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H o w t h C a s t l e

———— a journal of the arts —————



University of Massachusetts
Boston

Volume 5 Number 1

HOWTH CASTLE



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CARING ABOUT WALLS

SINCE NOVEMBER, OUR WORLD HAS KNOWN CHANGE. Walls that were made of stone and walls that were made of prejudice have been torn down. We, as human beings, now stand at a crossroad. We must decide at once what direction we shall take. Where do we go now that we can see beyond the walls? Should we insist that a country as racially oppressed as South Africa set the world precedent for equality and human rights? Is it time that the world decide that this oppressive style of existence is no longer tolerable, or do we allow the minority government there to make a few token gestures in an effort to retain power?

What about the walls that came down in eastern Europe; what should we try to make from the rubble? Do we, as westerners, only help them to build materialistic storefronts, shops of capitalism that are no deeper than their facades? The fact that communism did not work there does not mean that they must adopt capitalism. The possibilities in eastern Europe are great. They have a chance to decide upon what aspects of both "isms" to embrace. Since the cold war there has never been a country that could look to both great super powers, see what each one has done (both right and wrong) in an attempt to create a better form of government. There is potential now to show the world how it can be done. Should we feel there is no hope for our "system" of government? No, but things change when we stop caring.

Massachusetts has the third highest per capita income and the forty-fourth lowest tax rate. On the spread sheet this must look pretty good, but in reality, the wrong walls are being torn down here. Where "Excellence in Education" and "Universal Health Care" were once the battle cry of a progressive state, now we hear our self-appointed governors (Anderson, Carr, and Williams) screaming for "no new taxes!" We must ask ourselves, "At what cost?"

You see, Massachusetts is also a state where we read about an 86-year-old woman trying to hold on to her last remaining shreds of dignity and her apartment. Or we read where a drug addict who asks for help is put on a three-month waiting list for that help, and where child abuse, fostercare placements, and infant mortality are all on the rise. Last week, Boston recorded its forty-fifth murder of 1990. This year is only ninety days old. Can we live with a murder every other day?

It is time that we join with the rest of the world in an attempt to remodel our planet. It is the walls that repress, restrict, and limit our human potential that should be torn down. The walls of clinics, schools, and homes must remain standing. It is inside these walls that humanity lives. If we still care, it is our duty to strengthen, not dismantle, these walls.

— Peter T. Kidwell
Editor-in-Chief

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KEITH SNYDER

IN SEARCH OF VIRGINIA WOOLF

Long before the waters finally closed
over your head, you had entered
that wavering world to catch
the flashes of light
inside your net, not
to haul them gasping and shuddering
onto the shore as trophies

but to let them dart freely
in and out of darkness
and to follow the words right to the bottom
of things in themselves.

With dazzling words you danced
to the rhythmic chaos
of the sea, watched as waves
of bombers roared overhead

and wove a finer and finer mesh
under the splintering beams of light.

CONNECTIONS

It took two of us to kill
that night,

the unknown driver who left
the body lying in the moonlight

and I, who cut
the thread, a wail
frayed to a rasping
sigh unravelling
on and on
from the lump
of fur in the road

until my blood unfroze
enough to find a strangely
handy spade
and bring it down hard
where I guessed
the neck was, the shock
running up my arms.

In the quiet
I got back on the bike,
wheels whining

and the moon bleeding
white on the road home.

AT THE DENTIST

When I was younger, I could take the bit
straight in my teeth, unalloyed by novocaine:
sensation was never more acute
or thinking clearer than when I let
that blinding white light shoot
through my open mouth into my brain.

Now, as a gloved hand probes for rot
among the shells of former pearls
drilled and filed and silver-filled,
my nerves bend toward the shot
to lie in darkness, stilled.
Outside, in October sunlight, whirl
of birds and falling leaves, my head spins
a moment in euphoria, before the pain begins.

MY GIRLFRIEND IS NIGERIAN

There's a man in our bathroom.
He pokes holes in the walls, and
a veil of dust descends
on our fixtures. He asks, "Can I
move your toothbrushes?" He puts them
in the cabinet with slots for shelves.
The man puts the loose roll
of toilet paper out
in the hall
with the towel racks that haven't been
put up yet. Demi (our landlady) says,
"We'll have 'em up soon as I can
get my cousin over
here on the weekend."
The man asks for a dust pan.
"It's my mess after all," he says.
As he whacks a plate
around the socket with a screwdriver handle
he tells me about love,
politics, marriage, children, an honest
wage. My girlfriend comes in
from the bedroom. She introduces herself
with her usual munificence, and
offers him some refreshment. He accepts
a glass of ice water and proceeds to repair
past statements, taking care
to include what had been
left out.
Suddenly his din is
the weight of too many TV commercials
and I become aware of how tired I am, of reaching
behind my back for the toilet paper.
Later, I sweep up the dust.

REDS FOR JACO

Did they know who you were
when they hurled you dishrag
wet into that
steamy alley? Under
their feet your ribs
snapped like popsicle sticks, your face
was mom's fallen cake last Christmas.
Your well-calloused fingers, after
years of push and
pull, were disjointed
like broken cigarettes.

You lived on fretless rosewood
squelching harmonics in
deviated orgasms.
Nail down the groove,
then soar
like a hallelujah.

You played Bach,
transcribed Paganini.
But you beat your kids
with every measure, and waited
under bandstands with wings
for the catharsis
of flight.

STEVE MAZZULLI

JAZZ 101

Black artists
talked with social instruments,
rewriting philosophy
with soul.

GERARD J. WAGGETT

BIOGRAPHY

I've written your biography
 in pencil
So you can erase the pasts
 you'd rather forget
And rewrite them
As they should have run.
And on the cover:
 not a photograph
 but a portrait in pastel.
As for me,
Were I not under contract,
I would condense your life
 into one short story
 ended abruptly
 when the author
 lost interest

DESERT

Mom and Dad winter
in the desert; in autumn
they look for spring.
We shiver here;
Father swims there;
Mother takes walks
with cacti at dawn,
sunchildren reaching
sharp arms for clear
sky, quivering beneath
stern mountains' stare.
Her dog is company
when not cowering
from coyotes. She
misses pines,
greens, reds
and kids. Even in
the heat she misses
the summer.

JOE GIBLIN

MOUNTAINTOP, PA (THANKSGIVING 1989)

By the time I am showered and dressed
the Pocono Mountains have risen up to meet
descending pink and milky-violet hues —
Jim is lying on the couch, strung-out
from the long drive, six hours
straight and a twelve hour work shift
the day before. He murmurs something about
getting up soon — just a minute to rest.

Don't get up yet. Please.
Lie there — let evening accumulate
out beyond the picture window —
let it cocoon the mountains.
Let me watch you from across the room
just a while longer.

WESTON

We talked for hours
standing in her stall.
We took long rides
to the end
of the earth —

to the shore of the Saugatuck.
We talked to the islands and searched
for the church steeple
pointing out of the water.

We lay in the old Indian field
deep in the tall grass
and listened
for war whoops.
We heard only the sun
warming the grass
crinkling.

MICHIYO KUBOTA WHITEMAN

SOUND FROM THE ORIENT

TAIKO drums echo far
from the shrine
in the black forest

Mosquito net sways
like a green sea
in the hay-scented breeze

Crickets ring their
crystal chime in the shadow
of bamboo roots

A cat crawls on
the leftover feast in the white
legs of moonlight

A JEWEL BOX

I run up the stone steps of the blue house.
A red flower blossoms in my eyes.
It is spring,
and I look for music.

The smell of sheet music —
perfume named "Schubert."
Dim lamplight —
topaz chandelier.

Children's voices in Spanish
roll like rainbow glass beads
between the movements of Mozart.

A marble statue touches the keys.
The sound climbs a ladder
of white lace ribbon, enters
the orchard where notes ripen
and become shining
black necklaces, earrings, bracelets. . .

ROUGH EDGES

TIANA GORHAM

We carried our suitcases into the square, wooden cabin; girls were lounging or unpacking all down the row of bunk beds. I recognized several friends and said hi. This year I had brought a friend with me from home, Jessy. She didn't know anyone though. Just me.

"Hey, Beth! Down here." My friend Arlene stuck her arm out to stop me as I walked past the cubicle. We had talked on the phone a lot during the winter and had already planned to bunk together. Roberta, my other camp friend, stuck her head out from the next cubicle. We all hugged as I introduced everyone. I put my suitcase on the floor and sat down on the lower bunk. Arlene swung her tall, heavy frame up to the top using my shoulder as a step.

"Damn it!" she said as she caught her sweatshirt on the chipped wooden bedside.

"Watch out for splinters. They're everywhere," she warned Jessy.

"I suppose Beth told you all about us," Roberta said. "She probably left out all the best stories. Did she tell you about Jack?" Jessy shook her head no.

"She and Jack had this heavy thing going from across the volleyball court last summer. He was about two feet shorter than her. And he had this long red hair that kept getting in his eyes. She could spike that ball right off the top of his head."

"Yeah," Arlene said. "She and Jack kept track of each other all week. You should have seen them at the Last Night Dance. Thirteen-year-old lust."

She clasped her hands under her chin, rolled her eyes skyward.

"They were so romantic together. Beth rested her chin on his head while he just stared into her neck."

"Well, that was last year. I've grown up a lot since then," I said.

"Yeah?" said Roberta. "Well I saw Jack in the canteen this morning and he hasn't grown an inch." Everyone laughed except Jessy who just stood there with her lower lip in a pout.

Great, I thought. Jessy's not talking.

"What's the matter with you?" I asked bluntly.

"I thought *we'd* be sharing," she said. Somehow I knew she'd make a big deal out of bunking with me.

"Jessy, you'll be right next door. It's all set." I turned to Roberta. "It's okay with you still, right?"

Roberta nodded and said, "It'll be fun, really."

"You said. . .," Jessy's voice rose.

I took a deep breath and sighed. "Look. Just try it for tonight and if it doesn't work, we'll switch. Okay?" I waited.

She kept looking at her sneakers, but finally she nodded. Good. I wasn't ready to be stuck with just *her* for two weeks. She pushed her suitcase along to the next cubicle and out of my sight.

I had promised her mother that I would look out for her since this was her first summer at camp; she usually spent most of her time baby-sitting her brother and sisters. I had been coming to Camp Cedar Crest since my father died four years ago. I loved it, the great outdoors and all that, plus I knew my mother felt less guilty if she knew I was going to the beach every day and making gimp laniards and leather wallets with other kids my own age.

While I unpacked, I could hear Jessy sniffing from next door. I tried to ignore her, but I couldn't. After all, she *was* my best friend and everyone would think I was a loser if I just let her cry.

"What's the matter?" I snapped.

"Nothing."

"Then why are you still crying?"

"Leave me alone," she said.

I did.

Back in my own cubby, I placed a towel into each drawer to absorb the dust and splinters before I put my clothes in and stowed my suitcase under my bunk. Jessy was still unpacking, too; I could hear her slamming drawers and slapping stuff on top of her dresser. I could hear rock music coming from our counselor Peggy's room. She was the only one with a door even if her walls didn't reach all the way up to the ceiling either. Roberta and Arlene were telling her to sign the four of us up for soccer and volleyball. Good, I thought. Jessy and I had been on the state soccer team. She was good, and she'd like being better than most of the others.

After a few minutes, I went back over to Jessy's bunk. She was standing with her hands propped on her hips, facing the upper bunk. Oh no, I thought. She got an upper. Usually they were the first taken, but I'd forgotten that Roberta was afraid of heights. Jessy wanted a lower bunk because *she* was afraid of falling out. She'd told me that. Jessy could be such a baby sometimes.

"What are you crying for?" I asked.

"Beth, I don't want to sleep here."

"Come on." I pulled her out of the cabin and down the dirt path into the latrine. I leaned against the sink, my arms and ankles crossed while Jessy washed her face in cold water and blew her nose into a square of toilet tissue. She must have thought that I was going to give in to her because she looked quite surprised when I said:

"Shape up. You aren't going to wreck my vacation. Why don't

you just call your *mommy* to come and pick you up if you can't hack it?"

I pushed through the screen door, leaving Jessy there to introduce herself to some girls coming in.

Jessy was cranky over the next couple of hours. She and I were placed on opposite sides of the volleyball net for our first game, and I spiked more than one ball at her. One time she even kicked me under the net. The counselors were used to kids not liking each other, so they didn't complain to us. But I was uncomfortable with my own behavior. I was acting like a jerk, and I knew it.

After dinner I went for a walk alone. One reason I liked camp was because it was completely different from the city. The walls and floors of the cabin inside were rough planks with the knotholes still in them. No paint. No curtains. We were covered by a roof, but there was nothing fancy about our living arrangements. I felt a little guilty about Jessy. She was so unhappy lately. But, I thought, I can't always be there to make her happy.

It was so soft and quiet out in the woods. Pine needles cushioned the ground around our cabin. I sat and snapped pine needles in half, spreading their sap along my index finger. The pine carpet smelled fresh and at home here, not like the pine stuff we used to clean the bathroom. I picked up a pine cone and looked at the tiny grains of sand stuck to the open, tarry half-moons. Yellow pollen stuck to my fingers along with the sap and sand. I saw something dart into my sight from out of the corner of my eye. A spotty, brown toad sat perfectly still under a scrawny bush across from me. His colors made him nearly impossible to see on this ground. I watched him breathing until he pounced away-gone-in one move, propelled by the elastic of the pine-needle floor.

Once, at home, I saw a snake curled up in a spiral blending in with the nearly grey asphalt. I couldn't imagine where one would come from in the city. I rode my bike back and forth watching it from a safe distance. On one pass though, I got too close and it uncurled and scooted into the bushes in front of my house — a chain of S's all hooked together. I got the shivers. When I asked my mother about it, she said it probably came from the garden. I wondered why I'd never noticed them before. My mother had to pick her own tomatoes that summer. But here at camp, a snake could crawl over my foot, and I wouldn't even jump. Poor Jessy had never been to camp before.

I could hear Roberta through the cabin window telling the story about how her mother was a second cousin to Costello of Abbot and Costello. Everyone was impressed saying, "Really?" and "Wow." I could hear Jessy laughing with them.

I got up and brushed the pine needles off my behind before I went back inside. Roberta and Arlene were sitting with Jessy cross-legged on my bunk. I patted her on the head. She brushed my arm away but made room for me on the bunk. Things were cool for the rest of the night with the four of us. Roberta and Jessy got along really well, just like I thought they would. We even all sat together during the

movie that night.

At ten o'clock, Peggy turned the lights out, and we were spending our first night in the fragrant woods. Minutes later, I heard Jessy calling me softly and insistently. I got up and went to her. "You promised," she said.

"What do you want me to do?" I asked.

"Sleep with me."

"Jeez, Jessy," I said. But I climbed up into her bunk so she wouldn't get me into trouble. There wasn't enough room so I hung one leg over the side and lay still, figuring I would climb back into my own bunk as soon as she fell asleep. No such luck though.

Roberta was still awake. "You two sleep together often at home, too?" she asked.

"Give me a break, okay?" I said swinging my foot where I thought her face would be. Roberta grabbed me by the ankle to tickle my foot. I was helpless. I half-jumped and half-fell off the bunk, which brought Peggy out from her room. Luckily, I saw her light go on before she came out, and I had a chance to get back to bed. We laughed into our pillows until she finished her lecture and threats about grounding us from the Saturday dance if we didn't shut up.

I wanted to go back and talk to Jessy until she fell asleep, but I didn't. I listened to her whimpering for a long time before I could shut her out and fall asleep myself.

In the middle of the night, not sure where I was, I woke up. But somehow I wasn't scared. The crickets and bullfrogs at the pond nearby were all awake and talking to each other. I felt right at home sleeping in the woods, without the traffic sounds of home, with the moon for my night light. In the cabin, I could hear someone breathing with a soft whistle, someone else whispering in her sleep. The sound of Jessy's breathing eventually isolated itself from the other sounds around me; I listened for a few minutes before I tiptoed to her bunk. The moonlight through the windowpanes drew a black stripe across her face. She was sleeping soundly with her arm flung out towards me, her inky, tangled hair drawn across her paper-white skin. I stepped up gently on the lower bunk and leaned over her, feeling her breath warm across my face. I whispered, "I'm right next door if you need me." And slipped back away. ▲

BIG HAND, LITTLE HAND

MARY MCGRAIL

Barbara smoothed her work-skirt down over her knees and opened the restaurant door. Darkness covered her back and face as it shut, making the day into night quickly, without a sunset. She stood blinking in the airconditioned darkness, trying to adjust her eyes. Spots of yellow and orange moved around the room, blinding her, and when she blinked them away the hands of the clock appeared. Fear spread from her stomach into her legs. The minute hand cut the white space between the numbers ten and eleven, and the hour hand nudged five. Eight minutes this time, but still late. She said the last word to herself again and again because it had a short, mean sound in her head, like a slap. She hated her lateness. She felt as if a tiny, disfiguring tattoo shone on her forehead. "Oh, to be perfect in small ways," she thought. The details were wrong lately, and it seemed that bigger pieces of her life were somehow shaky, ready to fall.

Al was already in the back setting up the steam table for the soups. He glanced up at Barbara for a moment, said nothing, then looked away. Barbara apologized for being late. Her voice was soft and higher than normal, so she spoke slowly to control it.

"Can you believe? My alarm did not go off." She was laughing uncomfortably, making little hiccuping sounds. A strange detachment gripped her when she spoke to Al, as if she were standing a few feet from her own body, watching. He picked up a steel container of lobster bisque and held it carefully out in front of his hard stomach, moving slowly so it wouldn't splatter his dress shirt. Barbara realized she had never seen so much as a drop of food mar the starched whiteness of his shirts. He placed the bisque into the well of steaming water, and she saw the lines of muscle in his forearms rise like ropes beneath his skin. He was fighting the urge to smile.

"Yeah. Let's get the fuckin' show on the road, okay?"

"Okay," she said. She wished she hadn't mentioned the alarm clock. She was sleeping in the afternoons now, and it worried her. Pulling the curtains tightly across the cold winter sun. How would Al judge it? It was so important to maintain her composure around him, to stay back. He looked at her again. It was impossible to read his eyes. They were black stones; no color separated their pupils from the surrounding irises. His hair was aluminumgrey, slicked with Brylcreem

and parted on the side, straight as a switchblade. The sculpted path of a comb ran from his high square temples to the nape of his neck. She knew he'd grown up in Fall River and that he was in Vietnam in 1963, as a military advisor. Jimmy the bartender filled her in one slow Monday night. "Don't let on I was talking about him though," he warned. "Al doesn't like it." But Jimmy would make customers wait for their drinks while he finished telling a waiter or waitress a newly unearthed secret of Al's past life. Maybe he was afraid. Barbara never asked Jimmy where he got his information, or if it was reliable. Several times she had seen the two men enter the office downstairs alone and close the door. Jimmy emerged from the meetings and was always silent for a little while after. He'd do inventory, or start cleaning the bar, something solitary. She wondered if he owed Al for gambling debts or coke. Al dealt out of the basement storage room on Saturday nights after closing, but he had nothing for her, she told herself, nothing she wanted. "You'll be out of this place one day and he'll die here. Remember. Just get back to painting. Just paint." She repeated the words, and it was like saying the "Our Father" in church after confession. She had only to say it the right number of times.

The bar clock read 5:45. She ducked into the bathroom for a cigarette. She had prepped fifty salads and her fingers were stiff and cold from the lettuce. In fifteen minutes the doors would open and Saturday night would begin. By eight o'clock the crowd would be three deep at the door, watching, waiting for a table to open up, restless, drinking, wanting her attention. Barbara looked at herself in the mirror and exhaled smoke, aiming it at the glass. Customers were like small children. She knew smoking at thirty-nine was a gamble, and she thought of Al and his trips to Vegas. She examined her face in the mirror, avoiding the eyes. Her pale skin appeared gray in the smoky air, but its bony planes were unlined and her slight overbite and the dimple in her right cheek made her look like a tenth-grader who'd snuck into the girls' room after school. She ran her fingers gently along the three earring holes in her left ear. Only one was filled. A tiny diamond she'd bought herself last year on Newbury Street. The other ear was unmarked. She wondered about the time, and lit another cigarette. A Marlboro took six minutes to smoke, which made it just another time-piece. "Little stick of time," she whispered. Her voice sounded strange in the bathroom, like an echo coming up from deep inside a well. It made her lonely to hear herself. She thought of the last self-portrait she'd painted, a nude that seemed always to be gazing past her from that straight-backed chair in her kitchen, drawn to something beyond the picture frame, an invisible object or person that she had forgotten to include in the work. Her eyes found her now in the mirror, and they were searching. She hadn't painted in two years. The eyes began to ask her questions.

Are you going to paint?

No.

Why? Why not start again?

I don't know. It's all shit. I don't know how.

What are you then, Barbara, if you don't paint?

I don't know how.

What are you?

The fear came back, a light flutter in the belly, sinking down to the knees. She wanted to be upstairs again, moving, stocking ice at the bar, anything. If I don't paint then I'm a waitress. I wait.

Barbara touched the cigarette to a drop of water in the drain and it made a soft hiss. A tiny puff of smoke blew out of her nose when she sneezed, making her laugh for the first time that day. Every New Year's Eve she threw her Marlboros away, swearing loud oaths that were sealed with champagne. Her abstinence usually lasted a week. She drank a handful of tap water and walked upstairs, feeling calmer now that she had so much to do.

Station one was half full before she'd even gotten her apron on, so she quickly checked desserts, silverware, and coffee. Everything looked okay, but she stuck a few spoons in her pocket because they were always the first to go during a rush. Janice grinned at her from station three, down front. She'd be close to the door tonight, which was bad news in cold weather, even on Saturday. Janice placed her index finger and thumb next to her temple so they formed a gun shape, and pretended to pull the trigger. Barbara nodded and rolled her eyes in sympathy. Then she felt a presence behind her and turned. Al stood a couple of inches away. His black eyes were watching her and the trace of a smile played in the corners of his mouth.

"Think we'll be busy tonight?" she asked. Her voice was light and even, the way she needed it to sound with him. He said nothing, and then pointed towards the line already forming beside the hostess' desk. "Where are you, station one?" he asked her.

"Mmhm," she replied, looking at him carefully. Al made up the schedule and assigned the stations. He knew exactly where she worked every shift, and wondered why he would ask.

"You'll rake it in back here. Just get 'em in and out, you know? And you'll do one-fifty, one-eighty maybe, if the rush holds past ten." He smiled openly at her for a second and held her gaze. She felt warm and suspicious. Raising his hand to her left cheek, he glanced at her earring and nodded slightly, the smile becoming faint but never disappearing. "Nice," he said quietly, and then he walked away. Barbara held her pad and pencil, and waited patiently for them to stop shaking before greeting her customers.

By eight-thirty the dining room was packed. Barbara had seven parties and they each needed something from her. Six Japanese businessmen wanted to know what a baked potato was, and she described one in detail, her hands working, forming the round shape as the men eyed her solemnly. She hoped they would all order the same thing. Another couple stared at her, trying to catch her eye. She hated them for forcing her to look back. "Watch it," a voice warned. She smiled at

them and returned to the Japanese men, all of whom ordered the lobster with baked potato, salad with Italian dressing, and Budweisers. The other couple needed a check, and held up a charge card. She took it and started towards the bar, but three men sharing cherrystones needed more beer. And water. "Oh, and more bread. When you get a minute." She smiled. Yes. "Push harder. Move a little faster," she coached herself, but her rhythm was off and she felt dizzy for a moment, even nauseated. "Not now," she thought, feeling a tiny stab of fear. Change fell out of her apron when she ran to the bar but she didn't slow down. She pushed through the crowd, saying "Excuse me" in a rough way that was unfamiliar to her. A woman wearing a mink coat stood holding a drink at the bar. She was laughing with another woman and a man. She seemed to want everyone to see how merry she was. Barbara ran towards her, and she thought she would fall into the woman's hard, laughing mouth if she didn't stop. But at her approach the threesome swayed to the side without looking at Barbara, as if this were a dance step they'd been rehearsing. The woman's mouth opened again but no sound came out. Barbara's breath grew faster. Jimmy yelled for her drink order, but it was difficult to hear anything and her head felt strange and blurry. She had a terrifying urge to sit down on the floor, right there, but she didn't move. The room filled with voices layered one upon the other until the roar was like an unknown language shouted and whispered, and she couldn't understand what any of it meant. She looked at the clock, which had stopped moving. Then it all got quiet.

She was five years old. Her father was in the basement leaning over one of the broken clocks. He was drunk. She could tell because his hands were slow and his breath sounded heavy and deep, like sleeping. She picked up a clock and looked at him, ready to run, but he didn't see her so she moved to a corner behind him. She liked the broken clocks best. They stayed the hour you wanted and never changed after that. Barbara looked at the cracked bubble of glass, touching the knobs in back. The metal felt cold, and her palms left steamy prints where they touched it. She wished her father would throw this clock away so she could dig it out to keep. He made a sound in his throat and turned to her, seeing the clock. "Gimme that," he said. The muscles in his face were loose and his eyes looked shiny and red. Barbara sat perfectly still in the corner, watching him. She pulled her body in more, bracing. "Din' I tell you fuckin' kids stay outta here? Gimme that." He swatted at her but missed, and she scampered across the oily cement floor, heading for the stairs. Maybe he wouldn't follow if she got away with the clock. He'd sleep in his work-chair and forget she had it. She flew up the stairs, her fear lifting her, making her fast. When her jacket hood caught on a coat hook it pulled so tight she gulped and the clock tumbled from her arms and over the railing. She watched it fall. It moved so slowly through the air but she couldn't catch it, and the smash made a bright, tinkling noise down below. Before her father lunged at

her she looked again at the clock. It wasn't anything anymore, only pieces.

Janice stood next to her in the bathroom and made her sit on the peach marble next to the sink. She spoke quietly, offering sips of water and smoothing Barbara's hair. "Al is watching your parties. Don't worry." They looked at each other in the mirror. Barbara felt calm and empty. It was impossible to say anything. Janice lit a cigarette and placed it in Barbara's mouth, "like those old war movies," she smiled, then grew intent again, seeing Barbara's face. Barbara wanted to say how it was so hard to hear words just now, or understand, but she didn't know how to say it right. The images kept coming, clear as life.



She is running from him. Her small hands are stretched out, reaching for the porch door. The screen is glass now because it's winter. She pushes it hard with her whole body but it stays closed. Only her arms go through and get stuck there, in the glass, so she pulls them to get free and the long shards slice from her knuckles to her wrists, smoothly, like her hands are Jell-o. She sees them slack open and it isn't hurting. Then she is on the porch, and her father is gripping her wrist too hard, "to make the blood stop," he says. It drips onto the porch, getting darker there, little splashes. The broken glass is pink and wet but her father isn't mad anymore, just afraid. He holds her wrist as hard as he can on the way to the car. She thinks maybe his hand is bleeding too when she sees the red pour between his fingers and up over the hair on the back of his hand, drenching it. She thinks she might throw up but she holds it. He drags her, making her feet run off the ground a little until they reach the car. He starts driving very fast and she can see out the front window because she is sitting on dirty clothes left on the seat. In a soft voice that makes her wonder, he says "Don't cry" over and over. But she isn't crying. He lets go of her hand for a second and it opens up again like a big mouth and something blue and white in there shows. She throws up without feeling it. No taste. Her father tries to wrap a white sleeve around her hand but a huge circle of blood spreads right through so he uses another one and it gets soaked, too. "Oh Jesus Oh Jesus Oh Jesus" he says, maybe crying. Then blackness until the hospital room with a board for her hand, like a cutting board. Every time she turns her head to see the doctor sewing it the nurse touches her chin and asks her to look at the clock on the wall. The nurse has a big bun and a white cap sits on it like magic, even when she moves. Her lips are shiny and tan. "What time is it?" she says. "Can you tell me what time it is?" And Barbara feels afraid and sorry for not knowing how to tell the time. She is sorry for running and sorry for bleeding and she is afraid to say "I don't know how." She wishes she knew how to say the time.



She awoke during the night. She had been sleeping for a long time. The branches outside made shadows that moved across her ceiling in the moonlight and a soft whistling sounded in the windows. It made her feel good to hear the wind. She lay still and thought of nothing, letting the grey light rest on the canvasses in the room. One stood stretched and white, facing her in the quiet darkness. She looked at it for a long time, and then she went back to sleep, not wanting to dream.▲

THE POWER LINES

MATTHEW HICKEY

It is fall. Scott says the power lines off Beaver Dam Road are a good place to hunt so we go there. Even though there is a faster way, Scott drives my truck down Old Sandwich Road so we can pass by the field.

Sometimes, when it's summer, we pass by the field and the crickets chirp so loudly that the noise becomes almost like a quilt of muffled noise; no sound, finally. And the haze is so thick that the cast sun just sort of melts away before it reaches the horizon and for a while everything is a reddish nowhere, stuck between day and night. That is the best time to see the deer come out into the field.

Scott and I drive out there in the summer to wait for the deer. We park with Scott closest to the field and me, in the passenger seat, next to the old abandoned house that sits facing the field on the other side of the road. (They say the house is haunted but to me it is just void, staring into the field, and I keep glancing at it.)

If we arrive before the deer Scott begins to talk as he scans the far side of the field with my binoculars. He tells me of his job putting ceilings in the new high school in Carver. He tells me how he has to stand on staging to put the ceilings in, and how the holes that will hold the ceiling up are drilled. He says it was hard doing the boiler room; he swung from the boiler pipes. His hands, he says, are now all cut up and rough. He shows me where splinters of wood have pierced his fingers, but I cannot see.

Scott looks into the field.

Scott talks about his friends Brian and Steven and how they sometimes run down Old Sandwich Road. Scott tells me about a trip to North Carolina he took in June. That was a good time he says, smiling as he again peers through my binoculars, leaning further out the window of my truck. The hills of Kentucky were so pretty he says. We drove through at sunset. Then Scott tells me a story about how when he was a kid he broke his nose playing baseball with his brother. He made a 'tock' noise when he described hitting a pitch, and a crunching noise when his nose broke, and he even yelled as if he had broken his nose just then.

I watch him talk as as my eyes try to adjust to the failing light, but he just becomes an indistinct silhouette against the darkening field. I

can't see his mouth moving; I've lost his eyes as they stare away from me. He talks as if his thoughts have leaked into words and he is lost in them and so am I.

Through the binoculars Scott sees three deer at the far end of the field, one a buck. I can't see anything. Then it is too dark even for Scott and so we go back up Old Sandwich Road. I wonder why the deer never come out on the side where the abandoned house is. On the way back Scott, who is driving, spots a doe about twenty yards into the woods on my side of the road. We stop, and finally, after about five minutes of peering into the woods, I see the doe.

But it is fall as we head again down Old Sandwich Road toward the power lines, and the deer don't come out much this time of year, and we're hunting grouse anyway. But it is a nice drive down this road, and Scott has lots of stories as he drives my truck over the rocks in the road: stories about hunting with his best friend when they were younger and before his friend moved away. I listen and once again slip into these memories as if they were my own. I haunt his thoughts again like some real ghost stealing through his phantom past. The sun sets sooner in fall, and this time it is I who seems to become indistinct as the cold sun sets. And somehow I am only vaguely aware of where I am. I look to my side and see the vacant windows and abandoned house as it drifts sullenly by.

Scott tells another story as we speed toward the power lines. He tells me of his old hunts and I try not to intrude.

We are there, and as we walk along the path Scott points out to me the real places where once he almost shot a grouse. Scott decides that we will hunt in the spot where he and his old friend used to hunt after school. It is just at the top of the next crest. Scott walks ahead, but as he climbs the crest a winding gash twists into view from the valley on our right and curls along the slope in front of us. A new road straddles the crest of the hill and reaches into the woods above us before stopping in a dead end. Soon there will be a housing development.

I am a little dizzy from walking, clammy and out of breath when I reach Scott who is standing above me. He turns, and, looking at me for the first time, says,

"You can't know how my heart is breaking." ▲

HOOPS

Huge square boxes — dirty red bricks.
The words are crack suck dizzle treat, never drugs.
Standing watch, the warriors, the generals, the loser kids,
and watching us, the cops
or priests preaching *shoot hoops*
and pushing hope.

The mothers are concerned and hope
to hit megabucks so they can get out of the bricks
into a house with a driveway to shoot hoops
not drugs
or cops
or other kids.

And the generals, now in their 30s, still call themselves kids.
they don't even hope
to get out. They're safe from cops
and jobs and the world when they're in the bricks.
There's good money selling drugs
under the hoops.

The NBA is a joke, standing under these hoops.
We're not little rich kids —
Biff and Tiffany don't do drugs.
Their parents are full of hope —
their fireplace is made of friendly bricks,
and when it snows, they'll get a ride home from the cops.

Last night I got beat up by cops
in a paddy wagon under the hoops.
When they were done they poured me back into the bricks
to be cared for by the generals, the kids
who filled me with hope
that someday I'd get rich selling drugs.

Then they gave me some drugs.
I don't hate cops.
I was robbed of hope
by these hoops
and the kids
and the bricks.

But the bricks and the drugs
are forever. The kids seem to age while the cops
get younger, and I'm still under these hoops. . .

The staff of *Howth Castle* would like to congratulate Jack for winning the 1989 *Academy of American Poets* award. We are reprinting his award winning poem from last year's magazine to recognize his achievement. We also wish to apologize for the printing error that occurred in this poem last year.

BACK RUB

for Jamie

End of the day babble spills out
till I plug it up with my hand,
then I turn her over
like a pillow.

I wrap my fingers around her neck,
a rusted wound up Jack-in-the-Box.
My fingers squirting oil, loosening
the frozen gears. My hands —
cotton robot claws,
knead the knotty chewy dough
till it's like icing.

My hands drift to her back,
a steel cobweb, a bear trap,
clinging to the weight of the day.
Pressing whirly circles deep
into muscle, I am liquid wrench,
mystery oil. The cage opens,
she sighs.

Her arms, white cement.
I roll them, exposing
the licorice underskin. I trace lines
from shoulder to tip.
She begins to fade.

I travel her back
to the buttocks, once taboo
now anatomy. Her legs —
tubes of stretched elastics
wrapped in copper,
I squeeze till useless.

I skate my fingers down to her feet,
swelled puffy snake-bites.
I squeegee out the poison
and smooth over the skin
like new.

And, with a kiss
I send her to a place
where the Queens fly airplanes
and the Kings have soft hands.

JACK LEACH

FRONT PAGE

Your eyes suck me
to your smile,
familiar and obscene.

I think I was playing stickball
while the shaking girl
pleaded in the back seat.

You, tough with a screwdriver
against her throat,
and still my friend,

would've driven me
behind the mall.
Maybe I would have gone.

JACK LEACH

SECRETARY

At her desk she smiles
and she's drowning.
Boys once pushed her head down
under the water, and giggled
while she cried. She kept crying
until crying was fun.
Each night climbing out of the water
into her sandy bed — never
completely able to dry off.

HAS ANYONE SEEN THE THINNER?

and if making a place into a
painting creates movement of some kind
then my eyes want to stand next to
a mind that flies away bouncing
back and forth from the blues and
the purples these wet fingers have
kindly stroked high onto the left
corner of any oversized canvas and
if something strikes your memories
yellowed from the negligence tell me
louder louder than the last time so
maybe i can feel too and stroke it deeper
and harder into the canvas letting the
oils sink far far down that not even
these tips can change the color
now i hear blurs of what maybe it was
and my navy stockinged feet don't move
go on comment on the thickness of the
paint and the lightness of the sweeter
lines soft with waves encourage my
younger eyes of possible times dancing
from brush to brush to
brush blues not yet seen and romance
it all to an end unimaginable and with step
step step into another time of me and
perhaps it could be shared through the
placement of my eyes that see me wonder
when how or why my heart falls fast into the
dreams of blues and favorite brushes
are worn this time and the thinner
has been misplaced

CLIMB INTO THIS

dream me dream
me all we do
swirl back words
words and talk of an odd connection
grab my summer hair walk no stroll
eyes pie eyed or not
in eyes a smile of one now recalled
and touch
laugh with me hard into sky grays
on a night of me you
you me one night a sweater worn and worn
then sewn
plunge into alleys and you wanting
want them simple and never just a kiss
hummm construction elevator men stories a voice
marvels my ears
through old speakers birds whistle inked hands
drink coffee from a silver pot
those exclusive ties these fingers have brushed
dark suits run through doors
rooftops of then and now glazed with cooler rain
a whirlwind stunned still and believing summers
of summers can you love all that this is and
melt with you again and tough asking only
only smile me another dream
drifting off i go

SITTING WITH MARION IN HALIFAX

The light is now thinning to dusk.

What would I rather be doing
than eating this peppermint?

Marion's deliberate poise moves her
through the room like a marionette.

Her red coffee mug sits on the table,
the plant leans toward the light.

The harbor shifts behind us
and all I've got
is instinct to go on.

MONSOON

My retreat hut
lay deep under heaped up
pine needles dropped
from benevolent trees
to plug leaks in the slate roof.
After the rain
I step outside to urinate,
fertile sunlight
pours over the ridge
and mingles with raindrops
fresh on the surface of things;
a spider's web
stretches between two obliging milkweeds —
a radiant god's eye.
And the yellow muddy path
leading from my door and beyond —
a golden road.
I turn from my woods. And
in a tiny droplet
dangling
a precious ornament
my body
reflected in a fun-house mirror
floods with joy
and I fall.

THE FOLLOW THROUGH

for Olin

From behind, I wondered
about your shoulder blades
that poked from your rubbery
frame, as if they were extra;
I could tell
your mother never
taught you to skip rocks.

You didn't know how
to till the sand
with a silent foot
 asking the beach
to bring forth
that potential hovercraft.

You grabbed a
four-ounce-deep-sea-sinker
and twisting
like a furious golfer
plopped it three
feet from shore —

You ran from the pond,
 shouting
 — an unfinished
 game on the sandpile

"OLIN!" my voice cracked
 thick
with your frustration. . .

your bony back, darting
across the meadow
like a wounded
or pigeon-toed
deer,

crushed me

and I found my
heart in your skipping-stone
that waited in my hand.

LITTLE GAMES

KATHARINE BARTHOLOMEW

Everything was fine until the boat stopped at the 125th Street pier to pick up more passengers. She and Philip leaned over the rail of the upper deck to watch them come up the gangway. A group of chattering girls stood out from the rest of the crowd like robins among wrens.

Philip groaned, "Oh, my God! Those girls are my students." She knew then that the trip was ruined. He wouldn't want to be seen with her, not by those girls.

The holiday crowd came to life quickly. Beer cans popped, contraband firecrackers exploded, and gangs of red-faced children raced around the decks. It was going to be a hot one. Philip's girls stripped down to skimpy bathing suits, all curves and wide, white smiles.

The boat plowed on up the Hudson until someone above them blared out on a horn that they would be making a last stop at Edgemere to pick up more passengers.

Philip grabbed her by the arm. "Let's go! We're getting off here."

He hustled her down the narrow stairs of the upper deck and off the boat so fast that her head was spinning. Only when they were on the main street of the town and out of sight of the boat did he let go of her arm.

"Phew! Imagine a whole day of *that!* . . . those kids. . . the noise. . ."

Edgemere was like the little town she left to come to New York — the one movie house on Main Street, the same pizza place where the young people hung out, closed today, shut down. How scared she'd been at first of everything in the big city — the cab drivers yelling out of their windows, the roaring subway trains with men pressing close inside the packed cars. Then she met Philip at the front door of the building where they both lived, and surprised herself by going to bed with him the first night.

He told her, almost from the beginning, that he wouldn't marry her. He wouldn't marry anyone. Did she know what the chances of someone like him with six older sisters and no brothers marrying were? No, she didn't know. He was the one who taught sociology. The sisters teased him, tormented him, shooed him away, depending on the mood

of who was doing what.

I'll be different, she told him, not like the wicked sisters. He wouldn't listen to her. You'd change once you were married.

After a while, she saw that it was more than the sisters that would keep him from marrying her. Her began to talk about people he knew on Park Avenue, the east side, describing their apartments to her, the dinner parties they threw, but he never introduced her to any of these people.

When one of her roommates told her that Philip had asked her out, she wanted to smash the girl's face in. Philip wouldn't do a thing like that. Or would he? She cried until she was limp, wrung-out.

"She's crazy," Philip said. "I was only kidding."

In the end, she had to believe him; she couldn't do anything else. I am his and he is mine.

After that, she watched him if they passed a pretty girl on the street, or if one happened to be in a restaurant where they were eating. When she caught him looking at her other roommate, she began to meet him in the lobby of their building. Life became a torment; she couldn't watch him all the time, and there were so many pretty girls around. The only time she could relax was up in his room, just the two of them, he at his desk, she looking at him from his bed. My boyfriend, the professor.

On hot nights he would lean out of his sixth floor window for a breath of fresh air and she would wonder how it would be if he tipped over, fell out. Or if she came behind. . . and pushed. . .

She began to have dreams of falling, only it wasn't Philip who was doing the falling. *She* was the one hurtling down, not from a window, but from somewhere higher up. She was a long time falling, waking up just before she crashed, screaming, shaken.



She and Philip walked along the street of the town, just the two of them, and never had she felt more alone, not even on her first night in the city in the cubbyhole of a room at the Y, staring up at the ceiling, listening to the rain coming down outside the dark window.

"Where is everybody?" Philip's voice was loud on the quiet street. The only living, breathing thing they'd come across so far in their walk was a big dog lying under a tree, panting.

"You wouldn't have liked Bear Mountain," Philip said, "not on a day like this. You saw the kind of people that were on the boat."

I saw the girls.

"Let's go back to New York. The only place to be on a day like this is an airconditioned movie." He mopped at his face with a big white handkerchief.

"All right." She thought about all the time she spent putting an 'outfit' together for this day, buying a bathing suit, wondering if her legs would pass, and now none of it mattered.

The only place open was the Edgemere Inn, an ugly brown

three-story building with a 'Rooms For Rent' sign planted on dry, starved-looking grass on the front lawn. An old couple sat on the porch of the inn, still as two stuffed birds. Three women on a sagging couch in the lobby stopped talking to stare at them as they came in the door.

"When's the next bus to New York?" Philip asked the man at the desk.

"No buses running on Fourth of July, Mister. Next train, five o'clock."

"Five o'clock!" Philip was stunned. He looked at her. She looked down at her nails.

It was ten o'clock in Edgemere-on-the-Hudson.

"How about a cold drink?" Philip was still shaking his head. The man pointed to a bright red machine in a corner of the lobby.

She sat down with her drink, but Philip paced around the lobby like a tiger in a cage. The three on the couch looked at her, and then at Philip. She knew what they were thinking. A lovers' quarrel.

He was in a better mood when he came back to her. "Let's go for a walk. It's too early for lunch."

She followed him from the dim lobby into a bright sun. The town was beginning to stir; a few people were out hosing their lawns, fanning themselves on porch swings. She and Philip walked down the street as if they had somewhere to go, although they had no place to go. No place to go at all. They plodded along like two prisoners shackled together, silent, grim.

"Let's stop for a while." His voice startled her. Where had the sidewalk ended, and how long had they been walking on the dusty road?

They lay beside each other under a large tree on the side of the road. He put out an arm for her, but she turned from him in the grass. "No, it's too hot. . ." she murmured, although she was aching for him to hold her.

"This is nice!" He put on a show of stretching.

It wasn't nice for long. A swarm of pesky, blue-backed flies found them under the tree. They waved, they slapped, Philip swore, but still the blood-suckers came back to bite until they were forced to leave.



She was the youngest person in the dining room at the inn, but it didn't make her feel good: She could never be young the way Philip's girls were, laughing, pushing at each other. Except for the three on the couch, everyone sat at a little table, and they all talked back and forth to each other.

"Do you think she's old enough to drink?" Philip asked the waitress when she brought them two glasses of white wine.

"That's two dollars, Mister. You pay for the drinks now."

"Damn rude woman," he grumbled.

She couldn't believe how relieved she was that she wouldn't

have to smile, pretend she didn't mind, while he, and still another waitress, played out one of his little games.

One by one, everyone got up to go until they were the only ones left in the dining room. The waitress began to slam dishes around. She could have told the woman that it was no use; Philip would leave when he would leave.

He looked at his watch. "Three hours to go." He drummed his fingers on the table; he scratched the back of his neck. Awful to see him so nervous, so jumpy, as if they might still somehow be *found out*. She was almost sorry for him. She was dead calm, like one of those sad, frowsy women you sometimes see on the TV news wandering about in the rubble after her house burned down, or a tornado leveled everything to the ground. The woman was in no hurry, no hurry at all as she bent down to pick up a child's charred toy, or tried to stand up a chair with one leg missing. There wouldn't be anything much worth saving.

"I hope the train's on time," he said.

It didn't matter to her if the train was on time or not. They'd get there sooner or later. He wouldn't want to, but he'd ask her to a movie to cool off because he promised. She'd tell him no, thanks, I'm cooled off already.

"Home so early!" the girls would chorus.

"Home so early," she'd answer. ▲

A PAIR

WADE ROWLAND

I got one of those yellow forms in the mail, so I knew the package was there. I had been expecting it. She had called to tell me that it was coming, that she couldn't stand having that stuff around anymore. So I drove down to the Quincy Center Post Office to pick it up. There was a line, it was noon. I waited patiently. The postal clerk was pleasant. He seemed to be having a good day. Maybe the best day he'd had for a long time.

There wasn't much in the box. I could fit the whole thing under one arm. It wasn't heavy either. It had only cost her about seven bucks to send it. Well worth the money she spent to get rid of this stuff, to get it off her mind. None of the stuff in there was anything new: two books I had already read, a coffee mug, and a pair of pants she gave me when we first started dating.

She forgot the tank top that I bought at a concert. It wasn't the greatest concert. I didn't have what I'd call a terrible time, but not a great concert. I went because there was a chance that we could get backstage. You know, So and So's boyfriend is close friends with. . . . I went anyway. I liked the music. I let myself get caught up with the other's enthusiasm. I got along fine with So and So, and her boyfriend.

The T-shirt was black. It will look good with her red hair, auburn. Black even looks good with her fair skin. Her skin isn't pale like alabaster — that stone's too pasty — maybe an alabaster urn filled with white zinfandel. Just enough to show through. Besides, she paints. Artists always wear black. It will play a crucial role in her wardrobe. She needs that tank top. It was a Sting concert. The shirt had a quote lifted from one of Shakespeare's sonnets. "Nothing Like the Sun," it said. His mistress. My mistress.

The first book was a paperback, one of the *Best American Essays* series. A friend of mine loaned me that. I still have to return it. I was taking freshman English at the time. The guy who loaned it to me was a writer. He had read my essays. He liked them enough to loan me the book for inspiration. I hadn't read much non-fiction. I liked it. I was beginning to see what could possibly happen to me — anywhere, at any time.

The other book was a hardcover. I gave it to my brother for Christmas. He loaned it to me. The book was Robertson Davies' *The*

Lyre of Orpheus. We always did that. If he likes a book, I'll want to borrow it. I'll like it too. Same with music. If I buy an album, he wants to tape it right away. It's no surprise. I lived with him when his wife left him. He lived with me when I was cleaning up. We know.

He actually loaned the book to her first, and then she passed it on to me. She seemed to like the book pretty well. She never liked my brother much.

The mug was one of a set of two. She had bought them the week before the night I left. I think you would call the color of these things "dusty peach." It looks like old orange peel laying by the dumpster. She had bought them so we could have our morning coffee in them. So we could sit together with matching cups, but with my coffee lighter than hers. She liked that sort of thing. She would point it out when our outfits matched. She would smile and fit herself at my side. I would usually change my pants or something. She said that she bought the mugs because they had the serenity prayer on them. She didn't like the color either. She liked the prayer. A great prayer.

The pants were black chinos. They were good pants. I wore them with nice shirts at first, because they were new. They looked nice that way. But after awhile I started to use them for work. I was waiting on tables. I needed good pants for that job. They took a beating, though. Even those pants couldn't take that kind of wear. Now, they were beyond useless. They were worn out. I folded the pair up gently and put it away for good. ▲

THE HEMORRHOID

Laurie Zucker-Conde

The thin winter light struck the bowed chestnut-haired head, the glossy, floppy black bow she imagined made her look Parisian, the lucid slices of tea lemons. She grimaced. Her older boyfriend rattled his cup for her attention, smiled. She shifted uncomfortably. He was spilling over to tell his old mother, who trembled with the cold and half a dozen elderly ailments. The woman's rheumy eyes were full of adoration.

"How beautiful she is!" she breathed.

"She has a hemorrhoid," he confided. "She can hardly sit."

"Now what a shame. And still so young."

She stood suddenly, clutching the saucer as a teaspoon clattered to the floor, breathing through her nose, frowning.

"Well," sighed her boyfriend, "that spoon's dirty."

His mother leaned painfully forward, stretching out a trembling hand to the spoon that was out of reach. So she sat down gingerly, and bending as little as possible, picked up the spoon at her feet. His mother's palsied hand still hung in the air, as though she were blessing the carpet. Then she put her hand to her lips and blew the downcast young woman a kiss.

"She's ashamed."

"Well, that's just silly. You're silly." The younger woman nodded, feeling her foolishness personified and pulsing at her rump.

"Poor dear," clucked the mother. "It must hurt."

"Oh, yes, very much. It's an intestine. She has to put it back in."

"Have you given her some pomade for it?"

"Yes, of course. I've told her to put it back in gently, not to scratch it with a nail." She shifted closer to the couch edge. If she could only somehow dangle away from any pressure.

"Are you all right?" inquired the boyfriend, leaning over to feel her forehead. "You look pale. Why don't you go to the bathroom?"

She smiled thinly at him, feeling only loathing. His thinning hair, sallow skin, missing teeth, his hairy ass and hemorrhoids, his paunch, all the helpless sins of age he longed to share with her.

"I'm all right," she said.

"You have to put it back in. She doesn't believe me," he said, turning helplessly to his mother.

"You do, darling. Why don't you try?"

She had tried, squeamishly despairing, bending over, dabbing more than pressing at the strange painful lump with a terrifyingly bloodied Kleenex. So this was age. Not only did hair gray and breasts fall, but internal organs themselves turned bloody and lumpy trying to crawl away from the body, back to where? She suddenly thought of all the silver haired, well-dressed men and women coughing softly behind linen napkins, so careful with their cutlery, not paying attention to a word said — concentrating only on keeping their insides inside — as they solemnly ate the brains, marrow, and livers of the lesser animals.

She swallowed some cool tea, grasped their expectant faces, and shouted, "I've tried! It won't go back in. It's too big, and it won't go back in!"

"Well, don't get upset, dear. Do you want us to help you? We could try?" suggested the mother, turning to her son for confirmation.

"For God's sake!" She jumped up, stung. "I'm not a child!"

Bow quivering, she escaped into the kitchen, and over the dregs of tea, burst into tears. Marry him! That was rich. Not in a hundred years, no, not in a thousand! ▲

JOHN

RORY J. DOHERTY

I stand there feeling detached, and very conscious of my balance. I watch my hand carefully place the receiver back onto the phone. I don't know why, but I try to do it quietly. John's dead. It starts as a thickness in my chest, and then works its way up my throat and into my mouth, forcing me to swallow, but there is nothing to swallow. My face feels funny, but I'm not crying. I walk across the bedroom and stand in front of the mirror. This is the first time I've ever had to deal with anything like this. I don't know what to expect. I watch my hand pull slowly down over my mouth, and then stop to finger the stubble covering my chin. I wonder why I'm not crying, and I think about punching the wall, right there beside the mirror. I wait for something to rise up and drive my fist clean through the wall board, but nothing comes. Nothing.

I am trying to remember the last time I'd seen John, when my girlfriend comes into the room. Her face pales, and her eyes show a hint of fear when she sees me. "What's wrong, honey?" she asks. "What is it?"

Emily has her arms around me and I am looking at her back in the mirror before I answer. "That was my mother," I say. "John Tapia died last night." I sound strange, like maybe someone in a soap opera, but definitely not like me.

She holds me tighter and pushes my head down onto her shoulder. I have to make a conscious effort to break the staring contest I'm having with myself in the mirror. I start wrapping a strand of her hair around my finger.

She is rocking me now. "Oh baby, I'm so sorry. Are you all right?"

I ignore the question, and we just stand there. A single tear rolls off her cheek and onto mine. It traces the curve of my face and breaks on the edge of my mouth. She doesn't know John. She met him maybe once or twice. She only knows the stories. I settle into the nape of her neck, and let her support me completely. It feels good. Her shoulder neatly cups my head. A soothing numbness is working its way through my body when she asks, "How did it happen?"

It makes me mad that she starts to stiffen and pull away from

me. I want to yell "not now," and crawl back into the comforting hug, but it's too late. Her words, and the way I have to stop myself from being mean, have already shattered my refuge.

"He O.D.'d on heroin," I say.

Now she pulls back to look at me, the last thing I want. I don't know what she sees in my face. I know I'm not crying, but she lets me return to her shoulder and whispers, "Oh my God."

I think there are tears in my eyes when I hug John's mother at the wake. She looks older than she is. I'm sure that seeing me must be painful. It has to bring back a lot of memories. John and I were inseparable and constantly getting into trouble the whole time we were kids. If Mr. Walsh, the Ames School principal, didn't call with one complaint or another, then she knew that we must have skipped that day. No matter how many times we were grounded, or how long we were forbidden to hang around with each other, whenever John and I got together we always found some shit to get into. There was no limit to our imagination, and no act of delinquency was beyond us. Somewhere along the way I stopped getting into trouble, but John never did.

Mrs. Tapia looks up at me through her tears and tries to smile. "I guess I don't have to worry about you two anymore," she says. I try, but I'm just not able to smile back.

It hits me as I'm leaving that John would have tried to do the same thing —make me smile. He was a funny kid. He had a way with people, especially when we were in tense situations. No one could throw the bullshit better. Once we got caught trying to steal spray paint from Murphy's Hardware. We were maybe ten or eleven, and had picked this day to display our ever-increasing repertoire of profanity on the East Dedham bridge. I can't remember whose idea it was, but anyway, we were walking out of the store after stuffing a can each down our pants, trying to look innocent, when the manager stopped John. "Son, are you forgetting something?" he said. I'll never forget that voice, the deep tone, the way it made my heart jump.

John turned around to look at me and I saw it; his fly had come open and the can was right there, in front of God and everyone. I tried to feel if my fly was down, but John was already on a roll. He had tears streaming down his face and was choking out something to the effect of: "They said that if we didn't come back with spray paint they'd beat us up." The manager was looking to where John was pointing, across the square to behind a billboard where some teenagers were hanging out, probably getting high. God, he was good. After taking the paint from John, and giving us a lecture, he let us go and promised he would watch to make sure no one bothered us. As it turned out, one can was plenty.

I am stopped a few times on my way out of the funeral home by old friends. I try to look as upset as they are, but I really don't want to talk about how he died. I just want to get out of that morbid room and away from the stagnant air. It has that funeral home smell that no amount of flowers can cover. I can't help thinking that all the people

here, relatives included, really didn't know John. Everyone seems preoccupied with whispering about how so and so is dealing with it. My nods and hugs are mechanical as I work my way toward the door. I have to get out. I know it will only be a matter of time before I hear some old lady say something about how "peaceful" he looks. He looks dead to me and I want to get away from him.

On the way to the car Emily asks if I want her to drive. I hear myself say, "No, I'm fine." She has been holding my hand the whole time. Her fingers are turning blue.

John is being waked today and tomorrow. I went today so I don't have to go tomorrow. His funeral is the day after. I wish it were over with. I hate funerals. My face still feels funny. I don't know why.

Emily can't understand why I haven't cried, I mean really cried. I don't know why either. It's not "macho bullshit" as she likes to say. I just haven't. I got mad because she said I haven't accepted it, like I don't really believe he's dead. I'm sorry I got mad at her, but that has to be the stupidest thing I've ever heard — like I'm expecting him to jump out of that fucking coffin and say something funny. Sometimes she can be too analytical. I love her. We've been going together for two years now. I know I'm going to ask her to marry me at some point, but still sometimes I think she can be just too analytical. I shouldn't get mad, though. I know she thinks she's helping me. I'm just not the same as her. Emotionally we're different. When something makes her sad or angry, she'll cry or scream or do something, and then she'll feel better. It's not that black and white for. Most times I don't know exactly how I feel, or what I'm going to do. I honestly don't, but I do know John is dead. I don't need her to tell me.

My mother calls again to give the details and to check on me. I get along well with my mother. We've gotten along fine since the day I moved out, but when she asks me how I'm doing, I know I don't want to talk to her, not now. I answer, "Fine."

There are a few seconds; I hear her light another cigarette; I know it's coming, and then she starts in that tone. I can imagine the words mixed in swirls of Virginia Slim smoke. She would be sitting at the kitchen table in her chair in front of the window.

"You know, honey, I was with Margaret last night, and she was telling me how, well, how awfully sad John had been for the last few years, with all the trouble and everything."

She pauses, so I say, "Umm hmm." I know there will be more. My grip tightens on the receiver. I think about hanging up, not slamming the phone or anything, just quietly hanging up, but she would only call back, or even worse, come over. I try not to listen but I can't help it.

"On the outside John seemed sure of himself. You know, cocky, and funny, and all that, but inside he was a very troubled soul." She blows a mouthful of smoke into the receiver. "I know you probably

don't want to hear this right now, but at least he's found peace. I don't think you, that anyone, had any idea how miserable he was."

She pauses again and I let it go by. I feel myself getting mad, but in her emphysematous breathing I hear what's going through her mind. I know she is comparing me to John. She is worried. No. She is scared shit. Scared by how alike John and I were. I start to feel sorry for her, but what can I say? "Don't worry, Mom, I won't shoot up?" She had unexpectedly stopped by my apartment a while ago and saw my bong and a bag of pot. In her mind that's reason enough to worry, and I know there's nothing I can do about it. I wouldn't be able to convince her of the distinction. The best I can do is break the God-awful silence. "Did you learn anything more about how he died?"

"Yes, Margaret showed me the coroner's report. He had been partying all night. They found alcohol and cocaine in his blood, but it was the heroin that killed him. They only found one needle mark so they think that maybe it was his first time. Did you know that John was into that?"

I know she is really thinking, "Are you into that?" I answer, "Into partying, yes. Into heroin, no."

"Honey, wouldn't you feel better staying with us for a few days? Maybe just until after the funeral?"

"No, Mom, I'm fine. Really, Emily's here."

There is really not a whole lot more we can say to each other. I am wondering how I can get off the phone. She does it for me. "Well, at least you're not alone. Can I talk to Emily for a second?"

I can hear them talking. Emily closes the bedroom door. That's where my phone is. I am lying on the couch in the living room. I want to turn the TV on but I can't find the clicker. I'm not tired, but it feels good to just lie here and feel my face tingle.

It's not like we were still best friends. I stopped hanging around with John in the eighth grade. He went to Dedham High and I went to Catholic Memorial. My parents figured I'd have a better chance at a private school, like there would be no drugs around, no trouble to get into. The first time I got high I was with John. We were in the seventh grade, I think. I don't know if I really got high, or if what we smoked was even pot, but it didn't matter. We used it to laugh. We laughed at everything and anything. I remember John asking me to put some Visine in his eyes because he couldn't do that kind of thing to himself, and he was afraid the pot had made them all bloodshot. He had real sensitive eyes. I slipped and poked him with the bottle. It must have been a good half hour before we could stop laughing enough for me to try again.

I am lying here pushing and pulling at the skin on my face. I keep thinking of the stupid things we did together as kids. Like in the fifth grade. John was reading from a history book, you know, when everyone has to take a turn reading out loud. He said vagina instead of

Virginia, like it was a mistake. The class almost wet themselves. Everything stopped, even Mr. Capone had to laugh. All I could do to keep it going was squeeze out what sounded like a spontaneous fart.

They're still talking. I love them both, but I hate feeling like I'm being watched. What do they expect me to do? Sometimes caring can make things uncomfortable, more complicated. I don't feel like worrying about them worrying about me. It makes it worse. I wish the funeral were over and done with. Of course I wish John weren't dead — but he is.

We never went more than a couple of weeks without running into each other, and we'd always seem to know what the other was up to. I was working on my car in front of my apartment once when John pulled up on his latest toy, a '75 Harley. He was wearing a full face helmet, but I knew it was him. I had heard that he bought a bike, and I knew that only John would come tearing down the sidewalk like some Hell's Angel on acid. He bummed because I didn't get a horror-stricken look on my face and dive under my car, but other than that, he was happy to see me. He was so completely filled with the excitement he got from his new bike. Not because he was really into motorcycles. It was more because the bike was a novelty, it was his, and maybe because he was still scared when he rode it. We spent a good part of the day trying to figure out its mechanical features. John knew nothing about bikes. He knew he couldn't fool me into thinking he did. We could bullshit almost anybody but each other.

Later John got it in his mind to drive his bike to the Cape. The minute he said it, I knew he'd do it. He'd been paid the day before for some carpentry work he'd done. He had money in his pocket, and he had that excitement. He begged me to go with him. This was the first time I was able to resist one of his "quest" impulses. It was mine and Emily's first year anniversary, and I knew I had to take her out for dinner. First I tried the "You don't even have a license for that thing" and the "If you think I'm going to let you turn me into road pizza..." approaches, but John just looked through them. To make it worse, he gave up trying to convince me how important it was for us to ride down to the Cape that night. In between excuses I had mumbled something about the anniversary, and he picked up on it. He tried to act as if it were no big deal, but I knew he would go, with or without me. I let him ride off trying to do a wheely that almost tipped him over. I went out to dinner with Emily and put it out of my mind, until now. I never asked him if he'd ended up down the Cape that night, but I know he did.

After that we'd still bump into each other; nothing was lost; the conversation was never forced, but John never asked me to go off on one of his schemes again. He never said it, but it was like he didn't want to be responsible for getting me into trouble. In a way, we were each kind of jealous of the other. He'd ask about Emily, and jokingly, about what I was doing to pay for her. We'd talk about the pain-in-the-ass jobs we

had, and before long he'd be giving me shit about how long it was taking me to get through school. I'd point out that at least I was still in school, and ask when he was going to get his ass in gear. He always had some plan for going back, always for something different. I believed him. We'd make plans, but that was just the way we ended our conversations. We were still the same, I mean, we still made each other laugh, but our lives were different. I was busy with work, and school, and Emily, and he was busy with work, and partying, and getting into trouble while trying to stay out of trouble. Never anything serious, maybe a small-time possession charge, or D.W.I., and he'd be smiling that smile as he told me how it was. . . how he didn't know. . . how he realizes now. . . . He was still good. I'd tell him to save it for the judge.

John's funeral is tomorrow. Emily is next to me. I'm lying perfectly still, but she knows I can't fall asleep. She asks me if I want to talk about it. I really don't. I answer, "what's there to talk about?"

Then she asks me a question. She must be thinking about all the stories I'd told her of John and me. She knows I've never done heroin, but she asks me if I think that maybe I would have if I was with him that night. I say, "You know I don't do that shit," because that's what she needs to hear, and it's easier than actually thinking about it, but still, it sticks to something. I can feel it in my stomach. I think about John, and the way we used to get a rise out of making the other do something he wasn't sure of. I honestly don't know if I would have stopped him from shooting up, or joined him. He was probably full of that energy, and having a good time. . . and laughing. . . and then I almost cry, but I don't. I can see how Emily is torturing herself by thinking about it. Tears are brimming on the edges of her eyes. I kiss her and tell her how much I love her, and how much she means to me. I bury myself in her hair, and close my eyes. I listen to her breathing, and feel her skin against my face, getting warmer, softer.

John's funeral is at Saint Mary's. We were altar boys here. We even stole a bottle of that cheap wine that the priests use for communion. We joked that getting buzzed off the wine was O.K. because the Pope had blessed it, thereby sanctioning our sin. We sat on our drinking log. That's what we called it. It was concealed by a patch of trees and bushes behind the church. We sat there after mass and drank to the Pope.

Emily and I are in the back by the doors. There are a lot of people. John was very likable. The bench is hard and my collar is too tight, so I try to undo the top button and it pops off and rolls into the aisle. You can hear it. Emily picks it up and puts it into her pocketbook. I don't know why, but I think it's funny that she does that. I whisper, "That's mine and I want it back." She shakes her head and smiles, and then looks serious again. The priest is talking and the people are sniffing and I remember the last time I had seen John.

It was in this church about a month earlier. A mutual friend's mother had died, and we went to the funeral together. I don't think either of us had ever met the mother. John was complaining that his suit jacket was too small. He kept rolling his shoulders and pulling at his sleeves. Acting like I was deeply touched by this poor lady's death, I leaned over and whispered, "Sit still damn it, show some respect." Of course John couldn't let me have the last word; after a minute or so he whispered back, "I wish people I knew would either stop dying, or die more often so it would be worth my while to buy a new suit."

It almost worked. I made that noise through my nose trying to hold in a laugh, but I held it. I couldn't give him the satisfaction of making me lose it at a funeral.

After what seemed like eternity, the funeral ended and we watched our friend follow his mother's casket out of the church. This made us sad, and we didn't look at each other. Outside, all kinds of relatives, people we didn't know were crying and embracing each other. John put on a pair of sunglasses and thought he looked cool. We were standing there in the middle of it, not too sure of what we should do. We saw our friend in the limousine, but it was not like we could walk over, knock on the window, and say, "What's up?" So we were just standing there with our hands in our pockets, waiting. I was really uncomfortable and I asked John what he thought we should do. We both felt extremely out of place. John looked at me, and then around him at the huddled mourners, and then back at me. He stood there with his hands in his pockets, shrugged his shoulders and said, "I don't know, maybe we should hug or something."

I completely lost it. He never even cracked a smile. He just left me standing there, in hysterics, in the middle of all those sobbing people. I had to cover my face and pretend like I was crying.

And now the coffin is passing me and I'm standing here next to Emily remembering how mortified I felt laughing at that funeral. My face is tingling so bad it feels like the skin is two inches thick. John's passing me in his coffin and I'm sure I'm going to burst out laughing. You had to see his face, it was beautiful. . . . "Maybe we should hug or something," he said, just like that. . . and now I can't hold it in anymore. I turn to Emily, but she knows, and before she can put her arms around me it comes pouring out. . . and I am crying. I mean really crying, not like a man, but like some runny-nosed kid. I can't stop the waves of tears, or the sobs that come in between. . . and I stand here crying. ▲

OBITUARY

KEVIN DOTSON

o-bit-u-a-r-y (o bich'ooower'e) n., pl. -ar-ies [ML. *obituarium* < L. *obitus*: see OBIT] a notice of someone's death, as in a newspaper, usually with a brief biography. — *Webster's New World Dictionary*, Second College Edition

A grin, a snicker, a carefully controlled glare of incredulity, a wince of repulsion.

Such are the stock reactions that you get used to when, after being asked the inevitable "... So what do you do?" you reply, "I write obituaries."

I once deemed it a strange and wholly obscure occupation — the virtual digging-up of the old bones of the newly deceased in order to compose a concise, respectful, and halfway interesting memorial of a person I never knew. I thought in fact that it was a morbid and depressing section of the newspaper, all too often wedged 'coincidentally' between the classifieds and the comics, but otherwise unregarded by the public at large. I had little understanding and respect for the obituary writer, who seemed to have a certain macabre zest for the duty.

That was, of course, until I became one.

My editor at the newspaper was a man who could have been an insurance salesman because he sure sold me on the idea of becoming an obit writer. "Kev," he said in his best 'bro' voice, "Do you know what section of the paper is most widely read, the one that we get in trouble most for if it's ever inaccurate?" Since he was trying to rope me into becoming an obit writer, I had a pretty good inkling of the answer, but I indulged him just the same. "Kev, ask any of the editors," he said. "Taylor, Driscoll, anyone; they'll all tell you the same: if we get the obits wrong, then we ain't worth shit."

He went on to tell me how for some people, particularly the elderly and doctors, the obit page is the second section they read in the morning; the first is the table of contents on page one, to find the obit page.

Convinced that I was entrusted with the duty of perpetuating the paper's reputation for quality obits, I accepted the position, with only slight reluctance.

William Strunk, E.B. White's English professor at Cornell in 1919 (from *The Elements of Style*, by White and Strunk):

Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should contain no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts. This requires not that the writer make all his sentences short, or that he avoid all detail and treat his subjects only in outline, but that every word tell.



Jerry T. was the first full-time obituary writer. He was to be my mentor and I his back-up obit writer. His desk in the newsroom was a model of clarity and conciseness: a basket for incoming obits, a basket for outgoing obits, a neatly recorded desk calendar, and a phone with headset. He armed himself with a series of books which I associated with the mind of a man of fact and brevity: the paper's stylebook, *Webster's New World Dictionary*, Second College Edition, *The Careful Writer*, *Roget's Thesaurus*, a street directory of Boston, several phone directories. A medical dictionary and a directory of the region's funeral homes gave this man of exactness his persona of a man whose business was death. These were his tools. They would soon be mine.

I had a strange admiration for Jerry. He had written obits for the past fourteen years, so he was a wealth of knowledge on topics of common sense, neat writing, and dealing with dense funeral home directors. He took great pride in his job, and tried to instill in me the same sense of pride by telling me that there was no one else he had considered to fill his back-up slot. To some, this comment would have meant insult. Did he mean that he felt my mood and *joie de vivre* were suited for obit writing?

To me, however, it was a compliment. He meant that he felt that I reflected the thoroughness the job needed. I was even beginning to feel enthusiastic about writing obits — actually having some writing of MINE published in a major daily newspaper. And after a few hours of talking with Jerry, I began to understand the value of obituaries, both to the families of the deceased and to the public as sources of genealogy and history.



Nowhere in the paper is accuracy more vital than in obits. But we should strive to go beyond spelling the names correctly.

— *The Boston Globe Stylebook*

An obituary writer is a reporter of sorts. His job is to accurately gather facts about a deceased person through a series of interviews with relatives, friends, and coworkers. Often, if the deceased was a prominent person in the area, the newspaper's library or the archives of a uni-

versity must be consulted to learn more about what made him tick.

Perhaps the biggest challenge of the obit writer is to bring out that unique element of a deceased person to add flavor to the obituary. That element can be something rather basic: a nickname, membership to an unusual or exclusive society; or it can be something outstanding, like having published a paper on the plasticity of metals.

And there is no substitute for over-reporting. A funeral home once called to announce the death of a gas station owner. Despite my doubt that an obit for a man of such a profession would make it past the merciless, space-obsessed copy editors, I called the family of the man to get more information. I learned, to my chagrin, that he had received the Purple Heart for being wounded in the invasion of Normandy.



I soon overcame the jibes my peers were giving me about being one of "Jerry's kids." I would stick out my chest with pride when I told a friend or acquaintance that I wrote obits, indulging in the stock humor of the trade with, "It's a dead-end job, but someone's gotta do it," or "People are just *dying* for me to write about them." Sure, I was an obit writer; but I was also writing and learning how to write.

I also realized several universal truths about life and death, not the least of which was that as long as there are humans, there will be the need for three people: the doctor, to bring them into the world, the mortician, to see them out, and the obit writer, to remember them. ▲

BREAKING THE CHAINS OF OPPRESSION: A ROMANTIC IDEAL

SHERRI R. O'GRADY

One of the tenets of the American Romantics is that the conventions and customs of a complex society are oppressive and limit man's capacity for virtue, morality, and the discovery of truth. Nonconformity, self-imposed isolation, and radical thought processes dependent upon intuition are essential to free the individual from the constraints of society. The general condition of society can be improved as the individual's unlimited potential is attained and projected outward.

The first half of the nineteenth century in America was particularly restrictive to women and blacks, and many Romantic writers were compelled to voice their opposition to discrimination. Although there were organizations advocating social change at the time, the Romantics felt that individual spiritual growth was the first requirement for social advancement. This attitude is expressed in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance*, Frederick Douglass' *Narrative of the Life of an American Slave*, and Margaret Fuller's essay, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. These writers utilized different genres and had different objectives in mind, but they deal with a common issue: breaking the bonds of oppression.

In his autobiography, Frederick Douglass tells of his journey from slavery to 'freedom' as one of self-education and a growing will to be free. His struggle is fundamentally against the socially approved system of slavery, but his victory over slavery is dependent on his advanced understanding of his condition. As Houston A. Baker, Jr. says in his essay *The Slave's Narrative*, Douglass' task was "primarily one of creating a human and liberated self," (Baker, 245). Mr. Auld's objection to his wife's teaching Douglass to read indicates to Douglass that education is the white man's source of power over the black slaves. Thus Douglass' creation of a sense of self begins with his "desire and determination to learn," (Douglass, 79). Obtaining the power of the word is the first step to becoming "free from bondage [with] a chance to obtain the farthest reaches of humanity," (Baker, 248). Douglass' analysis of the subhuman characteristics forced upon the slave is the polar opposite of Emerson's "self-relying soul," (Emerson, *Self-Reliance*, 370):

I have found that, to make a contented slave, it is
necessary to make a thoughtless one. It is necessary to

darken his moral and mental vision, and as far as possible, to annihilate the power of reason. He must be able to detect no inconsistencies in slavery; he must be made to feel that slavery is right; and he can be brought to that only when he ceases to be a man," (Douglass, 135).

This passage reveals why many Romantic thinkers sympathized with the abolitionist cause. At the most basic level slavery strips man of his potential for perfectibility.

Margaret Fuller echoes Emerson's theories on self-reliance, and like Douglass, feels that "what woman needs. . . is as a nature to grow, as an intellect to discern, as a soul to live freely and unimpeded," (Fuller, 298). In the imaginary conversation with Miranda in *Women in the Nineteenth Century*, Fuller creates the ultimate self-reliant woman. Miranda's "soul refuses limits" (Emerson, *Compensation*, 383) imposed upon women by a male society and transcends both feminine and masculine qualities. Speaking through Miranda, Fuller expresses her belief that "each woman must form her own idea of herself on the basis of inner standards" (Blanchard, 215) discarding the "precepts by guardians, who think that nothing is so much to be dreaded for a woman as originality of thought or character," (Fuller, 299). Douglass and Fuller feel that slaves and women are prohibited from developing themselves through exploring inner meaning and truth by the restrictive laws and customs imposed by a society ruled by white men.

Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance* tells of the attempt made by a group of people to leave "the rusty iron framework of society" (Hawthorne, 19) behind them and create their own idealistic world whereby "the advancement of our race" (Hawthorne, 19) could be accomplished. The main characters in the story, however, bring to Blithedale the baggage of their past attitudes, and the experiment fails. Emerson's brand of transcendentalism as described in *Self Reliance* expounds a belief that it is possible to lift oneself above and beyond society and relationships and become invulnerable to the outside world. In *The Blithedale Romance* the characters' involvement with each other undermines the achievement of their individual growth and goals. For example, Zenobia comes to Blithedale seeking equality of the sexes. But her love for Hollingsworth overpowers her personal convictions. Miles is indignant when Zenobia acquiesces to Hollingsworth's statement that woman's "place is at man's side. . . all the separate action of woman is, and ever has been, and always shall be, false, foolish, vain, destructive of her own best and holiest qualities," (Hawthorne, 122). Unlike Fuller's Miranda, Zenobia's "mind was full of weeds" (Hawthorne, 44) and thus she could not achieve "outward serenity and inward peace," (Fuller, 299). Although a strong personality, Zenobia cannot free herself from emotional dependence, and she is defeated by the limitations imposed internally and externally.

Hawthorne's narrator, Miles Coverdale, pokes fun at these Romantic ideas throughout *The Blithedale Romance*. He reverses the

Romantic vision of man as constantly striving to greater humanity and virtue when he says, "For young or old, in play or in earnest, man is prone to be a brute," (Hawthorne, 73). He also mocks Emerson's idea of the "transparent eyeball" (Emerson, *Nature*, 4) when he says that "pausing in the field, to let the wind exhale the moisture from our foreheads, we were to look upward, and catch glimpses into the far-off soul of truth" (Hawthorne, 65), but discovers that hard physical labor and "intellectual activity is incompatible," (Hawthorne, 66). The Romantic idea that every man has unlimited potential is opposed by Miles when he says that "we may be very sure, for one thing, that the good we aim at will not be attained," (Hawthorne, 75). Miles does not achieve the Romantic ideal of self-reliance and fails in removing himself from society. He ultimately gives up writing poetry and his life comes to "rather an idle pass," (Hawthorne, 247).

Although each of the readings is concerned with breaking through solid restrictions and producing a more equal society, each contains elements of anti-philanthropy. The process to improve the world begins within the individual who then imposes his heightened morality outward upon the world. The philanthropist identifies himself with his cause; he can give charity and sympathy, but cannot advance humanity as his concern lies in improving the external world, not the internal being. Emerson discusses this issue in *Self-Reliance*. He speaks of the "foolish philanthropist" (Emerson, *Self-Reliance*, 365) and denounces their "miscellaneous popular charities; the education at college of fools; the building of meeting-houses to the vain end to which may now stand; alms to sots; and the thousand-fold Relief Societies," (Emerson, *Self-Reliance*, 365). The philanthropist creates a false dependence on charity and good will rather than promoting self-reliance.

The danger in philanthropy is that the natural morality and virtue that results from self-dependence is replaced by a dependence on the cause. The cause thus becomes the ruling principle in life. Emerson asks, "If malice and vanity wear the coat of philanthropy, shall that pass?" (Emerson, *Self-Reliance*, 365). Miles Coverdale, in pondering Hollingsworth's character, says that "when [philanthropy is] adopted as a profession. . . it is perilous to the individual, whose ruling passion, in one exclusive channel, it thus becomes. . . ruins, or is fearfully apt to ruin, the heart," (Hawthorne, 243). Miles, and eventually Zenobia, perceive that Hollingsworth has come to Blithedale solely to promote his scheme to reform criminals "through an appeal to their higher instincts," (Hawthorne, 36). Miles describes him as being a "bond-slave" (Hawthorne, 55) to his philanthropic theory. To this end Hollingsworth is willing to sacrifice the Blithedale experiment and his friendship with Miles. He throws Zenobia aside and falls in love with Priscilla, his only true proselyte. Hollingsworth's subservience to his mission narrows his vision and restricts his potential to become a humane and selfless man.

In his discourse on philanthropy Emerson says that he "cannot consent to pay for a privilege where I have intrinsic right," (Emerson, *Self-Reliance*, 365). Margaret Fuller echoes this statement when she says

that harmony can be achieved only "when inward and outward freedom for Woman as much as for Man shall be acknowledged *as a right*, not yielded as a concession," (Fuller, 298). Frederick Douglass would agree that freedom cannot be *given*. Douglass feels himself free after determining that he would never again allow himself to be beaten. He is still a slave, but he "resolved that, however long [he] might remain a slave in form, the day had passed forever when [he] could be a slave in fact," (Douglass, 113). Even after his escape to the North, the abolitionists could hide him, but not free him. He joins with the abolitionists, but criticizes the philanthropic efforts of the underground railroad, because by publicizing their assistance to fugitive slaves "they do nothing towards enlightening the slave, whilst they do much towards enlightening the master," (Douglass, 138). Freedom is an intrinsic quality that can only be attained through self-enlightenment.

This anti-philanthropic attitude confirms the American Romantic conviction of the centrality of self, and Emerson's motto "trust thyself" (Emerson, *Self-Reliance*, 364) becomes a prevalent image. However, the Romantic idea of self-recovery and self-sufficiency overlooks the real struggles that faced women and slaves in their quest for freedom from the laws and conventions of society. It was easier for white male Romantics to reconcile their ideas about creating a 'pure' society than it was for women and slaves. Emerson's statement that "no man thoroughly understands a truth until he has contended against it" (Emerson, *Compensation*, 381) distances him from an understanding of what it took for women and slaves to achieve a sense of self. Emerson's overriding optimism leads him to downplay the fact that the forces of society stunted the efforts of even the most highly enlightened individuals every step of the way.

Frederick Douglass had to learn to read and write as the first important step in his process of self-recovery. But he also had to remove himself physically, as well as psychically, from the bonds of slavery. The brutality of the system, coupled with Douglass' growing insight into its injustices, gave him the fortitude to risk his life to escape. Douglass would not agree with Emerson's statements that "every lash inflicted is a tongue of fame" (Emerson, 382) or "if you serve an ungrateful master, serve him the more," (Emerson, 382). Emerson could afford to glorify these things because he never had to experience them. The brutality of the beatings described by Douglass trivialize Emerson's statements.

The Romantic ideal is to break the bonds that limit perception, intuition and imagination, and the natural result will be the discovery of truth and morality. There exists a discrepancy between the theory and the practice, however, for how could women and slaves achieve their highest human potential when bound by artificial, prohibitive customs and laws? Even at Blithedale, where the best and brightest congregated, the women work in the homes and men till the fields, and, although intended to, the system does not evolve to correct this inequality. Fuller stresses that women need to develop "self-reliance and self-impulse," (Fuller, 308), but she also understands that it is necessary to "ask of men

to remove arbitrary barriers," (Fuller, 306). Fuller and Douglass not only advance themselves internally, but join with abolitionists and feminists to take an active stance in changing the social system. The Romantic belief in the "perfectibility of man" (Blanchard, 53) gave rise to reform movements aimed at producing a just, moral society. The solution to breaking the bonds of oppression begins with the "Emersonian concern for the integrity of the individual" (Blanchard, 53) and is accomplished by social activism. ▲

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LISTENING TO THE INVISIBLE MAN

JAMES FIDELER

Invisible Man is an existential odyssey marked by the failure of affirmation; the failure of saying 'yes' to anyone or anything outside of the self. For, without first recognizing his invisibility, the invisible man's affirmations become menacing falsities, acquired skins that he must shed with much anguish and, fortunately, much revelation. These incremental revelations are forced by his experiences, but nourished and given meaning by his halting re-affirmation of Afro-American self-expression in the form of traditional blues and Gospel music. These, along with jazz (during his self-imposed hibernation), spur his eventual emergence as an artist. The invisible man, made no less invisible by his role as artist, can affirm only that he must act, for without action (without writing or telling his story) his 'nightmare' would be a forgotten dream. In the discussion that follows I will try to demonstrate two important themes in Ellison's novel: 1) how jazz and traditional music, and other examples of folk-art, were really the soil that allowed the invisible man's identity to take root, and 2) how this reveals the author's profound belief in the importance and necessity of self-expression in an American culture destitute of sighted citizens in order to *help them see*.

Invisible Man, in its entirety, can be listened to as well as read. And, if we listen to it, we can hear jazz segue into folk, blues, and Gospel while remaining committed to its modernist structure and style. Just as jazz draws on more traditional forms of Afro-American music, so Ellison's prologue is like the beginning of a jazz tune, astounding in its virtuosity. It then sets out to recognize the musical and spiritual reserves upon which it draws. In his introduction, written thirty years after the novel's initial publication, Ellison writes:

I knew I could draw upon the rich culture of the folk tale as well as that of the novel, and that being uncertain of my skill I would have to improvise upon my materials in the manner of a jazz musician putting a musical theme through a wild star-burst of metamorphosis (p xxiii).

Certainly, the contrast between the folk tale and the novel is as apparent as the contrast between the folk song and its modern descendant, jazz.

This recognition of the particular traditions which he is at once a part of and draws upon, makes *Invisible Man* a uniquely Afro-American achievement.

In the prologue, the narrator subtly reveals his insights and symbolically shows the reader his tendencies. He has illuminated his invisibility privately with his 1,369 light bulbs. But he knows, too, that he must act. He tells us that he has discovered a "new analytical way of listening to music," the music being Louis Armstrong's "What Did I Do to Be so Black and Blue." Earlier Ellison had said, "Perhaps it was also to remind me that war could, with art, be transformed into something deeper and more meaningful than its surface violence..." (p xvii). Similarly, in describing Armstrong from his position as narrator and invisible man, he says:

I pour the red liquid over the white mound, watching it glisten and the vapor rising as Louis bends that military instrument into a beam of lyrical sound. Perhaps I like Louis Armstrong because he's made poetry out of being invisible (p 8).

In Armstrong's jazz, the narrator sees a form of poetic expression equal to the task of giving meaning to the complexities of Afro-American experience. But, he is also suspicious of the music's hidden depths and somewhat frightened at its raw intensity and uncontrolled power. He hears the music's call but questions whether many others can really hear it. The invisible man admits:

At first I was afraid; this familiar music had demanded action, the kind of which I was incapable, and yet had I lingered there beneath the surface I might have attempted to act. Nevertheless, I know now that few really listen to this music (p 12).

Surely, Ellison was not underestimating the music's popularity; rather, he was lamenting its futility. But our narrator is not a musician. He is a self-proclaimed "thinker-tinker," an invisible man who feels compelled to share the story of how he came to be so black and blue with the rest of the world. His final confessional effluence is telling because it demonstrates in no uncertain terms the connection he feels between the arts of music and word. He says:

I've illuminated the blackness of my invisibility — and vice versa. And so I play the invisible music of my isolation. (He writes!) The last statement doesn't seem just right, does it? But it is; you hear this music simply because music is heard and seldom seen, except by musicians.

Could this compulsion to put invisibility down in black and white be thus an urge to make music of invisibility? (p 13).

In effect, the invisible man asks us to bear with him, and we do. He commences to tell the story of how he came to recognize his invisibility. Along the way we are shown a man who is alienated from a society that gave him an alien's clothes. We are shown a man who would take himself out of society's skewed and shadowy vision so that he might shake off its imposed identities in favor of an identity of his own. Aside from his invisibility, the man discovers he has shared memory, that he is part of a collective consciousness he had heretofore repressed. Much of that identity he rediscovers in the words of old folk and blues songs.

Not until the ninth chapter of the story is the invisible man exposed to the sounds of his childhood. He has already been dismissed from college and the Bledsoe's set up is underway, but, the invisible man is still too enamored with the idea of his future acceptability to identify intimately with the man who carries around the discarded plans, the collector of old blueprints, Blue, Peter Wheatstraw. This man sings a blues that takes the invisible man back home, before college and the denial of his past.

She's got feet like a monkey
Legs like a frog — Lawd, Lawd!
But when she starts to loving me
I holler Whoooo, God-dog!
Cause I loves my baaby,
Better than I do myself. . . (p 173).

Still, his confidence in his pseudo-role is secure enough that he is not deeply touched by the song itself. But when the singer identifies him, and challenges him to admit to his Southern background, the invisible man, though conversing perfunctorily, actually finds that he *has feelings* about his heritage and what it represents. At this stage, however, such encounters may only serve to unveil his ambivalence toward this compelling and important part of his true identity.

God damn, I thought, they're a hell of a people! And I didn't know whether it was pride or disgust that suddenly flashed over me (p 177).

This encounter is important on three levels. First, he is still invisible to Wheatstraw. The bluesman cannot see him for what he is trying to be, but only for who he was. In a sense, Wheatstraw's insistence on a folksy down-home level of communication is as myopic as the affronting counterman's attempt at pinpointing his favorite foods in the scene that follows. But both the counterman and Wheatstraw touched on valid aspects of the invisible man's character. Nevertheless, at this point the

invisible man is unable to recognize the multifaceted nature of his identity, and ultimately resents his own transparency. Second, this episode is consistent with the narrator's somewhat detached, ironic perspective. He is letting us share in his gradual awakening and even allowing us to get ahead of him, if only slightly, that we might shake our heads knowingly at his halting progress. In describing his chosen narrator, Ellison says:

I decided that it would be one who had been forged in the underground of American experience and yet managed to emerge less angry than ironic. That he would be a blues-toned laughter-at-wounds who included himself in his indictment of the human condition (p xviii).

And third, the passage is extremely musical. It imbues the text with the quality of song, obviously enough in the actual blues lyrics, and more subtly in the sing-song monologue delivered by Wheatstraw. It is as if at this point Ellison digs into the musical undercurrent of the text and pulls up the blues. In so doing, he creates a folk song and a folk tale which symbolically and respectively pay the debts he feels he owes for his novel and for its model, modern jazz.

Much later in the narrative there is an episode that finds the invisible man sounding a more urgent and plaintive note. It is the murder of Tod Clifton and the narrator's attempts to find meaning in his deliberate "plunge outside of history" that bring to the surface all of the glaring contradictions that constitute the Brotherhood's "scientific tranquility." Here, the invisible man considers seriously for the first time that Brother Jack and the rest might have matters backward.

What if Brother Jack were wrong? What if history was a gambler, instead of a force in a laboratory experiment, and the boys his ace in the hole? What if history was not a reasonable citizen, but a madman full of paranoid guile and these boys his agents, his big surprise! His own revenge? For they were outside, in the dark with Sambo, the dancing paper doll; taking it on the lambo with my fallen brother, Tod Clifton (Tod, Tod). . . (p 441).

This is, I think, the point at which the invisible man embraces the notion of history as chaos. As usual, though, he cannot follow his intellect but must learn through tough experience. He will shortly become a spy on the Brotherhood's territory, as his grandfather professed to have been in his own time, only to find that his treachery is still too inadequate an action of defiance and self-affirmation to overcome his invisibility. However, between Clifton's death and the invisible man's retreat there is another important revelation.

The invisible man racks his brain for a way to make sense of Clifton's tragedy. He finds the Brotherhood's prefabricated dismissal of

Clifton's significance to be inadequate and simplistic. And, he finds the crowds amassed to mourn their "lost hope" dishonest, reprehensible, and self-serving — dishonest, that is, until the old man's tremulous voice moves the crowd to grieve honestly and openly.

I looked at the coffin and the marchers, listening to them, and yet realizing that I was listening to something within myself, and for a second I heard the shattering stroke of my heart. Something deep had shaken the crowd, and the old man and the man with the horn had done it. They had touched upon something deeper than protest, or religion. . . . It was not the words, for they were all the same old slave-borne words; it was as though he'd changed the emotion beneath the words while yet the longing, resigned, transcendent emotion still sounded above, now deepened by that something for which the theory of Brotherhood had given me no name (p 453).

Again, the invisible man finds meaning within his own personal history. And it is the only history that is capable of articulating the death of Tod Clifton for him and for the crowd. More significantly, his voice is undergoing a metamorphosis of range and timber. His is now the voice of one who is developing a deep sense of self, of the potential artist. But most importantly, the ultimate resurrection of his identity has been guided from within, not from the authority figures that he rejects; and, the reconciliation he makes with his heritage is evoked, in part, by the music.

We must not forget that the invisible man is angry. He says, "I have been hurt to the point of abysmal pain, hurt to the point of invisibility" (579). Only through resigning himself to two contradictory emotions can true expression emerge. So, he hates and he loves. Before he delineated love and hate, before he dared to express himself, he was lost. He says:

I'm a desperate man—but too much of your life will be lost, unless you approach it as much through love as through hate (p 580).

Throughout his novel, Ellison has his unnamed protagonist stagger hazardously into encounters with a formidable, seemingly systemic, opposition. But, the nature of his opposition eludes the invisible man: at times it appears in the form of Bledsoe, the morally corrupted educator; at other times, it is less obviously, but not less effectively, found fouling the invisible man's perception of himself, and fueling his gradual flight from injustice and his protracted groping for a true identity. The prophetic, insane veteran could be said to have been as lost; yet, our invisible man has a more difficult task, for he must recognize his invisibility and hold on, to his sanity. The veteran was incapable of this effort.

It proves its own enormity as surely as this journey is enormous, even though it takes us primarily up and downtown. Thus, the traditional music serves an important function in that it gives shape to the formless, random oppositions of life. It is the voice of sanity in a chaotic world. The invisible man says:

And the mind that has conceived a plan of living must never lose sight of the chaos against which that pattern was conceived. That goes for societies as well as for individuals. Thus, having tried to give pattern to the chaos which lives within the pattern of your certainties, I must come out, I must emerge (p 580).

Indeed, the invisible man has finally affirmed self-expression. He has assumed the role of the artist, and in so doing has made a reconciliation with his past so that he will no longer be invisible to himself, nor to others. Concerning the latter, however, the invisible man is not overly optimistic. His has been a harshly personal journey; he does not hold out much hope for humanity, except that he (and other artists, musicians, etc.) may offer up their visions so that the rest may go on living.

What enables the invisible man to transcend his experiences, unlike the veteran, who flees to insanity, is his capacity to generate an alternate vision unbounded by the constraints of his reality. This insistence on unbounded possibilities allows the invisible man to create his vast, prophetic "lie" (according to Ellison, an Afro-American folk term for an improvised story), with its "pied rind and surreal heart" (p xviii). Just as the invisible man is rescued by his folk heritage, he, in turn, extends his hands toward us that we, too, may be allowed to see. His offering takes the shape of a novel sprinkled with folk tale hyperbole, and the surreal nature of his odyssey reads like a jazz number in its unbounded eloquence. ▲

Howth Castle
—photography—
▲▲▲



Mary Cafasso



Jami Webb



Isle of Skye, Scotland
David Zadig



New Years
David Zadig



Mary Cafasso



Joel J. Pierre



Attempt At Syntax
Bob McDonald



Vinnie
Sabrina Hodge



Scotland
David Zadig



Nica's Theme
Russel DuPont



No Table Manners
Bobby Ann O'Rourke



Interior Askew I
Beth Ann O'Rourke



Gail Abdelnour



Joel J. Pierre



Monkey Tree, Zimbabwe
David Zadig

TOWARDS A MORE VISUAL CULTURE: IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION

ROBERTO GUILLERM

The oldest preserved communication regarding the world is in the form of visual information as represented by the cave paintings some 30,000 years ago. Since that time our society's means of communication has evolved through many, many changes. "The evolution of language [began] with pictures, progressed to pictographs, self-explaining cartoons, to phonetic units, and then to the alphabet. . ." (Dondis, 8). Each change has represented a progression along the way toward more efficient communication. However, according to Dondis in *A Primer of Visual Literacy*, there are many indications that society is now experiencing a retracing of this process back to the picture, inspired by the seeking of more efficiency.

Visual images are everywhere, and educators need to remain aware of the changes, the research, and their implications for instructional design. Society has developed verbal literacy; many are now also recognizing the importance of developing visual literacy and balancing the functioning of both sides of the brain. There is a lot to learn, and we are only beginning.

In *How to See*, George Nelson says that American society has supported education generously since the 1920s, and that our society-approved education has been primarily a verbal education, based on "words and numbers, numbers and words." Nelson attributes this factor to the needs of our industrial and technological society to have people who can read and write, and add and subtract, as well as to the gift of nearly three thousand public libraries nationwide by Andrew Carnegie at the beginning of this century. But society is now transforming itself in a very massive way, and one result is that we are experiencing a steady, persistent decline in verbal literacy in the population as a whole. We need to maintain verbal literacy, and the educational system also needs to be modified to meet the needs of the society to learn to read images, not just words. We need to develop visual literacy as well as verbal literacy.

Studies have shown that we all tend to see in terms of what we know or believe. We like what is familiar to us. In visual reading, like verbal reading, the completeness of the reading relates directly to the quality of the reader's stored information. To add interest and balance to our lives, we need to learn the language of vision, which uses light,

shape, color, texture, lines, patterns, similarities, contrasts and movement. To do this, we need to learn to develop both sides of the brain.

Research at the beginning of this century showed that damage to certain areas of the left hemisphere of the brain results in the loss of speech, poor reading, and a deterioration in logical thinking, while damage to the right hemisphere produces a deterioration in visual and spatial functions including face recognition and ability to dress oneself. The left brain is associated with verbal, analytical thinking, and the right brain is associated with visual, synthetic thinking.

The serious defects produced by damage to the left hemisphere led to the widespread view that the left brain hemisphere was dominant. Traditionally, the approach to education has been primarily a verbal, sequential approach utilizing our left brain capabilities, and leaving our right brain artistic capabilities behind. But, the right brain is beginning to be viewed as equally important.

Einstein is thought of as a great scientist and rational, left-brain thinker. Yet his ideas initially came to him as pictures and images, only subsequently put into words and mathematical symbols.

According to Peter Russell, author of *The Brain Book*, Einstein's theory of relativity was born not through rational analysis, but through lying on a grassy hillside one summer afternoon, gazing up at the sun through half-closed eyelids, playing with the light that came through his eyelids, and imagining what it would be like to travel down a light beam. This realization was the essence of the theory of relativity, and it had come to him not as a logical deduction, but as a creative, intuitive insight, the result of synthetic (right-brain) rather than analytical (left-brain) thinking.

According to Russell, studies have shown that increasing the proportion of the curriculum devoted to the arts has led to increased performance in mathematics, science and other subjects. Schools have found that the extra time spent on developing the abilities of the right brain also helps those of the left brain. This is because both sides of the brain support and complement each other. Yet, when budget cuts strike education, art is often the first subject to go because it is considered extracurricular.

We need to reconsider. The invention of the camera has brought about a new view of art, communication, education and intelligence. "An intellectual, trained ability to make and understand visual images is becoming a vital necessity to involvement with communication," according to Dondis. Visual literacy will become one of the fundamental measures of education in the near future. We need to keep moving in the direction of greater harmony and communication between both sides of the brain and to strive to teach for the two-sided mind in order that our students have access to the fullest possible range of their mental abilities. ▲

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KATHLEEN McDONALD

JOHN

I had almost forgotten, until today,
they had called him that, the Vietcong,
because he was flawless, and fatal.
I had almost forgotten the ten
thousand dollar price they
had put on my brother's head.
I had almost forgotten the murderous
junkets, mortar fire, and body bags
counted like tricks in a card game.
I had almost forgotten, and it made
me crazy when a letter came today
signed Jungle John.

KATHLEEN McDONALD

VACATION, 1989

We flourished in Hawaii,
like plants in a greenhouse.

But on the fourth day he forgot
and turned on the television.

"Oh my God," he said, "they killed them."
I came out of the bathroom to stare.

And the students' blood splattered
from Tienanmen Square.

P.S.A. FLIGHT 395

Someone always catches it.
Videotape vultures, they circle
recording and regurgitating,
feeding us at Noon, Six, and Eleven.
Their cameras wade through the remains
like coroners. The coroner
wades through the remains like a priest.

Does it matter, metal shredded,
on fire, falling from ten thousand feet?
Cardiac arrest, an embolism or impact.
They're dead, the scalpel, the tests
do not make them less dead.

This time we knew one,
played soccer with his sons
at the same summer camp.
Jeff saw Wade's father die. Alone
in the boat, Wade asked Jeff
what it was like, how his father died.
"They collided, it felt like a flaming spike,
there was a big bang."
When it happened it was just a plain crash,
just news. They cried in that boat
and their tears cut like scalpels.
The rest of Jeff's words sat stitched in tears.

How do you say you're sorry?
That you saw it, that it was exciting.
That you got to leave school early,
that there were cameras and reporters
and you saw it crash but
you couldn't have known
that his father died and your father
did the I.D. That you wanted to puke
when you saw their cockpits

painted with that huge black smile,
when their ads say: "Catch our smile,
We're P.S.A."

Still the bits lay deep inside,
like shrapnel the scalpels couldn't reach.
The pictures the vultures took
of the bodies and baggage, a hand
that could have been his father's.
They lay there festering
and they are on the news.

AND WHERE ARE YOU CRAWLING?

Did you fall from the heavens
when the atom bomb blasted your
parents' bedsheets?
Was the whistle the celestial signal
to become flesh again?
Was impact at ground zero
you crashing in the womb?
Were you dazzled by the fire-flash
at the end of the uterine tunnel?
Was your ass slapped by the concussion
of the nuclear explosion?
Did you choke on the mushroom cloud,
when you cried for air?
Did the radioactive wind
rock your crib in the fallout?
Were you raised in the burnt shadow
of the suburban wasteland?
Did your heart turn blue
in the nuclear winter
of post-modern shopping malls?
Do your chromosomes remind you of the
double helix
or twin serpents
locked in ecstatic rage?
Are you the nuclear child
of the melt-down family?
Are you the post-war mutation,
a genetic casualty
of parental fission?
Just who are you, boom-boom baby,
and where are you crawling
with that stone in your paw?

THE PROSTITUTE

It don't matter
that she'd been fucked
in the gray Cadillac
just before
I was drivin' by
and caught
her breasts exposed
to the frozen air
and thought,
Is her milk
any different?

You should of seen
the petrified nest
in them eyes
accepting cold winds
as if they was
scrapin' the john
from her skin
while she was
carelessly tryin'
to put her top on. . .
always aware
that the next
son of a bitch
just gonna crawl
into her again.

And maybe that's
what it was.
Yeah, maybe that's
what mattered
in those few
comatose moments.

She didn't
give a shit
about anything
anymore.

POEM

There is a seal
and when it can no longer find

food, it swallows stones.
All kinds of stone, rocks hard

things to rid itself
of that pained feeling —

I have been eating voices, stone
voices and with stone ears I have been hearing.

I am from Slavs-slaves
the stone amulate I wear

does not belong to me:
earth pushed it up

the earth does not belong to me, and this stone
was no accident someplace

three and a half million years ago —
though I am, and you, and we are

THE BOOK

I find a book in Karen's drawer.
The Facts of Life can't be hidden
For long from a curious 9-year-old,
Even covered by socks and cotton panties.

Facts are like answers: *The ANSWERS*
Of Life! No wonder the couple,
Hand-in-hand on the cover,
Smile like that — they've read *The Answers*.

But inside are words like sex, love,
Responsible, babies;
I turn pages to find adults,
Discuss, mature, work, marriage.

The answer is I'll become
Like my parents — working and married
With children? Dad yells, Mom cries,
I hide from them both, and the book

Calls it love! My hands shake as I
Put it back under the underwear,
Quickly shut the white drawer to trap
Nightmares already trapped in my mind.

FIRST NIGHT

Blood arrived without warning
like a stranger standing
next to my bed. I didn't
want to see the black eyes
glitter as he rolled up
his sleeves, I didn't want those
greasy fingers to stretch over
and rummage around my insides —
so I screamed, opening my eyes
before he could reach into me,
and there was no man standing
next to the bed, but laughter
cracking that dark room —
some girl stood rocking
on her heels, dropping
a cool ruby into my hands,
saying, "This is for you."
But it slid through my fingers,
cool liquid slithering between
my legs and I scrambled for it
in the twisted sheets, tossing off
the covers, running my palms
over their sweaty surface, then I
felt it: red as raspberry jam,
not a stone at all,
but something like wet glycerine soap,
and I slicked my thighs with it,
I stood up glistening and musky,
walking around that new bedroom
everything turned red
as I felt my way in the receding dark.

LIKE THAT

It did not die like that —
hell-throes, illumination, even pain;
just a thin sheet of late afternoon
sun against the orange bedspread,
a bit of beige-silver afternoon on a white wall,
and thinking,
there's a poem in this somewhere.
I did my crying, and you said no, no, no
so sadly that for all my being under you
I cradled you, and thought:
hope this doesn't spoil our dinner.

It did not die like that,
stoically or whimpering.
We overlooked each other's bravery,
hurrying, bumping into furniture while we dressed.
I knocked over your picture,
and took care that you saw me linger
over its dust, and place it back.

Later, still not sure of your face in the dark,
I squeezed your fingers, always the same,
while death slid out the neon crack beneath the door,
leaving time enough to nuzzle nearly clean sheets,
to live forever, to touch your hair, to know you would snore.

STEPMOTHER'S URN

KURT SCHILDHAUER

The sky was beginning to warm to a pre-dawn teal and the stars twinkled crisply in the early morning air. Jeffrey's breath came out in warm white puffs against the chill as he looked up at the darkened window. He looked at his new camouflage-green Boy Scout watch. Its glow-in-the-dark hands pointed to glow-in-the-dark numbers and told him it was nine after five. Six minutes, he thought, in six minutes she will turn the light on.

He turned to look past the streetlight at the cool green opalescent sliver of moon, comparing its color to the glowing hands and numbers on the dial of his watch. He held his wrist up so the dial was next to the moon and squinted. He knew the moon wasn't painted with radium paint the way the watch hands were, but he liked sometimes to imagine that it was, up there floating eerily, coating the earth with its cancerous glow. He thought about how he'd read that the ladies who used to paint watch and clock dials with radium paint would put a point on the paintbrush with their tongue. Then they would get cancer of the tongue. He imagined them — lying in bed, snoring, their cancerous tongues glowing like iridescent slugs.

He looked at his watch and waited for the last minute-and-a-half until it was exactly five-fifteen. Then he looked back up at the still-dark window. He held his watch up so it was next to the window. At five-fifteen and twenty-one seconds, the window lit up. He got on his bike and rode home. As he rode, he formed his mouth into a cave and opened and closed his mouth. The cool air made a spooky hollow sound. He pedaled faster.

"Where have you been?" screamed his mom as he came in quietly through the back door.

"Just out riding my bike."

"Riding your bike at five in the morning?"

"Yeah, what's wrong with that?"

"Usually I can't get you out of bed in time to make the school bus, that's what."

"Yeah, well I've decided to turn over a new leaf."

Jeffrey could feel his lip quiver as he tried not to smirk. He sensed that his mom wasn't that mad. But a smirk would be certain to irritate her if she was really mad and not just playing the protective

parent as he suspected.

"Nine-year-old boys are too young to be turning over new leaves. They should be raking them instead. Which is what I want you to do after school today. You can get your brothers and sister to help. Now go upstairs and get ready for school and I'll make you breakfast."

Her voice trailed off while he was thinking about his brothers and sister jumping into the piles of leaves he would rake. Jeffrey looked at his mother. She had stopped washing dishes and now sat clutching her ever-present cup of coffee. She seemed to have forgotten he was there and stared sadly into the distance of the printed wallpaper. ▲

SHOOT

JAMES ASSATLY

It was a hot August night when summer had begun to drag on too long, the kind of weather when adults' tempers get short and kids get to stay out later than usual. At around midnight Pete and Eddie and I were the only kids on the corner. While the cast changed from night to night, I was always a regular. My mother worked nights and I would wait until my father was passed out before I went home. Sometimes I'd have to wait a long time.

Eddie had suggested that we take a run over to Boynton Street to check out the Puerto Ricans. They'd been moving onto that block in increasing numbers over the years and all our parents were up in arms. It was Boston in the early Seventies, just before forced busing, when race and ethnic tensions were still building up. Boynton had become taboo, so it would be a thrill for us to run by it. Eddie was always coming up with ideas like that, interesting stuff, like going to Revere Beach, or the Museum of Science, or the Combat Zone. They hadn't let me go on the Zone field trip, though, because they'd said I was too young.

We walked fast up Boynton, giggling to ourselves at the loud salsa music and the crowds of Puerto Ricans hanging out on their front steps. They were drinking beer out of paper bags and singing along to guitars. Foreign laughter rang through the air. Whole families were represented, with kids our age and crying babies. The smell of spices unknown to me heightened the exotic rush. We saw a young couple kissing passionately, the girl's long black hair wrapped around their bodies sensually, while some silvery old men and women clapped and hooted, toothlessly. We stopped and watched, mesmerized. You'd never see a scene like that on our street. No one would dare kiss in public, no one ever sat out on their front porches. Sometimes we'd be hanging out on someone's stoop and inevitably their fat mother — it seemed all our mothers were fat — would come in her house coat with a broom and start sweeping at us like we were dirt, screaming, "What are you, Puerto Rican? Get off the stairs!" On our street, people sat out in the back.

"O.K. O.K. C'mon," Eddie said, moving us on before we became too obvious. But they never took notice of us. They just went on having a better time than we ever would on our block. We were giddy

when we made it to the corner of South where we went instinctually out into the middle of the street and started running along the inner trolley track. It was a favorite game of ours, trying to keep our balance. Cars passed us on either side, honking and yelling for us to get out of the way, but we ignored them.

"Man, that looked like fun back there, huh?" I said, arms outstretched as I skipped wobbly along. Pete was ahead of me on the inner track. He was better than me at the game.

"They're disgusting. Puerto Ricans are dirty," he said, spitting.

"Yeah, but those two horny love birds making out, I'll bet she makes him shoot," Eddie said. He was in front of both of us, skipping along the track. He was better at the game than either of us.

"What's shoot?" I asked. I honestly didn't know.

"You know, Pete?" Eddie asked.

"Nope," Pete answered, looking skeptical and spitting again. We reached Rosemary. Eddie stopped running backwards and went over onto the sidewalk. We both followed him.

"You guys never shoot?" he said. He seemed amazed.

"What are you talking about, Scannell?" Pete asked, decidedly suspicious. He wasn't convinced Eddie could show him anything. The power that went with being Billy Roarke's best friend had left him arrogant and jaded.

"C'mon," Eddie said, "I'll show you." He turned off South and started running down the street, heading straight for the tracks. He must have been excited because he ran fast and we had to work to keep up with him.

"Wait up, Scannell!" Pete yelled after him, huffing out of breath. I could tell he was interested because normally he would never run after Eddie like that. And I was definitely interested.

At the end of the streets in our neighborhood lay the rotting Amtrak rail beds. There were four or five parallel sets up on an embankment, but only one set actually ran trains. We used to throw the stones from the rock bedding at them when they came by. Who ever heard it coming first would yell, "Train!" and we'd all storm up the hill to bombard it. A favorite story of ours was that somebody had once killed a priest when a rock he'd thrown smashed through the window of the train, piercing the priest's head.

We built our forts in the giant weed trees that had sprung up along the dead tracks, and when we had a Council it was held in the empty lot at the foot of the track embankment next to the old abandoned Hood factory. When a Council was called all the gangs from the neighborhood would assemble in the lot and along the hill. Sometimes there were hundreds of kids milling around when we had a Council, called usually when tree fort burnings got out of hand. But sometimes they were called for other reasons.

"C'mon down here," Eddie said, panting. He stopped at the Hood platform which was all that was left of the factory that had once stood there. It was sunken and ideal for activities that had to be hidden

from prying eyes. I had once played doctor there with Mary Sullivan, who'd shown me the tiny buds of her breasts, and a girl nobody knew from West Roxbury had been raped and murdered there. Kathy O'Grady and Steve McGuire had gone there to make out and found the body, its head smashed with a boulder. Kathy and Steve weren't in school for a week after that. And no one was surprised when Micky Scanlon's brother TJ had O.D.'d there.

Pete and I joined Eddie, breathless ourselves. The three of us stood for a minute breathing hard and not saying anything. I leaned against the crumbling concrete wall, feeling the cool rough surface against my bare arms.

"So what's shoot?" Pete finally asked.

"You know when your dick gets hard?" Eddie began. Pete and I instantly looked at each other and sniggered. Nobody ever talked about things like that. Eddie went on, "Well, if you just jerk it for a while it will shoot."

I didn't have any idea what he was talking about. I knew vaguely about sex, that somehow men and women had contact that made babies, but I had no idea about this shooting business.

"Want to see?" Eddie asked us.

"Yeah," Pete and I answered in unison. I felt the first stirrings then of an excitement I wasn't yet able to articulate. I only knew I wanted to see.

Then Eddie took out his dick, which to my nine-year-old eyes seemed huge and adult. He started jerking himself, looking powerful, like a man. "Why don't you guys try?" he asked. He didn't want to be the only one engaged in the activity. I looked to Pete.

"Uh-uh," he said. "I won't be able to do it. I know I won't."

Right then Eddie and I should've realized. It still wasn't too late to stop at that point. Eddie could have made it into a joke, pretended that he was only going to piss all along, got out of it that way. But he was too excited, too carried away with the feeling to consider the consequences.

"Do it, Mikey," he said to me. "C'mon, it's such a good feeling."

So I did. I pulled out my own dick which, while hard, was still small and childish in comparison to Eddie's. I'd only just begun to grow pubic hair, but I went ahead anyway and started beating. I didn't feel anything.

"It's not working," I said, getting discouraged. Pete sniggered some more.

"Just keep trying," Eddie said. "Sometimes it takes a long time." He seemed a bit distracted. Then he said, "Know what will make it shoot faster? If someone sucks it. Want to try, Mikey?"

I wanted to try. It seemed that taboos were tumbling down all over the place. Nobody needed to tell me that sucking Eddie Scannell's dick was trouble. It occurred to me then, for the first time, that this was what fags did. The hatred of fags was natural in our little world, instinctual. I didn't know why, I only knew it was. Like going to church or

school, it was something we just did. But I still wanted to try. I looked over to Pete but it was too dark to read his face. I had no idea what he was thinking, though I knew he couldn't be approving. I went ahead anyway. I was in it then for good or bad and I knew it. I got down on my knees and put Eddie's dick in my mouth.

I liked it. Eddie started moving his hips and put his hands on my head, pushing himself deeper into my mouth. For that moment I forgot about Pete and fags and lost myself in the pleasure of sucking. "Look out," he said in a lost low voice and pulled from my mouth, shooting his semen over the wall. I jumped up amazed and just stared. Eddie said nothing, but the stiffness of his body and the pounding of his right hand said everything.

"Oh my god, what is it?" Pete said, and we both stood motionless for a moment while Eddie squeezed the last few drops from his shrinking dick.

"It's come," he said, laughing. "That's what you get a girl pregnant with." He zipped himself up and wiped his hands on his pants. "We should be going now. You get tired after and it feels good to sleep."

We were silent as we climbed up out of the platform. At Eddie's house, which was nearest, we parted quickly. Pete lived on the opposite side of the street from me, so he and I walked separately. I was glad. I was already beginning to feel guilty and didn't want him to see. Maybe if I pretended that what had happened was no big deal, I thought, then Pete wouldn't think so either. But I already knew it wasn't finished.

I climbed the stairs to our apartment heavily that night. I didn't bother to take off my T-shirt or jeans and I lay immediately on my bed. With my hands I felt the patches of dirt where I'd knelt before Eddie. I rubbed them and prayed the 'Hail Mary' for nothing to happen, to forget about what had just occurred, but my faith was weak, and I resigned myself to some penance I couldn't imagine yet knew must be forthcoming.

Nobody said anything for a few days after. Eddie wasn't around, and when I saw Pete we made no reference to that night. I began to be hopeful that it was all to be forgotten. I thought maybe the prayers had worked and so at church that Sunday I promised Christ that if he would let me get away with just this one sin I'd never do anything like it again. But he wasn't cutting any deals.

The next day I was hanging out on the corner in front of the Amvets post with Mary Sullivan and Eileen Brown. We were singing songs for *Jesus Christ Superstar*. Every time a trolley stopped we'd put our arms around each other and start bellowing for the passengers, "Should I bring him down, let my feelings out!" But we never got through the verse because we'd start giggling hysterically. *Superstar* was a big hit on Rosemary Street. Like the Ouija board, the nuns had forbidden it to us. I listened to it endlessly on our old stereo console. I always cried when Judas died. He screams to Christ, "You have murdered me!" and then a chorus sings, "Poor old Judas, so long Judas." I could never

understand why Judas was blamed for doing something that Christ wanted him to do anyway. I'd have liked to ask someone about it but there was no one I could ask. I kept my doubts to myself.

We were starting to get bored with our little game when I saw Billy Roarke walking straight toward me. He pounded a smooth police issue billyclub into his doughy palm. Pete was with him. He wobbled right up to me, his fat legs rubbing against each other.

"Playing with girls," he sneered. "Figures."

Eileen and Mary didn't say a word. I stood with my mouth open and knew it was all over.

"C'mere," he said, poking the billyclub into my chest. "Me and Pete wanna talk to you. Alone."

I thought about running but I knew it was pointless. He'd find me eventually. I followed behind them, slowly. I didn't look back at Eileen and Mary. There was nothing they could do.

The two boys went into the alley behind the Amvets and stopped beside the dumpster. The smell of rotting garbage was strong in the hot air and flies buzzed around their heads. I went up to them, and Billy immediately pushed me up against the dumpster, hard. Pete stood aside silently. He showed no emotion. I thought at that moment that if I ever had the chance to kill him I would. Then Billy stuck his sweating face into my own and said, "So you're a fag, huh? Like sucking dick?" I could smell his breath, nearly as rotten as the garbage by my head.

My knees shook and tears came to my eyes but somehow I managed to say, "So what?" in as insolent a voice as I could muster under the situation. "So what if I did?"

But that was a purely rhetorical question. We both knew "so what." I'd left myself open to a fate like that of Kevin O'Malley. Kevin was a quiet kid who'd moved to the street with his old grandmother. He liked flowers and kept a tiny garden next to his stoop. That was a big mistake. Everybody started calling him 'flower fag' when he walked by the corner. They'd spit at him and sometimes throw rocks. Once someone broke a bottle over his head and he had to be taken to the hospital. The cops came and questioned all the kids but no one would tell who'd done it. They wrecked his garden that night. And he'd never even sucked anybody's dick.

I knew that wasn't going to be me. I didn't care what it took. It wasn't going to be me.

"So what?" he laughed, and jabbed the billyclub sharp into my belly. "I'm calling a Council tomorrow and everybody's going to know you gave Eddie Scannell a blowjob. Unless. . ." He had a greasy hand against my throat and pushed harder with the billyclub so that I gagged and had trouble breathing.

"Unless what?" I managed to cough out.

"Pete and I will tell everybody that Eddie made you do it. Then all you have to do is beat him in front of all the kids." He loosened his hold on me. I breathed hard for a few moments.

"How'm I supposed to beat Eddie Scannell? He'd kick my ass." I wondered to myself if I could betray Eddie to save my own skin. Kevin O'Malley was strong in my mind.

"With this, stupid." He banged the billyclub against the dumpster and a loud clang rose out. "You're gonna beat Eddie's head in with this billyclub!" he said, laughing. Then he let me go.

I started running instantly and didn't look back. I could hear him and Pete laughing and he yelled, "Tomorrow at four, pussy! Be there or else!"

I ran straight home. I knew the girls on the corner could see me running but it didn't matter. They were going to know the whole story anyway. When I got to our house my uncle Jack was just coming out. He and my aunt Barbara and my cousins lived on the first floor. A Jewish woman, Esther, who went to college and had been to Cuba lived on the second floor. My mother said Esther was just another dumb liberal. She said all Jews were liberals but I didn't care, Esther was good to me. Sometimes I had ice cream in her apartment, which was airy and clean and full of books and plants. So different from ours with its smoke-stained walls and beer-smelling rugs. I never told my parents when I had ice cream with Esther.

I tried to run past Jack but he grabbed me by the arm. "Hey," he said, "why so fast? What's up, lil' Mikey? Something wrong?" He could see by my red face I'd been crying. My Uncle Jack was nice to me sometimes, but he had six kids of his own and my mother told me not to bother him.

"Nothing's wrong," I told him. I liked Jack a lot even though I didn't get along with my cousins. I didn't want him to know anything about what had happened. I remembered the story Jack had told about the fag bar that he and my father and some of their friends had happened into by accident one day after work. They were bricklayers and most ly worked downtown — once in a while they'd take me and some of my cousins for a ride to see some of the jobs they'd done. This time they'd finished a job and decided to celebrate at a nearby bar. Even after they'd realized it was a fag bar they'd decided to stay.

"We was drinking Johnny Red. Remember that Richie?" my uncle had said, laughing to my father. "So we was all getting crocked and laughing to ourselves about all these fucking faggots. Well then this one fag, big guy, built like a brick shithouse, he puts his hand on Richie's knee! Well, old Richie boy he just freaks. Christ, if you could've seen it. It was just beautiful He slams the fag straight in the fucking nose and blood comes gushing out all over the bar and then we all got in on it, you know. We was all just slamming them, breaking bottles and shit, grabbing faggots and smashing them up. Then I see the bartender on the phone, cops I figure, so I says, 'Richie, Paulie, Stevie, c'mon we're outta here!' What a fucking riot. Christ we laughed the whole way home."

No, I didn't want Jack to know what had happened with Eddie

Scannell.

"It's nothing," I told him. "I just gotta fight somebody, 's all."

"All right slugger," he said, rubbing my head hard. "Just make sure you nail 'em, right kid?" He was smiling then, proud.

"Yeah, Jack," I said, "I'll nail 'em."

"Atta boy!" he yelled after me as he descended the stairs.

I was already flying up the stairs. Nobody was home in our house. That was usual. My mother worked double shifts as an orderly at Children's Hospital now that my father was laid-off, and he wouldn't be home from the tavern for a while. I went straight to my room and threw myself down on my knees and prayed 'Our Father' hard for the strength to beat Eddie Scannell's head in with the billyclub. There were no other solutions. It had gone beyond that. It was my penance, I knew, to beat Eddie. And maybe he even deserved it, I thought, for being so stupid. For letting us get caught.

My father came home early that night, drunk like always. But he'd been drinking whiskey. I could tell by his smell and the mean look in his eye. He drank whiskey more than usual when he was laid off.

"What are you looking at me like that for?" he scowled. He was teetering and I knew he'd be passing out soon. It was easier to get away from him at these points because his reflexes were slow and he couldn't catch me. He stood in the doorway, wavering, and I shot past him, knocking him as I pushed my way out into the hallway.

"Get back here, you little bastard!" he slurred. "When I get my hands on you I'm gonna beat the living shit outta you!"

He only beat me when he was drunk, and even then only when he drank whiskey. When it was just beer he was soft and sentimental. He'd hug me and say, "You know I love ya, huh, pal?" and he'd give me a dollar. I'd take the dollar, but I hated him more than ever. I figured whiskey at least made him honest.

I went down to the tracks by myself that night and climbed my favorite tree. I climbed it higher than I'd ever climbed it before, all the way up to where the branches got thin and bent ominously under my weight. The wind sings when you get that high, and I sat there and listened, remembering that lullaby, "And down will come baby. . ." I stayed up there for hours that night, wondering what it was like to be a sailor, or a murderer. I thought about running away to California like my brother Terry had done when I was five. We never saw him again. But I knew I couldn't run. I didn't have the money. I thought that this must be how Judas felt. Like he had no choice, that it was all planned for him. I cried a lot for Judas that night.

Next day I went early to the library and sat reading the encyclopedia. I looked up 'murderer' but found no listing. I guessed you had to look them up individually. I considered going to confession and asking the priest what to do but decided against it. It was too complicated for a priest to understand. I knew whatever I chose to do made no difference to God anyway; I had no wish to atone for the sin, I only regretted

getting caught at it. I understood then that most of life was lived in sin. The challenge was to avoid detection.

It was around three-thirty when I dragged myself from the library down South Street. I hadn't eaten anything all day, my stomach was too queasy, and I felt weak. I could see from the corner at Rosemary that kids were already assembling up the tracks. I kept walking. No turning back now, I thought. No running away.

Billy Roarke was standing, billyclub in hand, with some kids from Anson Street, which was a block over from Rosemary. He left them and walked up to me when he saw me. His tone was changed, the threat in his voice gone.

"Hey, Mikey!" he greeted me, almost happily. He'd never called me by my first name before. "You sure got balls, Mikey. I gotta hand it to you." He patted me on the back and handed me the billyclub. It was smooth and hard and heavy in my hand. It would definitely crack a skull.

"Now, when Scannell comes," he instructed breathlessly, thrilled, "keep the billyclub behind your back. Stand away from everybody and call him over to you. We'll all be ready, so if he starts wailing on you we'll come over and start beating on him. Now make sure you hit him right on top of his head, and before you do you have to yell out, 'Fag!' real loud so we can all hear. All right?"

I nodded. Speech had deserted me. By now there were hundreds of kids milling around, girls and boys, all hanging in groups according to age and street. Billy left me and ran from group to group telling kids what was up. I stood by myself, shivering. The sky was cloudy, the air wet and charged with electricity. There was some thunder off in the distance. I stopped thinking and said the 'Hail Mary' over and over in my head as fast as I could. I clenched the billyclub hard, my knuckles white against the black plastic. Hot breezes stirred up dust and the buzz of voices all around me. I didn't move.

"Eddie Scannell made Mikey Walsh suck his dick. Scannell's a fag. We're all gonna be witnesses when Mikey gets him back," Billy told some kids from Hall Street who stood a few yards from me.

"Poor kid," someone said.

"How do you know Eddie forced him to do it?" another asked.

"Pete O'Dowd was there. He saw the whole thing," Billy answered.

Just then Pete and Eddie came up the hill. It had been Pete's job to keep Eddie distracted until everyone knew what was going on. Billy had taken care of everything.

It was time.

"Hey, Eddie," I called. "C'mere."

He didn't have a clue about what was going on. He trotted up to me, smiling. I couldn't believe he could be that dumb, but how could he have known?

"What's the Council about, Mikey?"

I'll never forget the stunned look in his eyes when I said, "This," and smashed the club across his face. I knew right then, as I heard cheering and shouts of, "Beat the fag!" that I had just committed the cruelest act of my life. Eddie staggered back and then stood still for one long aching second, his nose crushed and bleeding, the red already covering his face. That moment we shared alone like that in front of the cheering crowd was, I understood clearly, hell, with the shock and pain in Eddie's eyes the flame to my own sick guilt. I threw down the club and started to retch.

Then he was on me, punching and pounding. I cried out with some tortured joy. I could at least offer him that for my betrayal. But the older boys were too fast. They grabbed him up off me and started in on him seven or eight at a time. Billy and Pete were right in there, kicking and spitting with an incomprehensible rage.

"Leave him!" I yelled impotently. "He didn't make me do it! I wanted to do it! I wanted to!" But it was too late. They ignored me and lost themselves in that strange erotic spree. I couldn't see Eddie for the growing number of boys, and some girls now, who surrounded him.

I remembered the billyclub lying behind me. I turned and reached for it. It was clumped with dirt that had stuck to Eddie's blood. Through the dozens of kids I could see Billy's head bobbing clearly. I pushed my way through the crowd and thought of what Billy had told me, to aim for the top of the skull. And I did. I slammed the club as hard as I could down onto the crest of Billy's head. There was a crack like splitting wood that rang out above the fray and blood splattered over my arms and face. Before anybody knew what had happened I found Pete's head and smashed that, too. They both fell down over Eddie's prostrate body. For the last time I threw the club down.

In seconds a wide circle opened around me and the boys on the ground. Somebody half-whispered, "Goddamn, Mikey. You've really done it, man. You're fucking crazy." Then everybody started yelling at once. "Screw!" they screamed, "everybody fucking screw!" Within seconds they'd all stampeded away down the hill.

I found myself standing alone over the three boys. I was suddenly exhausted and I lay down beside them. The urge to sleep was strong. "I'm sorry, Eddie," I said weakly. "I'm so sorry." I didn't expect him to answer as I drifted into a deep and terrible slumber. ▲

THE ICE HOUSE

MURIEL H. POWERS

Should I start with the drowning? . . . I'm afraid of what that might do to you, and you in a family way. But I do want you to hear the truth about your father-in-law, Carl, before the neighbors start running off your doorstep, and you hardly settled in just yet. My family has known your in-laws a lot of years and besides, I was there when it happened.

Thelma was thirty or so when I first went to the farm. Her skin wasn't good. They ate nothing but potatoes that year. I rode in the back of the truck, eighteen miles out from town with grain dust blowing up from the floor, except where it was wet with blood. Are you getting queasy on me? Now, put some sugar in you tea; it'll give you strength.

That road hasn't changed much. I was up there recently. The ice house is still there. The field isn't a field anymore, but a pond. The farmers closed the sluices on Trout Brook every fall after the last hay was cut and then flooded what was a field three-quarters of the year. Then they all turned out in the winter to cut the ice and put it by in that stone mausoleum. I call it that because it's how it seems to me, remembering what I do. The concrete's crumbling down the inside walls now, but it was gray slab, forty foot high with a little clapboard building at the side that they used for storing rope and sledges and such. Had a small canister stove in the shack to keep warm by during ice fishing. The shack's been gone these ten years, and you would have thought it was always a pond.

You never knew Carl as your father-in-law. Your mother, Mae, took you away when you were three years old, and if it weren't for his son John looking for millwork downstate and carrying you back, you'd have no need of my ever explaining him like this. But it was in all the papers in the state, headlines in most of them, and then it got twisted by every tongue up and down the valley.

He did it for her. That part's true. But it didn't come easy to him, just easier than for you or me. And not because we're women either. Most men never see what he saw.

Sis sent for me that summer as the jobs at the doll factory were drying up due to low Christmas orders, and she thought she might ease Mother's burden a little. I was hired out to Carl and Thelma. It wasn't a hard job for a healthy fourteen-year-old girl. The well was in the corner

of the kitchen back then by the old sink. You could tell from the yellow and green linoleum on the well cover, what the kitchen floor had looked like once, but years of tracking in from the woodshed to fill the wood box had worn it through in front of the stove and sink and dulled it everywhere else. And kerosene lamps on the middle table in all the downstairs rooms served us for evening work, though at my house we'd put in electricity. Still, I didn't mind no conveniences as long as I didn't have to carry water down from the spring.

I took care of the two children all that first summer and every haying season after that for three years. Thelma was needed in the fields. She wasn't build like some farm women and Randall took notice of that and would get her a dipper of water when Carl seemed blind to how flushed she was. Kindness will catch any woman off-guard and that's where I think it started.

I was seventeen by the third summer, driving the truck out to the field with the boxes of sandwiches and drinks, and ready to see romance in every thicket and behind every spring-house. First I noticed the fresh apron she tied on in the middle of the week, and then I remarked how she looked younger with her dark hair smoothed back.

I climbed down from the truck and reached back to swing boxes and dinner pails down, but Randall had moved fast from the shade to my elbow and took charge, brushing against my shirtwaist, leaving chaff and sweat on my upper arm.

Thelma stood up to help and then Carl called the Colton boys to leave the stream alone and get something in their stomachs, he didn't want to be out there all night. I passed out sandwiches while Thelma poured lemonade in the tin cups. There were two whole pies and a knife in one box and waxed paper to eat on.

"Gram's been busy," Thelma smiled. "How're the kids treating you?"

"I tied them out in the play yard so they won't bedevil Gram." John had put his fat cheek up to be kissed, no matter the clothesline around his waist and tied back to the maple. You know the one near where you and John kennel the dogs now? Emily I simply plumped in her pen. The new baby, Louis, was still sleeping in the drawer in their room.

Carl's mother got around on a cane but still managed to bake for the family. "Don't want to be beholden to my children," she'd say as she sat on the porch snapping beans or shelling peas, whatever was in season. The pies were blackberry because it was early September.

My mother had lived on the neighboring farm and had gone to school with Carl. His mother was famous for her savingness. When Carl's father was alive, they ate scrapple until the last hog was used up. Carl had fed them mash and scraps all winter until the following fall when the butcher was called. Gram was a young mother then and would see that the younger kids were away for the day while the slaughtering was going on, but Carl was thought old enough to help. She washed the blood off him after the two of them had cleaned up the

kitchen and helped put the wrapped meat in the back of the truck, still seeping, to take it to the frozen food locker in the village. They ate knuckles, tongue and would have eaten the tail if it had been worth it.

"You all right, Thel?" I had carried a sandwich over to her and saw her gripping the tractor fender, the tendons on her wrist standing out.

"Near enough," she said, but I stayed by her just the same. Good thing, too, because she started to slide down to sit on the ground, but lost her strength and landed. Carl got there before Randall, but still Thelma held them off. "I just forgot my hat, that's all." Carl looked in her face, a little blotched now. "Get in the truck and go back to the house."

That trip back up the lane told me everything I'd feared to know. Thelma, alone with me, just sat with her hands in her apron, twisting them. She didn't even try to brush the strands of hair out of her eyes like she did when baking or mopping. Twice I asked her if she was okay and she really seemed to be. She was pale now, but she wasn't in any pain.

Just past the ice house, she had me pull over; didn't want to vomit down the side of the truck. We were both down now. I pulled at some late asters for fifteen minutes or so, until she came around, balled her apron and threw it behind the back seat, climbed in, turned the key and stepped on the starter. She dropped me at the back fence and took the crossroad west. It surprised me because the train depot between the towns was the only reason to go that way. I went through the barbed wire and crossed the field to the back porch. The kids weren't in the play yard. Gram must have put them down for a nap, but I'll never know how.

Carl was home just about six. Well, I know it was exactly six. I'd watched for Thelma all afternoon. He came back down the hall from their room and sat to eat. He never asked a thing, but I'd gotten used to Carl's silences. Still, I knew this was quieter than usual.

I washed the kids in the tub by the kitchen stove where I could see the window. Carl worked at the woodpile. It was on the same side. He couldn't see the west road, but he could see the south one and she hadn't come from there. Carl met her at the truck. I saw her eye the axe he was still carrying. He dropped it while he waited for her to get down. Must have asked her something hard, else she would have started straight for the house to see the kids put to bed. They stood together in the dooryard for ten minutes or so. I had the older two kids dried off and in their night clothes by the time they came in together. She lifted them, one to a hip, and packed them up the stairs to bed, without a word.

Carl lifted the stove lid with the poker, stirred the fire, and put in a chunk of wood to hold us until bedtime. He was waiting for Thelma to come back down. I was doing the dishes, but in no hurry to finish. Gram had gone to her room, "so as to give the young folk room," she always said. Thelma came back into the kitchen, just a little slower than she had left it. I noticed how her shirt had deep wrinkles when she

turned to the stove for the fried potatoes, still warm in the rancid grease, for her and Carl.

"Did you pick up some smokes?" He was lighting one and pressing his pack flat with his other hand. She would have had to go by Leonard's store if she'd gone to Tully's. That was her girlfriend. I thought she must have told him that, and maybe she really had doubled back, but I didn't think so. I'd been looking for her and listening for the truck all afternoon.

"No. I meant to. I just forgot." I knew she'd gone the other way and now he did, too.

"I never knew you to run out of them, Thel." She always smoked when she was pregnant. Said it kept down the weight. So he knew that, too. She looked sideways at me and back at him. I threw a dish towel across the dishes on the drainboard and went into the other room.

Some time in the night, I heard the train as it took the curve coming into the valley and I lay there waiting for it to take the one at the other end and leave us in peace. I wasn't used to the train and it always broke my sleep. That night, though, it seemed to have waked someone else, because I heard a door latch lift and then drop back. Car lights lit up the leaves outside my upstairs window. I climbed out of bed, and from the window I saw Carl clearing out of the driveway in a hurry. It wasn't my place to look into their bedroom, and what if Thelma was there? I could just find myself another job. Instead, I lay there listening. I heard the train leave the valley, its whine cut off by the bluff. More than an hour later, the truck pulled in. I looked out. Carl got down and Thelma just sat there. He must have had the keys in his pocket, because I had to leave the truck alone all the next day and deliver the lunches on foot. I guessed he'd forgotten to hang them back up in the kitchen.

If you look at the ice house today, off so far from the pond, you'd wonder that someone could drown off the back dock in dry grass. But this was September and a whole month before they closed the sluices and the field filled with water, deepest behind the ice house. I passed it that day in late September, lugging the dinner in the biggest cardboard box I could find.

Carl sent the Colton boys across the field when he saw me coming. I noticed Randall wasn't there in the shade of the tree, but I never said a thing. Thelma looked pretty worn, but I didn't say anything about that either.

"Emily didn't eat well this morning, Thel. Gram says she's got the 'can't-help-its,' but I lay her back in the crib for a while and she went right in for me."

"That's not my Emily," her mother agreed. "Well, I'll see about it when I get home."

They were short-handed without Randall and didn't quit until dark, around eight o'clock. Emily had a high fever by then. Thelma washed her own face and arms in the kitchen sink, dried, and went right in to her. Gram had her downstairs on her bed where she could see to

her. I stood in the doorway.

"Emily has to see the doctor, Carl. I need the keys." Thelma came out and crossed the kitchen to Carl.

"I'll drive. Just pack her up," Carl said. I was surprised because Carl didn't usually interfere with the kids, and I would have been glad to go along and hold Emily while Thelma drove.

They were back in an hour or so, Emily asleep in Thelma's arms. The doctor thought it might be the start of the gripe, Thelma told Gram and me. Gram said she wouldn't have wasted her money on a doctor when plain sense would have told you to wait at least a day to see how it turned out. It made me think that Thelma might have taken longer to go to the doctor's that night if she and Emily had gone alone.

October passed and November was well started before I saw Randall again. I was back in town in my last year of high school when I saw him in front of one of the hotels that rented by the week. He was from downstate and I figured he'd just gone back after haying season was done. I wondered what he was doing for winter work up here, what had brought him back. I didn't know he'd never really left.

"Do you want a cup of coffee?" he asked me. We went to the diner across the lot from the Bardwell Hotel and had hamburgers. It was dark when we came out. I said I had to go, but he didn't seem to have anything to do. Well, it was a mistake asking about Thelma, because he got cross and I was getting to like talking to him. I was seventeen. Anyway, he said he'd see me again sometime. When I told my mother about the hamburger, she lit into me. Said no one knew much about Randall except some said he was married and some said he was keeping company with Mae Stone. You knew your mother never had benefit of clergy, didn't you?

It was hog-slaughtering time when Thelma wrote and asked for me to come out. Carl's mother had slipped on some early ice and broke her hip. It was about Thanksgiving and we didn't think it would hurt her schooling much, so Carl came in for me.

I asked Carl if the pigs cried like humans when they were stuck. Some of the town kids asked questions I'd never thought much about. Carl said it didn't matter, they didn't have feelings, no more than a worm wriggling on a fish hook. Just nerves.

The children were glad to see me, except Louis who hadn't outgrown his colic. I could see Thelma had her hands full and I started right in peeling potatoes while she carried Louis down cellar to get some beans and beets she had put by.

"We're down to the last pork fat," Thelma said. "Just in time, too. It was those chicks that saved us this year. Them and the partridge this month."

"Emily," I said, "You'll have to let go or I can't move." Her hands were locked around my pants leg, but I knew she understood me. She was about fifteen months old and doing more walking than talking.

"Oh, she's a prison guard, the way she holds your ankle," Thelma said. I looked up at her. She sounded a little strange, but she

didn't see me look. She was measuring some evaporated milk for the baby's bottle.

"Kids keeping you tied down, Thel? I wish I lived closer."

"You don't seem to run down, do you?" she asked. "Well, I wish you did, too. I wish a lot of things."

That was Thursday. Thelma went into town Friday for some twine and a new galvanized pail. The slaughtering was done by Saturday noon and I was due to go back Sunday. It wasn't ten minutes after Carl took the south road that Saturday, for the frozen food locker with the dressed meat, Thelma had dressed herself and Emily and said she was taking her out for some air. She explained she didn't seem to have much time for her now that Louis had come. She looked out the window to the road, pulled the door open, and the two of them went out.

I watched them go down to the crossroads, her walking along and Emily holding her hand, stretching up over frozen clumps of grass. They took the east road, the one toward the ice house. The field of hoarfrost ended and the woods took over and I lost sight of them. A half-hour later I watched a black truck with sideboards pass down the east road.

It came out in the trial about the accident, "child neglect," they called it. Well, I don't know what else you could call it.

It was two hours later and an hour before dark when Gram called me into her room, told me to bring her a bottle and Louis and then go get Thelma and bring her and Emily home. Louis was still sleeping, but I did as I was told and picked him up and brought him in to Gram. She looked hard at me.

"Do you understand me?" "Yes." And I dressed warm and left the house. My stomach wasn't right on the walk, I was so sure of what I was going to find. I heard them before I saw them. Thelma sounded high-pitched and wild.

"There! There! She's right there." I came around behind the ice house to where they were. Thelma was in the water to her waist. Randall was just coming up out of the water. His jacket was on the dock.

Thelma started screaming. She wasn't making sense. I didn't want her to make sense. I didn't want to know what they were looking for. Randall drove down again. I tried to grab Thelma's arm. She shook me off. I ran back to the house; Carl was coming. I told him.

I said, "Give me the truck. I'll get help." Thelma was standing on the slippery black wood, her pants black with ice, when I got back. Mrs. Gleason finally talked her into leaving with her and going back to the house. She couldn't do any good there, and there were children at home. I stayed.

Every man and boy on the neighboring farms came out that night and, by lantern light, dragged the pond with any kind of grappling hook they could fashion until two a.m. when one of the ice hooks caught in the hood of Emily's red corduroy jacket and they brought her up to where Carl could reach her. Mr. Sprague brought the lantern over, lit up Carl's and the baby's faces, then swung it away. Carl carried her home

in his coat.

Are you all right? I needed to tell you that. I needed to. You had to see what Carl had seen.

Afterwards, Randall and Carl sat in the kitchen while neighbor men and women worked to take the chill out of them, soaking their feet and feeding them whiskey. Of course, the doctor had to be fetched out of respect for the law. Emily, it seems, had been poking a stick through ice patches in the grass and had wandered, probably to throw the stick in the pond.

Thelma carried Louis everywhere that next week. The baby might have gloried in it, but he fussed all the more. Gram kept to her bed. She had tried to get up for the funeral, but her legs gave way, and that with a man on each side of her. John followed me everywhere, to the chicken coop, the pigpen, woodshed. He helped me carry mash, slopping it on his black rubber boots. Carl spent most of his time in the barn, that and out with the truck.

By the next Monday, I was due to go home. I'd asked Carl on the Saturday before for a ride to the next town; I'd take the bus from there. He was stacking wood. I asked twice before he heard me.

"I have to go home." He lay the armload down, went in and got his 30-30 with the scope, said he had but one day left of partridge season. He wouldn't be home before dark. I thought how the shotgun was the better gun for birding.

He was good as his word. Thelma started when he came into the sitting room. She had Louis up to her shoulder, rocking him, the baby squirming and fretting the whole time. He said he'd be taking me home tomorrow as he had some time free in the morning.

I was surprised Sunday when I passed the back of the truck and climbed up into the cab that there was still so much blood left from dressing off the hogs a week before. I guessed that some hay or grain would be needed to soak it up right, and I slammed the door. We rode the eighteen miles over the mountain without much talk. I wasn't uncomfortable. I said before that I was used to Carl not saying much. More used to that than if he talked a stream. Well, he surprised me that Sunday as I was getting out in my front yard by saying something more than "Beholdin' to you."

He said, "I made up my mind that Emily would have a stone." I told him that I thought that was a fine idea.

You know how they found Randall. I can't say more about that. He was hanging in the ice house, a grappling hood in his throat, hauled up to a beam by block and tackle. It wasn't until they lowered him that they saw the bullet hole in his temple.

Thelma was never strong after that. Emily's death, Carl's murder of Randall and the trial used her up pretty bad. No one except Gram, Carl and me knew she lost the child she was carrying. No one but Thelma knew whose child it was, if she could even be sure. Gram worsened with the death of her granddaughter and the jailing of her son. She didn't live but two more years, just until Thelma remarried — a

Cady from Eastbrook. Some folks said that Cady had always wanted to farm. Even so, he was good to John and even went to the sheriff the time Louis was caught poaching. And he wasn't much of a talker, any more than Carl.

Your mother took you downstate, but it wasn't far enough. How was she to know John would see you twenty years later at a fair? John was as much Thelma's son as Carl's and he always had a taste for auburn-haired women. You have the same beautiful hair your father, Randall, had. That was the clue the neighbors were waiting for.

I watched that boy, John, grow. A real hunter and fisherman, just like his father, but his father hunted close to home, not given to the long hunting trips your husband takes. Still, he's a good man, same as his father. This will be hard on you, you know, because your baby will be issue to all three of them; Thelma, Randall and Carl. The neighbors will be looking to see who it takes after. How is Thelma these days? ▲

SLIDING

A wintry hilltop up behind the barn,
ears aching, fingertips numb,
scarves sucked into the corners
of our mouths with each breath,
mittened hands pulling sleds uphill,
warm and sweaty underneath, furnaces
working, smelling
of wet wool.

The crust just held us, lifting ourselves
up light, weighted by tightly-buckled galoshes.
Streams from our noses shone
on our nylon parka sleeves,
then dulled. We pulled
our sled to the top and piled on, all three
breaths held until we'd creaked over
the ridge of snowcrust

and then streaked downhill, hearts racing,
past the trees, eyes blurring
past the school, through the gate in the fence.

MURIEL H. POWERS

FARM KITCHEN

He called a bear off the hill
beating the ground, hollering
in a story I thought was tall.
He offered me elderberry wine
while his wife plumped up
the fire, embers sharpening
our faces, warmed with
smoke and wine.
Dressed in her socks,
mine drying near the heat,
I swallowed the story
grateful that folks still
make strangers welcome
with jelly jars full and
steaming wool on stove grates.

HE IS NOTHING

His skin is as white as baby powder
sprinkled on the bathroom floor after
everyone's morning shower.

He is as overpopulated with freckles
as China is with people.

He is as flaky as a fish that's been dead,
out of water for a month.

He is the light that reflects off the TV
from another room, preventing the full picture.

He is tin foil crushing between my teeth.

He is the crumbs that fall from my mouth
to the floor.

He is nothing to me. But
I am Swiss Miss
on a frigid winter's morning,
calamine lotion on uncontrollably itchy,
scathing skin,
Solarcaine on his sunburned neck.
I am the match he needs to light his last Winston.

MANDATORY VACATION

One hundred miles from
homemade fried chicken and baked potatoes,
my friends, fun and
no way to get back.

The week's almost over now.
It's Wednesday.
Three days left, three more days of rain.
Relentless rain
forcing, smashing.
Windows rattling.

Midweek boredom sets in.
Fifty-one exhausted red and white playing cards hidden
among spaghetti-stained dinner plates
on the kitchen table.

Overused fishing rods
Arched, bowed at the slender end, on the edge
of collapse against the discolored wall.
Hooks in collaboration with the dingy, nylon curtains
that hide the hazy, weather-stained windows.

The musty aroma of sea water trapped
between splinters upon splinters of
swollen wood.

In the quiet of the night
the bathroom door screams,
objecting to my presence, urging
me to leave.
Sending me home.

I smell the flounder frying.
Frightened fish stuck
to his fishing rod, flapping their bodies, trying
to get back
to the water.
Now stuck
to his death pan, sizzling.

After dinner,
cold cereal for me,
I escape
to my bed.

Floorboards conversing with each other about
my every step, every move I make
recorded
as I walk toward the bed.
The squeaking shrills of the boxsprings
rustled from the dampness
don't welcome me.

SANDRA HEDDON

THE RIDE

You were leaning there
arms crossed, cigarette dangling
I appeared and begged you for a ride.
You sat on my lap steering
while I worked the pedals blind.

Faster? I said
Yes, you replied.

BEDOUIN WOMAN

The black veil clings
to her hair, cheekbones,
confined breath. It ripples
over her velvet dress:
yellow squares inside purple.

While her sons tend the goats
that graze this faded earth
she sews forests of green
leaves along the sleeves,
flowers down the sides
to pool at her hem.

Her husband and his friend
who has ridden three days
drink the sweet tea
her daughters serve
from a brass tray.

In the tent of dusty angles
she draws her silver needle
and what she cannot see.

SUPPOSE YOUR FATHER WAS A PINE

after a poem by Pattiann Rogers

Suppose he planted you in decay
that held moisture enough
for you to root, beside
a lady's slipper bedded in moss,
that filament kind that grows
beyond itself, shooting green
fine as the hairs on a woman's face —

Suppose he planted you on his west
sheltered from the shock
of sunrise. You'd wake slowly
to a view of the river
falling into pools
trout shatter in spring.

Suppose he was always there beside you,
at the same distance, his arms
close enough to brush
when the wind moved —

Then today
your crown would pierce the sky,
would be the sign for the fox,
would beckon the redbird to nest.
Your roots would wrap boulders,
dig into earth to a nourishing depth.
You'd never learn to let go.

You'd see the world in heights,
deep green to sky. You'd grow
straight up, deviations
a search for sun. There are
movements other than reaching.

If your father was a pine
you'd know what it means to stand still
when the wind carries the smoke
of the last fall leaves.

ON THE DEATH OF LUCILLE BALL

It's not the being dead (who cares
when you're six feet down or a cup
of ashes on a mantle) but the dying.
So fast you never know, or months
or years to say goodbye yet never
saying the words. Either way it's
the final bow. Kicking and screaming,
breaking out in a cold sweat, willingly
or not, the time comes. And that's the time
to remember Lucy, and how the bread
kept coming out of the oven until she
was backed against the sink across the room,
her mouth open in that wide-lipped O
that for some reason no shrink's explained
makes you laugh until tears wet your face
and your stomach aches with pleasure.

LOST, WE DRIFT

I'm normal as Cheerios on the floor. Different
is not a word I know. I've come
undone like the wind.

Watching people by my window
I knew I
was lonely. I should have a roommate. So
I went to bed, dreamed of her big, she'd
pay all the bills.

Morning was usual — Special K. What's
special about it, it's cereal. I'll change
the humdrum. First, go to work
like a daughter.

Strange people on the street, like pears
wobbling off boards. Little bags and
purses, hands grab at doors to enter the
computer room, the sex room. My coworkers are
dull in the post office. What's to sort?
It's always the same letter —
How good to see you last Christmas, sorry
I haven't written but
mother's dying of cancer and with all the mess
I haven't been able to find a pen. Please
don't be angry. Come visit.

Too much paper in the office. It's
an ice cream shop. If Gloria'd be
my roommate we'd go to
find men.

Though I think they're ugly
with their hair and money.
I want a man to share a glass of wine,
stories about children they've known.
I could love a boy or old man,
anyone who could love me,
take me off the shelf
lay me in their arms and flip through my spine.

What's peculiar is that there are people,
not dogs or guinea pigs.
I'd love to feel a man's head,
all that brain working — where to
put the right leg, how to
slide a left
hand through a woman's cleavage.

I can talk till my grave
but that'll never make a man
rub his mustache on me.
I'll share letters from the post office.
I burn them open — packages, Christmas gifts.

Gloria has friends, I'd be like roommate
soap to her. She'd trip me on
the stairs, use all
my toilet paper. She'd pay her share.
What's a share anyway?

She said yes. I'll re-paper the walls.
Burn that lonely way.
I'll have a real person,
butter toast in the morning. Her father
will visit and we can
play hearts with beer and hats and
cheese dip and other people at night.

Gloria'll move in tonight.
I'll be a woman to
her father. Play my trumpet.
What a family we'll be.

Gloria must come or
I'll be like the bedpost.

Sometimes I watch myself die. From
a distance the cancer takes over my body.
I pace as life comes
out of me. I'm upset, not
in the normal way, lost because I
drift out of life. I'm gutted. Float up the walls
and I could disappear out the window or
down the heating grate. Cancer fills the room,
I need a roommate to stop the sickness
at the door. To cry, yelp, whoop, throw
pillows, scare the slimy hand inching
up the pipes. I'll serve Gloria and
her father tea and French bread. I'm desperately
happy, join my fun house. We could
make a pool out of the living room. And once
she's moved we'd be sisters.

I'll tell her little secrets —
the scissors under the bed, the rancid turkey,
the toilet that flows at night.
I'll take her to the cellar, show her
the heater that talks. We'll stand together,
sweep the apartment, open the windows. Free
once again. Who could be happier?

They've arrived. Oh, they're so handsome.
I could slide my hands along their foreheads.
I can hear me talking — The closet's extra
special too, Gloria. Don't the floors shine.
Let them look, think quiet thoughts — that
first boy I met, he took me on the balcony,
sang to me like Donald Duck. It's stupid moments

when I've been the most happy.
He was Donald Duck, the bird of my life but he
wasn't as tender in love. Real duck love is a
language still English yet more familiar
than a tear.

Look at her father, will you!
Cute as a duck. I'd like
to lock him in the toilet,
run soap on him.
We could pull the shades
and admire. Have our own
desert island in the city. Gloria
stays in the hall, we invite
her in on her birthday, then
right out.

I could drown in his feathers.
Quack, daddy!

They left. Here I am —
I quack,
I gasp. My love.

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The Student Life Office

Our friends at the *Mass Media*.

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Back cover – Molly Hooven

