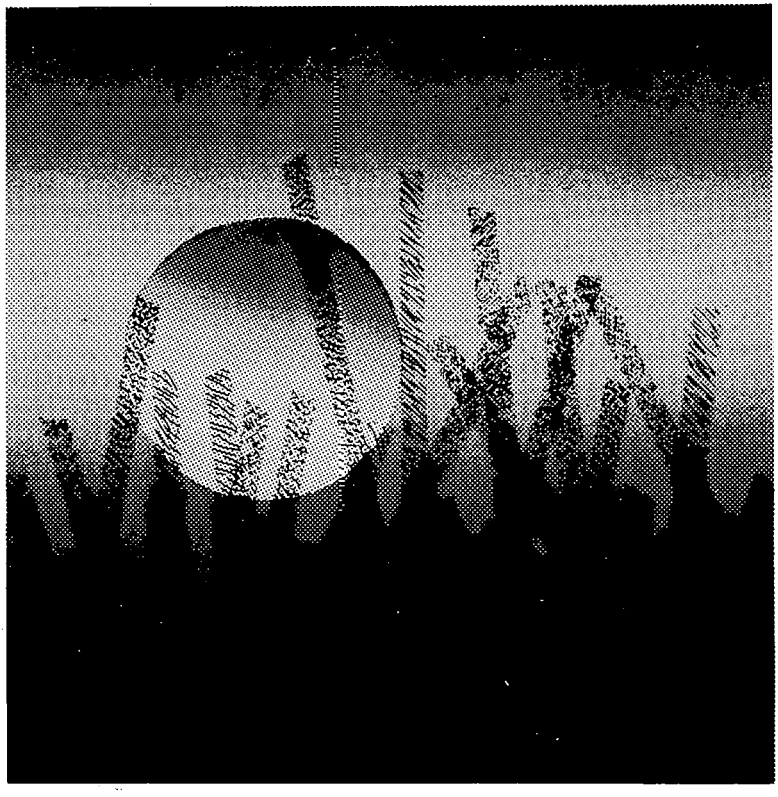
COTTONWOOD



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COTTONWOOD magazine welcomes submissions of fiction, poetry, graphics, photography, translations, reviews of small press literature and literature by midwestern authors. We also welcome articles on the arts from both local and national writers and artists. Poetry submissions should be limited to the five best, fiction to one story. We cannot return submissions which do not include a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

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COTTONWOOD 34

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FALL 1984

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FALL 1984

EDITOR'S NOTE:

We at COTTONWOOD are looking forward to celebrating the magazine's 20th anniversary with a special retrospective issue. Having been on the COTTONWOOD staff since the first of our special issues (KANSAS WOMEN WRITERS—25), I look forward with both eagerness and trepidation to the task of being responsible for the selection of the work included in that special anniversary issue.

With the great quantity of excellent fiction, poetry, and art COTTONWOOD has been able to publish in the past twenty years, there is no dearth of good material to pick from, but I have grown dependent on our fine staff of readers who represent a wide range of literary tastes and possess a great deal of literary talent as poets and writers in their own right. It is going to feel strange to chose material for an issue without their expert help. Yet I know that my final choices will be building on the wise choices they, and their predecessors on the COTTONWOOD staff, have made.

We want to thank you, our readers, for the interest you showed in our Salina Issue, 33, and in our Kansas poetry anthology, CONFLUENCE. That double issue is now almost out of print, but Denise Low has kindly edited a condensed version called A CONFLUENCE OF POEMS in conjunction with her son, Daniel Low. This collection has been chosen with the needs of school-age readers in mind, and Denise is to be congratulated for having a grade school student help with the selection.

COTTONWOOD 34 would not have been possible without the volunteer help of the members of the COTTONWOOD staff. Sharon Warner, Sally McNall, Tom O'Donnell, and Betty Campbell assisted with the proofreading of copy, and Phil Wedge has updated and proofread our mailing lists. I especially want to thank Jane Hoskinson and Tamara Dubin. Jane did the final proofreading of the printing codes (what a job!) as well as the entire text of this issue, and Tamara assisted with the final layout and pasteup. Through the generosity of the University of Kansas and the English Department, we have been able to have our typing done by Pam Lerowitz and Sandee Kennedy of the Word Processing Center. Our thanks to them, also. And a special thank you to THE LITTLE BALKANS REVIEW and to SOUTH DAKOTA REVIEW for allowing us to reprint two poems by William Stafford in conjunction with the interview.

—Erleen J. Christensen

POETRY

Robert Harlow

OUT HERE

Driving through the mountains
I fear avalanches
I fear wolves
if they'd come down
out of timber
and demand food

my hands a slender meal

at every rest stop
I bless my tires
count the lug nuts
and check the spare

my gas cap locked
against the sudden
need
of deer

you can never be too certain
out here
where the snow comes early
deep and long

I see myself
caught in the blizzard
that calls my name
coaxes me out of the car
and freezes the engine
with the patience
of a glacier

I imagine I will be found
huddled beneath the slow reach
of a spruce
as if it had given birth

curled to myself
speaking my last words
to my knees

what's left of me
ascending through snow
in spring perhaps
after animals being animals
have discovered me

bits of blue that were my coat
no longer keeping me warm

George Looney

THE BOATS KNOCKING AT NIGHT

There are things he knows are true,
like the sounds of the boats
knocking together all night in a wind.
It isn't the boats,
but the dead, trapped in a lidless world,
bumping the bottoms, the sides of boats,
trying to jump into a cabin
to flap and breathe, just once,
like they did.

He knows his father by his knock, how
he always hits the boat
with an entire side, swimming
at the wood and whipping about,
hurling his body out
at the last instant, and always
the same time everynight, as he
turns out his bedside lamp.
He knows to make that sound must hurt,
and understands his father's only means
to express a love he never could.

One night, though he waits
without falling asleep for hours
in the dark, he doesn't hear
the knock. He knows what that means too,
gets up early, goes down to the pier,
drops a stone in the water
then goes to work. There are
some things he just knows.

Linda Walvoord Girard

THE SURVIVORS

After the white crumbs disappeared
we thought, No matter. There's the road ahead.

The prairie grass grew shoulder high
over the wagon ruts.
No one sees us now
come hand in hand along the alley
keeping close to the brick walls,
the back sides of warehouses,
warming our hands over a barrel fire.

The ovens, ourselves as children rich with awe
leave us; we look back
crossing vacant lots
the downed grass black with oil spilled.
We're years away

afraid of open places.
In the tall grass there is a gassy smell
even in open air.
I look at you mornings
your blond hair turned salt color
and know it all happened
but does not matter:
who wanted us dead, how few
miles we were from the old hut.

Even the old woman with the matted hair
moves back into the trees

but we are glimpsed now and again:
thin figures, backs turned,
a wall painted in firelight.

Patrick Stanhope

WAITING

You survived
bleak winters
carving cigarette holders
from teak wood,
prayed the rosary
three times a week
on the steps of
St. Thomas,
and fascinated with language
you listened to French,
German
and Spanish
on the Short wave
as night pounded across the sky
like a dark fist
waving in your face
and your father's voice
became smaller
with each new layer
of snow.

On clear nights
you threw your eyes
against infinity
and imagined planets,
the eyes of God
looking down on you.

As the snow melted
like vigil candles,
you studied the lives
of saints,
and hardly visible
in the thick mist
of spring,
you perfected the laughter
of madness
while I watched you
praying in the garden
with a rosary
made of old bones.

Ruth Good

NEWS BLACKOUT

I have come to a point
in life where no more news
is welcome.

The blue awnings are flapping
in Malaga
and the storks stand on
one leg
on the rooftops of Europe.

This is enough.

This and knowing
the mist rises like exquisite
smoke in the forests
of Costa Rica
where golden toads
live on the tops of the
mountains.

The foreign ministers are
squabbling on the edge of a
lake, translators whispering
in their ears.

No bulletins are wanted.

Someone calls me
on the telephone
to take a piece
of my heart.

Do not tell me your news,
I ask.
Rather inform me

Which is the most beautiful
bird in China?
In the Western Hemisphere?
And who in the eyes of
the people is godly
enough to wear
his feathers?

J.B. Goodenough

OUTPOST

It has been forty years.
We here are older
By forty winters
And by forty summers
Of water pooled in trenches.

You no longer send biscuits,
Coffee, socks.
We have lost the pieces
Of your last letter.
There is rust in the guns.

The enemy remains.
We see their fires at night,
Burning in the hills,
Sometimes hear
Their singing.

But some of us have forgotten
Why we are in this place.
Therefore we beg you
To explain to us again
Our duty.

Fleda Brown Jackson

THE WOMEN MOURN THE CLOSING OF THE STEEL MILL

And if any man can find one of us he'll learn
why the whole universe was set in motion.
— Mrs. Antrobus, *The Skin of Our Teeth*

For months there has been no work.
Politics have left us rattling the bones
of our former selves, and while we wait
in our yellow kitchens, our men bundled
in rows outside the factory door,
we make omens of our eyes,
take small containable fears
as tonic against surprise.

From the north we think we hear
the shudder of ice sliding in,
and our locks are useless,
grizzled with rust. It is the hour
for incantations, witches' pursed weapons
and prayers raised from old books.
Bless water still boiling,
count four glasses in the sink.
listen for the crackling fur
of our animals, in from the cold.

We do what we do. We turn to the only love
we know. At night we wrap ourselves
like a poultice on his skin. We waste
the last logs for his cold feet.
We squander our allotted days hearing
his stories repeat their plots.

And see Our bread rises extravagantly.
We braid our rugs, break open tea bags
into our cups, and read there
the remainders of news:
Bats, toads, fish scales, bits
of colored thread, cocked elbows
of leafless limbs, white flapping
sheets
pinned to the line, rhyme.
We search the ancient books
for songs, for a strong chorus,
for words we can bounce in our throats.

Lyn Stefenhagens

LABOR DAY

In the morning
we coffee with the cats.
It is too warm already
for hot coffee,
for slow and twining cats.
The radio
says thunderstorms and heat.
We are damp as mushrooms under glass,
wet as the grass on the cats' feet.

It will rain.
Cicadas shrill it.
The cats smell it.
We will go
inside soon.

ICE STORM

Here are contents of goblets
on air-twisted stems,
carafes and decanters,
beakers and tankards
where beeches and elms should stand.
Here are armloads
of Baccarat crystal,
flasks blown in Bristol,
Waterford lace.

It is
as if
champagne
was poured and frozen on air,
as if a stein of ale
was raised but never lowered,
or rare chandeliers
were loaned and left too late.

It is
all the glass in the world
turning against a cold sun,
the caterers gone home.

THE DESIRE TO SAIL

The cotton bolls swelling out
Outside Bakersfield, clamor
For the wind's heat, the chafing rain.
How they want to be touched!

My wife is waiting at the mirror
Gathering her hair to a knot,
Waiting for me to get back, open the screen door
Late in the morning heat.

Our pasture is alive with children
Squatting in a rusted watering trough—
They sail through the broomgrass, playing ocarinas,
Headed for the schoolhouse.

When I arrive, we pull our bed from the wall
Into slats of sunlight.
Outside the cottonwoods are shedding,
The wisps jibbing to sea.

Ann E. Michael

INSULATION

Today I am sealing out the wind,
taking drafts from their hiding places
where they chill the whistle between sills
and forcing them back out
where they belong:
in tree boughs, through stems,
against bare-legged Catholic-school girls—
back, to Boreas' nest of clouds.
I am sealing out the wind
with a ball of greyish putty
to stop the mocking wood against glass
which sounds clear through me
nervy as a loose tooth,
a chattering gull.
I
press corners, gently, with both hands
healing all gaps,
a mother touching her child's lips
to keep the scream inside; I supress the wind.
Leaves and feathers
beyond glass
rush silently.
I marvel that they don't seem cold,
listen for trees to pound the house.

Miriam Sagan

IN CONJUNCTION

Green catalpas
Dangling their long-fingered fruit
Grow along Music Street

Where six sea captains
Brought six pianos overland by oxen
For their half dozen daughters

Spinsters, girls, and wives
Who played a cooling shade of notes
Against their whaleboned lives

Seaward, upisland, moving out
To scrub and barrens
We hang up cheesecloth bags

Of human hair
To save the sapling pines
From deer.

William Trowbridge

THE WOLF'S ADVICE TO HIS NEPHEW

Beware your pig: he runs the show now,
the whole steaming mess, with his love
of wet garbage and plague-sized lies,
announcing from a stew of mud and shit
that he's the cleanest creature ever born,
that filth protects a delicate complexion
from fly bite, sunburn, those embarrassing
age spots—beauty tips from a mound
of lard with twin assholes for a nose!
He'll eat anything, too, including relatives,
the very mother munching her swinelets—out
one end and in the other—while we get
shot, poisoned, parboiled on the stove.
Who's the endangered species, may I ask?
Who always has to catch the bomb
take the pratfall, find his hide nailed
to the barn, wear ratty little sheepskins?
They get sailor suits and "Wee, wee, wee,
all the way home." We get "Huff and puff
your sorry ass back down that chimney!"
Brains and fair play went out with the dew claw;
now it's all P.R. and who's got the real estate.
Try to pass for a collie, is all I can say.

Judy Roitman

3:33 A.M.

My husband
my lovely husband in the clock light
lies like Cupid.
Already wax is forming around his skin.
Inside his chest the common monster
sleeps.

We are getting cooler to touch
our bodies looser.
Skin leaves our bones behind
and there are folds with no mediation
there
just by his mouth.

Flexing my fingers hard
I remember my great-grandmother
her hawklike hand
and how my cousin cried thinking her a witch.

Do you remember sleepless nights?
Parades?
Do you remember helicopters
the women clutching their hats
backs arched
their skirts whipping on their legs
calves popping
from the strain of high-heeled shoes?

If you stop for a second it will be too late.
Everyone goes too soon.

Shirley Buettner

TWO HORSES

Two horses, so intent
as they nudge green needles
piercing the snow crust,
do not notice shallow whorls
surrounding fence posts,
the sagging rail, and
one post shattered

leaning into the pen
like a grizzled cowman
trying to hold,
with broken fists,
a second fence
of barbed wire together,
the gnarled weeds and wire
leaping.

These horses, hungry
but at home,
will not step over
a downed rail to open field
flattened with more snow—
it is not
a morning for
running.

Guri Andermann

ONE P.M.

for D.J.

In Arizona the trees are few,
their names simple: orange,
mesquite, almond.
But an entire forest fills New Hampshire,
the trees saying their names,
a chorus of whispering sound.

They seem to move closer,
and breathing is hard;
trees crowd each window and door.
I can hardly move through them to get the mail,
and the carrier comes,
his offering of leaves in his hands.

Letters from Dave
are blank as I feel:
All we want
is something simple
or true.
He sends self-portraits
that I tape to the walls.
My eyes mirror his
wherever I look.

In each picture he sends,
his hair is darker;
it's becoming the color of bark.
He lives in a place surrounded by trees
that breathe their names in his ears.
His eyes in the pictures
go deep,
deeper,
moving in toward their roots.

Larry Starzec

THE BAG LADY OF WACKER DRIVE

Bump-shuffling
a scavenger's route
she asks
businessmen
for quarters
as they tunnel
into office hours.
"I'd do better acting
a blind woman,
but I'm an honest person,"
she tells the balloon man
at Union Station.
She picks through
garbage cans
like a missionary
in search of souls
and finding them
places one inside the other
and carries her load
of sacred sacks
to her alley home
where Chicago is kept
in great paper bags.

B. CLINTON, MORTICIAN

It was all right for them to find him
in the Otter County Jail, a belt buckled
to his neck. Hadn't he confessed
a week before to Emmett Crow, the minister,
his eerie affection for the dead?—
then to pick up the Gilman girl
and trace a snowplugged ditch toward town.
Whether the February storm dumped confusion
into Clinton's head, or the bad wine,
the hearse spun like a bottle,
pointing stuck into a mound. A long time
the hearse rocked, the snow tires arguing
with ice, before he crawled back where
the girl lay bare beneath a sheet,
where wine spilled each unlikely place
his mind had likely been.

He carried her into the snow and set
her down. The hearse, he jerked free
as car lights slanted over a hill
to see the corpse in breasts and thighs,
her sheet blown off, and nothing
B. Clinton could do could find the eyes
of that black night and thumb them shut.

Joan Wolf

EDGES

I am accustomed to journeying
toward childhood, that jagged shoreline
where, at dusk, numerous bats appear,
messages that never quite reach our dreams.

Dressed in a torn habit,
I walk among pines and cedars
listening—the occasional echoes
of owls, water running steadily
over granite, the blinking signal lights
of fireflies that almost make a sound.

Once I startled a stranger
on this overgrown carriage path.
I looked into her face and my own face
was given back to me. After that,
it was impossible to withdraw completely.

At the diving rock there is peace.
I let my cloak slip off easily.
Waiting here, poised,
until a desire for submergence
channels again through my skin,
I center myself like a sun;
then I fall through space
the way a planet does orbiting
that sun, one half exposed,
the other remaining in darkness.

Austin Straus

COMMUNICATION

I'm talking to my estranged wife by transatlantic phone.
There's static, music, a rumble/hum of distant voices and
a persistent low whine.
When my voice finally reaches her
it's in another tongue, vaguely suggestive but
unintelligible nevertheless.
What I say fades in and out, I'm almost
singing.
She doesn't get a word
yet she's screaming at me anyway.
Long after I hang up
she's still screaming into the phone.
somewhere
in the middle of the ocean
her screams bubble up out of a hole in the cable
in sudden bursts
scaring the fish.

Steven Hind

THERE IS THE SOUND

of water in moss
and rocks
of killdeer's
shrill
and coyote's
voices
at night
the sharp
celebrations
of sparks
in the blue
white spool
from the fire
the wind
in the cottonwood
searching out
sounds
the whole time

WILLIAM STAFFORD:

Interview Poetry

William Stafford

IN THE OLD HOUSE

Inside our Victrola a tin voice, faint
but somehow both fragile and powerful, soared
and could be only Caruso, all the way from
Rome. I traced my fingers on the gold letters
and listened my way deeper and deeper:

Far people. There had been war; grownups
were brave about it, but they didn't really know.
Caruso was sorry so hard that our town
became part of the world. On the rug the Victrola
dug in and shook on its little carved paws.

OUT THROUGH A CHURCH WINDOW

Sunday means different: flowers tell church-goers
what all the rest of the week is for.

A light—only the daily sun—shines gloriously
purple and rose through a permanent story.

Neighbors transform under that light, shining
briefly on their way into their dark places.

A man and a woman sing stairs in the air:
the organ comes down slowly where the rest of us are.

Afterward people go about their lives
remembering all week what their lives are about:—

How the daily sun darkens, even toward noon,
how we are living a story in all our homes, toward night.

THE CENTER

Whenever you breathe God comes in:
"I'm home again. I'm home."
And curtains lean, then resume
their silent wait.

Listen—that sigh of welcome,
and after that no breath.
Wherever God stands, it is there that
the world will start again.

LOSERS

Along the coast, and all along those interior rivers
that bind places too quiet for missiles or treaties
we are the victims, the hostages, of The Twentieth Century.

Others have won it all, the national brands, the rubbing
and whisper of civilization's intricate software.

Their children feed money into machines and then swoon
through the plot of The Great Moloch Fairytale: winning.

We can feel the slide into maximum g's of acceleration;
we can feel it as we walk their parks, their controlled wilderness
or the paradigm plazas with banners and music and ads.

Well, we can be losers here and stand it while the weather is warm
and soothing, and the others keep cheering and hugging each other
and waving little flags.

AFTERWARD

In the day I sheltered on the sunny side
of big stones. In the whole world other things
were giddy: they moved. I leaned on the steady part.

Every day passed into darkness. Dawn
rescued the top of the rocks and the middle
and then me. The sun loved my face.

You can hardly believe what I did: when winter
came, when the nights began to be cold,
I dissolved away into the still part of the world.

Now it is cold and dark, and the long nights
return to the wilderness. One big rock is here
for my place. All else moves. I am learning to wait.

An Interview with William Stafford

Steven Hind interviewed Stafford in Hutchinson, KS. on Feb. 6, 1984, while Stafford was guest lecturer at Hutchinson Community College.

HIND: As a point of departure, I was interested in whether there were poets you caught fire from. How did your interest in poetry start?

STAFFORD: I've read many, many poets all my life. My parents used to read to us, and they would read poets like Edgar Lee Masters, Kipling, standard anthology things. The school poets, you know, Longfellow and so on. And . . . they had a gusto for all kinds of books. Sometimes, I feel today that I prefer prose. I read more prose than poetry in current writing, but I do read a lot of poetry. When I get into a library, I go scuttling around, just the way you eat olives at a party, you know, just nibbling all those little magazines.

HIND: I wondered about your parents and your interest in poetry. Your parents seem to be such a powerful and unique force in your work. I wonder if you think your growing up was unusual for a midwestern child.

STAFFORD: Well, it wasn't until I met other writers later that I thought it might be unusual. I thought this was the way everybody was. But apparently not, because I keep meeting writers who felt alienated from home, who were in rebellion against their parents. Our parents were, I guess, unusual. At least . . . whether they were unusual or not I'll say how they are, or were. They were addicted to reading. Not just in the abstract, but we'd just get out and walk to the library wherever we lived. Find the library, and start checking out books. And they read, not systematically or for any policy or educational value, but just because they couldn't help but read. They were helpless readers. (Smiling) And I caught it from them. I don't think I've met a young person these days who reads the way we read at home. Summer was an orgy of reading. The porch swing was where you would lie down in the morning and come in at night. (Chuckling) Or so I remember it.

HIND: This book we were talking about this morning, the Poulin *Contemporary American Poetry,* has a piece in the back about you in which Poulin says that your work is a "highly personal poetry" but not "self-torturing nor confessional." (Stafford laughs.) Do you see your work as having escaped confession?

STAFFORD: I don't feel bad about confessionals. I want to start there. For instance, Robert Lowell interests me a lot, the poems about his background, confusions, bafflements, and so on. But, yes, I think my poetry has escaped confessional if that means accounts of suffering. I don't feel like a sufferer at all. I feel lucky, awfully lucky. I distinguish that from feeling deserving of good luck. I don't know about that. I put that out of my mind, but just that I have been lucky and happy, so it's not confessional in the sense that . . . well, I guess confessional implies something that you have to get rid of. But I don't feel like that in my poetry. It seems to me welcoming recollections rather than pushing away recollections.

HIND: I couldn't help but notice this morning when you read the poem—I can't recall the title right now, the poem about calling home . . .

STAFFORD: Oh, yes, it's called "The Farm on the Great Plains."

HIND: Yes, I had the feeling that the poem somehow threw out a hook that caught you in a way that was very personally emotional.

STAFFORD: It's quite possible in a reading for this to happen to me. For me to be carried away by one of my poems. And in fact, I just keep some of my poems out of my readings, not because I don't feel all right about them, but because I'm not confident that I can go right through them with enough esthetic distance to make them effective. Actually, "The Farm on the Great Plains" is not quite in that category. I may have seemed to be caught up in it, and in a way I was, but not beyond controlling it for esthetic purposes. But there are poems like that. I had one in my pocket this morning, but I just decided not to read it. It's called "Remembering Brother Bob." It turned out that the family knew that poem. I didn't know whether they'd seen it or not. They said, "You should have read that poem." "Why didn't you read that?" one of them said. I sort of put them off, said I didn't know whether I could do it effectively or not.

HIND: Well, that was a wonderful performance of a poem, "The Farm on the Great Plains."

STAFFORD: That's fun to read, partly because it has dialogue, and I like that in anyone's poem, and partly because it tracks along toward something at the end, I think.

HIND: The issue of form and style comes up. I heard Marvin Bell talk about "the plain style on the plains." What about that in your own experience? Do you think style is something a poet can calculate or modify, or does it just come with the territory?

STAFFORD: Oh, that's good. That makes me stop. I don't have a . . . I ought to have a canned response to this kind of thing. But something in the way you say it makes me juggle a little bit in any preconceived ideas I had. For instance, I think style, effectiveness comes through care. It can be chosen and cultivated by the individual. I don't want to deny this, but there is a part of me that says, yes, but for it to be ultimately valid it must be arrived at by means of appetite. That is, if I were not available to the feelings of a certain poem, like "The Farm on the Great Plains," I would hate to try to concoct a poem like that because it might be wise to have one if you're from the plains. So it doesn't come to me as a result of calculation. It comes to me as a result of convergence between me and materials. But once it begins to come, I'm aware that's it coming and I say welcome, welcome, keep on. If that makes sense.

HIND: Yes I mentioned this morning reading Kathleen Norris writing about South Dakota and driving 400 miles to hear you, and you had said something to her about having her "on your radar." Do you have a sense of a literary community in the Northwest?

STAFFORD: I do have that sense. Probably I'm sort of ridiculous to take this stance, but I would feel bad if I didn't register the blips where the writers are where I live. I think I know them. On the other hand, I know that some escape me. Some show up and they're doing something that I don't know about, but generally I have a sense of the prsence of the people in an area who are writing, and a sense of what kind of writing they're doing. Very much so. Here, yes. So I read things like this new *Confluence* and I sort of check again. Yep, blip, blip, blip. But then there are some I don't know of course. Probably a majority I don't really know, their work, until I read through the book, and then they begin to register. And I like to do that. It's a matter of . . . like being able to find my way around a neighborhood.

HIND: That's a nice metaphor. You have spoken about the attention paid to poets in other cultures, other societies. I heard you speak about that in Dodge. Why do you think Americans in general aren't more interested in their poets?

STAFFORD: Well, I can think of several things to say about that. First, I'd just latch on to that idea that other cultures pay attention to their poets. I've been astounded when I've gone to some lands where I could see rooms full of people who could repeat in unison poems of some poet, some poet I'd never heard of too, sometimes. So that's astounding. This is just a simple fact. Then, about America. . . . Well, I guess maybe the

melting pot would be part of it. Our society is fractioned out among various peoples, and literary traditions. There just isn't a central tradition, so that, I just don't think there's a voice that represents the groundswell of feeling and concurrence of ideas and traditions that there would be in some other cultures. That would be part of it. You know, this is partly German, partly French, partly English, partly black, partly Indian. And if you can imagine a . . . a Black Elk having, not just a fractional part of the populace, but the whole populace, that would be like Ghalib in Urdu-speaking cultures. I mean that's one of my theories, which I didn't have before you asked that question. You think of maybe Langston Hughes, who can be appreciated by many people, but he can't, I guess, . . . his central core of followers would be the first to agree that he can't be fully appreciated by those who don't share the culture. We just don't share the same culture.

HIND: You speculated that the very openness of our society might have something to do with it, whereas other cultures might appreciate things that had to be said by indirection.

STAFFORD: Oh, yeah. Yes, you can imagine the pressure. You can imagine the society in which there is pressure not to say certain things, but a need to say certain things, and someone comes along who can say them indirectly. That would give off a sharp whistle. (Laughter)

HIND: I'd like to ask some questions about poems in particular. There is a tone of a sort of enforced humility in your work sometimes, and yet, you can be awfully tough about things that, it seems to me, you wish to criticize. As an example of that, I think of a poem called "Staring at Souvenirs of the West" that I saw in the *South Dakota Review*. You have Buffalo Bill staring "into his own gun barrel" and seeing "what his victim saw." You seem to banish the world of "Winchesters and war bonnets" in that poem, and the last scene is the death of Sitting Bull, his wife holding a cross "close in her hand when the shouting died." You seem to be suggesting there that we worship the wrong things as we consider the history of the West, that we glamorize the wrong people.

STAFFORD: I feel intensely revisionist about the history of the West. I'm not alone in this, of course, but the idea that through circumstances, through chance things, and a kind of an out-of-control hero worship we have become a nation that makes the history of the West be John Wayne civilizing the West . . . it jars my sensibilities quite a bit, so it doesn't surprise me that it shows up. When you were saying that I realized two things at once. One was . . . The second thing really was, yes, in fact I do feel intensely critical or revisionist about the standard depiction of values in the West. The first thing that's a little bit harder to get at is, my poems do have a kind of assumption of humility, and non-corrosive flavor usually, a kind of mildness even. The co-existence of those things is something I cherish. I want to be mollifying, but I do not want to be

conforming. That is, I want to bring about a revolution in ways that will help the revolution to stick. I don't want to adopt the ways of the opposition to change the opposition. Well, I'm a pacifist. That'd be another way to put it. And most ways of revising or rebelling or bringing about a revolution are too much like what they are opposing. So I stare at souvenirs of the West and my poems will often have what seems to me legitimately called coldness and deliberate causticness sometimes. They're hard. But I hope only where they have to be.

STARING AT SOUVENIRS OF THE WEST

What if a buffalo eye, big
as the wrongs done them, looked
into the lodges and hotels of Indians
and Whites? What if Buffalo Bill
stared into his own gun barrel and
saw what his victim saw?—if the moutains
came down to attend a memorial service
for their shaggy, mistreated citizens?

In parlors and lunchrooms let's have
crocheted work, and beads, a decorative bundle,
straw flowers, many sacred things
heaped over the guns and hard-eyed portraits these warriors
awarded themselves. Take your
Winchesters and war bonnets into that cold
you claimed, heroes. Here is a cross that
the wife of Sitting Bull hid: she held it
close in her hand when the shouting died.

HIND: Well, I think that's true. And always at the core of them is an assumption about who the kind of person is who is worthy of a better vision of the world, so to speak.

STAFFORD: I couldn't help thinking about, for instance, the wife of Sitting Bull. I think I wrote that when I was out at Cody, Wyoming, and saw the Buffalo Bill Museum. It's a pretty macho sort of worship that goes on there. Those gods are not my gods, that's all.

HIND: That's a nice introduction to another question. The title poem of your collection, *Stories That Could Be True,* creates this possibility of a sort of royal changling in the lost man or woman in the rain. Do you see that as a peculiarly modern predicament?

STAFFORD: I think you may be getting at something I haven't really shared in my consciousness. Let me take a run at this and ask you to bring me round if I don't see the right nuance here. I don't feel this is especially modern, but I think maybe the perception that it's present might be modern. That is, at the end of that poem the person has to say, and this is a story that could be true and I mean it to be true for anyone, that they can't say this isn't true, they have to say, "Maybe I'm a king." That because of what we know or how we feel about the nature of things now, it's harder for us to separate out with our fallible ways of judging those who, as a matter of fact, are real royalty, as seen by God. Royalty is an image here, those who have value. Who knows who has value?

In a way it's the same kind of fallibility that I am positing in something like "Staring at Souvenirs of the West." Maybe we're worshipping the wrong people or the wrong things. I have a poem that says something at the end about in a real war how hard it is to find out who the enemy really is. And human beings are all too much given to falling into situations in which they shrug off the need to keep on judging where the danger is, and they go gung-ho for something they quickly agree on as the enemy and have a great big whooping match out of pursuing them, and not till later do they find out, that wasn't it. So, something like "A Story That Could Be True" is especially poignant now, I think, not because it couldn't have been true other times. It could have been, but now we know more, it could be true.

HIND: And I assume that if one holds himself or herself in that posture, there might be a greater readiness to value the perception of royalty of the right sort rather than having to trust some prescribed system of what is right and wrong?

STAFFORD: Yes, we are always in the process of locating real royalty, not just an election now and then, not just a prize that settles it for us. We are always making that winnowing out. And this afternoon when I was talking to the students in composition, I felt baffled. I don't think I got going at all, but I felt, glimmering beside me, the possibility of locating something for all these people who are subjected to a system that identifies quality in someone as identified by a teacher. Identified by somebody else. Identified by a culture. I wanted those individuals to see the possibility that anyone who says anything to them, or anyone who writes anything may have a contribution that they could see. So when I said I'd read a person's paper, I'd not say, "I can't understand this." It's my business to understand it. It has a meaning. It has a value to me because it's different. And it may be *the* difference.

HIND: So once you adopt this assumption about being a king, you have to award it to everyone?

STAFFORD: Yes, to everybody. Yes. It's a story that could be true for anyone. And I think it's partly . . . I could almost say it here, what I

haven't said before, I guess. At least I feel the ambition to accomplish it. If you realize how fallible we are, you realize that a crucial revision in our opinions is always possible. So you're always alert. (a chuckle.)

HIND: You use the word "dream" frequently. In an interview you are asked to recall the experience that led to the poem "Accountability" and you "dream" your way back to Gillette, Wyoming. In "Vocation" you speak of, "The dream the world is having about itself." You say in "An Introduction to Some Poems" that we must "dream the exact dream to round out" our lives, then "live that dream into stories. . . ." Would you speak about "dreaming" a little?

STAFFORD: Yes, I've heard, though a long time after I'd already overused this word, that back in Chaucer's day they had a number of words for dreaming, that to be accurate about what you bring to consciousness from dreams, you really need several words. There are different kinds of dreams. Now, I suppose we could say "deep dream" or "work dream," something near to what we've been doing during the day. I mean we could dream when we are asleep something related to bafflements of the day before, closely and obviously related to what we've been doing. Or we could have even daydreams, but they are various ways to dream or degrees of consciousness about dreams.

When I use those words like, "dream my way back to Gillette," I guess I was looking for a term that would signify, all right, I'm going back, I'm recollecting, but I'm not recollecting just with my sharp conscious self to bring into full glare my rational existence, but I'm trying to approximate the feelings I had. Maybe I'm eve trying to pick up something from that experience that I didn't get at the time. It's more than just recollection, it's like trying to live it again so as to have more of it than my fallible self at the time brought to consciousness. I was looking for some term like that. I don't know what term to use, so I said I'll "dream my way back." It's not less than recollection, but more than recollection.

HIND: So those uses of "dream" are not necessarily a single feeling or notion?

STAFFORD: No, that's right. It's a whole area of possibile realization that I don't have a better word for. So I'm never accurate, nor do I pretend to be accurate with words. It occurs to stop here and quote somebody. I remember reading some philosopher named John Wisdom who said, "If we are always sure of the exact meanings of our words and they are unchanging and clear, then how can we use those words when we meet a situation that is new?" (laughter)

HIND: I found myself asking this question in another context earlier today. In a poem called "At the Klamath Berry Festival," you envy an Indian dancer, "the places he had not been." I wondered what "places" you had in mind there?

STAFFORD: Well, I guess I envied him his condition of not being educated to give quick responses to complicated events in terms of standard workaday solutions. To stay richly baffled is better than to toss off some term for a situation and think you've solved it. Or have some kind of lingo way or some, some automatic adjustment to accommodate to the rich confusion of events sometimes.

I have a story that might help on this. I was walking onto the campus at the University of Alaska early one June morning. That means the sun's rays are a long slant. The light is just sort of coming on, a rheostat up there. And I was looking for a certain building, the Gruening Building, he was a governor of Alaska and there's a building named for him. I was looking for this word, so I'd know where I was. And I suddenly realized, if I didn't know how to read, I'd be seeing this campus. You know I'd been to school, so I couldn't see the University of Alaska. All I could see was words. And I felt bereft, so I stopped and didn't look for the word. You know, tried to let the scene of that early morning come. It was that sort of thing for the war chief. He still had the whole thing because he didn't have the short circuits.

HIND: I wonder if this is part of that revolutionary message you were speaking of earlier. In what sense do you hold the belief in a poem called "A Message From the Wanderer" that one day, "all we have hoped for and all we have said will be all right?

STAFFORD: Yes. Other people have charged me in that poem with having just taken an easy way out, saying something optimistic and nice that I couldn't possibly know, or that people couldn't possibly know. Well, I have a wistfulness about that. If charged with that, I can't help agreeing. Someone could have a point. I mean that's . . . I don't really have any insight about whether it will be all right. But in a sense the living of one's developing life in such a way as not to be afraid, as not to assume that it will be bad, is just as possible as assuming it will be bad. So one of my little ways to get along is to say that I don't know enough to be a pessimist. You know, I'm not that sure it's going to be bad. So it would be quite possible to seem tough-minded and say it's going to be bleak, but it's no more accurate than saying it's going to be all right. I don't think either way is within the power of a human being to know. Or maybe . . . in one of my poems today I said, "Maybe those who sang were the lucky ones." I think that's as convincing a "maybe" as the other way.

HIND: It's curious to me in that poem that you associate this kind of assertion with the process of perception about what is not obvious about the world, suddenly this antelope—I can't quote it right now. There's an interesting link there because at the end of this, after you say it may be all right, you say, "There will be that form in the grass."

STAFFORD: Oh, yes. You help me there to realize something that that poem does. I hadn't brought it fully into focus for myself. I fumbled my way through the poem and felt satisfaction, but you help me see one reason I felt satisfaction: there is that reinforcement of the earlier image that says, if you look at the grass a certain way, you see it, see the antelope come out. Our perceptions are partial, and a belief in them or a commitment to them helps us to realize what's there. So it's a positive poem at the end, "Message From the Wanderer."

By the way, this is sort of . . . just a side remark. But I was down in El Paso starting the reading, and I knew I was going to end with that, "Message From the Wanderer," and a couple had a baby there. The baby began to cry and they didn't want to interrupt the reading, so the woman got up to take the baby out, or maybe the man did. One of them did. And I stopped and I said, "It's all right to take the baby out, but be sure to have it back for the last because we need it." Because in that poem it says, "Tell the little ones to curl up where they can" and so on. (laughter) I just wanted to have something that would embrace everybody.

HIND: Yes. . . . In your work there is this wonderful sort of larger principle of trusting in your own feelings, the things you've said today about writing, that teachers should not do things to instill an individual's distrust of self. The way that respect for persons confirms and supports the "Story That Could Be True" possibility, that "maybe I'm a king." Royalty could be anywhere. I think of something you said once about walking with your father and his saying to you something like, "Bill, keep your eyes open because you might see the hawk first." You latched on to that possibility that, yes, you might.

STAFFORD: That sounds helpful and valid. I was trying to find my way to a formulation this afternoon that would convince those students.

HIND: Well, I think you did it clearly. I keep seeing these connections in what you say. I wonder about one other element in these poems we've been talking about. Do you equate a certain kind of freedom with the ability to camouflage yourself—the antelope, the lizard? (Stafford chuckles.)

STAFFORD: You make me think about other things that came up earlier today. The idea of protecting yourself by inventions, of being unidentifiable because you are many. I'm thinking about that formulation I had for a student I was telling you about. Some people say, "How can you be a poet? That's so revealing." And I say, "How can you not be a poet because you haven't invented any masks?" You know, just the opposite of what they are saying. My assumption is that an alive person has many thoughts, is many people, has many attitudes, not one. The arrival at a . . . authentic, true self isn't my idea of what a human being can do. You're going to be different under every circumstance. So, this gives me all sorts of trouble with people like Orwell and others who feel that there

is such a thing as being honest and dishonest. I can't quite see that. It seems to me, for instance, that, uh . . . the term for, oh, euphemism is a very helpful thing. It's one step toward civilization. (Laughter) If you don't feel you need to use euphemism, then you're a real brute. But to lie a little bit is a sign of your need for redemption. Something like that. I think this is related somehow, that human beings don't find inflexible, everlasting stances. They are very . . . any individual is different at different times. It sort of goes back to the John Wayne, Buffalo Bill thing too. My heroes are . . . Sancho Panza-like people, really, Don Quixote-like people.

HIND: Okay. A reviewer of *A Glass Face in the Rain* went to some lengths to cast you as a sort of Robert Frost of the plains. How do you respond to that sort of comparison?

STAFFORD: Well, I think when you write or when you discourse, write or talk, you need temporary formulations to use on the way to fuller understandings. So a formulation like this doesn't have to be true to be helpful. It's one of the things to say. think it's an interesting thing to say, myself, and I can see why a person says it, without my feeling that I have to go on to say that's exactly right or that's true except in this and this and this. I'd have to go on for a long time to make the modifications. But you can't say everything at once, so that's something for a reviewer to say. I feel calm about it. I don't think Frost would (a chuckle), but I do.

HIND: I've always sensed a sort of predisposition for pessimism in Frost that I would not associate with your work.

STAFFORD: Yeah, I sense that in Frost much more so than in myself. If I get reckless now,nd I might as well, it might be revealing, no matter how grotesque it is. I think Frost is much more pessimistic than I am. I think that he is much softer than I, though. He still seemed to believe in fixed things. But I don't.

HIND: Would you say that he is, in some ways, more vulnerable?

STAFFORD: Yes. Sentimental. Vulnerable. He's not, uh . . . he's not yielding enough to survive in the world as it is. Oh, I once heard someone, I think it was Gerald Heard say, "Only saints are hard all the way through." (a chuckle) Well, Frost is no saint, and he's crusty, but the pie's pretty soft inside. Of course, Frost may be a strange one to say that about, but Hemingway was a spectacular example of a crusty meringue pie.

HIND: You came close to this earlier today, too. I have students who want to re-write "Traveling Through the ark" and have the man take some action to save the unborn fawn. What would you say to them?

STAFFORD: One thing I would say ishat the assumption that something can be done in extreme circumstances like that is the assumption that neglects the difference between real time and effective time. That is, . . . well, you know the idea of the "specious present"? This is the idea that something is going on to the point at which nothing is going to change it, and you feel, it hasn't happened yet, therefore, there's something that can be done, but in effect it's already happened. And the example I heard someone say is, you're standing on board the Queen Mary. It's going full speed. About fifty yards from the dock the captain turns to you and says, "You take over." (Laughter) According to some people's way of thinking, okay, there's time to do something. But the captain knows and you know and God knows there's no time. It's all over. So it was all over for the deer.

So, if I were talking to studentsnd we had a lot of time, we could talk about the specious present. And there are people who kid themselves all their lives about this, and there are some others who know that there are openings and closures of opportunity that are like a steel trap. You can kid yourself if you want to, but if you don't want to, how about doing something else?

HIND: I wonder if their desire, uh, if it blocks out other possibilities, if their desire to act in the specious present isn't a kind of John Wayne reaction.

STAFFORD: I think it is, yeah. In fact, I've had trouble with people in polital discussions about pacificism, and so on. I remember once taking a stand: well, I can't stop war. Jesus couldn't stop war. Eisenhower couldn't stop war. Why should I blame myself for not stopping war? What I can do is, to do the things that are within my power. I can decide there's one person who won't be in it. That's a possibility. But I can't stop it, and someone who was there kept saying, "Well, that answer's not good enough for me." You know, he had this John Wayne reaction: "I'm going to stop it." That leads you to terrorist acts that don't really do any good, but they relieve your conscience. I don't want to relieve my conscience; I want to do good.

HIND: What would you say to the young man or woman in the wilds of Kansas who yearns to write and is reading this interview?

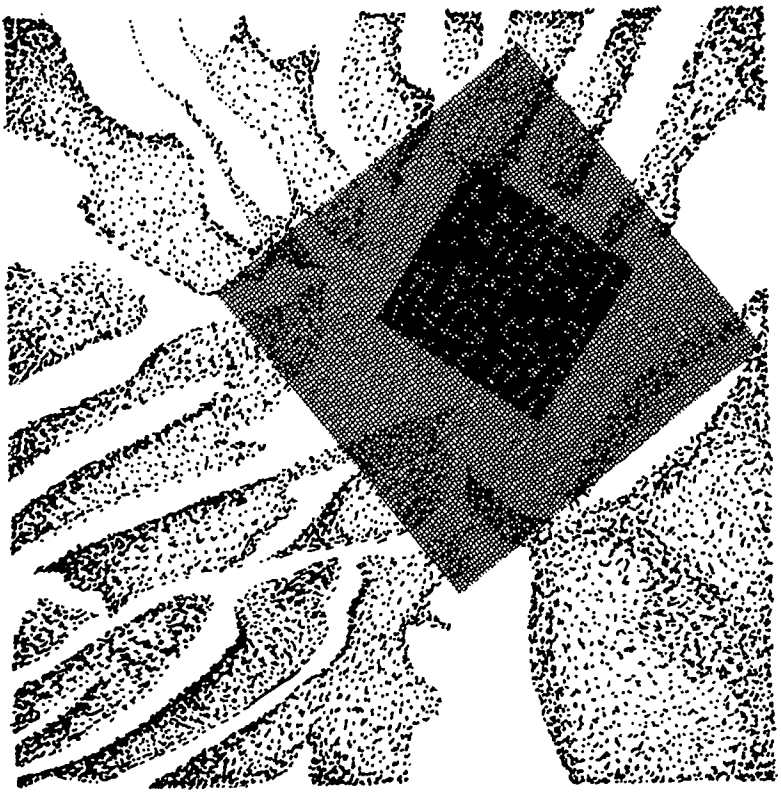
STAFFORD: I would say that, by all means, if you have tasted the pleasure, the exhilaration, the richness of writing or doing other arts, that's great. That you should. Don't pay any attention to those people who say, "You're unrealistic to do this. You're, uh, doomed, unless you get somewhere else," and so on. Write where you are. Write how you are. These things can combine to give you immediate satisfaction that will lead, maybe, to the kinds of satisfactions that are also aompanied by publication, and a lot of it, maybe. But you shouldn't guide yourself by the calculation toward that. Art is something that is satisfying while you are doing it. And to try to put its satisfaction outside itself in terms of

recognition a long time later is to change it into something that isn't art. I think I would add one other thing. It's just really another way of getting at what I'm saying here, and that is, whatever you do turn out is of possible interest to the kind of people who interest you. Don't assume that what you write, for instance, should go to magazines or editors you can't find any other connection with, except that they have a lot of money or run a big magazine. That's not the way to do it. You get published the way you make friends. You interchange with people who are on your wavelength.

OLD WAYS, NEW WAYS

Some things it is odd to say, though
once you think about it they are
all right, like the upside down song
a bird sings, flying past, reflected in the water.

"Goodby tomorrow," someone greets you—
that means "Hello" in the old language
used by thoughtful people, not the new way
of the rest of us after the bird flew over.



FICTION

Heather Tosteson

EVELYN MAY

Shaving off his beard, was that the beginning? It's certainly an event I can point to as I pointed to him from where I stood in the living room over by the big glass windows when he came not a bit sheepishly out of the bathroom. I pulled the drapes. It was an instinctive reaction and must have been, I'm sure, somewhat upsetting to him—and to me, it was that quick, that honest. Our marriage, like most, is nourished by tact, not truth.

"Oh dear," I said. "Why didn't you warn me?" My voice rose straight out of the polite register, I admit, but I don't think you can imagine how upsetting it is to see, after almost thirty years, a totally strange denuded chin at the bottom of a familiar face. "Why did you do it, Arthur?" I asked him, rubbing my hands together like Pontius Pilate. Then, when I saw the way he kept sliding his hand across that pasty white skin almost as if he were stroking a dog or cat, I snapped. "Don't tell me you're having a mid-life crisis? Not you. Not yet."

What Arthur is going through is worse than any crisis of faith he has had so far. And he's had many. I have seen him through all of them, but this time I think he may lose me. This time, you see, it's not a crisis—it's a conversion.

To what? Oh, I can't talk about it. It's too upsetting. All I can do is put on a good face. That's why I've invited half the parish over for our anniversary celebration tonight. I figure if I keep busy enough, I will stop brooding. Hah! I see his new face in every glass I polish. If I held a teacup to my ear, I wouldn't hear the ocean, I'd hear Arthur.

As well as being Arthur's wife, you see, I am his confidante, his intellectual twin. Yin and Yang—or so he would have the world believe. He preaches, I listen. He offers spiritual sustenance to his parishioners, I offer them food. I am Martha to his Mary. So be it. It is true that I offer tea and cake to Mrs. Jones and Mrs. Tims when they come to see Arthur at home, their eyes bloodshot, the pancake pasted a half inch thick over their bruised cheeks. They shake their heads, refusing, but smile. They know what I am really offering them is shelter, a place to escape to if they would only take it. But they won't. I don't know who I am angrier at—Arthur for shepherding them back into their filthy pens, or them, for their beastly patience, their mute tolerance.

These days, I am chary of patience, deeply suspicious of tolerance. Look where it's gotten me. All those years of patiently, *patiently* listening to Arthur's prattle. If the truth be known, of the approximately fifty-two sermons Arthur preaches a year, the texts of at least half of them have

been suggested by me. Our marriage is not quite as simple as my being the ear, he the mouth; my being the earth, he the rain. We have both planted our seeds of doubt, sprayed and pruned our spiritual roses. But my plot will always look like barren ground to Arthur. In his world, he is the mouth and I am the ear. I am never the head in the third pew nodding gently.

Arthur has underestimated me. I can sleep with my eyes open, my head braced against the back of the oak bench. I can pick holes in his intellectual arguments until they resemble the lace antimacassars my mother placed primly over the backs of the armchairs in the parlor. I have given as well as received in the interminable spiritual colloquy we have called marriage. But I have never trumpeted my message from the pulpit of the Sunnyvale Episcopal Church. I never trumpeted it across our living room, either. *My* mistake. I thought it was something as artificial as a Renaissance dance, the ritual by which I would make a suggestion, the way, two days later he would repeat the same idea at breakfast as if it were his own. I never imagined he didn't *know*.

But he didn't. He doesn't. My wife is my most devoted audience, he will tell the Bishop. She has followed the development of my thought along every twist of the path, shared my despair at every dead end, my relief at every U-turn. Idiot. I hacked our way through the wilderness, I tamed the horses, I read the sextant, I—I exaggerate. Slightly. It is my only way to compensate for the shock, the taunting truth of Arthur's spiritual miserliness. It is my only way of relieving my sense of helplessness—Don't you understand? This time, there doesn't seem to be any way to make him change his mind, no way to lead him down the well pruned path, no way to shoo him back into our prim fold.

Arthur, nurtured for years on my beliefs, has begun to take some far from doddering steps on his own. And I can't keep up. Arthur, you see, has experienced what I blush to say he calls a "sensual awakening". To be distinguished from sexual pangs. It is as if, after all these years of brooding over his Bibles, jotting down in his small leather bound pocket notebook anywhere, anytime, the chapter and verse of useful scriptures, aphorisms he thinks will allow him to hold his own with Kierkegaard, after walking blindly along the rim of the Grand Canyon discussing with me the present theological standing of the early gnostics, or lunching at Big Sur overlooking the Pacific Ocean describing, with his eyes fixed on the ground, every spiritual pang that preceded Luther's conversion, after twenty-five years of crawling into his twin bed after giving me a kiss on the cheek equal in intensity to the one he gives me at the breakfast table each morning, after all this I tell you, Arthur seems to have woken up one morning with the awed eyes of an infant, the physical innocence and receptivity of a child. These days I can come down in the morning and find him happily sitting out on the back porch brooding over a handful of daisies, a single rose, a spray of honeysuckle.

One morning, I peeked out at him through a slit in the curtains and I saw him pull a rose to his face, bury his nose in it, sniff loud enough for me to hear him through the glass. Then I saw him, I swear it, stick out his

tongue and literally lap the dew from two of the petals. I looked quickly across the yard to see if the Jamisons were about. I turned on the faucet and ran water for coffee. I opened the door ostentatiously.

"Oh," I said. "I didn't know you were here. A bouquet? For me? How thoughtful. How nice."

I firmly took the flowers from Arthur. I rinsed them. I arranged them in a cut glass vase and placed them on the table. "Your breakfast will be ready in a minute," I called to him.

Even at forty-nine, Arthur finds it reassuring to have his breakfast prepared for him. And I, I'll admit, find it reassuring to prepare it. Making breakfast is my way of anchoring body to soul. I hear the rush of water from the faucet, the ting of the saucepan, the hiss of the gas, the mutter of steam, the ching of the cups against the saucers. I open the window in the spring and summer and hear the jays scream wildly from the oaks, the mocking birds chatter in the pines. I draw a deep breath. I touch ground.

Making breakfast is also my way of embracing Arthur after our unspeakable and long separation. It is, or has been, the only embrace he can accept. When he enters the room, sniffs, smiles, brushes my cheek with dry lips, at last I relax. There has always been something almost voluptuous in adjusting my attention to the day, to Arthur's emotional climate, in feeding his intellectual hungers.

Now I am almost afraid to wake up. The days are even more baffling than the nights. I dread the sight of Arthur's empty bed, the sheets smoothed out and tucked in with bureaucratic precision. I never know where I'll find him. Once he was flat on his belly over by the rose beds. I went clattering down the back stairs, afraid to say a word. But he wasn't dead. He was lying with his chin resting on the ground watching an ant lion dig its trap and suck ants and other precise and thoughtless insects into that dry, granular vortex. I wanted to cry, I was so angry.

"What happened?" I hissed. "Are you sick?"

He shook his head, pointing his index finger discreetly in front of his nose. "Sit down," he said, grinning shamelessly up at me. "Watch this." He pushed a little sand down the hole and watched the earth convulse greedily around it.

"I thought you'd had a heart attack," I said, turning on my heel. "You shouldn't give me such scares. My own pulse must be over 180."

Do you know what Arthur did? He rolled over on his back and opened his arms. He reached up to me like a baby on a changing table. And then he recited poetry. Poetry!

I didn't even look across the fence to see if the Jamisons were watching. I held my head up and marched into the house. I could feel my face was hot, my hair damp with sweat. It has taken me a good two months to realize it wasn't mortification I was experiencing but the change of life.

"Who would have guessed he had a cleft in it just like Cary Grant? Did you suspect, Evelyn?" Wanda turned, her hands still cupped around the arrangement of rust mums and dyed yellow carnations and daisies she had placed in the exact center of the long reception table.

I gave a little tug to the white paper cloth to straighten it out before we began arranging the plates and the cups. "No, *I've* never seen his face like this before. He had a beard when I first met him. Grew it as soon as he was able, or so I have always understood. He wasn't that old when we met, you know. We married when he was only twenty-four."

"Well, you can't say it hasn't been a pleasant shock. I don't mean to disparage Arthur, but I have never thought of him as handsome. Now, Evelyn, frankly I wouldn't be surprised to see the altar guild swell to twice its present size."

"Would you be so good as to help me with this urn?" I asked.

Together we lifted it and put it at the end of the table where there would be room for people to circulate. "The cake will go at the other end," I said.

I wiped my hands on my skirt, and then I went back into the kitchen for the big cut glass punch bowl. When I came back into the social hall, I thought Wanda had fled, but she was opening the side doors for Arthur and Joey.

Arthur, bent double by the weight of the cake and his effort to stay on the level with Joey, shook his head to get the hair out of his eyes. His entire face was flushed an unbecoming red. He grinned at me, twisting his head.

"Watch out," I said. "You'll get an earful."

"Sweet nothings," giggled Wanda. "Here, let me help you, Arthur." She nudged her son over and grabbed onto the platter.

Now Joey was on tiptoe, his stubby fingers sliding off the platter as reluctantly as if he were slipping off a rooftop.

"Aw Mom," he whined. "I was doing fine. Arthur and me weren't having any problems until you—"

"Mr. Green," Wanda corrected him firmly. Then, in a loud whisper to Arthur and me, she added, "He's a darling child, but absolutely not to be trusted around sweets."

Joey flushed and stuffed his hands in his pockets. He slouched over to the window, if someone as rotund as he could be said to slouch, and stood staring out at the back lawn.

"Joey," I said, my voice having that spurious forcefulness it takes on in awkward social situations, "Come in and help me in the kitchen, please. We have hundreds of glasses to wipe and arrange."

I could have counted to fifteen before he turned around, and, the sides of his mouth sliding to his chin, lumbered across the room. Wanda's deep, thick laugh filled the room, washing both Joey and me into the kitchen. From the doorway, we could see Arthur standing firm as the mountains of Ararat in the deluge. He had a big puzzled smile. Wanda patted him on the back as she headed out to join us.

"Come on," she said, clapping her hands. "Plates, napkins, forks. Hup

two three four. The night has just begun."

"Arthur," I called loudly. "Will you take Joey out into the yard, please? It's far too pretty an afternoon for him to stay cooped up inside."

"I can go by myself—if I have to. But I'd rather just do some reading."

"Fresh air," Wanda snapped at him. "Exercise. Eight years old and you're paunchier than your grandaddy."

"Leave him alone," I said before I could stop myself. "He's a perfectly genuine, perfectly nice little boy, Wanda."

Wanda's cheek reddened as if I'd slapped her. "I wasn't implying that he wasn't. I'm trying to get him to go outside more. I want him to be like the other boys."

Joey, obeying the surreptitious sweeping motions I made behind my back, slipped out into the social hall. "Isn't he?" I asked his mother.

"Yes and no. He doesn't build forts and play Indians or space games like I remember my brothers doing. He's not interested in sports— unless you count chess as a sport. He wakes up and goes to sleep with his nose in a book. And when he's not reading, he's watching T.V."

"How is he doing in school?"

"Marvelously. Mrs. Adams says he's the brightest boy she's had in years. She pampers him a little, I believe. He's—he's just not what I had expected, Evelyn."

"He's a fine boy, Wanda," I said, patting her on the back as she stood looking out the window to where Arthur and Joey stared down at the dry beds of bedraggled dahlias and begonias and sprawling bushes sparse with roses. I usually do the gardening both at the Rectory and the Parish House, but this summer I haven't kept up, although no one has cared enough to comment or to offer help. Arthur, of course, is above these concerns.

"Just because he doesn't do everything *you* would—or your father, or your brothers—there's no reason to lose sight of the fact that in his own right and in his own way he's a good child, a remarkable child." I patted Wanda's shoulder and quickly left the room. I could feel the heat rising to my face and made myself breathe deeply, nonchalantly. I couldn't help it if my voice sounded affected, false. I understood better than I could ever let her know—Arthur too was not what I had expected, and I felt, as Wanda had almost admitted she felt, inhumanly mocked and betrayed—because it was fate leering at us from behind the linen drapes, not gentle baffled Joey, not buoyant and naive Arthur.

I inspected the table with its white cloth, its huge funeral flowers donated by Wanda's uncle, Jackson Millet, the polished coffee urn, the polished punch cups, the tall, tiered cake with its preposterous plastic bride and groom.

"Well, *this* is presentable," I said. "Now let's all run home and make ourselves so. It's almost five o'clock."

I went over to the chair and picked up my old red gardening jacket. Wanda, loudly calling for Joey, closed the back door behind her.

Through the window I could see her pull herself up short when she almost stumbled over the crouched forms of Joey and Arthur who were

kneeling down by the flower bed and deploying like merciless generals their troops of ants across the dry mined earth. Wanda brushed her long gold hair from her face. She put her manicured hand with maternal severity upon Joey's hunched back. And then I saw her, I swear it, stroke Arthur's hair, dark as walnut shells, thicker than a koala's fur. Arthur turned his face up to her and grinned, more trusting than Joey. I drew back from the window; I put on my jacket, turned and headed for the front door.

On my way, I stopped by the table and checked out the dolls on the cake to see if their knees would bend. They were both stiff as boards. I toppled them over in lustful but unoriginal positions: missionary, feminist. Then I picked them up off the summit of the cake and perched them on the edges of separate tiers, both pointing aimlessly into space. I tried to have them face the icy mountain, but then they looked as if they were slipping, not scaling. Finally, I just palmed them, scuffing out their escapades with my thumb. Walking down the driveway from the Parish House to the Rectory, I cleaned both dolls thoroughly with my tongue, then I slipped them into the pocket of my jacket. Like Joey, I have an unscrupulous fondness for sweets. Unlike that child, I have succeeded, after years of constant shame, constant scorn, constant guilt and willfulness, in repressing that affection completely. When I reached the Rectory, I rushed to the bathroom to rinse my mouth. I felt as if I had gulped a spoonful of acid. I rinsed and spat five times, eight, just as I do when I go to Dr. Nathan's to have my teeth cleaned. I began to feel sympathy for dour Miss McWilliams, the dental hygienist. Oral ablutions are as squalid as any other form of confession.

The wan gray-haired woman I saw peering open-mouthed out of the mirror at me was thinner than the girl Arthur had married. She was equally plain. She was equally unresigned.

May I admit something? All those years, I imagined Arthur had a weak chin. I thought he grew the beard to give himself the appearance of strength, strength of character. He did it, I now understand, to humble himself, to keep himself safe from temptation. And you know what? I believe he may have married me for the same reason.

I thought I could see with my hands, but what I saw was something slightly shameful, diminishing, a conviction as long held and as unnecessary in its own way as Arthur's decision to marry me. We are both guilty, aren't we, of spiritual pride, slipping the small lead weights in the toes of our shoes, insisting on hobbling our ebullient souls.

I washed my face, sponged off the damp parts of my body, then I went, wrapped in my robe, to the bedroom to choose my clothes. I changed my mind, slipped my navy blue suit back on its hanger, and put on an old, flounced, plum coloured skirt and a lacy white blouse. I brushed and teased my short hair into curls. I looked at myself in the full length mirror on the back of the closest door. I blushed. I watched my reflection blur to simple swathes and blotches of colour, blatant, jarring: red, white, pink, plum. I heard the front door slam and quickly locked the bedroom door. By the time Arthur had climbed the stairs, the plum skirt was safely

hidden away in the back of the closet, and I was pulling the navy blue skirt down over my hips.

"Just a minute," I called. "Have you showered yet?"

"My robe—" Arthur said. Then, haltingly, as if he were keeping a difficult resolution, "Never mind. It's not necessary."

I unlocked the door, turning quickly to face the closet. I reached in and pulled Arthur's big blue plaid robe off its hook and handed it to him without turning around. I could see him in the mirror staring at my naked back, staring down over my shoulder in the glass, staring at my naked breasts. I fixed his eye in the glass. I crossed my arms. Our faces were equally white. Equally expressionless. "Go on," I said at last, turning my face away from whatever it was we had seemed to be facing together. "I'll lay your suit out. But you must hurry." I moved back into the closet to find his good suit. I didn't come out until I heard the door click shut.

I went to the bureau for my bra, my slip, my stockings. I chose a pale blue blouse with a bow. I chose sensible black shoes. By the time Arthur padded back down the hall from the bathroom, I was slipping my wallet and housekeys into my navy blue bag.

"Shall I wait for you?" I asked. "Would you rather we went together?"

"Whatever is easier for you," he said. "Whatever makes you comfortable."

"For an anniversary," I said. "I think it would be nice to go together. I'll wait for you downstairs." I turned and quickly left the room.

Arthur, without looking at me, just slipped off his robe and shambled shameless as Adam over to the bureau for his underwear. His body is blindingly white, eerily tender. For a quarter of a century, I believe, none of it has seen the light of day—save his hands, his cheekbones, the back of his neck. For twenty-five years, I have seen him once in a blue moon with the eyes in the palms of my hands. Those dim, faltering eyes in the palms of my hands, again and again they have betrayed us.

Arthur came down in a new, navy blue suit of, I assume, European cut. At least his shoulders had never seemed so broad, his waist so trim, his hips so narrow. He was not wearing his collar. Instead he wore a pale blue shirt indiscreetly unbuttoned over his blanched, hairless chest. It's no use, even now, to disparage him. The truth is he looked wonderful.

"What do you think?" he asked, blushing, his large soft scholar's hands clutched into fists now and hanging heavily at his sides. I could almost see him begin to writhe inside the dark blue suit. I took pity. I took heart.

"You look wonderful," I said. "What a surprise. What a gift." I am always after him to take care of himself.

"You sure?" he asked, turning around and looking at me coyly over his shoulder. "George Nathan helped me choose it down at Middlefields last Thursday."

"Do you think it's flashy?" he asked with absurd diffidence. "Do you think it makes me look too—"

"Human?" I asked. "Of course not."

Clearing my throat, I slapped the table sharply. "I will abroad," I cried.

Arthur laughed and lent me his arm. I held my hand stretched flat above the blue cloth as if it were still slapped hard against the tabletop. He put his other hand over mine.

We walked down the dusty lane from the Rectory to the Parish House. The smell of honeysuckle was so heavy it could bury you. At the entrance to the church yard, he stopped. He looked me over carefully.

"I am a very satisfied man, Evelyn," he said.

I bit my lip. I reached out to open the gate. The way my eyes were, the flowers in the beds around the old brick building looked profuse, fresh. I blinked. The dahlias, sun-bleached, drooped their heads; the gawky zinnias were coated with dust; the grass was straw. Even at six in the evening, it was eighty-five degrees if it was anything. Indian Summer. Running my hand under my hair, I skimmed off the sweat. I imagined the flowers battered down by the first frost. Beads of water adorned my wilted breasts. I hunched my shoulders as I looked in my bag for the keys, trying to keep my blouse away from my body. It was new and I didn't want it stained.

"We'll just have to leave the doors open," I said, gasping at the first wave of heat that rushed from the social hall.

We had just time to open the windows and both sets of double doors and take our places at opposite ends of the table.

Wanda, with Joey and her uncle Jackson in tow, entered first. Behind them I could hear the ribald laughter of Dr. Nathan, I could see a maelstrom of colour on the lawn. Wanda shook hands with me, then headed down the table to say hello to Arthur. Joey had his transparent hair darkened with water or oil. He was dressed in a sweltering blue wool blazer. He kept his fists clenched in his pants pockets. He didn't look at his mother. It must be difficult for someone who is feeling murderous to look like a benevolent mule.

Wanda's uncle Jackson, the florist, on the other hand, has a face as thin and expressive as his great nephew's should be. Jackson's wide thin lips bent and opened, brisk as a sheet being folded. He wore a white linen suit and an even more preposterous straw hat.

"You look so cool and tranquil, Evelyn May. Who would believe the summer would cling on like this. . . I'm having a terrible time filling my telephone orders. People look through their FTD books and decide it's time for autumn leaves, for dried lotus and artichokes and straw flowers, and I'm hard pressed to find them. There is only so much substitution the agency accepts, you know."

I put out my hand to stop him. I placed my arm around his great nephew, smiling up conspiratorially at the mouth still flapping open and shut. "Joey," I whispered, "if you want, you can take your jacket off and hang it on that chair over there. You can go and play in the garden." His eyes seemed to sink back into his placid browned face. "*After* you go say hello to Arthur and get the first piece of cake. Or are you going to help serve? I know he needs some assistance."

"Mama seems very willing to help Mr. Green," Joey said with—or did I imagine it?—an adult insinuation. Then Joey smiled and put his hand, warm as a muffin, in mine. "I'd like to stay and help you," he said.

"I wish you could too, honey, but Joy Tims and your mama have both promised to help, and with the hot coffee and tea, I really think I need an adult. But I do need your help serving the cake—and," I added, raising my voice, "I need your help making sure Arthur doesn't sneak six pieces . . . You know how he is around sweets."

Joey favored me with his marvelous smile, delicate, acerbic. Then he lumbered off, his uncle Jackson, sprightly as a grasshopper, flitting behind him.

I turned to greet Dr. Nathan and his entourage. Dr. Nathan, in a double-breasted pink linen blazer and madras pants, was escorting Moira Nadeena, Sunnyvale's dance teacher. She was dressed this evening in red chiffon.

"Ooh," she scolded in her shrill, carrying voice, "twenty-five years. My very great congratulations. How nice. Ooh . . . how nice . . . And you so trim looking . . . and your husband, where is he?"

She turned, her hand still in mine, and saw Arthur. Her hand skidded into itself, her eyes widened, the green lids sinking langorously, lasciviously. "Ooooh," she sighed. "Yes, you are a lucky woman."

Arthur was talking with Wanda, his coat unbuttoned, his hand on his hip, his head thrown back like a wolf howling to the moon. "Thank you," I said, relinquishing the small, coiled fingers. "Perhaps you'd like to go over and say hello to Mr. Green. Would you ask Mrs. Millet to come down this way, please?"

Moira Nadeena gave my hand a sudden last squeeze, looked at me complacently with large, reflective eyes, and, latching her arm through George Nathan's, tripped over to congratulate Arthur.

"So this is the new soot," I heard her calling. "I must have it modelled for me."

I greeted the Whites, the Applebys, and little Mona Martin, the organist. Then, I turned toward the far end of the table. Wanda was in the middle of the cluster around Arthur. Joey was standing at the rim. He caught my eye, smiled, shrugged. His uncle was darting here, there, from Moira Nadeena to Mona Martin, from Mrs. Appleby to Dr. Nathan.

I removed my jacket, draping it over my shoulders. I was afraid to remove it for fear the back of my blouse was wet. I flicked my head angrily at Joey, and he squared his shoulders, put his arms out, shoved. Just like a bee making its way into a rose, Joey moved through the gaudy, fluttering crowd around Arthur. Then I could see his mother, leaning thoughtlessly against the paper cloth. Joey took her hand and tugged. She put her hand firmly on his shoulder. He stood on tiptoes and said something. She looked my way, lifted her perfect buttocks off the table and stalked down the social hall toward me.

"Hasn't Arthur begun to serve cake?" I asked, looking vainly for plates, for the ant-like stream from table to chairs.

"Joey suggested quite strongly that it was time, but I don't know that

Arthur could hear him above the cooing of Moira, the blare of Joan Appleby." Wanda laughed, looking comically and affectedly put out. "You know who I really have my fingers crossed about seeing tonight?" she asked, leaning conspiratorially toward me, her long bare hands deftly slipping cups under a steady stream of rose coloured punch.

"Dr. Magus?" Dr. Magus is new in town, an anesthesiologist at St. Mary's, whose profession and divorced status are, I am sad to say, his only claims to interest. He has a face honed like a hatchet, deeply pocked cheeks, a wallowing gait due to clownishly large feet. He is, I have been told by several women (widowed, virginal, divorced), forty-eight years old, the owner of an extensive portfolio of stocks and two black angus cows, which he allows to graze in his large, uncultivated back yard.

"I didn't know you had a weakness for rural pursuits."

"Oh my god, Evelyn, just look at him."

"Who?" I asked, glancing involuntarily to the far end of the table where Arthur trembled like the trumpet of a daffodil in the frippery surround of the altar guild.

"Michael Tims, Joy's brother-in-law. He's here on vacation from Cincinnati. Just *look* at him, Evelyn. Joy said he had a body that never quits, excuse the expression, and she's right."

I looked over to the door, which was completely blotted out by the, at least so far, faceless silhouette of a large, burly man in a knit shirt and levis. He looked as if he had been molded from styrofoam balls.

Well, he was probably an improvement on Black Angus. I patted Wanda on the back. "Go to it, honey. I can manage by myself."

"You sure, Evelyn?" Wanda gave me a hug firm enough to wrinkle my jacket and immediately slipped into the crowd.

"Mrs. Green?" Joy Tims, dressed in a frilled, old-fashioned dress, stood blushing by my side. "I'm sorry I was late. Lucas decided we should go out dancing afterwards and I couldn't decide what to wear and then the children didn't want to go over to Mama's and . . . "

I have told Arthur repeatedly that God could not have intended the Joy Tims of the world to inherit. Meek is one thing, spineless another state entirely.

"Well, I think you made a wonderful choice, Joy. That pink really becomes you." I waved at the punch bowl while I slipped another cup under the coffee urn and flipped the spigot.

"It's a square dancing costume I made my senior year in high school. Before I married Lucas, before the kids. But it seemed like it had almost come back into fashion and I thought, darn it, if it still fits, why not try it."

The dress was a tired cotton sateen, blister pink. Even with its gathered skirt, it was atrociously tight around Joy's thickened waist and hips. She looked down at it once, pulling her stomach in and smoothing down the first bulging tier. Then she let her breath out with a little gasp and reached for the glass dipper. I flipped the spigot. On. Off. On. Off.

Still no one had cake.

I made my way quickly to the end of the table. Like a dart to a bullseye, I went to the heart of the matter: Arthur. His face blank and a

little stupid as it often is when he is forcing himself to attend seriously to affairs of the heart or the hearth, Arthur was listening to Mona Martin trill out her various suspicions and intuitions about the substitute organist, who was beginning to claim more than his fair share of the supplementary performances. Joey's hand was snaking surreptitiously along the platter, easing off a white rosette.

"Miss Martin," I said, and shook her hand briskly for the second time that evening. "How delightful to see you here. I hope you don't mind terribly if I force Arthur to divide his attention between you and this Mount Everest over here. Joey Millet is going to assist, but it's up to Arthur to perform."

Arthur put his arm over my shoulder and gave me a squeeze. I held my breath. Arthur, tall, slim, movie-star handsome, hugged me as if it were an every day occurrence, hugged me as if I were—Oh! It's too much. Even for appearances' sake, Arthur has never sought to convey the impression of physical intimacy between us. We are the couple whose eyes meet, significantly, across the crowded room, the somnolent church, the dusty spray of honeysuckle, the thorny rose bough. Now, he's ready to pretend it is I who, all along, by choice tucked and folded the crisp hospital corners on our separate beds for a quarter of a century, I who let my eyes go blank with surprise and distaste when my hands or my shoulder were unexpectedly touched.

"Hurry up, Arthur," I said. "The whole room is filled with people and not a single one of them fed."

"Will you help me?" he asked, leaning down and kissing my cheek. "Like the first time." He put his hand under mine, and we both hesitated a moment, just as we had before. "It seems like something is missing," Arthur murmured, "but I can't quite figure out what."

"The bride and groom," Joey said, hopping on one foot, shoving out the first plate, pausing stoically.

"You're right," I conceded. "I removed them. I felt they were—" I didn't finish. I couldn't. But I guided Arthur's hand as, twenty-five years ago, he had guided mine.

"Joey," I said, reaching out for the plate, "take this piece to Mr. Fitch, if you please."

I let go of Arthur's hand, gave him a quick nod, and was heading back to the other end of the hall when he grabbed my arm.

"I'd like to make a statement," he called out loudly. The room fell suddenly, hissingly still.

"I want to thank all of you for coming this evening," Arthur began, pulling me to his side, clutching me to him like a recalcitrant rib. "As you know, today Evelyn and I are celebrating our twenty-fifth anniversary. A quarter of a century—a quarter of this, the twentieth century after the death of our Lord, Jesus Christ."

I noticed that Wanda had, when the music stopped, as it were, found herself vying for the same chair as Brutus, the styrofoam man. She looked willing to slump, legs spread. She looked in seventh heaven. Moira Nadeena, it seemed from what I could see over the sculpted shawl

of Arthur's arm, was cozying up with Dr. Nathan merely to get a better look at the new idol. I found myself looking up compassionately, protectively, at Arthur.

"It is a century notorious for its anxiety, for the threat of nuclear holocaust, the prospect of our very atoms turned in upon themselves as the twentieth century mind has already turned in upon itself, hopelessly self-conscious, querulous, prevaricating, complicit, our good deeds in general simply the failure to carry out the more heinous of our desires."

The Applebys, the Fitchs, even the Tims seemed to huddle against one another for support. Eyes trained on Arthur would suddenly veer like searchlights over the room, pin upon the door, then slowly, reluctantly, with due docility scan back to the tall thin man talking slowly, melodiously, without comprehensible intent, talking with such deliberate seriousness that the deliberateness became a particularly baffling form of enthusiasm. Moths hovered under the porch lights, a bat swooped low over the lawn. Joey raised his head above the window sill, then quickly disappeared, seeking, wise child that he is, the camouflage of the dahlias, the begonias.

"I got a rainbow tied all around my shoulder, Ain' a gonna rain, ain' gonna rain," I muttered.

"What?" Arthur asked in a stage whisper, leaning down so his ear gagged my mouth.

"The *good* news," I said, loud enough for the people gathered on the other side of Arthur's head to hear. "Faith, private commitments, personal growth, self-actualization." I faltered, facing the stony crowd.

"Except," Arthur misquoted me glibly, "it is the curse of this age that even our most positive private acts of faith are blurred by a seemingly intrinsic and insurmountable double vision, just as our most diabolic of public acts is glossed overby disbelief, diminished by the same halting, interminable dialogue. We have forgotten—" he went on firmly, stepping slightly forward, raising his hands to the audience as if to implore their assistance, then quickly, unconsciously, letting them fall, fingers splayed, to his sides. "We have forgotten," he repeated, "or we have failed to learn how to *feel* the truth entering the innermost chambers of our soul, just as we have 'tuned out' the world around us. We deafen ourselves to the screams of our neighbors, deafen ourselves to their cries of joy as well.

"Marriage, too, can be a way of blinding the soul, gagging the mind, deafening the heart—"

I tried to twist away from Arthur, but he gripped me as if I had no nerves, as if I had made no impulse against him. I looked at all our neighbors, our acquaintances shrinking back toward the dusty doorways, their mouths agape. Joy Tims was nervously spinning the dipper round and round the punch bowl. The cake persisted in all its six imperturbable tiers. Arthur went on.

"But marriage can also be a way of focusing our attention, of heightening our senses so that, when the time comes, we can hear the door of the soul squeak open, we can hear the regular angelic tread . . .

Marriage can teach us to see the truth of our times in someone else's face, to measure the cost of our hopes, our desires, our actions. Marriage can instruct us in tolerance—and in awe.

"Unfortunately, I," Arthur touched his chest with his free arm, "Arthur Green, am no different from the majority. I too am a doubtful product of our times, of our creeds, of our history."

He drew a long breath. I drew one too. Joey raised his head again over the sill. He scanned the room, picking out his mother, his lips collapsing in suspicion or knowledge when he saw where she had stopped in her tracks, turned, like all of us to stone.

"Evelyn May," Arthur said, letting me go and turning to look me full in the face. "I want to thank you. I want to thank you for insisting every day of our lives on the importance of today, insisting with stubborn rigor on seeing clearly—and refusing to hide me from myself by imposing on me any mask of piety or of rectitude—"

"And I," I said, "want to thank you Arthur for being the good, devout, loving and loyal husband you are. *And* I would like to thank all our dear neighbors for making the past four years of our life so much richer than they would have been should we not have had the good fortune to come to Sunnyvale. Now, let us eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we may die."

"Of shame," I whispered bitterly to Arthur, taking the serving spatula from his hand and cutting through the highest tier again and again, swiftly dividing it into slices. Moira Nadeena made her way with genuine Christian celerity over to the table.

"George," she called, putting out a plate for a second slice. "Help me hand these round, George."

"Joey," I called, "come and get it."

In fifteen minutes, people were slipping plates on to table tops, window sills, mantelpieces. The high, spuriously cheerful chatter was only intermittent. The Fitchs and Applebys had already made it to the door. Lucas Tims, in cowboy boots and a string tie, had made his way over for another piece of cake to help sustain his large, wobbly, beer-distended belly. He clapped Arthur on the back.

"Congratulations, old man. Can't say I understood all that, but it seems like you don't regret your old lady. That's real—um—real—And you've got a lot of gumption, a lot of cool, letting us know how you're feeling."

Joy appeared, her large pasty face, wizened with dubious loyalty, seemed to rest on her husband's expansively spread arm. "More cake?" she asked. Then she backed off. "I just meant, you know, if we're going to Logan for square dancing."

"I need to fortify myself," he said sternly, gripping the plate like a discus and turning to glower at his wife who shrank even closer to him, her head bowed for a second, then raised to inspect the wall behind Arthur and me. "You folks dance? Maybe you'd like to come with us. There's a whole gang going."

"No," Arthur said sadly. "I don't dance. Evelyn May?"

"I haven't danced for years, but thank you anyway."

"Nice talking to you," Lucas said, gulping the last bite of cake. "We've got to be getting on." He took his wife away, gripping her as firmly as Arthur had recently gripped me.

"We'd better get over to the door," I said, trying to keep my voice even. "That's the signal for everyone to leave."

Within another fifteen minutes, the road of a Harley-Davidson muffled by a mile of tepid air, we were alone—Arthur, Joey, and me.

"Let's go home," I said. "We can clean all this up tomorrow."

The cicadas jeered from the maples, the oaks, the pines. Refusing Arthur's assistance, I stumbled along the unpaved lane to the Rectory. My head down, I peered hopefully at the ground. Slipping nonetheless with a breathtaking jar into a pothole, a ditch, stumbling over a hummock of clover, stubbing my toe on a rock, I was thankful for this tortuous blind return over uneven ground. It camouflaged an even more tortuous departure.

Groping my way up the front stairs, I located the porch light. Then I found myself squinting and gaping, just as jolted as Joey and Arthur by the abrupt transition from dark to a moony light that cased us all like a jar.

"Come in, come in," I urged them. "Come in where the light and the land are equally even. Come in where the air is cool and does not reek of honeysuckle, only beeswax, Comet, Windex, and Endust."

Joey grinned, then let his mouth slip again into the expression of glum stoicism it had worn since his mother had, after brief, vivid conversation with the he-man from Cincinnati, come over and asked me with unnecessary tact whether I would be relaxing at home this evening. *Wouldn't* we like to go dancing with the Tims? They had invited her too, but she had been forced, unfortunately, to decline. She *did* enjoy dancing—didn't we?

"Well dear," I had said, rising to the bait, feeling her will catch in the roof of my mouth and tug the words out. "Why don't you just leave Joey with us this evening?"

"In fact," I added, with rapid and insistent innocence, "why don't you just let him spend the entire night with us. Then you won't have to worry about getting back all the way from Logan in any hurry."

"Evelyn May, I love you," Wanda said, giving me a bear hug. "And don't think I don't know how I have imposed on you," she whispered in my ear.

I smiled then. "Well, it just means you're like a daughter to me, Wanda."

"Older sister, Evelyn," Wanda said brushing my wilted hair off my forehead. "You're not half as old as you'd like the world to believe. And I'm not half as young . . . "

"Go give Joey a hug," I reminded her, my voice a little curt because of the involuntary admission of a less than responsible streak in my favorite

woman friend. "He's of an age, you know, when it still matters."

"Where are you going? Aren't you going to be lonely without me?" Joey asked with engaging simplicity. Then he looked up and caught the look that passed between Wanda and Lucas Tims' brother—complicit, eager, breathlessly eager, disinheriting.

Joey came close to me, and I put my arm around him and gave him a long hug. "It's true," I whispered. "Mr. Green and I will love to have you. Could you help me gather the eggs tomorrow?"

At this, Joey, with a token offer of his cheek to his mother's soft, warm, painted lips, began to edge away from Wanda, his hand firmly gripping mine. "See you," he said. "Tomorrow. Try not to come before I get the eggs."

He turned his back to his mother. Dragging me behind him, he went off in search of Arthur. I waved to Wanda and her new obsession. They headed to the door.

But the three of us, Arthur, Joey, and I, gathered at the door of the Parish House and watched Wanda mount and straddle the big motorcycle, wrap her arms easily around this huge undulant stranger and, with a toss of her hair, a casual wave of her arm, roar down the circular drive of the church and out onto the dim street, her blue dress deeper than the sea under the streetlights.

"Your mama's a young woman," I told Joey. "She deserves some fun. And you know, don't you, how much she enjoys dancing."

Joey had picked at the wood of the doorframe and nodded. Then he turned back into the empty hall, surveying the litter of cups and plates, the diminished cake, the pale punch, his face fixed, as I am afraid it will be until tomorrow morning, in this stubbornly miserable expression.

"Now, now," I teased him as he stood diffidently in the foyer of the Rectory, "what deep thoughts are digging furrows in your brow? Wanda will be here bright and early tomorrow morning."

"I know," he said, his boggish misery swallowing the words with a dark gurgle just as soon as they slid from his mouth.

"Would you like to read? Watch television? Take a bath?" The child shrugged off each suggestion.

"We could have our own dance," Arthur said, wading through the mire of sympathy and self-pity. "That is if you and Joey know anything about dancing. I don't. But I'm game to try."

"We could always call Moira Nadeena and see if she makes house calls," I suggested with a malicious giggle.

"No," Arthur said absent-mindedly. "I'd just as soon have the three of us."

"Music," I called, slapping my hands. "Disco? Old gold? Jazz? Jitterbug? Tango? Tarantella?" I spun the knob on the radio.

"I know how to polka," Joey said.

"Well? How? Come on, Joey, demonstrate." Arthur stood with his arms foolishly spread, the hands curved like an arthritic's.

"You need a partner," Joey said, looking away.

"So, begin with Evelyn and then she can teach me."

Joey shrugged, smiled briefly, then shook his head, listening to the music. "I don't think this is exactly the right kind of tune."

"Oh, can't you fake it a little?" I held out my hands and Joey took his position, and we tried, gamely, to polka around the old oak table.

"Now my turn," Arthur said, after Joey and I had collapsed, giggling, into the two armchairs by the fireplace. "I want to learn."

"I'm too old," I gasped. "You'll have to get Joey to show you."

"Nope," Arthur said, stamping his foot with mock forcefulness. "I want it to be you. I want to dance with you." He hooted. Joey howled. "Behave yourself, young lamb," Arthur growled.

Instead of doing the polka, I tried to teach Arthur to waltz. He kept trying to glide and swing as he had seen me do with Joey. When, inevitably, I tripped, he caught me close; he swung me back over his arm. Then, like some practiced Don Juan, he leaned over me, a total stranger, garishly handsome, grotesquely gay. I cried out sharply, in anger and pain, the sense of betrayal, a physical reality, paralyzingly intense.

"What is it? What is it? Arthur quickly lifted me upright and looked anxiously into my eyes. "Oh my dear, I haven't hurt you, have I?"

Joey was at my side too, looked worriedly up into my prim, shocked face. "No," I said, feeling flushed and woozy. "I'll be fine. At my age, it's not fun being swept off my feet." I felt myself reeling back toward Arthur.

"Quick Joey," Arthur said from far away, "help me get Evelyn to the sofa."

I felt myself being lifted and placed on the sofa. I closed my eyes and let my shame swallow my pride as easily as an ant lion devours its natural prey.

Later in the evening, I woke to find myself still on the sofa. Arthur and Joey were playing chess on a board set out on the fireplace hearth. I closed my eyes and drifted off again. When I woke a second time, Arthur was seated in the armchair reading, his hands manacled with shadow.

"Where's Joey?" My voice was gruff with sleep.

"In the guestroom. Sound asleep."

"What time is it?"

"Nearly two."

"You shouldn't have let me sleep like that."

"Why not? Obviously you needed it. You've been under too much stress lately. I've seen it—in your face, your voice."

"It's just age, dear," I said, smiling with effort.

Arthur came over and stood above the sofa. He took my hand, holding it loosely like a mooring line. He just stood there, swinging my arm, until I expected his toes to touch, his knees to knock. The face with which he regarded me was perfectly serious. Perfect.

"Happy anniversary," he said, putting his hand to his back pocket and drawing out a small box. I opened it slowly, my fingers clumsy with sleep and dread.

"I can't imagine," I said hopefully. Nestled in the box, like eggs in a nest, I saw two rings. I started to put the lid back on.

"Try it," Arthur insisted, taking the smaller one and slipping it on my

left hand. "It's twice as wide as the first one . . . I thought it would be nice, you know, to make a new commitment, with homage paid to all those years of—"

"Of *what?*" I asked, my face tight with anger and desperate curiosity.

"Loyalty," he said, opening his hands in a curiously weak and tentative gesture. "Love." He let his hands drop to his sides.

I had a sudden blinding image of Arthur on our wedding day, the way he looked out of the corner of my eye as I kneeled at the altar, hirsute, somber, stiff. I felt again that radical sense of detachment—from Arthur, from myself. "Why *him*?" I had wondered, dispassionately. "Why *not*?" I had decided, equally dispassionately, as I rose to my feet and let Arthur haltingly raise my veil. I smiled at him easily, dismissively, as I tried to smile at him now from the chintz sofa in our tenth, childless home.

This time, however, Arthur understood the infidelity inherent in my tolerance, the denial. He shook his head angrily. "Love. And loyalty. And, finally, *wonder.* Finally," he repeated to himself, "*Awe.* This," he said, lacing my left hand in his, patting them both with his other hand. "This is the awe of my life." He paused wistfully. "This, the wonder," he said with a ludicrous and triumphal smile.

"Evelyn," he said, curling up on the rug beside me, stretched out on the sofa like the Lady of Shalott. "You have to understand. It's as if a glass window that has always secured me from the world, secured me even from you, it's as if that window has been miraculously shattered and, for the first time, I can hear truly, I can smell, taste and touch truly. I can distinguish the unique quality of your skin, of mine, the difference between a rose and a camellia. It is a sensuality without desire, without— "

"Without desire?" I repeated, my cheeks flushing red as a clown's.

"Without need," he said. "As if my senses possessed a kind of intellect deeper than the mind's, as if the body were, in its sensual receptivity, capable of unimagined charity."

"Charity?" I scrambled to my feet. "Blarney! Poppycock! What in hell are you talking about, Arthur? All these years, you've been able, you've had the chance. Do you think I liked, year after year, the icy seclusion of my own bed? Do you think I liked the sight of my barren body? Do you think that my hand didn't burn with shame when you shrugged me away, morning, noon, and night. How dare you, now that my eyes are failing, now when my body flares up daily charring all my hopes, now when age brands me, leaving you as beautiful as an idiot or a madman— "

It was at this moment, with God's bewildering grace, the phone rang.

Wanda's voice, incredulous, shrill, squealed through the wires. "Evelyn? Is that you? Oh, honey, you and Arthur have to help me. It's just terrible. I'm so embarrassed. And Joy—embarrassment doesn't half describe what she's feeling."

"What happened? Where are you?"

"At a phone booth in the Emergency Room at St. Mary's."

"Are you hurt?" I asked, knowing the answer.

"Nothing but my cheeks, I think. They're going to be permanently inflamed. It's Joy. She'll be fine. She has a black eye and a bloody nose, but the doctor doesn't think there's a concussion, *or* that she'll miscarry, more's the pity."

"What happened? And Lucas and his brother? Where are they?"

"In the police station in Logan. Lucas is being held on assault and battery charges. His brother resisted arrest—both arrests, his own and Lucas'. It took four policemen to hold him down long enough to put the handcuffs on. Then it took four of them to lift him up once he was cuffed. *That* I saw from the ambulance. Then Joy groaned from her stretcher and I went over to talk to her. An angel of mercy I'm not: the ambulance just seemed the fastest way of getting back to Sunnyvale."

"But *why* was she in the ambulance? What *happened* to her?"

"I thought I already told you. Lucas attacked her. Right outside the Logan Social Hall. Then someone, I think it was the bouncer, called the police. Then buddy brother decided to come to Lucas' aid, and . . . "

"Why did he attack her?"

"I'm not sure exactly, and Joy's jaw's so sore she's not talking, but I think it had something to do with his dancing with a red-headed hooker from Logan the entire evening, and, in the process, consuming an entire bottle of Wild Turkey. Joy was stupid enough to say something about—either the girl or the liquor. Then, before you knew it, Lucas had hustled us all out of the dance hall. Joy was stupid enough to protest *again,* and then Lucas was on her calling her a dumb cow and slugging her as if she were one. Evelyn, he was dreadful." Wanda's voice caught, the truth of the whole evening suddenly standing before her intractable as a brick wall, moving toward her like a man's fist. "Joy just stood there. She didn't fight back. She didn't do anything, raise her hand, open her mouth, flinch. Nothing." Wanda began to sob, noisily as a small child.

"Just wait right there," I said. "Arthur will come and get you. Joy too, if she's ready to leave."

Arthur already had his coat on. He was waiting at the door, my coat in his hands. "Go on," I told him, sweeping him out the door with a gesture of my hand.

"Oh, I forgot," he said, his eyes blinking. "We have Joey here. You can't come."

"No, this time you're on your own," I said, taking my jacket from him, giving him a little hug and a shove. "The Emergency Room at St. Mary's. Wanda and Joy. Bring them both back here. Then maybe you'll have to go over to Logan and bail those men out—but that can probably wait until morning."

Arthur, looking white, straightened his shoulders and went out through the kitchen to the garage. I heard the car start. I went upstairs and gathered several blankets, one of which I laid out on the twin bed in the guestroom. Joey stirred. I leaned over and kissed his forehead, stroking his thick, transparent hair back from his face.

"Mama," he said, opening his eyes. "Oh, you," he said, then turned on

his side, bringing his knees on his chest and squeezing his eyes tight together.

"Your mama will be here in just a little while," I told him. "She'll be here when you wake tomorrow."

"But the eggs," he said. "She promised she'd wait—"

"You can still gather the eggs, Joey. I promise."

I stood at the door, clutching the mound of blankets with both hands, watching the child slipping deeper and deeper into his sound, indifferent sleep.

Downstairs, I laid the blankets over the arm of the sofa and went into the kitchen where I filled a pan with milk and put it on the stove, then collected cinnamon, sugar, and brandy and put them all on the counter beside four large ceramic mugs. I went back into the living room and tried to sit and read. Then, impatiently, I went out into the garden. The full moon was visible now. High in the cloudy sky, it made the clouds white as my late roses. The air was heavy and hot. I didn't understand why I'd gathered the blankets.

Desultorily, I picked a handful of roses on my tour of the dark lawn. The Rectory, situated downtown, is unusually quiet late at night. I have always liked this. It gives me, I feel, fair warning. I drew a deep breath, let it out again in a fully indulgent sigh. I can't help it. Being alone on a moonlit night is always exhilarating to me—no matter what is happening next door, down the street, across town, or in the tubes of the television set, the wires of the radio. I love, you see, solitude—all my life, it has been my salvation. My solace. Alone, one is never isolated. Alone, one rarely feels self-conscious. Love is irrelevant. So is redemption. It happens so quickly, five minutes away from the sound of human breath, human footsteps, and the silence begins to sing, eyes take on a new sensitivity, all the senses do. It's impossible to talk about. I begin to sound like Arthur. But I am sure it is not at *all* what Arthur is trying in his endlessly circuitous way to describe. It has to be different, doesn't it? What I am talking about has nothing to do with people. Never.

With the sound of Arthur's cautious return up our long, gravel lane, the silence compressed, its character altering completely. I returned to the house quickly. I opened the door in the kitchen that leads to the garage.

"Watch your step," I warned Joy as she climbed the four steps slowly and heavily. Wanda was right behind her, then Arthur, his face as white as it had been upon departure. Although no one might remark upon it, the truth is that I have always supported Arthur through the more squalid of his priestly duties. Arthur has never had to bandage the wounded, feed the hungry, nurse the sick. Arthur has only had to listen, with his eyes studiously fixed on the rug, the mantelpiece, the ivy quivering in the summer breeze, the maple leaves scudding in the autumn gale.

I poured him a brandy as he was taking off his jacket. When I gave it to him, he looked at me strangely, then smiled and drank it right off. I

poured him another, and one for Wanda.

"Would anyone like coffee, hot milk, a brandy toddy?" I couldn't address Joy directly.

"No," she said, the word indistinct as a groan through her thick, bruised lips.

"Do you want to sleep here tonight?" I asked her, looking her straight in the face this time. I gasped. Then I went and put my arms around her, a gesture as instinctive as the first appalled intake of breath.

"This is dreadful," I whispered to Arthur, my arms around this woman whose whole face was bloated with pain, every orifice sealed off with it.

He nodded, unable to open his mouth or close his eyes. Wanda, her back to us, poured herself another brandy, then, taking a deep breath and visibly squaring her shoulders, she turned to face the three of us. She couldn't speak either.

I said, "Let's go into the living room. Joy can lie down on the sofa. You look as if you'd be better off sitting down too, Wanda." Arthur and I led Joy into the living room. We had to seat her on the sofa with a slight pressure on her shoulders. I lifted her feet up. Arthur, with a barely constrained shudder, slipped a pillow under her head. She winced but held herself as still as she must have when Lucas' fist crashed into her face. I covered her with a blanket. She tried to smile at me. Mercifully, my eyes blurred the sight of that poor, battered face, that beastly gratitude.

"Arthur," I said, without turning away from Joy. "Would you go upstairs and get a nightgown from my bureau. You might also take Wanda up to the guestroom. I've made up the second bed for her."

I heard Wanda climb up from the armchair, watched her leave the room, Arthur's hand stiffly around her bowed shoulders, the blue chiffon sagging, ludicrously flimsy, around her knees, twisting around Arthur's legs. I took Joy's hand in both of mine.

"Do you want me to call anyone?"

She shook her head quickly, then winced.

"Tomorrow then," I said, touching her face gently as I could. "First you must get some sleep." I stood up, then I sat down again.

"It can't go on," I said. "You're going to have to leave him, you know."

She didn't move. The tears began to ooze from behind her blue, puffed lids; her thick lips parted slightly; her breath came faster.

"You're going to have to," I said again. "We'll help you. Everyone will help you. But no human being can be allowed to do this to another one." I started to get up again, but paused when I heard the sound, half groan, half sigh. I leaned over, putting my ear close to her mouth. "What?"

"Lucas? Where is he?"

"Where he belongs," I said. "Don't worry." I tried to make my voice kinder. "He's all right. We'll help him too. He's with his brother now." I misled her guiltlessly. "You have to start thinking about yourself now. You have to sleep."

This time I rose from the sofa and left the room, turning off the overhead light as I passed through the doorway. I climbed the stairs. Wanda was still awake, I could see from the light under the door. I

hesitated a moment, then knocked.

Wanda answered the door in her slip. Her face was streaked with make-up, as if she had just rubbed her fists in her eyes. She stared at me defiantly, then shook her head, folding her arms across her chest. I led her back to bed and pulled the blankets up tight around her shoulders. I handed her a kleenex.

"For Joey, tomorrow," I said. She nodded and docilely wiped off what she could of the steel blue shadow, the black mascara.

"Evelyn May, why would anyone put up with that? And that stupid brother, why did he help Lucas out?"

"I don't know," I said, trying to mask with the firmness of my voice the divisiveness of my imagination. "Fear. Stupidity. Some mad idea of love."

"I don't want to have anything to do with any of them anymore. I want to just stay by myself with Joey. Forever." Wanda's shoulders began to quiver, her breath coming in harsh rapid gusts.

"Hush," I said. "Take a deep breath and hold it. Let it go. Don't think. Concentrate on breathing."

"You make it sound as if I'm in labor," Wanda gasped, her breath quickening with laughter. But, as I repeated the instructions, her breathing began to slow, her eyelids slipped close. I went to the door, turned off the light, and pulled the door shut behind me.

I found Arthur sitting on his bed, the gown I'd asked for hanging ignored across his knees. He glanced up briefly, then stared at his shoes again.

"So that's where the nightgown went to," I tried to tease him.

"What?" He looked at me again blankly, then looked at his lap. "Oh," he said. "Sorry." With a small shudder, he handed the nightgown over.

"It looks perfectly serviceable to me," I said, handling the nightgown as gingerly as he had. "Why the disgust?"

"What? What are you talking about?"

"Well, I think perhaps I'll just wear it myself. It seems a shame to wake Joy. I just thought she would be uncomfortable in that silly pink sateen dress. What a mockery."

"What?"

"The dress. The hope. She wore it tonight because she thought she could call on Lucas' fond memories. She didn't know—or maybe she chose to ignore the fact that memory is the most individual of traits. What she remembered fondly, he might recall with abhorrence so great it could make him insanely vindictive. She remembers submitting to him the first time in what you call *wonder,* Arthur, *awe.* He can only remember her passivity, like the jaws of a trap waiting to be triggered. Maybe she looks now as he remembers himself, six weeks later, informed of her pregnancy, the mandatory marriage."

"What you are trying to say?" Arthur leaned down and pretended to untie his shoe laces. He stayed curled over, waiting.

"I don't know," I said, opening the closet door, stepping half-way

inside. "It may be dreadful of me, but I can see both sides of their tawdry story."

"Then you are more charitable than I am," Arthur said, unbuttoning his shirt. Our backs to each other, silently we slipped off our clothes and dressed again for the night.

"I'm not charitable," I said. "I am implicated, compromised. There are times, Arthur, when I have wanted to hit you. There are times when I feel you have beaten me black and blue as automatically, instinctively, as Lucas beat Joy."

"No," he cried out, standing in the middle of the moonlit room, foolish and glorious as a boy of eighteen. "It can't be. What do you mean? How can you say so?"

I walked over to my bed, I pulled the covers down. "Go to bed," I told him. "There's no point in talking about it. I don't really understand myself. But when I looked at Joy's face, I wasn't appalled. Do you understand, I recognized it—as if it were my own. When I imagined Lucas' hand smashing out, I imagine it shattering that very face in the mirror."

Then he was standing beside my bed. "Evelyn," he whispered. "Let me lie beside you. Let me hold you."

I moved over, as passive as Joy Tims. I let his arms fold me in. I began to cry, every atom in my body wanting to rebel, wanting to push out against this incomprehensible burden, this sensate weight.

"It's too late," I whispered to Arthur, to the world at large, my eyes clenched against the moon and the huge shadows, my ears deaf to our breath, the beat of our hearts, the child's cry, my skin blue and swollen with pain. "Too much lying, too much anger. *Too* much. I'm getting old. I *want* to get old. I don't want to feel so—I want to give up, Arthur," I said bluntly.

Arthur wasn't listening. His hands were running over my shoulders as if they were straight and soft as Wanda's. "Not on your life," he said firmly. "You mustn't forget: You're still here to tell the tale. And I am here, as I have always been, to listen."

"No," I groaned as I turned slowly over to face him. "There has to be an end."

"In time," he said, kissing my lips as if for the first time. "In due time," he said, holding me fast as the dark seas surged over my head.

Still holding me fast when the first light flooded the room, his hand white and frail as an eggshell cupped my breast, infinitely comforting.

Tess Enroth

DEADLY SINS

Sister Rosalia sucked at her dentures. Bright and rare, the pink flush seeped from the dry cheeks to the lined forehead where the crisp white coif pressed. Her blue veined hands clasped and unclasped in front of her thick body.

"It is a sin against purity. It might happen when you are taking a bath or in bed at night before you fall asleep. You must guard against it."

In the cold classroom, no one moved; thirty pupils from various grades sat straight-backed and motionless in the rows of connecting seats and desks. Before them their hands gripped the rough paper of their catechism books, open to the question, "What are the Seven Deadly Sins?" and the answering list of words. "The Seven Deadly Sins are pride, lust . . ."

Kathleen wanted to rub her armpit where the wool of her tightly knit sweater prickled her skin, but she dared not move. The boys, though they pretended to look straight ahead, were sneaking looks at each other and suppressing giggles; they would see and later would tease her for "feeling of her body," the sin the nun was trying to explain. Kathleen did not understand the arousals of lust, nor did she accept the evils of pride as Sister described them. Kathleen didn't like kids who were stuck up but doubted that God cared, and she knew when her mother talked about taking pride in always doing things well, she couldn't be urging sin. Kathleen was trying to decide why certain parts of her body were special—the small bumpy nipples her father called frog bites, for example. Mostly, however, she wished for class to be over faster; she could understand anger if they ever got to that, and she could memorize. Memory counted, not understanding, in these pale classrooms that smelled of plaster and linseed oil.

They were not let out of St. Peter's until three-thirty, and by four the January night began to settle down. If Kathleen cut across the railroad tracks east of the crossing, she could get home before dark and still have time to slide on the long, unrutted ice patches between the main tracks and the siding. And she wouldn't have to lie about where she'd been as long as she was on time. This disobedience didn't bother her because she knew she was not in danger—what parents didn't know didn't hurt them. With her father away all the time, her mother worried twice as much as some. But lying, now that was wrong. Kathleen could tell what was wrong by the way her stomach felt when she tried it; lying was a sin.

A light snow was falling, making the smooth ice even slipperier under her rubber soles. Kathleen put the book she was carrying on a rusty rail of the siding so her arms could be free. With a few running steps, she flung herself sideways onto the ice, right foot first and left knee slightly bent.

She sailed ten feet or more in perfect balance and then caught herself just before the rough cinders jutted through the ice sheet. Kathleen counted ten times, then five more turns, and she had to run for home.

She slowed as she neared the end of the alley. Behind the garage and still not in range of the kitchen window, she stopped. Putting both mitten tips into her mouth, she pulled them off, holding them in her teeth while she buttoned her coat to the collar. The air stabbed her chest even as her breathing slowed. By the time she got her boots off and walked into the kitchen, she was coughing.

"That child ought to go to school closer to home," her grandmother muttered. Kathleen could hear her mother's weary agreement. Next year, after she'd made her First Communion, she could go back to the public school only two blocks from home. Grandma didn't go to church on Sundays, but Kathleen saw her reading from her old prayer book; Mother went every Sunday but never prayed at home—not even grace. Maybe they weren't really Catholic. When Father came home, he went to Sunday Mass, but during the sermons, he always wiggled his nostrils or his eyebrows so Kathleen would have to struggle not to laugh. And at home he drank whiskey and used language her mother called too colorful for the girls to hear. If they weren't really Catholic, Kathleen would never have to think about covetousness and lust and catechism. And she'd have friends over after school 'til suppertime.

Kathleen's neighbors all went to public school and were lost to her as the warm weather ended. They played together until Halloween, running in the alley to kick-the-can or swinging in backyard swings. Down at the empty lot they flew kites, and sometimes they just hung around the public school playground. But as days shortened, plans for indoor play were made without Kathleen. At St. Peter's she hated the nuns, feared the scowl of the priest, and felt strange with the farm kids. She was just sure she was not really Catholic—she belonged among summer friends who went to Sunday School and earned ribbons for knowing Bible stories. Words like Deuteronomy and Ecclesiastes sounded lovely, not like gluttony and sloth.

On this dark winter afternoon, Kathleen munched on a Jonathan apple while she looked at Dick Tracy and Li'l Abner in the evening *Tribune.* Lying on the braided rug near her grandmother, she was listening. Grandma sat near a long window in a rocker and knitted afghan squares while conversing in a desultory way with Mother, who was peeling potatoes for the meat pie she was slowly constructing on the big hardwood table. Sometimes Grandma used German phrases—needlessly, Kathleen thought—what was being kept from her was village gossip, grown-up stuff that didn't matter.

"Gram, do nuns have bosoms?"

"What'd you say?"

"You know, tits?"

"Kathleen, you mean breasts!" Mother was trying to sound shocked by Kathleen's language, but she grinned at Grandma.

"They probably do have bosoms but certainly nothing else."

"Well, do they wash them when they take baths?"

"I should hope so," Mother answered while grandmother kept her eyes on her knitting.

It was hard enough to try to find out anything from her mother with all these signals Kathleen could see between the two women. She could, of course, wait to talk to Maggie. But the trouble with her sister was that Maggie would sometimes roll her eyes up and act as if Kathleen were too dumb for words. And sometimes Maggie explained things in words too risky for Kathleen to try—like tits and boobs—or even ass, which Kathleen knew better than to repeat. But Maggie could be trusted not to tell on her—except the time Betty Schmidt, a year older and wiser, told her how babies were born. Maggie said that Betty had a rotten mouth and that they should tell Mother.

Mother said babies grew inside in a special place called the uterus—grew until the mother rounded like a pear—and they came head first into the world through the vagina. She said that was a special opening between a woman's legs. When you grow up you have wide hips and space enough for a baby, so it didn't really hurt.

She said that Kathleen was not to talk about such matters with other kids. So Kathleen had facts. But then the nuns would throw something silly at her about touching herself in the bathtub. It was a sin like making a baby without being married. Kathleen could not for the life of her see why anyone would want to make a baby—or how anyone could take a bath without touching her body. There must be something she was missing.

When Maggie came in the back door, she announced she had another play rehearsal after supper. For Kathleen that meant a lonely evening. Maybe Mom would let her stay up and listen to Fred Allen. Or she could read the Dr. Doolittle book from the school library. That thought made her ears burn and her stomach flip over. The book! She had left it on the railroad siding. By now it would be buried in the dry snow. With any luck, she could retrieve it in the morning—but morning was a long time off. In the meantime her stomach felt the way it did when she had tried to lie.

As Kathleen hurried toward the crossing the next morning, she saw box cars on the tracks.

"Oh, please, not on the siding!"

Lined up, empty and gray, they stood on the siding near the slick ice, and there on the rail lay the book, between the big steel trucks. The dust of snow didn't conceal the parallel breaks in its cover. She picked it up in both mittened hands, and as she tried to flatten it, pages began to fall out in shreds and to blow away.

In terror, she knew she must lie—must tell a big lie, not a fib but a story, to the nun who ran the library. There was no way to make what happened excusable. She would have to lie to the smiling sister, the nicest one in the whole school, and then she would have to lie to her mother.

The boys often did tease and chase her. Once she had lost all the arithmetic papers with the gold stars on them, and her mother had been

sympathetic toward her and angry with the boys. So, it was not a complete lie to say that the boys had chased her and that she could not go back for the book she'd dropped. And she would volunteer to pay for it out of her weekly allowance. Kathleen worked out the whole story as she kicked the book into the snow and trudged on to school.

"Oh yes, Sister Loretta, I was afraid, but I shouldn't have dropped the book." Her voice sounded false in her own ears, and she hoped she wasn't blushing. As soon as she could she turned away from the concern in the nun's clear blue eyes. So this is sin! Sister Loretta trusted her completely, and Kathleen felt ugly. Her stomach hurt and something pricked at her eyelids. In the hallway alone, she felt tears spill down hot cheeks. Brushing them with the back of her hand, she leaned over the fountain and let the cold water bubble against her face.

At home that evening, she chose a busy moment—when dinner was being laid on the table and Maggie and Grandma and Mother were all talking—to tell her lie.

"It was Johnny Schmidt and all that filthy gang of his, I'll bet," Maggie said righteously, pursing her lips. "They're all such bullies I'd like to get my hands on them."

Sympathy! Kathleen's relief turned to elation as she began to embellish the story. She began, in fact, to feel that she had, indeed, been abused—by life in general and by boys often enough. By the time she crept into bed and said her prayers, her sense of sin had shrunk from sight. She felt sure a good Act of Contrition had cleansed her soul, an object much like the white bone that comic strip dogs bury. Of course, when the time came, she would have to confess the lie to the priest. Unless she forgot.

By April, Kathleen had almost forgotten both the book and the lie. Spring days smelled of sour earth and moisture evaporating from cedar shingles. She was, on a Saturday afternoon, leaning on a fence watching some boys play fungo. Beside her Paul slouched with a match in his teeth and his thumbs hooked in his belt. He was a head taller than she, and wore a jacket just like the ones the high school boys wore. He was talking to her about baseball as if she were his own age. After a glance at her ragged fingernails, she thrust her hands into her jacket pockets.

"Hey, now, let's go for a ride," he said abruptly.

"On the handle bars?"

"No, on the crossbars. C'mon. Don't be scared." With one foot on the ground, he waited astride the heavy bike he rode to deliver the morning papers. Kathleen zipped her jacket and moved between his arms. She put her hands on the middle of the handlebars and hiked up onto the crossbar between his legs. They headed down the empty street and around the ball diamond at the far end of the park. Her hair blew in the wind, and she could feel Paul's warm breath in her right ear. Around the old bandstand they swung and skidded to a stop in front of an open stand where refreshments were sold in the summer. They dropped to the damp gravel and then swung up onto the splintery counter almost in unison. They just sat there breathing in the almost warm air. Then Paul spun

around and dropped to the floor inside the stand.

"Want a smoke!"

"No. You're kidding!"

"You don't have to just to show off for me, Kath. I know you're prob'ly too young. But I gotta have one."

Kathleen swung her legs around and let her feet hang inside the counter while she watched Paul take a wrinkled pack of Camels from his shirt pocket along with a small box of wooden matches. He lit a match by snapping his thumbnail on the head.

"Wow!" Kathleen's admiration brought a small smile to Paul's mouth. He squinted against the smoke.

"Take a drag; it's really great."

"It won't make me sick?"

"Course not. That's bull." He held out the cigarette between thumb and forefinger, and Kathleen took it between two stiffly outstretched fingers. She leaned her face into her hand and pulled smoke into her mouth, then let it out in a cloud. Patiently, Paul fitted his hand around hers, curled her fingers slightly and lifted her hand to her mouth. He cautioned her to draw only a little smoke and to breathe it into her lungs; when she coughed drily, he said that was enough for the first time. She felt dizzy in the way she did on amusement park rides or the first time out on her skis—not a bad feeling. Then, wanting to prolong the private moments, she told Paul about the book and the lies, and he listened thoughtfully. He understood how complicated it all was and how painful for her, and he said she had not done anything to hurt anyone.

When he had dropped the cigarette to the floor and ground it out with his heel, he turned and leaned against Kathleen's legs. With both hands, he slowly pushed her straight brown hair away from her cheeks, smoothing it behind her ears in a way she didn't really care for. Then he pulled her face toward his and kissed her on the lips. He tilted his head to the side, like in the movies, so their noses didn't bump.

An instant later, Paul slipped over the counter and onto his bike which had been leaning against the stand behind Kathleen.

"Let's go." Neither said a word as Paul pumped hard all the way to her back yard. When he stopped behind her garage, she hopped to the ground, and they mumbled good-bye. He turned and sped away.

In the house, Kathleen skimmed through the kitchen.

"Where've you been all afternoon?" her mother asked.

"Oh, just over at Patty's."

Up in her room, Kathleen looked at her face in the mirror and touched her lips. Again noticing her nails, she rummaged in a drawer until she found a nail file. As she scraped under nails and filed at their stubby edges, she watched her hair swing forward across her cheek. She tossed it back, biting color into her lips. Then digging again in the drawer, she found a small comb and put it in her jacket pocket along with the change she kept in a china cup on the dressing table. Then she stood, opened her jacket, and turned slowly in front of the oval mirror, smiling at her body's reflection.

Conger Beasley, Jr.

THE MAGIC DEER

Two Chins, riding one horse and leading another, came over the hill. Below, in a grassy valley, was a small lake. Trees bordered the lake, tall willows and cottonwoods, their leaves rippling in the afternoon wind.

Two Chins had never seen the lake before. He had hunted all over this country and was familiar with every waterhole, but this lake was new. It was as if it had just appeared, or as if, in his thirst on a hot summer afternoon, he had dreamed it and caused it to appear.

Down through the high grass he guided the horses. The grass was dry and brown, and under the horses' hooves it crackled flat, leaving a dark trace.

The surface of the lake shimmered in the bright sun. Swallows flittered back and forth; a marsh hawk soared high in the air. All the way down to the lake, Two Chins puzzled over the presence of a body of water this big so far from the mountains. Rising up off the horse's back, he searched the surrounding slopes and gullies for feeder streams. Perhaps the lake was fed by hidden springs. There were springs in this country, and Two Chins knew the location of each.

When he reached the trees, Two Chins slipped off the roan and dropped the rawhide rope to the packhorse. The horses pushed through the grass to the water. There were no buffalo or antelope tracks, which Two Chins considered a bad omen. The grass was tall and straight, a perfect nesting site for meadowlarks, but also a good place for buffalo to wallow or antelope to bed down.

With white people pressing to the south and east, the available game was slowly being forced into a smaller area. As if aware of the danger threatening them, the animals, especially the buffalo, were mysteriously disappearing. Two Chins couldn't account for this. He knew white people wantonly killed animals—he had seen hundreds of buffalo carcasses rotting in the hot sun; but he thought that the animals, in reaction to the slaughter, had returned to their original home under the earth. According to the legends he had heard as a boy, all the animals had emerged into the world from a hole in the *Paha Sapa,* the Black Hills, located to the west of where he was now. Perhaps he should go to that hole and call softly to the animals to come back out.

He squatted down and scooped a handful of water into his mouth. The water was cool and sweet. Tiny bugs with long legs scooted across the surface. Dragonflies whirred over the reeds fringing the bank. Two Chins smiled when he saw them. Their presence was a reassuring sign of water.

They were powerful creatures, and the song they sang on hot afternoons filled Two Chins's heart with joy.

Kneeling down, he plunged his face into the lake. The cool liquid against his parched skin caused little bumps to rise on his legs and arms. With his eyes closed, he raised his face and pointed it toward the sun. Droplets of water trickled off his glossy black hair. A moment later he opened his eyes and saw bubbles frothing to the surface a short distance away.

Two Chins licked at the drops dribbling over his lip. More bubbles, white and frothy, appeared out on the lake. There must be a big fish down there, he decided. Or a beaver.

Two Chins stepped onto a rock, and from there to another. The water was as clear as the sky after a hard rain. More bubbles popped to the surface. Two Chins squatted down and peered into the water. Something was moving along the bottom, a large creature with a familiar shape. Two Chins gripped the edge of the rock and bent down close to the surface.

The creature was nibbling at the weeds that grew on the bottom. Two Chins felt his heart leap like a fish, and he had to hold on tightly to the rock to keep from falling in. The creature was a deer, and it was walking on the bottom of the lake, feeding on the grass and reeds.

Two Chins could hear his breath pop from his mouth like dry twigs in a fire. Suddenly the bubbles stopped frothing and the deer rose slowly to the surface. As its sleek head, bearing a handsome rack of antlers, broke through the water, Two Chins began to sing loudly the song the dragonflies had taught him as a boy.

His rifle was back onshore with his horse. But it was just as well, for Two Chins knew that with a creature this powerful nothing metallic should be allowed to harm it. With trembling fingers he pulled an arrow from his quiver and notched it in the bow. The deer's head and neck extended out of the water, and with powerful kicks it swam toward him. Two Chins's heart chattered like a magpie, but over that sound came another, the sound of his own voice singing the dragonfly song.

Slowly he raised the bow and drew back on the braided string. The deer swam closer, staring at Two Chins through beautiful black eyes. The chanting grew louder. As if by an invisible cord spun out by his own voice, he was pulling the deer closer to shore.

Two Chins released the arrow; with a fluttery rush it shot across the water and plunged into the deer's throat. Blood spurted from the wound, and the deer stopped swimming. The head sagged, and the antlers dipped toward the water. Clutching a knife, Two Chins leaped off the rock and splashed out to the deer. Blood dribbled from the neck and nostrils, soiling the water with a dark stain.

Two Chins grabbed the antlers, and clamping the knife between his teeth, began swimming with his free arm toward shore. Despite the arrow sticking out its throat, the deer's eyes were wide open. Two Chins noticed that they looked sleepy and relaxed, as if the deer hadn't suffered any shock or pain but was permitting him to lead it wherever he wanted. As Two Chins strained to haul the animal onshore, he shivered with

excitement. The deer was the biggest he had ever seen, with a magnificent set of antlers and haunches that would provide meat for many people in the village. Two Chins could barely contain his joy. He wanted to let out a piercing whoop, but feared it might spook the horses. Grunting between clenched teeth, he took firm hold of the antlers and dragged the dead animal into the grass.

When he ripped the knife through the deer's belly, the intestines came spilling out in a steamy mess. Then he carved open the wound in the neck and pulled out the bloody stem of the windpipe so the meat wouldn't spoil. Then, cautioning the packhorse to remain still, he hoisted the carcass onto its back and with rawhide thongs bound the rear hooves and antlers under its belly.

He wiped the knife clean, washed the blood and tissue off the arrowpoint, and returned the arrow to his quiver. Then he tied both horses to a cottonwood with enough slack so they could reach the water, and taking his parfleche he slowly climbed to the top of the hill above the lake. There, he could see out over the country, could see the vast swells of brown grass that flowed to the dark shapes of the Black Hills, observable on the western horizon. With careful movements he took a pipe out of the parfleche. Into the red catlinite bowl he pressed a mixture of tobacco and flakes from the bark of a cedar tree. With one hand gripping the stem and the other curled around the bowl, he offered the pipe to the four directions, then up to the sky and down to the ground. Then with a spark chipped from a piece of the flint and steel he ignited the mixture in the bowl, and smoked deeply and with great satisfaction.

Two Chins's life as a warrior up to this time had not been notable. Only once had he counted coup, against a Crow brave who had tried to steal horses out of his village. And only once had he stolen horses himself, from an Arapaho village a long way off by the Wind River. Now, with the slaying of the magic deer, Two Chins would be able to recount a great deed to his people. Perhaps, as a result, one of the better-known warriors of the village would decide to bestow upon Two Chins a bolder name that would more accurately reflect the bravery of the act he had just performed and his true worth as a member of the tribe.

That night he rode across rolling, windswept ground, the packhorse with the deer on its back plodding dutifully behind him. All night under a bright moon the deer's antlered head dangled below the packhorse's belly, spotting the dry grass with droplets of blood.

It was still dark when Two Chins entered the village. Horses corraled outside the ring of tipis nickered sleepily. Bats and nighthawks swished overhead. Inside the ring several dogs growled, and once he had to steer his horses out of the way of an old man who had crawled out of his tipi to die with his eyes fixed on the blaze of a new dawn.

In front of his tipi Two Chins slid off, crept inside the narrow opening, and roused his wife from a deep sleep. Many Stars uncomplainingly threw aside the buffalo robe and stepped outside to help her husband carry the deer to a rack behind the tipi. With a cord cinched around the

neck, they strung the deer up until its rear hooves dangled off the ground. Then Two Chins went inside the tipi, and without bothering to take off his clothes, fell onto the robe in exhaustion.

He slept until midday when he awoke with a dry taste in his mouth. The village was full of noises—dogs yapping, children squealing, women chatting, warriors strutting between tipis, showing off their horses. Two Chins licked his cracked lips and stretched his arms up toward the open top of the tipi. Many Stars brought him a buffalo horn filled with hot stew, which he ate ravenously. After finishing, he stroked his belly and wiggled his toes against the nappy fur of the buffalo robe. Then he stood up, and from a tanned scabbard hanging from the center pole, took a long, sharp knife.

That morning while Two Chins slept the sight of the deer on the rack behind the tipi had caused a stir among his neighbors. The points on the antlers numbered fourteen, which made it a very big deer, the biggest that many people in the village had ever seen.

"Where did you find that deer?" called Tail Feather, a warrior whose tipi sat next to Two Chins's.

"Ha!" Two Chins boomed. "I have a story to tell you! I have a story to tell everyone in the village!"

Tail Feather shuffled over to the rack and inspected the wound in the deer's neck. "You must have made some very powerful medicine to have killed it with only one arrow," he declared.

"My medicine was strong," said Two Chins. "To convince a deer like this to die requires the power of a true warrior. This afternoon, before we cook it, I will tell the story of how it died."

Two Chins and Many Stars removed the hide and quartered the deer and cut all the meat off the bones. Herself Afraid, Many Stars's mother who lived in the tipi with the childless couple, climbed a butte behind the village and gathered juniper limbs and silver sage. After several trips she had a big stack, and feeding the limbs and sage onto the coals of the cooking fire, she gradually built up a hot, sweet-smelling flame. Two Chins brought the meat around to the front of the tipi and piled it on a buffalo robe. Then he disappeared into the tipi and emerged a little later wearing his finest regalia—buckskin leggings, a shirt made from antelope hide and beaded with porcupine quills, an eagle feather dangling from a band around his head. Carrying a lance tasseled with kit-fox tails, he strolled through the village shouting, "Good deer meat! I have killed a giant deer! Come to my tipi and feast with me!"

Many of the villagers had already seen the deer, and had been waiting eagerly for the invitation. Now, after following Two Chins back to the tipi, they gathered quietly around the fire and listened to the warrior recount his brave exploit. Men, women, and children nodded and murmured with approval as Two Chins told them how the animal had risen up through the water, and how he had shot it through the neck with a single arrow. In the center of the polite throng, the fire, fueled by dry juniper limbs, popped and sizzled.

As a young man Two Chins had huddled on top of a butte in quest of a vision, and though he had fasted and prayed for four days, no bird or animal had offered to be his protector. But Two Chins had never given up trying. He went on other vision quests, and whenever possible he joined a war party to steal horses from the Arapahoes and Crows. He liked to go hunting by himself, for that way he thought he could best be ready to receive whatever bounty the Great Medicine might send him. And so it was yesterday when he had paused to drink from the lake and had encountered the deer. Now, before the eyes of the people—his heart swelling with gratitude and pride—he raised a hunk of tender meat to the sun and then around in the four directions. After pointing it to the ground and muttering a prayer, he held the hunk steady so that Many Stars could pierce it with a willow spit.

No sooner had the point of the spit touched the meat when the meat flew out of Two Chins's hands and tumbled over to the buffalo robe. There, it merged with the other chunks and began reforming itself into a solid pile of sinew, muscle, and arteries melding back into their proper places. The bones, lying in a pile under the rack behind the tipi, clattered together to form a complete skeleton, and the skeleton clanked around the tipi to the fire. The meat bounced off the buffalo robe and folded itself around the skeleton. The hide, which Two Chins had suspended over the entrance to the tipi, slithered across the ground and cloaked itself around the meat and bones. Lastly the head, with its lolling tongue, joined itself to the neck, and in a flash, before anyone could react, the dismembered parts were back together again, and the deer was bounding vigorously out of the village.

Cries and screams broke out among the people. Children hooted with terror; women wailed and covered their eyes; warriors ran to their tipis and snatched up their weapons.

Two Chins stood perfectly stil, staring at his empty hands. Many Stars and Herself Afraid collapsed at his feet, keening with loud, ululant yelps into the fringe of his buckskin leggings.

Several men mounted up and gave chase, but could find no track or evidence of the deer. An old man gathering prairie turnips outside the village said he saw it burst from between two tipis, bounce over a pack of startled dogs, and disappear into the air.

That evening Two Chins painted his chest and face with red and black circles. With a bone needle he gouged a number of small pieces of skin from his biceps and shoulders, and placed them on a buffalo skull inside the tipi. Dressed in breechcloth and moccasins, with a coyote tail dangling from the braid at the back of his head to aid him in tracking, he swung onto his best horse. As the sun dropped below the rim of the treeless plain, he rode out of the village.

All night he rode into a stiff wind, and as dawn rose over the prairie he topped the hill that looked down onto the lake. He searched the slope for signs of the deer, and not finding any, bumped his heels against the horse and started down. A breeze skipped across the grass, but the face of the water remained unruffled. In the pink glow that suffused the vast dome of

the sky, meadowlarks piped up from the tall reeds, and in an old cottonwood that crooked out over the water two owls called gruffly.

Two Chins got down from the horse and stepped onto the rocks. It was as though the deer had never existed. There were no tracks, no bark had been rubbed off the trees, no brush trampled down, no bubbles popped to the surface of the lake. And yet Two Chins was positive that the deer was there.

Clutching a medicine bag containing a smooth stone and the powdered remains of a dragonfly, he sat down on the same rock he had sat on when he first saw the deer. All day, without eating or drinking, he faced into the hot sun, following it with his eyes, chanting and praying in a steady voice. By late afternoon his eyeballs felt like bits of molten clay. Just as the arc of the sun touched the slope of the western hill, Two Chins stood up and peeled off his breechcloth and moccasins. Fresh tears streamed down his cheeks as he unloosened the coyote tail from his hair and dropped it onto the rock. Taking a deep breath, he plunged into the water and with swift strokes swam down to the bottom.

The deer wasn't there, though Two Chins wasn't disappointed. Quickly he tied his long braid to a clump of green weeds, and with both hands took firm hold of the bottom. Then he opened his eyes to this new and different world, and like the bold warrior he had always wanted to be, waited patiently for what he knew must surely come.

Paul Witherington

AT THE GARAGE SALE

Spain's not visible from the street where they back into the slot behind his rusty station wagon, or from the driveway they walk up, Carol in the lead. The garage is too dark, and there are too many people gathered around the goods that extend all the way out to the dracaena palm that Lois Spain planted ten years ago in the middle of the front yard, calling it her baby and dancing around it suspiciously even then.

First they see the metal of the cash box, then Spain's top half hunched over it, though no one is near his table, no one is buying now. Looking at the plates on another table partly in the morning sun, Carol sees why. Bits of food have crusted on them, ridges of brown cake and rings of thick tomato sauce. Nothing has been washed or even scraped. The glasses nearby are cloudy and the forks in a shoe box are webbed with egg. There are long plyboard tables of clothing too, and women unfold Lois's shirts and sweaters and look at the stains before folding them back. If ever there were a logical way to get Lois to come running back in

shame to wash and put away her things, Carol thinks, this is it. But logic isn't going to get Lois back, she's not biting at that kind of bait.

Carol who is closest to the dark inside of the garage motions to Cal and he comes slowly up to where she is holding some Christmas tree ornaments, little porcelain musicians and elves and trolls, wooden crèche animals and flat angels—each one with its own pricetag. "I remember when Lois bought these," Carol whispers. "We've got to save them for her."

"She's not coming back," Cal says, looking away. Carol does not know whether his guilt is faked or earned but she resents it as she resents Spain's display. Light without heat. Men.

A small boy takes something red from a box across the driveway and stuffs it into his pocket. Then Carol sees that it's from the box of giveaways every garage sale sets on its edge and she feels ashamed.

"I can't imagine his motive," she says.

"He's just showing off his pain."

"*Her* pain."

An umbrella goes, finally, and a clock with a broken alarm, but many people are still only curious about the life of the thirty-five-year-old woman that is spread out from the dark garage halfway to the street, like a highway accident. Pregnant mothers tow their first-borns and look in vain for children's clothes (what sort of a garage sale doesn't have toys?). A few college students in ragged shorts are looking critically at what it means to set up house. Neighbor kids come as close as they dare to the dark figure guarding the cash box and curl their bare toes off the cool cement floor as if remembering the wild dancing and singing in the backyard, the screams from inside that could be heard a block away, and the days the police were called and the rumors of madness spread. How relieved everyone was, finally, when she ran away one night with the small foreign car she had always said she could never learn to drive.

"The dishes too," Carol whispers. "I can't stand seeing them out like that."

"Reminds me of home," Cal says without a smile. If he is trying to make her feel her own guilt, he is on the wrong track. She is not one to waste time on such emotions, and she can't believe that good housekeeping is the price he has set for more attentiveness in bed.

A few older people have come to sort out causes. They knew Spain when he was growing up to the motorcycle accident that took off his left leg just above the knee. Afterward, they say, he played the clown with the plastic leg, taking it off at the roller rink after a dozen beers and sending it out onto the floor on its own skate, then reeling it in with his fishing rod while the spectators roared. It was the other side of his job at the post office, and they understood. Before long he reeled in a little Catholic girl who worked at the Dairy Queen, and Lois sat up with him until he gave up drink. She sat up a bit longer and all the foolishness went. Until now. Carol watches the older ones adding up the history. They have no intentions of buying: their basements are full of much neater garage sales.

Spain overhangs the cash box, and his fake leg sticks straight under the table. Inside the garage, various kitchen implements: a mixer, potholders stained brown and singed, a splayed vegetable brush, a toaster with a black patch over one slit, can opener and rusty bottle openers, ice cube trays, wobbly pans, a box of recipes which Carol picks up immediately and puts with her other acquisitions in a large cardboard box, long wooden matches, silk flowers in a ceramic vase, a soiled pizza cutter. Two ten-year-old boys are unwinding a long black extension cord. Behind them are the not-for-sale items every garage suffers: lawn mower, empty garbage can, coiled hoses, stepladder. And the checkout table itself with its makeshift cash box spread open to layers of little compartments.

"There's no way you can buy all of it," Cal hisses.

Spain nods at Cal and peels the tags from Carol's purchases almost reluctantly. Maybe because it means closing off part of his museum of self-pity, Cal thinks, and maybe because Spain knows the things he sells to them will go only a few blocks away. His face has fallen since that last evening they all met in the garden and tried to calm Lois down. At one time he was Cal's closest friend, and Cal supposes he should have come to visit afterwards, but he wasn't about to get into all those dead ends of what might have been. Nor does he have any desire now to sit across from the proprietor of this grief market and trade platitudes about it being for the best. Fate and all.

"There's one small thing you can do," Spain says looking between Cal and Carol. "Sit here while I get more things from the basement."

At the last moment Cal asks if Spain needs a hand.

"No sweat." Spain pulls his leg after him up the steps to the kitchen, rather like a man walking with one foot on sand and the other on ice.

There are a few people to watch, the crowd having thinned out quickly from the first curious bunch, and Cal sits at the card table with Carol at right angles. She is wearing yellow shorts and a yellow sleeveless top. Cal likes her careful, cosmetic ways and finds them something of a barrier. He thinks how Lois wore the same dress for two weeks before she fled town, her hair unwashed and uncombed, her breath wild. Carol's housekeeping is delinquent, but he has learned to appreciate that as insurance against the kind of thing that happened to Lois who in the old days could wipe up a stain before it happened. Carol is watching a couple of young girls spreading out Lois's items, and he can tell that she is playing Lois now and wanting to get up and show them how to fold things back. When Lois left, there was open speculation about another man, and Cal thinks that Carol suspected him, that when she said there was no reason to assume that it took two men to drive a woman mad she was just hiding her own jealousy, and perhaps hinting at her own capacity for madness. But Cal knows that Carol is no candidate for howling at the moon. She has too many people to save, too many projects of mercy.

As Cal stares at the compartments in front of him where a few coins

and folded bills and labels are neatly divided, he sees the box Spain used to use for fishing tackle. And now the dark corners of the garage give up their secrets: The price tags on Spain's fishing rods in a line with the rakes. Spain's golf bag with a full set of clubs and his globe of the world price-tagged in the middle of Brazil. The shotgun with one barrel over the other. Adding it up, Cal sees tags on the house itself, on Spain's wide forehead opening like a wound. He looks away before Carol sees. He wants to hang on to his own vision of things. He can imagine Spain in the half-finished basement where the mad-woman is chained on a spare bed, the fisherman kneeling unevenly between her legs and bobbing as if at some shrine. What Spain said mysteriously that day in the garden, half in the shade, while Carol was trying to quiet Lois: "One way it's been better, one thing I'll miss when she recovers." Cal didn't ask what. He wanted his own vision of them lying out in the fenced-in yard at midnight, their clothes scattered from the kitchen to the edge of the patio.

But now, as he walks down those basement steps in his imagination, Cal finds himself going not toward the bed but into the dark furnace room where he bumps and pushes aside something like a heavy quilt, then finds it swinging back into his face, the whole bulk of someone taller than life and hanging by a black extension cord just free of the floor. He falls back and the left leg of the hanging man comes with him, and Lois laughs from her chains.

"Maybe I better go inside and check on Spain."

"No need to rush," Carol replies, "he's just reeling in his fantasies."

Carol buys now from herself, in her mind, picking up the loose ends and taking them home to stack in their single-car garage because Cal will say there are already too many dirty dishes inside. Carol imagines Lois at the motel across the state line staring up from the stiff bed at a light fixture, wearing the same clothes she left in which don't even wrinkle because there's so little movement, so little outside pressure. Later at strange bars, Lois uses her new freedom to avoid entanglement. She is invisible even to waitresses. Taking the microphone near a deserted piano, she sings an old torch song that nobody hears. Puts the ice cubes from someone's discarded drink on her forehead and feels the drops fall from her eyebrows so slowly that she can enter each elongated sphere and lie there, curled to its shape.

Two old men gesture over a pile of coat hangers, their own shoulders little more than wire. A woman with her child strapped in a stroller goes through the aisles looking from side to side. When she finds nothing for her baby, she looks accusingly at Carol. My boy and girl are at summer camp, Carol wants to tell her. High in the Sierras.

She can well imagine leaving Cal some day, though not for anything as silly as his flirtations with Lois, but when she does, she will take everything so she never has to look back, never has to imagine what was left half in or out for Cal to hang his sorrows on. During the day she will work at a fast food place with her hair tucked under her yellow billed hat. At night she will lie with her legs up and listen to others' stories.

Hearing the door slam, she looks over her shoulder, and it's Spain clopping down the three steps with his weight on his good leg, and Cal following with the same limp, the same melancholy lurch, mocking and not aware of mockery.

Cal steers the car around Spain's rusty station wagon. His left arm is out the left window and Carol's right arm is out the right. The back seat and trunk are full of Lois's things. Carol's white legs are closed crossed, he observes.

"You notice I didn't go wild over the guns and stuff he had for sale."

She looks at his arm in the noon position on the wheel. "They weren't really for sale. Most of them didn't even have tags. Besides, he would never have put *his* things out dirty."

"The dishes weren't really for sale either."

Cal watches her lean forward to unstick herself from the hot seat.

"Anyway," she said, "When she comes back, she'll know where they are. He'll want her to buy them back."

"Meanwhile they'll sit in our garage."

"Something like that."

"But you know she isn't coming back."

They turn onto Grand Avenue, a car's width apart. They won't look directly at guilt or jealousy, not because these emotions might hurt, like the sun, but because like more distant stars they might fade from view.

Cal makes the turn into their driveway so sharp that Lois's dishes in the box slide from one side of the seat to the other, and Carol's legs come uncrossed, one of them red from the contact. More of his drama. More of her devouring mercy. They quarrel as they are unloading the car, come to terms over a cold drink, and go to bed in the heat of the afternoon to make an unusually passionate love.

Kerry E. Wilke

SARA'S CROW

The bird arrived in early May. I was splitting logs behind the cabin when I heard the crunch of Sara's footsteps on the gravel path which led back to the henhouse.

"Pete."

"Yes?"

"Look what I found."

I glanced over my shoulder and then lowered the axe. The late afternoon sun silvered the black feathers which spilled over Sara's hands. I pulled off my glove, stuck the axe into the stump, and followed her into the cabin.

"A crow? Where was it?"

"In the henhouse. It looks like he flew into the wall and stunned himself. The old rooster had him down on the ground and was tearing at him when I went in to get the eggs." She put the bird on the table and ran her hands over it.

"He's got some wounds on his chest and a bad gash over his eye." She parted the silken feathers between the crow's closed eyes. "Give me a wet rag, please Pete."

I got one, and she removed the blood from the bird and bathed the lump on its head.

"I think it might be okay. Could you get me one of the crates we brought the chickens up in, please?."

When I came back inside she was sitting in the rocking chair a few feet from the fire.

"Where is it?"

"Here."

She parted the woolen smock she wore over her jeans. The crow lay against her breast, looking blacker than ever against her creamy skin, his eyes open.

"Sara, he'll tear you to pieces. Get him out!" I moved forward and she put up her hand to stop me.

"No," she said. "I've done this before. I don't know why it is, but they never try to get away. Of course," she looked down, "not with a crow."

He looked up at her as she spoke, but his body remained motionless against hers.

"How long will you leave him there?"

"An hour, maybe."

The baby whimpered, and I lifted her from her crib and put her down on the hearthrug. Sara rocked slowly, staring into the fire and humming softly. Ann crawled towards her, but she didn't look down.

The baby began playing with her toys, babbling softly and letting out an occasional shrill cry as she lifted some favorite toy up to her face to kiss it. I stirred the logs, watching Sara. The firelight lit up the planes of her face and the sweep of dark blonde hair which fell to her shoulders. Several large curls had fallen inside the neck of her green smock and lay against the crow's back. Her brown eyes were almost closed, and the bird's beak made a small pucker in the lightly freckled curve of her breast.

After about an hour she put the crow into the box and we placed it high in the rafters of the cabin.

"I'll give him some water and wheatberries in the morning," Sara said. "Maybe he'll be strong enough to set free by then."

But he wasn't. Next morning he lay in the corner of the box, staring bleakly at me as I lifted it down. Sara offered him food and spoke crooningly to him, but although he fluffed his feathers out at the sound of her voice, he didn't eat.

"Well, it might take a day or two."

"By the time I leave, maybe," I said.

"No! You're not leaving. I'll ask Dad for money."

"You asked him last year and we haven't paid that back yet."

The baby whimpered at the harshness of my voice.

"Please, Pete, don't go. What if something happens?"

"If there's any problem you can call your father, that's why we have the phone. Maybe you should go and stay with him for a month. I'll be back as soon as I can."

"I will not! This is my home, and I'm staying here."

"That's up to you," I said, as I always did at this point in the conversation.

"What if the baby comes early?"

"Sara, it's not due until July. I have to go, otherwise we'll have no money for the hospital."

"But Dad . . ."

"The hell with your father!" I shouted. Annie wailed and I picked her up. "We chose this life, your father shouldn't have to pay for it," I said, more quietly.

"He doesn't mind, he's got plenty."

"I mind. We're not asking him again."

Sara sat stiffly at the table, a large tear sliding down her cheek.

"It's so lonely here without you."

I pulled her to her feet and put her head under my chin, feeling the hard bulge of the baby inside her pressing against my thighs.

"Honey, I have to go. You know I can't stand being away from you. It's like a nightmare out there in the Gulf, but the rig's the only way I can make enough in a short time. It'll only be for a month."

"But it's so dangerous out there. Oh, how can you do this?" She pulled away, her face twisting in distress. "It's my fault, if I could have kids normally like everyone else it wouldn't be necessary."

"Millions of women have Caesareans, it's almost inevitable in our case. Or maybe you think you should have picked a smaller husband?" I took her shoulders, kissing her wet lashes. She laughed, then sobbed, and pressed against me.

There was a faint rasping noise from the box on the table, and we turned. The crow was on his feet, watching us. I bent to look in at him and he opened his mouth in a silent threat.

"I don't think he likes me," I said.

Later I went out to feed the hens. After I finished I gathered the eggs and was at the last nest before I noticed the bodies of two young cocks lying beneath the perches at the back of the henhouse. I took them out into the sunlight. Each had an eye missing, and their skulls were gashed to the bone across the eye sockets. I squatted, looking at the limp carcasses, for quite a while. Then I took them and dropped them down the hole in the outhouse.

When I got back to the cabin I heard Sara singing softly from the front garden. I put down the basket of eggs, slipped out of my shoes at the back door, and stepped inside. Ann was in her playpen in the center of the floor, sitting quite still, staring at the crow which was perched on the edge of the playpen, a few inches from her face.

"Get away from there, you black bastard!" I leaped forward, swiping at the bird. Ann started, and the crow fluttered onto the table and went into his box. I lifted the baby and went out the front door.

"That goddamned bird was sitting right beside her. Did you leave his cage open?"

"Me? You were looking at him last." Sara stood, wiping her hands down her jeans.

"He was sitting right by her face, he could have ripped her eyes out."

Sara smiled faintly, and bent to pick up her trowel.

"Don't exaggerate, Peter. He's too weak even to fly yet, and he's shown no signs of aggression."

"He flew! I saw him fly back onto the table."

Sara turned and walked into the cabin.

I followed. "Sara, we have to let him go."

"It's too soon, Pete. Let's wait until he gets stronger, just a day or two more."

"Now! He goes now." I grabbed her arm and spun her around, and dumped Ann into her arms. I fastened the catch on the crow's cage and swung it down off the table. He let out a loud screech as I carried it outside, and I felt the hairs on my arms rise. Sara walked silently after me and stood in the doorway holding the baby, still wearing that aggravating half-smile.

When I unfastened the cage door and opened it the crow made no attempt to fly out. I kicked the cage so that it tipped and he took a few quick steps downward and braced himself against the side so he wouldn't slide out onto the grass.

"Out, get out!" My second kick toppled the cage over, trapping the crow inside, so I picked it up and swung it in a short arc. The bird shot out and fell to the ground.

"Stop it, Peter, he can't fly yet." Sara pushed me aside and gathered up the crow. She held him protectively against her chest and shouted at me.

"I won't let you! He's mine, and I'm keeping him till he's better." She grabbed up the cage and ran clumsily back to the house with it banging against her legs. She didn't seem to notice. Before she ran out she had dumped Ann in the doorway, and the corner of the box narrowly missed the child's face as Sara rushed past her. The baby wailed loudly, and I picked her up and comforted her as I went back inside.

Sara was standing on the table, placing the box back on the beam beneath the roof. She lowered her arms, and rested one hand on her stomach.

"Please, Pete, he can't fly yet."

"I told you, Sara, I saw him fly."

She dropped her gaze and climbed down.

"Okay, sorry, but not very well. We'll let him go tomorrow or the next day, I promise."

"I'm leaving the day after tomorrow. He's leaving tomorrow."

"All right," she said.

We went to bed early, and I lay watching the firelight flickering on the brass knobs of the baby's crib, Sara curled against my chest. All the old arguments I'd brought up against moving up into the mountains whirled around in my head, and I wondered for the thousandth time if we were doing the right thing.

Eventually I slept, to dream that I was walking through the streets of a metallic city, surrounded by people. As I looked about me I saw that their bodies were human, dressed in chain mesh tunics, but that their heads and hands were of shining gray steel, with switches and dials in place of features, and pincers for fingers.

I stopped, looking up at the tall symmetrical buildings, and the dull whiteness of the sky. Far in the distance a black speck appeared, approaching with tremendous speed until I was able to make out a flock of crows, hundreds of feet wide. The cloud of birds sped towards me, until it reached the street on which I stood, where it stopped, hanging above me and blotting out the light.

The mass of black feathers seethed, and Sara's face appeared among them, looking down at me. I stretched my arms up to her, but she shook her head.

"No," she called, "I can't, the baby's coming."

The flock of birds began to move again, and I pushed my way along the crowded street, trying to keep up with it. I woke, sweating, to find the cabin dark and the fire a faint glow.

Sara wasn't beside me, and a faint squeak drew my attention to the rocker. I got out of bed and walked across the cabin.

Sara rocked slowly in the chair, her feet braced against the wall next to the fireplace. The chair sloped backwards so that she was almost lying, with her head on a pillow from the bed. Her eyes were closed, and the crow slept on the pillow beside her, one of his claws resting against her cheek. I caught my breath and his eyes opened. For a moment our gazes held, and he screeched at me.

Sara's feet hit the floor and she grabbed for the bird as he fluttered away and up into his box.

"Peter, you gave me such a fright."

"What the hell are you doing?"

"I couldn't sleep in bed, my back hurts. I thought a change of position might help. He just came down to keep me company."

"Get back into bed."

She stared at me.

"Okay. I'll just make some hot milk or a . . ."

"Get back into bed." I took her arm, pulling her out of the chair. I dragged her across the room, and she sat down on the bed. She didn't speak again. I pushed her over and got in. After a minute she lay down, and we lay without talking until the sun came up and Ann began babbling.

After breakfast I got the cage down from the rafters and took it outside. Sara watched me from the doorway, as before. This time the crow walked out and took a few menacing steps towards me before he took off. He swept up and over the house and flew away down the hill. I watched him out of sight and then picked up the box and took it back to the shed.

The morning was cool, but by noon the sun had warmed the crisp Ozark air enough for us to take the baby up the mountain for a picnic. Sara was quiet, sitting cross-legged with the mound of her belly resting against her ankles.

"It moves a lot now," she said, resting her hand on it. "Usually when I'm sitting still." She brushed some grass out of Ann's hair.

"Sara, I have to go, can't you understand?" I reached for her hand, and she squeezed mine.

"I don't see why."

"This is the last baby. It won't be necessary again, I promise."

She looked out over the tree tops towards our cabin.

"I suppose so."

"Look at me."

She turned and smiled.

"I know." Her eyes slid away and out over the trees and my gaze followed hers.

"Let's get back now," I said, picking up Ann. "I want to get more wood cut for you in case it turns cold again while I'm gone."

When we got back I split logs for a couple of hours, but I didn't see the crow.

After supper I cleaned and loaded the shotgun, and put it in its rack near the door. We sat in front of the fire for a long time, talking about the new baby, and what we'd do when Ann got big enough for kindergarten. Sara sat on the rug, leaning against my knees. The baby slept face down beside her, her knees drawn up beneath her and her bottom in the air. Her red curls made a splash of color against the grays and greens of the patchwork rug.

We ate breakfast early and I had my bag packed by seven. Sara didn't clutch me the way she usually did when we parted. She stood in the doorway with Ann in her arms, waving, as I set off down the hill. About a third of the way down I looked back, but she'd gone inside. I went on, sliding on loose stones, until I reached the road about an hour later.

As I sat on the bank waiting for a lift I caught a flash out of the corner of my eye and turned, but I didn't see anything. I tried to thumb a lift with a couple of cars, but they were both full. I looked back up the hill to where I could see the sun reflecting off the windows of the cabin.

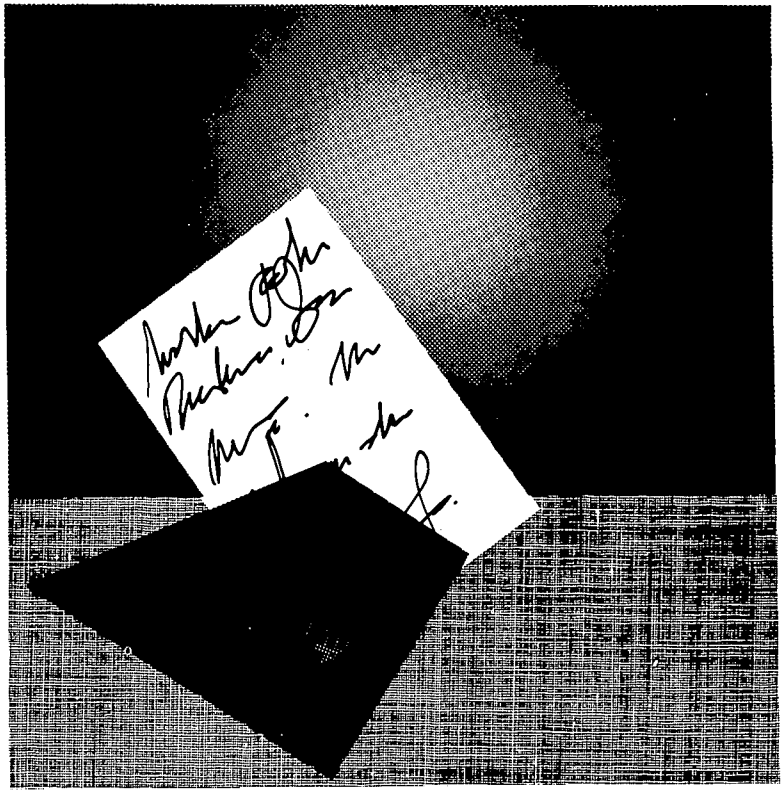
After about half an hour I threw my bag over the fence and climbed after it. I began ascending the path, slowly at first and then with increasing speed. By the time I reached the spot from which I'd looked back at the cabin, I was almost running. I dropped my bag and went on, faster.

Avoiding the gravel path, I approached the cabin over the grass and looked in the window. The aluminum bathtub was set up in the middle of the floor, filling with steaming water. Ann stood solemnly in her crib, still in her pajamas. Sara sat in the sudsy water, her eyes closed, lathering her hair. From his box on the table the crow watched.

I unlaced my boots and left them under the window. Quietly I stepped in the door, picked up the box, and walked out with it, holding the cage door shut. I put it on the chopping block and pulled on my glove. The crow struggled as I dragged him out. Holding him down with one hand, I brought the back of the axe down on his skull. I continued hammering at him long after he was dead, and then I took him out to the outhouse, and dropped him in. I put the box back in the shed and washed my hands and arms at the well.

My boots were warm when I put them back on. I walked into the cabin and sat down at the table. Sara looked around.

"Call your father," I told her.



REVIEWS

ASTONISHMENT OF HEART by Edwin Moses
SEGUES by William Stafford and Marvin Bell
FINDING THE BROKEN MAN by Scott Cairns
MEDITERRANEAN POEMS by Vance Crummett

ASTONISHMENT OF HEART by Edwin Moses. Macmillan: New York, 1984. 302 pages. $14.95 hardback.

Martin Troyer is a prisoner of time. He is also a prisoner of a secret. And between the two of them, he is astonished at least.

Edwin Moses' second novel is a tale of Martin Troyer, a man driven to the brink of death by his obsession with a secret learned at his mother's deathbed. For fifty years, Ellen Troyer kept the secret that she killed a tramp who begged for water at the back door of the Troyer farm house. The secret plagues Martin's imagination and dominates his relationships with other characters in the novel. In effect, it changes a rather ordinary English professor into what Moses calls "a no-man in no-time," a man who is lost, who "is smitten with madness, and blindness, and astonishment of heart.

Martin is a victim of his mother's madness, a madness he is not aware of until, after patiently reconstructing his past, he deconstructs his own sanity. "Think of it logically," Martin considers, "if she did it in self-defense she was nevertheless mad, because otherwise she would have told someone. If she did it not in self-defense then it was murder, for which she could have had no sane motive, and therefore she was mad."

The madness is everywhere. No flowers grow on the Troyer farm, the salt of the earth; Ellen dons only black, even for Martin's wedding; she become an old testament God whose only hope is to save her son from the punishment she has endured. She makes sure Martin gets away from farming and into "the ivory tower," (from black to white), the academic haven where "scholars go to get away from the world," as Ellen says. There Martin will be free of madness, free of the farm, free from a non-prosperous land. Ironically, however, he finds madness in his academic haven, also.

The novel opens during Martin's sabbatical year, when a young, aggressive woman whom Martin sees as his possible replacement moves into his office; there are rumors Martin is retiring. Martin's son, Paul, wants the farm his grandmother left. Martin's wife, Barbara, is being pursued by the department lecher. Martin is losing what he cannot see; he is losing his comfortable world, which is being replaced by the confines of time, complication, and astonishment of heart.

Martin's separate worlds affect him differently, yet they intersect as well. With Martin must deal not only with his son's demands that Martin sell him the farm; he must also deal with his attraction to Lisa, Paul's betrothed, a woman toward whom Martin's feels very gentle, protective, nearly paternal. He must also deal with the haunting memories of his mother, as well as his memory of father Jacob, a weak, incompetent man who had grown up a farmer without enjoying it, who married Ellen and let her run the place for him, "just as he'd hoped she would."

At the University, Martin must deal with Marie, the replacement, who is involved in a rather intriguing story-within-a-story as a self-appointed savior trying to protect a suicidal woman who has hopelessly identified

herself with a character in a poorly written novel by the man who is pursuing Martin's wife.

Moses' most fascinating character is Martin's wife Barbara, a charming mixture of wit, art, and passion. Martin is hopelessly in love with his wife, yet he feels he inevitably will lose her, primarily because of his inability to deal with a secret only he and Barbara share.

Secrets dominate this novel. Lisa and Paul plan a secret wedding; Martin's alleged retirement is a secret; there are secret affairs, lies to protect secrets, secretive journeys, and Ellen's secret, the biggest of all. The pace of the writing is secretly seductive to match. One cannot help being entranced by Moses' subtlety, both in language and tone.

Time dominates Martin throughout the book. A ceiling clock ticks in Martin's room, and Martin says Time's mythical mate, Death "sits in a dusty office, with a great black book and an ancient, a primordial telephone in front of him. He flips through the book at random and dials whatever number his claw falls on. But if you should be out when he calls, or your lines busy, he flips on and might not get back to you for years."

Martin constantly tries to hold onto his secrets, yet time and complication uncover them, just as time will eventually uncover the bones of the man Ellen Troyer buried in her field. There is hope for Martin, however. Though he and Death mingle, causing him to be astonished of heart, he is also astonished by joy, and by hope, time's tranquilizers, complication's combatants.

Moses has progressed greatly from his first novel, *One Smart Kid,* a hit in its own right. *Astonishment of Heart* is much more powerful, much more emotional and complex. It has been said that a writer's toughest task is not selling the first novel, but selling the second, and from the looks of *Astonishment of Heart,* Moses has establishing himself as a literary force to be reckoned with for years to come.

—Gary Brown

SEGUES: A CORRESPONDENCE IN POETRY by William Stafford and Marvin Bell. Godine: 306 Dartmouth Street, Boston, MA 02116, 1984. 52 pages. $12.95, hardcover; $8.95, paper.

The court life of feudal Japan often included poetry as a refined recreation. Lords and ladies were given beginning lines and asked to compose endings, often extemporaneously. These fests celebrated holidays, love, or challenges. William Stafford and Marvin Bell continue this tradition of shared poetry in their co-authored book, *Segues.*

The book consists of twenty-two exchanges of letter-poems. Stafford begins the series with "Hunger for Stories," and Bell responds with "The Part I Know." Stafford's verse asserts, "everything is telling one big story." Bell responds,

. . . A breeze will move a road,
and a ghost push us.
Sometimes, I look. I pinch off
a part of the story I know;
toss it to you. And other parts to
my mother, Belle, and my sister, Ruby.

Ideas thus develop "incrementally," according to the preface, in this unique correspondence.

Part of the success of the book is due to the ability of the poets. William Stafford, originally from Kansas, has won the National Book Award, among others. Their work blends together well, too, perhaps because both have ties to the Writers' Workshop at The University of Iowa. Stafford graduated from Iowa, and Bell teaches there now. Their shared background shows in their work: each poem has a burnished intellectual content; each includes imagery that develops, disappears, and reappears transformed; each creates tension between events and inner understanding. Bell's poem on running, "Slow," shows his mind working:

Out-and-back runs, says David,
are like folding a piece of paper.
At the far end, you know what to do.
Loops are the worst, repeating what you see
as if you owned it. You look forward
to the past; the run lengthens. . . .

A particular strength in Stafford's work is his familiarity with childhood. Even in his prose preface, he writes, "What if we tried playing annie-over with poems," and the term "annie-over" evokes a playfulness unexpected in a dignified form. His writing captures a child's sense of joy.

Throughout his share of the poems, Stafford refers to childhood memories, layering them with his and Bell's immediate concerns, such as schooling, the eruption of Mt. St. Helens, pacifism, language, and racism. Although Stafford left Kansas years ago, his work still is rooted here.

"Accepting What Comes" illustrates this poet's wonderment:

In a mirror so deep it's forever I see
that river come back, turning the whole world
around. Friends, it became like the Yukon
when I said, "Go away and leave me alone"—
But it gave me something to give you, here,
in my hand: this page. I write on it
what I find out there in any country. Please promise
to read it so well it will happen again—
Those turns, those dark little trees at the end
of the road, and the twang when the river appears,
a sudden long curve braced against
a horizon too grand for the eye to believe.
Friends, I tell you it's gold, it is better
than gold, if you learn to accept what you find

Though written by two men, these poems have a unity. Bell writes, "A series like this—is overlapping, with eyes front and back and chances to rest." And part way through the book, an on-going narrative appears—the two poets gradually reveal their lives to each other, and to us. This book should be read at a single sitting, so the continuity is sharper.

The work "segues" means "transitions from one musical theme to another." Each poem suggests a shift in the same song, a chord change in a still unrecognizable melody. This exchange of verses is pleasing to read. It invites the reader to try more communal writing, an art seldom developed in the West.

—Denise Low

FINDING THE BROKEN MAN by Scott Cairns. Window Press: Minneapolis, MN, 1982. 28 pages, $3.95, paper.

The language of Scott Cairns' poems is spare, and the vision is severe. Yet being spare, his lines are made memorable, and being severe, his sense of our lives makes for surprise and survival. In his poems, words seem to have literal weight; they drop like pebbles into our consciousness to quicken our amazement, our questions, and our responsibilities.

Although several of Cairns' poems seem set in a known region—The Pacific Northwest—far more are set in the mind's space. The landscapes, houses, and rooms of the poems are the landscapes, houses and rooms of all our lives, of all our memories. However, an area in this life is clearly identified. Thus, in "First Days in the Borrowed House" Cairns particularizes the tough experiences of relearning the most intimate of routines, and in "Exposure" realizes the value of struggle even as one is relieved by comfort. The poems refer to the familiar toaster cord and wool blanket, to the familiar actions of everyday life. If Cairns uses hyperbole, referring here to "some ancient † thing in the disposal" and there to "a thousand stripes of old blood † where a thousand brambles reached out † to slow my frantic crawling," he restores us to a specific bed, a specific "patch of earth."

Cairns seems to find continual value in images of waking and sleeping, sight and blindness, light and darkness. They appear in many of the poems in *Broken Man*: "A Return," "Waking Here," "Esau's Book," "The martyr," "The Murderer of Children Finds His Voice," and "Waking in the Borrowed House," among others. Given his penchant for particular images—indeed his penchant for being a poet—Cairns proposes in "Taking Off Our Clothes":

> Let's pretend for now that there is
> no such thing as metaphor; you know,
> waking up will just be waking up,
> darkness will no longer have to be
> anything but dark.

He thus makes us aware of the fact that all words shape our sense of reality, of the fact that some words deepen that sense. In "Naming," a poem filled with a conscious stuttering of phrases, he makes us feel that until we can give a word to the quality of light glancing through water, we cannot know it. Yet how to grasp either light or water? In the poem's final stanza, Cairns poses the problem and resolves it:

> the thing is to gather that light
> or to seem to until it's firm in your hand
> a good grip a grip of good light and once
> you've got the feel of it drink

Van Gogh in "We take the train for Tarascon. . ." "finger[s] the light into language." The "murderer of children" in another poem lives in a "shadow world" where nothing has shape or definition and there are no words for his actions; "We have stories / full of unclear language, whole volumes / of wrong names." A world of such diffusion, confusion in Cairns' terms, can only be immoral.

In "Esau's book" and "The Book of Lazarus," Cairns imagines the existence of these Biblical characters beyond the decisive moment in their lives. In "The Sheriff's Last Pronouncement" and "The Professor of History Resigns," the spokesmen make final statements to young people, advising them to "Stay home," to find reality not in the dreams of Robin Hood or the study of history, but in "poetry and lyric prose": "Learn to lie † in honest ways."

The world which Cairns sees has a terrible and a homely beauty; he writes neither of holocaust nor apocalypse, but of another sort of change:

> . . .as a man is changed
> when his hand, caught
> in machinery, is drawn from him.

He writes of the marvelous appearance of "a hundred elk rising," of "the occasional gift / of a cold and shaking woman getting warm." This world turns on tight paradoxes where knowing we cannot find words, we must nevertheless struggle to find them; where knowing our errors, we must be ready to forgive; where knowing the difficulty of the terrain, we may recognize wonder in it. For Cairns, as for Frost, "The only way out is through," and though it is rough going, it's well worth the while. As are his poems.

—Elizabeth Schultz

MEDITERRANEAN POEMS by Vance Crummett. Poetry of the Present, 4132 Warwick, Kansas City, MO 64111, 1984. No price listed.

Vance Crummett, a graduate of Kansas University who currently serves as an Assistant Editor of *New Letters* and teaches at the University of Missouri in Kansas City, here presents a small chapbook of some twenty pages. He takes the literal meaning of *mediterranean,* "in the middle of land," and applies it to the center of the United States, in which he sees both the exotic and the common.

I hear your footsteps coming
as though over soft grass
a sound
like branches breaking
in my ears

—from "A Woman Like Willows"

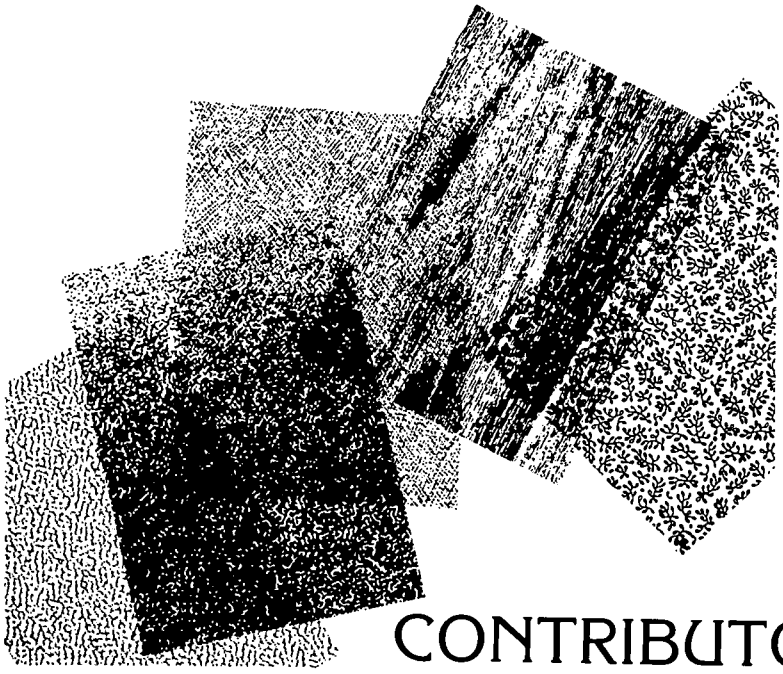
The mysterious hush in the first part of the stanza resolves into the throbbing *b*'s of *branches breaking.* They break in his ears, as if the whole outside world were reduced somehow to a world inside his own head. Yet his midwestern sense of realism will not allow him to be carried away completely. The poem closes not with a lyrical appeal to the woman but with his wry observation about the outside world.

For three days now I've been late to work.

Crummett's poems abound in silences, in dreams. The delicate spacing between words often becomes as important as the words themselves. He will not conquer the world, for the world has already conquered him, absorbing him into a medi-terranean peace.

a windblown sun
a sky filled with memories
orchestrations of leaves
a bucket of water
an empty chair by a window
a white porch carried aloft by
green leaves
oh perfect sound
oh willow pouring down.
—from "One Morning"

—Victor Contoski



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Victor Contoski (Rt. 6 Box 230, Lawrence KS 66044) has written a choral poem, "Quantrill's Raid," which will be performed by the Kansas University orchestra and chorus in Spring 1985.

Tess Enroth (7048 La Costa, Citrus Heights CA 95621) has published many poems, but "Deadly Sins" is her first published fiction.

Linda Girard (24499 Kelsey Rd., Barrington IL 60010) has published a number of fairy tale poems over the past two years. Peter Rabbit and Foxy Loxy have been in ASCENT and Red Riding Hood in NIMROD.

Ruth Good (119 Old Road, Westport CT 06880) has recent work in SOUTHERN POETRY REVIEW and the LITERARY REVIEW.

J.B. Goodenough (PO Box 218, Carlisle MA 01741) had several poem in NEW DIRECTIONS IN PROSE AND POETRY 46 last year. Her first collection, DOWER LAND, is from Cleveland State University Press.

Robert Harlow (407 Spring 5, Albany NY 12203) has an MFA from the University of Arizona and is presently working on a Ph.D. at SUNY-Albany.

Steven Hind (503 Monterey Pl., Hutchinson KS 67507) published FAMILIAR GROUND, his first poetry collection, with COTTONWOOD. A second edition of that book was printed in 1984.

Fleda Brown Jackson (Dept of English—Univ. Dela., Newark DE 19711) edits CAESURA, a literary magazine, and the NEWSLETTER OF THE D.H. LAWRENCE SOCIETY OF NORTH AMERICA. She has published in KENYON REVIEW, MID-AMERICAN REVIEW, BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL, and many other magazines.

Harvey Lillywhite (English Dept. Towson State, Baltimore MD 21204) has published in POETRY EAST, PLOUGHSHARES, and THE MISSOURI REVIEW.

George Looney (Eng. Dept—BGSU, Bowling Green OH 43402) is an associate editor of MID-AMERICAN REVIEW and co-editor of POOKA PRESS.

Denise Low (1916 Stratford, Lawrence KS 66044) edited COTTONWOOD's anthology of Kansas poetry, CONFLUENCE. Her latest book of poetry, SPRING GEESE AND OTHER POEMS, is just out from Kansas University's Museum of Natural History.

Ann Michael (7446 Overhill Rd, Melrose Park PA 19126) is, with David Dunn, a co-editor of LIMBO BAR&GRILL BOOKS, a small press. She has published in many literary magazines.

Ruth Moritz (515 N. 11th, Salina KS 67401) is a poet as well as a graphic artist. She has done cover work for HANGING LOOSE.

Judy Roitman (Math Dept—KU, Lawrence KS 66045) is a mathematics professor and mother of a three-year-old son.

Miriam Sagan (RFD 1 Box 26a, Chilmark MA 02535) is the author of AEGEAN DOORWAY (Zephyr Press, 1984). Her work has appeared in such magazines as PLOUGHSHARES, AMERICAN POETRY REVIEW, MADEMOISELLE, and HANGING LOOSE.

Elizabeth Schultz (English Dept—KU, Lawrence KS 66044) teaches and writes of American, Afro-American, Japanese, and women's literature and culture. Her present work concerns the transformations of MOBY

DICK in twentieth-century American literature, art and culture. She holds the University of Kansas Endowment Association Teaching Professorship.

William Stafford (1050 Sunningdale, Lake Oswego OR 97034) needs no introduction. We are pleased to be able to review in this issue a recent book, SEGUES, his"conversations in poetry" with Marvin Bell.

Patrick Stanhope (Box 297, Colwich KS 67030) is working on a creative writing degree at Wichita State. This is his second appearance in COTTONWOOD.

Larry Starzec (244 Harding St., Grayslake IL 60030) is Vice President of the Merchandise National Bank of Chicago and has published poems in a number of small magazines including KANSAS QUARTERLY and SOU'WESTER.

Lyn Stefenhagens (61 Lounsbury Rd., Ridgefield CN 06877).

Austin Straus (c/o Coleman, PO Box 29154, Los Angeles CA 90020) has had work in POETRY NOW, CAFE SOLO, THIRD RAIL, and many other magazines, as well as a number of anthologies. He is co-host of THE POETRY CONNEXION on KPFK-FM in Los Angeles.

Rodney Torreson (1052 Dick NW, Grand Rapids MI 49504) has had work previously in COTTONWOOD.

Heather Tosteson (P.O. Box 210193, San Francisco CA 94122) has had poetry in SOUTHERN POETRY REVIEW, POETRY NORTHWEST, and INTRO 11. She has only recently shifted to fiction; her first short story appeared in WESTERN HUMANITIES REVIEW.

William Trowbridge (223 W. First, Maryville MO 64468) has had poems in PRAIRIE SCHOONER, THE MISSOURI REVIEW, NEW LETTERS, and many other magazines.

Kerry E. Wilke (7019-24th NW, Seattle WA 98117) is completing an M.A. in the Advanced Writing Program at the University of Washington and has published poetry and fiction in such magazines as NEXUS, PASSAGE V, and POETRY SEATTLE.

Paul Witherington (1620 Elmwood, Brookings SD 57006) has published fiction in KANSAS QUARTERLY, PRISM INTERNATIONAL, WISCONSIN REVIEW, and EPOCH. He teaches at OUTH Dakota State.

Joan Wolf (806 Greenvale, Northfield MN 55057) will publish her first book of poems this summer. The collection, entitled THE DIVIDED SPHERE, is from Floating Island Press.

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STAFFORD ISSUE:
New poetry by William Stafford
Steven Hind interviews William Stafford
Review of SEGUES: A Correspondence in Poetry
by William Stafford & Marvin Bell