COTTONWOOD 36

COTTONWOOD 36

COTTONWOOD magazine welcomes submissions of fiction, poetry, graphics, photography, translation, 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
Box J, Kansas Union
University of Kansas
Lawrence, KS 66045

COTTONWOOD MAGAZINE AND PRESS receives support from the Department of English of the University of Kansas. The project is funded in part by the Kansas Arts Commission, a state agency, and the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency

Special thanks to Barbara Decker-Lindsey

COTTONWOOD 36

EDITOR: George F. Wedge

FICTION EDITOR: Tamara Dubin Brown
POETRY EDITOR: Philip Wedge
REVIEW EDITOR: Gary Brown

LITERARY STAFF:

FICTION:

Lori Dirks
Jane Garrett
Tim Schneider
Amy Smith
Michael Warren
Tod Westcott

POETRY:

Tim Bascom
Barbara Decker-Lindsey
Jane Hoskinson
Brent Lamb
Shelle Rosenfeld
Lynn Shoemaker

PHOTOGRAPHY EDITOR: Jon Blumb

UNIVERSITY LIAISON: Michael Johnson

BUSINESS MANAGER: Brent Lamb

PRODUCTION MANAGER: Tamara Dubin Brown

PRODUCTION STAFF: Kevin Dixon, Chris Kurtz, Stan Lawson

DISTRIBUTION MANAGER: Barbara Decker-Lindsey

CIRCULATION MANAGER: Amy Smith

FALL 1985

COTTONWOOD 36

CONTENTS

POETRY:

PHILIP KIMBALL: AN INTERVIEW AND A STORY

FICTION:

GRAPHICS by George Renault

COVER: Detail from "Mt. Fuji," ink on paper, by George Renault

FALL 1985

EDITOR'S NOTES

Although I have now been editor of *Cottonwood* for slightly over a year, this is the first issue for which I have had primary responsibility. The twentieth anniversary issue was principally the task of the retiring editor, Erleen Christensen—and a beautiful issue it was and is.

The operation of *Cottonwood* has remained substantially the same throughout its history. Editorial decisions have been made by a young and lively staff, many of whose members are currently or recently engaged in study in the Department of English at KU. I do not fit that description. My task, as defined by the staff is to serve as a coordinator of our activities and a person who, through continuity of association with the Department and the magazine, can recruit and train new staff, supervise production and distribution, and work with the editorial staff in making some of the more difficult decisions. What one sees in print (the whole of the selection process: content, style, form) remains the responsibility of a staff interested in writing and editing.

On the basis of the present issue, I anticipate a long and happy association with *Cottonwood*. Stories and poems in this issue seem to me truly to have been among the best submitted in the appropriate time period, and Erleen's interview with Philip Kimball, not to mention the rollicking good fun of the excerpt from his novel in progress, are work I am proud to be associated with.

For the future, we plan no major changes in editorial policies, will continue to read carefully all materials submitted and try earnestly to respond promptly and sensitively to authors.

In a tradition that goes back at least as far as the editorship of Mel Farley, we will publish thematic issues. Our next, to appear in November, will celebrate the one hundred twenty-fifth anniversary of Kansas statehood and the contribution of black writers to Midwestern literature. It seems to us that a literary magazine could find no more appropriate reminder of the central issue at the very start of Kansas history than to devote an issue to contemporary black authors who reside or have resided in the Midwest. We would appreciate help from our readers in publicizing this special issue and urging friends to submit work for our consideration.

George F. Wedge

POETRY

Walter McDonald

SNEAKING OUR FATHERS' SHOTGUNS

Nights, we shoved shotguns
into tumbleweeds
stacked against barbed wire,
jumped back and listened,

aiming our trembling
flashlights. In wind,
the dry spines rattled on wires.
Spooked, we blasted stiff weeds

that soaked up buckshot,
the strung wires singing for miles.
For hours we stalked the turnrows
and shadows, swinging our lights

toward the echo of coyotes,
the scamper of rabbits.
Into mesquites and cactus
we carried both barrels

like rattles tip-up and shaking.
Years later in the Mekong
we crawled on our bellies
hissing commands to each other,

holding our M-16's tip up
and silent, remembering
the scamper of rabbits,
the simplicity of rattlers.

Now we hide our knives and shotguns
in closets from our sons
behind our wives' old dresses,
knowing the risk, the dark appeal.

Sharyn M. Wolf

THE SWEATER

Mother you are knitting me a sweater
of full rust wool

Each stitch is for a time you did not hear me
You bend into night

You strain your eyes Knit one Purl two
You bind and sew

the sleeves for all the times I cried out
and you weren't there

The waist is for every time you were there
but did not answer

The collar is for when you turned your back
I ooh and aah

at the steamy autumn colors You did it all
Not one mistake

When I put it on it is much too big

Con Squires

FIRST FLOOR, SECOND FLOOR

This sleeping apart, even for a night,
redecorates the world.
I dreamed a man, burly and bearded,
came downstairs at midmorning.
He turned sidewise, slipped behind things,
but his face was no good.
We were all together, saying Who? shaking.
and I was supposed to do something,
but watched him through the door
and down the steps, turning up his collar,
buttoning a dirty plaid shirt.

Suddenly the yards were red
with poppies! Trees disappeared
and the hills blazed with them.
They were growing inches apart
even on the roof! He was gone
so permanently,
and I had done nothing!

David Citino

ICE AGE

There's no fear like winter,
three months of being unable
to run from any threat.
Tonight, the woolly-damp stink
of woodsmoke in my hair.
My feet still feel crusted ice
of a trek across fields.
There's barely light enough
for anything. I ache for sleep,
the body turning into itself,
mind moving back, back.
Something in me recalls
the world's sharp tilt to ice
over three million years ago
and so many nights since,
clash and grind of glacier
over stone, lakes great
as the imagination carved
inch by inch, howling and gnashing
of a billion wolves, dank
of the cave deep in each bone.

Lyn Lifshin

4:30 AM

words on tape,
a blood moon
falling into my
bed. I roll
near the wild
light my
hair sleeps
with your words
love you said I
never write a
word about what
I don't know.
the jungle,
steamy blood
on leaves a
woman's hand
in a mass
grave pulling
on you. Typing
out the dark
ness ghosts
in quinine
wind. Saigon
branches in
your ruined
house you take
a breath
it was random you
you say a gun
in the drawer
humans aren't
fragile they
will do anything

W. Fennell

FOUR ASPECTS OF WALTER CHRISTIAN

August 1944. Three weeks from training in Alabama,
Walter Christian fighting Germans in France.
A chunk of shrapnel cutting through his ribs,
His right lung popping like a soap bubble.
Walter on a forest ridge, gasping for air.
His face in long grass. Passing into dullness,
Drifting into sleep. Dim figures embracing him.
Walter being lifted, being carried off.

May 1944. A familiar sight—a lanky, blond figure
Moving through Grove Hill. Walter lifting
A Coke from the ice box at Pierman's Grocery.
Friday night in the balcony of the Sharon Theatre,
A newsreel flashing, then shadows across his face.
At dawn, his rowboat on Coatney's Pond. Casting a line.
Moving slowly down Hickory his graduation night,
Walter regarding white houses under green street lights.

November 1944. In Louie's Barber Shop, the shears buzzing.
Smelling hair tonic and shaving cream.
Walter's mind roving about the hill in France.
Unable to breathe indoors, unable to face his neighbors.
Gathering blitzkreig headlines, dreaming gold-star windows.
Turning vacantly in bed, his right side tingling.
Moving through Grove Hill like a stranger,
Walter ignoring the whispers of the townspeople.

August 1984. Driving his Chevrolet over to Abe's Tavern.
Old Walter at the bar, telling his only story.
Moving through the rooms of his farmhouse,
Walter eating tomato soup and reading the Gazette.
Walter on the bed, fighting to breathe.
His face on soft cotton. Drifting into silence,
Passing into sleep. Dim figures surrounding him.
Walter being lifted, being carried off.

Fritz Hamilton

A GREAT FLOWER HOUSE

(for Phoebe)

Walking through a great flower house
going room to room
opening each door to find a
new Phoebe flower of different

shape & size smell & color all
so sweet & wonderful & I kiss
each one & nibble the petals then
enter a room where the

flower is black & shaking wretched on
a stem en- flamed & it
gives off a harsh angry odor (
well

ho hum
Phoebe & I are
fighting again
ho hum

) I

make a point *not* to water this one &
move on to the next room with
a large red rose bleeding
her

forgiveness

Jan Wheeler

THIS DREAM

Today when I said
I dreamed your death,
your eyes flicked.

In that moment, bread
hardened on your plate,
tomato slices
slid under lettuce
which sagged as
vinegar separated
from oil.

You smiled as you said
we both know we're both
going to die sometime.

We balance these words
between us like
a tray of picked-over bones
and crumpled linen,
a graceless shadow
of what is left.

And o I feel as necessary
as parsley
and you are suddenly
as promising
as peas
rolling off a knife.

Gregg E. Hodges

GRACE

Two blue jays have flaked away from the sky
and are now anxious in the oak tree.
A cardinal adjusts her feathers of rust
in the corner of my eye. Fine cracks
spread through the clouds as when
turtle shells are fired.

Today I caught dry winter berries in my hand
as though they had been flung to me.
The crooked bush looked all fingers,
and the berries, globes of purple light,
augured other, unseen fingers, nearby.

But who can believe such things?

The sun sends down roots of light.
Birds are not nesting in dead trees;
knotted oaks gather the songs and squawks
of birds and pump this warm liquid
through twigs and branches, through trunks
to roots to soil.

And the stream is melting from its middle.

Hal J. Daniel III

ANNIE NOATAK

My finger
feels the
groove of

her cokewhite
shovel shaped
two incisors.

Two hands
honor her
brownwide

smooth face.

That deer
skin wild

Indian woman
gives me the

past
best

and I rip
sinews of
raw meat.

I brave
ice and

snow when
I look in

her starling
purple-black

eyes.

Larry Starzec

THE WIDOW'S PARLOR

Doilies she crocheted
lie like giant snowflakes
on floral upholstery
covering worn spots
where her husband's head
rested twenty years ago.
The heavy-cushioned chairs
could still swallow a child,
if a child were here.
In a corner a radio stands
like a thirties' monolith,
its polished wood slick
with fifty wipes of wax
but it plays no music
she wants to hear.
Above it she sees
the picture of Jesus—
the eyes which once followed
her no matter where
she stood have taken
an indifferent focus
as if waiting
for someone else.

Philip Miller

OLD HATS

Somewhere up in the attic
is my aunt's blue felt evening hat,
the one with the thin, jet veil
she wore the night she left town with a guy
she'd brought home once before,
a guy who wore no hat, his hair blown back,
who made everybody nervous when he laughed
but my aunt, seen later in Chicago on his arm,
and wearing for that occasion a picture hat
with a cerise satin bow.
It's in the attic now with all the others,
the pill boxes and fur cozies that came later,
the black toque she wore back home alone,
its osprey's feather standing up in front
like an exclamation point.
Up there must be layers of hats,
ones she put on through wars
and the depression—mad little Suzies,
hats with furbelows and flounces,
Garbo slouches, cloches that melted down the head
to expose one sculptured curl, the fedora
she wore—legend has it—to her third
wedding banquet: a history of hats,
all nested together in some old trunk,
and at the bottom, mashed flat
bonnets and boaters,
young ladies' stiff straw sailor hats,
little girls' kerchiefs and bandannas.
Nowadays she wears turbans of gold lamé
or velvet and holds court for poor relations
like me who come visiting just to catch
a glimpse, to take off our hats.

Ellen Snell

HISTORY REPEATS

She sent me a letter.
It said take care of my little girl.
Now Lolly sits on my floor
in her pink romper and yellow hair
playing with Maggie Mae her dolly
"My ma skipped out," she announces
she knows.

Lolly plays quietly well disciplined
and occasionally I teach her
words from flashcards
and she tilts her golden head
and gazes past me
looking very old and wise:
"My Ma. She skipped out out on me, huh?"
she queries, not needing the answer
she knows.

Slow aqua eyes and cherub cheeks
flushed with a child's enthusiasm at play
Lolly devised a game of solitaire
flashcard— solitaire.
If you uncover the G-is-for-Girl card
you win. "I'm a good girl. G is for good," she proclaims.
Lolly taught Maggie Mae the game.
Lolly is only three years old but
she knows.

The letter— take care of my little girl—
is crumpled. Lolly incorporated it into
another game.
She read the letter to me word for word:
"My Ma. She's a good lady," she says,
I love Ma." I shake my head.
Now Lolly sits in the center of my rag rug—
an adult in an abbreviated body—
talking with Maggie Mae
pointing a chubby baby finger.
"Mama's gonna leave you, child,"
she warns.
She knows.

Diane Robinson

OLD MAN WITH ROSARY

He kneels before the plaster virgin
mouths his rosary
His knees feel the floor
beneath the rag rug
Reciting his Hail Marys
he sees the Virgin in blue
circled in light
suspended above a hill

The first time he saw his Mary
she was mantled in blue
Flaxed wisps
graced her brow
Her eyes, bluer than her cloak,
stared at something
only she could see
She carried a cluster of sea anemone
He had pushed through the procession
toward the front where she walked
When they reached the hilltop
he knelt beside her

She did not look at him

Her eyes continued to gaze
at the nothingness beyond
They prayed to the Blessed Virgin
for her intercession
with the Sacred Heart of Jesus

He heard his heart
He looked at her
He struck his breast
Mea culpa
He had taken her
He would serve his penance
He would take her again
Mea culpa

The crowd rose
singing to the Virgin
who chose not to appear
He walked with her in the recessional

She did not look at him

He snaps back to the mysteries
fingered on his crystal beads
kisses the cross
touches the blue veil of the plaster virgin
rises and dresses
Later he will pick anemone
to carry to the churchyard
oblation for his Mary

Richard Holinger

TURNING SIGNIFICANT AGES

The neighbor's boy is raking leaves,
the leaves I left last fall,
the leaves that fell off trees
rooted in my lot.
He's asked a friend, a girl, to help.
She holds the 2-ply, 6-bushel
lawn and garden bag
while he two-hands wet, leathery leaves
and wind-dropped winter twigs
into the dark.

I stay inside and watch.

Some weeks ago,
the first day of spring,
I turned thirty-five.

After the rain, the snow became ice.
Fog clouded our block,
ghosted cars, houses, trees.
Thunder tonnaged the year's
first bombardment, sweet
and fresh as October snow.

I think of revising
then plan new starts:

EARLY ON THE MORNING OF HIS THIRTY-FIFTH BIRTHDAY,
THE PHONE INTERRUPTS THE HERO'S CRAP.
HIS WIFE WON'T ANSWER; SHE KNOW IT'S FOR HIM,
AND BESIDES, SHE'S UPSTAIRS, HE'S DOWN,
HER HAIR DRYER BLOWING, HER BRIEFCASE A MESS.
HE HAS TO DECIDE! TO FINISH OR ANSWER?!
IT'S RELATIVE, HE'S SURE OF THAT,
SOMEONE WHO RINGS AND RINGS AND RINGS

March 19: a freezing rain
gloves trees, beads branches.
I drink then write in my journal

middle age is when
everything that hasn't
should,
the excuse of excuses
is lost,
greatness or nothing
arrives

old is an age
to take solace in
when a fart is creative
as a poem about aging
and no one expects
more out of life
than life

THE HERO GOES TO THE PHONE.

Outside, the boy
and his girlfriend
comb leaves
through the hair
of yellow crocuses
already receiving the sun.

Steven Sher

"QUARRY"

Next field, beyond the failing
watch, shots richochet.
Shadows cast from the cool banks
ripple milky shallows.
Sun enduring catches in the trees,
its drop slowed, splintering.

Between shores, the hulking frames
of cars at unchecked depths
chart the spot across the quarry
the last unhappy lover dove,
broke his back on rocks.
Emotion held below the surface,

the welcome road grows dim.
A car advances and revives him
from his trance. Removing shoes,
she flies to him, already calls
into the wind. He turns, torn
by the whir of twilit sky.

His vengeance, without impediment
this night, springs
the trap, new lady landed
on his blanket. He steps from
his blind, single-minded,
collects what falls within his sights.

Darlene Mathis-Eddy

WINTER LANDSCAPE

The Wolf Moon claws the winter's sinews.

Fence post.
Bank barn.
Farm house.

In fanged ice, angularity.

Storms flense this landscape to essentials.

Feed shed.
Stone wall.
Corn crib.

In ribbed sides, flayed severity.

The starlight, hunting, throws few shadows.

Dead mouse.
Pine grove.
Still fox.

A razoring wind, solemnity.

These are nights of isolation.
Bleached, skeletal truths: configurations.

Kathleen Spivack

HOLOGRAM

I sit alone in human-woman form
and seek through separateness, to understand
what there is in the perceived landscape
particular enough to understand:

each singular grassblade, the trefoil arrangement
of ivy and clover, the pine tree's needles on the branch
in bunched distinguished patterns, fives and threes,
that, in pine, spruce, and hemlock make the difference

mostly by placement; the unique organization of
cellular patterns so that each part of a tree
is a logo for *tree* and the observing eye,
accustomed to order, puts it together in generalities,

creating designs as it watches, as a rose
becomes a hologram for *rose*,
and music, complex sound waves, models
upon the complex unfolding of those

petalled emotions we call "soul,"
each thought an electromagnetic symbol for "mind,"
and each person, you, for instance,
standing for all of humankind;

and cryptograms upon a page
which immediately become more than alphabet:
word, with its mystery, power
to, at one moment, both create and interpret.

It's true, at each moment we are all
thinking everything, everywhere; even a new baby
opening its sentient eyes
and an old woman, far away, shutting hers, dying;

and that cloud reforming over the valley
shaped just like flying horses,
and dissipating, and a giraffe in Africa
stepping delicately among thorn bushes,

and all the miracles, preposterous, of nature.
How do I know what a tree
is thinking? I don't, although the sap
is drawn upward jubilantly

through tubular spaces into tree-dreaming:
leafy extravagances, branches celebrating;
all that wild sky-life streaming
over the shapes that are "*World*" in its dances.

Marilyn Masiker

FLEURS DU MAL

Because women's bodies aren't straight inside
I use the flower kind.
Flowers that
open their cotton petals
drinking their color
from my bright red rain,
that unfold in darkness
beneath the cold sphere of my womb,

dark orchids
hiding where they won't be found.
Still,
they leave a clue for Brenda Starr,
send their nectar
down the stringy stem,
quiet drops
on the floor
near my heel.

Michael Smetzer

AT SERPENT MOUND

Quick and muscular,
looping for thirteen hundred feet
along the bluff's crest,
the Great Serpent uncoiled
in the high air above Brush Creek.

Excavation exposed no artifacts.
No decayed garments.
No hand-worked stones.
No bones.
Archeologists shrugged
among piles of simple clay.

Today we stroll a paved walk
around this restoration,
these graceful curves
rebuilt
to landscape this public lawn.
Our official short cut
treads over the snake's tail.

From the park tower, this double image:
an earthen snake
roped in by an asphalt walk.

Vincent S. Green

FARM SALE

We mill through
twenty years of farming
like dogs nosing garbage;
ready to carry off a fetid carcass.

"Help yourselves now boys.
Have you priced one new?
Who'll give fivee-yive
& a q-u-a-r-ter, yep! & six, yep!"

Poster says, lunch
on the grounds.
Sounds as if
it should be
rare beef on croissants—
we drink styrofoam coffee
and eat red dye and wheat paste.

"Jump in here now boys.
Don't be shy.
You could start
farming with this tomorrow."

Everybody
stays for the tractors.
Will the Farmall
really go
for nothing
like last week?

Jeff Boyer

JUNK ON THE HIGHWAY

Back when guidance counselors
were important people, not one
ever told us about this potential
career—administering to the broken lives,
I mean, of junk throwers on the highways.

I think I could do this.
Pick up the odd shoe, a torn
bedspread indiscriminately stained
with oil? molasses? How about
the fluffy cushion I passed further back?

These people even toss away their pets—
cats and dogs, birdies for the feeder,
discarded wildlife—opossums, skunks.
They only seem to have respect
for sloth itself.

See how shoes desire a mate?
I'd point out. And sudsy water
might fix the stain. Here,
let's bury Bowser
and pick up this rough-cut lumber;
we could make sparrow coffins if nothing else.

And lookit here—someone's thrown
a couch away—on the Interstate no less.
What possible domestic pain could lead to that?
This is important work.
Someone needs to do it.

SITTING WITH JOHN

In this small, uncrowded cafeteria
I sit with John as he spits explanations
of the local oil drilling business
and the ethnic backgrounds of the county—
mostly Volga-German.

"Be sure to see Octoberfest,"
he chides while I sift through remains
of greasy chicken enchiladas,
"There's more beer drunk here," he claims,
"than anywhere else . . . anywhere."
I've heard all that before.
John was a "late baby,"
born palsied, then neglected for years
by the local school system of blue-eyed descendents,
the red-wheat Germans who stumbled here
a century past.
A hundred years of wind and drought
have left them open with themselves,
but hardnosed with their cash.

"Ten thousand dollars," John drones
in slurry tones, "will buy a thirty-second share.
You hope to hit on one of three."

I wonder why no one's yet mentioned
(as they've done every other place I've lived)
why this would make a perfect target
for Russian bombs. "We're on the list
of ten most likely," it always goes,
some arsenal or installation given for the reason
as if it mattered.

Out here, it would have to be for spite.
This race of disremembered aliens—
asked by Catherine to inhabit the steppes,
kicked out by Alexander a century later,
the homes all burned, the granaries emptied.
The Volga-Germans would have to pay
for Petersburg after all.
In Ellis County, as on the steppes,
the blood runs thick
despite the heat.

Carl Lindner

CHILD IN A TREE

It begins
with an embrace, the arms
going round the trunk,
the hands flat
on the back of bark.
Touch is hunger
running through
the clenching toes,
the knees
hugging the sides,
the eyes
always on the lookout
for solid limbs,
a crotch,
a resting place.
At last a tremor,
a going stiff.

It had to come to this,
this clinging
to a branch that thins
forks
and disappears in air.
A child, a fist,
a nest in
winter.

My feet are on the ground.
My fingers close
on nothing.
Knowing
the feeling of falling,
of seeing another
slip away,
I circle the tree.
There is no choice.
All my fingers itch
and I begin
to shinny up

David Gerry

MUMMY

says if you dream of teeth
it means death
or morning birds
on the window sill an omen
stays up late
banks the woodstove
sleeps through the morning
buried in her blankets
hungry
we tug at them
try to unwrap her
rises by midday
like smoke from the woodstove
fists clenched
after touching herself
in her sleep
washes her hands
says she didn't sleep a wink
later in the day
her childhood unfolds
a cross country trip with her
father
who said
her first blood was the meanness
coming out of her
she sat in a chair
for three days
he scolded her
at eight years old
she laughed during her brother's
funeral

confesses it
to us as if we could forgive her
as if telling it
over and over
will ease the ache
that lingers like her recurring
dream
of a string with no end
she pulls and pulls
from her mouth
fears
one night it will end with a hook
pull out her guts like love
take teeth and blankets with them.

Daniel Bourne

BOYS WHO GO ALOFT

Boys die each day on the swingsets.
They twist the rope in and dizzy

it out like hot gorillas.
The yaw of the world around them

waits for them to jerk harder.
There is airplane to play.

To twist and shoot with their legs.
Like dots on the screen

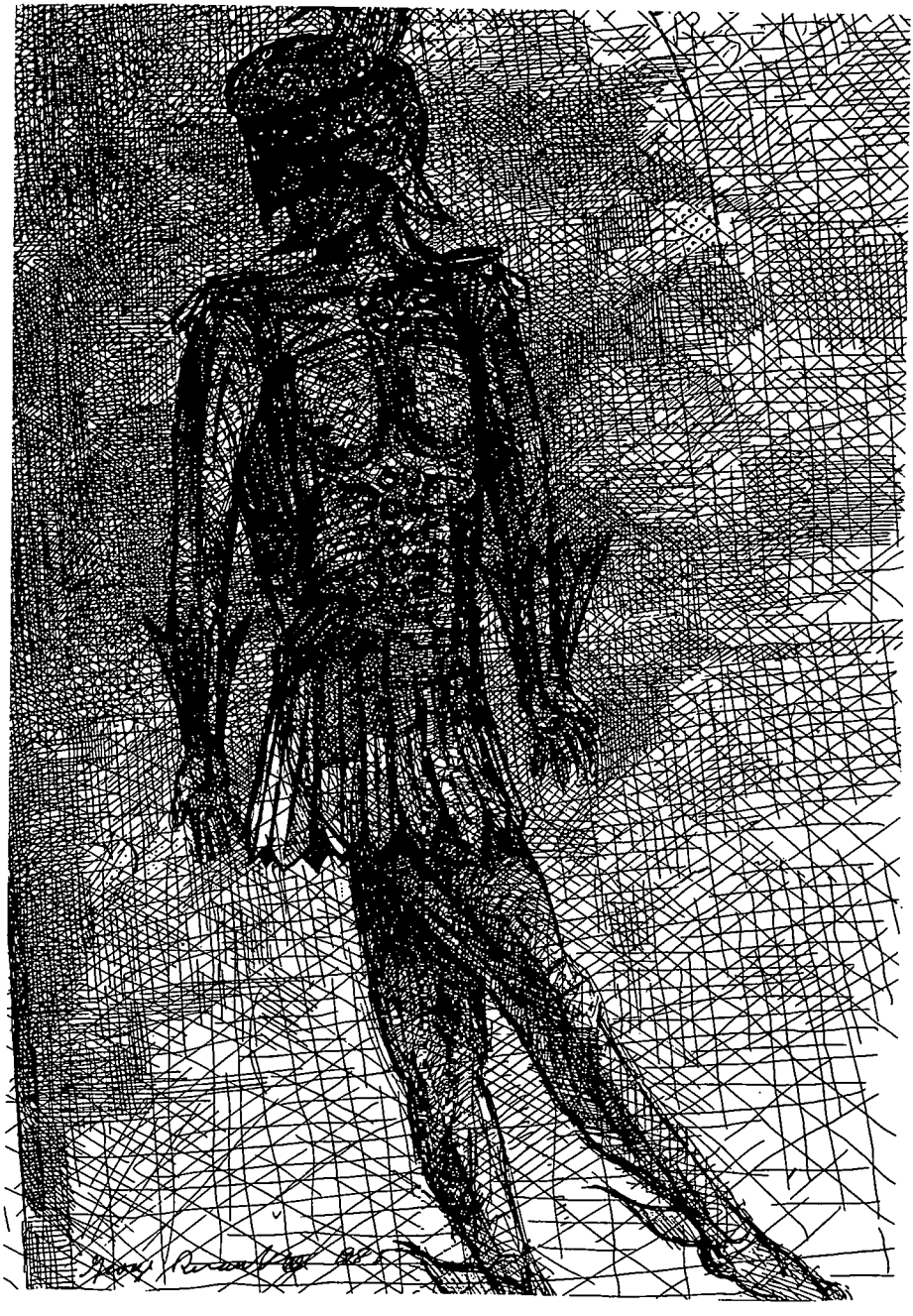
their mothers appear. Boys signal
their dogs on the ground to take cover.

Bailing out over concrete
they touch on a branch with their toes.

They jump and mean it. Each day
they go up to earn more wings.

Their mothers call and call
their names and the names of their dogs.

interview/fiction



PHILIP KIMBALL

AN INTERVIEW WITH PHILIP KIMBALL

Erleen Christensen interviewed Philip Kimball, author of Harvesting Ballads, at his home in Lawrence on 12 February 1985.

EC: Why don't we start with some personal biographical data?

PK: I was born on July 21, 1941 in Piedmont, Oklahoma. It was 104 that day. My Dad was driving a gasoline truck for a filling station. He'd gotten up at 5 in the morning to make sure Doc Long was sober enough to deliver us. Ms. Gidney was my midwife. She always took care of Doc if he was a little in his cups. By the time Dad got back from delivering his load of gasoline, I was there, crying away in that little house outside Piedmont.

EC: So you actually grew up a country kid?

PK: Well, I ended up not really a country kid and not really a city kid. My four great-grandparents settled in Piedmont during the rush for Oklahoma in 1899 when the territory of Oklahoma was opened up for white settlement. Although my parents ended up in Wichita after the war, we maintained a very close tie to

Piedmont and to the homestead.

EC: Your grandparents continued to live there then?

PK: Yes, and my Dad would always take his vacation at harvest time. We would all go down, along with my aunts and uncles and cousins to bring in the harvest. It was quite a family festival each summer. Most of our vacations and time off were spent going back to the farm.

EC: Your had your basic schooling in Wichita?

PK: I went up to the seventh grade in Wichita. Then we moved to Derby, Kansas, right south of Wichita.

EC: Now is that a bona fide farm town like Piedmont?

PK: It was up until we moved there. We were in the first wave of the invading armies of the housing boom after World War II. We moved in '54. The town of Derby went from a population of 500 to 5000 in one year. Someone came in and bought up acres and acres of the farmland surrounding the little town, and put in houses just as fast as they could build them.

EC: Did you, when you were in high school, work combining crews?

PK: I actually didn't work in high school. I graduated on May 29, 1959, and on June 4th I was on a harvesting crew in Oklahoma, heading north.

EC: Was this out of Piedmont, people you knew?

PK: Actually it was out of the small town of Carmen, Oklahoma. A classmate of mine in Derby had come from Carmen, and his father still had land down there. When we graduated we didn't have jobs, and my friend's father said, "Oh, come on down. There's a little work needs to be done around the place." When we got there, there were harvesting crews from Carmen that were looking for people. Actually it was summer before I went to college, and then the next summer that I worked harvesting crews from Oklahoma on up through the Dakotas.

EC: Was it a fairly small, family operation?

PK: My boss owned just his one machine. He had worked for other, bigger outfits, from Texas mostly, and then he finally bought his own machine. He was travelling with another man who had two, so together we made a crew of three combines. It was a real small operation, kind of down on its luck. I never did really participate in the big time, twelve, fifteen combine crews. There weren't as many around back in those days. It was still basically farmers who would cut their own wheat and then head north with the harvest in groups like mine—two people, machines. You'd find people with one machine—large numbers of small

crews.

EC: Did they have set routes—or did they just show up in town?

PK: Well, there were all sorts of different ways these crews worked. A number of them were *very* well organized—in fact, the second year, I went with a better organized crew, a man and his wife who had two combines, two trucks, and all the paraphernalia that goes with the crew—the housetrailer, the pickups. He had, over the years, established a set of clients. But of course you can't be too rigid on something like the harvest, because it doesn't always cooperate. It gets ripe or it doesn't get ripe. If the harvest lasted longer down south, you couldn't make it to the client up north in time, and he'd get someone else. There were always plenty of itinerant crews, like the ones I worked for the first year, people who just started out. They didn't have anyone set up. They'd just come into town, and they'd go down to the elevator. The state department of labor often would set up little headquarters where people looking for cutters would come, and all the cutters would be hanging out there waiting to pick up something. So it varied from the big-time operations, which had a set schedule that they maintained as much as the harvest allowed, to those who just went out wandering and hoping for the best. And good years, of course, things were all right. And bad years? They weren't so good.

EC: Were you a pool shark like Sorry?

PK: The first year, when I went with the itinerant crew, was one of the worst harvests of recent history, so we had a lot of time to sit around. Of course, we tended to spend time going to the pool hall! But I never got so good that I would wager as much as a quarter on a game! However, I did meet a lot of people who were very good, and watched a lot of serious games, and heard the pool-shooters tell stories of fairly serious games. Some of the pool scenes are variations of stories I heard in pool halls which were told as the truth. I don't know. Of course, by the time they're told two or three times, there may be some fictionalizing.

EC: You seem to have such strong roots in the oral tradition. I'm curious whether you talked to people who had tales of the Sooner days?

PK: One of the primary motivating ideas behind the book was the attempt to recreate the oral tradition of the short-grass prairie town. Of course, the one I had in mind was Piedmont. A lot of the stories in *Harvesting Ballads* are stories that do circulate in the town—or used to circulate. A lot of the people that told them are dying off now.

In the short-grass prairie community, *everybody's* a storyteller—there's not a designated storyteller. The community creates this oral history by every individual participating, both as a storyteller and then as a collector of the stories—because the stories come at you in a random fashion, which will help explain the randomness of the book. That's the way you, as a member of the

community, hear the stories—you don't get them told to you as, "On December first this happened, and on December second . . . " and so on down the line. You hear the story, and maybe ten years later you hear a story that is a connection with the story you heard ten years previously, and you finally figure out that this person was that person's mother, and whatever and whatever. So, you are both a teller and a compiler of the history of the community.

EC: May I ask when you first started on *Harvesting Ballads*—and where?

PK: 1964 in Berkeley, California, when I was in graduate school. I started with a very inchoate idea, but it eventually led to this book. None of what I wrote then made it into this book; graduate school isn't the best place in the world to write novels, so the project only lasted two days at that time.

Later, when I was teaching in Bonn, Germany (by coincidence it was my thirtieth birtday) I finished reading a book and threw it down, saying, "I can write a book better than that!" There was this long silence in which I realized that it's not what I *can* do; it's what I *do* do. Suddenly I started realizing that all the things I'd been doing for entertainment—graphic arts, acting, and so on—those were the things that really meant a lot to me. I decided I'd better devote more time to them.

I started writing *another* novel. I didn't actually come back to the *Harvesting Ballads* idea. I wrote another novel which is unpublished at this time, and which eventually I think I'll probably go back and revise. There's a lot of material in it that's worth doing. But anyway, I wrote that novel, and then in 1975, after I'd finished that, and I'd been sending it off and had gotten some encouraging rejections from it, I started back to the original novel idea I had back in 1964.

By that time I was in Wichita, working at the Cargill soybean crushing mill. I realized that I was getting a lot better the more I wrote, and that this was definitely worth getting serious about. Unfortunately, if you're really serious about getting published, it's pretty important to be where the publishers, the writers, and the agents are—which is New York City, if you get down to it—or maybe Boston. I decided to go to Boston.

EC: Did you go to Boston before you felt that book was complete?

PK: I was only half done when I decided to go. It was a combination of two things. Ever since I was in the eighth grade, I'd wanted to take a cross-country bicycle trip. This was in 1976, and it was the bicentennial year, and I said, "Well, what better time?" I had a lot of money saved up from working at the soybean mill and no commitments anywhere else. I packed up my bicycle, went to Eugene, Oregon, where my brother lives, and headed to Boston that way.

EC: Did you go alone?

PK: My first partner made it to Bloomington, Indiana and had to go back to job commitments, but then I picked up another friend who went with me to

Bradford, Pennsylvania, then had to quit and go back to work. I made it on to Boston by myself.

As I listen, I refashion the stories for my own purposes—and not just stories from the community. If anyone'll tell a story, I'll *listen* to it—and probably *steal* it! A lot of the stories in *Harvesting Ballads* I just overheard. One story, I overheard in a hardware store in Bloomington, Indiana. I just stopped, pretended I was looking at nuts and bolts, and lidtened to the story. Later it showed up in this book. To the extent that the stories are authentic (and I'd like to think that they are) it is that they basically are the stories I've heard, and often I've just retold them verbatim, to the best of my ability, remolding them a little bit to the larger scheme of the story I'm telling in *Harvesting Ballads*.

I use stories like they used to use the feed sacks that had cloth with patterns printed on them. Once you were finished with the feed in the sack, you had the material to make shirts, dresses, and various things. You get a pattern, make a shirt or dress out of it, and the finished product is neither the pattern nor the feedsacks. If you look at it, you can see the origins of the finished product. That isn't biographical in any meaningful sense, but anyone who knows my life can see the feedsack in this book.

My assumption about Boston turned out to be totally correct. Within four or five months, I was in contact with New York publishers and other witers, one of whom was George Garrett, who was basically the one who got the book published through his contacts.

I had a friend who taught at Johnson State College in Johnson, Vermont. He invited me up to read to his writing class. The head of the writing program came, and they invited me to read at the summer writers' workshop. George Garrett was one of the teachers. He recorded my reading and started, unbeknownst to me, sending it off to editors and agents and other writers. All of a sudden, I started getting letters from editors saying, "When you're done, send it to me!" After that initial contact, it took another seven years or so. In a sense, it was no time at all. To go from a complete unknown to being published in eight years is actually pretty good.

EC: Did you work exclusively on *Harvesting Ballads* in Boston?PK: I worked exclusively on *Harvesting Ballads*—and, of course, I tried to keep alive! Substitute taught, was unemployed, got a part-time teaching job, and finally ended up full-time at the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard. I finished the first draft of *Harvesting Ballads* somewhere around the early part of 1978, and then spent some time sending it off to the contacts I'd made and piddling around with these people.

EC: Did you send to a lot of publishers?

PK: I had a great collection of rejection letters: "You're a great writer and we wouldn't touch you with a ten-foot pole." Things like that! Eventually, a man at MacMillan called me up and was very interested but obviously didn't like the way it was—and that's when I did the first revisions, after talking to him—and then he moved from MacMillan to Dutton, during that time.

EC: So you followed an editor to Dutton?

PK: Well, it's not that I followed him, because there was no commitment between us. But we were still in contact, and he moved. Then he kind of burned out and disappeared from the scene, and his assistant, who had been with him at MacMillan and then became an editor at Dutton herself, took over. There was no trouble after that.

EC: Why don't we just back up a little bit and look at what happened when you took out that very first, two-day version and started working again?

PK: I took out those two pages and read them, laughed, and put them back away. I knew a helluva lot more about what I was doing. I'd already written a novel, so I had a certain amount of confidence; by this time it was a serious project. In eleven years, I'd realized that a number of things I'd learned would fit into the initial scheme. But some of the most important stuff I didn't even realize after I'd finished the first draft. That's the interesting thing about the evolution of a book. You never, even if you think you do, know what you're doing. It's a process of learning about it as you go along. In 1975, I had my initial ideas much better fleshed out, more characters, more of the political and social implications of the idea were clearer to me. Way back in 1964, I may not have had any political and social ideas attached to it particularly.

EC: Was the style—the rather unique sentence syntax—there from the start?

PK: Yes, that evolved totally naturally in letter writing. That first novel I wrote, the one I started in '71, was much more extreme in style than this one. But it was a natural thing. If you look at the letters I wrote in the five years previous to starting the novel, you'll find it's all there. The people who received those letters were quite baffled, usually, about what the hell I was talking about. I don't know exactly why—I read quite a bit of modern poetry and had written juvenalia myself.

EC: Your juvenile poetry— did you write quite a lot, did you publish some?

PK: I've had a few poems published in a German newspaper, some poems I wrote in German actually, while I was a student over there, and a few things in *Great Speckled Bird* in Atlanta, which is one of those famous underground newspapers that sprang up in the late '60s.
At the point in the late '60s when I was at the edge of realizing that what I wanted to do was more on the artistic side, I halfway got serious about writing poetry. But at the same time, I was very involved in graphic arts, doing silk-screen and wood-block prints. I was interested in photography. It was kind of touch and go for a while there whether I wanted to be verbal or visual. The poetry never really got to a level I would call it serious. I don't particularly feel I want to show anything I've done to anybody right now. But it did lay part of the groundwork for the prose style. When I realized I was a storyteller and not a poet, then it made it easy to switch over. I had learned a lot about what I did with language

through those early poems, and through my letters. I kind of consider myself an *epic* poet— rather than a novelist—but better call my work a novel because—

EC: That's what the publisher wanted to call it!

PK: And, of course, the editing. It's not quite as wild in its verbal style as it was earlier. But again, a lot of that style I don't consider as an arbitrary obscurity or whatever. I tried to work it into the rhythm of speech. Like the punctuation in there. I think, I hope it's my intention, let's put it that way—if you follow the punctuation, certain pause lengths for periods and certain pause lengths for commas, and another pause for the paragraph break and space break—you recreate, maybe stylized a little bit—the verbal rhythms of the speakers of the prairie. I find, at least in my own case (I don't think I'm ALL that unique) that language is shot through with what seem to be arbitrary pauses. You'll be talking along and there'll be this pause, and then you'll continue with your—sentence!

I find that when I speak German people are always finishing my sentences. Or when I go to the East Coast and talk to people, they're always filling in, like I don't know what I want to say next. I try to develop that in the rhythm style here. The breaks, the sentence breaks, the punctuation try to get the rhythm of the speech.

EC: May I ask about the novel that came between the first attempt and the second attempt at *Harvesting Ballads*? Was it different in style and subject matter?

PK: Well, it was a continuation, a kind of development on the style. I'm back writing on that one now, as a matter of fact. I started on it during the slack periods of working on *Harvesting Ballads*—

EC: Is this the one you read from at the University of Kansas reading?

PK: Yes. It's really quite similar to *Harvesting Ballads*. The whole concept of stories coming to people in random order and the reader or listener putting the stories together to make the story—I'm going to continue with that idea. I don't think it is going to be quite as random. I think that the basic unit of construction is still going to be the story, but the stories are going to be longer, perhaps. It seems to be that way—it's hard to tell. I don't seem to be as much interested in the rhythm of individual sentences as I was in this one.

EC: I did want to ask you a little about what characters you feel you *know* best, or think have been with you longest.

PK: That's interesting. Most people are interested in the characters, but I'm not particularly. My original ideas had to do with other things, like storytelling style, the environment. And I don't feel particularly attached to any of these characters, don't feel I know them particularly well. And I don't think I spent much time trying to develop them—other than my initial idea that the characters are the result of the environment they're in. Let's put it this way, I think the

inward trip is a sham, that psychology is one of the bigger hoaxes ever perpetrated on the human race. And I don't feel any need—in fact, I dislike it quite a bit— trying to develop deep psychological characters. I think the human being is in a recursive thing with the environment.

To the extent that I've succeeded in creating powerful characters (judging from what people say to me, what other reviewers have said) it makes me feel that my ideas are correct. For instance, how many physical descriptions are there? I mean, none basically. They're tall; they're blond, very minimal; you don't know what their voices sound like; you rarely know what they think. Let's change that—to the extent you know what they think and feel, it's not because I've told you. If you'll check conversations where the emotions come in, there's nothing written down that says, "She felt this," or "He thought that," or "He was mad." Obviously, there are some times you have to put a few things in. But I tried as much as possible for those cues to be external things, something in the environment, the wind blowing, kind of cheap tricks,when you get right down to it. But I think it worked quite well. I"m kind of amazed at it.

EC: The characters seem extremely authentic. I've spent time in the farm country, and I read other books with farm characters and feel they're Hollywood stereotypes, but Marcus Baldwin hits me as being *very* true—it's the sort of thing you're explaining, that you don't psychoanalyze them, you simply have them do things.

PK: And have them speak—to the extent that they speak. Which is not often sometimes.

EC: That rings very true, too, certainly with people like Marcus—

PK: I oversimplified what I just said about my relationship with the characters. Obviously a lot of them are based on observations of people I've known and people who are close to me. Parents and grandparents and so on. But I don't have any emotional attachment to the character as he turns out in the book. For instance, when it came time for Blanche to die, I hated to kill her off, but that was just for that moment. The character as a whole I don't feel any sense that she's a real person that I know.

The characters develop on their own beyond me, and I don't spend a lot of time worrying about them. In fact, I don't spend as much time worrying about them as I do about other things. A lot of revision came in when someone else, like the editor *was* interested in the characters, and said "Look, well. *Why* do they do this?" Marcus Baldwin is one of the characters we worked on in revision. Originally I had about a one-sentence scene when Marcus Baldwin came in, and that was it! The editor said, "Let's face it. He's a pretty important character; he deserves a little more than a sentence here." And I said, "You're right." And I put in the scene. So, the development of some of the major characters was directed from the outside—it was the editor that made me work.

EC: When you were doing the revisions was it mostly expansions—or cutting?

PK: Mostly expansion, but a few scenes were cut and a lot moved around, too. the original sequence was more discombobulated than it is now. We moved three or four scenes to get a little closer to a chronological order. That was one of the concessions I had to make. I didn't feel *bad* about making them. I could understand when an editor said, "Look, you want this to seem inchoate, and what seems inchoate to you, or confused to you, is quite a bit more confused than the reader coming at this for the first time can tolerate. It doesn't take much for it to seem confused to the reader! In your mind it can seem very patterned, almost chronological, but to the reader it will, in fact, accomplish your aim of seeming to be random."

It was an amazing period, that revision with Jerret Engle, the editor. She was so good I expected to hear any time during the book that she'd been fired. About a week after the book came out, she called me up to say she'd been fired. I was kind of sad.

EC: Is she with another publisher now?

PK: She's kind of free-lancing. One of her main interests had always been movie production. Now she has the freedom to pursue that, and she can always pick up free-lance editing jobs to keep her going. So she's pretty happy now that it's over.

EC: How would you feel if *Harvesting Ballads* was courted by the movies?

PK: Well, I hope it is. production companies, and individuals, have been interested in it. No one's bit yet. I think my only hope would be that whoever did it would do it well, and I wouldn't expect it really to be anything I would recognize much.

EC: You would tolerate that?

PK: If it was well done, I would tolerate anything they did—I think. I don't know, but I remember hearing an interview with Joseph Heller about the filming of *Catch-22*, and his attitude seemed reasonable to me. he said, "A movie's not a book, and I don't expect this to really have much to do with *Catch-22*. I just hope it's a good movie." And he thought it was, and he was satisfied. You know, the way I take someone else's story in the novel. I don't expect that story to be the same story, to have the same intent or even the same effect. But I like that original story I heard; it's material for me to make a novel out of. And I kind of think that's the way a good movie would be. They'd take this as the impetus to make a movie that had some similar characters and related themes—

EC: So more of the evolution of feedsacks—

PK: Another layer where someone took the shirt you'd made out of a feedsack, changed it into a shawl—or a quilt.

EC: One thing we might touch in closing is contact with other writers. Do you feel a camaraderie—or that you work in some isolation?

PK: That's a difficult question to answer. I think I *prefer* working in isolation. But when I want contact, it would be nice to have my friends who are writers more accessible. They are in Vermont, Pennsylvania, various places, Missouri. I don't feel isolated in any psychological sense, just the physical isolation of not being able to just hop in the car and go over and see someone in Vermont.

In a larger sense, I feel a kind of an artistic isolation in the culture. Nobody's particularly interested in matters of the spirit. It's a spiritual isolation that any sensitive person feels, whether they're a writer or not. The heroes of the country seem to be businessmen who go out and make as much money as they can. I don't feel any detrimental isolation other than the culture at large may be in some amount of trouble and I'm not sure what the outcome will be.

Philip Kimball

HOW FAESTUS COMES TO WICHITA

from a novel in progress

You know I always have blamed my mother for these damn flat feet. Not that she suffered from them herself, she threw me out the window shortly after I was born. Mighty hard on a baby's arches, unless you land on your head. But I always land on my feet.

You see, I didn't have a father. Mother was the daughter of the potentate of Birmingham, silver spoon, servants, everything she ever wanted in life, or thought she wanted, her father got her. Except what she thought she really wanted: for her father not to get her what she thought she wanted. Decided to show she could go it alone. When I bloated her belly I guess it proved to be more than she could cope with.

The washer woman raised me. Got along just fine, didn't find out who my real mother was until I was near twenty-one. Worked at the forge up at the steel mill, one day a sissified, well-dressed dandy comes up, says he wants to talk to me, says he was my half-brother somehow, same father he figgered. I tell him I don't have a father, says he wants to talk anyway, knows for sure I have a mother, and she's married to important power now. The man seems crazy to me, but what the hell, I'll listen to anybody's story. Meet me quitting time at the Steeler's Stall across the street from the mill. We drink a little King Cotton, play loud music on the jukebox and shoot the bull. After a bottle of wine I'm beginning to think the man knows what he's talking about, says we should go see my mother right this very evening. Throwing a big bash up at the mansion.

We head off to the tall timber, I mean where folks pooping agin the silk, park the car and walk about a half-mile to the door of this big old house nestled back in shagbark hickory, me expecting to have the cops sicked on our ass any time. But the butler, not really too happy to see us, still lets us in. I'm convinced this guy knows what he's doing. There's a string quartet playing, high society people milling around. Large oak-walled room, chandelier. A woman carries a tray by of something about the shade of muscadine, I grab a glass and down it. Mighty smooth stuff. Ask my new buddy which one is she? He points to a woman sitting in a giant maroon Morocco leather chair. I need another glass of wine.

I didn't pack a tuxedo in my lunch bucket, not exactly dressed for the occasion. A few curious stares. Finally hitch my belt and stride best as my flat hurting feet can do right up beside her and plant a shoe on the hem of her gold-laced gown. Pardon me, ma'am, but that fellow over there standing by the Ming vase says you're my mother.

She tries to jump up, like I thought she might, gets nowhere. Looks over at my friend, then back at me. "Dion is such a bastard." Studies my flat foot pinning down her dress. Back up at me. Long low sigh. "How have you been all these years, son?"

Often wonder what good it ever did me to find my mother. Working in the steel mill fifteen dollars an hour when we met, goddam barely pulling minimum, bubbling my brain and clogging my lungs in this fucking soybean crushing mill and oil extraction plant now. Living in the washer woman's house, only mama I'll ever know, saturday night loving my good gal waited tables at the Steelers' Stall and now I'm holed up all alone in a goddam weather-beaten house trailer, nobody to keep me company but Rosy Palm. I moved into step-father's mansion, got me an English tailor, oxford cloth shirts, silk rep ties, some goddam orthopedic Italian shoes, learn to live high on the hog, befitting the son of wealth and honor. Shit.

Things got real serious when I met my future wife. A big soiree on the grounds of mother's estate on top of Cheoha Mountain, right in the middle of the Talladega National Forest, nobody but those who know knows it's there. The party strung out among the bluejack and loblolly pine. Torches and tents, string orchestras and jazz combos, roast wild pig, champagne and caviar. Along about midnight a communal aspiration sifts the branches and the leaves. Ever body turns to look. A woman through the trees, dark eyes and crow-black hair,

diaphanous gown more light than cloth, aural fire appears to hover golden shoulders, supple breats and thighs, follows where she walks.

I'm standing at the edge of the clearing where a big swing band plays, flat feet and champagne, watching and refilling my glass. Shbegins to dance, each time a different man from the pages of *Who's Who in the South*. Seems like ever now and then she glances my way. I must be dreaming. Me a worker at the forge scrubbed clean and decked out in worsted wool, and stylish, but crippled shoes. What made me want to leave the Steelers' Stall in the first place. Give me one more snort of champagne and let me out of here, grab the jeroboam from the bar, turn back to the clearing, and she's standing there, torchlit patina and perspiration looking right at me, holding an empty crystal flute to be filled.

I was sunk. And should have known better. The daughter of Sephardic immigrants from Arbela or Ras Shamra, Ephesus, somewhere like that, trying to make it in the world. Good looks got her a toehold, chose me to get a leg up. Mother thought she was just the thing to finish the transformation hand-crafted clothes couldn't do, make a place for the workingman, illy-formed son among the people who put their trousers on two legs at a time. Swept right off my poor flat-assed feet. The next thing you know I'm walking down the aisle in the goddam biggest church I'd ever seen in my entire life, saying I will, I will.

You know, it's funny the way it all comes down. Water changing to ice. One instant it isn't, the next it is. And you never know when or where that instant is going to be, went from a happy redneck drinking beer with worthless friends hunting coon and chasing pussy to the upper crust married to a woman put nuts in the pants of every powerful motherfucker ever step foot in a Learjet to buy and sell whole countryfuls of ignorant crackers, rubbing elbows like my shit don't stink. First thing I had to do was quit my job at the steel mill, what would people think, a man that sweats. Join the Country Club and play golf, me and these feet hobbling around a pasture looking for a dimpled orange ball I'd just knocked the pee-wadding out of. Symphony concerts, theater and opera. Didn't really mind, liked it a hell of a lot better than ever body else hanging out at the mansion liked bowling, Bill Monroe and Ferlin Huskie, I can tell you that much.

And the clincher: she fucked around. Figured her foot in the door, time to head for the stairs. Started messing with a three-star general fly in from Huntsville for mother's occasions. I knew she was doing it, and knew how to put a stop to it. Don't care what these limp-wristed civilized cultured gentlemen do about this kind of bullshit, and just because I wore silk skivvies and oiled with eighty weight down at the 19th hole of the Country Club, don't think in a pig's ass I'm going to let any woman or any hounddog, even one wearing epaulets, get away with cuckolding this peckerwood. No sir.

Looked up one of my good buddies at the Steelers' Stall worked construction. Knew where and how to get me three sticks of dynamite, and after telling ever body at mother's next big affair I was going to have to leave early cause I had first row tikets to the Bolshoi, I parked the Astin-Martin down the road behind a clump of mockernut trees, made my way back through the woods to the mansion. Climbed honeysuckle to the balcony of our room. Took out a fifth of Mad Dog. And I waited.

Sure enough. Had near a half bottle left and here they come up the stairs, whispering, giggling, slurpy slopping. Boots and shoes fall on the oriental rug. Uncertain moonlight, broken cumulus, unsteady tumbling in the room. Then rhythmic creaking and breath. I mean I'd known for weeks this was going on, planned, plotted, mulled until I thought it couldn't hurt anymore. What the hell I had imagined I'd feel and do outside the double glass doors, half-known half-foreign odors of their rut. I could hardly hold the gold-plate butane lighter in my hand, hyperventilated brain gone giddy, some lethal compound, cheap wine, adrenalin, lust, testosterone, rage, fear, panic. Gather up the bundled dynamite. Flick the needle-blue flame and hold a trembling half-inch from the twisted fuse. Listen. Her moaning, cries, somehow louder, longer, I know, she's cresting, curl, orgasmic spasms.

And my washer mama's voice. "Gimp. Sex is dangerous."

The only advice she ever give me.

And I kill the flame.

Cold clammy sweat trickles every pore. Come within a half an inch. What they would have wondered, amazed, the whole world exploded ultimate clenching orgasm and eternal peace. What final grins for the fuck they think that they have done. And me to rot beneath the jail.

I need another plan.

Looked up one of my good buddies at the Steelers' Stall, used to work the tuna boats out of Delacroix. Knew where and how to get me all the fine-gauge fishing net I wanted, and after telling ever body at my mother's next big affair I was going to have to leave early cause I didn't want to miss the Met's production of Erlanger's *Aphrodite*, I parked the Masserati down the road beneath a growth of magnolia trees. Made my way back up the alley to the mansion, climbed the Virginia creeper to the window of ur room. Slipped in. Collected the equipment stashed under the bed and went to work. Had her figgered pretty close, putting the finishing touches to my Rube Goldberg contraption when I hear them coming up the stairs.

Slipped back out the window, circled the house, entered in through the hand-carved teak doors, kissed mother on the forehead and collected myself a bourbon and branchwater.

"How was the opera, son?"

"Inspiring, mother, truly inspiring."

"Why are you home so soon?"

"Uh. So inspiring as a matter of fact I left before it was over in a fit of. Inspiration. Where's my lovely wife?"

"Oh. Well."

The long pause, her desperate glance about the room. It hit me. The servants, domestic swing orchestra, presidents of banks and universities, captains of industry, military big chiefs, pearls and diamonds, hard lipstick and thick powder masks, they all knew. Seemed to know, knew at least, could see me, skinny, broken-footed honky in a tux, somehow weaseled into the mansion, but never into their world, can't ever wash the foundry sweat from the armpits and brow. What good was my scheming, had to be shock and outrage and shame,

what use would it be to them to have to interrupt the evening's wheelings and dealings because this ignorant cracker's devastating woman's running a little strange peter in.

I swallow hard. Too late to turn back.

"Mother. I've decided I must change my life."

"I'm very pleased to hear it, son."

Can imagine in my mind's ear, see it, the upstairs writhing and bouncing bed. I wamble best my crippled feet can do it through the crowded ballroom, jostling aristocrats and southern belles, yelling, make it to the bandstand drooling a civilized rideout to *One O'Clock Jump*. Snatch the leader's mike, wave the saxophone section back to their chairs, the brass, finally the drummer thumps to silence, muttering celebrants before me. It's now or never for sure.

"Honored movers and shakers, cream of the cream, I want to welcome you to my mother's house. Perhaps you've wondered why I've called you all together, some surely, what the story is with mother's gimpy son. Too bad the washer mama isn't invited here tonight." Whispered questions surge across and tumble the mirrored corners of the hall. A raucous laugh. I begin to sweat and tremble. "I want to thank you all. Your example, inspiration, has shown this prodigal boy the way. I've decided to become: an artist. Beyond my wildest dreaming a few short, brutish years ago, and now, this very evening: the first unveiling." Grab another bourbon from a passing tray. "Strike up the band and follow me."

I head for the winding stairs. People stand sort of dumbstruck, looking one to the other embarrassed sniggering, never know what to expect at mother's shindigs. I turn back to the band, perplexed instruments hanging in hand, have to make my way to the drummer, crash a ragged downbeat on the top hat, grab a drumstick for a baton, hit it boys, a one and a two, finally kick off *Love is Just around The Corner*, and I'm pushing through bewildered folk again.

Come face to face with step-father, standing, arms crossed on the bottom stoop.

."What the hell do you think you are doing, boy?"

First words the man ever said to me. The climax swelling, upstairs and down. Choose my words, first ever to him.

"Sir. I hope that you'll be proud. That I can justify all this time under your roof. Your kind concern for my future. Follow me and see."

Never did give a damn for me, suspicious of both my origins and my intentions. At most good for a laugh with his high-rolling buddies at the Club. Twists the five-dollar stogie in his hand, a crooked smile smirks across the lips. He steps aside, motions me on up the stairs. And follows.

That's all it takes. A noisy cheer, boisterous guffaw, the party shifts suddenly after us. Occurs to me half way up, striding like my feet weren't flat along the hall, muffled lust gasping behind the bedroom door, perfect timing: what the sam hill am I going to do after I open this damn thing up.

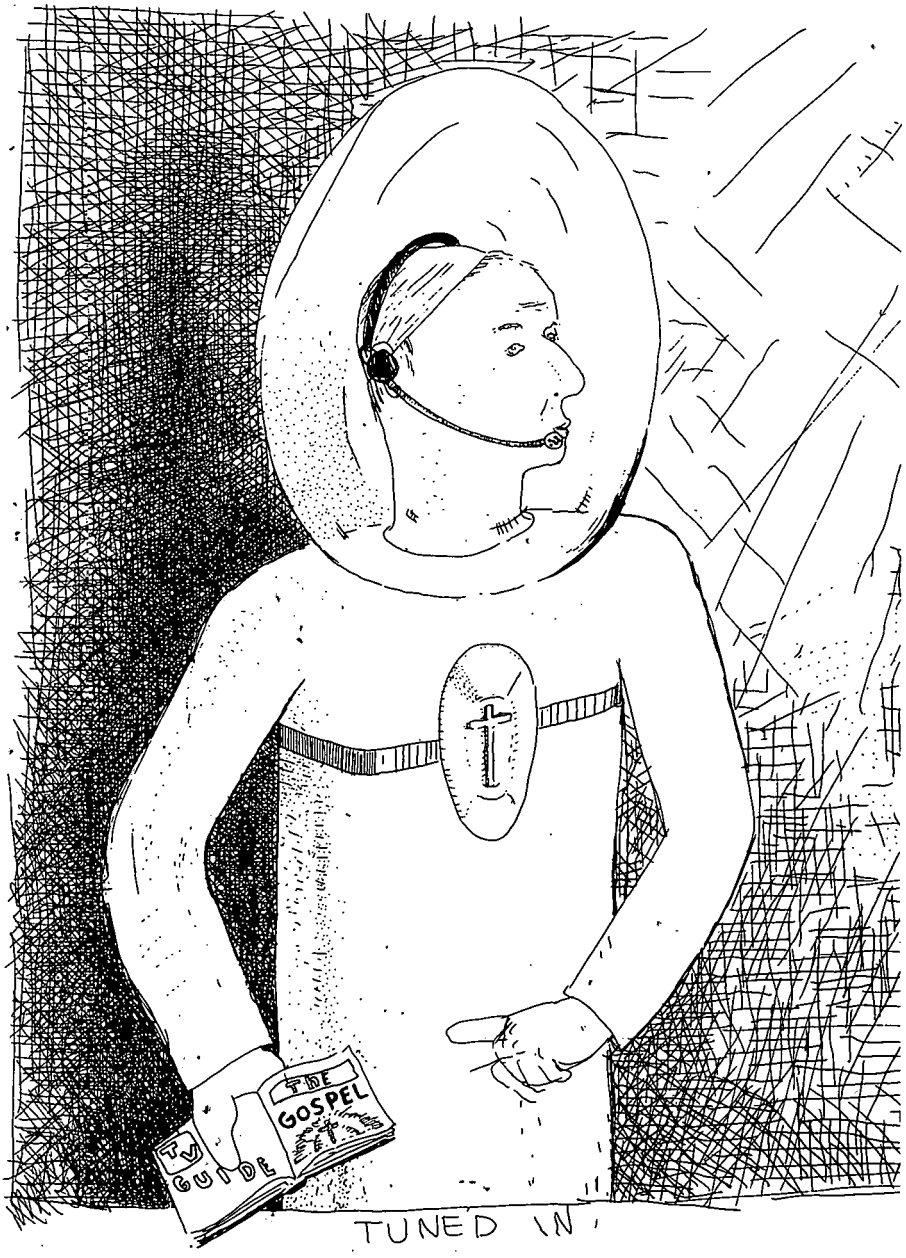
Too late to worry. Corridor packed tight behind step-father and me, crescendo, now or never. Deep breath. Kick open the door, trip the lever, spotlights, lovers tangled sheets falling fishing net, cold shut-down middle in the downstroke bursting roomfuls of honored guests gone quiet.

I take my bow.

And the shit hits the fan. Shrieks and hoots, applause. Sexual awe. My finest, final moment. A crush of people through the door against the crunch trying to get out, confused excited laughing indignant shuffle and shoving, wolf whistles, drinks splash and clatter. I work my way, nobody notices in the commotion, to the window. And our eyes meet. My wife reclining calm, luscious luster, beside the frantic general thrashing helpless caught naked in the snarled web. Eyes meet. And she smiles a fond goodbye.

God damn I love that woman.

FICTION



Peggy Payne

SMALL BOAT NAVIGATION

Alicia never saw the make-shift boat Manuel had brought all the way East for rowing across the ocean. She only pictured it from the things that her sister and her sister's husband said when they came back into her mother's kitchen. They, Lucie and Joe, talked fast, telling a combined tale, gracefully shifting the telling from one to the other, bright-eyed and forgetful of their twenty-two year anger at each other. They explained while he was in the back bathroom, was moving into the space they had made for him in the room that was now a sewing room. Manuel himself, in the days that he remained in Etta's house, never offered to explain anything at all.

Neither did he ask questions. He simply sat with them at the table in the house in Morehead, eating the dry white turkey that Joe, leaning over the table, had carved. Joe had taken over the holiday carving since their father, who was not his father, had died. Alicia was resentful of this. Manuel simply inclined his head and would not say, when asked whether he preferred light meat or dark. He took what was given. He never asked them who they were or what relation they had to each other. He did not, Alicia very gradually realized, appear even to assume.

Once, in annoyance, she had tried to tell him, tried to throw one stick of a fact into the path of his indifference. "I don't live here," she said. They were at the table. It was another meal. "I'm only visiting." He didn't seem to know it was he who was addressed. "Manuel," she said, though her speech was over. He looked at her and blinked without appearing to expect anything more.

But he would, with a quickness that was the only sign of life in him, answer questions. He would look steadily at the person who asked and answer, briefly, while a tiny worm of a scar pulled slightly against the motion of his lower lip.

"I don't know how long it will take to cross," he said. He leaned the knife and fork, that he used in that backwards foreign way, against his plate when he stopped to talk. "But the conditions—they have to be right for leaving. The current," he said.

Apparently he hadn't known that at first. On Friday he had given the first long pull on the oars that he expected to take him from the coast of North Carolina to the northern tip of Morocco. He had chosen the place, he told the reporters on the pier that morning, because it was a straight line. He saw no point in veering north to England. He had come from Utah; he was used to hot dry land.

On Sunday morning, Lucie and Joe, out for an early ride in the motorboat, had found him, his boat tied to a sea buoy, still in sight of the beach, out where the swells move like the slow green blips of a vital sign. He was waiting, he said, for the conditions to be right. He was expecting a current. It would get him free of the land and then he would be fine. "Like rockets," he said, "the way they fire to get loose from the gravity."

On Sunday the current had not come. Moored to the sea buoy, he was waiting. Lucie and Joe, visiting Lucie and Alicia's mama in the first week of spring, brought him home with them, to wait instead in the box-sized house in the flat shadeless subdivision on the inland highway side of town. Lucie and Joe's boat trailer sat out front, stretched the length of the lot. They pulled up behind Alicia's car with its out-of-state plates that wouldn't rust as fast as things do around a beach town.

Alicia was scraping corn off the cob for corn pudding when Manuel came into the house. Her mother was unloading the dishwasher. "Mama," Lucie said, as soon as Manuel was in the back. "Is it all right?"

"What am I going to do about it now?" said Etta LeGwinne, who at 67 complained of being tired. She nodded, still sorting the hot forks and spoons from the dishwasher basket. "It's all right," she said.

Alicia leaned against the kitchen counter and listened, to her mother's mostly silent answer, to Lucie and Joe explaining. It was her first visit home since her divorce. Manuel said nothing at all when he came back into the kitchen.

"Your uncles will be arriving about one," Etta said. Their uncles. The one who would want his Scotch "first off." And the one who would turn on the television.

At one-fifteen they were all assembled. The table was set with a cloth. Lucie and Alicia carried out serving dishes. Raymond, the uncle with Scotch, mimicked their motions, turning from the kitchen to the table and back, laughing and telling a half-heard story.

Etta said grace. Raymond resumed his tale. Lucie passed the rolls and the greens and the ovenproof rectangle of turkey dressing. Alicia was watching this Manuel. She cleared her throat.

"Where do you come from?"

"Salt Lake City."

"Is that where your family is from?"

"My father is Mexican. My mother was a Mexican-born Japanese."

"Why didn't you decide to row across the Pacific?" Alicia smiled as if she were making small talk and it didn't really matter. "It would have been closer."

He made a slight motion with his shoulders, as if that were ample answer.

"Why are you doing this anyway?" The corn pudding was coming around the table again. She cleared out a spot to put it down.

"I have always wanted to do it. First I wanted to see the ocean. When I was young—"

"How old are you now?"

"Twenty-eight." There was a silence.

"I'm sorry I interrupted."

"When I was a kid, I wanted to see the ocean. Then I did, when I was nineteen, by myself in northern California, hitching rides on that highway up on the cliffs. I could always see the water that whole day. I started thinking about doing this." He paused. "There were years since then I didn't think of it very much."

She waited. He had finished.

"Won't you be lonely out there?"

He smiled. "I'm taking books."

"Novels?"

He let out a breath. "No. Physics."

She frowned. She had not guessed he was smart. She sat back and watched him. He didn't seem to notice or mind.

"Out there by yourself," Etta said. Her tone was accusing. "You better think hard before you start heading back out there. Good thing for you if conditions never are right."

"Have you done a lot of boating?" Lucie asked.

"Honey," Joe said irritably. "The man's not going to cross the ocean in a boat he outfitted himself if he doesn't know what he's doing." He frowned in embarrassment. Manuel didn't say anything. Lucie got up and went into the kitchen and came back with the pitcher of iced tea. She poured some for herself and for the two uncles, Edgar, who had noticed nothing, and Raymond, who was impatient with the competition. Lucie went back into the kitchen. Edgar kept eating.

"So how is life as a swinging single? That's what I want to know," Raymond boomed at Alicia, Raymond who had 'never married.'"

"Oh," Alicia said carefully. "It's all right. It's pretty much like it was the first time. Except now, there's no pressure. To settle down again, I mean." She shrugged. "I'm getting used to it."

Etta coughed and put her fork down. "We have angel food cake and strawberry or vanilla ice cream for dessert." She stood. So did Alicia and Lucie.

Two nights later they all—all but the uncles—sat on the back patio. Manuel had ridden with Joe that day down to the beach to see. But the wind was wrong. In the back yard pine needles made their feeble shadows out of the light of a quarter moon. It was starting to be warm.

Manuel talked to them about the stars. He would find his way, of course, by celestial navigation. He had taken a night class at a technical school in Utah. It is really very simple, he said.

"What do you do besides this?" Alicia asked. "What kind of work."

"This and that," he said. "I used to be a teacher." She pulled at the leaf of a potted philodendron next to the back stoop. The garden hose was piled in big loose coils on the grass.

Manuel remained in the house a full week. Days past the day when Alicia went back to Atlanta. Days past the day when Lucie and Joe hauled their boat back inland to Lumberton. Alicia heard by telephone from Lucie that Etta was left there alone to stay with Manuel. No one knew when conditions would be right. Etta said she didn't mind at all. She said they would be fine. "She's lonely, you know," Lucie had said on the phone. "It's probably nice for her."

"He'll never know she's there," Alicia said with noticeable bitterness.

"She'll know he's there," Lucie said.

Etta herself called both daughters on the day that Manuel finally went back to sea. Telling it, Etta's voice teetered. Alicia's hand tightened around the phone.

"I know he's gone out there to die. We won't see that boy again."

"He didn't seem suicidal to me," Alicia said. Her tone was dry. She didn't offer it as comfort. "I think he'll probably be all right."

"Oh, he doesn't mean to die," her mother said. "But he doesn't know about the ocean. Not the first thing. Somebody will find him washed up somewhere. And that boat that wasn't meant for anything but a pond will be washed up somewhere else."

Alicia fingered the sagging rope of the telephone cord. She thought about her mother, in the box of a house alone. Sewing, in the back room, where that unquestioning "boy" no longer was.

"The newspapers found out about him," her mother said.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, some lady from the newspaper called. Said they had heard the oarboat man had come to shore and he was staying here. I was going to lie and say he wasn't. But he came and took the phone right out of my hand. Picked it up and said, 'yes.' Just, 'yes.' Just like that.

"He didn't mind answering their questions. Told them, just like he did us, he was waiting for the time to be right."

Alicia thought about it all again. She had come back home to her own apartment, gathering in mail and newspapers, listening for the cat that the neighbor was supposed to look after, freeing up two fingers to turn on a light. The place smelled funny like it always did when it had been locked up. And she had felt funny like she always did coming back to the present. In the house in Morehead, the little-girl furniture was still crowded all in one back room, just tall enough to trip somebody stumbling into that room without a light.

"Why do you suppose he was going out there, really, Mama?"

"He didn't want anybody," she said. "Or thought he didn't. Didn't want anybody to want him, either. It was that just as much. He said he for one wasn't going to be tamed down just by somebody's being used to him. I told him what to think about that. He didn't listen."

"No," Alicia laughed. "I don't guess he did."

The boat drifted to sea with Manuel. Alicia never saw that boat. She promised herself while she was near that she would not go see it. After the first futile set of questions, she had acted oblivious to Manuel, as he was to her and to her family's hospitality that he so thoughtlessly accepted. She thought about how Joe had carefully carved the turkey and served him like a special guest, how they all had

waited on him. She tore up a sheet of the note paper that she kept by the phone, tore it up in little pieces.

"I hope you're not really worried about that guy, Mama."

Her mother didn't answer. Pretty soon she started talking about one of Alicia's cousins who was expecting a baby.

Twenty days after setting out from the beach, Manuel was found. He had radioed for help. He was lying in the hammock strung between the two sides of his boat. He eyes were closed against the sun.

He was trying to get some sleep, he told the men on the boat who came alongside him. All night while his boat was aimed by the stars toward Morocco, he tried to sleep. But the waves woke him. Every wave woke him. It wasn't that way at first.

But two weeks at sea, he began to hear in the night each wave heading toward him. He could feel it a long way off, the rumble first in his stomach and his bones. Then the deep trembling grew and emerged from him—a sound, a hiss and roar. He felt the boat lift and rise and rise, felt it sink sickeningly down. He didn't look, as he lay in the make-shift closet of a cabin. As the falling ended, he would drift away into sleep. The sleep would last for moments. Then the darkness inside him would waken with humming again.

He stood it for a week. In the days, he tried to sleep, as he dreaded the nights of humming waves.

That was the way he told it to the men who rescued him. That was the way he told the reporters who met him again at a dock. That was substantially the way Etta told Alicia on the phone.

"They said he slept a long time when they got him aboard," Etta said. "He slept for a night and half a day. And then he got up and asked for bacon and eggs."

Alicia's back straightened. The foot that had been tapping an uneven rhythm against the kitchen stool stopped. She stared at the wall. Bacon and eggs. After where he had been.

And she knew where that was—out there where waves roll like a too-slow heartbeat. Way out there where waves move like the dangerously slowing blips on a monitor of vital signs. She had been there. She wasn't quite back. She laughed. So Manuel had asked for bacon and eggs.

Sam Gridley

REUNION

When I opened the door I was startled to see him. "What are *you* doing here?" I blurted.

He blinked once, surprised. Then he narrowed his eyes and put his hand up to rub hard at his moustache—that gesture I knew so well. "That any way to say hello to your old man?" he muttered under his palm.

We looked at each other. "Hi Dad," I said.

"Hi Matt. . . . Now are you gonna leave me in?"

I hesitated a second. "Mom know you're coming?"

He angled his head and glared in a puzzled, suspicious way. "Course she does. Where's she at?" Then he picked up the suitcases—that was the first time I saw them.

As he marched past me into the apartment I called out "Mom, Mom!" and by the time he dropped his baggage she appeared out of the bedroom. It was a sleepy Sunday afternoon in December and I hadn't been paying much attention to anything except the comics; but now I noticed she was dressed up kind of fancy, in new slacks and a tight blue pullover sweater, and she had makeup on. She went right over to him and put her arms around his waist, and he did likewise to her, and they kissed on the mouth.

"Matt," she said to me, "get Paul will you? Bring him in here. I've got something to tell you boys."

I went to fetch my little brother who was holed up in his room listening to a Snow White and the Dwarfs record. Whenever he didn't have something to do he'd want to hear that record over and over again. I had to yank the covers off, dump the stuffed animals on the floor and jab the lump with my foot to get him out of bed. "Hey, Toad," I said, "somebody's here. You've gotta come out." He came sagging along angrily, blaming me for the interruption. When he saw who it was he straightened up a little.

"Matt . . . , Paul . . . ," Mom began formally, with a hand on Dad's arm. "We've got some good news. Your Dad's gonna live with us again."

Now I guess the scene there was pretty silly. My mouth was probably half-open, since I always had a tendency to let my jaw drop when I was bewildered—a habit I have to guard against even today. Paul, who was still in his fuzzy overall pajamas that covered everything from toe to neck, had his hands up to his face as if he wanted to cover that too. Dad in his bulky coat was tugging fiercely at one side of his mustache, glaring over our heads at the wall. Only Mom looked like she knew what was going on.

"He's brought his stuff, he's moving in tonight," Mom continued.

"Is this," Dad cleared his throat to say, "the first you've told them, Liz?"

"Uh huh," Mom cheerfully admitted.

Dad gazed down at us like we were two of those weird fish from the depths of the ocean. Then he snapped his head around to say to Mom: "But how come? We had this all figured out a week ago."

"In view—" Mom said, and swept us with her eyes, and looked him up and down also (by now she'd taken her hand off him and backed away a little), "—in view of what's happened in the past, times when they've been told things and then they've been disappointed because you and I, you know how it was Michael, couldn't work things out, even though I guess we both were trying sometimes—anyway, you see, in view of that, I decided it'd be best not to get the boys' hopes up beforehand."

In our house this was quite a speech, and we all showed our respect for it by looking at Mom solemnly. For a little while nobody moved. Then Dad said with a nervous attempt at humor, "I thought Matt wasn't gonna leave me in the door."

I let out a short burst from the throat that was somewhere between a laugh and a snort.

Dad tried to carry the joke on, addressing Mom. "You sure you wasn't hopin' you could find a better deal? You know, if somebody else turned up— "

"No," she laughed, flushing a little.

"—you'd just say, 'Sorry Mike, there ain't no room for you *this* week'. . . . " A grin pinned itself across his face.

I tried to smile along with them, but my Toad of a brother misunderstood. "No," he cried out, "Nobody else's been here!"

Silence fell. Dad turned to study the dumpy kid. "That so?" he said, half-seriously. Paul nodded, eyes fixed in a sort of awe on Dad, who relaxed into an easier grin. "See?" Dad said to Mom. "I got this rigged, these're my spies here. I'll pay you off later, kid"—and he winked at Paul.

This helped get us over the awkwardness. Dad pretended to ruffle Mom's hair, and she pushed him off, and smirked in an impatient way, and told him to put the suitcases in the bedroom before somebody tripped over them. I lent Dad a hand in carrying them.

But I knew, and it bothered me a little, that he'd been misled. Because whatever other boyfriends Mom had, the Toad didn't know much about them—nor did I. Mom had explained it to me once: She didn't like going out at night and leaving me to take care of Paul, but the only other way was to bring guys home with her, which she didn't think was good—she didn't want us "exposed" to that. In case of trouble I could always call Grandma, so it wasn't like we were really alone. She went on for a long while, very earnestly, telling me things I didn't want to understand. I'd sometimes wake up in the early hours and sit in my bed wondering if she'd come home yet. A couple times I went looking for her, and crept slowly into her dark room till I could see and smell her there under the covers.

Another thing struck me as I helped Dad dump the suitcases on the bed. Some of the nights she'd been out lately, she must have been dating *him*. Like Dad, I was amazed she'd kept this secret from us, and to my crazy adolescent mind it seemed almost indecent. Other guys were one thing—since they were generally nameless and faceless it was easy to ignore them—but to be running around with *him* again—

Don't get me wrong, we liked our Dad, or at least tolerated him. He did the things fathers were supposed to—took us places, bought us things—all the while fairly uncommunicative. To a kid he was an imposing figure: "a long drink of water," my grandmother called him, but there was nothing watery about him; he was tall and sinewy, with a lean face dominated by the thick furry mustache. The only weakness showed up in his eyes: light blue and chronically tired, they tended to retreat behind that barrier of fur. Dad looked right at home in the narrow streets of Pleasantown, the steel-mill borough where both Paul and I had been born. He was a foreman or something at the mill—a good job, I guess. For a year after the breakup Mom kept us in Pleasantown and he saw us pretty often. But when they agreed to sell the house and Mom moved us to the apartment on the top floor of a huge old brick house in Minton, he didn't come by so much. Lately our relations with him had seemed forced.

"I'll unpack these later," he told me. I found it embarrassing to be in my mother's bedroom with him, though as he looked at me I tried to act mature about it.

"Y'know," he went on, shucking his coat, "you're gettin' up there. Takin' after my side of the family. I noticed that last time." He was referring to my height, which at that age was loose and gangly, not pressed-in solid like his. "Lemme see, you're—um—your next birthday, how old're you gonna be, Matt?"

I was just sophisticated enough for this to sound ridiculous. So typical of an absent father. "Eighteen," I suggested.

"Come on," he said, drawing up one end of his mouth. "I have a hard time keepin' track but you ain't gonna get me with that one."

"Ten?" was my next offer. It was a bad habit of mine, smart-assing when I was nervous—another thing that's stuck with me to this day.

It annoyed him, I could tell. The curve of the mustache deepened. "All right," he muttered. "Forget I asked." He turned away to pitch his coat across the bed.

I began to think I'd screwed up. If he was really coming back, it behooved me to watch my step. And I must have felt a little ashamed too, because I spouted all the true information—that I was thirteen and in the middle school and Paul was six and toady and listened to Snow White—the other miscellaneous stuff that he must have known already. He listened to me with his arms crossed.

We rejoined Mom and Paul in the living room, where things seemed strained again. It being a Sunday, there wasn't much to do. I wanted to finish the comics but something told me it'd be rude to pick them up.

Then Mom took over. She mixed up some nice light chatter about things we boys had been up to and people she and Dad knew and plans for a Christmas tree and so forth. Mom had become a very competent person. After the breakup with Dad she'd gone to a local business school and then to work for an insurance agency, where she started as a secretary and soon became an "office manager." In time she found us this big apartment in Minton, the county seat, a town with a lot of white-collar types. She was moving up in the world. Today, as I said, she'd dressed herself carefully—in snapppy clothes with makeup, earrings, etc.—and she handled the conversation with a smooth determination.

By now she and Dad had sat down on the couch, not too close together, while I threw myself into a chair and Paul squatted on the floor in his normal toad position. Unfortunately Mom happened to mention Eileen Hufnagel, and the Toad smarted off, and Dad expressed surprise, so I had to deny vociferously that I had any interest in her. They all laughed at me and I sneered. Then the talk went back to Christmas plans and this eventually led around to Paul's electric train, which lay scrambled in a box in the closet. At first it seemed an accident that this topic came up.

"Y'know Paul was wondering," Mom said to Dad, "if we could put up that train set this year. He still remembers the one year we had it under the tree."

"You mean that train that never worked right?" smiled Dad.

Mom said she thought it'd worked okay once we had it going, but ever since then it'd sat in a box, which seemed a shame.

"I remember we had a lotta trouble with that," Dad said. "It ain't the best set we could've got him. Hard to work with."

"The track kept coming apart," I put in.

"Yeah," Dad said quickly. He looked over and held my eyes a second and I knew we recollected the same things.

"Maybe when he's older we can get him a better one," Mom went on. "But in the meantime it's such a shame . . . 'specially when he asked me about it, Mike."

I figured she was overstating the Toad's interest; probably he'd just fallen across it one day and wondered why it was there. But Dad, not knowing that, had to ask him if he wanted to get it going again. Paul shifted around on the floor, and put his tongue between his teeth, and blinked his fat amphibian lids, and nodded. Then Dad asked me and I said, "Yeah, sure, I guess." Which overstated *my* interest as well. (I'd always been peeved they gave it to Paul rather than me.)

"Well I've gotta run to the market," Mom pressed on, "pick up a couple of things I need for supper before the Acme closes, but this sounds like a nice project for you boys to work on. I thought it could go in the corner there beside the toyshelf." She pointed to the next room, a long playroom that merged into the dining area.

Dad tried to heave a good-natured sigh, but it came out a little rankled. "I suppose we can give it a hack," he said.

And that's how we got into it. We hauled out the old cardboard box and started to pick through the heap of tracks and switches and transformer and box cars. Once Paul spotted the locomotive he took it aside to push it back and forth on the carpet mumbling little things to himself; probably he dreamed Snow White and the Dwarfs were driving it. Meanwhile Dad and I got down to business.

There's something I should explain here. From our point of view—mine and the Toad's—the worst problem in Mom and Dad's marriage had always been Dad's temper. He was a peculiar man. You saw, most of the time, that he was trying very hard to be patient. But the small rubs of life ground at him like sandpaper. At work, from what I heard then and later, it seems he was a good foreman and the guys liked him; he must have enjoyed fighting the snags in production, the gripes and breakdowns. At home, though, any little snag would get on his nerves, and you'd see the tightening in his face, the pressure on his mouth; and if he let his temper go Mom'd chill over the resentment. She had such a cool way of holding it against him that he'd get pissed off all over again, and the argument would run into days or weeks maybe, until there were so many grudges going at once that nobody could tell for sure what all the anger was about.

Well, our last attempt at the train set had been one of those times. Dad got furious at it and Mom accused of him ruining our Christmas. He smashed some things, she made a few cool remarks and he smashed some more. The Toad and I shut ourselves in a bedroom and listened to the crashes. I remembered that clearly and couldn't understand why Mom was taking this gamble.

In the closet we found the original board Dad'd bought to hold the rails. The intention had been to nail the track down permanently but somehow that never

got done. We began to piece the thing together—or Dad did, because when he concentrated on something he grew so intense you couldn't really help much, you had to stay to the side and hand him what he needed. At one point Mom had bought some extra track of a slightly different curvature, and if you mixed it with the original you'd never complete the loop. We realized this after we made the mistake. We started over.

The main problem was the cheap little metal connectors, which held the track segments together just long enough to pop off when your head was turned. About the tenth time this happened, Dad dug his fingers into his mustache and stared at me with those pale receding eyes. It had started to grate on him. My stomach started to quiver.

In a stiff voice he said he needed pliers to pinch the connectors tighter. It sounded like he was ready to blame somebody and I didn't want it to be me. So I rummaged hastily through the kitchen drawer and managed to find some pliers. Meanwhile he muttered about the tools of his that Mom had kept when they split up: "Good quarter-inch drill. My best wrench set. Don't know what the hell she wanted that for. Half my screwdrivers." When I handed him the pliers he glared at them suspiciously.

But then I saw him pull himself straighter, as if remembering something, and make a new try to be cheerful. It was a genuine effort, because Mom had already left for the market—there was nobody to convince but us kids. He smiled at me, teased me about having been the man of the house—at least I could *find* the pliers, he joked, and rapped me on the arm. He called to Paul, who'd wandered off to the living room, "Hey Son, you gonna help us set this up?"

The tone was about the closest Dad could come to family-style camaraderie. But the Toad looked over with one of his expressions that didn't express much, and mumbled an answer that said even less. In his fuzzy lumpish pajamas, his nose as usual packed with snot, the kid looked like a reject from the Dwarfs—one too dismal for even Snow White to tolerate. He was behaving like one too.

Dad stiffened a little and glanced at me, realizing I guess that he had to settle for what was offered. He gave an awkward shrug, and the two of us went back to the job. Soon the Toad disappeared into his bedroom, leaving us to fret over the train set that supposedly belonged to him.

Even with the pliers we had an exasperating task. We had to check each connector's fit and pinch it just the right amount in advance: too loose, and the track would slide apart; too tight, and we couldn't slip the connector on. My contributions were generally at one extreme or the other, so Dad had to do it all. His patience was sorely tried. He heaved some big, obstructed breaths, and glared, and held the tiny metal bits up to his eye as if he could intimidate them. Outside, the December wind hooted at us as it spun round the icy gables of that old brick mansion. It was strange and tense, working there with Dad, remembering his past explosions all too well; I would have escaped if I could, but I figured abandoning him would be too great a provocation.

"Don't bump the goddamn board," Dad growled as I tried to uncramp my legs.

I was getting really jittery. Mom took a long time at the store, and each little difficulty with the track was bringing us closer to Dad's boiling point. As usual in such a fix, I suddenly had to pee, but I was too anxious to get up. It seemed I'd been left responsible for keeping the lid on Dad's temper—a task I knew I couldn't handle.

I ought to admit, though, there was something spicy about the danger. It livened up a dull Sunday afternoon. And I was sneaking timid glances at Dad with a depth of speculation that was new to me. I wondered, for instance, how much he'd hooked up with other women; teenage folklore offered many tales on this theme but Mom, in keeping with her no-exposure policy, had been silent about it. Dad himself never mentioned any others. Peering at the side of his mustache, I puzzled over the indecency of his on-again, off-again pairing with Mom. It occurred to me—in terms used by Tommy Mashensic, the most advanced kid in my new school—that Mom looked like a pretty good piece, like Eileen Hufnagel but older, and I wondered if Dad saw her that way. Then I grew amazed at my own thoughts and shifted my legs uncomfortably.

"Watch yourself. Almost got this bugger," he said through his teeth. "Gimme that." I handed him the final link of track and froze myself still while he fitted it. But at the last moment the track flicked apart on the far side.

I caught my breath. Dad sat up on his hunkers and rubbed so hard at the mustache I thought he'd tear it off. I got ready for the explosion.

But his words, when he finally spoke, were almost calm. "Sonofabitchin' motherfuckin' bastard," he said. "Ain't worth piss. Who the hell made this piece of shit anyways?" When I read him the company name off the box, he described what he'd like to do to the president of that firm. His curses were so precise and anatomically inventive that I thought even Tommy Mashensic could have learned something from them.

With his lips squeezed into a thin line under the mustache, Dad repaired the track and went on to check the transformer. Meanwhile Mom arrived home with a bag of groceries and asked how we were coming along.

"Oh pretty good," he said, managing a false smile for her.

"Matt's helping you?"

"Yeah," he grunted, and I really appreciated that simple lie.

Because we had to hunt up a screwdriver and fix a broken electrical connection, Mom had supper on before we could finish. We all gathered at the table, where Dad strove for a hearty tone. He complimented Mom on the spread and told Paul and me we'd better eat up if we knew what was good. Then he dug in to his favorite kind of steak, sirloin-tip rubbed with garlic and broiled medium-rare, with mashed potatoes and limas. After all the tension I found I was starved. The Toad didn't eat much, but he was rarely interested in human food.

Mom kept a careful watch, it seemed to me. At one point she said to Dad, "You still like steak, I see."

"I like," he grinned with a full mouth, "the same things I've always done, honey."

Mom chuckled and for the rest of the meal wore a slightly smug expression.

When I was finished I carried my plate and glass into the kitchen, followed mechanically by the Toad, who had mangled his steak into bloody pieces and spread them around the rim of his plate. For a minute he paused under the kitchen light and stared at the arrangement on his dish like it had some special significance—a magical ring, maybe, known only to Dwarfs. Then he dumped it in the garbage and returned to Snow White. He was really weird, I decided.

When I came back to the dining room Mom was trying, in a teasing voice, to enforce her new rule on Dad. "Everyone in the family," she said, "takes their plate to the kitchen. I figured it's the least people could do, with me working full-time. See how the boys did it?"

As Dad drank up his coffee he looked over the cup at her.

"It means you, too, Michael. Come on, be a good boy," she twitted. "It's easy once you get the hang of it."

He set down the cup very deliberately, and drew his shoulders back as if his chest was full. Under his breath he gave a light belch. "I wouldn't want," he said slowly, "to break any rules here." And he rose in a dignified way with his dishes. As he strode to the kitchen he shot her a sternly facetious look that she warded off with one of her own.

I imagine it provoked him—not to clear dishes but to be treated like us kids. For when we set to work again on the train his reserves of temper burned off fast. At first it looked like there was nothing left to do: we put the engine on the track, turned on the juice and it went. Then Dad attached the various box cars and caboose. He turned on the juice and it didn't go. He checked that the engine's wheels were lined up straight on the rails. It didn't go. He checked every car, one at a time. Wouldn't budge. He took the cars off and tried the engine alone. Now it wouldn't go by itself either.

I don't need to list all the details. A couple of times I thought he'd crush the little train in his hand. At the end of twenty-five minutes, by fiddling with one thing and another, he managed to get the engine to circle halfway around; then it stopped. When he reached over to nudge it the track split apart in two places.

He wasn't cussing now, but swallowing his frustration till it gagged him. He had rubbed so much at his mustache that the skin beside it turned pink. At that point Mom, happening by, paused to look over our shoulders as we squatted by the board.

"Is it running?" she said brightly.

I sensed I'd better handle the question. "Not really. Sometimes it goes but then it stops and we can't see what's wrong."

Mom began to look doubtful. "Well, you know, if it's too much trouble"—she was addressing Dad mainly—"if it doesnt work, I don't want you boys to waste the whole night on this, maybe we should just forget about it. Maybe it's not worth the hassle, huh?"

Now this was the wrong thing to say to a guy who'd spent hours on a task that she'd talked him into. Since Dad had his back to her she couldn't see his face, but she may have noticed the hand go up to the mustache. He didn't make a sound or

move another muscle. After a few seconds Mom went away, with a shrug that implied it was our decision.

When he glanced at me I saw his eyes straining behind lids as thin and tight as stretch socks. "JE-sus fuckin' Christ," he muttered, and glared again at the track. "What does she—"

By then I was silently chanting a queer sort of prayer. Please, please, pleasepleasepleaseplease, I thought, don't don't don't don't don't. Of course this had about as much effect as reading a polite letter to a volcano, but the rhythm comforted me. Pleasepleaseplease; don't, don't, I sang in my head. At the same time, perversely, I wanted the eruption to come so it'd be over. I despised Dad for losing his temper over a dumb little train. I wondered what kind of idiotic strategy Mom had in mind, getting us in this predicament. And most of all I resented being the one that had to deal with it—it sure as hell hadn't been *my* idea.

Some long seconds passed. I made one last try to hold off what I thought was inevitable. To Dad's tense, hunched back, which looked to me like he was gathering force for a wall-crumbling explosion, I offered a scrap of paper. "Dad?" I said, "I found this in the bottom of the box. It's got 'Trouble Shooting Guidelines.' Maybe they. . . . "

He turned again and the surprise hit me more slowly, but almost as deeply as when I first saw him at the door. Because his eyes had gone slack somehow. There was a soft unsettled spot in them. And now his neck and arms loosened.

"Matt," he said, "if you ever get a woman that—" And he swallowed, and looked at me some more, and didn't explain what he meant.

A minute went by as we both turned our eyes away and studied the floor. I felt suddenly embarrassed and ashamed, I didn't know why.

Then Dad took the sheet of paper from me and scanned it. With a resigned, almost indifferent air he consented to try following the instructions. We wiped the track with a "dry lint-free cloth"; we examined the engine wheels for "dirt or grease that may cause your train to run erratically." Dad moved in a cautious, round-shouldered fashion, and spoke in a low voice. It wasn't like him—he acted as if he'd come against something too big to fight.

But after we'd done all there was to do, we switched on the train and—unbelievably—it sped around the track. I saw on Dad's mouth a sad, unpersuaded smile. Before anything could break I ran to get the Toad, who squatted on the carpet and stared, transfixed, like he'd discovered the Dwarfs in a magical dance. Mom came over and examined it, and squeezed Dad's shoulder as a compliment. "Very good, Michael," she said. "I'm surprised, really, I wasn't sure you'd do it." Dad looked kind of sharp at that, but then lapsed into an expression of relief and irony.

Mom and Dad soon wandered off together, leaving me and the Toad to operate the train. With all my brotherly authority I lectured him about things that he shouldn't do—I was terrified he'd wreck our fragile creation. But it didn't matter, because in five minutes he lost interest and went in the living room to watch TV. I kept the train going alone. It was pretty dull—round and round in a

simple circle—but I felt obligated after all that Dad had put into it. I didn't want him to see—I was afraid to let it show—that nobody much cared.

So there I was, watching the silly train circle and circle, sucking on my tongue, holding my knees against my chest, as still as if it was indeed magic. Maybe I figured that as long as the ring stayed unbroken we'd be all right.

Eventually I went in to look at TV with the others. We passed a surprisingly average family night that way. Mom made Paul and me hot chocolate with marshmallows while she and Dad drank beer. They cuddled some on the sofa. The wind snickered around the windows. At nine o'clock the Toad went to bed with his smelly stuffed animals and the rest of us watched a sexy movie about murder in a California beach house. Dad yawned a lot and at eleven asked Mom if it wasn't time we all hit the sack.

"Time for Matt anyway," she said, and refused to listen to my argument that I wanted to hear the news. Dad stood up with me, cracking his knuckles. "You comin' along now?" he said to Mom.

"I wanta get the kids' school lunches fixed, it's always such a rush in the morning. I'll be there in a little bit.

Dad said she didn't need to do that now, but she was already heading toward the kitchen. He switched off the TV and I heard his footsteps come down the hall behind me.

I went in my room, which was cramped and chilly. Mom had made a big deal of the fact that, though the apartment was smaller than our house used to be, the Toad and I would still have our own rooms; but I didn't like mine enough to fix it up—I'd left the walls bare, hadn't even tacked a poster to the door. Its one good feature was the dormer window over the bed that gave me a view down the street. Nights when I didn't want to sleep but Mom would yell at me for having a lamp on, I'd stare out that window at the yellow-white lights in other people's houses, watching them blink out one by one.

Tonight I got my pajamas on and went down the hall again to brush my teeth in the bathroom. I stayed there awhile to study my pimples in the mirror. On my way back I saw Dad step out of Mom's room— their room—in a robe that he held closed with one hand.

"'Night, Dad," I mumbled as I edged by.

"Yeah. Goodnight, Matt."

I closed my door, which was only a couple feet farther on, and stood behind it listening. I heard the floorboards creak beneath the carpet as Dad padded up the hall. "Liz," he called out in a muffled voice, "Liz, you comin' to bed?"

Though her answer was inaudible I heard him return, go into the room and shut the door. Then, guilty about my eavesdropping but not at all sleepy, I climbed onto my bed and yanked the covers up to wrap around me as I knelt at the window. On a Sunday night there wasn't much to see on a side street in Minton. A car every minute or so; some rowdy high-school kids splitting up; the pale wash of streetlights on the lawns and naked trees. The wind whistled a handful of notes, erratic and tuneless.

I don't know how much time passed, but I was still looking out when I heard Dad call again. This time Mom answered from somewhere in the hall. "Yeah,

I'm done, just gimme a couple minutes in the bathroom, Michael."

"You been makin' lunch for the whole damn school?" In spite of the sarcasm his voice sounded kind of plaintive.

"I'm a very busy person these days, Mike," she said in her office-manager tone. "Lots of things to do." And the bathroom door clicked shut.

A few seconds went by. Then Dad slammed the bedroom door so hard my window pane shook. I understood enough to see that each of them was making some kind of bitter point. The house was quiet except for the small whine of water in the bathroom pipes.

"Don't don't," I whispered out the window. "Please." But I got angry at myself for pleading because I suddenly detested them both so much I wanted to smash the glass and crawl out on the roof and punish everybody by freezing to death. I wondered viciously if either of them really wanted this thing to work. If they did, why all these dumb maneuvers? If they didn't, why had Dad turned up in the first place?

I flopped down on the bed and grappled the pillow. I tried to block everything out, but unsuccessfully, for I heard Mom's steps down the hall and the clunk of the bedroom door as she opened and closed it.

I waited for the blowup—the yells, the shouted threats that had always come in the past. It was so predictable. But tonight there was only a brief, sharp muttering, followed by silence. In time I realized they'd found something else to do.

The abrupt return of peace didn't calm me; by now I'd lost whatever detachment I'd started with. I remember feeling grossly disgusted—as if, after flirting so long with spite and rage, it was evil of them to make love.

They were perverted, I thought, and tomorrow it'd begin all over again. I scorned both of them with the furious conviction of a 13-year-old's brain. I lay awake warming myself with rancor.

Maybe it would've helped if I'd known how long this reunion would bumble on. As things turned out, it lasted till I slipped through junior college and went off to the university, and till miracles of evolution developed the Toad into a teenage lizard. An amazing stretch of time, when I think back on it. Dad was a different person, subdued somehow, and Mom—for a little while, anyway—learned not to goad him. Would I have fallen asleep any easier, knowing that was to come?

I don't think so. I was the wrong age for compromise.

Before I could sleep that night I had to bring out my pacifier, the one thing that would put my turmoil to rest. It was a mental image—so vivid I could touch and taste it—of Eileen (yes, I confess) Hufnagel. I crept up to her shaking delicately; my hand traced her contours on the chilly sheet. We were exposed but also sheltered in the obscurity of that small room brushed by a fumbling wind. We fitted ourselves together, and with the greatest tenderness I did unspeakable, unbearable things to her. Painful things. Godawful, crazy, violent things. It was the most innocent love I've ever known.

PET FROM ANOTHER PLANET

Dabney Stuart

TATER MCBRIDE'S CHAIR

Tater kept it in the alley that ran behind his house. Mark Random had never seen a piece of furniture so old, or so ugly. It was overstuffed, and what Tater called its "innards" leaked out at various tears in the blotchy green covering.

Thumbtacked to the garage door behind it was a small, handlettered sign that used to say "Tater's Chair." No one had bothered to take it down after the "Installation Ceremonies"; it was torn in half now, so only the first word was left. It disappeared when the garage door was up.

The one time Random had sat in the chair had been a shock, because the springs went through to the ground. It felt to him like stepping down when you think there're no more stairs but there are, and your foot plunges through the air where you thought floor was going to be, only by the time your brain gets *that* signal your foot *has* hit the floor.

That one time Random sat in it, however, was more than most people did. No one had ever heard Tater actually say not to sit in it, but Random had noticed that if a bunch of them ever went by it on the way back from the movies or the store they would all look at it as if he had.

Of course, they'd all seen Tater sit in it regularly, late on summer afternoons when the weather was nice with the big garage door swung up behind him, like a man out in front of his cave. The way he fit into it, Random thought, settling down as if nothing could surprise him, was probably enough to make anyone realize what he wasn't supposed to do.

Random thought the whole business with the chair was another way of knowing Tater was inimitable. At least that was how he explained his amazement one July afternoon when he and Tater found a stranger sitting in it.

They had come across Tater's back yard, passed by the side of the garage, squeezed through the gate that had dug its bottom into the dirt, and started off down the alley to the movies when Tater stopped. Random hadn't *seen* anything, but as soon as Tater stopped he realized something off to the right was different, as if there was a thickness where there usually was a space.

They turned around. "Morning," Tater said to the black man sitting in the chair. He was dressed in a black, pin-striped suit. It was well-worn in an unusual way, Random noticed, being shiny all over, not just at the places which get rubbed the most.

It was hard to tell how tall he was, but his bony knees stuck into the air so they seemed to make a triangle with his small head. His age was hard to guess, too,

but to Random he seemed *old*—somewhere around 90, he thought, but when he talked it was different.

"Un-hunh," he said. It was a deep, strong voice. It sounded to Random as if Tater had made a judgement and the black man was agreeing with it.

"How you doing?" Tater adjusted his body from its stopped position to one where he could listen without committing himself. It was a posture Random had seen him use before, though not often. The sunlight through the oak trees in the vacant lot across the alley flickered on the two of them. It looked to Random as if someone was playing with a mirror. From the very beginning something seemed odd to him, but he couldn't articulate it.

"Tollable." The black man spoke to Tater, Random noticed, but he looked at where Tater was standing rather than at Tater himself. It didn't seem a challenge exactly, but it struck Random afterwards that Tater was being asked to earn the space he filled up. Maybe that was what made him handle things the way he did.

"You?" the black man asked, inclining his head leftward slightly.

"Mobile," Tater decided.

The black man smiled. "Sit down, then," he said. Random remembered his football coach's habit of walking up and down the sideline during scrimmages, yelling to the defensive linemen on every play, "Firm but loose, firm but loose." He'd never known exactly what that meant until he heard the black man in Tater's chair use his voice.

"How 'bout some air first?" Tater moved around behind the black man and heaved the garage door up. Random watched the little sign saying "Tater's" snap up out of sight.

Even from where Random was standing he could feel a cold dampness drift past him for a second. Some of the flecks of sunlight hit the dirt floor of the garage, black with grease and sludge drippings.

"There." Tater rubbed his hands together as if he'd just made a fire and wanted to warm himself. Then he slid them two or three times against the sides of his khaki shorts. He sat down on the gravel edge of the alley, Indian-style, making an L with the black man. For an instant Random had an image of them waiting for somebody else to show up for a card game.

The black man took his hands out of his lap and placed one on each knee, reminding Random of the statue of Lincoln in Washington, D.C., except, he thought, the living man was scrunched down in that funny way because of the chair.

"'At your chair?" Tater asked him.

The black man said, "Nope." He hitched himself a little, seeming almost to pop up into the air and back down. Then he ground his hands around on his kneecaps a couple of times.

"I was put here," he said.

"Un-hunh," Tater said, looking off down the alley. Random was standing across from both of them and to one side; he looked where Tater was looking. All he could see was the same old alley, empty, T-ing at Mr. Snoddy's garage four houses down.

"Put here," the black man echoed himself. His hands slid slowly down his thighs until they rested limply on his lap. His elbows stuck out across the arms of Tater's chair. "Took um 30 years of pushin and draggin but they finely got me

here this mornin. They overcame." He shook his little knob of a head two or three times—it looked to Random as if it was an 8-ball rotating on a short pole.

"Who zat?" Tater asked. His voice was matter-of-fact.

"It was like all the time I was fighten um I was wanten um to win, too. Buncha women, mostly—ants, wives, sisters—them kind. Bunch um."

He turned the last syllable into a hum which kept getting louder, making Random feel as if a train was coming toward him, until the man leaned his head back and opened his mouth and let the rest of it out in a great roar.

His head rested on the back of the chair then, and Random was surprised to see how big his Adam's apple was. It stuck out like a beak, almost the size of his whole head.

The loud roar seemed to go on up through the air as if it were made of something more solid than noise. Random was impressed at the way everything became quiet for a minute after that.

"Tater," he said then, "come on. It's gonna be starting already." He kicked the crushed earth at the edge of his side of the alley.

"In a minute," he said. His voice was still in neutral.

Random couldn't figure out why Tater wanted to hang around any more. In fact, it didn't make any sense to him why Tater hadn't told that old man whose chair it was right off and let it go at that. Either the old man was nuts or crazy, Random thought, and then realized suddenly he was afraid of him. He had a disturbing picture of that little round head popping off his neck and following his roar up into the air, like a cannonball.

Random picked up a rock and threw it past them into Tater's garage.

Tater stood up, rubbing his hands on his hips again. He didn't pay any more attention to Random than Adam did to God, but Random had to admit it wasn't all that unusual. He knew Tater could get hunkered down on the unlikeliest things.

"They coming after you?" Tater asked. The black man's mouth hung open still and Tater seemed to look down into it.

"Ahnn," the black man said, making Random think of the sound he made when the doctor pushed his tongue down to see his throat. The man's head seemed to return to normal, looking the same again, showing the same white holes where two tiny black discs floated for eyes. "Not so far as I know. They rode the part of me they liked best until it finely wore out. Can't see I got anything left to trade."

"Well," Tater said, his voice sounding to Random tighter than before, as if he'd squashed it together on itself, "this is your chair as long as you sit in it, I guess." He scuffed some gravel with his shoe. "Or until whoever owns it wants to sit in it and kicks you out." It was the only time Random ever heard Tater talk as if he wasn't who he was.

"Come on," Tater said, turning toward Random and then starting down the alley. "Let's go to the stupid movies."

They took a left at Mr. Snoddy's garage and emerged into McArthur Street. The next block and a half it seemed to Random as if he was walking next to a knot. Tater snorted twice, and he had his head burrowed down in his neck.

About a hundred feet from the movie he put his fingers on Random's arm and stopped them. "I couldn't make that man get out of my chair unless I'd been in

on what put him into it in the first place, could I? And I can't see I had any part in that." He looked Random in the eye but Random knew he was really talking to himself.

Still, he seemed to relax some after that, Random thought, and even joked about the Superman short, which he usually took pretty seriously.

When they passed the chair on the way back from the movies, the black man was gone. There was no way to tell he'd been there at all, Random thought, much less how long he'd sat after Tater had talked with him.

Tater and Random stopped for a second or two, and Random stared at the stains on the green covering. He had no way of knowing what Tater looked at exactly, or what he thought, but from then on things seemed to change a little.

Tater didn't quit sitting in the chair, but he sat in it less. And when he did it seemed to Random as if he was just visiting. He'd move on almost before he got comfortable. He never said anything about the whole business, either, to Random or, as far as Random knew, anyone else, but three or four of them commented at various times that they felt different walking past the chair when it was empty, less intimidated, almost as if some change had come over the chair itself. Then they would look sheepish at talking that way, reach down, pick up some gravel and throw it at the garage door.

No invitations were issued, but Random and a couple of Tater's other friends began sitting down on occasion. After a while, the chair became something like a meeting place, especially, Random noticed, if someone had been getting flak from his mother, or somebody else, and needed a place to talk about it, or just let it slide.

David Mason

FISH AND GAMES

I'm a hundred yards down the gravel street and I can hear him shouting from the clinic. "Pansies," he says. "They're hiring pansies at the Fish and Game."

I've just left our skiff tied at the creek and I'm in no hurry. I pass the cannery trailors, the Russian Orthodox church. The hills behind Unalaska are autumn brown, treeless, spotted with Quonset huts from World War Two, a regular junkyard nobody's bothered to scavenge. When I reach the clinic I see that Rolf has a couple of Aleut kids slapping paint on the clapboard, and I mean slapping it on because winter's sitting on the hills and about to roll over and smother us.

Dogfin is still shouting when I go inside. He's mixing in Norwegian cusswords though he lost his accent back when he was a kid in Seattle. Not that I know him personally. I know his reputation. I unzip my uniform jacket and toss my fur-flapped hat to Connie at the desk, and she tells me Rolf is in the back with you-know-who.

Rolf in the back room gives me one of those paunchy-eyed looks of his. Our only medicine man is not even a doctor. He was a medic in the Korean War and he knows how to inject morphine and set bones and sew up gashes. They say he pulls people's teeth by leading a string from tooth to door knob and slamming the door. Being an employee of the State I get my coverage taken care of in Anchorage. Suspicion of frontier remedies is one of the holdovers from my childhood in Upstate New York.

Dogfin, when I get a look at him, has a pallor of pain. His red hair is slicked back in a ducktail. His beard has browned and gone grey. He's seated on Rolf's table, pressing himself back from his injured foot, and I notice his huge hands reddened by cold work. Some fishermen in this part of Alaska cease to be human, it seems to me. They're too big, too strong where their bones have broken and mended. Dogfin takes a look at me without recognition and mutters, "Pansy."

"Quit squirming," says Rolf, "or I'll cut off your damn foot."

"Help yourself," says Dogfin. "Even on one foot I could whip these pansies."

Rolf has cut the tennis shoe and peels it back, revealing a bloody snarl of infected lacerations. "You want to tell me why you didn't come in sooner?"

"I had work to do." Dogfin's eyes under pale brows are trained on me. "I got a boat to get ready. Got to pick up pots."

"Wasting time," Rolf says, stirring his jar of tincture. "Wasting a good foot, too."

Dogfin lets go of the table long enough to point at me. "Who's he?" He knows very well who I am, or who I represent. "A new pansy for the Fish and Game. Tell me where you studied biology, boy."

I tell him the name of my college, and his laugh has the effect of spit in my face.

Everyone knows how Dogfin hurt his foot. Everyone in Unalaska knows everything about Dogfin. He and a few other crab fishermen have the reputations of giants in these islands. Theirs were the first names I learned when I flew out from Anchorage. I was in research, where my environmentalism was put to good use. Now I'm on patrol, enforcement, which is supposed to give me a sense of the practical problems involved with wildlife management, and my skipper has told me more than once to watch out for two particular sea monsters: Billy Ness of the *North Pacific* and Dogfin of the *Viking*.

Dogfin threw a party for his crew two nights ago on the island of Amaknak or Dutch Harbor. They built a fire on the beach facing the Bering Sea and drank vodka and roasted Dolly Vardens. Somebody sold Dogfin a Harley 350 and Dogfin decided he would scale the mountain, Bally Hoo, on his new motorcycle. He rode uphill with a bottle of vodka zipped in his jacket, singing battle songs his old man taught him in Norway (the story goes). He made it to the top of Bally Hoo and disappeared. Searchers figured he had gone over the cliff into the sea. In fact, they later found him passed out in an earthquake trench. The motorcycle, one guy said, had eaten Dogfin's foot. Dogfin was drinking the vodka, and when he noticed his foot among the bent spokes of the wheel he did what you would expect a guy like him to do. He poured vodka over the wounds and fainted with pain. Even though he was drunk they couldn't wrestle him into the clinic. They had to wait until he noticed his infection and came on his own to see Rolf.

Now his blue eyes are chasing me or my uniform through the room and I'm looking around as if I were calmly taking in the shelves loaded with salves and alcohol and the hacksaw Rolf says he uses for amputations. "I heard about your moratorium," Dogfin says.

"It isn't mine," I tell him.

"You're wearing the State's badge, aren't you? Then you're the State. You're not a person. You're a pansy. So you studied fucking biology. So they put you out in the woods to tell us fishermen how to do our job. Fucking biology."

He winces at the red stuff Rolf is dabbing in the cuts. Rolf is muttering, "Anybody stupid enough to . . . "

"What's your name?" Dogfin asks me.

"Burton."

"Richard Burton?"

"That's right."

His face collapses, puffs out like a choleric blowfish, and I hear his unoiled laugh. "No shit? Richard Burton? *The* Richard Burton?"

"Yeah, I explored the Nile."

"You're new here, right?"

I've been out three months."

"New is anything under a year. Let me fill you in. Your moratorium doesn't mean shit."

"The crab are depleted," I tell him, and for once my uniform gives me the confidence. "Unless you let them alone there won't be any crab left to fish."

"Tell that to the Japs. Tell that to the Russians."

"That's not my job."

"It ought to be. Tell it to the sons of bitches who do the most damage. Get 'em to stop trawling."

"Why don't you have your union lobby?" I suggest. "The union's going along with us. My orders are to keep you ashore. The season's closed."

"Terrific. You keep us ashore and the God damn Russians are out there sitting on our God damn pots. I got news for you, Burford, you God damn biology people, you don't know your ass from a hole in the ground. I been fishing up here since World War Two. You weren't even your old man's mistake and I was up here, sixteen, scraping fish guts off the cannery floors till I got my first crew share. I'm skipper of a hot new boat, you hear of it? The *Viking*. Cost a million bucks. Me and Jack Ramsey—he's the owner—we're up to our eyeballs in hock to the God damn bank. I want a bumper season to pay her off." He pauses, watching Rolf with impatience. Then like an emperor to his slave he turns to me. "What's your boat—the *Princess*? I can't believe it! The fucking *Princess*. I'm going fishing, Burford. You guys just try to catch up to me. Just try."

It's Burton," I tell him.

"Burton, Okay, Burton. I'll call you Liz. Hey, Rolf, hurry it up. Just give me the God damn antibiotics, skip the stitches."

Rolf's stitches are neat and small. He takes his time with the gauze around Dogfin's ankle, glances at me with those sleep-starved eyes of his that mean he's spent too much time drinking in the Elbow Room. "No time for a chess game, Dick. I got too many teeth to pull."

*

The last loaded crab boats are in, hoping to make some money before the moratorium cuts them off. I'm working the docks with my skipper, Earl, watching the holds pumped down and the thousands of live crab crawling, the unloaders walking calmly on the backs of the crab. We're out there with our rulers and checking for dead-loss, and all the while I'm thinking about Connie. It was Connie who talked me into growing a beard to cover my sensitive face. She called it sensitive. She said a beard would give me stature with the fishermen. She told me she liked me because I was educated, sort of, but I talked like everybody else and didn't pretend to know correct grammar. I, in turn, like Connie because she laughs a lot, and she moves like she doesn't care who's looking. She has blond hair and a nice body and tells me I should write my mother more often,

which makes me think she's taking us seriously. Rolf thinks I come to his clinic to play chess with him.

Earl flips on his bullhorn, telling the last skipper to move. the unloaders, kids from the processing plant, are taking a break, passing a joint in plain sight. It's five o'clock and I told Connie I'd wait for her in the Elbow Room. I leave Earl and start walking, my boots squeaking on gravel. From the hills it looks like snow. There's a tight mist that has kept any sane skippers from leaving Dutch Harbor. Dull light shines through stacks of crab pots by the road. Some Aleut kids are snagging salmon in the creek to my right.

You can hardly say the Elbow Room is on a lane or a street. Unalaska's spit is too narrow for such things as lanes or streets. The Elbow Room, which was a military bar in the war and is still the only bar in town, is a green clapboard shack with no windows. The darkness inside lets people concentrate on the business at hand.

I'm looking for Connie's blond hair at the bar, in the booths, hearing her voice when she said to me, "You're sensitive." I don't make this claim myself, but she did one night when I talked to her about environmentalism and the industry, how the crab and salmon were damned near endangered species. The Wood River salmon run dies out every now and then and the crab migrations are thinning. She listened to me talk. She said, "You're sensitive, even if you do talk tough," and touched my face lightly with her hand. She didn't say *too* sensitive. She made me feel like I might have something unusual to offer her.

I'm still looking for her at seven o'clock. I've been outside with a beer in my hand, looking up the road at the clinic where the lights are off. Rolf must be drinking at home tonight. The cannery worklights give an amber glow and there are snowflakes drifting over the Russian church. Inside I order my third beer and buy a pack of cigarettes, though I don't regularly smoke.

I see Ivan Karakov, one of the Aleut fishermen, having a drink by himself in a corner, and I ask him if he's seen Connie anywhere tonight. Ivan says yeah, he's seen her. Seen her with Billy Ness in the skiff for the *North Pacific*. I'm standing there stunned like I've been hit over the head because Connie showed no sign of moving out on me. I ask him where they're tied. Dutch Harbor, he says. Across the bay.

I stand there shaking my head, trying to look like I knew that's where Connie was going. Off to some fisherman's boat. I'm about to order another beer for something to do when Earl comes in looking ready to kill. He says to me, "Dick, did you talk to Dogfin?"

I say, "Yeah, two days ago."

"You seen the *Viking* in port?"

When I lose my voice he turns to Ivan.

"Ivan, you seen the *Viking* in port?"

Ivan gives us a look, pious and deaf.

"Son of a bitch," says Earl. "Son of a bitch."

*

We've been at sea maybe thirty hours and the crew are ready to call it quits. The *Princess* is a sturdy ship, two hundred feet of white steel hull. I'm doing

penance in the wheelhouse and thinking of all sorts of righteous things I could say to Connie. But I know that it's like that summer I spent in Spain when I was in college. We speak a different language, we admire different things. She always wanted me to look and act like a fisherman.

We navigate by loran, east as far as Unimak, then northwest into the Bering Sea. From the wheelhouse with our pilot, Hatch, all I see is our bow rising and falling like the head of a whale. I take a seat while Hatch steadies the wheel, and all I can steady is my stomach and my umpteenth cup of coffee. Every now and then Earl comes through and scans the white and grey glare with his binoculars. Watching him, I feel my fingers tighten on my coffee cup. Earl is a born Alaskan with peculiar ideas about law and order. I know he brought his personal rifle aboard the night we left Dutch Harbor. The problem with Earl is that he makes Fish and Game business his personal business.

"Bastard's onto us," he says, and I guess that Dogfin's radio and radar are not in operation. I can hear Earl behind us getting through to Cold Bay, telling Charlie Monahan, "We'll never find him at this rate. Why don't you put a plane out for us?" And Charlie Monahan, his voice sputtering and squealing like something from outer space, agrees with Earl's request.

*

Off watch, I seem to have slept. Impression of cold beyond the porthole but my bunk is sweaty and the whole ship reeks of deisel heat. I hear our anchor dropping in the lee of some coast, guess that Earl has found us a place to wait.

I think about the day with its tension and lack of time, the open sea, wind and desolation. Winter has come. When I stood on the bridge I felt the winter like something heavy lowered on ropes. Snow slanted out of the white mist. There was no end to the motion and toss of icy swells. The crew were bored, I could tell, but I was too incredulous to be bored. I thought here I was, twenty-four years old on the high seas. Russia and Alaska far beyond the horizon, though there was no horizon. I thought of the square-rigged traders venturing into these waters with none of our modern instruments, the skin *bidarkas* of the Aleuts, massacred whales and seals. "In wilderness is the preservation of the world," I read on some Sierra Club Calendar once. When the world consisted of nothing but hunters like Dogfin there was a balance and wilderness was preserved. I wondered how the world ever got to be so screwed up, where a preservationist has to play policeman and tie the hunters up. Or maybe I didn't think any of this. Maybe I'm thinking it now or it keeps coming back to me. Maybe in daylight on the bridge I was just another empty-headed kid on a ship, face and hands freezing in lousy weather, standing there gripping the rail like I could be happy for the first time in my life.

*

Dawn light is not really light, but a variation of grey. We leave the coast, following coordinates radioed to us by the search plane. I am outside on the bridge where the fresh, bone-chilling air keeps me from getting sick. My face to the wind and the slow, tremendous rise and ploughing fall of our bow. The swells

are like grey mountains with wind-drilled troughs between them. Huge plumes of spray are lifted each time we dive downward from a swell, and my wispy attempt at a beard has quickly thickened with ice. We are headed almost due north, which means that Dogfin has set his pots in deeper water, as though he sensed a pocket of crab reluctant to migrate. As if he can smell what he wants under water hundreds of feet deep.

*

Darkness. We have reached the *Viking*'s hunting grounds. Earl, having gone without sleep for forty-eight hours, is sound asleep in his bunk. I am in charge. I am grateful to have Earl's temper and rifle out of the picture for a while, because in addition to being an environmentalist I am a pacifist. For the moment we bide time.

When we arrived there was such a wind and consistent swell that I could not see the worklights ahead. Hatch pointed them out to me, and we scraped the ice from the glass to give us a clearer view. It is certainly the *Viking*. Deep-sea anchors. Not a single float or pot left on deck. We are right in the middle of his staked-out grounds, and in daylight would see bright floats marking the positions of the pots.

I examine my watch. A very odd thing to do in the middle of night on the high sea. The time does not register. I can see the *Viking* clearly now, appearing and disappearing at the whim of great hills of water. Hidden behind a wave, its worklights show like a halo of aurora borealis, snowflakes streaking across it at ever sharper angles. Then the hull is lifted to sight again, a blue hull and lighted white cab. By keeping our nose to the wind, engines ahead very slow, we can just maintain our position. Hatch is the sailor and will decide if and when to drop anchor. I, with my green parka and fur hat, my badge and uniform, am the law. I feel like a Cossack out of his element.

"He's on the horn," Hatch says.

"Who?"

"Dogfin."

I hear the radio's crazy Martian sounds, as if it were transmitting wind.

"What's he saying?"

"Naughty words in Norwegian."

I get on the radio, peering over the wheel at the blurred *Viking*. "Hello, Dogfin. Can you hear me?"

A pause. When his voice comes over it is gruff and amused. "Yeah, I hear you. Who is this?"

"Burton. I met you at Rolf's clinic. How's your foot?"

"Burton? Liz!"

Dogfin laughs as if he has a mouthful of gravel. Hatch looks at me and I try to show him what a good joke I think it is.

No voice over the box, so I say, "Dogfin, do you read me? Dogfin, do you read me?"

"Like a God damn book."

"This is the Fish and—"

He cuts me off with a monosyllable of disgust. Then like an exhausted parent:

"Go on, Liz."

"Dick," I say, and before he can laugh I give him the official moratorium line and the "Do we or do we not have your promise to comply?"

"You do not."

"May I ask why?"

"You may not." He laughs again as though he has just told a great joke over beers in the Elbow Room. "What are you going to do about it, Liz? Going to come after us with boarding hooks?"

"Very possibly."

"You wouldn't dare."

"We are armed."

"This is Alaska, kid. Everybody's armed."

"We can radio for support."

"Try it and I'll sink you," he says. "I mean I'll ram your stinking hull. I'll monitor your radio, Liz. I'll get you. I'll twist your little head off and toss it overboard."

"I can't let you pick up your pots."

"What are you going to do, shoot me? Dont' be a horse's ass. You fire one shot and I'll shoot out your windows. You'll freeze." He laughs again, and it occurs to me that he is playing to an audience, surrounded by his three crewmen. "No ship that calls itself *Princess* and lets a pansy biologist aboard is going to get Dogfin. I'm stronger than you, kid. I've been out here since I was sixteen. The water's good to me. I thrive in it. Kids like you freeze easy."

"If you take a catch, we'll force you to return it," I say.

"Wrong, Liz. Ever seen what two barrels of bird-shot do to a college boy? I'll blast you to feathers. You get the message? I mean business."

He signs off and I can only get silence on the radio.

"Guy's crazy," says Hatch.

"Yes."

"Say he catches a load of crab. Who's going to buy it from him?"

"Good point."

"Like I say, he's crazy. He's trying to prove something."

"What do you think he's tring to prove?"

"I don't know. Maybe that he's crazy."

*

Earl has heard the news and comes into the wheelhouse muttering, "Son of a bitch."

"Any ideas?" I ask.

He shrugs, straightfaced. "If I have to, I'll pick him off."

"You can't do that."

"Why not?"

"Well, for one thing, it's murder."

Earl lifts a shoulder. "The man's got to be stopped."

"Earl, you can't shoot him."

"You going to talk about it?"

"What if I do?"

"That would be a problem," Earl says. He points a finger at me as though it were a gun and he has me covered. "Wake me up if he makes a move."

*

I have kept vigil in the wheelhouse and on our freezing bridge.

Another dawn surrounds us and I hold myself upright at the wheel, not completely sure I see what I think I see. Dogfin is moving to pick up his pots. I kick Hatch awake and he stands with me, watching. I can recognize the man at the starboard davit swinging the power block into place, and Dogfin himself at the picking boom. His red hair flickers in the weird light.

"Let's stop him," says Hatch. He throws our engines into ahead-full. Our bow rises like some terrible monster's snout. We're hauling up dragged anchors as we heave forward. I'm watching with tight eyes and I see the smoke and fire. "Stop, stop, stop!" I'm still shouting when I see Hatch covering his head on the floor. "Engines back, or still, or something!"

It was a warning shot. It came nowhere near us, but we are both reluctant to raise our eyes above the glass.

Hatch, who always wears a backward baseball cap, is shaking his head. His head stops shaking. We have both heard a second shot. "Whoa!" And Hatch is crawling on his hands and knees for the companionway. I raise my head, seeing that Dogfin and his crew have disappeared. Before I can figure it out Hatch is calling me from the companionway, and I am turning, my hat flying off, my hands forward to catch me if I fall. I can see Sammy, the cook, fat jiggling in t-shirt, pressed to companionway steps. Hatch is with him. They have wrestled Earl to the deck, taking his rifle before he could fire another round.

"Chuck it overboard," I say.

Earl thrashes and fights, screaming that he will kill me if I touch his gun. "Nobody touches my gun!" His face is blue and swollen. He seems to be wildly fighting for his existence. I can feel my anger pumping through me like hydraulic fluid. The weapon comes easily into my hands. I feel its weight and oiled stock before I kick open the door and toss the gun into the sea. I can't believe I have done it. Earl froths, kicks, screams what an idiot I am. And so it has gone on this voyage. I am in the middle, labeled an idiot by both sides. "I'll kill you," Earl shouts. "You stupid kid, I'll kill you."

"Get rid of him," I say.

In the scuffle, lifting Earl to his feet, my State of Alaska patch is torn from my jacket.

*

Sammy and Hatch are padlocking Earl in the freezer in an effort to literally cool him down. I'm in the wheelhouse listening to Dogfin cuss me up and down on the radio. He coughs. "One of us is wounded."

"Then give in. Let's get him to a hospital."

"No fucking way, Liz. No fucking way."

"You can't win. What point does it serve? You can't sell the catch."

"It proves a point. It proves a point."

"Like hell," I say.

"It proves I'm tougher than you."

He signs off and leaves me with no sound but the wind and our own uneasy hull.

*

Let out of the freezer, Earl has caught a cold and gone to bed. He swears he will report me for interfering ith a superior officer in the performance of duty. I tell him I trust the courts. Hatch is on the radio to Cold Bay and I can hear their storm warnings: "Wind's kicking up. Ought to reach seventy knots sometime tomorrow."

"We've had it," Hatch says.

"What can we do?"

"Try to out-run her, I guess." He swings the bill of his baseball cap forward with new initiative.

I get on the horn to Dogfin, and to my surprise he answers me. He sounds exhausted and fed up.

"How's your wounded man?" I ask.

The gravel in his laugh sounds more like sand. I now realize that I am listening to his wounded man. Over the radio his breath sounds so troubled that I wonder if the bullet is in his lung. I can hear the turmoil of his crew, some fighting for the microphone, which Dogfin apparently retains.

"There's a storm coming," I say.

"Yes, I know. I have eyes. Besides, we monitor your radio."

"Look, my skipper went crazy. I'll admit you're tougher than me. You name it. Let's pull out together. We'll get you to Rolf's and forget the whole thing."

"I wouldn't trust that quack with a toothache."

"What about your crew?"

"They have pots to pull."

"Dogfin, this is ridiculous. You've proven your point, whatever it was. Let's go."

"We all have our debts to pay."

I can hear the wheeze or whistle of air, or wind, or whatever it is.

"He's been warned," Hatch says.

I can see the *Viking* move as if limping to its pots. "What's he trying to prove?" I say. Nothing in Hatch's expression bothers to answer me. "I just don't get it. I don't get what he's trying to prove."

*

The *Princess* strains at her mooring.

We entered Dutch Harbor with a mound of ice on our stern. Today the oil dock was blown to bits. The few trees in the islands were uprooted and smashed, and four of the barracks built in World War Two gave up their effort to stand, collapsing in the wind like card houses. Bally Hoo has vanished in a fierce foreground of wind. All last night our ship tugged at its lines as if it too wanted to break free on the wind, coasting back to the open swell.

Today I went ashore and walked through snow to Rolf's clinic. Even in this sheltered back bay the damage was extensive. Unalaska was intact, though I saw no one else out of doors. Rolf was drinking in his office. He asked me if I wanted to play chess. I said no. I asked him if it was true that Connie had shacked up with Billy Ness, and he said yes, he guessed it was true and he always knew she was a deceitful little bitch. "The fishermen are kings around here, Dick. At least that's the way it's always been. Your jacket looks a bit tore up. You get in a fight?"

"Yeah."

"Who with?"

"I don't know," I said.

I now realize that I wasn't answering Rolf's question.

*

Last night the storm blew out. We woke to a morning of surprising calm, with torn weeds on the grey surfaces of waves and everywhere the shocking touch of ice. Hatch and I have monitored the radio all day, listening to what the search planes have to say. There is a pause in the static and talk and I tell Hatch that I am thinking of quitting the Fish and Game. It just doesn't feel like I can make a difference any more. I'm not clear that it matters, that anybody cares. Hatch tells me to sleep on it before I make up my mind.

We can hear a pilot calling Charlie Monahan, Charlie telling the pilot to continue searching.

"Forget it," the pilot says. "I'm freezing. You want me to stick it out, why don't you budget some decent fuel? Besides, Charlie, there's nothing to see."

"Nothing?"

"Nothing," the pilot says. "Get used to it."

Russell Binkley

HEY LITTLE MAN

The late morning sun slants in through the rip in the plastic curtain above the sink and makes a lopsided diamond on the print that hangs on the opposite wall. It is a picture of dogs playing cards. They hold cigars in their paws. They wear hats and vests, glasses and eyeshades. Big sloppy mugs of beer and pyramids of coins stand on the green felt tabletop.

Mom unzips the red strip of cellophane from a package of Camels with her teeth and leans back in her chair through the smoky shaft of light to slide the rest of the carton back on the crowded top of the refrigerator. Something gives her a sharp jab inside when she stretches. She pushes the sore spot between her ribs against the grooved chrome edge of the table and lights a cigarette and lays it across the glass ashtray that is already stuffed with butts. She blows the ashes from the creases of a five pound bag of sugar and clatters a lumpy tablespoon into the quart jar of black coffee. She coughs for thirty seconds and wipes the sweat from around her eyes with the stiff dingy ghost of a dishrag that stands up before her.

Her uncombed gray hair falls down over her face. She untwists the white fastener from a bag of sticky buns, gathers a handful of hair and wires it in a tight bunch off center at the back of her solid head. A heavy brown moth flops into the greasy water in the frying pan on the stove. She pries at something yellow that has dried to the table. Sharp crumbs of toast crunch under her bare feet on the sticky linoleum.

There is a clank and a heavy thud from upstairs. White particles snow down from the ceiling tile and land on Mom's blocky shoulders. She closes her eyes and spreads a big hand over the top of her head and bores her fingers hard into her scalp. "Buzzy!" she yells. Her tired yellow eyeballs move around under the lids. "Get out of Eddie's room!" Her voice is low and hoarse. She blows smoke from her nose and turns toward the livingroom where Irene sits. "He's into them weights again," she says.

Through the archway she can see Irene's sharp white elbow and tight gold bracelet that digs into her arm. Irene is on the couch under a plaster parrot on a silver ring that hangs out from the wall. She is Mom's second oldest daughter. She has come up to Pennsylvania from Maryland for a few days to visit her boy Larry who is brain damaged and in the state school.

The thick purple drapes are closed across the picture window and the strong overhead light is on. The dark bodies of dead insects line the translucent glass shade. A game show, Wheel of Fortune, is on television. The contestants' faces are blue. There is a tilted picture on top of the television cabinet of a young sailor with pink cheeks and lips posed in front of an American flag. A plastic lei of yellow flowers droops over the gold frame.

A *People* magazine is spread open on Irene's crossed legs. She plucks bobby pins out of her dyed black hair and drops them with little plinks into the margarine tub balanced on the scarred wooden arm of the sofa. "I wonder if that's her real hair," she says in a babyish voice, tapping a red triangular fingernail on a glossy page. A barbell rolls across the floor above her and the parrot swings back and forth.

Mom comes into the livingroom and stands at the foot of the steps just as there is another crash and a pained grunt from upstairs. She swipes at a cobweb on the dusty banister. Her shiny black dress is ripped out under the arms. "What the 'zackly is going on up there?" she demands. Her face shakes. "He has about ruined them floors with dropping them dumbbells," she says. She kicks at a clump of fuzz on the wrinkled purple rug. They hear someone collapse on a creaky bed.

"I read somewhere that she owns more than five hundred different wigs," Irene says, squinting in the smoke from Mom's cigarette.

Mom looks down at the straight white part in the center of Irene's head. "You and your reading," she says and she goes back to the kitchen. Her feet scrape on the dirty floor. She pours the jar of coffee back into the cheap aluminum pan on the stove and turns on the electric burner. The knob is missing so she rotates it with a pair of pliers from a child's toy tool kit.

"Get that dog off the picnic table!" she calls to the side yard. The animal's little white tail bobs around just above the windowsill. A child screams and then laughs. Mom sighs and the breath whistles from her nose. "As if it ain't enough I got all these kids of my own to tend," she says. "The neighbors sends me theirs to watch, too." She hunches up her shoulders and scratches a dry elbow. "I'll be glad when Labor Day gets here and some of 'em go back to school." She looks at the reflection of her face in the toaster. A breadwrapper has melted to the side and she lines up the wavy row of yellow stars in a crown across her forehead.

"Larry bit one of the whatchamacallits while I was up there yesterday," Irene says. She grips bobby pins between her teeth.

"Orderlies?" Mom guesses. She chuckles. A car horn honks and brakes screech and Mom glances out the window.

"Yeah," Irene says. "On the arm. It was a colored guy. He was trying to strap on Larry's helmet and he didn't want him to." She digs at a cuticle. "You really gotta know kids to work at places like that."

The burner glows red and the pan starts to rattle. Mom raps on the windowscreen with a crusty flyswatter and shakes a finger at something outside. "Elma's dropping off the twins here now that she thinks she has to work," she says.

"Does she pay you?" Irene asks, stretching her neck.

"That's a dumb question," Mom says.

Irene shakes her head and peeks around the doorway. One eye is outlined in blue. "Robert makes good money at the trailer factory, don't he?" she says. The television suddenly gets louder with a commercial for inspirational records by country and western artists.

Mom sinks back down into her chair and air whooshes out of the seat. She thinks she recognizes a snippet of "The Old Rugged Cross." It is backed up by a steel guitar and rhythmic little clops that sound like hoofbeats. "I bet that's Gene Autry," Mom says.

I didn't know he was religious," Irene says. She hangs out over the arm of the couch with her head tilted.

"Practically all your old time cowboy stars was religious," Mom says. She looks around at the smoky green kitchen walls. "She don't get that from me," she says.

"Who don't?" Irene asks. She holds a big pink comb up to her head.

"Elma," Mom says. "The best ain't even good enough for her." She picks up the hot pan with her skirt wrapped around the handle. Her thighs are muscular and pure white. "She made Robert haul that good furniture of theirs down to the cellar. Then she got him to slap up some panelling that he got at work around the furnace and paint them a shuffleboard on the cement. Now she calls it their rec room." She puts the spoon in the jar so the glass will not crack when she pours in the coffee. "So what does she do," she says, "but go out and buy a new livingroom suit up at that new place on the highway that I don't even want to know how much the payments is."

Irene unwraps a piece of butterscotch candy and crumples up the yellow cellophane and stuffs it down between the cushions. She blinks as if something has just flown into her eye. "That plaid one they put down in the basement couldn't have been but a year old," she says.

"Almost two years," Mom says. "And it wasn't no plaid. It was stripes. It had that new material you can wipe off." She slurps her coffee.

"I'd say they need it with all them animals she has in the house," Irene says.

"Registered French poodles," Mom says.

Buzzy comes hopping down the stairs on one leg. Mom's salt and pepper shakers on the quarter-moon shelf that Eddie built in woodshop knock against each other. Buzzy is a flabby thirteen-year-old with a sparse mustache and the start of a bad complexion. His black hair is plastered in wet spikes around his sweaty face. A bare belly hangs out over baggy white gymshorts. He limps out to the kitchen, black socks collecting balls of dust. He opens the refrigerator and

leans on the door, rubbing his foot and staring inside.

"You dropped it on your foot, didn't you?" Mom says. "I told you that would happen."

"I am in training," Buzzy says. He makes a muscle with his fat arm and pulls out a gallon jug of chocolate milk.

"Eddie always knows when you go in his room," Mom says. "One of these days he will lay you out and I won't be around to stop him."

"Oh yeah? And where will you be?" Buzzy says with his lips stuck out. He dumps Sugar Smacks into a plastic bowl and pours chocolate milk over it until it reaches the rim. Some cereal falls on the floor. He sits down and props his legs on the opposite chair.

Mom rolls the burning end of her cigarette against the ashtray to make a dull pencil point. "I'm just saying," she says, "not to count on me to always be here."

Buzzy shrugs and sprinkles sugar on his cereal and licks the spoon before sticking it back into the bag. Mom glares at him.

"What's this you're saying?" Irene asks, walking into the kitchen sucking on her candy. She is much thinner than her mother. The bones show in her cheeks. Her toenails have been painted a dark red and she wears white sandals with high skinny heels. She smells of hairspray.

"Just that nobody lives forever," Mom says.

Irene looks at Mom with her mouth hanging partly open. They hear a rough noise outside that sounds like a big sheet of cardboard with somebody heavy on it is being dragged across the gravel. "I figured I'd bring your cousin Larry down here this afternoon and we'd have us a special little supper," she says to Buzzy. "Maybe I will stop off and get us some Kentucky Colonel." She presses her thumbs into the spongy foam back of his chair.

"Don't get extra crispy," Buzzy says with his mouth full. "I like the original recipe." A Sugar Smack flies from his mouth and sticks to Mom's upperarm but she does not notice.

"You'll eat what she brings you," Mom says, raising her hand to make Irene think she would like to knock him off his chair. Instead she lights another cigarette, coughs, and blows out the match.

"Junior finally quit smoking in the house," Irene says. "I have been after him since before we got married. He did it for an anniversary present. It is so nice not to have stinky clothes anymore."

"I saw on Merv Griffin where cigarettes ain't all that bad for you," Mom says. "It's the paper matches you use to light them that's harmful." She holds up a big box of wooden matches and shakes it. "That's why I buy these." She nods her head in the smoke. "What if he was to take one of his fits while you got him down here? He is stronger than you and me together."

"They got him on some new kind of medicine," Irene says. "It keeps him pretty calm." She stands at the bulged-out screendoor and looks out over the driveway.

"I just don't know if it's a good idea," Mom says. "He could really tear this place up."

"Them twins has got their pants off," Irene says.

Mom stands up wearily and pushes past Irene. Her dress sticks to the back of

her legs above her knees. "Twins!" she shouts. She stands on the coarse green welcome mat on the stoop. With her big toe she feels the rough hole where the 1957 penny used to be embedded in the concrete before Buzzy gouged it out with an icepick.

"You boys better go home for lunch," she says to the three boys who are pelting the chalk target on the garage door with dirt clods. Her fists rest on the hard bones of her hips. A bucktoothed boy in glasses picks up one last rock and cracks it against the door. "Bullseye!" he screams, slapping another boy's open palm. He mounts his bicycle and strips off a handful of lilac leaves as he rides away.

The twins circle the candycane swingset. They are three years old. One neighs and prances like a horse while the other flogs him with a dirty rope. Their little behinds are white. "Tammy," Mom says, looking down at the eleven-year-old girl lying on the picnic table. The girl's ponytail grazes the dusty ground. She looks back up at Mom upside down, her dark eyes crossed. "You are supposed to be watching them twins," Mom says.

"I am," Tammy says. There is a book on her chest. On the cover is a picture of a blonde girl with red lips and *Missionary Nurse* in pink letters. Tammy has been going to vacation Bible school every night with a neighbor woman and she has gotten saved. "I can almost see God just sitting there," she says, looking past Mom at the sky.

Irene jingles her car keys. They are on an enormous brass ring that reminds Mom of the ones jailers carry in the movies. "I'll just bring Larry down here for a little while and see how it goes," she says. She pokes the screendoor open with her fingertips as though she hates to touch it.

Buzzy sticks his face out the door over Irene's shoulder. He wears the headphones that his mother sent him for his birthday and tinny music comes out. He bobs his head awkwardly. "Make sure mine is white meat," he shouts.

"Get out of this," Mom says. She leans against the blue stucco as Irene wobbles over the driveway to her car. Sometimes breathing hurts. "I guess I'll go rest awhile," she says to no one.

* * * * * * * * * *

Mom, lying across her bed, sees Tammy pacing around on the picnic table with a big floppy Bible. "Abominations! Sons of iniquity!" the girl screams, her voice a grating child evangelist's snarl. "The gates of hell are open wide for you!" She has lined up the glider and the lawnchairs in four short rows. The twins' streaked moon faces are turned up attentively while two other little children Mom does not recognize fidget and poke at each other from their seats in the back row. Tammy's hair flies about wildly and she yanks off a piece of tough red licorice with her teeth between rebukes. She gets down on both knees and with tight uplifted fists she pleads with them. "Only Jesus can shut them hoary gates." She gasps to choke back a theatrical sob. Her eyes are clinched with trying to squeeze out a tear. The children look frightened until she produces a paper bag of licorice twists from the shrub behind her. "Come and give your hearts to Jesus and I will give you this candy," she says. The children rush forward. Mom sits up and tugs down the blind.

Buzzy watches soap operas out in the livingroom. He gets out Mom's good glasses and pretends to drink with the actors. He sloshes his Kool-Aid and joins in their conversations. "For God's sake, Amanda," he says, chewing his ice, "you have to tell Jody the truth about Rachel and the baby." He gets to his feet and leans toward the television screen.

Mom nudges the door closed with her foot. She switches on the oscillating fan. It lifts the pages of the Norman Rockwell calendar that Buzzy's mother sent last Christmas. Helen lives in Michigan or Missouri or some other state that starts with an 'm'. She hasn't set foot in Pennsylvania for ten years because of her purchases with a credit card she found in the parking lot of a shopping center. The calendar has not been changed since April. Mom always forgets it is there and consults the one with the snow scene and poetry from the funeral home. It hangs next to the telephone in the kitchen.

She rolls over on her back and slides a hand into the gap between her buttons. She means to feel her heart beating but instead the tender place underneath her breast draws her fingers to it. She cannot help locating its painful center and pressing on it. Heavy trucks from the quarry rumble over the bumpy road in front of the house and shake the bed. She sees herself foreshortened between the medicine bottles and the kids' school pictures in the cloudy mirror over her dresser, her round nostrils and blinking eyes disappearing with each rise of her chest. A sharp wrinkle in the bedspread runs diagonally across her back, a giant slash.

Irene will be back in a couple of hours with the boy. She would rather not have Larry here, she thinks. Once he rammed his head through the glass door of her china cabinet. It was only an accident, Irene kept saying, but she hadn't been paying attention, filling out a word puzzle in the t.v. booklet that came with the Sunday paper. Blood splattered on the floor and wall and puddled in Mom's cup and saucer from Bushkill Falls. Another time he wandered out on the road and a man in a feedtruck brought him to the door. The driver stared at Mom through his thick glasses and made her feel it was her fault, even with Irene sitting right there, obviously the mother, painting her toenails gold. Larry's bare feet had been black with tar.

Mom naps and dreams she is in the hospital. The doctor shoves his curious face right up to hers. His breath is sickening with mouthwash. It is thundering far off when she awakes. The house is dark and quiet. She hopes that Tammy hasn't been going door to door bothering the neighbors about salvation. She pictures the twins, squashed like kittens on the pavement. She worries that Irene, distracted by an out-of-control Larry, has landed her yellow Mustang in a ditch somewhere. A horrible taste covers her tongue. She gets up and heads for a cigarette.

The twins are curled up asleep on the livingroom floor. Mom stands between them, her gnarled toes next to their smooth faces. Their blue eyelids flicker in dreams. Tammy snores on the couch, her missionary book open tentlike in her lap. A fly buzzes between the curtain and the picture window.

Mom goes out to the kitchen and sits down in the quiet. A stack of dishes tilts toward the sink from the drainboard. They are coated with an orangish sauce and stuck-on Spaghettios. She shuffles a pack of beat-up cards and lays down a game of solitaire. She can play without thinking. She knows the cards by their

creases. A light breeze blows in over the sink and pushes her smoke away in a straight horizontal line. One of the twins whimpers in his sleep.

Mom holds the flimsy black seven by its corner when a motorcycle sputters into the driveway kicking up stones. It is Eddie. He slams the kitchen door. He wears mirrored sunglasses and a black helmet with a gold stripe on each side.

Mom glances up at the clock on the stove. "What are you doing home so early?" she asks.

"Forgot something," he mumbles begrudgingly. A silver front tooth glints. He stomps through the livingroom, his greasy boots inches from the sleeping twins. He takes the stairs three at a time, his hard soles pounding the wood. "Hey!" she hears him yell.

Buzzy leaps down the stairs with Eddie right behind him. Eddie shoves out a muscled arm and pushes hard and Buzzy flies straight off the fifth step up and hits the front door head on. His head striking the wood makes a loud crack and Tammy sits up surprised.

"I told you before," Eddie says, his mouth tight. The veins stand out on his arms. Buzzy gets up with his hand rubbing the side of his face and tries to stagger away but Eddie grabs him by the elastic waist of his shorts and he yanks him back. He slams him to the wall.

"I told you," he says again. He circles both his hands around Buzzy's thick neck. His fingernails and knuckles are outlined in black oil. He lifts Buzzy off the floor by the throat. "You fat ugly bastard," he says. Buzzy jerks. His face is red and his eyes roll. His chubby legs hang loosely. He is choking. Eddie starts to let him fall and tightens his grip and picks him up again and bangs his head hard against the wall.

"Help me," Buzzy whispers. The twins giggle and point.

"Quit," Mom says in the doorway but Eddie ignores her. His bottom jaw is pushed out and his face is right next to Buzzy's.

"I said that's enough," Mom says. She slaps Eddie flat in the middle of his back. He looks at her with disgust, lifts Buzzy up a few more inches and then suddenly drops him. He slides down the wall and lands on the floor with a boom. The photograph of the sailor on the television set folds up and falls over.

"Someone big as you," Mom says, "shouldn't be picking on no thirteen-year-old kid." She shakes her head. There is a long wet rectangle on the wall where Buzzy had been suspended. Eddie turns and Mom sees herself side by side in his glasses. His mouth forms a straight mean line. He looks like his father, Mom thinks, the way his upper lip disappears.

"Just keep the little shithead out of my magazines," he says.

"You get back to work and leave us alone," Mom says. "It was peaceful here before you showed up." Her side aches. Eddie turns and walks out of the house and Mom notices a black handprint on the doorjamb that wasn't there before.

There are red and white stripes around Buzzy's neck. He sits on the floor crying. "Why don't you come on in the kitchen and play cards with me?" Mom says. He doesn't answer. "Irene will be here soon with Larry."

"That retard," Buzzy says. "Who cares?" He pulls his knees up to his sagging chest and puts his head down. The twins wrestle on the floor, trying to choke each other.

Mom opens a kitchen cupboard and reaches in behind the boxes of macaroni

and cheese. "Let's do something special for Larry," she says. She pulls out a faded roll of orange and black crepe paper. "Decorations," she says.

"That's from Halloween," Tammy says. "Halloween is wicked."

"It don't matter what color it is," Mom says. "It will make it look like a party in here. I figured we could stick it up by the light and twist it down to the refrigerator." She climbs up on her stepstool. "Get me the Scotch tape out of that drawer there."

"Here they come," Buzzy says. They hear a cardoor slam.

"Hurry," Mom says, wiggling her fingers for the tape. She holds her side with one hand as she strains for the ceiling.

Irene stands at the door. "We ran into rain," she says, "but Larry was very good. Weren't you, Larry?"

Larry teeters by Irene's side. He wrinkles up his mouth to one side of his face. He wears a scratched-up white football helmet. A line of mucus strings from his sore nose. He wobbles his head around in a sweep of the room, his lolling eyes not yet focusing. He is almost as tall as Irene. He makes urgent little yelping sounds..

"So where's the chicken?" Buzzy asks, wiping his red eyes on the backs of his hands.

Irene lets go of Larry and he flings his arms around and clears a plastic tumbler full of dirty silverware off the counter. Red juice runs down the cabinet door. He shakes and slides around the table towards Mom.

"Irene, watch him now," Mom says from up on her perch. "Don't let him knock me over."

"Oh, he's all right," Irene says, not looking up. She roots around in her purse for something.

Larry comes at Mom full force, quivering, with his blunt tongue writhing from side to side. "Take it easy now, boy," she says and his contorted face changes with recognition. He smiles. Her legs are unsteady so she grasps the fluorescent light for balance just before he throws his arms around her knees and buries his face in the hem of her dress.

"Oh," she says and she drops the crepe paper and it unwinds and rolls under the stove. She wavers a little on the stool but Larry gets very still and he breathes softly. His arms are covered with scratches and little pinprick scabs. He clings to her legs and cooes.

Mom slips a finger under his helmet. The hair is cut bristly and short. "Hey, little man," she says gently and she strokes the triangular patch of smooth skin behind his ear. He stands there, quiet, holding her tightly like he will never let her go.

REVIEWS

ECLIPSE by Linda Hogan

MISSOURI SHORT FICTION
edited by Conger Beasley, Jr.

PINCUSHION'S STRAWBERRY
by Jared Carter

FUGUE STATE by Jared Carter

FLIGHT by B. H. Fairchild

ECLIPSE by Linda Hogan. American Indian Studies Center, U.C.L.A., 405 Hilgard Avenue, Los Angeles, CA, 90024, 1983. 63 pages. $5.00, paper.

The poems of Linda Hogan merge the physical and spiritual, the past and the present, the political and ethical, the natural and commercial. These provide the backdrop for various scenarios in which the lives and experiences of humans and animals are first set and then examined. As an American Indian and woman, Hogan would appear to speak primarily to these two groups. However, her poetry is a wide vision—a sort of "dreamscape"—the images of which are culled and drawn from what we can all know and experience. Tied together by recurrent images such as fire, water, earth, and night, the poems are a series of mazes: each leads to a new and mysterious door or insight, but always reminiscent of the doors left open and examined behind us.

The connection between the past and the present plays an important role in the scenarios that Hogan presents. This connection illuminates and puts into perspective the role that we, as humans, play in this world. The past was once the present and has left its mark, as one day we will also:

The children's voices
I thought I heard
have disappeared, contained
all these hundreds of years
within the straight walls . . .

On the ground
the backbone of a large animal
connected to itself by air,
the ruins of another life
formed by earth
like a scar that makes us beautiful.

—"Ruins"

Modern technology and its effect upon nature and the earth contribute to the necessity of remembering the past and its bearings upon the present and the future. Nuclear power is the fire that often brings death, and which even today is so little understood:

Dark fields, dark sky.
Wires carry light to children
resting their heads,
against the breast's rhythm.
Light comes
from a distant mystery
inside a lead silo.
A young man opens a switch on power.
Street lamps wake up
the first light
splitting fields where papers blow . . .

Day is breaking
through doors
Earth has made another revolution.
New worlds burn
in dark places.

— "Idaho Falls, 1961"

In Hogan's vision, somewhere along time human beings have somehow managed to elevate themselves to the status of gods, with the power to conquer nature, as opposed to accepting their limitations and working with the power of nature in order to nurture the existence of both. In a world where "men smile like they know everything," Hogan reminds us that

No one is much without the earth
in their hands
and I pick up earth,
touch the people
the country
and things we try to forget.

—"Stone Dwellers"

The world is ours for the holding and keeping, as long as we consider the effect our actions have had, and will have, upon it.

It is Hogan's soft and dream-like language that gives her voice such impact, "a breath apart." It is in this dreamscape that the "disappearing moon walks on water," where the animals wake and sleep in worlds not much different from our own. In Hogan's sparse but beautifully descriptive language we learn to know and appreciate our place on earth: not as gods, nor as pawns in the hands of nature, but "small, somewhere between the mountain and the ant," part of the necessary chain of being. The despair of our desecration of the earth is tempered in these dreamscapes by a true appreciation of the beauty we do have on this earth, of how good it is to be alive, "loving every small thing/every step we take on earth." And while we have the power to destroy, we also have the power to create, to nurture, to re-create; there is faith in the continuity of life; and as all creatures and wildlife, "we rise/burning/out of soil." The interaction between light and darkness, fire and earth, and the hidden and the illuminated is brought together by our emergence, always, from behind the shadows, as in the eclipse, and our potential for resurrection. SR

MISSOURI SHORT FICTION EDITED BY Conger Beasley, Jr. BKMK Press: University of Missouri, Kansas City, 1985. 173 pages. $8.95 paperback.

Like most anthologies, *Missouri Short Fiction* is a carefully selected blend of works that cover most of the bases—mainstream, experimental, fantasy, parody, etc. And like most anthologies, covering all the bases doesn't necessarily mean the choice work is always chosen. However, there are enough strong stories in *Missouri Short Fiction* to carry the book into worthiness.

The most powerful pieces are sharply focused upon one particular emotion or aspect of the human condition. The hits include pain, food, sexual and spiritual bliss, jealousy, booze, and Hemingway. These pieces are not only filled with sparkling narratives and vivid images; they actually have you floating, cheering, groaning, or squirming in your seat as you read. C. W. Gusewelle, a columnist for the *Kansas City Star*, exemplifies this best with "Horst Wessel," concerning a traveler who is often unlucky and falls ill wherever he visits. The character's maladies are as varied as his journeys, but, as Gusewelle writes, " . . . if sickness is never convenient, other times the infirmities have at least been more interesting—not only clinically, in themselves, but for what they have allowed me to learn *en passant* about the nature of those societies in which I have been stricken." Gusewelle proceeds to prove this in painfully accurate detail, concentrating on an incident with a tooth that may have you postponing your next dental appointment.

Similarly, Conger Beasley, Jr., who edits the book, contributes a fascinating episode about a man who must learn "oraciones"to combat premature ejaculation. The story is witty, bold, and successful. Beasley's strength is imagery that blends mystical into real; Gusewelle's a powerful narrative that stretches real into mystical. "Blue Oraciones" and "Horst Wessel" serve as bookends in that the rest of the selections in the book are often variations of one style or the other. Some of these include a wonderful likeness of Hemingway by Michael Murphy, entitled "Lesson Number One," a story that is literally hard hitting and as good and true as a Robert Jordan kiss. Charles Hammer's "The New Roof" is a slice-of-life concerning a mixture of social classes and good old fashioned hard work; "Household Expenses" by Speer Morgan follows the decline of a man who allows his wife's friend to live with them longer than is healthy; and "Hunger" by Bob Shacochis is filled superbly with food, food, food—odd food and odd characters who sometimes get along and sometimes don't get along with Bowen, a white man and an outsider who sees the shoreline setting as a place where "Air and water and the scab of land wrapped each other and floated the men deep in the middle of darkness. Not even his grave held such magnitude for Bowen, not even that well-defined and measured box of emptiness, but everything below it, beyond it. This was Bowen's feeling. It didn't exactly worry him; it made him hungry." It'll make you hungry too.

The best of the rest include "Cow," a work of imagination by John Gilgun, where food is once again prominent, and "The Yellow Deer," a fable by Kristen Heitkamp with plenty of color, detail, and an interesting moral to boot.

Missouri Short Fiction is not without its credits. Many of the contributors have recently appeared in publications such as *Esquire*, *The New Yorker*, *The Paris Review*, *North American Review*, *Playboy*, and *Harper's*. Many of the authors have received numerous honors and awards as well. The book is a solid collection, buoyed by a few outstanding pieces and laced with variety and interest. GB

PINCUSHION'S STRAWBERRY by Jared Carter. Cleveland State University Poetry Center, 1984. 32 pages. $3.50, paper.

FUGUE STATE by Jared Carter. The Barnwood Press, River House, R.R. Box 11C, Daleville, Indiana 47334, 1984. 16 pages. $2.50, paper.

FLIGHT by B. H. Fairchild. The Devil's Millhopper Press, Persimmon Fork Road, Blythewood, S.C. 29016, 1985. 28 pages.
Paper.

The poems included in the two Carter chapbooks are among those written since his Walt Whitman Award collection, *Work for the Night Is Coming*. The Fairchild collection is the winner of the 1985 Devil's Millhopper Press chapbook contest. The poets have more in common than their success in meeting the criteria of award panels—and, surely, of any serious reader of poetry. The poems are strong, firmly crafted, alert to the sensations and significances of the the poets' worlds. Midwestern settings, when setting is specified at all, appear in both poets' work, as is natural enough for those who have spent much of their life in the Midwest, but the poems speak to universals of human relationships with people and environment.

Fugue State is dedicated to the poet Jim White (1936-1981). The opening poem, "The Enchantment," which bears the notation "for Jim," describes "two native Hoosiers" who "Become as statues waiting to be freed/From some invisible enchanter's spell" when "a bumblebee, driven by the breeze," sails toward where they are sitting amid books and iced-tea glasses. Their stillness is how they learned to cope with bees in childhood. They neither spoke nor moved:

. . .So that
A passerby who saw us sitting there
Might well have wondered at the sight
Of two grown men, eyes closed, heads bowed—
Not knowing that the sudden stillness
Flowing through each moment is neither
Grace, nor prayer, but simply there.

The quietness of the moment, the simplicity of the understanding between the two men, the directness of their response to one another and to their immediate environment are reflected in the calm, simple and direct language of the poem, a fitting elegy for one who lived and wrote from his calm strength and discipline.

A slim volume, only eight poems, *Fugue State* demontrates significantly the import of its epigraph from Samuel Pepys:

The sense of words being lost
by not being heard, and especially
as they set them with Fugues of words,
one after another.

This theme is developed in poems like "Poem Written on a Line from the Walam Olum" (the line providing the theme is "*There at the edge of all the water/ where the land ends*), For Star Atkinson, Who Designed Books," "Configuration" (an elegy for Glen Cooper Henshaw, American impressionist 1880-1946), and "The Purpose of Poetry." Counterpointing this theme are poems on rural life: "The Gleaning," about the last rites performed by a barber upon the corpse of a childhood friend killed in a threshing accident—a poem as secure and well-shaped as poems on similar themes by Robert Frost; "Mourning Doves," a meditation upon the sound of the birds heard at waking on a summer morning; and "Mississinewa Reservoir at Winter Pool," about the homecoming of townsfolk whose town has been drowned by the reservoir, a traumatic experience returned to in "The Purpose of Poetry."

In many ways this last poem, last also in the book, summarizes for the reader the rationale of the whole. A quiet direct poem, it describes the day-to-day life of an old man and his two dogs, which manage thirty head of cattle for him. A man from the courthouse tells him his farm will be flooded by the new reservoir—he had better sell and go live with a daughter in Florida. But

Evenings by the barn he could hear the dogs
Talking to each other as they brought in
The herd;
and the cows answering them.
It was the clearest thing he knew. . . .

This poem, too, is an elegy, suggesting that *Fugue State* itself has derived its being from the elegiac tone of Pepys' "sense of words being lost by not being heard." The words of these poems deserve hearing and rehearing, set as they are with "Fugues . . . one after another." *Pincushion's Strawberry* is a more expansive book—15 poems and 8 photographs that subtly reinforce the themes. It is no less thematically developed, centering as a volume around the speaker's relationship to animals, places, and things. The humor is more direct, especially in the delightful "Dear Friend," and the observation, particularly in "Beasts of the Field" and "Lightning," is remarkably sharp, perhaps because of the discipline of the couplet form adopted in these poems.

Both volumes add luster to an established career.

Flight is Fairchild's second chapbook. His earlier volume, *C&W Machine Works* was published by Trilobite Press in 1983. A third is on the way; *The Arrival of the Future*, winner of the *Swallow's Tale* competition, will appear in Spring 1986. The title poems for these two volumes are included in *Flight*.

The opening and closing poems, "Swimming at Meninger's" and "Flight," deal with altered states (amnesia and epilepsy, respectively), and other poems, particularly "Waiting for Sleep" and some of the poems set in taverns, deal also with the line between observed reality and psychic reality. The contrast between these realities is sharply focused in the humorous "The Woman at the Laundromat Crying 'Mercy'." Concerned ostensibly with the crisis of a woman frustrated by a change machine that will not work, the poem provides cool, crisp reflection upon her environment, a crass characterless wash-shop identical to the one Raymond Carver describes in *Fires*. "To My Friend" begins, "they all look like movie stars./'Here comes Herbert Lom,' he'll say. . . ." The friend's reality, an imagined life among movies stars, gradually blends into the narrator's reality "here in the Knox Street Tavern," where the narrator begins to see that

> . . .Behind
> the bar Eric Von Stroheim smokes a Gauloise,
> merciless and cool, contemplating so many frames
> per second, the small darknesses we never see.

Present and past merge in the memory of a friend's talk at a tavern in "The Men," or of childhood haircuts at the 23rd Street Barber Shop, but a more frequently employed device for meditating upon the passage of time is reference to photographs. These, too, are poems concerned with the nature of the real and with the altered state of consciousness we call memory.

The poem which gives strongest voice to these concerns is the brilliantly realized title poem of the forthcoming chapbook "The Arrival of the Future." The poem expresses a sense both of regret and of amusement at the response of an earlier generation to a solar eclipse:

In that country of old photographs—
men and women in overalls and work shoes,
daughters bobbing their hair like Clara Bow,
posing on the running board of a Model T—
word went out like threshing crews:
the end of the world was coming,
Judgement Day, and Christ would ride in on a cloud

We are brought close to the grandfather's work in the potato patch when "Slowly the ground fell away/and your hand vanished in a sudden night" and "Later, when . . . the same day started up again, you saw a new world almost like the old." For the narrator, listening to the old man makes the world "forever now and new and holy."

Carter says "The purpose of poetry is to tell us about life." These three chapbooks are clearly dedicated to that purpose. GW

CONTRIBUTOR'S NOTES

CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES:

Russell Binkley 308 SE 2nd, Newton, KS 67114) is currently co-director of an international study program for U.S. and Canadian students in Haiti. This is his first publication.

Daniel Bourne (PO Box 1473, Bloomington, IN 47402) recently spent a year in Poland on a translation fellowship. His own work has appeared or is forthcoming in SOU'WESTER, INDIANA REVIEW and PIKESTAFF FORUM, among others.

Jeff Boyer (380 Rarick Hall, Ft. Hays St. Univ., Hays, KS 67601) currently teaches at Fort Hays State University. His poetry has appeared in KANSAS QUARTERLY, TOUCHSTONE MAGAZINE and several others.

Gary Brown (3026 W. 7th St., Lawrence, KS 66044) is completing his M. A. in Creative Writing at KU and working as a painter. He is also COTTONWOOD'S Review Editor.

Erleen Christensen (1128 Rhode Island, Lawrence, KS 66044) is a former editor of COTTONWOOD. She has work forthcoming in WIND and MEMPHIS STATE REVIEW and recently won a poetry award from KANSAS QUARTERLY.

David Citino (278 Huber Village Blvd., Westerville, OH 43081) currently teaches at Ohio State University and edits the OHIO JOURNAL. Two books of his poetry, THE GIFT OF FIRE (Arkansas Press) and THE APPOSSIONATA DOCTRINES (Cleveland State Univ.), will appear in 1986.

Hal J. Daniel III (School of Allied Health and Social Professions, East Carolina Univ., Greenville, NC 27834) has recently published poems in ROLLING STONE, TAR RIVER POETRY, PEMBROKE MAGAZINE and SAMISDAT. He has also published two volumes of poetry.

William L. Fennell (79 Devon Ct. 4, Edwardsville, IL 62025) is an M. A. candidate at Southern Illinois - Edwardsville and is an editor of SOU'WESTER. This is his first published poem.

David Gerry (10 John Ryle Ave., Haledon, NJ 07508) won a New Jersey State Council on the Arts Fellowship in 1983 and has work appearing in BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL, NEW MEXICO HUMANITIES REVIEW, and STONE COUNTRY, among others.

Vincent S. Green (RR 2 Box 101A, Vermillion, SD 57069), a native Kansan, is working on an M. A. at South Dakota Univ., after having practiced Law in the U.S. Army. This is his first published poem.

Sam Gridley (Box 13267, Philadelphia, PA 19101) has published stories in SOUTH DAKOTA REVIEW and EPOCH.

Fritz Hamilton (1560 Eighth Ave. 7, SF, CA 94122) has previously appeared in COTTONWOOD and has work forthcoming in KANSAS QUARTERLY, PEMBROKE MAGAZINE, PULPSMIGH, WIND and several others. His sixth book of poetry is forthcoming from Minotaur Press.

Gregg Hodges (203 Ross Hall, Dept. of English, Iowa St. Univ., Ames, IA 50011) has recent poetry appearing in THE LOUISVILLE REVIEW and AWP's INTRO 16.

Richard Holinger (304 Gray St., St. Charles, IL 60174) received a grant from the Illinois Arts Council in 1983 and teaches at Kishwaukee College. His work has appeared in KANSAS QUARTERLY, SOUNDINGS EAST, CALLIOPE, FICTION 84, ENGLISH JOURNAL and elsewhere.

Philip Kimball (2624 Moundview Dr., Lawrence, KS 66044) is the author of *Harvesting Ballads*, which was nominated for the 1984 National Book Award. He is currently living and writing in Lawrence. **COTTONWOOD** is privileged to offer an excerpt from the novel on which Mr. Kimball is now at work.

Lyn Lifshin (2142 Appletree Lane, Niskayuna, NY 12309) is a previous contributor to COTTONWOOD and has published widely elsewhere. One of her books of poetry, KISS THE SKIN OFF, won the 1984 Jack Kerouac Award.

Carl Lindner (218CA, Univ. of Wisconsin - Parkside, Box 2000, Kenosha, Wisconsin 53141) is a former contributor to COTTONWOOD as well as to numerous other magazines. His SHOOTING BASKETS IN A DARK GYMNASIUM (Linwood Press) appeared in 1983.

Walter McDonald (3804 52nd St., Lubbock, TX 79413) is the director of creative writing at Texas Tech University. His poetry is forthcoming in POETRY, APR, ATLANTIC MONTHLY and TRIQUARTERLY and his books of poetry include ANYTHING, ANYTHING (L'Epervier).

Marilyn Masiker (252 King Rd., Forestville, NY 14062) is a chemistry student at SUNY -Fredonia. This is her first publication.

David Mason (6 Averill Court, Rochester, NY 14607) has work forthcoming in PN REVIEW, MID-AMERICAN REVIEW, SEQUOIA and NORTH DAKOTA QUARTERLY.

Darlene Mathis-Eddy (1409 W. Cardinal St., Muncie, IN 47303) teaches at Ball State University and is poetry editor of the BALL STATE FORUM. Her LEAF THREADS, WIND RHYMES (Barnwood Press) has just been published.

Philip Miller (1841 Pendleton, Kansas City, MO 64124) teaches at Kansas City Kansas Community College and is a former editor of QUIVIRA. His work has appeared in KANSAS QUARTERLY, CAPE ROCK and in Alan Pater's 1985 ANTHOLOGY OF MAGAZINE VERSE.

Peggy Payne (611 W. North St., Raleigh, NC 27603) is a freelance writer whose work has appeared in MS, THE NEW YORK TIMES, WASHINGTON POST and others. She received an NEH fellowship to study fiction at Berkeley in 1979.

George Renault III (1846 Maine St., Lawrence, KS 66044) is a printmaker and painter. He is presently working on a series of small etchings called "Past Lives."

Diane Robinson (117 Riverview Parkway South, Rome, NY 13440) has published poetry in COMPLETE WOMAN, KOSMOS, ORPHIC LUTE and forthcoming in UP AGAINST THE WALL, MOTHER . . .

Shelle Rosenfeld (918 Mississippi St., Lawrence, KS 66044) is a graduate student in English at KU and a member of the COTTONWOOD poetry staff. She won the Carruth Memorial poetry award in 1984.

Steven Sher (2962 NW Fillmore, Corvallis, OR 97330) teaches at Oregon State University. A new volume of poetry, TROLLEY LIVES (Wampeter Press) is just out and a collection of short stories will appear in 1986 from Gull Books.

Michael Smetzer (English Dept., Wescoe Hall, KU, Lawrence, Ks 66045), a former editor of COTTONWOOD, now edits NAKED MAN, which has moved with him to Lawrence, and has poetry pending with CINCINNATI POETRY REVIEW, WIND and TELLUS.

Ellen Snell (800 N. LBJ 114B, San Marcos, TX 78666) is a student at Southwest Texas State, and her poetry has appeared in CEDAR ROCK.

Kathleen Spivack (53 Spruce St., Watertown, MA 02172) has won numerous awards, including an NEA grant. Her work has appeared in POETRY, THE NEW YORKER, PARIS REVIEW and others. THE BREAKUP VARIATIONS (Applewood) is her most recent book.

Con Squires (22 Lake Ave., Auberndale, MA 02166) is a free-lance writer whose work has appeared in BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL, among others.

Larry Starzec (244 Harding St., Grayslake, IL 60030), a previous contributor to COTTONWOOD, has appeared in KANSAS QUARTERLY, SOU'WESTER and THE PIEDMONT LITERARY REVIEW.

Dabney Stuart (30 Edmondson Ave., Lexington, VA 24450) has recently appeared in TEXAS REVIEW, MONTANA REVIEW and EPOCH. His most recent volume of poetry is COMMON GROUND (LSU Press).

Jan Wheeler (6929 E. 93rd St. 41, Kansas City, MO 64138) is a marketing writer for a national professional association and, besides previously appearing in COTTONWOOD, has also appeared in NEW LETTERS, COLORADO QUARTERLY and CARLETON MISCELLANY.

Sharyn Wolf (650 Huntington Ave. 15J, Boston, MA 02115) is a jazz singer as well as a poet and has poetry appearing in SOJOURNER, VALLEY SPIRIT and ELECTRUM.

COTTONWOOD MAGAZINE AND PRESS

COTTONWOOD, like many small presses and magazines, receives its principal support from its subscribers and friends and through grants from arts agencies. For the foreseeable future we are especially concerned to maintain current subscriptions and to add to the list of our friends who are subscribers. We urge those who usually purchase COTTONWOOD one issue at a time to consider subscribing—it makes a substantial difference in the amount of the purchase price that comes directly to the magazine and press. Similarly, purchases from our backlist (available on request) go directly to support the whole of our endeavor. The backlist includes noteworthy chapbooks of poetry by Kansas poets Michael Johnson, Victor Contoski, and Stephen Hind, an anthology of Kansas poets edited by Denise and David Low, and Robert Day's *In My Stead.*

COTTONWOOD MAGAZINE AND PRESS
BOX J
KANSAS UNION
UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS
LAWRENCE KS 66045

Please enter a subscription to COTTONWOOD $12.00/3 issues:

Name . . . . . .

Street . . . . . .

City . . . . . .

State and ZIP . . . . . .

COTTONWOOD
ISSN 0147-149X
$4.00

KIMBALL ISSUE:
Section from a novel in progress by Philip Kimball
Erleen Christensen interviews Philip Kimball