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University of Massachusetts Boston

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# HOWTH CASTLE





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# HOWTH CASTLE MAGAZINE

1985—1986

Volume Two, Number One

(Double Issue)



Cover painting by Tony Pinto

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This issue is dedicated to the Students and Faculty of UMB.



## Table of Contents

### Fiction

<i>Remnants</i>	Deborah Noyes	7-14
<i>A Walk by the Lakeside</i>	David McWilliam	45-48
<i>In My Brother's Name</i>	Courtney Wayshak	49-59
<i>Only Brother</i>	Richard McManus	71-76
<i>The Day Off</i>	Kate Bartholomew	90-105
<i>Mutations</i>	John Willow	117-124

### Nonfiction

<i>Some Winners and Losers along the Pre-Med Trail</i>	Kevin Fitzgibbons	23-30
<i>Observations from a Darkroom</i>	Alexa Trefonides	35-40
<i>Isis of the Many Spheres</i>	John Jupiter Styles	64-70
<i>Embracing Bud</i>	Michael M. Ambrosino	88-89
<i>The Life of a Contemporary Moscow Woman</i>	Dorothea Braemer	108-115

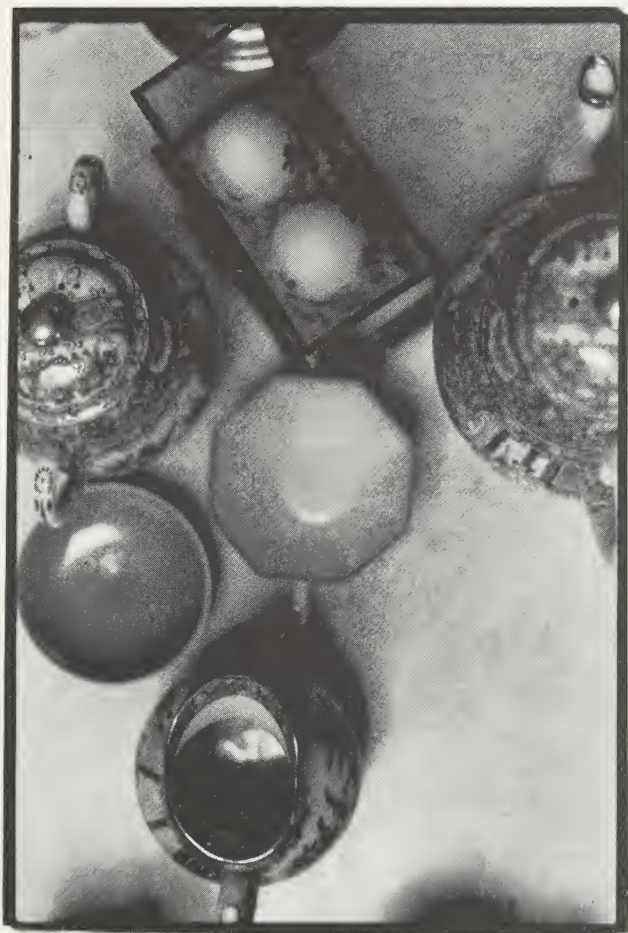
## Table of Contents

### Poetry

<i>Apple</i>	Wendy Barrett	6
<i>Reaching for Rimbaud in a Small Room</i>	Hugh Abernathy	19
<i>Feet</i>	Tom Chaney	20-21
<i>To Kefalo</i>	Tom Chaney	22
<i>Could</i>	Deborah Noyes	32-33
<i>Biography of PVT 000-000-000</i>	Stephen Sadowski	41
<i>Violin Spiders</i>	Morgan Paley Reed	62-63
<i>a little delicious sky</i>	Magdalena Rossi	77
<i>Fabric</i>	Andrew LaBonte	78-79
<i>My heart</i>	Anne Shropshire	80
<i>Nashville</i>	T. J. Anderson	82-87
<i>Israel</i>	Eddie A. Mueller	125
<i>The Pantheist</i>	Nancy J. Mades	128

### Art

<i>Photograph</i>	Kathy Dooley	5
<i>Drawing</i>	Kelly J. Carafotes	18
<i>Photograph</i>	Joseph Merkhanian	31
<i>Photograph</i>	Alexa Trefonides	34
<i>Photograph</i>	Alexa Trefonides	39
<i>Self-portraits</i>	Betsy Wirth	42-43
<i>Photograph</i>	Jo Anne-Phelps	44
<i>Photograph</i>	Tony Pinto	60-61
<i>Self-portrait</i>	Lisa Hergenrother	81
<i>Photographs</i>	Sally Jacobson	106-107
<i>Photograph</i>	Lisa Hergenrother	116
<i>Drawing</i>	Kelly J. Carafotes	126
<i>Photograph</i>	Joseph Merdhanian	127





# Apple

Wendy Barrett

Forget about the old school,  
black shawls wrap cold shoulders, a ruler  
cracks on a desk, it began with you  
Mrs. Smith, never saying Don't do that.  
Give me fat red crayons and a clean page.

Outside branches reach for more.  
Hold me. No, you are right the comma  
belongs here, we want to separate the clauses.  
I have needed too much from my teachers.

This room on the top floor faces west.  
It was not a mistake. You took my mother's place.  
A winter afternoon and I still need you.  
The whole room dissolves in red.

# REMNANTS

## Deborah Noyes

She walked on through the failing daylight, swinging a paper bag in her hand. She would have to hurry, or not be home by dark. And what would They say then? He would kill her maybe.

Her bare feet trailed through the gutter puddle of brown sudsy water. Beside the house there, a man with a sunburned head was rinsing his car with a hose, alternately spraying the giggling child lying on the lawn in cut-offs. Their laughter followed her down the street and she quickened her step, hating it.

The street was like a tunnel. It got darker and darker toward the end, where the trees closed in and around. After awhile she listened, but could no longer hear the laughter and was glad. There was no time for it. She needed to think—think all the time—about the truth. The child wiped sweat from above her upper lip, smudging a soiled mustache there. Besides the fact that she was forbidden to, it hurt to think of the truth. To remember. Remembering always brought the feeling. It was a sinking, sorry feeling, like when you've been betrayed, or lied to. And it got her all the time.

When she tried explaining it, like to her friend Spiros from the corner store, the feeling eluded her. It became a stranger harassing her from the shadows so she couldn't see his face. If asked, she could never have described "him" to the police, or found him in a mugshot. It was just a formless menace, following her all the time.

But she couldn't talk to the police anyway, even if the feeling had been a real person they would arrest. *They* had said so—again and again. Police were bad evil people who

stole children from their real parents and conspired with men in black robes, who said that taking them away was right and true. She could not talk to police. When an officer came into the breakfast shop where she bought Them donuts some Sundays, she would glide slyly into the Ladies' room. She would slouch in one of the stalls and read graffiti there until she was sure he was gone.

But this was unimportant. What was important was that not even Spiros could understand her blind creeping feeling. He would grin, uncertain of her words, and wipe his fat sweaty hands on the white smock he wore, or shrug apologetically while sliding a package of cherry licorice to her beneath the counter. Spiros had come in March from Greece to work in his father's store. He didn't speak English well, but understood some and nodded his head often. But Spiros could not understand what she told him about the feeling. She would begin her description over and over, shaking her head in frustration.

"It's like this, Spiros, it's all black and you're all alone with no one."

He would listen, watching and waiting as she spoke, pulling the fingers on one hand with the fingers of the other. "No, no, lemme start again. It's like you're mad at someone only you don't know who you're mad at. You feel bad Spiros, really BAD." But Nicki always gave up trying to tell Spiros, he just couldn't get it. And she forgave him. After all, he was her only friend; if he could understand, he would. Besides while she was with him—telling him—the feeling was forgotten in the effort. It was as if talking about it made it stand back and hide. It was a good, solid forgetfulness. Not like when she wanted to remember something, but couldn't. Like geography.

Nicki had tried to write down all 50 states on a sheet of lined yellow paper recently, before she got the encyclopedia. But her mind would stray off and the marker would slip into silly curved lines; so she would doodle instead. Once last month, she had drawn a woman's face. The picture wasn't very good, scrawled with no proportion, but the image she was drawing from had been clear and sharp in her head. It

was the other mother, the fake one. Then the achy forgetfulness came and made her angry. As Nicki tore the paper face to jagged shreds, hot tears had stung her cheeks.

The trees got thicker and she turned off onto a dirt road. The rocks were sharp on her feet, but her feet were tough and brown from long summer exposure. She moved into a tiny dirt driveway, where the rusted corpse of a car sat on cinder blocks.

"Where the hell you been?" asked the woman from the doorway, wiping her hands on a checkered dishcloth. She had been watching for the girl at the kitchen window.

Nicki offered up the paper bag from the steps and was silent.

"Damn, you got me menthols again. I tol' you Marlboro. You know I don't smoke menthol." The woman sighed and shoved the carton listlessly back into the bag. Her expression took on a patronizing attentiveness. "So little one, who'd you see today?"

The girl jerked past with a bored look on her face. The woman followed her inside like a drill sergeant, angered by the child's controlled hesitations.

"No one."

"Not one person, huh?"

"Nope. It's Spiros' day off."

"You shouldn't talk to that Greek all the time. He might tell the police."

The child flicked on a small black and white television. She curled up as best she could on a straight back chair to watch Hogan's Heroes.

"Turn that off."

Nicki rose mechanically and pressed her finger to the button. The image on the screen blurred to a tiny dot, then vanished.

"We love you, honey. You know it, don't you?"

Nicki forced a smile and mumbled "yes."

"Yes, who?" asked the woman expectantly.

"Yes, Mom."

"That's nice, baby. I know it's hard to get used to, but a bad mistake usually takes a long time to fix."

Nicki smiled again, wanly, fighting back the blind creeping feeling. "Can I watch now?" she asked, chewing anxiously on a piece of her dark tangled hair.

"Yeah, baby. Of course you can. But I'd turn it off when your Pa gets home for supper. He gets tired, you know, after a hard day."

The girl nodded knowingly and tuned in on Sergeant Shultz. The fat, silly Sergeant was wheezing out orders to the prisoners. Hogan was behind him, doing accurate facial imitations while the other good guys looked on in front, trying not to laugh. She figured she would laugh for them, even though it didn't feel very good to do it. She liked them because they made her have to laugh.

She heard the window in the front door rattle and leapt to turn off the set. She stubbed her toe on a large staple that had once held down a carpet edge. When He entered, she was sitting too casually on the stiff chair. He tossed his workshirt to the coffee table and ran his fingers through his hair—greased with sweat.

"You done your mathematics?" he asked.

The woman's voice sounded hesitantly from the kitchen. "Hon, she ain't had time yet. I sent her down for cigarettes and this morning you wanted her to spend the day cleaning..."

"Let her speak." He turned to Nicki, who felt the familiar stiffening in her muscles. "You done your mathematics yet? If you ain't, why not?"

"Well, like she just said I..."

"Like who just said?" he asked.

The girl hesitated. "Mom. Like Mom just said I had to clean and go to the store."

The man turned to the woman, who had emerged from the kitchen. She looked tired and scared.

"I tol' you Maggie, she's gonna have an education. Just because she can't go to no snotty public school, don't mean she can't better herself."

"Right after supper I'll send her up."

"Why don't she do it now," he said firmly, in the form of a suggestion. "Then she'll have supper. Wrap it up and keep it in the oven."

“Mark,”

“Wrap it up in the oven.”

The woman nodded meekly and left the room. Nicki watched Him from the corner of her eye. He turned on the T.V. and slouched in His vinyl armchair. “‘Get goin’ little one.” His smile was vague and tentative.

Nicki ran up the thin winding staircase to the one small room upstairs, closing the door behind her. She pulled the ratty curtains closed, carefully took a general mathematics book from a splintered wicker nightstand, and flipped through some pages.

She wished He would not always make her study math. The division and multiplication and fractions made her head spin, and her fingers shook as she scrawled the difficult calculations in a bent yellow notebook. Every time there was an answer wrong, he would make her copy it 20 times correctly. He circled all the wrong problems with an unsteady hand, so the circles looked jagged, like a drunk would make them. He said that repetition and discipline were the best ways to learn. That’s how He had been taught, not spoiled like kids today. All that pansy psychology. They both always said she had been spoiled by the fake parents she was forbidden to talk or think about. Of course They couldn’t know if she thought about them—not really. But the questions forced her to forget. He had a way of questioning her, she got so confused that she confessed everything she was thinking. Then He scared her and sometimes made her cry with his cursing and slamming—so now she didn’t think much—not in the house. And the old life, the forbidden life, of classrooms and picnics and hot laughing summers on Cape Cod, were the lies. The sad sorry lies that had to be avoided, like policemen. Forgotten, like the names and places she had once thought she loved.

The blind creeping feeling closed in on her, filling the air in the stuffy room, settling like dust in corners. She knew it would stay all night now, and she could not concentrate on the thin black numerals. They blurred together on the page. For one vulnerable instant, she lost control in a child-fit of rage. She slammed the fading mathematics book against the wall and heard loose plaster rattle in the ceiling. She tensed,

awaiting the steady crunching of footsteps on the stairs. But all she heard were dry, parched leaves rustling on the tree outside her window, and muffled voices combining with the prime-time murmur downstairs. She retrieved the math book and carefully smoothed the folded pages.

On the nightstand was another book, an encyclopedia. It was a thick volume containing the A to C sections of information. The woman got it for free at the big grocery store in town, just because she bought 50 dollars worth of goods one day last month. There was a new volume on display every other week, but They had only given Nicki this one. They thought she would have her hands full reading about aardvarks and John Quincy Adams. But in the past week Nicki had stayed up late each night, reading by a battery-operated pen-light clipped to her keychain. She had read 79 pages. The most interesting passages so far were the ones lumped under AMERICA. There was a full-page color map, with special lines designating agricultural areas, and little symbols explained in the bottom corner of the page. She liked to study this map. She had always been interested in places, and at one time had planned to travel all round the world.

When she opened to the map tonight, she began putting small magic marker stars on the states she would like to visit. When she finished there were 49 stars. She wasn't interested in Alaska, it looked too cold. As soon as she was old enough, she fantasized, she would buy a larger map and take it with her on the train. No, an airplane. *They* had taken her *here* on a train, after they dropped off the brown station wagon at some garage, where a Spanish man had been fiddling with the greasy engine of a pickup. Yes, she would take an airplane. And the people and houses below would look far away, and small like insects.

On a sudden daring impulse she pictured herself in Miss Robbins' second grade geography class. She steadied the orange marker and wrote "Nicole Allen, 2nd grade, Miss Robbins" in careful penmanship across the top of the map. She looked at it, then marked a small, deliberate box with two slanted lines for a roof in the corner of the Massachusetts state. It was just like the little symbols for

cows and grain scattered across the rest of the country, only it wasn't explained in the corner. Nicki wrote "My old house," beneath it, just as carefully she had written her name and class. She was so absorbed in her work that she forgot where she was. As His voice filled the house from down stairs, she cringed, clutching the marker tight in her fist. She tore the page with the map from the encyclopedia, folding it into a compact square. She stuffed the glossy, guilty page in the pocket of her shorts and begged an invisible presence in the room not to let him ask any questions. She fumbled for the math book and opened it in time with the door; he stood like a strong hard shadow on the threshold.

"You ready to eat?"

"Not yet, Daddy, I got some more yet." Sometimes he softened when she called him that.

"Wait 'till after supper." He stepped out into the hall and closed the door gently behind him. Nicki shut her book and touched the cool glossy square in her pocket.

In the morning she went to the woman's bedroom to ask what she should do today. Nicki had slept in her shorts and T-shirt, but wore them still. There never seemed much point in undressing and re-dressing unless she was told to.

The room was dark and smoky. The stench of alcohol lingered in the air and the woman was sprawled across the bed with sheets twisted around her legs. Her feet stuck out the bottom. They were yellow and hard-looking. Blue spidery veins lined her lower calves. She groaned softly when the girl touched her shoulder.

"Should I clean the kitchen?"

"No, baby, go play."

"Who with?"

"Watch TV."

"It's Sunday. There's nothin' on."

The woman moaned drowsily and rolled to her side. She pulled the sheet with her and Nicki saw a purple-black bruise on her thigh.

"If you want, go to the store."

"What should I buy?"

"Get yourself a donut." The woman's arm went up in-



distinctly in the direction of the closet. "Money's in the purse."

Nicki opened the closet door, careful not to let it unhinge as it usually did. She pulled a wrinkled dollar bill from a leather pouch in the purse and held it up. The woman nodded lazily and rolled away with the pillow over her head.

It was a hot, foggy morning. She lingered for awhile in the woods surrounding the house, stepping on the dew-furry moss with her bare feet to cool them. Then she got to the corner store—a mile and a half away—she found Spiros sorting fruit in crates and bins to be set up on the table outside the store. He smiled when he saw her and watched with his sad round eyes as she entered. He gave her two cinnamon donuts wrapped in cellophane and a pint carton of orange juice. When she offered up the dollar bill, he waved it away in a hurt, offended manner and she stuffed it into her pocket. Then she felt the cool smooth paper that was the map. She unfolded it—smoothing the stiffer wrinkles with her palm. "Where are we?" she asked impulsively. He looked at her, curious, and then at the map. But he didn't laugh. Since she had lived there, about 8 months, Nicki had asked that question three times. Each time, the recipient of the question had laughed: "silly child," or else they looked at her like she was from Mars.

Spiros scratched his head and poked his pudgy finger to a shape on the outstretched map. She stared at the spot, marked Ohio, and smiled up at him gratefully.

For awhile she helped Spiros carry the various crates of oranges, lettuces and onions to the table on the sidewalk. The street was very quiet. Sunlight broke weakly through the haze. Nicki thanked her friend for breakfast and set out with the idea of going to the little stretch of woods near the place where she lived. Some days she spent hours there, waiting motionless on a clump of rocks to spy on small animals or birds.

As she drifted away from the storefront, Nicki picked up a long broken tree branch from the dirt and weeds near the street on the other side. She snapped the stick against the unlevel ground with her hand and looked back at Spiros. He

waved to her, his expression wistful, uncertain, and then he moved into the clean, dim store. The wide door was pushed open—held in position by empty crates. The fruit and vegetables outside on the table were shiny in the sun. Nicki paused, leaning on the sturdy tree branch. She hated leaving Spiros; she felt alone. Maybe she would go back—stay with him forever. Across the street Spiros had leaned down to retrieve a scrap of folded paper from the floor by the refrigerated Coke case. He stared intently at this paper and then dialed the phone kept on the high counter by the cash register and glass jars of candy. No, Nicki thought, she would not go back; Spiros was busy. The child turned and wandered off down the street with the stick supporting her—pretending she was an old lady with a limp.

Three days later, Nicki kneeled on the living room floor, spreading ammonia-smelling cleaner with a huge blue sponge. The woman had found the sponge in a discarded cardboard box in the basement. The last tenants of the house had left it behind, and since there was no mop, the sponge would have to do.

The woman was softly humming to herself, reading a romance novel in the kitchen. All the living room furniture had been piled up in there so that Nicki could clean. The woman was in His tilted armchair, her legs dangling over the side—barely touching the linoleum.

They both started at the knock. It was a steady, confident knock, fearfully steady, like whoever had done it was contemplating whether or not to burst through.

“Who is it?” asked the woman sweetly.

“Police. Open up.”

Her eyes widened and she stumbled on stacked furniture while trying to cross the room. She hushed the bewildered little girl, easing her up gently by the arm. The next thing Nicki knew, she was huddled in a black corner of the hall closet. The closet door shut inaudibly. She listened, trembling, to the woman’s sweet, contrived voice.

“Something wrong, Officer?”

“Search warrant, Ma’am.” Nicki heard the rustle of paper.

"Search for what?" asked the woman her voice losing its calm.

"Move aside, please."

And there was banging. Doors opening and closing. The shrill screech of the closet door in the woman's room unhinging.

"Officer, please tell me what you're looking for. Maybe I can help..."

Bright, glaring light.

"We've got her."

Nicki watched, wide-eyed, bewildered. The woman struggled as they snapped the metal handcuffs to her wrists. She began to moan—shrieking "no"—then mumbling it in a low whisper. One officer eased her bent, heaving figure upward, and then she was gone. Nicki covered her eyes and whimpered quietly, so that it seemed to choke her.

"Send them in now, Frank. It's all right, this is the child."

The young, excited-looking policeman jogged out after the other one, who had led away the woman. The officer who had opened the door on her dark world stretched out his hand. The small white hands flew from her eyes. She began to slap and punch at the air. Coats and His workshirts flew from their hangers and covered her. The policeman reached in, firmly now, and she sunk her teeth into his hand. He withdrew, and suddenly two indistinguishable figures were reaching for her, touching her. But she couldn't see them for the blind, stinging rage of tears.

"Nooo! she cried. "No, don't, don't take me again... not again..."

"Nicki, Nicki it's Daddy."

"No..."

"Nicki, baby, it's us, it's your daddy."

The woman from her shredded drawing of a month ago was crying, leaning at her husband's side like a weak, frightened child. Nicki shook her head back and forth, as in a trance.

"Nicki, it's me and Mommy, Nicki."

She let the arms fold around her, let the bewildered sobs

rise and fall in her raspy, throbbing throat. And she sunk her head into the strong soft heat of his shirt.

“Mr. and Mrs. Allen, they’ve apprehended Mark Kroyman in town. It’s all finished.”

Nicki was pinned in by the man’s embrace. Awkwardly, she twisted her left hand into the soiled pocket of her shorts. The cool smooth square of security was gone. Her fingers came out clutching madly at the torn remnant of a dollar bill.



Kelly Pangloss  
New York

# Reaching for Rimbaud in a Small Room

Hugh Abernathy

When you lift your arms,  
I see the stains on your rose-  
yellow blouse.

Smells of musk and wild violets.  
When I take you in my arms,

I think of Rimbaud in a small room  
making love to a woman with strange  
purple eyes.

In evenings above the Seine  
he tries to stay sane  
at nineteen,

and raise his genius one more time  
as he stares across the water  
after she is gone.

But, you can't see into  
my thoughts. You unbutton  
your blouse and go in again.

Closing your eyes, you raise  
your arms and hope to touch  
the roses in the ceiling.

# Feet

## Tom Chaney

It was bold of me  
to wander sockless in nice pairs of shoes  
under green and blue shades  
from city to city in my quest for truth.

In Boston few would notice  
my naked feet,  
some in London would notice but not care,  
but in Paris, ah, parades of people noticed and formed  
schools of thought about it—some for  
religious reasons, some for political,  
some for a new purism.

My feet were full of yellow envy.  
Though their faces were roadmaps  
and the spaces between their toes  
were well measured, they knew  
they would never be hands  
and that unlike hands they would be  
preponderantly shorn.

Their one act of resistance was to have  
as little between themselves and the ground  
as society would permit.

I believed in them for they had stood me well.  
That's why in the summer I would walk on  
the smoothest lawns I could find  
(cemeteries were the best)  
and after swims I took long strolls on curving beaches.  
This gave my feet joy. They wanted more.  
They wanted to walk on glass walls  
and dance on chandeliered ceilings,  
to tromp over beds of moist flowers  
kicking up the petals.

There were things I couldn't do for them,  
things my hands could barely do.

There were moons I couldn't walk on.



# To Kelafo

Tom Chaney

His mind contained a raging elephant.  
Tusks broke through the whites of his eyes.  
The oppression drove him crazy,  
so he tried to escape to Ethiopia by night.  
With luck he would flee to America.

The night had come, and with it came  
the white arcs of missiles, and chaos and chaos.  
Like orange daggers, bullets raked the shadows  
on the shoreline and snapped twigs from trees;  
rocks cracked, birds whirled out of grass nests  
while he hid behind the bulwark of a ratty barge  
that crept up the Shebele River to Kelafo.

The boat was shelled and sank with its cargo.  
On a piece of wood he floated toward Kelafo.  
Crocodiles swept the shore with their tails  
that night in the jungle of snakes  
and dense fingers of bamboo and vine when silence was  
the damp chatter of insects and sleepless mandrills  
and the safe flight of bats.

The moon was reaping a purple cloud  
and the river smelled green,  
and the hushed giggling of water  
that went with him  
went past him, to Kelafo.

# Some Winners and Losers along the Pre-Med Trail

Kevin Fitzgibbons

When I was still in that state which Fitzgerald called a "chemical madness," otherwise known as adolescence, it worked out that most of the important male figures in my life were physicians. For example there was a child psychiatrist my parents had taken me to when that had been the fashion. However they had quickly come to the conclusion that he was, as my father put it, "a damn kook," and discontinued my treatment. The leading influence on me at the time, however, was my girlfriend's father. I'll call him Dr. Maxwell here for convenience. He had been a football hero at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville and had gone on to the medical school at Little Rock. He came from a small town near the Mississippi River where his family had owned a plantation for several generations. His father was a lawyer and, for a time, a state representative, who drank himself to death at an early age. Dr. Maxwell had a thriving dermatology practice in Los Angeles and in spite of the jokes he made about "popping zits all day" he took home well over \$200,000.00 per year.

When I was a senior in high school, I used to go down to Dr. Maxwell's office once in a while to watch him work and get an idea about what a physician actually did. This was at his suggestion. One day he had to burn a cancer off an old man's face with liquid nitrogen. He began joking with the man and told him he could cuss out loud if he wanted to. The whole thing was over in a moment and I realized that he had made it about as painless as possible for the patient. A few weeks later another of his patients, an old woman with terminal cancer who he was seeing free of charge died of an apparent accidental overdose of some medication she was

taking. The woman had left Dr. Maxwell all her worldly goods as she had no kin, and having no use for the stuff himself, he sent his daughter and I down there to take what we wanted. When we got there we found the apartment literally covered with sleeping pills. They were everywhere and of every variety, Seconal, Nembutol, Tuinol, Amytol. Because the bottles showed they had all been prescribed by her father, my girlfriend and I came to the inescapable conclusion that Dr. Maxwell had been an accessory to a mercy killing. We decided that he had done the right thing as we knew that the woman had been suffering terribly. Still we thought him careless and carefully gathered up all the evidence.

Besides the six figure income from his medical practice, Dr. Maxwell owned a string of apartment buildings in Orange County as well as a cattle ranch he and some other physicians had purchased in central Arkansas. He lived in a mammoth house sitting on the 18th fairway of the Brentwood Country Club which had an elaborate security system complete with electric gates and closed circuit TV cameras. He lived with his second wife who was younger than him and quite beautiful although she had some problem which caused her to miscarry whenever she got pregnant, and as a result her emotional state was slipping. It seemed to me at the time that Dr. Maxwell had everything a man could wish for, wealth, a lovely wife, good health, and he was his own boss and planned to retire at fifty. When his daughter and I entered college, we both declared pre-med majors.

The next three years were not exactly the most pleasant I ever spent. I sweated through inorganic chemistry, precalculus and biology my freshman year, organic chemistry, calculus and more biology as a sophomore and physics, p-chem and more calculus in my junior year, in the late spring of which my girlfriend and I took the MCAT. That summer we submitted our applications. I had a 3.75 overall GPA with a 3.6 in science and math and an MCAT score of 631. My girlfriend had a 3.4 GPA with a 3.0 in science and math and an MCAT score just over 600. Though our grades were quite high we knew that grades and test

scores were only the first hurdle on the road to medical school, not unlike the first elimination in a beauty contest in which those with the more obvious flaws are weeded out, while the rest go on to the semi-finals which in pre-med are the letters of recommendation and the interview. At this point the criteria used by the admissions committees becomes vague. Clearly everyone who is left is "smart enough" so they look for other qualities. We used to sit around like priests of some ancient cult trying to read the auspices between the lines of the official communiques or in the faces and words of the pre-med advisors: all *A*'s were no good as this implied an obsessive-compulsive personality. A few *B*'s made you seem human. Sports were good. They liked sports which showed "health." We began taking tennis lessons. Biology was becoming a "whimp" major like psych and sociology. Better to major in chemistry or physics or something off beat like comparative lit or classics that would suggest hidden depths to your personality. You definitely didn't want to major in anything that could be construed as leading directly to some other career (like engineering or business) as this would make it seem like you expected to be rejected and had arranged a back up career; in other words you weren't "committed" to medicine.

Pre-med is the most stressful major, a sort of academic life in the fast lane. This is true partly because you must move so quickly, on a three year schedule, to finish all the requirements in time to be tested on them (the MCAT) and to apply to medical school a full year in advance of the date of your graduation, and partly because the decision that will be rendered at the end of that three years has such an impact on your life, either way it goes. If you could record the emotional state of the average history or English major on a strip chart recorder, the resulting curve would look like the following: it would start out at a local maxima in the hopeful area. This corresponds to the first light-hearted days of the semester when summer still lingers in the air and students sample and pick out classes like items from a Sears catalogue. As the days jog along however, the curve dips and by the last half of October it hits a minimum in the despair region. At this point the clocks have been turned

back and night descends early and the first chill can be felt in the air. Students look out into the bleak gray dawn and can think of nothing but the mid-terms that are now imminent and the paper they haven't thought about since reading the syllabus. During the next month, the curve fluctuates in the despair zone and then, just before finals, hits an absolute low point. During these low points one's worst fears rise up and cast a shadow across one's life—fear of poor grades, fear of teachers, fear of being overwhelmed, fear of failure. In its advanced stages this mid-term depression can mushroom out into a kind of generalized school phobia in which the sufferer recoils at the mere mention of things academic. One can get into such a bad head that one's outlook assumes a kind of doomsday dimension and failure at school seems to merge with a more general failure in life. One's inadequacies seem to stretch out into the future like dominoes, one triggering the next, until one's entire life plans start to unravel and doubts of the most fundamental kind come bubbling up like marsh gas, causing disturbing phantoms to flicker across the landscape of one's dreams. At these times, one's level of functioning is reduced to survival; sleep patterns are altered, appetite is reduced. Students begin to check withdrawal and pass/fail deadlines, to consider taking incompletes and changing majors. Then suddenly it's Christmas and you've pulled it off somehow and you're filled with a feeling of euphoria and an almost brotherly affection for your classmates who you barely noticed before, now that they have been tried in the furnace with you, so to speak.

In the pre-med major, however, the entire first three years are a sort of perpetual October season in which one's fears dance across the night sky like witches and there is an ample screen upon which to project the doomsday scenarios of one's fevered imagination. The pre-med student, like the little man in the video game "Pitfall," travels a dangerous path in which trap doors may open up under his feet or booby traps drop down out of the trees at any moment. There can be no relaxation, no euphoria. A "C" in any of the required courses is considered lethal, as are faculty letters of recommendation that "damn with faint praise."

Failure to make the right impression in the interview is commonly seen as the main cause of the high mortality among prospective medical students. I spent a long time wondering how to behave in this situation. It's a fairly political thing, not at all unlike running for office. One must have a keen sense of what sort of candidate the electorate is favoring this season. There is a lot of talk about "psyching out" the interviewer and after a while one begins to feel like the "great imposter."

However, since I never got as far as an interview, I can't say what they are actually like. That summer the rejection notices came in one after the other. They invariably began, "We regret to inform you that because of the large number of applicants many qualified people must be denied admission..." and ended certain that some other medical school would take you, a note of encouragement as empty and spurious as forced smiles in a cancer ward. By the middle of August it was clear that neither my girlfriend nor I were going to be accepted. My own reaction was a mixture of shock and rage and then later, when the initial trauma faded somewhat, a sort of low grade anger that lingered for a long time.

We had a series of emergency conferences with Dr. Maxwell. He had just returned from a business trip to Arkansas and had talked to one of his old football buddies who owned a restaurant in Little Rock called Cajun's Wharf which was frequented by many of the local politicians. This friend was supposed to have close ties to the governor and certain legislators whose influence over the admissions committee in Little Rock was rumored to be substantial. The game plan that developed was that my girlfriend and I would move to Arkansas immediately and begin our senior year at Fayetteville. We were to work on the ranch during the breaks in order to pay state income tax and thereby satisfy the requirements for in state-tuition and thus establish our eligibility for medical school which was limited to state residents. I agonized over the decision for a few days. The prospect of living in Arkansas for the next several years did not thrill me but in the end, realizing there was no other choice if I wanted to be a doctor, I went.

It was a strange time. We lived in an apartment the only furnishings of which were a queen sized mattress which lay directly on the floor, a telephone, and a couple of old army surplus desks. My girlfriend had become listless about her studies and her grades suffered. When I wasn't studying chemistry I was down on the ranch hanging barbed wire, bulldozing trees and blowing up beaver dams with dynamite. This time spent on the ranch was the only thing I really enjoyed while in Arkansas and on Sundays I used to drive over to Winthrop Rockefeller's ranch on Petit Jean Peak to look at his car museum which surpassed any I have seen elsewhere including the Ford Museum in Detroit.

One weekend Dr. Maxwell flew in and we met him at his mother's place in a small town next to the Mississippi River. Late that Saturday night, after a dinner of fried catfish and several drinks, Dr. Maxwell and I took the Bronco and a bottle of Wild Turkey and drove up onto the old levy. I'd never really talked to him before without his second wife hovering nearby or the TV going in the background as he constantly flipped the channels by remote control from one sports event to the next. By this time we were both fairly drunk and he began to wax philosophical about his youth when he had been a football player and when he had dreamed of being an artist. He concluded that he had become "an artist without a medium." Then he began to complain about his wife who he said was crazy and was driving him crazy. By then I knew all about the problems she was having with booze and pills. I had fished her out of the swimming pool when she was going down for the third time one night after a Fourth of July party when I happened by chance to walk out into the backyard. I asked why he didn't simply divorce her. After a silence he said, "Son, I can't afford to. She'd take me to the damn cleaners with these community property laws. No. I'll just have to wait 'til they take her away to the funny farm or she does herself in, whichever comes first." This seemed a bit odd to me but I had problems of my own and didn't pay much attention.

In the next few months everything fell apart for us in Arkansas. First a local organized crime figure was gunned down in the parking lot of Cajun's Wharf and Dr. Maxwell's

pal became the center of an investigation. Next the doctors who co-owned the ranch with Dr. Maxwell filed lawsuits against him alleging fraud. Then Dr. Maxwell disappeared for two weeks and his wife put out a missing person's report on him. When he finally turned up his story was that his friend who owned Cajun's Wharf had kidnapped him and held him at gunpoint in a Las Vegas hotel room. The last straw came when his daughter and I were denied resident status on technical grounds. By that time the relationship had started to go sour anyway and when the semester finally ended in May, I took the first plane back to L.A. knowing as I did it that I was abandoning forever any hopes of going to medical school.

That summer I did a lot of thinking about why I was rejected from medical school. I talked to an advisor at USC who was more candid than the rest, possibly because I had already been rejected, and he told me that the reason I was not picked had to do with my score on the MMPI, a psych test all prospective medical students had to take at that time and because I'd been to three separate colleges. The combined picture was he said one of "instability." Also he said I had gone to what are considered second rate schools and so my grades were adjusted downward accordingly. An "A" became a "B" and so on. I began to feel disgusted and cheated like a gambler who's lost everything on a fight and then finds out the fix was in on it from the beginning. Soon after this I dropped out of college entirely without bothering to get my degree and went to work full-time. The last time I spoke to my girlfriend was when I called her drunkenly one night. She told me I was doing what she called "nigger's work" and called me a "loser" and then hung up.

There is a postscript to the story however. I learned from my girlfriend's little sister, who I remained on good terms with, that her father had made a donation of \$20,000.00 to the re-election campaign of a certain Arkansas legislator. Soon after that my former girlfriend was accepted to the University of Arkansas' medical school at Little Rock. At the time she wasn't even a resident of the state, and her GPA had fallen into the "C" range. Then, a few months



later, Dr. Maxwell's second wife died of an overdose of sleeping pills. There was a brief investigation because the authorities found large quantities of barbituates at the house. They wondered why the doctor kept them around especially when his wife had a history of suicidal gestures. In the end it came to nothing and after a few months Dr. Maxwell married a woman just four years older than his eldest daughter. The two of them took off on an extended cruise in the Pacific.

In the past years I've come to accept many things about myself, even my status as a "loser" in the eyes of my girlfriend and the medical community. But one thing that has always bothered me in light of certain conclusions I came to about Dr. Maxwell and the fate of the psychiatrist (he jumped out of a window in 1979) was: just what were the qualities they were looking for. They seemed to be good at spotting "instability," but what about certain other tendencies such as omnipotence, unbridled aggression, megalomania, and just plain viciousness? Perhaps I concluded, these were just the sort of traits they figured would stand the doctor in good stead during the difficult years of medical school, internship and residency, and produce the kind of tough leaders needed by the AMA in its efforts to preserve the power and high income of doctors in these turbulent times.



# Could

Deborah Noyes

A wall of rain blocks the doorway.  
Out there soggy gales snap laundry  
Like fingers, in some strange ecstatic  
Dance.

At the window your vacancy  
Sign swings back and forth,  
Shaking its head at storms.

We could hate  
The stillness in here.

A cigarette dangles from lips  
That speak only too frequently.  
Or not enough. Or never.  
Smoke clouds hover by your head;  
Haloes of discarded things  
Drifting to meet ceilings  
And form sky,  
Drifting  
From unattached points  
To light always  
On the meager  
Eventuality  
Of lamps.

But what if all the bright spots  
Are full  
Like parking lots in  
August towns?  
Seaweed and scavenge so popular now.  
    Undignified gulls too close  
    At dry shore,  
    Reliant on crusts  
    From strangers.

I could prance to the corner  
Store, with no umbrella.  
We need beer, or peaches, or  
Something.  
    Damp clothes, musty  
    Like attics, frighten you.

And that is why we stay out  
Of the rain. We manufacture  
Overcast days and sell them  
Cheaply, to each other.



# Observations From a Darkroom

Alexa Trefonides

I am a photographer. Often I hesitate to reveal this fact casually; whenever I do, I am pressed to define my job. People want to know what kinds of pictures I take (portraits, seascapes, sunsets...), if I have a subscription to "Popular Photography," what kind of telephoto lense I have, and whether I do weddings. Another question I get is where do I *study* photography. This question is an unfortunate result of the hordes of enthusiastic art students who go around claiming their fame before attaining any. They want to get a jump on the market, or have such confidence in undeveloped genius that graduation is a mere technicality. I usually sum up my situation with a very useful word: freelance. If anyone wants to know more, I show them my pictures.

Photography is a peculiar art form in that it rarely works out to be art if one considers statistically how many people own cameras, and how many produce compositions of lasting classical merit. This is relatively comforting in times of frustration for the serious photographer, and has gotten me through some of my fears of competition in the field.

My field is mainly black and white portraiture and street photography, but I dabble in everything else. There are many ways to use photography from photo-collage to traditional color, or black and white stills to video. It's all a process of light transference onto tangible materials. Some artists prefer the technical manipulation of film and prints, while some of us try to remain pure. I work behind the old philosophy spawned by the early masters, most notably Cartier Bresson, of the "decisive moment." The photograph is as straightforward as possible. The print itself is devoid of distractions and abstractions, telling a story of what was

perhaps a split second within a moment only the photographer caught. This takes experience and quick reflex, a combination of mechanical and creative skill.

Sometimes we have to make choices in order to preserve our visual intentions. For instance, the way to nice clothes and expensive vacations usually involves commercial marketing or at least paid continuous assignments. One thing I will not do is work in a commercial studio photographing cigarettes or Diet Coke. Commercial work requires a large amount of technical ability as well as expensive equipment, and infinite patience. It is second only to industrial photography, the most boring sort of task that some photographers revel in for its abstract-image potentialities. Why not photograph the inside of an oil drum for "Geizer's Weekly" if it pays? Not making limitations for yourself means having to meld commercial and artistic philosophies comfortably, or at least separating them in your own mind so severely that you consider only one your "serious" work.

Most of us like to make money at what we like doing, which is why my chosen occupation works well for a few particularly talented and obsessed people, and precisely why it works only a fraction of the time for me. Is there room for art in any commercial? If photographing empty space with a rim is too boring, is it possible to extract artistic sustenance simply from the act of creating a print? Some photographers are so enamoured of the light reading and printing of flawless prints that they forget about the content of the images they produce. I find about one step out of fifty in the darkroom to be exciting: watching the image slowly appear on the paper swishing in the developing solution. It is magical and I never get tired of it. However, I have great respect for technical ability beyond what it takes to produce a correctly exposed and developed print. The middle ground is where a fine technician uses her mechanical agility too convey her artistic message clearly.

In the name of technical skill, I do weddings and Barmitzvahs. I know when and what to shoot at one of these tediously joyful events, I know how to set up the shots without intruding on my clients' big day, how much film to use, and how much to charge. I shot my first wedding ten years ago,

at the pre-nuptial age of fifteen, and my last one a few months ago. I secretly hope it was my last one, because weddings are a pain.

Most freelance photographers hate doing weddings because no matter how many you've done, they continue to be nerve wracking. The risks involved are so plentiful at a wedding that messing up just one can destroy an otherwise careful photographer's integrity permanently. The flash could malfunction, the camera could break or get a ball of goo jammed inside the shutter without your even noticing. Wedding clients do not accept the fact that the only professional pictures of their wedding came back from the lab all BLACK. It's a blow for me too, which is why I always carry at least two back-up cameras and flash outfits and an assistant. I have ruined only one wedding in ten years, and even after refunding every cent, blaming the foul-up on the lab, and promising to photograph all my clients' future children for free for the rest of their lives, I still feel bad about it. I promise myself that if I ever do it again, I'll quit weddings for good. I may even quit sooner; I'm so jaded by mushy wedding vows and conjugal coo-cooing that romance is clearly an illusion to me, and I'm turning into a cold fish.

After one particularly lavish wedding on Beacon Hill, the couple stayed married for a year. After the divorce, they ordered two thousand dollars worth of prints.

So how did I manage to get myself to this point of professionalism? I have not attended the World Academy of Photography, or gone to any art school for that matter. After one introductory course in high school, I continued to apprentice with my father, himself a photographer and painter. He had put a camera in my little eight year old hands and taken me out on the streets to record the city. We went to deserted amusement parks, public demonstrations, parades, and wandered as far as our film lasted.

By the time I was eighteen, I had a substantial portfolio. I won a few teen awards, had a couple of shows in art centers and libraries, and even made my television debut: "The Tom Larson Show," UHF, nine Sunday morning. I think four people, not including my mother, saw it. I was a hit.



It was sometime during my first year of college that I realized all my awards have been during the professional novelty of my youth. I dropped out of school for three years in order to concentrate on my career. Now I was part of the grow-up scene doing parties, weddings, public service ads, but my serious work was losing momentum in its race to the top where public recognition would sustain my stardom. Furthermore, I had the usual outrageous expenses of the business: film, lense tissue, chemicals, paper, electricity, food, etc. I became a waitress.

Six years of the indignities of food service kept my photography business simmering enough for me to finally quit food and live off of my art. I never pass up a wedding or an oil drum. Sometimes I win grants to teach kids.

I've decided to start a small busuness photographing pets for those who do not have time to have children, but need to smother something with love. With lavish Art Nouveau backdrops the little Rasputeins and Genevieves are frozen in time forever. Clients love the concept. I even hand tint the photos to add that nostalgia from the thirties. I rather like the prints enough to think about calling them part of my "serious" work.

There are other ways to make money in photography. Shooting models' portfolios can be fulfilling as long as the model doesn't mind. That is, the shots I like for my portfolio may be different from the straight, more traditional ones the model needs to get jobs. I try to satisfy the both of us. The only models I can really be weird with are rock bands who need promo shots and album covers. One problem with photographing musicians is that even if a group has hired me, there's no guarantee that all members will show up for the shoot at the same time. Some of those people have their flaky moments.

Portraiture on the street is my favorite way to shoot. Strangers usually do not know when they look particularly interesting. They're often not aware of my presence unless I get within three feet of their faces. I like parades and public events because at these, everyone is on stage and expecting to see photographers roaming around. The only times people object to having their pictures taken are when they're



doing something wrong, or if they tend to do wrong things. I was once nearly attacked by a very tall group of Rastah men at a dance because they saw my flash go off in their direction. I gave them the film, and was glad they did not break my camera. I try not to cause trouble; now I avoid using flash and have discovered the beauty of dark, dreamy photos which emphasize the scarcity of light.

The best thing about being a photographer is that it is exactly what I want to do. As long as my eyesight stays intact, and my mind doesn't go, I can take pictures for the rest of my life. I may even live to see photography appreciated in its finer forms by the masses. Or at least by museums and collectors.

Last summer an aspiring actress friend and I were cleaning houses of the rich and lazy for character research purposes (and eight dollars an hour), when all prepared to dust with loathing the usual framed museum posters hung over the usual VCR's, I walked into a modest room which had an entire wall covered with Dorethea Lange prints. My heart warmed instantly. Lange was one of the artists who worked for the government during the Depression recording conditions in the South. Her pictures are very moving, and are now quite famous. She is one of a handful of photographers noteworthy enough to be collected and admired nationally . . . as are painters of equal caliber.

As people begin investing in and treasuring old photography, contemporary work will begin to find a place in respectable locations other than cafe and laundromat gallery walls. The part of photography that is akin to learning to drive will undoubtedly become more automated. The masses will always have Kodak, and I'm certain that even in the crudest snapshot or the most commercial print, creativity will sneak in and own the best final products. Until I'm blind or crazy, I'll keep snapping whether I make an impression or not.

# Biography of PVT 000-00-000

Stephen Sadowski

November 1951  
on furlough from a war  
with Korea  
just 72 hours before  
becoming an MIA  
on maneuvers  
beneath the sheets he empties  
his seminal vesicles  
into his wife—  
his contribution to the baby  
boy born  
in August 1952

Laos 1970  
on maneuvers  
beneath jungle vegetation  
a Green Beret empties  
his M-16  
into Charlie—  
his contribution to world peace



i dreamt there was a murderer in my family. my teeth (new set)  
fell out and they cut everywhere



11-18 85

"What a dachshund"



# A Walk by the Lakeside

David McWilliam

Mike looked at the water. His pressed white trousers and pressed white shirt shone back at him.

"If you could only see me now," he said into the tiny microphone slung around his neck, "you'd be impressed."

Sunlight played on the lake's motionless surface and left it in an expanse of sparkling yellow. Far off at the southern end Mike saw the shadows of the pine tree grove his father had planted twenty years ago sweeping across the glassy water. Mike continued:

"Dear Dad, you can't imagine how good this springtime weather makes me feel." His clean white tennis shoes felt particularly comfortable at that moment and he smiled.

"I'm circling the lake along the cement pathway, the one you and I so often used to use before your accident. Yellow daffodils line the green banks of the lake.

"Today for some strange reason I had the impulse to tape a message to you. I realize perfectly well that you're no longer the same, something's gone." Mike heard footsteps very faintly and turned around, but seeing nothing he resumed speaking.

"Your house, as I know you wanted, is now under my care. This isn't quite the way I wanted it, but you were hardly capable of managing your own hygiene, much less the management of your house. Why you ever fell from the eastern corner into the pool below is something I could never understand. At least, contained in your little room in our house you're safe. That makes me very happy, very happy. I've reconciled myself to your not understanding very much anymore. But I still remember everything you taught me. After reading much about stone houses I still



agree with you; I cannot see their advantage over plastic ones. Plastic is easy to clean, comes in any color you like, and is shipped in manageable 10 pound, 3x3x3 blocks." Mike had reached a bench by the grove of pine trees. He sat down.

Sue looked at herself in her mirror. She brushed her long black hair. Her fingers shaking she applied her blue mascara. She heard her mother knocking at her door.

"Come in," she said.

"Well, what have you decided to do?" her mother asked.

"I've let father out," Sue replied, "my hope is that he'll be able to solve his problem for himself."

Sue glanced out the window. At the far end of the lake walking by the pine tree grove she saw her brother. Turning round to face her mother, who had taken that moment to freshen up, Sue said,

"I never knew him and I'll never know him."

"Who?"

"Mike."

"What do you mean you'll never know him, you might?"

"I don't think so."

Mike had stood up from the bench and begun to speak. Again he heard someone's footfall, and, grinding grains of sand with his tennis shoes on the cement pathway, looked toward the grove of pine trees. Waiting for a few seconds without seeing anything he adjusted the microphone and continued:

"When I was a child of nine or ten you gave me some hollow plastic blocks. That was the beginning of my interest in Architecture. Now I'm with a group which has ideas very similar to the ones that governed your design of our house. We want only white, we think the box the most brilliant thing in the world, kind of like the one in which we now live."

Mike caught sight of himself in the water and smiled. Taking a white notebook out of his shirt pocket he reminded himself to commend his sanitation specialist on the appearance of the grounds. He then carried on speaking:

“Sue has, very regretfully I tell you this, forgotten what you imbued in us. I don’t think her manner of behaviour is at all nice. She always says she’s after the real thing, real love, real hate. In my opinion, and I know you’d agree, she’s become a pretty vulgar woman. She and I seldom speak, In fact she refuses to speak at all with me. This disturbs me terribly. But what can you do Dad? You’re gone beneath all of that pale watery stuff the nurse injects into your veins. Yes, that was and still is at my request. I believe under the circumstances this is the best thing we can do for you. You who had always been so calm and serene cursed and recanted everything you had shown me.

“It’s funny, but as I approach these yellow nodding daffodils I realize it was the sight of them which reminded me of you. These flowers made me think of you because after you had fallen you demanded that Sue bring daffodils to your bed. The doctors said all you had was a minor concussion. Sue said, ‘it was a bump that finally brought him out of his fanatical dream,’ but I knew something far more serious had occurred. You screamed at me, threw a plastic pitcher of milk at me, the rest is pointless to mention. Yet you can thank me for having the doctors prescribe something to restore your former peace.

“It seems that the medication you are receiving has a therapeutic effect. It will be continued. Sue says that the drugs are taking away your spirit. Just what she means I don’t know. But I really wouldn’t want to see you in the emotional state you were in before. Talking about emotions I’m doing some wonderful things Tuesday and Thursday evenings. I learn how to relax.”

As Mike said this he felt a sharp piercing sensation at his back. He quietly stared as the grass and the lake ran together into a blue-green syrupy puddle. His knees gave way and he slumped to the ground. Standing over him and

trembling in his pajamas and muddied slippers was Mike's father. The old man closed his eyes. He drew back his pink swollen hand and threw the syringe. Barely creating a splash it slid neatly beneath the surface of the lake. Small concentric circles, like a series of smiles, emanated out from the point where it had entered. Seeing the sun glistening along the tiny waves Mike's father said,

"At last, after all this time I'm alive. Good-bye Michael, thank you for your care."

# In My Brother's Name

Courtney Wayshak

The parking lot on Cottage Grove was full. The kid that sat on the stool, in the beat up shack, keeping a blinded eye on the worn out Chevys and Caddys with more rust than chrome, looked bored. His blaster was cranked up full force, blaring out noise that posed as music. I walked up to him and asked, in my deepest voice possible, if he had seen Chin. Over the screech and din he yelled "What!" I told him to turn the radio down. He did. I asked him again, "You seen Chin?" The kid was well into a cigar shaped joint of some weak smelling reefer. He pulled off the end of it and exhaled. The words ambled slowly from his mouth. "Naw, ain't seen a soul for the last hour or so dude." I looked away, over the roofs of the cars and stared into the skyline that rose up in the distance. He slapped my arm and asked for a smoke. I gave him a broken one. He bounced the butt off the end of the counter-top and tried to talk. "You're the first sucker I've seen since the lot's been full. No Chin, no anybody been by here dude." I could see that he had eaten pizza for dinner. Hunks of crust and tomato sauce stuck in between the cracks of his rotted teeth. I pressed him further. "You sure you haven't seen a Chinese guy wearing a powder blue windbreaker come into this lot?" The dooper shook his head. My patience was now as thin as a pancake and getting thinner. I was to have met Charles Chin in this lot an hour ago. I was feeling like I had been stood up on a blind date with an ugly woman. I stared into the kid's red, blood shot eyes and asked if there was a pay phone handy. He pointed across the street. I followed his finger and thanked him.

As I was making my way towards the phone booth a car

horn beeped. I looked up in its direction. A should-a-been condemned Oldsmobile slowly cruised up beside me. The window came down. A tiny head with a hat on the top of it peeked between the crack.

"You the Stiff lookin' for Chin?"

I nodded.

"Get in."

I slid into the front seat and pulled the door behind me. The smells of aftershave and pine air freshener were battling it out for control of the car's interior. The Olds pulled out into traffic.

The Fat-Guy driving kept his eye on the road ahead of us. A dimpled-faced middle-aged Mexican man sat in the back with a magazine on his lap. I could see the muzzle of a nickel plated revolver reflecting light from underneath it.

We drove along for a while with silence as the background music. Nobody said word one. Silence has always bothered me, it gnaws, like a herd of termites, so I asked if I could turn on the radio. The Fat-Guy said no like he meant it. So I started to hum. He told me to shut up. He was big enough so I did. With one eye on the mound at the wheel and the other on the scenery that whisked by, I concluded that the Fat-Guy hadn't the faintest idea of where he was going. I saw him run a finger through his hair when we crossed Michigan Avenue, then saw him run the same finger through the same hair when we crossed Michigan Avenue again, twenty minutes later. Bored, I reached for a cigarette. The Mexican leaned forward and asked if I had anything else inside my coat besides the cigarettes. I lied and said I didn't. What I really wished I had was a map. I would have given it to the Fat-Guy.

The Fat-Guy finally pulled into a Jack-in-the-Box restaurant. The Mexican told him to pull up to the metal speaker shaped like a clown's head. When we were directly across from it the Fat-Guy beeped. A nasal voice came from within.

"Can I take your order please?"

I leaned over and yelled for a coffee, two sugars. The Fat-Guy put his hand in my face and pushed me back. Then he spoke.

“Yeah Jack, sorry to bother ya, but can ya give me some directions on how to get to Fremont Ave. from here?” There was a moment’s hesitation. Then the voice reappeared. The voice told the Fat-Guy to take a left at the light, then follow that street down five blocks. When he saw a White Castle’s on the left he should take that right. The Fat-Guy sat there nodding his box-like head as if it were on a spring. When Jack finished speaking, I asked the Fat-Guy about the coffee. He reached over and put his finger in my eye.

With the directions in his head, the Fat-Guy jammed down hard on the pedal and tore out of the Jack-in-the-Box lot as if a gang of used car salesmen were after him. My head was jerked backwards, I smelled the burning of rubber, I heard the squealing of tires, I felt the rush of the wind, I saw life itself dash onwards into an abyss of futility, I felt...Whoa, get a grip,” I told myself. Since the accident, the one where I bumped my head, I’ve been stringing these long, involved sentences together in my brain. I hate that when it happens. I gotta get help.

The car was now heading in the direction Jack had given the Fat-Guy. The Mexican in the back was reading the magazine. He held it sideways. Another section fell out. It was probably Miss May. I hadn’t seen her yet so I asked if I could sneak a peek. The Fat-Guy rammed his elbow in my rib cage. I was now short of breath and getting the feeling the Fat-Guy didn’t like me. It must have been the “SAVE THE WHALES” button I was wearing on my coat. Guys like him feel threatened by other animals.

I was at an impass. No radio, no chit-chat, no sneaky peeks at the girlie mags. What did they want me to do for entertainment? I sucked on my teeth and waited. We drove around for another hour and finally I got so fed up I yelled as loud as I could, “What the hell is going on around here?” The Mexican looked coolly at his watch and answered.

“Mr. Stiff, Chin will see you now.”

“Well it’s about time,” I mumbled under my breath.

The Fat-Guy took his cue and hung a hard left, barely missing two old ladies crossing against the light. One of the

old girls dropped her bag while racing for the safety of the sidewalk. The Fat-Guy backed up and ran the bag over. With a smile on his face he continued to speed down a dark, ill-lit street at sixty some odd miles an hour. After several blocks of some hair raising speeds he jumped on the brakes with all his weight. The car fish-tailed and then came to a skidding halt. He had over shot his mark by a couple of yards. He threw the shift into reverse and backed up. We were now directly in front of the TRUE BLUE AUTO PAINTING PALACE.

The Fat-Guy eased the car up the well worn ramp. Once in front, he hit a small button that was held by glue over the rear-view mirror. The door lifted automatically. We sat and watched it roll up a cranky chain. Once up, the Fat-Guy pulled the car inside. As the car came to a halt he floored the engine. The small garage filled with a diesel fuel smoke. A big thick cloud of it sat right in the middle of the place, like a fumed Buddha, blotting out the light from the small bulbs that were hung on wires throughout the place. Just as the cloud began to settle, a tall, skinny black man walked over to the car. He pounded on the hood and pointed at me. The Mexican nodded and I waved. The skinny black man, who was obviously gay, went "Oh yeah!" He walked around to my side of the car and pulled the door open.

"Get out sissy," he said with a lisp.

I told him I was waiting till all the smoke had settled. He told me he didn't give a shit what I was waiting for. He reached down and grabbed my shirt by the collar and tried dragging me out. I pulled back and told him to wait. I looked down at my collar and saw that it was smudged with dirt. I wasn't thrilled with that one bit. I promised myself I would square with the limp later. I waved him away and told him to give me some room. He stepped back and with all the formality of the Queen of England, I emerged from the car and caught my first glimpse of the TRUE BLUE AUTO PAINTING PALACE.

It was a filthy little joint, crammed with busted auto fenders and assorted parts. Cans of paint were thrown everywhere. Before I had a chance to get even better acquainted with the squalor that laid before my eyes, I felt the

tug at my arm and a gun snuggle into the small of my back. I was dragged forward, towards an office that still had Christmas tinsel draped around the frame. When we got to the office door the black guy inserted a key into the latch. The door opened. "Get in there," he said. So I went.

The walls of the office were bare except for a calendar that hung over the desk. The calendar was advertising refrigerators. Different brands for different months. It was April, the month's feature was a Sears Kenmore. It was a bright yellow, with that no-smudge enamel I like so much. I remarked to the Mexican how lovely it looked, "It definitely adds something. Who's your decorator?" The Mexican nodded to the Fat-Guy and the Fat-Guy hauled off and caught me under the chin with a solid left hand. We were all just standing around, me, I was bleeding, but everybody else seemed OK. The Fat-Guy pointed towards a chair and told me to take it. I asked him where. His face curled up into a tight little knot, then turned an ashen shade of white. I could see the large veins in his neck expand with a blood rush. I figured him for mad.

"I'm gettin' sick and tired of hearin' that smart-ass mouth of yours," he barked. I told him I was sick of a lot of things, but there was little I could do except eat right and call my mother on weekends. He went to slap me but the Mexican stepped forward and caught his fist just as it was ready to snuggle into my jaw. I looked over at the Mexican and told him to tell the Fat-Guy he was one lucky pepper-head.

I was getting antsy. The fourteen cups of coffee I had at the hamburger joint were having an effect. I needed a toilet, and soon. I asked if they had one handy. In unison, like some Byzantine barbershop quartet, they said no. So I sat in my chair and rocked back and forth. That didn't help so I crossed my legs.

"Listen fellas," I said with a plea in my voice, "why the hostile treatment? Whatever happened to that Welcome Wagon spirit that made this country so great? Don't you guys read Miss Manners?" Just as they were ready to answer with their fists, a small Chinese man opened the door and stepped in. I figured it was Chin. He walked behind



the ratty desk with the wobbly leg and sat down in a swivel chair that barely squeaked. He rearranged a few sheets of paper, then pushed them aside. He leaned back in the chair and propped his feet up. The holes in his shoes were the size of quarters. Business must of been bad lately. Chin, in his chair, with his feet up, looked comfortable. He smiled at me, so I smiled back.

The Fat-Guy took the quiet time to expel a little wind. The office filled with a noxious odor which caused all of us to wince. He was asked to leave. Everybody seemed relieved. Especially me, the guy was making me nervous. Before he opened the door he looked at me with a face that was etched with hate. He pounded his giant fist into his palm. It was designed to scare me, but didn't. I just sat there and grinned. When he slammed the door the calendar fell to the floor. I reached over to pick it up. The black guy came forward and stepped on my bowling hand. "Leave it there," he hissed. I felt all one hundred and thirty-three pounds of his hair dressin' ass on my hand and I tried not to show that it hurt. I was glad there wasn't any music playing cause he'd a probably started dancing. I turned my head towards Chin and asked him to intervene. He snapped his fingers and the black guy stepped off. The Mexican moved forward and pulled me upright. The black guy put the calendar back on the wall.

Mr. Chin, still wearing his powder blue windbreaker, told me how happy he was I could come by. He sounded about as sincere as Ed Meese addressing the NAACP. I told him it was my pleasure. He said that he was a busy man. Like I wasn't. He went on about how he was doing me this big favor talking with me about my problem. I told him I understood. As polite as a nun, he asked just what I wished to speak with him about. I was just about to tell him when the phone rang. It was his wife. He looked around the desk for a pen and couldn't find one. He snapped his fingers and pointed towards the black guy. The black guy reached into his coat pocket and produced a pencil. He threw it on the desk. Chin began writing.

"Two orders of linguine with meat sauce, one order of pasta DeRillio, a half order green beans and garlic, and

some rolls. Yep, got it hon. What? And a liter of Coke, how about Pepsi? OK, see you soon, bye-bye." He kissed the mouth piece and hung the phone up.

"As I was saying, I'm a busy man, Mr. Stiff. A really busy man, if you haven't noticed by now. My boys have been telling me that you've been saying some rather rude and unpleasant things about me and my company. They say you've been yakin' some pretty big talk down at the pool hall. They tell me you've got quite a big mouth for so small a man. If you have something to say, here's your chance, now say it to my face."

I coughed lightly then spit on the floor. I knew, instinctively, that it looked tough, but no one seemed as impressed as I was. So I started to talk. Little words from the little man.

"We'll make this short Chin. My brother Jimmy, that's Jimmy with a J, came to me and told me of this problem he's had with you. Jimmy ain't the brightest guy in the neighborhood so I told him I'd help. He says he came in here one day and asked for a paint job. It was so simple. The car was nothing but metal, not an ounce of paint on the thing. His wife was naggin' him, so to shut her up he said he'd get the job done by the best. The best was out of business so he brought it here. He signed the papers, had the job done, drove the car home and thought that was the end of it. A week later he comes out of his house and sees that all the paint has been washed away by rain. He was pissed, and understandably so. He came down here, talked with you and you told him to stick his head in his ass and keep whistlin' till the Cubs won a pennant. That wasn't nice, now was it? You better be careful Chin, you could lose you Better Business Bureau registration with an attitude like that. Boil that down and all I'm here for is to ask you to redo the job. Simple enough?"

I sat back in my chair and waited on his benevolence. Chin rocked in his chair while doodling with a pencil. Each notation was drawn more furiously and after a couple of seconds the pencil tip broke. Chin exploded and hurled the pencil against the wall.

"Who do you think you are Mr. Stiff? Where do you get

off coming into my place like this and accusing me of shoddy work. I've been painting cars longer than you've had brains. I've won the Earl Schibe \$69.95 Auto Painting Award three times. I'm not in business to screw my clients. I give one hundred percent fast and efficient service. God damn it, I smile."

I paused for a beat then took the biggest breath of air I could muster. "Listen Chin, you've got this all wrong. My brother..."

He cut fast into the middle of my sentence. "And who is this brother of yours anyway? Another Stiff?"

I turned and looked around the room. I stared each and everyone of those imbeciles straight in the eye. "My brother? I just told you, Jimmy Stiff. Let me refresh the memory. Jimmy's a mill worker. Makes a nice chunk of change. Drives a '69 Chevy, with white walls. You gotta remember him, he's the only guy left in this city who still has them goofy-assed furry dice hangin' from his rear-view mirror. Listen, I'm sure it's in your books, just save us all a lot of trouble and look it up."

My bladder felt like an over inflated football staring at a punter's foot. Crossing my legs didn't help. I wasn't expecting this to take so long. I figured I'd come in, act tough, blow some smoke and they'd be putty in my hands. The last thing I expected was the hard-guy act.

Chin motioned the Mexican over to his desk. The Mexican ambled over and leaned his head down. Chin spoke into his ear. The Mexican shook his head a few times then spoke into Chin's ear. Chin was hot. He slammed his fist down on the desk top and turned a ripe shade of disco pink. He began making a scene. He pushed the papers on his desk onto the floor. He stomped his feet a few times, he wailed in Chinese and then ripped at what little hair was still on his head.

"No, I don't redo nothin'. You tell your stupid brother to keep his damn car out of the rain. I'm not responsible for his mistakes. If he wants that car repainted then he pays, like everybody else. Chin don't do charity. As for you, Mr. Stiff, this meeting is officially over. I don't want to see your ugly little face around here anymore, is that clear? And

another thing, if I hear you've been talking, say just one more word, mention my name in conversation, I'll have your knees broken and your nose ripped off the front of your face and airtailed to Hong Kong. Do you understand me, Mr. Stiff?"

I nodded and pretended I did, but I wasn't there to play patsy to a bunch of chumps. As casually as possible I went into my jacket. They must of thought I was going for the cigarettes because they were suprised as hell when I came out with the cannon. I leveled it at Chin's head and told him if he twitched, blinked an eye or drew a breath, I'd blow another hole in his nose. Of all the things to have done, he laughed. To me, guns are anything but funny. Off-handedly, I asked him if he thought the gun wasn't loaded. He said no, he believed the gun to be loaded, but he had his doubts about whether or not I had the guts to pull the trigger. So I did.

The first shot tore into his neck, knocking him out of the chair. He rose up slowly and stood silent while blood spurted from the wound. He tried to speak but came off sounding like the kid in the parking lot. "Are you...," he tried to finish the sentence but blood filled his mouth. So I finished it for him.

"Am I what? Crazy? Gutless? A fool, perhaps? Sorry Chin, I'm a business man, just like yourself. My business is to right the wrongs in this world. I came in here prepared to talk business, man to man like. What I got from you was a hard time. You tried to stick me after you got through sticking my brother, I don't go for that. I came in here all nice and expected to be treated the same way. Your gorillas smeared dirt on my shirt, refused to let me use the bathroom, stepped on my bowling hand and I'm supposed to act like Dudly Goddamn Doo-right? What do you take me for Mr. Chin, a Jehovah's Witness? Sorry, but if anybody around here made a mistake it's you."

The time for talk was over.

I spied the black guy moving off to the left with ideas of playing the hero. I let him move in close to my shoulder, then I wheeled and whacked him across the head with the end of my gun. I paused for a second to see if the gun was

scratched. Lucky for him, it wasn't. I watched him fall to the floor in a heap. The Mexican went for the door. I drew a bead on him and told him if he moved again I'd shoot his weenie off. He was obviously a man who loved his weenie because he froze in his shoes like a statue. With all the commotion going on around me I had completely forgotten about my buddy, the Fat-Guy. From out of the corner of my eye I caught sight of him tearing ass towards the office door with mayhem in his cold, cruel eyes. I politely asked the Mexican to step back away from the door. I aimed through the plate glass window and shot the Fat-Guy once, just under the arm pit. He acted as if he didn't even feel it, so I shot him again. He felt that one because he let out a scream that could be heard for blocks. No doubt he woke the neighbors. He came forward a few feet, then stumbled a bit, tripping over a fender. It was a shame, I was just starting to like him, too.

I looked hard at my Mexican friend. He smiled weakly.

"Get out the appointment book amigo." He looked at me like I was kidding. I told him I wasn't.

"Get out the damn book or you're next!" I had the gun pointed at his Adam's apple. It had bull's-eye written all over it. He rushed to the other side of the desk, nearly tripping over the slumped Mr. Chin. He hurriedly searched for the book but was making little progress. I cocked the gun. He hurried a little faster. Finally he found it. And it was about time. I told him to open it to the following week.

"Now write in my brother's name."

He was shaking visibly and blurted out he didn't have a pen. I gave him mine.

"What time?" he murmured.

I scratched my head a second and then said thoughtfully, "Make it for around eleven, that's a.m."

I watched him scribble in the name and I went around to check on the spelling. He had spelled Jimmy wrong. I pointed out his mistake and told him to correct it. He did.

"Now pay attention my friend. I'm only going to say this once. My brother's going to drive in here next week and he's going to be thinking that everything is square and on the level. You are, under no circumstances, to let on what

has happened in here today. If the man finds out, I'll be back, you can count on that, you hear!"

I watched his dark eyes flutter and his thin lips tremble. He stood there silent, bobbing his head up and down. I put a shot just over his shoulder to make sure he understood. I turned around and glanced at the office. I snatched the calendar off the wall and put it inside my coat. I looked at my watch, it was quarter to nine. I made for the exit.

My pulse was racing like a quarter horse bearing down in the back stretch. I thought about another cup of coffee but my bladder yelled, "Enough already!" I walked over to the mass of flesh that used to be the Fat-Guy, I looked at him for a moment and thought about all the wonderful times he and I had shared. But I couldn't hold it any longer. So I went on the closest thing handy. What did he care, he was dead.

Outside was cool and you could feel that hint of rain in the air. Two young people walked by arm in arm and they looked like they might be in love. On closer inspection, she looked like a hooker and he looked like a True-Value Hardware salesman. So much for love.

I made a right turn onto Cermack Ave. and walked north towards Ashland Ave. I caught the ninty-nine bus and was halfway home when I remembered that the Cubs were playing a twilight double header with the Phillies. I knew all I had to do was stop off and pick myself up a six-pack of Heileman's Old Style and my night would be set. I could already hear Jack Brickhouse yelling, "Hey, Hey, Cubs Win, Cubs Win!"







# Violin Spiders

(after E.L. Doctorow's  
*The Book of Daniel*)

Morgan Paley Reed

Their music quiet  
crawling, spinning a  
fine mesh web of  
confusion. Spewing a trail of  
sticky misinterpretation.

Daniel watches too closely,  
fry daddy; mommy fry.  
Susan Starfish rocks  
under water—toilet bowl of veins  
refusing coagulation. Wounds so  
deep they'll never heal.  
Flush them clean, the  
stain remains.

Can a spider be  
guilty? So easy to  
destroy, why bother  
groveling bugs?

Watch them under glass.  
See them sputter, dance.

Collect them. In lieu of pins  
destroy them. They  
outgrew their cigar box.

History repeats itself.  
What is always was.

Burn the draft card, burn the  
boy. Women burn for their crime of  
gender. No card needed, no card  
allowed; collective crime.

“Let’s go to Disneyland, Mindish.”  
“Let’s go to California, Wally.”  
Fantasy World—cut your hair or  
don’t—come in.

Yiddish prayers, pay to pray,  
blood money to save their souls.  
Save your own it’s tormented.  
Fix it  
if you can.

# Isis of the Many Spheres

John Jupiter Styles

There is no simple description of Isis, no concise enumeration of her spheres of activity. Compassionate to the grieved and ailing, affectionate and faithful wife to Osiris, nurturing and protective mother of the Pharaohs of Egypt in whom her son, Horus, was embodied; ever loyal to her devotees, stern disciplinarian of any and all who challenged or denied her greatness—Isis was a passionate goddess. Her intellectual and material accomplishments were many and essential. It was she who sustained human life—indeed, all life—through these efforts. Through her divine will life triumphed over death, reason over chaos, good over evil. Her role as giver of sustenance to human beings would have been enough to command the fear of her worshippers. But her all-loving, nurturing persona secured for her their veneration. Brilliant, vital and magnetic, Isis surpassed all other deities in Egyptian cosmogony, overshadowing even Osiris, her illustrious consort. Even in conservative and somewhat xenophobic Rome, Isis took her hold. She challenged lofty Olympus from her stand on the soil of mortals. Everywhere she went she alleviated the spiritual famine that plagued devotees of the remote Olympian hierarchy. In short, Isis revitalized and revolutionized the paganism of antiquity.

Born in the cradle of Egyptian civilization, Isis was worshipped extensively thousands of years before Greek traders and pirates stepped onto the shores of Egypt. In her native land Queen Isis filled several vital functions. Personifying the Earth which receives life, every year at the summer solstice she wept for her dead husband Osiris, the drought-parched Nile. As she sorrowed, her tears resurrected the dead god in the incarnation of their son Horus, the living

waters. With the inundation of the river the new year of planting—of growth and fruitfulness—began. Men and women gave thanks for their succor with sacred rites dedicated to Isis, led by her priests on the banks of the Nile. Thus Isis not only rejuvenated life, but, in fact, spun the wheel of time.

Her brother Seth, lord of Evil, was the drought that parched the soils of Egypt; his realm was the desert lying on either side of the Nile Valley. Yet Osiris, the consort of Isis, was the King of the Dead. The fastness of their marriage bond is notable. So ineluctably fitting was their union that they consummated it while still in the womb of their mother Nut, the sky-goddess impregnated by the primitive earth-god Geb. The strength of their fidelity demonstrates that, in Egyptian cosmogony, life and death are not warring forces; rather, they are balancing complements. Isis resurrects Osiris (in an important variation of the legend, reported by Plutarch,<sup>1</sup> she roams Phoenicia gathering his scattered remains and fits them all back together, save for the phallus). But she does not take action to ensure that Seth will not murder him again. In the unending cycle of the seasons death is the bed of rebirth. Isis' early identification with the earth led the Greek colonists in Egypt to equate her with Ceres, their own earth-goddess of grain.

In Egypt reverence for Isis preserved internal political security. Every Pharaoh was the incarnation of her son Horus, and Isis was said to suckle, nurture and protect him. Therefore any subversion against the Pharaoh was tantamount to challenging the divine will of Isis. Her strong nurturing disposition toward Horus, her grief over her husband's murder, her persistence in collecting the many scattered pieces of his dismembered body help to illustrate her loyalty to family values. In fact, she was regarded as the perfect wife and mother, the goddess of the family. But her compassion and very human capacity for empathy raised her above and beyond the microcosm of the family.

Apuleius' famous novel of the second century A.D., *Metamorphoses*, or, *The Golden Ass*, demonstrates the pan-cosmic dimensions to which Isis' maternal nature had risen by this time. In *Metamorphoses*, Lucius, having been

transformed by sorcery into the shape of a donkey, looking at the moon invokes the aid of whichever goddess manifests her presence in its form, hailing her as "Queen of Heaven." Isis appears before him in his sleep, splendidly garbed in all the symbols of her pancosmic powers. Gleaming stars and the shining moon bedeck her garment; a luminous circlet decorates her forehead; her shoes are interwoven with palm leaves, and the pungence of spices fills the air about her. Addressing Lucius, she refers to herself as "the mother of Nature, the mistress of all the elements, the first offspring of Time, highest of deities..."<sup>22</sup> She tells him further: "My nod governs the shining heights of Heaven, the wholesome breezes of the sea, the lamented silence of the world below."<sup>23</sup> Apuleius lauds Isis not only for giving life to all things but also for ruling the winds, seasons, and all movements of the celestial bodies, and for the sunlight which radiates from her presence. Isis tells Lucius that all other goddesses are only aspects of her, worshipped under indigenous names. But first and foremost, she titles herself "Mother of the Gods."

As a primordial mother, Isis merits investigation. After all, this aspect of the goddess accounted for a large part of her popular appeal. R.E. Witt tells us that "in the world of the Aegean where the religious ideas of the Greeks took shape, the All-Mother was much more ancient than the All-Father." Witt points out, for example, that "Cybele, the Phrygian Mother of the Gods, and the Cretan Universal Mother, whether called Rhea or Dictynna, evolved from a purely tribal totem into a universal father figure."<sup>24</sup> These primitive goddesses personified Nature, the source of all life. But further, they were for their suppliants personal Saviours: compassionate and all-embracing, as was Isis. In *Metamorphoses* Lucius cries: "Hallowed and everlasting Saviour of the human race, Thou dost always bestow Thy dear love on wretched men in their mishaps."<sup>25</sup> Temples of Isis were to be found by the marketplace, and there is evidence that the Iseum in Pompeii was also a public meeting-ground (an election notice has been found posted on the Iseum). Even as far away from the Mediterranean as Southwark, London, near the Thames, a jug has been found that bears the inscription "At Isis' Temple."<sup>26</sup>

Among other renowned attributes was her power to heal the sick. Long ago, in Egypt, she had wrested from the primordial god Re the secret of his name and thus, its magic medicinal powers. In Egypt, medicine was inexorably linked with sorcery and to a great extent they were indistinguishable. In the Ebers medical papyrus, dated circa 1600 B.C., she is invoked thus: "O Isis, thou great Mage, heal me, release me from all things that are bad and evil and that belong to Seth, from the demonic fatal sicknesses..."<sup>7</sup> In the ancient world diseases were commonly regarded as demons and thus the act of healing was a rite of exorcism. All through the ancient world temples were erected to Isis Medica, to which the ailing suppliant might travel to invoke her aid. Isis' reputation as the great pharmacologist was so great that Galen reported the giving of her name to an actual drug that reputedly staunched wounds, relieved headaches, closed lesions and ulcers, mended fractures and blocked the ill effects of poisonous bites.<sup>8</sup>

One is tempted to ask: "What didn't Isis do?" Indeed, she even declared that she had given human beings the gift of civilization. In Egypt, she was held to be the inventor of spinning and weaving. This is not as "domestic" as it sounds since papyrus served as both the stuff of writing material, agent of the transmission of civilization, and the symbol of the canvas-flagged ships that carried commerce up and down the Nile. But later, in Hellenistic times, Isis and Osiris came to be seen as collaborators in civilizing the primitive savage. Isis showed human beings how to preserve themselves through the introduction of laws, while Osiris taught them to cultivate wheat and barley. Osiris also founded cities and temples and taught mortals to venerate the gods. In three inscriptions known as the "praises of Isis" (found in various parts of Greece) Isis claims to have ended cannibalism, murder, "the rule of tyrants," and to have invented laws and navigation.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, she is said to have invented the marriage contract. In addition, she was the mother of several languages and established knowledge of moral imperatives in the human mind: truth, marital love, and the honoring of parents. Also, she set the gestation period at nine months.

We know that Isis' significance far surpassed her consort's by Hellenistic times; for Alexander, establishing

her temple in his new city, did not establish another for Osiris. By this time the worship of Isis was not only spread out over Greece, Rome and the Near East but also Spain, Gaul, and the British Isles. So her popular appeal is obvious. But what kind of reception did she receive in the Graeco-Roman world by those who were able to compare her to the traditional figures of the Olympic Pantheon? What thoughts and feelings did she inspire?

The angles through which she was approached by Greece and Rome differ strikingly. The difference had to do with intellectual temperament. Greece traditionally was always more inclined toward analysis, and its intellectuals tended to look for a philosophical or scientific meaning behind Egyptian myth. Plutarch, for example, interpreted Isis-Osiris-Seth (Typhon) along the lines of Greek physical theories associating moisture with life, aridity with death. Here Osiris as moisture preserved life and Seth as aridity destroyed it; Isis as earth was merely something acted upon by one, then the other.<sup>10</sup> In another one Plutarch's interpretations we still find Isis in a passive role: formless matter. Marriage to Osiris unites her with the organizing principle, Reason.<sup>11</sup>

If we look for one or two examples of Isis in Roman thought we must turn to poetry. The Roman mind was more inclined to react to whatever was to be seen or heard on the surface of a religion. Then, the aristocratic classes tended to look at things foreign with a jaundiced eye. Lastly, Rome lacked the awed veneration felt by Greece for civilizations more ancient than her own.

Roman poets were jealous of the ten nights of chastity periodically required of devotees of Isis. Propertius calls them the *tristia solemnia*: "Ten nights Cynthia has given to her religion...A curse upon the rituals which from warm Nile a goddess has sent to the women of Italy! A goddess who so often keeps ardent lovers separated, whoever she be, must always have been a cruel goddess..."<sup>12</sup> Ovid referred to Isiac temples as places of prostitution, and about a century later Juvenal ridiculed the credulity of women who made pilgrimages to Meroe to fetch Isiac holy water.

But among Roman poets we find one chord of sympathy. Tibullus, lying ill while absent from Rome and his lover

Delia, asks Isis to make him well, rewarding Delia for her pious observance of Isiac rites: "What help does thy Isis, Delia, now give me? What avails it that in dutiful observance of her rites thou didst bathe in clean water and—I remember well—slept apart on a chaste bed? Now aid me, goddess, now—for that thou canst heal is shown by the crowd of painted panels in thy temples. Then my Delia will pay the debt of her vow, sitting all clad in linen before thy door and twice a day chant thy praises, conspicuous in the Egyptian throng..."<sup>13</sup>

The cult of Isis was strong to the very end of paganism and gained adherents from the entire spectrum of civilization. In pagan antiquity she was always a force to be reckoned with.

#### Footnotes

1. Witt, R.E. *Isis in the Graeco-Roman World*. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1971), p. 3.
2. Solmsen, Friedrich. *Isis Among the Greeks and Romans*. (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 27.
3. *ibid.*, p. 3.
4. Witt, R.E. *Isis in the Graeco-Roman World*. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1971), p. 130.
5. *ibid.*, p. 134.
6. *ibid.*, p. 138.
7. *ibid.*, p. 187.
8. *ibid.*, p. 195.
9. Solmsen, Friedrich. *Isis Among the Greeks and*



*Romans*. (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 42.

10. *ibid.*, p. 64.

11. *ibid.*, p. 66.

12. *ibid.*, p. 70.

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# Only Brother

Richard McManus

Daniel sat on the tire swing that hung from the old elm tree in his backyard. Dangling his feet so that his sneakers barely touched the ground he raised puffs and puffs of dust from the bare patch of earth beneath the tire. The slam of the wooden screen door surprised him. It was Sunday afternoon and things were supposed to be quiet. His father worked twelve hour shifts at the mine and Sunday was his only day to relax. He was usually asleep in the parlor before the dishes were cleared from the table.

Daniel's younger brother, Harlan, came hurriedly down the hill. "C'mon," he said, smiling through his freshly wiped face. "Dad's taking us for a ride." Daniel gripped the rope securely and pushed himself. The tire swung around so that his back was toward his brother. "Hurry up, we're waiting on you."

"Go ahead by yourself, I'll be right up," Daniel said without turning to address his brother.

His mother was on her way out when he reached the back door.

"Hurry along and wash your face," his mother told him. "Your brother and father are already in the car." She tied a kerchief under her chin and picked up a pile of neatly folded sweaters. "Don't forget to lock up, and hurry. We haven't got all day."

They were all seated in their respective seats when Daniel got to the driveway. "Hurry-up slow poke," Harlan yelled from the window. His mother gave a quick wave of her hand and Daniel dashed over to the other side of the car and took his seat behind her. The engine was started before he'd closed the door.

Sunday drives were always an occasion for the Houghlan family. The boys were never told where they were going and Daniel often wondered if his mother even knew their destination. She would always make up little missions to keep the boys occupied in the back seat. Their last drive was at the beginning of summer, when they went to Crescent Caves. The mission that time had been to see who could count the most cats. The best they could do was a dead raccoon that Harlan said he saw.

When Mr. Houghlan looked to back out of the driveway, Daniel noticed he hadn't bothered to comb his hair. They couldn't be going anyplace special, he thought. Heaps of golden hay piled onto trusses were scattered in the fields that lined the road. "Look at all that hay," said Mrs. Houghlan, speaking to no one in particular. Then she turned to face the boys. "Why don't you two see who can count the most stacks of hay."

Harlan began counting aloud, "One, two, three, four ..." Daniel stared out the window, not counting. His mother always tried to act so cutesie-pootsie, he thought. Whenever they went somewhere she'd put on that act like she was putting on the pink kerchief that she only wore on Sundays.

"Sixteen, seventeen, eighteen ..." He'd swear she even raised her voice some to make herself seem more pleasant. Daniel saw a hawk gliding high up over the fields. He didn't tell anybody.

"Mom, what comes after thirty?" Harlan asked.

"Wow, you've counted thirty already. Thirty-one. How many have you counted Daniel?"

"None."

"Okay, if you want to be a sour puss then Harlan wins."

"Hurray, I'm the winner," Harlan exclaimed. He sat up straight and proud and then stuck his tongue out at his brother. Daniel stared, unamused and then faced the window.

Harlan began swinging his legs back and forth on the seat occasionally tapping his brother's leg with his shoe.

"Cut it out," Daniel whispered sternly. Harlan continued hitting his brother's leg a little harder each time.

“Stop it.” When his brother continued, Daniel grabbed his ankle and gave it a good squeeze, gritting his own teeth at the same time.

Harlan screeched and then started crying. Before anything could be said, Mrs. Houghlan had reached over the seat and whacked the side of Daniel’s head with the back of her hand.

“He pinched me,” Harlan managed to get out between sobs.

“How many times have I told you to keep your hands off your little brother?” she asked.

“But he started ...”

“No buts. He’s six years old. How old are you? Answer me, young man.” Her teeth were so tight Daniel wondered how she could get her words out.

“Ten,” he said.

“Well then why don’t you start acting it?”

“C’mon and sit up front with your father and me.”

Daniel watched his brother climb over the seat. He had stopped crying, but his face was stained with tears. It was worth it, Daniel thought, to wipe that cheerful look off his face for a few minutes. Harlan settled between his parents. All Daniel could see of him was tufts of his blond hair sticking up over the seat.

Daniel stared down at the holes in his sneakers until he felt the car turn right onto a gravel road. “Jensen’s Turkey Farm,” Harlan read from a splintered old sign. “What are we doing here Dad?”

The turkey farm was familiar to both the boys. Ever since Daniel could remember they had come here a couple of days before Thanksgiving to pick up a turkey.

“I thought we’d do something special for this Thanksgiving and fatten up our own turkey.”

“You mean we’re gonna bring him home alive,” Harlan shrilled.

“That’s right, that is if you boys think you can take care of one.”

“Oh we can,” Harlan assured his father. “Can’t we Daniel?”

Daniel didn't say anything. He hadn't had much luck with poultry. When he was five years old he had received six newly hatched chicks for Easter. He'd gotten up early that morning to see what the Easter Bunny had left for him. Mistaking the chicks for ducklings, Daniel tried to teach them to swim in one of his mother's mixing bowls. They had all drowned before his parents had risen.

The Jensens were standing at the driveway when Mr. Houghlan parked behind their rusty pick-up truck. Mrs. Jensen was untying an apron from around her waist. She smiled and came over as they got out of the car. Mr. Jensen stood and puffed on his pipe. After exchanging greetings Mr. Jensen said, "Those boys of yours are turning into some regular little men."

"And look at that blonde hair on Harlan," Mrs. Jensen added. "What I wouldn't do to have a head a hair that looked like that. I might just go inside and come out with some scissors."

Harlan grabbed his mother's skirt with one hand and smiled coyly at the turkey farmer's wife. The grownups all laughed. Always that blonde hair, Daniel thought. He looked up at his bangs that would soon need to be cut. Brown hair couldn't be too bad, it was the same color as his father's.

The women began stepping toward the house. "You boys stay out of trouble," Mrs. Houghlan said. "Course I'm not sure if it's the boys I should be concerned about." Both women giggled.

"Why don't you boys head around back and pick yourselves a nice big turkey," Farmer Jensen suggested.

"You keep a good eye on your brother," Mr. Houghlan told Daniel.

"Yes sir," he said.

Harlan went running around back to where the turkeys were, screaming at the top of his lungs, "Turkey-lurkey, gobble gobble, turkey-lurkey, gobble gobble ..."

Daniel headed toward the back too, but not until he heard Mr. Jensen say to his father, "C'mon over to the barn Hal. I got some shit that'll knock your socks off you."

Daniel had never seen so many turkeys. Usually all the birds were already dead when they came to pick up their Thanksgiving dinner. This time the two long, narrow coops were stocked full of the big white birds. The coops stood about four feet from the ground. Each had a slanted plywood roof and wire mesh sides and floors. Daniel noticed that someone had raked bird droppings into neat piles at the end of each coop.

Harlan found a stick and began scraping it along the side of one of the cages. The birds all huddled to the opposite end and began clucking loudly.

"Cut it out," Daniel demanded. Harlan laughed. Daniel leaped toward his brother, but he ran under the cage without even having to duck. He started terrorizing the birds in the other cage.

Daniel refused to go underneath the cages so it was difficult for him to stop his brother. When he finally caught him, he grabbed him by the shoulders and started shaking him.

"Drop the stick," he demanded. Harlan just stared at him and grinned. He tried to squiggle away from his brother's grip, but he wasn't strong enough. Finally he let go of the stick but continued to squirm. When Daniel let go of him, Harlan lost his balance and fell backwards, landing in the pile of bird droppings. He lay, motionless for only a moment, but it was enough time for one of the birds to get revenge on him. It landed dead smack in the middle of his forehead.

Daniel had to control himself to keep from laughing, he knew the incident would take its toll on him. Mrs. Houghlan was out the door before Harlan had reached the house. He buried his face in her skirt and Daniel saw him intentionally wiping his forehead. Mrs. Houghlan wrapped her arms around her son, placing her hand right in the soiled part of his shirt. Mrs. Jensen, who was by now outside, went back into the house to get a wet rag. His mother looked up at Daniel, who was walking slowly towards them. "I don't want to hear one word from you young man," she said. "Just go wait in the car until we're ready to leave." Harlan's crying

stopped while his mother announced his brother's sentence. "And just you wait until your father gets you home," she added.

Daniel headed around front to where the car was parked. As he was about to open the door, the two men stepped out of the barn.

"Leaving soon?" Mr. Jensen asked him. Both men laughed. Daniel shrugged his shoulders and climbed into the back seat. The daylight was nearly gone when the Jensens escorted the rest of his family, plus one turkey in a cardboard box, to the car. Harlan ran over, anxious to tell his brother how he had picked out the turkey all by himself.

Mr. Houghlan opened the back door and placed the box on the seat beside Daniel. It smelled awful, something had already begun to soak through the bottom of the box. Daniel hoped he could leave his window open during the ride home. He didn't look up as they said their goodbyes.





# FABRIC

Andrew LaBonte

I sort of try to grab you  
in bed but you keep moving  
my hands try to hold you down but nothing  
stays only a running stream of soft  
something keeps going through me, under me

hair and eyes and flowing skin go by  
and I feel like some monk  
admiring the needlework of blind nuns  
who weren't shy about using  
gold thread since they had the money

and suddenly I'm lost  
in the warp and the weft and a finger  
it feels kind of funny  
being singled out since  
there are so many other fingers besides  
but the finger comes out and the  
gap closes and I'm back again

outside trying to figure out what's  
inside pressing my face on a  
cheek, the smooth side  
of a face or a back  
closing my eyes imagining  
the dark warm beneath

and I lift my head, realize  
I've already come  
it was days ago and our bodies  
are draped like wet cloth over the square  
mattress and I'm staring now  
at a single bead of sweat  
running down the back of your leg





# Nashville-1977

Note: "I Shall Not Be Moved" (Sections I, II, V) is an old Negro spiritual. "Aqua Boogie" (Section III) is a song made popular in the late seventies by George Clinton and the Parliament Funkadellic Band.

## T. J. Anderson

### I

I shall not;  
     I shall not be moved.  
 I shall not;  
     I shall not be moved.  
 Just like a tree that's  
 planted 'side the water.  
     Oh, I shall not be moved.

For five days straight  
 rain baptized the city.  
 The Cumberland river was up  
 by ten feet and when  
 it lifted folks were thankful  
 that it didn't last forty days.  
 The tin roofs of shacks  
 were rusted razors.  
 The Cadillacs in the driveways  
 floated in the mud  
 like sunk riverboats.

We came out of the rain

only to see some seersuckered red-neck  
harnessed to a microphone  
and telling the wonders of  
the new Ronco Veg-a-matic.  
He showed us how  
it would cut carrots, potatoes,  
and onions lickety-split.  
How mom could save all sorts  
of time in the kitchen  
and if we acted now  
we could get a free tube  
of eyeglass cleanser  
so our glasses wouldn't  
fog up when we came into a room.

## II

*I made my home in glory;  
I shall not be moved.  
Made my home in glory;  
I shall not be moved.  
Just like a tree that's  
planted 'side the water.  
Oh, I shall not be moved.*

When she was young she learned  
how low she should wear her dress  
so men wouldn't see  
that stitch between her legs  
all spidery with hair.  
She wore high top collars, blouses  
with lace splitting from the sleeves.  
On one Friday morning

the yellow Jesus Saves school bus  
 picked her up, took her  
 down to the waters.  
 Mama threw a red robe on her  
 and the fat man  
 with the heavy hand  
 pushed her under.

A locket hung from her neck,  
 a woman's face inside its shell.  
 Her mother's mother's mother--the old woman,  
 who choked to death  
 on a bowl of chicken broth.

She was six.  
 All she remembers  
 is one morning a body  
 wrapped in a bed sheet  
 was thrown out onto  
 the front lawn for pick up.  
 "Don't look back Granny"  
 Mama said, picking up  
 the Tennessean from the front step  
 and spitting out a piece  
 of bacon that was caught  
 between her teeth.

### III

*Aqua boogie baby.  
 Never learned to swim,  
 can't get the rhythm  
 of the stroke.  
 Why should I hold my breath  
 fearing that I might choke?*

In the fall of 77  
I was too busy  
walking the streets of Nashville,  
but not too busy to notice  
the woman who passed  
our lines, refused to buy our papers.  
Muslim Man told me  
“Look only once brother,  
the second look is the devil’s.”  
My eyes framed by my glasses  
would swim toward her  
for as long as they could  
then sink down to the pavement.  
Muslim Man laughed, lit up  
a jumbo stick of Patchouli incense.  
(“Pussy Incense” he called it.)  
He watched it glow,  
its red hot tips shooting off smoke.

When it got dark Muslim Man  
packed his things and left.  
On the bus going home  
I sat across from him,  
his head cocked back  
like a trigger  
as the lights from the store fronts we passed  
shot across his bearded face.

## IV

In Centennial Park the rain falls like a net.  
The air is thick with the smell of Patchouli.  
He waits for her  
on the steps of the fake  
Greek Parthenon with its Georgia marble.



Boys are playing marbles inside.  
Cat Eyes scattering Reds  
and that marble with the  
American flag in the center  
tumbles down the steps,  
rolls into a sewer hole.  
He waits for her  
checks his watch to make sure  
the second hand still slaps  
the face inside the glass  
and it does.

He sees her now walking  
in the rain. She's looking  
at the leaves, the trash barrels, the squirrels,  
the grass sprinklers, the drunk  
under a tree, soggy from booze  
and urine.  
She sees him watching her,  
picks up the pace, one foot in  
front of the other.  
First right, then left,  
just like mama taught her.  
He starts to walk,  
fast and hard as the rain  
lifts from his feet.  
She looks back, looks ahead.  
She is stopped by his face,  
Stillness swells in her feet.  
He catches her. He's scalded with sin.  
The rain stops. People come out.  
She yells "fire," because mama  
taught her that people won't come  
if you yell "help."

But, why should there be a fire  
with so much rain?  
She screams as he bangs away  
at her on the matted Magnolia leaves.

## V

For five days straight  
rain has baptized the city  
and the Cumberland river is up  
by ten feet.  
There are only two things  
going on out here.  
A woman lies in the mud  
her skull cracked open  
a split pomegranate.  
A man finds shelter  
from the downpour,  
flips over an empty garbidge can,  
gets under it.  
He's got the kind of eyes  
that could cut through you  
lickety-split.  
And it rains, and it rains,  
and it rains, and...

*We shall not:*

*We shall not be moved.*

*We shall not;*

*We shall not be moved.*

*Just like a tree that's  
planted 'side the water.*

*Oh, we shall not be moved.*

# Embracing Bud

Michael M. Ambrosino

In a drug of cigarette smoke, heroin, and mental disease, Bud Powell chanted out harmonies that sensitive ears have marvelled at before and after his death in 1954. Amber fingers roaming, Bud pursued those ideas in music given birth by the genius of Charlie Parker, the crowned originator of "Be-Bop."

Left with only a piano, his most consistent companion, melodies and chords replacing a voice lost to brain decay and a looming distrust of others, Bud soared into musical places that most musicians cannot find. His compositions often bordered on anarchy and yet maintained an improvised order, racing or waltzing at unprecedented tempos.

Having listened to Parker, Bud understood the new musical idiom; Be-Bop with its thrilling tonal peaks, notes, that by virtue of the speed at which they were played, created harmonies that appeared to break the rules of time. Bud knew all this and every song that he touched was revealed, altered, personalized in a way that suited his passion for exploration.

That which we have in common, Bud and I, is the slender tie of one timeless channel that connects all musical forces with their appreciators: captured on record, the power and tenderness of the simple mourning ballad. In this case, Ira and George Gershwin's standard, "Embraceable You."

I was just an inconceivable thought in 1953, both parents having just met, flirting in an engineering booth between broadcasts. But listening to Bud, I can travel back to this dated recording through an expanse of the imagination that takes sounds and paints the ballroom green, fills the gap between my modern stereo and the hot ghetto club in a New York City of thirty years ago.

What a song communicates, what it speaks with the integrity of its musical message and the sensation of its delivery, hinges on the perceptions of those who receive it. Ralph Ellison once called music the "universal language," a junglegym open to all who would allow themselves to dance among the structures, drift into the metaphor of the composition, the visions and moods of song, transforming music into lyric, melodious dialogue into prose, that is at first abstract to the average dancer.

The power of the prose at hand, the strength of its rhythms, is measured by the vocabulary of that dancer and the virility of the fabric that lines their inner ear; membranes that allow music to pass through, compounding notes and tones to create appropriate sentences, phrases and especially words. Those words, linked together like DNA molecules, from spiraling chains of definition, sifting gently or forcefully through musical traditions that are often stronger than the syllables themselves.

It helps to know that Bud was realizing, perhaps for the first time, the death of his younger brother Richie (killed in a car accident that also took the life of trumpeteer great Clifford Brown) and that he was greatly affected by mental illness originating in a brutal police beating, just one of the scars inflicted upon this black man in racist white America. And it is even more remarkable when listening, to hear Bud pulling whole measures from this standard, replacing his own, making sculpture of the junglegym, brilliant art from the patterns pioneered by thousands of black musicians before him. But without these recognitions this song still exists in valueless strata that prompts one to daydream in pain, share the sorrow that went into the song's making.

To lose track of yourself in his music, to question and probe Bud's brilliance, to recreate your own losses for these three minutes, is to embrace the essence of Mr. Powell and make common sense of his revised classic "Embraceable You."

# The Day Off

Kate Bartholomew

Mama had a terrible time when Stevie was born. Mrs. Dravuschak, the midwife, had to stay at our house all day. She was there when I came home from school. Stevie was a large baby. "Why, he's as big as my Julia's two-month old Joey," Mrs. Dravuschak said as she washed him on the kitchen table, her gingham sleeves rolled up on her plump arms. The baby looked straight at me as I leaned over the table, and stared out of his blue eyes as if he knew I was his sister. I loved him right off.

After Stevie was born, Mama was sick for a long time. That's how I got to take care of him. He cried so much we all went crazy. Papa couldn't get any sleep. "Pshakrev!" he swore. "What's wrong with him?" He looked down at Mama in bed as if it were her fault. Mama didn't bother to yell back; she closed her eyes that looked like two black holes, and turned her head to the wall.

Stevie was born on Tuesday. On Thursday, Mama was still in bed. She sent Papa to Weiner's to buy a chicken. She must have told him what to do with it because he soon had feathers flying everywhere. A lot of the bigger ones had to be pulled out one by one. That was when I thought Papa would throw the chicken straight out of the window. He banged it on the table a couple of times as if that would make it behave. It's no picnic getting a chicken nice and clean.

"Mama uses the other knife in the drawer," I told Papa, thinking I was helping him out. He was sawing away at the chicken's feet with the dull knife.

"I don't need a snot-nose telling me what to do," Papa said. I hated when he used that word. Besides, I would be thirteen years old in September. After slamming around

pots and pans in the cupboard under the sink, Papa came up with the wrong one. I didn't dare say anything. It's your funeral, I thought. The chicken looked small bobbing up and down in the big pot Mama used to boil noodles.

Later, Papa sent me upstairs with a bowl of chicken soup for Mama. "Shh," Mama made a sign, pointing at the wooden crib that had been mine and then Rosie's. I tiptoed carefully around it. I didn't want the sleeping baby's mouth to open up in a scream.

Papa sat down with Rosie and me at the kitchen table to eat the soup. He gave each of us a warning look as if to say, "One word out of you, and I'll let you have it!" The soup was awful. Papa had forgotten the salt; there was a skummy grease floating on top. I was surprised that my sister, with her big mouth, didn't say anything.

"Dip some bread in the soup." Papa warmed up to us, now that we were quietly eating his soup. "Mama didn't get a chance to make noodles."

On Friday morning, Mama had to drag herself out of bed, sick or not, because she thought Papa was going to kill Rosie. He had already cut off her shoe laces because she fussed about the way he tied the bow. He was giving her a licking when Mama came down the stairs. Rosie was screaming so loud that all the neighbors must have heard her.

"Shut up!" Mama shouted at Rosie. "I can't even get sick in this house." She started on Papa. "What's the sense of cutting her shoe strings? Shoe strings cost money." I could tell Mama was feeling more like herself.

At six months, Stevie was still crying so much that Mama and I didn't know what to do with him. Even when he was sleeping quietly, we couldn't relax. A shriek like a siren could pierce the air any minute. I jumped to rock the baby at the first peep. It helped for awhile, but he would soon start up again. My brother's cries followed me out of the house, down the street; they haunted me at my desk in school, the playground at recess. I woke up nights afraid. Maybe Stevie was going to die like the Melarchik boy. I couldn't stand the worrying. I had to ask Mama if our baby was sick.

"No," she snapped. "He's hungry. I don't have enough

milk for him." Stella, our neighbor, gave her baby milk from a bottle. But Harry, her husband worked for Sunnyside Dairy every day, even Sunday. Maybe he even got a chance to steal some milk. We had no money. Our father worked only two days a week because things were bad at the Eureka Cement Mill. The Depression had spoiled everything for us.

I was glad when Mama told me the baby wasn't sick, that he wouldn't die, but still it was terrible that he was hungry. If I had some milk, I would give it to my brother right away, no matter how hungry I was.

Stevie was more my baby than he was Mama's. She started to have headaches. She would shut herself off in her room for hours with the shades down. Papa was too restless to stay home. He wandered around town, or played pinochle in the pool room behind Philip's Barber Shop with other men who didn't know what to do with themselves either. He left all the worrying to Mama. I began to stay home from school to take care of Stevie when Mama had one of her sick headaches. No one cared. The next day I would bring a note that I wrote myself to the teacher. Mama would put an X next to where her name went. Now that Stevie was beginning to walk, Mama needed me more than ever. Nobody missed me at school. I hardly opened my mouth when I was there. I had more important things to do at home, learning how to cook, boiling the clothes on the stove to bleach them white, and keeping an eye on Stevie.

In the afternoon, I would take Stevie in his wicker stroller for a walk by the canal. I was proud of showing him off. He was a golden boy with curls like yellow buttercups. Other little boys looked gray and dirty beside him. Mama had been right about his crying. Now that he ate with the rest of us, he never cried. In fact, he turned out to be a quiet little fellow. He would play for hours with an old spoon and a wooden cigar box. I bothered him more than he bothered me. I fussed over his hair; I polished his shoes until they shone like two brown billiard balls. No one at our house paid him much attention except me.

For only the second time that I could remember, Mama took me in her room and shut the door. The other time was when I got my period. I could tell by looking at her that it

wasn't anything good this time either. She was nervous. She straightened the bureau scarf and twitched the lace curtain on the window.

"Things are bad for us right now," she burst out. "You'll have to go to work. You're fourteen years old now." I always wanted to be grown-up, but now I was afraid. It didn't seem such a good thing after all.

The girls on our street went to work at the Schleiner Shirt Factory as soon as they turned fourteen. The factory was a long, gray building, like a box-car with chicken wire on the windows. I often heard the Moletski girls who lived down the street giggle and whisper about the two Schleiner brothers—small, fat men with big cigars who brushed against them as if by accident. They would sneak up from behind while the girls were bent over their machines. There was so much noise in the factory with all the machines going full blast that the girls couldn't hear them coming. The Moletski girls could laugh about it, but I couldn't. I didn't want anyone to touch me. But if Mama said I had to go, I would have to go.

"I'll wash out my white waist and brush my skirt," I told Mama bravely. "I want to be early for the factory," I went on, trying not to sound as bad as I felt.

"No, no," Mama put in quickly, "not the shirt factory. They're laying people off. I have something for you. Remember the Kotcher girl who had the cleaning job in Allerton? She quit it. Took off for New York just like that. It's lucky for you that I ran into her mother at Goldfarb's when I went in to buy potatoes."

"But Allerton's so far away," I cried.

"You'll be home every Sunday. Twenty dollars a month they pay."

I stared at her. I couldn't believe she was smiling. As if there was something to be happy about. I began to cry like I never cried before. Mama sat there and watched me for awhile. Then she made a disgusted noise, tch, tch, shaking her head. She got off the bed; the springs squeaked. I was ashamed of myself, but I couldn't stop crying even though I tried.

"What kind of craziness is this?" Mama asked. "I was



digging with bare hands in the frozen ground for potatoes in the old country when I was four years old."

"Don't make me go, Mama. I won't eat so much. I promise. Maybe a little piece of stale bread in the morning, and—" She didn't let me finish.

"You're a big girl now, Annie. I came to America alone on a boat when I was only twelve years old."

I had heard all her stories before. I'm not like you, Mama. I'm not brave. I'm afraid to raise my hand in school when I have to go to the toilet. Stevie. I had forgotten about Stevie. "Who'll take care of Stevie?" I wanted to know. Mama still lay down in her room with the shades drawn. The headaches would not go away. We all knew enough to stay away from her on those days. She was ready to kill someone.

"Rosie's old enough now. No one's going to pay you any money to look after your brother." The one time Rosie was left with Stevie, Mama found him eating his own caca in the high chair. Rosie had her head stuck in a book. She got a licking, but she didn't care. It was no use. If Mama said I had to go, I would have to go. I couldn't talk to Papa about it. He had to do what she wanted. Sometimes he argued with her when she wouldn't give him any money, but it didn't do any good once she'd made up her mind.

"Hurry! Hurry up" Mama pushed me out the door before we heard the first beep of the automobile. She had been standing at the window with the curtain open, looking outside for the man to come to take me off to work in his house. He held the back door of the car open for me. I didn't look at him. Mama came from behind with my clothes in the Octagon Soap box. She didn't say another word to me. The man shut the door on my side of the automobile, said something to Mama, and tipped his Fedora hat to her. I couldn't hear what he said in the closed car. Mama stood there on the street in her apron as we drove off. She didn't wave. I didn't turn my head to look back.

The man was driving fast. We were flying by the Schleiner Shirt Factory in no time. If only I could be one of those girls in the gray light carrying a brown sandwich bag, I wouldn't complain. When the five o'clock whistle blew, I would be hurrying, hurrying home.

I turned away from the road whizzing by. The man's hands on the steering wheel had black, bristly hairs on them.

We drove a long time. I was glad the man didn't talk to me. I wouldn't know what to say. I caught his eye in the mirror one time, and I looked down in my lap quickly. My finger nails were bitten. I hid them in my skirt. We stopped behind a house that stood alone with big trees around it. A bare clothes line was tied to two of them. I followed the man in the back door with my soap box. A woman sat in front of a little girl in a high chair feeding her an egg in its shell. She turned around to look at me.

"Well, here you are. You must be Annie," she said, smiling.

"Are you the new maid?" A fat boy in short pants came in the room holding a toy truck.

"Don't be fresh," the woman scolded.

"Can you play checkers?" he asked me.

"No," I mumbled, ashamed in front of the little boy.

"You can teach her, Stanley," the woman said brightly. "After supper when you finish your home work. Annie will pick it up in no time." The boy looked at me as if he wasn't sure. "Sit down here, Annie." The woman gave me her seat in front of the baby. "Give Mona the rest of her egg. Don't be afraid. She doesn't bite."

"Yes, she does!" the boy yelled from the stairs. I put the spoon to the little girl's mouth. It was shut tight.

"Sometimes you have to play games to make her eat." The woman saw I was having trouble. "Pretend the spoon is a choo choo train. Then pop it in her mouth when she isn't looking. You know how. You have a little brother." I didn't know how. Our Stevie ate everything. No one had to play choo choo games with him.

The man came in from outside. I heard him and the woman talking as they went up the stairs. "—looks about ten years old. Jesus Christ," the man grumbled. He couldn't mean me. I had on my first pair of Cuban heels.

"—take what you can get," the woman's voice drifted down before the door closed after them, and I couldn't hear any more.

The boy, Stanley, came into the kitchen, a school bag over his shoulder. He said in a smart-alecky voice, not too loud, so that his mother wouldn't hear, "Nancy, our other maid, was prettier than you. She could play checkers, too."

The woman tripped down the stairs, a jacket over her dress, car keys in her hand. "We're late. Come, Stanley." She gave the boy a little shove out the door. "Annie, I'm driving Stanley to school. I'll be back in twenty minutes. Mr. Gruber's upstairs shaving if you need him.

The baby, Mona, started to cry as soon as the door closed after her mother. I snatched her out of her high chair, afraid the man might come running down the stairs to see what was wrong with her. "Shh, shh," I crooned in my nicest voice, holding her close. She stopped crying, examining my face curiously. "I won't let anything happen to you," I told her. "I'll be good to you. You'll see."

"Call me Mrs. Gruber," the woman told me when she got back. She tied a pretty, ruffled apron around her waist, and we went to work. I ran the heavy machine to clean the rugs upstairs and downstairs 'til I thought my arms would fall off. The awful noise made me deaf. I peeled vegetables, I scraped vegetables. I washed fruits so pretty they didn't seem real enough to eat. Mrs. Gruber told me to take anything I wanted to eat. By the time the last dish was wiped, and the towels hung neatly on the rack, I was so tired I didn't want any of it. I could hardly keep my eyes open to play checkers with Stanley. He plink-plinked his red checkers over my black ones to win every game. That didn't make him happy either. He got disgusted when I made a mistake, and moved his checker instead of mine. He told his mother that I was no fun to play with.

The next morning, I woke up because the baby was screaming. My bed was in her room. She was standing up, shaking the bars of her crib. Her face was red. Tears were rolling down her cheeks. I quickly grabbed the dress I wore the day before because I had been sleeping in my petticoat. Mrs. Gruber, her hair in iron curlers, rushed in the room before I had a chance to get it over my head. I held it against my chest. She gave me a look as if I should have been up, and tending to Mona.

“Shh, don’t cry, my little dumpling,” she soothed the little girl. “Mommie will get you a warm bottle.” Then looking over at me again—I hadn’t moved—she said, “Annie, get dressed. We have a lot to do.”

I made my bed, smoothing down the ruffled cover. It was a pretty, pink silk with pictures of a princess wearing a long dress with a wide skirt. There was a crown on her yellow hair. A prince in tight knickers and a white wig tied in a bow, knelt before her, kissing her outstretched hand.

The light was on in the kitchen. The windows shone black; rain was pounding down hard outside. Mona sat in her high chair, her dark curls bouncing. I saw my little brother’s smooth head bent over his dish of oatmeal.

I get the blues when it rains,  
The blues I can’t lose when it rains.  
Each little drop that falls on my window pane  
Always reminds me of the tears I shed in vain.

Olga Kuharchik, who lived on our street, played the song over and over on her victrola. Everyone knew she was in love with a fellow named Robert. He’d been keeping company with her for a long time, but his family who lived on Main Street wouldn’t let him marry Olga because she was a Hunkie.

“Annie! Why are you standing at the door like a statue? Wake up!” I’d forgotten where I was. I poured myself a cup of coffee, and stood up drinking it. Mrs. Gruber didn’t ask me to sit down with her at the table. “Did anyone ever tell you you talk in your sleep? Mr. Gruber and I had to come in the room a couple of times because you woke us up with your yelling, as if someone was murdering you.” Oh no! I hated to think of the man and woman looking at me when I was sleeping. Maybe my bare legs were sticking out from under the covers. I couldn’t do anything right, not even when I was sleeping.

Yesterday, Mrs. Gruber had to remind me twice to shut the ice-box door so the ice wouldn’t melt. That wasn’t all either. She pointed out finger marks on the glass dining

room table top that I hadn't wiped off. While we were working, she talked about the other girl, Nancy. How good her chicken fricasee was, and her dumplings, as light as a feather. I didn't know what chicken fricasee was, or dumplings either. In the bed room, Mrs. Gruber had called Mona her little dumpling when she was crying. Now she was talking about dumplings that you ate. She went on some more about Nancy. Nancy played games with Stanley. The baby was heart-broken when Nancy left. She cried for two days.

I tried to remember which one of the Kotcher girls Nancy was. There were so many of them, and they all looked alike with their brown hair and freckles. They lived down by the canal in an old shack. Their mother was always drunk. They had no father. He ran away. Still, Nancy turned out so perfect; and I with a good father, and a mother who never drank, did everything wrong.

Mona and I were the only ones not rushing around. I sat in front of her feeding her cream-of-wheat. She hated it like she did so many other things. I held a napkin ready to catch the thin, white rivers of cereal she was letting run down her chin on purpose. I didn't want her to spoil the crisp, voile dress I'd just put on her.

Mrs. Gruber was scolding Stanley. "What did you do with your other glove. Put back that Oreo this instant! You're too fat already. One is enough." The house shook as Mr. Gruber stamped down the stairs.

After the Grubers left, Mona began to howl. I knew she would. Things like that always happen when you feel bad. I picked her up, and she stopped crying. I put her down, and she started again. I looked at the table with the dirty dishes, the scooped-out egg shells, and the crusts of toast with sticky jam. "Baby, I can't play with you right now. I have work to do. How about I'll tell you a story?" She didn't hear me; she was bawling too loud. It was terrible listening to her scream for so long. My hands shook. I was afraid of dropping a dish. It was nice to get rid of Mrs. Gruber for awhile, but with Mona carrying on the way she was, I couldn't enjoy one minute of it. My hands stopped their washing of a glass in the dish water. I remembered the dream I had last night.

A giant man was chasing me down a narrow alley. He was

dragging an enormous club foot, but he still caught up with me. My legs wouldn't move fast enough. He knocked me down. I screamed, but nothing came out of my mouth. He looked down at me, an ugly grin on his face. Slowly, ever so slowly, he slid a wide belt from his trousers to whip me, or what, I don't know. I woke up then.

The dream must have come from the trips Mrs. Gruber and I made up to the attic. We took armfuls of summer clothes to store away in big trunks with hinges. Under one side of the slanted roof stood one big shoe in a tall iron brace. It was facing the stairs to the attic as if ready to take off on its own. I screamed. The sole of the shoe was as thick as a brick. It was ugly. Mrs. Gruber laughed when I jumped.

"I should have warned you, Annie. I'm so used to seeing that old thing, that I don't pay it any attention. It was the childrens' grandfather's. He was a cripple. He lived with us until he died."

It was Sunday, my day off. I leaped out of bed at the first cry from Mona. "Try to keep the baby quiet at least until seven o'clock," Mrs. Gruber reminded me the night before. "Mr. Gruber needs his sleep. Nancy could always make her mind." Nancy, again. I tiptoed down the stairs with Mona on my hip, whispering all kinds of nonsense in her hear. She thought we were playing a game. Her eyes were round with excitement. What a spoiled thing she was! Our Stevie was the same age as she, but he was a little man. He could walk. Mama weaned him from her breast a long time ago by putting pepper on her nipple. Now he held a mug firmly in his two chubby hands, and drank his milk. With Mona, I was forever fixing bottles, and she was getting too heavy to carry around.

I knew the minute I put her in her high chair she would start up, but I was ready for her. I popped a lollipop in her mouth before she could say boo. I didn't know what else to do to keep her quiet while I warmed up her bottle. I was glad she couldn't tell her mother on me yet. She jabbered all day long, but no one listened to her much because her baby talk was hard to understand. Mrs. Gruber pretended to sometimes, but you could tell that she wasn't paying too much attention. Her pointed toe would start its tap-tapping

on the linoleum, her eyes wandered about the kitchen. Poor Mona. Nobody listens to you. I picked her up and twirled her around the room, joining her baby laughing. I was happy for the first time that week. It was my day off. I was going home.

I jumped when I heard the toilet flush upstairs, although I had nothing to be nervous about. The breakfast table was set, the pitcher of foamy orange juice sat chilling in the ice-box, and the oatmeal was on low. Mona was sucking on her bottle quietly. The lollipop stick was buried deep under the orange peels in the garbage pail.

I heard the clip-clopping of Mrs. Gruber's pink slippers on the stairs. She went by me at the stove to kiss Mona. I got a smell of her perfume.

"How's my wittle bub?" she baby-talked to Mona who immediately went crazy, banging her bottle hard on the tray of her high chair. "No! no!" her mother scolded, holding the baby hand still. You'll break the bottle. Annie's going to fetch mommie a nice cup of coffee while I sit with my little angel."

I jumped to get the coffee. Mrs. Gruber looked my way for the first time since she came downstairs. Her eyes fastened on my Cuban heels. She smiled a little, shaking her head. "Annie, you won't be leaving until one o'clock. That's when the first trolley goes to town on Sunday. You'd better get out of those high heels before you break your neck."

It wasn't fair. The day would be half over at one o'clock. Dinner at our house would be eaten by the time I got there, the dishes washed and put away. I turned to the stove, busying myself with stirring the oatmeal. I didn't want Mrs. Gruber to see how bad I felt. I was a big girl. It wasn't the end of the world.

When Papa had a day off, he slept late. Mama would be downstairs listening for him so that she could start heating up the meat that was swimming in thick gravy in back of the stove. Papa was the only one who got meat every day. Meat gave strength, Mama would say. Papa needed strength for the hard work he did with a pick and shovel at the cement mill. The gravy was bubbling merrily in the skillet when

Papa stumbled down the stairs, yawning so hard that his jaws cracked. Sputtering and spitting, he threw cold water on his face from the spigot in the kitchen sink to wake himself up.

I loved Papa, but it made me sick to hear the noises he made when he ate. It was a terrible way to feel about one's own father, but I couldn't help it. I would go off somewhere while he was eating so that I didn't have to listen. But nowhere in our house could you get away from the huge belches that exploded from him after he ate. Not even in the attic. It was enough to make you jump every time.

I knew my day off wouldn't be like Papa's. No one would be serving me my breakfast. I didn't know what it would be like. Mrs. Gruber never said a word about it until she saw my shoes this morning. I was afraid to ask her about it. She might think I didn't want to work, couldn't wait to get away. I knew she wasn't too happy with me, or she wouldn't forever be talking about the other girl, Nancy. Suppose she told me not to come back. I don't know what Mama would do with me if I got fired after just one week.

I didn't have time to worry about that, or anything else either, because I had to race around to get all the work done before I caught the trolley to take me home. It was a wonder that I remembered at all that I had no money for the trolley, not a penny. Papa got a check from the cement mill every two weeks, but I wouldn't get paid until I worked a whole month. Mama must have figured that since Mr. Gruber was the one who took me away, he would be the one to bring me back. And I did too. Although I wanted to go home more than anything, all week I'd been dreading the long ride with the silent man in the front seat, his hat pulled low on his forehead.

It was much better to be going home by trolley, but I would have to face Mrs. Gruber about the fare. I mumbled something to her about no money, my face hot. She went up to her room to get her purse, and handed me a half a dollar. I backed off. "It's too much. The fare is twenty cents one way."

"Keep the change, Annie. You're a good girl. You earned it."



Tears came in my eyes. It shows how wrong you can be sometimes. Here I'd been thinking all along that she didn't like me too much.

There was a woman in a straw hat waiting at the trolley stop talking to a young fellow. She began to whisper when I walked closer. Don't worry about me listening to you, lady. I have my own things to think about. The half dollar felt warm as I fingered it in the pocket of my skirt. Maybe Mama would let me buy a nickel ice cream cone for Stevie. Rosie, too. I was their big sister with a job and money to spend.

I thought about different things I would tell Mama while I looked out the window of the trolley. I knew Mama would be pleased that I could eat all I wanted at the Grubers. Even ice cream. I wouldn't tell her about the dreadful boy, Stanley. He was bad, pinching me hard when there was no one around to see him do it. I suppose it was because I couldn't play checkers good. I wasn't "much fun." I knew Mama would only laugh at me if I told her about him. "Pooh! Afraid of a little boy." No, I couldn't tell her about Stanley. I *was* afraid of the little boy.

The ride was taking a long time. The trolley was stopping often to let people off and on. It never got going really good, jerking back and forth enough to drive you crazy, but not enough to stir up a breeze from an open window. It was a warm day for October. When we finally got to my stop on Main Street, I jumped off the trolley and started to run. I stopped myself quick enough. A person with a job didn't act that way.

As I was walking along I heard the victrola at the Kuharchiks' house scratching out a blues song. The neighbors had complained to the priest at the Greek Catholic Church about the jazz music coming from the Kuharchiks every Sunday. The Kuharchik girls should be ashamed of themselves. Father Umansky had a talk with the girls. The music wasn't as loud on Sunday, but during the week it went on full blast, sometimes as late as nine o'clock at night.

Mama was sitting at the kitchen table, her rough hands with the thick thumbs quiet on her lap. I wondered if she'd

been looking out the window for me. She didn't get up when I came in. We looked at each other.

"Well, Annie—," Mama started, and then stopped. She looked at me closer to see if I was all right, and not going to cry.

"Hello, Mama." I stood in front of her, embarrassed, the way I used to be when I had to get up and recite in school. "Where's Stevie?"

"He's somewhere around." Mama got up to put the kettle on the stove for tea.

I walked in the dining room calling Stevie's name. He didn't come out from wherever he was. I lifted the long table cloth on the round table, and found him sitting on the floor, sucking his thumb. It was his hiding place. "Come out, come out, wherever you are," I coaxed him with a game we played. "I have a surprise for a good boy who'll come out from under the table." He didn't move. He wouldn't smile, staring at me with big eyes as if I was a stranger.

"Leave the boy alone," Mama said. "Have a cup of tea. He'll come out when he's ready. He's not used to you anymore." I swallowed hard. *Not used to you anymore.*

I'd brought home a toy truck in a paper bag from the Grubers. Stanley broke one of the wheels, and Mrs. Gruber put it in with the trash. I couldn't believe my good luck. I rescued it out of the barrel. Maybe Papa could fix it. If not, Stevie could still pull it along on three wheels by the cord attached to it. It was the bright red of a fire engine, and he wouldn't even come out to look at it. Why couldn't he be more like Mona. She wouldn't be hiding under a table. She was always glad to see me.

Papa and Rosie weren't at home. I didn't have to ask where they were. Rosie was out somewhere with her friends. Papa was playing pinochle at someone's house because the barber shop was closed on Sunday. Mama and I had never sat together like this at the kitchen table before. Mama never sat down with anybody, not even Papa. She was always at the stove or the sink. She ate standing up, scraping what was left out of the pots. Afterwards, she belched like Papa, but nothing as bad. I was nervous at the table with Mama. She wasn't saying anything, staring straight

ahead at the stove. Two ladies sitting at a table should be talking about this and that.

"Mama," I started, "you should see the thick carpets at the Grubers. Not like our rag ones that we beat with a broom outside. These are nailed to the floor. I run a big electric machine to clean them."

"Humph," was all Mama said.

I tried again. "Mrs. Gruber gave me a silk cover for my bed."

"She's rich!" Mama jumped down my throat. "Don't you get any foolish ideas in your head?"

I didn't have any ideas in my head at all, but I could see it was no use talking to her when she was like this. Stevie had peeped around the kitchen door twice, and then pulled his head back again. "Mama, can I take Stevie for a walk? I want to buy him an ice cream cone."

"It's too cold for ice cream. He'll get a chill."

"Candy, then." No matter what I said it was the wrong thing. Maybe Mama had one of her headaches.

On our walk, Stevie and I ran into Rosie, her head down. Sometimes she stayed so long at a friend's house that the friend's mother had to pack her off because she didn't want to feed Rosie along with the rest of her family. Nobody was rich.

"Rosie's like a beggar on the door-step. You can't get rid of him until you reach for the broom," Mama always said.

I thought it would cheer Rosie up if I gave her a nickel. It did. Her smile stretched to her ears as she raced to Kurie's Candy Store, her pigtails flying.

By the time Stevie and I got home from our walk, his sweaty, little hand was holding mine tight. Papa was sitting at the kitchen table eating cabbage soup. He mumbled something to me, and stuck his head lower, slurping up the soup as if he couldn't wait to get away. I wondered if Papa was ashamed in front of me. A big strong man like him working only two days a week, while his girl worked every day, even on her day off. I felt sorry for Papa. I knew he didn't want to send me away to the Grubers. It was Mama's idea. She could make him do anything. she would go on and

on about something until he couldn't stand it anymore. "Pshakrev!" he would yell. "Do whatever you want. You will anyway." Papa went out on the porch. Mama and I were alone again. Stevie took himself off somewhere to play his quiet games, or maybe to play with the red truck.

"Do you think Stevie will forget about me?" I asked Mama. I had to know.

"How could he?" Mama sniffed. "You'll be here every Sunday."

*Every Sunday.* "You saw how he acted. Hiding under the table for so long after I got here."

"What do you expect? He's only a little boy." Mama looked at me sharp. "You're not going to cry I hope. Come home once a week to cry," she muttered.

No, I wouldn't cry and spoil everything now that it was getting time to leave. I must make the most out of every minute. My thoughts of this day would have to last me for all of a long week. I put Stevie to bed, and told him a story, even though Mama said he's getting too big for such things. I stayed in the room even after he had fallen asleep, touching the tousled hair on the pillow, memorizing the face with the thumb in the mouth for company, as always.

Rosie skipped alongside me as I walked away from our house to Main Street for the trolley. She had never hung around me before. Other little girls looked up to their big sisters, but not Rosie. Maybe I was different to her now that I was working. I turned about to look back at our house. Mama was standing on the porch, Papa's old sweater over her head, her eyes straining to see in the bad light on our street.

A lot of the same people were on the trolley that were on before. They talked and joked with each other across the seats. Before he leaped off, one man yelled to the conductor so that everyone in the car could hear, "Don't take any wooden nickles, Charlie." The people laughed. "That Ernie's a card," a woman behind me said to someone. Let them laugh and joke, I thought. I have my own things to think about.





# The Life of a Contemporary Moscow Woman

Dorothea Braemer

Natalya Beranskaya's "A Week Like Any Other Week" is the intimate, at times touching, at times shocking matter-of-fact description of a typical week in the life of a Moscow woman, Olga Niklayevna Vorokova. The dominating element of Olga's life is the double, even triple burden of professional work, household work and raising children. These tasks she must cope with every day of her life. For her, leisure does not exist. She comments: "What a clumsy word, 'leisure.' Women fight for leisure. What a nonsense. Lei-sure. Personally, my sport is running. Running here, running there. A shopping bag in each hand..."<sup>1</sup> Olga's case is typical—the Soviet Union has the highest female labor participation rate of any modern industrial society, and at the same time a very low rate of male participation in the household. Why? A look at the historical development of the role of Soviet women helps to explain.

About 140 years ago, Fourier wrote: "The transformation of a historical era can always be determined by the condition of progress of women towards liberty, because it is here, in the relation of women to men, of the weak to the strong, that the victory of human nature appears most evident. The degree of female emancipation is the natural measure of general emancipation."<sup>2</sup> In an attempt to create a generally emancipated society, the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 proclaimed the full liberation of women and granted them equal political rights. The Marxist-Leninist perspective emphasized not only female employment as a

condition of full equality, but also sought to free women from family responsibilities by shifting these to the socialized sector. This, however, never happened. Social substitutes for family responsibilities were never fully developed. During the Stalinist period, employment was simply added to women's traditional family roles. The double role women began to play had its impact on society and culture. On the one hand, women were expected to be good housewives, and there was a nostalgia for the traditional feminine role in which family-oriented values occupied a central place. On the other hand, women had to be tough and independent in order to survive. The purges of Stalin, civil war and World War II created a shortage of men; and women, more than ever, were needed in the labor force. The long tradition of the "strong woman" in Russian culture was strengthened and still prevails today.

"A Week Like Any Other Week" perfectly illustrates these conflicting values between the feminine mother and wife, and the traditional strong woman. Lusya Markoryan, who is one of Olga's colleagues in the laboratory, hates her technical job, loves to sew and wanted to study to be a cutter. But she is afraid: "Who'd marry a seamstress nowadays?" she reasons. Being a seamstress apparently does not fit the image of the strong woman. Olga herself identifies with her job to a degree which is (perhaps unfortunately) not as common in the West. When her husband Dima suggests to her not to work, in order to have time for the household and the children, she emotionally responds: "Dima, do you really think that I wouldn't want to do the best for the children? I would like to, very much! But what you are suggesting would just...destroy me." It is inconceivable for her to give up her work, but it is equally inconceivable for her to do less housework. Dima once reprimanded her for coming home late from work. He expects her to at least call and let him know. "He is right; I don't argue." There is no doubt in Olga's mind, that from seven in the evening until early next morning her place is in the house, and if she is not, it is a personal failure for her. Whereas a woman in the West might choose to neglect housework in favor of a career, or to become a full-time



mother and stop working, Olga feels she has to be both a career woman and a good mother and wife at the same time.

Of course, those are not only Olga's ideas. Everybody around her expects women to fulfill this double function. Every woman in "A Week Like Any Other Week" has a career and raises at least one child, except one woman who does not have a family life and is not of Olga's generation: Marya Matveyevna is past seventy. Olga comments: "We consider her an oldtime 'idealist': we feel she's become somewhat...well, abstract. She simply knows nothing about everyday life. She soars high above it, like a bird. Her biography is exceptional: a work commune at the beginning of the thirties; in the forties—political work at the front. She lives alone, her daughters were raised in a children's home....Marya Matveyevna is occupied only with work-professional work. Party work." One can sense a certain respect for Marya's "spiritually pure" life, but it is clear that her revolutionary values (she was about 20 during the Bolshevik revolution) do not apply for Olga's generation anymore. Now a happy private family life is considered to be just as important as a career and considerably more important than political work. Olga tries to make her colleagues laugh: "Give the floor to the mother of many children," she says, "I assure you that I have had my two children with national considerations in mind exclusively." National considerations is a concept which seems ridiculously abstract to her. She has nothing against politics—she even volunteers to articulate a question for the political study group. But in the rush of her everyday chores she forgets about the assignment. Family and work take so much of her time that she can do almost nothing else.

There is no doubt, for instance, that her husband would not put up with a wife who would invest less time in family work. So much does he rely on Olga that he does not even know how to feed his children. When Olga is late once, he gives them chopped eggplant and milk, so that his daughter, Gulka, gets stomachache and diarrhea. "You should have given them tea," Olga remarks. "How should I know," is Dima's only response. He even leaves the house in a mess to punish Olga for her lateness. His household chores are

minimal—he puts out the garbage and sometimes goes shopping and to do the laundry—but even that he considers as almost too much. He suggests that Olga stop working, so that he can be “freed of all this,” meaning his work in the house. He expects her to mend his coat and iron his pants but always finds time to read his technical journal. When she remarks that she too has to read for her work, he dryly remarks: “Well, that is your business, but I have to.” For him, Olga’s role is clearly to take care of him and the children.

Surprisingly enough, Olga is considered to be lucky with her husband. Her friend Lusya tells her that she has a “wonderful husband.” In comparison with the other husbands in the story, Dima really comes off the best. Lusya herself is married to a scientist who refuses to put their child into a nursery school and insists that his wife leave her job. Lusya’s lover ran away when he found out that she was pregnant; another colleague, Shura, has a husband who is an alcoholic, a common illness in the Soviet Union. (The government itself has admitted that alcoholism is a major problem in the country.<sup>3</sup>) Altogether, there seems to be nothing like the new, liberated man we occasionally meet in the West. In terms of household work, this is statistically proven: A study from the 1970’s indicated that women do 75% of the housework, and the remaining 25% they share with their husbands.<sup>4</sup>

Just as Olga has to meet the demands of her husband at home, she has to meet the demands of her supervisor, Yakov Petrovich, at work. Her situation is typical for the Soviet Union, where the majority of the jobs that are dominated by women are still supervised by men. This is especially true in the fields of politics, medicine and science.<sup>3</sup> In Olga’s lab, almost all employees are women except for the supervisor. It is true that the government has made a number of adjustments in view of the needs of the large number of female workers. But it is also true that the work patterns, which were originally set up by men for men, have generally changed very little, even at a workplace now dominated by women. For example: according to law women have the right to sick leave, if their child is under

the age of two.<sup>5</sup> But Olga fears that her numerous sickdays will damage her career—and with good reason: her supervisor is losing trust in her, because he is afraid that she will not finish her work on time. After all, the Five Year Plan does not take sickdays into consideration. Similarly, the government grants each woman one year leave of absence before and after childbirth.<sup>5</sup> But when Olga decided to stay home for a year after her son Kotya was born, she almost forfeited her diploma. So when her daughter was born, she decided not to stay home. The supervisor, who, like her husband, expects a fulltime commitment from her, criticizes her lateness. The work situation is not flexible enough to allow for special arrangements for a mother who has to make breakfast and prepare dinner for four people and then travel one and a half hours before she can be at work. Interestingly enough, Olga herself does not consider that as a reason for her lateness; she mumbles something about bad weather as an excuse.

In her work, Olga and her colleagues are faced with problems that no doubt are also encountered by women in the West. Her supervisor takes advantage of her and makes her translate an article for him, even though she herself has pressing work to do. Her friend Iuyba gives her supervisor credit for a discovery that she made herself, because she became pregnant and wanted no one to know.

But there are other problems, which are typically Russian. Shortage of equipment is one such problem. It is difficult for Olga to finish her experiments on time, because there never seems to be enough labtime and equipment available. Another problem is bad organization. The first experimental products were prematurely manufactured—a better compound has since been discovered. "They'll only take up room on the shelf," Olga remarks.

Shopping is also a problem related to work. Since many women live in new districts, which have no shopping centers, the shopping is done downtown, during or after work. The women in Olga's lab solve the problem well: they have their lunchhours between two and three to avoid the biggest crowd at noon and a different woman each day goes shopping for all—apparently a fairly common practice in

the Soviet Union. Shopping itself is a difficult task: In many places one has to stand in three lines before one can get the desired product, and if one buys too much at one place, one has to put up with unfriendly comments from the people waiting in line. Some women spend up to three hours daily with their shopping.

Shopping is not the only area in which Olga can be considered to be luckier than the average Soviet woman. She and her husband have an apartment which is about twice as large as the average apartment. The minimum requirement for floorspace in 1972 was 12m,<sup>2</sup> and Olga lives in a 34m<sup>2</sup> apartment. Her family also has more money than the average family. We do not know how much Olga earns, but Dima makes 200 rubles, which is 40 rubles more than the average worker earned in 1972. (In the branches in industry which are dominated by women workers the salary is far below average.)<sup>6</sup>

The large apartment and the relatively high income give Olga an advantage over other Soviet women and might in part explain her choice to have two children, which is considered to be a lot in the Soviet Union. (With her two children, however, Olga finds it almost impossible to save up money for new cloth and a television.) In her lab, Olga is considered to be the "chief authority on the question of childbearing." The questionnaire the women are asked to fill out is an indication for the authorities' concern over the sinking birthrate in the country. Many women refuse to have more than one child—they feel that they do not have enough time and money and thus choose to have an abortion—the chief form of birthcontrol in the Soviet Union. Everything else is unreliable or only sporadically available. Up to the 2nd month, abortions are free. However, they involve a lot of paperwork and can be very painful since narcotics are rarely used.<sup>7</sup> Many women do not want to put their children into a nursery (which is for two month to three year olds), but also do not want to stay away from work for a year with only partial income. Oftentimes the grandmother will look after the child or children. But those who don't have a mother, like Olga, have to use nurseries and daycare centers (for three to seven year old). Daycare centers are overenroll-

ed. In 1974 only 60% of those who applied could be accepted.<sup>6</sup> Olga knows that with one teacher for every thirty children, her children don't get all the attention she would like them to have, but there is no alternative. Somehow she manages to find time for them at the end of the day and during the weekend, and they seem to be reasonably content.

Reading about Russian women, such as I have done over the last couple of days, can be very depressing indeed. One is almost tempted to label Olga's lifestyle—and that of many other Russian women—as subhuman. Their lives are structured so rigidly; there are so many burdens that have to be overcome that there seems to be little room for spontaneity and joyful minutes of leisure. What is attractive about their lives? I wondered—and after a while I was able to find quite a lot.

Throughout the story, Olga speaks in a self-assured voice. She seems to have no doubts about the importance of what she is doing. Unlike so many women in the West who feel superfluous, Olga knows that she is needed. Also, Olga might be a slave of her work and her family, but she is definitely not a slave of her body. Unlike women in the West, who are constantly exposed to pornographic material and who are constantly one way or the other made aware of how they look and how they are supposed to look, Olga does not have to deal with that kind of pressure. I thus consider her relationship to her looks refreshingly healthy: she enjoys getting her hair cut and changing the length of her skirt, in short, she likes to look good, but she is not, like many Western women, compulsive about it. Of course, one could argue that she simply does not have enough time, but I suspect that the *body image* of Russian women is generally different than that of women in the West. There is, for example, a lot more body contact between women. In America, where every form of physical contact is usually linked to sex, women are rarely seen touching each other. Olga, on the other hand, mentions on several occasions physical contact between women. One time she is worried and puts her cheek into the hand of her friend Lusya, another time they hold hands while they cross the street. The women in the lab are in general rather supportive with each other. They share

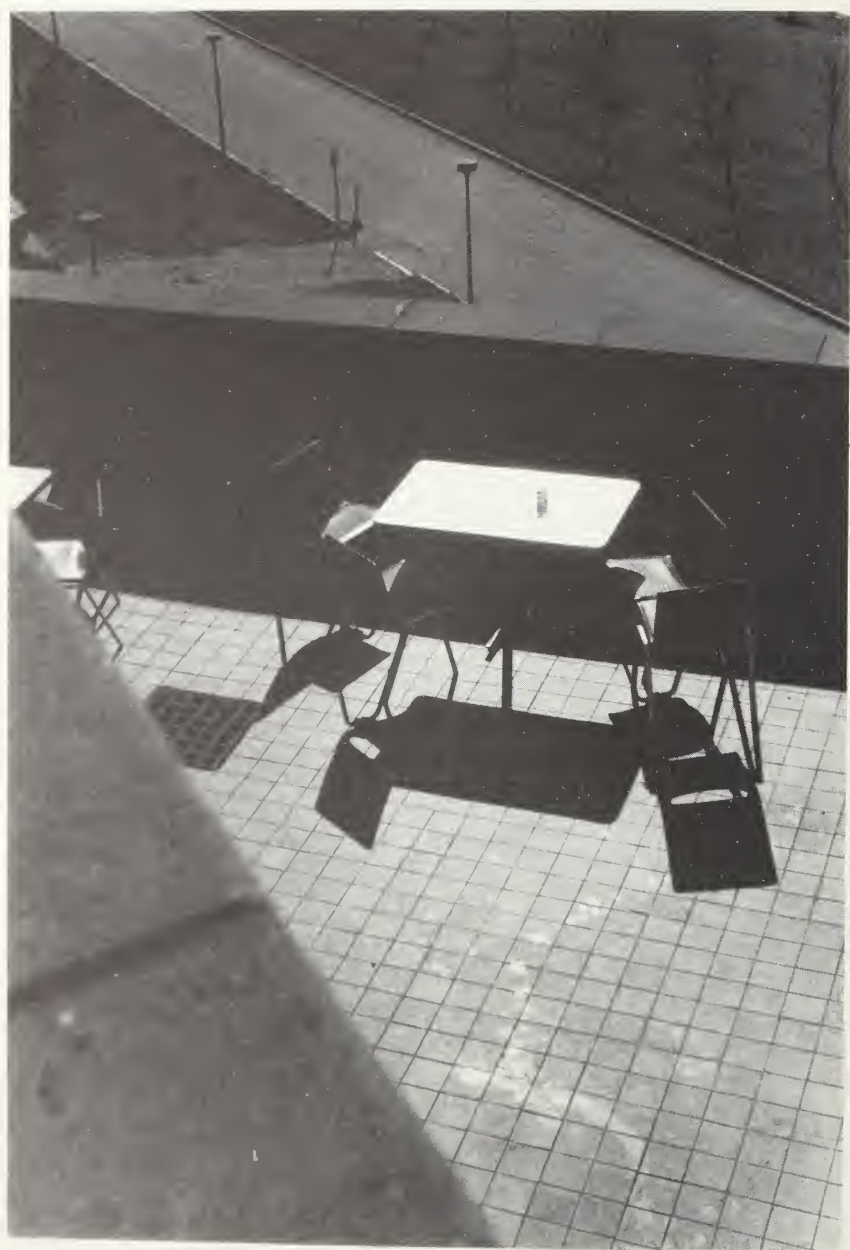
their lunch if one of them does not have any, and without complaining they buy food for each other. They all know about each other and discuss their lives during break.

Olga also enjoys her work very much, and this seems to be the case for several other women in the lab, like Lusya and Marya Matveyevna. Olga is not addicted to television (she does not have any time), but enjoys reading contemporary prose. (Reading in general is a favorite pastime for Russians.)

These are all points, which, I believe, make Olga's life enjoyable and worthy. Yet, if Fourier is right, in that the degree of female emancipation is the natural measure of general emancipation, then Russian society still has a long way to go.

#### Endnotes

1. Natalya Baranskaya: "A Week Like Any Other Week" *Novy Mir*, No. 11. 1969
2. Dorothy Atkinson, Alexander Dallin and Gail Warshofsky Lapidus, eds. *Women in Russia* (Hassodes, England: The Harvester Press, 1978), p. 86
3. Tatyana Mamonova, ed. *Women and Russia* (Boston, Beacon Press 1984) p. 23
4. Carola Hansson and Karin Liden *Moscow Women* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), p. 26
5. *ibid*, p. 125-126
6. *ibid*, p. 54
7. *ibid*, p. 113



# Mutations

*And an intruder is present.  
But it always winds down like this  
To the rut of night...*

—John Ashbery

“Fantasia on ‘The Nut-Brown Maid’”

## John Willow

I could tell the apartment had been well lived in. It was worn down like an old piece of canvas. There was a leather-banded watch on the arm of the sofa. I looked at it to see if it was the right time. But the face of the watch was broken, and its hands were missing.

Beth stepped out of the bathroom with a blue towel wrapped around her midsection and a pink turban on her head. Her face looked soft and fresh without the makeup. She saw me sitting on the sofa with the broken watch in my hand.

“That’s my old boyfriend’s watch,” she said. “The kid broke it.”

Just then I remembered her telling me she had a kid. She had called him ‘the kid’ then also. It made me think of a baby goat. I smiled. “Oh, that’s right. What was his name? Jerry?”

“Jimmy. He lives with my mother.” She let out an ironic laugh. “She thinks I’m too irresponsible to have a kid. I told her, ‘Mom, you know, maybe it’s true. I am an irresponsible bitch, ain’t I?’ But don’t worry, Alan, I’m not beyond hope.”

One thing I liked about her apartment was that it was well lit. In the afternoon the sunlight melted into the livingroom. So much light seemed not to belong there, with the empty Michelob bottles and full ashtrays and pieces of mail. I remembered the night I met Beth at my friend George’s



Halloween party. We were among the few who had not worn costumes. I liked the way she talked. She had a Midwestern accent, and sometimes she began a statement with 'certainly,' 'absolutely,' sounding sophisticated when she wanted to. She knew something about Greek mythology. She had called herself a Niobeian, though I didn't know what she meant by it. Putting it all together I thought she had something. By the end of the night I was saying to myself, ah, here she is, my Everywoman!

She turned on the stereo. A Reggae tune beat merrily against the wooden floors. It didn't seem to jibe with my mood. She was getting dressed in the bedroom. We hadn't had sex yet—I'd only known her a week. This was our second meeting.

There was a flattened pack of Camel Lights on the table, next to a few beer bottles. I took one and lit it, making sure there were still a few left in the pack. I sat down and blew a few smoke rings, inhaled some more smoke, and remembered how nasty smoking was. I put the cigarette out, but the bad taste remained. Then I thought about Beth's child, Jimmy. The idea of her having some rugrat tucked away in her mother's house began to slump on my mind. As I sat on the end of the sofa opposite the broken watch I tried to think of ways to unbuckle myself from her. Yes, that's how I felt—loosely buckled. She had told me she was a biologist in some 'sequestered' lab in Cambridge. DNA mutations was her speciality. That appealed to me. Here was a woman, 26, a little older than me, replete with a liberal arts education *and* a degree in molecular biology. Biology is so important these days, I thought to myself. I listened to the wheezing of a hair dryer coming from the bedroom. I wanted her to take her time so I could think things out. The Reggae station played a Creole song and I wanted to like it but I was in the mood for something more nostalgic, a Miles Davis tune or something. Then she came out of her room dressed in a bra and slip.

"Almost ready, Alan," she said smiling. She saw that I was a little uncomfortable, and uttered a trickle of laughter. Then she went into the bathroom singing 'coomiyameeoo' or some version of the Creole song. The

bathroom door wouldn't close all the way when she shut it.

"Putting on your makeup?" I asked, knowing that I made a face like an upside down smile, but which she couldn't see.

"Mm, hmm."

Spreading my hands up into the air I asked myself: Am I here for lust? Why can't I just get up and leave? I answered myself, Yes, I was here for lust. Stay and let it happen.

She took as long putting on her makeup as she did drying her hair. Her apartment seemed to lack something— a cat. She's a biologist, I thought, she must like animals, she's got *cat* written all over her face. I stood up and yawned out loud and stretched feeling like a cat arching its back. I peeked into the kitchen. Just a few dishes in the sink—not bad. No sign of cat food, no kitty litter. I was glad of that and smiled, feeling a surge of power in my blood. I faked a couple of right jabs at the chimes that hung in the kitchen doorway. Maybe I would be her cat, I thought. Be my own master and all, come and go like a shadow, slink in around dinner time, alight on the end of the sofa rolling my serpentine tail? That wouldn't be bad at all.

I was nudged out of my little reverie when I heard the bathroom door crack open and the sound of Beth's bare feet on the floor. It sounded like she was walking on the balls of her feet. The door to her bedroom closed again, and I thought maybe I should have done the customary thing and been late instead of early. The best way to do it is to be as late as possible without missing the movie. No one respects an early bird. In this case I wouldn't have minded being late for the movie. We were going to see another one of those kinky sci-fi flicks—ingredients: one UFO, phosphorescent teenagers with peacock hairdos, and two or three villainous normal people. Beth had insisted we see "Escape to Planet U," and at the time I pretended to want to see it. Now that it was too late to change our plans I resigned myself, thinking that I would do it for her, the scientist with the ill-kept kid.

"Alan, what time is it, please?" rang out her young and full voice.

I cleared my throat. "Ah, let me see now...it's 3:05. The

movie starts at about 4:00.”

In less than a minute she was out of the bedroom wearing a stunning black dress with a purple sash across the middle. She had on bright red lipstick, blueish eyeshadow, and new running shoes with purple stripes. She smiled those Nio-bean red lips at me as though she had been aware of all that I’d been thinking. Maybe she was as cynical as me. I surmised that she remembered my telling her that I liked women to wear dresses more so than pants when we were at George’s party. And I was flattered that she did wear a dress. As far as her makeup, I liked her without it, but I wasn’t fool enough to say so.

“Let me just tidy up this place before we go. The beer bottles aren’t mine. My brother Jeff was here last night and Jeff is a have-beer-will-travel kind of guy.” She whisked from here to there, opening and closing cabinets, turning on and off the faucet, wiping the table, emptying ashtrays. One, two, zip. The place looked better already, and she threw the broken watch into the rubbish for ever.

It took us half an hour to walk to the Nickelodeon. It was a nice day for a walk. The air was rich with the smell of autumn leaves and the faint trace of burning wood. Most of the leaves had fallen but there were still many bright yellow sugar maples left. On the way there we learned that we were both “artists.” I, a graphic artist, and she, a bio-artist. We came to the conclusion that it’s no big deal to be an artist. Neither of us, we agreed, was a great artist. “But you never know, Alan,” she had told me, “it’s conceivable that, under one of my microscope slides, I might create a bacterium that could, for instance, thrive on toxic wastes. It’s been done already, you know, but only for certain kinds of toxic waste. It makes slime. The bacteria consume the waste matter, and, voila, slime is all that’s left. Harmless, biodegradable slime!” Beth said the word *slime* with her mouth wide open as though trying to cram everything that was grotesque into that one word. While we were walking along she would pat me on the shoulder now and then to emphasize what she was saying. I found it disarming.

When we arrived at the movie theater we found, to our surprise, that the film we were going to see was playing not

this week, but next week, same time, same place. I was glad. The cards seemed to be in my favor now. Beth didn't mind either.

"Well, Alan," she said, "it looks like we won't be escaping to planet *U* today. But, you know what, I really don't care. Since we're here though—"

"Hmm," I interrupted, "why don't we raincheck the movie. Are you hungry?"

"No, I'm not hungry. But I'd like to have a drink, and I know of a dark and dismal pub where we can have one."

A few blocks away, past the blinking Citgo sign, was a place called Zach's. We walked together, not hand in hand, but close to each other, crossing through the rumbling traffic of Kenmore Square. A red-bearded vagrant in a moth-eaten denim jacket and dirty gray pinstripe pants stepped before us after we crossed Comm. Ave. His eyes were blood-shot, and he held out a huge red hand: "Can you spare a quarter, man," he muttered. Automatically, I put my hand against the small of Beth's back and ushered us past the man. Beth observed me as I couldn't help but sneer at the vagrant when we walked by. I don't think she liked that.

Zach's was underneath a joke shop, down two flights of stairs. I never knew it even existed, but I realized that maybe Beth knew many things, little quirky things that I didn't. There were no windows in the place. It would make a nice bomb shelter, I thought. An assortment of jazz—some of it very strange—piped into the lounge and over the table where we sat. There was no waitress or waiter, so I had to go to the bar to order the drinks. I got Beth a Black Russian and a beer for myself.

"So you're a beer drinker, too," she said.

"Only in dark and dismal pubs."

"I see." Her eyes roved over me, as if this were the first time we'd met. Somehow it made me feel defensive.

"Why?" I said. "Is beer uncouth? I won't drink it if it isn't the couth thing to do. I can drink Scotch if you want."

She squinted her eyes for a second. Maybe I put her on the defensive. "This is a nice place. I like it," I said, taking a swig of beer.

"Wow, you're pretty cool."

"What?"

"Nothing. I'm sorry. I'm in a mood, I guess."

"My friend George said you were high-strung. I guess you are." I really had nothing better to say.

"Oh? What else did he say? Maybe you don't want to tell me. But I'm not really high-strung. George doesn't know me very well—though he thinks he can read people like a book." She paused, and then said defiantly, "I think George is a dip."

There was a definite strain of sarcasm in her voice and posture and it made me feel uneasy. She reminded me of a jaded whore the way she held her glass up to her chin and looked through half shut eyes. What a moody creature, I thought.

There was one thing I wanted to clear up and that was this thing about the kid—Jimmy. Who was this phantom child? I was tempted to come right out and ask her. But I reminded myself that it didn't matter, that I was after her mainly as a sexual conquest. I believed in being firm about my desires. I believed that lust was good in and of itself. I hadn't tried love yet, at least, not for real.

"You know," she said. "I once went out with a guy who was a lot like you... He had an Achilles heel. You know what it was?"

I thought to myself that I didn't want to know about him or his heel. "What?—Wait a minute, want another drink?" I went to the bar again and ordered her a Black Russian. I ordered myself another Heineken and a shot of Scotch. When I returned to the table she was preening herself, scooping the smooth locks of her hair behind her shoulders. She faked a smile at me as I settled the three drinks down on the table.

"Oh, how manly. A boiler maker," she said.

"Hey, I'm a man. I can take it—besides, I need the hair it'll give to my chest. Rough and rugged, you know."

She took a long sip of her drink and said, "Piss on men," so low that it was almost a mumble.

There were a lot of drawn out pauses between our conversation. Beth was definitely in a mood. I tried to see what was behind those intense dark eyes. Some dark bird, I thought.

It seemed she might begin to cry right there, and I imagined seeing one of her tears trimming down her cheek along the edge of her neck. Her neck was the most brightly lit object in the place. She would look at my beer, at my red flannel shirt, but not directly into my eyes. Whatever she was holding back left a vacuum between us.

It was dark in the lounge and when I had downed my shot of Scotch the maroon upholstery seemed to darken the air. Everything in the place was maroon, the carpeting, the velour walls, even the ceiling fans. The lapses of silence were getting unbearably longer. I didn't think that Beth was the type who could stand silence for long. It was deliberate. It occurred to me that to her this was an all-too-familiar scene. I thought that maybe, just maybe, I was being a bit of a jerk. Did I have a heart? I began to think of all the romantic leading men in movies after whom I had styled myself and how none of them really fit. I used to think of myself as a Robert De Niro type. How phony, I thought. After all, I hadn't actually had that much success as a De Niro. My love life was the pits. I wanted, all of a sudden, to be honest with myself. But I wondered if it might be too late. I couldn't just start being honest with myself right there.

Then I decided, what the hell, ask Beth about Jimmy.

"Ahmm, Beth, you haven't told me much about your son. I feel awkward bringing it up..."

She leaned slowly against the back of her chair and took a sip of her drink.

"I don't want to sound like—well," I added, "I don't want to make you feel uncomfortable...I'm sure you've been asked this a lot."

"Alan, it bothers me...but I'm used to it. No. Wait, I might as well say what I feel. I'm not used to it. To be honest, I'm really sick of that question. It's hard to explain, Alan—but it makes me hateful, it makes me feel very ugly."

Her voice had become lower, but more tense. I had the discomfiting feeling of being studied. Sometimes, I reminded myself, a girl will do that. She'll just look at you and see things in you that you never think about. She probably saw me as a fool, just another dumb Joe.

"Actually," she continued, though her voice faltered

somewhat. "Jimmy is retarded. His father's name is John Cooper—John flew the coop. He didn't want to hang around with me and a retard."

The music was coming from a jungle. It played the peels of wounded elephants and the chatter of overgrown toucans. The bartender was leaning over the bar down at the other end of the lounge. He was talking to an old man with glasses and a cap. When he heard Beth's whimper, he cast a dog-gish glance at us. My lowered eyes told him it was none of his business and he looked back at the old man.

It occurred to me that there was something inevitable about all this. I felt like the straw that broke the camel's back. Sure, I could have avoided mentioning Jimmy, but I don't think Beth wanted it to be such a secret. Now she seemed weary. Her short, faint cries stretched into long sighs. I wiped away the blue streaks from her makeup that ran down her cheeks, and as I did this, watching my hand gently rubbing the napkin to her cheek, I realized that I had never thought of myself as *alone*. I looked into Beth's eyes and at her closed, relaxed lips, her long thin hands, and the smooth skin that wrapped like wax over her collar bone, and the idea of bones, her bones, made think of time, of nothing being left of us when we die but bones and darkness. No more tears rolled from her eyes. She was still. Like smooth mittens her curled hands rested on her lap.

# ISRAEL

Eddie Aronowitz Mueller

I live my childhood dream, married  
to a professor, his students  
loquacious in the kitchen. Sundays  
we sit around making *jiaozi*.  
My daughter learns Mandarin. But  
just beyond my Victorian's garden  
of marigolds, geraniums, wild  
roses, is Kibbutz Sdot Yam  
Fields-by-the-Sea, where I pick  
oranges, bananas, a stone which  
cleaned becomes a Roman coin;  
my street in winter, the glaring snow  
is the road to Jerusalem littered  
with dead tanks; and even with eyes  
open the fall of maple leaves  
evokes the tiled floors of Masada  
mosaic and tiered above the Dead Sea.  
I resent rivers and shade. My soul  
is mesmerized by the desert  
monotones, history, and my life  
slips by.







# The Pantheist

Nancy J. Mades

Pride  
is biodegradable.  
And silence  
is a slower form of asphyxiation  
    tumbling into an abyss  
    that has no form.

Fingers that graze a pile of words  
    remember  
that there was a hole inside the clouds today  
    and wonder if you saw it too.





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