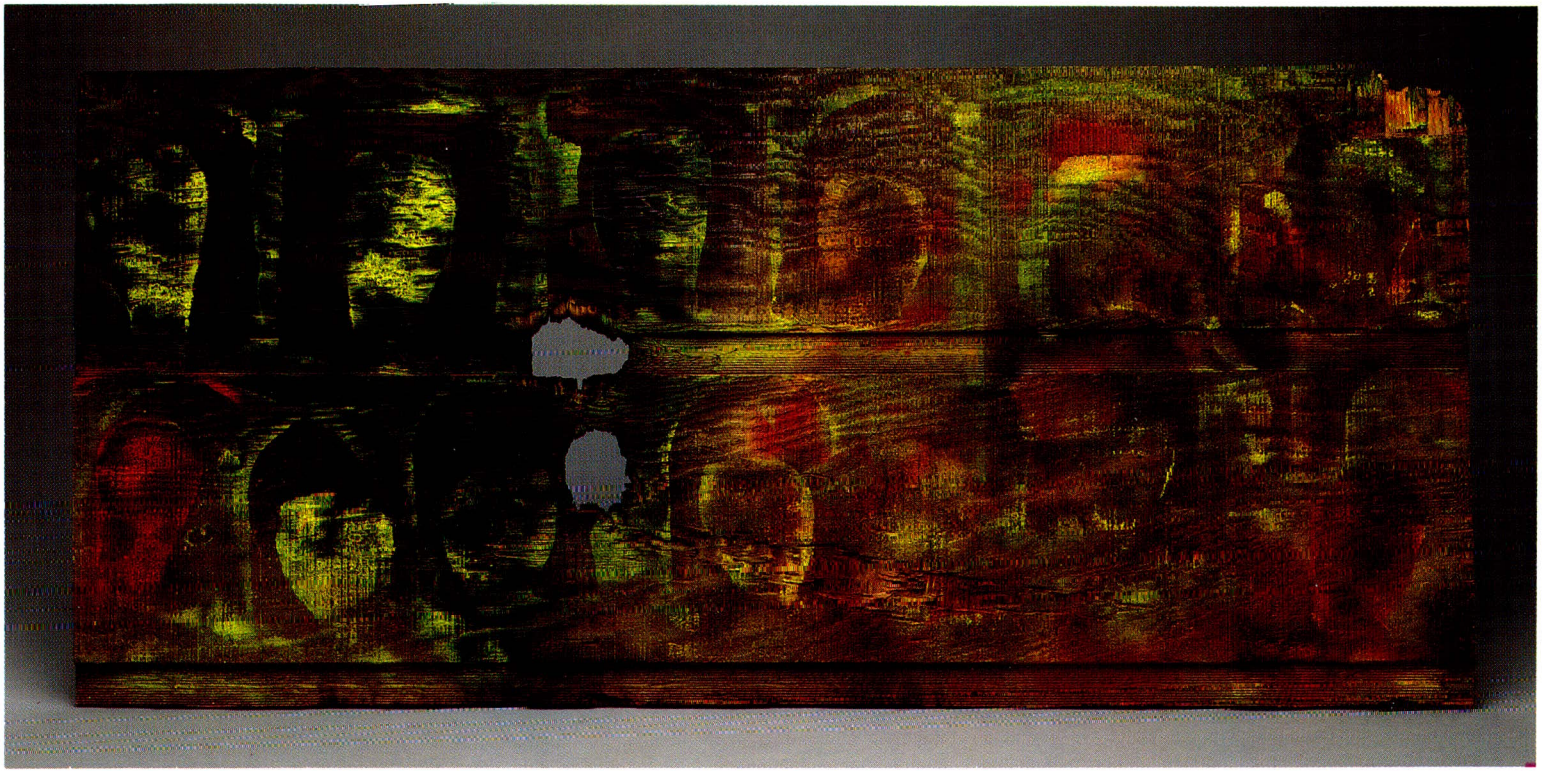

River City Reunion

Cottonwood 41

Fall 1988

River City Reunion

Cottonwood Magazine & Press
Lawrence, KS

Cottonwood 41

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 and Press
Box J, Kansas Union
University of Kansas
Lawrence, KS 66045

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This issue has been set in Baskerville typeface using Microsoft Word and Aldus PageMaker.

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Contents

Poetry

River City Reunion

Reviews

Front Cover: "Mektoub it is written" from "Mektoub it is written / November 22, 1963, Dallas, P.M." by William S. Burroughs (23.25" x 50.25").
Photograph by Jon Blumb.

Back Cover: "November 22, 1963, Dallas P.M." from "Mektoub it is written / November 22, 1963, Dallas, P. M." by William S. Burroughs (23.25" x 50.25").
Photograph by Jon Blumb.

Separations by Lasergraphics, Lawrence.

Word Processor: Beth Ridenour

Editor's Note

Labor day week 1987 was a time of great literary and artistic excitement in Lawrence. The English Department and Student Union Activities joined with James Grauerholz and William Rich (incorporated as River City Productions) to sponsor readings, music, graphics and photography exhibits at a number of Lawrence locations. Each weekday, there was a reading somewhere every hour between noon and 2 a.m., and on the weekend, there were three major events at Liberty Hall: Saturday afternoon talks by Timothy Leary and Jello Biafra; the Saturday night "Big" show (televised to those on the street who could not obtain tickets) featuring Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs, Anne Waldman, Diane DiPrima, Andre Codrescu, John Giorno, Ed Sanders, Jim Carroll, Steve Taylor and Edie Kerouac Parker; and a Sunday concert by Hüsker Du. But there were other shows quite as "big" all week, featuring well-known writers in topnotch performances. A number of the "reunioneers" were friends long associated with Kansas writing—Michael Novak, Patricia Traxler, Keith Denniston—and with *Cottonwood*—Bob Day, Bill Knief, Tom Averill. It is embarrassing to note how many names there are and how small my space; a throwaway program giving all the information is still available from *Cottonwood* for a stamped self-addressed business size envelope.

Also available from *Cottonwood* are copies of the **RIVER CITY PORTFOLIO** ($10 plus $2.50 handling & mailing), ten 11x17 broadside poems, typeset and illustrated by Michael Annis, with work by Ginsberg, Waldman, Codrescu, DiPrima, Michael McClure, Ken Irby, Victor Contoski, Denise Low, James McCrary, and Donald Byrd. A catalogue of issues still in print is available for a separate stamped self-addressed envelope; we were surprised and pleased at how well these sold in Bill Goetz's **Oread** bookstore during the reunion (at their original low prices, folks). Bill, by the way tired of having his mail addressed to the **Oh Read** bookstore has renamed it **Mount Oread.** We shall see what comes of that. Meanwhile, wherever Bill is in charge, expect quality.

Our next issue will feature works by KU alumni who attended the reunion. I wish we had more space to devote to reunion writers, but the press of a large backlog of fiction and continuing strong submissions in all departments make it difficult to expand feature sections. We all, and I personally, are deeply grateful to William Burroughs and James Grauerholz for the Burroughs materials in this issue and for what their presence on the Lawrence scene contributes year-in, year-out to the community's cultural life.

One last note on *Cottonwood* history. A full index of the first forty issues, and all occasional publications, is in preparation and should be ready for distribution with issue 42. Much is still in print, though quantities are beginning to dwindle for some items.

George F. Wedge

Poetry

Diann Blakely Shoaf

After the Volcano

—UPI/Reuters photograph, 14 November 1985

The lighting is strange, and the men
are all clothed, in clean white.
She extends her bare arms,
her head bowed. Her body
is nude to the waist, her dark hair drawn back
from her brow.

There's something Attic in all this,
the grace of the gesture. It belongs
to a dancer, a bronzed statue streaming
with drapery. Her breasts
are perfection, pure Phidian
curves, and untouched.

One forgets the crushed village, the mud
in her teeth. The small church was completely
submerged. Here, it is late:
ash falls from my last cigarette.
The eye dreams too much,
and needs its rest.

Ann Conner

Driving Through Kansas

These long, gentle hills
unfold, relax
the silk knot that holds your face.

You haven't looked at me
with those gray coyote eyes
for a long time.

I turn away
and pretend to study the map,
trying to find where we are

on these smooth leather trails
slowly coming undone
like a handful of reins loosened

by the swell of the land west.
Your hand traces
the far slope of the horizon

along my shoulder,
going up the curve of my neck
into the sun.

Wind rushes
through the car with dust
and the hint of prairie fire.

Out here, your mind rolls farther,
sailing mile beyond mile,
finding more than is drawn on the map:

how the hawk turns,
and the air runs wide open
to balance on the rim of a bluff.

I have seen you smile like that,
softly, sideways,
so that really there are no hills, no valleys,

just warm fingers of grass,
sudden whispers,
and the naked wagon of the sky.

Norman H. Russell

The Orbweaving Spiders

the orbweaving spiders
had captured the car this morning
small spiders with great webs
anchored to windows door handles
i would not find my way in

i spoke to them
with my hand i broke one strand
concerned and perhaps angry
the spiders busily
swept up

tonight they will come in the moon
they will string those great nets
they will throw them into the air
to catch the fish of flies
mosquitoes and white moths.

Tom Hazuka

The Stars Are Gone

The night is soft neon,
though the calendar says
new moon, and clouds
cover the sky
thick as the snow on the earth.
The light comes from nowhere.
No wind, so cold is pure
on cheeks, on ears, on numbing nose-tip,
condensing to a little cone of pain.
Inside, there is laughter,
thighs touching, wool soles
baking near the andirons.
There is no reason to stand
on the porch, looking up,
looking out, looking at houses
that aren't where you wish they were,
looking back to balcony nights
when breath blew even foggier,
the fire crackled louder,
and nothing was simpler
than a sky of uncountable stars
and two warm hands squeezing hard,
melting a patch of ice on the railing.

S.C. Hahn

Notes Home From A Traveling Salesman

Rulo

Left St. Joe this morning, stopped at Rulo.
This is a shot of the business block; this card
was the only one in the tavern, above a rack
of car deodorizers shaped like pine trees.
Imagine that I'm sending a forest. Ha ha.
See that building between the grocery store
and the boarded-up mortuary? That's the tavern.
That shining in the background is the river:
you can see a piece of the railroad bridge
sticking up. The lady behind this bar
says the trains don't stop her anymore,
just roll through town at night loaded with coal
bound for downstream cities. She says the kids
find rattlesnakes from the coal-cars; makes her willy.
She's got one in a pickle jar, preserved
in alcohol, just like — she says — this guy
at the end of the bar. She says the big excitement
comes in spring when suicides from Omaha
wash up against the bridge pilings just like flood-trash.

Arthur Winfield Knight
Locating Silence

Aunt Carrie had
a roomful of canaries.
They were in cages
from the floor to the ceiling
along one entire wall
of her sun porch.
Carrie was in her late 70's
when I was a little kid
but I remember
she used to say,
"I don't know what we'll do
when Charlie and I get old.
We don't have any children
to care for us,
and we've never saved any money."
When you went
into their yellow house
feathers floated thru the air
and the birds' shadows
fluttered on the wall
opposite their cages.
Sometimes you had to shout
to hear one another
over the bird song.
It must have taken Carrie
an hour or more
to feed them
and to clean their cages
each morning
and she must have removed
a dead canary
at least once a week.
They were all buried
ceremoniously
by her and Charlie
beside the weathered barn.
When Carrie finally "passed on,"
as my relatives liked to say,
she was in her nineties

and her heart stopped
as she was cleaning the cages.
Carrie just plopped over
like one of her canaries
falling from its perch,
finally locating silence,
while all the birds sang.

Sharyn Wolf

The Godfather

Godfather comes into her bedroom
She knows why
There is nothing to do but let him

put his hands inside her pajamas
He whispers What a little lady
She closes her eyes Thinks

other places Great white spaces
where it is warm She ignores the taste
in her throat Makes up songs

Has gotten so good she does not notice
when he leaves Or else she sings
Don't tell or else

Lauren Mesa

Loyalty

In 1942 the U.S. government assembled and shipped off to concentration camps 112,00 men, women and children, the entire Japanese American population of the three Pacific Coast states.

Daniels, *Concentration Camps, U.S.A.*

They arrive like mild horses every morning:
clop clop, clop clop,
wearing the g*etas* their fathers made,
wooden shoes to protect them
from the infection around camp.

My classroom is a barracks, the desks rough plywood,
but for roll-call their tea colored faces
turn up eagerly. When I ask questions
hands that were curled together
like poised lilies raise.

One student tells me her grandfather
built the railroad in California.
The uncle of another broke farm soil
all around Sacramento, and someone's family
owned a thriving grocery.
When he names the produce they carried
my student smiles at the adjectives
plump and *ripe*...

Outside our classroom their parents walk by
with shovels and picks.
Looking over rows of black heads
bent at arithmetic,
I think of the earth

their parents have just turned.
When I go home
I pass windows that appear candlelit
where slender onions grow
flame-like in bowls.

Edith H. Brown

Nicodemus on the Solomon: The Dream

Like one who was to come after him, he had a dream.
Benjamin Singleton, illiterate but free.
His dream, that freedmen have a place to live in freedom.
From Lexington he drew a following,
almost three hundred men,
to form a colony in Kansas.

In later Graham county, on the south fork
of the Solomon, the Nicodemus colony began.
Named for a slave who, it was said,
arrived on the second slave ship to America
and later bought his freedom.

Among the group of migrants from Kentucky
was the Reverend Daniel Hickman and his wife,
Williana, aged ninety. The group of three hundred
men, women and children were reduced to two hundred
by the time they reached Ellis. Some became ill,
others discouraged. A compass directed them thence
to Nicodemus. Williana was very ill. When word
came that they had arrived, she rallied.
"But where is Nicodemus?" she asked, eyes straining
to pierce the darkness. "There," her husband pointed
to the smoke coming from the ground.
"That is Nicodemus." She began to cry.

Lyn Lifshin

Devorah of the Roses

Packed in old
quilts on the
boat like dreams
pulled from
Lithuania the
blood in a great
grandmother's
wrist threading
a gold chain with
jade she'd
hidden behind
her teeth. Devorah.
dark as closed
sitting rooms,
onyx shadows,
peach and almond
painted tea chests.
Rose of lips
that would have
kissed the earth
if her legs hadn't
slid from under
the too warm wool,
the last names
wiped away

Nancy Hamm
Baked Alaska

In summer they did it
to the sound of the street.
The bed was crowded.
Trucks lurched through the living room.
Once a passerby heard her moan.
Now he pulls her socks off
one by one.
The air smells scorched.
The sidewalks are empty.
Somewhere the lake stirs
beneath a skin of ice
and they escape.
Somewhere they cross to the other side
of the photograph,
leave only their shadows
burned into the sheets.

Amy Klauke
The Lamps

This sidewalk tightropes home,
I hope, over the dark grass,
between weedy lots and houses
that wink away in yellow coves.
I pluck along on my thin walk
shook by nearby calls or laughs
and lean from those who go my way
and those who don't. They pass,
flashing teeth beneath lamps
set-up to soothe, but which instead
show all there is to fear
and lose.

Carl Lindner

Apple Tree Woman

Out of the black
twigs, she grows
a fire every spring.

Then she sprinkles
ashes on the bed.
Beneath her hands

the lettuce flounces,
ruffles
like a party

dress in a breeze.
Johnny Jump-Ups,
Morning Glories,

Bleeding Hearts—
everything
breaks into bloom

but this one tree.
Oh, the leaves
perch and flutter

on the tips of branches,
but the blossoms
don't come.

She cannot bear
the ache.
For apples—

gnarled, green, bitter—
she hammers the trunk
again, again,

swallowing pain,
counting
with her eyes closed.

Robert F. Whisler

Breaking Out

Sipping chicken broth and spiced
tea from spoons, we creak and sag
inside ourselves, overstrained,
as we watch our fence and mailbox
disappear beneath the drifting snow.
Squawking over cracked corn
and wheat in the backyard feeder
in the maple tree, two blue jays
attack a flock of starlings
as the cardinal and his mate
wait patiently for buckwheat, millet
and sunflower seed we cannot
take them in the waist-high snow.
Still sipping tea, we wonder
under all this coming down,
this shutting in and digging out,
under all this compacted weight,
this going against the grain
where pressures meet, where flashing
curls from shingles split by ice
and torn by wind, under all this
whiteness, this constant overhang,
what shim will slip, what stud
or crossbeam hammered loosely
in its place will pull its nails
to crash down on us, what crack
will rend our house apart.

Stephen Murabito

The Flying Men

Oh, man has tried to fly,
Looking like something impaled
On an opened oriental fan.

And the machines, like eggbeaters,
Pinwheels, French wire whips
With flappers: they crashed

Like fireworks explosions
Triggered too soon by anxious
Children; and people were stuck

Like turtles on their backs,
As if that alone wasn't enough
Trouble, but now to give birth

To these ungodly symmetrical
Accidents. But the magic ones who
Could truly be asked: *Oh, how*

Does it feel? Yes, they knew
As the cannon went off, spirit
Soaring out from smoke to rise

With body: flight then wingless,
Simple, free of steel and words,
For a moment perfect, then gone.

Michael Pfeifer

Union Station, 1969

At Union Station
I walk through the weeds
and a soft rain of rust.
On a siding
the diesel engines seem
mathematical and invulnerable.
Spiritual machines
trembling in anticipation.
When I came here — 7 or 8 years old —
the chalkboard schedules
were filled in
to New Orleans or Los Angeles,
where everything turns back on itself,
to Chicago or Pittsburgh,
where the engines are still ingots.
Cream cans
sat on the platform
at Fredericktown and Poplar Bluff.
Easing alongside the small, brown depot
at midnight,
someone still sat at the telegraph key.
Now the roof has gaping holes
where the sky seeps in.
Pigeons dive through.
The rotting rain forest
of girders exudes
the stench of dying steel
in black, vaporous flakes.
The rails and oak ties
have dissolved
into the earth
that still smells like 1956,
like oil and creosote,
the coal smoke and steam
that never leave metal
once it is forged.
The steam still
hisses through the lines
like wind-driven snow

across an icy crust,
while solemnly the oiler
bends over at every truck
and checks for a hot box.
Steam in the bulkhead,
in the gauges and dripping valves,
hesitates. The drive wheels slip once,
then the flanges
burnish the tracks,
flattening pennies and nickels
all the way to Tulsa.
I look up through the roof.
The awkward pigeons wheel back
and settle.

Special Section

River City Reunion

John Giorno

Berlin & Chernobyl

William Burroughs,
James,
and me,
were in Berlin,
the week after
Chernobyl,
and we got caught
endlessly
in the warm
Spring
rains,

walking
down
the street,
running
back to
the hotel,
with big
fat
raindrops
filled with
radioactivity
splashing in
my face
and running
down
my hair
into my lips
over
and over
again,

and the wicked witch
of the west
pulled his hat
down over
his face,
and screamed

"I'm melting,
Oh, no,
I'm melting!"

big fat
raindrops
bejewelled
with radioactivity
soaked into
this black
leather
jacket
that I'm wearing
tonight,
great
wet
clusters
in the soft
black
shoulders,
100,000 ryms,
I only wear it
on special
occasions,
I feel like
Louis the 14th,
I got a coat
sewn with
10,000 diamonds,
and I got off
easy.

1986

Patricia Traxler

The Dead Teacher

No one believes me
about the Dead Teacher
in 4th grade how the bus hit her
one morning before school
and dragged her down
the National City Mile of Cars
till she came apart on the hot blacktop
& the kids the kids
they picked up the pieces
of the Dead Teacher

I remember how they were laughing but not smiling

they picked up the pieces and threw her
at one another a hand half a leg a toe
I didn't do it
I'm always pretty sure of that
but that whole day I kept washing
my hands and after school the bus was late

The next day we had a substitute
with blue-black hair we were nice to her
The Principal called an assembly
& talked about the Donner Party
how *they* had good reason

There are savages among us here

he said and our eyes slid
slowly side to side checking
We rustled in our folding chairs

After school that second day
I watched the way the sky moves
with you as you walk
sidewalk to sidewalk it stays
right with you At every corner
I stopped and looked both ways
& then stopped
& looked both ways again

Victor Contoski

Redick Tower

Pilasters thrust up
an unbending grove of fingers
a Stonehenge of the twentieth century

a huge hand
stiff as an Egyptian statue
raised as in prayer

crowned with glyphs
strange figures left for future archeologists
trying to explain the ruins
    the sudden collapse of American civilization
    the mysterious fall of Omaha.

Michael L. Johnson

Joe Bob Dalton Tells How to Pick up Girls in Aggieville

when yer sittin in the bar
an ya see the one ya want
an the music is jus right
an yer jus enough drunk
an the light has jus that
right kinda dark to it
and if the other boys are
leavin her alone
cause it's hard to fight
and court at the same time not
that it caint be done but
ya gotta jus strut
up to her side
removin yer hat
and clutch yer pants like
ya had a hold
on a twelve-incher
about to gonna explode
which ya probly don't
an kinda hint
how much she brings to mind
someone from down home
then buy her a drink
an talk for a while
on how after all
we're all in this together
anyway git to the clincher
about how over at school
we got the biggest vat
of bull sperm in the world
an that's a lot
for her to think about
now don't ya wish *you* had
that kinda impact

Sally Allen McNall

Sixgun

—"I was fifteen."
William Stafford

My boyfriend taught me
(in return)
how to cast
bullets, and how
to shoot.
We'd sneak the sixgun
out a mile or so
into the desert
to practice.

The feel of the heavy gun
has left
my fingers, wrists, left
the shoulder muscles
that pulled long,
though I hear
his laugh
at my double grip,
at my bitten mouth.

And the dry smell
of molten lead,
that lingers, with
the feel of the pockets
of fine sand
down in the arroyos
under mesquite and salt
cedar shade,
which our bodies fit
as six cool bullets
fit six chambers.

(For Jonathan Holden)

M. L. Liebler

The Train is Your Blood

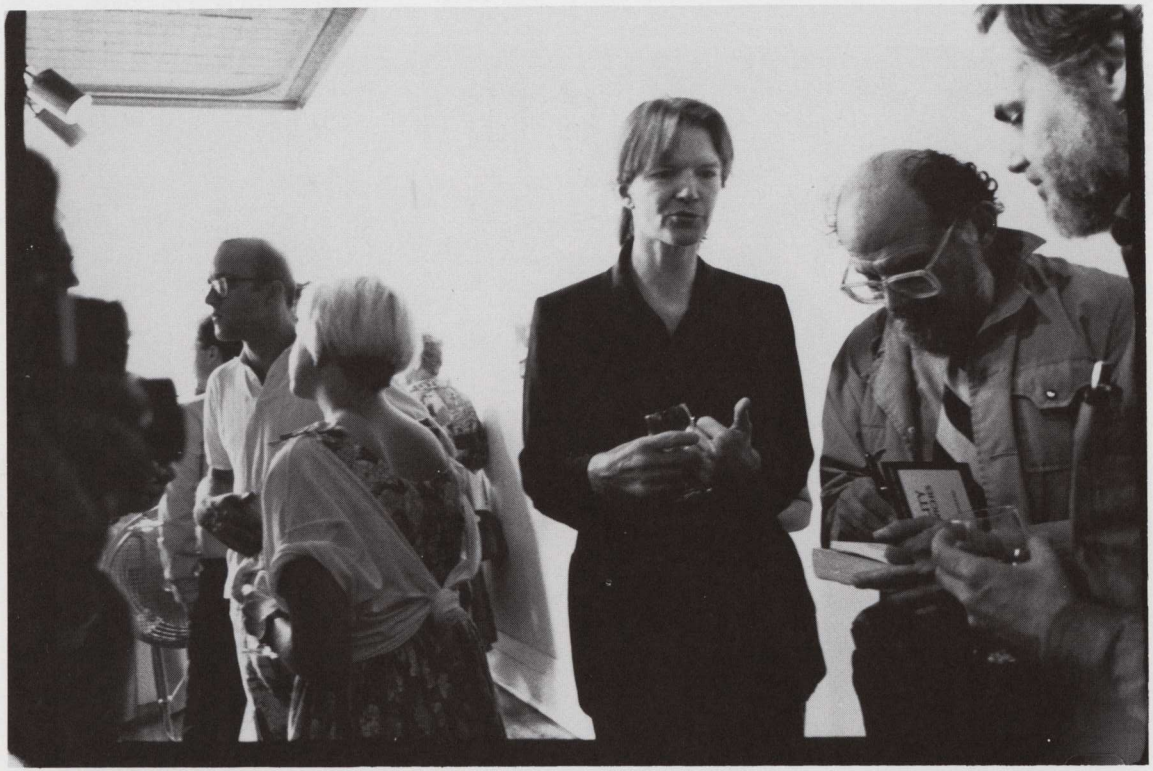
The train is your blood
Pulling up everything
By the roots as you shine
One last time
Like a coin being tossed
Deep into a blue fountain.

Somewhere you may rust
Waiting to change a world
That doesn't accept movement
Because it knows so little
About standing still.

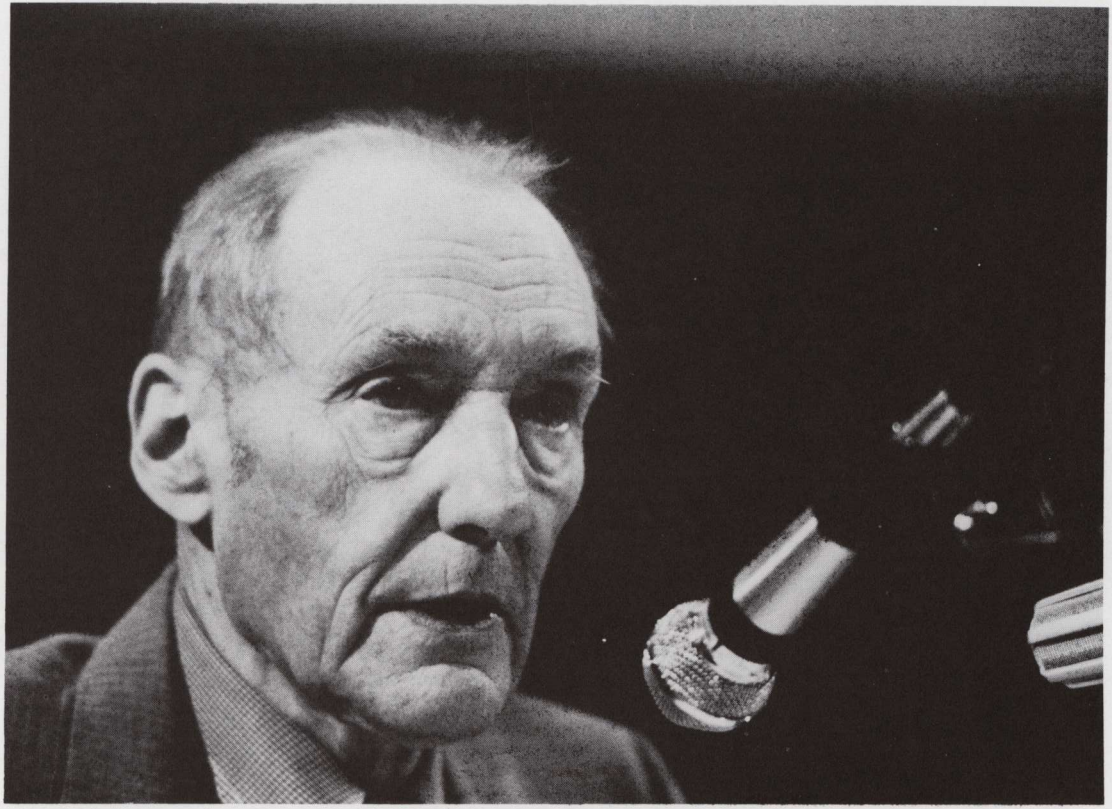
Keith Haring draws "Nude Photographer on Sidewalk" outside the Kellas Gallery, Lawrence. September 11, 1987. (Photo © Dan Starling.)

Jello Biafra (Dead Kennedys) speaks on censorship at Liberty Hall, Lawrence. September 12, 1987. (Photo © Dan Ruettimann.)

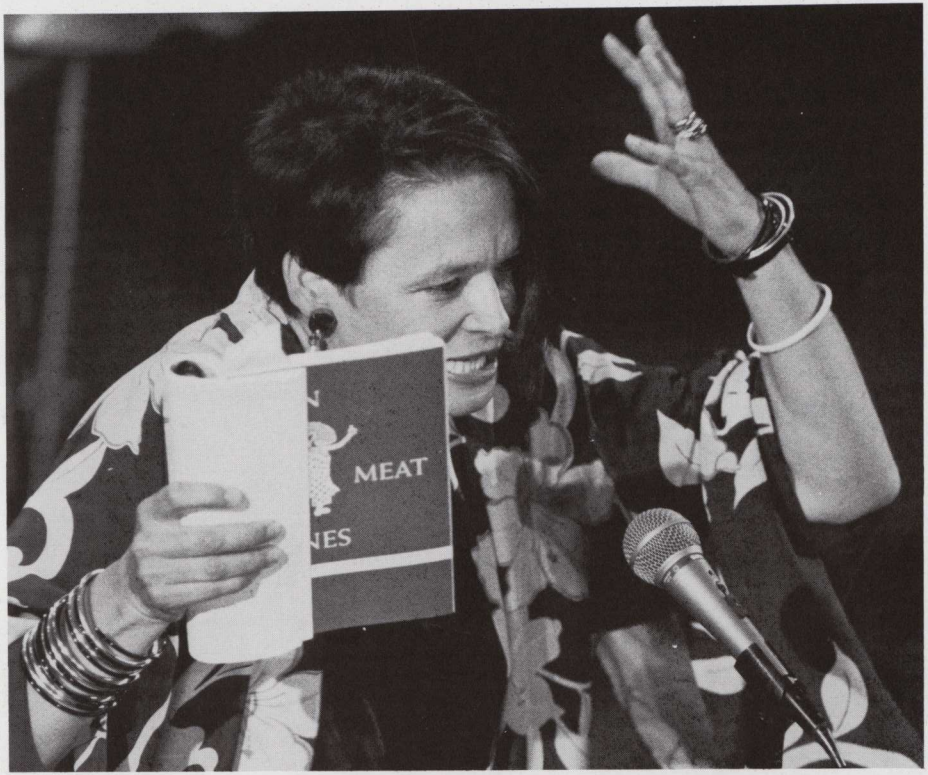
Allen Ginsberg in Lawrence. September 1987. (Photo © Joe Wilkins III.)



Jim Carroll and Allen Ginsberg (2nd and 3rd from right) at Kellas Gallery (Lawrence) reception for Ginsberg's photographic exhibit. September 11, 1987. (Photo © Bobby Waldman.)



William S. Burroughs speaks at the Kansas Union Ballroom, Lawrence. November 3, 1986. (Photo © Gareth Waltrip.)



Anne Waldman reads her poetry at the Kansas Union Ballroom, Lawrence. September 8, 1987. (Photo © Joe Wilkins III.)

Timothy Leary speaks on "The Emergence of the Cybernetic Person During the Roaring Twentieth Century" at Liberty Hall, Lawrence. September 12, 1987. (Photo © Dan Ruettimann.)

William S. Burroughs at Allen Ginsberg's poetry reading in the Kansas Union Ballroom, Lawrence. September 9, 1987. (Photo © Joe Wilkins III.)

An Interview with William S. Burroughs

The conversation between William Burroughs, George Wedge and Steven Lowe transcribed here took place at Burrough's home in Lawrence on June 18, 1988.

GW: A friend suggested I ask you which book or books you've written you find are particularly pleasing to you today?

WSB: Well, I'd say in general that writers are very bad judges of their own work. Sinclair Lewis says that he's written something that he thinks is just great, he can't wait to show it to someone. The publisher says, "Throw it away. It's terrible." Generally true. I found that several times; you know, I wrote something that I thought was very good, and reading it over a few days later, I said, "Tear it up and throw it into someone else's ashcan. It's terrible." So, any writing is spotty. In other words, I take this passage in this book that I think is pretty good—it's good as I can do—and this passage over here. So it wouldn't be a book it would be a series of passages, really, that I was more or less satisfied with. Of course, you're never completely satisfied.

I think all writers attempt the impossible; all artists attempt the impossible. The actual creation of life, that is, place, something that has existence apart from the painter—or the canvas—or the creation of characters, I don't mean actual characters, actual... In other words, all artists attempt the creation of life. Possibly it's just as well in many cases that they don't succeed, although they succeed to some extent. Like Fitzgerald and Kerouac formed whole generations, oriented whole generations.

GW: I've read a book recently that was very negative about Fitzgerald. Felt that all of his writing lacked integrity—because the writer saw him as a person as lacking integrity.

WSB: What in the hell does he mean by "integrity"?

GW: I think what he meant was that Fitzgerald knew he had a drinking problem and didn't do anything about it.

WSB: Of course. [Laughter] What's that got to do with his writing? Coleridge had an opium problem and couldn't do anything about it. That's just very philistine. He's criticizing the man, not the work. But anyone's weaknesses are an integral part of their whole character. Look at Proust and the snobbery from which he made a very great work. Although snobbery is generally, and I think

rightly, considered as a weakness, a lack of integrity. Submitting to arbitrary standards and revering arbitrary standards, which have no reason to be revered at all.

You know what Hemingway said about Fitzgerald? Well, he said "Fitz, he was a rummy and dishonest about money." Hemingway himself never had a good word to say for anyone. That was one of the most outstanding—I've been asked to write something on Andy Warhol, and I will—it's one of his most endearing characteristics. He never had a bad word to say about anyone. If he couldn't say anything good, he just didn't say anything.

SL: Remember what he said about roaches? You remember, you were talking to him once and he was saying how much he loved roaches because they were the best roommates. [Laughter] You'd come home and they'd greet you at the door, and then they'd all disappear and leave you alone. And I went, "Oh, my God." The old exterminator pattern.

WSB: You know, I was rather surprised to find out that he was a devout Catholic. I didn't know that, though I'd known him for twenty-three years. But what I was saying is that anyone's weaknesses are a part of their talent; without the weaknesses there wouldn't have been any talent. Now it's not that weaknesses make talent, or anything like that, but it's part of a whole character. You can't say just take out this little piece here and this little piece there. There wouldn't be anything left.

GW: I was pretty disturbed by this characterization of Fitzgerald's work. Partly because I devote so much of my own time to teaching authors who had problems of that particular kind, addiction problems. Because there's something going on in their work that—

WSB: Yeah, you do feel in Fitzgerald's work there's a certain frailty, certainly. He wrote one of the better ghost stories. Do you remember "A Short Trip Home"?

GW: No, I don't know that story.

WSB: Well, very few people do and it's hard to find. And there's a strange phenomenon in it. He says in a note to this: "I found that in writing this story I have used a description almost verbatim from another story. I didn't want to be accused of serving warmed-over fare." Well no scholars, so far as I can know, have ever found out what that was. And very few people have ever heard of "A Short Trip Home." It's not in my many of the anthologies or the collected works, but I have it somewhere in my library. Short story, about 15-20 pages.

GW: I'll have to look for it. If I don't find it, I may come ask you if you have it.

WSB: Well, I have it somewhere. But certainly Fitzgerald—I was talking about influencing the character and everything else of a whole era–*that* he certainly did. He really caught the Twenties. In a way that Hemingway didn't.

GW: There are a lot of things going on in your life right now. You've just come back from Amsterdam and London, where you had exhibits of your paintings. *The Western Lands* just came out last December. With all these things that are going on, what are you looking forward to next?

WSB: More painting. And more writing. I'm writing a book on Jesus Christ now; it's pretty well finished. It's a short novella. And I still have a whole stack of stuff to go through for the memoirs. Those are the main projects. And more painting, pushing away and painting further.

GW: I get the impression that one of the answers you might have given to that first question I gave you was "Well, the only thing I'm really happy with is what I'm doing right now." Is that fair?

WSB: No. No. That's not fair at all. Because some of my passages that I like very much date back thirty or forty years. No, it isn't fair. It *is,* but anyone's work is spotty.

GW: I've asked you sometimes to come to class and talk about *Junkie,* which was your first published work. Is there one of those passages in there?

WSB: No I wouldn't find one there, I don't think. That I would like to think of as representative, feel the same way about as Conrad felt about *The Nigger of the Narcissus,* that, you know, he could stake his reputation on that one book. Which I agree with. It's a terrific book.

GW: Was *Queer* the next thing that you wrote?

WSB: Yeah.

GW: And I would assume for a lot of reasons that there are passages in that work that are among those you contemplate with pleasure—

WSB: No. No, no, no, no. If I was making an anthology, I would take...well, certainly *The Place of Dead Roads,* the chapter of Kim on the mesa. I don't know, I'd have to go through and look here and there. And then see what all worked—I think there are some things in *Yage Letters.* And then there are all the Benway passages, which have stood up very well in readings. Benway passages and *Twilight's Last Gleamings.* A lot of passages I've used in readings again and again.

GW: Very well!

WSB: Well, yes, I mean everything that was successful reading material. And sometimes I've taken a passage from a book for reading purposes and found out that it didn't read well, the reason being it wasn't written quite well in the first place. So I've made a number of changes, small changes over the years in published work. Unfortunately, they don't usually seem to find their way into the subsequent printings.

GW: I think what I was steering myself towards, though you don't need to go where I steer, was that there is a rather sharp break between the earlier works and things that you did later.

WSB: Not so sharp. They come in more or less trilogies like *Naked Lunch,* and the work that didn't go into *Naked Lunch* but was produced at more or less the same time and related to it, that went into *Nova Express, The Soft Machine,* and *The Ticket That Exploded.* And that cycle, more or less, was exhausted. Although there are subsequent items, like the *Cobble Stone Gardens,* that went back to some of this early material that was written in 1958, around in there, and '57. Some that I hadn't seen in years that was collected finally from various sources.

And then another cycle was *Wild Boys, Exterminator!,* and *Port of Saints.* And then there were side issues, like a number of essays that were produced at the same time, in *Crawdaddy* and *Mayfair,* and another side isssue was *Last Words of Dutch Schultz,* a filmscript. Then, you come to another cycle, which is *Cities of the Red Night,* and a lot that didn't go into and went into *The Place of Dead Roads* and *The Western Lands.* So that's another cycle which is more or less exhausted at the present time. It doesn't mean that I've stopped writing; it means that a certain cycle has been exhausted. So I have this book, this Jesus Christ book that I'm working on now, probably be a short novella, and then painting and memoirs.

I probably never would have gotten into painting if I hadn't moved to Kansas. But the first pieces *were* actual shotgun pieces, wood and scrapwood, plywood hit by a shotgun blast, and very soon I began to paint the plywood first and before, prepare the wood and then put on tubes of paint. Didn't come to the spray paint idea until I had a vist from Philip Taaffe and Diego Cortez. Philip Taaffe is a young artist, quite successful, particularly well-known in England, though he lives in America. So he loved this idea of shotgun art and I didn't know anything about spray paint. He had a can of red spray paint and he hung it on a string in front of a picture and I shot it with a shotgun, 12 gauge, number 6 shot, and it was just an explosion of red across this plywood surface.

Of course, the whole idea of randomity in painting is nothing new at all; I mean, Yves Kline and Pollock putting paint on canvas and allowing it to drip down to form more or less unpredictable patterns. This is just a different idea, it's an explosion of color across a surface, wood or paper. You can do it with paper if you do it sideways. So you have the random factor, the completely unpredictable

factor, of a shotgun blast hitting the spray paint or hitting a tube of paint, and then you can, in fact I frequently do, impose on that a random order of silhouettes, if that helps, like that one there—"The Kennedy Assassination." [B. points at a painting standing on end against the wall.]

It should be horizontal, of course. But as you see these are silhouettes; these heads are silhouettes. [He turns it to the proper position and throughout the following description points to what he is describing.] This has a number of shotgun blasts; the paint was set on fire; it had quite a rough history. Sat in the garage for months before I could do anything with it. There was a shotgun blast coming in from the side, gouging that [points at a running tear in the surface of the wood], and that is the face of the assassin right there [points at a silhouette near the right end of the gouge and below and a little left of the holes made by a frontal blast] and [indicating everything to the right of this head] there's this blaze of destructive energy, yes. Here you have Jacqueline Kennedy down here [two silhouettes to the left of the assasin]. Several views of Kennedy [three silhouettes above those already described]; this is the best, the most recognizable. Where he sort of looks like a mummy because of the grain of the wood. See, there's another incalculable factor with wood things, it's the grain of the wood itself. With paper you have a flat surface to work with, and here I have the grain of the wood. So there will never be any replications.

GW: That's true.

WSB: It's impossible to replicate.

GW: As I look at it and I think about your painting and I think about your writing, what is probably an irrelevant thought crosses my mind. Do you see a relationship between the randomness and order in the painting and what you do in the cutups?

WSB: Good. Something, yes. There's an analogy there. Brion Gysin started the cutups, he said writing is fifty years behind painting. And he used his cut up method. But it only goes so far. You can't use shotgun techniques with writing. There's no analogy, at a certain point, between the two mediums in what you can do. So you can't have too much randomity in writing.

Painting is a completely different medium. It may well tell a story, but it tells it in bits and pieces, seen from different angles and a different light and at different distances. Like, see here [points at the third silhouette] you have Kennedy already a mummy and I've put the date in there like a postmark, and there's the face of the assassin, and there's Jacqueline and several faces of Kennedy, and all sorts of various figures in here. And, of course, it has another side [WSB turns the painting over and stands it vertically.]

GW: My!

WSB: It's in hieroglyphs, and this says MEKTOUB, "It is written." Yes, I like those colors, those red colors.

GW: Yes, indeed, I would think you would.

GW: I was interested a little while ago, when you were speaking about your works and going through a kind of history, that The *Western Lands,* which for me is very recent, so that I think of it as your current work, you put in the past with other things. "It was a cycle that was done."

WSB: Well it is in the past, certainly. I have written it. I'm not working on it now in that sense. Of course, in another sense I feel that all the work is one, essentially one continuing thing, that it's all present now. Everything is contained in the present—the past, *other* pasts and the future as well.

This is what I just finished. *Finished.* Sand painting with gunpowder. Have you ever seen sand painting? Well, it's done with gunpowder. Black light and gunpowder. Same principle.

SL: Since it seems someone used fire to get rid of your sand, as it were,—is it gunpowder?—it leaves a mark that the Navahos and Tibetans and people that are into that ..., it's the wind or feather or gesture and there's nothing left.

WSB: Yeah. That's all very well, but what you got to sell?

SL: Well, that's the difference between art and religion.

WSB: Yeah. Exactly. You know many of these folk masks, the Sepik River masks which are worth a hell of a lot on 57th street were not meant to be preserved. After the ceremony was over they burned them, because it was a religious rite. And then tourists and art dealers came in there and bought this Sepik River stuff which now costs a fortune.

SL: Too valuable to burn.

WSB: Too valuable to burn, yeah.

GW: It is amazing the things that people produce that nobody ever sees. Have you had the opportunity to see some of the Australian bark paintings that—

WSB: Yeah. Ed Ruhe. Sure, I saw all that. [to SL] Have you seen this stuff. Well, he's got a terrific collection of the Australian bark paintings and also boomerangs, spears and all kinds of artifacts he's collected over the years. It's in a rather small apartment down on Massachussetts Street. The stuff is just packed in everywhere. It's a unique collection; I've never seen anything like it.

GW: The paintings all have mystic and religious content.

WSB: Yeah. They're more or less stylized, a particular style. [to SL] You've seen those rock paintings, pictures of them in *National Geographic.* Well, those rock paintings are from Australia. These are on bark. Quite beautiful. But they are sort of limited. I mean it isn't what we call painting or art, it's rather some kind of a religious ceremony. When it loses that and when they start producing them to sell, then all the life goes out of 'em.

SL: The Navahos seem to do both, they produce sand painting as merchandise, but then the real ones, that you never see, are healing, only for healing purposes.

WSB: Well, of course you could take a sand painting and put glass on it, I suppose.

SL: Or pour it down on a glued surface.

WSB: Yeah, how about that. Isn't there something you can spray on it?

SL: Yeah, you could fix it.

WSB: Yeah. I knew someone, named Daniel Spoerri, I think it was, he would take anything, like a layout like a breakfast tray, and preserve it. Spray something on it

SL: Food and everything?

WSB: Yes.

And the Egyptian art. They didn't have any art; essentially all of it was funerary. Apart from its funereal significance, it doesn't exist. You can conceive of it as decoration, although that may not be quite true. Because a lot of them seem to me to be, they would *seem* to be, pictures of people hunting, gathering grain, doing all sorts of things like that. But actually these represent the spirits that are supposed to be administering to the deceased.

SL: Caretakers and that sort.

WSB: Caretakers. They even have a special kind of figure that is the overseer of all these spirits. And it's so typical that there's a name for it. Quite fascinating, the whole death thing. Just emphasizing the fact that all their art was funerary. And the idea, even concept of art for art's sake, is very modern. [A fine black cat jumps onto the couch beside Burroughs and he strokes it and speaks to it.]

GW: That's a beautiful cat. What did you call it?

WSB: Fletch....

GW: I think we probably have some very similar feelings on what you spoke of as "the say no to drugs hysteria." What are your thoughts about that?

WSB: Well, my feeling is that it's a bare-faced pretext to set up an international police apparatus that would be used to put down internal subversion or dissidence. For example this guy at the White House, William Bradford Reynolds, he said, "We ought to put the drug thing on a war footing. Anyone who suggests tolerance for drug use should be considered as a traitor." Now this is just insane. Flatly insane. *1984* and beyond. Anyone who disagrees with him is a traitor. I'm very angry.

GW: There is a lot of feel to the whole of that campaign that smacks of tyranny and—

WSB: Yes, you can just substitute the word "jew" for "drug-user," and *die Stürmer* storm again. The whole problem was a false problem to begin with. They didn't have the "good old days" which the conservatives embrace so nostalgically. You could buy morphine, heroin, cocaine right across the counter in any drugstore. There were no drug laws until 1914. How many addicts they had then, nobody knows. Well, they probably had a fair number of people, then they tried to make this a police problem, laws that were basically unenforceable, and just built up the problem from there. That's when the problem started. Now you can't pick up a newspaper, turn on your TV: *Drugs. Drugs. Drugs.*

SL: Creates a handy scapegoat too.

WSB: Well yeah. In the first place, if you really want something to stop, you don't play it up. You play it down.

GW: [to SL] "Sure we mistreat those people—but *drugs* are the real problem." That's what you're saying, isn't it? It's a scapegoat. They blame things on the drugs instead of the society.

SL: Well I think this unifies a society against a group of people.

GW: So as not to have to look at the realities of what you really need to do for the people.

WSB: Well, also, I mean, that people have been talked into the idea that this is the

number one problem. Actually if they handled it as a health problem, it's a very minor problem indeed. I mean the English, for years, had the system that any addict could go to a doctor and obtain a heroin prescription which he could fill free of charge at the National Health, so there was no black market problem there at all. Until the Americans talked them into their tried-and-failed police approach to the problem. Now they have a huge black market, people dying in subway toilets and all the rest of it.

SL: And high profit commerce. That's another thing that happened.

WSB: Yeah. And corrupt narcotics police and bribes and the whole syndrome.

SL: Cocaine for the contras.

Fiction

Gillian Kendall

Making It Through The Summer

For Margie

At five foot nothing, two hundred and something pounds, Gloria May Greenwood was tired of looking for romance. Fame she had at Central Florida County College where she was studying Theatre Arts, and where she got any female third lead she auditioned for (her bulk added instant humor to any character part). Money she had never cared much about (having been told that a girl can never be too thin or too rich, Gloria had determined early on that she would probably never be too much of either), but the wages she paid herself from Florida Arts Commission funding for the Street Theatre group she ran in the summertime covered her rent, grocery bills and manicures year-round.

The summer he was fifteen, Joel wanted to join the Lakeland Street Theatre troupe to get laid. That isn't what he put on the application forms, of course—he made up some stuff about being very interested in learning about the technical aspects of putting on plays. And at the audition, held in the cool, crumbling Spanish house where Street Theatre had its office, he played trumpet.

"Very nice," bellowed Gloria, without smiling, leaning back, immense, in her director's chair after he'd finished the trumpet part for his high-school band's version of "Love the One You're With." It had been atrocious, but the boy brimmed over with energy; he was young, he had nothing to do with his time, he was eager. She could, with time, teach him to act. Not this summer, though; all she could do this summer would be to wake him up a little—make him feel enough, and see enough decent acting to want to do it. In a few years, he could be good.

She made a note on Joel's information sheet, then wriggled her pencil in the air. Finally she stuck it in her mouth and talked around it, gesticulating with both hands, edged with sharp red points like claws. "I want you," she said, cupping her hands in front of her chin and looking at the ceiling, "I want you now to play something that tells me about *you*." She took the pencil out of her mouth, looked down at her notes, wiped her finger down the side of her nose, and glanced at the tip briefly, waiting for him to begin.

Joel shifted his feet and ran a hand through his pale, fuzzy hair. There was a cute blonde girl waiting in the hallway with the others who had already tried out and he knew she was watching him. He grinned towards the hall. "Well, I don't really know that many more songs. I can play 'Raindrops Keep Falling On My Head.' "

Seeing him smile out of the corner of her eye, Gloria thought he and the skinny chick outside were laughing at her. She pulled down her buttondown shirt, worn open as a jacket, and hiked up the tube top underneath, which was

beginning to show too much cleavage. "Look." She pushed herself up out of her seat. She flicked on a tape recorder by the chair and moved to the open center of the room, close to Joel but out of sight of the doorway. The opening chords to a *Chorus Line* hit belted out, and Gloria belted with it.

Joel was surprised at the strength and high purity of her voice. He'd expected that whale of a woman to sing a baritone. As he watched, she began to dance, and not a slow shuffle, either. She raised a leg and kicked from the knee, she bent at the waist like a small tree in high winds. Soon her arms were flailing and she was spinning, singing, almost screaming, "All I wanted was the music and the mirror and the chance ..." Joel figured she sang it so well from experience—she must have tried out for some play and not made it.

She was an actress, of course. He'd seen her when the College brought *Pippin* to his high school. She was Pippin's grandmother, salty and somehow sexy in a full-length pink dress with shimmering sequins over the low-cut bodice. And now, she was telling him about how hard it was to audition and not get accepted, her eyes passionate behind the mascara and eyeliner, full of appeal to him, the director, to make it happen for her.

The song ended and Gloria, out of breath, waddled back to her seat. "Like that," she said. "Do something real." She was glad to see that Joel's eyes didn't stray back to Roxy, who was hanging on the doorframe. Auditions were supposed to have ended five minutes ago but she knew the kid was about to learn something. The one thing she wanted her people to get in a summer was that theater wasn't just costumes and makeup and flowers at the stage door: it was a way to live and feel and communicate to other people. "Do you understand?"

"I can do a Harpo Marx imitation."

Three minutes later, silent except for the bleating of an imaginary horn that Joel, as Harpo, pantomimed in his right hand, he was sitting on Gloria's lap making faces at her. She was laughing, a small crowd had gathered at the doorway, and Joel, at the height of his enthusiasm, reached out and grabbed for her breast. It was a Harpo-esque move, designed to make her shriek and run, but she couldn't move—being pinned in the chair, she just tried to slap his hand away. He held on without thinking to the soft blob of flesh, and then the tube top slipped down so that he could see the sausage-shape of it on top, all except the nipple, still covered by the yellow spongy fabric. He snapped his hand away and tried to jump up, but she held him where he was. "I'm sorry," he said, "I never—" He had never done that before, he was about to say, but stopped himself. "I never meant to do that."

Gloria looked ready to roar with anger. "You should *never* do that!" She shoved him off her. He almost fell to the floor, but caught himself and stood facing her, his hand still in the shape of the horn.

Her makeup looked patchy over the pores of her cheek, Joel noticed. "I said I was sorry," he said. He had blown his chance at joining the troupe. She still hadn't recovered her breast and he looked down at it, then jerked his eyes back to her face. "You told me to do something real!"

Gloria yanked up the tank top and shook herself into it. "Not that, moron. You think I care if my boob falls out in public? Didn't you see me in *Hair*? I was hard enough to miss. What I meant was you should never, ever break character like that. What if we'd been on stage?" She looked towards the crowd at the door. Joel did too, cursing his clumsiness. Now the blonde girl would think he was just a horny oaf.

He *was* just a horny oaf, that was the problem. He should've kept hold of her tit and started sucking it, that would've upset her. Jesus, now she was calling them all in to humiliate him in public. "Did you see that?" she was saying. "Come in here, I want to talk to all of you." Half a dozen kids Joel's age, and Todd, Gloria's assistant, shuffled in. Todd was a good-looking WASP, with even white teeth and big biceps under his polo shirt. He was whispering something to the blonde girl. Joel checked out the other faces, but saw only two guys and two girls who looked like guys. No, so far the blonde was his only prospect, and now that college stud had her. Still, there were other people in Street Theatre. He'd heard the cast parties were wild. They rented rooms in motels sometimes, or drank champagne in private pools.

The group arranged itself at Gloria's feet, except for Todd, who went over and said something with his back to them that made Gloria nod, and say, "Well, you never can tell. Make some phone calls and find out who's paying." He disappeared and she took down her pile of papers. "Most of you did pretty well. Thanks for coming out here on a school night and all to audition. I have a nine o'clock class tomorrow so I'll keep this short."

Joel was sure he was the reason she said "most" of them did well. He'd watched everyone else's auditions and no one else "broke character." The blonde girl had even cried a little when she read from something called *The Glass Menagerie.*

"I have an eight o'clock *every* morning," he said. Some people laughed, but not the girl.

Gloria ignored him. "Most of you aren't going to make it through the summer." She stopped, and pointed the pencil in the direction Todd had gone. "He'll make it," she said. "He always does. So do you," she added, indicating some of the others beneath her. "I don't think you'll be here in September, Roxy," she said to the cute girl. Then it was Joel's turn. "You—I can't tell about you. Anyway, acting isn't all fun, and I'm not the easiest person to work with. But those of you that make it will find the experience valuable. I'll let you know over the weekend what Todd and I decide."

When Joel got home, his parents were waiting, sitting in the good chairs in the living room. It was the room they only used for birthdays or Chanukah. His mother waved the note he had left them, saying where he was going, in the air. "Street Theatre?" were her first words as he came through the front door.

Joel took a moment to put his trumpet down and see if his folks were pissed off or just "concerned." His mother had her worried look on. She sat bolt upright in the rough upholstery, feet flat on the ground. She was wearing a pink tent dress

and white sandals. Her hair looked starched, as usual. Everything about her was always neat and cool—everything except her voice. Her voice was like mildew.

"What does this mean?" She flapped a piece of paper and the tops of her breasts over her bra wobbled under the tent. She had large breasts. She was, in fact, a large woman, which occasionally interfered with her sharp-cut edges. Joel suspected that she wore a lot of elastic and girdles to try to keep everything in place.

Mr. Hume was better-looking than his wife, with olive skin and crinkles around his eyes and a mustache. Joel suspected that if he had taken after his father's side of the family, he'd have gotten a girlfriend long ago. Joel's father ran a real estate office. They had left New York five years ago when he had been offered a management position in Kreber and Kegel in Lakeland. His wife had decided then that she wanted to work, too, and got a receptionist's job with a rival outfit in the same building. They ate lunch together and told each other company secrets.

Joel could always tell if one company had landed a deal that the other one had bid for, because the partner of the victorious company would act a little smug, but apologetic, for a few days. Recently K and K had gotten permission to accept offers on the largest apartment building in the outskirts of Lakeland. Maybe his father was trying to atone for it by helping his wife speak to Joel.

Sometimes his father was more reasonable than his mother. "Is something wrong?" Joel asked.

"Only if you don't listen to us," his father said. "We don't know very much about this—"

"Oh, yes we do!" broke in his wife. "We know all about these people. Mrs. Z. said her daughter joined in with these—"

"That's not fair," pointed out Mr. Hume.

"Yeah!" Joel slapped his thighs.

"Be quiet!" his mother hissed. Turning to her husband, she said, "I didn't tell you everything she said. She also said—"

"It's just that we don't want you messing around with actors for a whole summer. Some of those people are a little odd, Joel," his fathersaid.

"Time out!" Joel made the football sign, and sat down gingerly on the couch.

"Are you dirty?" his mother asked.

"No, I'm not dirty. I've been playing the trumpet."

"Rope!" His mother turned her head without moving her shoulders like a doll, sniffing the air. "I smell burnt rope!"

"You've been playing the trumpet?" Joel's father raised his eyebrows and nodded.

"Yeah, I've—"

"He's been smoking pot!" Mrs. Hume's eyes rounded. "That's what Mrs. Z. said those—"

"Miriam," Joel's father said. "I would know. He's been playing the trumpet, for heaven's sake. We haven't been able to get him to play his instrument since junior high school, so maybe this isn't such a bad thing."

"I'm in the *band!*" Joel protested. "I'm in the band at school. I do too play the trumpet! Every week! You don't come to the performances!"

"I did," said his mother. "I came. Your father was working late but I came. It was nice."

"I wouldn't have been working late if—oh, this is off the subject. Sit down, Joel."

"I am," Joel pointed out.

"I meant relax. Take your shoes off. We're not here to yell at you, we just want to know what your plans are for summer. Emily Zuckerman got mixed up with some pretty unsavory characters last summer and got in some trouble."

"She got pregnant, Ruff!" Mrs. Hume turned to her son, the tent dress turning stiffly over her knees. "She got pregnant!" Joel tried to hide his excitement. "That's too bad," he said. "But I don't think it will happen to me." "She was just ... your ... age." Mrs. Hume leaned forward and pushed at Joel's leg. "Don't you tell me—"

"So we think you should keep your job at the golf course, Joey. That's what it comes down to."

"They fired me," Joel invented. "I can't go back."

His father raised his eyebrows. "That's not what Harold said on the phone. He said they'd love to have you back, they could even give you a raise. And Joel, I'd let you use my car on weekends to get there."

A few months ago use of the car would have tempted Joel. But compared to wild parties, it was resistable.

"Sixteen," said his mother, as if proximity gave her a right to more of Joel's attention. "Can you imagine? Drinking and staying out till dawn and then the boy didn't even call her."

"Oh, I would," said Joel, trying to kid her into a better mood. "I would at least have called her."

"Stop it! You are going back to the golf course!"

"This minute?" Joel said. "Don't I get to sleep first?"

"So, I'll call Harold in the morning," said his father.

"No, wait!" Joel said. "That isn't fair. You don't know anything about Street Theatre. Mom, I don't know what Emily's mom said to you but you know how she is. She's a wimp. And besides, everyone I met tonight was really nice."

"I'm sorry, Joel," his mother drooled out. "But I don't think we can believe that. It's not that you're not a good judge of character, it's just that we know certain things."

"Like Emily got pregnant?" Joel said. "Is that all you know about this community project? This is culture, Mom. Just like in New York! Theater! Think about it! I'll be famous! Your friends can come and see me—"

"We've made our decision," said his father. "It wasn't easy."

"So why're you even talking to me?" Joel was getting frantic. "Why don't you just tie me up and make me stay in my room all summer? Why don't you just treat me like a baby, for God's sake?"

"Please don't swear," said his mother. "Your father is right."

"It wasn't easy," said his father again.

"Oh yeah? Well, what if I don't abide by your decision? What if I'm a real live human being who can think for—"

"If you're so grown up," said Mr. Hume, "this won't upset you."

"Okay, it won't. You bet it won't!" Joel wanted to hit his father.

"We're not giving you any money this summer," said his father. "If you're old enough to go out acting and screwing around—"

"Ruff! He is not going to do that!"

"—you're old enough not to need an allowance any more."

"That's completely unfair!" Joel needed money to take Roxy to the movies before she'd sleep with him. He needed to buy rubbers so she wouldn't end up like Emily Zuckerman.

"What do you need money for?" his mother asked. "If these Street people are so rich they can—"

"They're not rich! They do shows for free! Who said they were rich? It's hard work! Most people won't even make it through the summer!"

"That's the bottom line, son." His father stood up.

"The bottom line," his mother nodded.

Without answering, Joel stormed out of the room and crashed upstairs to his room.

When the phone rang Saturday night Joel answered it only because he hoped it was Gloria. Usually, if his parents were out, he spent Saturday evenings lying in the tub, reading *Portnoy's Complaint*, jerking off to the good parts, and not answering the phone so his friends wouldn't find out that he had nowhere to go on weekend nights. At eleven-thirty he'd watch *Saturday Night Live* and drink as many of his father's beers as he could get away with. It wasn't unpleasant. In fact, he was pretty comfortable with the ritual, so when the phone rang and he had to get out of the tub and stand dripping to pick it up, probably to hear that he had blown the audition, he was annoyed as well as cold. But if he didn't answer, they might call back when he was out and leave a message with his parents, and there'd be more hassles.

"I guess you know what I thought of your acting, Joel."

Was she going to rub it in? Maybe she'd called to talk it over. He was getting his parent's bed wet. "Yeah, I've been thinking about that a lot." He shifted so he'd only drip on the rug. "You know, I was kind of nervous and I was thinking maybe we should try it again."

"Forget it," Gloria said. "You weren't acting, anyway. You were just doing imitations. But if you're interested, we could use a sound man for the summer."

Sound sounded like power. "You mean setting up mikes and shit?"

"There's more to it than that. If you're the sound director, you have to be on the set before everyone else to rig up the system, and stay after everyone else to pack it up. And you have to hang out next to the stage area for the whole performance and monitor levels. And you have to run sound, run the tape deck. *And* set up the mikes and shit."

"Nema problema," he said; it was his favorite expression. He was in.

After they hung up, the problem hit him: his parents. They really might cut off his allowance. Still, maybe Roxy would pay for stuff. He scanned the printed brochure he'd gotten at the audition. "Street Theatre involves more than one hundred young people every summer," he read. That meant at least fifty girls. Girls who were not from his high school, who didn't want to only date jocks and class presidents. Girls who were flamboyant, free, theatrical. And he'd be there all the time, making sure their mikes sounded good, running around in the dying Florida sunsets and romantic dusk, looking busy with cables and cords but having time to pay attention to one or two special starlets. "Some paid positions are available for technical directors." All he had to do was convince Gloria he knew his shit and she'd get him some bucks. A job!

After talking to Joel, Gloria made a sandwich, thinking about how malleable the young kids were. They jumped at the chance to join her troupe, partly because it was a social thing for them but then they worked their butts off just to perform in front of fifty Lakeland senior citizens with the mosquitos biting and lights going out when someone tripped over the extension cords. And for seventy-five dollars a week, four or five of them would work like slaves, call it fun and come back the next summer.

If Ron, her last boyfriend, had been as easy to deal with as Joel, maybe they'd still be together, and she wouldn't be lonely at night. She didn't want much from men—she didn't expect a commitment, but she hated sleeping alone. Everybody said physical affection was important, but they seemed to forget that fat people needed it, too.

Gloria hated her bulk, but she couldn't get rid of it. Todd had bought her a book that said it had to do with having control over the world and keeping her distance from people. She didn't know about that, and thinking about it just made her feel like eating. But eating kept her distant from people, because it seemed as if most people just wanted someone with a beautiful body. Ron liked her shape, but he'd left, he said, because she was too domineering. So maybe she was okay, even being heavy, except she was too domineering. Only Todd really accepted her as she was.

She had to call Todd next. She had barely said hello when he asked if she was upset.

"No, I'm just tired. I just called six kids and had to talk to four sets of parents and assure them that Street Theatre isn't a bunch of drugged out fairies."

"Liar," said Todd.

"They seem like a smart bunch."

"The parents?"

"The kids. I think I can do a lot with them. I'm thinking of Ionesco...."

"I think I could do a lot with that guy Joel," said Todd.

"I don't think he'd be into it," said Gloria. "He tried to feel me up."

"Oh well," Todd sighed. *"C'est la vie.* Have you eaten?"

"No." Gloria chewed silently. "Wanta go get something?"

Over Italian food and red wine at Lakeland's chintziest restaurant, lately turned punk hangout, Gloria took Todd's hand. Full of lasagna, mellowed by Chianti, she leaned across the crimson bench where she sat to his velvet chair at the side of the table. "Why aren't you straight?" she said. "I'm crazy about you. You're my best girl friend."

Titters came from the purple-haired teenyboppers at the next booth. Todd played up to the audience. "I'm sorry," he said. "It's just that, well, I'm saving myself for Mr. Right."

A girl in black leather approached the table. Gloria recognized her as the one who'd read Laura's speech at the audition. "Roxy!" she said. "What're you doing here?" She didn't add, in that tight get up with all that goo on your face.

Roxy shrugged and slid behind the table, her pants whispering against the vinyl. "It's another of my personas," she said. "I like acting."

"You were very good," Todd beamed at her. "Have some garlic bread."

"No thank you, I'm dieting." She gazed into mid-distance.

Gloria straightened up, feeling like an elephant beside a mouse. She took the garlic bread Todd offered and tore it in two. She didn't say anything, partly because she had nothing to say, and partly because she sensed that Roxy wanted Todd to talk to her. She nudged Todd under the table with her foot.

"You're kicking me," he said, and then looked surprised at her glare. Todd turned brightly to Roxy. "You better watch yourself around her. One false move onstage and she beats you up."

"I can tell," Roxy said. A boy with a mohawk was beckoning to her from across the room. She avoided his eyes. "She was pretty tough at the audition."

Gloria crumbled the garlic bread crust against her plate. "Sometimes you have to be a little authoritarian with high school kids," she said, returning Roxy's insult. She wished she hadn't let this little tootsie in.

"You're so-o-o cute." Todd cocked his head and crinkled his eyes at Roxy. "But I think Frankenstein over there wants you."

Roxy flushed, then looked sideways at Gloria. "Um, I'm sorry." Her blue eyes looked ghostly against the heavy black liner. "I'm sure I'll enjoy working with you."

"Don't worry." Gloria nodded. "You will."

After Roxy left, Gloria gave Todd a little push. "That was diplomatic," she said. "Getting rid of her."

"You've got to relax," Todd said. "These kids are going to be the death of you. She was just testing you."

Wounded, Gloria let the last of the Chianti drip from its straw bottle. "Sometimes I feel like a parent."

"Sometimes you act like one." Todd realized he wasn't being very nice to Gloria, who was not only his friend but his boss. "You're not like that with the people at school when you direct a show."

"They're different," she said. "If you notice, I'm really nice with the kids till they start fucking up. Then if I don't come down on them, it gets out of hand." Gloria picked up the dessert menu. "Truffles?" she asked. "Or tartuffo?"

"Espresso," he said. "Double. I have to write that press release for the one-act tonight. We open in three weeks, right?"

"Or Gelato?" Gloria continued. She signaled the waiter. "Two tartuffos and one expresso, please."

"Wait, I don't want any," said Todd to the waiter's back.

"You don't? Oh well, I'll take it."

Todd leaned on one elbow. "Did you read that book I gave you?"

"Yessir, I did, and I'm getting better. Now I only overeat when I'm under extreme stress."

Todd didn't know much about stress. He was born and raised in Georgia of parents who thought Reagan was too liberal and still talked about the time Wallace nearly won. They'd more or less disowned him when he left with his best friend Larry to go to a Florida acting school. He supposed that had been a pretty stressful incident. "I don't overeat."

"What do you do?" Gloria's tartuffo arrived and she picked off the chocolate covering, using her fingernails like scalpels and inserting the brown skin between her teeth.

"I overfuck," he laughed.

"I'd love to do that," she said. "But most men aren't very interested in people who look the way I do. I know I'm hot, but most people go by appearances."

"That little boy Joel seems to like your appearances," said Todd. He squeezed her knee. "Didn't you say he made a pass at you?"

Gloria softened up the ice cream with her spoon, shaping it into a long, thin mound. "I hope so." She didn't know if she was kidding or not. When the mound was fist-high and an inch around, she put on a mushroom top and poked a hole in the middle. "Sure you don't want some?" she offered.

Todd made sure the teenagers were watching, then licked delicately around the opening. The onlookers snickered.

He passed it back to Gloria. She turned the plate around in the pink light, and then lowered it to her mouth. To outdo Todd, she bit off the head and chewed it up.

It was the first run-through of *More Than Enough*, a one-act by Chuck Steele. No one had ever heard of him when the play came in to the competition for original scripts, but he had a New York address. There was lots of running around and screaming in it, and a queen whose head gets chopped off in a bizarre sexual/political statement in the last scene. Todd detested it.

"You can't *do* this stuff with high-school kids," he groaned when Roxy, cast as the luckless queen, read her second line: "I have never compromised anything." Roxy read it like a pom-pom girl defending her virginity.

"What do you want, Todd?" Gloria flashed at him, then bent back over her Samuel French script, already covered with her tense blue scribbles. "Neil Simon? Alan Ayckbourne? Isn't he the latest hit in Atlanta?"

This cut went over the heads of the four-person cast, but they heard anger in Gloria's voice and looked from her to Todd to see who would win. The director's sarcasm also escaped Joel, who was confused already. He didn't know why he was there. No one was talking about the sound and every time he looked at Todd, who was walking around with cables and a ruler, Todd just winked.

Alliances had already formed amongst the older members of the troupe; in every argument, most of them sided with Gloria. Those that didn't usually didn't get invited back the following summer. But Roxy thought that the director was picking on the cute boy from Georgia. "Did I say it wrong?" she offered.

"Yes," said Gloria.

"No," said Todd.

"Maybe," said Joel. Gloria glared at him. "Keep out of this. Unless you'd like to do it yourself."

"Me?" Joel said. "Me play the queen?" He stood up and took a few mincing steps towards Todd. Todd was measuring a pile of large canvas-covered frames lying on their sides by the wall. "Oh Thweetie," he lisped, holding his left wrist limply and arching his eyebrows, "I have *never* compromised my principles."

Todd took Joel's pinky between his lips and sucked it. "Never too late to start," he leered, and patted the boy's bottom. Joel looked back at Roxy to make sure she knew it was a goof, and to see if she was laughing. Roxy stared at Todd.

"Watch those flats!" shrieked Gloria, just as the whole pile slithered to the ground. Both men dived to right them, and there was a ripping sound. Gloria jumped up and thudded over to inspect the damage. She pointed to the corpse of a painted doorway. "Now see what you've done?" she said. "Why don't you quit goofing around, Todd, and finish those cues. And Joel, if you want to watch, please don't interrupt any more." She put her hands on her hips, as if to take up more room, but she tried to smile. "Okay?" she added.

"But I don't really want to watch," said Joel. "I don't know what I'm supposed to be doing here."

Todd threw Gloria a guilty glance. "I called him," he explained. "In case I needed help with the cues."

"Yeah, I'm really sure you're having a tough time with them," snapped Gloria. "All fifteen of them. Maybe you two ought to go into the office and hassle them

out." Her arm, short and ending in a point like a riding whip, stood out from her rotund body. She indicated the door to the inner office. Todd led the way inside. It was a small unlit room with a fan, the phone, several sagging couches and many boxes of old costumes in what used to be the pantry.

"She's a witch," Joel flopped down into what had once been an expensive velvet sofa. It gave under his behind and his legs dangled over the arm.

Todd sat on the floor near Joel's head, his back to the desk and the entrance to the costume room. He dragged a garbage can over and leaned on it, wrapping his legs around it. "Sometimes," he said. "But she can be a wonderful director. I'd rather work with her than anyone else. She did all these." He waved toward the walls, which were covered with posters from past productions.

Joel eyed the silk-screened posterboards. He pointed to a pink one with red lettering and a silhouette of a busty woman sitting on a piano. "Who was that?" he asked.

"No one special," said Todd. "That was just the advertisement for *Play It Again, Sam.*"

Disappointed, Joel turned back to Todd. "Were you in any of these?"

"Last year I was," said Todd. "Then I got more into the technical end. I like doing that stuff with Gloria. Plus, this is a way to meet people." He shrugged, not liking to admit that he, a college sophomore, could have trouble making friends.

"Good," Joel said, thinking of his Saturdays. "Are you in a frat?"

"No, but maybe we could find something to do—go out sometimes."

Joel sat up and craned his neck around to see the rest of the posters. "Maybe," he said. "Have a beer—" He swung around. "Holy shit! You're legal, aren't you?"

"Sure." Todd was miffed.

"The High-Q!" Joel yelped. "We can go to the High-Q! Man, once I almost got in there last year. I was with this guy who knew this girl who checked I.D.'s and we didn't even have to pay a cover, but then the manager found us and kicked us out."

"Drag," said Todd.

"Drag city," Joel confirmed. "Plus, she got fired." He shook his head. But then his eyes brightened, and he gazed at Todd with new hope. "But we can go there, right? You have an extra I.D., right?"

"I like the Research Center better."

Joel decided that what he had been told about the Research Center was not true. "I don't care where we go," he said. "Just so long as there's beer and women."

Todd didn't say anything. Joel took his silence as a sign of attention and went on. "You know, Roxy's pretty cute, isn't she? I mean, I thought, at first, I thought something might happen with her but ... seems like she really likes you."

Todd put his head most of the way into the trash can. "Joel." Though his voice was muffled, it sounded weak.

"What, man? Hey, come out of there."

Todd remained, his shoulders touching the sides of the opening. He sighed.

"Oh, shit. I'm sorry." Joel leaned forward in consternation, and kicked at the trash can slghtly. "Come on out, man. I'm sorry." As soon as Todd's face reappeared, he said, "Are you going out with her? Is that it?"

"Argh!" Todd sat up and put the trash can over his head and shoulders, trapping his arms down to the elbow. Piles of papers swooshed out, and a half-full Coke can fell and lay dribbling on the carpet.

"What?" Joel stood up and hammered on the metal over Todd's head. "What is it man? Are you going out with her? Jeez, I didn't know."

Todd groaned.

Joel stepped onto the couch, considering jumping on top of Todd. Then he saw that he could, without touching the ground, walk all the way around the room. He started to the right, stepping from one couch to another across the doorway. There he bounced for a while, appreciating the superior springs of the second sofa. "Well, what? Did I say something that bothered you?"

The trash can swayed toward Joel's voice.

"I know." Joel bounced higher. "You think I'm too young for all this, don't you? Well, I'm not! I'll be a senior next year! I haven't lived in Florida all my life, you know! Up in New York the girls are a lot more mature, and everyone's doing it by the time they're fourteen. I never wanted to move down here! If I was still in New York, I wouldn't still be a—a minor!" With his last words he took a flying leap and landed embracing the trash can. He brought it up and down on Todd's head a few times.

"I'll show you I'm not too young!" Joel sprang up again. He tore the container off Todd's head and beat his breast in front of him. "Outside I may be meek and mild Harpo Gefiltefish, a nice Jewish boy from Lon Giland, but underneath—" he dodged into the wardrobe room, and then said quietly, "Holy shit. Look at all this stuff. No, wait! Stay still! Entertain yourself for a few minutes. Jerk off or something. Call a girl and jerk off. You ever do that? No, of course you didn't. No one ever does that. Not even me. Look, just wait, okay?" He hummed a few bars of *Bolero,* his voice a little smothered.

Waiting outside, Todd wondered what Joel would do if he came back and found him masturbating. This boy was obviously mystified by all things sexual, very much how Todd had been at his age. Maybe he could help him out a little, at least tone down his act so he didn't freak everyone out with his flaming heterosexuality. Looking at the debris, Todd spotted something he and Gloria had lost the week before. "Hey Joel! There's a joint in here!" Some matches were there too, so he lit up.

"Ta Da! Underneath, Superstud!" Joel burst from the pantry, wearing a gorilla mask and a purple codpiece. His jeans were down around his ankles. In his hand, he held an imaginary horn. Honking, he dove for the far couch. His jeans caught the side of the trash can, and he ended up tumbling over Todd's lap. Embarrassed, he snatched the joint, put it in his mouth, and replaced the trash can on Todd's head. He grabbed handfuls of papers and threw them into the air.

"Superstud gets stoned!" he added, as, behind him, the office door opened and Gloria walked in.

Gloria's face got white and her long talons clutched at the door handle. Jesus God, she thought, I've lost all control. Todd, hearing the door open, took the trash can off his head and looked at his employer. She avoided meeting his eyes and left, slamming the door. "Hey, that didn't happen!" Todd called. "You imagined it!"

"Yeah," added Joel, crestfallen. He tore off the mask and codpiece and threw them into the costume room. "Have we lost our jobs?" he whispered. He began stuffing garbage back into the righted receptacle. The Coke can spilled when he picked it up, so he smeared the liquid into the rug. "Let's finish that joint."

The door banged back open. Gloria's eyes were like slits. "Oh no you don't." She put her fists on her hips and moved toward them like a battleship. "Look, what is all this shit, anyway? It's your own fault if you get hurt, goofing around in here like a couple of kids when there's so much work—"

" 'Kids,' right?" Todd's tone stopped Gloria. "We're acting like kids? Yeah, we were acting like kids!" He stood up and towered over the woman. "Why shouldn't we?"

"What if some parents walked in here right now?" Gloria stepped back to look him more squarely in the eye. "We've got four kids out there, that means four parents are coming to pick them up."

"Three," said Joel. "Me and Roxy are riding bikes home together." This was as yet not arranged, but Joel had seen Roxy dismounting her ten-speed and envisioned them cycling off into the night together. As a point of fact, he didn't even know if they lived in the same direction.

"Whatever," said Gloria. "You know how fast we'd lose our funding if one of them wrote to F.A.C. and said you guys were smoking dope in the office? Like that!" She snapped two pointed fingers together.

"Oh, come off it," Todd said. "The last time a grown-up set foot in this office was when that girl got knocked up, and her dad made an appointment."

"Do you have to talk about that?" shrieked Gloria. "You always have to tell everybody everything."

"Besides, it's your pot." Todd waved the joint. "Remember when we lost that joint? It was in the trash. Don't blame me, I can't afford drugs this good."

Gloria crossed to the desk and slammed down her director's book. "All right," she said. "Now you've told him—" she flung an arm in Joel's direction "—everything, now what am I supposed to do?"

"Nothing." Todd's voice softened. "Loosen up, before you have a heart attack."

"What do you mean?" Gloria narrowed her eyes, but her voice wobbled. "All I'm trying to do was keep things sane. If I don't do it, who will?"

Joel looked over at her, ready to make some smart comment. But he stopped himself: Gloria looked like his mother did when he swore at her. Her mascara was starting to bleed at the edges.

"Give me a break, you guys. I'm doing my best." She looked very fat and vulnerable, crying and dabbing her eyes with her fingertips, then wiping her hands on her cotton shirt.

"Hey, don't do that," Joel said. And then, to fill the silence, he added, "It'll stain, won't it?"

"Cold cream." Todd walked over and sat on the desk, kicking his legs against the back of it. He put an arm around Gloria's shoulders and leaned over so his face nearly touched hers. " 'Hey, honey,'" he said. "'I didn't mean to make you cry.'"

Gloria laughed. "What's that from?"

"My Turn to Waltz," he said. "Remember your line?"

" 'I'm not crying,'" said Gloria. " 'I've got hayfever.' "

"I saw that!" said Joel. "You brought it to Wilson, remember? That was you?" He looked at Gloria in amazement. "You played her? She was so different from you! I wouldn't ever have guessed that was you."

"She was thin," said Gloria. "I was twenty pounds lighter and they dressed me in black."

"She was beautiful," said Joel.

"See?" said Todd.

"I'm so tired," said Gloria. "All I want to do is go home and go to bed. I'm sorry I yelled at you guys. I don't know what got into me. I just felt ... so stupid, I guess." She couldn't afford to piss Todd off so much he'd want to leave. "But you really shouldn't have been—"

"Hey, Gloria," Joel winked, just like Todd. "How about that joint?"

Gloria closed her eyes, thinking of all the times every summer when the kids, like Joel, like Roxy, had pushed her. This had to be the last time. She just couldn't stand them any more. She was losing her mind.

The phone rang and Gloria lost hold of herself. Here I go, she thought, and then she felt all the rage come up inside of her as if she were going to vomit. She was sure she was screaming, and then she heard Todd and the kid laughing. Then she realized: she wasn't screaming, she was laughing, and the pain had oozed out of her eyes and was streaming down her cheeks in black streaks she couldn't wipe away fast enough. She laughed louder, realizing how silly she must look. It felt as if her bra-straps had broken. It felt as if she had taken off all of her clothes and let her flesh breathe and move and dance. She stopped trying to wipe away the smudges and gasped. "You!" she squeezed Todd's arm. "With the garbage can over your head!"

But Todd waved his hand, shushing her. He was on the phone. Putting his hand over the receiver, he whispered to Gloria, "It's the F.A.C. Here."

"Hello?" said Gloria. Her voice was serious but her eyes were very bright as she peeped over the receiver at Joel and Todd. Then she turned her back to them. "Yes, I'm the director..."

Joel, wanting to prolong the excitement, tried to drag Todd into a wrestling hold but Todd shook him off. "This is our bread and butter, man," he whispered.

He froze, listening to Gloria.

"Yes, we certainly do have late rehearsals," she said. "What? A French play, sort of a farce. Political satire, I guess you'd call it. Written like a comedy. Well, it's very new, they haven't determined the genre yet... About three weeks... Sure, we could do that... one week? One week from today? On, no, you don't—"

There was a pause in which Gloria and Todd locked eyes. She looked frightened. "Yes ma'am. If that's the case, I guess we can." She hung up, sniffed, and wiped her nose on her wrist. "If we don't pull something together to perform for their benefit this Saturday, we get cut next summer, probably."

Todd gulped. Then he smiled. "You can get serious again."

"Start pulling." Gloria picked up her promptbook.

Ten days (it was Saturday night), one paycheck (he'd waved it under his father's nose) and two difficult phone calls (he'd asked Roxy's answering machine if Roxy would go out for brunch with him on Sunday, and she'd called back and said yes) after the audition, Joel and Gloria sat by the stage testing mike levels for the first run of *More Than Enough.* The F.A.C. contact, Joan someone, had asked for the show to start at seven. At seven-fifteen Todd bounced over from behind the stage and signaled Joel to start the intro music. He sat down, panting. "There are a hundred and fifty men in three-piece suits out there," he said. "They've come from all over the state to this F.A.C. gig, and they've been in heavy-duty conferences all day. The Tampa ballet society entertained them last night, and the Jacksonville orchestra the night before."

"Who?" Gloria leaned over Joel to hiss. "They had who?"

"Tampa ballet! Jacksonville ork!"

Gloria put her head in her hands. "They must have the completely wrong idea about us," she said. "They must think this is real theater."

"They probably at least think we've rehearsed," Joel glanced sideways at Gloria. She gazed up at the stage, her hands clasped in front of her, a pleading look on her face. She hadn't bothered with any makeup for several days, and, judging by the circles under her eyes, had skipped some sleep, too.

"We've done nothing *but* rehearse," she whispered without looking at him. "But it just wasn't enough time. Last night Roxy forgot her lines, twice!"

"We could always commit hari-kari," Joel said.

"They've never even used the set before." Gloria's nails were all bitten away. "I told them to improvise the blocking if they had to."

"C'mon, what's the worst that could happen?" Todd kept his voice low enough that they couldn't hear him onstage, where Roxy's first joke had just fallen flat. "Roxy'll fuck up, the others will laugh, the audience will boo, and we'll all go home and get drunk."

"And we'll lose our funding for next summer."

"Then we'll get drunk next summer, too."

Joel felt sorry for her. "It'll be okay," he said. "Roxy knows her lines." He hoped they'd all get drunk anyway. He imagined comforting Roxy if the show bombed.

"Cut the sound!" Gloria elbowed him and he faded out the background noise. "Follow your cues, for Christ's sake!"

Embarrassed, Joel held the penlight over his book and waited for his next cue. All he had to do was turn the tape recorder off and on for background noises: a crowd, birds, blood dripping. Then, in the final scene, when the peasants got married and Roxy got beheaded, he played the circus music tape. He had never understood that part. "Hey, Todd," he whispered.

Todd shaded his eyes, trying to see the faces of the audience. "They hate it," he said. "There's only one woman, and she's the only one smiling. She's in the front row. See her?"

Joel looked out. A thirtyish lady with loose brown hair leaned forward, her head on one side. The men around her looked on dubiously. One was reading. "Why is there circus music at the end?" he asked. "It seems a little weird."

"It's supposed to show the farce of it all," said Todd. "The audience is supposed to see how ridiculous the social rules are. But I don't think this bunch will get it."

"Shit!" Gloria knew they shouldn't have done this. Roxy had dropped a line and was muttering aimlessly, frozen in the lights. In the audience, someone coughed, several people shifted. Gloria nudged Joel. "Save her."

Joel called out the line: "'This is nothing but nonsense,' " but Roxy had begun speaking again. Another actor picked up and started moving again, and Joel relaxed. "That was close."

"That was *it*," Gloria said. "She just skipped two scenes. Get ready to start the last tape."

Joel dug through his pile of tapes. With a little fast forwarding and some loud clicking which interrupted a dramatic pause onstage, he got the sound ready.

Todd dimmed the lights, and then brought up the festival colors for the last scene. The audience roused itself to attention again, attracted by the reds and blues on the actors' faces. There was some laughter at the first joke, and someone gasped as the guillotine was rolled out.

Gloria grabbed Joel's hand. "Maybe it'll work!" she said. "Maybe they're just stupid enough to think this is how it's supposed to be."

"Bring up the sound," said Todd. "Let's make it crazy. Hit Pem over the head with it."

Joel blasted the tape player so high he could no longer hear the actors. He watched them in pantomime, fascinated. Roxy moved towards the guillotine, swung around and said something. The audience laughed. Someone applauded.

"Keep the green," Gloria almost yelled to Todd. "They like it. Keep it silly. It's working!"

Roxy took her last steps upstage, protesting her death. Playing up to the audience, she waved her arms. More laughter. Joel was prouder of her than of

anyone in his whole life. She was saving the show, saving Street Theatre! And he was having lunch with her tomorrow! He wanted to clap, hoped desperately that the audience would. He looked out and saw excited faces.

Then a scream cut through the music: Roxy's flailing had knocked the cardboard guillotine over, and it wobbled dangerously near the edge of the stage, ready to tip into the crowd at any second. Gloria jumped up, then froze. "Save it!" she yelled onstage.

Joel heard Gloria's yell as he was looking at the actors. They looked paralyzed. Before he could think, he was onstage, pounding towards the guillotine and righting it. He got it steady in a minute, but there was a terrible hush in the room. He turned around. "A hundred and fifty men in three-piece suits," he thought.

"Save it!" He wasn't sure if Gloria really said it or if he imagined it. "Do something real!"

The only thing he wanted to do was get Roxy and go. He leapt into the air and landed on his haunches, like a frog. Three leaps and he was by Roxy, gazing up at her with reptilian adoration. She was laughing, trying not to, and sputtering, "No, no, I don't deserve this!" —her last line. Joel stood up, lifted his knee, reached his hand under it and shook hers. In his left hand he pantomimed squeezing a ball-bulbed horn, and honked at the same time. He gave the horn to Roxy to hold, pinched her ass and ran to the two peasants, waiting in each other's arms to be married. He kissed the man and shoved the woman under the guillotine. It descended, and she screamed. Joel snatched Roxy's hand and fled offstage in the blackout.

The first thing Joel noticed was that he was covered with sweat. The next was that he was still touching Roxy, and that an incredible amount of noise was coming from the audience. He made out booing and hissing.

"They're cheering!" said Roxy. Joel heard applause, too, and chairs scraping back and doors swinging open. When he looked out through a hole in the flat, half of the audience had gone. The other half was still seated, some stony-faced, some cheering.

"Where's the director?" The woman from the audience had her program with her; Joel wondered if she wanted an autograph.

"Here," Gloria looked the way she looked the time she'd walked in on Joel and Todd.

Gloria held her breath, ready to sacrifice Joel. It might have been bad without him, but it hadn't been terrible. If they lost their funding she would sue his parents.

The brunette woman shook Gloria's hand. "Amazing," she said. "I don't know how you do it."

"I didn't," Gloria showed her palms. "I had nothing to do with it."

"It's not to everyone's taste, of course," continued the woman. "But I thought it was so original. I had no idea when you said it was a political farce..." She turned to Joel. "I really enjoyed your performance.

"No," said Joel. "Really. Gloria did it all. I just do what she tells me."

After a case of champagne, Gloria, the cast, and crew were uproarious in the backyard of her apartment. "I forgive you," she said, hugging Joel. "Just don't ever do it again."

Joel was embarrassed. Roxy and Todd had left the party half an hour ago, and he'd heard nothing but praise from everyone else since then. "I don't even remember what I did," he said. "Can we talk about something else?"

"Later," said Gloria, and Joel felt even stranger.

He remained confused until everyone else had left and Gloria led him inside. "I want to take you to bed with me," she announced.

Joel was surprised. Despite the drink, the stories he'd heard of other parties, and the flirting he'd done with Roxy, he hadn't really expected anything to happen that night. He wasn't sure he wanted it to—with Gloria? She seemed so androgynous, being so big.

"If you like." She drew closer to him and suddenly he saw that she had another side, a sensuous side: the grandmother in *Pippin.*

For answer, he kissed her, and while it wasn't great, it was deep and it wasn't all they were going to do. For the first time in his life, Joel didn't have to fight forward. His only worry was that he had drunk too much to get hard. He thought he and Todd had killed a bottle between them. Gloria broke off the kiss to rummage in the refrigerator. Joel contemplated her bottom. It certainly was large, there was no denying it. His first lover would have the proportions of a dolphin. But that wasn't necessarily a bad thing, just unexpected.

"I saved this for us." She withdrew a last bottle of champagne.

"What?"

"I put it away when we got here." Gloria picked up a used plastic tumbler, rinsed it out, and led Joel down the hallway. "I figured you deserved a reward for saving the show."

Her bedroom was a haze of purple and feathers. Movie posters covered the walls, and little erotic etchings in gold frames decorated the dressing table. Her bed, unmade in the center of the room, had burgundy satin sheets and a canopy ruffle around the top. Joel sat on the edge.

"Can you open this?" Gloria handed him the bottle, which had a plastic cork. She wanted him occupied while she got undressed. Once she was in bed, everything went smoothly, but exposing her body for the first time to someone made her nervous. Crossing Joel as if she were going over to the dressing table, Gloria removed her pants. Her legs were better than her torso. Then she took off her bra, slipping the straps down her arms and leaving the loose shirt on. In her shirt and underpants, she climbed onto the mattress behind Joel. She hoped she was doing the right thing, but she hadn't thought about it very much. She knew she would like it; she liked being touched and she liked making men feel good. She liked the way they responded, unquestioning, enthusiastic.

The cork burst and Joel put the foaming neck into his mouth.

"Here." Gloria handed him the glass. "We'll share."

But when he had filled the glass she wouldn't take it. From behind his back, she told him to drink it. She massaged his neck.

Joel sipped, trying to relax his mind as well as his back. Gloria's hand felt tight under his shirt, so he straightened up and took it off. He didn't know if it was the right time to do that. Was he supposed to undress her or did they do it together or what? Her hands felt good, except when a nail scratched by accident. "You don't have to rub so hard."

Gloria didn't respond, but kept kneading, and Joel wondered if he had hurt her feelings. Maybe you weren't supposed to criticize. Maybe she was upset that he had started to undress already. He twisted around to see her face. She had taken off her pants. He put his arms around her shoulders.

She took the embrace, but leaned him back on the bed. "Relax." She rubbed his chest for a while, then straddled him, her knees below his hips.

Joel realized that getting hard wasn't going to be the problem. The problem was he didn't know what he should be doing. "Could I have some more champagne?"

"Can you drink lying down?" Gloria took a mouthful of wine, then put her lips to Joel's.

Joel tried to swallow and kiss her at the same time, but the alcohol bubbled up his nose, choking him. He coughed, pushed Gloria away and sat up. He hacked and gasped, making terrible noises, and felt himself going red.

Gloria clapped his back. "Try to breathe from your stomach."

This struck Joel as ridiculous, since he couldn't breathe at all, and his strangled laughter came in gasps. He felt harder pounding between his shoulder blades, and champagne came into his nose and mouth, then his throat cleared. "Sorry," Joel gasped, his face slowly turning back to its normal color. "It went up my nose. Do you have Kleenex?" After honking a bit, Joel felt better. "I won't try that again for a while. It didn't work."

"Hardly anything ever does." Gloria sat up, propped herself against a pillow, and used her feet to pull up the sheet. She looked straight ahead, clicking one nail against her teeth.

"You can't drink lying down. I'm sorry. I mean it was a nice idea. It...I like it." Joel wasn't clear on why Gloria had retreated. "Wait a minute, I thought you bit all your nails off before the show."

"I did. They're fake." Gloria splayed her small, plump hand, like matches stuck into an orange, wiggling the pinky. "This one's real. Someone told me if you quit biting one, you can quit chewing them all."

"Guess it's not true, huh?"

"Nothing works." Gloria pulled the cover over her stomach and tucked it around herself. "When will I learn? It especially wouldn't work with you." Joel's mishap had more than deflated her enthusiasm—it had reminded her of how

young he was. Anyone who'd never drunk from someone's lips had no business in her bed. He was too young to hope for love from.

"I liked getting massaged." Joel put a hand on Gloria's shoulder, then withdrew. "Where'd you learn how to do that?"

Gloria clapped a hand to her forehead. The world, she thought, had too many awkward adolescents. Sometimes she felt like one of them. "I should've known something like that—" She shook her head and reached for what champagne Joel hadn't spilled. "It's like when, tonight, you were up on stage. I was looking up, and it was like watching my whole life flash before me. No, it was like watching God. You know, I have this idea about God. He really is an old man with a white beard, but he isn't Santa Claus. He's kind of a crazy old guy, and he—his sense of humor is a little sick. He's really tired of watching us mess up the earth, so you know what he does? He likes to test us. He likes to trip us up. You think you're going along in your life and you think you're finally doing the right things and on the right road and God goes, 'Ha!' and chunks a big rock in your way. You have a car accident or your show bombs, I mean really bombs, or you lose your job and you blame yourself, but it's all this rock, and all you can do is struggle around it, kind of throw one leg over it and keep trucking, and after you get over that first obstacle you say wow, thank God, I made it, and He goes whump and puts up a barbed-wire fence in front of you." Gloria swirled the tumbler of champagne, trying to revive some of the fizz.

Joel had plucked an ostrich feather from a vase, and waved it over his face. "That's interesting," he said. "That's the first theological theory I ever heard that made sense to me."

"Ha. No. You're like God, see. I was watching you on stage and it's like you're, all the time, making hurdles for everyone. Especially yourself. You just can't—I don't know what's—"

Joel tried to fling the plume down, but it wafted gently to the floor. "So I'm an accident waiting to happen, huh?" He realized that he wasn't going to lose his virginity for at least the next hour.

"No, it's not that negative. I just never know what's going to happen next with you. Everything's, oh shit, what am I trying to say? I like you Joel, you're a good guy. And you really saved the show tonight... but you just happened to save it. You went up there with the right impulses but you had no idea what you were doing."

"And you always want to know what's going to happen next." Joel propped himself up on his side, facing Gloria. "You like to control it."

"I know, I'm too powerful or something. I do try to control everyone. But I can teach you."

"No!" Joel slapped the bedspread, then put his hand on Gloria's arm. He felt more comfortable since they had quit fooling around. "I never know what's going on, but you do. My life is a mess, but you can shape it up. That's what's good about you."

"Control. Discipline," said Gloria. "Acting is control. You have to learn to use all that energy the right way."

Joel threw off the covers and sat up next to Gloria. "You're all right," he said. "I like how you know what's going on. You make things happen, I let things happen to me. But I guess we ..." His stomach sank the way the feather had, swirling from side to side. It felt like the queasy, sinking feeling he had when planes landed. "We're not really right—you shouldn't be messing around with me." He knew the decision had already been made, and not by him. But he felt the need to agree, to voice a hesitant, confused "no" to the sexual offer. Even if the offer had been rescinded when he choked on the champagne, and even if it might be reinstated, later, he needed to protect himself, to proceed with caution. Sex might be nice with Roxy or someone else, or maybe it wouldn't. No rush to find out; having had the chance, he could say no. He was on the runway, fast but slowing down.

"Have you ever slept with someone?" Gloria lay down, pulling the covers over her shoulders. "And I do mean sleep. It's nice. We could—friends can do that." She worked her feet to warm the cool sheets, no longer interested in anything but rest. Joel had said he liked her, which was enough for one night, or even for one summer.

She and Joel both moved closer, to share a pillow; they held hands but kept their bodies a few inches apart. The champagne they'd drunk was going flat inside them. Joel fell asleep first.

Deborah Shouse

Watching

I see them watching me. The old white ones are scared. The young white ones want me, but they're scared too. They watch, silent and sneaky as cats. I feel them wondering, what it's like to have someone so tall, so mean and so black.

"You're bad-looking, and you know it," my wife Lottie always tells me.

The black women are another story. They practically knock me over with their hot eager breaths.

"I have to watch you every minute," Lottie says. But of course, she can't.

The old ones clutch their pocketbooks. I pick up a pack of gum, and they watch to make sure it doesn't slide into my pocket.

"What do they think I am?" I complain as I hand Lottie the milk and sit down at the kitchen table.

"A thief." Lottie's white teeth flash against the red of her lipstick. She looks good for being six months pregnant. She moves lean, not waddling like some of them.

"You keeping Cal while I go to exercise class tonight?" She brings me a cup of coffee.

"Naw. Get a sitter. I'm going to Keller's."

Lottie covers her teeth with a frown. She doesn't like me to go drinking. But she knows better than to argue in the morning.

I watch Cal make mountains in his oatmeal. Orange juice dribbles down his chin. He wipes his face on his pajama sleeve. I wonder why Lottie lets him act so slobby. But I guess Cal is like me. She can't watch him every minute, either.

"Toast is burned," I say. Lottie doesn't stop loading the dishwasher.

I finish my coffee and head for the door.

"What time will you be home?" Lottie looks at the dirty cups as she talks.

"Before ten." I shut the door and let the screen slam. The back rear tire is low again. I pull into a station and pump in air.

"Hey boy, you buying gas or what?" a man smoking a cigar yells from his Lincoln.

When I stand up, the man looks worried.

"I'm buying gas." I make my voice harsh as a chain saw. I pump a dollar's worth. I clean the front windshield. I even wash off the headlights.

My Daddy would have shoved the cigar down the guy's throat. Daddy was even bigger than I am: six feet six, muscles popping everywhere, scars crashing down his face and chest.

Daddy's temper got him killed young. Me, I want to live awhile. I can't care so hard about things. I don't even cuss the guy as I drive to work.

I go straight to the locker room, and put on a clean uniform. I grab some business cards. Today, I'm in the suburbs. I'll have to show plenty of I.D. plus a big smile for the privilege of spraying their houses for bugs.

"Have a great day, Will," the receptionist says. I see her watching, wanting me. I see the danger if I smile back. I don't want to be fired over a white girl.

"Sure thing." I don't even look her way, as I head to the truck.

"Don't you feel dumb riding in a truck with a bug on top?" my brother Roland yells. He's sitting on Mama's porch, having a beer. "Don't you feel dumb being out of work?" I walk in past him, and give Mama a good morning kiss. I pour a cup of coffee and move the cat off my chair.

Roland follows me.

"I'll get something in a couple weeks." He doesn't take being out of work seriously. He has no woman, no kid. Mama will let him stay forever.

"You be kind to your brother, you hear, Will." Mama lays her swollen arms across the kitchen table.

There's no use answering back. She always takes Roland's side. I read the sports section while Mama smokes and listens to the radio.

"You need anything when I come tomorrow?"

She turns down the farm report so she can hear me.

"Cigarettes. And don't get those fancy kinds with filters." Mama hands me her ashtray to empty.

"See you later, Mama." I kiss her big sweaty cheek.

"You're plain confused," Roland tells me, as I go back to the truck. "You work all day, you go home every night. You ain't got nothing."

"I got a job, a kid, and Lottie."

"What's so special about Lottie?" Roland twists his pinkie ring so the diamond shows.

"I like her." I'm not in the mood to argue. It's hard to win a fight with a cockroach sewn on your left pocket.

"You could have any woman. You're missing out." Roland doesn't understand about sticking to something. He has my Daddy's temper in a body smaller than Mama's.

"I like Lottie," I say again.

"You need some real women." Roland offers me a cigarette from his gold case, even though he knows I quit last October. He brushes a speck off the pants Mama irons so neat.

I drive off without saying good-bye. At the red light, I look into the next car. A woman smiles. Her black eyes gleam. She likes what she sees. Cool, strong, mean. Roland is right: I could have anyone.

A maid answers the door at my first house. I don't even show my card.

"One ran over my shoe in the kitchen this morning." Her big breasts wobble when she shudders. She rubs her hands on her thighs, and leads me to the kitchen, churning her butt lazily. "Spray good. Let me know if you need anything." She unbuttons my shirt with her eyes and marches out of the room, holding a can of Pledge like it meant something.

I watch her go, then start my work. I always do a good job. Why not? They pay me to do it. Besides, if bugs appear before the month is out, I have to come back for free.

I smile and show my I.D. at every door. Only my last house won't open up.

"Mommy, there's a black giant outside," I hear a squeaky little voice say.

"Let me see your identification," a woman commands.

I show my card.

The door opens.

"Please work quickly." The woman is blond, and nicely dressed. "I'm expecting guests soon."

"Yes Ma'am." Something makes me look at her. She is watching me. She is as beautiful as Lottie.

She leads me to the kitchen. Her lips are peach-colored, her skin like expensive cream. She straightens a ceramic duck on the counter while I spray. Her heels clunk on the wooden floor as she follows me to the living room. She watches me. She is so beautiful I'm scared to look back. I don't want to get fired over a white woman.

She arranges the magazines in the den, letting her hair float around her face, licking her lips as I spray the room.

"Mommy, where are you?" The kid runs in holding a doll and a cookie.

"I've told you, Melissa, you must eat in the kitchen."

If we talked that sweet to Cal, he'd still be scribbling purple crayon on the wall.

When she leads me upstairs, I can hardly breathe for the tightness of her skirt. She sits on the bed while I work, not even bothering to hide the silky white panties lying on the covers. I move slow, watching, waiting for her to tell me what she wants.

But she talks only with breasts, hips, and a flick of tongue.

Her fingers tease my palm when she hands me the check.

"I appreciate your efficiency." She brushes my arm as she opens the door. I stand on the porch, wondering what I should do.

"You must always watch service men, Melissa," I hear her say, as she closes the door. "You must make sure they do a good job."

I want to bust the door open, and take her into my arms. I know she would melt against me, soft as the butter Lottie pours over my pancakes. But I get into the truck, quick and head for Keller's.

"Hey Will." Rita looks at me like I was the last beer on a desert island, and brings me a draw. "Hard day?"

"Yeah." I take a long drink.

Rita leans over close. "You don't come in so often anymore."

She strokes the side of my face with a dark hand.

"Been busy." My voice is hoarse. Rita looks good. She stares into my eyes. She shoots lightning down my legs.

"You gonna be here a while?"

"Maybe," I say.

"I have a break in fifteen minutes." She walks over to another customer, swinging her hips like a cheap purse.

I drink my beer, trying to blur the picture of that blond. I think about Lottie, bouncing into her exercise tights, pulling the elastic under her thick tummy, getting ready to stretch and sweat so she'll look good for me after the kid comes. Lottie is great. Lottie's the best.

That blond is the kind of woman that got my Daddy killed. She wants it, but she's scared.

I'll find out how scared when I go back next week to spray again. The bugs will still be there. I didn't use any chemicals. I didn't do my usual best. How could I with her looking at me like I was a fresh-grilled t-bone steak?

My beer is gone. Rita flashes hot glances at me from the other end of the bar. Her teeth are dull but her body's fine. I try to think about Lottie, but as Rita slinks towards me, I'm watching her.

Richard Neumann

Dream Wars

Then the porch glider squeaks. My grandmother pronounces each word written in the newspaper slowly and loudly as though at this very moment she has just become aware of her voice. The caption printed below the young soldier's picture amuses her. So she repeats it. Bobby Duncan decorated for gallantry. As my sister closes her book to listen, the glider slows to a stop, and my brother, rocking gently on his little rocker, softly hums the sounds of the syllables. What worries me, though, is my grandfather's sigh. When he hears my grandmother's voice, he holds the glass of vodka at his lips as though he were just understanding her for the first time.

All of this, the glider story, is purely imaginary. I left that place years ago when I was just a girl. Yet often as I sit in the park, hanging onto my little flights of fantasy, I return to my grandparents' house. To the scene of the crime, one might say. Sometimes I find myself in the living room staring at the photographs that rest on the spinet. Occasionally my grandmother wipes the dust from their frames. And my sister, Paula, sneaks in, usually on Saturdays, and plays "Heart and Soul," but my baby brother, Gregory, stays on the back porch, rocking ever so gently on his little rocker as he waits for his chance to steal into the alley. My grandfather—I could never forget him, not in a million years—leans on the spinet in the early morning hours. He stretches his bony fingers around my photograph, leaving smudged impressions on the glass. He whispers my name into the soft light.

Now as I sit in the park once again, I hold the newspaper that I pretend my grandmother reads back home where the porch glider swings. I trace the outline of Bobby's picture, the one on page 12. He looks so young in that uniform, I think, like a boy playing at war. I can hardly believe what I'm reading. The caption printed below his picture seems too unreal. Decorated for gallantry, I say out loud. And I want to call to someone, even to the balloon man who wheels his cart into the park, and tell him to look at the caption. But I don't. I only stare at the balloons that bob on the wind above him. Then I turn away.

Years ago, ages it seems, when I vacationed one summer at my grandparents' house, Bobby Duncan chased me all over the neighborhood. I was just a girl still in school back then. Whenever we were alone, Bobby tried to slip his hand under my dress. Of course, I was a bit frightened, especially of my grandfather, who would have killed both of us if he had known. At first I kept Bobby in check, even though there was something inside me that wanted him. Finally, however, I decided to go with him into our garage. We'd be safe in there from my grandfather. I was sure of it. Bobby standing there, kind of blushing, looked almost like Gary Cooper, I swear. With his hand on the door handle, he stared down at the ground while his shoe traced a slow arc in the dust.

"Shucks, Ma'am," he could have said. "Shucks, you reckon we should?"

I nodded.

Then he looked me straight in the eyes. "Yep," he said. "Yep, I reckon we should."

Over the years I've grown fond of Paula and Gregory, as an *older* sister sometimes does. And they, well, in their own way, they wonder about a sister they only know by fantasy. I am still to them that girl in the photograph who left years ago wearing a paisley printed dress and my grandmother's old, brown sweater. On the back porch, where the glider once again swings, I like to imagine that Gregory rolls his tee-shirt between his fingers as he slowly rocks. He looks toward the backyard gate and stares off into the alley. My grandmother calls it a forbidden place. As usual he rocks alone, wearing a small, black beanie and his shoes dangle over the rocker's edge. His thoughts are his, and he keeps them, as he always does, to himself. Once I made Paula tease him about that and she gave him a nickname which stuck. She calls him Dopey. And still, of course, she teases. So my baby brother, Dopey, dreams. And sometimes in his imagination he hears music. It sings in his mind. It intoxicates him with its sweet notes, overpowering him like some drug, and compels him, regardless of my grandmother's warnings, to break through the backyard gate.

As he moves from his rocker to the work closet, Dopey hears another song in his mind, so he whistles it. He holds a broom in his hand and scribbles with a magic marker a face on the bristles. He plays a game of likeness. When he returns to the porch, he turns the tables on Paula; and teasing her, he waves her image in her face. She only brushes her hand across her forehead and looks at the face colored on the broom. Its coal black eyes and crooked mouth bounce.

"Dopey, what is that thing supposed to be?" she asks.

"Paula," he answers.

She doesn't understand, however. She sets her book aside and asks him again. "But what, pray tell, is that silly thing supposed to be, Dopey dear?"

Dopey only grins.

Paula, her curiosity now aroused, inches forward, her green eyes staring into the coal black dots.

When he finally opened the garage door, we're back to this story again, the whole truth and nothing but it, Bobby stared at me. He seemed scared. At first I wasn't sure of what. I didn't say anything, however. I only took him by the hand. With that, he looked a bit surprised, as though he had never expected me to go along with his little game. Then I led him into the garage. The odor of used motor oil, I remember, pinched at my nose, almost making me sneeze. I told him that it was all right. Then I realized that he was afraid of my grandfather. I had almost forgotten about the old man for some reason, even though he'd warned Bobby once. Told him that he'd really be sorry if he tried any funny stuff with his little girl.

"See?" I said. "See? The chevy's gone. My grandfather's at work. He won't be home for hours. Don't worry," I added, trying to reassure him. "He won't hurt you. It'll be all right. Honest, Bobby."

So I locked the door. Then we sat down. Bobby tried to laugh. As we leaned against the wall, he moved closer to me. The cement floor felt cool. Now getting his courage back, he told me that he wanted me, that he always had. And slowly he slid the paisley printed dress up over my knees. I had never done this before, gone all the way, so I did my best to seem as though I had. I even attempted a weak smile. When he rubbed his hand along my thigh, I closed my eyes. Then I wrapped my arms around his neck and pulled him closer. He pressed his lips against mine, very gently at first, then he parted them with his tongue as he searched inside of my mouth. I felt his fingers slip past the elastic band of my panties. At that moment my hips arched forward.

Yet back on the porch, my grandfather looks over at Dopey and takes a sip from his glass. He sets it onto the table and coughs. The glass rolls around the tabletop, then drops to the floor, going crash. My grandmother rises slowly as though she's been through this routine of his before, like some windup doll. The old man peeks around Dopey. He tries to smile. And Dopey stands there in front of the glider, bouncing the broom.

"Hey, Dope-a-roo, what you got there, Kid?"

Dopey only bounces the broom up and down. My grandfather wipes his eyes, then closes them.

"What in the everloving name of sweet Jesus is that thing supposed to be?"

"Shh," my grandmother hushes.

He opens his eyes again and points his finger. "Shh, yourself." Then he laughs.

"Watch what you say in front of the children, Martin." Dopey doesn't care, however. He only pounds the broom on the floor. Paula watches her image bounce up and down. Finally, after giving all of this some thought, she gives in and plays Dopey's game. As she claps her hands, she sings:

Hear Ye. Hear Ye.
The court's in session,
now.
Here comes the judge,
now.
Here comes the judge.

The evening sun seems to press inside the garage. I imagine its heavy weight sinking down and splitting the walls inside. An evening breeze whisks around the porch and tugs at Paula's hair. My grandfather muddles his thoughts, wondering

if he drank more than yesterday. His thoughts lose him, however, so he stumbles into the pantry to fetch his bottle. My grandmother busies herself, cursing at him under her breath, while she cleans up sweeping the shattered glass with the image of Paula into a dust pan. Twilight pours into the sky.

Then everything is the same. The glider squeaks under their weight. Dopey rocks in his little rocker, rocking gently. As usual he waits for his chance, no matter how slim it might be, to steal away. My grandmother opens the newspaper. This is her favorite game. And over the years she hasn't missed an issue. She reads the names in the column, as though she'll find one that might offer her hope.

"Alverman, Beirman, Beite."

Then she reads the name: Foreman, Herman S. The name seems to stick on her lips, but she presses them together again, saying:

Foreman. She looks up almost delighted. Yet there's a note of sadness in her voice. "Martin, do you remember Herman Foreman?"

He squints at her. Behind the lids his eyes seem to float. His mouth hangs open as though he wanted to catch the trailing syllable, chew and digest it. Then he spits and turns away, ignoring her. But my grandmother repeats the name. He runs his hands through his gray hair and pushes it from his eyes. Finally he resigns. "Yeah, he worked for the dairy," he answers. "We used to deliver milk together, back before the war."

My grandmother remembers.

The old man continues. "I remember one time when we ran out of ice," he says. "We sneaked into Old Man Murphy's wagon to steal some of his, and Hermie got kind of spooked I guess when we was lifting the ice so we wound up dropping it all over the damned street."

My grandmother smiles. For a moment I'm surprised. But my grandmother isn't. She only puts her finger to her lips as she looks at Paula and Dopey. My grandfather takes another drink of vodka, which seems to whet his memories.

"Hermie goofed with those pieces of ice so long that Old Man Murphy came out of the store and grabbed him by the back of the shirt," he says. "He walloped him a good one too. Geez, I can still see the look on Hermie's face when the old man started shaking him. Eyes bugging out of his head, like some mouse in a trap, I tell you," he adds. "Couldn't stop laughing. I thought I was going to die."

He pauses and whispers. "Hermie Foreman, what a character." Then he stares off at the sky. "So what about him, what about Hermie?"

My grandmother pokes her finger at the name in the newspaper to verify her thoughts. Paula pushes the paper's edge down. She looks to where the finger points. At the head of the column is another name. It stands alone in bold letters, its black type rising above the white page. My grandmother swallows.

"It says right here, Martin, that he died Saturday. Heart attack, it was," she says. "Guess he'll be laid out tomorrow."

My grandfather breathes out deeply, almost sighing. And she turns her gaze away from him and stares at the garage. Her fingers fidget with her dress.

"He was only 63," she says.
The old man sucks in air and nods.

Bobby told me that it was his first time. I told him that it was mine too. We didn't do much, though. We didn't even go all the way. It was only enough to make me know. As I held onto him, I felt him rub his fingers over and over inside my panties until I felt his breath on my neck. I closed my eyes again. I even whispered, softly moaning something, mostly nonsense, when he pulled my panties down, and I remember, as he inched himself forward, struggling to press himself between my legs, I called out his name once. It was then that we heard the handle on the garage door jiggle, then open.

Yet I can't face all of that right now, although it's getting late in the park. So I imagine my grandmother on the porch glider. She closes her eyes, then looks for someone. Softly she calls his name. The name whirls around and around in her mind until she sees a room. Its windows are draped with a dull, black cloth, trimmed in striking purple. People huddle around a long, stained box as they stare down. The whistle of a tea kettle in the distance sharply rises with the name in her mind. The box, like a wooden planter, holds the lifeless body of a man, hands folded across chest and eyes sealed tightly, seemingly sleeping, but gone, a solitary figure in the cold air of night. She thinks about his moustache and wonders if it will grow in the dark without light. She remembers learning in school that plants need light to grow, yet her thoughts swim in a sea and her eyes watch through the mist, and she feels a chill when the loneliness of the grave spills its bitter vapor when she reaches out and touches the man's hands, shaking them. Then she calls him from his sleep and whispers his name once again: Papa. But he remains silent, rigid in his bed.

She sees her mama seated on the couch. Her sister, while her mama tugs at a handkerchief, holds her in both arms, and the whistle of the tea kettle fades into nothing. Tears run from her mama's eyes, staining her cheeks. On the glider, my grandmother's eyes too now float in a sea of pink, puffy flesh.

Paula looks up at her and laughs. "What's the matter with you, gramma dear?" she asks. But she catches herself and senses my grandmother's sorrow. She clutches her arm, hugging and kissing it, and snaps the spell to wake my grandmother from her sleep.

"Gramma, I love you," she whispers.

Then my grandmother folds Paula into her arms and kisses her gently. My grandfather, however, sinks deeper and deeper into his solitude. He's all alone with his vodka, his memories, and his wishes, and he softly murmurs my name.

Dopey's mind is in the alley where he runs wildly, slapping a stick against fence posts. But he hears a voice. The voice echoes down a tunnel, beckoning him faintly, then he hears it more clearly, and finally his thoughts are harnessed.

"Dopey, do you want to play Parchesi with us?" my grandmother asks.

He looks at her as if weighing the question but turns to stare at the floor.

"Okay, you don't have to, but you should come over here and sit by me. C'mon," she coaxes.

He doesn't move.

"Boy, Dopey dear doesn't know how to play, gramma. But we do know that he likes to play, don't we?" Paula teases. "It isn't parlor games he wants, but alley games and Gypsies. Isn't that right, Dopey dear?"

Paula sets up the game. They place their players in the corners of the board.

"Dopey, you should have been a little Gypsy," my grandmother says.

"Gypsy, Gypsy," Paula pipes in.

Gypsies are my grandmother's bogie men. She tells her Papa's tale and changes a few things here and there to make it fit the day: when the sun goes down, it leaves in its dark shadows the Gypsies. They hide in the alley with knives in their teeth, waiting for a stray child, and when one comes, they leap out, flailing their arms in the air, and slash madly, striking the child in the neck. My grandmother only tells it to keep Dopey in the yard. And she built a metal barricade, a gate, to strengthen her tale—so she says.

Now as I sit in the park, watching the balloons bounce above the balloon man, I trace the outline of Bobby's picture in the newspaper. And he looks so young, I think, like a boy playing at war. I still can hardly believe what I'm reading. The caption printed below his picture somehow seems too unreal. Bobby Duncan decorated for gallantry. Of course, I've saved all of his letters, and sometimes, as though in a dream, I find myself singing that funny little song, "Soldier boy, oh, my little soldier boy, I'll be true to you." So still I wait. Some day, I'm sure of it, he'll return. Then everything will be all right. The war can't last forever. They never do. Only ours, the private ones, the dream wars, go on and on until one side gives up the ghost and surrenders. After all, we are the dream. So mine goes on. Although I'm years, ages it seems, from that moment, I still see my grandfather standing in the doorway of the garage. This battle of ours always ends the same way, of course. I run to the door, then pound on him with my fists.

"I'm not your little girl," I shout. "I'm Bobby's."

The old man looks at my panties, which are still lying on the cement floor. His face works itself into a rage. And Bobby, poor Bobby, he's scared, really scared, when he sees the old man shove me against the wall. Bobby crawls toward the doorway. My grandfather slaps him, then kicks him again and again until Bobby, now with tears in his eyes, slumps down onto the floor and presses his hands into the hot urine pouring between his thighs. Breathing heavily, my grandfather eyes me up and down. Then he turns on me.

"Your're nothing but a slut. That's what you are," he says. "A goddamn no good slut."

Then he spits.

"I disown you."

With that his rage takes over. He slaps me harder and harder. But I just stand there, defying him, because the battlelines are drawn. And I will not surrender. Then he tears at the front of my paisley printed dress. He scratches, like some trapped animal, at my breasts. I don't budge, however. So he screams at me.

"Here, Goddamn it."

He grabs his crotch.

"Is this what you want?"

I cry out to Bobby. And I retreat out of the garage and into the alley. And I'm gone.

Then my grandmother built the gate.

It stands like a wall. Its black bars have been forged and welded at a smithy's shop. It is a thick network of spears piercing empty space. It is bolted to a fat, wooden post by three rusty hinges. Each is badly in need of oil. The gate has a sliding bolt which slides from the lock into an opposing post. It can only be opened if it is pushed up at the lock. It can easily be repaired, but my grandmother leaves it angled to keep Dopey inside.

My grandmother shakes the Parchesi dice and lets them spill onto the board. As she moves her token past the others, Paula grabs the dice. Over in the corner Dopey watches their moves and heads toward the door. He fastens his hand over the knob, turns it, and pulls the door slowly. He opens it just enough, not wanting to draw attention to his maneuvers, and squeezes his body through. When he has pushed through, he turns and looks toward the glider. The door closes. As the lock meets the keeper, he shuts it.

He faces the steps below, then takes them, one by one, and at each he feels behind him a force. A force that seems to draw him back. But he continues. His feet touch the ground. On the lawn with his shoulders hunched up, he takes long, exaggerated steps, and each foot touches down, tip-toeing. He holds his breath, fighting the suspense, expecting to hear a voice.

Halfway across the yard, still tiptoeing, his eyes wide and glaring, Dopey steals a quick glance over his shoulder. He grins wildly and toes the final stretch, and the huge, massive network of bars presents itself.

Dopey stops. He stands before my grandmother's gate. This is his little war, and he fights it constantly. His heart now pounds going two-forty. So he covers it with his hands to muffle the sound. He stands there looking over his shoulder, when suddenly my grandmother's voice rings out. He freezes. Then he hears Paula groan. My grandmother has passed her tokens on her last throw. Once again all is quiet.

He reaches for the lock and his thoughts nearly make him dizzy. His sweaty hand trembles when it feels the cold, black iron. Only dice tumbling on cardboard rattles through the air. He reaches his right hand under the lock, shifts his weight to that side, and pushes with all his might. The gate squeaks. He moves his left arm across his face until his hand meets the bolt. He eases it, freeing the

bolt. It snaps back and clicks. Now the gate is unlocked. Suddenly, one hand begins slapping his forehead while the other one swings up and down. As his feet start to mark time, tip-toeing, he laughs hysterically. He laughs so loudly that Paula and my grandmother look out to the yard. And, seeing this mad spectacle, Paula giggles and loses her grip on the dice. But my grandmother is on her feet, standing at the porch screen. She makes the sign of the cross and prays to God. Even my grandfather is shaken from his vodka stupor. He rubs his eyes and takes a drink. Then in a single leap he is at the screen next to my grandmother.

"Get out of there!" he hollers.

But my grandmother's overpowers his. "Dopey! Dopey!" she screams.

This last blast makes Dopey senseless. He tears his hand away from his forehead, and with all his strength, still grinning madly, he strikes at the gate, knocking it open. The alley unravels before him. The gate bounces against the post, and it wails. And as it wails my grandmother wails even louder: "Dopey, you get back in here! Do you understand! Get back in here! The Gypsies will get you! Do you want the Gypsies to get you?"

It is her voice, not the words, that shakes him. He wheels around, and her voice leads him away from the gate. He moves in a trance, his eyes fixed on the porch. As his shoes drag across the lawn, Paula claps her hands, spreading her elbows out, and sways her hips, singing loudly:

Dopey, Oh Dopey, it's getting late.
Don't try little bogie to slip past the gate.
The Gypsies are out in the dark,
Boog-ga-boo.
And if you don't watch out, Dopey dear,
They'll get you, you, you!

My grandparents run down the steps and grab Dopey up in their arms. Paula too is close. She pats our baby brother's cheeks. Occasionally I hear her murmuring. Yet all is quiet in the park. The balloon man wheels his cart away. As the wind picks up, the pages of the newspaper flutter. And somehow one of the balloons slips aways from the others. It soars up past the trees and gradually it disappears into the darkening sky. Nine o'clock and all is well, I say out loud, and I trace a finger around the edges of Bobby's picture. Then I feel myself rising up as though I were inside of that balloon, all safe and sound. Yet another voice, which comes from somewhere much deeper, like some unwanted phantom, whispers to me that maybe, even after all these years, that maybe, the dream wars will not end here.

Mary Pipher

A Winter's Tale

1935 was the cruelest winter in a generation on the high plains of Eastern Colorado. In January, pale blue-grey snow covered the frozen land with a surface as smooth and impermeable as marble. Snow was piled into mountains twenty feet tall that drifted over roads, fences, sheds and automobiles. Gritty pellets of snow whirled up from the land and obscured the sun. Hoarfrost covered everything animate and inanimate. Sounds were all staccato. Voices broke outside like crackling twigs. And the air smelled of death, of the barely detectable scent of stiff corpses.

The wind, a vengeful god from the north, raged incessantly, howling, roaring, and everywhere defying sanity and threatening annihilation. Omnipotent and omnipresent, the wind pushed through walls, through layers of clothing, and through skin right into the bone marrow of the men and women at his mercy. The only way to escape the iciness deep in one's bones was to sleep. But, sleep was difficult in the drafty and poorly heated farmhouses of the prairie.

Eight miles north of Flagler on a bleak expanse of ranchland lay the Loutzenhiser place. Substantial barns and silos, a well with a battered windmill, and various farm implements were scattered around a two-story ramshackle house that trembled and groaned in the wind.

Lying on her cot in the attic of that house, Irene struggled to stay asleep. She pulled her legs and arms closer to her body and fought to stay warm and adrift on her dreams of paradise. All this winter she'd been having incredibly vivid dreams of tropical places. In her dreams she could feel the sun on her body and smell the fragrance of exotic flowers. Her eyes ached from the brilliance of the lemony sunlight. She dreamed of slender dark men in crimson shirts riding bejewelled elephants, and of women with long, diaphanous veils and sultry eyes lying in striped tents. And, she smiled at chattering monkeys jumping from palm to palm. She could smell cardoman and cinnamon pods in the air. In her dreams, she danced beside scantily clad natives in the orchid-scented breezes of perpetual summer. She wrenched herself away from such lovely places reluctantly at each waking.

"Get up." Her father first pounded on her door as he clumped down the hall to her brothers' room. "Get out of that bed, Irene," he shouted, his harsh command unmitigated by any greeting. "Hurry up now. Those cows won't wait." Irene could hear her brothers stumbling out of bed, cursing the day and each other. Her room was dark. That night while she'd slept, the wind had driven snow through the cracks in the attic walls. As she fumbled about for her candle, Irene could feel the snow-like crumbs on her blanket. Her hands were stiff and her nose felt frozen and hard. Her feet were numb. Each night she toasted a brick on the

stove downstairs, wrapped it in a towel, and carried it upstairs with her. She put it at the bottom of her bed to warm her toes, so that she could fall asleep. By morning, the brick was as cold as a tombstone.

Irene willed herself out of bed. The water in her washbasin was frozen. Later, perhaps, she could wash in the kitchen. She buttoned her thick garments with uncooperative fingers. She looked in her mirror and smoothed her dark hair. In the flickering light, she examined her face with its deep black eyes. She neither approved nor condemned the image of herself. It was as immutable as the wind outside or her father's rough voice. She heard the heavy tramp of her brothers' boots on the stairs. She opened her door and followed them down.

Pa was already in the barn. She heard the boys dressing in the back entryway. Hungry and shivering, Irene joined them. Ben nodded to her as he put on his fur cap. Harold and Clair were struggling sullenly with their frozen overshoes. Irene pulled her heavy overcoat off its hook. The wool was as stiff as plasterboard, and crunched as she maneuvered her thin arms into the sleeves. Irene was too miserable to speak. The sound of the wind and the sharp, bitter smell of the cold kept her quiet. "Everybody ready?" Ben said as he leaned his shoulder against the outside door. He looked at his sister. "Put on that extra scarf now, Irenie. And, don't let go of the line. The wind is extra strong today." Ben pushed open the door. The force of the gust flattened Irene against the wall. She shut her eyes momentarily as splinters of ice bombarded her face. Every fiber of her body cringed before the great maw of winter. She felt assaulted, her spirit broken. Clair swore, as his left leg buckled. His bad knee really acted up on mornings like this. Harold braced himself and led the way into the darkness. Clair limped behind him. Ben waited for Irene. "You get ahead of me today. You could blow away out there and nobody would know it." Irene felt awkward and wooden in her padded clothes. She forced herself into the icy wind that caused her lungs to ache and her eyes to sting and swell. She kept her hand on the guide rope and followed the hulking shapes of Clair and Harold as they labored towards the barn.

The hundred-yard journey to the barn left Irene numb and weak. She wanted to sit down on a bale and rest. But, Ben was struggling with the barn's sliding door. She walked back to help and together they tugged the heavy door shut. Irene turned and leaned against it. She undid her scarf, brushed the snow from her eyes and looked around her.

Pa walked among the cows with a gunnysack of bran, doling out measures to each according to its worth. The barn was dark and shadowy in the lantern light. It smelled of harness leather, fresh milk, straw, urine and cobwebs. Big, yellow Olaf was sitting by the separator licking his paws. Irene picked up her stool and buckets and walked towards her cows. She could see the steamy breath of the cattle and the pale wisps of her breathing. She could hear the munching and slurping of the hungry animals, and the hard, rapid plinks of milk streams on metal. She positioned herself by Marie and leaned her head into the red-brown flank. Her aching, stiff fingers pulled at Marie's cracked, soft udders. "Oh, God,"

she prayed. "When I grow up, let me live far away from here. Let me live in a city and teach school or work in a store. Let me wear dresses and silk stockings and have a bath every day. Let me wake up to tea and toast and a warm fire. Dear God, I know you have given such blessings to others. I do my best to serve you. Please, just let me be warm. Amen." She finished with Marie and moved on to Star. She milked seven cows before breakfast.

By 6:30 they were finished and back in the kitchen. Irene had an hour to eat and get ready for school. Harold, Clair, and Ben had all dropped out by eighth grade. But Irene had begged to continue and others had pleaded for her. And, by some miracle, Pa had softened and she'd been allowed to go on through high school. This winter of her senior year had been so frustrating. For two weeks now their road had been snowed in and she'd missed school. Every day she'd been optimistic. She'd dressed, piled up her books and waited. And, every day, she'd had to admit defeat and carry her studies back to the kitchen table. While her brothers had slept or played cards, while her ma had sewn and her pa had mended equipment, Irene had worked on self-imposed assignments. She'd read ahead, done all the exercises at the end of the chapters, and memorized poetry from her English twelve text. Yesterday she'd learned "Thanatopsis" and the day before she'd memorized "Ode on a Grecian Urn." And, for two weeks, she'd waited for the road to be plowed.

Ma said, "Irene, get the coffee and pour it around." It was the same breakfast each morning - thick, bitter black coffee and corn meal mush. They had milk from their cows but pa wouldn't buy sugar. He could afford better, but saw no reason for luxury. Her brothers gulped their mush hungrily, their eyes on their bowls. Pa sat at the end of the table, scowling into his coffee cup. Over the years, his features had twisted into a permanent grimace of bitterness and displeasure. His iron grey hair did not soften the harshness of his countenance. He looked as hard and unyielding as a steel trap.

"Pa, have some more coffee," Irene said. He grunted and pushed his cup towards her. He hated talk at the table. He hated anything that made life easier or more genteel, that gave life sparkle or polish. He valued work and thrift. Anything else he considered profligacy. Pa wanted land, and all his adult life he had single-mindedly worked towards that goal. He'd lived, and forced his family to live, little better than animals. Every spare penny went into savings for land.

Irene looked at her mother. She'd heard that she'd once been pretty and musical like Irene. But, any trace of prettiness or love of beauty had died in her before Irene's birth. Years of isolation, hard work, and life with pa had turned her into something colorless and mechanical. She wore her grey, stringy hair pulled back in a knot at the nape of her neck. Her skin was coarse and red; her eyes pale and watery. She wore the same clothes year after year—discarded men's shirts and long, amorphous skirts made from flour sacking. She no longer looked in a mirror. She never went into town. By now she cared for only one thing—to stay out of trouble with pa. She'd been with him thirty years now. In that time, she'd

never had a present, been to a social, entertained guests or received a compliment. Pa had no use for frippery. He'd worked her like a beast of burden from sunup to sundown. Some farmers tried to spare their wives the field work. But, not pa. He considered his family a resource to exploit to the fullest. And, by God, he would get every ounce of value from each of them. Perhaps, at one time, ma had protested this stark philosophy. But, the battlefield was now cold, all evidence of a struggle was overgrown.

Irene hoped the school bus would come today. Yesterday the milk truck had made it through, and pa had tamped down their section of road with his tractor. During breakfast the wind died down some. With the sunrise, she dressed warmly and walked down the road to her bus stop. She stood alone in the cold, grey dawn, stomping her feet and rubbing her hands together. She looked south until finally the school bus came into sight. How perfectly marvelous it appeared as it plowed and slipped down the road towards Irene.

Ava, Irene's friend from the next farm over, had saved her a seat at the back of the bus. It was coldest there but most private. Both girls started to talk at the same moment, laughed, and then Ava said, "You go first but talk fast, I've so much to tell you."

Irene smiled as she snuggled into her seat. Her eyes were sparkling as she spoke excitedly. "Oh, Ava, have you heard anything about our scholarship applications? I'm so eager to know. It seems like forever since we've been to school I wonder if the class took the chemistry test yet?"

Ava said, "I hope not. I hope they waited. I just can't understand chemistry from the book alone. Did you learn any poetry? I learned all the assigned ones."

Together the girls recited "Thanatopsis," almost as if it were a prayer. "Poetry is so beautiful," breathed Irene. "Someday I want to write a poem that fine." Ava traced on the window frost, I.L.—poet. Irene traced, A.P.—doctor. They giggled, then talked of their friends and their geometry problems.

Ava and Irene had competed for top marks since they were girls at the country school. Both had made straight A's in high school, and were likely to be named valedictorian for the Flagler graduating class of 1935. The competition had been clean and exhilarating and had only served to deepen their friendship. They encouraged each other to be best and dreamed together of faraway colleges. Together this year, they'd filled out applications, taken tests, and written essays to college boards. They'd made plans to be roommates and study together in domed libraries.

Mr. Doeschot, the school principal, signalled Ava and Irene into his office as they walked down the hall. His broad face was animated and his eyes merry as he ushered the girls into his office.

"Sit down, girls," he said. "I've got news for you. I've known since last Tuesday, but I wanted to hold it till I could tell you in person." The girls sat side by side on the wooden bench. Irene slipped her hand into Ava's and squeezed hard as Mr. Doeschot continued.

"You've both been awarded Regent's Scholarships to Boulder. It's the first time in our school's history that two of our students have been selected in one year. I guess they just couldn't choose between you." He beamed and stretched out his arm. "We're mighty proud of you two girls. Let me be the first to congratulate you."

Ava and Irene shook hands with him and then hugged each other. Irene pulled away first and said, "Please give us all the details so I can tell my pa."

Mr. Doeschot said, "Your tuition and books will be totally paid for. And, you can work for your room and board. You will be offered an opportunity to live in a scholarship hall. All that will be necessary is a hundred dollar registration fee." He paused and looked at Irene. She was very pale, her lips blue as if from the cold. He said carefully, "I think something can be worked out at the bank if your father has trouble with the money. I'll go out and talk to him if you think it will help. I know he is not very sold on education."

Irene shook her head sadly. No, pa was not keen on education. And, he hated Mr. Doeschot for having pressured him and having the banker pressure him into letting Irene go to high school.

Leaving the office, Ava was ecstatic. She said, "I can't believe this, Irene. It's too wonderful. I feel like a fairy princess, like Cinderella." Irene was quiet. The news had originally suffused her with happiness. But now, as she thought about it realistically, she began to feel a coldness deep in the pit of her stomach. "Ava," she said, "I don't think my pa will let me go." Ava reassured her. "Even your pa will see reason. It'll only cost him a hundred dollars to give his daughter a college education. It's a bargain for him. Won't he be proud of you? Doesn't he care if you are happy?" No, Irene thought angrily. He won't be proud, and he doesn't care if I'm happy. He only cares if I work hard and keep out of his way. To Ava, she said, in a voice soft as a whisper, "I'll ask him tonight."

Riding home on the bus, Ava talked unceasingly of their joyous future. "Irene, I'll get my mother to make us each a new dress with the money I've saved. We can buy the material together this spring. Do you think we'll have any classes together? I would think we could take English and History at the same time. Oh, I wonder where we shall live. Just imagine, if it's a professor's house with electricity and bathrooms."

Irene, originally sombre and pessimistic, found herself cheered by her friend's rosy vision. She spoke tentatively. "I've heard all the buildings on the campus are red brick and covered with ivy. Mr. Doeschot told me that we'll be able to see the mountains from the top floor of the library."

Ava chatted on. "Your pa will let you go. My father and Mr. Doeschot can go talk to him. We'll both go to Boulder. I'm sure of it."

At the mention of her pa, some of Irene's gloom returned. She looked out the window at the unbroken miles of white snow and white sky. "Those men talking to him will only make him more stubborn. He's still mad that he let himself be bullied into letting me go to high school. Ava, you know that I want him to say

yes so badly that it hurts. But, I'm so afraid to ask. If he says no, I don't know how I'll bear it!"

After evening chores, the family had dinner. The kitchen was dark save for the lantern on the table and the light of the cookstove. The big dogs lay by the stove waiting for pa to throw them his bones and scraps. Irene and her mother served the fried beefsteaks, mush, boiled potatoes and coffee. Then, Irene sat down in her usual spot by Ben. She took some mush and potatoes. She tried to eat, but had trouble swallowing the dry, starchy lumps. She felt as if she might choke.

Her father sat at the head of the table. He shoveled in large chunks of food. He wiped the grease off his face with his sleeve. Irene never took her eyes off him. She tried to read his rapacious face for cues about tonight's mood. Did he look especially angry or tired? Twice her father signalled for more helpings. Then, when he'd eaten his fill, he called the dogs over and put his plate on the floor. Tommy and Red gulped the leftovers hungrily.

Irene took a sip of water and looked her father in the eyes. I must do this now, she thought. If I think any more I shall lose my courage. She spoke out, her voice husky with fear.

"Pa, I've been awarded a scholarship along with Ava. Mr. Doeschot told us today. For only one hundred dollars registration fee, I can go to the university. The scholarship pays my tuition and buys my books. I can work for my keep. I really want to go. Please, will you help me get the money?" Her voice faded even as she spoke. She felt her hands grow cold. Her breathing was shallow and jerky. She looked around the table at her brothers' shadowy forms hunched over oily plates. Her mother's face was in the light. She sat erect and expressionless, every facial muscle taut. The wind was howling mercilessly. Irene could detect sobs and wails in the wind sounds. The wind, the darkness of the room, seemed to be signalling her, telling her to abandon her dreams.

Pa stared at her with a twisted sort of smile on his mouth. His eyes were cold. He took a swig of coffee and blared out, "Well now, it sounds like you've got some big ideas. Maybe you think you're too good for this family.

Irene cut in, "No, pa. That's not it."

Pa hissed angrily, "Don't interrupt me, girl. Are you getting too delicate for farm work? Do you want to spend this family's hard earned money and go off and live the easy life?" Pa was getting angrier as he spoke. And, to Irene, he seemed to be growing larger. His voice outshouted the wind. He moved his arms wildly as he continued. His arms punctuated his speech with sharp stabs in Irene's direction.

Pa went on, "You can't go. We need you here. Besides there is no future in education, especially for a woman. Did you ever meet a rich school teacher? You are better off marrying some boy with property. No sense going somewhere that you can't be of any use to the family." He pounded his fists on the table and, anticipating Irene's arguments, he exploded. "No more talk. I said no. You tell Mr. Doeschot tomorrow that I said you are not going."

Irene listened and felt the hard cold place in her stomach spread all over her body. She couldn't look at pa anymore. For the first time she realized that she hated him. She had always hated him. She looked at the others though. Why wouldn't anyone look at her? Would they let this be done to her? Clair moved uneasily in his chair. He started to get up and then changed his mind. Irene hoped this meant he would speak for her. Harold was sitting quiet as furniture, staring at his empty plate. He's a coward, Irene thought contemptuously, he'll never speak out. Ma sat frozen, her mouth as straight and tight as a two penny nail. Irene could see that her mother's hands were shaking. Only those helpless, fluttering hands betrayed any of her inner feelings. Irene looked at those hands and thought, she's forgotten how to fight. She won't protect me. She turned last to Ben. His face was red and hot. Surely he'll speak up for me. Ben loves me. He won't let this awful injustice be done. Oh, Ben, come on now.

Ben cleared his throat and looked at pa. Irene thought wildly, now Ben, save me. Ben stuttered as he started to speak. "Pa," he said. "I think you ought to let Irenie go to school." Pa turned his eyes to Ben. "Boy," he spat. "You stay out of this. This doesn't concern you. Keep your mouth shut or you'll be standing in the bread lines of Denver." Ben's face started to twitch. He never had won an argument with pa. He started to speak, faltered and stopped. There were tears in his eyes, but he didn't try again. Is that all? Irene thought, is this my defense? Will these few poor words decide my life?

Time seemed to have stopped. No one moved or spoke. Pa sat smirking, secure as usual in his power. Irene would have killed him if she could have. She loathed the others for their silent betrayal. How feeble her brothers were. They'd watched while pa chopped her dreams into kindling. She knew she was dying. The part of her that was special and alive was being murdered, here on this January night in this kitchen. "Oh, Father," she prayed, "Why hast thou forsaken me?"

Four months later, the prairie had turned a soft green, the breeze was from the south and the sky was robin's egg blue. Irene rode into town with Ava's family for graduation day. She had not invited her parents or brothers to the ceremony.

At the high school she and Ava joined their classmates at the back of the auditorium. Mr. Doeschot read out their names so that they could line up alphabetically. The school could not afford gowns. But, the principal passed out boxy caps with long red tassels that fell over the graduates' faces. Most of the girls wore new, printed cotton shirtwaists in spring colors—pink, green, daffodil yellow, and lavender. The boys were dressed in new or borrowed starchy suits. Irene felt hot, dowdy, and conspicuous. She was the only girl without a summer frock. She wore a heavy grey dress several years old that itched about the neck dreadfully.

Mrs. Reichenbach played "Pomp and Circumstance" as the class of 35 marched solemnly to their seats at the front of the auditorium. Irene moved woodenly along with the others. She didn't acknowledge the crowd of friends and neighbors standing and smiling as the graduates filed past. At last, Irene arrived

at her seat in the front row. She stood till the verse ended and then sat down stiffly. Nearby a baby cried irritably. The room was stuffy and many of the women had small paper fans to cool themselves. The room smelled of floor wax, perspiration, soap, perfume, and naphthalene. Irene stared straight ahead, her back rigid as a soldier's. For so many years she had savored the idea of graduation day. Now it was a formality, a mechanical procedure that gave her no joy. Ava was in the row behind her, very pretty in a bright yellow dress and her first pair of pumps. She was shimmering with happiness. She had been selected valedictorian and would deliver the commencement address. Irene was salutatorian, as she'd lost her place beside Ava in this last semester. After that evening in January, Irene had quit trying. Her grades had dipped and her teachers had chided her to work harder. But, she'd lost the will to work. It no longer mattered.

Two weeks earlier Marvin Huntzinger had asked her to marry him. It was a financially motivated proposal—the result of a business agreement between their fathers. The Huntzingers owned the land next to the Loutzenhisers and Marvin was an only son. If she married him, the farms would be joined into one large, very workable piece of property. Pa was eagerly anticipating all that land under his direction, with his three strong sons and Marvin to work it. Irene had listened angrily to Marvin's proposal. She knew as she listened that he would be the agent of her doom. Pa would never let her refuse him. When Marvin had asked for her answer, she'd looked him in the eyes and said stonily, "I will marry you because I have to, just like you have to marry me. Only, don't lie to me about it. Don't say anything to me about love or our future happiness. We both know who and what this marriage is for." Marvin had taken her hand awkwardly and said, "You don't have to put everything so bluntly, do you Irene? You might grow to like me." Irene had thought to herself, never, never if I live to be a hundred years old will I ever like you or the life we will lead. She'd hated her wretched combination of attributes. She'd had the facility to see the future but neither the strength nor the courage to change it. To Marvin, she said, "You can tell our fathers that I said yes."

She thought of Marvin now as Ava advanced to the podium. Ava walked gingerly in her high heels, her speech rolled up in her hands. "My fellow students," she began. "Our future lies before us as golden and glorious as a sunrise..." Irene thought of Marvin's bad English. He'd stopped school at sixth grade and hadn't read a book since then. She thought of his big, knobby red hands with their dirty nails, of his bad teeth. Ava continued, "We are a new generation, joining a caravan across new prairies." Irene thought bitterly, how well I know all the miles of my journey. I know the back-breaking work, the dirt, the stupidity, the narrow-mindedness, the avarice and the loneliness. She ached as she thought of how she would miss Ava. Ava would be leaving soon to work in a hospital in Boulder. She planned to be a doctor. Irene fought back sobs welling up from deep inside her. This school and Ava had been her life, her blue sky. Now only dark clouds were on the horizon, clouds black and ominous engulfing the blue. Ava continued, "We journey to unexplored frontiers. We shall see new

horizons, make new worlds. The future is ours if only we have the energy and will to seize it."

Her voice rose high and musical, trembling with excitement and expectancy. Irene had stopped the welling of tears and in its place she felt a deadness and heaviness of spirit. She remembered that Marvin blew his nose on his sleeve like her brothers. Would he, like pa, blow his nose on the pillowcase at night? Ava had finished now and the crowd broke into enthusiastic applause. She walked over to Irene, took her hand and said graciously, "Come stand by me. The applause is for both of us." Irene reluctantly allowed herself to be led to the podium. The room was a blur of color and sound. She stood there mutely, the meaning of the day lost to her. Ava whispered to her, "Smile, Irene. You look like you are at a funeral."

Ava graduated from the University of Colorado at Boulder and went on to medical school. She married, had four children and lived far from Colorado. She wrote her friend Irene for many years. But, Irene's letters grew briefer, more despondent, and less frequent. When Ava came home, Mrs. Page would stop over and invite Irene and her family to Sunday dinner. Irene would refuse curtly. She seemed embarrassed and angered by the invitations. Eventually, the letters from Ava and the invitations stopped.

Irene married Marvin as planned. They lived on his parents' homestead. The Huntzingers lived in the same manner as the Loutzenhisers. There were no embellishments to a life of labor, frugality and spiritual barrenness. Days were all the texture and color of grey tapioca.

Irene worked as her mother had worked for her father. She fed the dogs and chickens, milked the cows and cooked the mush and potatoes. God did not spare her those cold mornings in January out in an icy barn. Irene grew haggard and bitter. The sparkle that had enlivened her young eyes faded and was gone. She became as grim and silent as her mother, and as utterly devoid of hope.

Marvin worked like a slave on the tan, hard land of his father and father-in-law. Irene and he learned to tolerate each other. They were, after all, two work horses yoked together for life. Over the years Irene bore him two sons and a daughter. She felt no joy at either the conceptions or birth of her young. She was doing her chores. Annie, Mark and Douglas never heard her laughter. To them she appeared stiff and sour. They never knew that she had once read Shakespeare and sung soprano in the school's production of the "Messiah." She would not share with them the story of the person who had died before they were born.

About twenty years after graduation, her life of misery ended. Marvin had taken the children into town on a Saturday afternoon to pick up supplies. He'd left her at home with his aged parents. Irene had done her regular chores—the late afternoon milking, some housecleaning and carrying in the firewood. She'd served the old folks their supper and then she'd gone outside.

The sun was going down. Its golden light emblazoned the barn, the farmyard and the house. The combine glowed like copper. The sky was an opaque, violet

color save for the long, dark, scraggly V-formation of the Canadian geese that flew overhead. The land was a parched and dying brown and grey. The trees around the homestead were naked, black stalks that provided neither shelter nor solace from the north wind that was beginning to blow. Irene thought of the winter to come, of the long nights, the cold, the relentless snow and ice.

Something snapped inside her and she was far away. She could hear the sounds of parrots and macaws and ancient reed instruments. She found herself standing in a clearing in a tropical forest full of bougainvillea and gardenias. The music grew louder and more rhythmic as drums joined in. Irene plucked a gardenia and put it in her hair. The fragrance made her feel light-hearted and sensuous. In her heavy work clothes she felt hot and weighed down. She took off her thick grey jacket and her muddy work boots. Then, as she danced and grew warmer, she discarded her denim pants and woolen sweater. She was moving about now in only her underwear. Even those garments felt cumbersome and she peeled them off. A gentle, warm breeze wafted over her. How lovely it was to dance naked in a faraway country and to feel free for once in her life! She moved in a frenzy about the farmyard. The drums beat loudly in her ears. She swayed and swivelled past tractors, balers, the chicken coops and the big dogs. She was faraway now and untamed in a country that neither Marvin Huntzinger nor her pa would ever visit.

Marvin found her dancing naked by the barn when he drove into the yard with the children. It had grown dark and he could barely make out the small, lithe figure moving gracefully amongst the machinery. When he realized who it was, he sent the kids into the house. "Irene," he shouted. "What the hell are you doing?" She didn't hear him. The tropics are so far from Colorado. The next day they took her to the state sanatorium at Greeley. When she arrived, she asked only for a room for herself and all her flowers. Her eyes were shining. Her body poised for dance.

Karen Kates
Seconds

She is definitely at one of Steph's parties, Barbara thinks, with the old combination of both admiration and amusement. The aluminum table on the enormous expanse of lawn beckons with heaps of glistening strawberries, blueberries in cut glass bowls, unfrosted stacks of brownies, lots of perfectly chilled expensive white wine. The food Steph sets out has always been startlingly fresh, simple, and satisfying. (At the long ago children's birthday parties the mothers had expressed their gratitude to Steph for the nutritious cheeses and fruit, as well as small faces not smeared with chocolate because the brownies were uniced.) Kids, like adults, usually had a wonderful time at Steph's parties. Even today, on Jacob's fifty-eighth birthday, everyone falls into a familiar mood of cheerfulness, although each guest realizes that Jacob has abruptly become infatuated with the young woman who owns the neighboring property. Courtney is twenty-eight, exactly Barbara's age.

When she was a little girl Barbara had pretended to like her stepmother, Steph, to exasperate Hilda, her own mother. Now, she very much likes and respects Steph, but pretends nonchalance to be kind to Hilda. Barbara would not have believed that she could actually remember, so painfully and distinctly, the last time her father broke up a marriage—she was only four. Yet, she can see her mother's perpetually furious face, and her young, slender, dark-haired father backing, bewildered, out of the small hot apartment. Incredibly, this man has become Jacob, hefty, grizzled, bearded: a wearer of Timberland boots on the weekends. She recalls that so many years before, when she had not even started school, problems were kept secret, to be discussed with angry hisses behind closed doors. Now, in their large modern glass house, Jacob and Steph exhaustively analyze (asking Barbara's advice, and listening attentively to her responses) their friends' marriages and lovers, their own impending vacations, or reasons for wanting these trips. Moreover, they work very seriously at continuing their marriage: they are seeing a counselor recommended by Jeff, the man with whom Barbara lives, a psychiatrist.

Still, Steph and Jacob are embarrassed to have their friends know about the sessions. When they want to make plans, since they are already in the city for the evening, they confide that they have enrolled in the Lyrics and Lyricists course at the Ninety-second Street Y. Sometimes, (they do eventually leak everything to Barbara, who does not necessarily wish to hear) after Jacob has talked for an hour with his wife and the therapist about the single time he slept with Courtney, Steph and Jacob duck into a ten o'clock show at one of the big movie theaters on Third Avenue, before driving back to New Jersey. Jacob and Courtney were both regretful, afterwards. The films soothe Jacob and Steph.

In the warm luxurious sun Jacob presses his fingers into Barbara's shoulders. "Who has always kept me happy?" He realizes his mistake, grabbing at Steph's hand, as she passes with a pile of used plates. "Who *else?*" he teases.

He keeps an arm around Barbara, strolling with her down the length of the table. Barb is his child: he knows that she will want the tart pineapple at the far end. Now, they are slightly removed from the guests who, adorned in festive summer clothing and reaching out for all the colorful fruit, remind Barbara of butterflies circling toward flowers.

"Your mother and I inadvertently made a scholar out of you. You stayed locked in your room so you would not hear us fight during my visits."

Barbara glances at Jacob. It is extraordinarily rare for him to be like this: slightly drunk on wine.

"In all truthfulness, when you thought I was studying, I was actually wearing earphones and listening to junk rock stations—the WMCA Good Guys."

"You were tuning us out."

"Absolutely not: I was waiting patiently to hear that song about bye bye Miss American pie."

Jacob is still so full of pride about having a daughter with a Ph.D. What he won't realize is that scientists are like anyone else: they go crazy occasionally. The best chemist she knew in graduate school poured various splendid colors into a hundred slender test tubes, draped the glass over the department Christmas tree, then played *Silent Night*, perfectly, by selecting certain half-filled tubes to tap with the tip of his pencil. More than once, gerbils, given extra marijuana, dove into the sides of their cages like Donald O'Connor doing his *Make Em Laugh* number in *Singing in the Rain.*

Barbara is living at the house this summer while she finishes up some postdoctoral research nearby, at Bell Labs. The company runs a bus, a van really, that she used to ride, to and from the city. The trips gradually began to remind her of her childhood: travelling home to that cramped depressing apartment in Mount Vernon, her absurdly unhappy mother. Last spring, after the van dropped her, on warm bright evenings, directly in front of her building, Barbara knew that she would have to go upstairs and confront Jeff, and whatever it is that has been bothering him lately. As a child, impatient with the long circuitious route of the school bus, she used to leave her bicycle strategically chained to a lamp post a reasonable distance from home. Sometimes, similarly, last spring, she would hop off the van early, then shoot the rest of the way uptown on the subway. Her fellow adult van riders, too, brought back disconcerting memories. The Bell employees were more congenial, less boisterous perhaps, than a bus full of grammar school kids, but a lot of the talk was basically the same: parties, sports events, movies, family. Briefcases were snapped open and still, inside, were books, papers, calculators, memo pads. Eventually, Barbara chose to borrow Jacob and Steph's third car, the white Cutlass, and drive the ten minutes to work. She often feels herself to be going through this summer as if in a trance inhabiting Steph's

beautiful, cool, almost unbearably fragrant rooms. Jeff comes very often but she is relieved not to be with him as he swelters and broods, back in the city.

Jacob is saying: "A few months ago I lost a hat. Steph brought home another hat, needless to say, nearly identical to the one I've been wearing for twenty years—complete with the foolish little feather. There was a downpour on the afternoon that I misplaced the first hat. For two bucks, at Woolworth's I picked up a wool cap that you see everywhere." Barbara laughs, "Dad, are you speaking metaphorically? If so, I may be missing the point."

"Metaphors! I'm talking about a warm hat, that fits into my pocket, a hat that I don't have to *check* in both senses of the word. Imagine all these years, getting a restaurant chit for a *hat*, or walking around with one hand on my head to make sure my hat remained in position during a breezy day. Now, I own a convenient, economical, *democratic* hat. Behind me in line with the same purchase was a teenage kid and a young woman wearing a good suit and holding a briefcase."

His eyes are wandering to Courtney, who is approaching across the lawn. She is late arriving, and she may be the youngest guest, but she is also the most formal, for she is carrying hostess gifts for Steph: a sparkling new glass bowl filled with pretty napkin rings. Courtney's judgment is correct; Steph will enjoy the presents. Barbara, who, like everyone else, is baffled and charmed by Courtney, wheels around and walks up to the house.

"A daughter is always a daughter," Steph says evenly. "You won't really ever fall from his graces."

Even in the kitchen one wall is all glass, and there are vases of long-stemmed white flowers on the shelves between the copper pans. Barbara used to feel contemptuous of what she considered to be a fidgetiness about Steph, an extreme restless attention to the details of her surroundings. There are always fresh flowers everywhere in the rooms, except during winter when she distributes spruce branches in beautiful old pots. Barbara's mother, inexplicably, although Jacob's business began to do so well, kept the same furniture, seconds, picked up very early in their marriage, and refused to move from the apartment (decent if not excellent schools, why live in the city, or in a house with only one child.) There was something singularly joyous about a smell of cookies baking in Hilda's apartment. In Steph's house, you began to expect her atmosphere of overwhelming luxury, and eventually felt entitled to it.

"Sisters have the same advantage," continues Steph. "A friend might avoid you for months after a quarrel, but sisters are back on the phone relatively quickly. There is a connection."

"Think about the trip to Crete. You two are bound."

A soft pile of strawberry stems coats the sink. Steph switches on the disposal. She dumps raspberries into a strainer, then shakes water through the fruit.

"Barb, women your age are always saying to me: 'Do you ever regret not working?' Then they add, helpfully: 'Perhaps you could try law school.'"

Barbara, too, thinks this is very funny, as she imagines Steph heaving heavy musty volumes into these light rooms adorned with exquisite furniture and art works, the achingly fragrant flowers. In college, a professor had walked up to a student right in the middle of a big lecture hall and exclaimed: "Your perfume, Miss! A little less! The distraction!"

"Apparently, I hear from your peers, Barbara, it's a real coup to be asked to edit the school's tax journal. Can you imagine me spending my evening shortening students' entries, then meeting Jacob the next afternoon to discuss tax shelters with *our* lawyer, accountant, and stock broker!"

Jeff and Jacob are in the kitchen now, bringing used bowls and cutlery. "Why not a caterer, Steph?" Jeff kids.

Steph, looking at Jacob, smiles. "Well, a teenager would be of some use: he probably wouldn't mingle, so we could put him to work."

Jeff, just for an instant, glances disapprovingly at Barbara. He will never participate in this old running joke between Steph and Jacob about the son they couldn't have: Jeff, who does have a good sense of humor, still considers this jesting to be perverse. Barbara, who has, over the years, almost cruelly hinted at her lovers to her mother—watching her mother's face become half annoyed, and half admiring and prideful, never revealed that she stayed overnight in the hospital about ten years ago, when Steph had the hysterectomy. So, Jacob and Steph continue their cheerful rueful game that began with those exotic vacations for which they shared a taste. For the baby, they joked, they would have had to hire a sitter back home, or rent an extra suite in Egypt. Later: the child could have watered all the flowers, cut the lawn. When the London theater tickets didn't come through in time for a midweek getaway—who knows, we might have been roped into an open school night, after all, laughed Jacob.

Courtney, appearing to wipe and clean her new bowl, then fill it with fruit says: "I've beentold that it's the oddest feeling in the world, when you happen to run into your adult child at a party, and realize that you have mutual friends and acquaintances." Strands of her long light hair, as she stands next to Jacob, have fallen slightly across his shoulder. She is obviously unaware of this: he does not step away. Barbara thinks, feeling sorry for everyone, that he might as well actually put his arm around her.

"Your turn to be down on the lawn enjoying yourself," Jacob urges Steph. "Jeff and I shall clean and stack for awhile."

He thinks that the three women are so appealing, walking single file on their high-heeled sandals, holding out the bowls, like some sort of tribal females, participating in a ritual.

"A little less of this Chablis! I need my den's cache."

Jacob, who to Jeff's surprise, is unsteady, spills scotch on the liquor cabinet as he half fills the short broad glasses. Why, Jeff considers with amusement, is the aroma of rich wooden furniture and slopped whiskey irrefutably masculine? Why, after all, should that be?

The two men stand outside on the deck, swirling their ice, observing the party below. Again, Jeff wants to smile. He has a *déj à vu* feeling from too many movies or an overabundance of idly watched television: a pair of men handling drinks, surveying a spread of land. Jeff assumes Jacob to be thinking about the new serious wrinkle in his long marriage to Steph. Jeff also is certain that Jacob will remain married. Steph is a wonderful woman in every way and Jacob has spent years loving her: he will not easily give up the excellent relationship. There is a parallel problem in Jeff's own life that he would be reluctant to discuss with Jacob—Jeff rarely hints at it to Barbara. Jeff's career is in good shape, and at thirty-six he too has put in long years: school, residency, analytic school. Lately, however, he has watched friends who master computers with the same mix of admiration and contempt that he once reserved for the football players in high school. Jeff yearns suddenly for hard facts and specific results. He envies his friends their two year MBA programs, their unadjustable tables of figures. Yet he will probably not, in the end, relinquish a field that has snared his interest for half his life.

Jeff is not quite correct about Jacob. At this moment Jacob is daydreaming mostly about Hilda, who, now that Barbara is grown, he has not laid eyes on in years: Hilda, the best lover that he has ever had, a secret that he will always continue to keep. He used to walk in on Steph in bed with men—why not, with her long legs and her upswept blond chignon? She was only twenty-six, before they married. Sex with Hilda was like owning a painting by an extraordinary artist that only he had excitedly discovered. Unhappy Hilda: one weekend morning he had rammed his hand casually into her jacket hanging in the closet seeking change for what—a newspaper? Hilda's pocket was feathered with movie stubs. He had yanked out his hand in astonishment, letting dozens of the confetti-like cardboard pieces drop between his fingers, on to the closet floor. From then on he watched her tenderly as she went so determinedly about her minimum of housework in the small apartment. *Cary Grant*, he wanted to whisper to her: *Robert Taylor.*

Long ago, during their courtship in the forties, Jacob and Hilda were racketing uptown on a nearly empty subway car, sitting directly across from a soldier arguing with a young woman. The girl was valiant, but close to tears, despite herself. The couple were approximately the same age as Jacob and Hilda. Hilda rose, preparing to leave the train. She balanced against a pole close to the couple, and smiled. "You two go together so well," she said. "You seem so perfect," she said, still smiling. "Have a great evening." From the platform Jacob and Hilda could see that the pair in the window were smiling. The soldier's arm was back around her waist.

He would so much like to crawl to Hilda—now that he has just about shaken himself loose of Courtney, for some level advice, or the one last smarting slap at his ego that no one else is willing to give him. Birthday presents! I, Jacob, am

amused, drunk, and well loved, very possibly, undeservedly on this birthday, by my wife, my daughter, and loyal, tolerant friends. Jacob feels himself to be dazzled by his special luck, and, for the first moment in many months, truly, thankfully: peaceful.

Courtney and Jeff sit by the furiously swift, astonishingly clear stream that is concealed from the lawn by a cluster of glaringly white and dappled birches. There are two ways to look at the trees, Jeff and Barbara had concluded once, while stretched out on this bank where he and Courtney now recline. Jeff was reminded of a lovely graceful dance ensemble because of the asymmetrical curves of pale trunks and branches. Nonsense, insisted Barbara: the trees are gnarled biddies hunched together to gossip—in fact they might try some Porcelana cream for those age spots.

Courtney is speaking of Barbara, whom she likes. "Jacob once showed me photographs in an album of Barb as an adolescent—I saw this gawky sallow girl, but listening to him talk about her, with that father's pride, she began to appear lovely to me, too. The irony is that now Barbara is indeed beautiful, and I don't think she believes it."

This is the aspect of Courtney that Jeff does not understand—her instinctive and sincere generosity toward the woman who should be a rival. He guiltily disapproves of what some people would call her immorality (first Jacob, then him) but what he knows is simply an extreme casualness about sex. Courtney and Jeff happen to maintain offices on the same expensive city block, and after a few months of the game of embarrassedly avoiding each other, or sheepishly running into each other, they began to look forward to the glimpses of each other—discovering that they were curiously disappointed to miss their chance meetings at the bank, coffee shops, certain street corners. Jeff finds it hard to admit to himself how insulted he is when, after sex, Courtney takes one more drag on her joint, then remains peacefully asleep until morning. Barbara (he flatters himself, amused, that she is truly stimulated) sometimes gets right up to work. He lies that the light doesn't bother him. He likes to have her near, her pencil scratching.

Courtney's halter top knots in front. She unties the blouse and her breasts are free. Clever Courtney: on her gift, there was no ribbon for Steph to unravel but, with quick graceful fingers, Courtney loosens her own adornment for his benefit. Clever Courtney: her back, because of the skimpy pretty blouse, has been bared all afternoon anyway. A guest wandering too close in their direction would spot little amiss, merely two acquaintances, talking. She places the strip of material on a rock and Jeff sets his watch down alongside it. Courtney and Jeff hold hands in the stream, underwater. She never wears a watch, she had insisted, when he had wanted to give her one during the early feverish days of his infatuation. He realizes that if she had accepted that present from him and laid it, a moment ago, extremely carefully on the same rock, the gesture would have created more passion in him than the view of her small-breasted body, which of course, he is used to by now.

Once again, she is causing him to miss Barbara—Barb, with her heavy-lidded eyes, heavy breasts, those constant heavy books. Barbara is one of the few people he knows these days who does not go out for business lunches. He can always reach her by phone so easily: he pleasurably pictures her, while dialing, sitting at her lab bench, wearing her white coat. It is amazing to him—it seems a bit like cheating, he sometimes thinks, with amusement, that Courtney could be so enormously successful with no books, without graduate school. She designs jewelry: he has accompanied her to artisan's conventions where she seriously surveys tables and tables full of tiny beads in cups. The process seems both terrifically humorous to Jeff, and slightly exasperating. *Getting rich on beads?* He would not give any of the flimsy stuff to a woman.

"Summers inevitably remind me of my family's flaw: Augusts," says Courtney. "My parents had a reasonably good marriage except that my family never *ever* took a vacation together. Each August my father would send his business suits to the dry cleaner, then disappear alone in the woods with a canoe for about a month. 'Why can't I worry about him being stuck in a traffic jam like everyone else's husband?' my mother would ask me. My friends' parents always vacationed together, and brought back things like maracas or straw dolls."

Courtney smiles, splashing water. The silver bracelet on her wrist glints. "I tagged along with Jacob once, while he went shopping for birthday presents for Steph and Barbara—two May birthdays. I don't know why: I had this idea that he would search much harder for his daughter, than for his wife, but I was wrong."

Jeff stares through the grove, at the faraway party continuing near the house. He can almost count the guests the way Steph inventoried her wine glasses earlier this afternoon. He imagines that one woman, Barbara, will detach herself from the other people, and stand stock still on the lawn. "I can no longer tell when I'm really succeeding in my work. More and more often a patient walks in to see me with a sunny disposition and I wonder: have I, Jeffrey, actually helped him resolve anger at a dead father, or a former lover, or has the grocery check-out man heartily admired his new coat a couple of minutes before our session?"

Jeff, who couldn't be more serious about his concerns, wants to laugh at his own words. Perhaps he, like Jacob, has had too much of Steph's white wine. He holds out the halter to Courtney, then wraps her back into it, feeling, absurdly, as if he is diapering a baby, something he has never done in his life. Beads, for Christ's sake. He suddenly recalls a required child psychiatry demonstration during his residency—had he been watching intelligence tests for four-year-olds? The children had to copy a crayoned pattern of colored beads taped to the wall when real string and beads were placed in their pudgy fingers. You could see the yearning in their eyes to please the tester; you could see the urge to arrange the beads any damn way that they pleased.

Courtney drops a refreshing damp arm around his shoulder. She is wonderful at picking up moods and handling situations. "It's a good thing that right now you are too involved in your own worries to continue my conversation. If you had

asked me: 'What did Jacob bring for Barbara and Steph?' for the life of me, I can't remember."

Jeff is craving Barbara, in her old white bathrobe, studying.

Together in the apartment, Barbara and Jeff unpack the extra food: they load up the vegetable bin with pineapple pieces and strawberries, bind towers of brownies in Saran Wrap.

"We're all set up for the winter," Jeff jokes.

Then, he is thinking of the apartment in winter; the rooms, because of the sizzling steam heat, become very hot like this. He and Barbara have just arrived, and have not yet turned on the air conditioner. (That's why Barb started studying in the bedroom, although he keeps his desk in the living room: since she gets up late at night when he is in bed, usually watching her admiringly for awhile, they only have to run one of the air conditioners.) He has loved his two winters here with Barb. The tiny apartment seems to close around them, comfortably; he likes to hear the murmurs of another couple, above.

They sit at their kitchen table and split a brownie, and a small amount of wine. Jeff says: "During Steph's parties there are no second courses, really no second helpings. You just roam around enjoying your conversations. She certainly uses a fine idea."

Barbara's thoughts are elsewhere. "I've been attending these gatherings—Jacob's birthday parties, all my life. Divorce, for children, is not quite as damaging as people think. I was most bothered by having to pack and unpack a suitcase so often."

She is being untruthful. Jeff knows: she once told him that, at the beginning of an argument with Jacob, before the dispute blew full force, Hilda would run for bobbie pins to tack up her hair in tight strands across her head, so as she perspired in her increasing anger, her hairdo would not frizz. No child, Jeff believes, passionately, should carry around such a recollection. Barbara rarely mentions or analyzes her parents' problems, and, in those infrequent instances she does so briefly, and quite simplistically, as if condensing pertinent facts of her life that belong in a resume: where she attended college; what aspect of research absorbs her. (Hilda and Jacob were not well matched in the first place. His absolute optimism that things would get better financially infuriated her. She was astonished when he married Steph so quickly, and she still regrets ending the marriage. Hilda always thought of her cramped apartment as temporary, while Steph made hers enchanting—something that taught Hilda a lesson, Barbara knows.) *Seconds:* Barbara's furnishings, in her first apartment, were all new. She refuses to buy anything used; she will not take a hand-me-down, even from Steph, whose seconds are like nobody else's.

Barbara continues: "I have a fine memory of my parents, while they were still married. I was only about three, of course, asleep on a snowy night, when I was awakened merely by a sense of them standing at the side of my bed, admiring me. Their coats were all wet with snow: I could almost smell that snow, delightfully.

Later, I opened my door and peeked into the living room to see my father blow-drying the snow from my mother's hair—each time he lifted up a bunch to dry underneath he kissed her exposed neck. All winter, I waited, with decreasing hope, for the scene to be repeated."

She is so rarely in such a mood, speaking of her childhood, that Jeff feels as if he has been handed a gift. Always to his annoyance, other women, when bringing him home to their apartments for the first time, fixed him food, then sat across tables very much like this, watching him eat. Barb had said, simply: "help yourself," then went to answer the phone. He found himself surprised that he resented hearing her laugh in another room. He wanted desperately to know with whom she was talking, to share her life. He wants to enclose Barbara in the small apartment, protecting her from troubling recollections; he wants the fighting of the couple above (discovered with amazement when he and Barb were in the upstairs hallway for some reason) to be reduced again to murmuring.

He leans across the table, lifts her hair, and kisses her neck. Barbara, despite her refusal to take from Steph, smells, tonight, like Steph's house! He inhales again, reinforcing his opinion. Barbara also possesses Jacob's patience and optimism, a good combination for a scientist, and the two traits essential for her to trust, all these months, that things would get better between her and himself. What other characteristics has she swiped from the people she knows so well? Hilda's stubbornness, her repetition of an exact manner of living for a quarter of a century, must get Barbara through those early routine boring experiments. Jeff thinks: now, he too, is analyzing simplistically.

Barbara draws her face back. "What are you smiling about?" She is also smiling.

"I love you," he whispers. "You know that."

Becky Bradway

The Warm Weather Greyhound

They were first to get on the bus, because they wanted to grab the back. Everyone knew the back was where all the action was.

Putting her overnight bag at her feet—it was the only luggage she'd been able to sneak out with—Angie curled up next to the window, as close as she could get to the cold metal of the bus. She clenched her coat around her and waited for Kip.

"Jesus fuck, I'm freezing." Rubbing her hands together, she watched the strangers who straggled up the steps and down the narrow aisle, noting details, sizing up possible lives. Two people heading toward the back deflected her interest from all the others; they didn't seem to be bus people. That is, they didn't look poor.

The couple wore matching calf-length trench coats and slouchy hats pulled low over their faces, like characters from *Casablanca.* The man carried an instrument case (which made Angie think of gangsters), and a leather travel bag was slung over his shoulder. The woman—close up, she looked more like a girl—lugged two pieces of heavy-looking lavender luggage.

The man gave Angie a light smile as they took the seat in front of her. The smile was all she could see of his face; his hat was pulled low, hiding his eyes. He had long and slender fingers, what her mother would have called piano player's hands. Angie looked down at her own stubby, blocky ones.

Kip, who was right behind them, shoved his army bag on the rack, and sat behind Angie, tearing the wrapper off a Baby Ruth.

"Wait'll we get to Phoenix," Kip said, through a mouthful of chocolate. "We'll lay out by my sister's pool and get tans. We won't even remember what snow looks like. We'll roast ourselves to death, while everyone around here is freezing their asses off." His foot tapped manically, the way it always did when he was excited.

"Want some?" Kip shoved the candy bar in her face; Angie shook her head. "Now we can do whatever we want."

Angie felt like her bones were frozen. She had never once believed that their escape attempt would get this far. Outside the bus were the Springfield people, all the losers who hung out at the station, the snow swirling down like a confetti parade. People stood on the sidewalk waving mournful good-byes, but none of her people were there.

"I really snuck past Carmen, didn't I?" It made her feel better, knowing she had pulled one on her sister. She squeezed Kip's football-player-arm through his quilted jacket. "I thought she had me, when she asked about my bag."

"You're a good liar, Ange. But then, Carmen's sort of an idiot. Like when we were smoking dope and we told her the smell was incense?" Kip snickered through his nose, his thick brown hair falling over his forehead in a mat. When

he smiled, he showed the gap between his two front teeth that had first attracted Angie to him. There was something about that space that made him look goofy and cute, like a big friendly dog.

"She's okay. She can't help it if she's an airhead." Angie didn't like people to insult her relatives, even though she enjoyed doing it herself. "She's just trying to be Big Mama."

"Well, she'll never have it nailed down like your mom did. When Elsa said the word, boy, we all jumped. She was really something."

"Yeah. Well." Angie folded her arms across her chest. Whenever she thought about her mother, she felt like crying; not from sadness, but because she felt ripped off. She didn't think there had ever been a day when she had gotten along with her mom, but she had learned how to manipulate her parents like Silly Putty. When they were little, it had driven the older kids crazy, the way that Angie had gotten all the breaks, and when her mother died, she was thrown to the sibling wolves. Dad didn't give a damn anymore; he let Carmen run the house. It was such a major screw, Mom's death. When you died, you died. No second chances, no coming back. The End.

"Sorry. I didn't mean to bum you out." Kip put his arm around her awkwardly, like a boy on a first date, even though they had been going steady over a year. "Let's think about the new things. Like, now, don't forget to call me Sean."

"Stupid. What's wrong with Kip?"

A black man, wrinkled and shaky, with white whiskers and a mashed-up sack that Angie bet held a whiskey bottle, sat across from them. When he looked their way, his eyes were yellow. Angie scooted closer to her side of the bus. She hardly ever saw black people. It was scary how strong they seemed.

"I hate the name Kip," Kip said. "Sounds like a damn dog or something. 'Here Kip, here Kip.' " He whistled as if he was calling a pet.

The black man shook his head, leaning toward them confidentially. "No dogs on this bus," he said. "Not allowed." He settled back into his seat, like a banker who had done a civic duty.

Kip looked at Angie and shrugged.

"Okay, I'll call you Sean," she said.

"There aren't any rock and rollers named 'Kip.'"

"Sure."

"As soon as I get to Phoenix, I'm going to get in that band."

"Okay."

"I'll start there, then play L.A. Lots of people do it that way."

"I know."

The man in front of them turned around. "Did I hear 'band'? I'm in a band."

Angie took a breath. The man reminded her of a French actress whose name she didn't know. His eyes were as blue and clear as certain shiny marbles. His face and hands had an almost unreal delicacy, as if he had been molded, rather than born. Elegant; she imagined him holding a glass of wine, staring out plate glass windows.

"I'm getting into a band in Phoenix. Are you good?"

Kip just stared. Then he nodded.

"I'm in a group right now," the guy went on. "Dad's Night Out. That's their name. From Columbus, Ohio. At least, I *was* playing with them. Lead singer. But I got friends in Phoenix I'm going to hook up with. It's a much better bet, you know. Than the middle of nowhere. So what the hell."

Even his smile was perfect, Angie noticed, as if he had flossed after every meal his entire life.

"Name's Jackie. Cartwright. Like, you know, the Bonanza Cartwrights."

The woman next to Mr. Perfect turned and nodded a greeting, her red lips going up in a stressed V. Angie was relieved to find that, though she wore a lot of lipstick, Jackie's girlfriend was not very pretty. She had a narrow, heart-shaped face and round, blue-lidded eyes that never seemed to focus on any one thing. Her hair was thick and brown with blonde streaks, and circled her head like a helmet. Her nose was small and flat, as if someone had pressed it to her face at birth.

"I'm Kelly," she said, sounding as if she lived on Valium.

Kip leaned forward. "I'm Ki—uh—Sean Whitebridge and this is Angie Mulrooney."

"Whitebridge. Does that mean your ancestors built white bridges?"

Kip stared at Jackie, then gave a nervous giggle. "I dunno."

Jackie laughed. He pulled the hat off his head and straightened his yellow hair with his hand. He settled in against the window, putting his feet on the seat. "You're pretty funny. Hey, I brought my acoustic." He pointed at the luggage rack. "Maybe we can play later. After all the bus zombies conk out.

"That'd be cool." Kip's foot tapped double-time. "I play lead myself. And I sing."

"Great. Maybe this trip won't be so disgusting after all."

"Tell me about your band." Kip scooted as close as he could to the seat ahead, his hands gripping his knees. "Must be cool, having your own band. That's what I want, you know, but here everyone's a hick, they're not like into good music."

"Oh man, I know what you mean."

The bus driver started the engine. Angie watched him as he turned the key, then walked back outside. He stood a long time, smoking a cigarette, the smoke and his breath both white in the cold air.

Angie kept expecting to see her father, or Carmen, or the police, or someone she knew. The town was small; she thought she'd be spotted skipping school. Driving Kip's red car past the grocery store, stopping at the one light; Angie had even waved at Mrs. Leonard, who was out sweeping her front porch. Dave worked at the high school; she thought sure that *he'd* find out. Actually, she figured that Kip's sister in Arizona would blow the whistle on them; wasn't it against the law to keep runaways? Too easy. Maybe she wasn't as important as she thought she was. Maybe nobody had ever really noticed her.

What would they do when they found her gone? Would Dad get up out of his chair? Would Carmen cry because they let her get away? Maybe they would put her belongings in boxes, the way they had her mother's, shove her in the closet and forget.

When they passed the sign welcoming them into Missouri, Angie began to feel a strange surge of power. She realized that she could be anybody. She could tell Jackie and Kelly a pack of lies, and they would believe them. She could become any person she wanted, and there would be nobody to remind her of what stupid things she had done when she was two years old, or five, or ten. And if no one was around to remind her, then maybe she could forget.

As soon as they got on the road, the guitar had been pulled down, and Jackie and Kip were singing. Nobody on the bus complained about the noise they made. It was as if they were surrounded by a magic bubble, safe from other people's objections.

Jackie liked country music. They all cringed when he began singing Willie Nelson songs.

"That's hick stuff," Kip objected.

"Yeah, but I like it anyway." Jackie sat with his guitar propped on his leg. He reached into his coat pocket, pulled out a flask, and spiked the coke that Kelly was holding for him. He passed the bottle over the seat to Kip, who gave it to Angie. Smelling whiskey, she poured about a shot into her empty can of Orange Crush. She liked her booze straight.

"It's real, you know," Jackie went on. "About hard luck people. And it goes good with acoustic."

"I guess it is, I guess it does," stuttered Kip. "I guess I always did sort of like that stuff, too."

"Oh, Kip, you never did!" Angie rolled her eyes.

"Sure I did. I just never told you."

"Well, I hate country music," Angie told Jackie, who watched her with an amused smile. "It reminds me of my relatives."

"Don't be ashamed of your background." Jackie strummed the guitar and began to sing.

Angie squinted at him. "You're only five years older, you can't talk to me that way."

"Don't be defensive," he sang, to the tune of "On the Road Again."

"I'm not—" she began but Jackie was laughing at her, so she shut up. Besides, in a way he was right. Except that she wouldn't call it shame. Boredom was better. Nobody wanted to stay with a bunch of ignorant dopes who didn't know how to do anything except plant the crops, or cook apple pies. Who didn't know anything about the world outside.

Angie tapped Kelly on the shoulder, trying to find someone on her side. "Don't you think the Midwest is just boring?"

"Everything's dull." Kelly's glance passed over Angie and rested on Jackie. She leaned far over and bit his ear. Jackie didn't miss a note. "Except sex," she added, as she scooted back to her own side of the seat.

"Oh," said Angie.

At four in the morning, in Oklahoma City, they climbed out of the Greyhound and stretched.

"My legs are spaghetti." Angie was weaving like a drunk. They wandered, blinking, into the brightly-lit bus stop. People lined the hard wooden benches like statues not quite cut from their blocks. They stared vacantly at their knees, or at crumpled newspapers, as if the world was no longer of interest to them.

"Man," said Kip, punching the buttons for three different candy bars, "you could get depressed, looking at these people. They're so ... beat out, sort of."

Angie, huddled next to him, her hand freezing as it gripped a cold Dr. Pepper, felt it, too. She couldn't understand what had happened to these people, to make them look the way they did.

"Land of the Lost." Meeting the angry eyes of an angular young woman with a purple tattoo of a cross on her arm, Angie pretended she had been looking at the wall. The woman could hurt somebody.

"Just ignore 'em," grinned Jackie. In the sharp fluorescent light, his face was bluish, as if the delicate veins were showing through. "People like that always land on their feet." He slapped the button for Coke with his fist. "Hey, we're so good, we ought to start our own band when we hit Phoenix. I mean, really, maybe we should." He ripped the tab off the Coke and tossed it on the floor.

"That'd be great." Kip stared into Jackie's face. "Like a dream, or something."

Kelly looped her arm in Jackie's, nestled her face into his neck. Angie could see the reddish makeup in her pores. "That's just what he used to say in Columbus. If we could just find the right people."

"I've got these friends, you know." Jackie kissed the top of Kelly's head. "Bet we could work something out. Maybe have a really big band, you know, with a couple guitars and some chick singers. Why don't you give me your phone number?" He reached into the pocket of his baggy grey pants and pulled out a matchbook. "Scribble it here."

"This is great." Kip took the pack of matches, Angie handed him a pencil, and he walked to the blue cement wall, using it to rest his paper on as he wrote.

Over the speaker came the news that their route had been diverted. They would be going north, then back south again. Flooding on the Texas Plains.

"What the fuck!" Angie stamped her foot, adding her voice to the complaints of thirty other tired passengers. Kip was still writing. She wondered if he had even heard.

"Hey, it'll be fun," Jackie said, surprising her by looping his free arm over her shoulders. "You'll feel better if you start singing." His voice was whiskey-sweet as he leaned into her ear.

Angie didn't look at him. He was too handsome to look at. She hadn't been a non-virgin for very long. Her vulnerability was like tumblers in a lock.

"I can't sing."

"I'll teach you," he whispered. "It's easy." His arm tightened around her. He wasn't strong like Kip, but there was something demanding about his embrace. Angie was afraid to look at Kelly, looped by his other arm; or was the girl so used to it that she didn't care?

"I don't want to sing." Angie ducked out from under his hold, and walked to the candy machine, feeling out of breath. She reached into her pocket for change, and tried to focus on the selections offered.

As she punched up another Baby Ruth for Kip, the loudspeaker announced the departure of an east-bound bus. The people on the benches rose up in a group. Angie watched the tattooed girl gather her dirty suitcase and head for the door. With her back to Angie, she didn't look scary anymore. She only looked skinny.

It was only after they had gotten back on the Greyhound, and Kip had moved next to Jackie, that Angie began to feel really afraid. With Kelly now sitting beside her, she realized how alone she could be.

She couldn't do anything. She had never had a bank account, or a job, or a car, or any of the things that grown-ups had or did to get by. With Kip, she had assumed that, somehow, the right things would happen. But what if he left her?

"They're really hitting it off." Kelly watched the men jealously, then smiled with what looked to be great effort. She was one of those people who needed to smile at everything. Close up, Angie saw that Kelly had large front teeth that fell slightly over her triangular mouth when she talked. That was about all she could see of the girl, since it was so dark. Teeth.

"Jackie's so friendly," Kelly said, patting her hair. "He gets along with everybody. In Columbus, he had lots of friends. I mean, I am *very* lucky to be around him. Because I get to meet so many people that way." Kelly's voice was thin and edgy, like her body. Angie imagined that if she pushed her with her finger, Kelly mght fall off the seat.

"Kip's friendly, too. I mean, Sean." Actually Angie never thought much about Kip, about his qualities. They were always there, just as he was always there. They had known each other since kindergarten.

"Jackie's different," Kelly sighed. "There's really no one like him. We've only been going out two months, but they've been about the best two months of my life."

Kelly's voice bothered Angie. It had the same tone she had been using in her own mind when she was thinking about being alone, without Kip. It was the sound of someone calling from the middle of a pond.

"How old are you?"

"Twenty," Kelly giggled. "Old enough to know better. I don't usually go this ga-ga over guys. I've been out so much, you'd think it would be no big deal." The

girl looked into her lap. "It's just that Jackie is so terrific. I never expected to do this good."

Angie didn't know what to say to that. She looked out the window and saw her reflection in the dark glass.

Spacious, covered with a dust of snow, in the early morning, Salt Lake City looked like an empty Heaven.

Angie held Kip's gloved hand. They were across the street from the Temple, passing it on their way to McDonald's, where they would eat breakfast.

"Pretty. Ain't it." Kip's cheeks were red from the winter wind.

"Let's go look."

"Why?"

"Just want to." Angie pulled Kip a few steps. "Come on." Shrugging, Kip looked back at Jackie, then ran with his girl across the empty street.

They stood on the edge of the wide Temple yard, staring up at the building like worshippers. No cars, no people. There was only the Temple, which existed like a command.

The place was perfect. Unmarred. Pristine.

Angie couldn't stand it.

Jumping into the snow with both feet, she stretched out in the wetness, moving her arms up and down.

"I'm flying!" Angie yelled frantically. Kip stared down at her, and she laughed into his face. "You too!"

He looked over his shoulder at Jackie, who was crossing the street. "Naw." He shoved his hands into his pockets.

Angie couldn't believe how boring Kip was getting, and called him names. She got up, ignoring the snow seeping into her jeans, took a few steps, then did it again. She wanted to litter the whole white yard with her human angels. Closing her eyes, she pretended that she had gotten past it all, floating high above the golden Temple dome.

Someone grabbed her hand and pulled, and she scrambled to her feet, looking into Jackie's own unearthly face.

"You trying to get arrested?" He was holding her hand. He seemed both angry and amused, but looked around with real concern. "You're lucky nobody saw. These right-wing Mormon bastards'll shoot you."

Angie let him loop his arm over her shoulder. She was cold now, and tired; the city shimmered like a sheet of ice. Jackie smelled clean and fresh, as if he had bathed at every stop. He was looking into her face, his eyes that strange Paul Newman-blue. She could have gone for him, right into the snow, in front of God and all his minions, would have tumbled for his perfect teeth, his German blondness, for all the things he had to hide. Then she saw the glassy rims inside his eyes, the circles of his lie: he was wearing colored contact lenses. And probably hair spray. His shoes had high heels. It was a con, an image. He had shined up the surface.

"These people are seriously into God," he lectured her. "They probably have your photo right now."

"Oh, bite it." Angie let Jackie pull her along. Making the snow figures seemed silly, now. What was the point? As she walked, she watched the Temple over her shoulder, half-expecting God's heavenly FBI to emerge with swords and Polaroid cameras.

By the time they reached the corner, Angie couldn't see her own angels at all. They could have been shadows.

The Phoenix terminal was big and clean, filled with people coming and going. Compared to the other bus stops, this one was streamlined, civilized, metallic. Angie realized that she really was entering a new sort of life.

"I'm gonna call Patty to have her pick us up." The four of them were clustered in the middle of the lobby. Kip was hyped, anxious to settle things. "Listen, will you guys wait til I get off the phone? We can hang out before she gets here, decide how to get together later. Hey, my sister can give you a ride to wherever you want to go."

Jackie checked his watch. "I'm going to stop at the bathroom, clean up and shave. Why don't we split up, meet back here? Then we can set our coordinates for the future, right?"

They agreed. Angie waited as Kelly watched Jackie walk down the hallway.

"He's not coming back." Kelly sat on the edge of her suitcase. Jackie disappeared around a corner, his guitar case swinging.

"He's going to the bathroom."

"No. He's gone. I know it."

Angie stared at the girl's tiny, pointed face, her too-small hands. In the light, she looked wan, her makeup mask-like, her eyes set in blue circles. Avoiding Angie's scrutiny, she looked at the floor, tilting the hat brim over her face.

"Don't be dumb. He'll be back."

Kelly shook her head.

"Well, I have to pee." Angie was annoyed. She told herself that Kelly was crazy, she had to be; not even the worst rat would dump a girl in the middle of the city.

"Oh, settle down," she snapped, and walked away.

In the bathroom, Angie asked herself: What does Jackie mean to me? Nothing. What does he mean to me? Nothing at all.

When she left the john, she stood for a moment, then went to the far hallway, the one that led away from Kelly and Kip, the one she hoped led to the right door, the door where Jackie would be waiting.

Angie found him standing near a window, leaning against a wall, looking cool. A detective propped on a lamppost. He turned from the window, looked her way and smiled.

"You asshole." He was wearing glasses, prescription shades with thick lenses. She couldn't see his eyes.

"I was hoping I might get to see you. I was expecting it."

That threw off her angry momentum. "What do you think you're doing?"

"Leaving. You didn't think I'd want to spend the rest of my life in the bus station, did you?" He pushed his glasses down and stared at her over the top rim.

"That's cute. What about Kelly? And Kip? They're waiting for you."

"And you're not?" He laughed, and held up his hand. "Okay, okay, you're tough. As far as Kelly goes, I never said I'd stay with her. I didn't lie. I told her we'd go to Phoenix, that was it. Travelling companions. She knew it; she just thought she could change my mind. She's the manipulative one, not me.

"And Kip's a big boy. I'm just a guy he met on the bus, right? And maybe I will call him, who knows? Either way, he'll be fine. He really can play the guitar, you know." Jackie folded his arms, tilted his head to one side. "Don't you trust him to get by?"

"Sure I do," Angie said doubtfully. She hated the way he messed with her mind. "Don't turn this around. Why did you lie?"

"Lie? Me?" Jackie tried to look innocent, but Angie stared into his eyes until he looked up at the ceiling. "Because they needed me to. It was the only way I could escape without a scene. It's easier ... you give people what they want for a while, and then you do what you have to do."

His fingertips touched Angie's arm, guided her toward the window, closer to him. "You'll find that out. Wait'll you're on your own, figure out that Kip is a big weenie and that there's better things for you. Because you will. And it won't take long. You're like me. You've got to get out. This trip was your idea, right?"

Angie looked out the door and shrugged.

"You'll get bored here too. And when you do, you might want to give me a call. It's in the phone book, under Ron Baines. That's where I'm staying. B-A-I-N-E-S. Ronald."

"Don't count on it."

Jackie leaned against the metal that supported the windows. Without his smart-ass smile, he looked younger. "You know, it's hard for me, too. Sometimes I wish I could just settle in. Don't you? It's like an Underdog energy pill, you know? You just want to fly all over the place." He began to laugh—giggle, really—and he crossed and undercrossed his arms. Angie found herself laughing with him, because it was true: That was just how she felt.

"I always wanted to shake things up," she said, water coming from one eye.

"Like me. It's kind of a curse." He embraced Angie in a hug; not a sexual gesture, but a friendly one, the hug of a friend going away. There was something desperate about it; it went on a second too long. How many people had Jackie lost this way? How many would she lose? It was as if they had made a strange pact.

When they pulled apart, he looked out the window. A red Thunderbird pulled into the concrete circle.

"Oops, there's my ride." He picked up his guitar case, slung his bag over his shoulder. "Baines," he grinned, pushing the door open.

After they dropped Kelly off at the Best Western the ride to Patty's was silent. Kip sat on one side of the wide black seat of the Lincoln, Angie on the other. Both of them stared out the windows. Even Kip's sister seemed grim, biting her bottom lip, as if she hadn't really expected to find them. Patty's baby, in the front car seat, let out indignant whines.

They pulled into the rock-covered drive of the suburban ranch house. Patty stopped the car to let them out, then used an electronic door opener and drove the Lincoln into a cramped garage.

Angie and Kip gathered their bags and stood on the sidewalk, staring at the rows of stucco houses on the pretty, well-planned street. The sky seemed heavy, blue and cloudless over the low-lying homes. It was so warm that Angie knew, if she took her shoes off, that the pavement would burn her feet.

"Isn't this something, Ange?" Kip dropped his bag and reached for her hand, grinning like crazy. His foot tapped out another rhythm. "Isn't this great?"

Reviews

Selected Poems by Dave Etter. Peoria, IL: Spoon River Poetry, 1987. 240 pages. $14.95, hardback.

Selected Poems contains generous selections from the thirteen books David Etter has published to date, twelve books of poetry and one book of prose, many of them out of print. His work, consistently among the finest of our time though by and large ignored by critics on both coasts, concentrates on what Etter knows, rural life in the midwest, which he presents in all its drabness and pettiness as well as its intensity, infusing it with his own special imagination and humor.

In "Picasso," for example, one of his more recent poems, the famous Spanish artist comes to the midwest to have dinner with the poet's family—baked ham, sweet potatoes, and hickory nut pie. Then the family and their guest go out in the yard to listen to a tambourine solo (?!) by the poet's seven year old son. Picasso responds by making his hosts a valuable statue out an old bicycle pump, a Mobil oil can, some baling wire, and two green parrot feathers.

....and my wife said
thank you thank you we
sure will cherish this
fine piece forever
and my son put down
his tambourine and
said to Picasso
what the hell is that?

Wonderful warmth! Wonderful humor! The midwesterners appreciate Picasso—even the son is curious—and he also appreciates them. Picasso uses junk for his art. The poet's wife uses ham, potatoes, and hickory nuts for hers. Their son uses a tambourine. And the poet, being both traditional and contemporary, simple and sophisticated, uses the whole mixture to make an intriguing statement about art in our time, in our section of the country.

In spite of Etter's simple diction, the music of his poetry gives it a haunting quality, so that it seems to be saying more than the bare meanings of the words. It sings. In his early poem, "The Poet Dreams of His Youth," he reminisces in a musical framework about growing up close to nature.

The sad music of cello and bassoon.

The corn leaves are yellow.
I can never see them as green.

Sunflowers grow twenty feet tall
and stare the Bible from my eyes.

Hands that have burst their purple veins
float on the river where I was baptized.

In a tree of paper flowers
a calico girl makes valentines.

Every man, woman, and child of my youth
is standing by his own gravestone.

At dusk a boy with a red flash
comes out of the yellow corn leaves.

The sad music of cello and bassoon.

Here the long e of *dreams* in the title finds a subtle echo in the long *e's* in the second stanza: *leaves, see,* and *green.* The long *o* of *poet* in the title echoes throughout the work: *cello, yellow, grow, float, calico, own gravestones, yellow,* and *cello* again. These words seldom come at the ends of stanzas or in any recognizable rhythm. Rather they are scattered subtly throughout the poem, thereby assuming a shade more emphasis. They serve as a kind of counterpoint to the regular stanzas and stanza breaks, giving the poem an irregular dreamy rhythm appropriate to its subject. The haunting music of the long *o* and *ou* in the sixth stanza *(own-gravestone* and *youth)* emphasize the sound of the last word of the poem, making a long off-rime with *bassoon.*

Such poetry makes me wish the *Selected Poems* were a much thicker book, containing, for example, less of his prose from *Homestead* and more of his poetry. From the eighty-two poems in his first book, *Go Read the River,* he includes forty-eight, leaving out several of my personal favorites: "Picnic," "In Dubuque County," "On the Courthouse Steps," "Snow Cones," and "Sunday in Kankakee County." He had changed some titles ("Nude" becomes "Photographing a Nude") and rearranged the spacing of some poems, thereby changing their meaning slightly.

But these are minor points about a very fine book by a very fine poet, produced by Spoon River with all the care and love that Etter's work deserves. Few people have written such subtle, straightforward, understanding, and humorous work about our section of the country.

Read it. Love it.

Victor Contoski

The Woman in the Next Booth by Jo McDougall. Kansas City, MO: BookMark Press, 1987. 64 pages. $7.95, hardback.

Reading the poetry of Jo McDougall is akin to gazing into a large body of water: first glances show a clear, smooth, reflecting surface; second encounters and retrospection bring to light the secrets and complexities hidden beneath. The clear reflections ripple and distort, and there is that sudden, mysterious concentric circle growing on the surface which catches the eye and invites pursuit. This is the level upon which the poems of McDougall function and spring into life.

The Woman in the Next Booth is filled with clean, pure, straightforward writing. Line breaks are syntactical, the use of adjectives is spare, and the poems generally begin with a simple action or everyday occurrence from which point the poems expand in implications and levels of meaning. One manner in which this is effectively accomplished is through the closure of the poem—a few, seemingly casual lines which manage to leave a small, unsettling afterthought and which haunt the reader, as in "Walking Down Prospect":

> I walk down Prospect
> behind the buildings with the Gothic windows.
> Inside me your names fly up like two quail.
> When they are gone
> I pull my coat around me.
> When I get home
> I try to call you.
> Where you are in the world now it is dark.
> The phone rings into that.

The word da*rk* here is ambiguous and disquieting. For McDougall, the ending of a poem is where it really begins; her endings invite a re-reading and reinterpretation of the poem from its beginning. The poem "Reporting Back," for instance, begins: "There has been an accident. / A bridge has collapsed. / The water under it / has taken a bus, a car, a truck." This is a straightforward, unadorned presentation of what appears to be the subject of the poem. But read onward and

the true subject is revealed—the complex mental state of a *witness* of such a nightmarish catastrophe, how shock affects the mind and, frighteningly, how the reliability of witnesses in any situation can be affected by the power of suggestion:

> Some who see what they see will never tell
> say they don't remember
> say what somebody said they said.
> Buy this man a drink.
> Ask him
> What did you think of going down?
> Hydrangeas? Your mother? A fox?
> "A fox," he says.

The visions in this collection are dark and often unsettling, but attractive. The real and the imaginary co-exist side by side, much as the make-up of our own lives, where facts and figures are equal parts of an individual's sublunary existence. Fantastic metaphors, and flight into the bizarre/absurd, inevitably illuminate what is possible—and often probable—in the "real" world, as in "Silly Women":

> When death sees a silly woman
> He ambles over
> And asks her to dance
> If she says Thank you no
> He puts his hand on her shoulder anyway
> Turns her around
> Teaches her an old step
> or two.
>
> Death likes silly women
> who dance a little closer than they should

The scenario is creative, imaginary and, most would agree, impossible; and yet its implications are realistic and probable: the idea of "flirting with death."

In Jo McDougall's world, people covertly reveal through their actions, words and appearances what they keep hidden—consciously or unconsciously—from themselves as well as others. The characters in the poems give honest, realistic reactions to such occurrences as reading literature; seeing a movie on the American bombing of Cambodia; dancing and drinking in dim, hazy lounges, or a death in the family—things which are apt to move us and yet which reveal how, in the end, we inevitably return to focus upon ourselves. This is also an honest,

realistic observation for, after experiencing the strange, difficult and sometimes frightening events of our everyday existences, we all need to retreat sometimes to the safety and security of our inner worlds. Jo McDougall reveals and illuminates the water-gazer in us all.

Shelle Rosenfeld

George Grand by Philip Miller (Samisdat, 1987)
Kitestrings by Marilee Means (Ligature Press, 1988)
Local Color by Gar Bethel (Point Riders Press, 1987)
Tattoos by Art Homer (Green Tower Press, 1987)

The word "chapbook" comes from the old English *caep*, or trade; it later took on the meaning cheap. Inexpensive pamphlets—the chapbooks—were sold by peddlers, and they contained ballads, manifestos, nursery rhymes, and treatises.

Four chapbooks recently published show the range of production available to American presses for these inexpensive publications. All make available the works of fine poets.

Fast and dirty is Samisdat's chapbook of Philip Miller's *George Grand.* Samsidat punctually publishes one chapbook a month. This sixteen-page pamphlet was duplicated and stapled in the most economic fashion, in faithful imitation of the chapman's tradition. The advantage of this strategy is the low cost—Samsidat subscriptions are $15 for 500 pages. Everyone can afford this, and the establishment publishing houses are sidestepped. The copies used, however, had a dirty glass, so black specks float on white spaces. Toner speckles the pages, and paste-up lines are not whited out. This lack of care does not do justice to Miller's work.

George Grand is a drunk. Miller uses this character to tell the inside view of alcoholism. He writes:

> George Grand
>
> is not my right name.
> I took it one afternoon
> dead drunk, wanting to
> make some noise at the police station.
> Decided to telephone all my complaints,
> went to the pay phone, punched in 911,
> and started giving them hell
> I thought they deserved. . . .

Despite his debilitation, this character sees the world with a special wisdom. It is an outsider's view, but often it rings true, as in "George Grand to His Public":

Everyone knows a drunk's always
half-right, which is better than dead
wrong, like some I know, sober as judges,
trussed up, walking stiff and straight,
walking the line,
but needing a drink,
if you know what I mean,
real bad.

The sixteen poems flesh out the family history and daily life of this George Grand. He buys a bottle of port at a grocery store, sleeps on benches, and rents a hotel room. He manages an acute awareness of his predicament, which allows for a dry, black humor to relieve a potentially sordid portrait.

Miller accomplished his lively view of his subject with well-chosen language. He assumes an informality of diction, evident in casual line breaks and a conversational pace. Nonetheless, these poems are carefully built, with just the right images and figurative language to keep the monologues from becoming, indeed, slack ramblings of a drunk.

This slight volume is a teaser. Too bad other related poems recently published in Cats *in the House* (Woodley Press, 1987) could not be reprinted together with the George Grand poems. Perhaps Miller can make a collection of these poems in a further book.

Kitestrings, from Ligature Press, shows how a duplicated chapbook can still be done cheaply but with just a little more care. Simple, clean production goes along with decent paper and, probably, an attractive laser-script. The introduction (by Victor Contoski) is off-center, but otherwise this book shows how desktop publishing can be done attractively.

Marilee Means, who has published under the name of Marilee Mallonee, writes exquisite one-liners. Her humor extends to bulbs greening too early: "It's only the end of January, you idiots / Don't stick your pointed tongues out at me" ("Lecturing the Bulbs"). This light touch becomes blacker with "Preflight":

Waiting on the runway
I question the wisdom of radar,
remember all the shattered fuselage,
the icy wings,
rehearse the aerodynamics of uplift
as if it would help.

Then the roar begins
its thrust held back, held back
released

and just as the boy
who ran the ferris wheel all summer
could have guessed
we all say,
"Here we go."

The speaker's nervousness is undercut by the frolicsome ferris wheel image. It makes a good punchline.

The volume has a consistent tone, and many of the poems have to do with flight or overcoming gravity. This happy mating strengthens all the poems, as they begin to comment on each other. We soar with kids on jungle gyms and Acapulco cliff divers. Like candy, they go down sweetly and leave a craving for more.

Local *Color* is a more graphically sophisticated chapbook from Point Riders Press, edited by Frank Parman. A ghosted photograph of Sitka, Kansas, grain elevators wraps around the front and back covers. It blends well with the typography and internal book design. Gar Bethel is a master of evoking mood, and the tasteful book production allows full appreciation of his work.

These poems celebrate the wise spaces between towns—where monarch butterflies, cattle, and wheat keep the sky company—and they celebrate the people who live constantly humbled by weather and an infinite horizon.

The selection of subjects includes some expected rural scenes like the birth of a calf. Yet Bethel is able to infuse each experience with new perspective. He writes of crossing a barbed wire fence,

It is then you catch
the slivered glimpse
of a horned lizard
frozen at an angle
in deep razor grass
or the bur that hangs
its life upon your pants.

Although nature and farming are the underlying basis of his scenery, Bethel chooses human moments, not mysticism, for his epiphanies. In "Heading Home," it is not the "dust of Southwest Kansas" nor the "scent of sage" that resolve the poem, but rather the abandoned gas station, moon pie and RC Cola, and sheds "sinking into wild haired weeds." It is the evidence of human life that fills Bethel's poems about feedlots, processing plants, bars, parades, and coffee shops.

Bethel writes about rural Kansas not as a traveller penning trite similes while travelling I-70; rather, he is an insider, telling us what it is really like to spend time in the expanses of the plants. He expressed human dreams, like that of the waitress whose son and husband died in accidents or the carpenter struck by lightning: "...Tomorrow I stop / thinking of myself at all, / except maybe as a hammer, calling / the language of fire from the sun."

Green Tower Press of Northwest Missouri State University published *Tattoos.* This classy production shows that even the lowly chapbook can be a work of art. It is handstitched, and red endpapers provide the right touch of flash to the demure beige and black color scheme. If only the press had not been so modest: the designer and cover artist are given no credit, nor is there a colophon.

Art Homer is a brilliant wordsmith. His work shows what energy is possible in the contemporary lyric. "Trying to Slep" begins,

> When I lie down: two breaths,
> and a flash lifts off,
> nosing up from my backbone
> with the bulk of a catfish, nervous
> dart of a sculpin. I must rise,
> claw the night, dramatic sweat
> spreading into my sheet.

He improvises on the theme of blue catfish, and then returns to, "Reeled into my chest again, / the fish becomes simply / another disgruntled organ." He is able to sustain an image at length in taut, surprising language. He does this in every poem throughout the book. Truly, the poems are tattoo-like. Each unrolls a picture. Further, the mind's workings add a third dimension, the consciousness within the tattoo itself.

The four sections of "A Book on Tattoos" serve as section dividers, introducing themes. This is probably a good idea, but the poem, of course, becomes fragmented. It deserves a careful reading, especially since it is the backbone of the entire collection. Homer uses quotations from Ar*t, Sex, and Symbol: The Mystery of Tattooing* (R.W.B. Scutt and Christopher Botch). He evokes the sensuality of tattoos: "The fantasy sweetheart / goes by no name. She may be changed, a rose / slipped between her thighs." These skin pictures—women, peacocks, butterflies, and fox hunts—move through the poem like sirens. He concludes,

> *The first thing men want to do is kiss it.*
> Go ahead. A bit of color beneath the shoulderblade,
> *El Mariposa* won't bite back. When you've forgotten
> the first thing you wanted, rest. Listen to the big

rose of the lungs swell and fall away. Along the bent
stem of the vertebrae, the wings scissor together.

The tattoo fantasy culminates with flesh and image merging. Homer manages a magical union of words and imagery.

Like the lyric, the chapbook is a versatile medium, allowing artistry, as in T*attoos,* or utility, as in *George Grand.* Because of the brevity of much poetry, chapbooks are especially apt. Publishing costs have risen in recent years, and publishing houses have limited or eliminated their poetry lists. The chapbook form provides an alternative to mass duplication of McBooks.

Denise Low

Contributors' Notes

Becky Bradway (924 Bryn Mawr Blvd., Springfield, IL 62703) has recent work in *Ascent, Greensboro Review,* and *Samisdat,* among others. She also edited *The Writers' Bar-B-Q.*

Edith H. Brown (714 Eudora St., Denver, CO 80220), a native Kansan, has appeared in *Womanthology,* a collection of Colorado Women Poets, and *Colorado Women.*

William Burroughs (PO Box 147, Lawrence, KS 66046) recently exhibited his artwork in London. His many novels include *Naked Lunch* and the recently completed trilogy *Cities of the Red Night, The Place of Dead Souls,* and *The Western Lands.*

Ann Conner (619 Fairdale, Salina, KS 67401), a KU grad., has poetry in *The Spirit That Moves Us, Midwest Quarterly,* and *Kansas Quarterly.*

Victor Contoski (English Dept., KU, Lawrence, KS 66045) is working on a series of poems about midwestern buildings, of which "Redick Tower" is one. His most recent poetry collection is *A Kansas Sequence* (Cottonwood/Tellus).

John Giorno (222 Bowery, New York NY 10012) has published widely. His books include *Grasping At Emptiness* (Kulchur Found.) and *Suicide Sutra* (C. Bourgois).

S. C. Hahn (PO Box 82301, Lincoln, NE 68501), a previous *Cottonwood* contributor, has also published poetry in *Prairie Schooner, Fine Madness,* and *Montana Review,* among others.

Nancy Hamm (2456 N. Lincoln, Chicago, IL 60614) lives and writes in Chicago.

Tom Hazuka (1128 3rd Ave., Salt Lake City, UT 84103) co-edits *Quarterly West.* His work has recently appeared in *Sun Dog, Chariton Review, South Dakota Review,* and *New Mexico Humanities Review.*

Michael L. Johnson (English Dept., KU, Lawrence, KS 66045) chairs the Kansas University English Dept. His books of poetry include *The Unicorn Captured* (Cottonwood) and *Familiar Stranger* (Flowerpot Mountain).

Karen Kates (9 Fairview Rd., Scarsdale, NY 10583) has published stories in *Mademoiselle* and *Redbook.*

Gillian Kendall (1016 Vallejo Way, Sacramento, CA 95818) has worked for the fiction depts. of *Redbook* and *Mademoiselle.* Her work has appeared in *Conceptual Vandalism* and *Thursday's Child.*

Amy Klauke (c/o *Northwest Review,* 369 PLC, Univ. of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97401) has published in *Northwest Review* and *Renditions.*

Arthur Winfield Knight (PO Box 309, Guerneyville, CA 95446) has two recent books on the beats, *King of the Beats* (Water Row) and *The Beat Vision* (Paragon House), co-edited by Kit Knight. He also publishes his own poetry widely.

M. L. Liebler (31725 Courtland, St. Clair Shores, MI 98082) teaches at Wayne State University. His books of poetry include *Measuring Darkness* and *After the Boxes: New & Selected Poems,* which is forthcoming.

Lyn Lifshin (2142 Appletree Lane, Niskayuna, NY 12309) has appeared several times in *Cottonwood.* Her recent books include *Raw Opals* and *Rubbed Silk,* both from Illuminati Press.

Carl Lindner (218 CA, Univ. Wisconsin-Parkside, Box 2000, Kenosha, WI 53141), a previous *Cottonwood* contributor, has a new book, *Angling Into Light*, due out later this year.

Denise Low (1916 Stratford Rd., Lawrence, KS 66044), a former *Cottonwood* editor, teaches at Haskell Indian Junior College. Her new book of poetry, *Starwater* (Cottonwood), is just out.

Sally McNall (English Dept., KU, Lawrence, KS 66045) teaches English at KU and has published poems in *New Letters, Plainswoman, Womanspirit,* and *Kansas Quarterly.*

Lauren Mesa (319 Doris Ave., Oxnard, CA 93030) won the 1987 Silverfish Review Chapbook Competition. Her poetry has appeared in *Poetry, Cutbank, The Laurel Review,* and *Sonora Review,* among others.

Stephen Murabito (324 Meyran Ave. #2, Pittsburgh, PA 15213) has recent poems in *Beliot Poetry Journal, Tar River Poetry,* and *Minnesota Review.*

Richard Neumann (Dept. of English, SWMS University, 901 So. National, Springfield, MO 65804) teaches at Southwest Missouri State University.

Michael Pfeifer (4280 Gertrude, St. Louis, MO 63116) has poems in *Carolina Quarterly, Cutbank, Negative Capability,* and *Missouri Review,* among others.

Mary Pipher (3160 S. 31st, Lincoln, NE 68502) is a Clinical Psychologist. Her work has appeared in Ted Kooser's *Oak Creek Gazette.*

Shelle Rosenfeld (1023 Kentucky, Lawrence, KS 66044) is Review Editor of *Cottonwood,* Associate Editor of *The Note,* and Co-Editor of *Disorentation.* She recently won her third Carruth poetry award.

Norman H. Russell (2102 Thrush Circle, Edmond, OK 73034) has recent poems in *West Coast Review, Roanoke Review,* and *Prairie Schooner.* One of his many chapbooks is *Night Dog & Other Poems* (Cottonwood).

Diann Blakely Shoaf (4000 Dorcas Dr., Nashville, TN 37215) has poems forthcoming in *The Reaper, Southern Humanities Review,* and *The Little Magazine,* among others.

Deborah Shouse (12659 Pawnee Lane, Leawood, KS 66209) has published stories in *Iowa Woman, Plainswoman,* and *Anemone,* among others.

Rebecca Stowe (338 E. 65th St. #15, New York, NY 10021) is currently working on a novel.

Patricia Traxler (PO Box 1216, Salina, KS 67402), a former *Cottonwood* contributor, has appeared widely in magazines such as *MS Magazine* and *The Nation.* Her most recent poetry collection is *The Glass Woman* (Hanging Loose).

Robert F. Whisler (214 Cross Creek Dr., Glen Burnie, MD 21061) has appeared in *Poem, Georgia Review, Southern Poetry Review,* and *Coe Review,* among others.

Sharyn Wolf (203 E. 72nd St. #2G, New York, NY 10021), a former *Cottonwood* contributor, recently taught a course called "50 Ways to Find a Lover."

Brian Yansky (310B. W. 34th St., Austin, TX 78705) has a story in a recent anthology from Tilted Planet Press.

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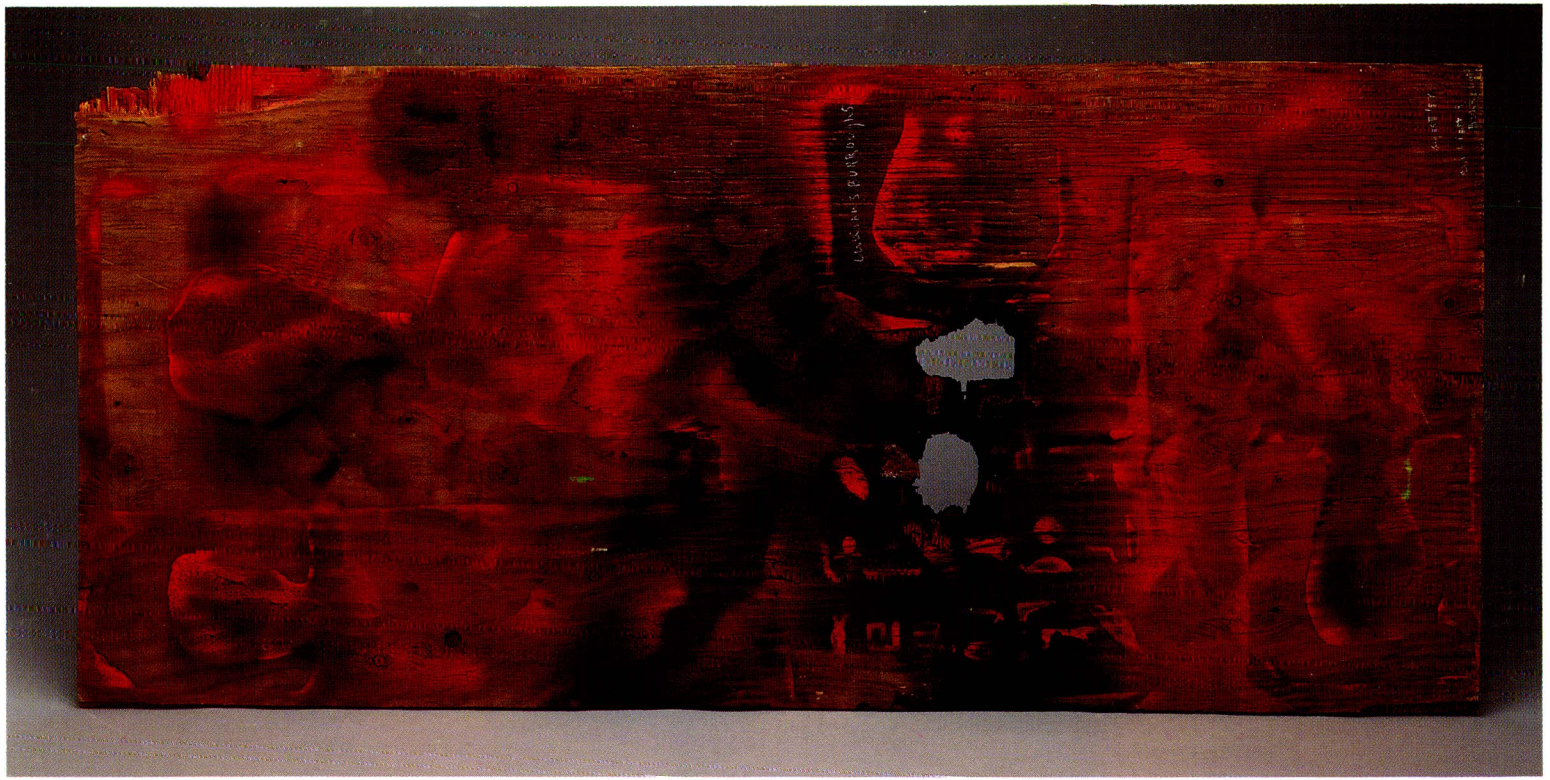
Cottonwood 41 celebrates the 1987 River City Reunion in Lawrence, Kansas. Writers featured in this issue include John Giorno, Patricia Traxler, Victor Contoski, Michael L. Johnson, Sally Allen McNall and M. L. Liebler. Also in this issue Cottonwood features a photographic portfolio from the River City Reunion as well as George Wedge's interview with William S. Burroughs.



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