition of my car.
He was not the man driving

too close beside me on the freeway.
Or perhaps he was any of them or all
of them, or the man breathing

between my breaths in the still elevator.
He is always there.
He is always just inside my hearing.

He is always telling me comforting
lies. On the road, every paper
is a small animal, he is whispering

to me when I drive. A snake with
a human head will be your killer,
is murmured from the ceiling.

Judith Thompson

GIRL LOOKING INTO MIRROR

The face has the sheen of a pear
The hair is one wing of the crow
swooping over
arcs of bamboo silken fans a hand
drifts of iris shimmering
faces of children
cherry blooms
peach petals flesh
bone white rice
fields all
melting
whole people flowing
up Mount Fujisan
the river Sumida baked.

The face lies flat
The back of the head is black.

Sterling Kelly Webb

A SELECTION FROM A WORK IN PROGRESS: THE GIFT: IV, 21

In love with thoughts like little likeable whores;
When they're giggling on your lap, you can't see,
Can you? You'd rather them, than the empty room,
The buzz of a lost fly on the dusty window
Overlooking the dry canal and acres of weeds
Shaking their golden genitals in the impregnating air,
And the sun a fiery spider trapezing through the web
That binds the worlds, the creatures, hearts, atoms,
Stars together in a net of rapture running
Like a river through this empty room: your soul.

Roger Shimomur

Larry Schwarm

John J. Kessel

THE HOME

"Bingo!" the sign said in big red letters, and below, "Every Tuesday Nite, 7:30--10:00, $250 Coverall."

Vincent Ketter and his mother sat in a car in the parking lot of St. Jude's Roman Catholic Church, waiting for the traffic to let up so Vince could drive closer to the door before letting his mother out. It was the first Tuesday in January; the car heater was not working, and it was bitterly cold.

"I wonder if I have any luck tonight?" Mrs. Ketter asked the windshield. "I have no luck lately. I go too much already." She turned to her son. "Are you going someplace tonight?"

Vincent fiddled with the dial of the radio, which faintly played through the staccato of interference from the motor, an old song by the Supremes. He didn't really want to ignore his mother, but he always did, never actually confronting the 'why' behind the things she said, never answering her questions with more than a token response. He was thinking about a letter he had received that day. "I'm not going anywhere tonight," he finally replied. "I hardly know anybody who lives around here anymore."

"Then you can leave the house at ten to pick me up. That way you miss all the madhouse." Vincent continued to look directly ahread, to the snow-covered parking lot, to the confusion of cars, headlights, middle-aged women and men bundled up in heavy coats, scarves, rubber boots with jingling metal buckles. "Vince?" his mother asked, "Why don't you come with me this time?"

This was the question she invariably asked, and she always received the same answer. Vincent did not like bingo; he felt uncomfortable with the kind of people who went there--though they were basically the same kind of people as his parents--and he thought the game was pointless. His mother always spoke of it in the same terms: "You have to get out once in a while. You have to take a chance in this life." Vincent could think of no tawdrier chance--rows of people facing each other across the tables, penitents aligned in group expiation, a slight desperation in their eyes, half-broken, waiting for their number to come up. Nothing more. Just waiting for that insufficient number.

"Come on, Vince. You have to take a chance in your life."

Vincent turned up the radio, "Baby don't leave me," chanted Dianna Ross.

"I don't want to Ma," he said, finally turned to her.

"Oh well, you shouldn't sit around the house so much." Mrs. Ketter stared myopically through the window, her face slightly illuminated by stray headlights from outside. Vincent could see her breath in

the cold air of the car. Her face was worn, heavily lined at the corners of the eyes, the line of her jaw given way to old age. Her hair, coarse, short-cut, was a dull reddish-brown, a result of repeated coloring, washing, tinting. She was sixty-two years old, and bingo had become the center of her life. When she spoke of "going out," it was not a matter of movies, or restaurants, or even bars, but always one of St. Stephen's Church, the Croatian Men's Hall, Our Lady of Good Counsel Elementary School, and the Matthew X. Parker Post of the VFW. When Vincent was home from graduate school he would spend at least four nights a week driving his mother to bingo while his father slept; he would read at home while she played, pick her up at ten or ten-thirty, listen to her stories of the numbers that always seemed to elude her grasp. He did not often think of what this meant to her.

The crowd in front thinned a bit and Vincent pressed the car forward cautiously. His mother got out, moving with an air of almost childish impatience and anticipation; he made his way out of the lot, turned down the radio, and drove slowly home. The living room was lit when he pulled into the driveway, but no one was there when he entered the room--his father must have gone to bed. Vincent kicked the snow from his boots and used the end of the scarf that snake-wound tightly around his neck to clear his fogged glasses. His mother had knitted the scarf. Mrs. Ketter knitted well, though she had to hold the spasmodically weaving needles very close to her face. Her eyesight was extremely poor: she had neglected it for so long that when she was finally brought to a doctor, little could be done. Her paper bag full of skeins of green and blue yarn lay on the couch beside a half-completed afghan.

Vincent took his copy of Tender Is the Night from the end table, sat down in the swivel-based armchair, and began to read the letter which he had used to mark his place. It was from a girl named Margaret, a fellow graduate student in the English Department at the University of Virginia. Vincent's leg was over the right arm of the chair, his eyes and narrow, stooped shoulders intent over the letter. He was tall and thin, brown eyes deep-set and hollow behind very thick lenses, long hair dark brown, almost black, his body so curled as he read that at first glance you might suppose that he was a very small man rather than a large one. He put the letter in his shirt-pocket and tool up the book.

Dick and Nicole Diver were at the beach, and he had never particularly liked that part of the novel. Dick was supposed to be fascinating to those around him, but Fitzgerald never showed the things he did that made him so charming; he just told you that Dick made everyone feel better. Yet Vincent always spent his vacations at home

with the Divers and their like--people from the pages of the novels that he read, bright-eyed people, laughing people, giddily mad, tragic people, highly imaginary people, insubstantial, who could not force themselves into your consciousness when the book was closed, who never breathed and never lived through the mundane, sluggish hours. The cinematic ideal, always moving, changing.

It was turning into a bad evening. Vincent could not keep from thinking about his mother and her bingo, and he could hardly imagine more of a dead end. He had recently taken to looking at old, worn photographs of his parents, looking into the confident young face of his father, who stood in workclothes beside an old Model A. His calm mother in another picture, hands clasped behind her back. Her hair had once been even darker than his own, and it had hung long, over her shoulders. Dark skin, gentle eyes, slight of figure: she had been a beautiful woman whose life lay open before her, awaiting her step. And now the only chance you took was on a piece of paper, in a church hall, in a crowd of a hundred others whose own lives had come down to the same constricted columns of numbers. You have to take a chance in this life.

After another ten minutes in the armchair he rose and went to the bookcase in his room and scanned the shelves, looking for something to catch his mind. Failing in that, he sat on the bed and stared at his face in the bureau mirror. He took the letter from his pocket and slowly read it again. The silence of the house was broken only by the rushing sound of the furnace turning itself on in response to the ignorant command of the thermostat.

Still holding the letter, Vincent walked quickly from the room, through the kitchen and down the basement stairs. It was rather cold; he sat scrunched in a ball on the card table chair next to the extension telephone and read the letter once more. He then picked up the receiver and dialed a long distance number. The phone clicked for several seconds, rang once, twice, and was answered.

"Hello?"

"Hello, Margaret? This is Vincent Ketter. Ah--hello."

"Hello. Well, how are you? Did you get my letter?" Margaret sounded just as pleased and interested as you were supposed to sound when called by a friend who was a sometime lover.

"Yes, I did. I was just reading it, and I thought I'd call you instead of writing just now--I mean, I'll write you anyway, but I just wanted to talk to you. It's been pretty dismal around here, to tell the truth--I-ah--you probably know what I mean."

"It gets pretty lonely around here, too, but there are always things to do. Sometimes I go out with friends." She kept her voice noncommittal. "A lot of people stay here over the break."

"Yeah, well, I hardly know anyone around here anymore." An edge was creeping into Vincent's voice. "Actually, aside from you, I don't really know many people in Virginia. I think most of the people in the department are kind of stand-offish. I mean..." Vincent stopped dead. He was staring at the pebbly surface of the concrete basement wall, through which seeped occasional drops of water. He could not think of what he wanted to say, and something was stirring in his chest.

"Vincent?"

"Margaret? - -Margaret, I can hardly stand it here any more, and I've only been back two weeks. I don't know what's wrong. My mother's out playing bingo, for Christ's sake, and I can't hack it. I cannot just sit and read anymore. My life is solidifying around me. Margaret? You've got to help me out. I really don't feel too well."

Margaret was silent for a moment, as if collecting her thoughts. The long distance line clicked. He could hear a stereo playing some sort of folk music in the background.

"I think I know what you're feeling, Vincent. You want things, but you don't get them. You always act like you're missing a big party that's going on somewhere, but you don't know the address."

"Please don't make jokes."

"I'm not joking," she said, obviously upset. "The only time I've ever seen you when you didn't look like you wanted to be somewhere else was when we've made love. What do you want from me?" He didn't answer.

Nervously, and perhaps a little petulantly, she continued. "You don't ever do anything. Maybe you can make your family change, or else, if you have to, just leave. If it's too much, I mean." There was concern in her voice, but it seemed to Vincent that it was getting more distant. He put out his hand to touch the wall, his fingers rigid, the tips cool against the concrete. The droplets of water were icy.

"God," he said vacantly, "I can't be sure if..."

"Sure of what?---don't make things up! I know you want me to love you---well, you're involved, too. You don't know what it means anyway. The--that party isn't going on anywhere. No one can give you everything. At least I can't." Margaret's voice trailed off, a bit plaintively. "We're good friends, aren't we, Vincent? I'll help you if I can. But what do you expect from people?"

"Friends. Yeah--I guess we're good friends." He was shutting her off, despite the fact that he desperately wanted to speak to someone, but it was a very long distance call. "What will I do? How can I change anything?"

"You just start again. I had to..."

"Oh, Jesus! Start again!" Vincent tried hard to control his voice. "Look, I'm sorry I bothered you. I'll write you..."

"Vincent? Stop playing that hurt game. I want to talk..."

"I'll write you later. Good night." He hung up the phone.

The thing in his chest was now threatening to choke him. Vincent turned off the light and went upstairs. He walked into the living room, sprawled on the couch, and opened his book. Dick and Nicole were still on the beach. He sat staring at the page for ten minutes; he read the same paragraph four times and did not take from it any meaning. His reflection in the darkened plate glass of the picture window mimicked him; they stared at each other. The spectral image was superimposed over the frozen outdoor scene, the light from a streetlamp making a star above his left shoulder, making his head in the reflection much less distinct than the rest of his body. He sat and thought about what he had done and had not done with his life; about what he was. At nine-twenty-five he put on his coat and scarf and went out to his car.

* * *

Mrs. Ketter was sitting near the very center of the church hall. Beside her sat Helen Grudjen, a voluble woman who played eight bingo boards at once. Mrs. Ketter did not like Helen because she talked all the time, usually about the stupidity of other people, and the Ketters were sure she talked about them when their backs were turned. Besides this, Mrs. Ketter's poor eyesight allowed her to play only three boards. She sat hunched over her specials sheet, a red plastic bingomarker in her right hand, awaiting patiently the next number from the hefty man with the cigar who sat on the stage with the machine. Mrs. Ketter had not had any luck that evening--she had needed only N 32 to complete the inner square and win the fifty dollar prize, but it just wouldn't come. "Damn it, number N 32, they just won't call it," she had muttered to herself, and sure enough, someone else had won two numbers later when they called G 54.

Vincent arrived at St. Jude's at twenty minutes to ten, which was very late, much beyond the time that people usually started to play, but he insisted at the door that they sell him a 'special.' His mother did not see him until he sat down on the chair opposite her, a wooden folding chair with "St. Jude's" stenciled on the back, just as the table between them was stenciled at its center.

"Vincent! You're late. It's almost over." Mrs. Ketter, still keeping an eye on her sheet, stared at him in astonishment.

"I 26," called the man with the cigar.

"I want to play," said Vincent, his voice very low. He was having trouble controlling his breathing. His mother gave him a spare bingomarker, "You better pay attention, then," she said. After a moment she added, "I'm glad you came. You have to take a chance in this life."

Vincent held the marker loosely in his hand, then, slowly at first, he began to mark the numbers as they were called out, taking his chance, the only chance he was willing to take. After two or three minutes, his shoulders began to shake, and he lowered his head toward the table, still attending to the numbers before him. He began to shake more and more, and his mother finally took notice of him: he was holding the marker in both hands, sobbing, just barely audibly, shoulders shaking, hair down in his eyes, sobbing, yet still patiently attending to the numbers and the paper before him, now and then gasping for air, hands shaking, marking the numbers as they came. Mrs. Ketter, nervous and frightened, tentatively reached across the table to touch his wrist.

"Vincent?"

"B 12, " called the man.

"Bingo!" yelled Helen Grudjen.

Wladyslaw Cieszynski

LADY DISDAIN

if i wanted
to hide from you

i would stand
would wear no disguise
i would even hold
a candle to my face

and you would walk through me
maybe shudder
the hair across your shoulders

i would be only vague
a chill on your body
a stirring without definition

and when i wanted you
i would begin to disappear.

(Trans. Seth Wade)

SAMUEL WOLPIN

SAMUEL WOLPIN is a young (born 1946) poet of Argentina. His verse, poems in prose, and concrete poems are published widely in Latin American magazines, and he has had one book published, Explicaciones bicicleta arriba (Montevideo: Los Huevos del Plata, 1969). He is a member of the editorial staff of the literary review El Lagrimal Trifurca.

the charmed snake

the basket was made of willow, the flute of bamboo, the turban of silk, and the tourists of kodaks that is to say, they followed him through the street till he reached the second corner and began his multiple preparations in front of the basket rose a soft melody, evoking pastures and the sea the kodaks prepared their retentive eyes, suspending the breathing of those holding them after several minutes of music, some put their hands in their pockets, trying, with metallic sounds, to encourage the snake-charmer; others were going, with slanderous murmurings when there remained only one tourist, without kodak, the awaited snake stuck its head out of the ear of the snake-charmer; it coiled about the flute and finally fell into the basket

dream of a dream

after eating heartily, the man was on his way to sleep after a little while he began to dream he was dreaming that a man like himself was sleeping in a bed identical to his own and was dreaming something strange: this ultimate dream possessed independent life and was observing how the man, who appeared to be having a nightmare, was tossing about in the bed, disheveling the sheets suddenly the man, no longer able to bear his anguish, awoke and the dream possessed of independent life, the only residue, again looked in the direction of the bed and saw it completely made up as if no one had lain in it

Michalea Moore

THE SONG OF THE BODY

at night
you huddle in your bed
unable to sleep
remembering that you could not undress
in front of the other girls
at slumber parties;
you wore your pajamas
under your clothes
and wished you were
a disembodied head.
but your body did not disappear;
it submitted to the demands
of the changing moon
and grew in accordance
with some unwanted plan.
your mother told you secrets;
you began thinking you might never be free
of the demands made on you.
you enjoyed the night time
when you could lie in your bed
and your body seemed to dissolve
into the darkness
leaving only the thought of your freedom
streaking through your mind like a comet;
and even that burned out.

O. Howard Winn

AN ABSOLUTE

What might be true
is
what is true
under certain
conditions
that are discernible

to myopic eyes
or astigmatic
antennae
as well as vision
(visionary)
to objects solid

as the touch
of
my hand
upon your body
which I know
as powder smooth

scent
gold and ivory
truth as it is
through my eyes
fingers
and mouth.

Patricia Henley

EATING AUTONOMY

I set up housekeeping,
the fifth time in five years,
bringing along the poetry books,
those skinny bibles,
the danish pots,
black and matte as charcoal,
and that old nag.

She hangs on by her teeth,
under my skin,
digging in. Her sneaky chatter
deceives me. When I escape,
she's angry, wringing her whines,
curling like a baby's fist
on my mattress.
Any day now she'll drown
in a pool of doubt,
her own life-blood.

Heat, thick as kudzu, sheathes the earth,
the mirror's reflection
marbles the smudged windowshade.
I will be still,
watching my blue veins,
round and smooth as flower stems,
feeding my hands.
The hair on my legs
will grow wild and quietly,
pleasing me.

Sandra Wilson Schroeder

MAMA BEAR

I stand in front of a mirror.
Blood seeps from the holes
I've made in my face.
It is like this over and over,
this concentration on my skin.

A bear walks in my shadow.
She stares over my shoulder at my face in the mirror.
Someone has stolen her babies.
Holed up behind me
she licks her dry tits,
turns a raccoon body with a clumsy paw.

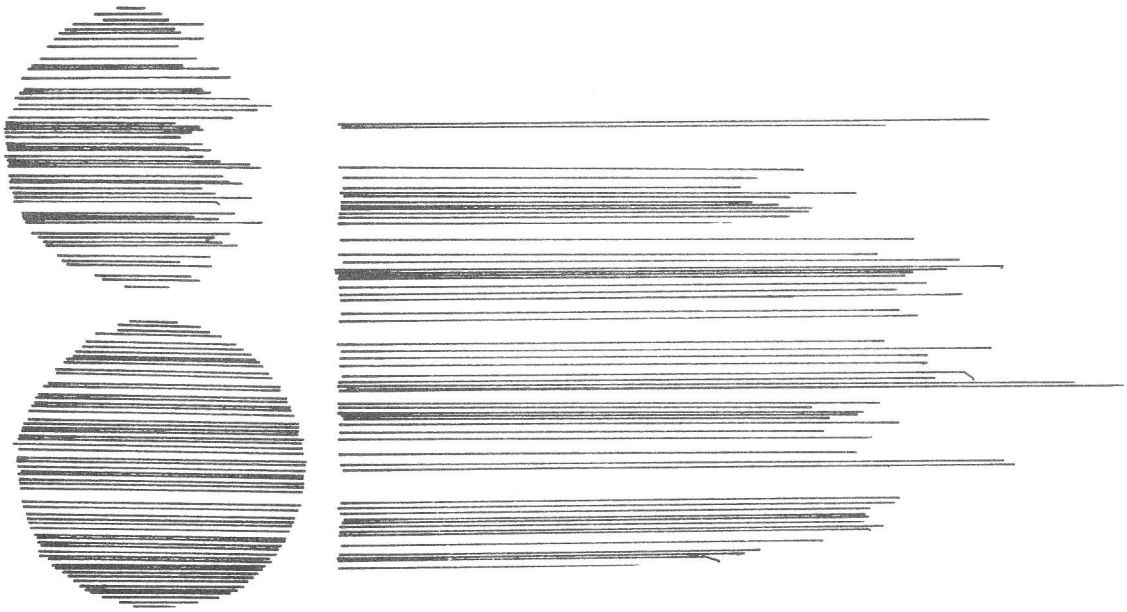
Someone has stolen my babies.
How can I trust my womb?
I knew too young how time takes
their blue eyes, how their wrinkled fists
stop gripping your finger.

Feeding on winter berries,
we search for lost cubs to warm our neck,
the smell of milk around their lips.

Old grizzly, bitter old grizzly,
you and I can take the vengeance of an aunt.
We can candy them away, bribe them
from their mothers.
Gather into your den the squirrel children,
the young of the weasel, tiny rabbits
and small badgers.

Leave my face alone. My skin has had enough.

There is a whimper and a murmur.
Children are at my door.
Chocolate is on their tongues,
toy animals in their hands.
The bear rolls in my shadow,
playing with her toes.



R. D. Lakin

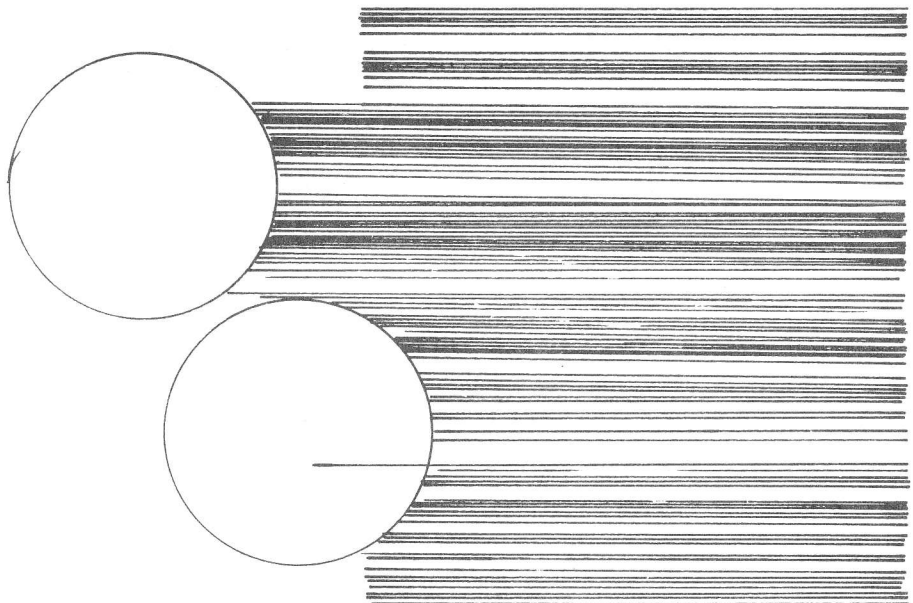
DRIVING INTO LARAMIE GAP

My son's head lobs in sleep,
our Ford fat with decals
that prove our past,
two purple towers never once used
in a western set framing the pass,
a perfect place for ambush
of our belated wagon train,
and I startle my son awake:
"Did you bring your gun?"
a joke perhaps on the sunny plateau,
but there in the shady passage,
rocks hanging heavy with age,
I see a million years in layers
of red and rust and yellow pageantries,
and I suddenly want
another weapon for him
greater than this hurtling caravan,
this explosion of speed
vacationers more and more need.

lyn lifshin

THE MAD GIRL'S DREAM OF HONEY OF OTHER THINGS THAT STICK

lying under the
plum and melon guilt
drinking rum tupelo
honey sweating and
shivering imagining
someone who wouldn't
come rubbing my back
and then just go,
imagining his fingers
when you knocked
on my door it was
like the white cat
nosing the door open
coming into bed later
with the rain on him
when he wouldn't let
me touch him in the
day rain prints on
the pillow just as
i'm dreaming this



Paul Lamar

LETTER

For you this is a tragedy,
For me a disappointment.
Your relative, my neighbor upstairs,
Died on the day previous to my saying hello.
Since his arrival three weeks ago,
I had listened to
His footsteps
His typewriter
His records
Telephone
Shower
Broom,
I report that he slept straight through
From 12 to 7 each night,
That he never dropped anything,
That he laughed a lot.

I thought we'd be friends,
I was planning to lend him a record.
Then I saw you moving his things out,
The bookcases and roll-top desk and two oil paintings.

Enclosed is a summary of my life.
Would you please tell me something more about him
And if we would have gotten on well?
If you think so,
Would you accept flowers?

When you say you love me
I don't hear

the words,
my ears have fear

in themselves.
When you say you love me

silence is a dark smile
in my mouth.

Hairs of rain
clean the sky bald,

there is nothing beyond
your eyes.

My boots clamber
toward the rest of my clothes

clinging
to your chair.

Naked, I sit on your lip
necessary

as a message
our tongues connect.

There is no more distance
to be covered by words.

Ralph J. Mills, Jr.

FRAGRANT FOREST
(Homage to Max Ernst)

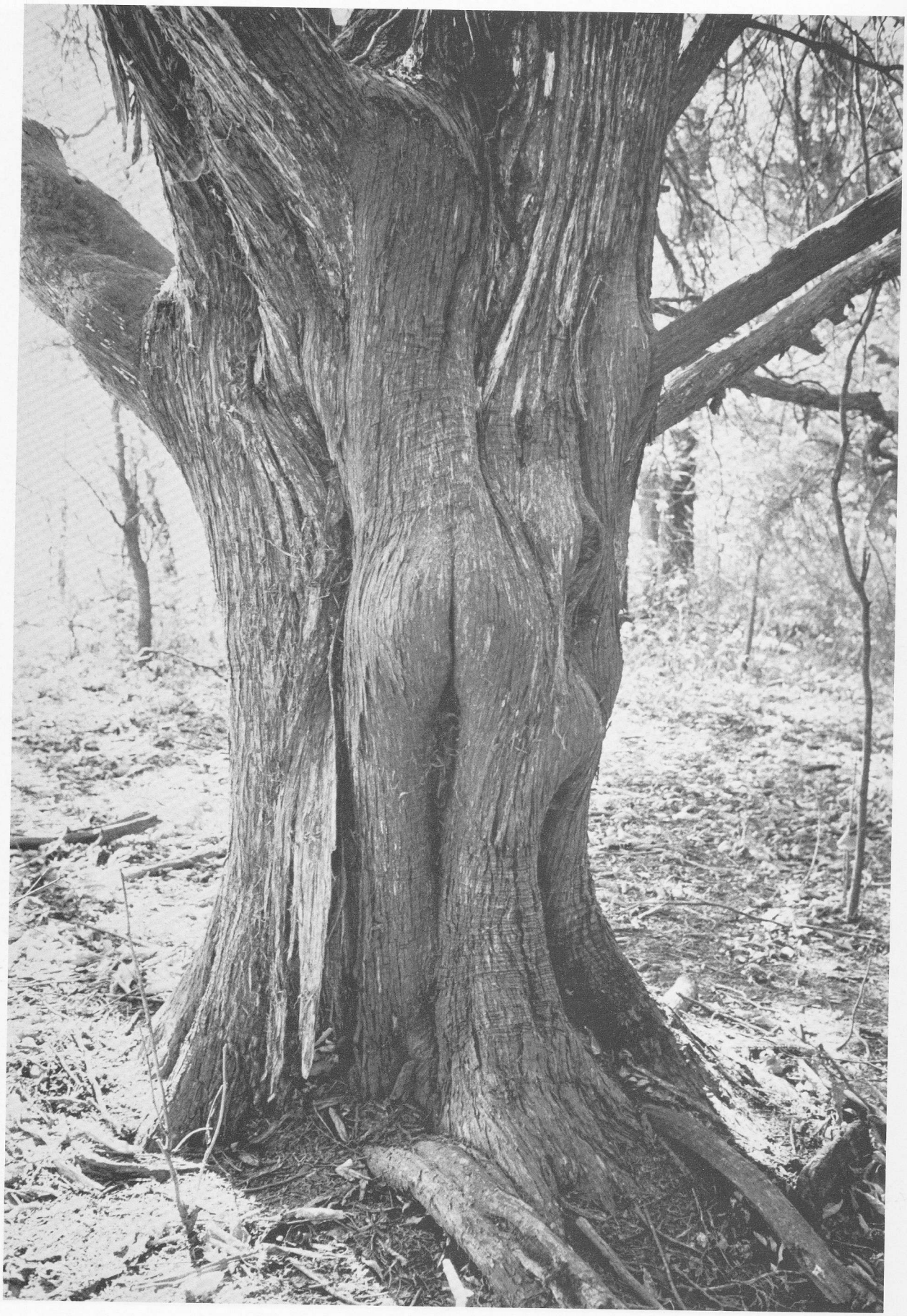
The moon's iron ring
has caught
among stiff branches
bare of leaves

Here the gate of night
unlocks a silence
in hidden glades
the pallid moon
can't touch

Water stirs, streams
wind beneath the giant trunks
rivers are whispering
through buried roots
thick as lovers'
tangled thighs

Perfume of musk
of black loam
lifts in waves
toward the midnight sky
breath of a sleeper
haunting the forest
like a beast after prey

Somewhere above
stars could be hanging
staring jeweled eyes
but they're not to be seen
and the hand with its brush
has just stopped



Larry Schwarm

Greg Curry

James Cleghorn

THE DAY OF THE LAST LEAF

On the morning of the last leaf
Representatives
From each country of the world
Stood before the tree
Wordless with no interpreters
The President was there
Pacing
The bladeless ground
Having dismissed
All advisors
And reporters waited
With blank tablets
Staring at their faces
Even the poets
Helpless as scientists
Could offer no cure

By noon all were sitting
Watching
The leaf weaken
Hands dangling from knees
While the populace
Unable to draw near
Peered through binoculars
From high hills
Or merely stared that way
Through space

By evening
The leaf went
A solitary crisp wrinkle
Audible
Above the expiring breath
Of the prone multitudes
Each eye glittering cold
Counting the fixed stars

One by one

Thomas Averill

JESSE CARSON'S GONE

Jesse Carson's gone.

During service this morning my mother nudged me and whispered too loud: "Jesse and Mabel aren't here. We should go by after dinner."

Ma's always whispering too loud, and then when people look at her she nods her small head up and down and all around at them. She nods all the time like that.

I remember a toy I had when I was a little boy. A big rubber blow-up clown with sand-filled feet that I spent hours and hours punching in the face, knocking it clear to the ground. It would right itself and come back for more. One day I poked the least little bit of a hole in it and it wouldn't be blown up again. It just lay there crumpled around its own solid bottom. I cried over it: I was young then.

After church we didn't even get dinner before Mabel called up and said Jesse was real sick and we should hurry over. Seemed odd to me. Jesse'd been to my store to buy a few weekend groceries on Friday, and he'd been pretty chipper. He sayed for an hour talking about the usual. The dam. The way the county roads were getting like washboards now that the highway was closed. We wondered when it would rain. Even though Jesse'd moved up to town, he still visited his land down in the valley four miles away almost every day.

"I don't know," he said to me. "Every morning I wake up and I just don't feel right till I've gone down and driven around the place. It changes so much. Say I go on a week's vacation. When I come back it seems different. It's the same, but different. Like that time I saw the Reverend Aarnton in overalls fixing the church roof where it leaked. Always before I'd seen him in his gown or his black suit. He was the same, only different. Anyway, I like to keep up with it. I can't live there and work there like I used to. And Mabel likes the running water at our new place so much, but at least I can go down every day. It's only rented out, you know. It ain't like the Corps of Engineers has done any more than condemn it so far."

A lot of old farmers around here feel like that about their land.

"When are they sposed to buy it out?" I asked him.

"I don't know. I don't know," he said, waving me away and turning around. "Whenever it is, it'll be too soon." He wouldn't look at me.

I've seen others do the same thing. These old people. They act like it'll just go away if they don't think about it.

So when Mabel called, I drove Ma over there and she hurried in so fast it made me look like I didn't care--following behind so slow in comparison.

When we went in the bedroom to say hello and ask after him, I really started back. Ma stood there looking and hardly batted an eye, but I'm just not used to such things. The room smelled awful, and Jesse didn't look calm and dignified like usual. His face was ashy white. His mouth was open, exposing almost colorless gums. His hair was unkempt, and there were some patches of stubble on his chin where he'd missed with his razor. I was glad his eyes were closed so he didn't see me jump back. He looked like he'd aged ten years each day since Friday, and that's a lot when you start with a sixty-three year old man. I kept waiting for him to open his eyes, and it looked like Mabel was, too, as though since company was come he would surely look to see who it was. We stood quietly over him for a full minute, until I started feeling antsy. I got this feeling that Mabel wanted something special from us. Maybe Ma felt it, too.

"How is he?" Ma asked. "Is he bad sick?"

"I don't know," answered Mabel, wringing her hands and shaking her head back and forth. "I don't know how he is."

"What does he say? Does he hurt anywhere in particular?" Ma looked at her. She was still shaking her head. Her face seemed fleshier than usual--as though her wrinkles had shrunk and forced her skin to bulge out where it was fat.

"I don't know," she said, real quiet. Then she started blubbering. "Oh, Ruth. Ruthie. I'm afraid. I'm so afraid."

Ma went over to her and held her. "There, there. There, there. What's to be afraid of? Trust in the Lord."

Then it was like Mabel all of a sudden got a hold of herself. She quit crying, looked Ma straight in the face, and said: "Ruth, he's dead. I think he's dead." Then she started really crying. Not the blubbering, but huge sobs like something else was inside her throwing her this way and that. I got spooked.

"Jesus Christ," I said, "Jesus Christ." I looked at Jesse. He looked awful.

Ma sat Mabel down in a chair and rushed over to Jesse to feel his hands, then his face. She lifted his eyelid. I turned my head away and was almost sick to my stomach. Ma gave a little shriek. His eyeball had rolled out of his face onto the sheets and left nothing but a dull red socket staring at us.

I kept looking back and forth between the empty socket and the eyeball staring up from the bed sheets. The left one. The left one. Used to be, for the life of me, I could never remember which was Jesse's glass eye. Now, from the death of him, I'll never forget it--for all the good it will do me.

Ma opened his other eye and it lay back and stared at us, lifeless as the other one.

Ma felt for a pulse in his neck, but I knew by then she wasn't going to find one. Mabel was still hunched over in the chair, rocking up and down so that it looked like she'd bang her forehead on her knee any minute.

"You, Herman," Ma said, snapping at me like I was a little kid, and not already past thirty, "call the funeral home and get them to send an ambulance."

Ma was hugging Mabel when I came back in. "They said it'd be about half an hour. I gave em good directions," I said.

I could tell from the bump under his eyelid that Ma had put the glass eye back in Jesse's head. I was glad she'd done it while I was gone.

I stood in the doorway watching Ma trying to calm Mabel down, but it wasn't easy.

"The Army Corps of Engineers called him yesterday," she said between those huge sobs.

Who'd have thought such a thin-chested old woman could sob so loud and long?

"They said they'd made the final arrangements and that they'd send him his check just as soon as it went through Kansas City."

"That Goddamn dam," I thought, "that Goddamn dam."

"He just let the phone fall back on the receiver and when I asked him what it was he told me all about it. They gave him just what he wanted, but he didn't seem happy about it. 'I guess I just never believed it was true: that they'd finally settle it all and leave me with nothing but money,' that's what he said to me.

"Then he went to bed early last night. Said he was tired. He woke me up real early this morning. 'Mabel,' he said to me," and Mabel started crying hard again. "'Mabel,' he said, 'I don't want us to take their money. They're just like a plague of locusts, and I don't want any part in it: them or their money. They've got no respect for land or people, or anything alive. All they care about is their plans and schedules and deadlines and blueprints. They aren't trying to buy the land, they're trying to buy me. If you take the money it will be like you've sold me.' 'Jesse,' I said, 'you're talking like you won't be here.' 'Mabel,' he kept saying, 'Mabel. Mabel. Mabel. Don't take their money.' And he kept on saying things about the Army and their money, only it didn't even make much sense after a while, and he got me to crying and crying. Then he grabbed me hard, and I was so afraid."

She cried and was almost gagging, until Ma said, "It's all right, Mabel. It's all right."

"I didn't go near him after that. Everything was so quiet. I was so afraid . . ."

She cried some more while Ma hovered over her trying to help.

I went outside to wait for the ambulance. Coming for Jesse.

The land. The money.

They were fast, and no sooner than I walked down the drive I saw them and waved them in. The driver rolled down the window.

"This is the place," I said to him, and he drove on in. While I walked down the old highway I saw them carrying their stretcher inside.

Hell. Jesse's only been in that house two years. Seems longer, though, because he used to walk down to the store and talk so often. Same old story as so many of them in this town. They get too old or worn down to farm their places, and their kids don't want anything to do with them or the farm--anyone who grew up on the farm and has a choice is likely to leave--and they get somebody to rent it, and get a place here in town to finish out their lives.

That was before the dam. Now the government will take you off your land and leave you with nothing but money no matter how old you are. Jesse Carson's not the first one I've heard of who seemed to kind of give up after his land was condemned and taken away from him, but he's the only one I've seen do it so quickly after the sale was final.

It's like he wanted to die fast so there couldn't be any doubt as to what caused him to have a heart failure.

A failure of the heart.

Jesse knew Pa even before I was born, and he saw me grow up and take over the store when Pa died seven years ago. He helped me a lot then.

"Herman," he said to me, "you know your Pa was a good man. He lived a good life, and a simple life. Every man in this town was his friend. And every time someone comes in the store now they'll look at you and see your Pa in you, because you're a good man, too. That's reward enough for any man, dead or alive."

Jesse had a lot of faith in me, and it pulled me through. I was only twenty-five then.

He had three daughters: married and gone. They'll all be back for the funeral.

I kept on walking. I knew Ma could handle everything without me. Besides, I'd seen enough of him already. The left eye's the glass one. The left one. I'll never need to know it again.

I walked to the rise not a quarter of a mile from where Jesse lived on the closed highway to look out to where they're working nonstop on the dam. It must be four miles away, but those big earth-moving machines are so loud they sound like they're bulldozing the neighbor's garden plot. Beyond the dam work, about ten miles away, is Lamar, the county seat. They're fifty thousand; we're about two

hundred. I've got the only store and gas pump in town. Me and the minister keep this town alive. He gets them on Sunday in church, and I get them during the week--though mostly for a little gas, or whatever they forgot in Lamar during their shopping trips. And they all come by to talk--especially the old ones. We all complain together.

The store used to be more of a gathering place when Pa had the post office, but I like it fine the way it is. Most people like Lamar, and I'll admit I go there for some real fine things--the softball league, the kind of socializing I can do over a beer, meeting new people.

My home is the small town though: a nice place to live, but I wouldn't want to visit there.

Of course Lamar is moving out this way, too. The businessmen are following the dam out like flies following a garbage truck, the college kids are coming out to get back to nature or something, the hunters and motorcyclists are getting out in greater numbers than ever. It's getting downright busy.

When the Army Corps finally fills up the lake, we will be isolated again: back to the days when it wasn't easy to get to Lamar. I'll be able to come to the crest of the old highway, here, look at Lamar, and be surrounded on three sides by water.

Now I'm surrounded by naked land where they've bulldozed all the trees from the river bottom. And by weed grown fields where there used to be golden wheat, and new milo, and corn, and beans about this time of year. All of it plowed, planted, and cultivated by men like Jesse Carson.

Not two weeks ago he said to me: "I guess this'll be the last crop to come out of my land."

Oh, Jesse Carson. Gone

A man could raise almost anything he wanted on those fields there in the bottom, those fields that are just sitting waiting for the water to cover them up and get it over with. They say if they flood here, it'll keep the bottom land downstream from flooding. It's as though the Army's lived in constant fear of a big flood ever since 1951. Twenty years without a flood--except the kind that replenishes the soil.

Jesse had the right idea. "Flood, my bottom," he always said. "If they were really worried about flooding they'd take all their money and machinery and put it to better use. Herman, for what that dam is going to cost they could terrace every farm in the county. Make it flood proof and save the land.

"I don't like a flood any more than the next fellow. I remember you and your Pa and me rowing down to my place twenty-three years ago. Do you remember the way the mud covered the roofs of the sheds, and how long it took us to clean up the house?"

"I sort of do," I said, trying to call up the pictures again.

"But this isn't for flood. Wilson Reservoir, and Kanopolis, and Milford, and Tuttle Creek, and Perry. Maybe they were for floods. But this is for those damn Lamar businessmen--boat sellers, real estate developers, nature hikers, motorcycle clubs, fishermen, Kwik store operators, and you name all the other organizations we saw at those lake planning sessions."

Jesse Carson never said a word at those meetings, but sometimes I could just look at him and tell what he was thinking. We've known each other even better since his girls grew up and went away and my Pa died and the dam business started occupying everybody's minds.

This year it's been so windy that it's been hard to keep any moisture in the ground. Mr. Hatton was telling me it's getting drier every year, and pretty soon we'd look out and it'd be just like a desert.

"But they're building a lake," I told him. "How can it look like a desert if I'm surrounded by water?"

"It's a desert already, Herman," he said.

"But it will be a lake," I said.

"Even with a lake it'll be a desert. Filled with boats and Coke stands and electric lights. All right, all right. Only a kind of desert. Don't be so literal. What're you gonna do, open up a bait shop and sell minnows and worms to fat ladies with sunglasses on?"

"No, I'm not," I said. He really makes me mad sometimes. "I feel the same way you do about this lake, but I'm getting tired of being beat down every time I talk to anyone about it," I told him.

He shrugged his shoulders, paid for his cud's worth of chewing tobacco, and left, muttering: "A desert. It'll be a desert."

The town cynic, he is. When he hears about Jesse Carson dying so quickly after his land was finally sold he'll say something like: "He'd have died anyway."

Hatton is like the rest of us on those Army Corps boys. He'll take a walk up to the crest of the hill on his place--he's about a mile and a half north on this ridge--and watch what he calls the ants and spiders building their big dam. He tries not to get any closer to it than his place.

"To keep it in perspective," he says. "I wish they really was no bigger'n ants. I'd kick em a good one with the toe of my boot and send em scurrying."

He likes to imagine such things. I could tell him the truth about insects.

After you kick an ant hill down, they'll build themselves another one real quick.

Spiders are hopeful, too. When I got home last night after drinking some beers in Lamar, my bladder was filling up as fast as I could empty it, and I went outside three times to pee. Each time there was this hopeful spider no bigger than my thumbnail building his web across the door. All he ever caught was me, and he couldn't keep me. That spider had more faith than a church full of people these days. He kept building and building and building.

In the background I could hear those Army Corps people working non-stop on the dam. But that's not even hope. It's a project, a deadline, blueprints, schedules. No filament from the body, no sustenance coming of it except for the people who always feed on what everybody calls "progress." They should just call it what it is: money-making.

Mr. Hatton, you have to do more than shoo a bug away--or kick it around. They're strong and resilient. And the Army's stronger yet, because they're organized for it.

They're different from us real, individual people.

Jesse Carson is back at his house dead.

And the Army works straight through the night, their big spotlights brighter than Lamar's skyline. They work through Sunday like it wasn't even there. They aren't like us. They're stronger than men have a right to be.

I walked back to the house just in time to see the ambulance driving away. Jesse will be embalmed in Lamar, then in three days he'll be buried in the cemetery here. In the land.

He and the dead people in that cemetery did more than all of us live ones put together. If the cemetery had been closer to town, the lake would be that much closer, but there's so much time and legal trouble involved with moving the dead that the Army decided they'd move the lake over a ways instead, or at least not fill it quite so full.

"I'm going to say here with Mabel," Ma said to me when I peeked in the doorway. "You go on home and get yourself something to eat. All I ask is that you stop by the Reverend Aarnton's to let him know. We'll be busy calling family."

"Yes, ma'am," I said. "Is there anything else I can do?"

"You go ahead on in to your softball game if you want."

I looked at Mabel. She nodded her head. "We'll see you later," she said quietly.

"I guess I really should go," I said. "They'll be counting on me."

Church league plays in Lamar every Wednesday and Sunday evening.

The minister was eating his dinner. He always nods so gravely--an up and down yes--when something's gone wrong and he hears bad

news; but then he always shakes his head back and forth--a no--and smiles at good news. Maybe when you tell him something good he thinks you're trying to pull his leg and he doesn't want to believe that of you. Anyway, he nodded up and down and said he'd go right over.

I didn't stay long because I was in a hurry to call Carla and get to Lamar. If Ma wasn't going to be there, Carla might as well come watch me play.

She'd just gone over to pick up her new French Poodle dog. I left a message with Maxine and she said she'd try to get Carla to come watch. They're both divorcees.

I made myself a couple of salami and cheese sandwiches. My eyes were bigger than my stomach, but at least Mother wasn't there to remind me of it and grumble between the mouthfuls it takes her to eat what I can't finish. She swears I'll kill her some day unless I quit taking so much that she feels obligated to keep from going to waste. Today I added another day on her life by hiding the last three bites of my sandwich down in under yesterday's newspaper in the trash.

Things were looking up by the time I got to Lamar. There was a cool wind blown up from the North, and the sky was even clouding up. It didn't look like it'd rain any minute, but it made you hopeful that the dry spell would get broken up some day. Kind of like getting reminded of Christmas in August.

Jerry, our manager and the best catcher in the league, was there early, like usual, and we warmed up for a good long time before anyone else came. At a quarter to four, fifteen minutes from game time, Carla still wasn't there, and the Methodists were two men short. That would have griped me if we hadn't played, but they had nine by game time. We tossed the coin. Jerry won, and we took the field as the home team.

I took my place on second base. I hadn't told any of the team about Jesse. I didn't want to upset the game. If they felt the way I did, they wouldn't be able to concentrate very well. There was the game, but there was Jesse--big in the background.

Matt Heron, our pitcher, walked the first batter, but then settled down and got the second one to hit a high pop fly to our center fielder, Martin.

Carla came before the second out. She sat in the bleachers with her new dog--a cute little white-haired thing that sat up in her lap like he owned it. Maxine was with her, too. I waved at them from second base, and they waved back and smiled, which made me wish the game was over and I was with them over at their place.

It looked to me like Carla'd got her hair done again. It looked nice--curled tight above her head. I grinned, thinking that she'd got it bleached again and curled tight so that she and her new puppy could

be look-alikes. Of course, they aren't. Her mouth is so rich and full, and she's got such straight, even teeth. She about bowled me over when I first saw her. I met her when the First Baptist Church in Lamar, where she worships, and our church took the Youth House of Lamar on a picnic. These are disadvantaged kids who are getting away from their homes when they have a broken family, or a drunkard for a father, or something like that.

I donated a bunch of potato chips--an off brand that had been hard to sell. Carla had made up a whole bunch of turkey sandwiches, and other people brought so much that the food was flowing all over. It was really good. Those kids had a great time, especially the way Carla was kidding and teasing with them all afternoon. That's probably just what they needed--a little attention. She was wonderful with them. And we struck it up right away, too.

Carla goes to church so she can do such things. Of course she was raised to it just like me, but she says it is the social contacts you get that make church important. We hit it off, and I started going over to her place for a beer whenever I could get away.

Ma doesn't like beer, and she says that Baptists shouldn't drink. But even Jesus drank wine--which is better than the grape juice I donate to the church. I give them bread that's just short of the selling deadline, too. The communion bread--the body--just short of the selling deadline. Waste, waste.

Heron was pitching a good game, and we were hitting their pitcher like he was throwing volleyballs. I laid down a good bunt in the second, but got stranded on second base. Samuels, the right fielder, brought my glove out, shaking his head. "We'll score you one of these games," he said. Seems like I'm always getting left on base.

It thundered at the top of the third, lightninged through the bottom. The breeze turned to a wind at the top of the fourth, and before we'd got them out it started sprinkling a little. We kept on playing through the top of the fourth, but it was getting slick by the time we got to bat, and from the looks of the tops of the trees bending up and down in the wind, and the coolness from the North, and the way the lightning streaked high in the thunderhead, we knew it wasn't going to quit. The umpire called the game, which was all right with everyone--we could beat them any time--and while we were gathering the bats together I told some of the fellows about Jesse.

"I'm real sorry," said Jerry. "You were pretty close, weren't you?"

"Yea," I said.

"I just saw him on Friday," said Heron.

"I know," I said, "I did too. He lost his will, that's all."

The news filtered through the team. Some of them came over as though to make sure it was true.

"It'd probably be nice to go by and say something to Mabel," I suggested to those that had known Jesse best.

Mabel. And Ma. Both sitting with tears in their eyes. Hugging each other. Calling family. Sharing the news. The sadness. Spreading the death thinner and thinner until it is not so terrible.

I went over to Carla and met the dog. It was a fidgety creature--a tiny thing with those big, drug-store eyes.

"Herman," said Carla, "meet He-man."

"He-man?" I asked, chuckling.

"Yep. He may be small, but he's a man, so I called him that." She smiled, and I smiled back. I think it was the first time I'd smiled all day.

"Can you come over for a beer?" she asked me.

"Sure, but I can't stay long. I'll explain on the way over."

I left my car at the park and went with her. She drives a late model GTO, and she drives it well. On the way to her apartment I began telling her about Jesse. About how he had died. And why.

While I talked, the dog tumbled over the front seat and into the back, then it hopped back over and onto her lap, making it hard for her to steer. Finally, I ended up holding the dog and trying to comfort it. I had the feeling that Carla wasn't listening to me.

When we got to her apartment, a brand new place called Cedarwood Gardens--even though there isn't a cedar tree within half a mile--I sat back in my favorite chair while Carla got me a beer. She sat down on the thin-lined, black vinyl couch. The difference between her furniture and Ma's is like the difference between riding in a 1974 Ford Mustang and sitting in a 1950 Plymouth.

I put my feet up on the coffee table--a sheet of plastic on glued-together, sixteen-ounce Budweiser cans--and began to talk more about Jesse. I just couldn't get him off my mind. I told Carla about going over there. How Ma seemed to know even beforehand that something was wrong. I told about how Ma opened Jesse's eye, and how the glass eye rolled down onto the sheets.

"Oh, Herman," she chuckled, "you must be making this up. Could that really happen?" She whispered into He-man's ear: "Did you ever hear of such a thing?" then she laughed out loud.

I got mad. "Of course it's true," Isaid. "Just as true as it is that the Army killed him." Sometimes you feel like you know all about something, but you just can't get it across to someone else. Most of it stays inside and ends up rotting away. You tell a piece of it, and the other person thinks the rest of it inside you is something different from what it really is. It's hard, sometimes.

The bubble light over the TV reminded me of Jesse's eye.

Carla changed the subject.

These people in Lamar don't understand about the Army and the lake. The dam. It is not every day that someone I know dies: especially for such a definite reason.

The Army keeps slowly eating away on us. They remind me of the Dutch Elm disease that's killed so much of the shade in Lamar. You drive along and see those huge, topped-out elms standing like monuments to what used to be.

Waste.

All those meetings. The Army.

"These plans have been on the drawing board for twenty years."

"It is not a matter of whether or not the dam will be completed, it is a matter of how. Tell us how you want your lake--what would you like there?"

And old DeWitt Smith saying, "We'd like it the hell out of here."

The expressions on everyone's faces. DeWitt had said what most of us felt, but it was too late: too late to even feel anything, so after the grinning and chuckling was over the younger ones just set their faces up like statues, and the older folks began to look forward to dying. People I'd known for years of laughing and smiling and shouting all sitting there silently, heads bowed. The Army people in suits and ties--smooth, sure, confident.

Jesse Carson turned around, craning his neck so he could see me good from that one eye, and frowned, shaking his head quickly. He had an expression on his face that looked about like he had been in church and heard the minister tell everybody to go home, that there was no God. I wanted him to speak out--make some sense like he does in the store--but he didn't. So many of us didn't.

Whenever I mention the dam, Carla says, "I don't know how you can get so upset. You'll be living right on a big lake. Won't that be nice? Your business'll pick up, too."

Business. The whole dam thing is business, and I found out from when I went to Topeka to the Baptist Junior College there and was going to get a degree in business, that business to almost everybody there meant money. M-O-N-E-Y.

I was quiet. Carla got me another beer. She was acting like the new dog was the only thing in the room--running around the floor with it and brushing its white hair until it shined like a neon light. I think she was nervous because I was moody. She did not want to talk with me.

"Herman," she said after a pretty long silence, "I promised Mary Jane I'd come over to show off He-man."

"Do you want me to leave?" I asked.

"I don't care," she said, and I almost threw my beer can at her. I don't care. I don't care. "You could get another beer from the fridge and I'd be back before you'd get it finished. Let me turn on the TV for you."

She did; then went to her bedroom. He-man followed her and nudged the door open as he snuggled through the crack she'd left in it. She was talking to the dog and changing her blouse.

I watched and half forgave her for not understanding about Jesse. As she buttoned up the blouse she'd changed into--a colorful one with red and white stripes and blue polka dots--she looked into the living room and saw me watching her.

She hurried in. "You naughty boy." She smiled and winked. "I won't be long."

Then she was gone.

I finished my beer and got another one. They interrupted the TV program--that new firemen-rescue squad thing where they can save anyone--to announce that Lamar and the surrounding areas were due for severe thunderstorms and possibly tornadoes. I turned the volume up, but they didn't say anymore.

I wished that Carla would get back. She hadn't seemed to mind my watching her change her blouse. I didn't know what to think of that.

I sat and sat, watching Carla's bubble light change colors. I worried about the storm. On TV, the firemen rescued a crippled boy from the trunk of a car in a junkyard. His mother cried and cried.

Mother hates storms, and every time there's a warning she's sure it's the real thing and gets as nervous as a horse in a burning barn. I figured she'd be with Mabel, but she would still worry. It was raining, though not as hard, and my car was a mile away. I began to get mad at Carla for being so inconsiderate.

Last time I was caught out in a big storm Mother said it almost killed her.

I thought of giving her a call, but then she'd want to know why I wasn't home already. I wished I was home.

Jesse gone. Mabel would need a lot of comforting. And Mother would.

Me, too.

Carla had been gone for an hour when Maxine came home from wherever she'd gone after the game got rained out. I scared her a little, sitting with the TV blasting, drinking beer in that strange, bluish light a TV gives off.

"Herman?" she asked, seeing a figure on the couch.

"Yep," I said.

"Where's Carla?"

"She took that French thing to Mary Jane's and said she'd only be a little while. That was an hour ago."

"Well, have another beer."

"I already have," I said. "Twice."

She started to say something, but there was another weather announcement and I shushed her up. It sounded to me like things were getting worse, and I asked her to drive me to my car.

I didn't say anything all the way there, and finally Maxine asked, "Is something wrong, Herman?"

"No," I said. "Ma hates storms and a good friend of mine died earlier today. A man that helped me see straight after my father died. His name was Jesse. Jesse Carson. A farmer . . ." I could tell she wasn't really listening.

Like Carla.

I sighed. I felt like they could both go to hell.

"Oh, I'm sorry," she said finally, looking out the window.

"You tell Carla . . ." I began, but quit.

"What?" asked Maxine.

"Never mind," I answered. "I guess I can tell her myself."

I drove home as fast as I could, took a quick shower, put on some clean clothes, and went over to Mabel's. It was dark there, until I came up close and saw a crack of light through the living room shades. The car radio had said that the tornado watch was over, and I could tell from the clouds that it could not rain too much longer.

Ma and Mabel were sitting listening to the FM and waiting for weather announcements.

"Where've you been?" asked Ma.

"Oh, I helped Jerry clean everything up after we got rained out, then went home and cleaned up and came on over."

"How long have you been home?" asked Ma.

"Bout an hour, I guess."

"An hour?" She sat up and stared at me. Her hair needed combing. "An hour? I called over there every fifteen minutes since we turned on the radio an hour and a half ago."

"I must've been in the shower."

"Did you eat anything?"

"Oh, yeah. I forgot. I went to get a hamburger at McDonald's. There was a big crowd."

Mother nodded. After all, Mabel should have been the one we were talking to.

"How is everything?" I asked. I went over and took Mabel's hand and looked down into her eyes. They were red and swollen and looked huge in her face.

I was mad at Carla. I was mad at myself. I was mad.

"Sorry I didn't make it over sooner," I said to her.

"Well, we've worried some about the weather, but we're thankful for the rain," said Mabel.

She sounded so sad it made me want to cry. I felt like erasing everything that had happened to me the whole day. All but church, I guess. The rest had just proved what I always thought: If people don't let you down, something else will. I wouldn't erase church because Jesus was the only person who didn't spend his life letting other people down.

Mabel got up and went to the bedroom and came back. She put something into my hand that felt like a marble.

"I never liked it. Never a bit," she said. "Now that he's gone, I can't stand to have it here. Take it. Maybe you'll understand what to do with it."

"Yes, ma'am," I answered.

"He never wore it," she said.

I took it into the kitchen, turned on the light, and gave it a close look. It was a glass eye. I turned it around in my hand. It was just like Jesse's eye, only right in the center of the pupil, if you looked close, was one of those reflecting pictures. When I held it one way I could see an American flag. When I moved it and it reflected the light at a different angle, I saw a girl leaning over a chair, her breasts flopping out of her open blouse.

I couldn't help but grin, wondering whatever possessed Jesse to buy such a thing. I pictured him stumbling across it in some optometrist's mail order catalogue and not really believing that such a thing could be purchased. Sending away and still not believing it would come. But it did. An embarrassment to him when he had to show it to Mabel. I imagine he got madder at it the longer it sat around, because it was making me mad already. It was like Jesse'd willfully made himself the butt of some bad joke. I couldn't even imagine looking Jesse in the eye and seeing a half-naked girl, or an American flag.

I thought I knew what Mabel meant, and I went outside the back door. The sky had cleared a little more, and I could see some stars. I bounced the eye up and down in my hand for a minute, then heaved it over the trees as hard as I could. I hoped it would land below the draw and just keep rolling and rolling.

Someday, somebody will find it and go around baffled all day, asking what the hell? What the Goddamn hell? But that somebody's not going to be me.

When I came back in, Ma was ready to go. I told Mabel again how sorry I was, and we left.

I was hungry, but I'd lied myself out of eating very much. Still, Ma fixed some eggs. Sometimes she just knows me as well as I do.

"What was it that Mabel gave you?" she asked.

"Nothing," I answered.

"Nothing?" she asked. "I saw her give something to you."

"It was something she wanted me to see, and not you, or she'd have shown it to you."

"Come on," she insisted, "what was it?" She knew I'd never tell her. I could tell from the tone of her voice. She probably figured Mabel would tell her.

I smiled and acted mysterious. "It was Jesse's sin," I said. "Mabel couldn't stand to have it in the house now that he's gone. It was the only time he let himself down, you see. But I've thrown it away already."

We were both quiet.

I thought she might start in on me about all the other things that had happened to me that day, but again she knew when to hold off. She ate her eggs in silence. I heard her sigh a couple of times.

"You go to bed early tonight, Mother," I told her. She nodded, not saying a word. It was so quiet I could hear the Corps of Engineers working through another night.

Mother and Mabel: Sitting, clinging, comforting.

Cynical Hatton: You start to see funny, until you are standing on some hill thinking: I'll let them get a little further, then I'll kick them with the toe of my boot.

Carla: I see you now, and I'll see you no more. You, too, are gone.

Jesse: They would buy you. Exchange you. Until the heart fails.

Herman: Trying to do right. Letting down and let down. Punched down--full of holes--without tears.

We get older, weaker. We die.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

DAVID ALLEYNE came to Lawrence last year from New York City. His poetry has appeared in Indigo, En Masse, and Black Creation. . . . THOMAS AVERILL is a Kansas writer making his second appearance in Cottonwood. . . . GUY BEINING has been published widely in little magazines, including Little Review, Beyond Baroque, and Invisible City. . . . ROBERT BOWIE has had poetry accepted or published in many magazines, including Harper's Magazine, The Malahat Review, The Texas Quarterly, Mississippi Review, and Tractor. . . . BONNIE BROWN is a translator and critic of contemporary Spanish poetry. . . . RICHARD CARAM is a Columbia, Missouri, poet who has had poetry recently published in The Sou'wester, and The Wisconsin Review. . . . MARGARET CESA has two books of poetry, Left Hand (1974) and 32 (1973). Her work appears in anthologies by Harper and Row, Macmillan, and Thorp Springs. . . . WLADYSLAW CIESZYNSKI's work has appeared in two anthologies, New Poetry out of Wisconsin and Passing through Oshkosh. . . . JAMES CLEGHORN has appeared in The Massachusetts Review, Forum, eikon, Quabbin, Harvest, and elsewhere. His work is included in two anthologies, East Coast Poets and Working from Silence. . . . WILLIE CROMWELL is a Lawrence area poet studying at the University of Kansas. . . . GREG CURRY is a photographer living in Topeka.

GARY DAVID recently arrived in Lawrence. He has had poetry published in The Human Issue, Train City Flier, and Shelly's. . . . MARK DeFOE has had short fiction and poetry published in Prairie Schooner, Western Humanities Review, Cimarron Review, Mississippi Review and Florida Quarterly. . . . WILLIAM GALLAGHER is a Lawrence area poet who has had work recently published in Ark River Review, Charas Six, The Above Ground Review, Poetry Venture, and Jewelweed. . . . LOIS GREENE is co-editor of Aux Arcs. She has had showings of her art work in various parts of the Midwest. . . . PATRICIA HENLEY is a poet-in-residence for the South Carolina Arts Commission and editor of Peacewood Press. . . . JOHN J. KESSEL is a Lawrence writer and was formerly a co-editor of Uranian.

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SETH WADE's poetry and translations have appeared in many magazines. He has a book of poetry, Mr. Many, and is editor of The Horbly Gnome and The Pan American Review. . . . STERLING KELLY WEBB lives in Milwaukee. . . . WILLIAM WHITMAN has published poetry, fiction, and translations. His books of poetry are Dancing Galactic Bear (Crossing Press) and Homage to Point Reyes, which is scheduled for publication next summer by Thorp Springs Press. . . . O. HOWARD WINN has had work recently published in Descant, Kansas Quarterly, Sou'wester, and Lake Superior Review.