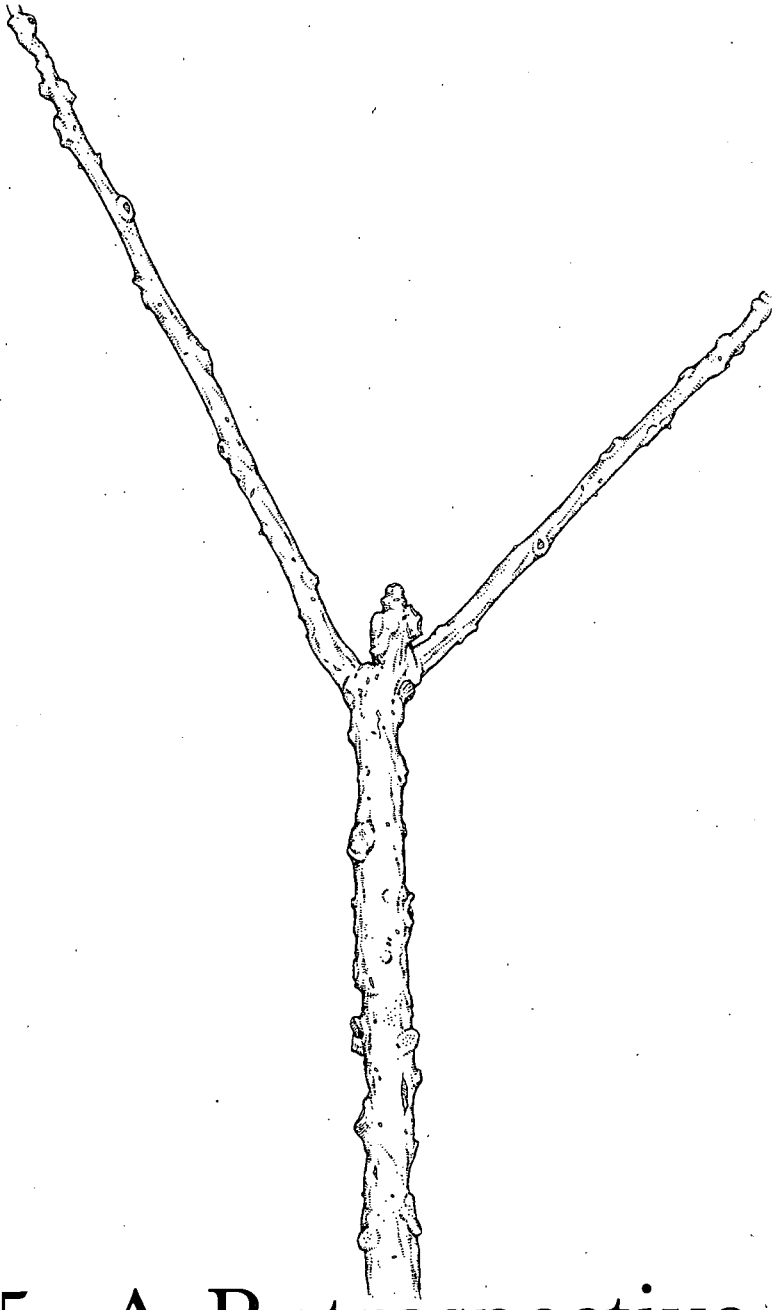
COTTONWOOD



35: A Retrospective

COTTONWOOD

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SPRING 1985

Edited by Erleen J. Christensen

COTTONWOOD 35

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.

Since COTTONWOOD has no regular source of funding, we depend heavily on the interest and support of our subscribers. Issues appear tri-quarterly at $4.00 per issue or $12.00 for a three-issue subscription. Although issues are sometimes irregular, three issues are guaranteed per subscription. Subscriptions and submissions should be directed to:

COTTONWOOD MAGAZINE
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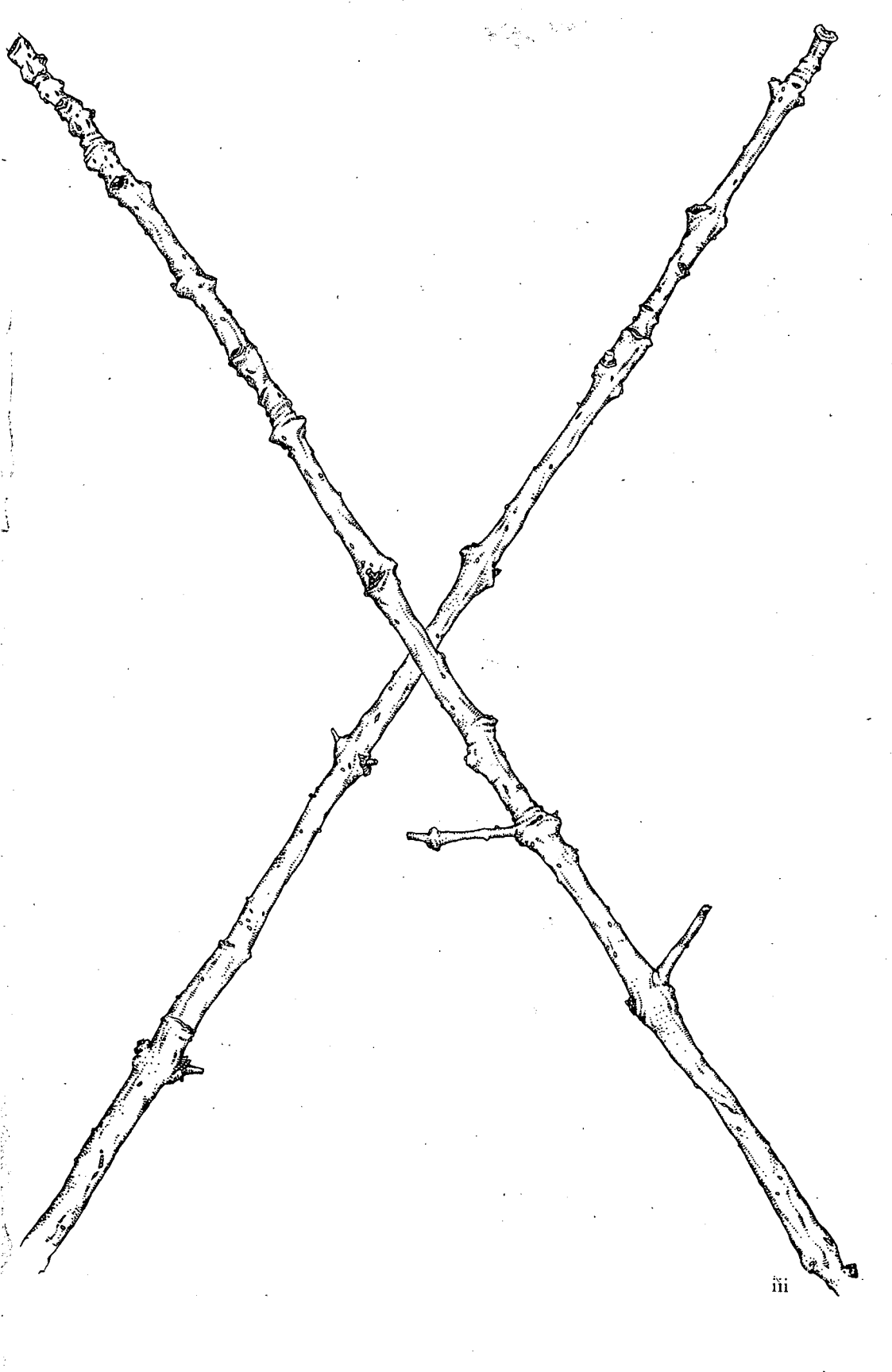

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COTTONWOOD 35: A RETROSPECTIVE

Subsequent publication history of these works (as given to us by their authors) is included in the contributors' notes.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

In a newspaper story on COTTONWOOD's retrospective issue, I was reported to have "said with a sigh" that I had read every issue of COTTONWOOD. If I sighed, I'm afraid it was a reaction to the reporter's late-night phone call not to the task in question. *Reading*, and rereading, thirty-four issues of COTTONWOOD was a pleasant task, an intriguing stroll through the literary history of my own lifetime—a chance to see what we valued and admired a decade ago, two decades ago; a chance to see *our* literary period take shape as I read, no longer embroiled in living that phase of history.

This retrospective presents neither a literary history nor a representative selection of the past two decades—instead, it presents a sampling (inevitably biased) of what one person in 1985 considered the best of what we had printed in those thirty-four issues.

Certain artificial limitations made the selection easier. I did not consider reviews and interviews, any work which had been reprinted from other sources, or work from books and chapbooks published by COTTONWOOD (unless that material *also* appeared in the magazine).

I'd like to thank, not merely the people who helped with this issue, but those who've been such a help throughout my editorship—Michael Smetzer, who learned how to run a magazine first but let me know COTTONWOOD was my baby *now*; Mel Farley, who taught me the ropes, and remained friends; Sharon Warner, who always offered a helping hand or a shoulder to cry on; Sally McNall, who stepped in when the going got tough; Phil Wedge, who *learned* the ropes faster than anyone I've ever known; Tamara Dubin, who has done more of the dirty jobs than any one person should ever have to do; Denise Low, who just kept on promoting and selling COTTONWOOD; Jon Blumb who made the photo selections; Melissa Nolte who did the pasteup; and all the others who've found time for COTTONWOOD when they didn't have any.

And finally, to Michael Johnson, George Wedge, and all the present staff members who are carrying COTTONWOOD into its third decade, my thanks and best wishes.

—Erleen J. Christensen

COTTONWOOD—A Brief History

NOTE: COTTONWOOD's numbering system went through several confusing transmutations in its early years, but when Michael Smetzer set up the archives in 1975, he simply numbered the past issues from 1-17 consecutively and began to use that numbering system on the magazine itself with 18. In the material which follows, the consecutive numbers will be used rather than original numbers.

Bill Kneif, the editor of the first and second issues of COTTONWOOD and an advisor to the third, writes from Taos, New Mexico;

> It's hard to believe that twenty years have gone by since Bob Day told me that there was a little money—maybe $500.00 or even $250.00—and no active organization left over from Quill Magazine, and Ed Eigner was the amazingly calm and perceptive first advisor, and I was a freshman, and it was Spring in Lawrence. Dear God. I don't think you really realize how amazing it is that Cottonwood survived the first twenty *weeks*. But it did, mostly due to the hard work of a long line of dedicated people, I would imagine. Good luck to you. I hope Cottonwood survives for as long as people have reasons for reading it.
>
> In the meantime, I can't quite stop without saying hi and thanks to some fine, thoughtful people, who, sometimes inadvertently, contributed to the early progress: everybody in the first staff, and Ed Ruhe, Ed Grier, Roy Gridley, Mannie Schonhorn, Ed Eigner, and David Stewart. We had our first meeting in beautiful, musty old Fraser, and that's gone. We met and drank beer at the Gaslight, hung out at the Abington book shop and they are gone. Our first office was above a store on Massachusetts Streets (I could name a friend or two who might have spent a night there now and then) that I wouldn't even recognize today. But Cottonwood has remained, and I am glad. Congratulations.

Robert Day, the graduate representative on that first issue, recalls those days at the Gaslight as he writes of his story, "The Mackinaw" which appeared in COTTONWOOD's first issue:

> By my memory the story came from a reference in *Time Magazine*: something about football fans "turtling down into their mackinaws." I thought the phrase a poor one. There is always some unnecessary flash in bad newsmagazine prose and it was fun in those days to read *Time Magazine* out loud to catch them at it. We were doing that one day at the Gaslight Tavern. But while we all knew bad writing when we heard it, none of us knew what a mackinaw was. I wrote a story about a search for the coat. The town is Lawrence; the hardware store is still there on Mass Avenue on the east side in the nine hundred block.

THE COTTONWOOD REVIEW, as it was called in the early days, had ambitious plans from the start. The second and third issues serialized the first of COTTONWOOD's interviews with visiting writers—this one with Allen Ginsberg. An interview with Robert Creeley, promised for the fourth issue, appeared in the fifth, but it's hard to do everything. In the third issue, editor David Stewart had announced, "Because we have expanded our staff and facilities, subsequent issues of the *Cottonwood Review* will include reproductions of the visual arts, film, manuscripts, and critical articles." That fourth issue was a

beautiful magazine, with the promised graphics. Stewart, himself, did the layout and design.

Stewart served on COTTONWOOD over a longer time range than any staff member. After his early stint with COTTONWOOD, he worked as a translator-interpreter and administrative assistant at NATO headquarters in Turkey and taught at a number of colleges in Kansas and Missouri before returning to KU where he served on COTTONWOOD's poetry staff in 1974-75 and 1981-82.

A number of others have served on the staff five years and more, including James Carothers, Jon Blumb, Mary Davidson, Tom Russell, Diane Hueter, and Chuck Marsh.

Some of the "visual art" of the '60's and 70's brought COTTONWOOD considerable notoriety. An older woman once introduced herself to Erleen Christensen as "The only person who defended COTTONWOOD on the Arts Commission when you were putting naked ladies on the cover." There *were* naked ladies, including a pregnant one—and a naked man on a bicycle. Two fully-clothed women caused just as much furor, however, as they stood with their arms around each other. The abstract blobs in one issue caused no furor, but that issue quickly sold out as word got out that the blobs were ink prints of anatomical parts.

COTTONWOOD offended on political, as well as "moral" fronts. Richard Colyer, who was advisor from 1969-1979, recalls that he had to defend the "bleeding flag" issue (10-1970) to a number of his more conservative colleagues. That issue has the distinction of being the only issue with a black editor and a black cover artist (Cortland Berry and John Carter, respectively). In fact, Colyer feels that the magazine outgrew its undergraduate roots and became a national magazine in the years he was advisor.

Nonetheless, in a quiet way, during 1967-69, the editors of issues 5 through 8 (Kenneth Irving and Jeff Lough) also did their part to build the magazine by publishing work of quality—some from poets whose names we all now recognize. Advisors and faculty supporters from that time period, such as Gridley, Ruhe, and Terry Moore, (as well as staff members) recall with fondness those heady days when poets always seemed to be passing through and even undergraduates came to readings in large numbers. COTTONWOOD could count on selling well at tables set up at registration, from a sales box outside the COTTONWOOD office, and at local bookstores.

Jim Schmidt, a veteran and student in the German department, served as editor of issues on either side of Berry's "Bleeding Flag" issue (9, 11, 12), and it was during his tenure as editor that the magazine switched to the large, 8 1/2 by 11 format, began to feature high-quality reproduction of photography, and did the only multi-color covers in COTTONWOOD's history. When Schmidt went to Germany on a fellowship for a year, Colyer served as behind-the-scenes editor co-ordinating the work of various people who read and evaluated material until Michael Smetzer took over as editor in 1974.

Smetzer likes to say that he inherited a subscription list of six—including one or two loyal members of the KU faculty, and a single library. He deserves credit for getting COTTONWOOD on a business-like basis, for expanding the variety of its associated publications (tabloids, chapbooks, broadsides), for winning several national grants, and for increasing the magazine's presence through exchange mailings to other magazines and giving away tabloids and old issues

locally.

The magazine was hardly staid during Smetzer's tenure. He printed more naked people than any other editor (of course, as the editor of six issues—15 through 20—he simply *edited* more pages of magazine than anyone else!). The magazine was widely respected for its photography (Larry Schwarm and Bill Kipp were photography editors) and for the range of its sometimes experimental poetry—and fiction. Smetzer reinstituted interviews by reprinting the Ginsberg interview from 1 and 2 in 15, and by printing new interviews with William Stafford, Robert Kelly, Donald Finkel, and Diane Wakoski in subsequent issues. Beginning with 17, each issue included a "Featured Poet" from the midwest, or with midwestern connections—Victor Contoski, Harley Elliott, William Kloefkorn, William Stafford.

Denise Low took over as editor in 1978, with 21. She was especially interested in promoting the magazine and worked tirelessly at making it better known in Kansas. Under her aegis, reviews of books by midwestern authors became a regular feature of the magazine. She continued the practice of interviewing visiting writers (Ted Kooser, Gary Snyder, Robert Day).

COTTONWOOD had published a number of chapbooks and broadsides in the early 1970s, and Smetzer had published several chapbooks and a tabloid called OPEN HOUSE, but Low published the first *book* under the Cottonwood Review Press imprint when she brought out *30 Kansas Poets* in 1979. During her tenure as editor (1978-81), the press also published Michael L. Johnson's *The Unicorn Captured* and Steven Hind's *Familiar Ground* (co-editor Robin Tawney did book design and editing on all three projects). But Low's biggest coup was securing the right to print Robert Day's short novel, *In My Stead*. She enlisted the aid of the KU Design Department for both this book and the last issue of the magazine she edited, 23.

Melanie Farley, who had served as Low's assistant editor, actually completed the work on the Day book. She was responsible both for the shift to the 6 x 9 magazine format and for instituting the practice of publishing special issues edited by one person, or a set of special editors. The first of these special issues, KANSAS WOMEN WRITERS (COTTONWOOD 25), sold out with record speed. Although Farley did not edit the magazine long, her effect on its development was great, and she has the distinction of being the only editor to have edited two special issues—Sharon Oard Warner (who was on the staff from 1980-85) co-edited the second, 19 STORIES (COTTONWOOD 27/28).

Farley published COTTONWOOD's second interview with a fiction writer (the first, with William Gass, was in 7). While that interview with Terry Southern was hardly, in itself, a decision to emphasize fiction, the fact was that fiction *did* become a more important part of the magazine when, in 1982, Erleen J. Christensen, who had served as Poetry Editor under Farley, became editor, and Sharon Oard Warner, who had been Farley's fiction editor, became assistant editor. Whether the escalating numbers of good fiction manuscripts were a fluke of fate or the result of Warner's encouraging letters to promising submitters and Christensen's promotional mailings to creative writing departments and influential little magazines, we'll never know. All we know is that the number of high-quality submissions from all over the country steadily increased during 1982-85.

With 29, COTTONWOOD formally dropped the "Review" from its name (the magazine had always been informally called COTTONWOOD). Denise

Low, who wanted to do another Kansas poetry anthology, took charge of the press operations, supervising the printing of A KANSAS SEQUENCE, a joint venture with TELLUS magazine, a reprinting of the Hind poetry book, and a poetry special issue, CONFLUENCE (COTTONWOOD 31/32), as well as putting together (with the aid of her son, Daniel) a collection of excerpts from CONFLUENCE (A CONFLUENCE OF POEMS) which could be used with young people.

Christensen began the practice of giving each issue a special focus with the "Contoski issue" (29—1982). Other issues focused on photography (30), Salina (33), and William Stafford (34). Interviews continued (Victor Contoski, Galway Kinnell, Seamus Heaney, Harley Elliott, William Stafford), and often inspired the focus for the issue. Each issue had a feature artist; the Dan Massad drawings which are reprinted in this retrospective were done especially for 30—after Massad had read the material in the issue. Book design, once again, became the editor's province.

Smetzer's list of six subscribers had, by the time Christensen took over, become a handful of a hundred cards or so—a motley collection of subscribers (paid and lapsed), exchange copies, bookstores, one-time buyers—and old friends and former staff members. In the attempt to systematize the information we had and to expand COTTONWOOD's promotional efforts, COTTONWOOD developed separate lists for subscribers, exchange copies, promotional and informational addresses—all entered into a computer which can sort them, make sense of them, and print them on mailing labels. At last count, there were over a thousand names and address—all of which were initially typed in by COTTONWOOD staffers donating their time. Some one hundred and fifty of the people and institutions on that list are subscribers—the other names include former subscribers, contributors, buyers, our exchange lists of regional and influential national magazines, and our "target markets" for promotional mailings.

People in fairly large numbers, began to know about COTTONWOOD. Manuscripts came in, unsolicited, from people with well-known names, as well as from people who thought we *ought* to know their names when we didn't. New York agents inquired on behalf of their clients, and less-established folks wrote for our "authors' guidelines." As the number of poems and short stories submitted each year inched up to the one thousand mark, the burden on the editor, and the volunteer staff, became greater. We began to feel like a grownup magazine—except when we realized that grownup magazines pay clerks to fill orders, typists to do typing, accountants to keep books, and salesmen to trudge around to bookstores, while on COTTONWOOD such stuff was volunteer labor (by people having trouble finding time to work on their own fiction and poetry).

The efforts to turn COTTONWOOD into a grownup magazine in *every* way have just begun. The organizational efforts of late 1984—the hammering out of a detailed set of bylaws, a formal division of duties and a system of dividing up the labor of the magazine—have given COTTONWOOD the potential to continue to grow in the next decade. The hopes for the future are bright. COTTONWOOD goes into its 21st year with an editor who has been a supporter of the magazine throughout its history. (George Wedge can proudly claim to be a "charter subscriber" and one of the faithful on Smetzer's list of six). His position as both a tenured faculty member and a poet in his own right should be an asset

to the magazine. He has a strong supporting staff, most of whom are poets and fiction writers themselves. And Michael Johnson (who outgrew his role as "faculty advisor" as the COTTONWOOD staff was drawn more and more from the ranks of the faculty and staff rather than the students) continues to be an outstanding "University Liason"—a delightfully vague title for a man whose role on the magazine has been most helpful, but hard to label.

—Erleen J. Christensen

Thomas Fox Averill

A PERSONAL READING OF THE LITERATURE OF DOUGLAS COUNTY, LAWRENCE AND THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS

> "Lawrence! No Kansas pioneer is disturbed by any doubt as to what's in a name. Truly that was a name to conjure with, a name to be loved, a name worthy of a man's best thought and warmest heart's blood."
>
> —W.R. Lighton, SONS OF STRENGTH

Literature is not history. It is the lie about a place, or the place re-shaped. Even more, it is the legend, the myth of a certain place. In Kansas literature, no place contains more legend, is more a place of myth, is larger than life, than Lawrence. Douglas County, Lawrence and KU combine three important myths that pump in the heart's blood of Kansas and, in fact, the United States: that we are a pastoral country of sturdy, democratic yeomen; that racial and ethnic equality is possible and even a source of our strength; that we believe fundamentally in the rights of individuals, the minority within the majority. Let me give some examples of these beliefs in our literature.

Helen Rhoda Hoopes, a long-time Lawrence resident and KU Assistant Professor of English conjures the pastoral myth of Douglas County and its people in "Winter Twilight on the Victory Highway":

The mellow concave of the sky rests its pale apricot brim
On the brown edges of the Kansas prairie.
Venus and Jupiter, two distant crumbs of light,
Cling to its cerulean surface.
Twilight smudges the nearer fields
Where snow lies white in patches.
The dry cornstalks solemnly mark time
In long rustling rows
Up and over the curve of the hill
In the west seven acres.

. . .

. . . in the little house . . .
They are young and very strong.
There is good food in the pantry, and plenty of sweet hay in the big barn.
In the spring the redbud will blossom;
The pasture will be green again.
The fields must be harrowed and planted.
They will plant potatoes and beans, and put new shingles on the house.
The meadowlark will whistle in the stillness,
and in the barnyard
Buff Orpingtons will clatter over their yellow corn.

This lush landscape, these strong people appear again and again in the work of poets like Willard Wattles, Paul Kahn, Victor Contoski, Esther M. Clark, as well as the many novels set in the rural Douglas County of territorial homesteading.

Other writers, including Harry Kemp (tramp-poet who came to Lawrence to attend KU in 1907), Margaret Lynn, Margaret Hill McCarter, Leonard Nathan, Florence L. Snow, Richard Realf, and Kennth Irby, evoke the territorial Lawrence of Charles and Sarah Robinson, James Lane, the Eldridge Hotel, Quantrill, the Underground Railroad, Blue Mound. They show the Lawrence settled by radical New Englanders, the abolitionists, and free-staters made larger than life by the tumultuous historical events around them:

> We cross the praires as of old
> The pilgrims crossed the sea,
> To make the West, as they the East
> The homestead of the free.
> —John Greenleaf Whittier, "The Song of the Kansas Emigrant"

Abolition fascinates the historical novelists who write of territorial Kansas—but it also haunts the later, more cynical writers, like Harry Kemp, who see the dream of abolition and racial equality die into the segregated "bottoms" of a town unable to live up to its past:

> At the time of the slavery agitation its citizens had encouraged the negroes to escape, had petted them, idealized them . . .
>
> Now, the great negro population, at first so encouraged, was crowded into a festering multitude of dilapidated buildings that stood on the flats close by the region where the river coiled through level acres of low-lying county.
> —Harry Kemp, TRAMPING ON LIFE

A more recent writer, Evan S. Connell, Jr., who attended the University of Kansas from 1945 to 1947, uses Lawrence as a symbol of personal freedom and of education—spiritual, intellectual and sexual. Other writers such as William Inge, Joseph Stanley Pennell, Frank Harris, Robert Day, James Gunn, and, again, Harry Kemp, present a similarly complex fusing of education and freedom. Connell's description of an art class learning anatomy in Davenport (Lawrence) provides an example. The art teacher, Andraukov, tries to give his students a purer, artistic, unsqueamish sense of the human body by using a live model and asking his class about breasts:

> Andraukov . . . carefully licked the under side of his mustache and pushed the cigarette deeper into his mouth. His knuckles were yellow and hard as stone. From the town of Davenport the sound of automobile horns came faintly up to the university hills; but for these noises and the creak of the instructor's shoes the life studio was quiet.
>
> Logan Zahn was a thin, heavily bearded young man who sat in corners whenever possible. He was older than the other students and wore glasses so thick that his eyes seemed to bulge. There were rumors that he was writing a book about something.
>
> Zahn and the model looked at each other, both expressionless.

"You will tell instructor amount of angle. The left breast now, to where it is looking?"

"At the print of Cezanne's apples on the wall."

"And the right?"

Logan Zahn was not afraid. He pointed out the window. "At the Episcopal church."

Education is often sexual, as well as mental and spiritual: the breast staring at the Episcopal church. Yet there is a link here with the earlier literature.

Our literature explores the cultural issue of sex and the breaking of puritanical and Victorian sexual mores, just as it explores racial and economic issues. After all, many Kansas writers attended the University of Kansas, and came from small Kansas towns—Inge from Independence, Wattles from Bayneville, Pennell from Junction City, Irby from Fort Scott. For these writers, Lawrence perhaps represented academic, personal and sometimes sexual freedom, a life unfettered by the small talk and small-mindedness of their home communities.

Another Kansas writer used historical legend to show our roots in freedom. In his poem, "Harvest: June 1938," Kenneth Porter wrote a poem for Donald Henry and Ray Jackson, Jr., two KU students who became aware of rising fascism in Spain in the 1930s and enlisted, along with other students, to fight in the Spanish Civil War. There was great outcry from the parents of these KU students who accused the university of brainwashing them, changing them too radically from the fine children they had once been. But Kenneth Porter points out that Lawrence and Kansas were founded in radicalism:

Donald Henry
Ray Jackson
They were Kansans
their schoolbooks had not yet forgotten
John Brown
They were men from the wheatfields
Spain was a furious sun which drew them along paths of light
as the water ascends from the trickle through sand, from the buffalo-wallow,
to swoop like a billion bright chatos which speed to relief
of the drought-besieged fields,
Theirs too was a lean and stubborn land.
For five years it had known
the dictatorship of the drought, then blackshirted dust-storms . . .
the dust still swirls in a gas-cloud,
heads have fallen. . . .
but the lines hold. . . .
irrigation-canals have brought up reinforcements. . . .
. . .
John Brown of Kansas still goes marching on—
his tread is on the plains of Aragon!

Thus Kenneth Porter speaks for the infusion of the radical past into the present. And in Kansas, Lawrence and KU represent that radicalism.

Reviewing how Kansas writers have used the historical and cultural myths of Lawrence and KU has revealed to me some of my own impulses and feelings about the place. I grew up in Topeka, but was attracted to Lawrence as a liberating town where I could get away from everyone who knew me. Like a free-stater, I could start fresh on the world in a new territory. I came to the university in the 1960s, when another political radicalism was sweeping the nation. Lawrence, as it had been in 1854, was *the* place to be in Kansas, and I am glad that I was at this freest place, glad that I was part of a strain of radicalism running throughout Lawrence and KU history. Kansas University students, along with university students and concerned citizens all over the country, brought down a political power—Lyndon Baines Johnson—and finally helped convince the nation of both the futility and immorality of the Viet Nam War. Significantly this happened most vociferously in Kansas in the same place where abolitionists had come years earlier to fight the immorality of slavery.

Lawrence poet Kenneth Irby makes this point well in his poem "To Max Douglas," where he connects radical hippies and radical abolitionists, both facing the violence of a new territory:

> The woods around Osawatomie
> are as wild, the thickets
> on Potawatomie Creek just
> as dense and matted beard
> as John Brown's sons' farms
> John Brown's grimeyed cutlass *hacking* massacre
> a hundred years? anyone with sense would *still*
> be scared *shitless* to go out there on foot at night
> high, and knowing what we do?
> the underground railway now
> is dope not slaves, runaways
> of revolution, nutcrackers, unshacklers
> of deep spirits
> the dark gods
> wait in the blooded underground
> their visage is more shapeless
> and more terrible than ever.

In the 1970s I spent three years living on a Douglas County farm, raising animals, gardening, living in the landscape, and, in my spare time, going to graduate school. There, I first became interested in local literature, in Kansas writers and how they created literature by combining the land with the idea of the land, and the history with the myth of place. My reading of that literature tells me that Lawrence, KU, and Douglas County, because of the richness of both land and history, because of the tension created by myth and its opposite, an anti-myth (the inability to live up to a myth) have been the setting for more Kansas literature than probably any other place in the state—with the possible exception of the romanticized Dodge City.

The myth and anti-myth Kansas writers see in Lawrence and Douglas County,

then, lies first in the pastoral land itself, where people can make a fine living, transplant their ideas and their civilization onto a beautiful, hospitable landscape; second, in the radicalism of abolition and free-state politics transplanted onto that landscape; finally, in a university sprouting from the fertile soil, and encouraging a fertility of intellectual and sexual freedom. And there is also disappointment. The myth shows Lawrence as a bulwark of racial liberation. The anti-myth is a segregated small town. The myth shows Lawrence as a place of intellectual freedom. The anti-myth is a place where those interested in international and national politics are seen as brainwashed by their professors and by radical student leaders. The myth shows the open, beautiful liberating Douglas County landscape. The anti-myth is a county drowned by a lake, slashed by a superhighway, pocked by "development." Or, as poet Paul Kahn laments:

> At the head
> of every stream there is a dump.
> Glass, metal, grey warped wood.
> Maybe they think if they put it there it will
> go away.

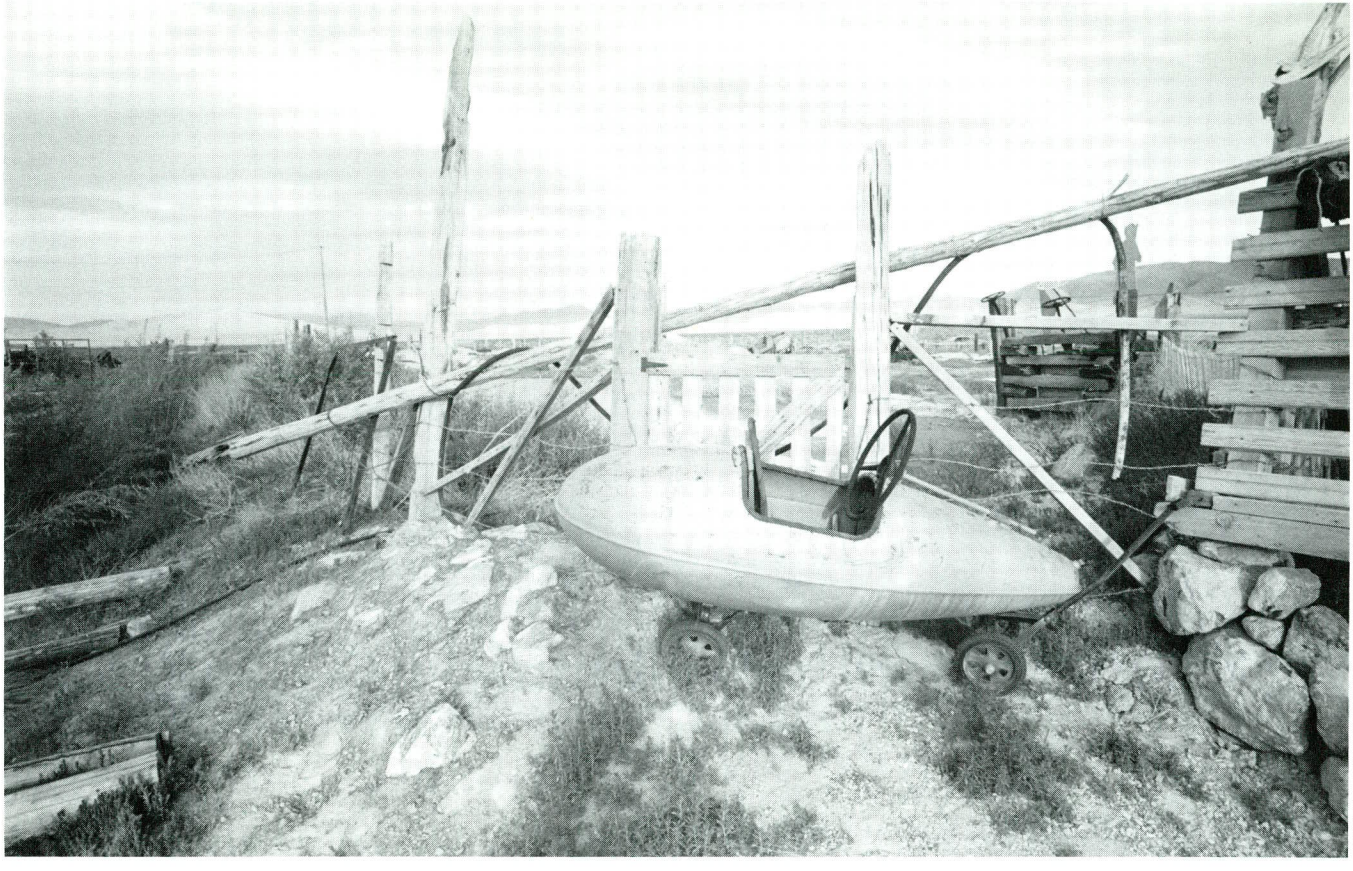
These disappointments are strong in Lawrence and Douglas County literature exactly because the myths about the place are so strong. This tension between the myth and the disappointment is exactly what makes Lawrence such grand territory for the writer, whose literary work always needs tension and conflict as its primary ingredient.

Finally, it is the legend and the disappointment, remembered by our past and conjured by our writers, that defines us. It is what so many Kansas writers have used as a basis for their Kansas literature. I have in mine, and some of my first efforts were written in Lawrence, set in Lawrence, and published in Lawrence, by COTTONWOOD REVIEW. So was the work of many of the contemporary writers I've mentioned in this reading of our literature. We writers will continue to conjure with Lawrence, with the university, with Douglas County, for it is important Kansas territory, which, examined, will tell us who we are. The Kansas poet William Stafford, who lived in Lawrence for a number of years, sums it up in his poem "Bi-Focal":

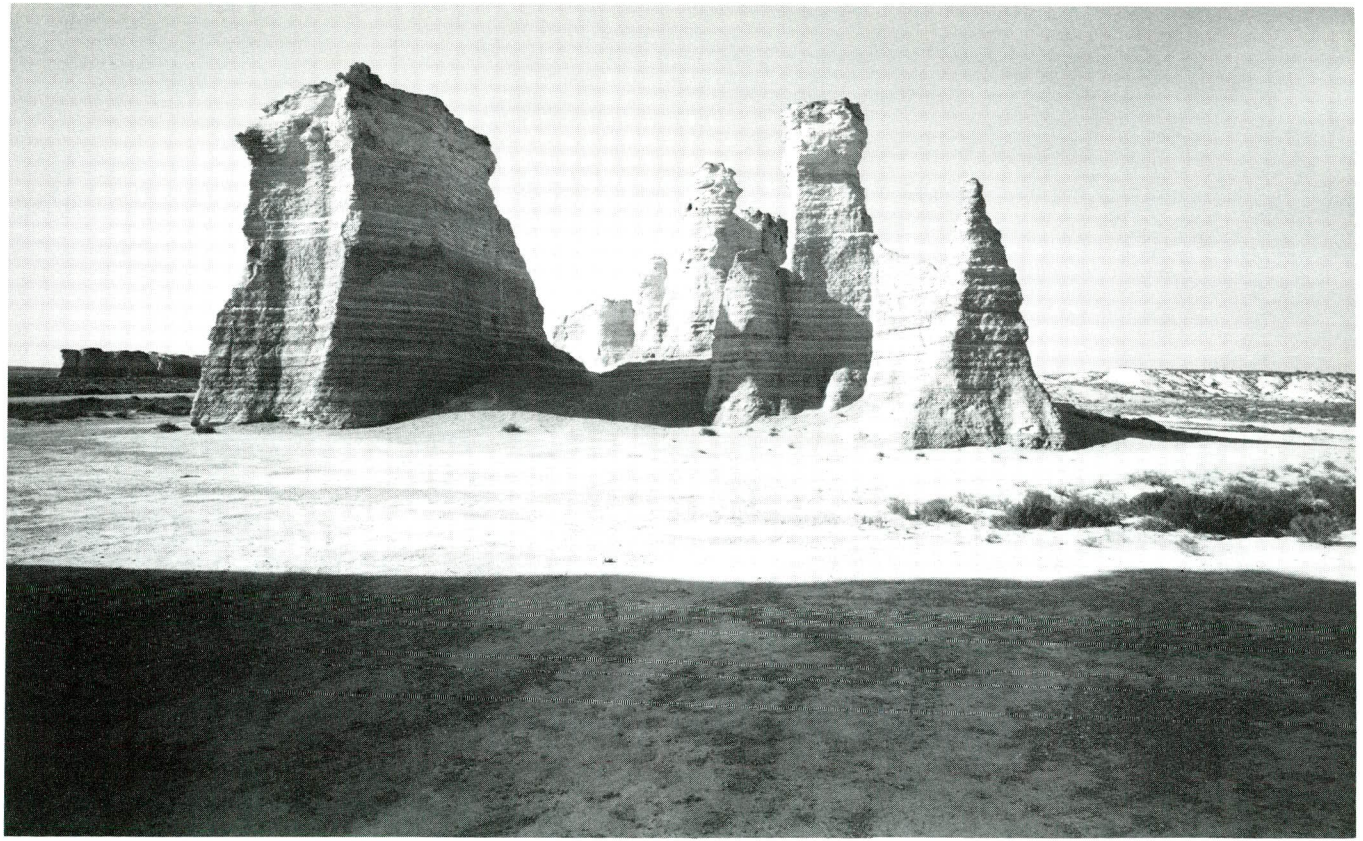
> So, the world happens twice—
> once what we see it as;
> second it legends itself
> deep, the way it is.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Terry Evans



Bill Kipp



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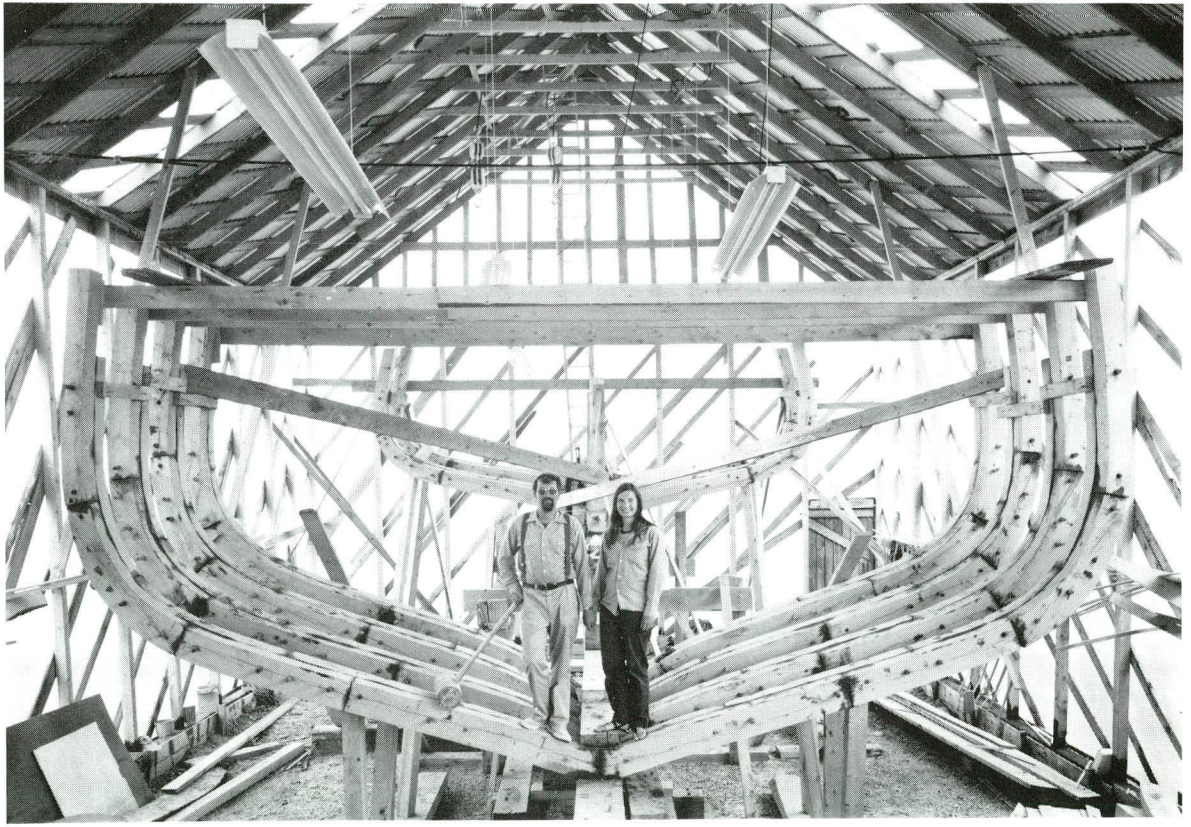

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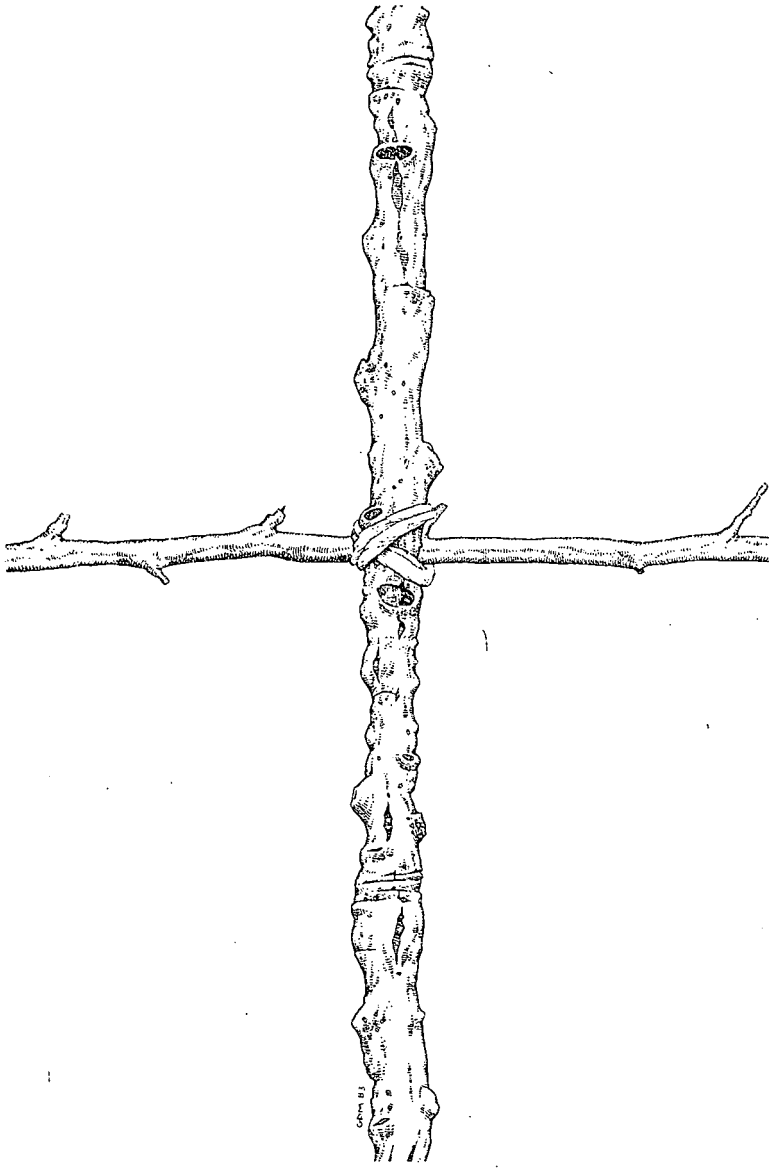


by COTTONWOOD STAFFERS

R. Paul Day (Robert Day)

The Mackinaw

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

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

"O.K.," I said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"That's right, son— you know, they've got a big wool collar and you can pull it up around your ears and you'll never get cold." He had acquired animation as he spoke and he actually seemed to turtle down into the invisible coat. It was as if he was talking of a thing that he had once loved, but for some reason it seemed unfashionable to love it any more. But when he talked about it in this way the love got through somehow. Perhaps it was the love that reminded me that

Granddad Warner had a coat like that; maybe a Mackinaw (I saw it only once when I was little and I convinced myself now that I could never recall it accurately so I didn't dwell on it, but turned to listen to the clerk).

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

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

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

"Hardware store?" I asked.

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

I thanked them and went back outside and up the street toward Nelson's Hardware store. It was getting colder and my jacket wasn't helping to keep me warm. My mind was alive with ideas about this Mackinaw. I had all sorts of pictures in my head. I finally found Nelson's Hardware. It was a curious shop. It had a big sign facing the street which said Nelson's Hardware and two big windows on either side of the solid wooden door. In the windows the passer-by could see simple saddles mounted on sawhorses. I went inside and noticed that the place was dimly lighted. The only light seemed to come from the two windows and sort of a glow from somewhere in the back of the long store. The light from these two sources didn't seem to reach each other so that I got the impression that the middle of the store was almost dark. The store was scattered with long tables loaded with odds and ends, the usual junk, unless you looked closer. Then you noticed that there was an unusual amount of outdoor gear—such as axes—not just hatchets like an ordinary store might have, but big double-bitted axeheads, without handles and you bought the handle separately. On the walls were skillets, big black ones, and leather goods and ropes, not nylon cords, but real ropes. At the back of the room there sat an old man in a plaid wool jacket. He was sitting on a rocker and he hadn't moved since I entered, but rather he just rocked. To one side of him was an old pot-bellied stove—grey black with use. As I walked toward him I noticed the old wooden floor creaked.

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

"Do you know what a Mackinaw is?"

"Sure," he said, and he stopped rocking. "Sure," he said again. "I know

what a Mackinaw is. I used to have one myself. Warmest darn coat I've ever owned."

"Do you have a Mackinaw?" I said.

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

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

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

"Bet he does," said Nelson.

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

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

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

"This ain't no lie," the man with the pipe continued. "It's the honest-to-God truth, son," and he looked at me. "Old Sam Porter was out chopping wood one morning on his south acreage and it was kind of cold so he took along his Mackinaw. Well, it wasn't cold enough to snow, I guess, 'cause it started raining. I remember that well because it was the first good rain after the long drought. Well, old Sam was out cutting wood and when it began to rain (a cold, almost freezing rain), he was real happy because we all wanted rain. Well, the spirit got in him, I guess, because he just kept chopping wood, and singing away and when it started to rain a bit harder he went and put on his Mackinaw. He was so happy that he just stayed out there all day long—in that freezing rain, just chopping wood. And it was raining hard, you understand." The old man now rocked back on his chair farther than usual. He had a smug look and he puffed his pipe and gave the impression that he was going to let us in on a great religious secret.

"And you know what?" he said finally. "When he got home he was bone dry! That's right, he was bone dry. That Mackinaw protected him all day long; it was woven so tight that not a bit of rain got through. Now, I tell you that's some protection—there isn't much that will take care of a man like that. Well, when Sam noticed how the coat kept him dry, so the story goes, he sat down and right

then and there he wrote it into his will that he be buried in his Mackinaw. Well, I went to Sam's funeral in '46 and sure enough there he was in that three-point Mackinaw of his. And I expect that his soul and that Mackinaw are all that's left of old Sam now."

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Way before your time, son."

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

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

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

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

"Well, Jake forgot his Mackinaw and it was a cold day. And he was pretty upset to be without it on a day like that. No sooner had we crossed the first ridge—not five miles out of town, when we saw one heck of a big buck running parallel to us down the other side towards the wooded canyon. Well, Jake was a crack shot and always got those bucks when they ran like that. Well, he reached for his Winchester and started shooting. He was cold without the Mackinaw, you understand, and didn't feel right—and maybe the gun didn't fall the same on his

shoulder or maybe a fellow needs something he knows is good and strong next to him when he has to do a good job. Whatever—Jake missed that buck the first two times and then the darn thing turned toward us and was running like the wind right at us, and old Jake got buck fever (I promised him later I'd never tell a soul but since he's dead and gone, I guess it don't matter). Anyway, he got the fever and threw out eight good shells without firing one of them. Not pulling the trigger but just throwing that lever down, and out would fly a 30-30 shell into dust. Well, that buck broke to the right and was gone in a moment. Jake didn't say anything for a long time, and I don't think he ever forgot that till the day he died. You understand I've seen him kill deer with the Mackinaw on and with it off. But I only saw him once when he wished he'd had it on and didn't and that time Jake Warner wasn't much good. I guess, in a way he loved that coat, like we all did if we had one." And the other two nodded.

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

from COTTONWOOD 1, Spring 1965

Michael Smetzer

THE WART

When you wake up in the morning
your nose itches
When you look in the mirror
there is a wart
Everywhere you go people glance quickly
and look sick
You try to hide it with your hand
but every time you touch it
it grows

So you go to the doctor and he cuts
it off
In a week it has grown back
larger
You wear a band-aid over your nose
all day
People look at you like a sewer

Your lover could not stand the band-aid
and has left town
The note saying good-bye is written
to your wart
No one can remember your name

You are "the man with the wart" "the wart man"
or simply "the wart"
Pranksters leave fresh lemons on your door
Nothing you try takes it off

The wart covers all your nose
Women scream
Children call you "monster"
You only go out at night

It spreads around your eyes
It has broken up into many scaly lumps

A plastic surgeon cuts away your face
but the roots have reached into your brain
Warts come up along the edges of the plastic
They are filling in your ears

A preacher tells you to pray
You take his hands and are born again
to Jesus
The next day his hands sprout warts
He does not return

One morning you are blind
Warts are growing on your eyes

You can no longer hear
so you lie in bed and dream
In your dream you are a handsome knight
A princess kisses you and her lips
burst out in warts
You kiss her and all your warts pass
onto her body

When you wake up you are well
Only dry husks are scattered in your bed
You are weak but joyful

At noon your lover returns
covered with warts
She has come back to embrace you

from COTTONWOOD 29, Winter 1982

Michael Johnson

JOHNNY WEISSMULLER READY TO DIE

Tarzan, who once could swim
like a god in crocodile rivers, swing
on vines like an ape from tree to tree, and sprint
for miles with Jane in his arms, now sits
on a terrace in Acapulco, stares
at the ocean, breathes
through a tube in his throat, eats
through a tube in his stomach, and waits
to die.

In the hospital, a year ago, he yelled
his jungle yell in the night. The nurses rushed
from their monitors. The other prisoners of tubes woke
to fear.

But the animals did not hear.

from COTTONWOOD 31/32, Fall 1983

Diane Heuter

POSSUM

slow man possum
eats eggs in the hen house
snotty nose and ratlike tail
Mama pokes him with a stick
saying go
slow man possum
go leave the hen house
and the eggs
find some slow man possum hole far away
under a tree
or in a pile of scrub brush
where slow man possum
can be happy
with possum children
and possum wife
snow white rose red
hit the possum on the head
Mama's in the kitchen
baby's in the bed
Mama bakes a pan of good corn bread
Papa's in the garden
shovel in his hand
snow blood blossoms
slow man possum
move along
move along

from COTTONWOOD 25, Fall 1981

Denise Low

SPRING GEESE

not one tidy vee
but a whole complex of angles
branching off each other
like the genealogy
of man

spring, not fall
and this is Kansas
not the northern woods

not a magazine cover
of migrating geese

but their honking chorus
spread across the southern horizon
stays in my ears for days

from COTTONWOOD 25, Fall 1981

Erleen Christensen

A NIGHT'S TALE

We sit cross-legged on the sheepskin
drinking brandy
while the music trucks its way
across Arizona.

The door stands open
as if the party
might change its mind
and return.

We lie naked on the sheepskin
the music gone, unnoticed,
the door kicked to,
the party private.

I sit on the
sheepskin
with coffee and sunlight
trying to remember the transition—
liking the story because
I can't find it.

from COTTONWOOD 25, Fall 1981

Chuck Wagner

THE TRUNKS OF CARS

In the late 50's
we crowded friends
into the trunks of cars
to sneak them into drive-ins,
and then refused
to let them out.
their shouts of rage
and rhythmic kicks
gave birth to rock-'n'-roll.

In the 60's
we went off to war
despite the clamor of cars
in driveways and garages
across the country.
When we returned
we diagnosed
the recurring pounding
as delayed stress syndrome.

In the 1970's
we heard knocks.
Cursing the unions
and shoddy construction,
we replaced shock absorbers
and poured STP
into engines.
Next time
we'd buy imports.

In the 1980's
all seems quiet,
but they sit
hunched against wheel-wells,
hands wrapped tight
around tire-tools
waiting
for a dark deserted road
and a flat tire.

from COTTONWOOD 26, Winter 1981-82

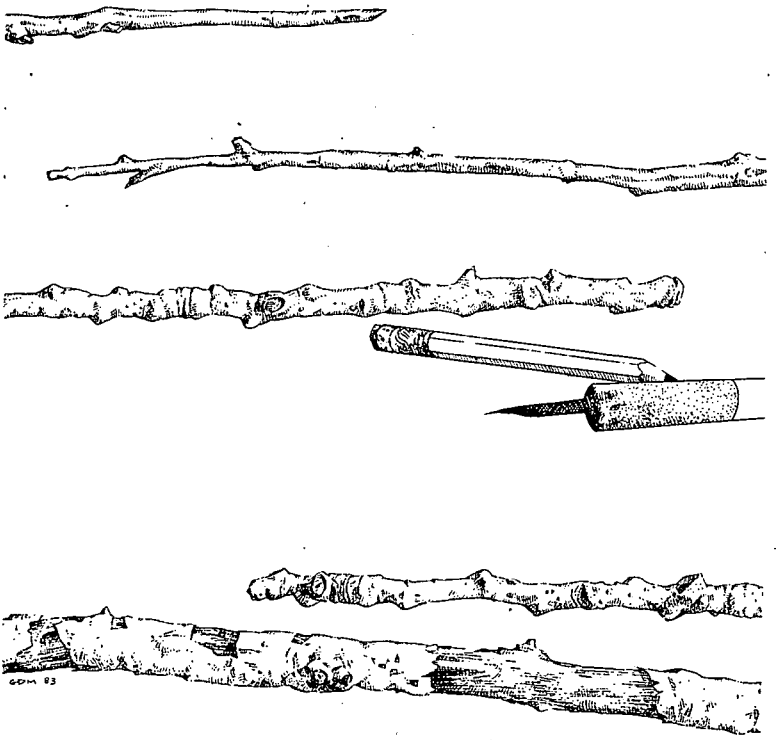
NOVEMBER

All over Kansas
people are trying
to read
old love letters
but the dry
shriveled words
tumble from
the pages
carpeting
lawns and sidewalks.

When the wind blows
they scrape along the pavement
sounding
like rain.

from COTTONWOOD 31/32, Fall 1983

POETRY



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

from COTTONWOOD 34, Fall 1984

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.

from COTTONWOOD 34, Fall 1984

Jack Anderson

THE WORRIED STONE

A stone got worried.

It worried that any day now
they could climb the hill for it
and chop off its head.

To calm it down
they tried to point out
it didn't have a head.

But that
only made it feel worse.
"They've already done it."

The stone kept on worrying
that next they would amputate
its arms and its legs
or pluck out its eyes.

So day and night it
maintained a vigil,
it was always on guard
so no one could surprise it.

Then they said the stone
was foolish to worry,
for it had no
arms, legs, or eyes:
stones, in fact, they said,
had nothing but stone.

The stone was appalled
and started to shout:
"But how can you hear me
if I'm nothing but stone?"
"Stones can't talk," they said.
"Everyone knows that."

The stone was now
more worried than ever,
for it was either
insane, it concluded,

or else not a stone,
and it couldn't decide which
—or which was worse.

It just sat on the hill worrying
forever and ever.

from COTTONWOOD 34, Fall 1984

LIFE ON THE GLACIER

Life on the glacier has its
advantages:
for one thing, we are in constant motion.

Agreed, the weather is beastly cold
and the Governor and I have to take such pains
to ward off pneumonia and freezing at night
we never dare remove our clothes,
which makes both sex and cleanliness difficult
(though not, let me add, impossible).
Yet, despite the inconvenience, we are moving along,
we are going someplace,
we are going South
to the sun and citrons and the meals in the garden
stretching from pasta to dolce with three kinds of wine.

Slow progress, yes,
but we do progress: look,
we have already left that snowflake behind
and that one, and that one. And so, I maintain,
though our teeth may chatter
as we sip our perpetually lukewarm tea
(we touch nothing else,
saving up as we are
for the treats of the South)
and though the cups and saucers echo our teeth,
we know we have grounds—these shifting grounds—
for hope.

And that is why from dawn to dusk
I wave my handkerchief in a flurry of farewells.
And when the gawkers jeer
that it's only an easy day's train ride to Lasagna
while the Governor and I
will never
reach anywhere our way,
I can reply, oh yes we shall,

through chillblains and sneezing
we have followed the more arduous
—or, as I like to call it,
the heroic—course,
so we shall appreciate Manicotti all the more when we get there,
and we have moved this far—not much, but *this far*—
from where we began
(count it out, if you like—you'll see, you'll see):
we are demonstrably here
and on our way onward.

from COTTONWOOD 13, Spring 1973

FEBRUARY

O my darling, February
has come into the room
early
and stands afraid

looking
just the way
I had imagined her

slender and naked
almost silver white
(even her hair
in which she receives
telegraphic messages
from the South Pole
which sounds like icicles
falling from a wall)
her eyes are downcast
and she crosses her arms
before her breasts

Yet her sudden presence
frightens steam from the pipes
we keep searching for sweaters
and pawing through bureaus
for grounds for divorce

What shall we do with her?
for the time has not yet come
when she will marry John of Gaunt
and go off to live
in the Castle of the Counts of Flanders
where she will dream all day in the kitchen

by a bubbling kettle
and study the Old and New Testaments
painted on the tiles
even so
she will die young of consumption

How shall we entertain her?
we have no snowshoes
Olaf the walrus
gazes sadly at his frozen dish
the boardwalk is closed
and the little stands
where they sell candy apples
the watch dogs snarl through the mesh
which shutters the merry-go-rounds

If we were in Flanders, my darling
the three of us
could eat hot fried potatoes and mayonnaise
from paper cups
which warm the fingers
no matter how cold it is.

from COTTONWOOD 33, Spring 1984

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.

from COTTONWOOD 34, Fall 1984

Guri Andermann

BOLDLY THE DEAD GO (FOR K.W.)

. . . do not forgive
Jeremiah 18:23

You must have been thinking
how boldly the dead go
in their coffins to the grave.
A parade of black,
people bring flowers like flags,
giddy in the sun.
Eight years old,
you watch the box go into the hole,
Oklahoma dirt falling to wood.
My father is in there,
and you want to go with him.

More will go into that hole
than a dead man in his box.
You want to step in like a sleepwalker,
make decay become your first dance.
Later you will learn
how skin splits to the bone,
how the heart moves out from ribs
like a worm.

Your mother,
frail and thin as wind,
bent to you, whispering
forgive him, forgive.
Drill a hole in that word,
Kathy. Send it to sea.
It will founder there among waves,
thin letters like
arms
flailing.

from COTTONWOOD 33, Spring 1984

William Page

THE SALVATION OF UNCLE FLOYD

Uncle Floyd's head comes bobbing up,
the cigar still smoking, words
seeping like cheap wine
from the corners of his mouth.
He strikes a match in my skull,
peering across the forgotten years.
There's the office he clerked
in, there's the bar tended
the year he was on the wagon.
Tattooed on his forearm, a drunk
sprawls in a slumway door. He
recognizes it; it's him.
Uncle Floyd blinks hard, until his eyes
clear. His mind's like a journal
entry glistening. He takes
the Havana from his mouth
and pronounces his name—Master
Sergeant Floyd Coile, born again in
the U.S. Army, his pocket full
of pencils. The typing ribbon
and the multi-colored forms
have saved him. He signs
himself the man of letters,
the clerk, the right hand
of printed orders, the promoter,
the demoter, potato peeling
detail, sick call, leaves and
A.W.O.L.'s. Uncle Floyd, ready for
the reenlistment binge.

YES SHE SAID BUT NO

Before he asked he made sure
the censor was stripped and
staked out in the garden
to attract brightly colored
birds.

Yes she said but no
not with these tall clouds
coloring the sky with rain.
So he went away a year
and then came back.

The censor was carried in
a marble box awash in agate and flint
to transmit the thought of centuries
shorthand:

yes she said but no
that knock on the door
is the Red Chinese Army
Quick! Say something poetic.
He went away for a year
and then came back.

The censor was chained in the attic
overblown on cookies and milk.
Yes she said but no
not with this apple
leaning sideways in the light.
He went away for a year
and then came back.

By now the censor was a
scared relic done up in ermine;
his thoughts sold in the common
market as a cure for gout.
Yes she said but no.

Their movements became a constellation.
Mountains languished.
He went away she went away

all they had know went away.

Even the censor forgot their names
and the exquisite details
of their forms.

TO BUILD A FENCE IN THE RAIN

you need to want the fence
beyond anything.
Time equals wire;

get it strung
get it stretched
get it stuck.

Duckwalking gulley mud
barbs spanging off the roll
for once you don't pick up
every turtle snake or stone.

Fixing metal strand on metal pole
steel pliers pockets full of metal clips
metal stretcher chain dragging wet grass
where you fling it into and lean against
the metal truck tell me
is the lightning still galloping
off in the southwest?

No matter how hard it rains
shift your noisy boots
and say it's letting up.

both from COTTONWOOD 33, Spring 1984

David Ewick

GRANDFATHER ON THE PORCH

He tells me
he has gold buried
in the back yard.
He tells me he used to walk the tracks
from Batesville to Columbus
with twenty pounds of marbles
in his hip pocket.

And I believe him.
But grandfathers won't last.
They walk one day off the porch
with a paring knife
from grandmother's kitchen.
They make a slice in the sod,
tear it back like ripping up carpet
in a rich woman's house
and without so much as a tip of the hat
they're gone,
a lump in the yard
for children to trip over.

He reads papers on the porch,
concentrates on the obits.
There're people dying now
that ain't never died before,
he says, and looks at me
like I'm some hope,
or could raise the dead.

from COTTONWOOD 31/32, Fall 1983

Steven Hind

THREE DAYS ON THE PRAIRIE

I.
Coronado

In the King's armor he troops
over the green fur of the prairie
to the trough of the Arkansas.
A red-tailed hawk cries
over the eye of a dustdevil
and buzzards wheel above skulls
in the yellow evening.
Still he clings to the gold
thighs of his dreams.
Quail's call sweetens the wind
as the horses drink.
The noisy array strikes
back for a knoll to the south.
Teeth of bluestem grease
taut bellies as the sun fades
to a dark hide full of stars.

II. Wheel

High wheels break the morning
grass on the prairie.
Necks polish yokes
and the whip stings the air.
The hawk cries
into the day and the rabbit
hunches in flowers.
No thing knows what will happen next.

III. Drilling

Grain furls close to the hub
of the rig, grinding its steep trail
through the rock. Pickups gleam
in the sun and the roustabout
hammers on steel.
Dustdevils rattle the grain
and a buzzard's eye
holds a small steeple,
clear and bright as a shrine.

from COTTONWOOD 31/32, Fall 1983 and FAMILIAR GROUND (COTTONWOOD, 1980)

Elmaz Abinader

MOORING IN THE QUIET
(for Alan)

Here on the plain
the water has edges,
neat lakes bordered by small trees.
Life is motionless
and deliberate beneath the marble surface.
I stand with my boat
in the dark and listen.

I know what the sea
has told me. It has left words
clinging to my feet as they sank
into the golden sands of Valencia.
Messages surround my ankles
as I struggle up the rocks of Palos Verdes.
I cannot be this way
again, it warns me.

It is not easy anymore.
The boat is powerless.
It will not ride the silent lakes of Nebraska
alone. Nothing reaches
to the sky with white foamy passion.
No one travels on the waves to land
freely at the shore.

I drag my boat across the plain
where golden wheat lies still in the fields.
With each journey it becomes lighter.
The sails unravel
and speak to me in a language
we have invented.
And when I look behind me,
I see the contours have remained.
In case I pass
this way again.

from COTTONWOOD 30, Spring 1983

Keith Ratzlaff

FIELD BURNING

Dan didn't lift a finger in honor of the wind.
Kept his hands (wide and fat-knuckled, lazy
as chickens) dry and in his pockets,
let them do a little chatting with the
matches and loose change before running
them out and putting them to work.

Dan didn't listen to the radio weather, much;
didn't even look for Eldon's booming orange windsock
inching around from the east. Took kerosene
in three ten-gallon milk cans, his matches and
his hands, drove them all out in a brand-new Ford
pickup and lit his field at the western edge.

Dry corn stubble coughs more than it burns,
sputters a bit, then dies without some help.
Dan was a helpful man, generous with his kerosene—
poured it out like free beer.

Dan didn't notice when the wind slapped
around from the east. Only paid attention
when the flames, low and a quarter-mile long now,
doubled back and blew his third milk can over the telephone wires.

Dan didn't care about the milk can, much;
but fire was kicking his new tires.
Revved up, Dan drove smack
and axle-deep into
a badger hole God saw fit to plant in his way.
He rocked the truck in the loose dirt
until it wasn't any use—barely
made it hands and knees across the road
to Alvy's rented 40 acres.
The Ford burned yellow as goldenrod,
banged open like ripe milkweed.

In the cafe next morning, Dan, crouched over his coffee,
took hoots from children-farmers half his age.
He talked about the weather. But with eyes like
a rabbit, he'd twist his head, looking over his shoulder
toward the door where the wind kept sneaking in.

from COTTONWOOD 30, Spring 1983

J. B. Goodenough

THE OLD MAN TO THE CHILDREN

See, said the old man, swallow
The apple-seeds and don't you know
You'll have an apple-tree
Growing in your insides forever
And the branches will find
Their way out every which way,

You'll have kerry-pippins knobbing
Under your hair, or russets
Banging in your ears, or great
Gobfuls of winesaps, and you will
Be stretched upwards, arms
Twisted out, grown crooked,

Said the old man, you will
Spit cider and pee vinegar and
Roots will vein in your legs
Bedding in earth, and after a while
You will stay put like it or not
While your leaves rot and fall.

Quiet. They chucked the cores
Away, watching the bees
Crawling over his eyes. Run.

HOUSE AT THE END OF THE ROAD

It is not wise to ask.

You have heard she is
Decent folk, but then
You cannot believe all you hear.

Besides, she knew your
Grandfathers; think then
What she must know about you.

If she tells you to get
Off her land, leave. If
She asks you to stay, leave.

What dries on her roof,
What swims in her brine,
What hangs in her smokehouse,

It is not wise to ask.

both from COTTONWOOD 29, Winter 1982

Rick Campbell

CROSSING THE NEVADA TERRITORY

This is where they broke.
Brother strangled brother,
oxen died in the sand.
The river turned to salt
and every last chance evaporated with it.
You could suck stones with better luck.
If you walk into this land
learn to milk cactus.
Eat lizards and snakes.
The Humboldt and all rivers
might go wrong.

The Alleghenies were green as paradise
when she still woke beside me.
Mornings cool as rain. Her sweetwater
kept me alive. The sun blisters my lips. I was a fool to try this crossing alone.

from COTTONWOOD 30, Spring 1983

Rodney Torreson

DOING CHORES IN THE DARK

While doing my chores
I had no good reason,
my father insisted,
for fearing the dark

but that evening a tractor
drove itself crazy
choking and coughing
over the ruts
charging around
the oatbin and crib

delirious with lights
I had, that moment
before dropping my pails
to head for the house,
all the reasons I needed
for running.

from COTTONWOOD 29, Winter 1982

Scott Cairns

SO WE ARE CAUGHT HERE

as if each morning were a waking
to the shock of wind off the bay
and all the whining of sea birds
held the quick alarm of human calling.

I've seen those birds and heard
their crying through the thick morning
of the bay; I've imagined women
frantic through the fog, their white arms

tearing through the fog's white wall
to find somewhere in water a few yards out,
the child asleep beyond waking, rocked
in the sure grip of the hidden bay.

from COTTONWOOD 29, Winter 1982

Jack Hand

TO MY FATHER

You ravened through my childhood
Like a black wolf—
I played the knife game
For you until every finger
Was bleeding.
And ended the game
With my hand pinned
To a pine table with six inches
Of Italian steel.
Now you walk a warm beach
Far from the kestrel winds
Of home, following the flight
Of marsh hens and egrets
With your hard, blue mariner's eyes—
When I try to follow,
The razor clam shells
Slice the hardened skin
From my feet and the raw flesh
Leaves a trail
That cannot reach you.

A father at forty,
I feel the terror
That drove you—
And play the knife game still,
My fingers bloody,
My hand pinned
To the certain center of pain,
Struggling to keep
My dark, sharp shadow
From my son's eyes.

from COTTONWOOD 29, Winter 1982

Victor Contoski

ANIMAL LIFE ON THE GREAT PLAINS

1
Before man came to the Great Plains
there was a huge sea in the middle of America
wherein swam great monsters.

Then the Rocky Mountains rose.
The sea contracted, the water flowed away;
But the monsters remained.

They became buffalo.

2
The Indians came.
Then white men.
Then Buffalo Bill.

The monsters retreated deep under the earth
beneath Salina and Great Bend and Wichita.

They went home to their bones.

3
They lie now under the prairie
and dream of the Second Coming of water

LEAVENWORTH

The mansions on South Broadway
settle like fat uncles
after Thanksgiving dinner.

Soldiers in the fort
guard ghosts of settlers
from ghosts of Indians.

For years escaped prisoners
have thrown their grey clothes

over the white houses.

They are heavy, heavy.

So Leavenworth lies down
in the Misssouri River valley
soothed by muddy water.

And rain falls on it
like dust.

THE ROOKERY, Ft. Leavenworth

The five daughters
of Colonel Pipkin
slept

one after another
in the
haunted bedroom

Something ... .
a presence . . .

At night the ghost
a little old lady
came to bed.

* * *

The colonel believed
in spirits
bourbon and water.

Wanted to sleep there himself.
Not proper, said his wife.

And the years passed.

* * *

The colonel died.
His wife died.
Their daughters died.

Their grandchildren died.

And still the poor cold ghost
little old lady
trying to get into bed.

Move over.
Move over.

all from COTTONWOOD 29, Winter 1982 and A KANSAS SEQUENCE (COTTONWOOD/TELLUS, 1983)

Jared Carter

TREADING WATER

In the pool at the old Y—echoing white-tile walls,
glassy reflections, chlorine stinging my eyes—
The instructor stands waist deep in the shallow end and points
at me clinging to the scum gutter, announcing now
It is my turn to let go and float, on my back, face up,
arms spread, perfectly still. And it is my turn to know
How this body already too long and too narrow will hover,
as though fallen into space, and then sink, slowly,
Into the depths. As he went on down the line some boys
could do it, some couldn't. But they were boys.
It took me ten more years of unbuttoning blouses and
unhooking bras to begin to know flesh and how much
It weighs, how it fits on the skeleton, what it promises
to hands or water. And to know, without even asking,
Which of them are good swimmers, and can stay afloat
in the water, while others, whatever they might say,
Seldom go near it, except to get tanned. In the company
of a woman who swims well, whose arm to my touch
Is as familiar as that encountered in the back seats of cars
on summer nights at drive-ins, or parked by the lake—
I once again remember the different strokes, how
to relax, and let go, and make the water work for me;
She comes swimming toward me now, joyous in the knowledge
that she cannot fall, her hair spread in a dark halo,
And we meet, in the deepest part, and tread there, slowly,
almost motionless, and are borne up together.

from COTTONWOOD 29, Winter 1982

Dave Etter

EDWINA'S TALE

Dear old Daddy was always very precise:
"The shovel is out by the Cyclone chain-link fence."
"We've run out of Glad plastic garbage bags."
"Buy Tabasco pepper sauce and Kodachrome film."
"I'm going to need more of that Sheetrock gypsum wall-board."
"Get your feet off my Naugahyde vinyl-coated chair."
Daddy has been gone close to eight weeks now.
He's up there in that all-American trademark heaven,
telling the boys all about Prestone anti-freeze,
Univac computers, Neolite soles and heels,
and the pure wisdom of using Scotchgard stain repeller.
But Mom is still here, bless her vague little heart:
"Edwina, honey, put away those kitchen dooddads."
"Try on that new pink whatchamacallit I bought
for you."
"I can't have your thingamajigs laying around."
"Where's that doohickey I left on the hall table?"
"We must look nice for my friend Miss whozis."
Daddy, Daddy, she's driving me crazy.
I just have to straighten out this nameless wife of yours.
She doesn't know it and she'll never know it,
but she's gotten out the Q-Tips cotton swabs,
Niblets corn, and the Electrikbroom vacuum cleaner.

from COTTONWOOD 26, Winter 1981-1982

Steve Hahn

CATTLE SLEEPING IN DECEMBER

Tonight even stars
seem to breathe deeply, fading
from sight with each breath,
their light returning like frost
from the nostrils of heifers.

Low sounds of sleeping
fill the valley, spread out
over hillsides like sighs
from deep within the ground,
from all inhabitants resting
on the curving belly of earth.

Over the land, farmsteads
are scattered in darkened herds
sleeping, the single eye
of a yardlight keeping watch.

from COTTONWOOD 26, Winter 1981-1982

Anita Skeen

BUD REDMOND COMES FOR GRACE WILKIE

There are no longer students idle
in the t.v. lounge of Grace Wilkie Hall,
sprawled on bunk beds writing
letters to boyfriends off at KU
Iowa, and East Tennessee State,
or still at home on the farm,
riding combines. No young women
in bathrobes, slippers flopping
down the halls, head for the bathroom
with toothpaste and shampoo.
Students have been absent
for over a year, and today I notice
the north wall is gone, exposing
a cross-section, a giant doll house,
squares of pink, yellow, green
three floors high, three rooms wide,
a tic-tac-toe game waiting for players.
Bookcases cling desperately to the walls,
paint smiles down at the onlookers.

Below, where I stand among displaced
bricks, wire fencing, and tire tracks
engraved in the soft mud,
Bud Redmond Construction Company
trucks yawn in the spring sun,
their faded skins shielding their private
parts, bored with old noises
and perpetual destruction.
Three men prowl about the clutter.
One stands with a clipboard,
apparently making notes.
Another drinks coffee
from a long silver thermos.
A third forces tools
into tight fittings.
What has become of Grace Wilkie?
Is one of these men, orange hat
like a warning light flashing
against the green wall, Bud Redmond?
What would the two say
over tea, she handing him a glass
plate piled high with cookies, linen
napkins in her hand; in a collision of carts

at the Safeway, her mushrooms crushed
beneath his Manhandler soups;
in the formal office, walnut desk
and chairs dustless, where she writes
silently on a clean white tablet as he rocks
on his heels, his small hands turning
a child's fur cap in nervous circles;
or in a metal shed, where he lifts his eyes
from the blueprint, finger still in place,
as she closes the screen door
on her way out?

from COTTONWOOD 25, Fall 1981

Norman H. Russell

THE LAND OF BLIND CREATURES

we had to carry fire
when we went below the earth
into the stomach of ground
through the hole in the mountain

thinking to see the gopher
we saw white spiders
thinking to see worms
we saw clouds of bats

in the last light of our torches
we saw tall warriors of stone
standing before us
hanging down above us.

from COTTONWOOD 23, Fall 1980

Susan Jordan

STRING GAMES

I knew a man
whose slender fingers
pulled string games
through the air,
as easily
as smiles into the room,
caressing the slightest knot
towards the tip
of his finger
as the next game
emerged in the space
between
his laughing cool hands.
Jacob's Ladder,
slip-slip twist
and under
the Cat's Cradle
as we watched
in still delight
that extension
of string and hands
into patterns now familiar
in their simple intricacies
Space and string
and hands tensed
in play—the between
is the game
as lovers apart,
yet held,
discover.
Meanings must be made
to fill the space
between the lines
of feeling, love
once carried
full-wide and grinning
in a glance
goes anxious in
installments of questions
on the nature
of
the knot
and will it slip?

from COTTONWOOD 25, Fall 1981

William Kloefkorn

THE BURNING

Grandfather, big almost
as the blazing outshed
he plunged into,
returned unmarked:
but the keepsake luggage
he had been advised to rescue
had been left behind,
and in its place
the full-blown figure of a nude
spread out uncreased like all of Revelation,
covering him that vast, wayward distance
from the knees to the stubble
of his upthrust chin.

Grandmother, disobeyed,
exhaled a wisp of prayer:
Jesus, she said,
that one word intoning
how much she knew at last
of what the old man dared to hope to spare
beyond the workbench.

Very shortly thereafter,
the wine bottles began to explode,
and then, as if in wry cahoots,
Grandfather's poster
at the right lower corner
began to smoke, then to smolder,
and, fanned by a small sudden breeze,
burst into flame.

It was later rumored that Grandmother
might have survived
had it not been for the
popping of the bottles.
I believe otherwise.
I believe that the ankles and the thighs,
the belly and the breasts,
the neck, the burst of yellow hair,
the mouth, the eyes
of that uncouth intruder
had been sufficient as, say, Armageddon.

That, and the angle of Grandfather's chin.
so fixed it might have been a chiseled tongue
unsaying Virgin.

from COTTONWOOD 23, Fall 1980

Duane Clark

SASKATCHEWAN PRAIRIE

This land is ready to rise
from the map
shake off the heavy bundles of wheat
on his back
shrug his tired shoulders
and rub up against the soft skin of stars
in gray underbelly of sky.

This land is tired
of the work, plowing, endless furrows
seeds and planters.

A traveller is what he needs to be.
Leave a place
and become again somewhere else.
Ready to pack big clumps of sod
in a suitcase
and move from this thick leaden Canada,
of men and machines and grayness.

Ready to rise from the map
and move.

from COTTONWOOD 22, Spring 1980

Tom Hansen

HE

he can't read the map any more
the names of the cities keep falling into the rivers
and drowning
years later they wash ashore speaking Spanish
their eyes open like flowers

he looks for love under every rock
snowman the darkness says *you are down to your bones*
keep going
the great roots of his fingers reach out
his deathbed wish is an ocean

he is the man who is going nowhere
and every evening he gets there just in time
to find himself gone
goodbye he says to no one
and no one replies

from COTTONWOOD 21, Fall 1979

Dick Lourie

SIGNS OF MATURITY

lately when my mother phones she tells me
things about herself as well as asking
what I'm doing and how am I and so forth

this is a sign of maturity: and when my grand-
parents came from Miami to visit
for two weeks—he's eighty-six and hale like
having a huge antique clock that still runs
smoothly but stands right where people trip over it

she's eighty and starting to fail—hundreds
of pills and she wanders then returns like
a child again and again lost near home

their visit put a strain on my mother that
she called to talk with me about but besides
that she described
her drive to the Catskills
with my stepfather to see the blazing
changes of the leaves and the house where he
spent summers as a youth as she spoke

I got happy for her: the bad things and
the good things about their marriage are of
her choosing and I could tell from her voice
that the fall colors had made her serene and joyous

from COTTONWOOD 20, 1978

Thea Liston-Clark

It was snow

in the sleep
easing down,
forgetting to fall
for an instant,
and then swelling again
in a curve.

And you and I throwing snowballs.

(I have touched
you so
in dreams.)

One huge snowball
glides towards my jacket
then mists
into milkness,
into moist stars.

And even as I bend
to throw one back,
it forms and flows
from my hand,

in a spell,

(in the dream
it was snow.)

from COTTONWOOD 17, Fall 1975

Judson Crews

THE SEASONS

For if
I cherish
that

Which is
about
to perish
A snowflake
upon
a rose

Will it
therefore
live forever

Outlast
a sudden
dying

Will it
hear my
heart's soul

Crying
and thereby
be born again

from COTTONWOOD 10, Fall 1970

John Knoepfle

OUTPOST ON THE MISSISSIPPI

The French commander
at Fort Chartres
addressed the Indian villagers
he was about four feet five
he told them I have a little body
but my heart is big enough
for everyone
the Indians believed him
time has them now
the commander
and the Indians
and the French soldiers

the afternoon is hazy
several groups of tourists
gathering in silences
a family walking a balance
on the stone foundation
of the commissary
kids on swings
a man and a woman
blowing alternately
at their picnic fire
the planet rolling slowly
to accommodate the scene

he says do you believe me
I say the whole nation
wants to believe you

from COTTONWOOD 7, Spring 1969

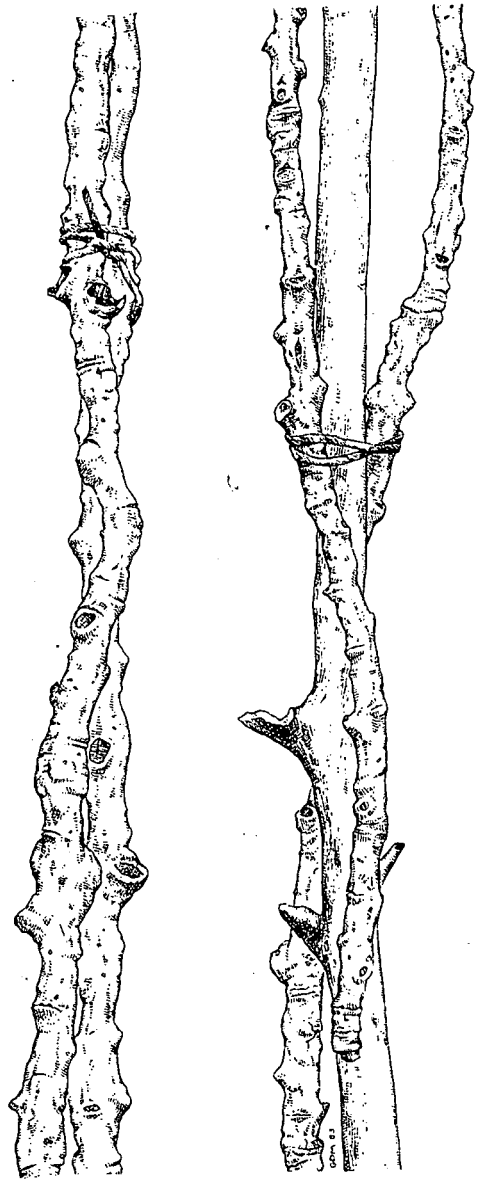
W. S. Merwin, translator

VOLUNTARY MUTILATION

(Follain)

Rather than have to serve
in the emperor's armies
one fine evening the master
took the axe to himself
cut from his hand two great fingers,
his young blonde wife
gently bandaged the place
and the yellow hearted
pansies shook in the border
the master's two dogs howled
as he was carried to bed
then the lamps smoked
surrounded by moths
but the women who gathered
on the village square
facing the red clouds said
that what they saw was the blood
of soldiers.

from COTTONWOOD 8, Fall 1969



FICTION

Peter Desy

A DRINKING MAN

In the second year of my father's retirement, my parents moved to California to be near their daughter Angie. Late that February my mother said to me on the phone, "I just don't know what to do anymore. I stay in my bedroom almost all the time. He throws empty beer bottles on the lawn in front of the apartment and all the neighbors see them in the morning before I can pick them up."

I stood in the kitchen of my apartment, fingering the handle of the freezer door.

"I'm so mortified. He walks around the complex drunk, talking and swearing to himself."

"Probably nobody hears him." "And he's getting more and more abusive. Last night he called me a dirty animal."

"I'll write him a letter, Mother, and threaten him."

"Oh, yes, Anthony, please do."

"But it won't do any good. He'll only lay off booze for a couple of days."

"I don't know what to do. You don't know what it's like living with that man. I almost never come out of the bedroom. I can hardly say the rosary. He pounds on the door and says those dirty things to me. What can I do?"

"Leave him."

"I can't. I just can't."

"Mother, you asked. Leave him," I said. "Pack a suitcase and go to Angie's." I knew she was suffering, but where was it written that I had to share the burden of this marriage and do penance for it?

"*Nobody* knows what it's like living with him. Nobody will *ever* know. I say novenas constantly that the man will change. And the stench from his colostomy is overpowering. The doctor told him to stop drinking to keep regular. He's drinking himself to death."

"I'll write him a letter." I thought it would be easier to write my father directly about his drinking because my mother had recently come to identify her husband as an alcoholic, a sick man with a disease, like leprosy. But she wasn't always sure.

"*Is* alcoholism a disease? I wish to God someone would tell me."

I was opening and closing the freezer door. "It doesn't matter. Leave him."

"As soon as I hung up I sat at the table in the dining-L and cleared away a small area from the mass of dissertation file cards, overdue books, and papers. I immediately got up and brought the half-gallon bottle of gin and a glass of ice to the table and poured several ounces. I took a warm beer as a chaser from the case near the table and sat down again, brushing off some eraser leavings with the back of my hand. When my father received the letter, my mother told me, he read it and threw it in the garbage. "I guess I'll have to be good," he told his wife. Two days later he came back from checking the car so drunk his facial muscles were slack. He went to the refrigerator, got a beer, collapsed into his chair and passed out.

A month later my mother called and said she wanted to come to Pennsylvania for a visit.

"I just have to get away. We never should have moved to California," she said. I never heard her sound so weary.

"Sure. Come and stay a couple of weeks." I tried to sound casual so she wouldn't notice the implied time limitation. "I have classes to teach, but the evenings are free."

We drove right from the Amtrak station to my small apartment in Greensburg, fifteen miles from St. Vincent's college.

"It's small, Anthony, but I'm sure it's just right for a bachelor." She paused slightly before bachelor, as if it were a racy word.

In the early evenings we played rummy for a tenth of a cent a point and then watched TV until she nodded off in a chair. It usually took me three or four shakes to rouse her and then she went to bed and fell asleep with one of her rosaries entwined in her wrinkled, bony hands folded on her stomach, the bedspread tucked under her chin. She look so diminutive in my bed that I felt like lifting her and putting her on top of the dresser for the night. Two votive lights, one on either side of her, would complete the setting.

One night when I looked into the bedroom and saw her asleep I was sure I could imprint my thumb on the loose flesh of her face. When I was a boy, at night in bed my mother would make the sign of the cross on my forehead with holy water from the small font tacked to the doorjamb of my bedroom. Now a sharp sadness took me unawares. *I will annoint her forehead with a sign.* What sign?

I often wondered why, after seven years, she had decided to journey over two thousand miles to see me, but I couldn't think of a tactful way to ask her.

"It's very nice here, Anthony, even if it is almost March. It must be beautiful in the spring."

Maybe she was preparing to die.

I was not surprised when Angie called a week after my mother returned to California to say our father had lapsed into unconsciousness. I should take the earliest flight to Los Angeles. I could call back to tell her my arrival time and she would pick me up. Angie's husband Vic had picked the old man, drunk and shivering, off the kitchen floor of the apartment and had driven with him in the ambulance to the hospital outside Irvine. All the way my father had cursed his wife, calling her a dirty animal and a rotten bitch.

"I'm not sure he's going to make it," Angie said. "There was blood coming out of his colostomy and he was puking up this awful yellow stuff."

I arrived at LAX at 1:00 a.m. California time. Angie almost missed meeting me because of the fog. She began talking as soon as I stepped into the terminal. "Anthony, you don't know what it's like living near them. She's always asking me to drive her to the store, then back again because she forgot something. When she says, 'Do you mind?' I could tear my *hair* out." She clenched her bleached hair in illustration.

"I know."

"You *don't* know. She drives me crazy. I don't blame you but you live in Pennsylvania and get her once for a couple of weeks. You *don't* know what she's like."

"She's a pain in the ass. But I wouldn't want to live with him, either," I said. *Know* them? Hadn't I lived at home until I was twenty-eight? Even now, I felt separated from them only by distance. Soon after I moved out, I had a dream about my mother in which I stood by the front door with two empty suitcases and suddenly I knew I had forgotten to pack. My mother was saying, "I'll never, *never* give you a divorce. You'll have to ask the pope for an annulment."

"Did it ever occur to you that we were *taught* to hate Dad?" Angie asked. "He worked his ass off for over forty years and she never once told him she loved him, or even kissed him."

"It occurs to me all the time. Everything they say or do occurs to me." I dug my nails into my palms.

"You really like living inside that head of yours," she said. "Is that some clever thing you picked up doing your dissertation?"

"No. Virginia Woolf would never say that. Too obvious." I laughed to cover my spite. Angie had never read Virginia Woolf, I was sure.

By the time we reached the car I realized how much we'd already said. Angie always assaulted a point before I could get my bearings, and I usually got trapped before I knew it.

I tried to pay the parking attendant, but Angie waved me off. Then she waved at the fog. "Of course, there's always this shit."

I thought of my father but wasn't ready to hear the worst yet. "Did I ever tell you about the time Dad and I were watching an old Western on TV? It starred an old cowboy actor who was about six foot six. In one scene he beats up a whole gang of bad guys and walks away without a scratch. One of those barroom brawls. Dad said, 'That's my idea of a man.' I was in college but it made me feel like a peanut anyway. If that character was a man, what was I? I'm five eight."

"Anthony, I'm sick of sad stories." Angie came off the ramp onto the Santa Ana freeway doing sixty. Her hands were tight on the wheel as she looked over her shoulder at nearly impenetrable fog. "My God, Anthony; did you *have* to get here in the middle of the night?" Reluctantly, she let the car slow.

"You said to get the next flight."

She sighed. "Okay. Anyway, you'll stay with Mother. Drop me off and you can use this car. I'll drive to work with a friend. Vic can use the other car during the day. You go to the hospital in the mornings and afternoons with Mother. I'll take the night shift. Vic'll take the graveyard shift. Whoever's on duty calls if something comes up. Okay?"

"Okay. How is he?"

"He's either unconscious or semi-conscious. He probably won't know who you are. It's his pancreas. I don't give a shit what the doctors say, he's dying from booze. And his colostomy looks like a raw volcano. I saw it. Disgusting." She leaned over to press in the cigarette lighter. "Mostly he sleeps and mumbles curses. It's getting pretty bad. Yesterday when Mother and I were in his room he said, 'No good cocksucker' as clear as could be. Right when the nurse was fixing his intravenous."

"What did Mother do?"

"Oh, she said to the nurse, 'You know, he's an alcoholic. He's not responsible for what he says.'"

I imitated our mother's hushed whisper. "He's Jewish, you know."

"Yeah, that's it." Angie laughed and blew smoke out her thin nose.

I was remembering when my Uncle Jim was laid out at the Seneca Funeral Home and a man who said he was a friend came to view the body. My mother recounted the story. "When he asked your Aunt Irma what he died from, she told him cirrhosis. The man said he didn't know Jim was a drinking man. I was never so mortified in my life. I *told* Irma to tell people he died of cancer of the liver. I don't know *where* her brains were."

"Sometimes I feel like I'm ten years old," I said. "Mother *did* make us ashamed of him. But once in a while I did break through to him, once when we were both drunk. There wasn't much. I just got closer to his anger. One time when I was in college and Dave Heaton came over, we were sitting in the dining room. Clear as I'm talking now, only louder, Dad said, 'Dirty Jew bastard' to himself. He was drunk, of course, sitting at the kitchen table. You know, as long as I'd known Dave, I was still embarrassed, and I wanted to scream in Dad's face."

"I feel like jumping out of this goddamn car and wandering in the fog."

"Okay. No more sad stories." I felt guilty for breaking some sort of agreement and tried for a laugh to cover it. "But as Mother would say, I was never so mortified."

"Anthony, you're thirty years old. You don't need a father. Forget it. Christ, can't you just forget it?"

I wanted her to tell me she understood. But Angie never lost or surrendered the advantage. Ever since she'd made it through her too rapid adolescent growth, when I'd stand next to her I'd check our heights to see who was taller. And she always seemed to have the edge.

"How's Vic?" I asked into the silence.

As Angie speeded up, she moved her head close to the windshield, as if she could will her way through the fog. Then she slowed. "Let's change the subject."

"I just did."

"Anthony, Vic hasn't worked in seven years, you know that. I told him he ought to do *something*. Take a job to keep from going crazy. Pick oranges, pick some goddamn thing or other."

I didn't know what Vic used to work at, only that "He sets up businesses for people." Angie had a way of making a subject seem formally closed, as if she had pounded a gavel and scanned the wings for the next witness.

She pulled sharply into the driveway of the double garage behind her condominium and hit the brakes just inches from the door. I wasn't sure how I felt, but I think I wanted to wring her neck.

The old man had deteriorated and been moved to the intensive care unit, along with the network of tubes that sprouted from his body. Because he'd been admitted with several day's growth of beard, the orderly mistakenly thought he had a moustache, which was now neatly trimmed. It gave him an air of distinction and mitigated the sharp beak of his nose which had been broken five times in brawls during his professional hockey days. Once the family doctor told me I looked like my father except for the nose. "You haven't got your father's nose." My father told me, "*I* haven't got my nose. The goddamn thing is spread

all over ten hockey rinks." I'd laughed, in a rare enjoyment of my father. In the doctor's office I'd felt a powerful physical affinity with him. As the doctor probed the glands in my neck, I was surprised at the formation of a thought I felt I was almost articulating. *A father is a progenitor.*

Now, looking at the tube that came from under the sheet, divided into irregular segments of urine, I again felt my father as a body. At one end of the tube was his penis, dribbling waste into a plastic container under the bed. I tried to imagine that penis erect, tried to feel some profound connection to it, but instead I remembered the words of St. Augustine: we are born *inter urina et faeces*, between urine and feces. I pictured my father's wrinkled buttocks, the anus wired shut, the colon diverted to the colostomy opening in his side.

The next day my father was hooked to a respirator. I watched and listened to the machine wheeze and cough oxygen at precise intervals into the wasted body beneath the sheets. The upper half of him jerked up involuntarily on the machine's intake, as if tossed playfully by some huge beast.

"He doesn't feel anything," the doctor told us. "It's a reflex action." To me, standing and watching, it was my father's body lurching in a macabre game of see-saw. I remembered what the nuns had taught: the body is a temple of the Holy Ghost. Now a rude machine was tossing this temple, a doll stuffed with failing organs.

Anticipating my mother's doubts, I said, "I'm sure the doctor is right, Mother. He doesn't feel anything." I wasn't sure if I was trying to comfort her or find my own response. What's more, I didn't know what that response should be. I felt weightless and dizzy.

The next day at 3:00 a.m. the nurse, not Vic, called from the hospital. I wondered if Vic had *ever* been there. The possibility that he hadn't wounded, then angered, me.

On the way to the car my mother asked for the third time, "What were the nurse's exact words?"

" 'There's been a change in his condition.' "

"Is that all?"

"The doctor advised that we should come to the hospital. Something like that. And that we call Angie."

Surely my mother knew my father was dead, but neither of us spoke again until we reached the hospital.

Angie pulled into the parking lot behind us and we went in together. A nurse standing outside the intensive care unit told us to follow her to a nearby waiting room. The doctor arrived a minute later and sat on a small wooden desk, holding his clipboard to his chest like an attentive schoolgirl and looked at us individually. "I'm sorry," he said, "we lost him at 2:45." He went on, adept at his lines. There was nothing they could do, there were too many complications. But he never suffered at the end. He lapsed into a coma, as we probably knew. The doctor was terribly sorry.

"Oh, no," my mother said in a slight whisper, not disbelieving, but adding her small note of finality.

I thought I now understood why some people are at first not shocked by the death even of someone close. There is no vicarious death. Death is the felt corruption of one's own body.

I looked at my mother for a sign of sorrow. I saw only that she was tired. She had slept little and in fits. "Her vigil" I almost said to myself, but she had merely waited for her husband to die. Still, her dammed-up grief would overflow when her loss was fully revealed to her. No. I had never known my parents to touch. They were not bodies to each other, nor soul mates, nor even roommates. Maybe my father was always a kind of corruption to my mother and his death was just another stage in the process: he wore it on his left side, the dark pink, soft knob of flesh with a hole in its center—his colostomy, that opening that discharged, uncontrollably, his bodily wastes.

Whenever my father had appeared in his open robe to show me the enflamed flesh of his rerouted colon, my rage choked off any sorrow or sympathy. "How would you like to have this goddamn thing the rest of *your* life?" Only once did I feel pity for him, the one time he didn't scream about his fate. He almost cried. I even thought I loved him then.

Now I imagined a transfigured Christ in a glowing white loin cloth, pointing to his side, a colostomy ringed in thorns, dripping precious blood.

She'll never grieve for him. Then, who would? He hadn't borne his suffering with meekness and forbearance, but with outrage, not the way of martyrs. Only my sister, who was clasping my mother's hand to her chest, would grieve. "It's all right, Mother, we love you," she said.

"Yes, we love you, Mother," I heard myself say. "Everything is going to be all right." "Maybe you'd like some coffee," the doctor suggested.

Obediently, my mother nodded.

"The doctor's right, Mother. Come on, let's get some." Angie led us to a small area reserved for staff coffee breaks. Seated at the table was Father McCardle, ready to greet us. He rose.

"Ah, I was sorry to hear about your husband. May his soul rest in peace." He had administered the last rites to my father and assured my mother that he had not suffered.

"Thank you, Father," said my mother. "Please pray for his soul."

"I will, I will," he said in his sincere post-mortem voice. "That I will certainly do."

As the priest sat down he winked at me and moved his head toward the door. After he left, I followed and joined him in the hall and he led me to a vacant room where we sat on beds facing each other.

"You know," said the priest, "the Church now allows cremation. I thought it better not to mention it to your mother for fear of offending her. It could save a great deal of money, I'm sure."

"Yes, that's right."

"The only stipulation is that the ashes may not be brought into church for the funeral Mass. Would that be a problem for the family?"

"I don't think so. I'll ask my mother right now and see what she thinks."

My mother's response surprised me. "I was going to suggest that, but I wasn't sure how you and Angela would feel." We assured her it was all right.

"Let's go home now. I have a novena to say, and the rosary. But I want to see your father one last time."

The nurse said it was all right to enter the intensive care unit where the body lay.

My mother walked to the bed next to the still respirator, touched the covered

feet and looked at her husband. She took her rosary from her purse, kissed the crucifix, and blessed herself. Angie went to the head of the bed and touched her father's forehead, then his lips. She stared at his face, then turned and left the room.

If only my mother had called my father honey or darling, just once. Did I *have* to feel grief? I turned and went out the door to join my mother and sister.

"I'm glad I went to see him again," my mother said.

"So am I," I lied.

When we got to the car, I looked back at the hospital, which was like a hacienda restaurant without a sign. When you die in a Detroit hospital, I thought, you die on the fifth floor behind brick and dirty windows, not in a giant Taco Bell without old trees that dropped their leaves for half the year. I hated Southern California.

The next morning I went to the Saddleback Mortuary and arranged for the cremation and the copper urn that, to my amazement, was shaped like a box, not a vase. Was this a California urn? The mortuary would have the body transported to the crematorium. A family member need only "take possession" of the ashes the day after tomorrow.

On the way back to Angie's I bought a fifth of gin and put it under the car seat. After we had a late meal, Angie disappeared upstairs. After an hour I sought her out and found her face down on the bed, crying.

I sat down beside her.

"What's the matter?"

"I loved that man," she said into the satin bedspread. "I really did. I loved him."

I felt myself reach down for her to smooth her hair. "I know." She had loved him, but I didn't understand why, or how.

Angie sat up. Her face was splotched and shiny. "Nobody else ever did. I never knew anyone who *ever* loved him. Everybody treated him like he was a freak." She stopped as her feeling built again, then choked out, "Not that woman with her rosaries and holy cards. Goddamn her!" She sobbed again. "And that bastard Vic downstairs. What's the matter with that man? I don't understand him, I'll never understand him. *Why* won't he go to Detroit for the funeral?" She beat the pillows with her fists.

"I don't know."

"Bullshit. He's your drinking buddy, isn't he? You suck up drinks all day up and down the coast, don't you? *You* tell me. *Why* won't he go to Detroit? The bastard."

"Spite, I think." I paused. "I guess. Come on, you go wash up and I'll go down and pour you some wine, okay?"

"Wine? That's your medicine. And his. I want tea."

Drained and shaky, hair plastered to her forehead, Angie got off the bed. "Give me a few minutes, brother of mine."

When she came down in her robe, face washed, she was her capable self again. "Mother, we'll sit on either side of you," she said while she poured herself more tea. "You won't even feel the plane take off." She had taken advantage of our mother's desire to get back to Detroit as soon as possible and had cajoled her until she relented. It would be her first flight.

I, my mother, and Angie had left the motel in plenty of time to be early for the 9:00 a.m. funeral Mass at St. Brigid's. My mother felt it was appropriate for the family to be seated in the front pew before friends and relatives arrived. As they filled the pews immediately behind, I felt faintly popular. My mother had asked me to say words at the crypt where my father's ashes were to be placed, and to lead those gathered in a short recollection of my father. *Lead them.* The words gave me a slight thrill.

During Mass I stood, knelt and sat down as my mother did, feeling no connection with the priest, his gestures, or his words. I wondered where my father was, the one for whom this Mass was being said. In defiance of the Church, Angie held him under her coat, as he had been inside the small suitcase she carried on the plane from California.

I tried to picture my father, to discover some fond memory of him. Instead, I found myself wondering what would become of his tools, especially a set of small screwdrivers he used to tighten the stems of the family's eyeglasses. Where were they now? *Gone are his hands from those instruments.* I felt guilty trying to turn the circumstances into a bad poetic eulogy, even if it was only a diversion.

But where *was* my father? In heaven? The word felt archaic. Besides, it would be grotesque for my parents to be reunited in heaven. My mother's small body, the wen on her head, her partial bridge. My father's colostomy, his hook nose. What could either have in common with God? Maybe God was the God of my mother's novenas, and maybe the saints were the good people of her prayer cards—colorful and bright with holiness. Or maybe heaven was a place where angels scoured your body clean, a decontamination chamber. Then I wouldn't need gin any more and my naked body would know, without my mind searching, what it felt.

Angie, first out of the family pew, carried the urn shielded by her camel's hair coat. On the way to the car she said, "I'm glad I brought his ashes to church."

"Yes, I am, too," said my mother. During the drive to the crypt I tried to rehearse what I was going to say, but the only words that came were, "And he will be sorely missed." Or, "This man will be sorely missed." Or maybe, "We'll now begin to sorely miss him." Too soon, before I had decided on the right expression, I had pulled up to the circular drive and come to rest in front of the greyish marble building.

After about twenty minutes, only about a dozen or so cars from the church had shown up. My mother said we had better go in, that everyone who was coming had arrived.

As soon as we got out of the car, Angie handed me the urn. As I took it, I wondered if there were a ritual way to carry it, like a priest conveying a chalice or an altar boy a cruet. I settled on holding it with both hands, against my ribs. As we walked the short distance to the embossed metal door, the relatives followed closely behind. Angie pointed to a small antechamber of white marble off to the right. She led us to a wall that held rows of small doored receptacles for the urns, one of which stood open to receive my father's ashes. No one knew whether to take a prayerful attitude, since there was no priest to establish an atmosphere. It was up to me.

"This is my father," I began, holding the urn away from myself. "You all knew him and he will be sorely missed." After my cousin Al's "Amen," I had no idea what to say next. I placed the urn in the receptacle and closed the little

ornate door. I saw anger flash across my mother's face and immediately disappear.

"Angela will now lead us in a decade of the rosary," she said, kissing the crucifix before handing Angie the lavender beads.

Angie took the rosary, grasped it, and made a ball of it for her hand. "Hail, Mary," she began, her hands white, her uneven voice revealing sorrow and rage.

I just deposited my father's ashes. I felt as if I were in a bank, had just examined my safety deposit box and returned it. All that was missing was the turn of a key and a manager's reassuring smile. Whose valuables were these ashes? Not my mother's. Not mine. Angie's? More than anyone else; certainly, she could lay claim. I could hear her high broken voice intoning, "Holy Mary, mother of God . . . " Grief, I thought.

And how does one visit ashes? Stand in front of the marble wall and whisper to the door concealing the urn? "Nor in thy marble vault . . . " But I had no song, hadn't even the language or wit to create a two minute farewell to an urnful of ashes.

And would my mother be a companion urn? Her sparse body would make scant ashes, would fit a petite brass box, a HERS to her husband's HIS. Maybe her body would yield no ashes at all, would instead poof into a tiny white wisp of smoke, as if touched by a magician's finger.

Fleet of foot hockey player finds final rest. The hockey fans called my father Speedy, chanted that name when his body raced down the ice, all parts working harmoniously, unmindfully. Before booze, before his colostomy, before his wife. And before me. I saw my father sitting on a white bench in the locker room, his face and chest glistening with water from the shower, drying his hair vigorously with a white towel. His arms were powerful, his loins gorgeously relaxed; his buttocks rode firmly above the sinews of his thighs as he stood to dress. And he was smiling at a boy standing at the door. I felt a sensuous current go through my body.

Was this another diversion? I was being sentimental, I knew. Angie could grieve in tears and choke out words of love; she cried for the real father. I had to create an ideal one. But why should I love my father now, in death? Why so overwhelming a desire?

Then, at least in part, I knew. My father's separation was more real than his physical presence had ever been. The realization sent a shock through my body. So now I felt strangely outside this small congregation inside this crypt. Detached, unborn. But clearly related to the ashes a few feet away.

Now I knew my father was entirely gone and I loved my idea of him as surely as Angie loved hers. Only his death made this possible. Ashes. I thought of opening the door of the receptacle, lifting the lid of the urn, pressing my wet finger into the dust of my father and then to my tongue. Bitter. *The taste of ashes on my tongue and in my mouth.* Love for the father's gone body, the fear of corruption, the fear of my own choking rage that echoed my failed love. Father, body, ashes.

My sister completed the final Hail Mary and returned the rosary to her mother who kissed the crucifix and deposited it in her purse. Now we were all going for hot coffee and a late breakfast and, as though in sudden recollection, I was terrifically hungry.

from COTTONWOOD 33, Spring 1984

Rod Kessler

BENNY AND I

When the bus came, the driver told us he wasn't going to let us on with that shotgun.

"Look, son," the driver began.

Benny cut him off— "I'm not your son!"

"Okay, young fellow, take it easy. Now you see all those folks on the bus? You bring a shotgun on and you'll scare them out of their wits."

We looked into the bus. I could see eight or ten people, dressed like they were coming back from church. They stared at me and Benny, which isn't surprising considering the big deal the driver was making.

Benny and I had been waiting at the bus stop for more than an hour, trying to keep warm. It was Sunday morning, after we had finished Benny's route. Benny had struck matches to his pocket warmer, but the wind was too strong. When he finally got it going, it was too hot to hold for more than a couple of seconds, even with gloves. Benny said it was sometimes that way when he did his route early—it would be so windy that his eyes would tear, and then the tears would freeze on his cheeks. But when the pocket warmer got going, it was too hot. Benny said someday I could take over his route.

"Listen," continued the driver, "why don't you let me take that piece apart for you—I'll bet the stock comes—"

"I know. I can do it," said Benny. Benny wouldn't let the driver touch the shotgun. He snapped it open at its elbow and jiggled with it for a minute, and the wooden part came away from the barrel.

The driver said he was glad we' worked it out, but Benny said "You mean you're glad you got your own way." Then we sat on the bus with our khaki bags and orange hats and Benny's broken-down shotgun. It was ten o'clock, according to Benny's watch, which still ran pretty well. Keney Cove would be the last stop.

Benny was older than me and bigger, and he showed me how to do things. One time we tried hiking to Bradley Field, thinking to hitch a ride on one of those private planes. Instead, we ended up seeing the inside of the Windsor Locks police station. I couldn't keep walking. I got so tired I decided to sit down along the road and stick out my thumb. A man picked me up. He was an off-duty cop. He stopped for Benny, too, when he caught up with him down the highway. Benny said to him, "Why don't you mind your own business?" so instead of taking us to the airport, he took us to the police station.

Benny didn't get angry at me for sticking out my thumb. He joked about it later, after his mom drove out from Hartford and rescued us. Benny's mom didn't think it was a joking matter. "He's just twelve years old," she said, meaning me, "so it's up to you to keep an eye out for him." Benny's mom looked like Andy Devine on television, and I wasn't used to her being sore and yelling. I was used to her handing us chocolate candy and letting us do whatever we pleased. She let Benny have all kinds of things, so long as he earned the

money himself. He even had a genuine World War II bayonet with real blood stains on it. But this time she went on and on about my being just twelve and how if either of us boys had a father to look after us we wouldn't get into scrapes like that.

If either of us had a father to look after us, we probably wouldn't need to take the bus to go hunting in Keney Cove. I had never gone hunting before but Benny had. His shotgun had checker-patterned carvings on the wood. Benny bought it with money from his route—he got it at Sears.

Benny had the hunting permit, but he said once we got into the woods I could shoot. I was looking forward to that, firing a real gun. Benny warned me that it would kick, but I knew I could stand it. I'd seen it plenty of times before on television.

Benny was pretty sure we'd find something to hunt. You got to hunt squirrels, rabbits, quails, pheasants—things like that, and it was perfectly okay, you wouldn't get into any trouble, so long as you didn't shoot more than the limit. We had a little book that told the limits. I thought it would be fine if we hunted a pheasant or two. Two would be best—one for each of our moms. I asked Benny if he'd ever tasted a pheasant but he hadn't. He thought it probably tasted like chicken, but better because you hunted for it. I could picture handing the bird to mom and seeing her smile and slide it into the oven. Benny explained that you had to pluck a pheasant first, then clean out its guts—and then sometimes you had to pick the shot out of it. I figured that two rabbits would be maybe less trouble than pheasants.

When the bus reached the end of the line, we were alone with the driver. As we went out the door, I made a fart sound. Benny laughed and said that was pretty good. He also said he hoped there was a different driver on the bus when we were ready to go home.

Keney Cove is a flooded-over bend in the Connecticut River. Woods creep right up to the water, which looked as still as ice, as though it were thinking about being ice, and as you walked down along the bank you could see fields behind the woods—fields of snow in the winter, but corn fields or shade tobacco all summer long. Benny said they grow cigar tobacco out here, the best in the world. My dad smoked big cigars before he died. Benny didn't know if his dad does or doesn't. He didn't care either. His dad and mom couldn't get along and his dad left them when he was only two. So he doesn't remember things about his dad.

Here and there the ground was marshy and my shoes got wet. I was walking on the inside, closer to the water. Benny walked with the gun slung across his chest pointing away from the water and me— Benny was careful when he pointed it, even when it wasn't loaded.

When we got far enough into the woods so that we coldn't see the bus stop behind us any more, we decided to try out the shotgun. Benny had ten shells in his bag. He took off his glove and loaded one in. I took off my glove too, and he let me hold another. It was longer than my thumb and made out of green plastic formed into a tube for the shot and powder. There was a metal cap that read "Remington Peters 15 GA." I thought that meant they were made in Georgia. Benny said, "Could be."

He pointed to a clump of branches about twenty feet away and said to imagine that's the bus driver. I pictured him standing there in that green jacket, with his

thumbs in his belt. Benny shot. A bunch of shredded leaves fell to the ground. Neat! I asked if I could try, and he said okay but only one. We wanted to save our ammo for hunting.

Benny loaded it for me and showed me how to hold it. I kept the butt firm against my shoulder and sighted with the bead up front. It was hard to keep both eyes open. Benny said to get him in the head, so I aimed right between where the eyes would be and I hit him, blam! I stood against the kick, and Benny said, "Frankie, you're a natural."

After the shots, everything sounded especially quiet. Benny said we'd have to go off a ways because the noise probably scared off the animals. We decided to sit down and eat the sandwiches that his mom had fixed for us. That way we'd give the animals some time to get over it and come back.

Benny's mom worked at the diner near Aetna on Farmington Avenue. Sometimes she worked at night. She was a cook, which is maybe why she and Benny are both so big. My mom taught people how to dance at the Arthur Murray studio. She also sold Compton's Encyclopedia door to door. Compared to Benny's mom, mine was thin. She was a lot younger, too. But I doubt that she'd ever let me have a shotgun.

When we started out again, Benny explained that we had to be quiet. He showed me how to walk like an Indian. I kept my eyes on the tree branches, looking for squirrels and quails, but I didn't see anything but blue sky through the branches. My feet felt cold. I could see a field through the trees on higher ground away from the river. It looked sunny and warmer over there, and Benny agreed we should hunt there after I told him a few times that my feet were freezing.

In the field yellow corn stalks chopped to the height of my knee broke through the snow crust. They threw shadows that looked golden and warm onto the snow. There was no way you could walk without crunching, though. We just crunched into the field and the sun on my face felt good. Benny said there might be pheasant in a place like this. I kept my eyes open for pheasants.

We didn't go far before we saw some other hunters. Four men walking side by side slowly crossed the field ahead of Benny and me. They saw us, too, and stood still, waiting for us to get close. I said to Benny that maybe they'd let us hunt with them. Benny just laughed as though he doubted it and said they'd probably tell us to keep the hell out of their way.

"You boys fire those two shots before?" asked a tall man wearing yellow-tinted sunglasses.

"Seen anything?" asked another, a guy with a funny moustache.

"Could we hunt with you for a while?" I asked.

The man with the moustache said sure, just so long as we both stayed plunk in the middle and Benny kept the barrel pointing downrange.

"We know how to hunt," said Benny.

"And you boys keep real quiet, too. If you see anything, just give a little whistle."

I figured for certain we'd get something now.

The men fanned out on both sides of us, and we stalked across the field. Benny shushed me before I could ask a single question. All the guns were pointed forward. I wished I had one.

"Look at her go!" one of the men shouted. "Yee ha!" Four shotgun blasts ripped down from the silent field. There, maybe fifty yards ahead, a big rabbit on the run flipped over, tail over head.

"Hey, nice shooting!" one of the men yelled.

Benny hadn't even raised his gun to aim.

The men made it over to the rabbit before we did. They were chuckling, and one man, the one in the yellow glasses, held it up by the ears. "You boys want a little hunting trophy?"

I held open the wide mouth of the khaki bag on Benny's back, and the man dropped the rabbit in. I told them we'd go home and stuff it. "Certainly has enough holes to stuff it through," said the man.

Benny and I headed back and the four men went on without us. They were passing a flask and joking around. I couldn't believe they let us have that rabbit. "Isn't that something!" I said to Benny.

As we headed back to the river, Benny let me carry the gun. It felt heavy after a while, and we sat down on a big fallen log that was soft but a little wet from rotting.

"Let's look at the rabbit," I said.

Benny took off his pack and we dumped the rabbit onto the dirt. The fur was smeared with smelly brown doo. So were the rest of the shells. It was coming from the rabbit's behind. The rabbit's behind had been blasted open. There was blood too. Maybe the rabbit had been sick to begin with. It looked bad.

"No wonder they were laughing about it," said Benny. "No wonder they gave it to us."

He sounded disgusted.

"Some present," he said. "Some big deal."

We didn't want the rabbit after that. I thought we should bury it but Benny just gave it a good kick. We went on. I still had the shotgun.

We reached the river bank and walked beside the current that was so slow we couldn't hear it running. The mud made the footing slippery and I was careful holding the gun. I kept an eye out for anything moving, besides the dried brown leaves shimmering in the branches.

Then I saw it. A little grey cat running along the ground. I swung the barrel up for a shot, but when I pulled the trigger nothing happened.

Benny said it wasn't loaded. I asked how come, and he said he'd wanted to be extra careful back there with those men.

"Careful?" I asked. "About what?"

"It was getting crowded back there, that's all."

Then I asked if it was okay to hunt cats. He said he didn't remember anything about cats in the booklet that came with the permit.

"Maybe that means there's no limit," I said.

"Yeah," said Benny, handing over a shell. The cat had gone up a tree. Benny said to be patient. I circled the tree and spotted it half-way up. I aimed along the barrel and kept the butt in tight. When I squeezed the trigger, the little cat flew off the tree and hit the ground with a thud.

It lay there quiet and peaceful, with just a little blood showing. The fur was smooth and soft. One of the rear legs had gotten shot off, but I figured we could stuff it anyway. We put the cat into the khaki bag. Benny told me again I was a

real natural.

We didn't have to wait long this time before a bus came. It was a different driver, and he didn't say anything about Benny's gun. He asked if we'd gotten anything and I told him what.

He looked down at me from his seat at the wheel and his eyes went suddenly tired. He was an old man with grey in his hair and crinkles around his eyes.

"That's a hell of a thing to shoot," he said.

"What's it to you?" Benny put in.

"People live around here," he said. "Some little boy— "

"It was wild," said Benny.

"Yeah," I said, "It was wild."

We sat down. The door closed with a hiss and the bus pulled out.

"How do you know it was wild?" I asked Benny.

"Nobody who has any feeling for a cat is going to let him roam wild in the woods all day," he said.

We didn't talk much for the rest of the ride. I was happy just to be warm once again. And I was tired. When we got to our stop the driver looked away as we walked by him to get off.

"It was wild, pop," said Benny, "Wild."

Benny's mom wasn't at home. The note said there was food on the stove and pie in the oven.

We had some pie, then took the khaki bag into Benny's room. We spread the business section out on the floor and then dumped out the cat. I took it by a paw and carried it to the bathroom and ran it under the faucet. The water streamed nicely through the fur, rinsing the crud that had stuck to it from Benny's bag.

Benny said we'd have to clean out the cat's guts. You couldn't just leave it the way it was because it would go hard and start to stink. Benny had a biology kit, the kind that come with dead frogs, and he got out the fancy knife with the razor-sharp blade. We took a piece of board and stretched the cat out on it, nailing its three good feet. With the sharp tip of the blade, Benny pierced the cat's belly, right in the middle. He cut straight down to where the cat makes. The thing opened just like it had been unzippered. The insides smelled musty, like an attic or like your skin smells after they take the cast off your broken arm that's gotten better. Inside the cat's body everything was tucked away as neat as my mother's dresser drawers.

I thought I could tell the heart but Benny said it was the liver. The heart was under that, inside a membrane, like cellophane. Benny showed me the lungs and the ribs and the stomach and the intestines. It all fit together so neatly. It reminded me of the time we took my watch apart to see how it worked. Benny showed me the little flecks of shot.

Benny began to skin it, peeling the hide away from all the insides. He used the edge of the knife to help it along. It was like taking a kid's jacket off for him. When Benny got to the feet, it was like the jacket had gotten stuck going off inside out. We couldn't get the skin off the feet until Benny sliced them off. Then the skin slipped away just fine.

Benny had trouble with the head, too. The skin wouldn't come off there either. We didn't know what to do. The knife didn't help. Benny got out his bayonet and just wacked the head off altogether. That meant we weren't going to stuff it, but

we still had a nice piece of fur.

We had trouble at the other end, too, but after we lopped off the tail we had a real pelt. The fur was smooth, and when we cut away the three leg parts, you couldn't tell that one leg had been shot off. It really was a nice little pelt.

Benny said we still had to tan it or else it would get stiff. He went looking for his book about stuffing and fixing up animals, and I scraped away the bits of flesh that were still sticking to the inside of the skin. The inside of the fur was sleek and smooth, like the inside of your cheek when you feel it with your tongue.

Benny said that tanning the skin wasn't going to be easy. First we had to brush away all the dried blood, and then we had to salt down the skin. If we didn't do that, the hairs would come out later. Then we had to boil up some water with alum and borax mixed in. He didn't think they kept alum or borax around the house, and we didn't find any.

Benny figured the best thing to do would be to brush it off and salt it down and leave it alone for a while. The book said you could leave it packed away in salt for as long as you liked. He thought his mom would help us get the other stuff, the alum and borax.

Benny got his toothbrush to brush off the dried blood, and then we used the salt shaker. Here and there the skin was still damp from the rinsing and the salt didn't go on well. It felt rough against my fingers inside the fur.

When we got it salted up pretty well, Benny wrapped it up in the comics. I figured we'd keep it in his freezer until his mom got us that other stuff, but Benny handed it to me and told me to keep good care of it. He said it was mine because I had hunted it.

I liked the way Benny looked after me. He was a real friend. But he had a claim on the pelt too, seeing as how it was his gun, and his place, and he'd taken me hunting. But Benny woudn't take it back. He said, "No, you keep it. This is the way it's supposed to be—to remember your first time."

He could be pretty stubborn. The way we settled it was, we unwrapped the pelt and Benny sliced it with heavy scissors. Then we each took half. I left for home then, walking through a wind so cold it made me cry. I didn't care. I was thinking how proud of me my father would have been.

from COTTONWOOD 29, Winter 1982

Keith Denniston

SUSPENDED SENTENCE

When the whole truth is known, when everything is finally and totally out in the open, open as much as anything in this world ever really can be, though there is always probably a good deal that only God can know, and if he does, he won't tell, which undoubtedly is a good thing for us who can only manage to do whatever it is that at any particular time seems to be the, at that moment, best that anyone can do, even though later, not fully understanding, others will decide that he did some terrible wrong and will be happy to tear him to little pieces, blaming him for every single thing that ever went wrong, things that happened in the distant past when he had absolutely no control over events and happenings that he was too young even to fully understand, let alone cause to happen, as well as present events like the unexpected ones that no one could possibly have foreseen which occurred to us this Good Friday when Mother, my sister Sharon, and I were sitting around the kitchen table, lunch over, the dishes washed and put away, our dog fed and asleep on the back porch, Mother kneading dough for hot cross buns for Easter dinner because she said that this year she was going to go to mass whether anyone else in her family did or not so she was getting her work out of the way and simply giving up on us though she had tried to raise us right since Father up and left us in the lurch which she always said several times a day when we were home from college, and Sharon, all in black, as usual, which she swore she would wear forever so it was no use for Mother even to try to talk

her out of it for she would mourn forever and ever or to try to stop her from playing Lennon's Double Fantasy over and over on her own record player in her own room, was dyeing Easter Eggs purple and yellow to make a decoration for the table for Easter Sunday, being careful, as Mother told her to be, with old newspapers spread over one end of the kitchen table to catch the dribbles, dipping hard boiled eggs into a bowl of purple and a bowl of yellow dye with a wire gadget she had made and then carefully placing them on mother's cake-drying rack, while I was just sitting there, smoking king size cigarettes, trying to catch up on my philosophy assignments, which after attempting four other academic fields with little success or interest is what I have now declared my major to be, when our doorbell, one of the old fashioned kind you twist not push, rang, and Mother said, since I was doing nothing, which is what she calls reading philosophy assignments, I should answer it, so I lit another cigarette and went to the door, expecting nothing except, since it was Good Friday, some Jehovah's Witnesses or school kids with the day off who wanted to sell some kind of stupid tickets, so imagine my surprise, if you can, when I opened the door and there stood, I couldn't believe my eyes at first, our dog who was supposed to be asleep on our back porch after lunch because he is real real old, fourteen, and Mother will not have him in the house because he drools, but she had just had manure spread on her garden patch and no one can stop him from rolling in it and since he is so old and decrepit as well as huge, he is very difficult to bathe, which of course is a chore that always falls to me, but, of course, I am no idiot, whatever Mother and Sharon may think, so I almost immediately realized that it wasn't our dog standing on his hind legs but an old man in a long black overcoat who had a mop of reddish grey hair, bushy eyebrows, and a huge mustache of the same wiry reddish grey hair and a protruding mouth which made him for an instant look remarkably like our dog, an uncanny resemblance, which I was still pondering as he said, "Hubert, I need to see your mother," so I realized that he knew who I was and in a flash I realized who he was, of course, our Uncle Rufus whom I had not laid eyes on for fourteen years since that dreadful time that Father up and left us in the lurch nor he me, to my knowledge, since he was Father's brother, and, as we believed, felt guilty about what Father did to us, so all these many years he has let Mother, Sharon, and I live in this house which he owns and we just pay taxes and upkeep, the taxes which kept going up every year so the upkeep we have let go down because all these years Father has sent only child support checks to Uncle Rufus which Uncle Rufus forwarded as regular as rain by the fifth of the month, which explains why Sharon and I continue in college though she is twenty-three and I am twenty-four because when we graduate the child support checks will cease which constitutes our income, not generous, but it has been sufficient to our needs, especially since we only have to pay taxes and upkeep on Uncle Rufus' house which we call our home, so with these thoughts racing through my mind I escorted Uncle Rufus into our kitchen, hardly noticing that he kept muttering, 'poor little tyke' at me, why, I knew no reason at that time, but Mother, always alert, recognized him immediately and said, "Why, Rufus," pulling her hands out of the dough, but Uncle Rufus said, looking at Sharon, her black dress contrasting violently with the purple and yellow eggs, "Oh, you know already," with great sadness, and Mother, her doughy hands arrested in midair said, "What, Rufus?" and Uncle Rufus bowed

his shaggy head and said, "I hate to have to be the one to tell you, but Hubert is dead," so in a trice Mother and Sharon looked at me and I was totally bewildered, knowing myself to be alive and started to remonstrate when Mother understood and said before I could utter one syllable, "Your father, Children," and, like a ton of bricks, it hit me because I had been named Hubert after my father, Hubert, so in reality I am Hubert, junior, but seldom if ever have I thought of myself as so, so Sharon shrugged, understanding too, and went back to her eggs, but Mother looked stunned and said, "How, Rufus?" and immediately I thought but did not say, 'social disease,' those very 'thought' words shoving my mind down a dismal corridor of painful repressed memories and old guilt that I never really deserved to feel because Mother had always been violently opposed to drinking in any form and had always said that all you could find in drinking establishments were prostitutes and social diseases, I think because she had always suspected that Father frequented such places, so when I was merely eight years old and had to return to school because I forgot my coat and I accidently saw Father and a blond lady get out of his Buick and go, pretty as you please, into the Triple Cross Bar and Grill, thinking to save Father from a social disease, not even knowing what one was, I rushed home and told all to Mother, wouldn't you have done so, though little did I expect the three days of violent arguments that followed my, I insist, innocent disclosure, which ended by Father up and leaving us in the lurch, running away in his Buick with the blond lady to Tucson, Arizona, where he opened a rather lucrative garden center business, Mother having divorced him with Uncle Rufus acting as intermediator because Mother and Father refused to have any more intercourse, but Uncle Rufus seemed to side with Mother so she received child support payments and, thanks to Uncle Rufus, a roof over her and her children's heads, though he dropped out of sight, perhaps not wanting to be reminded of his brother's infidelity, but before that while the divorce settlement was being arranged, he noticed that I especially seemed to be taking Father's absence hard, and indeed I was because I felt that I was totally to blame and guilt was gnawing at me, but Uncle Rufus mistakenly thought I was simply grieving over the loss of my Father, so, feeling by proxy, guilty himself, he brought me a dog for company, a reddish-brown puppy of indeterminate species, saying to Mother, "It's no substitute for a father, but maybe it will cheer the little tyke up," and no one can remember whether it was Sharon or I, we both have argued over it endlessly, who first noticed that the dog remarkably resembled its donor, Uncle Rufus, so Rufus the dog was called and Rufus it is called to this day as it now lay sleeping on our back porch, so my confusion at the front door is little wonder, but as Uncle Rufus was explaining to Mother about Father's heart attack, his interment in Tucson, Arizona, and his will favoring the blond lady who had become his wife, I was thinking about the generosity Uncle Rufus had shown us over these last fourteen years and about what the future might hold for us if he discovered that his wards had named Rufus Rufus after him, and Sharon must have been following a similar train of thought because she stopped dyeing her eggs, looked at me, and said, "Where's Rufus" to which Uncle Rufus replied, "I'm here, Child. You're wearing black? Did you already know?" while Mother who had always said that we should not call Rufus Rufus simply spluttered, looked at me, and pointed with her doughy hand to the back porch where Rufus was having his nap, so

evidently both Mother and Sharon had placed the total responsibility on me for keeping Uncle Rufus ignorant of his look-alike and namesake, Rufus, the dog, so while Sharon was telling Uncle Rufus that what she wore was her own business and Mother was remembering her manners and asking him to take off his coat and sit down after so many years, I quietly slipped out the kitchen door to the back porch, tried to get Rufus to get up, but the dog was sleeping like a log so I dragged him down the back steps into the back yard by Mother's garden patch where I smelled the fresh manure, and knowing it would be my luck for Rufus to finally wake up and roll in the manure which he loved to do, it being his nature, I continued to drag him by the collar through the back gate and into the alley, thinking he was too old to up and leave and would remain there until Uncle Rufus concluded his visit and/or his business with Mother and we would know our fate now that Father was dead, but after carefully closing the back gate and running across the yard so I would not be missed by Uncle Rufus, I had just reached the back porch door when I heard our neighbor, Mrs. Hurley yelling, "Oh, Hubert, Hubert, Rufus is run over. I think he's killed," so back I flew in a panic because I loved Rufus, and I could hear Mother and Sharon and Uncle Rufus, too, following, all having heard Mrs. Hurley's loud yells, and sure enough there in the alley was poor Rufus, his middle section all squashed and oozing out, and a 1950 dark green Dodge shiny as a brand new car, with white sidewalls, had stopped and out the driver's door stepped a little lady in a bright print dress wearing short white gloves and a flat little white straw hat with lilies-of-the-valley and a white half veil holding down her silvery grey cork screw curls, who said very calmly, "I am so sorry. He ran right in front of me," but Mrs. Hurley shouted, "I'm a witness. I saw it all from my kitchen window. He just lay there. You ran right over Rufus," and dumbfoundedly Uncle Rufus said, "No, I'm here," and I said, "That dog can't run," and Sharon said, "Just like Lennon. Struck down by an assassin's bullet," and began to cry, but the lady said, "I never carry a gun," and Uncle Rufus said, "What Lennon? Does he live around here?" and Sharon said, "John Lennon, the Beatle, you old fool," and Mother wiped her eyes and said, "Poor Rufus," and Uncle Rufus said, "Oh, I'm all right. I been called worse," and Mother started to say, "Not you, Rufus, the dog . . . ," but Mrs. Hurley interrupted and said, "Why Rufus, Is it Rufus? Why, it's been years," and Uncle Rufus remembered her and smiled and said, "Is it Mattie Hurley? Why you haven't changed a bit. How's your mother?" so while Mrs. Hurley was explaining how her mother and Mr. Hurley had passed away years ago and Uncle Rufus was explaining how Hubert had died of a heart attack in Tucson, Arizona, just last week, his brother Hubert, not me, and Sharon was explaining to the lady in the white hat that she was not in mourning for the dog because she could not have known he would be run over, but for John Lennon and had sworn always to wear black, I leaned down by poor old Rufus, the dog, and I started to think that maybe he had died on the back porch, which was why I couldn't get him to wake up while dragging him down the back steps, across the yard and into the alley, that he was dead before the lady in the white hat had run over him in her new ancient green Dodge, but I decided to let well enough alone because I remembered all the guilt I felt for telling about Father and the social disease which started all our troubles and he died of a heart attack after all, so keep mum, I thought, after all, what they don't know won't

hurt me because ever since the day Father up and left us in the lurch I knew that sooner or later I would get the blame for it all since for all these years I have been living the life of a convicted criminal who has been given a suspended sentence, and the lady in the white hat was talking to Sharon, telling her how she understood though she didn't even know who John Lennon was because she had once spent New Year's Eve at the Waldorf Astoria dancing to the music of Guy Lombardo with her late husband who had bought her the Dodge the year he had died, and Mother said she couldn't understand or for the life of her think how the dog had gotten in the alley since he was too old to jump the fence, but he was an old dog and she supposed it was just his time, though he was supposed to be on the back porch, she said, giving me a straight look which I avoided, and besides, she said, it was clouding up and getting chilly, and the lady in the white hat agreed and said it always did that on Good Friday, it seemed like, so she was on the way to Mount Hope cemetery to put some flowers on her late husband's grave before it rained, but after the accident, she said, looking at Rufus, the dog, she guessed she would let it go, and they all stood there around Rufus, so finally Mother said why didn't they all come in and have a cup of coffee and get acquainted, or reacquainted, and everyone nodded and Sharon said she would be happy to play Double Fantasy for the lady in the white hat and for Uncle Rufus and the lady in the white hat said that would be very nice and that she would be more than happy to drive home and get her Guy Lombardo records, but Mother told her she wouldn't need to do that because she had some that it would be nice to hear again, she was so deathly tired of Double Fantasy, that she and her late husband Hubert used to enjoy dancing to the sweetest music this side of heaven, and the lady in the white hat giggled and winked behind her half-veil, but I asked Mother, "But what about Rufus?" and Uncle Rufus smiled and said he could certainly stand a cup of Mother's coffee and a little music, especially if Mrs. Hurley would come over too, and she smiled back at him as if they both knew a secret, so I said quietly to Mother, "No, I mean our dog," so she said, "He was your dog so you can bury him deep in my garden patch and then have your coffee," so Uncle Rufus took his hindlegs and I took his front paws and we dragged him back into the back yard, and then Mother led and they all started in, but the lady in the white hat said, "Oh, Oh," and ran back to her Dodge and brought back a bouquet of jonquils in a coffee can wrapped in tin foil and handed them to me saying, "For the poor puppy," and she followed the rest in, so I got the shovel from the shed and dug a deep hole and dumped old Rufus into it without any ceremony thinking it should have been me and filled the grave getting lots of Mother's manure in around Rufus because he loved it so and when the grave was level, I raked it smooth and put the can of jonquils on it and it looked nice, and I could hear the music from the house, both Double Fantasy and the sweetest music this side of heaven, and I knew that when the music stopped they would all start to figure it out, then Uncle Rufus would know I named, though it may have been Sharon, Rufus after him, and the lady in the white hat would guess Rufus was already perhaps dead and Mother would figure out I had put Rufus in the alley, and Mrs. Hurley might even have seen me do it and might be just biding her time to tell Uncle Rufus who would tell Mother who has been waiting all these years to get back at me for driving Father away, and they would all come roaring out of the house like the thunder of God, and it

would be the end of me, when, God knows, all I was ever trying to do was something expedient.

from COTTONWOOD 26/27, 1982

Edwin Moses

OBJECTS FOUND IN THE WOODS

I've liked to walk in the wooded bottomlands along Wildcat Creek for many years, ever since I was a boy. In those days I rambled simply for the rambling's sake. Then as a young man I walked to keep from thinking too much. Now I go merely out of habit, I suppose. From my room I can get there on foot in twenty minutes or so; I used to do it in less, but Sunset Lane seems steeper now, I can feel my heart pound as I climb the hill, and my breath comes short. I think that perhaps I will just stop here one day—a hot day—sink to the pavement, and roll back down to the bottom like a half-deflated beach ball.

At the top of the hill I cross Sunset Avenue and walk along the fence that separates the Girl Scout Park from the cemetery. The Girl Scouts' property resembles a golf course; rolling, mostly open grassland, it has a clubhouse in the middle and a municipal water tower near the back. The cemetery is park-like too, with old trees and grave-markers dating back to the late 1850s. Most people are afraid of cemeteries, and I remember, as a boy, regarding this one with superstitious dread; exploring it alone at night was a great adventure. But now I like it: it's a peaceful place, and I like to think of all those people, whose names I read on their stones, whose lives, most of them, were bitter and lonely, at rest in their everlasting dark.

I stay on the Girl Scouts' side of the fence, though, until I come to the back of their land; then I scramble through the wire and walk along under a row of Scotch pines, down the gravel road that borders the cemetery. Today, a bright afternoon in late November, fox squirrels scold me from among the graves, blue jays squawk at me as they pass by overhead. Soon I reach the rim of the creek valley. This area has been much built up over the years—across the creek, where once there were open fields, now there's a vast trailer park—but the bottomland itself remains unchanged. It remains a refuge for the small animals—beavers and muskrats, coons and possums, an occasional fox—that around the margins of towns, in a world not their own, still survive. You don't go down into the creek-bottom to get from one place to another, just if you're out wandering, so there aren't many beer cans; but there's lighter detritus, now and then, plastic bottles and suchlike washed into the woods by floods.

To reach the creek I plunge straight down the hill, through bushes and small trees, on a path so faint I sometimes lose it completely; then, pushing through scrub cedars, I have a scratchy walk. The creek itself runs brown in summer, clear, bright green over algae in winter, and is small enough to ford knee-deep wherever there's fast water. You can go fishing in it for carp and channel cat, but they run puny, so that it's really boys' fishing. It hasn't seemed worthwhile, not for a long time. Once at the creek I turn right, upstream, and for fifty yards or so

walk along the foot of a steep hillside; not quite a cliff, but you'd climb it on hands and knees, scrabbling for footholds, kicking loose shale down the slope into the water. The path is safe enough except at one treacherous spot where a spring keeps the ground perpetually soggy; I slipped there once and skidded in, waist-deep in the murk. In this same pool last winter, in eight feet of water, a woman drowned. She was walking across on the ice and fell through. She stayed in the water for almost a week, until I in my turn walked out on the ice, frozen harder now, looked down at my feet, and saw her lying there, all shadowy, as through a chipped, scored, translucent pane of glass.

Once past this pool I reach the flat bottomland, and there the walking becomes easy. I have constantly to wind about, though, dodging thorns: greenbriar; gooseberry (long ago we came here to pick gooseberries for jam and pies, but now the trees have grown so high and thick that the bushes, in deep shade, bear no fruit); and honey-locust. The locust thorns are three or four inches long and hard as ironwood, and I dream, sometimes, of walking into them at night and putting out my eyes.

But now it's mid-afternoon, with bright fall sunlight filtering through the trees, and I walk along in peace, until I see on the ground in front of me a small heap of bright-colored objects. There's a red felt-tipped pen; a litte red plastic skeleton, of the kind sold by dimestores for Halloween; a third-grade arithmetic and a third-grade reader, each with "Property of Debbie Fairchild" inscribed in red on the flyleaf; and finally there's a small plastic-covered notepad. In this is printed in block capitals, again in red

CLUB
PRESIDENT— DEBBIE
SECRETARY—ELSIE
TREASURER—JOHN
MEMBER—

Nothing else out of the ordinary is in view. I sit down on a log and look at these things. I think about them for a long time, until it is almost dark.

I

The three children, all carrying schoolbooks, scramble down the hill to the creek and set out single-file along the path. Debbie, in the lead, seems not so much oblivious of the obstacles in her way as disdainful of them. She flicks branches aside carelessly, so that John, immediately behind her, has to duck and swat at them, and soon falls farther back. When she comes to the soggy place, she plants her foot squarely and firmly in the wet, flooding her shoe and sock with a geyser of muddy water. She skids, flails with her arms to keep her balance—she almost pitches her books into the creek—and continues on without looking back. When John in his turn arrives at this place, he plants his left foot solidly and swipes viciously at the ground with his right, lifting a dollop of mud the size of a half-dollar onto the back of Debbie's dress. Elsie tiptoes across fastidiously; even so her black-and-white saddle shoes turn a uniform dark brown. As they near the point where the path opens out into level woodland, John and Elsie lag farther behind, until the formation suggests not a leader and two followers, but a victim and two conspirators. Once on secure ground, Debbie glances back, imperiously beckons them on, and sets off again, weaving her brisk way through the

brambles. The other two reluctantly close the gap. It's a sticky afternoon for late October, and they sweat and itch in their heavy school clothes.

Debbie leads them to a little glade, stops, and sits down crosslegged on the grass. She takes out of her coat pocket a pen, a notepad, and little plastic skeleton. The others come up and stand facing her, surveying her sulkily. "This is the headquarters for the club," Debbie announces firmly. "It's a great place."

"It's a *rotten* place," John says.

"Rotten," Elsie echoes. "My shoes are all muddy."

"Crybaby," says Debbie fiercely. "It's a *great* place."

"I'm thirsty," John says. "And hungry. If we had it in my basement like I said, we could go up to the kitchen . . . "

"John's basement is nice," says Elsie.

"I'm the president, so you have to do what I say, so we'll have it here."

"You're not a president. You're a *dictator,* isn't she, Elsie?"

Elsie, not knowing what a dictator is, nods cagily.

"It's a stupid club anyway—it doesn't even have a name. How can you have a club without a name?"

"It's—it's the Skeleton Club," Debbie says, raising the skeleton triumphantly aloft.

"Dumb name," Elsie says.

"And besides, if you're the president, and I'm the treasurer, and Elsie's the secretary, who's the *members?*"

"We'll get Lynn for a member."

"I *hate* Lynn," John says.

"Lynn's dumb," Elsie says.

"I'm the president, so we'll get Lynn," Debbie says, opening the notebook and posing the pen to write.

But John says suddenly, "Let's have a vote—how many want *Debbie* for just a member? Me!"

"Me!" says Elsie. And now John chants, and Elsie joins him, "Debbie's just a member, Debbie's just a member . . . !"

"Shut up, Shut up, Shut up!" Debbie cries.

"You can have your old club," John says. "Elsie and me'll start our own. And Elsie, you can be the president."

"We'll *both* be the president." They join hands and turn—"So much for *you,*" Elsie sniffs over her shoulder—and slowly, hand in hand, they thread their way through the trees and out of sight.

Debbie sits there for a long time. She's no longer a president, now, but a queen, brooding on the direful punishments—the boiling in oil, the feeding to the moat-creatures—that she'll visit on her traitorous subjects. When she finally looks up, it's deep twilight. Hastily she gathers her things together and sets out, but she goes the wrong way, deeper into the woods. Brambles snatch at her. In blind panic she begins to run, trips over a root and falls, and everything goes flying. She scrambles up and hurries on, fighting tears, running and walking and running again; hopelessly turned around, she circles back toward the deep pool in the gathering dark.

II

Debbie stares at her mother's gravestone, wondering why she isn't sad. Experimentally she screws up her face to see if she can cry, but nothing happens except that she feels silly— "Like a monkey in the zoo!" she says to herself, and glances around to see if anyone is watching. She doesn't even know why she keeps coming here—her mother's been dead for almost a year now—unless it's because her father tells her not to. "It's unhealthy," he says. This makes no sense to Debbie—as if you could get sick just from walking around in the cemetery—and she hates her father anyway, but still, coming here straight from school was a dumb thing to do. She's missed the bus, and to walk to the Wildcat Creek Trailer Park from the cemetery takes almost an hour, and when he asks her why she's late, what will she think of to say?

Unless she doesn't go around by the bridge after all, but walks straight down the hill and wades across the creek! She giggles at the thought: her father would have ten fits. He's forever warning her against going near it, because, he says, "You're all I have left, darling—if anything happened to you, I don't know what I'd do." When he talks about how she's all he has left he gets very weepy and sentimental and she hates him more than ever. So now the idea of wading the creek, breaking one of his rules to get away with breaking the other, grows in her mind until it becomes irresistible. She sets off down the hill.

But when she gets to the bottom, she sees it isn't going to be as easy as she thought. The trailer park is right across the creek and up the far bank, but the water looks much too deep to wade and the bank is too steep to climb. She looks about irresolutely, wondering if this is where her mother drowned; shivers, and wishes she were on her way home on the school bus. It's too late for that, though, and too late to go around the long way—she has to go ahead, so at random she turns right, upstream, and starts walking. This turns out to be a mistake: almost at once she sticks her shoe into a soft spot, and drags it out coated with mud. So now she's going to catch it whatever happens. When she gets to where the path opens out she stops, no longer in a hurry to get home, and sits down to think things over.

She's gazing so intently into the water that she doesn't notice the stranger until he's standing right behind her. He says, "What are you looking at, little girl?"

She stares up at him and sees a tall young man, dark-haired, wearing khaki pants and an old army jacket; she's prepared to be frightened, but his calm face and quiet voice reassure her.

"Nothing," she says. Then she adds, self-importantly, "My mother was drowned in that pool—she fell through the ice, right over there."

"That's too bad," says the stranger. "You must be lonely. But there's another little girl, you know, just like you, that lives in the water there—look down." She looks, and sees, in the clear green autumnal water her reflection, with the stranger's looming darkly over it.

"That's silly," she says.

"That's right—you're a big girl now, aren't you? Too old for make-believe. So if you can't be friends with the girl in the water, why don't you come and be friends with me?"

"No, thank you," She says, a little uneasy now. "I have to be getting home.

My father will be worried."

"I'll take you home," the stranger says. "But first I want you to come and play a game with me."

"What sort of game?"

"Just a game— I'll show you how to play. And then I'll take you home to join your mother."

Debbie thinks the stranger must be confused, but she doesn't want to offend him—she really does need someone to help her across the creek—and anyway, he has her by the hand and is hurrying her along into the woods. "Not so fast!" she says.

The stranger glances down at her. "Those things you're carrying—they're slowing you down," he says. "Leave them here."

"But my books, and the stuff for my club . . . "

"You won't be needing them anymore," he says, "now drop them!" And he gives her arm a twist, so she lets them go.

The game lasts a long time, until twilight. When it's finally over, the stranger scoops Debbie up in his arms and carries her back to the deep pool in the gathering dark.

III

Debbie's father has developed a ritual: every Sunday he brings her to the cemetery and makes her read aloud what's written on her mother's grave:

Ellen Fairchild
Born 1945 . . . . . Died 1981
Devoted Wife and Mother

She reads it in an expressionless monotone, like someone reciting in a language she doesn't understand. When she's finished her father says, "You see? Your mother's dead. Her body is right down there, in the ground. And her soul's in Heaven."

Debbie, glad to have gotten this foolishness over with for another week, doesn't bother to argue. She knows where her mother is: she's in the woods down by the creek, where they so often used to go, just the two of them, "To get away and be by ourselves for a while." Except for the two months during the summer when she was in the "home"—though that's certainly not what it was, she knows what a home is like as well as anybody—she's been going down into the woods almost every single day, ever since her mother left her. Her father has tried all sorts of ways to stop her—he's argued, pleaded, threatened her, and once he even whipped her with his belt. Last spring he hired a girl from the high school to meet her at school, take her home, and watch her until he got home from work; but she scratched and kicked so fiercely that after three days the girl wouldn't do it anymore, not even for ten dollars a time. Now, except for the weekly trips to the cemetery, he seems to have given up: when she comes home from school at six o'clock instead of three, he only stares at her sadly.

Debbie knows the way so well that today, a bright afternoon in late October, she skips dryshod across the wet place in the path without even noticing it. She wanders around in the woods for a long time, singing to herself, talking to her

mother under her breath. For the two of them this is home now, a refuge from her father and from the doleful sympathetic face with which the world regards her. So when her mother actually appears before her in the twilight, wearing the long white dress she was buried in, Debbie is not even surprised—it seems so natural. She's a little shy at first, though, awed by her mother's beauty, the pale delicate face, and the black hair hanging loose below her shoulders. But then her mother smiles— "Why, what's the matter, don't you love me anymore?" she says, gently mocking; she holds out her arms, and Debbie rushes into them. "Mama," she cries, "Where have you been, I've missed you so!"

"Why, I've been in the creek," her mother says. "Didn't you know? And Debbie, it's the loveliest world—all clear and green, the fish swim to and fro, and the birds sing for me in the trees . . . "

"The trees?"

"The trees that you see when you look into the water, you know. But darling, I've been ever so lonely without you, so I've come to bring you back home with me; and we'll live all by ourselves, in the water-world together."

"But won't Daddy be sad?"

"He will. But you must choose. Now who do you love better, your father or me?"

"I love you."

"And your books and your school friends, or me?"

"You."

"Then leave your things here, darling, and come with me."

Debbie sets down her books, her notepad and pen, her little red Halloween skeleton, and follows her mother through the trees: her mother seems to float along above the ground, untouched by thorns and brambles. Soon they reach the water. "Look there," her mother says, "that's where I live; where we live now." She peers down and sees her own face, and her mother's, smiling, beside it. Her mother takes her hand. "Darling, come with me," she says, and leads her down into the deep pool. Silently, with hardly a ripple, they sink together into the dark.

from COTTONWOOD 26/27, 1982

Melissa Nolte

BEAN BELT WOMEN

"Come on, girls, move it along," Johnson shouted as he walked the narrow pathway at the backs of the line of women. "We've got a hundred and sixty-five more cases to get out before quitting time and you're fawning over these cans like pigs in a poke!"

Maria grunted. "Is that how Pokey's got its nickname?" she yelled at Johnson, not taking her eyes off her work. The women around her giggled out of fatigue and boredom.

"You're funny, Rhodes," Johnson yelled. "So funny I forgot to laugh."

Sarah yawned, and then noticed in vague horror that she'd sprayed saliva over the open cans running by in front of her. "Oh, well," she thought, "people have probably put worse things than that in these cans." Her hands were nimble though gloved in rubber and covered with pork grease. The cans of baked beans came down on the conveyor belt two by two so the women used both hands to pitch a one half-inch square of pork fat into each can. A big pan of pork fat sat between each woman and the moving belt. They had to lean a bit to hit the cans. The "Stokely Van Camp's Pork and Beans" label was put on farther down the line.

The women's hands moved fast, and looking down the belt from where the cans came in, their arm movements looked a blur. The only stationary image was the two lines of intent, weary faces on each side of the belt.

Maria and Sarah stood next to each other. Sarah had only been working a couple of weeks. Maria, a veteran of many months, had trained her on the bean belt. Sarah cried all through her first night. She wasn't fast enough. Her pork fat hit the belt or her overalls or Maria— everything but the cans. Maria told her it would get easier. And it did. Each night that went by was another victory. Sarah was proud of herself. By the end of two weeks, she was thinking she could do the job indefinitely.

The screaming break whistle sounded, and the women threw off their rubber gloves and aprons and scrambled out of the bean belt room toward the break room.

Maria was a big bony woman and Sarah had to jog to keep up with her. "It's a slow night," she said breathlessly.

"You're telling me," Maria said.

In quick, timed movements, the two women punched their cards out for

dinner, got sack lunches from their lockers, and headed for the parking lot. It was four-thirty-three a.m. "Three minutes!" Maria beamed. "Not bad."

They climbed into the back of Maria's Chevy pickup. Then they both sighed as they pulled out sandwiches. They didn't talk as they ate. By that time of the shift, they were ravenous and ate like wild dogs. Then for the next twenty minutes they passed a pint of whiskey between them and smoked cigarettes, talking wildly, chain-smoking.

"You got the hootch?" Maria asked, breaking out a cigarette.

Sarah brought out the whiskey, took a gulp, and gave the bottle to Maria. Then she lit a cigarette. She hadn't smoked until she came to Stokely's. She hadn't drunk whiskey either, or done anything in excess. She was a twittering, slight-framed woman. She had fine pale blonde hair and large spooky eyes. She clung to her job at Stokely's as if it were her moor in life.

"Weed heard anything from Color Rite?" Maria asked, blowing smoke rings as she gazed at the stars.

"Nope," Sarah said, shifting her weight. "He sits there with the baby all messy and doesn't even notice. I came home yesterday and Cooper had shit all over the bed— and Weed was sitting there reading the newspaper."

"Jeez," Maria said, "I didn't think the strike would last this long. Color Rite needs the ones they spent so much time training, don't you think?"

Sarah said she didn't know what to think.

"Well, kick the man's ass, girl!" Maria cried.

"He should at least clean up baby shit if he's gonna be at home mooning and jerking off!" They both burst into laughter. Maria's strong white teeth flashed in the moonlight. They heard someone playing a clarinet in the distance. The whiskey was calming them down.

Sarah gulped some whiskey and it trickled down her chin. "You know, men can be a real pain sometimes, but if you got a good one—"

"There aren't any," Maria said flatly.

"I think Weed's a good man. He's just lazy, that's all. He doesn't like his hands to stink."

"Oh God," Maria said. "I'm not going to touch that one." They both laughed again. "Hey, next break, let's get up on the cat-walk. I want you to see it."

The end of dinner break signaled them like a prehistoric bird squawking. They took their time walking back, heaving the empty whiskey bottle into a trash can.

"Don't know what I'd do without that hootch," Maria said, wiping her mouth.

At the next break, the sun was just tinging the sky with pink dawn as Sarah and Maria climbed the ladder to the cat-walk above the bean vats. "The clean-up crew is off at four, so no one's up here now," Maria said back over her shoulder as they climbed.

They sat with their legs dangling, smoking and staring down at the bubbling beans. The cat-walk was above the light fixtures, so they couldn't be seen. They were about fifty feet above the vats. "Here's where they cook the little suckers," Maria said.

"I know," Sarah said. "They gave me a tour when they hired me." She

smoked and coughed a bit. The whiskey was wearing off, and she was cranky.

"You know, I really hate this place," Maria said. "But when I climb up here, I feel like I've got more of a perspective on it all. I mean, it's just beans!" She sputtered, and laughed.

"How do you keep from feeling like a robot?" Sarah asked.

Maria looked at her. "Well, let's see—I think about where each little can is going. I think 'this pork fat's going to Grandma's for Sunday dinner, this pork fat's gonna feed the kids with weiners, this pork fat's gonna be eaten cold, straight from the can in the Belmont Hotel by some wino who thinks he's being good to himself.' " She stopped short. "You think I'm weird?"

"No," Sarah said. "I think I'll try that."

The break-end buzzer sounded and Sarah jumped. Her cigarette fell from her fingers straight into the bean vat. She put a startled hand to her mouth and looked at Maria with wide eyes. "That's nothing, honey," Maria said as she stood to go back, "one time I was dangling my legs here like we were doing tonight, and my shoe fell off."

Sarah giggled all the way back to the bean belt, her crankiness gone.

"I told Johnson that they should make new labels for the cans," Maria said, " 'Van Camp's Pork, Beans n' Shoe'—but of course, he didn't get it."

A couple of nights later the conveyor belt broke down. Johnson told the belt women to take an hour for dinner, but to be discreet about it.

Maria and Sarah sat in the truck, leisurely enjoying their food and whiskey.

"Who do you suppose is playing that horn?" Sarah asked drunkenly. The clarinet music floated on the still air to them, sweet and solvent with their mood.

"Probably some jazzhead who can't sleep. Could be a block away. Summer carries sounds like that." Maria smiled. "I was laid by a sax player once. He really knew how to play *me.*"

Sarah stiffened. "What do you mean?" Her cheeks burned.

Maria stretched and took some whiskey. "He had good hands, strong fingers. He knew how to push my buttons."

Sarah coughed. "Do you like sex?"

Maria didn't answer for a while. Sarah felt embarrassment stinging her ears. The clarinet played relentlessly on, hotly melancholy. It slithered up and down their bodies.

"Do I like sex," Maria said finally. "It depends. I don't like pump off, jump off, which is probably what you're getting from that man of yours."

Sarah gasped. "That not true!"

"I'm sorry," Maria said, "I didn't mean it that way. But who asks 'Do you like sex?' Hell, everybody likes sex, unless they're unhappy, or somebody's just sticking it to them."

The two sat quietly and absorbed the faint music, passing the whiskey.

"I'm not very happy," Sarah said. "But it's not Weed's fault. It's my fault."

"It's nobody's fault. It just is."

"No. I expect too much."

"Don't matter," Maria said. "Do you wish you had big tits?"

Sarah was startled. "Why, uh, yes, sometimes."

"Who's fault is it that you don't have 'em?" Maria leaned forward.

"No one's," Sarah said quickly. "But that's different. That's something physical. I'm talking emotional."

"It's all the same. I learned that years ago. Maria capped the whiskey.

The clarinet stopped when the dinner-end buzzer sounded. "I wonder how that jazzhead likes Pokey's music," Maria said. They both laughed.

"Maria, do you have anyone you're dating now or anything?" Sarah asked.

Maria lit a cigarette. "Nah. I had a thing going for a couple years but it didn't work out."

"Why not?"

"We weren't made for each other. Too much fighting, you know. It gets old."

"Yeah," Sarah sighed. She looked at Maria's full head of dark wavy hair, her olive skin, her robust body crushed beneath a pair of tight overalls, and wondered what it would be like to be her. "Weed still hasn't heard anything," she said.

"How'd he get that name 'Weed?' " Maria asked.

"Well, our last name is Grasse. And he smokes a lot of dope. Too much. His real name's Arthur," Sarah answered in a soft whiskey drawl. She felt good.

Maria breathed deeply. "You know, I never wanted to get married, never wanted kids."

"You're smart." Sarah laughe. "They ain't much fun."

"I guess I was afraid more than anything," Maria went on. "Now I'm more afraid of being alone."

Sarah shuddered. "Sometimes I wish to God I was alone."

"You chilly?" Maria asked. She handed Sarah an old blanket that was in the truck bed.

Sarah put it around her shoulders. She wished the clarinet was still playing to ease the light tension. It felt like they'd been to dinner too long.

"Well, you asked me if I liked sex—how do you like being married?" Maria asked, starting in on the whiskey again.

"I don't know," Sarah said, looking down. "At first it was real nice. I saw Weed like a saint or something. He looked beautiful and smart, like no one could touch him."

"And how do you see him now?"

"The baby came, and he didn't like the noise. He didn't like me being on edge, and he didn't like not being able to go anywhere at any time. Things aren't so great now." Sarah sighed, and pulled the blanket closer around. "But they'll get better. I don't like working. I'd rather be at home with the baby."

"Hey, you two," Johnson yelled. "Get in here. The belt's going now."

Maria hopped out of the truck and offered a hand to Sarah. Sarah thought it was a strange gesture and ignored it. They walked silently back to the building.

The next night Johnson moved Sarah from the bean belt to the bean table. There women sorted through beans to make sure rocks or bugs or other foreign substances weren't in them. She asked him why he was moving her and he said that since the belt was moving slower, they didn't need as many workers on it.

A woman named Sherry trained her on the bean table. She had sharp lemur-like features and wore a tee-shirt that said "Foxy Chick." She wasn't as warm as Maria and didn't have as much patience. She would cluck her tongue when

Sarah asked questions or made a mistake. Then after about an hour, Sherry leaned over to Sarah and said, "I thought I'd tell you this for your own good, you really shouldn't hang around with that Maria. People are talking."

Sarah blushed with anger and embarrassment. "What do you mean?" She felt her eyes fill with tears as she tried to rake through the beans.

"She's funny. You should stay away from her," Sherry said, not looking at Sarah.

"What do you mean?" Sarah asked again, her voice quivering.

"Don't be stupid, girl. She's, you know, *funny*." Sherry looked around, and then leaned forward and whispered, "And if you hang around with her much more people will think you're funny, too."

"What do you mean by *funny?*" Sarah asked.

Sherry clucked. "Are you retarded, girl? I didn't know Pokey's hired retards." She exaggerated her whisper, "It means she *likes girls*.

"So what," Sarah said.

Sherry gasped. "Well, I don't know about you—but if my man caught *me* hanging around with one of those, he'd whup me for sure."

"That's your problem," Sarah said.

Sarah told Maria she thought it was too cool to eat outside. She ate in the break room by hersef, missing the whiskey that came after dinner. The room became hot and stuffy with smoke and agitated conversation. Sarah avoided all eyes and wished she were outside.

The next break, she stayed inside, also. She couldn't stand the noise and stale air, but she couldn't stand to be laughed at, either. She had fun with Maria. But she had to face people's eyes wondering, and she'd rather be alone.

Maria didn't ask for her company. Occasionally she'd glance at Sarah with humor in her eyes. But usually she loped out to her truck as quickly as possible. And when she came back from breaks, she'd be glassy-eyed from her hootch.

Sarah watched her constantly from the bean table. She watched Maria's arrogant stance, how she'd switch from one hip to the other, her wild hair fuming around her head in a dance. Sarah wanted her to come begging for her company. She wanted to be wanted.

But for days, they barely acknowledged each other. The other women around the bean table had become friendly with Sarah, and started including her in their conversations. There were several young mothers, and they talked about their babies and lazy husbands and which pre-soak worked best, and what was on television last night. Sarah joined in, as she had for years, but something was different. Now she was aware of that presence across the room, and all the talk seemed silly.

Sometimes she'd dream about Maria at night. Then she'd see her when she went in to work at midnight, sleepy-eyed from an evening nap, and all sorts of warm curious feeling would arouse her. One time when Weed was making love to her, she imagined he was Maria.

Johnson put Sarah back on the bean belt. It was moving faster and needed more workers. Sarah stood next to Maria again. "Hey, Sarah, how ya doing?" Maria asked.

Sarah smiled and said fine. She told her that Weed might be going back to

work soon.

"Then you'll get to stay home with the baby?" Maria asked, almost mockingly.

Sarah sensed this and only nodded.

"You want to go up the cat-walk with me?" Maria asked.

Sarah felt her breath quicken. "Sure, next break?"

They went directly to the cat-walk at the break buzzer. Maria was chattering about some stunt she said Johnson had pulled on her, making her work overtime because she had knocked over two pans of pork fat.

They were breathless after climbing the ladder and immediately sat down, swinging their legs over the bubbling beans. "Maria, I'm sorry I've been such a snob lately," Sarah said. "I've had trouble at home and just wanted to be alone."

Maria smiled. "No sweat. What's the problem? Weed been down?" She looked away, as if preoccupied.

"I guess you could say that," Sarah said. She swallowed hard. "Maria, I have to tell you something. Her face was hot and it made her pretty, covering her sallowness with vitality.

Maria looked at her. Her eyes danced in merriment. Her mouth was drawn in an almost smile. "Yeah?"

"I dreamed about you," Sarah said. She was looking intensely at Maria, but saw a man walking down the catwalk behind Maria's head. "I dreamed we made love," she said. Then the man arrived and stood behind Maria, covering her eyes with his hands. He asked Maria to guess who.

Maria laughed like a child and struggled to get the hands from her eyes. "Ron!" she cried. He put his hands on her shoulders and looked at Sarah. "This is Ron, he works on clean-up crew," Maria said, her eyes flashing.

"Hello," Sarah said, feeling tears of embarrassment.

"I came up here to get my clarinet," the man said. "I hide it up here."

"You're the jazzhead who plays for our dinner!" Maria said with delight in her voice. The man nodded. "Why don't you join us in my truck for dinner tonight? I'd like to hear that clarinet up close," Maria said.

"I'm shy around strangers," the man said.

"Don't matter." Maria looked at him over her shoulder and smiled.

"I play the piano," Sarah said weakly. Then the break-end buzzer sounded.

When Sarah and Maria started work at the bean belt, Maria turned to Sarah after a few minutes and said, "No shit, you play the piano?"

Sarah nodded and continued throwing fat.

When the dinner break buzzer sounded, Sarah was paralyzed about where to go. The thought of eating dinner in the stuffy break room made her feel like crying. But the thought of going to Maria's truck and pretending she hadn't just made a confession made her sick to her stomach. She walked slowly to the ladies' restroom and laid down the plastic couch in the foyer. She put her forearm over her eyes and whispered to herself, "Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ."

"Hey," Maria said, touching Sarah's arm.

Sarah sat straight up. She was alarmed and looked at Maria with angry, frightened eyes.

"Hey, you want to come out and eat? Maybe have some hootch?" Maria

asked.

"No," Sarah answered. She stared at the floor.

"Listen," Maria said, "about what you told me at break-time, that's okay if you want to have fantasies." She scratched her head and shuffled her feet. "But I'm really not very into it."

Sarah stared at her with an open mouth. "But, but they said you like—women."

Maria blushed. "You know, that rumor's been going about me since I got here."

"You mean, it's not true?" Sarah felt her eyes begin to tear.

Maria frowned. "I like women, sure, but not for *sex.*" She looked at Sarah and her face got hard. "Women like you—they haven't got anything in the world. Except—except lard-ass husbands and squalling babies. They, they think I can take them away. They want me to ride up and charge them away, for Crissakes!" Maria was yelling. "You're the third one who's come on to me! The *third!*" She switched from one foot to the other rapidly, almost in a dance. "Don't look at me with tears in your eyes and expect *me* to save you! *Don't!*" Maria stood still for a moment with her last words frozen on her lips. She turned around in a circle, looking for something to kick. "I'm the one who should be mad. You want me to be something I'm not so *you* can be happy. I'm the one who should be mad! You have no right to be mad at *me!* She kicked the wall in a quick fierce movement, then she went out the door, saying "Hootch" under her breath.

Sarah rested her face in her palms and cried. After a few minutes, her cheeks began to ache from being screwed into a grimace, and she felt a renewed anger which she had to release.

She walked to Maria's truck and found her with the clarinet player. He had his instrument and was just starting to play. Sarah braced her hands on the sideboard of the truck and glared at Maria and Ron. "I'm sorry I'm not good enough for you because I'm married and not very pretty," she spat. She hardly knew what words were coming out of her mouth. She only knew they made sense to her. "But if you gave me a chance, you might really like me."

Ron looked shocked. Maria just shook her head.

"This is my last night," Sarah added, smacking her hands together as if she was ridding them of dust. She turned and walked back into the factory. Johnson was in the doorway waving her time card in the air. She had forgotten to punch out for dinner.

She heard Maria say, "What do you think this is, an Andy Hardy movie?" She looked back over her shoulder and saw Maria standing in the truck, waving her arms. "You can't expect people to be how you want them in your head!" she yelled at Sarah through cupped hands.

Sarah took her card from Johnson and put it in the time clock. "You girls don't bring your fighting to the belt. Take care of it outside of work," he said to her and winked.

"Yes, sir," Sarah said as she headed for her fat bucket.

from COTTONWOOD 25, Fall 1981

CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES:

Elmaz Abinader (English Department— University of Nebraska, Lincoln, NE 68588) has an M.F.A. from Columbia and will soon receive her Ph.D. from Nebraska. Originally from Lebanon, Ms. Abinader has published in WRAPPING THE GRAPELEAVES, an anthology of Arab-American poets and ALL MY GRANDMOTHERS COULD SING, an anthology of Nebraska Women Poets. She currently has work appearing in WILLOW SPRING and AMELIA.

Guri Andermann (2509 N. Campbell 157, Tucson, AZ 85719) is about to graduate from a paralegal program and hopes to work in the area of women's rights or with women's issues. She hasn't been writing since entering school, saying, "Writing makes me too neurotic to allow for academic success."

Jack Anderson (110 Thompson St. 1 C; New York, NY 10012) has published seven books of poetry and three books concerning dance history. He has been a critic for *Dance Magazine* and presently is a dance critic for the *New York Times.*

Thomas Fox Averill (English Department—Washburn University, Topeka, KS 66621) teaches creative writing and Kansas literature and spends his extra time writing, running, and keeping in touch with other Kansas writers. His first collection of short stories, *Passes at the Moon*, has just been published by The Woodley Press.

Jon Blumb (1201 Prospect, Lawrence, KS 66044) is the staff photographer at Spencer Museum of Art, and has been doing freelance photography work.

Scott Cairns (712 5th Ave., Salt Lake City, UT 84103) has two collections of poems, *Finding the Broken Man* (Window Press, 1982) and *The Theology of Doubt* (soon to be out from Cleveland State University Press). "So We are Caught Here" is included in the later collection.

Rick Campbell (PO Box 10092, Tallahassee, FL 32302) is editing a small magazine, RED BASS, and doing some work for Anhinga Press as well as teaching at Florida A&M University. His work has appeared in THE GEORGIA REVIEW, CEDAR ROCK, PIG IRON, and other magazines.

Jared Carter (1220 N. State Ave., Indianapolis, IN 46201) writes frequently about the midwest. His *Work for the Night is Coming* was the 1980 Walt Whitman Award selection.

Victor Contoski (English Department—University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS 66045) has had poems from his latest book, *A Kansas Sequence* and his cantata, "Quantrill's Raid" set to music by Charles Hoag. He is currently working on a series of poems about midwestern architecture.

Erleen J. Christensen (English Department—University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS 66045) edited COTTONWOOD magazine for three years and has had work in such magazines as KANSAS QUARTERLY and GREAT LAKES REVIEW.

Judson Crews (2323 Kathryn SE 381, Albuquerque, NM 87106) is widely published, and identifies WORMWOOD REVIEW and POETRY NOW as magazines which have published his work over a long period of time.

Robert Day (Washington College—Richmond House, Chestertown, MD 21620) is the author of *The Last Cattle Drive* and *In My Stead*. He writes, " 'The Mackinaw' was the second short story I ever wrote. . ." and adds, "Years later I bought such a coat after seeing a man wearing one on a street corner in Duluth, Minn. on November 24th, 1963. I gave it to myself as a Christmas present that year, to see if it was possible to climb into one's fiction and come back again, unchanged; it is not."

Keith Denniston (English Department—Emporia State University, Emporia, KS 67701) teaches creative writing and writes experimental poetry and short stories. He says that "Suspended Sentence" came about as he was preparing a lecture on the Fisher King myth for a class reading "The Waste Land," and stopped in the middle of it to write, for a remedial Freshman class, an example of combining sentences.

Peter Desy (1626 Cunard Rd., Columbus, OH 43227) has had a story in NEW AMERICA's special issue on the child in contemporary society and has new poems in THE POETRY REVIEW, SOUTHERN HUMANITIES REVIEW, and MEMPHIS STATE REVIEW.

Harley Elliott (Art Department—Marymount College, Salina, KS 67401) has eight books of poetry, including *The Citizen Game*, just out from Basilisk Press. He also makes visual pieces and has recently been writing fiction.

Dave Etter (PO Box 413, Elburn, IL 60119) has just published his sixteenth volume of poetry, *Home State* (Spoon River). After its publication in COTTONWOOD, "Edwina's Tale" appeared in *West of Chicago* in 1982 and then was republished in *Alliance, Illinois* in 1983.

Terry Evans (740 Highland, Salina, KS 67401) has recently worked on Prairie landscapes, which appeared in COTTONWOOD 30. She received a Mid-America Arts Alliance Photography Fellowship in 1983.

David Ewick (610 Dorumi Shijo Omiya, 3-3 Mibigayogosho-cho, Nakagyo-ku, Kyoto 604 JAPAN) teaches at Konan University in Kobe and Heian Women's College in Kyoto.

J.B. Goodenough (P.O. Box 218, Carlisle, MA 01741) has a collection of poems, *Dower Land* (Cleveland State University Press, 1984) and had eight poems anthologized in *New Directions in Prose and Poetry 46* (1983).

David Gremp (17936 Gottschalk, Homewood, IL 60430) is the editorial director of *Journal of American Photography*, Calumet Photographic Society.

Steve Hahn (2910 Cedar Ave., Lincoln, NE 68502) has work appearing this spring in THE MONTANA REVIEW, PRAIRIE SCHOONER, and SOUTHERN HUMANITIES REVIEW. He is a technical writer in Lincoln.

Jack Hand received graduate degrees from the Iowa Writer's Workshop and Kent State. He taught creative writing at Columbia College from 1972 until his death in August 1983. He published more than one hundred poems during his lifetime and his book manuscript, *At the End of the World Bazaar*, is currently being circulated for publication.

Tom Hansen (1803 N. Kline, Aberdeen, SD 57401) teaches at Northern State College. His work appears in recent issues of HOME PLANET NEWS, DEKALB LITERARY ARTS JOURNAL, and ANIMA.

Robert Harlow (407 Spring 5, Albany, NY 12203) is in the Doctor of Arts program at SUNY-Albany, and his work has appeared most recently in THE MIDWEST QUARTERLY.

Diane Hueter (NW 317 Webb, Pullman, WA 99163) works at the Washington State University Library and has work appearing in an anthology, *In the Middle*, edited by Sylvia Wheeler. Her chapbook, *Kansas: Just Before Sleep* was published by COTTONWOOD.

Steven Hind (503 Monterey Pl., Hutchinson, KS 67501) is the author of *Familiar Ground*, which went into its second printing at COTTONWOOD in 1984. "Three Days on the Prairie" is in that volume.

Earl Iversen (125 E. 19, Lawrence, KS 66044) teaches photography in the KU Design Department, exhibits widely, and teaches workshops. He received the Mid-America Art Alliance Photography Fellowship in 1983.

Michael Johnson (English Department—University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS 66045) is chair of the KU English Department. His latest book of poetry is *Familiar Stranger* (Flowerpot Mountain Press). His *Dry Season* and *The Unicorn Captured* are from COTTONWOOD.

Rod Kessler (English Department—Salem State Colege, Salem, MA 01987) won the 1984 AWP competition. "Bennie and I" is included in his collection, *Off in Zimbabwe*, just out from University of Missouri Press.

Susan Jordan originally published "String Games" in COTTONWOOD 25 (KANSAS WOMEN WRITERS).

Bill Kipp (100 Cypress, Kansas City, MO 64123) has taught photography in Kansas City, and currently does studio photography at Woods Photography in Kansas City, Missouri.

William Kloefkorn (English Department—Nebraska Wesleyan, Lincoln, NE

68504) was chosen Nebraska's State Poet in 1982. Originally from Attica, Kansas, Kloefkorn uses small town life prominently in his fourteen books of poetry. His latest, *A Life Like Mine*, is just out.

John Knoepfle (English Department—Sangamon University, Springfield, IL 62708) has published numerous books of poetry. His latest, *Selected Poems* (BkMk, 1985), includes "Outpost."

Thea Liston-Clark was a member of the Cottonwood Staff and a KU student when she died just before "It was snow" appeared in COTTONWOOD 17 (1975).

Denise Low (1916 Stratford Rd., Lawrence, KS 66044) teaches at Haskell Indian Junior College. "Spring Geese" appears in *Spring Geese & Other Poems* (KU Museum of Natural History, 1984). She and her son David edited a selection of Kansas poetry for use with school children, *A Confluence of Poems* (Cottonwood, 1984).

Dick Lourie (16 Aldersey, Somerville, MA 02143) is one of the founders (and still a co-editor/publisher) of HANGING LOOSE magazine and press. His books include *The Dream Telephone* and *Stumbling* (Crossing Press) and *Anima* (Hanging Loose Press). "Signs of Maturity" was reprinted in *Anima* (1978).

W. S. Merwin (c/o Atheneum Publishers, 597 5th Ave., New York, NY 10017) lives in New York and Hawaii. "Voluntary Mutilation" is included in a collection of translations from Follain (*Transparence of the World*, Atheneum). Merwin's latest book of poems is *Opening the Hand*, and his latest prose is *Unframed Originals* (both Atheneum, 1983).

Dan Massad (18 E. Main St. Front, Annville, PA 17003) has his M.F.A. from the University of Kansas. He has exhibited widely in the Midwest and in the East.

Edwin Moses (541 Woodland Ave., Williamsport, Pa 17701) is a full-time writer who has just completed his third novel, *Erika*. His earlier novels are, *One Smart Kid* (Macmillan, 1982) and *Astonishment of Heart* (Macmillan, 1984).

Melissa Nolte (English Department—University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS 66045) also had a story in COTTONWOOD 26/27 (19 STORIES), and has published nonfiction in the Kansas City *Star* magazine and the *Squire* newspaper. She is finishing a degree in Creative Writing and Illustration at KU.

William Page (English Department—Memphis State University, Memphis, TN 38152) writes, "I'm currently on leave, working on my fourth book of poems, which will include the poem 'The Salvation of Uncle Floyd,' which is based on a composite of characters I knew years ago in the Air Force." His first two books are: *The GateKeeper* (St. Luke's Press, 1982) and *Clutch Plates* (Branden Press, 1976).

Keith Ratzlaff (907 Washington, Pella, IA 50219) also published "Field Burning" in a chapbook *Out Here*, a 1984 winner in the State Street Press poetry chapbook division, Pittsford, New York. He is teaching writing at Central Collete in Pella.

Norman H. Russell (Central State University, Edmond, OK 73034) teaches biology and poetry and has published poetry in various magazines.

Larry Schwarm (who will be moving back to Lawrence in the summer of 1985) has lived in Milwaukee, WI the past four years, doing commercial photography.

Anita Skeen (English Department—Wichita State University, Wichita, KS 67208) has been a finalist for NIMROD's Pablo Neruda Prize for Poetry for several years and won the Second Seaton Award given by KANSAS QUARTERLY in 1981. She has published over one hundred poems in magazines ananthologies.

Michael Smetzer (326 N. Main 8, Bowling Green, OH 43402) edits NAKED MAN and is an assistant editor with MID-AMERICAN REVIEW. His work has appeared in HANGING LOOSE, POETRY NOW, KANSAS QUARTERLY, and other magazines. He has work pending in NEW LETTERS, WIND, and TELLUS.

William Stafford (1050 Sunningdale, Lake Oswego, OR 97034) is busy writing and publishing. His recent readings included a tour of Japan in the fall. *Danger in My Heart*, an account of his life as a conscientious objector in World War II, has just been republished by The Bench Press.

Rodney Torreson (165 Elmwood, Grand Rapids, MI 49505) has published in such anthologies and magazines as WINDFLOWER ALMANAC, SPOON RIVER QUARTERLY, BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL, and the 1985 ANTHOLOGY OF MAGAZINE VERSE & YEARBOOK OF AMERICAN POETRY. He teaches at a Lutheran parochial school.

William Trowbridge (223 W. First, Maryville, MO 64468) has a short story appearing in THE LAUREL REVIEW and has published widely in such magazines as THE MISSOURI REVIEW, THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL, and POET AND CRITIC. He is a professor at Northwest Missouri State University.

Chuck Wagner (321 W. 16th Ave. 1, Bloomington, IN 47401) has published in POETRY NOW, LITTLE BALKANS REVIEW, INSCAPE, and KANSAS QUARTERLY, among others. He is presently working on an M.F.A. at Indiana University.

Lyle White (417 S. Glendale, Wichita, KS 67218) has been exhibiting his photographs widely and traveling to do them.

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