

druid's cave

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All submissions in this issue were judged anonymously.

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Druid's Cave

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Karen M. Hendricks

Carol Raney

Survivor

From the cabin behind her, men's voices drifted down to the water like animals coming to drink. They would be talking about the drowning that morning and what would happen to the woman. The girl allowed the gray lake water to lick her bare toes. Her eyes followed a line of green scum that ran jaggedly along the beach, separating the wet sand from the dry. She saw gouges the dead man's feet had made in the wet sand before they'd stretched him out, face down, higher on the beach.

The woman had screamed at them to save him, save him until one of the men from the cabins had to slap her and shake her hard. She fell to her knees, water dripping from her short black curls and bulging swim suit. Watching, stunned, the girl had jerked to life with a sudden hatred for the box-pleated little skirt around the bottom of the suit and the way the woman's heavy breasts jiggled like egg whites when she cried. She pictured the woman squeezed into a glassed-in jail cell where the water would rise two inches every hour and drive her slowly insane. To be *that* afraid of water—the girl had never before considered such fear and the body's treachery.

When evening had come, she'd moved restlessly from one room of her family's cabin to another. She didn't understand why she couldn't shake the morning's feeling—or what it was, exactly, that she felt. She'd seen dead people before, a family, once, strewn all over the highway. She'd been sick to her stomach, had nightmares for a while, and gotten over it. So it wasn't that.

"I'm going for a walk," she said abruptly to her mother, who was sweeping sand into a little mound on the kitchen floor.

Her mother frowned. "I don't know . . . If you stay away from the lake, I guess. Don't go getting yourself any more upset. Promise me, now."

The girl weighed the need against a broken promise. The need won out. "All right," she said. They were leaving in the morning, cutting their vacation a day short. For some reason she didn't understand,

she was drawn back to the lake. Water, people who swam in it, the odds of survival—everything seemed much more complicated than she'd thought.

She waited until almost sunset, knowing the evening air would be too cool for swimmers to use the beach. She left her parents flipping through magazines on the cabin porch and set out through the trees. Goosebumps ran in quick shivers up her arms and legs. She got them easily, though—because there wasn't any meat on her bones, her father said. But no matter how cool it got at night, she refused to wear anything except cut-offs and a halter. As a concession to her mother, she had tied a black nylon windbreaker around her waist by its sleeves. The hood tapped her calves as she walked.

She followed the path that led past the other vacationer's cabins. Children playing on the steps, kids perched in the branches of pine trees called out to her. She ignored them, her thin, sun-freckled face intent on the third cabin from the end of the row. She halted on the path, not wanting to go any closer, although the woman's red Chevy was gone. The man's green sports car was still parked in the drive. Two weeks before, the couple had arrived at the resort in separate cars. The girl had thought it strange that two people so much in love would need separate cars for their vacation. Then she had seen that his car wore Nevada license plates, while the woman's said: Illinois—Land of Lincoln. She had mentioned that fact casually to her parents. "Shacking up for a week or two," her father said, grinning. "Daniel," her mother said, and that was the end of that.

The redwood cabin ahead of her was silent, gathering darkness inside. It had been abandoned in a hurry, the girl thought, hating the woman's ample, betrayer flesh with a rage that shook her. She whispered: Bitch. Bitch. Bitch. The man's striped beach-towel was still hanging limp on the line stretched between two trees. The screen door had been left unlatched. A gust of wind from the lake caught the door and waved it at her in a gesture of invitation. To keep herself from crying out (someone might be watching), her teeth clamped hard into her lower lip. The blood tasted faintly metallic. She forced her feet to move on, one in front of the other, at a dignified pace down the path to the lake.

She couldn't believe it. The boy was still doing double back-flips off the end of the boardwalk. He was about fourteen, a little older than

she was, slim and tanned a rich brownish-gold. Two children and a young girl with curly blonde hair sat watching him, swinging their legs from the manager's porch. The blonde girl, a newcomer, smiled and said something to the boy when he ran back up the walk to start over. With an audience he was more fired up than ever, running quickly to launch himself into space, tuck, curl, spin once, twice, landing easily as a cat. Watching him from the shadowed path, the girl wondered if he ever stopped to eat or sleep or swim; or if he was just part of the unreal, time-out world of vacationing in a strange place. He was running down the walk again, his bare feet thudding on the planks. The sun in her eyes, she saw a golden circle spinning in the air, spinning on and on and on.

Avoiding the boardwalk, she took a short-cut across a sand dune spotted with straggly grass. She kept her eyes fixed on the lake, not wanting the boy to think she noticed him talking to the girl. Let him entertain Blondie, for a change. She was sick to death of his childish acrobatics.

... Although it *was* true that in front of the soda fountain in Deerwood once, he had almost killed himself for her sake. She had driven the five miles into town with her mother, who went to the supermarket and gave her a dollar for a soda. The boy had been standing in the street with three older boys, all of them looking over a brand new Harley-Davidson, propped up alongside the curb. She didn't recognize the boy at first, wearing jeans and a shirt instead of swim trunks. He was slouching like the others, his thumbs hooked casually in his belt. He looked up and saw her coming across the street. She hesitated, then waved. He turned away and said something to the one with the long chin, who nodded. She saw the boy straddle the shiny black bike, touching all its chrome with gentle hands. She was almost to the shop door when the motor roared to life. She turned in time to see the boy and the cycle shoot away from the curb into traffic. Gunned sharply, out of control, the bike reared on one wheel and flipped over on top of the boy. She stood pressed against the shop window while sirens screamed and an ambulance came to take him to the hospital.

He was back at the resort the next day, with nothing more than scratches and bruises to display. His grandfather, the manager, told him to sit on the porch all day—but when the girl came out of the of

fice with a bottle of pop, he was up doing back-flips off the end of the walk again. She watched for a while, drinking from the sweating bottle. Then she walked carefully away down the path, each foot converging on an imaginary line centered directly underneath her.

She didn't go into the shop for a soda the day of the boy's accident, even though she saw the green sports car parked at the curb. The man from Nevada and the woman from Illinois were inside at their usual booth in the corner. She couldn't stand to watch them run their fingers up each other's arms and kiss while the boy might very well be bleeding to death in some hospital. It was a false alarm, though; the boy was fine and her secret pleasure in watching the couple was not damaged by the incident. She watched them ("covertly," she thought) whenever and wherever she could—at the beach, walking past their cabin, in the ice cream shop. They seemed to spend a great deal of time in there. He was quite heavy and tall and wore a different pastel leisure suit and neckscarf for every day of the week. The woman was every bit as plump and colorful as he was. Sometimes she would wear a lavender tea rose tucked into her black curls. She was bound to be from Chicago, living in a fifteen story apartment building, where the elevator would run a steady stream of visitors up to her door. She would greet them graciously, dressed in a sequinned hostess gown, a wine glass held delicately in her rose-nailed fingers. This man, though, a famous dentist from Reno—no one, not even her best friends, knew about him. He was her one true love, she was his. But something had happened and they could only meet like this, be lovers once a year for two weeks. The tragedy and the beauty of such a love brought tears to the girl's eyes.

She sat in a booth across the room where she could watch them (covertly) and eat her ice cream slowly. They never noticed her. They were completely absorbed in each other—and in the double sundae heaping the dish in front of them. The woman's red lips moved, saying wicked, lovely things to the man. She held up a maraschino cherry, dangled it by the stem. The man (he looked clever) fed her newly invented words of love with whipped cream and nuts. Sometimes it took the girl nearly an hour to finish a small strawberry sundae and her mother had to come in the shop after her. There was no one in all of Michigan to tap the man from Nevada and the woman from Illinois on their shoulders and tell them it was time to go.

That morning at breakfast, she'd said, "Let's go down beach now. We only have two more days left."

"Aw, kiddo, it's too early for swimming," her dad said, settling his day-old beard behind a two-day old newspaper. Her mother rubbed her temple with her knuckle and couldn't seem to get her eyes open. Both got very lazy and frowsy looking on vacations. The girl supposed they deserved to.

So she carried a towel and the large umbrella down the beach for herself. The boy came out on the office porch when she was alone. "Hello," she said, without stopping. She had no time for him that morning.

The couple was already splashing around in the shallow water, engaged in a tug-of-war. The girl looked around for his striped towel and her white one with pink seahorses. Several yards away from the shore she stabbed the umbrella into the sand and spread her towel. Very little time left, she could afford to be bold. She wanted to know what they said to one another and what it was, exactly, that the boy did to the woman to make her shriek and push him away, and what meaning it at all.

She took her time about rubbing suntan oil into her legs and arms. She wished for about an inch more thickness of flesh to cover around her bony wrists and ankles. Looking far out on the lake she was fascinated by the way the center held smooth as smoked glass and then extended toward the shore, breaking into heaves and hollows around the edge as if something on the bottom was pushing up. In the shallows, the man was pulling the woman by one arm, pointing toward the raft. She struggled against him, her protests and laughter echoing across the water. Farther down the beach, a mother and father with two children with waterwings stopped to watch them.

When she thought about it, the girl couldn't think of a time when she had seen the woman do more than wade in the water. She seemed so afraid, but let herself be led out into the lake until her broad shoulders disappeared. The man was swimming around her, dog-paddling, his flowered trunks ballooning out of the water. The woman gave up and began to swim toward the raft—awkwardly, flailing and churning the water. The man swam alongside her, trying to guide her. She was swimming blindly, headed away from the raft, out toward the open end of the lake.

The girl stood up to see them better. She giggled. They were like whales in bright bathing suits. One whale stopped swimming.

began to sink. It was the woman. She went under once and came up shrieking. The sound strangled in her throat as she went down again. The girl stood rigid, her mouth open to echo the woman's cry, but no sound came out. She saw the man dive. The surface churned and smoothed over them. Then the woman's face broke water, contorted with fear. The man did not come up. The woman appeared to be standing upright in the water, although she was too far out to be touching bottom. Her head rose slightly higher now, moving slowly toward shore as if something propelled her along. Her rigid torso mounted steadily out of the water. After a while, the forward movement wavered, stopped, and she began to bob up and down.

Then the girl understood—that the man had been walking on the bottom of the lake; that this woman, his lover, stood on his shoulders and couldn't be shaken loose. Would not be shaken loose.

The girl screamed then, and found herself running down to the water beside the young father. They ran out onto the dock. "You stay," the young man said. He dove and swam quickly out to where the woman floundered, her face hopeless, locked in terror. He reached out to her with his child's bright blue waterwings.

Dusk seemed to be growing out of the lake—a soft, gray mist rising. The girl raised her head to listen. Behind her, an unknown woman's voice joined with the men's. Bodiless, wordless, their blended murmur floated down to her at the water's edge. It sounded like sad music—a song that was natural and true, but one with an underlying question, a jarring note of uncertainty.

A heaviness had settled in her chest—a weight she felt too frail to carry. The girl's head dropped, she began to cry. The hair falling forward around her cheeks grew wet and matted as if she'd just come up from swimming. She heard the boy's feet running along the boardwalk, then silence. Without turning, she could picture him catapulted up, spinning soundlessly against the dark sky.

She couldn't stand it. She'd scream at him to stop. Not one more time. Not for her, not for anyone. Suppose his timing was the slightest bit off or he slipped and landed on his back or neck . . . She thought how a broken circle looked, laid out flat and still.

She held her breath and listened for his footsteps to start up again. Nothing. A loon, floating in the reeds, mourned gently across the water. She turned and looked back up the beach. The boy had left

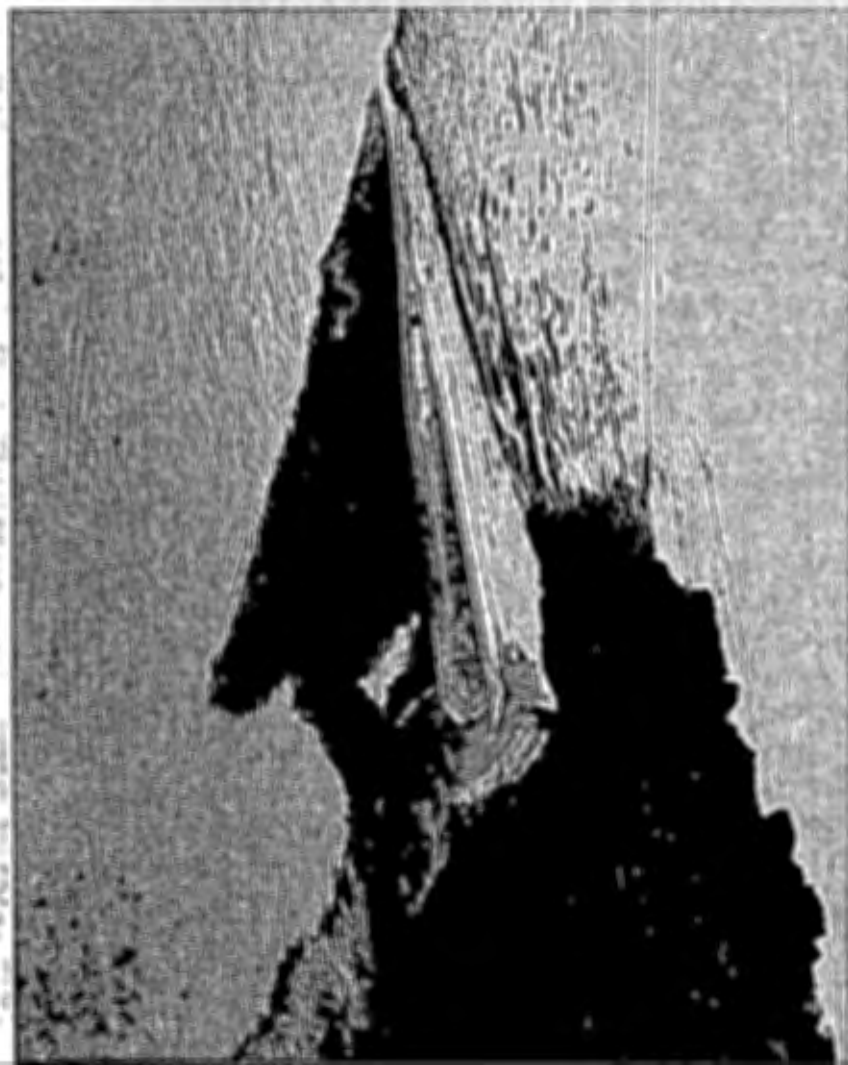
the walk and was squatting on the sand dune. He watched her steadily, resting his chin in his hand. Standing very still, she returned the look. Her hair, dark and wet with tears, blew around her face, skimmed her bare shoulders. The boy's eyes followed its movement.

Reluctantly, the girl straightened and stopped the crying. She began to walk slowly up the beach toward him, the black windbreaker loose and trailing its hood behind her in the sand.

from Bracelet, a novel

Bracelet is a small sophisticated subdivision in southwestern Pennsylvania with an electric gold fence around it. Bracelet is sophisticated only because it is rich, filthy rich. All the streets in Bracelet except Bracelet Boulevard are painted silver. Bracelet Boulevard is made of real silver. The runway at the Bracelet Airport is also painted silver.

William H. Bracelet III founded Bracelet and established the Bracelet Airport. He built a fortune by dealing bracelets and assorted jewelry to foreign exchange companies. He usually would deal with the East Indian countries. He had a few good things going for him. He was not only witty, but more so sly. Practicing what he termed "The Art of Manipulation" he once wrote a book called, *How to Use People*. Many businessmen are buying it still. Bracelet was sactimoniously suave when dealing with women. However, the Indians were the easiest subjects for Bracelet to manipulate. They were naive as hell. He once sold them two hundred kilograms of tin for two hundred thousand dollars worth of crude oil. The Indians had no use for the oil. Bracelet had glued gloss-glitter on the tin to make it look like expensive jewelry. He told them the tin was from ancient Greece and that it had mystical energies incorporated from Zeus. Bracelet could make his grey eyes spin and glisten when he told the Indians these tales. He said it was the energy from the tin that made his grey eyes glisten and spin. He told them his whole body would get a mystical sensation if he stared at the tin long enough. The naive Indians believed Bracelet. Bracelet laughed to himself as he left the Indians. They were all sitting in triangular formation waiting for their eyes to spin and glisten, and anticipating Zeus to come down and energize their souls. At first, Bracelet laughed out loud when three weeks later he came back and found two hundred Indians with sparkling, rolling eyes. It was as if they were indeed on air. Then, he got scared half out of his mind to see all those Indians wholly out of their minds. But perhaps the Indians were truly in touch with their minds. They were happy, and they did feel good. But they didn't want to talk to anyone anymore. They just wanted to hum and chant and eat vegetables and gophers. Seeing all



this, Bracelet almost died of heart-attack. He did die though, twenty-two days later, from internal bleeding of the lower left larynx. He choked on a lobster tail when he was showing off his ability to eat lobster tails. Bracelet was coughing and gagging and pointing to a glass of what he thought was water. Well, Frank Oliver thought it was water too, so he gave it to Bracelet. Bracelet guzzled the drink and choked and croaked on the shell all the more. The clear compound was chemicals composed of tequila, gin, and everclear. It belonged to Sandra Parker. It really burned Bracelet's already bloody throat. Poor Bracelet never was much of a drinker. Everybody in the room was sure Bracelet was gulping water. "Fuzz" J.Y. Knott was sure, Dr. James "Jim" "Clep" Clepper was sure, Dr. Phillip Zachary Rigormore was sure, but Sandra Parker wasn't so sure.

Sandra Parker isn't so sure of anything. She isn't sure she's a whore either. Everyone in Bracelet thinks she is a whore. Braceletians all think she dresses, talks, walks, and looks like a whore. Her reputation is that she sleeps with anyone, anytime, anyplace. Actually she is a virgin. If she stays in Bracelet she will stay a virgin, because nobody wants to be seen with a whore. Nobody wants to get V.D. Sandra just took off on a 747 for Los Angeles. She is taking a bar exam at four o'clock this afternoon. Sandra wasn't even drinking the clear chemical compound. Though she seldom drinks, she is also thought to be drunkard. Consequently, in the presence of Braceletians, Sandra always has a drink in her hand.

Francis "Frank" Oliver is responsible for spreading the rumors about Miss Parker. (He took her out once.) Frank is more freaky than frank. Because he is on 5'5", Frank often tries to compensate for his lack of height. Frank has olive-green eyes. He loves olives. He has an intense paranoia that some day he will get painful pimples on his tongue from eating too many pimentoed olives. He has a thirty foot by twenty foot billboard of a seedless black olive in his olive room, which is in his ninety-seven thousand dollar house. Frank's favorite drink is minced olives (no pimento) and butter-milk on the rocks. His second favorite drink is shredded pimento mixed in concentrated orange juice with apple cider. Frank moved to Bracelet two months after he inherited 875,000 dollars from his Grandpa, Manfrex X. Oliver. Now Frank also owns twenty thousand acres of orange groves in Gracevine, California. Frank has an eighteen thousand dollar chandelier in his living-room. It was made in Italy, and of course it is shaped like a giant

olive. The lights on it are pimento-red, as is all the carpeting in the house.

When Frank took Sandra out, he brought her to his house to see the chandelier. While they were admiring the light, Frank began kissing her. She kissed him back. Frank was then able to kiss her on the neck. She sighed. That was the last time Frank and Sandra ever kissed each other. Frank concluded that any girl who would let a guy kiss her on the neck, on the very first date, had to be a whore. And besides, she wore no bra, and if Frank stared long and hard enough he thought he could see her nipples get hard through her light blue blouse. Well, when Frank thought this happened he figured she must be aroused and wanted his or anybody else's frankfurter, so she was definitely a whore. Frank told Braceletians that Sandra Parker would sleep with anyone in Bracelet, or Grapevine, or for that matter even blacks in Jackson, Mississippi. Sandra's reputation was ruined. Braceletians logically deducted that she would probably sleep with "Japs," "Chinks," and "Spics" too. News spreads fast in Bracelet. Sandra will always reside in Bracelet because she is in love with Frank. She hopes that some day Frank will take her out again and maybe touch her breasts too.

Sandra is also in love with a twenty-two year old half-brain saxophone player from Boston, Massachusettes. His name is Charlie Blowter. They met each other five months ago and lived together on the beach in Laguna, California. Though they slept with each other for a week, they never had intercourse. Sandra thought that since they were in love they should wait before they had sex. They haven't seen each other since those memorable days. Sandra loves the thought of being in love with Charlie so much that she never wants to see him again. Apparently she gets enough satisfaction from an abstract fantasy affair. Sandra writes Charlie every other week to tell him just how much she loves him. Charlie has never returned her letters. He never will either. Charlie Blowter was just mutilated beyond all recognition six hundred and forty-two seconds ago.

II

Today is a typical Tuesday morning in Bracelet. The autumn sun is drying all the freshly cut lawns. All the lawns in Bracelet are cut on

Tuesday mornings by one of "Fuzz" J.Y. Knott's eight forty, two thousand dollar lawn-mowers. All the houses in Bracelet are neurotically neat and tidy. Just in case there would just so happen to be unexpected guests or friends. If there are people in the houses, they will be dressed in very expensive wearing apparel. Usually there is one of three cars parked on the acrolite driveways. There are only acrolite driveways in Bracelet.

Richard K. "Dick" Landerson has a fiber-glass basket-ball hoop on his driveway. It is for his nine-year old son, Jeremy, to play with. Four days before Dick received his Masters Degree in Finance from Penn State University, he legally changed his name from Londerson to Landerson. However, he still insists that his name be pronounced, *Londerson*. Dick was a famous swim star at Penn State. He once held a record for the butterfly stroke time in P.S.U. history. Dick is very proud of that fact. Dick is an over obvious proud egotistical man. He loves the number 7 almost as much as he loves Ambassador Scotch. Dick's house phone number is 777-7777, as is his license plate, and Dick always puts seven ice-cubes in his scotch. Dick's swimming pool is also shaped in the number of 7. "Fuzz" J.Y. Knott had the most expensive swimming pool until Dick added two sliding boards and a twenty-foot high life-guard stand. Dick was talking to "Fuzz" in his Rick Nightwhips Bar, Suana, and Lounge one night, when "Fuzz" told him that his ("Fuzz's") pool cost \$17,575. At the time Dick's was only \$17,125. The next morning Dick ordered two sliding boards for four hundred dollars, and a two hundred dollar life-guard stand. That put Dick's pool value at \$17,725. Dick also bought a spare diving board for five hundred dollars just in case "Fuzz" adds new items to his pool. Dick is very proud of his pool. The letters PSU in bold blue print are painted on the bottom of his pool.

Dick had a dream when he was sixteen. He wanted to become a bank president, have a rich luxurious house, a new green Cadillac every year, a white two-seat Porsche turbo carrera, a wife to secure him, and a son to be a great athlete, preferably in football. Most of Dick's dreams came true, except for his son's inability to play football. Since Dick attained most of his goals, he doesn't dream anymore. He just fantasizes. Often when Dick is in the shower, he will imagine being in a swimming race. He usually imitates his famous butterfly stroke. Dick also has a special chlorine button in the shower for a more realistic effect. If Dick doesn't feel "up-to" fantasizing while taking a shower, he turns on a special t.v. set that has films of famous

swimmers in Olympic games. No one is allowed in the shower except Dick. Not even his wife, Sylvia.

Dick is a very overbearing person. He has an opinion for anything and everything. Dick pretends to be an expert on all matters. Dick's most famous philosophy is one which he terms "The Art of Manipulation." Dick often claims that being able to manipulate people is an art that involves wit, patience, and charisma. Dick manipulated his parents until they died, which happened when he was thirteen. Dick is still proud that he was feared by all his classmates. Actually Dick has been manipulating people for forty-two years now. Dick is forty-two years old. Dick manipulates old as well as young ladies, big men, though he finds little ones easier. Dick even loves to control animals, but he gets more satisfaction out of humans. Dick can't manipulate his wife's cats though, but he does her, and quite easily, too. Dick gets back at the cats by shooting rubber bands at them. He goes to "Fuzz" J.Y. Knott's Hardware and Lawn Equipment Store every third Monday (before he goes to his bank) and purchases a pack of fifty multi-colored rubberbands to shoot at the two cats. Sylvia doesn't like that too much. But she never says anything. She knows by now after seventeen years of marriage just how she is supposed to respond. That is, she knows how Dick wants her to respond. By now its a redundant expression of stimulus/response, like Pavlov's dog, only Sylvia doesn't salivate.

From the first day Dick met Sylvia, he knew that she would be his masters degree present to himself. He knew then that she would be there to be his security blanket, to listen to his problems, to nurse him when he's sick, to give him attention when he regresses back to times past when he was young. (Dick believes that when he craves attention, it is only because he is regressing back to when he was a little boy desiring to be held and caressed as a little boy does, as he did when he was a little boy.) When Dick feels like this, Sylvia holds him tight. Dick holds her tight too. He is nice to her then. Usually when Dick pays attention to her it is only to give a command, or to yell at her for something. Often Dick is mean to Sylvia for no apparent reason. Probably to prove to himself that he doesn't need her as much as she needs him. Dick has no psychological explanation for his diabolical behavior. He has no explanation for why he has four copies of Immanuel Kant's book, *Critique of Pure Reason*, either. One copy of waterproof, and is kept in his bathroom. Dick has never read the book. He also has three copies of Georg Wilhem Friedrich Hegel's *The*

Phenomenology of Spirit on order. Some day Dick won't be able to order Sylvia around. And then what will he do for security? Probably die a nerotic death. Well, if Dick could outlive his money, he would undoubtedly live forever, unless there would be a stock market crash. But according to Dick, there will never be a stock market crash. They will always be intelligent businessmen to keep the economy moving strong. There will always be the driving love for making money. There will always be a natural drive in men to want money.

Sylvia has heard these philosophies (thoughts?) more than anyone else would or could. Just as Sylvia has been to all of Dick's high class dinner parties more than anyone else; and after the dinner parties, Sylvia would be there to help Dick release all those Ambassador Scotch and waters. This is about the only time Dick doesn't think he's the suavest, handsomest, blue-eyed, blond-haired guy on earth.

But most of the time Dick is the most confident, cocky, and conceited man on the globe. When Dick is extra-confident, he drinks his Ambassador Scotch on the rocks, instead of with water. He usually feels like this at parties, or when he is having a meeting with another important business associate. Being a bank president, Dick gets to act confident quite often. Dick drinks his scotch on the rocks whenever he flies on supersonic jets too. He does so at least twice a month. Sometimes Sylvia goes on the flights with him. She usually doesn't like to go though because she hates to leave the cats. She doesn't mind leaving Jeremy as much as she does the cats. Dick only makes her go he thinks it is necessary for wives to go. (The bi-yearly New York City Banquet for Eastern State Bank Presidents requires the bank presidents to bring their wives, unless they are dead or severely ill).

Dick likes it more when Sylvia doesn't go on the flights, because he can flirt better with the stewardesses. Dick often imagines seducing the stewardesses. Especially the ones with the big breasts. Dick never tries to carry these impulses out though, because he is too virtuous. Dick believes in the Christian ethic that one should only have sex with his wife. (Even if he wants and desires to have sex with someone else. Even if he just would be doing it to be releasing his inner tension.) Dick feels he would suffer too much guilt if he carries these impulses out. Dick always rationalizes why it would be permissible for him to "cheat" on Sylvia. But he still won't do it, and he feels guilty thinking about it just the same.

Dick sometimes imagines what it would be like to feel big breasts in his firm, hard, large fingers. Sylvia's are the only breasts that Dick

has ever laid hands or eyes on. Sylvia's breasts are small. (33A-cup) But Dick says that touching big breasts is just like touching small ones, except big ones are bigger. But even Dick doesn't believe that lie.

MEMORIES OF CALVIN

Gabe, the night cook, was late for work. Gabe was new to Calvin. It was bad to be colored and a newcomer to Calvin in March when the wind was still blowing icy slivers through the air.

Father had been sitting in his restaurant back office, a storeroom made to suit him, watching the old Grandfather clock he had bought a long time ago. He kept the brass pendulum shiny, reflecting brilliantly whatever light might be striking it as it swung back and forth, forth and back. Father glanced at the face of the clock, then back to me, frowning his disapproval.

"Gabe's a half hour late," he said slowly.

"Billy tried to call him, but no one answered," I replied. Billy was the day cook, and Gabe was the night cook. Billy had been working at Father's restaurant for as long as I could remember, but Gabe had just been hired a month and a half ago. He was the only colored man employed in Calvin, and Father said he was the first colored to live in Calvin since the 1880's. Everyone said that Father had taken a big risk in hiring Gabe, but Father said he hadn't. Gabe had been a Navy cook for a long time. His stews were better than Billy's.

"Gabe's used to warmer weather than this," Father said. "Maybe he got lost, or stopped somewhere along the way to warm up."

"Maybe that's it," I agreed eagerly. Gabe was not really a bad sort. I did not want Father to fire him, but if he found Gabe drinking in a Tavern, Father would have no choice. That was just the way he did things. He put on his coat. Then, without thinking, he pulled open his desk drawer and groped into it blindly. After a moment, he scowled and shut the drawer angrily.

"I forgot," he said, looking at me to offer an explanation. I did not know why, but Father must have been looking for his gun. He used to have a small pistol in the drawer. Then, one night, Bessie, a waitress, snuck into the office and took the pistol. She then took it home and shot her husband John. John recovered, forgave Bessie, and did not press charges, but Sheriff Morton kept the gun, and Father never

bought another one to replace it. He thought things out for a moment, then relaxed his brow.

"No need, really," Father said. "We'll probably run into Gabe on the way here, chattering his teeth." He laughed.

"You want me to come along?" I asked. Having just turned thirteen, I thought of myself as a man of the world. Father smiled as if he understood, and he nodded.

"Get your coat and cap," he told me. I got my coat from the rack outside Father's office as Billy walked in, still wearing his always greasy kitchen apron.

"Well, at least it's slow out there," Billy said. "Ev'rybody just wants coffee, and that we got plenty of."

"Fine," Father said. "Billy, do you think you can wait around a while longer? I'm going to look for Gabe."

"Sure. You taking Davey with you?"

"I'm going," I said, pulling my knit hat out of the coat's pocket. The two men exchanged an amused smile. Once we left, I was not so certain that I wanted to face the unseasonable cold. I knew how the restaurant's customers felt, especially the ones who came in the winter to sip a cup of hot coffee while sitting above the furnace vent in the middle of the floor.

During the Depression, we lived in Calvin, a small town in Illinois, and Father owned the Arlington restaurant. I worked there from the time I was old enough to walk, washing dishes, peeling potatoes, clearing tables, and sometimes going out at night with Father to search for employees who were late for work. The restaurant stayed open twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, three hundred and sixty-five days a year, for nearly eight years.

More than just a restaurant, the Arlington was a gathering place for all the rootless men in transit. The ones who sipped coffee unhappily, frustration cooling in their eyes, were the ones going to the big city, maybe St. Louis, probably Chicago. They were factory workers, farmhands, or just plain drifters. Then there were the men who had come back. Most were unshaven, clothed in shabby rags. They did not look frustrated, for frustrated men were still trying, and these men only looked hopeless. They were the ones who left half-filled coffee cups and unfinished meals. Father said it was hard for a man to sit in one place very long when he hated himself.

When it came down to it, Gabe Davis was not really all that different from the other men who came to the Arlington. We had

ben colored men passing through, too. They never stayed, of course. They stopped for a meal, and, feeling the stares, finished eating and moved on. Gabe just had a flicker of hope left in his eyes. I guess that's why Father hired Gabe as a night cook, even though Billy and everyone else didn't think he should.

Besides a touch of optimism, Gabe had two other things Father liked: experience as a cook, and size. Gabe was maybe forty-five, and the biggest colored man I'd ever seen. My father was a big man, but Gabe stood nearly a head taller. Father liked that, for there had been a few men or two when the men got rough, and Father wanted a few big men around to keep things quiet. When I met Gabe, I couldn't think of anyone he might have trouble keeping quiet.

Reaction to Gabe was different with different people. No one exactly loved him, but Calvin was never especially friendly to newcomers. Gabe stayed in the back cooking. "Out of sight, out of mind," was the way Billy put it. A few of the men, especially Nick Hardesty and Jim Overstreet, had said a few things about wanting their food cooked by a white man, but they kept coming. Father figured that by the time spring came, all that would have died down. In the meantime, though, there had been a couple of scenes.

The most recent had been two nights ago. Nick Hardesty and Jim Overstreet used to be foremen at the mill, before the mill was shut down. Father said they hated being out of work more than most. Nick was a big, proud man, and he did not like having to go begging for odd jobs and part-time work. He was one of the stubborn ones who had yet to break down and look for work in the cities. In Calvin, he was getting leaner every day. Father said it was only a matter of time.

It was about nine o'clock when it happened. Washing dishes in the back, I could hear Father's grandfather clock sound the hour. Nick, Jim, and about a dozen other men were sitting in a corner, talking, drinking coffee, eating Gabe's sandwiches, and absorbing the heat of the furnace. The cold had been expected to let up by mid-March, but it hadn't. The men were tired of being cold, bored, and out of work. When I looked out into the dining room, there were even fewer smiles to be seen than usual. Nobody told any jokes. The men leaned back in their chairs, trying to get further away from each other. I went back to my dishes, and Gabe kept putting sandwiches together; all of it was done in silence.

Suddenly, I heard the smashing of dishes in the dining room. Gabe and I immediately rushed out to see what was happening. It was

a sure bet that the commotion was coming from the corner table.

Nick Hardesty stood above the shattered plates. Apparently, he had just hurled them to the floor. He glared at Gabe with a meanness rare even for him.

"Why do we eat this nigger-cooked shit?" Nick shouted. "Look at his hands! They're filthy!"

Gabe's hands tightened into fists when he heard this. His patience was thin, and when Jim Overstreet tossed his plate onto the floor, that was all that Gabe was willing to take.

"Pick it up," Gabe said. Nick laughed, but it was a mean laugh. His pals joined in.

"He thinks we'll listen to 'im," Jim said. He was always ready to follow Nick's lead, especially when it came to name-calling. This made me mad.

"Leave Gabe alone!" I shouted. "He can't help what color he is!"

I knew this was wrong almost as soon as I said it. Gabe didn't like anyone having to stand up for him, especially a thirteen year old boy. He pushed me out of the way and walked toward Nick.

I thanked God when I saw Father come in the front door. He could size up things in a minute. I knew he was mad, even though he tried not to show it much. Father stepped between Gabe and Nick, then looked at Nick.

"Nick," Father said, "if you don't like Gabe's cooking, why not eat dinner with your wife for a while?" He turned to Jim and the others. "Same goes for the rest of you. I don't want any trouble here."

"You're the one who started the trouble by hiring that nigger!" Nick protested.

"I own this place," Father replied, "and I can hire whoever I damn well please. Now, finish your food and go home." He saw that Nick and Jim had thrown their sandwiches on the floor, and he said his words directly to those two. They hesitated for a moment, then got their coats and left, grumbling all the way.

Gabe did not like things like that happening, but he got used to it, I guess, and I sort of thought he liked his job, but now Father and I were out looking for him. I could see my breath like cigarette smoke in the dim twilight of the outside light of the restaurant, the lights which grew weaker as we got further away. The snow and ice stung where it hit my face, then slipped off onto the ground. When the tiny crystals struck Father's face, they melted for an instant, then refroze, whitening the dark brown hairs of his beard. The cold made it hard to think,

hard to remember why we were challenging the wind. But Father still managed to think of some place to start looking for Gabe.

"We're going to the McMahon Tavern," Father had to shout over the howling wind. I guess he really believed Gabe would have stopped off at the Tavern to get a drink. I didn't want to believe it myself, but Father was usually right. He gave me a slap on the back to keep me going.

I was not sure I should be going into a bar, but nothing could be worse than the cold and snow. Father led the way, walking into the Tavern so slowly it was almost like the wind was still blowing on him.

The inside was not what I had expected. I had always heard about the noise and the crowds at the McMahon Tavern, but there were only three men there. A tall, skinny man quietly stood behind the counter. Nick Hardesty and Jim Overstreet were sitting at a table near the center of the room. Nick was drinking while Jim slept. I was happy to see that Gabe wasn't there, but Father seemed disappointed. This I could not understand. I thought he would be happy that Gabe was not out getting drunk, too.

Father walked up to the counter, ignoring Nick and Jim. The skinny man smiled. Most people in Calvin liked Father.

"Evening, Joe," Father said. "It looks like business isn't too good."

"Even for a weeknight," Joe agreed. "Earlier, though, Nick, Jim, and about a dozen others were here in a pretty mean mood. They got a little drunk, and that riled 'em up even more. Then they got up and left. A little while later, Nick and Jim came back by themselves. They've been here for close to an hour."

Father hung his chin against his chest, which was his way of thinking. After a moment, he walked over to Nick and Jim.

"Evening, Nick," Father said, smiling. Nick smiled back.

"H'lo, Jack," Nick slurred. He then turned his head away from Father.

"You haven't seen Gabe tonight, have you?" Father asked. Nick shook his head, mumbling something.

"What'd you say?" Father persisted. This time, Nick just shook his head. Suddenly, Father stopped smiling. He whirled Nick around and yanked him out of the chair. "Have you seen Gabe?" he growled, shaking Nick.

"N-no," Nick stammered loudly.

"The hell you haven't," Father muttered. He threw Nick across the table as easily as Nick had tossed the sandwiches onto the floor.

Father walked out of the door, but it was the kind of walk that made me run to keep up with him. Father had unbuttoned his coat when he entered the McMahon Tavern. He didn't bother to button it back up again. The wind was strong, but it no longer slowed Father down.

"Why were they so drunk?" I asked.

"Sometimes drinking helps a man forget what he'd rather not remember," Father answered quickly. "Davey, do you know where the other men are?"

"No," I said, shivering. It was getting colder.

"I hope they're down on their knees praying for mercy," Father said. "Maybe you should go back to the restaurant, help Billy." Father paused. "How old are you, Davey?"

It seemed like a silly question. "Thirteen," I answered.

"I guess that's old enough—not that anyone's old enough. You might as well come along."

"Where are we going?" I asked cautiously.

"The Bridge."

The Calvin Bridge crossed what was now a frozen river. It rose about thirty feet above the ice. I hadn't the slightest idea what Gabe would be doing at the Bridge. It seemed like a pretty foolish place to be in this cold. On such a night, the wind on the Bridge could almost knock a man down if he wasn't in a car, and Gabe didn't own a car.

The Sheriff's car was parked at the entrance to the bridge. I could see Sheriff Morton walking onto the Bridge. His big coat concealed the loose belly which hung over his belt like a sugar bag. He held a flashlight and a big knife. The flashlight beam was moving toward something in the shadows just below the Bridge. It looked at first like some kind of big sack tied to the railing.

Even before the beam fully revealed its target, Father knew what it was, and his hands shook. Then I saw it, too.

"Gabe!" I cried. I tried to run for the spot where the rope was tied, but Father grabbed me and pulled me close to him.

"Look at it, Dave," he whispered. "Look at it, and remember it all the rest of your life."

Ice was stuck to Gabe's clothes, like it was stuck to mine. But Gabe also had a crust of ice about his face. It encased the tongue which stuck out between frozen lips. The ice was thickest, though, on the rope,

making it look like Gabe was held up by a long, slender icicle, but an icicle which moved back and forth, forth and back, as the ice on Gabe's face keenly reflected the glare of the flashlight.

I forced myself to look away, and I saw that Sheriff Morton was already cutting the rope.

"Morton!" Father shouted. "What are you doing?"

"I can't pull him up unless I cut the rope! It's stiff!"

"You can't pull him up in this wind!" Father called back. "At least let me help you!"

"I don't need any help!" Sheriff Morton said. He set down the flashlight and held the rope with one gloved hand as he held the knife with the other hand and slowly cut through the rope. The rope gave way to the blade slowly but certainly. Finally, the last strand was parted. Sheriff Morton gripped the rope with both hands, but it was too icy to hold on to.

The ice man went tumbling through the frozen top layer of the river with a crash. The current would carry him downstream. He was gone.

I was sure that Father would say something to Sheriff Morton, but he just looked at him, and then turned away. Father still held his arm about me, more for support than to comfort me. The wind seemed to be growing weaker as Father and I walked back to the restaurant to wait for spring to come.

Shuffling through the rusty-looking leaves, George let his head hang down as he examined the ground before him. The fallen leaves gave way to his soggy shoes with only small rustlings as protests of their being moved. His hands in his pockets, George's head and arms swayed to the swooshing sounds his feet made as they scattered the floor of the forest.

He tried to step into Butch's footprints, but found they were too widely spaced for his stride. So instead of lurching behind his friend, George walked to the side so that the boys left a pair of trails as they approached the forest's edge. Here the growth was less dense than other parts of the woods, and they didn't have to watch every step for fear of falling down some hole. Butch kept up a very quick pace as he led the way, and soon left George lagging far behind.

The smaller boy stopped and searched the woods behind him for any sign of Teschner, their absent companion. Nothing yet, but George found himself fascinated by the way the paths that he and Butch were leaving teased and taunted one another as they wound through the forest. First one crept toward the other, then darted away around a tree or a rock, sometimes even joining together for a few yards until they reached the spot where George was now. He looked back down the path but still found no trace of Teschner.

"Maybe we should wait here for him," George said to Butch's back.

"What for?" Butch called over his shoulder.

"Maybe he did something to himself again."

Butch turned around now. He did it slowly and with a great release of breath so that George would know what a pain Butch considered this. "Where did that dope get off to, anyway?" he asked after he had searched the forest.

He crossed his arms in front of him and tried to find Teschner's puny body among all the hills and bushes that made up this part of the wood. George moved to a large white rock and perched himself on it so that his dangling feet left dark wet spots on the rock's side. Gurgles came from his tennis shoes if he wiggled his toes or swung his legs, so he whistled a tune to the sounds he made with his feet.

"I'm gonna count to thirty," Butch said as he approached the rock, "and if he's not here by then, then we're taking off without him." He sat down next to George, and without realizing it, recited his numbers to the cadence that George was beating out with his feet.

Below the ridge of the hill, just out of sight of the other two, Teschner was creeping along a protruding root that would lead him to a clearing at the crest of the hill. His pants, like those of George and Butch, were soaking wet, but all the way up to his waist, showing how far he had slipped into the stream. A few hundred yards farther back in the woods, he'd been left behind after he'd refused to wade across a knee-deep stream. He had remained on the far bank, searching for a more shallow place until he realized that he would soon be left behind by the other two unless he found a place to cross. So he had settled for a place that was only thigh-deep and had slipped and fallen in all the way up to his stomach. He covered the last part of the hill on his hands and knees and stood up to see if he could spot his friends. George saw him first and called out his name. It looked as if George and Butch were trying to hatch a giant white egg.

On that egg, George was wondering if Butch would really leave when he counted up to thirty. Teschner could be in some kind of trouble and need them; Teschner always fell down and hurt himself or clumped to the ground out of a tree and snapped one of his skinny wrists. Butch was up to 23 now. George decided that if Butch did leave, he would have to stay behind the look for Teschner.

That was when Teschner's head popped from behind a hill so quick that it made George jump. Teschner didn't see them until George waved his arms and yelled, "Here we are."

Butch clicked his tongue to show how little he liked the idea of Teschner rejoining them. "Look at him," he scowled, "he got himself even wetter than we did. He had to cross that stream after all that trouble."

He swivelled on the rock so that he could face Teschner more directly and continued, "His mommy's gonna give it to him now, he got all wet and dirty."

George only whistled and banged his feet as response. He leaned back and let the rock send some more of its warmth into him. He caught just a glimpse of a chipmunk jumping from branch to branch as it travelled through the forest. It was using twigs no bigger than George's little finger as it sailed. Last summer, when George had found a very small chipmunk lying stunned in his backyard, he had

rushed into the house to find some bread or water to feed the injured animal. By the time George returned, the chipmunk had recovered enough to bite him five times before he could pull his hand away. The chipmunk had then dashed up the tree while George put his hand to his chest and watched.

He shifted his attention when he heard Butch burst out laughing and followed the finger that pointed to where Teschner was sprawled out on the ground. Teschner pulled himself up and looked up meekly to see if his friends had witnessed his clumsiness. They had.

"What a dope," Butch commented. "All he ever does is fall out of things and worry about getting his clothes dirty. He couldn't even catch himself after he tripped. Just went 'boomp,' right to the ground."

Teschner had scraped the palm of his hand when he fell, but instead of inspecting it, he let his mind wander to places where giant birds existed like the one that laid the egg that his friends were sitting on. Birds like that lived a long time ago and could swallow up boys like him in a second—if they wanted to. The birds that Teschner thought of were birds that let boys sit behind their heads while they flew. Giant white birds with pink stripes down the sides.

"Teschner walks with his head looking up in the air," George said as he watched his friend come nearer.

"What?" asked Butch out of the side of a crinkled up face.

"Teschner walks looking up in the air. That's how come he falls down all the time. He doesn't watch where he's going."

"He's lucky he can walk at all. He's such a dork. All he ever does is fall down and hurt himself."

Teschner looked at his friends on the rock and tried to conjure up an animal that would make a trail like the twisty one in front of him. The leaves on the forest floor clung to his wet pants as he walked through the deepest piles and kicked them into the air. While he was watching a gold and yellow one twirl its way to the ground, out of the corner of his eye, Teschner saw three groups of acorns travelling in an arc toward his friends. The pods passed right over the white rock and made little popping sounds in the leaves as they hit the ground. Butch heard the noise, looked over, and saw the last of the acorns rolling to a halt. He wondered where they came from. Teschner was too far away to have thrown them. Even if he'd heard them talking about him and gotten all excited, he still wouldn't be able to make it all this way. So where'd they come from?

Teschner was wondering the same thing. The two boys examined one another from a distance to see if the other offered any clue of where those acorns came from. Teschner wondered if this was the way some strange new animal attacked before it swooped out of a tree and carried people off. He put out a hand to stop that last yellow and gold leaf from having to come back to earth, giving it a squeeze so that it would crackle, but it was too wet.

"Come on, Teschner. Will you get over here?" It was Butch screaming over his shoulder as he ran to the top of the hill, where George was already to the tree at the hill's crest.

"Come on, you dope. That's the big kids throwing at us," Butch yelled at him. This was finally enough to start Teschner after his friends, still not really understanding what was going on.

The big kids that were throwing acorns at the three boys were really no bigger than George or Butch or even Teschner, but none of the boys got close enough to see each other clearly. And over the three summers that the two groups had been at it, no one got close enough to hit anyone with an acorn, either.

George was at the top of the hill yelling for his friends to load up with acorns while Teschner and Butch were still puffing their way up. This old oak was the only place around that hadn't been stripped of acorns by all the fights the boys had had since summer had ended. Teschner reached the summit just as three more handfuls of acorns spattered at his heels, still sent by unseen attackers.

Butch was saying, "With all these acorns we can't lose." We knew a lot about military strategy from watching television early on Saturday mornings, and was self-named captain during skirmishes like this one. He hurled his handful of pods at their assailants, who could just be seen by their bobbing heads near the base of the hill.

"Yep. It's those big kids alright. Well, if they want trouble, here's the place they're gonna get it," Butch said as he and George both sent a barrage at the bottom of the hill to give emphasis to his words, ending the other boys for cover. The other group of boys didn't know what a mistake they made by moving.

By this time, Teschner had reached the top of the hill and had thrown his acorns immediately after those of his friends. As he released them, Teschner's eyes and brain told his arm to throw right down the center of the hill, where the big kids were right at that second. But the message got scrambled on the way and Teschner's arm threw over to the side of the hill, towards the place the boys were headed. He

could never have anticipated that well all on his own—it was a freak.

The acorns that Teschner threw and the kids he threw them at reached the same spot in the bushes in the same moment. George and Butch looked up from their gatherings as they heard Teschner say, "Uh-oh."

The two oldest boys down below were already under cover, but the smallest and youngest target picked out a spot in the bushes that an acorn was going to come zipping into in just an instant. Teschner could see all of this from his spot on the hill, and that's why he made the noise he did.

The acorn hit the boy in the forehead, about an inch above his eye, and sent a trickle of blood all the way to the boy's cheek, staining his blond wisp of an eyebrow red on the way. The biggest of the boys hiding in the bush saw the blood and immediately started crying. The smallest boy, the one that had been hit, saw his friend crying, decided that whatever was wrong was worth crying about, and started bawling himself, even though he hadn't felt any pain yet. It was contagious crying. Soon all three of them were bawling.

The last boy stood there and stared at the blood while his tears dropped onto the dry leaves, not making a sound. Then, he tore out of sight, running behind a large bush so quickly that the acorn that did all the damage hadn't even time to roll to a stop.

George and Butch could hear the oldest of the boys yelling at them, saying, "You guys did it now. You knocked his eyeball out. You guys are really in trouble now. Big trouble."

"You hear that, Teschner? You hit that kid in the eyeball. What did you do *that* for?"

Teschner couldn't make himself respond.

"Come on down here and help me look for that eyeball," came from down the hill. A figure could be seen scrounging through the leaves for what he believed was a lost eyeball.

The boy asked his friend, more quietly now, "Can you see anything?"

"No."

"Can you open your eye?"

"No."

"You didn't even try. Try and open your eye up."

"I don't want to. It hurts."

The boy stood up and moved closer to his injured friend, saying, "Open up and lemme see."

"No, let go of me," the small one said as he struggled weakly in the arms of his friend.

"Come on. Cut it out."

"No. Just keep looking on the ground. It's down there somewhere. I know my eyeball's knocked out."

From the gate that separated his house and yard from the woods, the other boy was just re-entering the park. Behind him was his mother, running to keep up with him as he gave her an account of the happenings.

"...and then these big kids came and started throwing rocks at us. We didn't do anything to them, they just came out of nowhere's and started throwing at us for nothing. Billy got his eyeball hit then, just like I told you, and it got knocked out and bleeding and crying and that's when I came to get you. They tried to get me too, those big kids, but I got away from 'em."

"How big are these boys?"

"Big. Real big. About 17 or 18."

That slowed her down a little bit. Three oversized teenagers that might resist her attempts to stop them from throwing rocks at her son's friends. Maybe she should go back and get some help. After all, there were three of them and only one of her.

Her son tugged on her sleeve and wanted to know what was taking so long. "If you don't get there fast, they might...they might..."

"What?" she wanted to know.

"I don't know, but come on. We gotta get there," the boy said as he started ahead. His mother followed.

When she was close to the hill, the lady was surprised to see that Billy was standing; she had expected to find him lying sprawled out in a pool of blood. But there he stood, hanging limp as a rag with his shoulders heaving up and down with the force of his sobs.

Another older boy that she recognized from somewhere was on the ground shuffling through the leaves and crying and yammering about, "Eyeball is gone. Never find it in all this stuff. To many leaves around to ever find it."

Billy turned when he heard her crunching through the leaves and she caught her breath when she saw the blood on his face. She reached to examine the cut, but he shoved her hands away with his fists.

"Let me look at it," she commanded.

"No. It hurts when you touch it."

"I haven't touched it yet."

"Well...don't. It hurts when you touch it. My eyeball fell out and we can't find it."

She could tell very well that his eyeball was intact and in place, and that the wound had already stopped bleeding. The breath came back into her body and she wondered how long it had been since she breathed last. All it would take to fix Billy up would be a Band-aid. Her heart was still making her temples pound.

That was when she wheeled around so fast that her son didn't have time to move when she grabbed him and rattled him so hard that his head rocked back and forth. She warned him that he was never to scare her like that again, and that he would be lucky if she ever allowed him to enter these woods the rest of the year. He was too confused to resist when she shoved him back towards the direction they came from, and let himself flow along with the force of her attack. He stumbled along for a few feet before he got his bearings, then walked away slowly.

The lady turned and found herself facing Billy and the other boy. They had stopped crying when she had grabbed her own boy, and now stood with their mouths open, wondering what was in store for them. She motioned with her arm, and they both flinched away. She grabbed them both by the shoulders and shoved them after her son. They were warned to move along quickly, or else she might forget that they weren't her's.

She stayed behind for a moment and tried to calm herself after such a scare. She took out some of her rage on a pile of leaves and kicked them high into the air. It helped.

She watched as the leaves filtered slowly to the ground, contrasting with one another in the piles they made. Looking over the surrounding hills, she wondered what this place would look like once autumn had settled in for good, with everything all red and yellow and gold. She would have to remember to return sometime and take a look. It was strange how this place was only a few feet from her door, yet, she had never experienced it.

Behind a tree at the top of a hill, she noticed the head of a small boy peering at her. Then it was gone. Then she saw that same head and a pudgy body run and disappear through some overgrowth at the hill's summit. She started toward the spot.

Behind that very same tree, George was saying, "What did you have to go and hit one of them for, Teschner? Now we're all in trouble."

"I couldn't help it. Whoever *hit* one of 'em before? Not me. I never even came close. They all just ran right into it."

"Boy, are you gonna get it," George kept on. "What's she gonna do us for hurting her kids if she beats up on *them* for *getting* hurt? She even kicks leaves around. That is one mad lady. What's she doing, Butch?"

They looked over to where Butch had been just in time to catch him zipping away through the forest. It had been his head that the lady had seen.

"Uh-oh," Teschner mumbled as he rose to his feet.

"That's the second time you said that."

Then George looked back down the hill and found that his face was three feet from that of the lady that he'd been watching beat on the kids. The breath trying to get through his constricted throat made a popping sound as he jerked back like he'd been smacked on the head. Then he took off after Butch. If Butch was scared of this lady, and he was the biggest of them all, then this lady was not someone to mess with. Teschner had the same thoughts, because, for once, he was about keeping up with George.

They cringed as they ran, expecting to be shot down as they fled, at least tackled in mid-stride. They also tried to control their breathing so that they could hear how close behind that lady was.

But nothing happened. No screaming or yelling or anything. It was worse than if there had been a whole lot of noise behind them; it was less scary if there were curses and threats to catch you like astards sooner or later. George glanced behind him, fully expecting to be pulled to the ground by his hair, but still saw nothing. He slowed down a little bit.

Then they heard one sharp, shrill call. Teschner slowed down when he heard it. George speeded back up. Teschner stopped, slowly, searched the undergrowth for any sign of movement, jerking one leg up in defense when he saw the lady on the ground under the oak. She was struggling to get to her feet. He stopped and studied the path down the path from him.

"What are you doing, Teschner?" George called out over his shoulder. "Come on. Let's get outta here. Keep running."

Teschner didn't seem to hear him. He was intent on watching the lady on the ground trying to get to her feet. Another call of pain. Teschner remembered when he'd seen motions like this before: a bird had fallen out of the tree in his yard and moved just like this

lady did now. He and his brother had seen it fall, but his brother had refused to let him touch it, for if he did, it's mother would leave it alone to starve. And the next day the front yard was empty when he returned with stale bread. He watched as the lady gave out and brought her foot in to her body for inspection.

"Don't go back there you dope. That lady is mean," George called again, but Teschner continued walking away from him.

"What is that crazy jerk doing?" George then said to himself. "He's nuts if he thinks *I'm* gonna go back there with him."

He turned and looked for any sign of Butch, who was all the way to his own front door half a mile away. Turning the other way, he saw that Teschner was now very close to where the lady would be. He yelled once more, and Teschner only waved at him to follow.

George looked for Butch one last time. Nothing. He bent down and picked up a nice big acorn that would really bounce hard off of Teschner's head. He deserved whatever he got for all the trouble he'd been today. He'd knock Teschner a good one with the acorn, George decided, then leave him where he was and let him take care of himself for once.

He wound up and heaved the pod at Teschner. He was too far. The acorn bounced twenty feet from its target, causing Teschner to turn while he walked to see what the noise was. Teschner tripped over a fallen log and fell so that only his feet were sticking up in the air. George walked slowly to where Teschner was, muttering that he didn't know why he ever did some of the things he did.

"Whatsa matter with you? You're not gonna go back there, are you?" George whispered as he approached.

"Why not?"

"That *lady* is back there. The same one whose kids we hurt...that *you* hurt."

Teschner replied, "Then you stay here."

"Whataya nuts? I'm not staying here alone."

The woman felt her ankle gingerly as she swore to herself. How do these kids do it? They live down here all 24 hours of the day and come back with scratches. I'm here fifteen minutes and already I twist my ankle so bad I can't walk. Hope it's not broken. She wished she could have something to hit, something just to smash.

Looking around, she wondered if her own boys would return to

search for her after a while. Probably not, they were too scared of her now, and would be for at least another day. Her eyes widened when a bunch of broomsticks that formed into the body of a small boy moved into sight along the path.

"Hey," she called.

Teschner jumped back behind the tree. George stuck his head around to see what she was yelling about. "See," he whispered at Teschner, "she's still pissed off at us." George was using his away-in-the-woods-language.

"Would you come down here?"

"That's it," George said as he folded his arms in front of him, "she wants us to go down there and you're crazy if you think I'm going."

"Can you hear me?"

Teschner put nose from behind the tree and yelled, "What's a matter?"

"I'm not going down there, no matter what she says."

"I twisted my ankle. I need help. Would you boys give me a hand?"

Teschner stepped all the way clear of the tree and asked, "You o.k.?"

"I don't think so. It feels really weird."

George picked a piece of bark off the tree after Teschner moved toward the lady.

"I'm staying put," he told himself. "I'm not going down there. Let him be crazy. Let him get beat up. Not me."

He could hear the lady say, "If you could just help me to that pink house over there on the edge of the park."

"Oh, yeah," Teschner responded, "that's old lady Brown's house. She has three dogs." He stopped and looked at the ground before saying, "Want me to look at your ankle? I know what it looks like if it's sprained or if it's really broken. I had 'em both."

George was waiting for the lady to pounce all over Teschner as he approached the spot where she lay. He watched closely as Teschner continued, tripped over another root, and tumbled onto his head, right at the lady's feet. That was when George got up and followed.

"Let me lean on your shoulder while we walk," the lady was saying as she struggled to her feet. "Are you sure you're alright?" she asked of Teschner. "That was a pretty hard fall you had just then."

"I'm o.k."

George moved in closer and said, "Sure he's o.k., lady. He always falls down like that."

She looked at George and said, "Oh, now there are two of you. Move around here closer so I can get up."

Her ankle ached as she propped herself up on the shoulders of the two small boys. She grimaced until all her weight was on her good leg, and even then, just dangling her ankle shot pains through her.

They saw her face, and Teschner asked, "You sure you're alright, lady? Want just one of us to go for help? It won't take too long."

"No, don't do that. I only need a little bit of support. Come here closer to me," she said as the boys let themselves be guided to her sides. She placed a hand on each of them and started walking as best she could.

Each step on the foot killed her. Lucky they were going downhill, or she didn't think she would even make it. Though she put as little pressure on her ankle as she could, it ached with every movement, and she'd only taken seventeen steps so far. There must be 500 more steps before we get to that house. That means we're one-half of one-tenth of the way there.

Teschner felt the hand dig into his shoulder one more time. That house is a long way off, he thought, by the time we get there, this lady'll have her fingers dug clean through me and be touching her nails to her palm around my bone. Then she'll take them out and you'll be able to see through to what's behind me. Don't think I'll make it. We shoulda never came back and got this lady. And my pants are ripped.

George, on the other side, warned, "Look out for this mud here. It'll suck your shoes off. You wanna stop for awhile, lady? And take a rest?"

Say yes, say yes, he pleaded to himself. I'm not gonna make it if you don't stop for me to rest. This lady weighs nineteen tons and I'm gonna have her fingerprints dug into my shoulder for the rest of my life. She made George wince when she bumped her foot and grabbed tighter around him.

"No, let's keep moving," she said, "Then it won't hurt as much."

Teschner groaned softly. George closed one eye.

This lady's trying to grab my knees through my shoulder.

Be home, Old Lady Brown, be home. Can't make it to another house.

Only fifteen more steps to go.

When they reached the gate, all three of them sighed at once, "We're here."

Mrs. Brown had seen them coming and had the gate open as she fussed over the lady's foot. She directed them to a rusty lawn chair in her yard.

"These two already know each other," Teschner commented as he pushed the gate closed in front of him.

"You called her 'Old Lady Brown' in front of her friend," George reminded.

Mrs. Brown was off into the house arranging things at the hospital with the lady propped into the chair before anyone noticed the two boys were still outside the gate. The lady motioned them over to her and said, "I want to thank you two boys very much. I think everything will be all right now. Uh...I don't know your names."

"He's Teschner," George said, "his real name's Bob."

"He's George."

The boys scraped the dirt off the toes of their shoes while the lady looked at them and smiled and nodded, until Teschner spoke up and said, "Here, let me get these things out for you," as he moved towards the burrs that were caught in her hair.

She pulled away. "No. That's all right."

"It's o.k. lady. He's good at stuff like that," George broke in. "He can always get slivers out without hurting and get sawdust out of your eye. Really."

"Well, then, go ahead."

Teschner started stripping the hairs away from a burr while George watched intently, cautioning now and again to be careful. As the boys worked, the lady thought of the last time she'd been to the X-ray room for a broken finger.

"Now let's bend it this way."

"Ow."

"Hold it there."

"I'm dying."

"Now like this."

"It doesn't move that way."

"Just try."

"Shit."

She'd taken hold of George's arm and he felt her grip tighten as she sat and recalled the pain. By now, the pain in her ankle had changed from a throbbing to a constant fire, and she grabbed ahold of

George even more fiercely. Why did everything have to happen to her?

This lady is sure strong, George thought. The spots on his arm where the lady was pressing grew bigger and whiter. I'll be a cripple if I hang around her or her much longer. First the shoulder, then the arm, and then whatever comes next. I'm gettin Indian sunburn onehanded.

The lady attempted to get up when Mrs. Brown returned and announced that everything was ready for the trip to the hospital. Teschner was still working on her hair, and it pulled tightly as she moved. She hissed out through her teeth and dug her nails deeper into George's arm, making him jerk away and bump into Teschner, knocking him down. A little tuft of hair came away in Teschner's hand and the lady gave a scream as she fell back into the chair.

The boys and Mrs. Brown listened to the lady swear at her ankle for at least a minute after their dance was over. Then they watched her chest rise and fall in silence.

"Listen," she said after a while, "I think just us two old people can get along fine now. The car is right here and I shouldn't have any trouble getting there. So I just want to say that I'm thankful, George and Bill..."

"Teschner's name is Bob."

"George and Bob. Thank you very much."

"That's o.k. lady. Teschner's sorry he hit your kids, too. It was an accident all the way. Honest."

Teschner nodded his agreement. "We'll go back and look for it, if you want."

"Look for what?" she asked, puzzled.

"That eyeball."

"Oh, the eyeball. Didn't you see? We found it and put it back in. Everything is just fine now. And I better get going," she said with Mrs. Brown at her side for support.

Teschner latched the gate behind him and the boys waved goodbye to the car pulling out of the driveway.

"How dumb does that lady think we are?" George asked. You just can't put an eyeball in right in the middle of the woods. You gotta have hospitals and stuff." He turned and faced the woods. "You feel like going back and looking for it?"

"My pants are ripped."

"Well, what do you want to do?"

"I don't feel like going and looking for some eyeball that's not even there."

"O.k., o.k. Let's go see if we can find Butch anywhere."

Gregory Brosofske

Angel

He put down the cup and went to the door. No one. He closed the door. He went to the table, the pine one, the one with his sister's lamp. It was on and the light was white and sick and it was on the table. She wouldn't want it that way. She'd have it under. The table would be white-wash too but she would want it under the table. He turned off the lamp. It was cold. He rubbed his eyes, and slid forward off the chair to his knees, to his stomach, flatly. He dug his nose deep into the rug and breathed in the dust. Biting his lip, spreading his arms out, he let his fingers between thick yarn shag combing. Light from the street came in slipping around a dead tree in the frontyard pushing shadows at his back and the rug. The rug with shadows, the one where he swung his arms around brushing the flat tips of yarn flat on his stomach on the rug where he moved. His arms and legs open, then closing through the shadows like a fan

making angels in the snow even though she called us in to eat my sister in violet with fur around the hood we'd swing our arms then our legs then our arms trying to do both at once laughing with our faces in the white dust lightly being wings in half-light and she'd call again for dinner that's getting cold and we'd run in watching our shadows that were long run too being thin and black against the white hungry and not looking back at the holes we made suck the sky's black out.

He reached into his pockets under him. Tight to fit the hands in. Fists tight bone tight like two eyes white like pearls tight as a mother-fuck. He pulled in and wrapped around them. Like a snake for a while. It

wasn't enough. "Eye lids," he said very soft. Almost sweet like he was a small kid on Black Island asking his grandfather to worm a hook. On his back now he unreeled like a slow spool and looked at the ceiling. It should be white. He knew that. It was blue-grey. Soot in the half-light. He sat up. The blood rushed down and away from his head. He felt the sides of his throat pulse. The door was open. He got up and closed the door. Rubbing his eyes, he wanted a cigarette. He opened the closet and got a pack from the shelf. He lit one, sucked the smoke right out, then a 'shaa' through his teeth and put his hand in the left pocket. He listened. The wind made sounds like a tv through a fat wall. He sucked at his cheek and held his breath not thinking of anything and balanced on one foot. He took a bite of a sandwich on the table. The window off his left shoulder rattled. He wondered if the glasses on the sill would ever fall off. The window rattled. He swallowed. The bite of sandwich was dry in his throat. Ashes from his smoke fell off toward the floor. Light came through the window, through the glasses at the sill. Still light. Small light. Street light. Shit light because it was dark at his feet trying to find ashes to rub in. He walked to the far corner of the room tapping his thigh with his right hand between each step do pa do pa lo pa pa

parades and suza suza with bright bowls of brass bat
music for black boots with thighs in them mar mar
marching cleets on cobbles cat backed waves of drum
music and boot-sheen black as piccolos blackly in the
backyard my aunt's yard with wings of fingers in the
night light and I was running like deer in fields in the
back lawn that she told me to play in looking for wings
in the black air swinging arms singing to the trees'
music that rattled like doors in the wind and I think I
saw them maybe in the half-light or my face in the
black cool and oil slip of puddles on the black-top of the
driveway something to touch with long fingers thin
fingers dipping for the color of oil something to taste
like the color of oil, but there's just a finger's gaul joint
popping at a puddle's splash

He sat with his back to the corner. He noticed that the door was open. He closed it, and sat in a corner diagonal to the first. He pulled his knees up under his chin and wrapped his arms around tight as boot-lace. It wasn't enough. He listened, then licked his fingers and saw a rose in a vase. The blue vase on the table. The rose was dead. He unwrapped and walked slowly in the dark with shadows of the frontyard tree slipping across his face like greased lines of night. He took the rose from the vase. On his back he could feel the rose was dry. He crumbled the rose. He had dust on his face. He sat up, stood up, and lifted a cup away from the table. Wind rattled the window. He dipped his finger in the cup. His finger was wet. A glass fell off the sill.

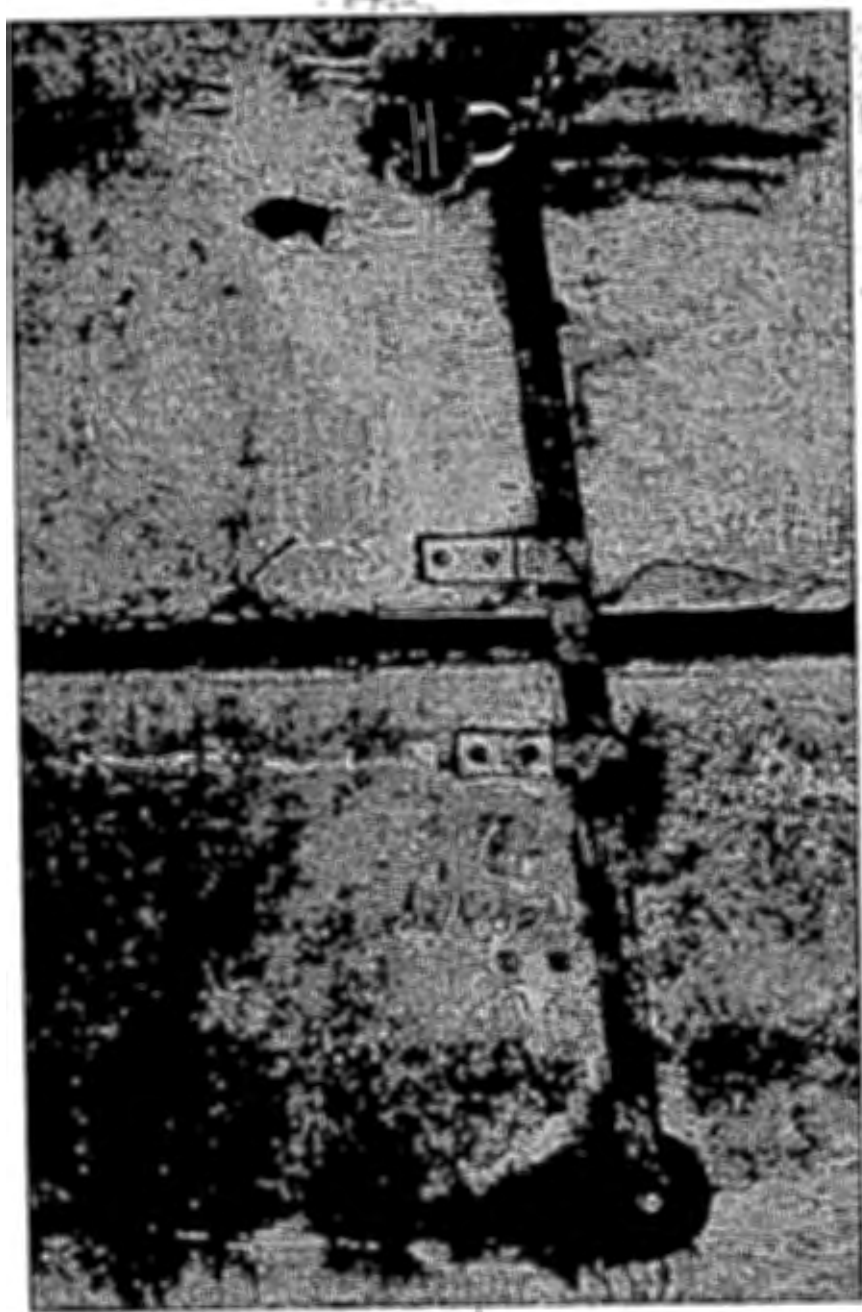
A Practice in Guinea

I cry
hearing a woman scream.
I see the blood rush
gush
and finally clot.

Stop.
Don't go to Guinea
or strange beaches
alone.
Avoid bands of women
armed with broken bottles
stained and shining,
searching for the prize.

Dona Lantz





Karen M. Hendricks

Reunion

I like small boxes
odd buttons
and finding forgotten
notebooks.
Old words
speak
new thoughts
as I peek
under strange covers.

Dona Lantz

Blacktop

The world's
a hot blacktop road
lined with yellow weeds
at noon in August
and everywhere
and still air is in wrinkles
and the cars—
they just suck along.

John Able

The Rainbows Jangle

There he is
reclined on a red divan
cool as linoleum.
Naked and all stretched out—
in a reflective mood, I suppose.

The universe is creaking
and he is nonchalantly squeezing
clay between his fingers—
a little blood spurting out with each clench.

The rainbows jangle,
and there he rests,
contemplating condoms and Cadillacs,
allowing dappled dolphins in pinkly green seas;
and all the time he's murmuring:
Oh, it'll do . . . it'll do . . .

John Able

weeds on the horizon

all is surface
i cannot see my hands
clasped behind you caressing
what must be your brains
and when i press you to me
the face that i see lengthens like evening
flattens
and in your eyes two white hands swim
desperately clawing for air
i am afraid you will burst like a ripe fruit
i want to scream
when i feel your hands
on the back of my head
pressing my face to interface

Robert Brown

Saturday Night

visions of Ruby, Azure, & Starlight
flicker on the wick of a wax finger
empty brown label smells of scotch
beside half-tide glass

metronome rhythms of thrusting loins
slippery white sheets slide
as a burning, aching knot unties itself

lapping mouths caress in view
of milk-light pouring through open window

padded footsteps, clothes like rustling leaves
the Starlight flickers and she's gone

Mark Hootman

ROOTBOUND

your asparagus fern
slides out
of it's pot
dangles desparately
like knotted prison sheets
stretching to overcome space

in the last lower
kitchen cabinet
your sprouting seeds
slouch on
spindly toothpicks
in fifteen carefully
cleaned cans

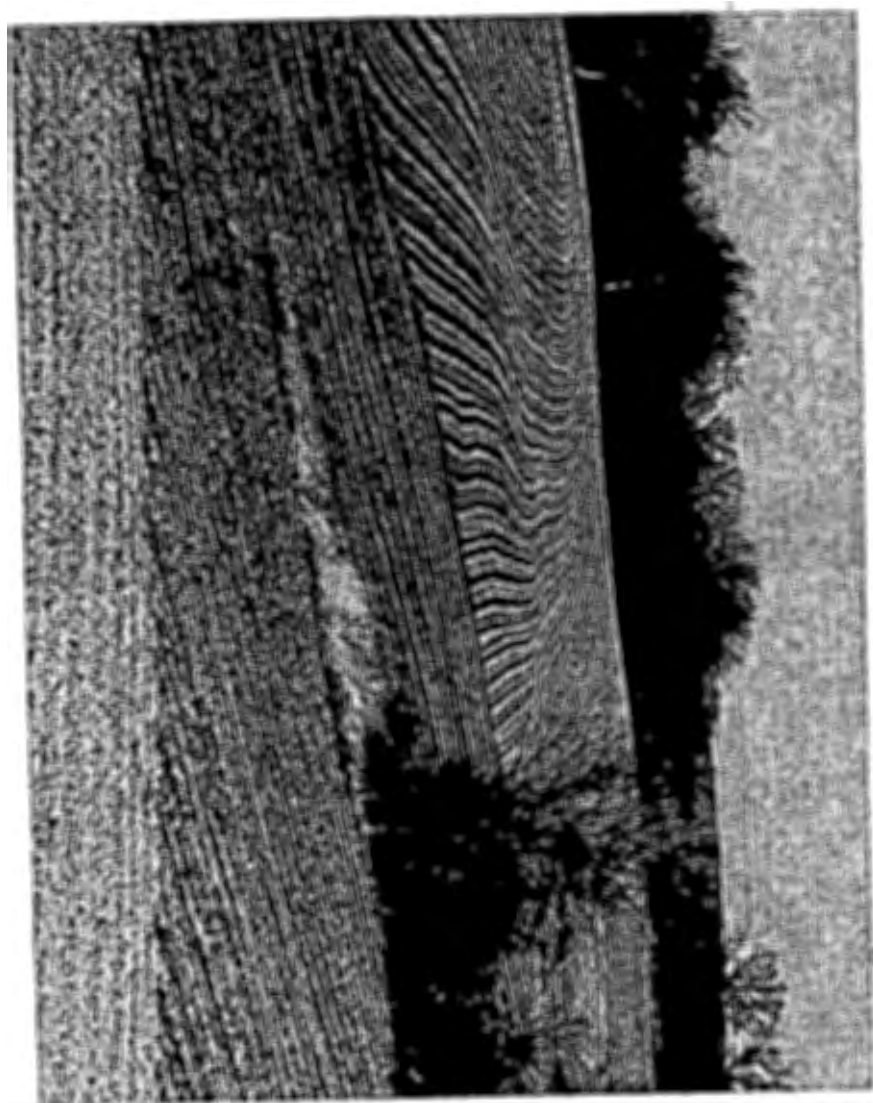
its no wonder
your love
makes me grow
peacefully
rootbound

Betsy Ferraro



Dan House

Dan House



When I Get Off

All the world's problems
which had been sitting there,
slowly attaching themselves like barnacles,
melt like warm summer ice cream
and slide slowly
down the back of
my skull.

Todd Perala

**Fish Story
(for penny)**

Poor
Baby Doo
Daddy
went a'fishing
and found
you

voided white flesh
rusting
floating like a
lily pad
in his favorite
lagoon

(green was always
her color)

a gift for
diligent papas
who give
their treasures
to young men
in tough jackets
and find them again
in mystical communion
w/Nature.

(green was always
her color)

Christine Allen

Walking Past the Apartment Complex

Coughing
At night
lightless
passing the wall.
The pigeons curdle
in nests
I hear a sound
coming over
the edge of the building
like sail tips
somewhere
I hear
claws at the brick.
Beaks.
I twist up my hands

One window lights,
shudder-quick.
A wild eye

Gregory Broszofsky

Everything's in dust—
a bowl
four goblets
an imitation grecian platter
a picture of my father
a picture of my ex-wife.

On the other bed
Tom is sleeping.
I can see the bottom of his boot.
The wind blows
all four of his beetle posters
nod.

Out the window
some cars happen.
They sound like cars.

Gregory Brosofske

Snow and Jill
A slow floating under the trees.
Her left eye
closed.
Under the lid.
A bee.

Her thin nose.
Her black hair
in strands
black moonlight
in secret strands
At her feet.
Hands open, close
like fish mouths.
The broken skin.

A yellow eye
in the night
for the moon.
A white jaw
hung
on a limb of a tree
and snow,
the night
wind.
Panther
descends
like a nostril.
Yellow eye.
Brine breath.
Sleak gut.
Spitting up
something soft.
Just for Jill.
whose breath is black
against the snow

Gregory Brosofske

Up
in a birch tree. Hanging.
Her nose flattened,
like at the window,
at the bark.
Her desire eyes stab red
in the dark.
Fingers
tight
round, around. Hanging.
like a wind chime
sweating black beads.
She's laughing.
There's a bird overhead.
A white wheel
spinning around her neck.
Chaffing.
music

Last night
she drank six cups.
She took a walk.
Without her glasses
down the railroad tracks.
She walked on gravel
and saw the tracks go straightly
She touched herself and found that she was wet. She slipped
on a tie and cut her cheek.
She lifted herself to her knees. Her hair was dry. She ran
her fingers through it. She pulled it out
in patches. Five patches. Off her left shoulder, something ran
in the grass that was dry. She couldn't see it and braided
the hair between her knees. She lit her hair. She breathed the smoke.
It started to snow.

Gregory Brosofske

Bulldozers

and years. the portrait
wasn't finished.
clumps of paint
fell off the canvas.
the easel waited
with the spiders
for the artist.

Mary McAlpine

i study history
to learn about women
who bound their feet
restrained their breasts
and sat in red velvet chairs

Mary McAlpine

POEM WRITTEN TWO DAYS AFTER A SUICIDE

I stopped at the white enamel stove one
step beyond the door, the two dirty cups
in the sink; in silence I swore they were
there

He said cardinals are songbirds but I was
too close to know, I only saw him nesting
with her under the walnut tree beneath my
window . . .

Maybe, *I* said later, cardinals become
songsters when they ride white pintos,
a lock snaps in place, while cursing my
release like the worn brass key clinking
relief on the white enamel stove one step
beyond the door; and a shot from the pond
on Wednesday

Anne Maddente