Cottonwood 46
Anne Waldman Issue

Cottonwood 46

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 $5.00 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
400 Kansas Union
Box 20
University of Kansas
Lawrence, KS 66045

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

Cottonwood Magazine is indexed by the *American Humanities Index* and the *Annual Index to Poetry in Periodicals.*

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

Cottonwood 46

Anne Waldman Issue

Cottonwood Magazine and Press

COTTONWOOD 46

Contents

Poetry

Anne Waldman

Fiction

Reviews

Graphics by Ann Pearce
Covers by James Pearce

Editor's Note

It's pleasant to be back on duty at Cottonwood from a sabbatical that gave me a chance to work steadily on writing and to travel. It's also pleasant to have an issue come together that includes working with some wonderful friends who have long been associated with KU and Cottonwood

The center section of this issue is Jim McCrary's interview with Anne Waldman. Anne gave a reading at the Lawrence Arts Center in December. I have heard few readings as strong, rich and intimate. It was, of course, a smaller venue than the Union ballroom, where she performed during all the hustle and bustle of 1987's River City Reunion, and small, responsive audiences sometimes bring out the best in the best. The poems included with the interview are from her current work; we are grateful for her continuing interest in our magazine.

Jim McCrary now lives in Lawrence. In '87 he had to travel in from California to participate in the River City Reunion as one of the returning alumni readers. He was already on the scene in 1965 when Cottonwood came into being and was among the first to have a small book, *Coon Creek*, published by Cottonwood. Since those days he has operated a press in California, worked as an editor of *Avec*, picked up a Master's degree at Sonoma State, and continued to write. His next book, scheduled to be out in April, is *West of Mass* from Tansy Press (1031 Maine Street, Lawrence, KS 66044). Like Anne, he has a poem, beautifully illustrated by Michael Annis, in the *River City Reunion Portfolio*. (Both the *Portfolio* and *Coon Creek* are still available from Cottonwood, by the way.)

Still farther back in time, there were a couple of years in the late '50's when I collaborated with Arvid Shulenberger, Gerhard Zuther, and Butler Waugh as an advisory panel for the student magazine *Quill*, which in time became *Cottonwood*. One of the liveliest student writers, like a good many of our students then and now, chose to remain in Lawrence and became the wife of James Pearce, an artist who worked at Centron. James created a number of very exciting landscape paintings before his death in 1977 at the young age of 36. His wife, Jane, and daughter, Ann, have given us permission to use one of these as the cover of this issue, which also features Ann's graphics work, emblematic of her recent degree in art from KU. Ann is also a pretty swift young poet, carrying on the artistic strain in each parent.

Though we continue to experience delays in getting issues out, we continue to continue. It would be very good to hear from our subscribers with information on things they would like to see us do and, when appropriate, the change of address cards that will insure that we continue to continue to reach them as we appear. Please note that we have ourselves had a change of address because of remodelling in the Union building.

Close readers of the masthead will notice that Jane Garrett, who had served with distinction for a number of years as fiction editor of *Cottonwood*, has retired from that position. Laurie Carlson and Ben Accardi are the new joint editors for fiction.

George F. Wedge

Poetry

Charlotte Nekola

Seaside Romance

The cook drops live crabs in a vat of steam
slams the screendoor, kicks a clamshell
at Captain Bob's Bar and Grill.
The waitress thinks of a place up the beach
nothing but a gray bait shack, a dune
and a watermelon about to roll in the road.
But now she pours a Singapore Sling
for a man who murmurs about acres of color T.V.'s
and claims to be King of Gypsies.
The cook inspects eight letters
tattooed on each of his knuckles:
h-a-t-e and l-o-v-e.
Far from the restaurant
beyond the slumping cattails
Misty of Chincoteague, wonder pony
sleeps in the island sunlight.
The cook opens a clam for the waitress
folds her cardboard suitcase
into his white convertible.
They drive and drive
past the faded hydrangeas and pink cottages
past the smoking french fry stands
his knuckles on the wheel
past the giant Paul Bunyan at the truckstop
she lights his cigarette
past the abandoned missile site
the end of the boardwalk
and a field of cantaloupes:
behind them
they believe the highway burns.

Barbara Horton

Rowing

Before she steps into my craft
mother carefully removes
a golden bangle from her wrist.
"Where are we going?" she asks and I repeat,
"We're going home."

But home for her is Snyder, Arkansas, her mother's
bloody fingers plucking feathers from a hen,
freshly beheaded, the heifer, its eyes at dusk
full of wisdom, giving light.
It is a house that burned.

I try to remember what we talked and dreamt about when
she was young and I a child
learning the words for river, tide, and wind.
How can it be that mother's destination
is in my hands?

She leans toward the water
as if to see the moon that's like her face
reflected there, but it is morning,
the water pink, the pines that line the shore
as still as time.

Ron Schreiber
depressed

sometimes no reasons, not today.
instead there are choices:

lots of work to do, & I've done
very little, like trying to
climb a mountain because it's there,
like Sisyphus, landing at the bottom
with the big-horned sheep.

Monday a benefit reading for
writers with AIDS, PEN, $10.00 a head,
which means poor people don't come.
which means I have to go through
my poems, my chronology, again.

why do so few poets get AIDS?
Bob asked, thinking of dancers
& painters. —because we're so oral,
I told him, but the next day we learned
that Tim had been sick for two years.

one boulder cracked into thousands
of cairns, & what are those sheep
doing down there? —eating grass
when they should still be climbing.

T. J. Harrison

Insomnia

Gradually now the wind rises like the sound
of stiffly rustling bedsheets, or pale, dry
leaves scuttering from the eaves of the house.
Always it is the dead of Autumn, these hours
skeletal and lean as emptied stalks, miles
from water or the promise of a rain,

though ones who sleep perhaps might dream of rain,
and dreaming be awakened by the sound.
On the county road a pickup barrels past. For miles
its muffled rumble lingers in the dry
clumped weeds of the shoulder. You have lain for hours
listening as if to nothing, to this house

sigh and sink in on itself. Even to the house
you are a stranger, foreign as a rain
which threatens but does not arrive. In these hours
abandoned by everything but sound,
anticipating nothing but the dry,
slow whistle of the 3:15, the lost miles

come back to you. You'd forgotten those miles,
that dark river between you and the house,
you and the man you lie beside, but in this dry
interval before dawn, the memory of rain
moves in to remind you. A steady sound
whispers, this, this is the life you have chosen. Hours

mean nothing to the insomniac. Hours
are merely a space to be gotten through, just miles
of clear darkness punctuated by sound
where nothing changes. Listen to the house,
deeply silent as a winter rain,
and to the stiff, bleached shirts snapping dry

on the lawn. Hear the weather vane creak as its dry
iron arrow follows the hours,
like a hired man scanning the horizon for rain.
And know that nothing will help you. The miles

of dark lead always to this life, this house.
Know that you too must hear the nightingale's sound

become the lark's. For when with dawn those miles
dissolve, you too will rise and go forth from this house
into the dry and empty day without a sound.

Richard Nester

Rooster

> The difference between northern and southern racism is clear. In the South they don't care how close you get as long as you don't get too big. In the North they don't care how big you get as long as you don't get too close.
>
> —Anonymous

We don't see you at first,
your comb and spurs, the blue-black scythe
of your tail, your chest-out strut,
but we know from the cackle
of hens you are there,
starting up again
like a drunken row,
between the banjo's bounce
and trombone's caterwaul,
a call,
a strut,
no Ellington symphony yet
but just some song,
jail song,
work song,
song of use,
with a bottle of beer in between
and all the notes you'll need,
booze-bent or straight
from the bodies of women.
You got pretty big over there
in Storyville,
in all that gumbo
of gutted lives.
Dead now
and with noting but a horn
to speak for you,
Louis, you come as
close as love.

Antony Oldknow

In the Body of the Night

There has been breathing. I woke hearing it,
but now there is black silence, only, the clock
ticking, not a breath of wind. Stealthily
I get up from bed, feel my way around
obstacles to the black window, ease back
the edge of the curtain a sliver, squint
out at the unmoving street columns, think.
The black still shapes stand round, stand and wait, wait.

I step back, grope, sit upright in the hard
chair, stare into the blackness of the room.
Nothing will come. I force my breathing down
to a slow walk from lungs I can feel
my ribs touch. I sink into one with the
solid silence, the whole earth's blackness, loss.

Richard Cummins

Class of '46

My father told me
that during the war
he was on a train
through Texas and somewhere
in the night the train
stopped for fuel
and a hundred sleepy
soldiers stretched
in the stale air
of the coach, stepped
outside and inhaled
the smell of a thousand
yellow flowers.
He couldn't remember
the name of the town
but when I heard the word
Amarillo, I smelled flowers.

'46.
Night planes
over Rickenbacker
Air Force Base
would wake him.
Rolling on top
of my mother
to protect her,
he'd wake fully
and the windows
were full of night
in Columbus, Ohio.
He'd breathe hard.
Flowers.

Steve Peeples

The Raccoon

Standing in the simple kitchen
his wife did not look up,
but kept her eyes on her work
and the little monitor.
She worried her long fingers
over something soaking in a bowl,
and listened to the muffled rasp
of a child's breathing,
even and thick with sleep,
cutting through the house's sounds.
She nodded to the basement,
a single flick of the head,
no other gesture.

Heading down I crouched
to miss the overhang
even though at full height
I would clear it,
as if my eyes imagined some longer man.

The raccoon hung by a hind leg
tied to a ceiling hook—
a string of muscles,
streaked with fat and gristle,
skin peeled cleanly to the neck,
draped down over the head—
looking like a child who could not quite work
a shirt over his face.

Only the paws were untouched,
four tufted gloves,
fitting perfectly,
holding their perfection
against the anger of the muscle,
while the skin clung to the throat,
then reached for the floor,
giving the coon twice its natural length.

A single bulb threw each movement,
each solid thing,
into drastic cutouts.
I made a noise, a scuffing with my foot.
He turned to me,
still lost in the pleasure of his work.
He wiped the smooth white fat from his blade,
and pointed to the other knife.

Kevin Boyle

The Spirit Of The Law

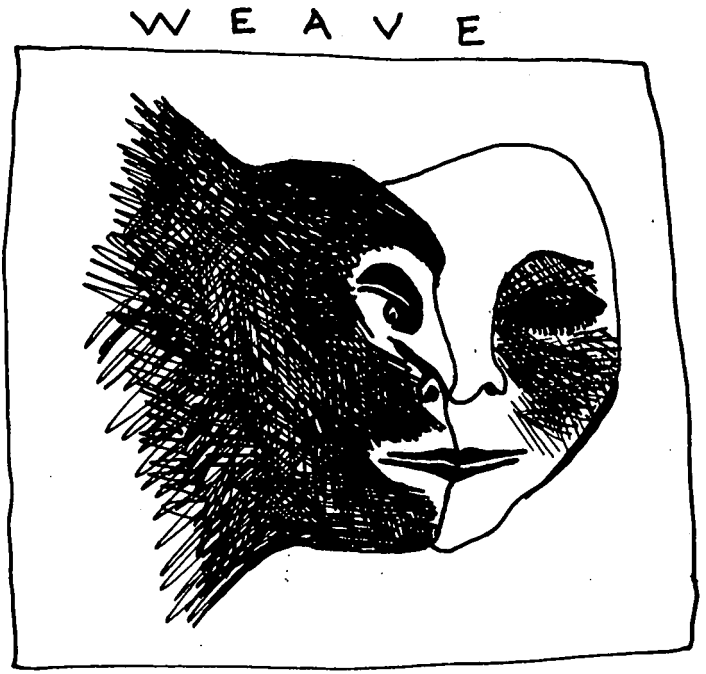
My friends at first must not have known the law.
They didn't know why I rode my bike
into Connecticut after a softball game
on a Wednesday night when work seemed closer
than the next state, or on Friday nights
with no shots and beer or joints to hop me up
after the job, just the ride out across
the Merritt and into the same roads as here.
It seems odd to think a person would fill
a tank just to cross highways that are ugly
with stink and then suburbs, riding with
no woman's chest pressed against his back,
no loose hand playing below the belt,
just the balding head in contact with night,
bent forward. I'd stop in the first station
across the line that welcomes me, a safe driver,
into the state, just past the lit-up sign
with the governor's name slashed across it
in script, and I'd balance the bike by
the pay phones, bothering no one working
the pumps, get the helmet undone and creep
back into traffic that's especially thick
on Friday nights with the big Connecticut cars
moving toward some summer home they bought
twenty years before and are bored with now
and anxious to get to. I don't wear dead faces
embossed in leather, stretch my legs
as if I were in a bobsled, or burn rubber
when lights are almost green. I've got a Harley
that's nothing jolty or abrupt. At tolls
I never watch the suited men who roll
their windows down to toss a quarter; I give
no insult, have no proud eyes. I just stare
out into the red taillights and follow a pair
that taunts me like a boss who says it can't
be done that way, or a woman on a Saturday
morning who is bored and wants you to fix it.
I catch them and pass with patience, and find

others then to follow until I've arrived
into country I like, two lanes with bright tar
patches that whistle softer than bridge grating
as I cross, and the telephone poles that hold
the gully of line and then tense it again where
they please. I'll watch those lines for the time
it takes to get dark, seeing something
graceful and tortured in them, a control
and loosening that gives my exposed head
a chill. It's why I come here; I think
with my body when my head's open to air
and the shadows the electric lines make
can cross my face, leave and come back again.
I ride never wanting to go back to my place
in the city, a home with quilts, place settings,
and walls that have a woman's touch hammered
into them. I'd rather camp the weekend under
pines and the noise they make, my bike kicked
up slightly off the ground, waiting to touch
the needles and tar, and just watch the bike's
chrome shine in the near dark and know it holds
something for me, a small promise it won't break.

Kevin Boyle

Romeo Bound

My head as rich as swill, the one night tattoo
stamped near my wrist now a smeared blue code,
I wanted more after closing. One happy, thin,
black woman, loaded, her voice an octave above
my thoughts, asked me to the after hours club
I knew was for blacks only. The town is simple
as a triangle really: Hispanics own the hollow toward
the tracks, blacks cover the streets from Highland to
the river in a slope, and whites plot the high ground
to the west. If it is early and you are careful or
if it is late and you are drunk you can go
anywhere and feel safe. So, happy to dance after
drinking, my feet skidding along the wet passing
stripes down the center of the street, I went with her.
I've forgotten her name. After drinking a boilermaker
round, we danced inside some pop funk first, then
some slow things, an exchange of bodies in our hands.
Maybe there are few things better than being empty
headed, with an erection, in danger, and a woman
in your arms. Nothing more than my chest touched
her breasts, I did not kiss even her forehead or cheeks,
I did not hold her hands or even say much over
the noise except, "I got to go to the toilet," and left her
at the bar drinking. Joining me in the bathroom
were three guys who said, "Get the fuck out of here"
over and over, while one held my lips at knife-point
and another pissed thoroughly on my pants and shoes.
I hurried through a goodbye at the bar and saw her
again once, a while back, on lunch at Sal's Subshop.
She was beautiful in the day and sober, and we spoke:
"Keeping dry these days?" she said. I said, "Yeah,"
and that was that. She smiled and ate in one spot
of the room, and I took mine outside into fall.
Autumn is something in Ossining: the palisade
so grim, the leaves dying, the prison, the tugs' labor.
From the hill I could see the width of river and spit
gristle onto the grass around the town's bank clock.



Anne Waldman

An Interview with Anne Waldman
conducted by Jim McCrary

In mid-December 1991 Anne Waldman found time in a busy schedule to pay a visit to William Burroughs and give a reading at the Lawrence Arts Center. As she says in the following interview, she "grew up" when she served as director of the St. Marks Poetry Project in New York City in the 1960s. Since then she has published numerous and eclectic volumes of poetry, edited two recent anthologies and performed her work with musicians, dancers and other poets and produced records, videos and tapes along the way. I began the interview by asking Anne about a selection of poems she read in Lawrence that she had "translated" from Buddhist texts. She referred to the poems as "the nun's poems."

JOM: I'd like to ask you about the nun's poems . . . it seems you have found some "fast speaking women" and as well a way to bring them out for us to listen to. What is the source of these poems? Who were these women . . . when did they live and how? I want to know more about them . . . they seem to contain a lot of, as you would say, Hag Energy.

AW: I'm pleased you've asked about the nun's poems as I've been working on these versions for the past year and am curious about the response to them. The *Therigatha*—or Psalms of the Sisters—are a compilation within the Pali canon set down about 80 B.C. but based on a much earlier older tradition in Buddhist India, going back in some cases to the time of the Buddha. There is some difficulty ascertaining the historicity of the Theris or nuns, and in some cases the legends extend back to the nun's *former lives.* But it is a fact many women chose the *an-agariya* or homeless life as an alternative to widowhood, despotic marriages, prostitution, tragic loss of children. The nuns sing of cutting through their attachment to physical beauty, wealth, family, comfort and of cutting through their personal grief. In one of the poems or songs, the former courtesan Ambapali chronicles the decay of her own body: "Once my hair was black like the color of bees/ Alive—curly/ Now it is dry like bark fibers of hemp/ I'm getting old/ This is true, I tell you the truth." Later she cries: "Formerly my breasts looked great—Now they hang down like waterless waterbags!" In another one of the songs—which is actually more of a dramatic dialogue—Subha, a serious

Bhikkuni or nun is accosted by a persistent lothario at the entrance to a tantalizing mango grove. He raves on and on about all he'll offer her—muslin from Benares, garlands, creams, blankets scented with sandalwood—if she'll only lie down and make love with him in the romantic woods. She parries with him, getting nowhere, until finally out of her frustration she plucks out her eyeball and thrusts it in his face. Of course his desire is immediately quelled on the spot. I am always on the scent of hag energy, the humorous, spontaneous and ultimately profound expressions of women who speak out of true experience, who have lived dramatic lives, who have actually seen through the insubstantiality of their own projections. These women were not virgins. "I'm through with kitchen drudgery," another exhorts, "my pot smelled like an old watersnake." I know only a few Pali words and phrases from my studies in Buddhism so have relied heavily on the Rhys-Davids' translation which is extremely awkward, and the more recent K. R. Norman translation. Their footnotes are good, however, and helpful. I came to these songs in a masters class at Naropa where we were studying sutras and other texts in the Pali canon.

JOM: Are these direct translations or are you improvising?

AW: These are versions of crochety, wooden translations. I'm bringing my particular sensibility to the work. When I first came to these songs I felt bewitched, as if these voices were inside me or hovering close by. There's a piety in some of them that I play down at times. I'm not as interested in the Buddhist slogans, party-line didacticisms. I've taken a lot of liberties.

JOM: Is there a lot of this work . . . more to translate? Are they going to be published?

AW: There are at least 70 of these psalms and I've worked with about 50 of them so far. Some have been published in the new Buddhist journal *Tricycle* accompanied by a short essay. I plan to do more.

From the *Therigatha*:

Mutta Speaks

Get free, Mutta
free as the moon
free from Rahu the Dragon's claws
mind free, free of debt
heart free

enjoy the food they give you
when you're out begging

Tissa Speaks To Herself

Tissa: go get trained in "morals"
in "mind" in "insight"
Practice
Don't let the opportunity slip
Free of any yoke
Quit sex, drugs
Get on without intoxicants
Get going

Nanduttara

I used to worship
fire, the moon, sun,
all the gods
I used to go down
to the riverbanks
for the bathing rites
I took many vows
shaved half my head
slept on the ground
didn't eat night-food
Then I decked myself
out with many ornaments
baths, unguents, massage—
you name it—
tried everything
to stave off death
I was a slave to my body
Then I really "got" it
saw my body as it really is
went homeless
Lust? Sex?
Forget it
All that binds me head & foot
got loosed
got cut

Sujata Speaks

I was so well dressed
ornamented
wearing a garland
smeared with sandalwood paste
attended by a crowd
of slave women
offering food & drink
great quantities of it
I went to the pleasure garden
But what did it mean?
After playing
I saw a Vihara
and followed him
to Anjana Wood at Saketa
I sat down
paid homage
He taught me the Dharma
I got inspired
became homeless
You know the rest

JOM: The nun's voices simply fascinate me. They seem very dramatic which leads to a question I imagine you've been asked before and that is the idea of writing poems as *text* as opposed to that which is to be *performed.* Are you concerned with this as you compose?

AW: I'm interested in working both on and off the page and do that all the time. There are pieces that are meant to be heard, sung. They are psychological states of energy, often rants. "I'll make your semen dry up / Your genitalia will wither in the wind!" This line from a curse to the patriarchal establishment has got to get launched full voice not *sotto voce.* Other poems have whispered parts. The on-going long poem, now 250 pages, **IOVIS OMNIA PLENA** ("All Is Full of Jove"), is meant for the page, although it has some long oral parts to it and is a collage of many voices that spin around the eidolon, the phantom image, of male energy. I went to the *Therigatha,* because these songs came out of an oral tradition which even in very stilted translation sang across centuries to me. I could hear the passion there. I hear very much of my own work first before it gets to the page, or there's a seed syllable or rune that arises and needs to get unlocked—

spoken—and then transmitted to text. "Skin Meat Bones" arrived that way, those words heard as notes out of a dream that then wanted to be repeated and riffed upon. Of course the sound there was the Buddhist mantra, "Om Ah Hum." But the long collage—*Iovis*—extends over time. It's more deliberate, I'm with some very specific material that doesn't lend itself to the other kinds of modal structures I've been developing. It's got a different kind of epic shape through time. It has long prose bits. But one of the meanings of "performance" coming through Middle English "performen" is "to enact a feat or role before an audience." You remember Olson at Berkeley in 1965 talking about how the poet is made of three parts—his life, his mouth, his poem, and then he says, and remember he's up on stage here, "I'm in the presence of an event, which I don't believe, myself." And that famous night was certainly a performance. The poet doesn't need a lot of gimmicks and back-up accoutrements and accompaniments. The voice and the body are the instrument. Well, I love to romanticize the poets' job even if they are just talking. And the event is what the poet creates when he/she's out there, exposed, raw and it's as much an event for the poet as the audience. But I love to perform, as you know, with musicians and dancers and appreciate collaboration of all kinds especially as the situation comes together organically. I've been inspired to write actual songs with the help of professionals like Steven Taylor—like "Kali Yuga Blues," for example. *Helping the Dreamer* [Anne's latest collection] was selected with eye and ear to text, but it presents a range that can include chant, pantoum, dream, lyric. "Coup de Grace" is a denser piece in the book that works both ways, I think. It's got a drive when read aloud, more subtlety on the page. Poets have been mouthing, composing on the tongue for centuries. And we've had the more recent pleasures of reading to ourselves silently—but don't the words always sound in your brain anyhow? Both both. I see no particular problem. Does one have to make a choice?

JOM: Choice? No, I don't think we can. I don't think we are in control of the voice as the poem first appears. But . . . speaking of choice . . . you are editor of two anthologies recently published: *Nice To See You*, the homage to Ted Berrigan, and the St. Marks anthology, *Out Of This World*. Choosing the work for them must have been very satisfying. These two books, along with Tom Clark's recent biography of Charles Olson, seem to come together, in a way, almost as closure to a very strong period of American poetics. What is, or what do you see as, the state of American and global poetics? What's changing and growing?

AW: *Nice To See You* and *Out Of This World* do close a particular chapter so to speak. And certainly those collections come out of a very specific urban poetical scene and cover two and a half decades of literary activity and community. And it's a scene I personally grew up inside of. I think the Index in *Out Of This World* is particularly interesting for the anecdotes and accounts of events in and around St. Marks: a sweet compendium of particulars. And yet you have tremendous variety in the selections of work of over 200 writers who come together under the rubric of locus. That's all they have in common perhaps, the place, the community, the occasion for reading, publishing, teaching. There's no such thing as a St. Marks poet or Naropa poet for that matter, or a Lawrence, Kansas, poet. As communities we're similar and we're all part of the "outrider" tradition. Like-minded, marginal, obsessed with poetry as a spiritual path, mad word-alchemists, subversives. Andrew Schelling and I are now editing a very different kind of book from Naropa although the *place* again is the underpinning, because the essays and lectures and talks we've selected were specifically created for that situation. So there's the thread that they happened in a certain magical context. And the spread will be extraordinary—eco-poetics, performance, dharma, dissipative structures, Fourier—wonderful subjects for the next millenium. Everywhere I travel in the world, there's a like-minded poet meeting you at the interstices of life and language. And it's amazing to see the effect the "outrider" scene—which has roots with Black Mountain, New York School, San Francisco Renaissance, and Beat confluences—has had in the thinking of artists, poets, intellectuals of former Eastern European countries. When Allen Ginsberg and I visited Czechoslovakia a year and a half ago at the height of the Velvet Revolution, we met folks who had samizdat copies of Allen's works, *Fuck You: A Magazine of the Arts*, Fugs records, poems by Creeley, others, that all had been hidden under the floorboards. They were so happy to see us! They wanted to know about Ted Berrigan, Patti Smith. East Berlin was much the same. We're getting students from all over the country and from other countries as well now at Naropa. Asian students, German, French, Canadian. There's a group in Vienna starting a Schule für Dichtung (School for Poetry) modeled after the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics at Naropa and I'm traveling over there in April with Anselm Hollo and Jack Collom to help inaugurate the inception. Ken Irby, Steve Addiss, Stanley Lombardo and I were talking about having more of a Naropa connection with the scene in Lawrence. A teriffic proposal. I see what we poets are doing as *web-work* all the time. In Lawrence, I conducted a short interview with William Burroughs about his new dream book and celebrated James Graverholtz's birthday with dear friend Steven Lowe and others. And it was a pleasure to hear Stanley Lombardo read from his Greek translations just

sitting around his living room, and he helped me with a Hag's poem ("Caillech na Beara") from the tenth-century Gaelic. Stephen Addiss presented me with a beautiful calligraphy on the subject of ambiguity, and Ken a photocopied poem. Denise Low later gave me her new book. I got interested feedback on my reading at the Arts Center. John Moritz wanted more rock 'n' roll! Much correspondence these days is through cassettes—tape and video, fax, and those old standbys—little magazines, newsletters, letters. But there's nothing like meeting with the poets, drinking excellent wine, eating chocolate-covered ginger, as I did in Lawrence. What a life! I touch in with the tribe at many points. The annual summer convocations are important at Naropa. We hear one another's obsessions. I drone on about Buddhist Hags and Rocky Flats. You have Ed Sanders on Green Poetics, Peter Lamborn Wilson on Temporary Autonomous Zones, Nathanial Mackay on blues and jazz, Alice Notley on the Inanna myth, Kathy Acker on her latest thievery, Diane di Prima on Olson, and on and on. Changing and growing? The planet is threatened. We have to change our ways, cut the addiction to fossil fuels, "clean up our act" and continue the invigorating practices of poetry—investigate poetics, mytho-poetics, eco-poetics, translation, etc. There's a strong link to lineage, to a sense that poetry *is* a sacred path. That it can be skillful in re-making the world. "The eye altering alters all."

JOM: You mention Naropa and the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics . . . what's going on there and what's coming for the future . . . who is going to be in Boulder?

AW: This summer [1992] we're planning our four-week summer program under the theme of "The Other North America" and we'll have a contemplative ecological focus, a translation focus, an investigative poetics focus and a final-week highlighting performance. We're also putting more energy into our Prose Track under the admirable leadership of Bobbie Louise Hawkins. Anselm Hollo is working with students in translation, presenting the poet's approach. We've gotten some good work from our masters' students in translation from the French, Gaelic, the Czechoslovakian, Italian. And my Assistant Director Andrew Schelling is an excellent translator of subtle ancient Sanskrit poetries. Recent faculty have included and will include Joanne Kyger, Rikki Ducornet, Keith Abbott, Amiri Baraka, Paula Gunn Allen, the wonderful Native American poet and scholar, Robin Blaser, Lyn Hejinian, Jerome Rothenberg, Rachel du Plessis, Ed Sanders, Reed Bye, Robert Kelly—as well as our summer core faculty which includes Allen Ginsberg and Diane di Prima, and many others. We're also planning the summer program of 1993 with a baseball

week, and a focus on the New York School. We have 34 new students in our MFA this year after careful selection and are expecting even more to apply next time. We are definitely expanding, but also still operating on a shoestring. Not many benefits, no tenure, no breaks except the usual loans for students. Our faculty has to work other jobs. We're small and visionary. The founder, Chogyam Trungpa, said Naropa Institute should be a hundred-year project *at least.* But we have an important "seat" in the poetry world, and an authority of purpose, vision, rigor, compassion.

JOM: What about the students coming to Naropa? Do you see in them a reflection of the kind of poetics we've been talking about?

AW: All the poets coming to Naropa are active poets, scholars, visionaries, sometime meditators, politicos, travelers to exotic realms, both real and imagined, outriders, experimentalists. My 11-year-old son calls us "weirdos." Have you seen our recent Naropa ad? Andrew came up with it: "If you want to study with writers who've been jailed for acts of personal and political conscience, expelled from totalitarian states, maligned in the mass media, come study with us." What is an American poetics? It would have to be subversive in these dark times fraught with materialism and physical affliction. It refuses to be nailed down, co-opted, coerced. It doesn't serve any one party line or platform. But it's less sentimental. It's seen a few wars, it's seen the dying of nature, the decay of cities. The language is being examined, exploded. And it's not just white middle-aged college-educated folks doing it. The personal "safe trips" aren't as interesting unless the words startle and rearrange the mind. I'm interested in risk. American poetics is a conglomeration of tendencies. More and more other languages and cultures are invited in. The "Slams" and the international poetry bout in Taos are making some waves as public events and use the popular combat metaphor. The greater public seems interested but we'll never be as popular as football. For me personally, the poetry "business" is still the great adventure, the only never-ending show in town.

JOM: Your last comment has a lot of the Waldman energy which has continued from good old "alphabet city" and, as always, feels positive and encouraging. A good place to stop. Thanks for taking the time to answer some of my questions.

from IOVIS OMNIA PLENA
— an excerpt —

for every scribe
which is instructed,

things new
and old

—H.D.

also, my same old light
& your volts appear, what travels Zeus?
is my scrivening error or errant?

O delite my light
& pure my governing
the mere record of a dance
& it never nears the state of stillness

O come grate the occurrence
neither tempo is young when the anchor lunges

The sperm is brave Ha.

Memory is a road

Ill-remembered this passionate cozy tryst
very triste eh?
Juiced out over many wars . . .

Erasable optical drives?

from the mother to the babe in her womb

the word "race" is a delusion:
dark age

The noose approaches
It's usually hung in the forest
Rue of matins
The noose approaches

Mount the brooms, witches
Noose coming closer
The terror in the heart is crisp
Another day to put together the world

Eh you for certain o way thought you only vitale to my day?

Me in a sari ready to die after time spent with you

Sign your life here, the date is set

What other man could I love
solemn or hopeful when I turn?

The great house flashes: Manipulate the day & don't out taxi Maitreya

Alcaeus, do you own your experience?

I sing to the elements
& then I sing to the wind
Why is he like stone?
Stone I call you
I sing to wind but
stone I call you
Not a heart
but a dead stone
I want it like his heart is needed
or a substitute. Is it so dead
can you really say that?
Feels dead in the little window
I see him & his heart I can fuel
It is substitute for stone, dead
I sing to say this
so I won't be sad
Stone I need as heart

& NEEDED as a kind of life apart
in a place where TARHIB means terror and TARGHIB is a kind of enticement
and Ghost Shadows fight with Flying Dragons and both gang up against Born To Kill

Dear Skybox,

Do you know that the packaging of your baseball cards is not biodegradeable or re-cyclable? The packaging may look good, but it's not helping the environment.

Your packs are made of a material that will last for hundreds of years. I have included an example of what I think your packs could be like which has paper around the cards and tinfoil over that and they are not stuck together. So you can re-cycle them separately. And you could think about using wax paper.

I think this is worth doing and I hope you will keep it in mind. And I know a lot of other kids who feel the same way.

Thank you. Sincerely yours,
Ambrose Bye, 5th Grade

ancient in me
active in me
in the present tense under nacreous sky
I dwell inside the pearl,
hiding from all the men
to study their names:
the name of Indra:
from *ind*, to drop
like sperm, like seed
O god of light ray
another name: Vasava, king of the Vasas or

Maghavam: "the bountiful"
I live inside his thunderbolt and
return to his hand
I slice life right next to him
feeling his power as it drops
indefinable
indicative
indifferent
rises like the
name of insurrection
but Indra got down to his place
his implement stolen
subdued
subjugated

The date of this is April 2, 1991
My Mom's Birthday: A Living Hell

To start out my Mom woke up with a dream that there were two guys blowing their brains out. Then at 7:30 A.M. a lunatic had called and said I have some of your friends hostage (Jane & Anselm) and you must do exactly what I say if you don't want them to be hurt. He hung up after that. I locked every door in the house. Then my Dad called the police and they said this guy got a reputation for pranking. My Mom was scared to answer the phone.

Then when my Mom picked me up from school we found out we were locked out of our house she didn't have a key and there was none hidden under a rock and I have locked all the doors and windows. I was having a piano lesson and I did not have my music pieces. But we went anyway and I survived the piano teacher. Since we couldn't go home since my Dad wouldn't be there till 11 we went to *New Jack City* and watched guys blowing each other's brains out. Ice T the rapper was an actor in the movie, pretty good. Then we went to Sushi Tora where my Mom drank a lot of saki. And I start writing this for my school report on What Did I Do Today. Later we went to Andrew's and he was still up reading. As we drove home my Dad's headlights were just pulling up too.

Fiction

Harry Voltanowski

You Gotta Relax

Upstairs above the restaurant there's rooms. Two of them the boss rents out to two old ladies, and there's one the Boss'll let you stay in overnight if there's a snowstorm or you have to work a double shift. There's nothing more lonely than being a dishwasher in one of those rooms after working a double. You crawl under those thin covers and while the wind rattles the big window right above your head you listen to the swells live it up downstairs in the bar. A drink in the Boss's bar costs the same as an hour's pay for a dishwasher. You lie in that bed and after sixteen hours of hard fucking work you can't sleep because of the way they're laughing and the way those glasses sound when they hit the bar or tinkle against each other.

It's not because it's too loud. It's the thought of the dollar bills behind all that noise. A dishwasher can't think of that many dollar bills in one pocket. That's why it's hard to sleep up there, and why whenever I don't have to, I don't. But sometimes it's a hard choice. Like this one night, when the kitchen was closing and the snow was falling hard and the battery on my '65 Falcon died.

"I'll drive you home," said Jimmy. He was one of the cooks. A new guy.

"How will I get to work tomorrow then?"

"Call a friend and have him drive you."

"I don't have a phone," I said. I didn't have any friends either.

"Well come home with me then. We can stop off and have a few beers on the way."

"You can stay upstairs if you want," the Boss said. It was a dilemma. I didn't want to go up into that room, but I didn't want to get into the car with Jimmy either. Cooks are nuts. They'd just as soon cut you up as a lamb chop. And they drink. And they have tempers. Before you do anything with them, even walk out the door after work, you need to watch them for a while, six months maybe, to see how crazy they are, to see how much they understand the difference between something alive and something dead,

and if they do, if it makes any difference to them. If they smile, you want to see what it is that brings one to their face.

Once I worked in a restaurant that had mice. Every night we put a bunch of those glue traps around the kitchen at night, and every morning it was my job to check them and kill the mice. One day I had to shovel the snow off the front steps of the place so the cook said he'd do the traps for me. It wasn't a big restaurant so it was just me and the cook in the morning. When I got back in he had one of the glue traps on the prep table.

"Look at this," he said.

There were two mice in the trap, one facing north and one facing south, side by side. The way these traps work is that you have a four by six inch plastic dish with some thick sticky glue in it. You put a piece of cheese in the middle of the glue and the mouse hops right on, but if he hesitates for even a second, he gets stuck and the more he struggles, the more he gets stuck. The instructions say the mice get so scared that they die of heart attacks, but that's bullshit.

"You got two," I said.

"I know I got fucking two. That isn't what I'm talking about. Look at them! Close!"

I looked. One of the mice had his snout stuck so deep in the glue he could hardly breathe. To make it worse, his hind leg was right in his friend's face and his friend's head and mouth were free. What they say about animals chewing their legs off to get out of traps is true. The mouse with the free head was gnawing on the other mouse's leg, the shin part of it, and the other mouse couldn't move it because it was stuck in the glue. The bone had been reached and you could hear the mouse's teeth grinding on it and the other mouse would scream through what little remained of the opening of his mouth. There was blood splattered all over the mice and the glue.

"Do you see it?" the cook said. He was leaned over the scene, like I was, on the opposite side of the prep table. He was a big guy and there was a twinkle in his eye.

"He thinks it's his own leg that he's trying to bite off! Ha ha ha ha haaaaaaaa . . . !"

Cooks are not stupid. And there's things in their minds that you need to be careful of.

So I was nervous about going anywhere with Jimmy, much less home with him. He was new, only there a month, not long enough for me to tell about him. He was kind of a runt, but full of nervous energy, and he smiled a lot, at things that normal people smile at. That made it tough to get a bead on him. His whites (that's the white uniform kitchen help wear) were

baggy, and he had a mustache that looked like it was one of his eyebrows, and you could tell he'd never have a beard.

"So what do you say?" he said.

"I don't know. I don't want to stay out too late." He'd said something about stopping off for a beer. Cooks, and dishwashers, never go out for a beer. They go out for ten.

"Me either. I'm working the morning shift. There's this place on the way home. We'll stop off, have one, and go home. I'll make you breakfast in the morning and bring you back and you can take care of your car."

I hesitated. Whenever someone has a million nice things they're going to do for you if all you'll do is get into their car and go somewhere with them, it's a sure sign that death is on your heels, and if they want you to spend the night at their place, death has a shoehorn in your shoe. I try to have things to say, excuses, reasons why I can't go, why I have to go home, but they were all based on that, going home, which I couldn't do. But I didn't want to stay upstairs either.

"And my cousin's staying with us from Pennsylvania. She's real cute, too."

I didn't need another screwhead girl to do a job on me, but I was past that point where you can come up with a believable excuse. I had to fake some enthusiasm.

"Heyyyyy. Deal!" I said.

Jimmy lit up a joint as soon as we got into the car. He took a hit and passed it over. I took a hit.

"I really don't want to get fucked up tonight," I said.

"Me either, really. This is just to relax me."

There's guys who can smoke a pound of reefer, drink a quart of whisky and do brain surgery afterward. They know how to relax. I don't. Jimmy pulled out of the parking lot like we were in the Indy 500 and we slid onto the other side of the road, but no cars were coming. He got us back on track and took off down the highway, pushing her up to sixty even though the snow was packed hard and slick and falling so hard you couldn't see forty feet ahead of you. In places where it snows, there's a mentality held by some that the faster you go the safer you are. This mentality, and it's not just the mentality of a cook, says that the real hazard on the roads when it's snowing are those who slow down to accommodate the snow and ice. This mental outlook is so strong that those who hold it would gladly kill someone who was driving slowly in front of them in a blizzard if they could get away with it. Put this mentality into a cook, and death has his foot on the gas.

"Where we going?"

"Silver Creek."

"That's forty miles away. You live there?"

"Yeah, right on Route 5."

"Jimmy, that's right on the goddamn lake! The snow down there is going to be six feet deep!"

"Don't worry! This car's great in the snow."

Twenty minutes later, with even Jimmy the cook forced to slow down to forty, we just flew off the side of the road and half buried Jimmy's Impala into a snow bank. We were in the middle of nowhere. It was midnight. And it was still snowing.

"You okay?" he said.

"Yeah, I'm okay."

"Okay. I got some shovels and salt in the trunk. We'll dig ourselves out and be on our way in no time."

Shovels. What you need when you're buried in the snow is good heavy spades. Snow packs down. It turns to slush and ice and when the snow plow goes by it drops on a load of ice-cold lava. You need a shovel with a sharp edge and made of cast iron or hard steel. Jimmy had two aluminum snow shovels. I knew we were going to die, but we didn't. You couldn't really dig with those things, but we scraped and chipped and hacked for two hours until the sweat was streaming off my face and my hands were aching numb with the cold. Jimmy looked fine. He wasn't even wearing gloves. We were almost out of there when a pickup stopped and pushed us out the rest of the way. It was easy. If he'd been there two hours before, he could've gotten us out in two minutes. It makes me wonder what God is like. Jimmy waved his thanks to the pickup truck as it drove away and we warmed up in the car.

"I guess we should've got stuck two minutes ago," he said.

I was in no mood. The blood was coming back into my hands. There's nothing that hurts worse than that, except maybe fire on skin.

"Jimmy, it's still snowing. I don't think we're going to make it to Silver Creek. Fuck, my hands hurt."

"I think you're right."

"So what do we do? Look for a motel?"

"No. We head into the city and stay with my uncle."

It made sense. The city was north. The farther south you went the worse the snow got because of the lake.

"Okay."

Jimmy made a U-turn, and we headed north to the city.

We were in an old, old part of the city, where the houses were only one story high and instead of driveways, they had sidewalks going to houses in

the back. They were only one story, these houses, which made them older than those old two-family houses you see in most of the rest of the city, and the street, if we could've seen it because of the snow, was made of bricks. The whole setup was from another era, an era of immigrants, an era of neighborhoods and ragmen and horses, an era when a job was a job and there wasn't much difference between a steel worker and a dishwasher.

But that was a long time ago. Now, it was three in the morning and eerie. It had been snowing here too and still was, but there wasn't any wind, so the snow came down in big flakes, soft and silent, as we turned down one street and then another, and then another, deeper and deeper into the city. I began to see some houses with the windows boarded up, though they didn't seem abandoned. I got the feeling there were people there, awake, though God only knows what they were doing behind that plywood.

"Where the hell are we, Jimmy?"

"This is Old Kaisertown. It used to be German about eighty years ago, but now it's half niggers and half Polacks who won't move because they're too crazy or too old or because they don't have any money."

We finally got onto a street that we didn't turn off of. We just kept driving, past cross street after cross street and as we did, the houses began to thin out. There were more and more spaces between them, vacant lots. We finally got to a block that dead-ended in a big slope, the kind you climb up and find railroad tracks on top of. It was a short block, with one house on the left halfway to the end and a house on the right, right at the foot of the slope.

"How come there's hardly any houses here?" I said.

"The niggers burned them all down."

We plowed through the snow and pulled over to the side of the street in front of the first house. We got out and waded through the waist deep snow to the front door. The picture window on the place had been boarded up with two by fours and there were cast iron plates bolted to the front door. The doorbell was one of those you twist. Jimmy didn't bother trying it. He knocked on a part of the door that didn't have any iron on it.

"How's he going to hear that?" I said.

"Unc's up," he said. "He stays up all night. He's probably drunk too."

The door opened and he was. You could see it, smell it in the cold wind even. He was a runt, like Jimmy, pushing fifty, bald with a fringe of hair around the bottom, tufts of it sticking out here and there. He was wearing a dirty sleeveless undershirt and baggy old pants with one suspender on and one suspender off. He held a butcher knife in one hand and looked at us with red, wary, drunken eyes.

"Hi, Uncle Bob," said Jimmy. "Can we come in?"

He didn't answer.

"Come on, Unc! It's cold out here!"

"Who's that with you?"

"This is Harry. He works at the restaurant with me."

Uncle Bob didn't seem too impressed. He stood there looking at us, then let his jaw drop and moved it around back and forth. He was whisky drunk.

"Uncle Bob, we're freezing our asses off out here!"

Uncle Bob moved back, into the darkness, leaving the door open for us. I followed Jimmy into the house, into the living room. It was lit up by the TV and there was a woman, half wrapped up in a blanket asleep on the couch.

"That's my Aunt Jean," Jimmy said as we walked through to the kitchen, where there was a round table in the middle of the floor with a lamp and a bottle of whisky on it. Uncle Bob went to the cupboard and pulled out three shot glasses. He rinsed them under the tap, then set them up on the table. He poured some whisky in them, picked one up, then nodded at us and then at the glasses.

"Have a drink, boys!"

"Thanks, Uncle Bob," said Jimmy. "But we're kind of beat and we got stuck in the snow . . . "

"*I said have a drink!* Didn't my *sister* raise you any better than have a fucking drink with your *uncle?*"

"Okay, Unc, okay!"

Uncle Bob looked over at me.

"And your goddamn friend too, or you can both sleep in the fucking car!"

The only person I had to blame was myself, so I couldn't get mad. I just felt lucky that I didn't have to work the morning shift. I sat down at the table with Jimmy and Uncle Bob, and we drank until daybreak.

When I woke up my head hurt real bad. The whisky'll do it to you every time. I was in a bed in a small, shadowy room. The windows must've been boarded up because the light was pretty low and I knew it had to be daytime. I didn't have any idea of what time it was, but I assumed it was late. I was going to have to roust Jimmy and get myself out of here as soon as I could. I hate myself when I wake up like that, and I like to put it as right as I can as fast as I can.

Then the door opened, letting in some light, and this guy walked in. It wasn't Jimmy and it wasn't Uncle Bob, and he was holding a gun in his hand. I've seen guys in bad shape, drunks in the street, guys hit by cars, guys with stumps. I've never seen nothing like this guy. He was thin as a bone, with

greasy, thin, long hair. He wore sunglasses, and his skin was so pale it was like Chinese dumplings, steamed. His arm, the one not holding the gun, was all bent and twisted, and clutched up against his body. He didn't stride in, he kind of limped, like he was favoring that bad arm. He moved his head a little bit this way and that, as if he were looking for something, though I couldn't tell where his eyes were pointing because of the sunglasses. Then he lifted the gun, it was a sawed off shotgun, and pointed it right at my face.

"Psss sssm maad pss pssss smyam." He was saying something, but I didn't know what the fuck it was. This was it. I started saying an Act of Contrition out loud.

Then over his shoulder I saw Jimmy walk in with one big handgun in his hand.

"Hey motherfucker," he said.

The guy didn't turn. He just kept the gun pointed at my face.

"Psss ssss fuckssss sssspppp . . . "

Booom!

Jimmy, who was maybe two feet from this guy, fired the gun right into the ceiling. It was so goddamn loud I almost started crying. But this guy, he didn't even blink. He waited a second, then turned his head slowly around, his body following in a delayed shuffling movement, to face Jimmy, who was now pointing his own gun right at the guy's head.

"I'm going to back up slowly so you can get out of this bedroom and then I'm going to let you out the front door," said Jimmy. "If you don't want to do it that way, then one of us is going to fucking die. That's all there is to it."

The guy didn't answer. Jimmy took a step back. The guy didn't move. Jimmy took another step back, and the guy still didn't move. "There's no fucking percentage in this for either of us," said Jimmy. The guy shuffled forward, Jimmy backed out of my line of sight, and the guy followed. They had a few more words, and then about twelve hours later the front door opened and six hours later it closed, and I started breathing again. Jimmy came in a second later.

"I didn't know you were Catholic," he said. There was a smile on his face.

"What the fuck was that?" I said. I was sitting up in the bed now.

"Hey, take it easy. He's gone now. His name's Hank Kaminski and he lives in the house at the end of the street. He's a heroin addict, a really fucked-up dude, and sometimes he comes over and tries to rob Uncle Bob."

Uncle Bob came up behind Jimmy and stuck his head in.

"You should've killed the fucker, Jimmy. I told him the last time he was in here that I'd kill him if I saw him anywhere near the house again."

"Aaaahhh . . . "

"Hey, Jim, let's get out of here," I said. I got up and started dressing.

"I can't right now. That was Uncle Bob's last bullet and I have to go and get him some more ammo. But don't worry, I'll be back in time to get us to work."

Uncle Bob's last bullet. Jimmy'd faced that monkeyboy down with an empty gun. Oh, man.

"Come on in the kitchen and have some coffee, altar boy," Uncle Bob said.

The window in the kitchen wasn't boarded over. I sat at the table, looking out at the endlessly falling snow, feeling the shakes coming on while Uncle Bob poured us our coffee. The gun Jimmy'd used was on the table. I could hear, very faintly, Jimmy starting up his car outside. Uncle Bob sat down at the table with me. He fiddled with the gun.

"You gotta learn how to relax," he said. He was wearing an old torn, flannel shirt, unbuttoned. The old steam radiator in the kitchen was hissing away, clanging. He reached into his shirt pocket and pulled out a few bullets, held them up for me to see, and snorted a short laugh. Then he loaded the gun.

"I was a cook once," he said. "You a cook?"

"I'm a dishwasher," I said.

"I was one of them too." He put the gun down and slid it over to me.

"You know how to use one of these?" I didn't like the look on his face. It looked like I was going to have to learn.

Michael W. Young

Fire in the Open Sky

Ignoring the wide, almost unbounded Sunday sky, Karen kept noticing that her father was not driving the familiar road as quickly as he had always done before. Instead of racing above the two-lane, daring any police cars she and the other kids used to imagine were waiting in the low brush, he seemed to be measuring out every stripe of pavement, timing his slow breaths to equal distances from home to the intersection. It was getting dark. Maybe that's all it was. He must have thought they were both too old to play games. It was only a road.

This, though, was not a trip she wanted to take. School was getting to be one long, numbing grind. Break just wasn't long enough. If she could have stayed home for a little longer, like till her roommate graduated. They were already sophomores.

"Sure you got all your things, Pumpkin? You bring your boots? Sneakers packed, or you give up on them?"

"I've got them, Dad. I'm sure. And if anything's back home, I could always get a ride back next weekend."

"You're always welcome home, but I thought we'd paid for a longer reservation than that up at Kansas State."

In the early but quickly moving twilight, Karen saw the small smile her father would add to finish off any kind of joke. To her, though, it was a welcome sign of the tenderness she'd found missing at home. Her week off was already being catalogued in her memory and it seemed it had only happened at night. The mid-March days were still short, but, more than that, she thought of how few times the family had a chance to talk. Even after her little brother had gone to sleep, her father quietly went back into the fields to work on a machine or move hay for the cattle. Alone in the living room of the tall, cathedral-ceilinged house at night, she worried if there would be a farm to come back to in May.

"I see the Wasingers are still in their place. All the lights."

Nodding to the buildings well across the brown prairie grass, her father agreed with no more emphasis than he would an idle remark about

oncoming weather. His eyes remained softly fixed towards the road, but Karen felt the pickup pull itself a little faster around the low turn and away from the bright house windows.

"Been wondering, what's your major going to be? Still want to be a doctor, or is it back to stewardess?" The smile was there again.

"Daddy."

"Yes, Pum."

"It's bad enough I'm going back for another two months. I don't like my new biology teacher, can't stand my statistics class either. Med school would be even more years and I don't think it's worth the money. I'd really rather stay on this side of the state. I could get a job in Hays, Garden City, or Liberal, or Dodge. Maybe I could even stay home."

"First thing," he said, his shoulders tightening into his chest, "you're never living near that filth in Dodge. Second, if you go to Hays, it'll be for school. Finally, your mother and I want you to stay at K-State."

She sat back against the door, packing her short, blonde hair flat into the window, and lowered her eyes.

"I just want to make you proud, Dad."

Suddenly, Karen saw his hand coming at her and she shuddered. The broad, rough back of his hand slowly touched her cheek gently. It was as if he wasn't angry, but afraid she might disappear. She had shaken so quickly under the worn denim jacket that her father hadn't noticed. Turning to him, she felt a deeper kind of fright. His pale eyes, against the leathery face, were wide open, as if he hoped she could see far inside him.

The pickup followed the road until it joined 51, the route to the interstate. There were only a few turns and stops on a country blacktop like this one, but Karen had already sensed that they weren't driving to her destination; they were being taken there. The truck moved smoothly as if it had been trained by all the trips. It was about then that she realized that the radio had never been turned on. It was the hum of the tires that was echoing in her mind.

They rolled to a slight stop at a fork in the road she always looked forward to seeing. The Donegal's place was just ahead. She and Harry and Janet had all been close since kindergarten. He'd gone east, farther east than Karen, to St. Louis and Janet had gone to CU, to hunt for a rich ski bum, as they had joked. If it hadn't been so late, she thought, Dad could stop in for a quick hello with the folks. It'd been too long. But she didn't see the string of lights Mr. Donegal had put up around their drive. There wasn't anything in the twilight but two tall shadows and what seemed to be a long, low black wall that moved as the clouds filled in the sky above it.

"Dad. Dad, something happen out here?"

"Karen, their loans were called. Bill Donegal shot himself a week, ten days before you came home."

She tried to hear the hum of the tires, but they weren't there. She looked again at the swaying wall, waiting for the lights to come on and letting the ranch house jump out from the dark to tell her it was a misunderstanding. The wall, though, would only let a thin wave of deep brown and purple blue roll across it as the truck kept pulling them into the already dark northeastern horizon.

"Honey, it was Janet who asked us not to tell you. She rushed her mom out to Missouri. With the auction, there was nothing left to keep them here."

"Shot?"

"It was closed casket. Father Oltmann said a mass for the family, but they stayed away. Word finally got out and reporters came."

"I had given up on the evening news by then. He's gone?"

"I'm sure if you wrote Janet, all of them would be in touch."

"Your loans being called, Dad?"

"It's not for worrying. We agreed you're going back to do your best."

"But if we lose . . . "

"Pum, no one loses what they don't really own. You can never own land. It belongs to no one. But we do own the right to work it. We've paid for the chance to use it a while and use it well. Partners. But it is always going to outlast us all."

He had never spoken of anything like quitting before, even in the most innocent card game. Her anger mounted as did her doubts. Too much had been happening behind her back. Whatever his choice had been, it was already frightening her.

"Pumpkin, don't you ever notice the sky? I hadn't much, in a way, till one of those reporters said something I overheard. You know, he said it made him nervous."

She had been looking at the darkening sky anyway, but she wasn't trying to see it. It was the covering, the roof she'd always known. In that long moment of silence, she felt she was recognizing something she had let herself forget, but all this without knowing what to focus on.

"That guy said the sky's too wide, just too big," he sort of laughed. "He couldn't take it that it was all the way around his head. Guess there are people just not used to the open flat land of Kansas. Damn, it made him nervous. Believe it?"

She wondered how he could dare laugh. That hearty but polite laugh reminded her of how Mr. Donegal used to enjoy a good one and that memory, with its lukewarm numbness spreading through her, made her father's humor sound not good-natured but sacrilegious.

"Look at that, from what looks like an ocean overhead, to the way that sunset goes orange up on those thin lines of clouds. And how full and burning that sun is. Hell, this sky is what has been letting me face each day. Remember, Karen, in our land, there are no mountains, no buildings to keep you from the sun. The sun and the sky run on forever. We get our storms, but here and above have no limits. Nothing stops what you can see."

There was no answer, not really the thought that there was an answer in her. Grief had gone all the way to anger.

After a while, she realized her father knew she'd have nothing to say and was glad he knew her at least that well. All through the break, the family had avoided talking about the troubles around them. This was in spite of any attempt she made to understand and share the tensions wearing away at them. Donny, her little brother, had been the typical prairie car-nut. A fast, slick car was a special pride in a neighborhood where houses were miles apart and friends saw you coming. They had minutes and minutes available for envy or criticism before you were close enough to hear. But the Firebird he had helped buy for his sixteenth birthday was still unpainted when she got home. Wednesday, on a closer look, Karen found the new engine was gone from under the car's tarp and the only tires in the shed were bald.

At the main meal on the day she left, the Sunday dinner her mother always worked so long on, Karen spent her time watching Janie, her older sister. Though unspoken, the whole family was thankful that the meal had become a tradition because it now provided an honorable way for her parents to give Jane and her young family some charity without the word having to be mentioned. Her husband, Travis, was a good man and a strapping looking wildcatter who had worked on everything from big derricks to stripper wells all through the open ranges. Janie had often told Karen she would never marry a farmer, just to have a different life, but now companies were auctioning pipe and bits and pumps like banks as the Farm Bureau had been doing with people's tractors and cattle and homes.

She had been watching along the highway edges, picking out the occasional house or the top of the Co-op elevator miles away, but she had not been looking at them, only vaguely naming shadows. The dark blue ceiling of the eastern sky had arched up, growing a deeper, darker tempera at its roots to what was starting to squeeze the brilliant glow of the nearly departed sun, like when, as a child, she figured a door to heaven was slowly being closed.

"Sure seems late for you to be going back to school. When I was your age, we left a lot sooner to get back to State."

"Things have changed a bit since you were a kid, Dad. And no need to worry about getting caught by the Hi-Po. Eric's a safe driver, if that's what you're asking."

"You're getting a devious mind in your old age, Pum. But I've always trusted your choice of friends. It's just that I didn't see you doing much homework this week."

"That's because you were always out." She wanted to try for a straight answer again, to pounce on any chance she might get.

"You know," he said quickly, tripping her words before they had a chance, "there's a lot about farming your brother's yet to learn. Seems crazy about the land, but I didn't pay much attention either at that age. You remember running out in the fields when you got home from school to ride up with me when I tilled?"

"Yeah, Dad."

"You always wanted to drive it and I'd let you when we were away from the house and your mother. You were good at keeping the lines clean, but you'd forget to get the turns smooth. And remember when we'd go spread, and how I'd tell you over and over to be careful? Donny's going to learn that the hard way. You, you'd go running into the irrigation ditches, kicking up the water while we went to check if it'd leeched. Donny still doesn't know to care that now we need a post-emergent herbicide. He only knows he likes the land."

"Dad, I do want to talk to you about the farm."

"That's good. Your mother never did learn how it worked, but she knows how to keep a family. And she lets me do the paper work in the kitchen, lay it all out on the table, even keep the invoices, tallies, the big checkbook in a special place in the pantry, even though it messes up her cooking. That's why I moved the safe, and it's the same old combination, down from there to the cellar. I know it should at least look like she wanted her place to be."

"Dad, please." She hoped to get him back to that moment. In the twilight, she could still see his face clearly. It seemed not to be concentrating on the road or the truck or her, but somewhere thousands of miles away. The flicker of a distant oncoming car's lights danced through the compartment and he smiled broadly, like he was smiling at its dance.

"Dad, are we going to fail? Is the bank going to call in our notes?"

"That's for me to know."

His expression was not showing any anger, but Karen still felt her face stinging. His words had come out slower than usual and had a low rounded sound. They had filled up the inside of the cab and washed away her thoughts. She was left feeling as dry and barren as the soil in a drought.

The truck carried them on toward the intersection. It took them quietly through a few worn houses and a store with a diner on the side and gas pumps out front that together was town. Not far past that, along a dried

and sandy creek bed, the truck pulled off on a wide shoulder about a hundred yards from the ramp to I70 and came to rest.

The entire weight of what she had heard and seen on this trip was pushing on Karen's heart and she was trying to pull in some cool air. Her father sat motionless, looking more and more like a silhouette, sitting straight-backed, his head mostly up and aimed forward.

"Sorry we haven't more time. Things to finish."

The orange band of sunlight behind them seemed to be sealing in his words under the closing sky. The final moments of the day looked more like the gas jet orange flame of a prairie grass fire that was coming up behind them from the horizon. Staring at the empty gun rack in the rear window, her mind tried to find a place to hide the Remington her father sometimes brought in the truck. She tried to find a way to say a word that would start the pickup and race them away from the flames.

"You ever see that teacher of yours? Helped you look for a summer job back east?"

Karen blushed, turning almost the color of the clouds that framed her surprised face through the window.

"The young one from back east? The one you grabbed so happily at the basketball game? In the fieldhouse?"

"I know, Dad."

"You scared him. Or did we by being there?"

"It wasn't anything like that. He's really good. He made us realize things, things I never thought I could think of before. He cared."

"Never doubted. Just wondered if you still had a thing for him?"

"Stop grinning, Dad. You know I'm still seeing Rob."

"Always thought you were good about people."

She heard the sound of tires rolling across gravel and knew Eric was there, even though she didn't look up to see his lights.

"You know, your mom and I wish we could do for you what we did when Jane went to school. I'll need you to work the farm this summer."

"This summer?" she slightly gasped in excitement. "You sure?"

"I've got almost a full load of seed coming this week. I wish I'd knew you like wheat so much."

"Big goof."

Eric honked, flashed his lights, and honked again.

"Love you, Daddy." She leaned to give him a kiss and smiled wider when he pulled her closer for a moment.

"Never doubted, Karen."

She had begun remembering the stories about work and other things he used to tell and she had questions she wished she could have asked, but Eric's car had already turned and they were heading up the eastbound

ramp. She saw the truck turning to head back down 51 before she settled back for the ride.

"Already midnight. Already," the worn voice in Karen's head kept repeating. She hadn't settled into her dorm long enough, only about an hour, to do more than start anything. A couple of books were on her bed, papers were spread across the floor, and a book lay open, thrust up against the back of her desktop. She couldn't find the text she wanted.

"Karen. Oh, Karen. We're going out. Want to come?"

It had to be Allison, her roommate, calling out in those long syllables. They cut through all the roar and crash of the halls. When the door popped open, Karen saw her roomie had a typically giggly grin.

"Grab a coat. There's a Sig Ep who has a car. Come on. One quick donut and creamies run before school starts again. You promised the last time."

"But not with a test in the morning, Allie. I got nothing done at home."

Allison gave a little pout as she turned and dug through the legions of shoes massed in her closet. With a blue-heeled pair in her hands, she sat on the edge of Karen's cluttered bed.

"Would it make a difference if Rob did or didn't come along?"

"I really need my sleep. Maybe later next week."

"But I'm the one who introduced you two."

"Can't think about that now, Allie."

Her roomie didn't bitch back at Karen. She didn't even smirk. Allison smoothed the spread where she'd been. As she swung the door closed she called, "You don't know what you're missing," paused, then walked away down the tiled floor.

After some sort of time passed, Karen found herself standing by Allie's side of the room, figuring how to rip down all the posters of TV and rock "hunks." There was no reason, but the ideas scared her. Turning the other direction, she saw her own print of a lime unicorn, its head cocked towards a rainbow over an ice-cream white mountain. Except for a Snoopy poster from Janie, it was all she had for display. The unicorn had been Allie's present during a trip they'd made to Kansas City the April before. They had also picked out the platoon of shoes standing by Karen's bag. She stood, wanting to remember anything else from that long-ago freshman year.

The sun had long since gone, but her heart would not forget how a piece of flat land had a bit earlier seemed to be the entire world or how that day was the only part of her life. The guilt of that day was what wouldn't end. Now she also needed to apologize to a friend who couldn't guess how much she deserved one.

There was nothing to do, though, but throw her other bags into the closet where they hit the tops of her best work boots. While the boots were still swaying on their high, wooden heels, she smoothed the pages of the book on her desk, tucked the stretched and tattered red cloth book mark tightly into the binding, and slowly sealed the text.

Chirpings. Chirpings? And the light was still on? Karen tried to think it all through as she struggled against being awake. The double chirp of the phone rang out again. It was sharper, clear, and scarier than what she'd heard in her sleep. It was the sun that was on already and she leaped out and up from the covers to grab the phone and tell her friends that she meet them a little late at class.

"Oh, hi. Sorry."

"Honey?"

"Mom?"

The answering silence shattered the earlier flame of embarrassment. The warmth was gone from her cheeks. The cold, though, refused to awake her from this feeling.

"Did Dad hurt himself?"

The morning outside her window was brilliant and a gentle wind polished the day into a shining, chilled sharpness. Karen, after hanging up and tripping through Allison's discarded shoes, reached to the back of her own closet for her boots.

Though she had not seen him for a couple months, she guessed right and found the teacher walking down a long lit hall after a class. Again, she surprised him. But this time, he did not hesitate, hugging her tightly in response, asking what was making her cry. They'd found him, she said, in the field. They'd found him slumped by a combine. His heart had finally given out. He hadn't told her about his heart.

Far in the corner of the dark parlor, Karen stood guard over her new doubts, carefully watching the family and their friends visit her father. More than just the town had come out. People from the Farm Bureau, even ones who had moved away, a couple of agents from the Extension Service, folks from the Grange and the local Co-op all came because they had known the man. And they came because they all still shared what he had borne with them. A couple of aunts were with her mother, who was thanking everyone in her soft, ringing voice. Karen was proud of her calm, but she looked so small now.

Bob, the oldest of the kids, was in from Wichita with his wife and son. They had their best clothes on. Jane sat in a high backed chair, trying to nurse her youngest. Travis fidgeted too much for people not to notice the frays in his and the kids' jackets. Close behind his mother, Donny kept

looking around with his eyes wide as if he was hoping to recognize someone in particular.

Karen stayed away from the crowd, not wanting to hear it mutter anymore about her father or their future. At least she could give him her honesty and listening to well-meaning whispers would lead her to lies or tears, she thought. Standing on a step in the corner, she could see across and a bit down to his face in the casket. The ruddiness the wind had etched seemed smooth, as if he were younger. His best blue suit bulged a bit along his chest and shoulders. The mortician just hadn't lain him right, but she asked to have him left like that. Her mother, she hoped, would be pleased at how strong he looked. That strength was at peace now, but she could not find rest.

Slipping out through the lobby and then to a back loading dock on the Dillon's market side of the funeral home, Karen found a space outside that gave her the security the dark walls had been denying her. Slowly, she began to pray that he would understand why she'd worried the way she did and forgive her, forgive her lack of faith. She prayed he understood why she was going back to State on Friday only to pack. Bob's machinist job at Boeing was too good to leave. They were too far into buying a house. Mom couldn't afford to hire a man. But, as Karen tried to explain to the clouds, Travis was a good worker and his family needed a good roof over them. Donny would know how to farm, as they had learned from following their father around, and together the two would make one good farmer. But they needed her. With what she had already learned, she knew she'd be even better with the livestock than she was as a kid and they all trusted her with the books. The family had to try.

If her father could accept that, or even if he couldn't, she had one more prayer. Really, it was a deal. She'd forgive him for working even when he'd been warned what it would do to his heart if he'd forgive her whenever the farm did fail. As his lesson had taught her, she had found a lot of the papers in the pantry and his insurance would help with some of the loans. Still, there was no help coming for them or their neighbors, only speeches written to play for other crowds and the occasional reporter. But she knew she didn't have to forgive him for trying, for keeping it going, only that he was gone. Karen felt the west wind turning to the south and her eyes widened out to see the limitless sky. It was hers from then on.

Michael Barrett

Spin

One summer evening, at the best Mexican restaurant in Fort Wayne, my mother leaned forward into a bar of tinted sunlight and said, "Bobby has a transfer, and him and me are going to Tennessee. You boys don't need to come with us. You aren't kids anymore."

"O.K., Ma," said Danny, dripping taco sauce on his refried beans. He put the spoon back in the bowl. "So, when you going?" he said. "I mean, where?"

"Well, we're not completely sure yet," said Bobby, "but Memphis."

Bobby was her boyfriend, our mailman.

She held there in the glowing light, like an old photograph.

"Oh," Dan said, nodding. "Sure. Where Elvis came from."

"Vivian's gonna let you stay with her for a while," Ma told us. She leaned back, out of the light.

"Oh," Danny said.

She had worked a lot of jobs and had known a lot of boyfriends, and we had lived in just about every neighborhood in Fort Wayne, but this was different.

"Well, God," I said. "That's amazing news."

The restaurant was a fancy place, a place overlooking the river. A place we'd never been before. While we finished eating, everybody quiet, Bobby doled smoke rings into the warm patch of sunlight on the table and twisted off his cigarette ashes in his leftover food.

Two weeks later, we rode over to my Aunt Vivian's trailer in the back of Bobby's truck. It was filled with Ma's stuff: her clothes, dishes, plants, the T.V. set, the stereo and records, the recliner, a lamp, her bike, sewing machine, two cat cages, a paper sack full of pictures.

"This is gonna be cool," Danny said, sitting in the recliner, grinning, turning pretend channels on the T.V.

"We'll make it cool," I said.

"Party!"

The trailer was an old '50s model, swimming-pool blue with round windows and a white lightning bolt down the side. Ma was giving Vivian instructions in the driveway when we pulled up. She turned on us the minute we jumped out of the truck.

"You boys get a job and move out right away, you hear?"

"O.K., Ma," said Dan.

"All right," I said.

"Oh now," said Aunt Vivian, looking at us, "that's O.K."

Her kids had lived there, but they were gone. After their daddy, Earl, left, she had let them run wild, drinking chocolate milk and eating jelly beans for supper, Lucky Charms. She let them watch whatever they wanted on T.V. every night until they couldn't stay awake and fell asleep on the floor in their clothes. They were more than she could handle, that was easy enough to see, but she wouldn't accept any help. We tried to take a couple of them for a while, but she wouldn't have it. "These kids have been through enough," she'd say. Then one morning, little Early went to school without his shoes on, and after that a social worker came over and had a look around. Vivian kept them home from school then, so the State dropped by one Saturday and took them off to a foster home.

"I get a hearing in a couple months," she said, following us into the kids' bedroom. The walls were covered with scribbling. We threw our coats on the beds. "I'm gonna get them back, for sure."

"Damn straight," I told her.

It was a dry morning, calm, all the trailers in the park white with sun. We unloaded our boxes, working to the sounds of kids playing in the other driveways and a whispering on the highway out front. Bobby smoked cigarettes in the cab and searched the radio band for country-western songs while he waited. Ma gave Vivian some money, and she wadded it up and put it in her pants, then moved it to her shirt pocket, then put it inside her shirt, then poked it in her shoe. She watched us, blinking. Our feet crunched gravel.

When we finished unloading we stood in the drive while Ma talked to Bob for a long time, leaning against his door, radio in the warm cab hissing. They lit cigarettes. She smiled and climbed into her worn-out MG.

"You do what Vivian tells you, now," she said from the rattling car.

"O.K., Ma," said Dan.

She looked beautiful again.

"You take care of her," I told Bobby.

"I love you boys," Ma said, and she roared off in the tiny car for Memphis. We stood by our boxes, watching her pull through the trailer park, and when they were gone, I picked up a carton, and felt the cardboard touch my hands back, smooth and firm, like skin.

"We love you, too, Ma!" Dan shouted.

We found jobs that week, for which I am thankful, because they helped us adjust. Going to work can take your mind off your worries. At work, little things count, and you learn how to make the best of your situation. You find it isn't so bad. At least you've got some money coming in.

I washed dishes at The Eddy, a seafood restaurant on the highway. I worked in the back with a woman named Maxxy, too old for washing dishes, who came in late a lot and never explained why to anybody, except me, when over her pots and pants she told me that she stopped to throw stones at a funeral parlor on the way to work. Sometimes we had fun washing dishes back there. We sprayed each other, or played tag with wet rags. We overloaded the washer with soap, just to see the suds gush out. Our fooling around bothered the waitresses, and she liked that.

Danny worked for a contractor to Indiana Bell, installing wiring in housing developments around Fort Wayne. If the gas company or the water department dragged a backhoe through a phone line, he'd go to the break and sit on a stool in the ditch, the ends of the cable on his knees, sorting out matches in the hundreds of tiny colored wires. When he found them, he crimped them together with little connectors. He got good at it. It took him all day at first, but he got a cable down to a few hours.

We got our routine down, and we all pulled together, and we had fine times in the trailer. We shampooed the carpet and painted the ceiling white, we cooked expensive dinners or went out to eat, we took long, lazy drives in Vivian's El Dorado, around the farms outside Fort Wayne, on all-day swimming trips to the rock quarries. Vivian got her hair done up in a permanent that looked nice and made her feel good, and she hummed songs, and bought spices, and planted tulip bulbs outside the trailer. We drank and played cards on Friday nights, and slept in late on Saturdays, and Vivian would get up first, and make big breakfasts for us, french toast, pork-chops, fresh pineapple, and coffee.

One night there were flowers on the table when we got home, the trailer cleaned up and bright, and she looked extra pretty. "It's my birthday," she said. She had Mexican beer cold in the refrigerator, and we sent out for pizzas, deluxe, and when we finished eating and the beer was gone, Danny and I sang "Happy Birthday To You." Then she went to her bedroom and came out with three brand new pairs of Levis, one for each of us.

"Just because," she said.

They were good times, ones I'll remember. But it wasn't long before the sky loaded up gray, and the trees went red, the sharpness fading from things. It was time for us to move and let her kids come home. We took her down to the DSS for her hearing. It was just a meeting between her and the social workers who had been phoning and visiting her, and in the fluores-

cent glare of the smoky, carpeted room, she lost. She didn't have a job, they said, she hadn't moved into a good enough place for them.

"But I want my kids," she said.

Get off welfare, they said. They told her she could visit them.

She wanted us to stay with her, then, which we did, of course, but things weren't the same. She moped around, not talking, and cried. One morning we found her on the couch. She wouldn't get up.

"Come get some breakfast," I said. "Fresh coffee. Good stuff."

"I'll be all right," she said, so low I could barely hear her. "Go on and leave me alone."

"She'll snap out of it," Danny said, but she looked too sad to me. I put coffee and some rolls on the coffee table for her and we went to work. But that night, when we came home with beer and pizza, we pushed open the door, and there she was, sitting in the darkness, still in the exact same place.

"Whoa," Dan said when he saw her there. I walked over to her.

"Go lie down," I said.

"Can't—niggers outside," she whispered.

Dan came over. "No, Vivian, there's no niggers outside," he said, shaking his head.

"Yes there are . . . hiding. In the bushes."

He looked at me. "What do we do?" he asked.

"Oh, you don't have to worry about it," she snapped.

"I won't worry if you go lie down," I said. "Please?"

"Not necessary," she smiled, looking at me for the first time. "I'm an All-Electric Woman."

I called a doctor, who told us to call the police, who took her away in a car. "Turn me loose!" she kept shouting. They took her to Evansville for treatment for her angry feelings.

The next day, we called Ma. "Vivian's in the spin-bin," Dan said. "She hit her doctor with a chair."

"Ma," I said. "They got her on drugs. They don't know how bad she is yet."

"God *damn* you boys," Ma said.

It was just the two of us then. We stayed in the trailer, and went to work each day, and the days got short and snowy with approaching winter, and when we came home from work each night, the trailer was empty and cold.

"Let's just leave," Danny said one night after we had finished eating and were watching *The Endless Summer* on the hazy T.V. "She's not coming back."

"Where?" I asked.

"We'll take her car to California."

"How?" I said, and he knew I had him. We didn't have any money. Her welfare was gone; we were barely keeping up with the bills. We had even crawled to the back of the trailer a few times when the landlord or the power company lady came looking.

He stared at the bleary T.V.

"I'm going to join the army, then," he said.

"Sure you are. You don't want to do that."

"Yes, I do," he said. "Fort Wayne sucks. If I join the army I can learn a trade. I can go to Germany."

I went over and leaned into his face. "Look," I told him. "You aren't learning a trade and you aren't going to Germany and you aren't joining no fucking army. You can get yourself a different job or whatever you want, but you're not getting involved in that shit. That's just a stupid idea, Dan."

We stayed, and he settled on a program at the community college that trained him to be a machinist and paid him while he learned. They gave him a piece of steel to practice machine operations on. It was going to be a paper punch. He showed it to me every night.

At the restaurant I rose to bartender. The customers drank and drank and drank. I stood behind the bar in its cool, dark alley, pouring booze all day, listening to their divorce stories over and over. The dining room played elevator versions of Perry Como or Andy Williams songs, songs like "This Diamond Ring," "Bangladesh," or "Scarborough Fair." The program repeated, and I got to where I was hearing the songs coming. I knew all their little hooks by heart.

We came home in the dark and read magazines or drank and watched T.V. It got so we didn't talk. Some nights we made separate dinners. He listened to Beach Boys albums. "Let's go to California," he's say every time the El Dorado got stuck. "Let's go to California," he'd say whenever the weatherman predicted snow. I sat by the window sometimes and looked out over the trailer park at all the trailers closed up tight against the dark and cold, imagining the kids inside, the parents home from work, the T.V.s going and dinners on the table, and I wondered what it must be like, what makes the world keep spinning. When I could, I stole crablegs or steaks or beer from the restaurant, and we passed the winter, awash in yellow light, furnace continuously blasting.

Come spring the tulips bloomed and kids ran and shouted in the driveways again.

"Let's get out of here," Dan said.

The heating bill was lower now and we decided to save, and when we found out Vivian was living in a group home, I moved to the back, and we took in Gordon, Dan's friend who worked at Skyline, the mobile home plant.

Gordon barely brought a thing with him except some clothes and a set of barbells, and he put a jar with his appendix in it and a collection of German war medals on the dresser where I had kept books and photographs. He hung a tarantula in a block of plastic on his bedstead.

Gordon did magic tricks. He could break cigarettes in half and put them back together like new, and we could never see how he did it, even when he was drunk. He liked to fill the ashtrays with gunpowder and light them off in the house, and he fired off bottle rockets and roman candles inside, too, and we got into wars with them, and it was fun. We got sloppy about taking care of things, but it felt good. We bought sheath knives at G.I. Joe's and practiced until we could whirl them down the length of the hallway and stick them in the bathroom door. We took the El Dorado out and squawked its tires until they smoked.

When it warmed up, Gordon got his motorcycle, a purple Honda 750 with apehangers on it, and he taught Danny to ride. Danny couldn't stay off it after that, and one afternoon they got drunk and spray-painted "Enola Gay" on the sides of the El Dorado and took it to a motorcycle swap meet in Muncie. They traded it for a set of Maltese Cross mirrors and a used Honda 750 like Gordon's, then got blue and yellow tattoos on their arms of a motorcycle wheel with eagle wings flying from the spokes. They did plenty of drinking and riding then.

They were having fun, and they kept after me to get one too, so I looked around, and eventually I spent what we had saved and bought one too, a BSA Lightning 650, older than the Hondas, an older technology. It had a chrome-plated gas tank with red and gold *BSA* emblems sticking from its sides. It made loping sounds from its cast iron block and long, low exhausts, next to the ground. You sat way back in a hard, flat seat, the handlebars curved back, wide into your hands.

And that's how we spent the summer—riding, riding with our shirts off, riding to the flea market in Shipshewana so Gordon could look for SS daggers and Death-heads, riding to Indy, to Michigan City, to Kentucky, into Michigan, riding around the golf courses, down to the quarries, on beer runs, cruising Fort Wayne. Sometimes we just rode aimlessly, anywhere we wound up. "Let's take the sleds for a putt," Gordon would say. He could stand up on the seat with his arms straight out, the Honda doing forty down a gravel road.

We had a little spot behind the trailer where we parked the bikes, and we'd sit there in the evening, roasting chicken and corn on the cob, drinking, watching the white and blue sky turn pearly pink and aqua behind the black silhouettes of trees, waiting for the moon and stars to come out sparkling, the heat of day hanging on into the darkness.

Then we'd go out blasting the Indiana backroads, empty streets canopied by trees, tunnels of hot asphalt air, scaring up owls into the road in front of us, freezing them into wing-spread streaks with our headlight beams and speed. We clung to the bikes, our hair in snarls, tears streaming our eyes. My speedometer needle would bob in its green circle of light as the motor hit the power band, everything smearing around the vanishing point, headlight brightening, and sometimes flashing out, slinging me into the Indiana blackness one hundred miles an hour.

We were drinking out back one night, our faces and arms flickering in the firelight. Summer was ending, you could feel it. Danny was tossing his piece of steel into the air in front of him. He caught it in a fist.

"Fort Wayne sucks," he said.

"Oh, really," said Gordon. He took a slug of beer that ran down the sides of his mouth.

Danny stood up and threw his piece of steel as hard as he could into the woods.

"Ho, ho!" Gordon laughed.

"Fuck you, Gordo."

The bikes leaned glowing in the shadows.

Danny was right. I had been showing up for work hung over, the waitresses taking me back by the walk-in cooler, making me drink coffee. "What's the matter with you?" they'd say, and what could I tell them. I got caught leaving work with four lobsters and a fifth of Jim Beam in my pants. Mr. Chin took me into his office and yelled, "You little son of a bitch, you take a pay cut or you're fired." I owed him, I suppose, but I was only making seventeen cents over minimum wage, anyway. Gordy had been pink-slipped at the trailer plant for answering "Spring Fever" when they asked him why he called in sick. And though Danny had gone to his classes, and had drilled, countersunk, milled, chamfered, threaded, knurled, and burnished his piece of steel, it never did punch holes in paper, like it was supposed to.

He sat whipping the fire with a stick, sending clouds of sparks curling into the air.

"All right," I said. "I'll go to California."

"Hey, man," Gordon slurred, "you won't be sorry. They got Hell's Angels out there and everything."

We stayed home that night and looked at maps, but later, I woke up to the sounds of the highway out front, feeling bad about having gutted the trailer, hoping whoever moved in would fix it back up. Dan and Gordy were awake, too, laughing in their room. I lay there watching a pattern of leaves swirl on the window and wondered what else I could do. Please, God, I

prayed, please don't let me fuck up. I could hear my heart thumping as the reverse shadows of headlights crawled across the walls. The last thing I remember before falling asleep was Gordon telling Dan we could stay in the YMCA in L.A. if we had to.

On the second day of the trip, we were almost to the west side of Nebraska, riding in formation in the evening rush-hour traffic, our bikes like pack mules, covered with bags. We were tired. We had ridden all the night before through the glare of the semitruck lights, and earlier that day Dan and Gordy had fought at a McDonald's over whether to stop at Yellowstone or the Grand Canyon, with me wanting neither. Now we were driving into a cloudy sunset, our nerves shot, everybody grim, staring straight ahead.

The road spilled out in front, cars and trees and road and sky falling into the vanishing point. I waited for a hole in the plodding traffic, then pulled ahead, just to feel the road speed up beneath me. The landscape flattened, I gained distance, passing station wagons and sedans, kids in the back of them waving at me, hands circling in the air. Then I slowed down and held my place, checking my mirrors for their headlights. But they didn't show.

I slowed until the cars I had passed were passing me, same faces watching. But they didn't show.

I stopped under a bridge. Traffic shot by, both directions, while I waited, then after ten minutes, I figured they broke down, and headed back on the east-bound side of Nebraska I-76. A state cop stopped me doing seventy-eight. He left his flashers going while he lectured me on the distinctions between Indiana and Nebraska driving laws, and I was listening to him and watching the highway at the same time when I saw Danny and Gordon go by on the other side, chasing me, doing maybe eighty-five, a line drawn on paper.

I rode into twilight without seeing them, Nebraska sky swirling like marble. It clouded up and started to sprinkle. I coasted into a rest area and set up my tent just before the rainstorm hit.

The sucking sound of semis on wet pavement made a strange rhythm in the tent, and I sat up for a long time with a flashlight over my map, trying to figure out just where the hell I was and what I was going to do. I could go to the YMCA in L.A. and look for them, I realized, but I didn't want to. I looked at the map, the shape of Nebraska. I was near Scottsbluff. I decided I would just stay there.

J. Morris

Still Not Smoking in Sleetmute, Alaska

I should have known the marriage wasn't going to work when Kelly decided to quit smoking on our honeymoon. She said it seemed like as good a time as any. "It's my last addiction," she growled, looking at me skeptically. For two weeks in Florida she complained and cried and drew deep trenches in the sand with a clam shell, and chewed gum in hurried, angry chomps. Chewing that gum—and she chewed it all the time, I mean all the time—she looked like a starved hamster finally let loose on a piece of lettuce. Also, might I mention, she didn't use the right sunscreen factor, and burned important parts of her body. I won't even try to describe what it was like, back in our hotel bed. "Careful"—"I'm sorry"—that was about it.

I suppose it's comical to say, "And it went downhill from there," after the honeymoon, but it did. Kelly spent an awful lot of time with her friends down at the Silly Wabbit, a bar across from where she worked. Most of these friends were still single, and even the married ones weren't, in my opinion, deeply married, or at least they didn't act like it. Kelly never told me I couldn't join her, but she never made a point of inviting me either. I showed up there once or twice, anyway. The last time, Kelly spent the entire evening leaning across me and talking to a pigeon-chested Phys. Ed. teacher named Tuck. I looked at Tuck's left hand. The only ring he wore was on the middle finger, and it was a huge silver skull. When we got home I started right in. "Did you see his ring? You were flirting with the Phantom. What an honor."

"Now y'all cut it out," Kelly told me. "This is your problem, not mine."

"That's a flabbergasting remark. You're saying I imagined it?"

"Now look." Kelly took a barette out of her hair and pointed it at me. "When we were dating you told me what a jealous fella you were. You said to ignore it. It was a sign of love, you said."

"It still is, but I'm talking about Tuck, not me."

"No, you're not, babe. You think you are, but you're actually talking about you. And I gotta tell you, I can't take much more of it."

I said, "You seemed to be flattered, when I was jealous before. You didn't object."

"I guess," said Kelly, reaching unhappily for her pack of gum, "that I'm a tad sensitive these days."

Kelly had a point, as far as me being jealous was concerned. I was born jealous. Ever since I was a boy, ever since I first dated, ever since I can remember: jealousy. I was an only child, that was my excuse.

Kelly worked for the Department of Commerce, and I even became jealous over that, jealous about GS-10's with pencils behind their ears, looming over the water cooler like moose, asking Kelly what she watched on TV that weekend, according to her.

As for Tuck, I was crazy with suspicion, and she was continually angry at me. "How's The Ghost Who Walks?" I would mutter when she came in at ten, smelling of burgundy. "Stop it!" she would shout back. "I'm warning y'all!" She wanted a cigarette all the time, that was obvious. She divorced me in six months flat. The loss was bitter—I felt robbed—but what, exactly, had I lost? Why, I asked her, did you marry me in the first place?

She shook her head, jammed a piece of Juicyfruit into her mouth—she was still chomping like a cute, pissed-off little hamster—and said, "Well, babe, y'all can't imagine how flattering it is to be wanted that bad. I succumbed." Part of why I did want her so bad was that she could use a word like "succumbed" and have it sound right. She had a very confident sense of herself, what she could get away with, where to draw the line, but there was more to it than that. Being from Mississippi helped. I'm still sorting it out.

Then I met Danielle—pronounced Da-*neel*—and started thinking about getting married again, almost right from the beginning. We got involved in a hurry.

Danielle is from New York City, and has got that snap in her voice. When funky New York music comes on the radio, she hoods her eyes, pouts her lips, and dances, briefly and lewdly, sort of like saying hi to an old friend. Danielle is shorter than I am (don't ask), and has tiny, rosy-tipped tits, and her eyes are the color of honey. She loves to read. She knows words, and could say "succumbed" too, if she felt like it, under the right circumstances. But she wants to be street-tough, and won't let on that she reads. She's not street, she's more like penthouse—I met her mother, so I know—but wants people to think otherwise. She knows words, though, and if the circumstances were right she would say "succumbed," and mean it.

We read completely different things. She checks out biographies and popular novels from the library, I buy volumes and volumes of short stories,

not that I can afford to. But our reading habits are the same, so the difference in what we read doesn't matter. We lie in bed and read together, toes rubbing each other's ankles every now and then. She likes to tell me incidents in biographies, I like to tell her the plots of the stories. Neither of us can go to sleep without reading, not even after making love.

"Okay if I turn on the light?"

"Sure," I say, reaching for my glasses.

I started living at Danielle's apartment, pretty much. I bought her a teakwood elephant, about six inches long, with real ivory tusks. I also brought over a desk lamp from my place. It's made by a very futuristic Swedish design place called Hegberg. The neck is flexible, and the top is shaped a little like a pterodactyl's head. You've never seen anything like it, I guarantee. The point of the design is: maximum light. I'm an industrial designer myself, so I know the value of proper illumination.

It was the only thing from my place I felt like having with me. All the rest of it could stay there, on the other side of town, for all I cared. It would be more fun to gradually select a life of objects with Danielle.

Then, a few months after I fell for her, she got her big break. I was never close to anyone before when they got their big break. All her life Danielle has wanted to be a model, and one Monday morning (with me still asleep in her bed) she got the call from a very big agency. They liked her portfolio and they wanted to do a shoot, that Friday. It was a big account, and big money, and it could lead to God knows what other kinds of bigness. Danielle woke me and told me, and her honey-colored eyes blazed like lasers. She squatted on the bed naked, and bounced up and down on her heels. She lit a cigarette and blew smoke around joyfully. Her little tits were hard.

I was happy for her. Who doesn't want the big break? I've been waiting for mine for years, killing time designing corporate stationery and scale models. Watching Danielle was like watching a kid get ready for a long steep ride on a new sled. She was so excited she couldn't catch her breath. I was proud of her.

Well, but all that changed quickly. The reality sank in. The modeling job was for a lingerie company. Danielle was going to have to wear just about nothing, and then the pictures of her, very sexy pictures, were going to be in magazines and on buses all over the country. Strange, violent, tall men would ogle her, and readjust their crotches accordingly. How could Danielle remain dispassionate about all that attention? By Wednesday I was as insecure as a puppy, and needed maximum reassurance that Danielle

loved me and intended to fulfill the promise of those pictures with no one but me.

I put it to her, in more or less those words. "Don't you trust me?" was her response.

Well, I did, in my head. But the circumstances made my stomach very uneasy. All I said, though, was, "Yes but." And she said, of course, "But what?" And I said, "Nothing." Not once in the time I'd been with her had I voiced my jealousy. Don't think I hadn't learned anything from being divorced in six months flat. I could still picture Kelly, giving me that skeptical look and shaking hands for the last time outside the courthouse.

The morning of Danielle's shoot, we had an argument right before she left. It started when I asked her to call me and let me know how it was going. She wouldn't promise to. "I may not be able to take a break for a personal call," she said.

"Well, you might as well start to set your standards and needs, right from the beginning," I countered. "Don't forget, you have something they want. It's not just them doing you a favor. You can say, As part of my working conditions, I must have a short break for a personal phone call."

"I can *not*," Danielle said, her voice going high. "You don't know what you're talking about. This is my big break and I will do anything they say, professionally. I have to show how easy I am to work with."

"Oh boy," I said. "I have a really bad feeling about this."

"It's out of my control."

"So you won't call me."

"I didn't say that. I said I can't promise to call. I will make every effort to call."

I shook my head. I knew I was defending a losing position, but I couldn't let go. "I don't know if I can accept this. If you're going to be a successful model, then I think we need to have certain things understood."

We were standing in Danielle's kitchen. I noticed we both had our arms folded tightly across our chests. We both leaned against a kitchen appliance and glared. Danielle said, "Look, I'm sorry, I can't talk about this anymore now. I have to leave. Under no circumstances will I risk being late for this. I love you. Everything's okay."

"Do you," I said. "Is it."

She stubbed her cigarette out in frustration, and picked up her purse. We said a few more things, more of the same, and then she left.

I hurt in so many places that it scared me. I went back into the bedroom and lay on the bed and moaned. That was enjoyable, so I moaned louder. Then I made a kind of barking noise. Her cat put its head into the room and stared.

Her clothes from the day before were lying on the floor next to the bed. I pulled them up in a pile and clutched them to me. I extracted her panties and draped them over my head, rubbing my face with them, inhaling her, and moaned some more. This would be a terrific moment to have a heart attack and die, I thought. Found dead with Danielle's panties up my nose. I said out loud, through the white silk, "See what you've driven me to." Taking a deep breath, I puffed the panties off my face. They flew off and landed on the clock radio.

I sat up and stared around the room, trying to find something that looked better than I felt. Well, those panties did please me—quite lovely, spilling over the radio like vanilla ice cream melting. The sight of them made me feel a little better. The cat had come in, and now it sat down on a magazine that was lying on the floor, as a cat will. They always pick a spot that features them. It settled on the magazine like a picture settling into a frame, and looked at me impenetrably. I told it, "Don't blame me. I am an only child." I could see it thinking, What fools these humans be. "You're neutered," I said. "What do you know."

I got up and went into the kitchen. I had brought over a little work to do, and I sat at the kitchen table and took a look at it. It was a slightly unusual assignment: Yakuchev Ball-Bearings wanted an office furniture redesign. I doodled for a while, but couldn't get into it. I kept seeing images of Danielle, in a half-brassiere and phenomenally skimpy panties—much tinier than the ones I'd inhaled. The images kept popping off in my head like little flashbulb pops. She was smiling, her lips wet. A flashbulb popped and Danielle's tongue crept out and licked the lower lip, slowly and professionally.

I did not care what the furniture of Yakuchev Ball-Bearings looked like, now and forever. I moaned and barked, and banged my head, experimentally, on the kitchen table. It was no relief. I picked up a pack of Danielle's matches and struck one, watching the flame quiver. I brought the match close to my wrist, close enough to feel the heat start to turn into a burn. That was no relief either, and I shook the match out.

In my mind, Danielle knelt on a silk-sheeted mattress and rubbed her thighs, up and down, up and down, and pouted, while tall men with New York haircuts circled around her with cameras and offered her cocaine.

I looked out the window, wincing. It was summer, and an elm tree in front of the apartment building shook its leaves, like a hundred restless katydids. The breeze blew again, the tree shook its leaves, and a car honked over on Eighteenth Street. Somehow or other, this summer afternoon and the absence of Danielle were going to have to coexist.

*

The phone rang around five. We have a deal that I can answer it if she's not home. It was her, and I was weak-limbed with relief and joy. "How are you?" I asked. "How's it going?"

"Great," she said. "This is really something. These people are incredible craftsmen. They love me."

"So do I, don't forget," I said. "Sorry, that was stupid. I'm so happy you called."

"So anyway, I'm calling to say, we're going to keep shooting. We've got a rhythm going, and we want to stay with it."

"A rhythm?"

"Mister Eccleston is sending out for sushi, and we'll go on into the night. Everyone's getting time and a half but he says he doesn't care, he's so exhilarated by what we're achieving here."

"He said exhilarated?"

"Yeah, exhilarated, what's wrong with that?"

"By what you're 'achieving.'" I tried to let her hear the quotes.

"Huh? So anyway, you can stay there and everything, but I'm not sure exactly when I'll be back. Plus, Mister Eccleston was saying that we should all go out for a drink afterwards, to unwind, which sounds great."

"Do you have to?" I said. What a losing battle.

I heard Danielle make some kind of slapping noise, with her hand or her tongue. "No, I don't 'have' to. I *want* to. This is my big break. Please understand."

"Okay," I said. "Thanks for calling. I might go back to my place. I haven't been there in a week."

"Oh," said Danielle, and I thought for a second that I got through to her. But then she said, "Well, if you do, would you please feed the cat before you leave? And turn the phone machine on? And don't forget to double-lock?" She said all this very rapidly.

"Danielle," I said, "please don't leave me."

She made the slapping noise again. "I will—not—focus on this now. I have to stay centered. This is art. It's my life." She didn't sound at all street. She sounded like her mother's daughter. She sounded like she had succumbed, all right.

"Well, isn't that deep," I said, and she hung up on me.

"To her it's art," I said to the cat. I replaced the receiver. "It's her life, suddenly, did you know that?" My stomach was in agony. "They're going on," I said, in a breathless whisper. I was trying to capture exhilaration. "Yes, they're going on . . . into the night . . . cue the music, please." I waggled my fingers, hearing trumpets. "They're incredible craftsmen. Mister Eccleston is . . . ta da . . . sending out for sushi." The cat meowed loudly. "Yes, sushi," I told it. "Your favorite." I took a can of Nine Lives Mixed Grill out of the

refrigerator and spooned some into a bowl, breathing through my mouth. I put the bowl down, and the cat went to work on it. I rinsed off the spoon and looked over at my furniture drawings, sitting on the kitchen table. "Mister Yakuchev is also sending out for sushi," I said to the cat, who was crouched over its bowl, bolting the food down. "The night is young."

I put the phone machine on and packed up my drawings and left, not forgetting to double-lock.

Driving home, all the songs on the radio had developed new levels of meaning. I suffered from delusions of reference. All the love songs were about me. Even the commercials spoke to a lack I felt. I stopped at stoplights and pictured Danielle being escorted home by Mister Eccleston. She unlocked the apartment door, saw that I was gone, and invited him in. He strolled around the place while she poured them drinks. He touched her teakwood elephant, and frowned at the Hegberg lamp. He went into the bedroom and pointed out my book of Pushcart Prize stories on the nightstand, commenting on her interesting taste. She didn't correct him. When the stoplights went green, I accelerated foolishly, trying to run over these images.

I thought then of Kelly, and missed her sharply. Not for the first time, but it was the first time since I'd been in love with Danielle. I had the notion of calling her and saying, You were right, I was impossible. But you shouldn't have quit smoking on our honeymoon. Well, we all make mistakes. Come back to me? I never supported your career enough, I would say. Section manager for the Department of Commerce: now that's a sensible, well-chosen career. I didn't appreciate that, at the time. I think I could be much more appreciative now. How about it?

As a fantasy, it was a letdown. Kelly said, Babe, I'm flattered that y'all called but I'm remarried, with a baby, and still not smoking in Sleetmute, Alaska. I work for the Department of the Interior now, in the field, and Tuck teaches at Sleetmute High. But thanks for thinking of me. Y'all take care.

A country song called "The Prettiest Eyes" came on and I became woebegone. There I will lie, I thought, in my own lonely bed, without so much as a pair of panties to inhale, wondering all through the night: How long is she going to put up with me?

When I got home to my apartment, the door was hanging open. Someone had broken in, and everything I owned was gone.

Earl C. Pike

The Magician's Wife

1937

I met Erich in 1937. It was summer, late: out in the hot farmlands west of Kansas City; I, a young girl of 19, laboring in my father's fields under a sun that had long ago turned my skin nearly black; resting on the porch in the evenings with my skirts pulled up to my thighs to let cool air in, my mother whispering repeatedly *Have you no shame?* as she hiked up her skirts in similar fashion . . . I met Erich in the summer of 1937 and my life was like the flat tedious plains of Kansas; you could gaze out in every direction and see corn: short corn, long corn, green corn, ripe corn, dry corn, all corn . . . and then in the summer of 1937 when I was a girl of 19, the only fingers that had touched my thighs belonged to the twilight breeze . . . there were always people traveling through, of course: preachers and politicians, communists trying to organize the farmers and salesmen trying to organize my mother's kitchen, sometimes musicians, sometimes clowns and other merry-makers in shows; and among them all, in a traveling carnival, full of silly skits and ladies who danced with snakes, peopled with freaks and a man who could guess your weight and age at the same time; in a roving show parked on a hot night in August, 1937, in an empty corn field, there among them I met Erich, and his name was magic.

1957

The Hudson was frozen solid. The temperature had dropped overnight, and a blistering wind picked up, so the chill was almost 20 below. Some of the papers had that morning called a halt to the performance, saying that he didn't have to prove himself under such extreme conditions, that he was unquestionably The Greatest, that the public would understand if he postponed for better weather. He would have none of it, of course. Some of the braver press had trickled out onto the ice early, knowing that he would show: they were buried beneath heavy wool coats, snuggling their cameras in the sleeves so the lenses wouldn't crack.

Early in the morning, at sunrise, some men had come out, cutting a hole through the ice with axes, picks, saws. They had to keep poking at it, because the hole would freeze over quickly. One man suffered frostbite. Down in the hole it looked all black, bottomless, full of menace.

I was the only one who was absolutely sure; I may have been even more certain than Erich. I knew he could do it.

1937

His name was Erich, and his game was magic: that's what the barker said. On a crudely-built wooden stage, a tattered curtain separated in the middle and limped to each side. Standing in the stage's center, a young man, clothed in frayed black coat and pants, stared out at the audience of farmers, ranchers. He was tall and gaunt, the lines of his face angular and bony, as though he rarely ate. Even in the pale light of that evening's torches, his eyes were visibly blue and startling: fixed, fierce; you could fall into them, swimming in some unnamed ocean, drowning. His shoulders stooped as he swayed gently back and forth, surveying the eyes that surveyed him, completely silent.

He lifted his hands from his sides and pressed his fingers to his temples. His fingers were long and delicate, porcelain, graceful in even that simple movement.

He spoke:

You see what you cannot see; what you see, is.

He stood there massaging his temples, speaking in a low and soft voice, the lids of his eyes fluttering; and my own temples began to throb, a gentle roar filled my ears, my eyes lost focus.

Because it is not in your eyes at all; not in your ears—they are useless. There is no taste on your tongue, there is no scent that fills your nostrils, no texture that travels across the surface of your skin.

I thought I heard singing but realized I was wrong; it was the sound of lions—but that too was wrong: it was the sound of babies laughing—but that too was wrong for there was no sound at all. I could smell lilacs but they were not lilacs; it was the smell of dark wet earth growing corn but it was not that; it was the scent of death; there was no scent. Salt and sugar flowed over my tongue, and then my mouth was dry. My skin was stinging, then glowing with pleasure, then blank and dull.

Distrust your senses; they lie, they deceive you.

I opened my eyes, but I do not remember having closed them. He stood there yet, plain and simple, thin; his hands were again at his sides, and he was smiling at me, a wry grin, full of mischief, hinting at seduction and danger; and he said:

It is in your mind; and that is where I move freely, where I have power, where all illusion is staged.

The stage then exploded with smoke and thunder; it was mostly cheap pyrotechnics, but it startled me, and I jumped back. Smoke hung in the air for a long moment before being carried away by a hot August breeze. The stage was empty.

A voice echoed out, coming from all directions and no direction in particular.

Poof, it said. *All gone.*

1957

His lungs were incredibly powerful; Erich knew from extensive trials that he could last four minutes. I knew from experience that I could last twenty years.

1937

When the show was over, and my eyes were clear once again, I boldly made my way to the performer's tent. I simply walked in, and found him sitting there, at a dressing table, wiping off sheets of make-up with a cloth. He saw me approaching in the mirror and turned around. The left side of his face was still masked with pancake, the right had been cleaned: he had two faces.

"Hello," I said.

He smiled widely, small wrinkles gathering around the corners of his eyes, his brows rising quizzically, amused. He said nothing; he just gazed at me grinning, waiting.

"I, uh . . ." I stopped. My palms were sweating. "I just wanted to say, um, that I liked your show. I mean, the magic. The show."

He laughed. I could *see* the laugh, beginning as a swell in his chest, rising up through the hollow of his throat, reverberating in his mouth, then leaping out into the room, hearty and sweet. It drew me in; it invited, welcomed, soothed; and my palms were dry again, the trembling in my arms and legs ceased, and I felt warm all over.

"Why, thank you," he said, almost in a whisper. "There are very few young ladies who have the courage to come backstage. They all think I'm going to do something drastic: make them disappear. Or worse, hypnotize them and make them do terrible things."

"I don't think that."

"That's good," he said; then, smiling more broadly, "But how can you be sure?"

I stammered again. "I . . . guess I—"

His smile faded a bit. "Relax," he whispered, "No harm will come to you." He picked up the oily cloth and began removing the rest of the make-up, casually, with the long fingers that danced, and asked, "What is your name?"

For the first time, I smiled. "Sarah," I said.

1957

But he wasn't acclimated to the cold: he had to prepare, for six weeks beforehand, by taking daily baths in ice—buckets and buckets of cubes from the freezer poured over his body as he lay shivering and naked in the tub. I made the ice, freezing a new batch every evening, hauling the pails in the morning. At first he could bear only five minutes under ice, but he worked up his time, day by day, second by second, until he could withstand 25 minutes without jolting out and screaming.

The day before the performance at the Hudson, as I was spreading ice evenly over his skin, leaning over the tub, he snatched my wrist and pulled me to his face. His lips were blue, his cheeks ashen, his eyes were hard black water.

"You can't freeze me out, you know," he growled through a broken smile.

I jerked my wrist free and away and stood up above him.

He laughed. And laughed: bellowing, choking. "Just a joke, my little Sarah! Just a little joke!" and he closed his eyes, shut his eyes, and plunged his head beneath the ice. I went to refill the bucket.

1937

I ran away with the man named Erich; I left that tiny home and cornfield and jumped on a caravan, joined a traveling show of freaks and fakes. We married. The ceremony was performed by a Justice of the Peace in the neighboring town: he stood before us and exclaimed, in essence:

Presto! You're married! Presto! You have a new name!

I left only the briefest note for my parents, promising that, in time, I would return, as Mrs. Erich Weiss, the magician's wife, famous.

Love is a magic that makes names and places disappear.

1957

With this kiss I thee wed; with a kiss, I pass the key.

1938

The dogs of war were snarling in Europe but it didn't matter to us: we were Mr. and Mrs. Erich Weiss, living in a home on wheels, moving, forgetting the names of people and places. I learned the act, or at least my

part: to stand aside and gesture toward The Master, to support the illusion, to let myself be bound by magic, to honor power. I wore a short dress with cheap, flashy sequins.

The dogs of fear began growling in the recesses of my mind, but they had no name and could not therefore be called away. So I could not describe them; and so I could not face them.

1957

Some of the press, in desperate lunges for wild copy, have suggested that they were fake: but I know that the trunks, all of the locks, the handcuffs, the chains, the ropes, the wire, the straitjackets, the hoods: I know—I touched them all—I know that they are all real.

1938

I pass the key, the power to open all things.

1957

They had to place air-jets in the water to keep it moving; otherwise the hole in the ice would freeze over in minutes. And if it froze over he would be trapped, skating on the belly of ice, pumping hard for some air; and he would die.

1938

He began teaching me all of his illusions, and I became a part of them. I learned my steps in those dances: I was the thing captured and then freed with flourish; I was tossed into the air and made to hover; I was flashed out of existence, thrown into the stale breath of nothingness, only to return, whole; I was the rabbit in a hat; I was the Queen of Spades and a swallowed flame; I was that thing mutilated by swords and saws.

The last of these was easiest, from a technical point of view: I climbed into a long and sturdy box, sealed in by snaps and latches. Only my head remained visible at one end, my feet at the other. Erich would hoist a long saw, shiny and dangerous, vicious with teeth. He would place the saw in the middle of the box and begin pulling it back and forth, laboriously, ignoring the screams I would let out for the sake of the audience, or the sympathetic gasps the audience would offer in return. Having made his way all the way through, he would separate the two halves of the box; and the crowd would roar its approval and delight.

The first time, and every time thereafter: as he set the saw in place, but before beginning to rip through the wood, he would lean down, kiss me on the lips, smile, and whisper to me:

Sarah, my love: maybe this time you will die.

1957

We crawled to the river in a motorcade, he and I in a limousine, others following. We had police escort. The press were snapping pictures from the moment we left the house, and seized every opportunity—a wave, a nod—for another photograph.

The event had been widely publicized, billed as **THE MOST DARING ESCAPE EVER ATTEMPTED!!**, and **HIS MOST DANGEROUS STUNT!!** Millions waited, hanging on every syllable of an announcer's voice on home radios.

Erich wore a cape over his swimming trunks; despite the cold, he wore nothing else. He didn't appear the least bit chilled himself, or frightened.

1938

The Night of Glass: In Germany blue-eyed bandits ran into the streets in an adrenal frenzy, salivating: and the darkness was punctuated by the reckless and riotous rhythms of shatterings, the foul music of fascism. We read about it in the papers.

I got pregnant. I remember the night: after a performance Erich performed again, pushing his way into the hollow coffin of my interior, sweating, groaning. In the light of the moon that poured through the windows, I could see his face above me, twisting alternately into a grimace and a grin, but always twisting. With a final growl he cracked the coffin open, broke its velvet walls. Something popped inside. Something clicked, shifted, changed: and I knew that this egg and that seed were allied, partners. I felt nothing: no pleasure, no release, no liberation. Only the familiar rawness of scrapings.

He knew, too, because Erich has always known, because Erich has long eyes, because Erich can hear inside skulls, because Erich can touch the guts of coffins. He rolled away from me, sweating; still looking down over me, his twistings settled into the smooth mask of a magician, he said:

Abracadabra.

I tried to smile but could not. He reached down and held my face in one broad hand, his thumb and forefinger pressed into my cheeks, gums. He laughed, and said:

I can make things appear.

1957

The long parade of cars stopped at the banks of the Hudson. Reporters swarmed out of their cars and surrounded ours; the flash and spark of cameras seemed like lightning.

1939

New Year's Day: I sat on the toilet of our new, stationary home. Erich was performing at a club. Inside me the shriek of brown-shirts began; inside me I could feel sticks slicing through the air, inside me there was glass breaking, shattering, exploding: shiny and red, tearing, cutting: and I pushed, I shoved, I was sweating and groaning, my face twisting in alternation between a grin and a grimace: and with a final growl I broke the coffin.

In the toilet was blood, tissue.

I stood up. My legs were shaking and rubbery. Sweat bathed my face. I pushed down the handle of the toilet, and the water began gurgling. I thought:

I can make things disappear.

1957

We had to wait for all the photographers to take their posed portraits. I am accustomed to the regular sighs of patience.

1942

Erich devised a new illusion. It was very complicated. I was the target: he had found a leather hood with straps to place over my head, my hands were cuffed behind me.

Three men came out, dressed in indeterminate military uniforms, carrying rifles. A member of the audience—someone who knew something about weapons—was invited to the stage to inspect the rifles, check their loading, authenticate their actions, firing mechanisms, bullets. They were, of course, real rifles, genuine bullets, so no deception was ever detected.

My body was tied to a stake at the center of the stage.

The men took up position, hoisted rifles to shoulders, aimed. They were no more than ten feet away from me. Had I been able to peer through the leather hood, I would have been able to gaze down into the blackness of the barrels, almost taste cold steel on my tongue. But I could see nothing.

A drumroll began softly offstage. Erich held up a long piece of parchment, and began enumerating my crimes: there were many and various, all damning, all fiction. The drumroll swelled, accelerating; Erich's voice began booming, blaring out with mock scorn the sins for which I must die. At some point his voice, and the drumroll, crested simultaneously, and then there was only silence. People in the audience held their breath; one vast collective freeze of air.

And the rifles exploded.

If you were in the crowd, you would have seen my body slump immediately. You would have seen my clothing shredded in three places; out of each blood would be dripping or gushing. You would have seen me

still, the ropes biting into my flesh. You would have seen my feet twitch suddenly, a last thrash, before slipping into death: and then, breaking the terrible silence, you might have screamed. You would have heard Erich shouting for a doctor; and you would have seen one rush to the stage, tearing open a black bag, pressing the cool metal of a stethoscope to my neck, then shake his head. You would have heard Erich shrieking, that *Oh my God something's gone wrong!* Your stomach would begin falling, sweat forming around the arch of your lips; the three men would have untied me, in panic, in terror; and your breathing would hasten until you were dizzy. You would have seen my body dragged offstage, Erich screaming behind my lifeless form, clutching at his hair.

And the stage would be empty, and you might faint.

And exactly thirty seconds later you would have seen Erich and I walk calmly back out on stage. I would be smiling; Erich would be wiping his brow with a handkerchief. The wounds would still be visible. And Erich would say:

This is no illusion.

And you would feel lightheaded; your body trembling; you might feel the thin trickle of urine between your legs that you could not stop or control, as Erich said:

I have the power of life, and death

1957

And Erich began walking out onto the ice.

1945

The war is over. No, it's not. Yes, it is. No, it's not.

1957

He reached the hole and stood over it, looking down. He was grinning, supremely confident, entirely unafraid.

1946

We moved into a larger house; Erich was becoming well-known, and enjoyed regular bookings at increasingly heftier fees. Our new home was spacious: five bedrooms, a nursery, a detached garage with a separate apartment above it. It was in the apartment that Erich perfected his tricks. He kept it locked; I had no key.

The nursery remained empty.

He kept trying, of course. I knew it could never succeed: I could feel scar tissue inside, dating back to the Night of Glass. That space was barren, a coffin.

Erich ached to raise the dead.

1957

Erich ached to rise from the dead.

1947

The summer of 1947 was the last summer I saw my parents; it was the last Erich would allow. I traveled alone, by train, clattering and chattering over the tracks of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Nebraska, and then out onto the bronzed and level plains of Kansas: home; I had not been there since leaving many years before.

My parents were gray and bent, the severe soil sucking them down under; the fractures of farmers, frozen along with the frost on winter wheat. They were dying, I guess, but they did not die for another five years. There was little to say; we sat out on the porch every evening, watching the earth turn. There was little to say and it was a wild delicious delight to see them.

And sometimes, during the two weeks of that visit, I sat out the porch alone, and lifted my skirts to my waist, and let the soothing fingers of breezes caress my inner thighs. I opened my legs to the wind. I could no longer capture the full ecstasy of the breeze a decade earlier, but my skin still tingled, thawed, blossomed. My muscles began rocking to the rhythm of the air, and I whispered:

Come and come and fill me and I float away.

1957

He climbed into the trunk. Photographers took parting shots as the lid of the trunk trembled, ready to fall.

1953

They were buried on the farm.

1957

He gestured to me. He was on his knees in the trunk, chains wrapped around his body. He carried the weight of six cuffs: three on his wrists, three on his ankles.

He nodded.

In the hollow grave between my gums and cheek, I could feel the ice of a shaped metal sliver. I had the power to open all things, or I could close them.

1954

I am learning to stare down clocks.

1957

The trick was simple: it was all in the kiss.

When I pressed my lips against his, the key to open all things, the key to open the first lock, which made all subsequent locks mere child's-play: the key would slide down the length of my tongue, and into his mouth. The illusion was perfect: the magician kissed his wife goodbye, return or survival uncertain, a last lingering moment of love and affection. The press always forgave the embarrassment of public intimacy: it was understandable, and made good copy. It was all in the kiss; I alone knew.

The trick was simple: I could keep the key. He could not protest or demand explanation without raining ruin on himself. Were he to cry out, his bald secret would be exposed: and he would become a common charlatan, not the master magician.

The trick was simple: it was all in the kiss.

I pressed my lips against his. A piece of cool metal rested on my tongue; his tongue searched for it.

The trick was simple: I could keep the key.

I hesitated.

Then on a thin glaze of saliva, the key slipped off my tongue, and onto his.

Our lips parted; he smiled up at me.

1955

In the end, the movement of sand through glass favors me.

1957

He crouched down into the trunk, and the lid was closed after him. The trunk was chained, each chain secured by heavy padlocks. In the cold and stinging winds, sweat broke out on the faces of observers: it seemed impossible that he could escape from cuffs, ropes, the trunk, chains, padlocks, the black and freezing tomb of water.

1956

The earth spins; I hold my hands in my lap, and wait.

1957

But he could, as always. It only took one key to unfetter the first lock; the rest were easy. Now, between Eric's gums and cheek, a key was safely nested.

They pushed the trunk to the edge of the hole—

1956
Tick tick.

1957
—and pushed; the trunk plummeted down and away.

The counting began tick tick; everyone knew that Erich's limit was four tick tick minutes, no more; everyone knew that after three tick tick minutes his head would begin swirling and spinning, the cells of his body screaming tick tick for air; everyone knew what the clock tick tick could bear so the first minute saw only giddy expectation tick tick crackling through the crowd; and another tick tick thirty seconds passed as some of those watching felt their breathing grow tick tick shallow, in mounting nervousness; then another tick tick seconds passed and the buzz of whispers died down, melting into the ice; tongues tick tick began sticking to the roofs of mouths and all lips were dry, parched; the crowd inched tick tick closer and closer to the gaping black hole, pushing aside police lines, as another 45 seconds tick tick crawled past; everyone now knew that this was the Third Minute and tick tick that Erich's brain was beginning to bubble, tick tick, burn; fifteen seconds; that the water had seeped in fully and was freezing his limbs tick tick stiff and solid; 20 seconds; tick tick; he's late he's late he's late; 20 seconds, and his bladder was loosening; tick tick; and his arms, his legs, were convulsing; tick tick; 10 seconds; and the trunk stopped moving altogether when at five minutes tick tick the dread silence of the crowd was broken by one long piercing scream, and then another and another—

—and I felt strong arms seizing my elbows, pulling me away, dragging me for a few steps over ice until my feet started moving and I could walk away from the hole, the trunk—

—and being led away, dimly aware of the shrieking, the violent flash of cameras, the consoling voices, the panicked whispers worried over my welfare; while I was walking, moving over ice, I felt the hard metal of another key, the one that fit the lock, nested between my gums and cheek, toward the back of my mouth. With my tongue I pushed it out of its hiding place and toward the back of my throat, and swallowed hard. It lodged there—for a moment I thought I might choke or gag—before it slipped loose and free, falling down and away.

Poof, I thought. *All gone.*

Summer, 1959

I was walking, moving over ice. The wind was sharp and hard; it picked up small pellets of snow and flung them through the air, slapping them repeatedly against my face, where occasionally they left angry red welts. I

pulled my collar up as far as I could, but it was not enough: the wind always found me, always attacked.

I was walking; moving over ice; the glass surface shifting and re-forming, creating bellows, roars, the raw rumble of ice. It was slippery and I had a difficult time gaining solid footing; the ice threatened at any moment to spin me around, toss me into the air, and reverse the world.

I was walking, moving over ice, looking down, and I could see clear through.

And I saw something move through the haze of crystal.

And then a face floated up from the depths below, and pressed itself against the smooth underbelly of ice.

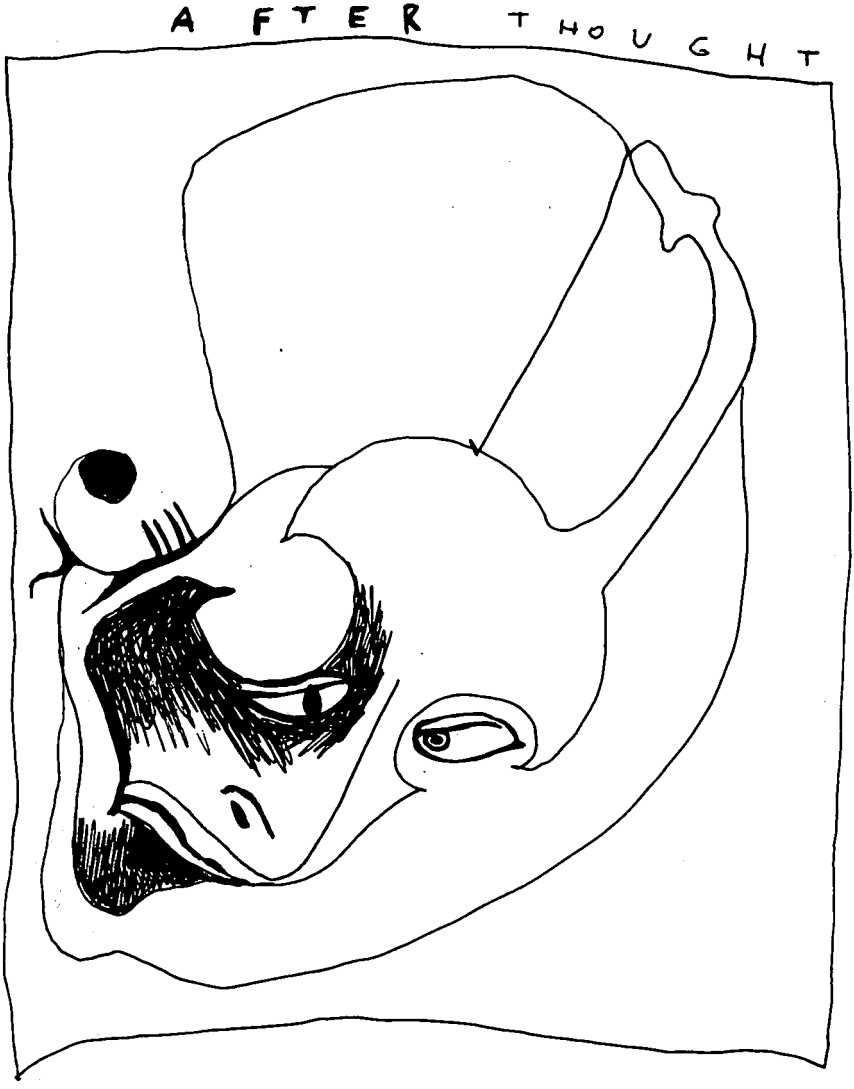
It was Erich, free.

I woke up. My body was coated with a greasy sweat. It was a hot night in August, six months since I had swallowed a key. It was a hot night in August; the time of year when farmers have begun to sit back a bit, waiting for a harvest, proudly showing their early fruits at county fairs and local markets. It was the time of year when sons of farmers packed to leave for the college in the big city, or the army in some far land. It was the time of year when farmers' daughters ached for something more than the breeze on their thighs, when they yearned for mysterious strangers, passionate, magical.

I lumbered out of the bed. The moon was full and the window was wide open, so that a cool blue light splashed onto the bed, making it glow, shimmer. It was the bed that Erich and I had shared. Only the one side was rumpled from sleep—mine—the side that had been his was still clean and smooth.

I took off my nightgown and splashed my face with water from a washing-bowl beside the bed. I laid back down on the bed, naked. I stretched out over the complete expanse of bed, both sides, and rumpled all the sheets.

I fell back to sleep.



Reviews

PrairyErth: (a deep map) by William Least Heat-Moon [William Trogdon]. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1991. 622 pages. $24.95 cloth.

In Alaska, last August, I told a fellow where I came from, and, of course, he replied, "Kansas! It's so flat and boring," and went on with something like, "I mean . . . with the mountains . . . it's so much more beautiful in Alaska. I love it here."

"Kansas," I said, "is beautiful in a different way. Really."

"Yes, but it's nothing compared to Alaska," he persisted.

Somewhat defensively, I said, "Any knucklehead can see beauty in the mountains, you can't miss it. But in Kansas beauty is more subtle, and maybe better because of that." He did not agree or understand, nor did he seem convinced of my earnestness.

The subtlety of this landscape explains how someone like William Trogdon can come along, write a thick book about a single Kansas county, and leave one feeling, in the end, that he has left a great deal unsaid. In its subtlety the prairie asks him "to bring something to it and to open to it actively. . . . The prairie is not a topography that shows its all but rather a vastly exposed place of concealment. . . ." Trogdon wants to dig out the submerged details of a land normally perceived as flat in more than one sense. Consequently, the book's overarching metaphor (reminiscent of his first book, *Blue Highways*) is the map. *PrairyErth*'s subtitle is (*a deep map*); Trogdon divides the book into sections corresponding to the twelve U.S. Geological Survey quadrangle maps that detail all but some slivers of Chase County; and the twelve maps form a three-by-four grid as if to delineate an archaeological dig. A rough-hewn grid is stamped on the cover like a brand, and this emblem appears at the head of each of the seventy-six chapters. The symmetry is so thorough that I feel compelled to explain it: opening section with two chapters, closing section with two chapters, and in the middle, twelve sections (matching the squares of the grid) with exactly six chapters each. The first chapter of every section is titled "From the Commonplace Book" and spreads out before the reader thirty or more quotations that will echo throughout that section.

It all fits very well—too well, maybe. Despite Trogdon's sensible explanation, his frustration in trying to organize the book, and his admission that the grid is not the territory, I have to admit being initially put off by such a Cartesian scheme. For a contrary scheme, I think of Barry Lopez's *Arctic Dreams*, similar to *PrairyErth* in its effort to describe a place by drawing from diverse methods of description—geology, biology, history, anthropology, etc. Rather than a grid, however, Lopez centers each chapter around an animal or a geologic form or a human endeavor and the chapters seem to grow naturally outward, sometimes overlapping or leav-

ing gaps. The grid of *PrairyErth* implies utter coverage, which is, of course, an illusion.

My first reaction gave way to, I think, a fairer understanding, that is, to see the grid as a method constructed from the things at hand and used with no illusions about its reflection of reality and with every expectation that the method must fail. And, by the end, it does fail, with Trogdon's blessing, perhaps. The reader should see it coming, should see the paradox of a fellow who frequently invokes "dreamtime" hanging onto a rationalist grid. If that contrast is not enough, surely his disparagement of the Jeffersonian grid—drawn in those familiar hedgerows of Osage Orange—foreshadows the breakup of the Trogdonian one. Near dead center of the book, in typically well-crafted sentences, Trogdon explains how "the great American grid, an expression of eighteenth-century rationalism if ever there was one," has shaped the lives of "countians" since the days whites began settling Kansas:

> [A]s curbstones are to a suburb, so was Osage hedge to the prairies, as it came to mark out routes and channel citizens onto them, laying down a pattern that so shaped lives that people began to build their new houses in alignment with the now visible grid. They set out their furniture accordingly, dressers and bedsteads against walls running only in cardinal compass directions, so that, still today, Chase County sleeps north-south or east-west, the square rooms squared with the world, the decumbent folk like an accountant's figures neatly between ruled lines, their slumber nicely compartmentalized in Tom's grand grid.
>
> The dreaming citizens lie comforted that outside their walls run the township-and-range lines, their defense against a fruitful and transgressing nature perpetually threatening erasure and apparent disorder.

The older order of the Kaw Indians and the "fruitful and transgressing nature" of the tallgrass prairie lie sleeping and dreaming beneath the surface. Trogdon wishes to get beyond the two-dimensional, to unearth shards that will show us the "big flow," as Gary Snyder says, of geological, biological, and anthropological time.

Trogdon's challenge to two-dimensional thinking puts him at odds with the way most countians view the world and reinforces the reality that he is an outsider (a fact he seems well aware of). Though he shows a genuine affection for most of the people of Chase, empathizes with them, and even gains the trust of some, to countians he remains "that book guy." They measure him by different standards, concluding that anyone who

walks the country roads and the fields in Chase County as he does is a little eccentric. The people the author seems to admire most are the rare environmentalist, the occasional feminist, and the long-absent Native American. The difference between Trogdon and most countians mirrors the tension between flat and deep that energizes the book. Nostalgia clashes with more expansive critical thinking based, at least in part, on Trogdon's reading, the breadth of which is apparent in the Commonplace Book. Concepts like "progress" become questions.

The Kansas Turnpike, like a stainless steel knife, slices off a corner of Chase County. From atop Jacobs' Mound, Trogdon watches distant trucks humping their loads across an uninhabited prairie. His accustomed musing: "And I could see fence lines, transmission towers, and dug ponds, things the pioneers would have viewed as marks of a progressive civilization but which to me, a grousing neo-primitivist, were signs of the continuing onslaught." To varying degrees, the cultural descendants of the pioneers carry on that pioneer vision of progress. At one extreme are the overgrazers and the rancher who, much to Trogdon's disgust, turns Diamond Spring into a muddy, eroding trough. At the other extreme are a feminist rancher and the folks who rally for a Tallgrass Prairie Park. Most countians, however, fall between these extremes, being fairly responsible stewards yet holding to rather traditional views of gender and hesitating to embrace anything like environmentalism. Trogdon, with compassionate humor, helps us understand their conviction:

> It seemed to me then, were I to line up all three thousand countians along Broadway and ask every environmentalist to step forward, even the closet ones, I could take them all into the Emma Chase [Café] and buy them a Mexican Nite Special on a single twenty-dollar bill. Of the several reasons for killing off the prairie park, this sentence I heard a few days ago in the Wagon Wheel Café in Strong City is the fundamental one: *I don't say that the prairie park was all that bad an idea—I just say I don't want some government telling me what to do.* Those words, better than any others I know, situate Chase County in the American West.

Those words also explain why the people of Chase scorn the possible expansion of Ft. Riley into the county as much as they disapprove of the prairie park. But such generalizations by Trogdon are relatively few, and the wealth of this book lies in its particulars. Trogdon introduces us to Dudley (Slim) Pinkston, a ranch hand who knows cattle and good stories:

> His voice is granular, a gullet full of creek-worn flint, and deep, the sort you used to hear from some villainous gun-slinger in a 1930s B western, yet his face is open, the kind you'd ask to see your child to school. In my first days in the county, I often heard about Slim, and almost always after his name came an appositive, *a real cowboy*, carrying respect and distinction from the western-store, all-hat-no-horse cowboys who only dress the part as they understand it played by country singers.

Showing his sensitivity to voice, Trogdon lets us listen to Slim by quoting long passages full of story and memory, the sort of discourse we could scarcely find anywhere else but that we do find abundantly in this book.

In contrast to lifelong resident Slim, Linda Pretzer Thurston has come home to Chase, after tiring of academia, to start up the Emma Chase Café in Cottonwood Falls, where she serves linguine and eggplant parmigiana but not, much to the chagrin of her customers, grilled cheese. The culinary conflict mirrors the cultural/political one, Linda hiring only women and encouraging them to serve the food with a dash of feminism. Luckily we also get a sampling of her voice in the book, for she has since found she missed the university, and she closed the Emma Chase to return to scholarship.

Plants evoke the mystery of prairie. Like the voice of an old cowboy, plant lore finds an important repository in *PrairyErth*—whose name comes from the scientific term for the soil found on these Flint Hills. One chapter gives a compendium of lore and learning about the cottonwood; another treats native plants. With some traditional belief and a great deal of biological data, Trogdon invests plants with spirit and personality, and fulfills his deep-map promise by literally going beneath the surface to explore tubers and tap roots. The same plants he now describes once served as abundant sources of food and medicine for native people and for the whites who cared to learn from them. He is able to reintroduce to us some of the manifold uses and distinctive traits of pilot weed, buffalo gourd, Indian breadroot, lead plant, and others. Demonstrating his personal involvement, Trogdon describes an experiment: ". . . I brewed several extracts according to old receipts: one of them I couldn't bring myself to swallow (a writer most fails when he loses nerve), but another I drank two cups of. Soon I lost my legs and had to lie down, and my mind seemed to tumble as if old tethers broke, and I dozed off into some grassland dream . . ."

It is this kind of personal, imaginative knowledge of the land that reveals the inadequacy of the flat map, the grid, and offers instead a "mental map." Barry Lopez writes of mental maps which "correspond poorly in

spatial terms with the maps of the same areas prepared with survey tools and cartographic instruments. But they are proven, accurate guides of the landscape. They are living conceptions, idiosyncratically created, stripped of the superfluous, instantly adaptable. Their validity is not susceptible of contradiction." Trogdon's experience creates a mental map to supplant the grid, and through "dreamtime," he attempts to sketch what Lopez calls a "mythological landscape," the cultural and spiritual map of whole peoples, particularly native peoples who live close to the land. And though Trogdon intends to lie in this Procrustean grid he has made, he shall dream his way out of it.

In *PrairyErth*, as the grid becomes inadequate and a rough map of a spiritual landscape unfolds, the book moves decidedly toward environmental and Native American concerns, and this movement accelerates from beginning to end, culminating in the failure of the grid. In the ninth sector of the twelve, Trogdon displays a curious dislike of the Homestead quadrangle. He begins a chapter with, "I'm not going to hide this from you: I don't much like the Homestead quadrangle, lying as it does with all the mystery of a checked tablecloth, its section lines marked so clearly by square fields and roads cut into the high and flattish topography that they show up in satellite photographs. . . . In this place, I end up talking to myself to disrupt both its desolation and my sadness at seeing the grid so heavily laid onto the land." As his doubt about grids creeps in, with the tenth section Trogdon makes what I consider his first major break in the county line by visiting Diamond Spring six miles north into Morris County. The reality of the land prompts this, for the origin of Diamond Creek, an important place in the Flint Hills, does not heed the square boundaries.

In the eleventh and twelfth sections the designer of the grid begins almost to lose interest, selecting an unsettling passage from André Gide for the Commonplace Book: "There always comes a moment, just before the moment of composition, when a subject seems stripped of all attraction, all charm, all atmosphere, even bare of significance. At last, losing all interest in it, you curse that sort of secret pact whereby you have committed yourself, and which makes it impossible for you to back out honorably." Walking the twelfth and last sector of the grid and finding little to interest him, Trogdon decides to turn his attention toward the Kaw, the Native American tribe whose history, though centered further north, touches what is now Chase County. The grid, if heeded, would have precluded discussion of this vital subject. He drops the last quadrangle and renders three informative and sensitive chapters on the Kaw, their history, and the current state of their nation. However, of the 145 pages remaining after the Gide quotation, about 75 of them are quoted. The quoted material is interesting—Chase County newspaper stories spanning one hundred years, early accounts of relationships between whites and Kaw Indians, the eloquent rambling of

Wes Jackson about sustainable agriculture—but we benefit from this symphony of other voices (as we do in the Commonplace Book) only after paying a price, our author's voice. He becomes a shadow, a selector and transcriber more than a writer, as if he has little left to say, and he moves the project toward completion with help of subcontractors.

The last of the central seventy-two chapters prescribed by the grid Trogdon titles "Until Black Hole XTK Yields Its Light," the readers' chapter à la *Tristram Shandy*, a black page whose excess can be erased to provide whatever remaining text suits each one of us. He says that though he never found a subject for this chapter, his instincts told him to hold to thebook's original design. After the middle seventy-two chapters, he closes with a section called "Circlings" in contrast to the opening section, "Crossings." With an old friend, Trogdon walks across the grid in an effort to go the way the Kaw did when they were exiled to the Oklahoma Indian Territory. The final journey heeds no straight lines, and the two walkers make their humorous way along what they must imagine to be the old Kaw trail, not a "narrow, trodden depression, but a direction—one of the compass, of history, of the spirit." He says, "We were hunting the idea of the trail." Patterns on the prairie, such as the flight of the red-tailed hawk, the orbs of sun and moon, the girth of the cottonwood, are circular.

My son Joey and I visited Chase County on a recent Sunday, a spring-like winter day, possibly the most pleasant weather Chase County had seen since the release date of *PrairyErth*, October 19. We drove the gravel and dirt roads, took some pictures, and walked about in Cottonwood Falls. In town I noticed a few other touristy folks, and noted four or five names for that day on the register at the Chase County Historical Society Museum. A special display case at the museum features some items related to the book. While Joey handled more museum pieces than a three-year-old should, I talked with Ruth Wilson of the Historical Society, and she seemed pleased about the effect *PrairyErth* would have on the county. Among other things, it might spark more support for a prairie park at the old Springhill Ranch. Countians are divided on that issue; a sign outside of Cottonwood Falls reads, "Keep Grasslands Free, No Government Acquisition." Being there in my self-conscious mood, I reminded myself of something I've thought before, that is, to write about a place is likely to contribute to its decline. Like a map, the writing reduces landscape and space to a flat page, and it draws visitors. We can only hope that decline will not follow this book. If it does, it will be the reader/visitor's fault for failing to bring along the wisdom of *PrairyErth*, which does all that a book by a visitor can do to uncover the essence of a place. The lingering spirits of those who have lived sincerely in that land will say of Trogdon: He has slept on the prairie, brewed heady teas from its plants, and dreamed.

Dan Martin

Towns Facing Railroads: Poems by Jo McDougall. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1991. 57 pages. $16.95 cloth, $8.95 paper.

Jo McDougall shows remarkable continuity of form in her second full-length volume, *Towns Facing Railroads.* She is a master of the short, evocative lyric. "Remodeling" is four lines long but suggests many stories:

> My mother fell flat on her porch the day it iced over
> while she was gone to the store for a quart of milk.
> I think it would be like that if she came back now
> to hear us hammering on her house, whistling.

The poem travels backwards in time and then shifts gears to present time. The personality of both the mother and the grown child are clear, and the details of a porch, icy weather, milk, hammering, and whistling together sketch a reality for the poem. This abbreviated style, with just enough details, are typical of the work in McDougall's first collection, *The Woman in the Next Booth* (BookMark Press—UMKC, 1987), as well as this new book.

Especially engaging is the sense of humor that enlivens the poems. The tone is consistent throughout the book, wise with a shading of irony. This humor allows potentially bitter experiences to be tolerable. The inflexible mother of "Remodeling" is almost a slapstick figure. And the rebuilding goes on, not haunted by ghosts. "Blessing" is a humorous slant on a neighbor's tragic life:

> My neighbor hangs out the morning wash
> and a storm dances up.
> She strips the line,
> the children's pajamas with the purple ducks,
> her husband's shorts,
> the panties she had hidden under a sheet.
> When the sun comes out
> she comes back
> with the panties and the sheets, the shorts and the
> pajamas.
> This is my ritual, not hers.
> May her husband never stop drinking and buy her a dryer.

Even "Upon Hearing about the Suicide of the Daughter of Friends" takes a difficult subject and makes the poet's own fear a familiar experience, "We may know it sometimes through its disguises, / say the sound of a car at two a.m. / grinding to a stop in a gravel drive." Each poem ends decisively, often

with a twist. The reader is given a parting insight or perspective to soften the hard blows that fall.

Especially effective in McDougall's repertoire are dramatic monologues. "His Funeral" is from the point of view of an adulterous lover who wonders "what the wife knew" and "what happens to the body first / and how soon." The deadpan language defines the situation deftly. A wonderful poem is "The Dress," which begins, "Well, I'm her mother, and I cannot see it, / that kind of money for one more thing to wear / to the Frostee-Freeze...." The mother goes on to contrast her early parenthood of "pukey babies" to her daughter's romanticizing of a "weenie boyfriend." It outlines the inevitable antagonism of the generations, innocence versus experience, with devastating insight.

The topics of these poems range widely, from small-town life to urban settings ("Once in Winter"). Some are clearly about Pittsburg, Kansas, where McDougall teaches English at Pittsburg State University. Many appear to be about ordinary happenings, such as neighbors quarreling in "Neighborhood":

> There is rage in the woman's voice
> coming from a house close by.
> Perhaps he is drunk again or home
> smelling of women.
> Her voice
> shakes the catalpas.
> The moon climbs over the town,
> erasing windows.

Again, the ending shifts from the domestic scene to a longer view.

Some of the characters are the same, such as the mother who appears in both this collection and in the earlier book. But no single topic unifies the collection. Rather, the consistent narrator behind the words becomes a reliable guide through all sorts of situations. This is a guide to trust, with gifts of endurance and good humor. The result is a collection that reads as a seamless whole, composed of many parts. Together they provide a running commentary on the absurdities of the human condition and how to survive them.

Denise Low

The Clay that Breathes by Catherine Browder. Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions, 1991. 159 pages. $9.95 paper.

In the title novella, Eve, expatriate American potter in Japan, flushing with her journeyman stature, says to herself: "this is my life. I do it with my hands." She does not yet know what at length she will learn from her sensei and her colleague, that pots and teacups are thrown by hands, yes, but art is made from the soul, the disciplined senses and emotions which must channel into numinous conduits to reach those hands and place the spiritual into every piece that's shaped. Reading Eve's story and the other quiet but scintillating tales within this book lets us see that what Eve the character says of her work can be said of Browder's prose: This is her life; she does it with her heart.

Browder's love and respect for her characters shines like her Asian seascapes and the delicate beauty of gardens, markets, spare homes; perfect *Japonisme*. This is not the techno-Japan of corporate conquest and business page headlines, the fast lane of all fast lanes. When we encounter businessmen here it's at play, at dinner, at bedtime. This takes us where people live, shop, love, talk and suffer. The sensitive portrayals are never marred by sentimentality or sterotyping. Browder is that exceptional writer who immerses herself in a culture, learning to love it, then, having left it, to draw back from her passion and grow "cold as ice" as Chekhov advised, before proceeding to the page. Browder emerges, with this collection, from the confines of the small magazine, stellar work printed in impressive journals with deplorably meager followings. Here is an author to watch . . . and to read.

Case in point: "Sakurajima," the story that struck in me the deepest chord, enriches on many levels, a layered and textured piece. Marta, from whose point of view we first encounter this seabound land . . . . Sakurajima, with a live volcano that enriches the soil with its lava . . . has come to say goodbye to old friends in Japan (she has taught here for a year), two of whom lived in her stateside home ten years before this as exchange students. A long flashback fleshes these students fully. At a party, stateside, a gathering of many families' exchange students in the university town, the students' elder escort, Kimura, explains to the American parents present: "These are our future, our flowers, who have grown up in the soil of Sakurajima." Each student is then called upon to tell of some facet of family life at home. Kino, one of two guests in Marta's home that year, sings; beautifully. Marta is moved and surprised. She sees how little she has learned of him in a school year, less still of the other, less quiet boy, Noboru. Like this one, there are incremental revelations to the reader throughout this story. Little by little, steadily, they enlarge, especially Kino; he is bright,

curious, a klutz and a bumbler with simple tasks; he is disliked by Marta's father, that is, misunderstood. The tension grows and nuance abounds.

Now, ten years hence on the island and in Tokyo, Marta learns more of Kino, the necessity that drives this former poor farm boy to succeed and worst, the tragic accidental death of his counterpart, Noboru, the wealthy boy, pride of *his* parents no less. Marta delays departure, visits Noboru's parents. They want any recollection she might muster for a remembrance of that charmed American season. It is then she realizes how little she actually learned of the compliant and obeisant boy, how little there is to distinguish the pacific ones among us. Marta leaves, imagining how the lovely Sakurajima lives on inside all its children, living and dead. The power of "Sakurajima" emanates from a quiet, stoical kind of exposition without a trace of sentiment.

Ann Tyler selected "Tigers," the lead story, as her second place choice in the *First American Fiction Anthology* (1990). "Tigers" is both humorous and tragic. It is about the "second wife" relegation of Cambodian women living in America, second-class citizens and therefore spouses who must scratch and claw for a foothold with language and their American mates, both official and unofficial, who take but have trouble giving back to their captive wives. Explosion comes unexpectedly when old collaborators with Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge are discovered as fellow refugees among them during a language school outing. They too have suffered, may not have been willing quislings at all in a conundrum of war and displacement, of obscure new polity and meaningless forced allegiances.

The story unfolds through Dara, who apologizes for her "Ma Vonn's" "Tarzan English," for example, "No good live in projects. Need friend . . ." etc. Dara's problems now layer with American nuance superimposed upon the problems of being teen-aged and forced to sleep in the same room with a younger sister, half-American, therefore her stepfather Tom's true daughter. Dara is forced to clean kennels without pay for Tom, a veterinarian. Like Vonn, her mother, she must confront certain events from her past, reluctantly in her case. Vonn tells her to never forget her true father, wrested from them by Khmer Rouge boy-soldiers. She must also recall the beheading of an uncle, the tree-pillorying of a young child. These are tigers, all right. They survive. The reader joins the author in willing them to prevail.

"Kites" is brief as the time left to grandfather Tomura. Though dying, he has a moment, an epiphanic vision, recalling his son as a boy, the son with whom he now lives in America and from whom he is growing estranged over the son's mistreatment of the *gaijin* daughter-in-law. This vision recalls a moment so sweet as to negate his pains.

"Goodwill" is compelling. Barbara, refined and perhaps quaintly liberal, meets the challenge of her life among Lao-Hmong residents of "the

projects." In her visceral attempt at teaching and helping, she tries to become them, yet while gaining their love and allegiance for her selflessness, she gains also their pity and their nickname, which is a mispronunciation of her name ("Batty"), and prophetic. Her obsession renders the liberal-besotted Barbara useless to her charges, ironically less able to cope and survive the stringencies of life she fears for them. This story gains much from observations of the projects staff, a black and a white member, who enter into the action as they report on Batty.

"The Beholder's Eye" surprises in becoming not only a love story but one that enigmatically pleases by a wholly plausible happy ending which is in no way telegraphed.

The title novella is a minor course for japanophiles regarding an ancient, patient, reserved and enlightened culture of sensei and apprentice, of tradition and its simple pleasures, of contentment without complacency.

Catherine Browder's subtle, disguised presence through masterful writing recalls the best writers of an earlier time. She owes much to those classicists, yet she's borrowed nothing in the way of original treatment given some venerated and profound themes. The book is a minor triumph in taste and elegance, by Milkweed Editions, beautifully enhanced by drawings of Stephanie Torbert.

Donn Irving Blevins

Contributors' Notes

Michael Barrett (405 S. 7th #3, Ann Arbor, MI 48103).

Donn Irving Blevins (Box 23368, Stanley, KS 66223) is fiction editor of *UNCLE* and fiction coordinator of the River Front Reading Series in Kansas City. A story of his recently won second prize in a *Negative Capability* contest.

Kevin Boyle (114 N. Gilbert #5, Iowa City, IA 52245) studies at the University of Iowa and his poetry has appeared in *North American Review, Denver Quarterly, Antioch Review* and others.

Richard Cummins (3030 W. 4th Ave. #B-20, Kennewick, WA 99336) teaches at Columbia Basin College. His poetry has appeared in *North American Review, Cincinnati Poetry Review,* and elsewhere.

T. J. Harrison (1111 Abrams Rd. #211, Richardson, TX 74081) is completing an M.A. in Humanities at University of Texas-Dallas and has appeared recently in *Manna, Connecticut River Review, Wisconsin Review,* and *Southern Poetry Review.*

Barbara Horton (1715 Wesley Ave., Evanston, IL 60201), a previous *Cottonwood* contributor, has also appeared in *Spoon River Quarterly, Poet Lore, Kansas Quarterly,* and *Embers,* among others. Her chapbook *The Verb to Love* (Silver Apples) came out in 1990.

Denise Low (1916 Stratford, Lawrence, KS 66044), a former editor of *Cottonwood,* continues to teach creative writing at Haskell Indian Junior College. Her *Starwater* appeared from *Cottonwood* Press in 1990.

Dan Martin (English Dept., Wescoe Hall, KU, Lawrence, KS 66045), Review Editor of *Cottonwood,* is a graduate student in English at KU.

Jim McCrary (1041 Kentucky, Lawrence, KS 66044) teaches poetry at the Lawrence Arts Center and co-produces the Poetry Slam at the Flamingo Club. He has recent poetry in *Caliban* and *Exquisite Corpse* and two new book collections out: *And/Or* (e.g.) and *West of Mass* (Tansy).

J. Morris (7411 Hancock Ave. #102, Takoma Park, MD 20912) is a musician living near Washington, D.C. His stories have appeared or are forthcoming in *Northwest Review, High Plains Literary Review, New Delta Review,* and *Other Voices.*

Charlotte Nekola (1 Tenafly Rd., Tenafly, NJ 07670) has appeared in *New Letters, Calyx, The Massachusetts Review, Poets On,* and *Big Wednesday.* In 1987 she co-edited *Writing Red: An Anthology of American Women Writers, 1930-1940* (Feminist), with Paula Rabinowitz.

Richard Nester (c/o Fine Arts Work Center, Box 565, Provincetown, MA 02657) has recent poetry in *The Elephant Ear* and *The Old Read Kimono* and prose in *The Catholic Agitator.*

Antony Oldknow (927 West 16th Lane, Portales, NM 88130) is Associate Professor of English at Eastern New Mexico. His work has recently appeared in *Antaeus, Webster Review, Poetry East,* and *Great River Review,* among others.

Ann Pearce (1110 Louisiana, Lawrence, KS 66044) will soon be presenting a one-woman show of her paintings at the Venue in Kansas City. She plans on continuing her study at the Maryland Institute College of Art, and claims Ed Ruhe as an influence.

Steve Peeples (3772 Oak Lane, Marietta, GA 30062).

Earl C. Pike (3256 15th Ave. S., Minneapolis, MN 55407) is a consultant on HIV/AIDS related issues throughout Minnesota and the region. His work has been published widely.

Ron Schreiber (9 Reed St., Cambridge, MA 02140), a previous *Cottonwood* contributor, notes his Kansas roots, his mother being born and raised in Caldwell, KS. Ron edits *Hanging Loose.*

Harry Voltanowski (420 9th Ave., Apt. 12, San Francisco, CA 94118) lives and writes in the Richmond District.

Anne Waldman (2227 Nicholl St. W., Boulder, CO 80302) is Co-Director of the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics at Naropa Institute. Her most recent collection is *Helping the Dreamer* (Coffee House).

Michael W. Young (English Dept., 202 Andrews, Univ. of Nebraska, Lincoln, NE 68588-0333) is an Assistant Professor of English and reader for *Prairie Schooner.* He confesses to having an M.A. from Kansas State University.

Cottonwood
ISSN 0147-149X
$5.00