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GRIEVING

November unfurls along Ashmill Road,
and the last dogwood leaves cling like Red Sox pennants.
Lovers go inside the house, their arms filled
with dead wood they have gathered.
Behind them the floor of the woods is gold
with its own coin; this is the money
they have failed to earn in the allowable season.
If they seem sad, it is because they know
they would have no use for it anyway.

The mind on such days collects itself,
a squirrel's nest in a hollow tree.
The squirrel sleeps peacefully and warm;
he does not need to remember all he has gathered.

In the steely light the sycamore shows its new
green scars like shadows burned into its arms.
The poet decides to take the harder road this time,
and the trail the deer make descending to the stream
at dusk leads him to their beds. He knows
they have the perfect house — no roof, no walls,
no mortgage but the acrid saliva of the hunter.
They will loan him this house, leaping out of its
windows and doors when they hear him. He knows
they stand apart from him like bridesmaids,
waiting for him to touch their invisible furniture,
the places they have lain. Which of those
still saplings are the legs of deer
waiting for him to pass?

The lovers warm their hands
by the fire they have made. The heat
makes a wind, rushing into the chimney.
Outside, the poet stands hearing the wind
and the deer straying down the hill to the creek
and the lovers who have scars like the sycamore,
merely seasonal things. He gathers
what he can, knowing it is worth everything,
and that he cannot keep it.
W O R K

Tip the wheelbarrow and the path
of wood chips winding through the blood-red
trees is longer. As I work, the beings
of the woods whose paths go anywhere
in and out of light, ignore me. I do
what men do -- make a single way, flat
and paved, where wheels may go. Today
when I am done, I leave a monument of stones
where my road ends. Leaves come down
and cover all my work. The mold,
the rain, the sleepless snow
begin an endless work of their own.

--- for Phil & Cecily
from BLOCKNOTES

2
Light drifts down over his chest
and taps itself out in small molecular radiances
called Iliad or Sonnets from the Portugese.
Body texts sprout out like patches of an illness —
curable petrifications.
He grows supple and oily again,
forgets the patch of signs,
for years is little more than "reader as sump-pump."

But one morning he sees the rising patches,
runs to shut out the light, is too late —
good literature is growing
out over his body in infected scabs.

11
Priceless alphabetical sticks.
Last letter—remains, he mutters,
dragging four S-parts across the room;
setting up the memory of a shape and a sound.

That S he puts outside his house,
leaning it ceremoniously against the front door.
Mute gesticulating neighbors
pass glowering at the connotative symbol.

Secretly, that night, he fastens together
half recalled parts of other letters,
but before he can complete one
He is found and slaughtered.
10
Moonlight opens his mind,
inscribing it with vision-curls.
He probes his way home,
eyes rinsed with the significant.

In Mary's arms he discovers
a lover who is his own exact double
And speaks of him in the third person
as if he hardly existed.

On the wall behind the kitchen sink
there is a little pink stabbing light
And in its broiled loneliness
an immense boustrophedon inscription.

6
The wink implies
culture in its entirety --
world-spirit, kidding-spirit,
Delicate seams of humor.

He tries winking at the Rockies.
To his amazement they wink back,
giant invisible wits just over the cabin-top
and he goes around all day

looking westward for more of the relation.
What he sees is the little sea-horse floaters,
Eye-nuisances he lives with,
and in the distance some tinfoil.
I WANT TO PAINT TONIGHT

I want to paint tonight, 
transfer this light 
these scudded sea shore clouds 
lumbering over these North Philadelphia streets 
to canvas. 
I want to paint tonight, 
immortalize 
a little Black girl 
in a red raincoat 
well kept row homes 
profuse with houseplants 
and MAB tints. 
I want to paint tonight, 
a broken big wheel 
discarded in the street 
white veined collards 
behind cyclone fences 
clusters of Blackmen 
against pastel blue bar walls 
hand lettered BARBECUE signs 
shouting at stomachs seasick on Cutty Sark. 
I want to paint tonight, 
the Coltrane music 
Malcolm speeches 
Garvey speeches 
King speeches 
Bob Marley songs 
dancing all around me. 
I want to paint tonight, 
pick up brushes and bleed, 
slash creative jugulars 
and splash canvas 
with the juices of life. 
I want to go to church 
on canvas tonight,
hold communion,
hold baptisms,
hold funerals
and weddings
on rivers
of rainbow oils.
I want this light
like I want a woman
tonight
want to move into this light
these moments
like I would between thighs.
Tonight,
I reach for brushes and canvas
oil
light
truth.
MORBID THINGS

Sometimes I try
to write about happy things.
When I was growing up,
my folks always accused me
of liking stories
that ended tragically.
They'd say,
"There's enough sorrow in life.
Why dwell on it?"
I told them
I could only describe
what I saw, not what
I didn't see.
Bob got a divorce,
and Walt was arrested
for making it
with some guy
in a men's room.
Jack shot himself
and Gary, my senior class president,
flunked out of college.
My parents said
I didn't know the right people,
didn't have the right attitude
when I broke up
with Margaret and Jan
and Veronica. A girl told me
her life was ruined
because one lover
had been a woman,
and her parents didn't understand.
I guess I didn't know
the right people.
Thirty years later,
I'm still accused
of writing about morbid things.
Jeff's dying of cancer,
and Jay's wife
rammed her car
into a bridge.
Maybe it was suicide.
Maybe not.
I still try to write
about happy people,
but my wife's mother
tried to kill herself
and my dad needs prostate surgery
for the fourth time.
And I still can't describe
what I don't see.

LAUGHTER

You begin to laugh
when I kiss your back.
I run my tongue
along your spine
and you shiver, saying,
"It must not be
much fun
kissing a person
who can't stop laughing."
Someone we know says
laughter sounds orange
at night,
but I can't decide
how it sounds
in the afternoon.
I hold your breasts,
and I seem to feel them

swell with your laughter.
When you reach behind you,
feeling my erection,
you say, "I didn't know
my back was so sexy,"
but neither of us
say anything
when you roll over.
Somewhere deep inside you
I can feel the laughter
rising ... rising.
It comes toward me
like a high tide,
and I feel the way I do
when the undertow pulls me
out into the ocean,
then your laughter reaches me.
When I come,
I'm laughing too.
GATHERING

1.
The way he gathers them, 
dead weeds, parts of cars, tires, 
turtle shells, whenever he goes out 
he takes his bag, 
he walks old roads at morning, 
finds parts of necklaces, 
cigarette lighters, 
some he gives away to the poor, 
some to his old friends, 
most he began putting together 
twenty years ago, shapes of desire, 
dreams suddenly remembered 
there in his back yard, 
he will lecture you on it, if you wish, 
he will show relationships, 
tapping this hose or metal plate 
that piece of wood shaped like a pelican, 
he will answer your questions, 
when he began, places to look, 
his best find, the way light hit it, 
the point to it all.

2.
It is no solution, he admits, 
to what goes on here, 
the neighbor's silence, 
children crying in a barn, 
telephones ringing. 
It is so little, this sitting 
beneath the shagbark hickory, 
looking for a way through, 
for new information, 
the binding light along one edge, 
shadows along another, 
the replication of absence, 
and then tomorrow or the next day, 
a door slightly ajar,
Harry Humes

a window slowly falling
of its own weight,
something flying off a car
as it passes,
those repetitions, he admits,
that are hard to avoid.

3.
The children come out of the barns,
they grow up,
they avoid his face,
his hands fluttering like falling birds,
righting themselves
at the last minute
on a piece of hurricane lamp,
a fishhook, a wingless toy airplane,
a paper wasp's nest.

He remembers every piece,
he will tell you the day
they finally fit in.
He will stop in the middle,
sometimes, and listen,
then walk off in the direction
his ear has been bent.
He gathers sounds now,
a small twig snapping beneath a paw,
the splash out on a lake,
click click of bats,
rush of swifts from a fieldstone house.

It goes on, this gathering,
step after step along old roads,
familiar trails, fields,
his bag filling up,
his backyard almost not enough.
LAST NIGHT

one big crystal
goblet
exploded
in the middle of the floor
    on a Turkish rug

we were watching
GLORIA; Gena
was just about to plug
a mobster
when the crystal went
b-a-n-g
we took cover
shaking in the guts

I called Diane and Jeff
(being crystal/spirit
expertizers)
they said shake the house down
with sage
and get rid of those angers

this morning the land-lady
said, nobody's been
murdered here, but
this is Brooklyn

we slept with the lights on
just in case the sage didn't work
FLIP TOP DESKS

Gus says back in grammar school
they had wooden flip top desks
with metal hinges and
empty ink wells
wrote in pencil till second grade
fought with Joe McDermott
when he threw Gus' hat
on top a car
loved his third grade teacher
Miss McGowan, uncontrollably
scrambled for coins when the money
man threw dimes and nickels
in the schoolyard
ate bologna sandwiches
every day for seven years
except for tuna fish
on Fridays
played St. Joseph in the
Christmas play age six
engaged in the battle of
snowball fights on the way
to school
complained of too much homework
read his library book about
Abraham Lincoln
fascinated by the stove pipe
hat of Abraham
and the log cabin in Illinois
where Abe was born
and then there was that something
about Rose Marie who lived just
up the street in seventh grade
that kept him awake at night
PARTNERS IN CRIME

Gus says back when they were still playmates and Nancy lived at 3843 and he lived at 3841 North Delhi St. they watched that fence between their back yards sag and sag till finally it collapsed completely they would go to the grocery store to buy penny candies to the candy store to buy 10 cent cones of Breyers ice cream to the German bakery to buy jelly donuts and cinnamon buns back when Nancy was nine and he was eight playing with dirt in the window boxes playing hide and seek listening to Charlotte Kitchen singing about somebody named Ninny Capoola who liked a "Hairy Banana" and sometimes they would stretch the truth, just like it was a rubber band, until it nearly snapped back at them like the time on Halloween they went all the way to the Convent at St. Stephens just to get an extra cookie and were discovered by Gus' parents on their way back home at the railroad bridge on Erie Avenue and that time Gus let Nancy do all the talking
Tommy Olofsson

DREAM SEEDS

At night the air relaxes from all the light. It's easier to breathe and we have time to notice that we exist.

Day is a sudden whirlwind in the sand, but even a grain of sand can be changed by darkness into a fertile seed.

Like a black star the seed grows in night's floating ground, where dreams weave their wireless root systems.

THE SHADOW INSIDE ME

Night has driven the shadow into my own body. It's an inward robe that stretches its arms and legs into my limbs, whispers like silk along my spine, turns darker and darker until it finally comes off in me as the color of sleep, behind whose eyelids two black flames are flickering.

translated by Jean Pearson
THE WAVES WITH YOU

Desire's rapid fish, the algae
of finely branching lust, the waves
that come and go, caresses

oozing from our fingertips, soon to
be sucked into the mighty swirling current
where each breath is frothy with spume

from the great salt waters and every
clear thought crushed like the message
in the bottle out on the high seas.

FREEING THE SHADOW

Freedom breaks down doors that don't exist,
lets you sleep peacefully on the rack of your ideals,
makes you realize you've left your limitations.

Water can hollow out rock, and maybe
you can take up your borders and walk
without leaving any traces.

You set your shadow free and watch it run
along roads no one else can see.
And then, in the night, you follow it.

translated by Jean Pearson
FOR THE BAYMAN

We have all decided to take risks
clam for clams in cold water
pull the rake to again and again
feel for that squirt of movement
with our bare toes
listen carefully for the ping
of clamshells on the tines
take them home in a bushel basket
set in a rubber inner tube
with a rope to it tied around our waist
clam plough, sand furrows.
We have all decided to plant
exotic seeds or transplant small eggplants
or try the fragile tomatoes in new soil.
Next year the asparagus
will take a deeper trench
and again I will pull in
the muddy bundles of blue mussels
as you bend your long stork legs
to harvest periwinkles.
JWHH’S GIRLS

by

Dusty Sklar

At seventeen, when I was already an exile from the world, I became a junior stenographer and was exiled from my race and from myself as well. Descendant of rabbis, devout recipient of direct divine revelation, reviler of pigs and crustacea, I veered sharply off the path of righteousness when I came to work for the Jewish Health and Welfare House (tetragram: JWHH), and the gates of Experience were thrown open to me. I had read Madame Bovary and Anna Karenina and Brothers Karamazov and I didn’t want to live. I wanted to LIVE! Nothing I had ever read in the public library in any way prepared me for JWHH.

It was 1945. All eligible young men were at war. Even living in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, among the pale skinned Chassidim, I knew that much, though I had personally never come within hand-holding distance of an eligible young man. But I had seen enough movies to make me suspect that there was a great breach in my education. I was plump, eager and, through Spinoza’s guidance, on my way to Enlightenment. Also, because I could never think of anything worth saying, I had taken the trouble to memorize the most meaningful of the contents of Bartlett’s Quotations. Put this together with my fairly skillful typing and shorthand, and I could almost pass for a creature of the Renaissance. Surely somebody could be deceived into loving me.

But all great things are as difficult as they are rare, says Spinoza. Mike Singer, the fundraiser to whom I was first assigned, would not love me because he loved only “broads.” One quiet week between a testimonial lunch and a benefit dinner, he tried to reform me by peppering his notes with extraneous matter. Halfway through a letter soliciting a huge sum from an important president of an important company, I began to type:

“
The sexual life of the camel
Is greater than anyone thinks.
In moments of amorous passion
He often makes love to the Sphinx,
But the Sphinx’s posterior entry
Is blocked by the sands of the Nile,
Which accounts for the hump on the camel
And the Sphinx’s inscrutable smile.”

and had to retyp.

All day long women phoned him, just to chat, as if he were the last available man left in America, which he was, just about. Occasionally some turbaned beauty would turn up before lunch and, while Mike was seducing someone else on the phone, would try to beguile me with bonbons or pistachios, as though I were a prospective mother-in-law. They usually wore, these beauties, Joan Crawford’s mouth, Marlene Dietrich’s eyebrows, walked like Ingrid Bergman and talked like Lauren Bacall. An incredible syncretism. Was it likely that I would ever get to marry the boss, as the Silver Screen had conditioned me to hope that I could?

Did these women know, I wondered, that this gorgeous man was 4-F because he was psychoneurotic, and that he had to wear sanitary napkins because of bleeding hemorrhoids? Myra, one of the other stenographers, had given me this vital piece of information in a quick briefing my first week at JWHH. Her religion was psychotherapy and she found Mike a fascinating subject. 4-F or not, psychoneurotic or not, hemorrhoidal or not, he looked pretty good to me, the flawed hero of my fantasies, until the crisp fall morning when I came, innocent and eager, to my little desk in the corner of the large room, whipped off my typewriter cover and froze in icy terror at what was waiting for me in my typewriter carriage—a string of photographs: women spread apart like dead chickens, men pushing themselves into the behinds of other men, two couples tangled
in each other’s genitals, everyone looking pleasant and plastic, like the shopgirls in the fashionable shops on Fifth Avenue.

So, I thought. This is what it means, then, to be psychoneurotic. No wonder the Army, even in their desperation, could not find a place for him. Myra had taught me that sex and neurosis came together like fever and thermometers. This manic could never be transmuted into husband. What were hemorrhoids compared with a depraved mind?

When I met Myra in front of the elevators, I wasn’t very hungry for lunch. I was willing to forego food for awhile, at least until I could purge myself of the image of those pictures, but Myra insisted on ordering a sandwich for me.

“Myra, I can’t work for Mike any longer,” I said, chewing nervously on my sandwich. Spewing out my disillusionment, I was almost finished with lunch before I realized that it was bacon and egg—BACON AND EGG! May God protect me! To violate the Law in a sleazy coffee shop. Myra was quietly attentive. “Interesting,” she nodded. “Do you see what you’re doing?”

“I didn’t know it was bacon.”

“No, I mean look at what you’ve got in your hand.”

I looked. It was a paper napkin.

“You’ve been twisting the corners around.” I didn’t respond and she added, “and tearing them off.”

Next to my plate was a heap of twisted bits of napkin. “I guess I have.”

In what I took to be a kind of wise therapist’s whisper she asked, “Is this what you would like to do to Mike Singer?”

I stared, paralyzed. Was she suggesting that I was psychoneurotic? I didn’t know which to feel more ashamed of, breaking the dietary law or trying to castrate Mike Singer. Maybe they were even related. It was evident to Myra that I was a pretty severe case of repression. A classic case. She marvelled that I was able to function at all and tried to induce me to see her therapist, a neo-Reichian. I felt sick enough to make an appointment on the spot until Myra mentioned that I would have to free-associate lying naked on a couch. “Look, Myra,” I pleaded, “If I could free-associate lying naked on a couch, why would I be repressed?”

“Your resistance is quite strong,” she said pityingly.

I was hopeless.

In the afternoon, Mr. Singer called me into his office. “Take a letter, baby,” he said, and tossed his pencil down the neckline of my blouse. He fumbled around, trying to remove it. I beat him to it, broke the pencil neatly in two, placed the pieces carefully on his desk, and walked out.

When I told Myra about it, she thought for a moment. “What else could—you do in your present stage of development?”

I grew suspicious of myself. For years I had been flexing the muscles of my conscious mind, and had left my unconscious to fester. I could almost feel the pus oozing out of my ears.

Myra threw the cover over her Remington and picked up her purse. “I’m having dinner with Jimmie. Want to join us?”

All I knew about Jimmie was that her name was Gertrude and she was working temporarily as a stenographer until she could break into the theatre.

“Do you think it will be all right with Jimmie?”

“Sure. She thinks you have a sensual mouth.”

My sensual mouth involuntarily formed itself into a grateful smile. Thank God my disease hadn’t spread that far! But I suddenly remembered a prior commitment to my mother’s pot roast. She was not a woman who took cooking lightly.

“Call her,” Myra suggested. “Tell her there’s a fundraising dinner tonight and you have to work.”

“What, you mean lie?” Fine. I was willing to do it, never mind the consequences to my eternal soul, but teach me, somebody.

“Shulamith, do you want me to call her?”

Not only was she unpressed. She was bi-lingual. In eloquent Yiddish she convinced my mother
that the consumption of her pot roast was not so great a mitzvah as raising funds for homeless Jews.

We had a giggling fit in the elevator. "I was afraid she was going to offer to donate the pot roast," Myra choked. I knew I was already in the hands of the powers of darkness. It was exhilarating, putting one over on Mama, whose nose could always sniff a rotten onion.

"It was the Yiddish that did it," I said. "Anyone who speaks Yiddish is basically good." I was giddy with the unfamiliar freedom of belonging to myself for a few hours.

Jimmie's apartment was right near the office, on Washington Square. "Her mother's fourth husband is loaded," Myra explained. "A land speculator. Wait'll you see the place."

"Does Jimmie live here alone?"
"When she has to."
"What do you mean?"
"Oh my God, it's exhausting trying to talk to you." When she saw my hurt look, she added, "Never mind, kid, you'll catch on."

I despaired of ever catching on. There was too much to catch on to, and I was too far behind.

On Jimmie's husky invitation to "Come on in whoever you are" I found myself standing in ultra-violet darkness. I could dimly see a figure reclining on a sofa and the tip of a cigarette glowing like a firefly in the wilderness.

An hour earlier in the office our hostess had been a tweedy British type. Now she was metamorphosed into a gown of purple batik and a Tallulah accent. "Dahlings, do sit down."

We groped toward the light of a red lamp, which gave the room the appearance of a phosphorescent cave. The only other illumination came from a tortuous iron candelabrum on a table in the corner. Jimmie motioned us there and with a riant toss of her head said, "I'll get the first and only course."

"She's a sensational cook," Myra whispered.

My stomach growled appreciatively, but it was building itself up for a letdown. Despite the promise of the candelabrum, the good white wine, the fine table linens, the fresh Italian bread and Afternoon of a Faun in the background, all we got was Campbell's Vegetarian Vegetable Soup laced with a stringy substance Myra later explained was smoked oyster. Bacon and smoked oyster all in the same day, after seventeen arduous years of observing Kashruth. Progress was frightening.

Hypnotized by Jimmie's luminous eyes, I drained my bowl. In the candlelight her face was that of a patient, melancholy Mephistopheles who finds the world absurd but is unwilling to disillusion others with this knowledge.

Jimmie wanted to know how I liked working for Mike Singer. She and Myra exchanged smiles over the name, it seemed to me. "I worked for him before you came," Jimmie said.

"How did you get on with him?" I asked.

She snorted. "I don't get on with men. I was transferred to Fifi Heilbronner, whom I adore absolutely. Look, dahling, I can easily get you into our department. It's gay, it's really gay. You'll fit in beautifully." She did strange things with her mouth as she spoke. It was never still, but moved out and in like she was sucking on an eternal Lifesaver. There was something suggestive about the motion, though it was almost certainly an involuntary twitching. I could barely hear the words for all my concentration on the vessel forming them.

Myra thought I would be happy working for Fifi. "She's archetypal. You know, bosomy and protective."

I did not want to alienate my new friends and agreed to the transfer. I was touched that they took an interest in my career. Anyway, it would be a relief to get away from Mike Singer. Jimmie refilled my glass. Warm with drink and affection, I raised it and cried, "Let the world slip: we shall ne'er be younger," hoping the quote was somehow suitable to the occasion.

"Taming of the Shrew? We're doing it at the Academy workshop this week." Jimmie was delighted with me. For my part, I was proud to have an actress for a friend, even if she was a stenographer. The only friends I had ever been able to make in high school were girls who never became cheerleaders or class officers, girls who wore cotton stockings and did all their homework assignments with a
religious fervor. The despised and rejected, despised and rejected, secretly, even by me. After a few more sips of wine I stood up, tottering on my chair and declaimed:

"If you have a friend worth loving,
Love him. Yes, and let him know
That you love him, ere life's evening
Tinge his brow with sunset glow'
Why should good words ne'er be said
Of a friend till he is dead?"

My audience looked embarrassed and I realized I had strayed too far from Shakespeare. I slumped down in my seat again and reached for Myra's matchbook, tearing a strip off and twisting it. "She's sweet, don't you think?" Jimmie asked Myra. Myra watched me without comment, and I suddenly became hot, aware of the torn matchbook. "You are—sweet," Jimmie repeated.

Jimmie left the table and paced around the room. "Dammit, when is Edith going to show up?"
Jimmie distended her lips in my direction. "Sweet," she murmured. "How can anything be so sweet?" Maybe she preferred doggerel to Shakespeare, despite her theatrical background. Unless I exercised extreme vigilance, I myself was often tempted to pass up Jane Austen for Fannie Hurst.

Myra was looking through Jimmie's record collection. "Don't you have any of Sarah Vaughn? Edith's mad for her."
"And you?" Jimmie crooned to me, "what are you mad for?"
"I'm not mad," I assured her.
"What do you do, apart from tearing pieces of paper?"
"I have visions," I bragged. I had never told anyone about them, but now I was in such worldly company I saw no harm in it.
"Really?" asked Myra, drawing nearer. "What are you on?"

I was trying to draw meaning from the question when the door was suddenly kicked open by a great hulk of a man who boomed, "get 'em up and keep 'em up, this is a raid." Springing from behind him, like a pair of pigeons deserting a monument, were two other of my co-workers, Edith, a stenographer, and Melvin, the messenger boy. The giant, who introduced himself as Buster Cherry, a trumpeter, was Edith's boyfriend, and I thought he was quite good-natured about the derisive laughter over his name. Apart from this, I found in him no other quality which was attractive. He was much too Rabelaisian for my taste.

Edith had brought her own records and proceeded to play them without a word to anyone. The congregation rocked and grunted appreciatively. Edith withdrew a miniature page from her purse, filled it with some tobacco from a tiny pill box, lit it, and sucked in the smoke in short gasps. she passed the pipe quickly to Buster, who did the same. When everyone in the room had taken a few short puffs, it was given to me. I confessed that I didn't smoke.

Edith said, "It's Mary Jane, honey. Try it. Do like we did."
The tobacco smelled sweet, woody, and I wondered what sort of ritual this was. I was ashamed to ask, for fear of being thought stupid, and sucked in my breath as I had seen the others do. For the first time I could hear clearly the notes playing around the melody. I chuckled softly to myself. How had I overlooked jazz before this? I felt deep and self-contained. It didn't matter that nobody took notice of me. I was no longer afraid that I would humiliate myself, gave up wishing that I could be more interesting. Suffused with sudden self-awareness, I felt a tender love for myself and for all living things. God, I was living at last! Enough of visions and books. They had armored me against life. Now I was in it, I could see for myself there was nothing to fear.

Jimmie took my hand in hers. She said I had beautiful fingers and then kissed them. Tears rolled down my face. She asked me what they were for.
"You're not yourself, and that makes me sad."
"My brother was killed in Bataan. I took his name, and now I've become like him."
"It's a dangerous thing, to take the name of someone else."
“Well, I didn’t know, you see, and now it’s too late.”

“It doesn’t matter. You’re a variation on a theme by God. It’s not easy to be yourself, even without taking your brother’s name, you know what I mean? It probably takes years of searching before you find the self that’s really you.”

She let go of my hand. “The blind leading the blind,” she spat out, and turned away.

Days passed, whole weeks. I sat welded into the chair, making friends with myself, as if I had come upon a stranger. When Melvin smiled at me I smiled back, undaunted, right into his thick glasses and pitted face. Satisfied, he curled up to enjoy the memory of my kindness.

Suddenly I became aware of a low moaning in a distant part of the room. I made my way toward it, groping in the phosphorescent light, past idols of gold and clay, past shadows that hid blemishes. I groped until I was entangled by a veil made of fish netting. I looked down on the bed behind the veil. The giant, more monstrous with no clothes on, was crushing some frail figure trapped beneath him. I beat with my fists on his back, crying, “Please, somebody help!” His arm shot out like a firebolt, caught me on the side of the head. I fell back. The netting enveloped me. All was darkness.

I was in a taxi with Myra, crossing the Williamsburg Bridge. We spoke without looking at each other.

“You’re an idiot,” she said.

“Honest, I thought he was hurting you.”

“You should be so hurt.” I envied her for feeling no shame, not even towards Edith.

“Edith will probably never speak to you again.”

“Are you kidding? All she cares about is pot.”

“Pot?” I asked, thinking that it was some form of sexual deviation.

“Oh God, I am tired of explaining things to you! Marijuana. That’s what you had tonight, a lot of good it did you!” And I had mistaken my euphoria for a permanent state. The kreplach one eats in a dream are not real kreplach.

My mother was sitting on the steps, shivering in the icy moonlight, rocking back and forth. She squinted anxiously at the taxi as it stopped in front of the house. My breath might be evil-smelling, my eyes hallucinated, or my voice a scream, so I did not speak. I hung back behind Myra the Self-Possessed, who had learned (in which Cabbala?) how to wallow in the dung heap and rise up smelling of Tabu. My mother just sat there, arms hugging her body, rocking back and forth as though in prayer. Well, she always wanted me to have friends. I’ll show her friends, I thought. Myra started past my mother.

“What are you bringing me here at three o’clock in the morning?” my mother frowned.

“Oh, hello Mrs. Greenberg,” Myra said in Yiddish. “I’m Myra Cooperman. Poor thing, you shouldn’t have waited up for us. These fundraising dinners go on forever. I hope it’s all right with you if I sleep over. I didn’t want Shulamith to have to come home alone.”

“God bless you,” cried my mother. “Your mother knows where you are?”

‘Oh, of course. I never go anywhere without telling Mama.” She winked at me as we followed my mother up the stairs. “A pushover,” she whispered.

My mother made us hot Ovaltine. While we drank it down, she asked Myra questions about her family and the office.

I barely recognized my friend. She exuded wholesomeness and piety. I looked at her face as if I could learn there all the practical mechanics I needed to survive this confusion. All the months at JHWH, I had tried not to think of the great blank distance between me and other people. And now, that serene face made me know I had thought of nothing else. Myra’s ease in the world was more mysterious to me than being alive. No, it was the same mystery. It was being alive.

When we left for work the next morning, she and my mother embraced. My mother told her, “Don’t be a stranger.” I felt like a stranger: too wise to go on living the “good” life of my ancestors; too weak to plunge headlong into the decadence of my new world.

25
While Myra dozed on the subway, I opened by book of Spinoza. With the desperation of a lonely traveler reaching for Gideon in a remote hotel room, I read:

"After experience had taught me that all things which frequently take place in ordinary life are vain and futile, when I say that all the things I feared and which feared me had nothing good or bad in them save in so far as the mind was affected by them, I determined at last to inquire whether there might be anything which might be truly good and able to communicate its goodness..."

"'Teach me — teach me how to live!' I beseeched my one friend and advisor."
ERNEST OBERHOLZER AND BILLY MCGEE
GO CANOEING ON RAINY LAKE

FOR GENE MONAHAN

I

In 1913, table feet had claws, men scowled in photographs, no World Wars were numbered yet, your grandmother and Teddy Roosevelt still alive. Two canooers, one a Harvard man, the other Ojibwa, paddle under a full May moon. Clicks and whispers rise from the just-broken ice to the canoe paddlers. Otherwise silence. The men say little; one wears knickers and high boots, a plaid wool shirt, too hot now in spring; the Indian wears a skin shirt, face dark under a brimmed hat. A fish leaps; an otter rolls over a few hundred yards ahead. Ernest Oberholzer spots a moose shadow erect near shore, its ancient nose pointed toward somewhere under water as if music were rising from that spot. Years later, the white man writes about a moose, and says:

"Sooner or later you will meet one — that ludicrous patchwork of snout, hump, bell and flapping ears which the scientists say is one of the oldest animal forms, and more than looks it. He not only completes the illusion of the past; he makes the pleistocene a reality."
Bill Holm

I I

But now it is May, 1913, on Rainy Lake, where Canada and Minnesota come together at the bullseye of the continent. The two canoers have still not made camp. Billy McGee paddles while Oberholzer reaches down in the ribs of the canoe, brings up a violin case. He tightens the bow, rosins its hair, tunes. Bare fifths ring over splashing fish, moose breathing. He bows a chord — D minor. Bach's \textit{Chaconne}. Neither moose, otter, not Indian know this music, though they have heard it many times before, so they listen. The violin misses notes in this spiny, grandiose piece, but the sound goes on swelling up from that canoe into the night, as if the canoe itself were being bowed by something invisible beside it in the water.

Not just the illusion of the past, this is the past itself, 1913 also a pleistocene, ice still not quite gone on the cold lake, stone islands only shadows as the moon passes under a cloud, the \textit{Chaconne} moving into a major key down in the low violin strings, the moose slowly lifting his great heavy nose up from the water into the cold spring night.

SCOTT JOPLIN

I

He never smiled, his friends said, 
but looked out at you 
from those doleful eyes, 
like turned-down gas lamps 
set in a coal-black wall. 
He did not sing 
the song of the happy darky 
to set toes tapping 
in St. Louis whorehouses. 
The darkness within him 
was darker and lovelier than 
the elegant black curve of his nose — 
than the smooth black hands 
moving over the ivory keys — 
blackbirds flying in a fog.
II

Once he had a daughter
whose dying split his heart
like a sounding board.
He spent ten years
bringing back to life
a honey-colored baby
deserted under a tree in Arkansas.
On the lines of music paper
spread out before him,
she sang forgiveness
to the crooked and the ignorant,
and taught them all together
to dance the Real Slow Drag.

III

In the few old photographs
the mouth turns down at the corners
like a beached canoe.
Perhaps he knew what would come,
brain gone, hands trembling,
silent piano waiting in the corner --
an upright coffin with teeth --
to pull him in, devour him
if he should touch it,
and spit him out, years later,
his black skin unrolling
as from a player, full
of little squares and diamonds
that are ghosts of hands.

IV

Behind the iron piano strings
his leaves and flowers -- Maple Leaf,
Fig Leaf, Rose Leaf, Palm Leaf
Gladiola and Chrysanthemum
Pineapple and sweet Sugar Cane
bloom over and over again,
a Heliotrope Bouquet grown
in light under the darkness
of the stony Missouri ground
that he worked into music
with those elegant black hands.
THE DANCE

Think of the pas de deux
Of one dancer before her mirror
And other perfect half --
Two bodies like wings winged
At the barre -- of how much
Self-absorption it takes
To lose the self: that pupa,
That long embrace. Thinking
About you, I think about
The cold waltz of the Atlantic
That evening off Marblehead,
Of how the wind turned bitter
And drove us inland, back
Along the streets. Now, for me
That wind is the black skirt
Which wrapped around you,
The night is a drawing in
Pen-and-ink of how each precise
Small dance of light cast
Its shadow out across the
Lengthening sea. I needed a way
To forget how that winter
The flesh was so lonely
I could barely bring myself
To lie down in it. I wanted
To be delivered back wholly
To the body, the dance about
The bones, mirrored by another
Whose moves come to me like
My own lost song. Maybe then,
I keep thinking, the last poem
Won't mean the end of touching
The world. Maybe then as always
The last word will be flesh.
LETTER TO RUSSELL BARRON

Here's a thought: most likely
Whatever glimpse we caught
Of each other will turn out
To have been the last one.
I don't know where a solitary
One of you are, or even if
You are all alive. Much as I
Might like it, I don't believe
I'll ever make it back to sit
In Chiodo's drinking beer
Just down the block from WAMO,
Or that the currents are going
To carry me home.

Russell,
You're the one who turned me
Round to rhythm-and-blues:
45's with labels as luminescent
As tropical plants. I can't
Tell you all that they've meant.
Without them I might never
Have reached Muddy Waters,
Hank Crawford, or those horses
Cantering along the keyboard
In Tatum's elemental hands.
If you made it over the river
I hope you got farther than
The suburbs. That evening
I was terrified by your father,
Passed out and wheezing like
A narrow-gauge, there in the
Unlit livingroom — I barely
Knew the first things about
Singing.

   Listen, Russell,
Wherever you are, I hope that
From time to time you rise up
In the heart of your house
In the soft mammal dark. I hope
You have a woman like I do
Who hasn't contracted terminal
Good taste. I'm sorry about
The ways we lose each other
Along our drift of days,
That the trolleys have vanished
Along with the Mystery Train.
And I'm sorry about the Friday
I never showed up. I was with
That lovely armful of lonely bones,
Skinny Margie Stulginski,
And I'd most likely do so again.
CAMP CALVARY

In memory's black-and-white
The setting is always the same
Evening in northern Ohio, cabins
Fading grainily from sight
Like almost weightless, almost
Transparent things. The sky
Is enormous, trees are whole
Summer nights.

In one of them
We are in a barn watching
Old movies flicker silently
Through their frames until
There is nothing but light,
The shadowy animals which have
Their lives in our hands, and
The film begins that ratcheting
Of action back onto its reels.

There is something above us!
Something the color of creosote
And pitch is flying there
Among the rafters and webbing
Of the barn.

We keep losing it
In the distance, finding it again
Where the beam of light scatters
Its soft dim grains. There are
Men on tables, waving brooms.
Quirky, smudged movements.
I remember everything rushing
In shadows and quickening glints,
The film shuttling faster and
Faster into its own undoing,
Reversing the laws of physics.

This is where memory also frays,
But off in the darkness, beyond
The film's shirring absolutions,
I think something is being killed.
Hal Sirowitz

GAZING OUT

Just when I was learning
a few things about the wind,
how it sways the top branches
of the trees, but only nudges
the lower ones, how it can lift
the top strands of a woman's hair,
& then put them back in place
without disturbing any other part of her,
along comes this character wearing
a pink hood, preventing me
from seeing what effect the wind has
on his hair, & I am reminded
by the rattling of the window
that I have obtained all this
information from behind glass,
& don't know that much at all.
LET

let this dark summer
fall into everything

the warm air like breath

up the hill under trees
at night we walked

sometimes I think my father
wants to laugh and cry

all at once

BLUE TABLE/STAY COOL

don't question don't
answer don't think

watch a white cat
jump from the top

of the refrigerator (it's
always buzzing

at night to stay
cool) to the blue table
TOMATO SANDWICHES

the whole front
yard, tomatoes
and squash it was
just before the
Rose of Sharon
flowered white
cats chased bees
thru the unmowed
grass no money
for pizza on
Clay’s food stamps
but suddenly, tomatoes
sliced and fried
green with garlic
and salt or at
noon as boats moved
slowly over the Hudson
as a life unravelling
in hills of rubble,
lathe and nails
and the smoothed Shaker
boards. Even the
machines of the sewing
factory turned off
we spread the mattress
on the floor with the
one folded up blue
homespun quilt put
Loud Reed on or Leila
the tomatoes salted
on blue tin plates
their juices running
down our skin our
juices running down
chunks of July like a
rose in a cube of plastic
the blue air river
the only sound except
for your parents
in the room below us
turning up Dialing
for Dollars
THE DAY AFTER BITBURG

lyn lifshin

don't want to sleep
the maples keep dripping
I wake up at 3 am
as I did as a child
long after the war
branches full of my
mother whispering of
lamps made of baby
skin woke up shaking
in the yellow room
dreams of fire I
felt night braid in my
belly as the baby sitter
at the lake said in
tunnels they hung young
girls up by their mouth
on a hook like cattle
to die threw babies
into fire their flesh
spit like hot dogs
or bacon frying. When
I saw "kike" on the
blackboard I didn't
go to school 3 days
longed for gold crosses
on spikes thru my ear
lobes was glad to
be thought Irish or
French. Last night, a
pen on the bed was
leaking, twisted in
to dreams of blue
numbers tattoos
blue Zklyon B a
blue more indelible
then kerosene in
jected into eyelids
and breasts. In the
night something like
flesh of women near
starvation in camps
in me that's just
pressed with a finger
but can't come back
to what it was
Sixty-Seventh Street Scheherazade

Night after night,
Marlin keeps making me tell him
What it was like, what the 3 of them
Were like, each in his own way.
Doesn't do a bit of good to say
It didn't hurt particularly,
But it certainly was not any fun
At all -- I was dead drunk.
We didn't have our clothes off --
It was pitch black in the elevator,
I didn't see a thing, and
There was no playing around.

But I have to make up all that stuff
For Marlin, figure it out from what
I saw of them in court and their pictures,
If they were the ones,
But I guess I shouldn't complain --
    Marlin's sweeter to me
    Than on our wedding night.
AT THE CEMETERY

Sea spray stirred into snow blows across our cemetry,
Nomadic ghosts no longer tied to their animals.
We brush away the dust
That obscures the name plates of our ancestors.
Our memories wander like the snow.
We lay our ferns on the ground.
I wish I knew a prayer to say:
May you be peaceful,
Though it is cold and quiet,
And dream a dreamless sleep.

We stand at the edge of the grave.
Hope hovers around us like the wandering snow.
We have such faith in our selves, we will always keep
your name,
But you will not greet our children.
It is not of your time.
Remember this.
Robert Bly

DOLLY

Who is this dog lying on the snow
whose brown dingo-like face enlivens
the uneven snow with her intentful look?
This sled dog lying in the yard

eighty miles from Mt. McKinley is one dark hill
among many dark hollows in the wallowy snow.
It is Dolly who crosses her white forearms, relaxed
near the chained sled dogs, waiting for something to happen,

because she thinks a dog cannot make things happen.
Things happen somewhere out in the big air, when the door
opens, when a moose starts across the railroad track,
when the train, dragging the world, comes from Anchorage

and all the sled dogs howl. That's something.
When the sun sets, is that something? When late shadows
erase entire slopes of McKinley, as when a teacher
erases a student's sentence on the blackboard, is that something?

Maybe and maybe not. Waiting won't do any harm.
THE SMALL ANT HEAP

These tan earth particles have been heaped up overnight, and each particle is a stomach-traveller that has travelled all the way through Egypt. The travellers now lie crowded together in their humility.

In the center of its heaped-up particles, a black hole goes straight down, where humans cannot follow. It is the hole in the tip of the penis; and surely it is the small opening in the kitchen floor that goes down to the cellar; and if a woman descends through that hole to retrieve a pancake she will meet the green and yellow giants, and will have to cook for them for five years.

So the hole must be death. But the ants are not the fabricators of death; they made the hole in order to see the light. Now three ants appear out of it, one after the other, and scramble up the crater sides. They move with jerky electrical motions, fierce, intent on their task. Last night in my dream several flying saucers appeared in the western sky to my mother and me.... And later, when they had landed near where we stood, I opened a small vein or artery in my finger, so as to mingle my blood with the pale green blood of a plant. When a man is born, his mother is always present; so death must be something that we and our mother will experience together. She gives us a magic apple; it falls and we get down on our knees to look for it. I am on my knees now, but cannot see the ants any longer. They will go over the wide earth and return to this black hole, as to a friend's house.
Andrea Barrett

Some Reasons Why I Had To Move

Now, they all walk into my single room in the brick building in Chesterfield and wonder why I left that pretty house. Just give me one good reason, they say—my mother; my father; my brother, Mike, and Chloe, his wife; my aunt. Neighbors, even. People I hardly know.

“Melissa,” they say. “What’s up? Why’d you leave that house for this?”

They look around and see that it’s ugly—very plain, very new, very clean. It opens outside to the parking lot, like all the others. They wrinkle their noses, already knowing the reason. I know they know. They know I know, but we all pretend to know nothing.

I say, “It’s easier to heat.”

Or, “It’s quieter.” (They point to the traffic spinning by, but I shrug. Different quiet. They know.)

I could say Sandy, Lizzie, Al, but I don’t. I say, “The other place was too small.”

Or, “The kitchen was impossible.”

I never say Sandy, Lizzie, Al. And I never say Carrie or Ben. I make up things instead: “The roof leaked. The toilet ran.” Always, I blame it on the house.

And really, I do. I blame it on the house that I slept with Ben and finally had to move. The house made it inevitable. All that back and forth and casual undress, Carrie’s evening absences, Ben’s constant presence. It was inevitable that one summer night my cat, Lizzie, would escape through my bedroom window to the garage roof below. Two other cats were mating in the oak tree; the male chased Lizzie up the drainpipe and back to my room, where they whirled about like they were in a blender. I fled through the open door between our apartments and into Ben, who calmed me down, got rid of the cats, and took me to bed like we’d been doing that forever. I’d wished for that since the first time I’d seen him, wished so long and hard that it had to happen.

Our house was a crumbling, two-storied Victorian, carved into three apartments: a big one upstairs, a big one down, and my tiny two-room nest in the back. Kitchen below, bedroom above; pantry and maid’s rooms linked by tacked-on stairs. A bathroom walled-off from the kitchen, where toilet touched shower and sink. I’d rented it just before my twenty-fourth birthday, when I’d realized that my parents were tired and that no one would marry me.

Cheap, hollow doors separated each of my rooms from my neighbors’ apartments. Upstairs, Mr. Weaver puttered quietly during the day and turned his TV set down at night when I turned mine off. We kept the door between us locked and listened to each other snore. Downstairs, Janice made breakfast for Al each morning, before he drove off in his moving van. Their little daughter, Sandy, whined; their baby cried. We left the door between us open. Janice strolled in for butter or eggs, and Al came for coffee when Janice was busy and flirted with me if I was still in my shower towel. I never took him seriously. He was married, a father (Janice was pregnant again); he owned a gun rack and a blue floral living-room suite new from Sears.

Our house hummed this way until Mr. Weaver died and Ben and Carrie moved in. The night they came, there were voices and laughter, furniture thumping, the crash of picture hangers being hammered in. They sounded like they were having fun, and I knew they weren’t from Chesterfield. They hauled boxes between rooms, arguing happily about a mirror. I turned off the TV and listened to them, but was too shy to knock on our connecting door. When they quieted down, I went to bed.

I was kept awake by other noises—moans and threshings so startling that at first I couldn’t imagine what they were. They made sounds I thought were made only in movies, and then only in the kind of movie I’d never see. I put my pillow over my ears and blushed and blushed in the dark until I’d sweated through my nightgown and had to change. I woke Lizzie up (she sleeps at the foot of my bed); she flounced downstairs in a huff. Every night for a week this went on, but every morning I had to go to work before my new neighbors were up. I rinsed my nightgown out in the sink.

My first news of my neighbors came from that nasty four-year-old Sandy, who I’d lured in from
downstairs to catch the bugs that had hatched from my tree-stump table. They were an inch long, but Sandy fears nothing. I bribed her with cookies.

"Lissa," she said to me. "Do you know there's new people upstairs?" She squashed a giant bug with my shoe and put it outside. I stood well back in the kitchen.

"I know," I said casually. "Have you seen them yet?"

"Me and daddy saw the man outside. Daddy says he's a regenerate 'cause his hair is long. But I liked him. He picked me up and tossed me over his head." She crushed another bug while I made my plans. When she was done I brought her back to Janice and told her my idea. Janice went along right away; she was curious too. We started looking for a recipe that afternoon.

When Saturday morning came, we baked the raspberry ring from Janice's Good Housekeeping. We brought it around to the front stairs and up to our neighbor's door, but Ben, who answered our knock in a half-open robe that didn't cover anything important, messed up all our plans. Janice thrust the ring at me and fled downstairs, claiming Sandy was calling. She left me staring at Ben. All I could think of was the lumber mill where I work—he looked like a silver maple, smooth and strong and sleek. I took one look at him and knew I was lost, knew my bathroom floor would flood while I stood openmouthed in the shower, dreaming of him. I must have stood openmouthed a few minutes there, because he finally laughed at me and asked if I'd like to come in.

"Yes," I whispered, and blushed. Ben led me in and introduced me to Carrie, who was still at the breakfast table. Robed like Ben, she was sleepy and plump, pale and not very pretty. My eyes slid off her face like a marble on ice and returned to Ben, who was very tall. Carrie pulled his robe closed and offered me coffee and cornbread. She smiled as if to reassure me.

"You must be Lissa," she said. "Melissa McCarthy, right?"

I stared at her stupidly.

"Sandy told me," she said. "That little monster from downstairs."

I laughed, amazed that she didn't pretend Sandy was cute. "She's awful," I said, and then couldn't ask the obvious question: "What are you doing here?"

Ben sat down and crossed his legs. "We're graduate students at the University," he said. "Biology. It's quiet and cheap here, and less than an hour away."

"And I found a job," Carrie said. "At the box factory, nights. Ben's taking time off to write his thesis."

I nodded and tried to look wise. They'd already finished school and still went back for more. I couldn't believe it.

"You want to look around?" Carrie said. Proudly, she showed me their scratched old furniture and the bedspread they called a hanging and had tacked up to the wall. The rooms, stripped of Mr. Weaver's heavy furniture, seemed very big. "A little paint, a few bookcases, prints..."

I nodded again and watched Ben bend over to search through some boxes. From behind, his legs looked like polished wood. He straightened up, holding a joint.

"To good neighbors," he said. He lit the joint and passed it to me.

I took a little puff and felt very sophisticated. Janice would have been shocked, but Janice wasn't there. We went back to the kitchen and sat, eating everything in sight. Carrie walked me around the apartment again, this time explaining how things would be. She outlined Ben's imaginary desk with her hands. In the bedroom, she predicted walls of bookcases, a television nestled in one. With a smile I opened the door to the hall that separated our two bedrooms, hoping that the tiny space between would hint at the need for quiet nights.

Ben bumped between us, resting one arm around Carrie's neck and one around mine. He peered through the door at my lonely bed, so close to theirs.

"So," he said. "You already know lots about us." He laughed and let his left arm drift down to Carrie's breast. I felt something strange stretch inside me and stepped through the open door.
“Have to go,” I muttered.
“See you,” Carrie said. I watched Ben stroke her arm like he wished they were back in bed. I closed the door and waited for the click on the other side. They walked away without locking the door, and so I left mine unlocked too.

The noises from their apartment never changed. In the early evenings I heard bangings and rumblings and smelt fresh paint as well. Later, they kept me awake. I grew circles under my eyes, and Sandy, who crept in looking for cookies, said the circles looked like dead mice. Her mother had them too.

“And,” she said. “The people upstairs are naked. I saw.”
I sat down heavily, thinking of Ben. “What’d you see?”

She took a fistful of Fig Newtons. “They’re painting,” she said, like I didn’t know. “In their underwear.” I didn’t know.

Janice came in and cuffed Sandy before she could say anything worse, but whatever else she told her mother was enough to turn them against Ben and Carrie. In the mornings, after that, Janice and Al joked about hippies and orgies and drugs while they shared their weak coffee with me. Al stroked the blue sofa he paid for a month at a time and made cracks about braless women and shiftless men. I listened and nodded my head, trying to stay silent without being suspected myself. Janice and Al were my friends—it wasn’t their fault Chesterfield hadn’t prepared them for Carrie and Ben.

At night I’d come home for supper, sit with Janice exchanging recipes and news, and then head upstairs. As soon as Ben heard me he opened the door. We’d shift between apartments and televisions then, waiting for Carrie and trailing Lizzie at our heels. Before Ben cooked Carrie’s supper he’d come in and watch baseball with me, stretched out on the bed like a panther and apparently unaware that his loose shorts made it hard for me to concentrate. When Carrie came home we’d drink wine while she ate, sometimes smoke a joint or two. Sandy’s screams floating up from below would make Ben and Carrie joke about middle-class drones; I laughed with them. I couldn’t help it—their loud new furniture seemed comic in Carrie’s mouth, their fights and pinched economies funny in Ben’s.

Really, I blame my troubles on the house. By spring, as I bounced between upstairs and down, it began to seem very small. By summer, when Lizzie leaped out my window and Ben gave in to my wishing, I felt stuck in one more life than I had rooms. I had more lives than my cat.

After Lizzie’s escape, it was only a matter of time. “Complications,” I sometimes said. “Unresolv-ed complications.” No one knew how complicated. Ben came to me each night Carrie worked, and then went back and cooked her supper. Sometimes, just a few hours later, I had to put pillows over my head to block out their noises. Ben didn’t mean to torture me, but he didn’t care what anyone thought.

I did, and tried frantically to keep my separate lives separate. Since I’ve never been very good at that, people began to find out. Al, who was fixing my Vega one hot August Sunday, was first. We were leaning over the greasy engine when Ben strolled into the yard. Al rolled his eyes at me, muttering about parasites and expecting a response. I froze as Ben walked up. And then Ben, stupid Ben, smiled his sleepy smile and bent down to kiss me hello. “Thanks,” he said.

I pulled away from him, making like it was oatmeal cookies he thanked me for. But Al lifted his head and sniffed the wind like a dog. One good look at me and he knew.

“Nothing to do?” he asked Ben.

“Nothing,” Ben drawled. “Just hanging out. If you don’t need ’Lissa here, I thought maybe she’d hang out with me.” He took my hand and led me away, as if Al were stupid or blind. Al turned red and dove under the hood. I started to yell at Ben but then knew there was nothing to
say—Al was one of those people Ben didn’t worry about. When he took me for a walk in the woods I didn’t worry either, but the next morning I ate alone. Janice locked the door between us and knocked when she wanted to visit.

Carrie knew next, or maybe she knew all along. As summer wore on she began to complain about Ben. All her girlfriends, she said. All her friends. She mentioned names, women I’d met. It was up to me to include myself in that group if I chose. I didn’t choose, at least not out loud, but she knew without me saying anything. She said she didn’t care, but at a party I saw her turn pale when a short woman stood up on a chair the better to kiss our tall Ben. At night, I heard her crying when I didn’t hear the other noises, and the more I tried to conceal our secret the more Ben seemed to flaunt it. At his birthday party, he pulled me under the stairs until Carrie lit the candles on his cake and had to come calling us.

Finally, when he had nothing better to do, he came into the lumber mill where I work. This was lunchtime, and I was surrounded by people I’d known all my life. He leaned over my desk and said, “It’s hot. How about a long lunch?”

It wasn’t his fault I blushed, but I did and then everyone knew. As if to make sure, Ben reached over and touched my face.

“Come on,” he said.

A little murmur went up behind me. Most of the people didn’t know Ben, but they knew he lived in the same house I did and that he lived there with a girl. I told him I was busy and spent the afternoon hiding from everyone.

That evening, I went by myself to the Chesterfield Inn, looking for a quiet place where I could figure out what to do. Ben walked in an hour later, right there where my father and brother drink. He dropped his heavy hand on my shoulder, and I knew that one of us had to go. Heads turned and I shook him off like I would any pushy man, but his long fingers kneaded my back in a way that, months ago, I’d only dreamed of.

“What’s the matter?” he asked gently.

I thought of Carrie and my family and was firm. “Nothing,” I said. My fingers itched for his arm, but I held my drink instead. I couldn’t get away from him until he went to take a leak. As soon as the door swung shut behind him I took off for home. Two at a time I dashed up my stairs and locked the door between us.

In the other room, I heard Carrie breathing. She tiptoed to her side of the door and locked that too. We sat on our beds with the door between us until Ben came home, and then the two of them had a big fight. I went downstairs and slept in the armchair, so I wouldn’t have to listen. When morning came, I took Lizzie and left.

I found this place that same day. It’s clean and quiet, easy to heat. It’s close to work. Lizzie can’t get through the screens. Right now, these all seem like good reasons, as good or better than the truth.
KATHLEEN MOSER

Five or six years ago, when Kathy and I were both brand new "in the business," we used to test our little wings by travelling with a troupe of other women from the Feminist Writers Guild. We read for anyone who would have us. I especially remember an afternoon event, at Kutztown University. Kathy couldn't find a sitter and so read her eight-minutes worth to the heavy-metal rhythm of three-year-old Justin's lusty two-fisted thumps on the sides of the podium. The louder her voice, the harder he drummed. The poems highlighted here, then, are hard-won. The voice is brave, tremulous at times, as outer landscapes and inner worlds converge at the point of madness or pain. Some poems are jaggedly idiosyncratic; they cut a crooked swath; they cut like broken glass. Others squeeze the reader: Kathy makes us know, as if for the first time, how thin we must often make ourselves to pass unharmed through the "narrow of an hour."

Sharon Sheehe Stark
NOT EVEN

We place our faces close
and I want to swim,
you are such warm water.
We laugh through glistening clumps
of fallen Autumn
or run races
from the theatre to the car.

The days shorten.
The way we shape our smiles
and the candle inside
makes our flashlight eyes
seem seasonal.
They glimmer
like a feast day.

I ask you
can we keep that moon
as a jack-o-lantern?
You say
not even in October.
Pumpkins are carved with that purpose
and can't be kept either.
PEARL MAKERS

With tender fingers
she selects each pearl by size
following the smooth curve
to find each opening
and guide the needle through.
Sometimes
when the needle pricks her
she raises the hurt to her mouth
and her eyes glaze like forgotten pearls.

It's her eyes that hold all the oceans
where she roams, whenever she needs,
and pulls salt air in
and forms a pearl
around her heart,

not like the simple heart of an oyster
with its dumb and basic throb.
When an oyster feeds, she filters sea.
She channels her world through need
and her lumpy mucous body grows
within a barnacled shell.

When a grain of sand or something undigestible
lodges at some unwashable place
her tender ganglia flash.
She shifts and feels, and shifts,
and still feels,
so she begins to build
layers around the pain.

Each time a piece of world intrudes
she builds. She dams the sands,
and layers and layers
all her nacreous attentions
till finally she is lifted
from this brine and business
and opened to air
and higher appetites.
AXIOMATIC

Miranda Lexander had been declared insane,
and it was only a notion
that began her descending motion.
It was only a thought,
a musing
at first,
and her mind would alwaysold itself back
within its accepted dimensions.
Miranda, then, was only randomly strange.

Energy to matter, to die
must be to spatter, such ideas
they would flare,
each time glowing.
She would imagine her bridge partner's atoms on expedition,
dissembling now and reassembling in some future.
She reasoned that it would take approximately the span of time
that it takes a dying grandmother to become some part of a locust tree
with brittle leaves rattling echoes of history.

Miranda's heady crescendoes,
less and less occasional,
revealed in the finely toned acoustics of her skull, until
the symphony took over,
synapses and arias and during the lapses she saw that
pieces of Christ and parts of Pavlova would collaborate with wayward parcels of herself in 600 years, and swim through a luminous lake, a thin silvery pickerel.
Kathleen Moser

In the corridor quiet
of asylum,
Miranda had painted precisely
every hair on her head
with magenta nail polish.
She knew she could better chart
their paths this way,
and in millenia hence
the cells of her mind
would more easily recognize
the matter of her head.

In the heat and the movement
while planning reunions,
Miranda finally imploded
into her clarity.

She rocked herself
a motion and a flame.
HOLDING SUNS

After crusty bread and cheese
and red wine, they become each other's banquet
until under new August they forget
papers, labs and cell structures. Now they are students
of that last touch and this next . . .

If you focus it's possible to see
galaxies under a microscope.
Beneath a promising curve of lens
an egg.
Millions of sperm cells
surround it. They push
until they dissolve, against
the membrane. Even after the egg
accepts its one, these unneeded cells
swim a corona of endeavor

around this dividing,
around this tiny sun.

This has been seen before
this surrounded sun,
by every red sighted placenta
as it blossoms and spirals
around a beginning.
Beneath a promising curve of belly,
a morning,
seen after a woman unfolds
from a man
that she held in her eyes,
that she allowed to dream
inside her.

. . . this next caress of late afternoon
as it smudges the horizon and kisses the tops of trees
with a flush. The couple gaze
at how the day
pours itself out.
BESIDE THE WIDE RIVER

I never suspected it was the harp,
how strings shivered
as we drove beside the Delaware,
wanting

how a thousand rivers ran on car windows
and how water in the blood ran abreast
the river currents,

how wind beaten rain shivered
in the corners of pouring glass until
each pool blew away, and wipers
wipers wipers wipers wipers
temporary sweeps

each undone by clouds full of themselves,
but from arc to arc
enough vision to stay on the road.
Every song of the ancient harp rolled
like waves, shivered

beside the Delaware.
It rained and rained and we wanted
the race across the muddy lot
to a restaurant table

and onion soup in thick brown bowls.
We blew across the steam
and watched windows stream,
and the river, full of itself,
push against its banks.
We watched how wet a Sunday can be
when all of it rains
and our blood crested

beside the wide river.
When any ancient harp shivers
we might drive again
beside the Delaware
without destinations, again
swept in Sunday gray, in flood time,
beside the Delaware
when rivers in our bodies surged
and a bittersweet harp was music,
and car windows rained
and the world rained

beside the wide river
as it curled above and beneath itself
and its water filled and emptied, flowed
away
but remained, water
in and beyond its sources and surface, water
that was the wide river.

SNOW ON THE BOULEVARD

Enough snow
to make everything snow.

We laughed snow.

Snow mounded into car shapes, porch shapes,
leveled into sidewalks, sparkled into streetlights.
Walking was pushing snow

along a city street,
for blocks and city blocks.
Our breath blew whirlpools
in falling snow.

I believed snow.

My eyelashes caught sky
till my snow-fringed vision
held the store
and the stone church
and the row of porch railings
like crystal toys,
like the glass snowstorm in my chest
that your January dances
had shaken to blizzards.
My heart
inverted to a storm
forever ready to snow
unless
carelessly dropped, unless.

And even the plows, officially sent,
flashed yellow eyes
and clinked their chains,
scraping ways through. Always

would be snow, tomorrow

would be snow. The dancing, drifting
and softly dropping days, and
your whitening whitening shoulder,
intending to carelessly turn
from anything not yet broken,
would only only

only be snow.
MORNING WHISTLE

It was early for Uncle Joe to begin.  
He wanted the journey back,  
away from his cancer.  
Who imagined as he gnawed bed sheets  
that his pain was God,  
anxious to touch him.

I stood in line to the coffin  
behind my mother, behind Aunt Germaine,  
surrounded by the nervous noises of grief,  
he looks wonderful   a blessing   a blessing.  
Uncle Joe always  
smiled for me in his hugs.

He lifted me up so high.  Uncle Joe  
is gone now.  
He left his waxy face behind.  
Nana stiffly kisses it, my cousin sobs against it,  
everyone looks at it.  
It was the last place that we saw him.

His funeral day began and I looked at morning,  
after I looked at my first smudge  
of menstrual blood.  
I pressed a new woman's forehead  
against the cold bedroom window glass.  
Uncle Joe began whistling to God

before this dawn began to drip  
behind smoky trees, behind  
the rose-lit station, behind  
the long-morning whistle of the 5:45.  
When I was little and awake before the rest,  
Uncle Joe and I would sit by this same window

and listen to that whistle.  
He would ask, Kathy, where is that train from?  
I would answer softly because then  
I thought I was really supposed to know.  
I think it's from Philadelphia, Uncle Joe.  
How he would grin and kiss my forehead and say

and so am I.
Kathleen Moser

SAND

There is a beach
where the sand burns and scratches
my knees.
I breathe anger like salt water
and it's difficult work not to die.
There is no laughter or play in seasonal heat
and a dried castle erodes in ocean winds.
This is the ocean that tumbled stones and shells
to make sand,
and brought each curling handful
generously in,
inviting me to build.

There was a beach
where I knelt in salty pools
and sculpted parapets and towers.
My eyes widened enough
to hold the dazzling horizon.
Clear dreams poured from my red bucket
to fill every moat the blue shovel could dig.
It was a day elastic enough to wind seven roads
away and towards,
and grant an entire age to the kingdom
as I sat proudly in the center.

There will be a beach
where my mind will be brought to its knees,
as the mind that first put steady flame
to candescent sand, also came finally to kneel
at a sea. And glass, clear and solid, flows
imperceptibly around sand.
Inside the powder of shells and stones,
discarded by lives gone into time,
pushes visibly through the narrow of an hour.
This, the reflective funnel shape
designed to measure the tumbling confusion
of minutes.
BLUE CLAW

we ate blue claw crabs
a friend's rented apartment
our madras plaid shorts
our college t-shirts glued
to our bodies
in Philadelphia humidity

fucked with the lights on
not for the first time
but it was maybe the
not hearing footsteps
made it seem so

I was reading Henry Miller
convinced the draft would
somehow miss me
pass me by the way I knew
death would

you wore the glow of new love
a bright cap on an old
Nehi Grape soda bottle
from a summer day that
promised to go on forever

& when we left we forgot
the crab garbage being
lost in ourselves

coming back from Wildwood
with hickies blue balls & lies
the boys accused me said
I'd stunk up their place
with a South Street whore

not having met you
not knowing fucking
was just something we did
not nearly as important as
half a dozen other things
Al Masarik

that have kept us going
these nineteen years
& will remain as nameless
here as in all the songs

all the movies that try
to capture a thing
impossible to capture.
A WAKE FOR NORA BELLE ORDEZ

Who brown-eyed and laughing
filled my eighth year
with her black hair cascading
like a dark river
as she looked up at me
walking beside her,
up from under that river of hair
in that special way
some women are born knowing --
looked up and smiled but
reserved still
something of herself
for herself
as some women are born knowing
to do.
And then left,
was gone
like that
and I,
who'd been told
too many times
that dead things were just gone,
thought her dead
and dared not ask
but mourned her,
mourn her still,
her bright dark laughter
and the pungent sweetness
of small girl flesh --
a soft mystery become
a hard one,
hard as death.

So now some fifty years
later these words
for Nora Belle Ordez,
so long away,
so long gone
and so much that was
bright and wondrous and feminine
gone with her
to this day.
And this day it rains
and suddenly I remember as though
it were all a moment ago
and my hands reach out
as though to grasp something,
someone,
then open slowly,
fall to my sides
and I stand
staring into the rain
remembering too many things at once
and all of them gone —
or dead.
Who am I to say
even now?

CLOSURES

Evening along Duval Street.
Bob Bryant and I sitting in the Sundae Palace
drinking coffee and talking
for the first time in a long time.
The day closes its circle as we sit
talking of circles closing, relieved
that there are no young ears close
to be profaned by our old man's talk.
We see ourselves sitting comfortably
in rocking chairs on the porch
of a clapboard house, content
to let the sun go, content to
let the day close its circle,
content to let all circles close
and know that we
are that which the circle encloses
as we are the circle closing
and all circles closing
as the dark August sun
closes the circle of this day
and two old friends sit talking over coffee
at evening along Duval Street.
LETTING THE STRANGERS IN

At the borders of private beaches, nudes appear, posturing in unknown syllables, the barricades down like rocks. Their wailing music crowds and washes with the tide.

At night we watch them, gathered at the murky fires dropped here and there like small yellow bombs burning a circle around themselves.

Sleepless and edgy with cigarettes we finally, at dawn, invite them in. We are tired of the unknown, whatever it is. The house fills with fog, silver and blue clouds like Greyhound buses, full of strange folks, chattering, clothed and eager, heading for the beach.

NUDE SWIMMING

Something about the moon, perhaps the black shine of the water -- we looked at each other like gods. The morning's worry of weeds or depth was darkened out. Purely ignorant, we lay along the mystery and spun half moon, half night. We sparkled for each other, made small stars fall from our fingers and then walked back, happily languid, into marriages and loves like unknown holy lakes.

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TELLING CHILDHOOD

The kids glisten at the new bright mall in my hometown. They do not care for my old buried field compressed beneath this parking lot

or how one spring the gypsies came, garbled in costumes, language bright as coins, to set up camp. Instead they wide-eye all the marvels later

they'll relate: the elegant lights for sparkling miles, trees inside of glass,

the twenty feet of waterfall down artificial rock. I hear them tell

their children who then shrug, entering the abandoned lot at dusk, some smoky campfires glowing in rubble music from a dozen patchy tents.
CIRCUIT

Coming close, I feel for connections,
the memories sweet and divided
as the rich damp smell that rises
from pavement with a light rain falling,
a rain like others, like the one
that hottest day during a childhood
summer, a rain that grew heavier
as I walked into the woods, out
along a path I'd noticed and avoided,
a path that plunged through a pine grove,
ground soft with needles, the air
sap-scented as the wind quickened
and water roared down, as hail
clicked through branches to land
slick and layered at my feet,
those trees calling down lightning
on all sides refracted through a storm
savage and wholly my own, as now
in the hills north of here, thunder's
first echoes signal another summer
storm's approach and safe in this house
I want it sudden, full, and loud, again
that terrible, delicious current riding
each instant like lightning up my spine.
PRAISING THE GEESE

Baptists without dogma, they hallow the woods, the vast message of their presence reaching me where I stand and cannot answer, soothed by a racket more assured than any voices whose words I'd recognize, such singing as fills itself, such motions as bodies lifting their slick weight, such gathering to a single purpose, a young one then others, a flock angling, climbing beyond the spruces that shadow the water from which they rise predictable as myth, urged southward, their world with one direction, while I who change and move four ways at once will wait, will sit up nights imaging a church, its choir gone wild and mouthing a litany so finite, so familiar and wordless and free.
POEM

to Frank O'Hara (1926–66)
poet & perfectly nice man

When the bird sings, I am a child
again in California where canaries
were furnishings in a house
with black & white linoleum
under the television that JFK died inside.
The holly performed its one trick
in winter by the front door;

the fuchsias

bobbed heads we pried open
revealing magenta inside the white cups
like a present the summer Frank O'Hara died.
I've had lousy times at plenty of parties
but never again as in 1966
with a whole country between me
and Fire Island ...

Oh

coffee tastes god-so-welcome

this morning. My left ear is ringing:

Someone thinks about me

because it is Tuesday and I am in love!

Frank,

there is no fear in San Francisco. Sailors
ride the BART line in from Oakland,
all in white carrying rhododendrons.
Men in leather and chains cruise the mall
like young evangelists.

Half the choir quartet

rehearse for Easter in the next room
while I write. Soprano and alto

sing about their savior who's risen

and so, I guess, do I

who dreamed last night that

Frank O'Hara was alive & well ...

an attractive forty.

The day is sweet

like the center of honeysuckle,
a day you can buy on Maiden Lane.

Lana Turner is eating kiwi tart
while Garbo reclines in her rose-colored room ...

I look for you Frank, in the faces

of pretty 17-year-old

boys in Chinatown.
BIRDS

crows circle
the graveyard
build nests
on the mausoleums

my father says birds
try to catch souls
of men rising
from the grave

if caught
they cannot reach
heaven, become
ghosts

he was taught
to throw stones
for his father
resting there

a crow perches
on a tombstone
it is not family
I have no stones
FLAG DAY

Flags sprout up
this time of year
to glower at the flowers,
entangle the passing bird
in stripes.

Who can forget
the red white and blue
stacked like crosses
at the hardware
store?

Boys, shirts abandoned,
parade the streets
with toy guns,
salute
the waving form.

Summer's breath
is on their backs,
July beckons
with the heat
of wars.
Bruce Bennett

TAKING THE CURE

You must take the lie
and swallow it whole
and feel it coursing

through every
last
place

every
hidden part

till you no longer
know
who you are

till you watch
and wonder
what
is this thing
I've become

and you gag
and gag

you must face this
then

spit it out
GETTING ALONG

"I'll take it all,"
I said
but they said
"No, it isn't all yours anymore.
You can have half."

So I drew a line.

Pretty soon
they were over it.

"Wait, this is my side,"
I said
but they said
"There are more of us now.
You don't get a whole side anymore
you can have part."

So I squeezed
onto part
pretty soon
they were there too.

"Hey!" I yelled
"This is mine.
You're not leaving me
any room!"

but they pushed
and shoved
and shoved
and pushed
till I was right
on the edge

so I started
pushing back

and one of them said

"He can swim."
Gary Fincke

COAL

That winter my mother showed me hell,
Opening the furnace, shoveling
The coal while my father slept for his
Bakery nights. "The devil's work," she said,
"And you'll roast in it unless . . . ."

I believed her. All of the papers
I covered with scrawls curled and went black;
Nothing of me lasted a week.
My coal spirit -- the first winter
I remember, the snow piling up
One weekend until everyone walked
Again, heads tilted into the wind.
On Gibson Hill a boy on a sled
Surprised a sleepy cinder truck
And was split. I stayed inside and
Waited for my skin to tear. The room
Above the furnace grew horns. At last
The Korean War began; someone
Else we knew was opened easily
As a roll, and all afternoon
Our radio said his name, the tubes
In the back glowing like our name
On my father's baker sign.
LETTING THE STRANGERS IN

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or depth was darkened out. Purely ignorant, we lay along the mystery and spun

half moon, half night. We sparkled for each other, made small stars fall from our fingers

and then walked back, happily languid, into marriages and loves like unknown holy lakes.
Their breasts, how they cried
Out and I believed
This time I was not
Mistaken. The dough
Ran over the night;
The bars emptied at
Two and my father
Unlocked the door so
Each desperate tongue
Could finish something.
Which was what I heard:
How beer did little
For it, how stories
Let their weight build up
Until nothing could
Reduce them. I knew
What they meant, heavy
Sometimes myself, though
If someone would walk
Back into that store
And buy those sweet rolls,
Each one filled with cake
Left-over and crushed
And moistened again
Into something desired,
Then it might not end
In the vacant lot
Of progress, it might
Not be the last time
I show my children
How work disappears,
Say how some men, for
As long as they last,
Return and retie
Their night shift aprons.
ALONE

Loneliness, they report, is a man's fate. 
A man's fate, said Heraclitus, is his character.

--Jack Gilbert

Thanksgiving alone, and after a long
day of loud rock and roll, I drive,
late afternoon, out of the city to where
snow still clings at the roadside, drapes pine,
and sparkles from the low sun in stubble rows.

The sky already going red, I park and walk
to a hilltop, mine not the first tracks to mar
the snow: rabbits have been through, and a large
bird's tracks crisscross the path — pheasant perhaps,
from the size. At the top, stillness falls.

A few cars hum in the near distance, then fade.
The sun gone except for the brilliant red
flung across cirrus. By now everyone
has either scraped plates to drowse by the fire,
or they pull their chairs close to the table for grace.

I remember other holidays alone,
quiet, the house's traffic of cries and laughter
driven into walls by the raucous strains
of saxophone. Then outside, cold, to walk
and to watch, as now in the valley, the lights
come up in the city. This evening, they come
up in a dozen little pockets spread
west and north, where I can see, to the city
I've left and beyond. The cirrus marks
changing weather. A flurry of wings from the scrub

sends a large bird — crow, I think, then no --
the red crest a smaller version of the fire
in the sky, a pileated woodpecker. A clear
view as he flaps across the open field
to vanish in gathering darkness at its end.
FOR PAT, WHO WASN'T HOME

The buffalo over the door
of the Last Chance Saloon
is still dead.

The green river's whitecapped under a stone-gray sky,
the empty gaze of the concrete horse. All the hills
lean toward the river, spilling trees.
Coffee is still a nickel,
but I couldn't get you on the telephone.

When I drove this road for the first time,
leaving home for college at the other end
of a short state, I could rely on the coffee
and sour cream raisin pie.

College changed us all; we grew up a little,
fell in and out of love, made some friends,
many of whom are now dead.
My first love's smile died with him in Viet Nam,
on his forty-eighth mission.
My best friend died with her husband and unborn baby
on a highway joining this one a few miles east.

Today, in the rain, coffee is still a nickel,
the pie is fresh, the raisins fat,
the river is green.

You elude me,
and the buffalo's eyes are dusty.
MISADVENTURE

When the whistle of the logging freight
blew seven longs,
the pastors of the Lower Light, Redemption,
and the Burning Sepulchre
slumped into their creased serge
to divvy the toll
of the wrongfall and the widowmakers:
Carolinians
laid by the heels, a wide country from home.

Daily, in the high Cascades,
the toppling drummed
like grouse wings in the forests of Appalachia,
the quakes of ague,
or the hobnails of apostolic
congregations on the puncheons.
Oversummering in the Tarheel shacks,
the logmen
were nearer to Abraham than Asheville.

Sometimes the trees,
those rockfast disciples,
will take a man with them when they fall
like those who drown
with a death grip around the neck
of a savior or an assassin,
but there are no services for the trees
nor seven longs in steam.
Without benefit of clergy, they are cast down
to float in the river —
long coffins for the men to come.
PASSING THROUGH ALBUQUERQUE

At dusk, by the irrigation ditch
gurgling past backyards near the highway,
locusts raise a maze of calls in cottonwoods.

A Spanish girl in a white party dress
strolls the levee by the muddy water
where her small sister plunks in stones.

Beyond a low adobe wall and a wrecked car
men are pitching horseshoes in a dusty lot.
Someone shouts as he clangs in a ringer.

Big winds buffet in ahead of a storm,
rocking the immense trees and whipping up
clouds of dust, wild leaves, and cottonwool.

In the moment when the locusts pause and the girl
presses her up-fluttering dress to her bony knees
you can hear a banjo, guitar, and fiddle
playing "The Mississippi Sawyer" inside a shack.
Moments like that, you can love this country.
ELISEO'S CABIN, TAOS PUEBLO

Style is the ultimate morality of mind.

—Alfred North Whitehead

Sagebrush and yellow alfalfa
bank the rutted road
that winds in under the bedstead gate
latched with baling wire. Horseskulls
bleach on fenceposts by the cabin
set snug near the sandy creek
edged with flameflowers, with ferns.

Pieces of plows hang from the cedars
with barn hinges, tractor chains, broken axheads,
old ropes, harrow teeth, a rusted-out kettle,
soup ladles, and a buffalo hide strung
over a long pole wedged in willows.
The cabin's faced in slabwood,
twined over by flowering sweet pea.

The old man has set his cot outside
near a cement tub brimming peonies.
Lying there alone at night, watching
stars wink, hearing the creek talk,
who of us could account for himself so well?
ELISEO'S CABIN

Mountain at its back, the cabin
sits buried in pines on the high meadow
where your father would come to camp alone
to watch thunderheads collapsing on the prairie,
striking and flaring and trailing sweeps of rain.

Worried about his sleeping on the ground,
you sawed planks and hauled them up by buckboard
rocking to the meadow on wheels that smelled of sage
to roof a room and snug its seams with battens.

Now old yourself you come to the cabin
to heat chili and bread on your wood stove
and sit in a lawn chair under the spruce,
whittling birds and turtles for grandchildren.

You watch the ponies graze, the distant peaks,
the clouds floating across the valley floor.

And, with a drum you fashioned as a boy
at the Indian school in California,
you chant old songs to sagebrush and pines.
WHAT THERE IS IN DARK

What light does with dark is a wonder.
Not the kind we make, but dawn
that peels night away
so the underneath leaps out
one thing at a time, and slow,
so it can't be denied. First,
the ticking clock feels about the house.
The bannister posts begin to rise, squinted,
white. The house in the trees
senses itself. Soon, the barking
down the road will collect a dog.

You talk like this, each evening
unraveling all the work that went
before, like some princess, I forget which.
Which is what I do best
and often is best to do I say -- thank you
for bringing back what I never wanted,
one thing at a time: this rocking horse,
that book, birch against snow,
garbage on the walk.
I say it again: Dawn's rosy fingers, my ass.
Lazarus is coming out, blinking
at his friends, the sane, tireless
hills, a burro trudging past, you
can understand I think a little peeved
everything's coming by again.
Contributors

Pat Apatovsky writes from New York City where she is a printer and publisher of fine editions of books and broadsides.

John Balaban is a Professor of English at Penn State and the author of two books of poetry and a recent novel, Coming Down Again (Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich).

Andrea Barrett lives in Rochester, NY. She has recently completed a series of related stories; others have appeared or will appear soon in Northwest Review, Michigan Quarterly Review, Spectrum, and Prairie Schooner. She is presently at work on a novel.

Bruce Bennett teaches at Wells College, but is currently on sabbatical in Italy. His most recent book is Straw into Gold (Cleveland State University), and a chapbook from State Street Press is forthcoming.

Robert Bly’s most recent collection, Loving a Woman in Two Worlds (Dial Press) is just out. We are pleased and grateful that he will be doing a benefit reading for the PBQ at the Painted Bride Arts Center in March.


Robin Campbell lives in Chicago where she grew up. These poems were written in California, her home for several years. She is currently working on a novel.

Russell Endo is a Philadelphia poet. His work has appeared in such places as Friends Journal and APR, as well as in previous PBQ.

Joseph Farley is publisher and editor of The Axe Factory/Axe Factory Review. His first collection, a chapbook called January, was published in ’86. He lives in Philadelphia.

Al Ferber is the author of two recent chapbooks, Gus (Pudding Press) and Inventory in The Badlands (Johnston Green Publishers, Scotland). His work has appeared in Proof Rock, Blue Buildings, Apple Jack, and more.

Gary Fiske has had recent work in Cimarron Review, Beloit Poetry Journal, Indiana Review, Prairie Schooner, and others. a new collection of his work, The Days of Uncertain Health, is to be published soon by Lynx House.

Robert Gibb’s most recent book, The Winter House, was published by University of Missouri Press, and his next, Entering Time, will be out soon from Barnwood Press.

Linda M. Hasselstrom is a rancher from South Dakota, and founder of Lame Johnny Press. Her most recent collection, Caught By One Wing, was published in ’84 by Julie Holcomb Letterpress of San Francisco.

Allen Hoey won the 1986 Camden Poetry Award (judged by Galway Kinnell). The book, A Fire in the Cold House of Being, is due soon. a chapbook, Work The Tongue Could Understand, is due soon from State Street Press. He lives in Ithaca, N.Y. and runs Tamarack Editions

Bill Holm’s most recent book, The Boxelder Bug Variations, was published by Milkweed Editions. He lives in Minnesota, Minnesota.

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Albert Huffstickler has three chapbooks coming, from Bard Press, Chawed Rawzin Press, and Aileron/I.\'Ecole Whitman Press. *Ahraxas, Nimrod, and Samisdal* among others, will be featuring his poems in the near future. He resides in Austin, TX.

Maurice Kenny edits *Contact II*, a journal of poetry and criticism from NYC. *Between Two Rivers: Selected Poems* has just been published by White Pine Press.

Robert King teaches at the University of North Dakota. Bloodroot Press published a chapbook, *Standing Around Outside*. He has placed poems in recent issues of *River City Review* and *The Cape Rock*.

Arthur Winfield Knight is best known for his studies of Beat literature. In the last year or so he has published books of non-fiction, poetry, and a play. Spoon River Press published a “dialogue” of poems written with his wife, Kit, which is titled *A Marriage of Poets*.

Ilya Lifshin won the 1986 Jack Kerouac award, and her winning manuscript, *Kiss the Skin Off*, was published by Cherry Valley Editions.

Joseph Lucia edits *Creeping Bent* from the Lehigh Valley of Pennsylvania.


Al Masarik has a new book coming from Duck Down Press, *Excuses To Be Outside*. He is currently contemplating a move to northern Nevada where he and his wife, Jill, will buy a burro.

Warren C. Miller resides in Conway, SC.

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Tommy Olofsson is one of Sweden's leading younger poets, with five volumes to his credit. A literary critic for *Svenska Dagbladet*, he has recently edited a collection of essays, *Joyce in Sweden*.

Jean Pearson has had poems and translations in recent issues of *APR, Colorado State Review, Stone Country* and *Milkweed Chronicle*. She has completed a book length collection of Olofsson's work in translation.

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Mary Stewart is a printmaker who has expanded into photography, drawing and watercolors. She teaches design at Syracuse University.

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Joseph Wilson has recently had poetry in *Stone Country, Poet Lore, Embers, Poets On*, and much more. He is an editor of *Spectrum* and *Worcester Review*. 