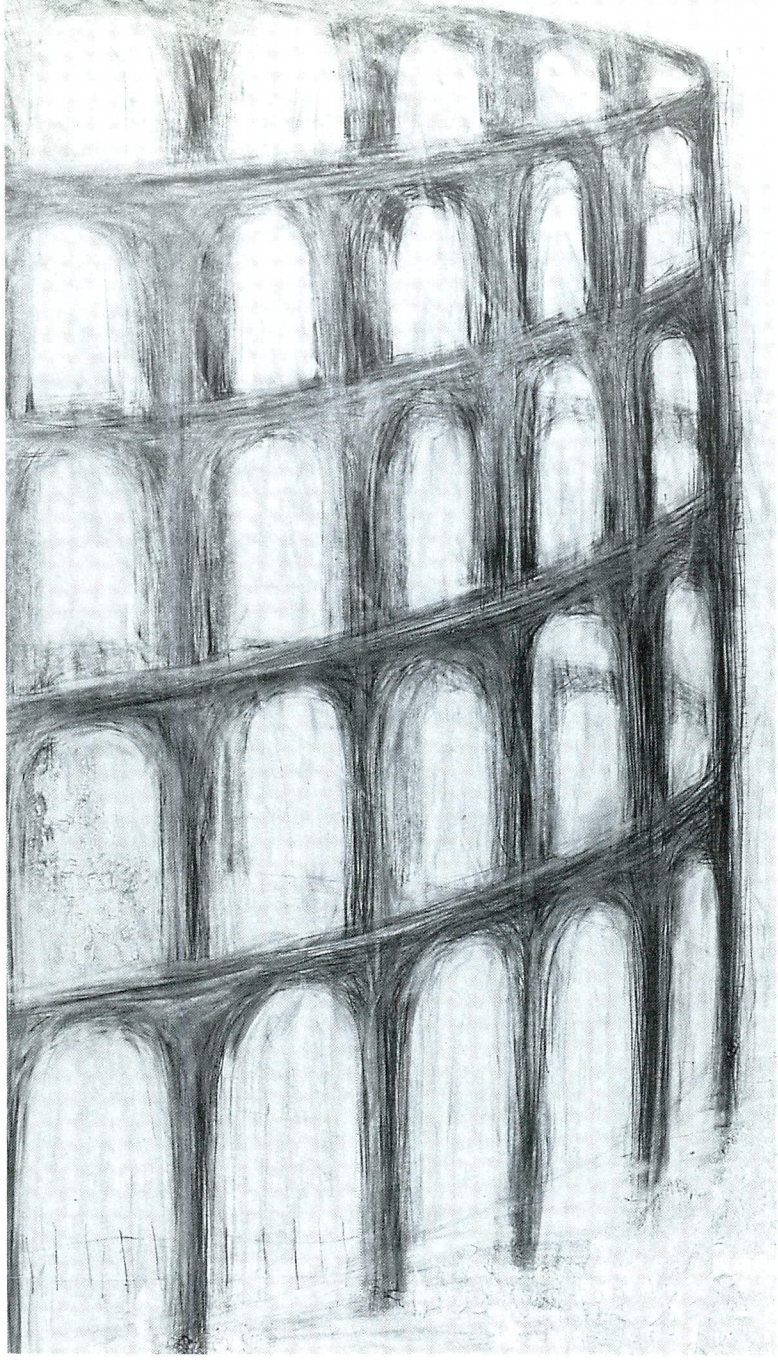

Cottonwood 49
Gloria Vando

Cottonwood 49

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.

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Cottonwood 49

Gloria Vando Issue

Cottonwood Magazine and Press
Lawrence, KS

COTTONWOOD 49

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Pencil-and-paper artwork by Lana E. Turner

Editor's Note

The staff is at work selecting materials for 1995, our thirtieth year of publication. Like many small magazines in a University setting—low in funding, subject to frequent staff turnover and to doldrums during the summer hiatus—we are often behind schedule and liable to lose readers who have moved without leaving forwarding information. In such circumstances, survival has to have something to do with quality. In my position as Emeritus faculty and within the year to become outgoing editor of this enterprise, I can take some pleasure in having contributed for the past ten years to the continuation of the standards set by my predecessors. It would be good to hear from our readers, subscribers, and friends as we turn the corner into our celebratory year.

The current issue features the poetry of Gloria Vando, the graphic art of Lana E. Turner, and a stunning collection of fiction and poetry. I am very proud of it and strongly urge our friends to share it with their friends so that we may continue to thrive (and perhaps prosper?).

Gloria Vando's work should need no introduction. Those who have not met her should visit The Writers Place to witness her spirited delight in promoting and encouraging the arts. Phil Miller's interview captures some of her spontaneity, wit and charm—even a brief telephone conversation can convey volumes—but one needs her presence to get the beauty of it whole. The same excitement, passionate belief, and honesty is in her poems.

One of the many benefits of knowing Gloria is that she sent us to the Kansas City Artists Coalition for help with this issue's graphics and we discovered there the work of Lana E. Turner, who teaches painting at Rockhurst College. Some of her work will be on exhibit starting August 5 at the KCAC (202 Walnut, Kansas City, Missouri). We wish we had funds for color reproduction of her paintings.

The Washington Writers' Publishing House has brought out a volume, *Farewell, Goodbye, Wave Goodbye* by Paul Haenel, one of whose poems was in our last issue. A collection of poems by Phil Miller, *Hard Freeze,* has just appeared from BkMk Press in Kansas City. And Nancy Winters, also in our last issue, has succeeded R. L. Barth as editor of *The Epigrammatist* in Davis, California. How nice to feel that small as we are we have friends from coast to coast!

George Wedge

Poetry

Kiel Christianson

"Ravens are widows"

—Western Apache wisewords

Stand back, you old crow!
You depress me.
Not your black cloak so much
as the way you hang there
on the edge of the road, the
outskirts of town, the
feathered, skittering fringe
of the fire. You're touched
by death. You reek of it—
your clothes, your breath.
There! Take this carcass
thrown to the shoulder
by an unforgiving fender.
Take these scraps cast
beyond our circle of light.
Grasp them in those bony talons,
clutch them in that toothless beak
and fly from here. Return
to that barren rook, your
netherworld haven, neither earth
nor heaven, and turn your
jaundiced eyes away from us—
we who wait for nothing;
not food, not death, not you.

Sally Allen McNall

Sorrow

They stand in the kitchen, the man and boy, leaning back,
heads down, arms crossed
so each can get a grip on his biceps, feet also crossed.
It's after the funeral.
Others edge gingerly around with food in foil or freezer bags,
label it, put it away.
They see the likeness. "Look at them," one whispers, meaning
how funny they are
in the day's larger funniness, the odd day's occasion, the
discordance of this death.
The point is, the man and boy aren't father and son. They are
son and second husband,
though for years, until this week, that's been old history. Now
it's all the imaginable future,
an Armageddon of *whose she was.* Everyone has seen this, and
the man has backed off and
backed off until he's wedged in a corner between stove and door
hugging himself.
His arms fall open. "What do you want me to—What can I do—?"
Too loud. He hears,
stops. "You can't do a thing for me," says the boy softly.
They stare at each other.

Raylene Hinz-Penner

Thanksgiving Evening

My red-cheeked nephew struggles with the paper
pilgrim hat Miss Nancy helped him make.
We cross the bridge into a cold south wind.
It is dusk and we must hurry.
We scramble down the rocks toward water's edge.
I am sorry to have worn slick leather soles.
He grips the box of stale Ritz crackers.
We have come to feed the ducks.

I am glad to spot the Muscovies close,
huddled out of the wind. They expect us,
feathered in elegant black and white,
their bare knobby faces grim and vulgar.
I caution him against the edge, the cold
water, that I do not swim. Dauntless, he
fumbles with gloved fingers to hurl the first
handful of crackers. The ducks are grateful.
They dip and flap. And now with a congregation,
he goes wild, flinging cracker bits in showers
into the river which swirls and heaves,
a maelstrom of black and white.

And then, so soon, even the smallest crumbs
are gone. It is too dark. I am ready to go.
Beckoning, I point out the pink fluffs,
clouds still left in the western sky,
but he is looking for more ducks.
He ignores now the few who swim alongside,
noiseless, greedy, while he races the bank
with his flashlight, calling as he points
here and there into the darkening water,
"I think that one is familiar . . . Oh, that one
is familiar. . . . Does it look familiar to you?"

Familiar?
Suddenly I am old, too old as I hug myself
against the wind and try to remember some first
knowledge of this word that he has learned today,
a word which holds him to the bank, for which
he casts these beams of light across dark water,
asking the night for a sign, searching
the dark for "familiar."

Lauri Anne Whitt

Elegy at a Dark Pool

the doe raises her
dripping mouth
casually, unseen

wild geese
beat great moments
out of vision

myriad eyes smoulder
softly & blink out
among pale trees

a swallow dips its
wings once without
pausing or returning

haiku drift like paper
boats: white
skimming the surface

stones crack into
speech, full of
body and waiting

in a dark pool

where we will end,
gone gray and still
in one another's arms

holding our history
together like
sudden prayer

eased into final fluency
on slow,
flown syllables

Carol Tufts

Naked Ladies

(for Ellen)

Tonight we toast the naked ladies,
those leafless lilies that flaunt
their fine pink all through
the crush of saucy August,
while you tell me you can see
their name—an impressionist painting
by Renoir, perhaps, those rosy women
all lavish flesh, luscious
as the season. And you're tickled
as a girl swirling the wine
of her first seduction,
you at eighty now, still here
after four operations that tore you
as green hills are torn for ore,
the ruined skin seamed back in place
the way the earth's crust is roughly gathered
after the miners have gone.
Only this time they've had to leave
the cancer burrowing inside you
even as we toast the pink
leafless lilies called naked ladies,
even as you say they were you once,
but not now, not when you see yourself
a crone carved in ceremonial scars
like a map of where your life has gone
in this world you won't let close
its astonishing days upon you.

Robert Cooperman

Obituary in *The Denver Ledger*, March 3, 1876: John Sprockett

"John Sprockett was killed yesterday
in a livery-stable shoot-out
in the mining town of Gold Creek,
by William Leeson, over a difference of opinion.
The homily about living by the sword
could not have been more applicable.

"Sprockett was born in Dido, Missouri,
his father a Presbyterian minister,
his mother a school-mistress
from whom he learned a love of poetry.
Once, he bet a crowd in a Salida saloon
that for every poem he recited from memory
he would be paid a drink; for each verse
he failed to render, he would stand a round.
His performance was flawless.

"It is to be pitied he never practiced
the precepts in his father's Book,
for Sprockett was credited with the deaths
in gunfights of no less than fifteen men.
How many others he casually murdered
it cannot be calculated,
but he was known to take quick,
lethal offense against any who remarked
upon the scars inflicted on his face by a bear.
He was also henchman to Colonel Quantrill,
the privateer of Bloody Kansas infamy,
whose predations exacerbated our tragic Civil War.

"Sprockett was best known for guiding
the Englishwoman Sophia Starling
through our mining and mountain country.
As his employer, Miss Starling
became the first female to scale Long's Peak.
Their appearance was often marveled at:

a genteel young lady condescending
to a man of his reputation and grim visage.

"His exploits were celebrated in dime novels,
but *we* can only be saddened that a man
of so poetic a soul saw fit to destroy it
in drink and mayhem. He left no family,
was buried without fanfare or mourners.
Let that lack be a lesson to all deluded
into the belief that a life spent
in disregard of Law can garner any reward."

Blythe Nobleman

Feeding the Tortoise

I.
Too often I think of that day
the two of us crawling around the backyard
lawn like infants, our palms and knees
stained with grass. You find the tortoise
half-buried under the persimmon tree
backed against a root as your children backed
you against yourself, against your mother.
You prod his inanimate shell, pinch the folds
loose, tough skin caked with dirt.
Facing each other, we sit cross-legged
feed the tortoise green grapes and lettuce leaves.
He chews without teeth as you still chew me
moving the pulp around in your mouth
never swallowing or spitting out.
At the end of that day, mother,
you laugh, throw your head back
empty yourself of joy. You fix
the dinner of a special occasion.
We eat outside on a picnic.

II.
You call me into your room.
Sitting at the vanity mirror lit
like a theater marquee, you perch
sideways on a velvet stool with posture,
a movie star, brushing your wig.
I hold the tortoise close to my chest
like a shield or a pillow. My blood divides
into separate elements that remain incompatible
moving through the same veins at unequal pace.
With your most maternal vision, you look at me;
your hand extends the offering of your life.
A cluster of lethal tablets clinging
to each other, not wanting to descend alone.
Hand raised to your mouth
in a form of salutation,
you swallow.

Lyn Lifshin

On Another Coast

Maybe
could it have
been because of
rain that we fell
together so
easily that first time
rain keeping the
others near the
fire your hair was
blacker than the melon
seeds under the straw the towels
smelling of sweet trees our
bodies lifted to each other in the
rain cottage the
wet leaves pulling us
close and down

Jill Divine

Hands

There are days when hands do all the work.
When there are bills to pay or pictures to draw.
Days of holding babies, the hand cradles the tiny neck,
strokes the hair and smoothes the christening dress.
All day long the hands work, brushing away tears,
covering yawns. They become a separate animal,
attached to our bodies, doing their own dance.
They talk among themselves saying *hello* and *stop*,
they flutter in happiness and then, palms up,
say *I don't know* and cower in the folds of a dress.
Those are the days when the mind rests, when feet
are content to stay in their shoes and the eyes
become an accessory to the startling life
the hands have taken on. We find them pointing
at strangers, snapping wildly at music
and pounding the table at someone we love.
They are wild for hours and we must reel them in,
these once familiar appendages wearing our rings.
They settle down like little birds, quiet again,
turning the pages of a book, flipping on a light switch.
They have, on their own, taken care of a whole day,
doing what the hands need to do. They have reached out
and gathered in life, and in our sleep
the animals of our hands begin to plant.

Laura Stangel Schmidt

Decoration Day, 1880

A photograph inclines on the mantlepiece:
three daughters, stillborn last May,
their casket propped on the kitchen table.

The camera saw their faces, their hands
displayed like the perching feet of sparrows.
She glances at the picture from time to time

as she goes about the day's routine:
arising at five, breakfast, the house
in order by nine, bloody show, six loaves

of bread, a suet pudding, butter sandwiches
for the boys' lunch, a pot of beef to boil,
breaking water. By the time the garden is weeded,

her cervix, malleable as gold, is rhythmically
thinned to a rim of eight centimeters.
An infant's gown, scissors, a bucket of water

drawn from the well are set on the bedside
table. Her oldest son is sent outside to watch
the four young boys. At four, she delivers

a daughter. She rises, calls her son to bathe
his sister while she goes out to gather
wildflowers. She shades her eyes to see over

the plain of coreopsis, gaillardia, larkspur to
three smooth stones set in cottonwood shade.
A sparrowhawk tilts on a rising draft.

Michael L. Johnson

Ty Murray, the Bo Jackson of Rodeo

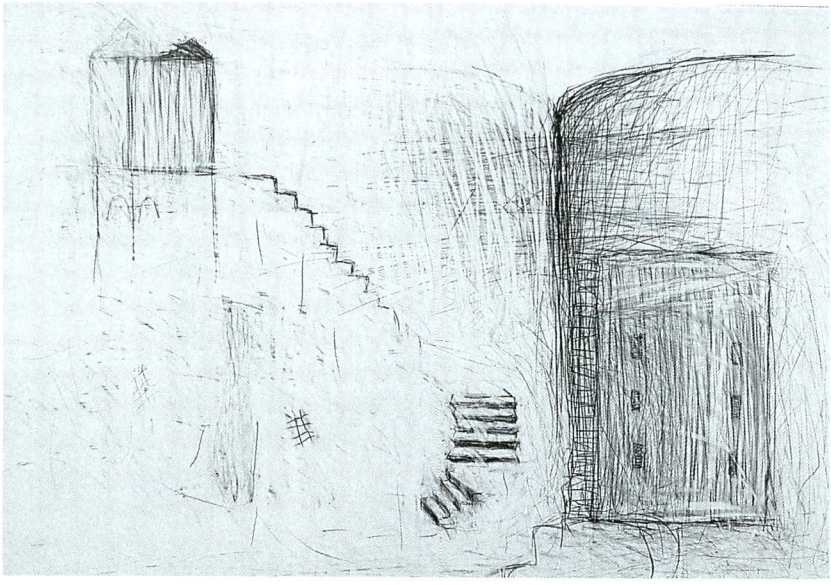
Your nerves fire like hot wires when the chute blows
open. Any guy who's ready to ride
a bull and says he isn't scared, he lies.

When you first start riding, fear makes the world
turn black. What counts is putting fear aside
to get the job done. If you ride enough,
things slow down so you can think. Then the rest
takes care of itself—no future or past,
only a ton of bull under your butt.

Just like with saddle broncs and bareback broncs,
you dance a duet: your moves counteract
the animal's. You lean back, hold on tight
with one hand, reach the other up to God.

It's all risk—and yours alone. You can get
stove-in bad and go broke at the same time.
Real courage means that whatever comes up
you don't like, you deal with it. Straight-away.

My career could last for fifteen more years
or end tonight. Don't plan too much. Those eight
seconds are a long stretch of violence
and grace. It's almost mystical—but fun,
a thrill every time. I'd do it for free.



Fiction

Deborah Artman

The Mermaid Parade

My sister Natasha lies with great abandon on the beach. I'm impressed. One arm is flung back. Her underarm hair is silky and black. The hair on her legs, a fine, light fur. She opens her thighs and laughs. "You could lie like *this*," she says.

We both look at the curly hair poking out at her crotch. Her knees are slightly bent.

"Or like this." She turns so her legs are in a sideways run. We are discussing ways to avoid tan stripes on the leg. For summers now, I've had the New York frontside-backside tan, with white stripes like seams running down my legs.

I keep my head still and move my eyes to see if anyone is staring at my sister. In front of me is a woman in her 60s. She is with her husband. I am comforted by them. They have a beach umbrella.

"I really like this beach," I say, pressing my weight down so the sand fits my body.

"Hmm," says Natasha.

Two teenage girls unfold lounge chairs three feet away from us. They pull out the tape deck, the icebox, the comb, the water spritzer, the sunglasses and the lotion. They settle back in their chairs, grease up and lie very still. Then one remembers to turn on the tape and she leans forward carefully, reaching so as not to touch the arm of the chair with her oiled skin, and punches the button down. Bon Jovi.

"I never understand why people come right next to you when there's a whole beach out there," I say.

Natasha laughs. She's being very agreeable.

"I love Coney Island," I say. "It's my new favorite place."

A boy with a heavy icebox calls out: "Bee-yuh! Ice cold beer, hee-yuh!"

"If I had a beer, I'd fall asleep," I say. "I'd much rather smoke pot." I press my weight down so the sand fits my body.

"You smoke pot?" says Natasha. She stretches luxuriously.

"Sometimes." My hands are palm down, my body straight, in order to tan evenly.

"I think I could become a pothead," says Natasha.

"Mm . . ."

"I smoked a lot of pot in Colorado," she says.

"Really."

"My boyfriend out there smoked pot. He had a broken windshield and was a lowlife and a Marine and he had a baby and he couldn't spell. If you touched the windshield the whole thing would have shattered. He gave me peppermint Schnapps and he called me 'his lady.' He'd say, 'How do you like this, milady?'"

"That's nice," I say. "Milady."

"I thought it was kind of creepy," says Natasha.

People are starting to claim their territory. A Puerto Rican family plops down on the sand. The mother ties each corner of a blanket to four different garbage cans so the babies can have shade. The father scratches his chest and looks out at the ocean.

"I thought he did something else," I say.

"You mean, the oboe player?"

"Was that what he was?" The top 40 countdown continues from someone's radio. It clashes in the air with the Bon Jovi tape.

"For the symphony." Natasha strokes her belly. "That was in Chicago. He was incredibly skinny—6'3" and 140 pounds—and he had beautiful hands. People thought he was either really ugly or really beautiful. His face had all these hollows in it."

"Mm." The sun feels good.

"He drove a Honda and he had to duck his head down when he was driving. That was endearing, the way he drove hunched over." Natasha pauses.

I turn to her and open one eye. "And what happened to him?"

"He was one of those people who thinks that kids are the only good people on earth and everyone else sucks and women are crazy and neurotic. We had to kiss lying down; he was a head taller than me."

My sister lies with her eyes closed, hands behind her head.

"What about you?" she says. "Anything happening for you on that front?"

"No."

"Then there was the robber," she says.

"Sounds like Clue," I say. "The robber, the Marine and the oboe player."

* * *

The first time Natasha visited me in New York, she got lost in the Port Authority building. I looked everywhere and finally had her paged. When she came to the meeting place, she burst into tears and threw her arms around me. Natasha is shorter than I am and she works out. She runs long distance, bikes, swims, and does Nautilus. When she threw her bulk at me, she knocked me back a little. She has a big bear hug.

During that visit she wouldn't go out of my apartment by herself. I took her shopping one day and in the dressing room of a boutique she lifted her shirt and said, "Do you want to see my scars?" I stared at the faint wide purple lines that ran down from her nipples and disappeared under the curve of her breasts. Honestly, her breasts didn't look much smaller to me.

"The doctor did a good job," Natasha said. "They don't hurt when I run anymore."

"We'd go riding on his motorcycle," Natasha says to me now. "I didn't tell Mom. We'd go up into the mountains. He embezzled money from the bike store before it went bankrupt. He stole some bikes to sell later."

"It's nice to be by the ocean, isn't it?"

"He had a problem, really. He'd case a place and figure out how to break in. He once broke into the Fine Arts Center and stole some art."

When I don't respond, my sister says, "You sound like a real beach bum."

"Sunbunny," I correct her. "Did he get good stuff?"

"Yeah, some nice things," says Natasha. "He used to yell at me when I'd talk about how fat I am. 'If you wanted to, you'd lose weight,' he'd say. 'What's the big deal?'"

"He's right."

"I know," she says. "He was pretty good-looking."

"Was he good?" I say, teasing.

"Yes," says Natasha, serious. "I think I'll go in."

"I'm not hot enough," I say.

Natasha stands and brushes off her hands. She walks on the sand gingerly and picks her way towards the water. She stops when the old woman in front of us says a few words to her. From my spot, I see my sister standing on the horizon. The sun burns out the edges of her body. Her hips are full. She's not fat really, she's round. She's a woman, I realize. We are daughters of Russian peasants and the world is not an easy place for our bodies. The older woman gets up. They go into the water together.

* * *

So far, so good. No blow-ups. I close my eyes and consider Natasha's exploits. I wonder if her scars still show, what the men say.

I've always been in awe of people with scars. I knew a man once whose stomach was a battlefield. He'd been sliced up by a gang and almost died. When I saw his stomach, I wished he were my lover. I met a woman once with a scar down her back.

"It's not too bad, is it?" she said, when I gave her a massage. And I wanted to prove it was not; I wanted to protect her.

Years ago, this is how I learned my sister tried to commit suicide: she called and said brightly, "I'm sure by now you've heard."

"Heard what?"

"The knife was too dull and I got scared."

It was almost her birthday; she was 19.

"Mom and Dad told me you were dropping out of school," I said slowly. "And that there were only two weeks left to the semester."

"Typical," she laughed. She seemed to be in a very good mood.

Natasha is up to her waist in the water. Her arms are lifted at the elbows, fingers dangling in the water. She and the woman take little jumps with each wave. I go in my usual way, plow through the crests and dive under.

"Oooh," I say.

"It gets better when you move around," a woman says, smiling.

I lean into a wave and push the water away with my hands, swimming towards Natasha.

"This is my sister, Pearl!" says Natasha to the old woman.

I wave hello, then swim out past everyone else. My sister doesn't follow me.

If we all have our own refrain, my mother's was, "I want to live by the water." She grew up in Boston and spent summers at Revere Beach. We went there once when I was a kid, and I remember the Spook House. Hollow-eyed dummies leapt out of the darkness and cold spaghetti ran across our faces. In Kansas City, my mother would cup her hands around her coffee cup and stare with glazed eyes out the kitchen window. We lived in the middle and she wanted to be on the edge. She'd dream of the beach and we all understood we were missing something.

Before Natasha tried to commit suicide and dropped out of school, she called me and said, "Pearl, I met a tall blond man. We slept together in an open field."

"How lovely," I said.

"Pearl," she said, "when you were growing up, did you ever feel that there was something wrong in our house?"

I thought of the hours I spent in the closet, sitting cross-legged and rocking. The empty clothes would brush my head. In the dark, I'd sing, "I love to go a wandering, along the mountain path. And as I go I love to sing, my knapsack on my back. Valerie, valerah, valerie, valerahahahahahaha. . . ." And I'd rock, banging my head in a steady beat against the wall of the closet.

Diving under the water, I can feel my blood pumping in my ears. I hear the bass drum of the ocean rolling across the floor. I lose my body to the water, the resting place, the hum. I have no weight, no past. I undulate my body and pretend I am a fish.

"Do you think Jeffrey is Mom's favorite?" asks Natasha, when I return to my towel.

I sit down slowly so that all the water droplets stay on my skin, then lie back carefully.

"Really? Jeffrey?"

"I think he is. He makes me crazy. Before he left, he'd spend all day in his room. Mom didn't do anything. Then he'd come down and cook himself a meal and leave all the dishes. And she'd come home from work and complain."

"It was always like that. No one ever did the dishes."

"I did them for a while and then I stopped," says Natasha.

The kitchen in Kansas City comes back to me: the pots and pans on the stove from last night's dinner, a crusty knife on the counter, the sink filled with dirty dishes.

A woman behind us yells: "Wilfredo!"

"The last time I went home," I say, "Mom and Dad went out to dinner and I cleaned the kitchen. There was no food in the refrigerator."

"When they kicked Jeffrey out finally, it was pretty ugly," says Natasha. "He hasn't spoken to them since."

"Wilfredo, get back here!" says the woman.

"What do they do?"

"Dad doesn't say anything. I'll come home from a decent day at work and Mom is sitting at the table with her hand around a coffee cup. You know what she says? *I'm dying.* 'I'm dying,' she says."

"Nice."

The woman finds Wilfredo and puts him back on their blanket. He whimpers.

"Metaphorically, of course," adds my sister.

"Get out of there, girl," I say, trying to make my voice a joke.

"I saw Jeffrey on the street the other day," says Natasha. "I knew I'd run into him eventually. I was near the computer center at the University. He practically lives there."

"Maybe we'll have time to see the Sideshow," I say. "Before the parade."

"He was a mess. You know how he smells sometimes?"

I sigh, remembering. He'd wear the same clothes for weeks. His hair would get wild.

"What time is it?" I say.

"Eleven ten. Well, he smelled like that. There was a bum near us picking through a garbage can. And Jeffrey pointed to the bum and said, 'I'm a step away from that, you know.'"

I turn over. "Can you put lotion on my back?" I say.

"Can you believe he said that?" Natasha goes on. She rubs the lotion on the back of my legs matter-of-factly, as if it weren't the first time.

"Well, it's true."

"But if he *knows* it—" she says, and doesn't finish her sentence.

Behind us, the woman yells: "*Wilfredo!*"

"I talk to Jeffrey, you know," I say, after a while. "I call him every now and then."

"Wilfredo!" yells the woman. "This is my moment!"

Wilfredo says something in a high voice that gets lost in the music of the beach.

"You do?"

"He told me he's starting a business. With a partner. Some kind of computer thing. A printing business."

"He's never had a job. In his whole life," says Natasha. "Mom goes on and on about it."

"It's true. I don't know. How does he eat?"

"I don't know."

"Let Mommy relax for a moment, then we'll go in the water," says the woman.

I feel the backs of my thighs heat up.

"Rad-i-a-ting *heat*," I say, an old joke from my teens.

"But how can he say that when he *knows*?" says Natasha.

"Natasha."

She breathes in and out deeply, waiting for an answer.

"He's made a choice, Natasha," I say. "He chooses to live like that."

"They never made him do anything," she says.

"They all conspire. It's his role to fuck up. That's what they expect from him."

It's when we talk like this that I get mad at my sister. She brings me back into it, that house, the kitchen table. When Jeffrey spilled the milk, my dad would bang the table with his fist. All the plates and silverware would jump and my dad would yell, "You sap!"

Jeffrey would lose his keys and come home late. He'd play mournful flat bleats on his trumpet. He had no ear for music and the sounds from his bedroom were like angry farts. He'd break a glass or steal sections of the paper, sleep through dinner. I always gave Jeffrey puzzles for his birthday, and the wood and metal mysteries collected dust on his bookshelves, all solved, all easy. He was the guy to pick on in school, awkward with his body, and he wrote in scratchy handwriting that was so small you had to squint to read it. One of my teachers once told me Jeffrey could write a term paper on the back of a stamp.

"I'm not Jeffrey," I had said in reply.

Most often, he sulked alone in his room, reading *Scientific American* or *Boy's Life, Popular Mechanics* and *Consumer Reports, Psychology Today* and *Mad.* Natasha read the encyclopedia and *Time.* We'd all lie in our beds behind closed doors, reading books and magazines. I preferred *Life* and the Sears catalog. And *National Geographic.* I'd look at the pictures and wonder about the tribes. How to stretch a lip like that. How to pierce a nose. How to fit those rings and rings around your neck.

Long necks were scary things. Natasha and I would sit in front of the Modigliani print in the attic, testing our fear. The woman's neck was endless like a swan's and her eyes, painful slits. Jeffrey had slanty eyes, too. Our mother said he had his grandfather's eyes, Russian-Mongolian eyes. We all held onto this rare scrap of history. Grandparents were part of other people's lives. In our house, we knocked together like stones. We were beggars each with a cup held out empty in our paws. Natasha flirted with the emptiness there, always returning to Kansas City after her pilgrimages elsewhere. Jeffrey had accepted the space at the center so completely, he simply holed up in his room.

"Kick him out," I told my mother, when she called me years later for advice. When my parents finally did, Jeffrey punished them by hanging up whenever they phoned him at his apartment.

"I hear a shofar every morning," he told me. "Someone blows it in my neighborhood."

"What do you do for money?" I said.

He laughed. "How's Mom?"

"Not great," I said.

He laughed. "Good," he said.

"Wilfredo! Dammit!" yells the woman behind us. She rolls over and lifts her head. Wilfredo is wandering towards the water. I watch him, too. My body is the sun and so much older now. The fire in my skin almost feels like kisses. Let's stay here, Natasha. Let's be two women at the beach, only.

"Jeffrey told me he wanted to see a therapist but he couldn't afford it," I tell Natasha. "He knows how he's living. I don't think he'll go over the edge."

Natasha lives with this for a minute and then rolls onto her side, propping her head up with her hand.

"He told *me* to give them a message," she says.

"You didn't do it, did you?" I say, into my beach towel.

"I did."

"It's not your responsibility. Why should you be the go-between?"

"'Give them a message,' he said. 'Tell them I'll only speak to them if *they* go to therapy for three months.'"

"Let it go, Tash," I say, gently. "Let's go to the Sideshow." I put on my shirt and shake out my towel.

"You know," says Natasha, in an afterthought, "I liked the robber best because he didn't treat me like I was sick."

On the boardwalk, the King of Magic wears a shiny lime-green vest with gold glitter paisleys on it. He's huge and his vest puckers on his belly.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he says into the mike, "you have before you strange, odd, unusual people. We're here because it's the only place in the world that would have us."

"They're starting the ballet," I tell Natasha. I pronounce it *bally*. "That's what it's called when you try to tease people into coming to the Sideshow."

"We make a living doing things you wouldn't do for all the money in the world," says the King of Magic, with a gleam in his eye.

"Come on." I pull my sister over to the crowd that begins to gather in a circle around him.

"Inside you'll find the Exorcist Girl, Madame Twisto," he says. "She can turn her head around 360 degrees. We have Serpentina, the snake charmer. She's in that pit now, that pit full of snakes, big ones, little ones, even itty bitty ones.

"Nothing to hurt you, nothing to scare you," says the King of Magic. He dips a metal rod into a bucket of gasoline and lights it with a match. The flame leaps and wags in the wind.

"If I swallow any of this fire, my lungs will blow up and I'll die. But that hasn't happened yet," the King of Magic says. Then he sticks the ball of fire in his mouth, holding up the empty metal rod. He holds the fire inside his

cheeks for a minute, then blows it back onto the torch. The flame leaps and dances again.

A boy in the crowd squeals in delight.

"Isn't this great?" I whisper to Natasha.

"Now ladies and gentlemen," says the King of Magic, "please move in, move up. And if you faint easily, *please* do not watch this."

A man steps forward, wearing a gold cummerbund. He is missing a tooth.

"I'm going to prove to you beyond a shadow of a doubt," says the man, "that sword swallowing is real, and not a fake or humbug as people seem to think."

He places the tip of his sword on his bottom lip, drops his head back and slides the sword down his throat.

"I'm starving," says Natasha.

"Ha, ha," I whisper back.

The sword swallower turns around so everyone in the growing crowd can see the handle of the sword at his mouth.

"Shit," says a man in the crowd. His head is shaved and he's got a tattoo on his arm. Then the sword swallower slides the sword out, wipes it with a cloth, and bows.

"Tim Knight!" says the King of Magic. "The world's youngest and finest sword swallower!"

A two-year-old boy next to me is absolutely mesmerized. He's wearing a blue sunsuit and a white sunbonnet. His black skin is new and beautiful.

"Where's Satina, the Rubber Girl?" says the King of Magic, looking behind him. The Rubber Girl smiles. The crowd moves in closer.

"These are real Siberian Secret Police handcuffs that I am placing on this lovely young lady," says the King of Magic. "And if she doesn't dislocate her hands from her wrists and free herself from their grip, I'm going to sing you all in free."

"C'mon, I haven't eaten anything all day," says Natasha.

With a grand swing, the Rubber Girl frees one hand from the handcuffs.

"Let's have a big hand for Satina!" says the King of Magic.

"It's so early," I say, clapping.

The guys in the crowd whistle. They say "yeah" and clap a couple of times, then cross their arms, tucking their hands under their biceps to make them stand out.

"He's building his tip," I explain to Natasha.

"Come see the Human Blockhead! He drives metal spikes all the way into the center of his head!" says the King of Magic. "And you're going to live to tell about it!"

"I'm *hungry*," says Natasha.

The crowd drifts away as the King of Magic talks money.

"Don't you want to go in?" I say. "I hear they have Otis, the Frog Boy, only they're calling him the Human Cigarette Factory."

"He has no arms or legs!" the King of Magic says in his sing-song voice. "He can roll a cigarette in his mouth, light it, and make smoke come out of his ears!"

"I need to eat something," says Natasha.

I look over at my sister, who insists on being my little sister. She could be pouting and pulling on my sleeve. I can't believe Natasha doesn't want to see the Sideshow. I love the Sideshow. Seeing the Human Cigarette Factory is part of my itinerary for the day.

"Okay," I say.

Natasha eats her cob of corn that drips with butter. Her chin is shiny and she gulps down her Sprite. When she visited me that other time, she ate all my food without offering to help out. She slept on the couch and waited for me to come home from work. By the end of the week, I'd had it.

"I'm not your mother, dammit!" I yelled, slamming my bedroom door.

"Don't try that psych stuff on me!" she yelled back through the wood.

"What's the matter, Tash, can't take it?" I said meanly. "Isn't that what you want, everything out in the open?" She was crying and I could hear her rustling around in the living room. I leaned against the door and breathed deeply.

"I'm going," she said, when I finally came out. She was shoving clothes into her backpack.

"Don't go."

"I'm going."

"Natasha, don't go."

"I don't feel right here," she said, tears starting again.

"You expect too much from me," I said hopelessly.

The sun is hot and I drink the last of Natasha's Sprite.

"Look for a black car," I tell her, as we walk along the boardwalk towards the parking lot. "That's where we are meeting Celia."

Celia was the Rubber Girl last summer. I met her at an art opening.

"What do you do?" I had said.

"I'm a snake charmer," she'd said. It turned out Celia was Serpentina and the Rubber Girl and Madame Twisto and Elektra, the Human Dynamo. The King of Magic was also the Human Blockhead. The sword swallower

was the Human Pincushion. All the strange, odd and unusual attractions were really only three people. I had sat through two shows, enjoying the joke, a child, fascinated by the grotesque. The Human Blockhead hammered a spike into his nose. Elektra's tongue could set a metal rod on fire. The Human Pincushion bared his chest and pierced it with straight pins. He wiped away the tiny drops of blood matter-of-factly.

"Do I look hysterical?" says Celia. She is wearing a hula skirt and a bikini top.

"You look great," I say. "This is my sister Natasha."

Natasha mumbles hello. Something is happening to her. In a crowd, she becomes wanting.

A couple arrives wearing handmade hats. The man's hat has a Nathan's cup sewn onto it, along with a plastic hot dog and plastic french fries. The woman's hat is like a big plate. Miniature plastic people in swimsuits stand on the plate with a crest of water behind them.

A man walks up with a horse head. He nods to a woman with a chicken head. They put their arms around each other for a photographer. All over the parking lot, people prepare for the parade. The Mummer's marching band warms up. Junior cadets go through their paces. A woman walks by, dressed as a lobster. A fish gets her fin pinned on by a mermaid.

I get into the spirit of things and try on hats that Celia has in a bag.

"How's this?" I ask Natasha, who is sitting on a curb, her chin in her hand. The hat is a Mexican sombrero with pompons around its edge.

Natasha shakes her head.

"What about this?" I put on a Chinese peasant hat.

"You look stupid," says Natasha. I turn my back to her and get t-shirts from Celia. They say: The Coney Island Hysterical Society.

"Put this on," I tell Natasha. She obliges me. I wander around chatting with people while Natasha sits on the curb. She haunts my conversations as I check out the crowd. A seahorse, the local Polar Bear Club, a King Neptune with a spear. Natasha sits like my mother, chin in her hand, unimpressed with the masquerade.

A man with a megaphone and suspenders and a straw barker's hat calls out our tour position in the parade.

"We're lucky," says Celia. "We're behind the marimba band."

Everyone lines up. The man with the megaphone's daughter is our mermaid. She sits on the trunk of Celia's black car, her legs inside a green tail.

The marching band turns onto Surf Avenue. The fish and the lobster follow. Then the junior cadets. Then the seahorse, the Polar Bear Club,

the marimba band. Then us. The "O" in "Coney" on our t-shirts is a spiral like you see in cartoon characters' eyes when they get hypnotized.

"I love this!" I say to Natasha.

The marimba band explodes in a frenzy of steel drums and maracas. Two bare-chested men in sailor pants dance. Their chests and backs shine with sweat. A man plays the triangle. A woman raps on a wood block. The rhythm is deafening and seductive.

I move away from Natasha and try to walk with my eyes closed to feel the rush around me. I hear the bells and the wood blocks and the sand shaking. I can smell fried food and the ocean.

"Spread out!" yells Celia, and our tight pack of people opens up. A crowd lines the street. It seems all of Coney Island in its tacky splendor is here. A bald man with a pink sunburn and a Hawaiian shirt. A man in leather with a red handkerchief tied on his head and a big earring dangling from his ear. I see flashes of faces and smiles. Everyone points at our masks and hats and t-shirts. They cheer our mermaid, who waves prettily from the car.

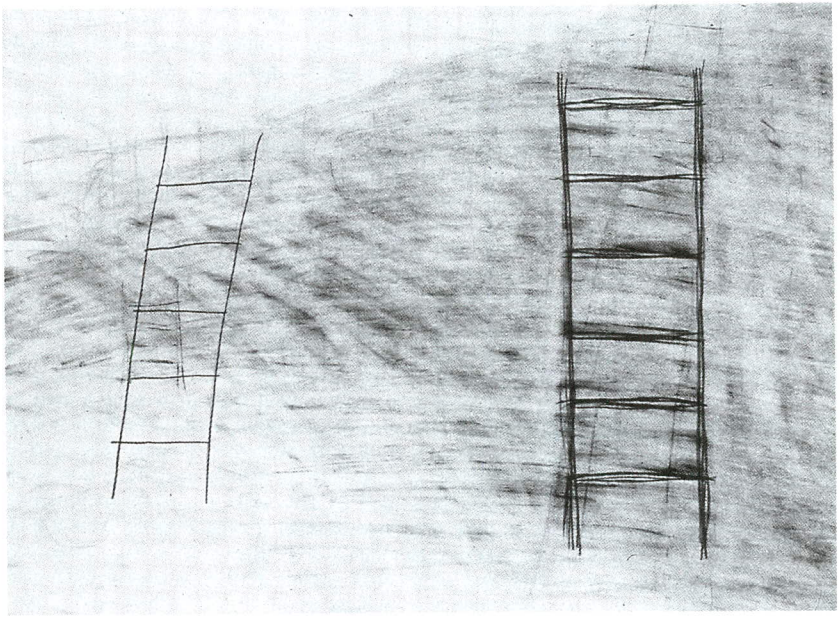
Someone hands me a small set of cymbals. Where's Natasha? She's been given a bag of balloons. I see her throwing them to children. In spite of herself, she's taken in by their wide and shining eyes.

"All these people!" shouts Natasha. Her arm arcs expansively, ending in a flourish. Another balloon sails out to the crowd.

I laugh and bang my cymbals together in reply, finding a rhythm to fit in with the other percussionists. I do an inside dance with the music, wag my hips a little.

"I've never been the center of attention before!" shouts my sister. Her cheeks are pink.

"It's fun, isn't it?" I say. The din and the sun and the drum and the sand. Everyone is applauding.



Tereze Glück

Arson

He leans against what used to be a counter, in this room that used to be the kitchen.

You say you were working in the kitchen, he says.

He smiles, a smirk. He leans against the charred counter as if he owns it, lives here.

A little accident—now come on.

He's unctuous, his elbow possesses the counter that was white—I remember. I had books there; my cookbooks. Now they're ashes.

I try to think what the man is getting at.

He thinks he can just wait and he'll hear what he wants. Will you look at him? He thinks he's an old hand, knows what's coming: confession.

"There was no accident," I say.

"You were cooking—you've said as much already." He throws this down, an accusation; more, his proof.

"That's right," I say.

He looks at his fingernails, bending the knuckles back: the man's way. He must have been practicing this—his timing, his stares at me, then away. I can imagine him telling it later, wherever it is he winds up: at home, at a bar; *so I said to her, isn't it true you were using an appliance.*

Oh, yes, that's when he'd got her. Around the table they nod, admiring of his skills of detection.

That's what he was—a detective.

"Look," I say, "the smoke alarm went off. I just left. Out the front door. The rest is history. The rest is ashes."

He only stares at me. He thinks he's on television, he's got his own series—*Fire!* maybe they call it.

When I heard the smoke alarm go off upstairs, I went to the staircase and thought: I'll go up, I'll go see. I thought it must be some malfunction or other—as if a fire, I mean a real fire, could not happen to me, as if I were

not that important, not that real. Even thinking about flight made me feel like a malingerer. I'd lecture myself—oh you, you're overreacting. Oh you; as if you'd have a fire.

So I hovered by the base of the stairwell, contemplating ascent; and thought finally, well, no; just in case.

And it was a good thing.

I'm not exaggerating. I was out the door, across the street in the hayfields where I looked upward to see if there were smoke coming out of the second story, when it blew up, blew into flame, like an eruption, like a lid blown off.

I thought, first off: my clothes!

Then: lucky thing I got out.

Then: there's a lesson for you.

The man didn't stop, didn't stop insinuating. He kept looking sideways at me, sly-eyed, and back again at his fingernails. He thought I'd actually started it, I knew that: and maybe he thought as well, on purpose. He wanted arson. He wanted his big break. That's what I thought: that he wanted arson.

As if I'd burn my clothes, my house, my things.

Every day I went back to try to salvage something from the fire, and every day he was there. To investigate. To investigate the site. Mostly he just leaned against what used to be the white kitchen counter and watched me sift through remains.

The third day some people from the insurance company came. Instantly they were busy with cameras, the measuring of things, the taking of samples. As much as the police detective leaned on the remains of the counter, the people from the insurance company explored, examined. Once the detective said to one of the insurance men: she was working in the kitchen you know. The man from the insurance company looked up and said, this didn't start in the kitchen, mister, it started on the second floor. And he explained how you could trace the progress of the flames, how the fire left a trail behind itself—blazed its trail, I thought; left varying degrees of disintegration, a variety of char.

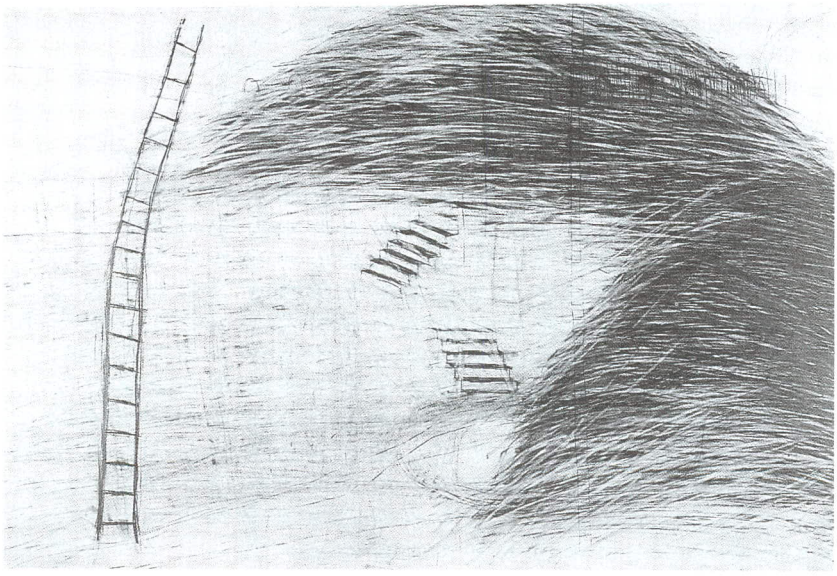
The insurance men came twice and spent a long time each time. When they'd finished they said: a mouse chewed through a wire between the walls. They said the fire had been burning inside the walls for about two hours before the smoke alarm went off, and that by then, the walls had grown so hot they'd actually exploded. They could tell this by the

fragments of wall, their shape and location—that the wall had burst rather than just burned, like a building blown up by a bomb.

These insurance men, they were like coroners, only of buildings instead of bodies, the way they could analyze the corpse of a building and reconstruct the event.

We found another house, in town. People sent money, clothes, furniture; strangers as well as friends sent us these things. My husband salvaged some papers of his although they are a permanent dark gray. Most of all I missed my clothes. But I liked the house in town so much better than the house across from the hayfields—I could walk to the general store, I had neighbors whose voices I could hear, whose faces I could see.

I liked it so much better, life got so much better, that there were times I could almost see that man again in my kitchen, eyeing me and his hands; and I almost wondered if he mightn't be right, and if I had done it after all: burned down my house, to get out of it, to save my life.



Thomas Fox Averill

Matty

We cleaned the house spotless: furniture dusted, floors vacuumed and mopped, bathrooms scrubbed. Then we started on ourselves, everything from behind the ears to clean toenails. Lined up for inspection in the kitchen, we gleamed like the Spic and Spanned floor, the Ajaxed sink. We piled into a car freshly waxed, recently vacuumed, the inside polished so that even the knob on the steering wheel glowed like a rare gem. Our mom and dad and little sister sat in the front seat of the old Hudson; we three boys sat in the back, the seat material as fuzzy and springy as our close-cropped hair. We breathed quietly, on edge because Mom and Dad were on edge.

"Well," said Dad when he backed the car out of the graveled drive. He aimed at the Union Pacific station across the Kansas River. Mom nodded, her face as solemn as an Amen in the Episcopal church. We boys nodded like Mom, grinned at each other, but did not let our lips bubble into laughter.

We were on our way to meet Mom's Aunt Matilda. She was from New Jersey, a place we invoked with the mysterious words "Back East."

"Who *is* she?" we asked the week before. "Who is she to *us*?"

"She's my mother's cousin," Mom explained. "She's the daughter of my grandmother's sister. She's one of the few relatives left on my side. She's a librarian. Pay attention to her and you'll learn a few things."

Aunt Matilda's visit to Kansas meant everything to Mom, whose family was very small and very old, and, as she told us, formal and refined: ministers, teachers, librarians. They were people, we inferred somewhere in our eleven- and nine- and eight-year-old hearts, who might disapprove of our mom's early marriage ("Why, she's only twenty!") to a Kansan ("Why can't he stay in the East!"), and her move to the Midwest ("What do people *do* there but farm?"). They would see her immediate pregnancy ("They must have conceived on their wedding night!") and prolific family ("Can you imagine having *four* children?") as signs of poor taste, or lack of control. We had to pass Aunt Matilda's inspection, win her to our side, make sure

she took only flattering remarks and positive stories to the few other aunts and uncles who would gather in a tea room in the refined East for a first-hand report.

Our parents marched us into the Union Pacific Station. We checked arrival times and headed to the track. We boys begged for coins. Dad found a penny, a nickel and a dime. We didn't care who took which; by the time the train came and went, they would be only thin disks of copper, nickel and silver.

Nothing beats waiting for a train. Anticipation hums like the tracks when the train is still miles away. The tracks themselves are so ordinary, steel bars, perfectly parallel, cold, and pinned to ties. Yet just touching a toe to one brings the greatest sensation of danger, and fear, and makes a nervous mother scold with a tremendous scowl. We placed our coins and jumped behind the line Dad made with his foot. As we waited, people lined the tracks. The porters brought out their huge, metal-wheeled carts and stood at attention. And then the hum, and the deep chug, the shrilling whistle, the train itself looming up beside the river, rushing the station with a determination impossible to stop.

The engine towered in front of us, shot past as though it had forgotten Topeka altogether. Then: the sudden hiss of hydraulics, the fizz of steam and smoke released from between the cars, the shriek of steel on steel, the staring faces of those inside the passenger cars, the quick dismount of the conductors with their squat, four-legged stools, and finally, passengers. We had seen her picture, and heard Mom's warning: "Of course she's older now." But none of us recognized the short, pot-bellied woman who lugged a suitcase as unwieldy as she was. Her face was squat and puffed, with a protruding beak of a nose, recessed eyes, her head clamped by a feathered hat. Her legs were thin as sticks.

We waited too long in our places, until the woman set down her suitcase and searched the station platform. Mom approached, extended a white-gloved hand. "Aunt Matilda?" she asked, and when she found the hint of recognition, "I'm Mary. Welcome to Topeka."

"This is it, huh?" said Aunt Matilda. She looked at the old station, at the blue sky, at us. "I thought I'd never make it. I wouldn't let them take my bag from me." She winked at us children. "Too many goodies," she said. She smiled, and her teeth were as small as ours.

We kids broke apart; the tension of waiting patiently—for the whole week as well as at the station—sent us whirling around, slapping at each other. "Kids," said Dad, "you get back here, kids."

We were at the tracks, braving the steaming, hissing cars to find the coins we'd offered to the train. We brought them to where Mom stood

talking about us. She said our names, and each of us held out a hand, palm up, to show the flattened coins.

"I'll trade you," said Aunt Matilda. "When we get home. A box of chocolates for those coins. Is it a deal?"

We nodded. "Can I get your bag, Aunt Matilda?" asked Dad.

"Matty," said Aunt Matilda.

"Matty," we said, trying something we had never called anyone before. "Matty, Matty, Matty."

"Boys," said our mom.

"What goodies are in your suitcase, Matty?" asked Beth. She was five.

"Well, you'll just see, little one," said Aunt Matilda, and she pressed down Beth's curls. They sprang back when she lifted her hand. Aunt Matilda readjusted the shoulder strap of a gigantic purse and we all followed Dad, who lugged the suitcase to the Hudson.

Dad stowed the luggage in the trunk. He and Mom and Beth climbed into the front seat while we boys, according to plan, squeezed into the back so that we left Aunt Matilda plenty of room. "Ouch," said Richard.

"Ouch yourself," said Robert.

"Ouch, ouch, ouch," we all repeated.

"Hush!" said Mom, shooting us a stern look. She had rehearsed us for Aunt Matilda's visit. We knew what we would eat for every meal, had even helped plan the menu so we wouldn't complain and ask questions every time we sat at the dining table. We knew who would sleep where, Richard giving up his bed to Aunt Matilda so that we three boys shared a room again, as we had when we were Beth's age. We knew what excursions we'd take, what hours to disappear so the adults could talk, what skills and talents we'd be expected to show off: Richard and his piano, Robert and his mighty baseball swing, Randall and his tumbling, Beth and what she called her dancing. The entire week had the same regimen as a play. We had even pretended that Aunt Matilda was at the dining table, in the chair to the left of our dad. We practiced our manners: elbows off the table; left hand in lap as much as possible; small bites of food chewed all the way and swallowed before taking another; "please" and "thank you" and "you're welcome" used more liberally than sugar and salt; more food offered to others before seconds were taken for ourselves; main course finished by everyone before a mention of dessert; a polite "May I be excused, please?" once the entire plate was cleaned; plates cleared from the table when leaving.

We had the play in mind, but not always the proper attitude. So when Aunt Matilda dropped into the seat next to us, squeezing us even closer together, and Richard elbowed Robert trying to get more room, and

Robert scooted Randall's knee against the door handle, and Randall raised his arm sharply, accidentally hammering Robert in the nose, and Robert turned quickly away, banging his ear against Richard's skull, we knew we should say "Excuse me" and "I'm sorry" and "That's all right," but we didn't. We shouted, we whined; tears popped out of our eyes. Dad turned around with his big arm and pinned down our legs.

"Sorry for the tight squeeze," said Mom, "but we didn't see the point in getting a sitter just for a trip to the station. Plus the kids all wanted to be the first to see you."

"I'm not squeezed," said Aunt Matilda.

We three boys huddled into the space of two seats to give her room. She filled her space, her purse on her lap. And she filled the back seat with an odd odor, a sharp smell like vinegar and perspiration and cats when they come in from the rain. For a proper lady from "Back East," she almost stank.

"How was your trip?" asked Mom.

"Long," said Aunt Matilda. "Who would have thought Kansas could be such a long ways from New Jersey."

"Halfway across the country," said Dad.

Aunt Matilda sighed. "Well," she said, "the longest trip is when you go where you've never been before."

On the way home, Mom told Aunt Matilda about Topeka, the department stores—Pelletiers, Crosby's and The Palace—about Washburn University and its art museum, about the newly formed Topeka Civic Theatre, about the Episcopal church we attended every Sunday. She told Aunt Matilda about Lawrence, too, and Kansas City, because we had trips planned there. "We'll show you our itinerary as soon as we get home," Mom said.

"Itinerary?" asked Aunt Matilda. "I'm not a visiting diplomat, I'm on vacation."

"We'll make sure you're comfortable," said Mom. "You can do whatever you want, and skip anything you don't want to do." Mom looked at Dad. Her face meant trouble. We boys knew about the itinerary. Like the menu, it had been typed, and revised, and typed again.

"How about eating chocolates?" Aunt Matilda said. "Does the itinerary allow me to sit in a chair and watch these kids eat chocolates?"

"Yeah," said Richard.

"Yeah," said Robert.

"Yeah," said Randall.

Beth popped up from her seat. "I want to eat chocolates, too," she said.

Aunt Matilda laughed. "You have lovely children, Mary."

"Thank you, Aunt Matilda," said our mom.

"Matty," said Aunt Matilda for the second time that day. "I want you all to just call me Matty."

"Matty," we boys said together, "Matty, Matty, Matty." Mom and Dad refused to try it out.

When Dad pulled into our driveway we tumbled into the yard like broncos out of a chute, ready to buck the cowboy of restraint off our backs. "Change your clothes before you play!" shouted Mom.

When we came in for supper, the adults were sharing a bottle of wine and talking in the kitchen. Aunt Matilda had changed out of her rumpled blue dress and wore what our mom always called a housecoat. She sat on a kitchen chair with her thin ankles propped up on another kitchen chair. She had taken her hat off, but her hair matched her hat, a tight cap, brownish-gray, like owl feathers. She held her wine glass at her chest, inches from her lips.

"Wash your hands, it's almost time to eat," said Mom.

Dinner was Mom's special menu: a huge roast beef, cooked slow, with plenty of rare meat in the middle for the adults, enough gray outside for us children; rice cooked with onion and mushrooms and beef bouillon; green beans with bacon; and a red chocolate cake known as "Waldorf Astoria" because it originated in that glamorous New York hotel. We crowded the small table.

Aunt Matilda sat where we'd practiced, but it was different from rehearsal: we'd imagined her as a regal presence, but she sat in her striped housecoat, her chin almost at her collarbone, holding onto her wine glass for dear life, still exuding that faint stink of stale perfume, of rail smoking car, of sweat, of the moldy dust that lives in ancient, rarely-packed suitcases. Mom brought steaming dishes to the table one by one, to Dad's appreciation. He stood to carve the roast beef. "Tell me when I cut the slice that looks right for you," he said to Aunt Matilda.

"Oh, whatever," she said, and the rest of us sat, mouths watering, while Dad cut slice after slice, each one bloodier than the last.

"How's this?" he asked finally.

"Anything," she said, and he dropped a piece of red meat onto the stack of plates in front of him. He loaded on the rice and the green beans and set the plate in front of her. She finished her wine and Mom stood up from the foot of the table to fill her glass. Aunt Matilda waited politely until everyone else was served, which was one of Mom's rules for us kids.

We ate like hungry boys will, our only real business being growth. Dad and Mom ate well, as they always did. Beth barely ate a scrap, but Mom had promised not to embarrass her in front of company by spending half the meal cajoling her to take one more bite of this or that. If Mom had, Beth

might have pointed to Aunt Matilda and said, "But look, she's not eating anything," because she wasn't. The old woman picked at her food, pushed it around her plate, lifted only the smallest bites onto her fork, and half of that dropped to the plate before reaching her mouth. She could hardly cut her meat, the effort seeming to exhaust her; only a quick sip of wine rallied her. Through it all, Mom tried her best with small talk.

Finally, after we boys had eaten our fill, Mom turned to Aunt Matilda. "You've had a long day. Perhaps you'll enjoy your meat more in a sandwich tomorrow."

"It's a long, bumpy ride on the train," said Aunt Matilda. "I'm just glad I made it here."

Mom began clearing the plates. We boys jumped up to help. Before Mom could bring in her Waldorf Astoria cake, Aunt Matilda said, "Now I promised these children some chocolates. Richard, go to my room and you'll find a nice big box of them on my bed. You run along and bring them back."

Richard looked at Mom. She shrugged her shoulders and shot her eyes up the stairs. Richard disappeared. He returned with a narrow box of Russell Stover Assorted Chocolates.

"Now just one each," said Mom as Aunt Matilda found the cellophane string that would break the seal. She opened the box with the expertise of a magician finding still another scarf. When she lifted the lid, some of the chocolates, melted from the long, hot ride, stuck to the paper that protected them. Others sat wilted and formless, or gooed together in their little cups. "Such a trip," Aunt Matilda frowned. "Such a long and hot trip." We were afraid she might burst into tears.

Instead, she said something we were forbidden to say: "What the hell," and she burst into a laugh that embarrassed us more than tears might have. "Chocolate is chocolate, huh, boys?" she asked. "I like the nutty ones." She scooped out the wafers stuffed with peanut candy, then went for the chocolate-covered peanuts and almonds. By the time she looked up, she'd eaten six.

She launched the box around the table. "One each," Mom said again as the box reached Richard.

Richard poked at the humped centers of what was left, hoping to avoid coconut. Finally, he picked one out of the box. A thick strand of caramel pulled away from his mouth.

"Richard," said Mom.

"I can't help it," he whined.

Aunt Matilda held up her hands as though she were five years old and just finished with a brown finger painting. "See what that train did to my

nice chocolates." She laughed, and when the rest of us scooped out soft chocolates and messed our hands and faces, and when Beth spit a chocolate-covered macadamia onto her plate, our parents were tolerant. Mom never served the Waldorf Astoria cake. Aunt Matilda went to her room before we kids did: "A long ride on a long train," she said.

When our mom and dad came into our room to say goodnight and tuck us in, Randall remembered the flattened coins in our suit coat pockets. "We promised her she could have them. Can we take them and say good night?"

"Absolutely not," said Dad.

"The poor woman's exhausted," said Mom. "She needs her sleep."

"How can you get tired riding on a train?" asked Robert.

"It's not just that," said our mom, "it's her age. She's almost seventy years old, you know."

"Is she going to die?" asked Randall.

"Of course not, dummy," said Richard. He had just reached the age where his brothers seemed impossibly ignorant, exactly like Beth was just growing out of the age where everything she did was cute. Robert and Randall were in between, without the obligation to be intelligent or endearing.

"I'd like to ride on the train," said Robert.

"It wouldn't make me tired," said Randall.

The next morning we woke up early. We tiptoed through the house being hushed by our mom, given stern looks by our dad, who would leave for work, then come back at noon with the rest of the day off. The breakfast menu was french toast and sausage, and we were starving. Aunt Matilda would not wake up.

We boys sent Beth to listen at the bedroom door. When she came back, we questioned her: "Can you hear her moving around? Is she snoring away?"

Beth shook her head.

"Maybe she *did* die," said Randall.

"Shut up," said Richard, "or I'm telling Mom."

At nine o'clock, Mom cracked Aunt Matilda's door. At nine-thirty, Mom started cooking sausage, hoping the smell would wake Aunt Matilda and the appetite she'd lost on the train. At ten o'clock, Mom went to Aunt Matilda's door. We boys stood behind her, trying to get a peek. "Breakfast time, Aunt Matilda," said Mom.

"Matty!" insisted in a voice so scratchy it sounded like a horror movie. And then, "I forgot I'm in Kansas. You get up early, don't you? Farm breakfasts, I'll bet. I'll be along."

Mom stacked french toast until it leaned precariously on the serving platter. And still no Aunt Matilda. Randall knocked on her door balancing

a cup of hot coffee in his hands. "Coming," we heard, and then the door cracked open and out shuffled Aunt Matilda in a rumpled housecoat and fuzzy slippers. Her hair was plastered to the sides of her head. She leaned for the coffee. Randall backed away. Whether from the sight of her puffy eyes, or her ridiculously thin legs, too insubstantial to hold her up, or the way she staggered along like she might fall on top of him, Randall turned and ran, coffee sloshing down the stairs.

Aunt Matilda didn't fall. She walked down the stairs like Beth had just quit doing, both feet meeting on each stair for balance. "Where did that boy go with my coffee?" she croaked.

"Randall," said Mom, breezing in from the kitchen with sausage and french toast. "That was Randall. He's pouring you a fresh cup."

"I've got to have it black and strong. I've brought beans in my suitcase if you don't have some that'll wake me up, Mary."

"Don't worry," said Mom, "Walter likes his the same way."

Randall tiptoed to where Aunt Matilda had plunked herself at the table. "Do you drink coffee?" she asked him.

"No." He set the steaming cup next to her.

"How old are you?" she asked him.

"Eight," he said.

"You must be big for your age," she said. "I'd have guessed you to be drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes by now." She lifted the coffee to her lips with trembling hands.

"Aunt Matilda," scolded Mom as she returned to the dining room with juice and a plate of sliced apples and bananas.

"I smoked a cigarette once," said Richard.

"Richard!" Mom scolded again.

"I drank some coffee, out of Dad's cup," said Robert.

"I'm skinny for my age," Randall finally answered. "Mom and Dad worry I'm not growing enough. They think maybe there's something wrong with me."

"I wet my bed last night," said Beth.

"You children just sit down and mind your manners. And quit pestering Aunt Matilda."

"Matty," we children chanted.

The old woman smiled. "They're sweet children, Mary," she said. "Now feed them so I can watch. I love to watch young people eat."

"Do you have any kids, Aunt Matty?" asked Beth.

"Never did," said Aunt Matilda. She finished her coffee in a huge gulp, like TV cowboys drink shots in saloons. "But I have you children, and my sister's two children. Of course they're grown up now. One of them is married already."

"How is Carl?" Mom asked.

We didn't pay attention to Aunt Matilda's answer. Starving, we piled french toast on our plates, drowned it in syrup, plucked sausage straight off the serving platter into our mouths, sampled the fruit, drank glass after glass of milk. Aunt Matilda took a slice of french toast and cut it distractedly into tiny pieces while she talked about her branch of the family. Her lone piece of sausage rested on her plate like an accusatory finger, pointing at her, telling her to eat up.

After we'd cleared our places, we debated in the back yard whether she'd eaten a single bite. "I saw her," insisted Randall.

"No way," said Richard.

"Not a bit," said Robert.

"But she drank all the coffee," said Beth. "I saw Mommy empty the pot."

"I saw her take a bite," said Randall.

"I saw her sweating," said Richard.

"Who didn't," said Robert. "She kept wiping her face. We all saw that."

We ran to the car when our dad came home from work. We stormed the house together. "What's for lunch?" Dad hollered. "I'm starving." He found Mom in the kitchen, cleaning breakfast dishes.

"We just finished breakfast," said Mom. "Have what's left over."

"Where's Aunt Matilda?" He put four sausages on a slice of french toast, added another slice and took a huge bite.

"Walter," Mom frowned.

"My lunch," he said. "Even if it's not on the Matilda menu."

"It was chicken salad," said Mom, "that new recipe, with grapes."

"So where is she? After her late breakfast?"

"In her room. I encouraged her to take a bath and relax before our afternoon plans." She shook her head. The afternoon was a Topeka tour: the Capitol, the State Historical Society Museum, Forbes Air Force Base, the Menninger Clinic, Washburn University. "Children," our mom said suddenly, as though we'd done something wrong, "go outside. Go run off your breakfasts. Right now."

We played all afternoon. We did not crowd into the Hudson, full of chicken salad. We ate peanut butter sandwiches when we pestered Mom, and were sent back outside. We did not see the Capitol, the Museum, the Base, the Clinic, the University. We did not see Aunt Matilda until dinner, when we found her sitting at the dining table, drinking wine with our parents.

She ate a little of her dinner: Swedish meatballs, the rice cooked right in with the meat, with noodles and broccoli. Just as Mom was ready to serve the Waldorf Astoria cake, Aunt Matilda, in her jolly voice, the one we hadn't

heard all day, called for her chocolates. "Who went for them last?" she asked.

"Richard," said Robert.

"Well, then it's your turn, young man," said Aunt Matilda. "The long, thin box this time, the one with the green stripes. Right on my pillow." Robert shot away like a space rocket.

They were chocolate mints, buttery, but with a bite. Aunt Matilda took several and passed the box. Richard tried to take three, but Dad cleared his throat and he put one back. The rest of us took two each, except Beth. When she reached for hers, Mom snatched the box and handed her one. "You didn't eat your broccoli," she said. Beth pouted, then ate her chocolate.

"One thing about Godiva," said Aunt Matilda, "it's sure better than broccoli." She pointed at Beth, who gave her a smile that showed teeth smeared with the rich brown of chocolate. Dad poured the last of the wine into her glass. She raised it and said, "Here's to your wonderful family."

Aunt Matilda slept in the next day, and the next. The itinerary, freshly typed on clean white paper, sat on the living room desk. Dad stayed later and later at work, since it was no use coming home to find Aunt Matilda "relaxing" in her room. We kids didn't care. We had Waldorf Astoria cake for lunch and afternoon snack. We roamed the neighborhood instead of being squeezed into the car and driven to boring places we'd already visited too many times.

By the end of the week, we realized we were going to miss the Kansas City Zoo. "You promised us we could go," we told Mom on the last day of Aunt Matilda's visit.

"I can't force your great aunt to do anything," she said.

"Will she ever wake up?" we asked.

"Maybe by ten o'clock," said Mom.

"Can we wake her up?" asked Randall.

"At ten you can go to her door and knock gently."

But ten o'clock came, and we knocked as loud as we dared. We stood in the hall listening to the nothing behind Aunt Matilda's door.

"Let's pretend to be animals," said Robert. "I'm an elephant." He bent over, threw his arm over his head for a trunk, and paced the floor outside Aunt Matilda's door. Every few steps he reared back and his elephant trumpeted furiously.

"I'm a lion," said Richard. He dropped to all fours and crawled the floor, head held high. He roared from deep in his chest.

"I'm a crocodile," said Randall. He dropped to his belly and snapped his teeth. He hissed at the elephant and the lion.

"I want to be a kitty," said Beth. She pranced and meowed.

Robert stood up out of his crouch. "There aren't kittens at the zoo," he said. "I wanted us to be zoo animals." He trumpeted, and raised his voice. "I want to go to the zoo!"

We meowed and hissed and roared until Mom shooed us outside. By the time she called us in for lunch, we knew we weren't going to Kansas City. Aunt Matilda sat at the table drinking cup after cup of coffee, exactly like nothing was wrong.

"When I grow up," said Richard, "I'm going to go wherever I want to go."

"I'm going to do what I want," said Robert.

"I'm going to be a zookeeper," said Randall, "and be a lion tamer, too."

"Are we going to the zoo?" asked Beth.

"Oh, dear," said Aunt Matilda, "was it the zoo today?" She tried to smile, but it was more like a pinch in her owlish face.

Richard hurried away from the table and returned with the itinerary. We weren't sure Aunt Matilda had ever seen it. He put it next to her. "Let me see," she said. But as she reached for it, she elbowed her coffee, and the cup tumbled over. The coffee streamed over the itinerary. Aunt Matilda broke into a sweat. The room smelled sour, like bad cottage cheese. Aunt Matilda tried to pat at the stain with her napkin. Mom brought in a sponge. "I'm sorry," said Aunt Matilda, "I'm sure the zoo would have been just lovely."

"It's in Swope Park," said Richard.

"It's great big," said Randall.

"It's got a train," said Robert.

"Have I ever been?" asked Beth.

"We can go anytime," said Mom.

In fact, we'd only been once. But because of the way she bit her lip, because of the wrinkles in her high forehead, because of the disappointment in her face, we didn't challenge Mom. She was just like us: we'd all waited for Aunt Matilda to wake up, waited to see if she would eat, waited to see what she'd be "up to" for the afternoon. Then dinner and chocolates and she would disappear for the evening.

That night, at dinner, Dad was jolly. It was Aunt Matilda's last night with us. Maybe he was glad. He taught us to toast, with grape juice in small tumblers. We clinked them against the adults' wine glasses as Dad said nice words about Aunt Matilda and our mom's side of the family. Aunt Matilda responded with "fine children" and "beautiful home" and "fine community. I like Kansas, too," she said.

We shook our heads. Maybe it didn't matter in a toast if you told the truth, we thought, and Richard cleared his throat in an imitation of Dad: "To all the fun we had this week." We clinked.

Robert cleared his throat. "To Aunt Matilda's chocolates."

Randall raised his tumbler. "To Mom's big breakfasts."

Then Beth lifted her glass, but she didn't have any grape juice left. She looked around at everyone, but she didn't know what to say. She thumped her glass down, ready to burst into tears.

"Thank God you didn't say anything," said Aunt Matilda. She leaned forward and poured a tiny bit of wine into Beth's glass. "It's bad luck to toast with an empty glass."

"The child shouldn't have wine," said Mom, but it was too late. Beth took a sip. She made a sour face, but she swallowed.

"I want some," said Richard.

"Me, too," said Robert.

"I get some, too," said Randall.

We gulped our grape juice and held out our glasses. Aunt Matilda sloshed a tiny bit of wine into each eager glass. We sipped it down before our parents stopped us. It was sour, and pungent, like the smell that followed Aunt Matilda around the house, but it made our mouths warm. Our tummies burned.

"More," said Richard, but nobody took him seriously.

"There is no more," said Dad.

"And I'm out of chocolates," said Aunt Matilda. "It must be getting time for me to go home."

"Tomorrow," said Beth.

Aunt Matilda went to bed right after dinner. "Long train ride," she said.

We boys went to our room at nine o'clock. We lay in the dark, trying for sleep, but we were keyed up, as though we were the ones traveling on the train the next day. "Your bed is going to be full of cooties," Randall said to Richard.

"Shut up," said Richard.

"I wouldn't want to sleep in your room after she's been in there. It stinks," Robert said.

"Yeah, it stinks," said Randall. It was the revenge of the little brothers, the two who had to share a room jealous of the one who had his own room. "She's probably in there snoring away and filling the bed with her cooties."

"She gave us chocolates every night," said Richard.

"She sat around in those old floppy clothes and let out a stink," said Robert.

"She ran out of chocolates," said Randall.

"I bet she didn't," said Robert. "I bet there's a bunch of them. She's just saving them for the train."

"I wish I had one," said Randall. "Right now."

"Me, too," said Robert. "I'm not sleepy anyway."

"I dare you to go look," said Randall. He slapped his hand against the side of Richard's bed.

"Why should I go?" asked Richard. "It's not my idea."

"It's your room," said Robert. "You can go in looking for something. A book, or your slippers or something."

"I won't go unless you guys come with me," said Richard.

"Mom and Dad will catch us," Robert said.

"Yeah," said Randall, "the more of us, the more we get caught."

"You're chicken," said Richard. "You're just scared to go in there when Aunt Matilda's asleep."

"Am not," said Randall.

"Are too," said Robert. "You're afraid she'll wake up and catch you and eat you up. You're afraid she's a witch."

"You're afraid she's a zombie," said Richard. It was the revenge of the older brothers, the two who were supposed to be brave taunting the youngest for his cowardice in order to build up their own courage.

"I dare both of you," said Robert, the middle brother trying to play both ends off each other.

"We all go, or nobody goes," said Richard. "I don't even care about chocolates."

"Chicken," said Randall.

"Double chicken," said Robert.

"Triple chicken," said Richard. He stood up out of bed. We tiptoed down the brightly lit hall, past our parents' bedroom. We stood outside Aunt Matilda's door. We bent down, placed our ears to the thin wood. We heard the rhythm of caught breath followed by the short rasp of a snore. Richard reached for the door handle, and we quietly spilled into the room. A crack of light from the hall creased through the room, revealed the shadow of Aunt Matilda's suitcase next to the bed, closed up like some huge sleeping turtle, revealed part of the bed, part of her. When we looked, to see if she was still sound asleep, we were amazed. Lying in her bed, still in one of her old housecoats, she seemed unnaturally short, shrunken up. Her feet were so tiny they might have been a child's. Her most prominent feature was her mouth, wide open, catching, then rasping breath.

As we approached the suitcase, each of us broke the light, made a momentary shadow cross Aunt Matilda's face. She moved slightly, her body shaking like a dog's when it dreams. We stopped, terrified. Her smell

engulfed us, a sour smell, like the insides of our mouths after drinking wine, before we brushed our teeth. We hurried to the suitcase. Richard bent over it and reached for the snaps. Robert put his finger to his lips. Randall crouched behind, holding his ears, as though that would help silence. When Richard released the clasps, they snapped up with the sound of a turtle biting the air. We waited, forcing ourselves to breathe. Richard opened the suitcase. Right on the top was a thin box of chocolates. Robert started to turn back, pushing Randall, but Richard grabbed his arm. Richard dug into the suitcase and pulled up two more boxes of chocolates, one with stripes on it like the mint box Aunt Matilda had shared with us earlier in the week. The other was thick, the kind that opened like a book.

We could have left then, but Richard dug some more. This time, he found something hard and gleaming when he held it, something that clinked against the first when he picked up the second, something that shattered the silence of the bedroom when he dropped a third onto the second in the pile of Aunt Matilda's frumpy housecoats and underpants. The striking of glass against glass made a thundering toast. We knew the liquid inside the bottles was something people toasted with, that Aunt Matilda had probably toasted herself in her room night after night, or in the early morning when she wouldn't come out. Richard tried to bury the bottles, but they made too much noise, as bad as marbles in a bathtub.

Aunt Matilda turned to the wall, then onto her back again. We trembled, but she didn't open her eyes. When she settled back into a snore, we saw that one flap of her housecoat, which was unbuttoned halfway, had fallen away from her body. One of her thin legs was exposed, bare all the way up and past her waist.

Randall stopped breathing. Robert turned away. Richard stood and stared, because none of us boys had seen before what we saw then: the mound of pubic hair, thin and disheveled, the naked thigh, the dark space between Aunt Matilda's legs.

Who knows how long we would have stayed in the bedroom, staring and not staring, frightened and curious. But we thought we heard a noise in our parents' room next door. We ducked down. Richard dropped the boxes of chocolate into the suitcase, but he didn't bother to snap it shut. We ran out of Aunt Matilda's room.

"Boys," Dad said. His head peeked out from his door.

"We had to go to the bathroom," said Richard.

"All three of you? At the same time?"

"Yes, sir," said Robert.

"Really bad," said Randall.

Dad smiled. "Well, go to bed. I don't want to hear another peep out of you boys tonight."

We did as we were told.

On the way to the train the next morning, the one morning Aunt Matilda actually ate some breakfast, the car was as quiet as our bedroom the night before, when each of us lay wrapped in sheets, and in thoughts we didn't share. And we stood quietly on the platform waiting for Aunt Matilda's train to charge the station. None of us could look at Aunt Matilda, so we stared down the tracks to where distance forced the parallel rails together.

When the train finally rumbled toward us, Aunt Matilda, dressed in her very best, looking again like a traveler and not a wrinkled bird in a housecoat, turned to us. She set down her handbag and pulled out a box of mints. "I was wrong," she said. "I rummaged around in my suitcase and found more chocolates. For you, boys." She offered the box to Richard. When he reached for it, she clamped down on his hands. "Just one thing, young men," she said. She looked at our mother and father and we gulped. Richard stood beside her, his hand on the box of mints. Robert and Randall wanted to run, anywhere, up the tracks or down. But finally, as she wanted us to, the three of us looked Aunt Matilda in the eye. "You boys never gave me those coins you promised me," she said.

"Coins!" shouted Richard.

"Yeah, coins," repeated Robert.

Randall reached hopefully into his suit coat pocket, then grinned. He pulled out the flat piece of copper, and we knew we would find our coins, too. We hadn't been anywhere that whole week, not church, not to Kansas City, nowhere we could wear our best clothes. We offered what had been a dime, a nickel and a penny to Aunt Matilda, and she let go of the chocolate mints. We ran in circles as fast as we could, relieved by what she had demanded of us, relieved by what she hadn't said to us, and to our parents.

"You and Walter have a lovely home." Aunt Matilda nodded definitely, so that her feathered hat almost wobbled off her head. "And a lovely family, too."

"Thank you so much for visiting, Aunt Matilda," said Mom, but she sounded like the minister after church.

"Please come again, Aunt Matilda," said our dad, "anytime."

"Matty," said Aunt Matilda. "How was I to know you'd be so formal out here in the West?" The train hissed, the conductors set out their stools, people disembarked around us. Aunt Matilda took one last look at Mom, then backed towards the passenger car. "You've been good to put up with me," she said.

Our parents stood silent, waiting.

Aunt Matilda turned to mount the stool. Beth pumped her short legs into action. "Matty!" she shrieked, her voice so loud we imagined Matty was one of her dolls with its head under the train wheel. Beth almost tackled Aunt Matilda with an extravagant hug. Mom peeled her away, and Aunt Matilda slowly climbed into the train. Her slip showed three inches of white below her knees. When she turned for a final wave, she looked one last time at us boys. She crooked her finger and shook it at us. "You boys eat those mints one at a time," she said in perfect imitation of our mother.

"No!" said Richard.

"All at once!" shouted Robert.

"Thank you, Matty," yelled Randall. He waved furiously.

The old woman disappeared into the train. We hurried to the Hudson. On the way home, Richard tore open the box of mints. Mom didn't say a word. Each of us took as many as we could lift out. Richard passed them up to the front seat, but only Beth took any. We boys finished the box before Dad pulled into our drive.

We were glad to be home, to be stuffed with chocolates, to know what we knew. We were smug, in our innocence, to think we were the only ones who knew it. We ran into the house, screaming.

"Matty?" yelled Richard.

"Matty?" shouted Robert.

"Matty?" screamed Randall.

But, of course, nobody answered back. Nobody said a word.

Leslie Pietrzyk

To Be Like That

Louise slides her legs to a cool part of the sheets. Jillnoon still sleeps; Louise touches her bare shoulder, but she doesn't move. If Louise forgets to call later from the office, Jillnoon will sleep until one or two in the afternoon.

She spends a moment easing the confusion out of her mind. Some kind of dream about seashells, something unconnected. An unfinished fragment of someone else's dream maybe; maybe Jillnoon is dreaming about those same shells now.

Louise gets out of bed. On her way to the bathroom she loops Jillnoon's terrycloth robe around herself. The curtains dangle open because after Louise goes to bed, Jillnoon "lets in the night" so she can write. Jillnoon is a young poet. Her name used to be Jill Masters, but she changed it to Jillnoon Lasky. Her first book of poems, *Spike and Heart*, is scheduled to appear in the fall, issued by a small press in Wisconsin. The title poem is Louise's favorite—a poem about building the transcontinental railroad. It's the idea of spanning the country that Louise likes, making the edges accessible to those living in the middle. The poem is dedicated to her, but that was done even before she said how much she liked it.

Louise was born in the middle, in this city, and she stays. Her daughter Bridget lives with her ex-husband Marty in one of the northern suburbs by the lake. Marty's new wife, Anne, picked the house because she liked the garden of Grecian statues in the backyard, Bridget reported. Louise wonders whether it was the statues' elegance or their tawdriness that seduced Anne.

She turns on the hot water in the shower. She and Jillnoon share the kind of apartment where, as Jillnoon says, "Hot water is an untested theory." Sunlight randomly roams the apartment's odd nooks; Louise likes those nooks and the way they fill with scattered sun. The day she and Jillnoon moved in, before unpacking the boxes that crowded the floor, Louise tapped her knuckles along the walls, listening for the hollow spots that

might mark secret cubbyholes. "Nancy Drew would have found an abandoned cache of emeralds or a mysterious leatherbound diary," Louise explained. Jillnoon said, "All you did was give headaches to a few roaches." They laughed, and together they emptied box after box, combining their belongings as dorm roommates would. Jillnoon bunched the sunny corners with statuesque plants; Louise lined the walls with her black and white photographs of the steel mills in Gary, Indiana. The prints are deliberately grainy, pressing more grit into the twists of smoke pumping from each thin column, the orderly sprawl of metal-gray buildings, the unsmiling faces trying to hide under hard hats.

Louise has converted the walk-in closet in the second bedroom to a darkroom; she prefers it to the modern, spacious room she had in the house where she and Marty and Bridget once lived. It seems long ago. Back then she spent her free time photographing leaves floating in ponds, waves washing away sand. Old women waiting like props on park benches, resting their feet.

Louise pokes her wrist into the stream of water. Still cold so she brushes her teeth at the sink, keeping her movements slow as if polishing diamonds in an heirloom setting. She likes to brush her teeth, likes the way toothpaste bubbles up along her tongue. No one she knows enjoys brushing their teeth—not even Marty, who's an oral surgeon. Their first conversation revolved around teeth. "My front teeth are so big that in sixth grade, four others were pulled to make room for them," she told him. "I insisted that my mother save the teeth in a plastic box. I thought I might want them back some day." Marty had laughed and inspected her mouth. Then he kissed her.

Bridget has the same large teeth. "Gross," Bridget would say to the suggestion of saving teeth in a box.

Louise rinses her mouth with water, then spits into the sink. Jillnoon leaves behind toothpaste dribbles at the bottom, near the drain. "They're so easy to rinse away," she reminds Jillnoon many times, "really."

Jillnoon has never been married. Louise thinks that might change. Jillnoon's still young and likes children, so she might want to marry one day. Certain things about Jillnoon seem ephemeral. Signing the lease in pencil. "I wasn't thinking," she'd said with a loose shrug. "I write poems with pencil." Louise shrugged. So she'll break the lease and I'll be alone. She's my lover, not my life.

Today Louise is meeting Marty for lunch. He was vague when he called yesterday—he plans things far in advance and maintains a coded organizational system of books and calendars, so there must be something major about this unplanned meeting. Something about Bridget because there's nothing else in common now.

She was married to him for thirteen years; ten of them could be called happy. Divorced two years ago.

Rather than one big bang break-up, theirs was a slow dissolution. She thinks of a photograph soaking, the first patch of gray slowly emerging. Only moments later the whole picture appears, obvious and uncompromising. Respective partners are super-imposed images added later, giving dimension like clouds in a previously blank sky.

The water is finally warmish and, shedding the robe, Louise steps into the shower, pulling the curtain shut behind her.

The choice to move away from Bridget and Marty wasn't easy. But to stay would have been to deny the vastness of her unhappiness. Louise's unsuburban actions scared away her old acquaintances long ago; her new acquaintances, friends of Jillnoon's, claim to be shockproof. Both groups seem happy to have arrived at their agreed-upon codes of behavior.

When Louise first moved in with Jillnoon, Marty tried to keep Bridget away from her. Now Louise is allowed to see Bridget on Wednesday nights and Saturdays. They go to galleries where Louise hopes to show her photographs someday or to ethnic neighborhoods overflowing with exotic smells and foods, or sometimes they go to parts of Gary, Indiana, to take pictures. Bridget uses one of Louise's old cameras; Louise plans to give her a camera for her birthday in June.

Bridget likes Gary, and Louise is happy to know that. "It's a real city," Bridget says. "A real failure," Louise says. "Like a dinosaur. Don't romanticize the truth out of it. You've got to recognize what it is." Bridget says she'll live there some day, and Louise doesn't tell her she won't. Bridget also tells her that Anne thinks Gary is dangerous. Louise laughs when Bridget says: "I guess she thinks honesty is dangerous."

Jillnoon and Bridget have met many times and are friends. For Career Day at her school, Bridget invited Jillnoon to speak to the sixth-graders about being a poet. Louise knows that Anne thinks Jillnoon is more dangerous than the city of Gary. Anne thinks Bridget shouldn't be exposed to that sort of thing. While Marty is not happy with Louise's present life, he has accepted it. "Anne will never accept it," he tells Louise over and over, though she believed him right away the first time he said so. Anne refuses to meet Jillnoon.

Louise is glad to be a mother and not a step-mother; a lover, not a spouse.

What she thinks of now when she thinks of marriage is a recurring nightmare she used to have. It takes place in the shower: As the water sprayed onto her body, she scrubbed herself with a loofah. Though she could see her skin flake off as the sponge passed over her body, she scraped

harder and harder because she couldn't stop. She'd finally wake up, hands rubbing the sheet along her legs. Louise has not had this dream since moving away.

She quickly rinses the conditioner from her hair and turns off the water. She stands in the shower for a moment, letting dribbles of water trickle the length of her body. Then she steps out, reaching for a towel.

"How about a promotional celebrating our millionth résumé?" the advertising manager of Louise's print shop chain asks. "A sign like McDonald's: 'Over 1 million printed?'"

"I don't know," Louise says. "Have we done a million? If we have then I'm sure plenty of other places must have."

"Does it matter? We'll be the first to make a big deal out of it. It'll really go over big. We'll start a trend."

"I don't know," Louise says. The manager, just out of college, impatient to "start a trend," is marking time before heading to Madison Avenue. Why do they all expect to start a trend out of college? "Write up the details in a memo. I'll see."

"Great!"

"But no flashing neon. Something subtle."

"It'll be on your desk by the end of the day." She leaves Louise's office.

Marty bought a print shop for Louise when they were married, but she's since paid him back and expanded the first store into five. Marty wouldn't accept the interest due on the loan though she insisted. Finally, she added it to Bridget's savings account.

Jillnoon used to work as a typesetter at one of Louise's shops, and before they became involved, Louise almost fired her for working on her own poems instead of Harold Straub's rush-job résumé.

The photographs of machinery on Louise's office wall were taken by Bridget. "The blurriness makes them more interesting," Bridget explained. "So they look less like regular machines and more like how you want them to look."

Time to meet Marty. Louise pulls on her trench coat. She'll take a cab downtown. Marty works in a hospital by the lake. His whole life seems to be engulfed by water. He met Anne on a chartered flight to an island Club Med.

Driving is slow because her cabby is a novice, unaccustomed to mowing through lines of pedestrians, continually surprised by intruding vehicles. He moves like a slug down his lane, frequently glancing back as if expecting to see a trail of slime.

He leaves her at the restaurant's door and she tips him more than he deserves. He blinks quickly, then eases the cab into the traffic, turning the

wrong way onto Clark. At one time she would have immediately thought to work this into an amusing story for Marty.

The restaurant, Marty's favorite, overflows with businessmen and their billowing conversations. Its reputation rests on inexpensive, authentic German food. The waiters are curt. Louise wouldn't choose to come here herself, but Marty always asks to meet here. "It's convenient," he explains.

"Louise." Marty, suddenly behind her, pokes his finger into her spine. "How are you?"

"Good," she replies. "Yourself?" This restaurant, with its solemn entrées and walls loaded with ornate beer steins and carved cuckoo clocks, makes her economical with her words.

"Great." He offers a brief, stiff smile. "I have a table. Over here," and he leads her to a place by the window. He's already eaten one piece of bread—she knows the basket always, always contains five slices, and theirs has only four. He helps her take off her coat, which she slings over a chair. "You look good."

"Thank you." She opens the menu. This restaurant claims to have invented the sauerbraten sandwich; it is a permanent lunch special.

"New dress?"

"Not really."

"I've never seen it."

She murmurs a nothing-word. Her new clothing continues to surprise him. As if he thinks she timelessly languishes on a shelf between their meetings.

A waiter, barely civil, takes their order.

"Well," Marty says, jabbing his finger into his glass of water, a habit he's always had.

"How's Anne?" she asks.

"Oh, good. Her firm has a big case. The Thompson thing. Maybe you read about it in the paper."

"Sure. And Bridget?"

"She's trying to decide on a project to enter in the Science Fair."

"I thought she was building a volcano."

"Half the sixth grade is building a volcano."

"Too bad," Louise says. "She was excited at the prospect of all that erupting mud."

"Boy, what a mess." Marty reaches for a piece of bread. No wonder he's gaining weight, she thinks.

"I don't know how to say this," he says. Then he stops and looks at her.

Louise watches as he butters his bread. The butter is in a bowl of ice so it's hard, and Marty ends up with crumbles. "Well?" she says.

"Well. Bridget invited her friend over, the one with the red hair. . . ."

"Andrea."

"Andrea, right, invited her to stay overnight Saturday. No problem there. They watched TV for a few hours, giggling like maniacs. Then they went up to Bridget's room, still giggling. The usual. You know how girls are."

"Yes."

"So we think everything's fine until Anne pokes her head in the bedroom to tell them there's popcorn downstairs. We were watching a video, and she made a big batch, way too much for the two of us."

"Yes."

"Both Anne and I thought you should know."

"Know what?"

"So Anne pokes her head in the door and sees the two of them sitting on the bed kissing each other. Bridget's got her arms wrapped around Andrea's neck; Andrea's grabbing all over Bridget. Anne couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe it when she told me."

"What did they do when they saw Anne?"

"They were embarrassed. They stopped. Of course."

The waiter brings them pea soup, pulling spoons from his apron pocket. Marty seems relieved at the interruption and does not speak.

Louise sips her soup, warm as the water from her hot water faucet, and wonders what she is supposed to think, supposed to say. She never read Doctor Spock's book. She knows Marty wants to see her looking guilty, claim the blame. He finishes his soup quickly, tilting the bowl to fill his spoon with the last dribbles.

Finally he says, "Well?"

"What did you say to Bridget?" she asks.

"Anne was so shocked she couldn't say anything, just told them about the popcorn. Acted like she didn't see."

"It's a normal phase for girls," Louise says. "Really. It is."

"When I talked to her later, Bridget told me they were practicing kissing. For when they start going out with boys."

"See," Louise says. "I wouldn't worry. It's no big deal."

In passing, the waiter grabs the soup bowls off the table, and they grind in his hands.

"Anne thinks Bridget shouldn't see you anymore. That you encourage her to be like that."

"That's ridiculous. That's utterly ridiculous."

"Is it?"

"I'm her mother." Louise's napkin falls to the floor. She does not pick it up.

"Would the courts think it's ridiculous?"

"I don't believe this," Louise says. "A simple kiss between two sixth-grade girls. If she were kissing a boy, no one would be concerned. I wouldn't have been summoned like this." She pauses. "I want to talk to Bridget."

"I think you should. Anne and I are very upset about the whole thing."

"I don't believe this," Louise says again, and she sets aside Marty's outburst of directives: Tell her this, explain that, make sure she knows. . . .

It probably is a phase, Louise thinks, like triple-pierced ears. And even if it isn't. Even if it isn't, who's to say what's right—not Anne, not Marty. If it's so bad, what does that mean about me? But it's a phase, nothing more. And if it isn't? "Excuse me," she says to Marty, standing, interrupting him. Her mind is caught on a cubist canvas—all angles at once and none clear to her.

She walks downstairs to the telephones and calls Bridget's school, leaving a message for Bridget to meet her on the school steps at 3:00.

On the way back upstairs, she overhears someone call, "Shelly!" and that makes her remember a patch of her dream this morning. Stacks of seashells along the high tide mark in the sand. Stacks and stacks, in neat piles, and it was her job to photograph each individual shell from every angle. But she only had a wide-angle lens.

It's a phase, she reminds herself.

When she returns to the table something immersed in drippy gravy has been deposited at her place at the table. "I guess I'm not hungry," she says, and she and Marty talk of the weather and the impending baseball season and somehow fill up the rest of their time together.

Before leaving to meet Bridget, Louise telephones Jillnoon, punching the buttons of her own phone number as if they're a secret code. The phone rings and rings; she has the feeling someone is hearing but not answering, and just as she is about to hang up, Jillnoon says, "Hello?" Her voice is skimpy, something the wind could shake loose. "Louise?"

"How'd you know it was me?" Louise asks, curious though not surprised.

"I was just coming in, and I heard the phone through the door while I was looking for my keys. Who else would keep a phone going for eighteen rings?"

"You counted?" Louise says, imagining Jillnoon standing outside the door, her bright lips moving as she counts, becoming so linked with the sound of the phone that she forgets to dig through her purse for the ring of keys.

"More or less."

Now that she has Jillnoon's attention, she doesn't know what to say. There are rehearsed explanations, pleas for advice, but those words are too sharply in focus; they don't interest her now that she's talking to Jillnoon. She thinks of Jillnoon's face, of how her nose crinkles at the top when Louise says something funny.

"What do you do when you know you're right and the rest of the world thinks you're wrong?" she asks.

"Shout it from the rooftops," Jillnoon says without a pause for thought.

Two thumps come across the phone line, and Louise sees Jillnoon pulling off her boots, letting them drop to the wooden floor, settling herself into the rocking chair in the corner next to the phone. Jillnoon does not know what it is like to not have an answer. Louise cannot be so bold. Such a quality could carry a person in unexpected directions. Surely that's not all bad?

"What if you're not sure that you're right?" Louise asks.

"How could you not be sure?" and it seems to Louise that Jillnoon understands what she's asking. "All you need to do is look at what's right in front of you." Despite Jillnoon's wispy voice—or perhaps because of it—the words become something solid, something to hold onto.

Louise thinks of what seems long ago: Bridget was six, maybe seven, and Marty took them to the top of the lighthouse in Evanston. The tour guide—"chipped teeth," Marty whispered—droned like a revolving fan, fact after fact. How many hundred stairs. How many hundred feet. How many hundred ships. The blue in the sky was wide and long, distracting. Then Bridget begged to jump into the pile of crackling brown leaves far below. She waved to the man who was raking; maybe he'd beckoned? Marty touched her shoulder—"too far down," he told her, calm, "look"—and Bridget cried. Cried and cried until Louise wished the lighthouse were not so many hundred feet. She couldn't think of how to explain so many hundred feet to Bridget.

"We're going to Evanston," Louise tells Bridget and the cab driver. "To that lighthouse." Bridget, who has informed Louise that she is missing a mandatory after-school play practice, shrugs. The cab driver turns around.

"I never heard of no lighthouse in Evanston," he says.

"On Sheridan Road," Louise says.

The cabby drives fast, passing car after car. Louise rolls down the window. Loose newspapers on the floor flutter, and Bridget holds them down with her feet. The cab curves into and along the road.

"Does Anne know not to pick me up?" Bridget asks. "She was going to get me after rehearsal."

"She knows," Louise says. "Your father told her." If he remembered.

"We're in Evanston," the cab driver says. "I don't see any lighthouse."

"Keep going," Louise says.

They wait at a red light, and Louise admires the college students passing before her. The jumble of brightly colored sweaters spilling across the street reminds her of stones on a beach. She has read that this school is known for its academic programs. Her advertising manager attended this school. Marty already talks about where Bridget will go to college. "This will be the back-up school," he says, "in case she doesn't get into Princeton or Harvard." Can Bridget feel the weight of these expectations?

"Andrea's sister goes to school here," Bridget says. "She's in a sorority, and she showed us the secret handshake. We promised not tell because it's a secret, and she could get kicked out of the sorority for telling."

The cab driver says, "I bet for a million dollars you'd tell me pretty fast."

"Show me the money first," Bridget says. The driver laughs.

"Smart kid," he says.

The light is green, but they wait for one straggling student to cross the street before pulling forward.

Bridget seems the same, and Louise wonders what drastic changes she's looking for.

"Quit staring at me, Mom, you're giving me the creeps."

At the next traffic light the cabby asks, "What's at this lighthouse? Why're you going?"

Does he ask all his passengers why they choose their destinations? Because my ex-husband's new wife thinks I'm turning my daughter into a lesbian and I want to know if she's right.

"We need to get off the ground for a while."

"Yeah, getting some perspective," he says as they continue north. "I can relate, you know. But my fares are on the cement."

"How will I get home?" Bridget asks.

"Don't worry," Louise says to Bridget. "I haven't ever left you stranded, have I?" Then, "Turn right here."

"Oh, *this* lighthouse." The cab driver pulls into the gravel parking lot. "Yeah. I've been here."

Louise hands him money. "See you later," she says, guiding Bridget out of the cab.

"Sure," and he's off, his cab skimming along the surface of the road.

The Association of University Wives, Louise, and Bridget stand on the catwalk at the top of the lighthouse. The guide explains how important the lighthouse was, how the ships depended on seeing its light. Then she talks

about how the lamp worked, how the keeper had to climb the 206 steps carrying two buckets of kerosene. "That would keep you careful not to spill," says one of the women. The guide seems miffed, as if her best line has been stolen.

The air is chilly. Louise scans the lake, searching for something to indicate that the dream this morning was really hers. She doesn't know what she wants to say to her daughter. Bridget knows the facts, is forming the opinions.

"I wish the lake was as blue as the sky, don't you, Mom?" Bridget says. "Wouldn't that be cool?"

Louise nods. The University Wives call down to a gardener on the ground who does not hear them. A gull drops into the shimmering lake.

"Look," Bridget says, "that's Gary." She points to a small, unfocused shadow to the south. "You need your camera."

"I've never seen Gary from so far away," Louise says. "It looks like nothing."

"Clear today, isn't it?" The guide moves next to them. "It's not often this blue." She stands, smiling proudly, then her loud voice begins to gather everyone together for the descent. "Come along, there's another group waiting to go up."

Before Louise speaks she wonders, What will Bridget think of me? How will I change in her eyes and how permanently? and she instantly sees her selfishness. I'm Anne and Marty, posed like Greek statues, looking for things that Bridget only sees in her out-of-focus way. Gary and Jillnoon. Bridget will choose neither. She speaks quickly, "You shouldn't be kissing your friends that way."

"What?"

"Nothing," Louise says. "See how the sky and water mingle along the edge. I want us always to be like that."

Laurel DiGangi

Bang

I don't get mad at dogs when I step in their shit, I get mad at their owners, and that's sort of the way I feel when I find my ex, Steve, passed out in the hallway in front of my apartment, blocking the door. Steve never had an owner, not even me, but like a half-wit mutt he could never stop himself from doing stupid things. So I'm mad at my neighbors—sober, college-educated Evanstonians who, thinking the person ringing the front door was delivering their pizza or groceries, pressed the buzzer that electronically unlocked it.

Steve looks quite peaceful, actually, propped up against my door, legs spread out in front of him, head flopped to one side. Reminds me of a stuffed teddy bear lamp I saw at a girlfriend's baby shower. The bear was stuck to the lamp's base by a velcro strip, and I imagine this strip down Steve's back, holding his limp, boneless body erect and firmly attached to my door, like if I opened the door he'd slide along with it, upright. I do what I imagine many women would when given the opportunity to examine an unconscious ex-boyfriend at close range. I consider his thick unstylish moustache, lobster-red sunburn (which he always assumed was an attractive tan), and string of slobber juicing down his chin and think, "Yuck! I used to do *him!*" I almost say it aloud. Then I check his wallet, which is easy to do since it's fallen out of his pocket, along with a pint of Peach Schnapps and a snotty red bandanna.

My picture's still in it, a year after our breakup: Steve and I sitting on his ma's plastic slipcovers, my hair long and poufy, like he liked it. There's pictures of his ma, sister, nieces, nephews and even his German Shepherd, Tracey, who was half-dead when I knew her. No driver's license—probably lost it in a D.U.I.—and no credit cards either.

If there were phone numbers inside I could probably get Steve's sister to haul his ass out of here. I don't even know her last name now that she's remarried that chicken-truck driver (another drunk—it's a *familial* disease they told me at my first and last Al-Anon meeting, meaning that women with

alcoholic daddies emanate invisible rays that harpoon alkies into their lives) and besides, I can just hear Janice suggesting that I "let him sleep it off."

I momentarily consider this option. I do live on the top floor, and the loud guy across the hall almost never uses his front entrance. Steve could wake up feeling quite foolish and leave quietly. Only problem is I need to get into my apartment. It's four in the afternoon and I've got to prepare for my first date with a studly folksinger.

This looks like a job for the cops. I don't call from my neighbors' since I'm too embarrassed to tell them Steve's my ex, but by the time I walk to Seven-Eleven I realize I can hide this fact, even from a 911 operator. I claim a totally strange derelict is blocking my doorway. They ask if he's armed, and, feeling cocky, I say I'm not sure, that maybe there was something sticking out of his pocket, but I was too afraid to look. By the time I jog back there's already two squads pulling up in front of my place. Damned good timing, since I can't trust my neighbors to buzz in folks they're actually supposed to.

I let in two cops with my key, surprised at how much they look like Steve with their farmer tans and beardless moustaches. They don't have their guns out, like I hoped they would, and bound up the stairs two at a time. They call Steve "Bud," as in "stand up, Bud," and "You don't wanna be carried like a baby, do you, Bud?" Hearing Steve's moans and mutters brings back memories, and even though I can't see him, my mind's eye is providing the visuals. He's doing his waking drunk routine, eyelashes fluttering, head lolling from side to side, and when he says "hold your horses" in that silly little boy voice like the whole thing's one big joke, I know the cops must be lifting him up.

I listen to their slow descent down three flights of stairs. Steve keeps saying "Slow!" or "Whoa!" and the cops are laughing, glad to be hauling a stupid, unarmed drunk, instead of a violent one. I hide behind the building and peek through the gangway at the rest of the show. Steve's cooperating but he's too wasted to climb the stairs into the paddy wagon and is trying to crawl in. He braces one knee against the wagon floor but each time he tries to boost himself up it slips. The cops literally push his ass inside the wagon but his legs are jutting out the back, kicking—a clumsy flutter kick, like he's learning to swim. The cops are laughing, and so am I.

But the studly folksinger, whose name is Aaron, is not amused. We're at this fake health food restaurant in Rogers Park where old hippies smoke Marlboros and drink carrot shakes at outdoor tables and you can buy bottles of sterilized urine to fake out drug tests in the adjoining food/

book/crystal store. Now I know it's against common etiquette to ramble on to first dates about the faults of ex-lovers, but Steve reappeared only hours ago and my two best friends had their answering machines on and I've got to tell someone. Besides, Aaron's just spent the last half-hour talking about how his next guitar has got to be a Martin because they're top of the line and that's what Dylan plays. So I interrupt his second description of spruce tops and mahogany necks to relate this incident. I flop my wrists back and forth, imitating Steve's frantic kicking, while Aaron sips his cappuccino. He wipes milk foam from his mouth and says, "You think that's funny?"

Because Aaron has curly black hair, stunning blue eyes, and a half-way decent body—especially for a musician—I defend myself.

"They weren't hurting him."

"You don't know that," he says, cupping his chin in his hands and pulling back his skin in what must be his typical pose of stunned disbelief. "Why'd you call the cops, anyway? He wasn't threatening you."

"He was blocking my door!"

"Couldn't you ask a neighbor for help?"

I'm passive-aggressively refusing to continue this conversation when our heavily bearded waiter interrupts with a flourish. "Enjoy!" he says, and plunks down two styrofoam plates bearing pita bread sandwiches. The bread's so stale it cracks when I lift it and loses most of its filling. Shards of famished alfalfa sprouts catapult to my sweater, but Aaron's oblivious to my problems. "I need to understand this," he says, like we've got some lengthy relationship on the line. "Why couldn't you just let him sleep it off?"

"He owns a gun!" I say, with such drama that anyone knowing me would spot the pretense. Aaron is transformed. He sits up straight and leans forward, his eyes widening and possibly turning a shade bluer.

"You shoulda told me," he says.

Steve always wanted a gun, but never got around to buying one. Each winter when he and his fellow bricklayers suffered massive layoffs he'd drive a leased cab part time and become obsessed with personal safety. One year about a week before Christmas, during one of his AA-inspired sober spells, he dragged me to a gun store in this ritzy northwest suburb. It was probably one of those frigid Sunday mornings when Steve ignored my strokes and kisses, and, yearning to be productive, dressed quickly, took us out for breakfast at his favorite no-name greasy spoon, and visited the hardware store before it closed at noon to pick up whatever he needed to tune up his sister's van, rewire our old floor lamp, or plaster a hole in his mother's ceiling.

Guns always scared me, but a long afternoon drive beats the hell out of sitting under a ladder drinking weak coffee with Steve's mother while he

plasters. The gun store's across the street from a children's boutique and kitty-corner from an Episcopal church. There's a holly wreath on the door that obscures several manufacturer's decals. The customers are all men, either cops in uniform or guys in frayed flannel shirts, grubby down vests and clay-caked work boots. The salesman looks like these guys, only cleaner, and hovers over the glass counter case asking, "Can I help you?"

Steve knows nothing about guns all he can say is, "I'm uh, looking for a gun."

"First-time buyer?"

Steve nods in embarrassment.

"Whatta ya want it for? Self-defense? Target?"

"Yeah, uh. . ."

"Both?"

"Yeah, both."

"Watcha lookin' to spend?"

"Not much."

The salesman hands him this plain gray gun as flat and unshiny as slab of concrete.

"That's two-eighty-five marked down from three-and-a-quarter," he says. "It's not pretty, but it's durable."

Steve asks if he can pull the trigger and pretends to shoot at his feet. I'm no longer intimidated by this place—it's no different than a jewelry store, really—and I like examining the guns in the cases. So many in one spot—chunky, lean, round, square, big, little.

"That one's cute," I say, pointing to a pearl-handled snubnose, and Steve says, "You want one too, babe?"

The salesman puts it in my hand and it feels pretty good.

"A mousegun!" grunts one of the customer cops. "Leave those to the collectors."

The salesman ignores him. "It's a Colt twenty-two. Perfectly reliable, if you know how to use it."

I extend my arms, spread my legs and aim for the longest Winchester hanging from the back wall.

"Bang!"

Of course Steve never buys his gun, never sends in his application for firearm owner's I.D., and I never encourage him. He could get pretty depressed when he was drinking and jobless and it was bad enough coming home finding him spread out on the sofa sipping Schnapps, listening to Neil Young sing "Helpless" and crying over this stupid Rita bitch he broke up with two years earlier. I didn't need to see him with a gun to his head.

The folksinger doesn't work out either. He keeps staring out the restaurant door like maybe Steve's gonna burst in with his sixshooters drawn, or like maybe some babe who's got dibs will discover him here with another woman. The latter seems more likely, now that I'm told he's got a gig here in half an hour, at this same fake-healthy restaurant which fills up with chain-smoking folkies on Saturday night.

"I've got this new song you gotta hear," he says.

"I met you last night," I say. "They're all new songs." But he doesn't understand my sarcasm.

In earlier, masochistic times I'd probably stick around 'til the last set, just to get snippets of attention during breaks and hopefully more when the show was over. But tonight I wait for Aaron's tribute to Dylan and during "Positively Fourth Street" I wave my hand in a corny "bye-bye" gesture and leave.

It's only nine o'clock and I don't feel like going to my safe suburban apartment. Instead I drive past Steve's old haunts: Jasper's on Wrightwood where I met him, the Clark/Diversey singles bars where he'd start the evening and the no-frills blue-collar taverns where he continued until dawn. I'm wondering whose doorstep Steve is sleeping on tonight, whose doorbell he's ringing in pursuit of a drinking buddy. I think about his binges, how I'd conduct extensive telephone searches, clucking my tongue in unison with his sister Janice, who'd say, "you know how Steve is," and "he'll show up in a few days." I even cruise past her house, looking for Steve's car, although I don't know what he's driving or even if he's driving. I've got plenty of time and nowhere to go yet I feel rushed; I clench my teeth at each stop sign or one-way street. I remember how desperate I'd feel when Steve would disappear. Back then I'd come home from my searching and pray to find him sleeping on the sofa. It was my last hope. Tonight I pull up in front of my building wondering if he's sleeping in my hallway. Not that I want him to be. I'm just curious.

I climb the stairs slowly, not wanting to care. But I reach my landing and smell Schnapps—some must have spilled—and the memory of Steve and I sitting in the bleachers at a Cubs game becomes vivid. The night air was unseasonably cold; Steve took off his windbreaker and wrapped it around my goosefleshed arms, rubbed his big hands on my back and said, "I'll warm you up, babe."

This thought is too dangerous; it deserves to die. I aim my hands at the landing where Steve lay only hours ago.

"Bang!" I say, loud enough to make the dog across the hall bark.

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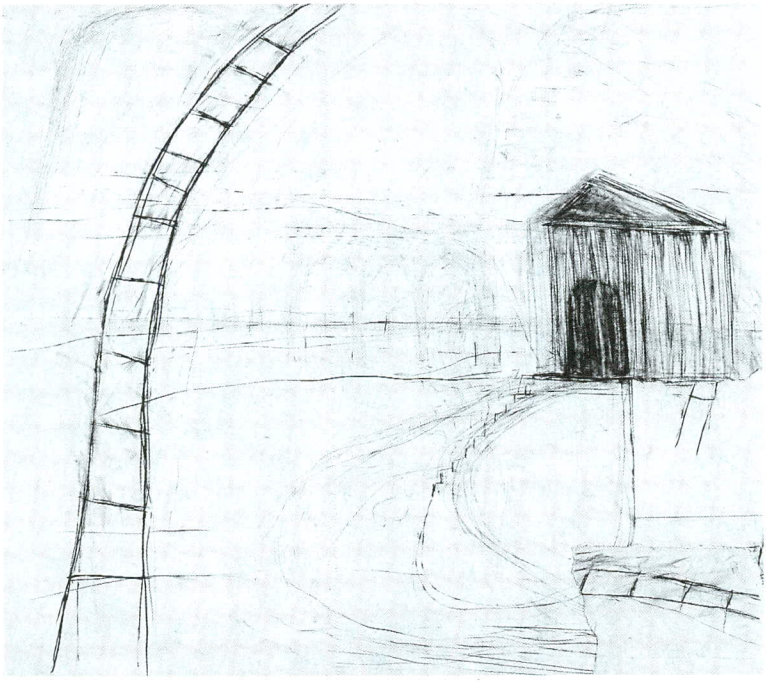


Gloria Vando

An Interview with Gloria Vando
Conducted by Philip Miller

Gloria Vando is a poet, editor, publisher, and an important contributor to the national literary community. Vando, who has lived in New York City, Puerto Rico, Europe, and presently in Mission Hills, Kansas, was educated at Texas A & I University—Corpus Christi, New York University, the University of Amsterdam, and Académie Julian in Paris. She was the editor of *Helicon Nine*, the literary magazine of women's arts and letters, and is now publisher of Helicon Nine Editions, which publishes poetry, fiction, and creative non-fiction. She is co-founder, with her husband Bill Hickok, of Kansas City's The Writers Place. Her work has won many awards, including the Billee Murray Denny Poetry Contest, the Kansas Governor's Award (for *Helicon Nine*), the Thorpemenn Book Award, and the first Artist Fellowship in Poetry from the Kansas Arts Commission in 1989. Her poems have been widely published in such places as *The Western Humanities Review, The Kenyon Review, The Seattle Review, New Letters, Stiletto One,* Milkweed's *Looking for Home,* and *Kansas City Outloud II.* Arte Público Press published her book *Promesas: Geography of the Impossible* in 1993.

Philip Miller interviewed Gloria Vando on March 16, 1994, at her home in Mission Hills, Kansas.

Philip Miller: You were born in New York City?

Gloria Vando: I was born in New York City and did my junior year in Europe and stayed another year and studied art. I got married—I was still in school—and went back to NYU, had two children, Lorca and Paul; and then we moved to Texas, Corpus Christi, which was gorgeous, a lot like Puerto Rico. My third child, Anika, was born there.

PM: While you were in New York, you spent summers in Puerto Rico after you were twelve.

GV: Yes, because my grandmother had moved back there. I grew up with my grandmother. We spent summers there. At that point my mother and stepfather had bought a coffee farm, and we had to oversee it. Because of the climate, I had horrible asthma. I would pray to God I would die.

PM: Spanish was your first language?

GV: Oh, yes. My grandmother wouldn't speak English. The Americans were the "enemy." Her father was the person who took down the Spanish flag when the Americans marched into Puerto Rico in 1898. Thirty years later she found herself stuck in the United States, on the mainland, and sort of out of place. And I grew up with her and all of her stories about her life as a Puerto Rican.

PM: And this, of course, has become a part of some of your poetry.

GV: A part of my *life.* I actually inherited her attitudes about a lot of things. Although unlike her, I became politically active very young.

PM: And later you moved to Texas?

GV: Yes. In 1962—just in time for the Bay of Pigs invasion. There was a naval base in Corpus Christi, and we were sure the Russians were going to blow it up. We were sitting targets.

PM: Had your writing begun by then?

GV: Oh, yes. I started writing when I was around fourteen, really seriously writing. I loved it. My mother had a houseful of books so I grew up reading. I read constantly. One funny thing that happened when I was about fifteen: I came home from school, and there was a little note from my mother that said, "This is not an appropriate book for you to be reading." The title was *The Fleshpots of Antiquity.* I had *not* been reading it; someone else had. I immediately went and read the whole book—wow!

PM: And you moved from Texas to Kansas City.

GV: We came to Kansas City in 1976 when my husband (at the time) became the conductor of the Kansas City Philharmonic. In between, we lived in New York City where I worked for Mayor John Lindsey.

PM: Which of the three places was the most productive?

GV: I've never been so productive as I have been in Kansas City.

PM: Do you think it's Kansas City?

GV: I think it's my age too—a combination of things. I think the climate in Kansas City is more conducive to doing your own work. New York City is tremendously troublesome—just to buy something at the grocery store is a headache. Here, most things are easier to do. Your energies can be devoted to your work, not fighting traffic and subways and people. It's urban, but relaxing and kinder. This is not to say that I don't like New York—I *love* it. But it is hard living.

PM: What made you choose writing over another art like acting or visual art?

GV: I studied art for many years. I went to Music and Art High School—the first arts magnet in the country. In order to get in, you had to pass a citywide competition. But my heart wasn't in it. Then one day while I was

walking home from my friend Nina's apartment in Washington Heights, I reached the top of this hill and looked down at the city. I was so overwhelmed by what I saw that I sat down underneath a street lamp, got out my notebook, and wrote a poem.

PM: Do you still have it?

GV: Yes. It's only borderline embarrassing: "Dusk has come. Darkness has enshrouded the city." It was fun, though. But I felt so good after I had written it that it made me want to write more. And I was very lonely.

PM: You're an only child.

GV: I grew up as an only child. I have a sister who's about my children's age. All my friends lived up in Washington Heights, and I lived way down on 89th Street. It was not a happy time of my life. I went to sixteen schools, so that gives you an idea of the lack of permanence in my life and friendships.

PM: You mentioned you grew up with your grandmother.

GV: Yes, but I don't really remember much of my childhood. Maybe it was happy. I can't say one way or the other. My grandmother was witty. She punned. She was well-read. She loved Dumas, Hugo, Maupassant, all those French writers who were forbidden by the Catholic Church. She read them anyway, sneaked them out of the house, and when I was little, told me about them. She always read to me or told me stories. And I'm in love with that tradition.

PM: And you knew two languages.

GV: As soon as I went to school, I had two languages. I had the pleasure of stories in English *and* in Spanish. The stories in Spanish were very grim, like Grimm's Fairy Tales, where terrible things would happen and everyone would die. My grandmother also told me about her childhood and how things were at the turn of the century—she was born in 1880. And of course the way things may have been were very nice for her, but not for many of the people of Puerto Rico. It is difficult for me to describe this because Puerto Rican people are not of one mind. The *jíbaros*, the peasants who lived on the mountains, and the workers who lived in the town, were abused by the Spanish. There was "society," those with the power, who had it all very well. When the Americans marched in, the society represented by the Spanish was destroyed. The workers said, "Ah, we are going to be emancipated from the Spanish." But one tyrant replaced another. So everyone was unhappy, but for different reasons.

PM: And so the heritage from your grandmother?

GV: Since her family was in society, her world toppled. Her son, my Uncle Carlos, became an Independentist and joined the workers. And he had a tremendous influence on me also. And my father went with my uncle,

too. The rest of my mother's family remained part of the system. Their children are teachers, doctors, in business.

PM: So you have lived in two different cultures with two different languages?

GV: Yes, definitely. I would say in two different social structures. My grandmother would always say, "We're not *poor.* We just don't have any money." Whatever her financial circumstances, she always considered herself part of "society." That was the point of the poem "Fire," which takes place during the Depression, before I was born. Yet she was the first society woman in Puerto Rico to work, so she was a feminist on top of that. She became the island's first trained telegrapher. She traveled throughout the island teaching young women the Morse code. She had a tremendous sense of self-empowerment. And when she didn't like something she either changed it, or she just got up and left. It happened with her husband: she didn't like the way he behaved, so she took her two younger children, got on a boat, and fled to New York City. This was the pioneer spirit, the same spirit that brought the Spanish from Spain and all the people who came to the United States.

PM: *Promesas: Geography of the Impossible* is your new book of poetry.

GV: I'd been writing poems, a lot of different poems, and all of a sudden, I started seeing a certain theme in many of them. Part of it was a certain longing, a kind of sadness because I didn't belong anywhere. I was always looking, either in religion, which I never found, or in the culture. I traveled always with one foot in New York, the other in Puerto Rico, one foot in society, the other out picketing. I was as at home in Spanish as well as English. These factors fought each other, but they enriched my life.

PM: Then "Geography" represents your point of view.

GV: The point of view of the people who came to this country, looking for gold in the streets, the "Lands of Cockaigne," the promises of food and safety and opportunity.

PM: Would you say that these poems have three kinds of time: a distant past, your own and your ancestors' past, as well as a sense of the present?

GV: Yes, that's true. When the Spanish went to Puerto Rico looking for the Lands of Cockaigne and found this idyllic island—Puerto Rico—which means *rich port,* it was just the perfect place, the place they'd been dreaming of.

PM: You allude to "The Land of Cockaigne" in your book's epigraphs.

GV: Yes that's a medieval poem about a paradise, a utopia, which, of course, is unattainable—hence the "impossible" in the subtitle.

PM: Would you say your poetic style has evolved?

GV: The poems in the book range in time. Some were written as long as twenty years ago. And I rewrote quite a lot. I'm still rewriting and the

book's already published. Poems never seem to get finished. Well, sometimes they do. Sometimes you look at a poem, and you say there's nothing more I can do. I have gone as far as I can. Sometimes I have a cynical bent in my work, an edge—where if I go in one direction I want to twist it around, show the other side. I can't do Pollyanna.

PM: But here are some poems that surrender more to their subjects. You have more than one persona.

GV: I think there *is* a dichotomy in my work where I have these warring voices. And I do argue with myself. It is very easy to go in one direction or the other, but that is never the whole truth, never the answer. For example, you do have a land of freedom, but you also have the homeless. And both elements are always there. In your peripheral vision, you are always aware of this other view, and to deny it and not see it is to see only half of what's there. So I do go in and out. Sometimes, however, it doesn't make for a good poem. I have to be very hard on myself.

PM: Are tensions harder to work out?

GV: Yes, and sometimes they interfere. I have taken things out of poems because I've felt that even though something may be meaningful, it doesn't always work in the poem. People talk about truth. I don't know about truth, but you do try to make something work as art or as close as you can get to it.

PM: You don't seem to be a bit afraid of a poem that goes three or four pages like "Fire" or "At My Father's Funeral." In the book, you establish a rhythm between the longer and the shorter pieces—tightly written ones like "Moving Pictures."

GV: I think subject dictates length and style. For example, I used to have a hard time not rhyming. I used to have to force myself not to rhyme. Even internal rhyme: it was always there, and the rhythm was always there. But now I'm having fun with it and not hiding it. If I do rhyme, I'm having a good time. I like the challenge of puzzles, of working out specific beats and line endings.

PM: And subject dictates rhyme and rhythm.

GV: I never decide to rhyme anything, but if I find that happening, especially slant rhyme, I go with it. Stanley Kunitz described the process of writing as "word begets word," and in a sense that's true for me. I've never sat down and said I would write a poem about this and this and this. Either it comes or it doesn't, and if I can sit down and write the whole poem through, that's a terrific luxury. If I just write the beginning and get interrupted, I often can't get back to it. You lose the rhythm, the voice that propels you forward.

PM: Are you working on a new book?

GV: I had two. They arose simultaneously. The first one was closer to being finished so I concentrated on that. *Promesas* is about my childhood and is quasi-autobiographical. This other one is more about life in general.

PM: Have you written poems in Spanish?

GV: Yes. And my mother has translated some of my poems into Spanish. Her translations are sometimes better than my poems. She's very good. Although I must say the language sometimes changes the emotional tone of the poem. Words take on different emotional connotations. Spanish on the whole is softer, more sensual. It caresses the reader. We are not shy about endearments. My grandmother called me "*cielito,*" which means "little sky." On the other hand, we are also much more formal. Older people are addressed in the polite or formal voice—*usted*—and called *Don* and *Doña*—even family members. There is a very distinct, observable hierarchy of relationships, and, consequently, language.

PM: I want to talk about your important contribution not only to the local, but to the national literary community. But first I want to ask if your community activism helps you or distracts you from your work—or both.

GV: Both. On the one hand, it is very stimulating to be in a community of writers. As I said, I'm a lonely person, lonely in that writing is a lonely occupation, and for me, it is extremely important to be around other writers who are like-minded. But when you have too many things to do to make something happen, when there are, for example, the gallery at The Writers Place, The Writers Place itself, Helicon Nine, the contests, the books I am publishing—then my own writing tends to suffer. I've had terrible problems saying no. I finally said, "No." Someone asked me to judge a poetry contest and for the first time, I said, "No. I just literally cannot do it." And I felt *terrible.* And I've asked myself why it's so hard for me to say no, and I think maybe it's a hangover from childhood, that if I'm not nice, I'll be sent back to boarding school or something like that!

PM: Were there turning points in your life?

GV: Sure. One when I was in Europe, and I read Stephen Spender's autobiography, *World Within World.* He wrote that almost as bad as the Nazis and their atrocities was the world's "lack of horror in the face of horror." Here I had been defending the neutrality of the Dutch. And this one line hit me so hard my whole thinking changed. Not about pacifism, but about the responsibility every individual and every nation has—to face what is happening and to do something about it. It was a moral call to arms for me. There was another incident that influenced my *writing.* I grew up under the heavy influence of T. S. Eliot and Yeats. I thought at the time that since I could never write as well as Eliot or Yeats, why bother? What kind of ego do you have to have to even think of publishing? Then one day I was talking

to Virgil Thomson. I asked him why Nadia Boulanger had been such a great pedagogue, and why American composers had gone to Paris to study with her, and he said, "Because she gave me permission not to write like Beethoven, because she encouraged me to write like Virgil Thomson." And I went over, threw my arms around him and kissed him. It was liberating! I figured if he could do it with Beethoven hanging over his head, perhaps I could, too. Maybe not on the same scale, but it didn't matter. The point was, you had to do it.

PM: In "At My Father's Funeral," you write: "My father, a free thinker, who/insisted I be reared like him." Was your father a writer?

GV: He wrote for the Spanish paper. He was the New York correspondent. And he had a political satire column. He also founded the Spanish Theater in New York City. When Arte Público published my book *Promesas*, Nicolás Kanellos had just written a book about the Spanish Theater, and that's where I found out my father was its founder, and a playwright, and an actor. My father also founded the Puerto Rican PEN, and my mother became president years later. He earned his living, however, as a chemist.

PM: In one of your poems you write: "My mother cunning yet innocent / grabbing the new moon by its promise. . ." She was in show business, I believe?

GV: She was an actress, singer, dancer. She had her own dance company. But now she's writing and winning awards like mad. She was the Poet Laureate of Puerto Rico. It seems, everything she enters, she wins.

PM: You founded *Helicon Nine* magazine in 1977?

GV: Yes. It was inspired by *The Paris Review* and other small magazines, and the fact that a lot of women were not getting published, and there were few, if any, women editors and publishers. When I came back to Kansas City, I called all my closest and dearest friends and said, "Let's start a magazine." And they said, "You're crazy." And I said, "No. We're going to start a magazine. And you're going to be the art editor, and you're going to be the poetry editor, and you're going to be the fiction editor, and we're going to do it." We held an auction, and we auctioned off *everything*. We had Leonard Bernstein, Eubie Blake, Alice Neel, and Virgil Thomson sign the backs of director's chairs. We had paintings, cartoons, photographs. We raised $14,500 and did our first issue. The price-of admission to the auction was a subscription. Incidently, the first issue sold out in a matter of months.

PM: Did you have the name then?

GV: Yes. We had thought of *Venus Envy*, but that was a little too feminist, too much of a joke. One of the reasons I founded *Helicon Nine* was that when I went to school in the '50s, there was no mention of women in

any of my courses. I studied medieval literature, and the professor, Lillian Horenstein, a woman, never mentioned Christine de Pisan, who had been required reading for the Knights of the Round Table in France. When I grew up, knowing I was going to be an artist, I kept meeting artists, women artists, and realized something must be wrong. Surely there had been women artists all along. We would compare notes and talk and soon came to realize there was a whole bunch of women from Sappho on, and maybe earlier, who were doing marvelous things. They had not been recorded because history was being recorded by white middle-class men, mostly. And they would record the important events in *their* lives, which involved other men, not women. Founding *Helicon Nine*, I thought, would make it possible for my children to grow up knowing they were a part of such a feminist legacy.

PM: So *Helicon Nine* had a feminist perspective?

GV: Yes. It was non-political, though. We wanted to focus on women's contributions to the *arts* rather than on politics. There were other magazines—such as *Calyx* and *Heresies*—doing that. We wanted to bring to the attention of readers the works of women throughout the ages. I wanted it to be multi-disciplinary. Everything was so compartmentalized, and I thought it was important to have a dialogue between artists, to see what artists in different disciplines were doing, so as to understand and appreciate them. Another reason was that I would meet people—I was traveling a lot then because I was married to a conductor—and I would meet women and I would say, "What you are doing reminds me of what my friend is doing in dance, and I would love to get you two together."

PM: Could you give me an example?

GV: Yes, Ann Sperry was working with sculpture in New York. Philomene Bennett was working with painting here in Kansas City. Their sensibilities were similar. They reminded me of each other in their working habits, their philosophies about art. I had another friend, Judith Norell, who was a harpsichordist. She said she would like to do an article about the composer Elisabeth Jacquet de LaGuerre. I said, "Who's that?" And she said, "That's the problem. Nobody knows." She had been the darling of the Louis XIV court. They minted a coin in her honor. She would have been the court musician if she had not been a woman. Norell sent the article and a tape, and I thought, "My Lord, why can't everyone listen to this?"

PM: And that inspired the famous *Helicon Nine* with the record insert?

GV: Yes. I think also the idea behind *Helicon Nine* was to create a "salon in print." Where you would invite artists from different disciplines to perform or talk.

PM: And you published hundreds of artists over ten years.

GV: Yes. And in every artistic discipline: literature, dance, music, theater, sculpture, architecture—we featured Kansas City's Mary Rockwell Hook, the second woman ever to be admitted to the Paris École des Beaux Arts. She designed a house in Kansas City where Hemingway once wrote a novel. By the mid-'80s, the new feminist art movement and art criticism had gotten very strong. Women in music and in the other disciplines had begun publishing their research and excellent anthologies and encyclopedias were coming out. It no longer became necessary to continue what we were doing. That's when we branched out and started publishing books.

PM: Which is what Helicon Nine Editions is doing now.

GV: When we started publishing the magazine, we wanted to give a real sense of each artist by presenting a portfolio of her work. So we only had twelve artists in the first issue, maybe nine or ten poems by each poet. But then toward the end we began to get so many submissions it got crazy. We started adding more and more artists until we were publishing one poem per person, and found ourselves doing what everyone else was doing. Trying to accommodate everyone became impossible.

PM: And you shifted from magazines to book publishing in 1990.

GV: In 1990 we did the anthology—*The Helicon Nine Reader*, and in 1991 began publishing the books that had won the national competitions we sponsored: the Marianne Moore Poetry Prize, the Willa Cather Fiction Prize, and the Virgil Thomson Creative Non-fiction Prize. We got too few submissions for the non-fiction, so we abandoned that contest. And now we have Woods-Colt press doing creative non-fiction. The winners of the first poetry and fiction contests, by Biff Russ and Rosmarie Kinder, were both first books. The poetry judge was Mona Van Duyn. While she was judging, she won the Pulitzer. Later, when we asked her to inaugurate The Writers Place, she became Poet Laureate of the United States.

PM: And that first Helicon Nine Contest reading with Mona Van Duyn brought one of the biggest audiences I've seen in Kansas City.

GV: Yes, a nice, attentive audience. And Robley Wilson, who was the first fiction judge, also read.

PM: I know you have some new books coming out from Helicon Nine—David Ray's new book, *Wool Highways*, for example.

GV: Which just won the William Carlos Williams Award sponsored by the Poetry Society of America. Last year we published Judy Longley's book of poems, *My Journey Toward You*—Richard Howard was the judge for it; Regina De Cormier's *Hoofbeats on the Door*, which was a runner-up for the first contest; and Ellen Bache's *The Value of Kindness*, which won the 1992 Willa Cather Fiction Prize. Right now I'm about to publish Anne Whitney Pierce's *Galaxy Girls: Wonder Women*, another first collection of stories, and last year's Fiction Prize winner.

PM: I know you are continuing the contests. Does Helicon Nine have any new publishing plans?

GV: Yes. We're publishing *Feuillets*, which literally means "little leaves." They're one-poem or one-story books, inspired by the need for fine literature in a small package. I felt that really good things were getting lost in anthologies and magazines. Years ago, newspapers used to devote half a page to fine literature. It was called the *feuilleton*. They would draw a line through the middle of a page, and at the bottom, present poems and stories. Then they stopped doing that. And so this will be our way of attracting people to fine literature, people who might not find it otherwise. The covers will be designed by local artists. The books will be hand-sewn, signed, limited editions, and sell for a song.

PM: Are you asking for submissions or soliciting?

GV: Soliciting. I'm going to try it out here in Kansas and Missouri. And if it takes off, I'm going to open it up, and maybe use writers from all over. I'm also planning to publish another book, *Nights with the Angel*, an anthology of poetry on alcoholism and recovery, edited by Victoria McCabe, Janice Hayes, and Rawdon Tomlinson.

PM: You are also co-founder with your husband Bill Hickok of The Writers Place, which is your newest project. Just what is The Writers Place?

GV: It is a literary community center for writers and readers. To me, it is a place in the community that everybody is welcome to use and be a part of—with a focus on literature.

PM: How did it come about?

GV: Well, Bill and I had been looking for a long time. I had heard about the Poet's House from Elizabeth Kray, who founded it with Stanley Kunitz. Here in Kansas City, writers would hold readings at the Artists Coalition, or at this or that restaurant, and after the readings, there was no place for us to go, or to call *our* place.

PM: By *our* do you mean the literary community's place?

GV: Yes, the literary community. Theater people had their theaters, visual artists their galleries—everyone had a place except writers. We didn't have someplace to call ours, where we could put our books so others could read them. The library of The Writers Place is an extremely important part. What good is there having a book if it's not available to the public? And most small press books certainly aren't included in most libraries or bookstores. So now we will have our own library and bookstore.

PM: And the bookstore will specialize?

GV: In regional books and magazines and books by members as well as one-of-a-kind art books and hand-made books that really can't be found anywhere else.

PM: You and Bill had searched a long time for such a place?

GV: We'd been looking and looking, and then Ann Hyde, a real estate agent, called and said, "I have it. The castle—I've found a writers' castle." And we saw it and that was it. It was love at first sight. It was the right place: you can get there by bus, car, you can park, it is well-lit, it is in the middle of town. It is an area that is changing for the better, getting new galleries. The Uptown Theater is almost next door. There are nice restaurants nearby.

PM: It's two blocks west of the Uptown Theater across from the Valentine Shopping Center.

GV: Yes. But sounding the place was nothing compared to what then went on. What happened was that a whole group of writers (mostly puny poets) got together and made this place work. We cleaned, we scrubbed, we painted, we built. And from all of this emerged this wonderful idea.

PM: For the record, what does The Writers Place provide?

GV: The Writers Place offers, besides refuge and stimulation and excitement, a gallery that shows print-related visual art. It presents readings: poetry, fiction, creative non-fiction; performances and music. In the basement, we even have a life study drawing class. And various writers' groups meet there regularly—for example, the Cowtown Playwrights Salon, the Blockheads, and others. Every so often Wyatt Townley offers a Yoga course there.

PM: Workshops?

GV: Workshops, panel discussions, an annual book festival. It's a living, breathing entity—and we have a browsing library where you can sit around and read books.

PM: Is there a governing board?

GV: There is a Projects Board of Directors and a Development Board. Judy Ray is our indefatigable and gracious Executive Director.

PM: And besides Writers Place-sponsored workshops, presentations, and readings, you also offer space for others.

GV: Right. Riverfront Readings at The Writers Place presents its series; Rockhurst, Helicon Nine Editions, *New Letters*, Woods-Colt Press, various community colleges, have all presented readings, workshops and programs. UMKC Continuing Education classes are given there. It is very much an integral part of the community. Soon, The Writers Place will be presenting programs with the Academy of American Poets, for their touring series.

PM: John Hollander is coming soon, I believe.

GV: Yes, the Academy is sending him to us. We hope to establish ties with other literary organizations across the country and have a really national network, including touring writers and programs.

PM: You are also putting out a monthly literary calendar.

GV: And a newsletter. The calendar is monthly and will eventually be statewide, probably including events in Kansas and Missouri. The newsletter, *The Keep*, is being edited by Donna Trussell, and Carl Bettis edits the calendar.

PM: How does one become a part of The Writers Place?

GV: You join. It's $25 for a year's membership, $15 for students. You can become a friend for $100 and so on. There are discounts for all members at events and at the bookstore. The $25 is a bargain, and not only does it pay for benefits, but it makes you a supporter of The Writers Place. $100 membership also gets you an additional 10% discount at Whistler's Books.

PM: Future plans for The Writers Place?

GV: We want to plan ahead so we can apply for large grants. We are audiotaping programs, videotaping some. And they will be available. We plan to apply for a grant for a Writers Place cable TV show. We also want to initiate our own on-going workshops. And we plan to continue our Schools Programs which have included nearly all Kansas City high schools. We have been bringing students in to meet panelists from different disciplines. We had a city-wide high school poetry contest, and the winners read at The Writers Place. We are doing workshops for them, showing them how to improve their writing and how to present their work. Ann Slegman has spearheaded that.

PM: And The Writers Place also sends writers out to the schools.

GV: Yes, and we will continue to do all these things. We are only a year and a half old.

PM: How do you feel about The Writers Place's progress so far?

GV: It's wonderful. I want to jump up and dance.

In the Crevices of Night

There's a man in my dream
a man with a hatchet
ransacking my bureau
hacking at the doll asleep
in the bottom drawer.

A bloodless ritual.

He calls himself a surgeon, says
he's up on the latest laser beam
techniques. I know better.
I know the jig's up.
Youth is waning and the end
is closing in on the beginning—
a telescopic fantasy focused
on dismembered limbs, a glass eye
rolling across the parquet floor,
tiny fingernails scattered
in my underwear scratching
at the obscenity of early death.
But not a drop of blood. Not a cry.

I turn from the dream
and pressing my body to yours
reach for you
across the thin ice of night.

On this Day I Think of the Widows

February 14th

On this day I think of the widows
who awoke before dawn and planned
a morning of strenuous exercise,
five times around the mall
until the stores open, then new
linens for the bed, a down pillow
or two, scented paper for
the closet empty in the hall.
An afternoon of cleaning windows
and attics, discarding clothes
snug to the point of pain.

On this day I think of the widows
who busy themselves in kitchens,
clanging pots and pans like tocsins
warding off despair, who dedicate
an hour before tea to scouring
grease off burners on the stove,
who fall to their knees, as in prayer,
and wax each linoleum square
until it glows and they can see
reflected in its speckled gray their
own neglected faces. On this day

I think of the widows, my friends,
who fall asleep exhausted at day's end,
the television hawking its relentless,
heartless lies: promises of love undying.

Ode to Your Back

The days wrap themselves around me
like worn shawls.
I am cold, always
on the point of shivering.

Nights come stunted and maimed,
undernourished children
with no place to go.

This night I dream of happy
endings: the hero, turbaned, rouged,
made up with heart-shaped lips, penciled
brows, married to the ingenue
to keep her safe because he loves
is not in love with her and

wake to find us, you and me
and the war-orphaned babies in London
who died from lack of touch
and my own chilled body moving
moving in close to the heat

of your back. Your back.

Father's Day

This time his father takes him
to the Liberty memorial,
a World War I monument
overlooking the city. In single
file they climb the spiral
staircase, the boy's legs
straining to reach the last step.
Swell way to spend a Sunday,
his father had said, and
the boy feels proud to be
on top of the world with his dad.
The man leans over as if to kiss
him, the boy lifts his face
expectantly—suddenly he's upside
down and before he can resist
his father's fists around
his ankles he's dangling over
the side of the tower, dangling
like a tangled marionette above
the coaxing ground, his red
jacket, like a spurt of blood,
coating his head and arms
as they bang against the granite.
Coins from his pockets sprinkle
the earth with tiny setting suns.
You can always trust me, son—
his father's words bruise the air—
always, you hear? He feels
his heart pummeling his eyes
and ears, warm urine caressing
his chest. *Yes, Daddy, yes—*
he cries back, his voice
threadbare over the shivering
treetops—*yes, yes*—trying
to penetrate his father's glazed
senses—*yes, yes*—hoping
to reassure him once and for all
so he will stop having to prove
his love.

Witness

The robins are blind drunk again,
the hawthorn tree just about bare.

They stagger through october air,
slamdunk their bodies every now

and then into a windowed version
of themselves, sprawling stunned and

out of sorts on sill and deck—then
like good sports, hurting and dazed, they

rise and start again as though each
berry offered life not death. Two

blue jays on a nearby elm observe
the birds' debauchery like

wary relatives or friends shoved
to the sidelines of affection,

powerless to scold or coax or move
this other species that they love.

An Act of Love

In memory of Bob Townsend

> "Some get high on drugs,
> my satori is bread."
> —from the film *Diva*

I smell fresh bread—
yeast, I think you said—
and remember you always
in the act of kneading,
your fingers pleading
with the dough, coaxing
it into fleshy breasts

and thighs, then pressing
down, flattening it out
with the heel of your hand,
then breast again until
it resists your will,
holds together like skin.

To make bread, you said,
is a blessing, a way
of coming to grips with God,
with dread. To give bread
is an offering of love,
bearing with it
the smell of the earth and
of the baker. I feel

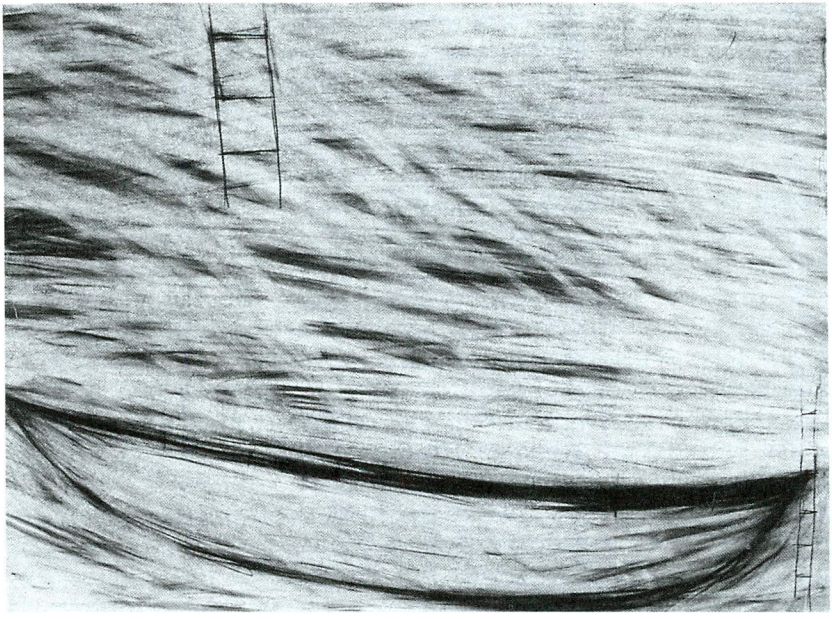
that, too, as I push and
pull the taffy-like dough,
kneading it until it doubles
in size, triples, grows
so huge it can feed
the multitude, feed the soul,

bring back the dead.

Blanca's Red Lips

This wedding in Lawrence,
is like most others except when it's over
the bride and groom get a standing
ovation, as if they were the ingenues
in a hit play with a happy ending.
An earlier wedding intrudes and I see
my friend Blanca jumping up and down
like a small child chanting *Yes! Yes!*
the groom's cheeks puffed with laughter,
the priest asking the congregation
to joining him in a round of applause for
this special couple who, after ten years
of equivocating and playing the field,
chose to play it safe and get saved, *saved—*
and Blanca, her mouth a perfect oval of joy.
Then my sister's shower a year later,
the male stripper gyrating hips against air,
women snapping telephotos for a closer
look in the privacy of their own lens,
and Blanca, that same glaring smile,
ululating at his hard, false promise—
already knowing, even then knowing—
and we too busy asking tired questions
about babies and when, as though
we had a right to know, and just weeks
later my daughter's voice on the machine,
sobbing, sobbing,
Blanca's red lips seared into my memory.

for Blanca, who died of AIDS



Reviews

West of Mass by Jim McCrary. Lawrence, KS: Tansy Press (1031 Maine, Lawrence, KS 66044), 1992. 71 pages; $8.00; paper.

One of the best, most recent publications to come out of the Kansas Magic Realism School is Jim McCrary's *West of Mass.* True to the heritage of ritualistic regionalism that gave us vortex landscapes where the episodic nerve was wired to fast association, the Hobohemian experience of the beanery and the tough, flat *noir* of Belle Starr and Salt Chunk Mary live again. After all, the Turk left Coronado stuck out there, and every good magician knows how to create a legend when nothing else is happening.

It is no wonder that William S. Burroughs lives in Lawrence and encouraged this production. The illustrations by S. Clay Wilson will alert the readers to what scenes may follow. "Hippy Jim" might now be drinking red beer at Sporty's, with a half-white Kickapoo, but we still taste the flavor of the old Rock Chalk Café, or the years and names before that which keep that realism wired, as in his description of the Dalton brothers putting on a show in Coffeyville: "The term wired / applied to any other than / Emmett, Bob, Grat and Bill / is ludicrous. Look it up, pal. Look it up."

He asks the reader for the freedom that clarifies kicks . . . or there's always Charlie Starkweather, or Bat, or Jessie, or those hair-triggered legends of his poems. He deliberately pushes pathos to the flash point where he gets inside the "wired" and doesn't just ingest wired as a metaphoric caffeine/amphetamine past-beat familiarity, but rather a metaphor for the magic realism like in the wires that the storm left sparking and shooting around on the ground, as if he "Can't lay anything down / there is no down left."

Though some of McCrary's poems require that special Kansas wild, esoteric humor to fully appreciate, most of them bring it right home, as in his "S&L Updated," in which he has Bonnie and Clyde comes down on a bank with Neil Bush behind the desk. Or his "Quien Es (?) Indeed," illustrated by a great S. Clay Wilson rendition of the classic portrait of Billy the Kid and his past and current lovers, full of holes or not: "Here stands William Bonney / like a lot of us / at the apex of his career / and in the middle of a dilemma. . . ." Some of his most accessible poems mimic the conversations of cowhands playing a little poker or crawling into the bunk, as in "Film Noir":

With a name
like "Sundance"
how could you
be anything but
a "kid"

and sleep with
anyone but
a fellow
named
"Butch."

Jim McCrary works the Kansas idiom into his realism and draws special attention to associative levels of meanings or double meanings, reminding us of a Kansan who doesn't want to waste any words, or a gunfighter who lets his riding (reading) partner take it any way he wants it. In his poem "Doc," he uses Doc Holliday's last words "This is funny" to comment: "No doubt about it / the man had a way / with / shotguns / and metaphysics."

Charles Plymell

Promesas: Geography of the Impossible by Gloria Vando. Houston: Arte Público Press, 1993. 89 pages; $8.00; paper.

History as a Second Language by Dionisio Martínez. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1993. 79 pages; not priced; paper.

Rhythm and Guts by Stanley E. Banks. Kansas City: Georgia A. B. Press (PO Box 120077, Kansas City, MO 64112), 1992. 60 pages; $10.00; paper.

In "Nuyorican Lament" from her first book *Promesas: Geography of the Impossible* (a "Nuyorican" is a Puerto Rican born in New York City), Gloria Vando writes, "But *patria* / / is a sneaky word" which doesn't let go. In these three books of poems the poets are all primarily concerned with exploring their cultural heritages, finding poetry in their uneasy relationships with their respective cultures. They often feel their cultures threatened by powerful, imperialistic forces; at the end of "Nuyorican Lament," for example, Vando walks through San Juan:

I walk down El Condado, past
Pizza Huts, Big Macs and
Coca-Cola stands
listening for a song—

a wisp of song—

that begs deep in my heart.

All three poets listen for such songs.

Gloria Vando begins *Promesas: Geography of the Impossible* with epigraphs from *The Land of Cockaigne,* Columbus, Neruda, and Jean Delumeau (*Sin and Fear,* 1983):

> The Lands of Cockaigne were utopias . . . all locate[d] in a distant somewhere else, in a lost isle at the heart of an ocean. . . . The same geography of the impossible explains why certain Europeans believed in the "American Mirage." Newly discovered by the great Renaissance voyages, the people of America were assigned virtues that Europe had long since lost. Moreover, upon contact with civilization, these native American virtues vanished away.

Vando's purpose here is to rediscover the "Lands of Cockaigne" (imaginary lands of idleness and luxury), which for her means rediscovering Boriquen (also spelled "Borinquen"), the Taino name for Puerto Rico. In doing so, she might break down the cultural stereotypes associated with Puerto Ricans and other Hispanics by contemporary colonialists, just as Puerto Rico seems to be moving toward American statehood. How can she contact her past? Most immediately by exploring her personal history, as she does in the wryly titled first section of her book, "In the Dark Backward." In this section, Vando gropes through her literally dark past in search of her cultural identity. In the first poem, "Fire," Vando's persona tries to escape from a fire in her NYC Eastside tenement block. It turns out to be an escape from "an upstairs hell, this darkness, / this gloom, this view of brick / and cement and dried pigeon dung." Fifty years later, her persona sits in a ball park 1,500 miles away (Vando now lives in Kansas City), thinking of the escape she made from the "darkness" of New York, the escape her grandmother, Abuelita, dreamed of but never made.

Vando's escape to the Midwest leaves her uneasy. How much has been lost in her flight? In her long poem "New York City Mira Mira Blues," she writes of returning "home" to New York City from "the wheat and the corn / of Middle America, where whole- / someness grows so tall you cannot / see the poverty around you, grows / so dense the hunger cannot touch you." Vando wants to be touched by her return to "Welfare Island whose one aesthetic / function is to spew enough smoke / and soot into the air to obscure / Queens and itself." Vando returns to the city of muggers, Lincoln Hall, flop houses, and street people, to a city which casts its pall over everyone, even the privileged benefactors:

I see my children stepping carefully
between [street people], handing out coins
like Henry Ford. I see them losing
faith, losing hope, losing ground.

At last Vando arrives "home," with all the complexities that word brings to mind. The poem ends:

Yes, I'm home,
home, where my grandmother's aura
settles softly and white like
a shroud of down, stilling, if only
for a moment, the island's screams.

This homecoming offers only temporary relief. It puts her in contact again with her American roots, but is ultimately unsatisfying because the song of Nueva York is not the deepest song in her heart. She has further to go.

Throughout *Promesas: Geography of the Impossible,* Vando yearns for refuge, for safety, for home, but where is home? Is it in colonized Puerto Rico? Or in "Nueva York" where she grew up? Or at the "most holy national shrine" (according to the Historic Sites Act, 1935) of El Santuario de Chimayo? Vando visits this shrine in the impressionistic travelogue "Santa Fe Journey," and finds "sullen youngsters [who] damn us with their eyes," and more questions than answers:

And I, the tourist, come too;
to pay homage, to honor—what?
A lost heritage? A dying legacy?
These strangers who speak my tongue
are not *my* people? I'm from Borinquen—
that tiny island drowning in a sea of Coca-Cola.
These people have their *patria.*

To what place, if any, does she owe cultural allegiance? Vando's poetry explores options. In the "dank, dark belly" of the sanctuary, Vando finds relics, charms, lockets, wedding rings, service medals, bracelets, photographs, plastic icons "adorned with rosary beads," "and, finally, *promesas.* Tacked to the walls. / Hand written promises to God." A father promises God that he'll walk 150 miles to Chimayo if his son returns from combat in Vietnam. Vando asks, what will he do if his son does not return? Will he

curse God or walk farther, seeking deliverance? Vando's poems are *promesas* too. They are signs of her faith. In crossing darkness to keep faith with her past, Vando finds "the center, my center" in Chimayo,

> extending outward past the past,
> far beyond the future—
> for I was here before, even before
> I drank the magic Chimayo potion
> that obliterates time and space and boundaries,
> restoring peace, oneness.

Vando has faith in this vision even though she is aware of the tacky signs—"Shirley's Pizza Parlor / Nambe Bronze Works / ICE"—which encroach upon it. In "Faith," Vando regrets her loss of Catholic ritual: she was "exiled to a prosebyterian plane" in other people's houses when her family broke up. Though she tries to dismiss Catholicism, it ambushes her just like other aspects of her cultural heritage. The poem ends:

> I *know* the curtain falls on all things. Still,
> Sometimes, something deep within me hums
> In a minor key
> Mouths syllables I don't fully understand or even hear and
> When I least expect it, stuns me
> With a right hook to the eye of reason.

Vando's poetry worked for me like Catholicism does for her, hooking me when I did not expect it. This is a first collection with an array of powerful punches.

After reading Vando's collection in which history is clearly the first language, it took me awhile to appreciate the more elusive, allusive poetry of Dionisio Martínez in *History as a Second Language*, also a first book. Whereas Vando is clearly the participant in many of her poems, Martínez is more often the observer, keeping his distance. In his poem "Fugitives" about his Cuban neighbors, he writes, "The voices are cautious—as if / whispering, even here and now, / were a precondition for survival."

Reading Martínez's second poem here, "Lament" (note how the title lacks the specificity of Vando's "Nuyorican Lament"), I was perplexed and finally frustrated by the twists and turns of language. After his house has been destroyed by the ocean, Martínez writes, "I'd thought there would be a resolve / of sorts," but there isn't. The poem evades resolution, and because it leaves so many options open, my interest waned. But, as noted, I read this book after being delighted and captivated by Vando's forthright

engagement with her worlds. And as I read more deeply, Martínez's poetry snagged me with its subtleties. In "1929," Martínez's father tosses a pebble in the lake, and Martínez watches how the ripples start at the center where the plunging pebble made the depth noticeable. This is just the way a Martínez poem works: the poem makes depth "noticeable," and we feel its ripples.

Like Vando, Martínez looks to his rich cultural heritage as a source of poetry. Martínez is of Spanish and Cuban extraction; he was born in, then exiled from, Cuba, and grew up in the U.S. and Spain. In "Fascination," Martínez looks at that "beautiful arsonist," the *flamboyan* (Spanish for the royal poinciana), which lights up his "incognito days." Clearly he is trying to get some hold on his Spanish heritage; the poem ends:

> Each *flamboyan* releases its share of dead
>
> flowers. Lining the road, they are alternately
> red fists mapping a trail to another season of bad
> dreams and an endless fire that will not burn.

Even the exotic *flamboyan* brings only "another season of bad / dreams" and the self-canceling notion of "an endless fire that will not burn." The poet seems to hesitate here, as though staring "into the heart of the light / from the safety of [his] dark glasses" ("Carp"). In contrast, Gloria Vando stares into the flame in "Legend of the Flamboyan," leaving no doubt about the symbolic import of the tree. This poem concerns the coming of Spanish colonists to Borinquen/Puerto Rico. The Tainos, native inhabitants, an agrarian, peaceful tribe of potters and weavers, welcome the colonists, the "silver giants," who soon turn them into "human picks" to dig for gold. With many killed and their culture devastated, the Tainos decide on mass suicide, and they become the ubiquitous, bloody-leaved *flamboyans*:

> The first Spaniard to awaken
> was startled by the hush, as though
> the earth itself had given up.
>
> He stepped into the chill,
> into the stained silence,
> but saw only flowers, thousands
> of flamboyans—
>
> splashes of blood—
>
> blooming all over the island.

Is Vando's symbolism too obvious, or does stark exploitation necessarily call for such strong art? Is Martínez's cryptic symbolism closer to complex, often paradoxical truth? If you prefer Martínez's approach in "Fascination," there's plenty more of it in his first book.

In the title poem, Martínez writes of his distance from "history." The poem seems to be set in Cuba as Castro came to power. Martínez overhears his father and his friends "conspiring" in the next room, though he can hear only cadences, not words. He says, wryly, "The new regime / succeeded in spite of their plot." In lines which suggest the workings of a police state, Martínez defines history as something that can never be defined:

> The specifics of a conversation
> were not necessary to understand a plot
> or a confession . . .

And yet Martínez does get hold of it, in "The Continental Drift Theory," for example, in which he begins, in unusual specificity, "Nearly half the men of my generation have named their children after European cities." With obvious irony, Martínez claims that "home is where your name is not a foreign sound," but where is this in a world in which ethnic identities are increasingly blurred? The children named after European cities will "drag Europe back to the empty continent at the other end of the Atlantic. Every child will find a place to match his name and a familiar sound to lie down in," while their parents will forget the names of their children, Vienna, Geneva, Lorca, Sofia, etc. So where is "home," where your name is not a "foreign sound"? It seems that "home" is in many places at once.

There's a preciosity about some of Martínez's language here which weakens his poetry. In "The Wind Chill Factor," for example, he writes, "I've learned to pretend not to notice // what others have not begun to admit." That conundrum collapses in its own cleverness. But alternatively there are poems of the power of "Pain," about a torture victim. In this poem, Martínez's characteristic distancing is entirely appropriate because of the impossibility of relating to someone who has been tortured. Martínez and others wait for the victim with a wheelchair, though what he needs is a new pair of shoes. Gingerly, they talk with him:

> We asked the obvious questions:
> if half a life of torture really
> softens the bones until the body falls
> like a ruined sack, if rebuilding
> the shack is worth the trouble. And when

someone mentioned pain, the word rising
from its metaphors, you tried to laugh.

Your mouth opened like a small wound.

This stark final image, set off from other lines, shows that Martínez, in expressing the pain of the victim, can speak history as a first language.

Rhythm and Guts is Stanley E. Banks's third book of poetry. Here's the title poem.

Rhythm and guts are
forged on a dim page

hammering out a life
of mixed attitudes
and hard adjectives

no fiddling with
weak emotions,
wishes or regrets
each line feeds rhythm,
madness, misery—
in the gut of meaning
is where bleeding
and beat flow.

There's plenty of rhythm and guts and hammering and bleeding and madness in these poems, for sure, as Banks, an African-American based in Kansas City, deals with hot issues such as gangs, drugs, AIDS, Rodney King, Nelson Mandela, and guns, guns, guns. Banks would be like his own Death Preacher who has "fired up many funerals / with his timely, down home, / straight forward, right in the / pocket scripture messages, / put life in death, / made sinners sizzle, / [and] brow-beat backward buffoons," and for the most part his sermons did reach me. In 1981 he won the Langston Hughes prize for poetry, and in "A Jail-Bird Dog," for example, there's Hughes's characteristic wit and snap and concision, as well as some flashy rhymes and half-rhymes—how about stamina / asthma? Adjacent to this in the book is "Incompatible with Life," in which two homeboys have been blown to bits by eight blasts of a sawed-off shotgun. Rhythm and guts all over the page.

Despite this toughness, however, occasionally the poetry slackens into chopped-up prose, as in a poem grimly titled "The Bloodshed over Love." The language and thought are weak here:

> In the aftermath of her
> discovering that she didn't
> love me to the degree that
> she had initially claimed,
> she left me to hemorrhage
> and wallow in self-pity.

Wallowing, indeed. And while I'm finding fault with what is essentially a good book, I must point out that there are a number of annoying typographical errors.

Like Vando and Martínez, Banks is searching for cultural identity in a society which all too often oppresses "minorities," by stereotyping at least. In St. Cloud, Minnesota, Banks, still haunted by slavery, stands by the Mississippi. The poem ends:

> I heard the river voices singing,
> "Swing low, sweet chariot /
> comin' fo' / to carry / me home."
> There I was one hundred and
> twenty-five years later in
> St. Cloud on the bank
> of the Mississippi—
> a Black man still lost and
> trying to realize my freedom.

Much as I'm drawn to Banks's grappling with major issues, sometimes he closes off a poem with a generalism (as above) rather than cutting deeper.

Rhythm and Guts is dedicated to Banks's brother Carl, "murdered at 17," and his poem "Carl at 15" describes the "charmer brother" with everything—but no place to go This poem is foreshadowed by what Banks calls his "Annihilation Poems," five poems written about the dire situations he encountered at one, eight, thirteen, twenty-two, and thirty-one. I'm reminded of the brutal determinism of Richard Wright's *Native Son.* Much as I was moved by the black-on-white clarity of Banks's work, I was depressed by its grim vision. If such a vision was Banks's intent, the book is successful. When he writes of "the gifted misery / of [Miles Davis's] melody," the words might apply to Banks's own poetry too.

Brian Daldorph

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Gloria Vando (9000 W 64th Terrace, Merriam, KS 66202) publishes Helicon Nine Editions. Her most recent book of poetry is *Promesas: Geography of the Impossible.* Her poems have appeared in *Stiletto, New Letters, Kenyon Review, Seattle Review,* and *Western Humanities Review.*

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Artwork Acknowledgment

Cottonwood 49 features the work of Kansas City, Missouri, artist Lana E. Turner.

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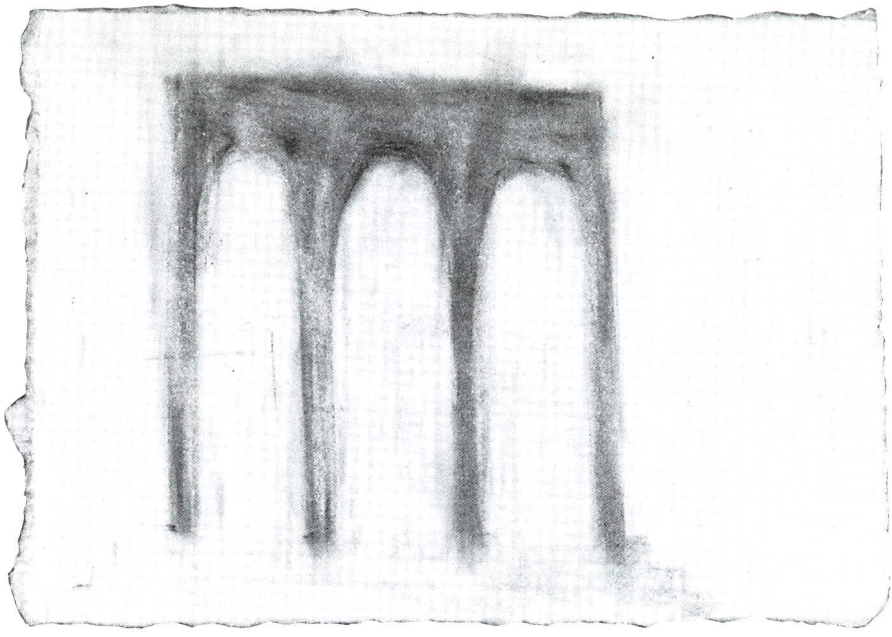

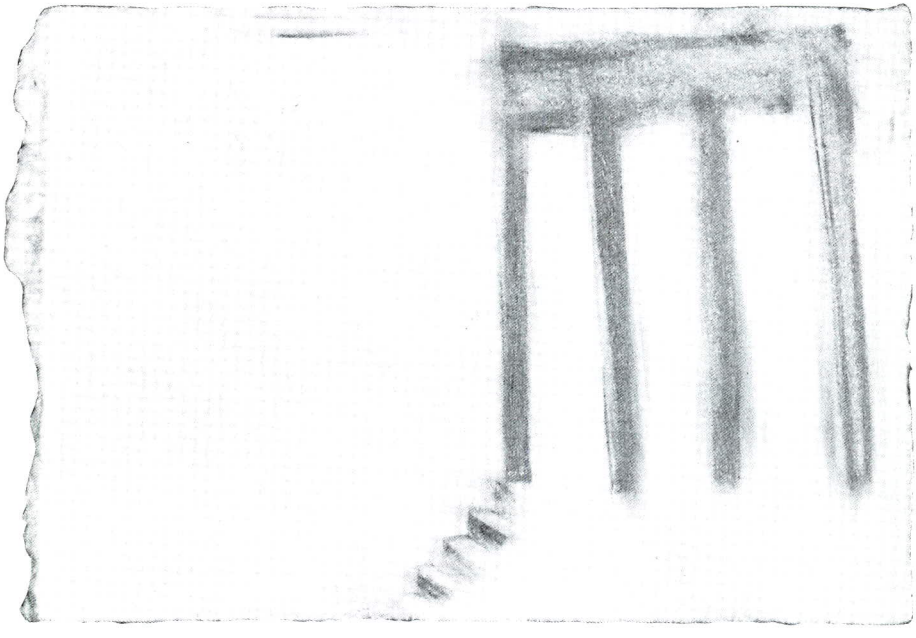

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