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Preacher

i used to believe i was a preacher, riding through the hills of ohio,
samuel peter spreng, "asked of god" (so my mother called me.)
i preached god's wrath, wrote of the wrath of my mother's god,
raised five children
(when the last was born i tried to breathe
into his tiny nose and mouth, still wet from the womb, while his mother bled
and screamed, and i begged this wrathfull god to spare my isaac, to let him
live. i breathed into his beautifull body
till the doctor coaxed me away from my dead son, my isaac)
i'm no poet; i am a philosopher, theologian,
but deep within me there lies the pain of a sunrise and
the tears and blood of the poet my god denies. i rise early, walk the
streets of a modern cleveland,
to ask the hand of my prettiest parishoner.
i die in a house on columbia street, while my daughter looks on.
she calls the doctor and cries silently as she is released from her fifty-year
bondage to me, too late to marry. when i was twelve i was a saddlebags preacher,
everyone's lover.

i will write writing, tears, then days of empty paper,
months and years.
i do not spill into my notebooks now, feel pen on paper,
tears of pen on paper, of long walks on my fifteenth
birthday in the new spring of new-melting ice,
of crazy and blood.
i cry to the mirror, wonder if crazy
is only a brick, wonder if blood still cries inside my wrists,
breaks loose even now
but i am busy combing my hair and looking out the window at the parking lot.
i am student, wife; student, wife.
does sun in my eyes still write poems of me? they used to fly quickly,
past my eyes and live in my hand and pen, now
they pass my pen and live in the sun,
like the blood of my wrists they do not sing now.
but what question, what reason for this sound of typewriter
in an empty kitchen, empty brain? i am student, wife.
my eyes are not student, my brain is not wife, my words are blind,

i am crazy, crazy and blood, crazy and screams, crying on my sixteenth bi
while daddy says smile and takes home movies,
and i blow out the candles.
i am not student, wife. i am fifteen, sixteen,
twelve and writing poetry already of wrists and mysterious lovers,
scaring mama with my oldness. i am poet, singer,
everyone's child. i am child-erikka
or n.s. winter or julia beck and sometimes i am nameless and
everyone's lover. i am student, wife. wrists do not cry, the sun
is mute on white paper. the sky is finite, it has a formula
and the child of darkness is gone, died long ago as the blood
escaped her white wrists
long ago
the last time.

II

poem, first since death, written now on typewriter. i used to ask
is life after birth possible? i can only talk of
when i cared, when i read sartre
and knew i was not, i was pain, i was not even tao.
mama cried when i told her her god was a fool, even now
she believes he'll save me in a flash of flame like a burning bush.
i used to believe i was isaac. i loved to walk in the desert,
crying for my people and cutting myself, offering my flesh as a sacrifice
to the red sun of blood, this god of my mother's. i loved to sing
the last song of isaac, i loved to look to the moon and sing before death.
those magnificent heavens of my mother's god opened once to reveal his gl
and i laughed and shouted that it killed my people in germany,
for i am issac, and is ing only to the sun. the sun was round like my eyes
and red red red and i lived to watch the red and the dirt mix
at sundowndearth, dying and resurrecting each day in glorious eternal death.
now i bathe my body in sweet oils, my mind in sleep, and the sun is now only
or gone, and it is never red but orange or pale yellow like my skin in the lampli
i seek out the dark places so i am not reminded of the darkness
of night or the red red sun.
i live in caves with rats and i am no longer afraid of them.
i am student,
wife.

III

words come faster.

the house is dark now, cat paws my lap
 for friendship, the sun is gone. detail upon detail claw my brain.
 i am wife, student. my pen is silent.
 i hear my husband now, driving home and writing his poem life always, singing
 sun and playing flute and happy my wrists no longer cry.
 he is silent while i look for words to fondle,
 to kiss like my cat before feeding warm
 milk and broken cookies.
 i am isaac once again, i am not isaac. i am student, wife.
 i am the whore of the sun, turning tricks like raindrops by the billions,
 i bleed when it says live and i stop when it says
 "i am the king of all cats and lover of all students, wives."
 my mother's god does not understand mine. her god has orgies of
 bread and wine, gets stinking drunk on the sacrificial wine
 and bloats on bread and belches before he pukes.
 he lies in dew, gently tells my mother to scrub the floor once more before he comes
 for her, and she obeys with perfect humbleness;
 he rewards her with the grace of another day and another floor to scrub.
 i am not isaac. the sun calls for me to scrub the floor
 and i sleep another hour before drawing the shades. i kill my god
 and lover the sun and watch the blood stain the sky and drain to the horizon.
 i am student, wife. i kill my god and poem a word,
 live in grace of husband and house; my new god whispers.

Nancy Spreng

ALL IN GOOD TIME

Robert Hummel strutted along the concrete overpass. It was Milwaukee, North Side, summer. Above him was a clear blue sky, below him the gay rush of automobiles. It was Sunday, day of leisure and light.

He paused at the end of the overpass, his three legs coming to a halt - right, left, rear. He viewed the Lake with satisfaction, calmed and inspired by the shifting glint of the water. A promising day, a fine day.

Resuming his gait, he descended the broad concrete steps into the lakeside park. It was pleasantly filled, lovers strolling or kissing, people walking their dogs, children playing soldier (HUP two three four five six), sensuous old toms lolling in the grass and soaking up sun.

Over by a little pond sat two old men. They sat the way everybody

sat - knees locked in half-bent tripod - but nothing else about them was normal at all.

"Ridiculous creatures," Hummel thought. "Twisted features, hunched backs, dingy, sparse white hair. Ludicrous old geezers."

They cooed incessantly to one another, projecting an air of silly conspiracy.

For a moment, in self-congratulation, Hummel dwelt on his youth, his physical perfection, his proud solitude.

"Curious old things," he laughed at them soundlessly. "What do they say, I wonder?"

The old men giggled in tandem.

Despite himself, Hummel moved closer, pretending not to hear or to notice, eyes on the pond.

"Money," said one. "Now *there* was an idea."

The other nodded cheerfully. "One of our best - and it really changed things," he punned, poorly. "But sex, what about *sex*?"

They burst into shrieking gales of laughter.

"Poor addled brains," thought Hummel. "Senile." Contemptuously he began to turn away.

Still gasping with merriment, one said, "I've got it! Oh, you'll like this one! People are vain, right?"

"Right. But we made them that way."

"Well, of course we did. But what specifically makes them that way?" He answered himself. "They have three legs."

"The only animal on the whole planet!" the other responded triumphantly.

"Right—it's essential to their self-concept."

"Marvelous! Shall we give them two legs or four?"

"Well, four's pressing it, don't you think?" He laughed.

"Two legs, then," they said together.

Just like that, it was so.

Hummel stood staring, lower lip loose and tongue dry. He had heard them plan it - because of that, he alone knew. These two old men? - making all the day-to-day decisions of reality.

They looked mournfully at one another.

"We really couldn't do *that*," said one. He sighed.

"True. It'd be cruel. Only for a moment then." They smiled.

Robert Hummel stood alongside the pond, gazing vacantly at two old men. They cooed incessantly to one another, sitting carefully on the chipped green park benches. (A nice touch.)

"Ludicrous creatures," he began. "Ridiculous old-" he stopped. He shifted his feet, left to right. What was it?

He grasped at the shadowy memory. He thought he had it for a minute, thought, "What happens when such odd old people die? Does - does anyone *miss* them?"

He had never had a thought like that before.

The old men giggled a squeaky duet, and Hummel turned away, vaguely unsettled.

They watched him depart, watched his novel rhythm with glee. (HUP two three four!)

A fine day, a promising day.

—James LaRue

under twin pines

pine cones open-gilled wood fish
half submerge in the earth

others back to the bound to twig
sail-toss rigged high in forsythia branches

the mud hardens with the cold
the wind sprays hair around the lee of our faces

charlie

i

when i was a child
there was this man with my name
who used to harangue and argue
when he sat in my grandfather's house

on a metal-gray chair
put out like a cage on those special occasions for the clan

at first i inwardly laughed at him
at the family's taut muscle twitch
baiting their dog-legged impatience and his belligerence
listening to the volume rise around him
in the dark feasting room

later years later i would learn
how my father and his brother pushed from their mother's lap
laid on the floor of the car in 1928 and
watched when the gun went off point blank
watched as their mother tried to cover her face
and how his brother for years afterward would awake
crying crying in his orphan's night
mommies fingers are on the floor
mommies fingers are on the floor

and i would learn
how that man with my name my grandfather
lost his family to a brother
and became my "uncle"
after growing tomatos and flowers for 15 years
in a prison yard

ii

i remember a recurring dream
i had as a child of falling
falling along this inverted corner of a building
and watching the windows slash by
like layered slate-gray leaves

i think of this of suicide
of charlie letting his hold go slowly
and falling in the night's shades like a strewn bouquet
down past layers and layers and layers
of limestone rock

i was given his razor and white silk scarf
and the facts why he sniffed limestone dust
everymorning ritually, as if preparing
for the day's white quarry haze
and why he drank stiff alfalfa tea

his veins must have run like that stream
in the gully behind his garden behind the quarry
that stream clogged white and thickened by the rock's run-off
those water-sheets flowing
like stained unwinding gauze
from the piles and piles and piles of aggregate
hollowed out from the family owned land

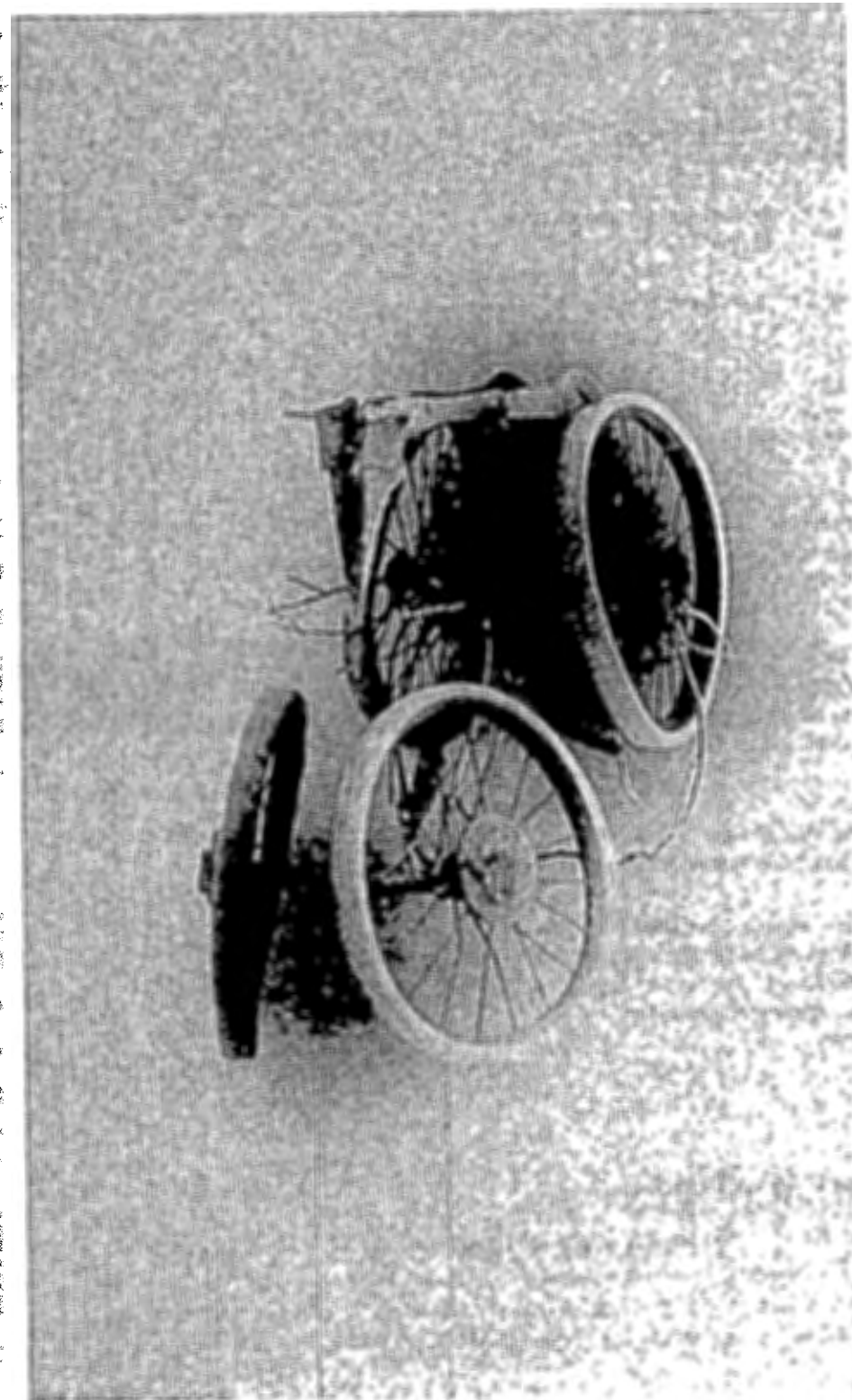
i have come to know some part of his pain
remembering him slipping silently away
into that dark quarry that was himself
unable to stop
like the fluid and seed dream flows
that cannot stop from a dropped green tomato

and i think of his razor
stained
with its slate-gray blades
in its original tattered cardboard box

—Charles Wm. Collinson III

City Theme #1: Emptiness/Solitude

Zepher - returning hot and equatorial,
celebrating sun city-screened
and opiated through open window,
clustered auto-howl
burst and busted in inner ear;
hand-head-holding experience of footed asphalt: searing.
I street corner rag-ragging
debauched



hand in pants cock-roaching groin of impotent soal,
cocktail hour karma - coined in mobile belch of alcoholic monoxide.

I now into my circular motion of hand

sexpressing solitude on rags,
on rags of wet clay guttered emptyness.

wishing for jesus farm boy angels to rescue

and deliver to grit winds
sweeping I

atop,
high atop,
like tire-swinging
then I

cat walking roof-top
like atlas pendulum,

in head-cracking speed split sound oh sonic booming on heads
of art starved starlings
pecking pebbles
'neath white lamp light.

11/6/74 The perception is disgusting
and hateful and is wretched to see and hear
gut crys of automated man-

homeless
anonymous powerless

banal in thoughtless, wordless, deedless;
emptyless fulless, wholeless, leastless,

smiling with

seductive, satiated, satisfied grin grinning at moments
of peak, of climactic thomas peaking through windows
with shades of night shady lady,
envious of copper toned tan
of nippy

COO-COO.

Pilgrimage to Pontiac

Cityfied
Street wise
united

detached:

Pontiac - I has cum

main street main-line
you with boy scout good godness goodies
tie-died abstraction of Disney-Landed

moon hymns,

prick puddling porcelain
trucker stop urinal:

mesmo-flashed
eat...gas...eat...gas

Pontiac - I am gassed,

B-O petroleummed, inciting corn stalk solitude
'neath billboard sign, signing signature

to rail road tie
fire-smoking
to choking mother moon.

Pontiac - I eat out,

in dunkin' donut douche factories

drinking in coca-coal black stares
of freckled farm girles-
itching to scratch

my corn silk,
and cheshire cat truckers
aching to shuck my cob.

Oh, Pontiac - Relieve me,

lest I be sheared in eighths
and slopped in potentate's garage
and sign ooh slyly nibbled
by hound-dog mama in silk.

— Gregory Brososke

AUNT NANCY

Aunt Nancy was a cemetery person. You know, of course, that there are two differend kinds of people - cemetery people and non-cemetery people. Cemetery people seem to derive some sort of satisfaction out of visiting graves—no, no, that couldn't be it—perhaps it's comfort. Actually, I don't know what it is because I'm definitely a non-cemetery person. And going to graveyards makes

non-cemetery people feel awful and they prefer to stay dead away - I mean *clear* away-unless absolutely forced into the trip. But, I do know that my Aunt Nancy was a cemetery person - that's because she was always the one in charge of the Memorial Day ritual at the family lot back when I was a child. On Memorial Day (actually, we called it Decoration Day) Daddy loaded the back of the Ford with buckets and tubs and crocks of his annual crop of peonies and iris' and then we rode over to pick up Aunt Nancy. She filled up the rumble seat with her rambler roses, and daisies, and whatever, and we headed for the cemetery. I was the only child allowed to go—that was a practicality rather than an honor. Believe me, there was not much room in the front seat wedged between Daddy and Aunt Nancy—there was a lot of him and even more of her—but, somehow, we always got there, and then we spent a very busy hour or so fixing the flowers on the graves. Daddy unloaded, and Aunt Nancy arranged, and I ran back and forth to the water pump filling containers, being very careful not to step on any graves—a very serious offense, according to Aunt Nancy. While we were working she would tell me all about the people buried on our lot and the adjoining ones for that matter.

"Now here's your grandfather's grave," she'd say, "you know, he was a fine businessman - made a lot of money." And then she'd smile and shake her head. "Spent it all, though - on us children, I'm afraid! And here's Cousin Sarah - eloped with Johnny Bill Jerrod - he went bankrupt, but they were so devoted, so in love. Did you know, Diane, that they were great friends of the Andersons—see, they're buried right over here on the next lot. Now, isn't that sweet! Sam Anderson drank a little too much—now, don't ever repeat that, Diane - he was a good fellow, all in all. And, here's the Noblett family - they lived just down the street from us. I'll never forget the time their horse ran away—"

And she would go on and on reminiscing and arranging bouquets - the peonies for Grandfather, the rambler roses for Cousin Sarah - each one designed to suit their individual personalities as she recalled them until she could stand back and say, "Ahh, just so!"

I remember one year especially - we had finished all the decorating and Aunt Nancy was sitting on the stone bench that was there on the lot. Suddenly she looked very disturbed—"Look, Diane,—look over the hill there—there's a grave without any flowers

at all!"

"Yeah, yeah, you're right," I agreed, "but, we're all out of flowers and vases and besides—" but, she was already busying herself.

"Let's see, we'll take some out of Aunt Clara's bunch (actually, your Great Aunt Clara never liked flowers much, anyway.) And, I'll cut a few springs from this evergreen on the Anderson's lot (now, Diane, this is not stealing from the neighbors—their shrubs need trimming badly.) Now, you run see if there isn't a mason jar on the floor of the back seat."

When she had finished her creation she placed it lovingly on the empty grave. The inscription read "Frank G. Shumacher (1878-1931)".

"Now, doesn't that look nice?" she looked at me for approval.

"Real good, Aunt Nancy, just fine—but look, uh, we don't even know this man - this Frank Shumacher."

"What difference does that make?" She stared at me in dismay.

"Don't you know, Diane, that you can love someone—whether you knew them or not!"

I puzzled over that remark all the way home in the Ford—even yet, some thirty-five years later, sometimes I get to thinking about it. And, because of all those Memorial Days spent with Aunt Nancy, I, non-cemetery person that I am, make an effort to visit her grave when I go home. I usually stop at the little greenhouse near the cemetery gates and buy a potted plant, something that will last awhile, and then I take it over to the lot and pull a few weeds - that sort of thing - and get to remembering.

Aunt Nancy was my favorite aunt, but more than that, she eventually became my friend and advisor. When I grew up and got the job at the bank, I used to stop by her big grey Victorian house on my way home from work. She was always home—always working in the kitchen—concocting some marvelous smelling soup or stew or baking something. She had raised six children so I guess she got in the habit of cooking a lot though the older children were off and gone. We usually had to battle our way through the living room and dining room to get to the kitchen, however. Everyone said that Nancy's cooking was superb, but her housekeeping was hopeless! There were sorts of heaps of things all over—materials for school costumes, books lying around all opened at important looking places, maps showing where our boys

were fighting now overseas, assorted mending discarded in the corner, partially knitted mufflers and sweaters and such - half finished projects all over the place. It was a mess and I loved it—House Beautiful could take lessons from Aunt Nancy as far as I was concerned!

She'd seat her bulk at the kitchen table, smooth her grey hair back in its bun, and look me over with her clear blue eyes, the ones with the laugh wrinkles at the corners.

"What a nice surprise - your dropping by!" she'd say, as though she really meant it. "Now, how are things going with you, Diane?", as though she really wanted to know. (Aunt Nancy was not one to bother with empty conversational niceties.)

"Boy, Aunt Nancy, I'm bushed tonight and things aren't going so good—I've got problems," I'd begin.

"Tell you what" she'd interrupt, "Let's you and me have a Kool together."

Now, Aunt Nancy had done a very peculiar thing when she turned fifty—she had taken up smoking. The family's reaction was very negative and they didn't even know smoking was unhealthy, not then.

My father was horrified, "Really, Nancy — at your age!"

My mother was disgusted, "Well, if she's going to do it, she could at least learn how!"

Aunt Nancy had a way of holding a cigarette between her thumb and first finger as though she were planning to thread a needle with it. Then, she'd purse up her mouth and take quick, vigorous puffs, blowing enthusiastic billows of smoke.

Well, anyway, we'd smoke our Kools together and I'd tell her all about my troubles with Joe, the new teller, or whoever it was that was currently driving me up the wall. Now, Aunt Nancy was the best advisor by far that I have ever had — at least, on matters of the heart. As far as I can remember she never gave me any advice at all — she just listened while we blew clouds of smoke in each other's faces. But, somehow, the doubts, the worries, the fears — all evaporated in the atmosphere of Aunt Nancy's very murky, very mentholated kitchen.

Funny about that — I could confide in Aunt Nancy personal matters that I would never dream of telling anyone else. I suppose that was because Aunt Nancy had had experience in such things.

My own parent's courtship was a great disappointment to me. All I could dig out of my mother was that, since my father had a nephew and nieces in high school when he was a youngish bachelor he was asked to chaperone at school dances. Since she was a young Latin teacher, she was asked, too. After several years of chaperoning Christmas formals, Sweetheart Balls, and Spring Proms they finally drifted into marriage. I could visualize them just "drifting" into the minister's study for the ceremony — she wore a suit — how dull! I should have at least invited the school board!

Ahh, but Aunt Nancy was a different matter - she had romance - and on that Mother was much more verbal.

"You see, Diane," Mother would start off, "your grandmother died young - in her forties - and that left Nancy, the oldest of the girls to look after the younger ones. She was only 25 herself but took her responsibility very seriously and she did a good job - no trouble at all with Lila or Mildred or Evelyn — nothing but everyday wrangling. But, Florence, the next to the youngest was another matter. Florence was (Mother would always hesitate here) "Well, Florence was a little wild - not really fast you understand like those McCoy girls down the block were. But, Florence was only seventeen, and she was very pretty — she had auburn curls and brown eyes and she had a way of tossing the curls and looking sideways and smiling with the eyes. Florence was a flirt, no doubt about it. Boys liked her - and Florence liked boys. It worried Nancy to death she kept her eyes and ears open and hoped to goodness Florence would grow out of it."

"Keeping her ears open like that she heard right away about a new young real estate agent down at Snyder's Realty, Greenwood. He was from Cincinnati and he was 27 and he was tall and blond with a mustache and he wore the sharpest pin stripes with a matching vest — but, mainly he was a bachelor and he was what they called "hell with the women". Why, he had already picked up and dropped every one of those McCoy girls! And then it caught Nancy's attentive ears that he was seeing Florence - on the sly she gritted her teeth, straightened her shoulders, put on her church shoes and marched down to Snyder's Realty.

"Mr. Greenwood, I am Nancy Gardner, Florence Gardner

sister," she introduced herself formally. "I am responsible for, uh, family matters."

"Why, how nice to meet you, Miss Gardner — were you thinking of buying property?" John smiled hopefully.

"Oh no, uh, no, not those matters — I mean more confidential things - I mean, personal matters. What I mean is — really, Mr. Greenwood! (he was looking at her in a very disconcerting way) -uh, well, Mr. Greenwood, you see, Florence is only seventeen years old. And, I know she looks older and she's very pretty —

"Oh yes, indeed!" John Greenwood agreed vehemently.

"Yes, well, anyway," Nancy continued, "Florence has not yet quite, shall I say, 'found' herself."

"Is that right?" Mr. Greenwood seemed fascinated.

"Yes, and -uh, well, I feel I should protect her somewhat."

"That's very admirable, Miss Gardner."

"Oh, do you think so? -uh, well, now, Mr. Greenwood — you seem like such an intelligent man — I mean, don't you think it might be more appropriate for you to look for someone, uh, more mature, more settled —"

"Ahhh -" John Greenwood looked animated. He leaned forward over his desk — "you mean a real woman, one with a head on her shoulders, one that's more than pretty. One that's truly beautiful — beautiful with an inner beauty."

"Uhhh, well, yes, something like that," Nancy was rather taken aback by his enthusiasm.

"Now, Miss Gardner, put your fears at rest - forget your worries. You see, I've already found such a person."

"Ohh-oh, you have?—already? — oh well, in that case I guess I won't take up any more of your time!" Nancy bolted for the door. But, she turned back with her hand on the knob — "Are you sure, Mr. Greenwood?"

"Quite sure, Miss Gardner." And then he stood up and grinned his best roguish grin. "I just met her. How about you, Nancy?"

In less than a year they were married!

Every Christmas when I was a little girl I used to make Mother tell me that story on the way to Aunt Nancy's and Uncle John's Christmas party. It had happened many years before I was born. By the time

I remember them Uncle John was almost all the way bald and Nancy was — well, fat. But, he wore the sharpest red velvet sm jacket to serve his egg nog from the cut glass punch bowl, and wore her taffeta church dress to pass the Christmas cookies that made from my grandmother's secret recipes. Sometimes Uncle would brag a little about his trim physique.

"I can still wear the suit I was married in," he'd say, "isn't something, after all these years!"

"You may have kept your figure," Aunt Nancy would retort just look what you've done to mine!"

Then he'd grin his best roguish grin and say, "No matter, I don't matter at all!" It didn't matter at all, either. He'd put his father's record on the Victrola and take Aunt Nancy's arm—"Nancy, shall we waltz?" And I would watch, mesmerized, as Uncle John and Nancy waltzed around the Christmas tree in the big Victorian room to the strains of:

"When I grow too old to dream, I'll have you to remember me!"

"When I grow too old to dream, your love will live in my heart!"

I was humming that tune and reliving that scene in my mind's eye as I drove up to the greenhouse this last visit home.

"To heck with a potted plant—I should buy something more for Aunt Nancy - something "just so", as she would say. Now, let me see — hum, I know - red roses - red roses with long stems - yes, that's it!"

But, by golly, the door was locked. I rattled it before it hit the door.

"Dammit, it's Labor Day - all the shops are closed - how could I be so forgetful! There goes your great flower idea! Well, you're stuck - guess you should go on over to the lot anyway."

I could not believe my eyes at first! There was a vase of roses there, beside the stone engraved, "Nancy Gardner Greenwood, 1895-1959" - there was a vase of long-stemmed red roses! And I spotted the new grave over the hill on the Schumacher lot - and a lot of flowers - wreaths and baskets of every description.

"Someone - someone must have brought it over - that's what it could be! How about that!" And then I sat down on the stone bench and lit a Kool.

"Now doesn't that look nice, Aunt Nancy? Just so, wouldn't you say?"

— Ric McDaniel



from **Army Journal—1971**

i know killers
i know killers from illinois
kansas kentucky ohio hawaii new jersey utah
who know killers in other places
who get sent to still other places to kill other
killers or (is it a dream when
bombs whisper sky gray try to hide
the face of) themselves.

kelly & me to the cathouse
to score some dope;
we pick up on some dynamite shit.

—Dennis Darling

Bluffton, Ohio

Pea-hulling time
and the neighbor-ladies gather
to squeeze and gossip of old Ed Wright,
living by himself and wearing dirty shirts
and how his family's trying to put him in a home,
and ping go the peas in the dishpans 'twixt their knees.

Sommer's Barn

It takes in light and air
between slats and gives off
the strong breath of straw
fermenting in the half-dark;
and all you can do
is crane your head back
and wonder at the cathedral
of a roof, breathe in, and believe.

Linda

Except for the occasional
Plash of a frog, and the beam
Of a light from the other shore,
The lake could be anything—darkness.
Linda arranges the hem of her dress
And says she believes in everything—
God, witches, U.F.O.'s—some force
That moves the universe. Her dress,
A fresh white print, makes a semi-circle
From her husband David to me.

Central Illinois

Flat is a noun
here: Corn and loam
like patch-work as far
as birds disappearing south.

Tracks run straight east
to west as an arrow,
giving and receiving boxcars
in one long shuttled breath.

Go north. Consider stopping
at Toby's Mesa Cafe. Picture
the red-vinyl stools, hairnet-waitresses,
and truckers who come between them.

Drive on. At night,
there's a constant ring
of lights from farmhouses
and towns keeping you company.

To a Waitress in Old Town

You are not unlike a maid of Babylon
Who ornaments the neck of an ancient urn:

She looks with large, dark eyes the world upon
While stately posed, her head subtly turned.
What loneliness of sailors your dark eyes have viewed
As they plan their youth for 3 nights ashore—
Talking low together, picking food
Between their teeth, then sauntering out the door.
What desperation you have seen across the street—
When a man who stumbles in a narcotic daze
Tries the door of the long-closed Produce and Meat—
Even as your slender hands are setting down trays.
Where is beauty? In all of this or none?
Your lips are still; your eyes are deep and dark
as a maid of Babylon.

November

Chestnut horses
grazing on a ridge
behind dark slender trees. . .

A cold freshness
one throws oneself into
coat unbuttoned
running awkwardly
along railroad planks. . .

Marriage

(for Sue)

Your oven on against the cold,
We sit before it with fruit and tea
And talk of friends who devote themselves
To reaching the state of matrimony.
"It's probably the most rewarding
thing in a person's life," you say,
Offering me a brandied orange,
"But just one part of you is marriage."
I taste the syrupy fruit and agree,

Adding that often the loneliness
Between husband and wife is greatest.
You nod, warming your hands at the stove.

—Gary Duehr

Standing to Dance

Old man with grey, straggled
hair is huddled limp,
eyes closed. At first faint
blood tapping in his head grows
gradually louder and faster
until a drum
pounding a rhythm
is pushing him
to his feet.
With a pain he slightly straightens the slump
of his back and lifts his arms and head
to the sky. Growing from inside out.
Old man gasps and heaves thick breath
over his lips wide apart turning blue.
Then eyes opening frantically and reaching
for the sun clouds wind dirt everything
a roaring-river-rumbling rushing from deep
inside comes crashing from his throat wonderful
scream Music for dancing with the world.

—Dave Henson

A Turn of a Change

This paper is about changes. Of late, I have simply taken to calling them, 'the changes'. But what is it, folks, what is it that changes our very personalities, makes enemies out of the best of friends, and turns warm refuge into cold, deserted, bombed out villages?
A book of changes.

When we were young, we cheated on our wives. We used to go out and drink and wench our way through the countryside. We would awaken in the morning, vomit strewn about our beards, on our clothes, seeped in the straw of our beds. In the air and mouth was the flavor of a dirty peasant girl, like the one next to us in the straw. We feel ourselves much superior to them. We were. But time has changed the surface of the earth and things, and we no longer wench and drink. We go out and hunt with the hounds, and then bring the birds home for our plump and aging wives to cook. At night, in bed when the wind blows cold, there is no breast like that of a seasoned matron, wife, and lifelong companion.

Remember, dear listeners, there is no category, there is no quarter. No one is immune. And at every stage in life, as you would expect, the subject is aware only of past changes. Certainly he is not expecting anything else in the future, having just recently emerged from the throes of a book of changes.

In parochial grade school, in America, there are usually what the nuns and teachers call 'God's special children'. They go straight to heaven because they cannot do anything wrong. They are the mongoloids and retarded children. The adults have taken it upon themselves to say, because they cannot reach the mind or feelings of a particular person, he is not as enlightened or intelligent as... them, us, we, they, or one other of those collectively referred to pronouns that means everybody else except you. And the little normal children make fun of the less fortunate little children, and laugh at them, which makes it that much harder because sometimes they really are funny. Some people never learn and laugh until the day they die. And they die after eighty years never having known that they were laughing at themselves. They were the butt of their own cruel jokes. They? Me. You. No one is immune.

These are the changes.

And somewhere in a cage for men, in Levinworth, Kansas, there is a prisoner, an inmate who no one can figure out. He is huge physically, but he is as harmless as he is big. He will submit to any sexual assault. He will not fight back. He sleeps. He wakes. He walks. He eats. He shits. In the pail.

Must be a vegetable. Something wrong. Here is one who does not change.

"No!"

"No, ladies and gentlemen of the jury. . . yes you, the jury. I submit, your honor, after careful investigation and deliberation, that there is indeed something going on in this man's head. I submit that no one is immune, and this is living proof. Good God, that you would even think to define thought and action by virtue of what escapes the mouth, or by what others see in the movement of the body in these, the first three of many dimensions. In this man's head, ladies and gentlemen." Quite excited and fervent now, as the venerated attorney closes in on his point.

"I put it to you. He is a man, he has his own thoughts, his own world, his own separate private set of changes. That is it. Changes."

He throws his auburn mane back with a jerk of his head upward and screams at the top of his lungs, "Changes, changes, changes!"

The defendant sits there like a bump on a log.

"Well," says the judge, "I am human. I am a judge. I must judge, as every human does, a thousand times every day, in the same way humans have for thousands and thousands of years. This man is guilty of not changing. And he is sentenced, for the rest of his life, to change where we cannot see."

The cycle completes itself. The judge dies at the age of eighty, and the mogoloids laughed all the way to heaven.

—James V. O'Brien

Feeding Time

She lies in a high, wide bed
Her head turned to the wall
Her legs still as a legend
Her brown eyes open
Waiting until
The man of the "I Do" six years ago
Flops into the stiff starched blue sheets.

Laying back to back
An accidental touch of warm skins

Sparks a deep August flame
Till he turns
And mounts her
Like a grunting sow
Pushing at the age old feed trough
In

And

Out

He rolls over
Thinking of how nice the trees
Lined up like housing development rows
Look.

Again
Her head turns to face the wall
Her brown eyes close.

Fifteenth Birthday

Head bent down reading
Pages turn, turn
She sits, her legs folded Indian fashion
High on the back bedroom roof

A hot July sun squats in the afternoon
Burning her face and arms
And sucking the breath from trees
Leaving no shadow in the yard
To cool crew cut summer grass
No birds cloud the sky
Turn, turn

She looks up
And leans forward on the perch
To look down and watch
The beer-bellied neighbor
Strain and stretch
As he smears creamy thick car wax
Over the dirt brown Electra 225
His arms move in sweeping circles

His tongue makes smaller circles
Tears of sweat drip
From his barrel chest and pebble pocked face
Into the spreading wax

She turns her head
Her hand brushes brown feathery hair
From her glistening neck
Her tongue circles dry lips
More pages turn, turn

Turn, turn
The polished car politely sits
The sun lies stretched out in the west
The turning stops

Peering once more around
Her stiff legs unfold
She stands and stretches her arms far out
A deep sigh and she flies from her perch
Crossing the sky
The only bird of the day

Until gravity cracks her
Like a bullet snapping whip
On the concrete sidewalk
Below.

—Gabriele Moshage

The Lighthouse

Alone
he stands,
surrounded by
the raging sea,
assaulted by
the endless
night.

Like a warrior
with a mace,

he casts his beam
into the darkness,
swinging it
round and round
lest he be taken
unaware.

—Dave Richard

SEX SIMPLE

coming
in
deep
you can fly
coming
in
deep

LOVE

he brought me these roses - every friday he brought me one fresh red rose. we figured i got pregnant on a friday and it worked out good cause he got paid on friday. so every friday night he'd bring the rose. sometimes they'd be buds and sometimes he'd bring a fuller bloom - but mostly they would be beautiful buds. i never got to expecting the roses. i was always genuinely surprised & didn't really know why he was bringing me a rose every friday.

sometimes he would vomit right after giving me the rose. he would be sick and drink some codeine and then go vomit. but always he would give me the rose. sometimes he would write a little note to go with the rose. i liked the notes more than the roses. sometimes they would be little poems. sometime he would stagger & fall down after i read the poem. he would fall and i'd worry that he hurt himself - but he never

did.

oh, sometimes he would take me out to dinner even though we didn't have much money. we wouldn't go fancy but it was fun to go out with him cause i liked people to see what a handsome man i was with. sometimes he would go driving to a liquor store after we went out to eat & had laughed. he would take me home & i'd feed the dogs while he said he was going to get beer. he would wreck the car then. he wrecked 3 cars all the same way - - -

sometime he would rub my back & i'd get turned on, he couldn't make it cause he had too much to drink or he had taken codein to kill the pain. i never knew what pain.

the baby died—too many roses, the dr. said.

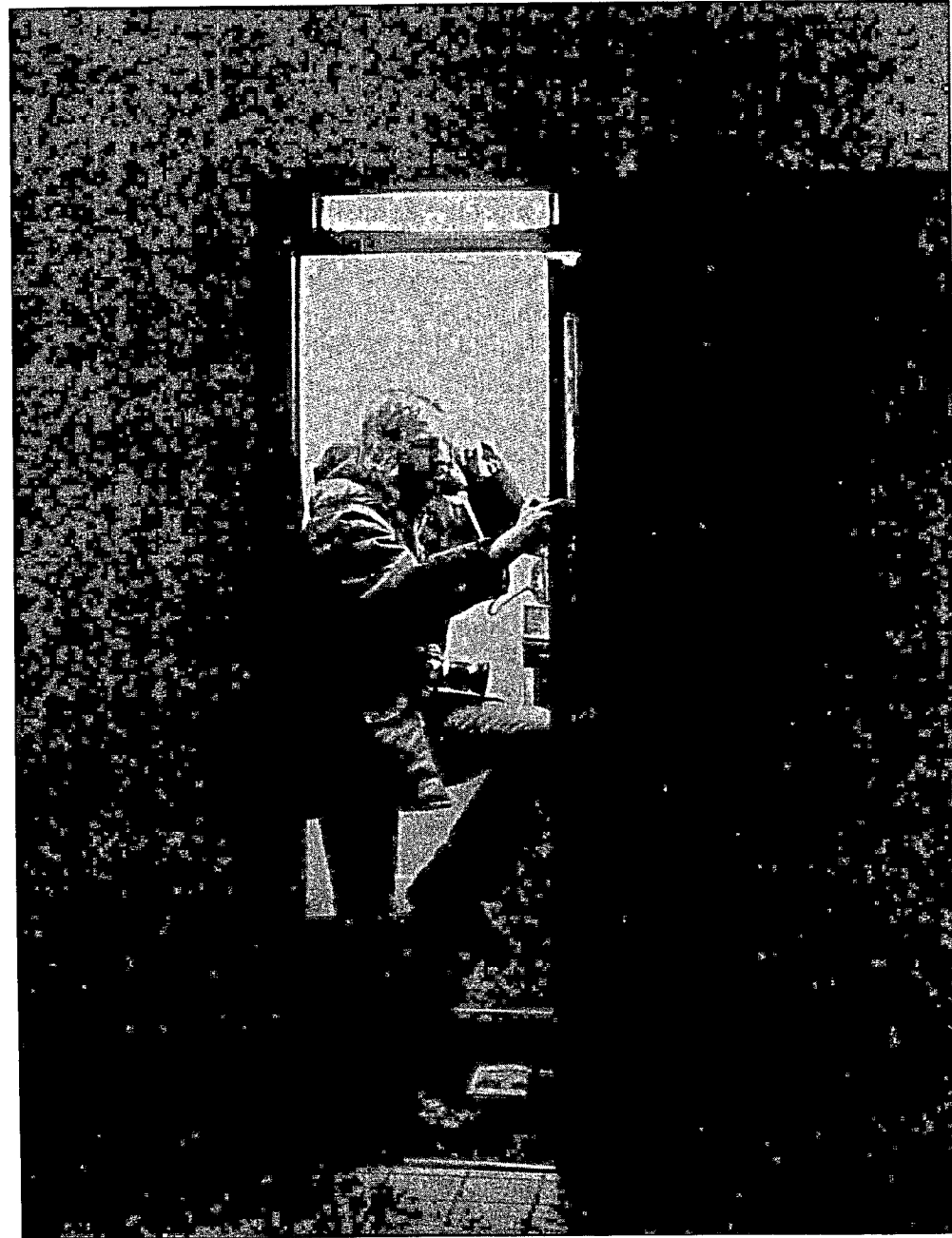
you ate too many roses.

—R. Wantling

NATALIE 'N ME

The long ago lure of dim, scented lofts flooded back to me the moment I stepped inside the leaning old barn. I had to wait for the late afternoon sun to leave my eyes before I could make out the loft ladder in the shadow of a far corner. Being essentially a city girl, I picked my way rather gingerly through the packed straw and manure trampled into the floor of the now deserted stable, but the faint animal smell and sweetness of dried grasses blended into a fragrant childhood memory. My grandfather straddling the loft opening, tossing hay down to his prized Belgian mares; their snorting drifting up to me as I would swing out on a knotted rope, out across the mounds and bales to make the daring jump; buried to my neck in the prickly hay.

I hadn't been on the farm since my grandfather's death five years ago, but the worn ladder rungs were familiar under my hands and feet



— Steve Feutz

as I climbed the dizzying height to the loft, a sketchpad tucked under my belt. I realized with surprise that I was enjoying myself immensely, reliving the small pleasures of childhood, the unexpected delight of a scent, a sound.

Later that summer and many times after that, I was to remember this moment with tearing regret, knowing that my joy in this place, those memories, would never again come to me free of the shame and anguish of that summer's self-discovery.

The loft was exactly as I remembered it with its high peaked rafters and cathedral stillness. Disorderly heaps of old hay glinted brown and gold in the shafts of sunlight through broken boards. I propped the sketch-pad up on a bale of straw and settled down to work in the half-light.

Then, without warning, one of the shadows separated from the darkness and stumbled toward me, monstrous, hump-backed and bristling with straw. I sat rigid with fear, dark childhood fantasies reeling through my numbed brain. Phantoms and ghouls and things that go bump in the night. Suddenly the advancing creature began to look vaguely human and I plunged for the loft opening.

"Hey, wait, lady," the thing croaked.

The hell I will, I thought, just as a tangle of baling twine sent me sprawling. I must have hit my head on something because my next awareness was of a hovering blood-smeared face surrounded by a shock of wheat-colored hair. The concern in the pale blue eyes staring at me helped slow down the pace of my racing pulse.

"Who're you? Whad'ya want?" I mumbled, edging away. "Cool it, lady, I ain't gonna rape ya." The voice cracked a little and wavered in pitch, although the owner tried hard to maintain a constant bass. I was focusing now and sat up for a better look at the brave man-child standing before me. He was about thirteen, quite short and stocky with a square, blunt-featured face. Through the tatters of his blood-stained shirt, ugly bruises were visible on his shoulders and chest.

"What happened to you?" I asked.

"None of yer business," he snapped, brushing straw from his shoulder-length hair. He shifted under his backpack as if the straps hurt him.

I gathered my scattered supplies and injured dignity as best I could. It never entered my mind to be afraid of him. How could you be afraid of a very small, thirteen year old boy? "Okay," I said, "But don't ever scare anybody like that again. You really ought to clean that face, you know. It's a mess." I waited. He methodically kicked a bale of hay without answering.

"Want to wash up at the house?" Surprised, he glanced at me sideways, and nodded.

As he followed me across the barnlot to the house, I noticed a peculiar swagger to his walk, but whether it was from bravado or exhaustion I couldn't tell.

"You live on this farm all by yourself?" he asked, eyeing the surrounding forest as if it hid something ominous. Or perhaps might hide him.

"Just for the summer," I said. "It's my grandfather's old place. My father leases the land to the farmer up the road."

"You *like* bein' alone?" he persisted.

I smiled. "I need lots of free time to work on my paintings. I'm in art at the university and each graduate student has to put on a one-man show of his best work sometime in the fall. Mine's scheduled for September. So I don't mind being alone. For a while at least." But I thought of Josh at his summer job in France, our growing commitment to each other over the past two years, and hated passionately "les jeune fille francais" with their enviable and internationally scandalous reputation.

"This place ain't like most of Illinois," he said. "So flat. Here you got woods all around. A house in the woods."

I glanced at him quickly. He caught my eye and as if ashamed at having revealed some desire within himself, he scooped up a rock and hurled it at a meadowlark perched on the rusting water-trough. He missed and was quiet the rest of the way to the house.

There I sent him to the bathroom with clean towels and iodine. When he reappeared in the kitchen door, the bloody grime had been replaced by decorative splashes of iodine over one puffy eye and on a scraped jaw. His eyes brightened at the sight of two steaming bowls of chili on the table. We ate in almost complete silence but I saw he was watching me cautiously like a trapped wild thing. I asked no questions

and he didn't volunteer any information until much later that evening.

When the dinner things were washed up, we went to sit on the porch steps. It was a constant marvel to me how lovely and serene nights in the country were. I had never really listened to the throaty music of tree frogs before this summer. An adventurous firefly braved the chill spring air and landed on my arm, flickering on and off. By moonlight, I could make out the boy's silhouette against the porch pillar. We were quiet for a while, listening, watching. I could almost feel the tautness draining from him.

Then, "Don't ya wanta know why I was in your barn?" he asked.

"Only if you want to tell me."

"I wasn't hurtin' nothin' so if you call the cops. . . ."

There's no reason for me to call the cops." I couldn't see his expression, but knew he was watching me.

"Lady, why're you being so nice to me?"

I couldn't answer for a moment. "I'm not, especially, but it's nice to have some company. By the way, my name's Ceely. What's yours?"

"They call me 'Duke'. That's on account of I'm a pretty tough fighter."

"You do a lot of fighting?" I asked.

"Got to. Lots a times the other kids think it's real funny to call me 'Squirt' or 'Pee-Wee.' I don't take any a that crap."

"You must have tangled with a real brute this last time."

His hand moved up to gingerly finger his battered face. "Aw, hell, guy I thumbed a ride from give me this. Starts gettin' funny with me, y'know, so I calls him a goddam fairy and he slugs me 'n shoves me out shile the car's still movin'." I gasped in anger and horror, not only at the incident but at the offhand way Duke told of it. "It don't matter. Ya gotta figure on meetin' a few a them jerks when you're thumbin'."

I shook my head and sat waiting. From the woods back of us, the baying of a coonhound floated through the clear night air.

"I run away from the Home," he said suddenly. "They got people out lookin' for me and I'll get put in solitaire if they catch me this time."

"Why did you run away?"

"Couldn't take that place no more. Kids always razzin' me and

the cottage parents all hate me on account a me fightin' all the time. It's a real cell. Besides, I just got a letter from Natalie—she's my sister—wantin' me to come back 'n live with her."

"You're lucky you have some family to take you in," I said. "But wouldn't it be easier for Natalie to get legal custody instead of you running?"

He shrugged. "Aw, Christ, I couldn't set around and wait for them mothers to get somethin' *done*. The social worker'd jaw around for a couple months and then it'd be some assed over judge's turn to screw around with it until. . . ." He made a gesture of disgust. I had to laugh at the boy's grasp of bureaucratic procedures. On second thought, it wasn't funny at all; he had obviously been through such red tape before. I asked if Natalie was expecting him.

"She says the door's always open. Natalie 'n me, we've always been tight, y'know?" I nodded to show I understood. "Jesus, it'll be nice to get back there. My own room, anything I want to eat, no bitchin' and hasslin' going on."

In the dark, his voice lost its raucous adolescent quality and to my ears he was a small boy again.

"Sounds nice," I said encouragingly. "Where does Natalie live?"

"Can't tell nobody that," he said, very firm. "One thing I learned is you go shootin' off your mouth, you only got yourself to blame when the law gets ya. It's one hellava place, though—big old house in the country with lots a rooms and high ceilings. They got a garden out back with lots a fancy flowers that Natalie likes—I don't get off on it much, though." He began pulling up wood splinters from the old porch planks and breaking them into equal lengths. "Naw, my favorite thing's the horses. Natalie 'n me, we used to ride damn near ever morning across the fields 'n back in the timber." He heard the longing in his own voice, just as I did, and coughed loudly to cover up.

I said quickly, "I used to ride some, too, when I was a kid. My dad bought me a saddlebred and some tack. I never was much good, though."

Duke was almost reverent. "God, you ought'ta see Natalie! She can ride 'n train any damn thing on four legs. At horse shows when she comes in the ring all dressed in black up on that shiny black stallion a hers, struttin' along. . . well, them other riders knew they

ain't got a prayer. She's got cupboards full a trophies and silver plates."

I was duly impressed by such an accomplished sister and said so. He told me a little more about his sister and her "rich, faggy ol' man"—Duke and the husband obviously didn't get along at all. I got the distinct impression that he was the reason why Duke lived at the Stevenson Home for Boys and began to develop a strong dislike of the man myself.

As the moon rose higher in the sky, the night became brighter and more lovely. The trees surrounding us reached up into the sky and pulled down tiny pinpricks of light to nestle among their leaves. The distant hound was silent now and even the tree frogs' call had simmered to a murmur. Beside me, Duke began to play softly on an unseen harmonica, its mournful wailing echoing the sound of wind among the leaves. I hugged my knees up closer to my chest and shivered. The sound of the music was so painful, so haunting, that I almost wished he would stop. This strange boy was stirring feelings in me that I didn't know existed. I wanted to reach out, touch his downy cheek, smooth that tousled head, comfort him. Instead, I huddled on my side of the steps as he played on and on until very late.

Finally, breaking the spell, he stood and stretched. "Mind if I sack out in the loft tonight? I'll be on my way at sunup."

Pulling myself from my cramped position, I shook my head. "Go right ahead. You have a blanket?"

"Yeah." He hesitated, teetering on the top step. "Thanks for dinner. . . 'n everything."

I smiled. "Thank *you* for the company and the music. Good luck."

He ducked his head in embarrassment and didn't answer. I watched his small, forlorn looking figure trudge back across the moonlit yard and disappear into the shadows of the barn.

He was gone the next morning when I went out to call him in for breakfast. In spite of laughing at myself, I felt absurdly lonely for the next few days and mooned about wishing that it was September and Josh home again. Aimless wandering through the woods everyday only magnified my sense of desolation. Even the squirrel dashing for over ahead of me—even she coupled, gave birth and suckled. I didn't know why that not-very-earth-shattering revelation suddenly seemed

so important.

Finally, in despair over my inability to concentrate, a confrontation became necessary. I sat my reluctant self down on the worn sofa one night and we had it out.

She: Don't get nasty, now. I told you before Josh left that woman cannot live by art alone.

Me: 'I told you so, I told you so.' The stock female defense. Your lack of originality makes me ill.

She: There you go getting abusive again. As usual, afraid to admit your natural womanly needs and desires. Finding art is no substitute, aren't you?

Me: I hadn't realized there were three of us in here—you, me and Phyllis Schlafly.

She: Very funny. But if you're such a dedicated artist, why can't you work with your man gone? Hmmm? Very revealing, isn't it?

I was not about to give *her* the satisfaction of another 'I told you so' and threw myself into my work with admirable zeal. The sketchpad filled with preparatory drawings and before another month had passed two canvasses stood drying against the wall.

Late in July I began work on an oil which excited me more than any painting I had ever done. It was a fantasy portrait of a blunt-featured, denim-clad young boy, half in sunshine, half in deep shade. He was seated on a fallen tree and played a Pan-like pipe. I worked hard on it and knew that it was easily my best effort of the summer.

One morning in the forest clearing I was absorbed in putting the finishing touches on the painting when the pipe began to play and I wasn't even surprised. The boy was born out of a union between my memory and my desire. Why shouldn't he play to me? But Greek pipes do not sound like harmonicas and boys who play *them* are very much alive. I looked around. It didn't take long to find him—the man-child-myth of my painting—grinning from under a low hanging bough, harmonica at his lips.

"Damn you, Duke! That's the second time." Initial anger swung over to amusement. "You have real flair for entrances, did anyone ever tell you?"

He sauntered over to me, cocky, kicking aside leaves and sticks as

he came. "Aw, you wasn't scared." Squinting his eyes, he stood back for a critical look at the painting. "Guess ya finished my pitcher, huh? Don't look too much like me, though, but you're pretty good—almost as good as Natalie."

"Thanks," I said. "How long have you been watching and where did you come from?"

"I been ridin' my bike out from town about ever day. They don't want me hangin' around the Home—say I ain't good for nothing but fightin'. I guess they're right, too."

I tried to hide my irritation at being spied upon. "Well, you didn't have to hide in the bushes. I'd be glad to have somebody to talk to except for one thing—I can't stand to have anybody look over my shoulder while I paint."

"That's what my sister says, too."

I dipped my brush in the yellow ochre and then stopped, struck by a thought. "Hey, I thought you were going to live with her. What happened?" Then, looking at his face, I mentally kicked myself for the tactlessness of the question. Whatever the momentary emotion was that flooded into his eyes, it vanished just as quickly as it came.

"Aw," he said, "Her faggy ol' man wouldn't let me come back. Says I'm a pain in the rear. I think the bastard's just jealous of Natalie 'n me being such good buddies. He even called the cops to come take me back to the Home."

"Your brother-in-law's a great guy," I said wryly.

He lay near me, sprawled in the leaves, until the painting was finished in early afternoon. We talked: I told him about the comfortable middle-class neighborhood I grew up in, about my two brothers studying medicine and accounting, and a little about Josh; he, in turn, told me about the car accident which killed both of his parents and left he and Natalie, then four and twelve, at the mercy of the courts. The sister had been placed in foster homes until her graduation from high school, while the small Duke was shifted from one institution to another. He didn't seem to want to talk about his stay in these "homes", so I, having learned my lesson, did not ask. I was also informed that his real name was Richard Fitzgerald Kincaid. I said that "Duke" suited him better.

After packing up my paintbox, I asked him to come to the house

for dinner before starting back for town. His "thanks" was gruff but his face lit up with pleasure. The boy's obvious loneliness shamed me. Here I was feeling sorry for myself during one summer's self-imposed isolation while this boy's whole life seemed empty of affection and attention.

Almost every day from then on he peddled his bicycle the five miles out from town to carry my easel and paintbox around and to watch me work. He said he was training to be fastest on the track team next year. One day I noticed that my sketch-pad and charcoal pencil were missing from the supplies. Duke muttered something about work to do and disappeared until that evening. But with the unerring instinct of a growing boy, he kicked the back screen-door open just as the scent of fried potatoes and ham filled the kitchen. There were smudges of charcoal on his face and his jeans were coated with sticky little burrs. "Here," he said, shoving a roll of paper at me. "You'll probably get a helluva good laugh, anyway." I spread the drawing out on the kitchen table and stood studying it in silence, while Duke clattered pan lids at the stove in a noisy show of nonchalance. I stood with my head bent longer than was necessary because I didn't know what to say or how to say it. Even allowing for his lack of experience, the drawing was amazingly childlike in perception and technique, with none of a child's spontaneity. The trees consisted of sticks with great ballooning tops, placed haphazardly along a ruler-straight road leading to a tiny house, evidently meant to be far away. Very little attempt had been made at perspective. I had seen better fourth grade work and the implication disturbed me.

"It's nice," I lied, without meeting his eyes. "You must have spent a long time on it."

He came to sit beside me. "I tore up all the other ones I done. I didn't think you'd like 'em."

"It's not *me* you should be trying to please," I said. "It's you that counts. Do *you* like it?"

His nose wrinkled. "Naw, nothin' like yours or Natalie's. I'd sure as hell like to learn to paint a pitcher, though." His voice was so wistful that my hand reached out to cradle the back of his head before I could stop myself. He sat very still for a moment and then, as if the touch was unendurable, jumped up to noisily gulp down a glass of



Is this a Button Hole?

water. We were both quiet over dinner that night and I told him that I needed to be alone afterwards to work. Actually I wanted to lean against the porch pillar under the stars and dream of Josh and how my new paintings would be received. Duke had no place in these dreams. After he left, though, I was unaccountably irritable and too restless to either work or dream, so I wrote a letter to Josh and went to sleep early.

Once Duke rode with me out to the shopping center where he swaggered along beside me as I purchased a few needed items and seemed pleased to be seen with me. When I dropped him off at the Home, he thrust something into my hand and sat waiting, grinning in embarrassment. It was a lovely filigree necklace inset with a small turquoise, my favorite stone. I put it on as he watched. "Yo're a real pretty chick," he said. "Like Natalie. Me'n her, we sure don't look alike, but we are." Tears blurred my eyes and he was gone before I could speak. I never told him that I had seen that necklace disappear off the counter at Carson's into his pocket. I quietly returned it the next day with a brief explanation.

By mid-August, Duke had made himself very much at home in the old farmhouse. He arrived before breakfast every morning, propping his bike alongside the porch, and stayed until amost dark. We talked about art, love, John Wayne, the nature of good and evil, Led Zeppelin, and spaghetti. I taught him how to make burritos out of tortillas, refried beans and chili sauce: "Them sonafabitchin' Mexies really knew how to cook," he marvelled. My work suffered; Duke *did* look over my shoulder and he *had* to be fed at least three to four times a day. I was so busy playing social worker and surrogate sister that September was almost upon us before I realized it. September and a return to normalcy, to coin a phrase. September and Josh and workshops and my exhibition.

I began to read Duke parts of Josh's letters. He was mildly interested in Josh and wanted to know if he liked kids. I said I really didn't know, we hadn't gotten that far yet, which he didn't think was very funny. He asked about my town address and was relieved to find the apartment was only four blocks from his school.

I began to panic a little. "Duke, I'm sure you won't want to hang around with Josh and me once you get back in school with all your friends."

A small anxious frown wrinkled his brow. "What kinda friend would I be if I didn't? Besides, I ain't got any other friends—just you. I could talk to Josh whenever you're busy," he offered generously.

Immediately, I had a mental vision of Duke wedged in between Josh and me on my grandmother's loveseat, all three of us staring fixedly at a flickering candle while Arlo Guthrie crooned in the background. I felt this, but I also felt the strong pull of the other undeniable emotions this tousle-headed boy aroused in me. I think Duke sensed my withdrawal but it only made him cling that much tighter. No knowing how to handle the situation without causing anyone pain, I made up my mind to talk to someone at the Home about the problem.

The week before I left the country house, I made an appointment with Duke's social worker. He was a small, bird-like man with sharp features and a very soft voice. I wondered how he ever commanded the boys' attention, let alone respect. He led me to the rather drab staff lounge where we both hunched uncomfortably in easy chairs, drinking coffee with a metallic taste, while I told him the story of my friendship with Duke. I felt awkward trying to explain the intangibles of our tangled relationship to this stranger, but he nodded in all the right places, so I stumbled on.

When I stopped, he looked at me directly and his voice was not as soft as I had thought. "So you want to break it off before you get any more involved, is that it?"

I winced at the bluntness of the question. "I want to go on being his friend but not in the way he. . .oh, I don't know. It's more than I bargained for at first."

The social worker was quiet for a moment. "I won't pull any punches. It will be hard on him. I don't know of any other emotional commitments that the boy has ever made. Being rejected by his own father certainly doesn't encourage him to open up to anyone easily."

I was bewildered. "His father? Isn't he dead?"

"Didn't he tell you? His father is an alcoholic and lives in Chicago. Nobody knows where the mother is." Seeing my astonishment, he smiled. "You've evidently been given a different version of his past."

I said desperately, "What about his sister Natalie? He admires

her so much that I'm sure. . ." I stopped. The bird-like head was wagging.

"There is no Natalie. He doesn't have a sister."

I don't remember much of what was said after that. I wanted to be alone to sort out my warring emotions and decide what I should do. Although the social worker had given me more information that I cared to know, I thanked him for talking to me and left as quickly as I could.

I pushed the swinging door open just as Duke pulled it from the opposite direction and we almost collided. I could see that he was surprised to catch me coming out of the administration building and knew that the look on my face told him what I had learned. He stepped back and we stood staring at each other wordlessly.

"So now you know," he said. I nodded. He refused to meet my eyes after that and kicked viciously at the grass, sending chunks of turf flying. I was as miserable as he was but determined to settle this once and for all.

"I guess you don't want me around any more," he said.

"Sure I do. *Sometimes*. . ." The look on his face made me stop. "I'm sorry, Duke, but I have a life. . .After all," I said as gently as possible, "I'm not really your sister."

To this day, I can clearly remember the string of obscenities he flung at me before disappearing around the corner of the building. Hurt and shaken, I managed to get through two hours filled with errands and appointments and headed back to the quiet refuge of the farmhouse.

As I pulled in the gravel driveway, I knew something was wrong. The front door stood wide open and the shattered pane of glass was only a hint of the wreckage I found inside. Curtains had been ripped and pulled down, windows broken, and furniture overturned. In the kitchen the dishes that we had shared so many meals on were lying in slivers all over the floor. I stood in stunned silence, watching a stream of molasses flow slowly down the side of the stove, forming a rich dark pool below.

But it was not until I went into the spare bedroom, my studio that the terrible racking sobs gripped me. The painting I was most proud of, the portrait of the shadowed young boy in the woods, no

longer stood on the easel facing the door where I could see it
everytime I passed by; it had been slashed into ribbons and hurled into
a corner where tatters of canvas still clung to the crooked stretcher.

I spent the last week in that house cleaning up the mess and
repairing what damage I could. My father assumed that vandals had
broken in and failed to understand why I insisted on paying for
anything I could not fix. I never told anyone the truth about the inci-
dent and when Josh and I were married we moved away from the un-
iversity town, so I did not have to drive by the Home anymore.

—Carol Raney

Diabetic Love Poem

He worked, panted and pulled in her,
Stretching like taffy in a gooey vat.
So sweet,
So sweet.
Even to think of this
is to require insulin.

—James LaRue

SANSET

O smooth, slow Sandset,
beachtown surfing off dunes to sea,
when I first felt you at three,
I would float in shallows—
a bobbing white ballfish—
toward a sliding queen porpoise.
How I wanted to ride her
Lone Ranger above
all those sunsets in goldening waves.

But I've heard lately
you're dissolving to dulling junk.

The wharfshack on poles
where I'd eat hush puppies and seafood
while beneath pink fish would mate quiet and tranquil. . .
Now it's no more than an over-sized orange crate
sunk in the mud of freighter oil.
And the even sand has boxed itself in billboards,
stiff neon and billions of cylinder engines
roaring away like crashing biplanes.

In fact, the only thing undissolved
is a museum of mired conquistador's bones.
But soon tourist kids will use
even those skulls and bones
for jungle jims and stick in those ribs
pink gum.

DOLLHOUSE

There's a tan grand mansion
on a terraced cakewalk hill
where Abe Lincoln used to stovepipe swing.
(It was built by dasherflash
General Hornum Teasdale
who, in a July, 1865 swirl,
cavalcaded his brass tacks yankees into Tennessee.
A nervous diamond-clinker squirt-
eagle forehead
above a horseharness mustache
and gold glory balls for eyes.
He farted beautiful plumes
when Union banners every where
like star-spangled washline forests
told him the war was over three months before
[In his private burial plot
is his wife next to his horse,
himself somewhere else]
he always had it backass).

Now seventy-five Quiet Theresa there lives
alone but for her shotgun guard and maids.
Somehow a rich spinster,

she did up the place like a giant doll's house.
Life-size hobby horses that dwarf her
(So miniature in her
tooth picks knees
Saran blonde hair
and red wax lips)
jig-saw puzzles ceiling size,
and green game tables of floors.
Even the heavy air is blue ice candy.

She whiles all daily
in her electro wheel chair
from picture window to window
waiting for a cloud beard
of Santa of a God
to down-sky come
to want her play house
and to stash her forever
in his big black bag
(with dozens of cute horn reindeers
who know the direction to
Plush Red & White Candy Cane Stripe Death.)

LUCILLE BIZARRE

Around town they'd joke she was named
Lucille Bizarre
because that was what she was.

Way she'd look like a carriage coming round the bend,
surrounded by bundles harness-tied to her arms
and, under roof of bangled brim,
horse-sized eyes

still looking hypnotized
from asylum shrinks in the thirties
after her one-year husband left.
She was really in pieces,
as if he'd pulled out her spine like a bookmark
with his silverscreen teeth
and folded it among pressed flowers

in unpublished novellas
always in her packages.

The psychologists didn't know how to handle her;
this woman'd stick herself in corners,
a flamboyant stiff victrola
playing out the splitting sound
of a needle knifing through endless circles
of hysterical veins and nerves.
After three years they finally injected
a cure or kill serum slowing down the speed of her tension,
saving her, after a fashion.

She passed away the next forty years' time
instructing elocution in church basements
to well-bred teens.
She'd record into them
every poetic rhythm in Illinoisan literature.
Vachel Lindsay poems were the mechanics of their souls.

Her students were always especially savory, as she'd say,
in performances of her annual patriotic pageants.
Their audiences dissolved before her eyes through the years from three hundred to
one.

Still, she maintained bright forecast,
in her mid-seventies keeping in shape
running a mile a day at the high school track,
lifting barbells at the Y,
and peddling in circles her ancient bicycle,
its enormous tire a ridiculous rubber grinder
of the grooves it made in the road.
And she'd wear hot pants and water color flowers
on her knees fading in breezes as she pushed
home her varicose legs.

Still, when cruising by a couple in the park,
their forming star would remind her
of the man still owing her a postcard.
Her mind'd smoke upward,
an ascending crying cloud
raining most horrible blackwater as it fell
on her agonized trunk.
She'd skitter 'cross the road toward the river,

careen at the brink, then drive back
for a picture window view of the water fall.
"How delightful", she'd reflect,
listening to its violent pattern against her glass
like to a phonograph.

—Daniel Ursini

E.R.A

I had a dream;
they, blood red,
smiled as they entered my prison cell
and laughed
when I protested against tearing hands
attacking my nightgown, tossing it aside.
Their eyes gleamed
like knife-blades
in the pale light of my candle
and they severed my breasts,
still encased in my bra,
and hung them
by the straps
from the ceiling fixture.
My shrill, high-pitched soundwaves
rushed out,
tickling them,
making them laugh
as I bled twin pools
that engulfed me.
Now, I am just like them.

—Colleen Cargill

Syndrome

The stage is bare.
The woman enters. She sits down. The lights begin to dim. Slowly the

entire stage is dark except for one spot that stays on the woman. She lifts up her hand; examines every detail in it and places it by her side. She speaks.

Woman: It really didn't take long. The smell of wisteria and vanilla. Wisteria and vanilla. I saw sunlight dance gentle waltzes with the wind. The air was cool. . . .oh, so cool. The wind was faint, distant. Much like the harmonica that lulled me to sleep when I was just a child. But the lights. Globes of flames seared my eyes till I was blind. The scents of perfumes and medicines flooded my nostrils till there was no longer a trace of wisteria and vanilla. And now there is only this. My mind can think of nothing else. Wait! I can hear it now. The harmonica. (THE FAINT SOUND OF A HARMONICA IS HEARD IN THE DISTANCE) Oh, time so soon. Not yet-not yet. The sky is still light. And I haven't seen the first star yet. Oh, let me stay just a few minutes longer. (The harmonica stops.) Softly. . . .softly take me. Caress me with the night breezes. Drown me with dew drops and let me touch the ocean depths and fish for pearls and starfish. The sand covers my toes and seaweed clutches at my heels. Oh. . . .gently gently. (Pause) The air here is cold. There is no breeze. No trace of the wind. Stale breath. Remnants of deceased coffee grounds. I long for wisteria and vanilla. To play with crawfish trapped in a dixie cup. To dry moss just recently picked from the cathedral walls. The snakes have vanished. The air has driven them to the swamps where they dive into walls of mud and die. Their skins can be eaten or so I've been told. The cathedral was once full of them. Long before I was born. God and the snakes shared holy communion and danced on the altar. The chalice over flowed and stained the whiteness of Gods alabaster soul. But the snakes are gone now. The mud has devoured their futures. Cementing ceilings cling to their dried skins ripping them from their slimy veins and corpuscles. Still the snakes accept the mud and become stillness. . . .the needle stained my dressing gown. . . . tore into my shell and brought me silence and the smell of stale breath. My insides were taught obedience to nature but left me wanting desires. The music I

heard was soft. Tiptoed over my ears leaving me numb. I feel coldness now. I can reach out and touch it. Stroke it-play with it. And what of the past you wonder. Images long ago discarded crop up to distract me now. I see faces of my family frowning. I can hear them talking about me—wondering—questioning—discussion. (pause) Why? Questions abound over printed pages but answers are found in the tears long ago shed over roses and thorns. The mounds of dirt tell so much in their silence. What secrets they know; what answers they withhold. But dirt can turn to mud when watered by tears. I know. My dirt has long since been washed into the sea. I lay exposed. The cold, night winds chap my yellowing skin and toss burnt, dried leaves over my bones. The walls of dirt can fortress me no longer. I am a victim of time. I can still taste the incense; the priest's litany cries from his decaying lips. I am alone and cold. Dirt floods my mouth. I can taste it—rough, black grains. They leave me now. Alone I lie here feeling satin layers fondle my skin. Wisteria and vanilla. The winds come and chase the roses off my mound. They dart across the marbled valleys, skimming from angled hands, reaching for a sanctuary, only to die broken under the black heels of rubber. The holy cards scream out prayers for me along with paintings of saints. Mother cries and curses God, spitting out phrases of agony. But I am still. Calm. Quiet. Rosary beads crack in my grandmothers arthritic fingers. And my sisters distort the wishbone—a remnant from the dinner. . .wishing for dreams. . .fearing. . .what? And I watch them contort and convulse, feeling nothing for them. Satisfied to caress my satin folds. Smelling the perfume used to hide the traces of fermoldhyde. I am so content. . . .sterile walls warn me of something. White walks up to me and touches my sweaty brow. Beads of sweat dry and vanish. Tubes and plastic devices enter me—force me open—stretch my skin till it breaks and bleeds. The cream of white sours into yellows and then milks into a tapestry of rainbows reaching out for me; pinching me; groping for me;



they cover me; absorb me; claim me. Slower, slower,
nothing. And the sunlight dances gentle waltzes with the
wind. I am so content to watch. Oh, wisteria and vanilla.

—James P. Thorp

you both laughed
at the lace of beer-foam on your lip;
he kissed it off and
brought you home,
too drunk on your ass
to remember what happened.
too bad, kid—look at what
you missed
 cloud-9 kisses
and happy little hi-power buzz-plane
nose-diving into you, crash/
sputtering wide jet-streams of white fog,
thick silvery smoke-screen.

morning, you woke up, tongue
like a cotton tennis sock,
gut a cold glass jar
of brand-x marshmallow fluff
to be scraped clean in a few weeks
with a silver spoon.

The Mime

Sapphire eyes spark at us
from a face painted white as cloud.
With easy precision,
he creates a universe:
climbs, pulling ladders from empty air,
finds an invisible friend in his own embrace.
We oooh and ahhh as he plays the artist,

sculpting air.
How God must have felt,
pulling worlds from the silent void,
modeling clay drawn out of his own emptiness,
for an applauding host—

MIRANDA

Miranda, running through the white chickens,
laughing as they scold her like old women
startled without their teeth in of a morning—
laughing, as they scatter like scraps of newspaper
pushed aside by a mischievous wind—
Miranda, squealing, Ruthie, look,
look, as the chickens protest,
their combs pushing up stiffly out of their white feathered faces
like handfuls of stubby red fingers,
their wattles dangling like pulpy, lolling tongues—

You could hardly know (nor could the chickens care)
that last night they lay as usual in the upstairs corner bedroom,
and Miranda turned, finally,
leaving her back to the lulled against Ruthie's hushed breathing
as she faced the billion little dark squares of the window-screen
 (let her hand question its body then, finally—
 let it trace the swell of hard-nippled breasts,
 coast like a sled over a snowy, undulating field
 to stop at the gradual mound
 where the tentative new fur
 lay coarse and thick as a mare's winter coat,
 and from there withdrew her tightened fist
 before it could touch the new, secret mouth
 drooling its dark red surprise
 onto the clumsy white wad pinned inside her underpants).

Beyond the billion little squares of the screen,
her eyes followed as the pockmarked knob of moon,
cold and white as bone, crawled up the darkened sky.

—Rebecca E

KEROUAC, JACK KEROUAC. . . .
angel of benzedrine, of pot, of travel,
high-zen monk of BOP,
who burned the keys of mad typewriters,
who torched the minds of a generation,

KEROUAC, JACK KEROUAC. . . .
spontaneous priest of throbbing job,
passionate prince of neon life,
who dug the cosmic flow of things,
who yoga'd the consciousness to visions of ecstasy,

KEROUAC, JACK KEROUAC. . . .
HISTORY records the steam of your songs,
classical professors read you in closets,
winos weep at your worn-shoe legend,
critics stand naked in your verbal explosions,

KEROUAC, JACK KEROUAC. . .
YOU BLEW THE SAXOPHONE OF YOUR INSANITY,
whose notes caressed the barbwire of heaven,
YOU WAILED THE BLUES OF COMMERCIAL MADNESS,
whose strains made purgatory more enticing,

KEROUAC, JACK KEROUAC. . . .
broken wine bottles lie strewn on your grave,
barren winds blow from Pawtucketville,
Moriarity still mourns your passing,
And I smoke a reefer and think of you
often. . . .

For Langston Hughes

one small black stone
left to sleep
in a dry creek bed
begins to roll
and gather itself
into the form
of thunder mountain.

—Terence M. Fitzgerald

on your back
again,
chilled,
bare knees
up and open,
but staring white-faced
at a strange ceiling,
white and pocked
and antiseptic.
the sheets
are different too:
white and unwrinkled
and just for you.

the man
fingers and sucks
carefully
for twelve tight minutes
until finally
you're off

the hook.

you wonder
how much
of your hundred and seventy-five dollars
the nurse gets
for cleaning up your blood
after the man leaves
the perfect square white room
and who
empties the trash.

—Andrea

as a matter of fact
the fact of the matter
is that matter in fact
is what is the matter with fact

-The Beatific Vision of the Universal Joke (tjduszynski)

Having reread *The Floating Opera* twenty-one times (or is it twenty-two), I have come to the realization that life—that mayonaise reflection of menthol filter cigarettes, hyperthetical urbanity, fone-bone brides, barroom psychology, and old asparagus—is. It wasn't an easy realization, mind you. But like the farming of the old asparagus, is. How the acceptance of the realization will be, if it indeed will be, is something which I long to suffer. Not that I enjoy suffering. (In a secret perverse way I suppose that I really long to suffer. My fondest dream is to be the protagonist in a Tolstoyevsky novel about psychotic dynamite caps. But enough of this, for now). I promise you, dear reader, as well as myself, that I will not devote any more ink to negativism or other optimistic inversions.

So-o-o-o...back to my realization about life. I confess that I really don't understand being, other than the fact that it is. Which leads me into a frame of mind coincidental with that of John Barth—being is. Not a blind acceptance of reality, or fatalistic encounter with day-to-day existence. No, what I savor is far more simple yet more far-reaching and thought-provoking than fatalistic nihilism or whatever it is barroom psychologists maintain.

My realization—life is—came to pass about six or seven weeks ago as I closed the covers of *The Floating Opera* for the twenty-first or twenty-second time. The realization overcame my virgin soul in spurts of seminal thought—prethoughts I call them—which blastulated into an embryonic realization that life is. The first of these pre-thoughts centered around an insane attraction to *The Floating Opera*. At the time I knew nothing about John Barth, and even less about life (but I'm learning). But the title of the Barth work in ques-

tion included the word *opera*. That did it! I was hook, line, and sinkered into hydrochondria, much in the same way I conned myself into enjoying *The Beggar's Opera*—that five-letter common demoninator which sends musical-literary Wagnerians like myself shinnying up the neo-Freudian tree of longing—O-P-E-R-A. For that matter, I'm certain to fall victim to *The Hand Opera*; unquestioningly to *The Asparagus Opera*.

Speaking of opera, let's disgress for a second or two (or four or more) so that I can clarify a few matters of my own past life in order to place that Barthian realization—life is, my own realization—in its proper perspective.

As a young boy growing up in the ripe asparagus fields of Chicago, I felt a certain creative urge. What it was (and is) I can't exactly pinpoint, except that creativity and truth—that elusive butterfly "why"—connived with my inbred middle-class systems of values (the hyperthetical fone-bone mayonaise menthol barroom asparagus of page one...better make the asparagus old—yes old asparagus). You see, even as a youngster I was perceptive, aware. You might call me a precocious observer of life and self.

A vital part of my inquiry into life centered about the mental suicide of my father—he's a businessman—the quint-essential middle-age, middle-class whiskey-drinker, who destroyed his own humanity for the sake of money. I can vividly recall the day he withered. Munching a maraschino cherry he calmly unloosened his necktie and declared, unemotionally, that he'd never plant another asparagus spear as long as he lived. And that was it. Lock, stock, and barrel. It was then and there that I decided to farm the old asparagus and seek the truth about life which he plowed under. I started keeping an inquiring journal (written in a crayola-ballpoint evolutionary style), perpetually conscious of the question "What is life?"

It wasn't until quite recently (the past six or seven weeks) that I started to relate the events of my past life into a cohesive meaningful statement—life is. Which confirms the old cliché that hindsight is always 20-20. A few events, in retrospect, stand out as being important—the proverbial signposts of one's life, they're called.

The first signpost was the creative urge I mentioned a short while ago. My inquiring journal contains this poem (in Darwinian

pencil-point) which I will eventually set to music:

alone at a grand piano
amidst the scathing shadows of the evening
contemplating being alone
ticking of a metronome andante

suddenly it happens or so it seems
musical inspiration symphonies
manuscript paper neatly stacked in reams
annotates trumpets flutes bassoons
tempo quickens
in a dream

promenade blossoms childhood scenes
overtit snowflakes evergreen trees
Freudian rainbows gloriously
in dreams

feverish allegretto

innocent virtuoso

manhood adolescent boy of three
ludwig von dentons tapered classically
growing up finger-printed ivory
to your query i respond
further than far
music is me

Thus I concluded, at a rather early age, I might add, that in addition to being an ace observer of life, I'm also a poet (and let's dispense with the quips pertaining to knowledge, please).

Which ties in rather nicely, I might further add, with the Gay Barth parallel. Both librettists (I feel the categorization is justified) hold middle-of-the-road middle-class views of life. Gay's hard-core acceptance of the real world is exemplified in the characters of his

opera—assorted scoundrels and knaves, the ragtag botulism of Augustan London. Macheath and Company are real. They do. They act. Perhaps they lack sophistication, but a certain charm and charisma exudes through the hungry story line.

Barth's opera is markedly different—setting, point of view, characterizations, and cetera. There is a distinct similarity between the two works. Both are parodies—Gay's of the Italian opera of the Classical tradition; Barth's of the self-searching existential novel. Both share a common realization—life is. But what is life?

This question brings me to the second signpost of my early childhood (when I was six or seven). To put it bluntly, I was a chronic bedwetter. My father could never understand why I continued to engage in my ammoniac nocturnal activities. In fact, I'm not quite so sure myself, either. Like all concerned fathers, he made me an offer I couldn't refuse; namely, he offered to buy me a plastic ship-building kit for every week I was in drydock. For a few weeks this adult psychology apparently worked. Mother was granted a temporary reprieve from lemon-tinted bedclothes. Father basked in the limelight of self-plaudits and Fitzgerald manhattans. And junior, never one to follow-through any experience to its completion, started building plastic boats which were never quite finished. This cycle of harmony screeched to a premature halt, however, on the morning after the Pepsi-Cola drinking contest. As I think back to that traumatic morning, I vividly recall a bewildered young man floating on a urine-soaked island of awareness. I remember staring at the asparagus cracks in the ceiling of my unkempt room, shivering, and feeling generally lousy. Mother will despair over the morning wash, I sobbed. Father will consume his unlaudatory manhattans. And I will be condemned to an endless cycle of unfinished boats. Why, I sobbed, why?

The non-toxic crayola journal entry for that day was a tearful mixture of ammonia stench and embarrassed asparagus tips. I was near despair—no, it was something deeper—a desperation beyond despair which I came to realize and remedy during my undergraduate college years.

My mind's eye first discovered the terrible malaise in which I was

immersed, toward the end of my junior year. By this time my whole life had been the same old story, hour after hour. By day I was studying literature, steeping my intellectual inclinations in the words of Faith, Hope, and Wine.* By night I was the up-and-coming blue-collar union working class hero, rubbing elbows with the botulistic riffraff of Chicago. Sometime during this period (the twenty-first or twenty-second year of my life, I'm not sure which) I made the acquaintance of a certain asparagus-bearded literature professor whose Brownian** movement of thought crystallized my perception of the malaise. I suddenly became aware of my true middle-ground position (which yielded, incidentally, a bumper crop of asparagus blossoms). On the one hand I was involved with the elitist intellectuals who condemned the struggling labor classes. On the other hand I gained a first-hand account of the piddling mental dwarfs who condemned the intellectuals on a purely economic basis. My right ear detected screams of "We're better than those mental midgets!" while my simultaneous left ear recorded anger-ridden messages to the tune of "Those smart-asses couldn't earn a hard, decent buck if their lives depended on it!"

The intensity and fervor of both factions enhanced my own feelings of despair. I was driven to thoughts of my lonely past—a recurring cycle of withering asparagus, ammonia nostrils, and unfinished boats. Those goddam unfinished boats! By this time my basement was literally cluttered with rotting, useless hulls of my ongoing past—a past which, God knows, I've tried to make some kind of sense out of. The asparagus crates were on the verge of overflowing with tired, trivial accounts and recollections of my past history—with no relief in sight!

No relief, that is, until I read John Barth. I decided to put my complete faith in the man who turned my mind unsidedown TWICE, and insideoutsidewaysonce. His Floating Opera became (in the past six or seven weeks) my rallying point of the realization of life—life is. I suddenly realized that my pre-Barthian days were filled with the same old crap—the same old stories, the same old jokes, songs, cliches,

these are the names of 3 lit professors under whom i have studied.

*pun on the name of a lit professor named Brown.

Hamlet-type characters who didn't know a shit about being—(being is, right?).

These are the two worlds which I had tried to reconcile for the past twenty-one or twenty-two years:



I found that this condition kept me in a state of constant hassle. I was simultaneously superior to a group and inferior to the same. But thanks to Mr. Barth I now enjoy a lateral view of life (lifeis):



I now enjoy equal rapport with both factions, and with no hassle from either one. You see, I have come to the conclusion that too many people spend too much time trying to reconcile the substance of the basic fact of life—life is. After reading Jaybee it dawned on me that here I am, allowing myself to be rationalized, hypothesized, hypnotized, cannibalized, tantalized, fermented, fragmented, tormented, copulated, fornicated, and masturbated to DEATH!

Is it worth it? I'm still not sure...but in the meantime I've adopted the Barthian view of reality—lifeis—in hope that it will lead me beyond the life-death cycle, to the tranquility of assembling my documents and reaping the old asparagus in anticipation of the new.

—Tim Duszyhski

I KNOW

I wear pink flowered
flannel pajamas
as my roommate
in kelly green jumper
and nylon hose
leaves for Sunday service.
She says

that I do not know Jesus
I have lost faith.
But I do know Him.
He lives alone
in a mournful cabin
by the grey ocean-
feeds nuts to the chipmunks
bread to the ebony crows.
As day breaks
he walks the beach
counting grains of sand,
for years he walks
until exhausted legs give way
He kneels
sweats hot blood
and asks that his children
not taste the cup prepared for them.
I know Jesus
I tell my roommate;
and I know his children
who wait
crouched behind a dawning sun
blood money dripping in pockets
who
smiling
wait to kiss his burning cheek
who
wait.

CRUCIFIXION

In second grade
the nun told us
how our sins crucified Jesus.
I always felt personally responsible,
imagining myself in Roman armor
pounding nails into His open hands
-inch by inch-
His trembling eyes
all the while forgiving me
who knew not what I did.
Once I started crying in class

and Sister Conception-
her black and white robe
hiding her womanhood from our young minds,
told me tears would do no good.
What's done is done
He's dead

Thirteen years later
I still dream about it:
the blood-stained nails
thorns in torn skin
and clear
bright water
streaming from the open wound
streaming down his hip and thigh
to lie in a puddle at my feet.

"Women are gold instruments
through which men blow their
emotions."

THE INSTRUMENT

He touched his lips to mine
blew in solid breath
that scraped its way
along chafed veins
forcing rasping notes
through sweat-clogged pores
and into the frigid room.
His eardrums broke into red clots of pain.
Holding hands to his head
he spit thick saliva at me
"Damn Bitch"

Alone-
tears sailed like clear boats
down my cheeks,
the moist streaked lines
became harp strings
playing warm, wild tones
that melted the sharp air

into pools of melody
luminous pools of melody.

—Phyllis Gardocki

Spring 1974

Eduardo—the winds have
combed the thirsting land the rain
has steamed and pressed the folds of hills
Come with me to desert spring
And see the desert trees,
Now in bloom and soon
to be gone

Just before dawn the cactus that pushed
at the world with many fingers and bled
a single ruby drop now wears a badge
as piercing as
 those thorns you love to touch lightly with
 your brown fingertips
as hot as
 the blackened shale of crumbling mesas
 beneath our soles

Many clouds form patterns
the hawk circles in their maze
this kaleidoscope of patterned colors
 desert dust in desert blood
 turquoise sky set in thick tarnished silver
 of cloud and mountain
kiss me leaving flat-salt taste of
sea shells warm sand in my fingernails and skin

Eduardo—let's run to the spring
to desert spring to race and love
in the cool dry morning
then gaze at the distant cool promise of
mountains and share in the desert flowering
before the dawn

You are like a veteran of the war, just returned

who would write home asking for more cherry kool-aid
while vacant eyes studied the
tracks in your tan muscled arm
more like a map of that village, showing—
 where the bombs were buried, even
 where three of your patrol lay wrapped in plastic
like sandwiches.

who later sat defoliated at Murphy's bar
measuring how much to say before the
 questioning faces of old friends
never getting beyond the great dope in 'Nam or
 the women.
who wore Levis, stiff, dark and strangely patched
from the inside.

I think of you as a veteran of the war.

—Sue

Editor: Gary Duehr

Literary judges: Charles Collinson, Gary Duehr, Rebecca Ellis, Phyllis Gardocki, and James LaRue

Art judges: Chris Cox, Terry Kruger, and Cheryl Treiber

Thanks to all those who submitted their work for consideration. There was a large amount and decisions were tough. Material was judged anonymously, with no judge voting on his own work.

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