PAINTED BRIDE QUARTERLY

NUMBER 38
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTENTS</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jabari Asim</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharan Flynn Tette</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. J. Marks</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve Cleveland</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candy Kaucher</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol Gordon</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Ann Mannino</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Farley</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle Waughtel</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel Tzaia Back</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lydia Tomkiw</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becky Turnbull</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pat MacEnulty</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fred Slaven</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Desnos</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>translated by Karl Patten</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al Ferber</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyn Lifshin</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ron Houchin</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lorrie Jackson</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robyn Supraner</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara Henning</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathleen Anderson</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R. Nikolas Macioci</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doughtry &quot;Doc&quot; Long</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributors</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark Pardovitch</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The Flying Afrikan*
*County Mayo Guide*
*Nothing More*
*Bambi and the Waitress*
*Peace Hole*
*F.F.*
*I Was So Stupid*
*Propelled Backwards*
*Locked Out*
*Pippa Repasses*
*Hershey Kiss Stars*
*Letters From Canada*
*The Lesson*
*The Other One*
*After Love*
*Where Grief Hovers*
*Night Song*
*What You Want*
*At the Mecca Bar With Seth*
*Your Wife*
*Our Last Day*
*A la Faveur de la Nuit*
*Under Cover of Night*
*Cowboys and Indians*
*Just as the Woman Being Turned Over to Soothe Her Chafed Skin*
*The Phone Belches*
*The Thing Is, I Am Bread*
*The Red Jeep*
* Judy Jetson (on her back, tattooed)*
*By Appointment Only*
*Rooftops & Dreams*
*It Happens to Us All*
*This Is What You Wanted*
*Redemption in a Hotel Room*
*Snow Talk*
*Blues Walk I*

*Photographs*
*Front and back covers*
THE FLYING AFRIKAN

1
It never surprised me none

A simple step & leap. 
That's all it took 
That's all the old folks needed, 
so it was good enough for me.

At home, it was just for sightseeing. 
Cause to call on cousins in distant villages 
When I saw folks flying, I just watched 
Like I said, 
It never surprised me none

2
Grandpa always said people & things 
looked real small from way up yonder in the sky 
I'd just nod my head, because 
it made sense to me

Impatient? Naw 
Knew I'd get my turn

3
Don't want to talk about that none. 
I was tricked, understand? TRICKED 
I suppose you think 
we all just up & walked into 
the belly of that ship, huh? 
Naw, boy, wasn't no volunteers

Anyhow, 
couldn't step & leap 
with chains on 
Some tried, but they died. 
Gave their bones to Davy Jones
4
Waited a good while after we landed
I figured night time was the right time
for takin’ off.

Jomo & me took off together,
about three hours after nightfall
Flew & flew, seemed like forever,
’til at last the winds got warmer
We knew we were home.

I winked at Jomo & said.
‘I wonder who’s mindin’ my yams?’

5
They met us with drums, wonder & dance
My wife wasn’t fooled
She’d kept my footprints in a pot
COUNTY MAYO GUIDE

It was not in the stone tower
I saw the ghost who shared my face
She was strolling on the white strand,
bending to pick up stones,
intently examining each, tossing this one
and that aside, so that I felt her warmth
in each small round fist
pried from its damp pocket of beach
I followed her next
on ancient druid paths. Her bare feet
crushed the delicate heads of wildflowers
against the gray stone of the Burren
releasing aromas so rare, tourists are forbidden
to secret blossoms away. It was she
who howled from the black cliffs of Moher,
her voice wild and terrible in grief
for those who perished,
nails ripped from fingers
desperate to dig rotten potatoes
from the grim earth, knuckles
bloodied and reduced to bone
from banging against the thick stone
walls of absent landlords
NOTHING MORE

When you realize you’ve lived most of your life,
you want to have a sudden tangible impact on people,
you want “to be that self which one truly is,’”
as Kierkegaard says. Sometimes your eyes catch
someone—their eyes—and hold for a few moments
When you look away there’s a strange feeling—as if you’ve shed
a drab outer skin—it’s old and brittle, and, as you stretch and move,
it crackles and drops off
You breathe more deeply The sky’s
a sharper blue You taste the air,
you see every branch, every movement of the forest grasses
in the May breeze

These are days you never forget,
when everything you want to happen does
and you’re floating

A simple day Eating, touching, walking,
ever enough time to say to each other
all the things that need saying; no way
to tell all that’s happened to each of us
before the other appears

We’re absolutely alone—
we can deny the aloneness, but it doesn’t go away.
We’re in our friends’ minds
Some are trying to live and some are dying
We’re fading out of their minds.
I’m fading out of the memories of people I knew in Chicago
twenty years ago And, as they fade
out of my memory, it’s as if they’re dying
Dying is forgetting Nothing more
You’re not dead until there isn’t a flash of memory
of you left anywhere in the world
BAMBI AND THE WAITRESS

She walked to the top of the hill and drank whiskey and watched the light fade on the mountains. When it got dark she walked down. Then she drove into town and went to a restaurant. She was the only customer.

It’s so quiet, the waitress said. The tourists are gone.

Thank God, the woman said.

The waitress smiled.

The woman stayed a long time after she had eaten. She looked out the window at the neon signs and the dark sky.

I need to close soon, the waitress said.

The woman stood up. Sorry, she said. My mind was somewhere else.

You can stay until I leave, the waitress said.

The woman put on her jacket. Thanks, she said. But I think I’ll go down the street and have a drink.

Do you mind if I join you? the waitress said.

The woman stared at her.

I’ll be ready in a minute, the waitress said.

They went to a bar where photographs of eagles and bears and moose lined the walls.

I met a moose in the woods the other day, the woman said. A moose lying down. Very still. I almost stepped on her. Scared the shit out of us both.

What’s your name? the waitress said.

The woman took a long drink of whiskey. Bob Dylan, she said.

You have an odd sense of humor, the waitress said.

I’m sorry, the woman said. I’m nervous, and when I’m nervous I get obnoxious. My name’s Bambi.

I want to know your real name, the waitress said.

The woman faced her.

I swear to God, she said. My name is Bambi.

You don’t look like a Bambi.

I realize that. My mother named me Bambi in the hope that I would look like one. I don’t.

Maybe it’s the black leather jacket, the waitress said.

The woman laughed shortly. What’s your name? she said.

Marie.

That’s a pretty weird name too, the woman said. If you don’t mind my saying so.

They drank awhile. Bambi ordered another whiskey.

Do you live around here, Bambi? Marie said.

Sort of, Bambi said. I live in my car. And I park my car on the edge of town, mostly.

You live in your car, Marie said.

Yes. My car. A ’64 Mustang.
Oh, Marie said, Why do you live in your car? I don’t actually live in my car. I sleep in it, on cold nights I keep my stuff in it. My guitar. My tapes. What I mean, Marie said, is this: why don’t you live in a house? Or an apartment? My car is cheaper, Bambi said. I see, Marie said. Well. How long have you—parked around these parts? Not long. A month, I think. I knew I hadn’t seen you before, Marie said. If I had, I would have remembered you. You’re very striking. Is that a compliment? Bambi said. Yes. It is. Bambi finished her whiskey. She said nothing. You don’t take compliments well, do you? Marie said. No. I don’t. I’m very nervous. Why? Why are you nervous? Because I don’t know if you’re coming on to me, or what, Bambi said. I don’t know what the hell is going on. This sort of thing doesn’t happen to me. What sort of thing? I need another drink, Bambi said. What sort of thing doesn’t happen to you? Marie said. You mean people coming on to you? Bambi ordered another whiskey. Shit, she said. I can never deal with anything. Listen, Marie said. Do you want to come home with me tonight? Bambi got her whiskey and drank it in one long swallow. Yes, she said.

It was past midnight. Tree branches moved outside the bedroom window. The two women lay in darkness. So you grew up in Idaho, Marie said. That’s right, Bambi said. Rupert, Idaho. Potatoes and beets. Grain elevators. And irrigation ditches. I used to watch the tadpoles in the irrigation ditches. You lived on a farm, I take it, Marie said. Yeah. Until I was fifteen. Then we moved into town. I grew up in Boston, Marie said. Like Massachusetts? Bambi asked. Right. And then I moved to Seattle—that’s in Washington, by the way—and went to college. And then I moved here. A college girl, no less, Bambi said. What did you study? Journalism. I used to work on the newspaper here. You must be slumming, Bambi said. How’s that? To go to bed with the likes of me.
Don’t be stupid, Marie said
I was born that way, Bambi said.
Marie touched Bambi’s face
Are you still nervous? she said
A little I can’t help it
You’re so very attractive, Marie said Your eyes The way your eyes look at me.
I like looking at you, Bambi said I like you
You’d better, Marie said Because I have a crush on you the size of China
Gosh, Bambi said
When you walked into the restaurant, Marie said, my whole body got warm My whole body And my skin tingled
Perhaps I’m demon-possessed, Bambi said. Did your hair stand on end?
I wasn’t letting you out of my sight, Marie said I wanted to talk to you, but you were so preoccupied Why were you so preoccupied?
I was listening for something I couldn’t hear
You’re very strange, Marie said. If you don’t mind my saying so
Not much, Bambi said Not if you keep touching me that way

In the morning, after breakfast, Bambi brought in her guitar and a bottle of whiskey, and sang
My God, Marie said You could make money at that
Yeah, on the planet Venus, Bambi said Nobody wants to hear a dyke named Bambi sing about Idaho
You might be surprised, Marie said
I’ve played bars and coffee houses, Bambi said. It’s tough I made more in two months driving a tractor than I did in a year of performing I need to go somewhere like Vancouver That’s where I was heading, more or less, when I came through this town. Now I can’t seem to go any farther
Did you write those songs you just played? Marie said
Yeah A year ago I haven’t written anything since. And it’s driving me out of my fucking mind
She swallowed some whiskey, took a deep breath and then slowly exhaled.
Isn’t it sort of early for that stuff? Marie said
What? Whiskey?
Yeah.
Not for an alcoholic, Bambi said
I didn’t know you were an alcoholic
You’re not very perceptive then, are you? Bambi said, and took another long drink The thing is, she said, I’ve got to come up with some songs When that happens, I’ll go to Vancouver I can’t just play the old stuff That would be—I don’t know, I just can’t do it I need to come up with something new. That’s what keeps me alive You know?
Not exactly, Marie said.
Bambi sighed. I’m tired, she said We didn’t get much sleep last night I know, Marie said. And I have to go to work soon. Lunch shift
Bambi said nothing.
Will you be here when I get back? Marie said
If you want me to
I do
Then I’ll be here, Bambi said

A few days later, it began to rain; light drops touched the window. Marie was getting ready for work. Bambi lay on the floor, next to her guitar.
The room was dark when she woke up. It was raining hard outside. She got to her feet and put some wood in the fireplace. While she waited for the fire to take hold, she went into the kitchen and made coffee.
She was drinking her second cup, in front of a huge fire, when Marie came home.
I hope you don’t mind me making myself comfortable, Bambi said.
It’s wet out, Marie said. Is there more coffee?
Lots, Bambi said.
Marie took off her coat, went into the kitchen, and returned with coffee. She sat down next to Bambi.
Shit, she said. I could barely stay awake today. We should go to bed early.
I took a nap, Bambi said.
I know you did. You were snoring when I left.
I had a dream about shiny buildings, Bambi said. Big shiny buildings.

Metal and glass.
That’s no excuse for snoring, Marie said.
Everything was so bright, Bambi said.
Marie suddenly leaned over and put her tongue in Bambi’s mouth.
I wanted to do that all afternoon, she said when they paused for breath.
I can tell, Bambi said. That was positively uplifting.
You know what we should do? Marie said. We should go on a picnic tomorrow. In the mountains. I don’t work till evening.
But it’s raining, Bambi said.

It’s supposed to clear up tomorrow, Marie said. The weather is strange here.
That’s true, Bambi said. Everything is strange here.
She looked toward the window and the dark wet trees outside.
I love the mountains here, she said. They give me this feeling. Like I’m a ghost. Like everything’s a mystery.
That doesn’t sound like a very good feeling, Marie said.
I feel close to myself here, Bambi said. The mountains make me feel that way.

Marie sipped her coffee. Are you going to stay in town awhile? she said.
I don’t know, Bambi said. Are you?
Actually, Marie said, I don’t know either. My ex still lives in town.
Your ex?
Yeah. We broke up a year ago. But she still lives in town. And it’s a small town.
Ah, Bambi said.
So it's kind of weird, Marie said I mean we still see each other sometimes, but I mean we shouldn't, you know? Because it's unhealthy.
I hope I'm not getting in the way, Bambi said.
No, no, no You're not. I mean, I don't want to be involved with this woman anymore. Period.
Bambi reached for her whiskey bottle
Which is why I think about leaving town, Marie went on.
But this seems like a nice town, Bambi said Except when the tourists are here.
Yeah, Marie said, but they keep the place going
Fuck 'em, Bambi said
That's an enlightened attitude, Marie said
Bambi took a swig from the bottle.
Feed 'em to the bears, she said Feed everyone to the bears

The next day was sunny. They packed a lunch and drove out of town
They sat by a small bright lake and ate cheese and apples and drank wine
Then they made love A hawk flew overhead.
Ain't it Sapphic, my dear? Bambi said.
I wish we could stay all day, Marie said I wish I didn't have to work tonight
Me too, Bambi said.
They lay on their backs and enjoyed the sun.
Tell me about your past love-life, Marie said
Well, Bambi said. My only major romance was with a very butch woman named Jan. I mean, I'm sort of butch myself, but Jan was butch I'm talking Clint Eastwood.
How long were you together? Marie said.
Four years.
Did you love her?
Yeah. Very much. It just didn't work out
Why not?
For the same reason nothing ever works out, Bambi said Because the universe is fucked
You really believe that?
Yeah. Don't you?
I don't think so.
They were silent awhile. The hawk flew over again
So tell me about your love-life, Bambi said
I don't feel like it right now, Marie said
Bambi studied her What's wrong? she said
I don't know
I'm sorry if I got you down, Bambi said.
Marie sat up and put on her shirt I'm getting cold, she said
Bambi touched her arm. I didn't mean to bring you down, she said
Marie turned and looked at her.
If nothing ever works out, she said, why bother getting to know anyone? Why bother being alive? Why don’t you just kill yourself?
Bambi sat up. Jesus, she said. Why are you so upset?
I don’t know, Marie said. I don’t know. I’m sorry.
After a minute Bambi picked up the bottle of wine and took a drink.
Come on, she said. Tell me about your loves. The life and loves of Marie.
There’s not much to tell, Marie said. I already told you about the woman who lives in town. I’ve had a couple of other relationships. They didn’t end well.
Bambi ran a hand over Marie’s back. Are you warmer now? she said.
Marie shivered.
Let’s go, she said.

Bambi continued to stay at Marie’s house. She played guitar and listened to tapes. She went for long walks. She drank. Some days she didn’t get out of bed.

Her dreams were vivid, more vivid than her waking life. Often she could not tell whether she was awake or dreaming. She was beginning not to care.

After work one night, Marie drove to her ex-lover’s apartment. She and her ex-lover wound up in bed. Then they had a bitter, bitter fight. Marie intended to tell Bambi, but Bambi was drunk on the floor when she got home, and the next day it seemed to Marie that nothing had truly happened.

The weather was turning cold. Bambi and Marie spent much of their time in bed, sometimes making love, but seldom talking. When Marie was at work, Bambi played the guitar. She drank more and more. She had been in town almost two months, and she was restless and irritable.

One evening Marie came home to find Bambi sitting on the floor, staring at nothing. In her hand was a bottle of whiskey. Next to her on the floor was a second bottle, empty.

Have you been reading Zen and the Art of Alcoholism? Marie said.
Bambi remained motionless.

A woman came to see you today, she said. I didn’t get her name.
Oh, Marie said. What did she look like?
Real skinny. Pale. Like an albino gazelle.
An albino gazelle?
I call ’em as I see ’em, Bambi said.
Why are you being nasty? Marie said.
Was it your ex? Bambi said.
I don’t know. Maybe.
Bambi took a sip of whiskey. She said she’d drop by tonight, Bambi said.
Marie took off her coat and flung it into a corner of the room.
You drink a lot, don’t you? she said.
Bambi gave her a look. Yeah, she said. Why do you drink so much?
Bambi set down the bottle. This may sound like bullshit to you, she said, but what I do is, I wait for songs. You know? I wait for songs to come. When the songs don’t come, they don’t come. And when they don’t come, I drink.
I bet you drink when they come, too. Don’t you?
Fuck you, Bambi said. Just fuck you. This is none of your business.
It is if you’re staying with me, Marie said.
Fine, Bambi said.
She got to her feet, picked up the bottle of whiskey, and left the house.
It was a chill evening. The moon was nearly full, and the stars were bright.
Woodsmoke was in the air.
She walked on the sidewalks, under the trees. She drank fiercely, and when the bottle was empty she stopped in a liquor store and bought another.
She walked a long way. She passed the windows of houses, and saw people sitting in front of the blue lights of TV sets. After a while she walked to where her car was parked. She drove out of town and pulled up on the shore of a lake. She put on a Robert Johnson tape and looked at the water in the moonlight.

For the next three days Bambi didn’t eat or sleep. She sat in her car and drank whiskey and listened to Robert Johnson, Hank Williams, Billie Holiday, Bessie Smith. Then she picked up her guitar. The first song was finished in an hour. The rest came easily after that, until there were five of them.
Five new songs.

Marie was at the restaurant. It was evening. Bambi came in and sat down at a table.
Haven’t I seen you somewhere before? Marie said.
Maybe on the silver screen, Bambi said. My name is Dolly Parton.
What do you want? Marie said.
Soup and bread. And a cup of coffee.
Marie went back in the kitchen. Soon she brought out the food. She sat down across from Bambi.
You jerk, she said. I thought you were gone.
Did you sleep with that woman? Bambi said.
What?
That woman. Your ex. You slept with her, didn’t you?
Yeah, Marie said. So what?
Bambi broke off a chunk of bread and thrust it in the soup.
So nothing, she said.
I thought you were gone, Marie said.
I am, Bambi said.
What do you mean?
I’m leaving, Bambi said. I’m going to Vancouver.
Why don’t you wait awhile? Marie said.
I’m not waiting anymore I’ve got some songs
There was a silence.
Go fuck yourself with your fucking songs, Marie said
Thanks, Bambi said
Marie stood up and went to wait on another customer In a few minutes
she was back at Bambi’s table.
I could use some more coffee, Bambi said
Listen, Marie said. Stay around awhile Another week or two
That’s a long time to sit in a restaurant, Bambi said
You know what I mean, Marie said Please Another week We need
to talk
Bambi shook her head.
You need to resolve things with your ex, she said And I need to go to
Vancouver
What the hell’s so great about Vancouver? Marie said
I had a dream about it, Bambi said.
Jesus, Marie said. She bit her lip. Okay, fine, she said I don’t know Shit
Do you want the rest of this soup? Bambi said
Please, Marie said Another week. Stay another week Will you at least
think about it?
Bambi turned her eyes to the window
I’ll think about it, she said.

That night Bambi was on the road. It was pitch black except for the
headlights Bambi could feel the mountains all around her
PEACE HOLE

it's so weird that we're both human beings
we come cloaked in a bucket of clothes
it's not horrible man it's nature
which idiot were you going to become
that dead branch is no squirrel
and you can't animate life out of just anything
I've got to go watch the sun set
before these people catch up with me
I'm not worried when I'm elated
to be here
make me tell you
I don't know anything else
FF

dead things enter clear glass jars
floating disconnected
I've decided that part of a woman's brain
goes there too
so that the shelter of polite technical terms
blocks the passage to her essence
because her screams would be spelled
GUILT
does not speak to you again
nothing more than the machine
that roars for a couple of minutes
there are scores of human reasons
for your denial of any existence
but you wished to hell all of yourself fit inside that glass jar
that defines in and out as two different directions to be cut from
if only you could pass through to live in the film
that is the unattainable edge
dead things don't know about
I WAS SO STUPID

I was so stupid
trying to hang myself from an infinite rope
all the way down I keep seeing visions of pain, sorrow
and intermittent happiness
I'm waiting till it breaks my neck
but I don't know what hanging feels like
so I keep asking myself
Am I dead yet?
when I remember how I was sitting on a grassy hillside
with someone I loved who was light years away
realizing no matter how I ran
I could never recover the distance
still
I'm falling waiting for the crunch
or have I become an evil
gods yo yo
for I am screaming I love you with a portion of infinity
but the feeling never stays
and if there is no architecture to build
it is only because it cannot bear to crumble
like the plans for my neck
PROPELLED BACKWARDS

propelled backwards through
the landscape of this city
I wonder what is happening somewhere else
  in my mother's heart
  in my brother's consciousness
But I do not know what is below me
and I am trying to implant memories
in the places so many other people touch
then the train turns slowly
leans
my mind leaps
and I fear that I am falling
through all the poisonous imagery of my past
If I am like the piles of rubble
left everywhere to themselves, then
I am slowly beginning to look more natural
so that when I am gone
or covered over
I will be nothing
but I will have this place
LOCKED OUT

As the door clicks I know
as surely as a dead bolt shot home
that I’ve done it again

Beyond the glass
and out of reach as a quiet conscience,
my keys hang from a brass ring
on the chair post

And me outside wondering
how long, this time.
No escape by car, no neighbors home

I begin the circle
Some window probably,
some window may admit
an answer like a magic mirror.
Only my own face stares back,
mugged and wavering

So I am left with ordinary resolutions.
advance planning, duplicates,
a hiding place undetectable
except to those who have the key,
which I have forgotten.
Some compromise to muffle
that tinny jangle, a sound
of little metal jaws gossiping,
careless, careless
MARY ANN MANNINO

By now we're used to what French critics call "eccentric centers" in fiction. The strange no longer overwhelms us nor even estranges us. Still, the fictions of Mary Ann Mannino are strange indeed. They revolve around missed chances, misperceptions and false memories, her characters caught in past mistakes, religious guilt and incredible dream lives. Sometimes her stories are more obvious and direct, as is the case with her ethnic stories, all eccentric-centered in Italian-American neighborhoods, while at other times her stories reach for metaphors, nuanced dialogue and accented point of view. All of her stories are in some way whimsical, humorous, quietly ironic. They look like they're about to succumb to sentimentality, but then they don't; they grow up suddenly, cease being innocent, suggest little interesting snags of darkness and depth behind the surface of easy access.

Both stories included here are about divorcing: changing perceptions, growing up, becoming independent, starting new obsessions "Pippa Repasses" has echoes of Browning, Shakespeare, Lawrence, but these echoes turn out to be no help at all in a modern setting. They are disrespectful of their sources, turning parody to blank parody or pastiche. The characters are kept at arm's length, functioning almost as test cases "Hershey Kiss Stars" seems more frivolous, flirting dangerously close to sentimentality. Its characters feel more and more personal, however, more assimilated into the story that surrounds them. I like the "stretch" in both stories, the way little details accrue, the way the commonplace and banal incident turns eccentric and delightful. The pain of divorce includes its therapy here. Follow the smell of Douwe Ziaderns and enjoy.

William F. Van Wert
PIPPA REPASSES

There are some places in this world where every man does not wear professionally dry-cleaned blue Oxford cloth shirts and every woman does not study gourmet cooking with Julia Child, or candy-making with Douwe Zijl dams. Most people learn this when they are twenty, but I was down with a virus, a burning infection that caused the pupil of one of my eyes to turn permanently white. My vision, to my knowledge, was not impaired, however. Afterwards, I got a job in a men’s haberdashery, married one of the customers, a gentleman who preferred yellow ties, and wore a size 15 collar.

We lived across from the store in an apartment building, a brawny five story brick structure, built before the Depression, with comfortably large rooms, parquet floors, and two fireplaces in each apartment. Spider-web cracks in the plaster on the ceilings and walls and the friendly rattle of loose windows showed more neglect by the present owners than poor construction by the original. The building had many corridors, long white ones that tapered like candles, and always ended abruptly in spaces slender as a wick. I often wandered through them on my days off, nonchalantly tying my shoe lace and brushing my eye against an open keyhole.

One day I looked into a room whose pink marble walls and floors shimmered like silk cloth in the sunlight. At a table in the center a man in high sandals sat tossing a golden apple from his left to his right hand. He flung it deliberately, but higher with each pitch, and each time the apple landed with a snap in his open palm. Across from him stood a beautiful woman in a long white dress, winding and unwinding, on her finger, the end of the gold braid that crossed her breasts and cinched her waist.

"I must leave tonight," he said. "Are you coming with me?"

The room was silent, except for the taut air that seemed to snap back and forth from his face to hers. Slowly she turned and passed her glance around the room. It fell first on a fan, folded on a purple sofa, and then on a small wooden boat, a toy, on its side next to a child’s chair. She paused at potted ferns and at the view from the window, a crisp expanse of blue linen sea. Then she came nearer to the table and ran her hand across the black bowl that held the apples, her thin fingers lingering on the white faces of the men in chariots who chased each other round and round the surface.

His eyes watched her face.

She moved closer and then knelt at his feet, putting her head on his knee. His eyes were on her hair, and his fingertips touched the mounds of red curls with too much tenderness, as though her hair were fragile as blown glass. Her eyes rested on the wooden boat.

For some time everything was still.

"Helen?" he said, as though her name were a question.

Her eyes moved slowly from the toy to his face. She felt his hands slip
from her hair to cradle her cheeks

"We leave tonight. Together," she said. Then added, "Alone."

The air vibrated like stretched fabric with the sound of that one word "Alone." In saying it, she folded up the room as neatly as a shirt. Against that solid background, I could see shapes and shadows becoming sharper, clearer, beautiful in a way unknown to my own life.

Back the white corridor to my apartment, a certain remembered smell, something sweet yet bitter, smooth but burning, circled round me. I opened my door and noticed how pale the colors of the room had become. The sofa a faded lavender, the walls a white mushroom.

"Clyde," I said, "I'm buying a couple gallons of pink paint. This room needs a little life."

Clyde was doing his stretching exercises, bracing himself against the wall by the fireplace.

"Looks fine to me," he said, then sniffed the air. "What's that funny smell? Did you burn dinner?"

Dinner was prepared this morning: cold marinated lobster and avocado salad. "I'm going to get a thirty-minute run in soon so I can watch the news. How about dinner in front of the TV?"

He leaned toward me as he opened the door, kissing the air above my head as he left. I watched him from the window, a body encased in a silver waterproof jogging suit, slippery to the touch. Feet in solid Nike running shoes, hitting the concrete separately, slipping from my range of vision.

I painted the apartment, bought a white dress, filled a glass salad bowl with some yellow delicious apples and set it on the breakfast table. For several days, I thought I had captured the space between those two people. But something was missing. Clyde never tossed the apple from one hand to the other. There was no snap in the air. Maybe I had the wrong kind of bowl. I remembered their bowl had figures.

I decided to go back and take another look. I found the right corridor, but it narrowed and ended abruptly just before the door to that room. I couldn't believe it. I rubbed my hands up and down the walls. Perhaps they'd guessed someone had seen them and they had disguised the door I stuck my finger into some of the cracks, looking for the keyhole. I brushed aside a few fragile cobwebs, and some pieces of loose plaster fell onto the floor. A spider ran under the floor boards, but there was no door. Disappointed, I turned, thinking perhaps I should buy a painting of the Aegean Sea, and hang it on the wall where their window had been.

Behind me, on either side, new corridors that had not been there before opened up. I chose the right one and passed several key holes. Some were stopped up with paper or else their antiseptic smell repulsed me. Then I came to one that was painted yellow with a print like a silk tie. It appealed. I bent over.

I was in a darkened room. Heavy drapes sealed the window, and the air was the texture of mildewed clothes. The only light, a candle on the table by a tall bed in which a woman lay, her body awkwardly twisted sideways, the covers rumpled, as though she had struggled with her dreams.
Her hands lay open on either side of her head, forming a halo around her face. It was her face, more than the candle, that illuminated the room. I stared at white, an even transparent whiteness like fine silk shirts made whiter still by the darkness of the room, and the red, maroon and brown of the bedclothes. Not just the color of her skin but the way her head was innocently turned open toward the ceiling expressed whiteness.

Something else controlled the room. Something centered in a man, who, poised above her and holding a dark pillow in his right hand, stared, like me, at her face. He was dressed in a dark brown, loose-fitting shirt; around his neck was a gold medallion, some sign of rank. His shirt, for all its darkness, was lighter than his skin, which was almost black. The candle light reflected from her face to his, from white to black I could feel the glance that slipped out from his eyes. It had a thickness to it, a texture layered with passion that shifted from hate to desire to despair. In staring at the face of the woman at that moment he was uncovering himself, peeling back fold after fold of his own soul. I felt a certain surprise that there could be so many layers of feeling, but more than the layers, that there could be so much feeling. This man saw himself more distinctly by staring into another's face.

The aroma of a burning sweetness, reminiscent of a different time, and something very white, followed me back to my apartment.

Once there, I saw the blur of my own things: the lack of outline in the furniture. For example, the chairs had covers that touched the carpet. One thing slid easily into another. There was simply no distinction. Then, too, the light bulbs were frosted, and the muted light cast hazy shadows without clear lines. The shadow from the couch blended into the shadow from the table.

"I’m going to wash these covers," I said to Clyde, snatching them from the chairs.

Clyde was sitting on the floor polishing his shoes. I looked closely at his face. But it was indistinct, cast in shadow.

"Tomorrow, I’ll buy larger watt bulbs, but for now I’ll take the lamp-shades off."

"I like the dim light in this room," he said. "It tones down that flashy pink paint you used on the walls."

I began unscrewing the silk-pleated shades and placing them carefully on the floor.

"What is that strange smell?" Clyde asked, walking into the kitchen.

"Your Beef Bourguignon is simmering nicely, so it’s not that."

"Something in the air," I answered.

"Probably some new kind of pollution."

I set bowls on the table, got out glasses. Clyde uncorked a bottle of wine.

"Forget about changing things around here. Let’s go to a movie tonight," he said.

We went to the movie, something Clyde picked out about a man who was comfortable only when he wore a gorilla suit. I was bored. Clyde was amused.
Next day we both went to work Clyde to the pharmacy, me to the clothing store. On the way home I bought light bulbs. But still something wasn’t right. I thought perhaps I could find the texture of that glance of self-knowledge in darker colors. On my days off I shopped. I bought brown sheets, red comforters. I hung maroon velvet drapes in our bedroom, but no, the texture I was searching for was as elusive as an odor.

Weeks passed. I set candles on the night table, but each morning in the mirror my skin was no whiter, Clyde’s no darker, nothing changed.

One holiday, perhaps Columbus Day, I left my apartment with my shoes unlaced and strolled casually through the corridors, sniffing a door here or stroking a wall there. My eye was pulled to the keyhole by the scent of wet earth and flowers pouring from it.

I was in a small stair room. There was no rug, no curtains, just two pieces of furniture, a double bed and a small chest next to it, on which rested a glass of violets, deep purple with tiny yellow centers. Rain-soaked tree branches brushed against open casement windows tucked under the slanted roof. The rhythm and the odor of the rain, the earth, and spring flowers rose like mist around the bed, like a transparent cocoon enclosing the naked bodies of a man and woman. She touched his face as softly as if it were the petal of a violet. With both her hands she stroked the tanned skin around his eyes, around his nose, down his cheeks, behind his ears, as if memorizing the feel of his face. His eyes followed hers and when she opened her lips he opened his, and they met somewhere in the middle so that it was not she kissing him or he kissing her, but one motion, one unity. His eyes looked into hers, moved with her movement, one reflecting the other. Still kissing him, she slowly lay back against the pillow, her hands open around her face, her legs parting for his entrance. His eyes on her face, his mouth on her mouth, easily he rolled on top of her and slipped into her body. And then the gentleness stopped, and a force within them surged from one to the other, beating with an urgency against the cocoon of space that held them. I watched. I watched the mattress rise and fall to their rhythm. I watched the muscles in the man’s back tighten until I thought they would snap. I watched their eyes. What I saw was a rope connecting them. Two people braided together like the strands of hemp in a belt.

I walked back to my apartment. I felt a sense of loss. It was that connection I needed and did not have in the politeness of my marriage, my distanced conversations, my gourmet dinners. The smell was stronger than before. It slid up through the floor boards, in through the cracks in the plaster. Back in my apartment it came in through the spaces around the windows and down through the ceiling fixture. Sweet like flowers and yet a sharpness like clove or some herb whose exact name eluded me.

Clyde was reading the newspaper, keeping up with events. When I walked in he put the paper down on the coffee table.

"I’m going to see the movie. Today that stench is worse than it’s ever been. What’s for dinner?"

"Dinner?" I said. Then I remembered that I had planned a tomato salad with stroganoff.
I heard the door close. I didn’t consider the odor to be a stench at all. There was something enticing, inviting, almost seductive in the smell, a: once like vinegar and chocolate. I started to slice tomatoes against the white counter, thinking perhaps I could fill the bedroom with violets or remove the rug and let the bare floor boards show. Absently looking at the red tomato slices against the white of the counter, I remembered the smell.

It was peppermint. Before my illness, Douwe Zuiders had filled my parents’ kitchen with the magical smell of peppermint, turning it into red-and-white striped candies. Red and white circles, red and white sticks, red and white tables, beds, even people, red people in white clothes, white people in red clothes. And I remembered a certain texture in the air those days when I was happy to live where I was. The more I thought back to those times, faces that crumbled into smiles, colors that sparkled from walls, something inside of me growing like a violet, or a rain-drenched tree, the stronger the smell became. I opened the door to the apartment. I saw red and white boxes under Christmas trees, red goblets on long white tablecloths. I followed the smell.

It did not lead me to my parents’ home, but out beyond the apartment building, the clothing store, past the newspaper stand, the hardware store, the gourmet food store. It led me to this house, and this tall thin man with turquoise eyes and a limp. His house is wallpapered with maps of the universe, and in the pocket of his shirt he carries peppermint sticks. His name is Douwe, but not the Douwe from before, perhaps a cousin or no connection at all. He says such questions are irrelevant.

I sleep on his couch sometimes. I sleep in his bed sometimes. It does not matter. Here I do what I want.

Through looking in the mirror, I have noticed that the pupil of my eye grows darker everyday. It is not the fire blue of the other, but it is no longer white.

I look more often in the mirror here. What I see delights me more than the strange things I remember seeing in keyholes.
HERSHEY KISS STARS

In a house that resembled a castle because it was large, stone and encircled by a moat of convention, there lived a woman who brewed iced tea with mint leaves, knew how to lay tar paper on a roof to repair a leak, and had been a charismatic, although briefly.

Her life was well-scheduled. So, at ten past one on a July Tuesday, her children safe at the swim club, she decided to mop spaghetti spills and broken dreams from her yellow kitchen floor. Although she liked the serenity of spotless linoleum, mopping was boring. Therefore, before she began, she turned her radio to the country station. The story songs made her chuckle, sometimes laugh out loud and forget the dull gray of her life in the pinks and purples of fiction.

While she was in the midst of scrubbing hardened jello from in front of the refrigerator and riding in the front seat of a diesel bound for New Orleans in the rain, he, a thoughtful neighbor, the father of her daughter Jessica's best friend, dropped in to offer her a chance to purchase sturdy kitchen chairs.

"Five bucks apiece. You can't go wrong. They're upgrading the cafeteria at the university. Hundreds of chairs on the grass behind the union building. I can take ten at a time in my station wagon. How many do you want?"

An astute man, ever on the lookout for a bargain. He taught economics, and had for twenty-some years. Two classes of Intro to freshmen, two classes of macro to majors. She turned down the volume on Kris Kristofferson, the afternoon's featured vocalist, who was crooning "she knew in her heart that he lied."

"Silver Tongue Devil," he said grinning. "One of my favorites, although I like Loving Her Was Easier Than Anything I'll Ever Do Again, better."

He turned the volume back up and sat himself down at the kitchen table.

"Thought I was the only country music lover around here. Those songs really tell it like it is, don't they?"

"Not like it is anywhere I've ever been."

She stopped mopping and looked into his tissue-soft blue eyes.

"It could be I've led a sheltered life."

"I've written a few songs myself. Never sent them anywhere, though I was thinking of mailing my lyrics, Peanut Butter and Jelly, to Merle Haggard about two years back, but one thing and another, I never got around to it. It's a great song about a sandwich. And it would be a hit. I know. When did you ever hear a song about a sandwich?"

Not only was she well scheduled, she was hospitable. She poured him a glass of tea, dropped in three ice cubes, supplied him with an ashtray for his cigarette, and replied to his questions in order. She continued wiping the floor, however, curling the mop around his boots.

"I'll take six. We can use four in here and a couple more in the family room."
“Great,” he said, writing the number in a notebook he took from his pocket. “I’ll bring them tomorrow.”

“I’d be interested in hearing Peanut Butter and Jelly. What’s it about?”

“Well,” he said, enthusiasm turning his ear lobes pink, “thealoneness of marriage. The end of love. You see, I put peanut butter on one side of the bread and jelly on the other, and although they come together in the sandwich, the peanut butter is always on one slice and the jelly is always on the other. Get it?”

Laughter filled her cheeks like air rounds out a balloon. She wasn’t sure how serious he was, and she wondered if he’s think she were rude if she laughed, but at the same time what he said struck her as exceedingly funny. She let herself go. It was a wonderful laugh that tickled the insides of her stomach and shook some of the mental blocks in her head.

He sipped his tea, carefully removing the mint leaves and laying them in a neat pile in the ashtray. He, too, was an ordered person.

“Mint tea,” he said, “brings to mind the recent split-up of AT&T. I’ve been working on an op-ed piece about if for the last year. Do you realize that since the split, we pay more, business pays more, everybody pays more? But, where does the money go? In my opinion breaking up the telephone monopoly was a costly mistake.”

She knew nothing about economics. What she knew about monopoly was that it was smart to own Boardwalk and Park Place or all four railroads. But she did pay bills, between nine and nine forty-five Friday mornings, while her preteens, Anastasia and Jessica, slept

“You’re absolutely right! I’ve noticed that my bill has at least doubled or perhaps tripled in both the bottom line and the number of pages needed to arrive at that line.”

“It’s Access Charges. They were going to be paid to local operating companies by various carriers, but the FCC turned it around and the consumer ended up paying.”

“You’re absolutely right! They’re ripping us off.”

“You have a perceptive, discerning mind that understands the economy’s subtle nuances. You should be in one of my classes. Obviously you’re a quick study.”

She squeezed out her mop over the sink, rinsing it with clear water.

I never realized Paula’s father was so intelligent, and at the same time funny, she thought.

“And my dear lady, those trim shorts you are wearing demonstrate that you are adept with figures of all kinds.”

When she turned from the sink with the mop in her wet hand she saw him light another cigarette and smile at her, not unlike the elders might have smiled on Suzannah.

She put her bucket and mop into the cellarway and then poured him another glass of tea. This time, she poured herself one as well.

“Let’s sit outside, while the floor is drying,” she said.

He picked up the transistor radio from the kitchen counter. Kristofferson was singing, “Sometimes it’s nice to have somebody nice to be close to.”
They sat at the redwood picnic table, the radio twanging between them. He tapped his fingers to the beat, hummed the melody. She started to sing the refrain, exaggerating the country sound, stretching out the words.

"If you're feeling sal-ty, I'm your te qui-la. If you've got the free dom, I've got the time."

She laughed at the words. He laughed at her laughter. She stood up and started dancing. Grabbing his hand, she jigged him across the patio.

"Such a body," he said. "Buoyant as AT&T."

"Such fun," she said.

Yet the tiniest bit risqué, she thought.

He kept a mental note of all types of free entertainment. He was still an Assistant Professor at forty-eight. His list of publications, two letters to the editor on the evils of pornography, had not been considered scholarly enough to merit promotion. But, he often asked himself, who has time to publish? He had responsibilities, a wife, six kids, three dogs, two rabbits. Nights in his cellar, he built wooden flower boxes which he sold to supplement his income. Luckily, his wife, a nurse, worked alternate weekends. It occurred to him that there was a free concert at the neighborhood park that evening. An over-sixty-five band, coincidentally, was playing country music.

"Want to go to the concert in the park tonight?" he asked.

She had never been to the free concerts, not because she could afford better, which she could, but because she had never scheduled them in. Truly, it had never occurred to her to attend a concert, a virtual picnic on the grass, with her husband. First, he was allergic; second, he was never home. He was an obstetrician at a teaching hospital. His parents, New Deal Democrats, had raised him conflicted. On the one hand, he felt guilty for earning as much as he did; on the other hand, he wanted to be the best. His income proved he was the best fertility specialist in the city. To ease his guilt, he moonlighted in a free clinic. Basically, he spent all of his time at the bedsides of women, women who were not his wife. She sublimated by scheduling. She mopped floors Tuesdays at 1:10, bought Christmas presents at February sales, finished Spring house-cleaning in January, so as to take advantage of flu season when most likely she would be confined to the house with sick children anyway.

All in all, the idea of a break in the routine appealed.

"You and Otto," he said. "Me and Louise. We'll make it a foursome."

"Yes," she said.

There were mosquitoes at the concert. Fortunately, she had worn slacks. Louise, his wife, who had worked half a day, fell asleep on the grass almost immediately. Otto, her husband, who sneezed and was bitten through the first half, was overjoyed when his beeper signaled him, and he could gracefully rush off to a primapara's bedside.

"Next time we do this, let's go to the academy," Otto said over his shoulder.
That left him and her

"Alone, at last," he said, ignoring half the neighborhood, two of his
dogs, and three of their mutual children.

They began to talk. The narcotic air, brimming with the smell of lilies
of the valley, made her say all sorts of ordinary and secret things that she
had never intended saying. She confided that she had refinshed most of
the furniture in her house, though Kris Kristofferson songs were hysterically
funny, loved string beans, Goldie Hawn movies, and flea markets with a
passion. Her favorite food, she said, was chocolate. She told him that she
had been a virgin when she had married Otto, but that lately she regretted
that fact. She said it seemed as though she had been eating hot dogs and
beans for seventeen years and since she had never tried anything else, she
had no idea whether she liked hot dogs and beans.

He whispered that he, too, had been a virgin when he married Louise.
Afterward, he had discovered that to him married sex was a feast of many
delicacies, but Louise was never hungry. He had refinshed all the furniture
in his house, plus the doors, the baseboards and the kitchen cupboards,
hated string beans and anything else green and edible, loved Kristofferson
for the depth of his perception into the human condition, and felt that,
although flea markets and garage sales often yielded a bargain, economically
speaking, the best bargains were to be incurred trash-picking. In this way,
he told her, he had himself acquired a desk, porch furniture, several tables,
an overstuffed chair, albeit with only three legs. He had used some of his
wife's nursing books to replace the fourth leg.

She laughed, imagining Otto, reading glasses in hand, stomping around
his study searching for his obstetrical journal only to find it propping up
the uneven leg of her sewing machine table.

She heard her own laughter and it occurred to her that she could not
remember the last day she had laughed so often. She didn't want to hurry
home, get to the next item on her schedule, which happened to be watering
the fern bed. She wanted to stay just where she was. After giving it some
thought, she concluded that she was experiencing happiness, something
she knew even less about than economics.

She lay back against the stone step where they were sitting and gazed
up at the sky, something she took for granted, like her driveway, but had
never really considered.

"The sky is semi-sweet chocolate," she said.

"Dotted with hershey kiss stars," he added pressing his thigh against
hers in the darkness.

He said, "Not in a very long time have I felt so peaceful. Never have
I felt so comfortable just talking. I know I can say anything to you. Like
Kristofferson's song, 'You've opened every door in my mind?'

"I'm flattered," she said, "but also married,"

"Of course, I too am definitely married."

He patted his wife's portly rump.

"Louise and I have been to marriage encounter."

He kept his knee against hers.
"It is just that you have 'smiled on my soul'" Looking steadily into her eyes he added, "Rarely does one find a spiritual soul mate, a true platonic friend."

She thought the idea sounded totally implausible, especially since the whole time he spoke, he rubbed his leg gently back and forth against her. But she was nearing forty, and that elusive X factor, happiness, had already seduced her. She had to face it, she liked the warmth of his leg next to hers, she liked laughing, she liked this whole day, the kitchen, the patio, the concert in the park. Definitely, she liked being happy better than she liked being scheduled.

"'Here's to friendship,'" she said offering him a spearmint lifesaver from her purse.

He began to call her daily and arrive in her kitchen for mint tea three or four times a week, disrupting her schedule. She fell behind. She liked it. They discussed articles, books, movies, their children's problems at school. They planted marigolds, refinshed a clock and two chairs, joined the committee to plan the family picnic at school. Somehow he arranged dinner invitations to his house. They played Trivial Pursuit and Scrabble. One Saturday they even tried tennis at the free public court. With Otto and Louise they went to concerts and movies. The four of them spent a day at the shore. Sometimes, they went places without Otto and Louise, if Otto was working and Louise had a headache.

They haunted flea markets. One Sunday, they bought a dozen old medicine bottles in assorted colors, a real bargain at a dollar a piece. He kept six and she kept six. She put hers on her kitchen window sill where they caught the afternoon sun and filled the air with rainbows while she prepared dinner.

They were the best of friends, and more. They consulted each other about everything. She picked the color that he painted his house, a soft ivory with milk chocolate trim. He chose the rug for her family room, a definite bargain at fifty dollars. She trusted him when he said he loved her, even though he continued to live with Louise. He drove her to pick up her car when it had to be inspected. He trash-picked a lamp for her and rewired it himself. He kissed her passionately in the back stairway, the garage, his office, her cellar, his kitchen in the middle of a dinner party while his wife and her husband were eating rice pudding in the dining room. She was his sunrise, he said.

She made him pans of chocolate brownies, helped him finish the op-ed column which finally got published. He bought her chocolate kisses and left them on the dashboard of her car when she was shopping. She stopped laughing at Kristofferson.

She threw out all her schedules. She chopped the head off her mop and used it to prop a philodendrum vine he had found in the trash at the university. He became her only clock. Dinner was prepared when he was eating with his family. Food shopping was done when he was teaching so she would be available for lengthy phone calls when he was free. For two years she
ignored spring cleaning and fall cleaning. Emotional intimacy became her addiction.

Her daughters said she never heard them when they asked her questions. She often forgot to pick them up at the swim club or take them to music lessons.

Her husband objected to the disorganization. There were no clean shirts, no salads with dinner, often no dinners, but worst of all, frequently no clean underwear. One day he told her he was temporarily moving to a condo near the hospital. She barely noticed. That was all behind her.

Her romance was the only thing that mattered. Lying in her queen-size bed alone at night, she probed her feelings. She would leave her refinished furniture, her fern bed, her yellow kitchen floor, even Jessica and Anastasia, and live in one room with him. This she had told him. And he had received her declaration with, she couldn't be sure, paralytic joy or astonishment. He said living with her was his fondest dream, but he couldn't tell Louise just yet. The slow meandering way he moved in all things pleased her. It made every small pleasure last, like eating turkish taffy. So she trusted that he would leave Louise eventually.

In the mean-time her husband bought a town house near the hospital because he said he needed a little more space and living in the condo made him realize how convenient it was for an obstetrician to be within walking distance of the hospital. Her daughters spent alternate weekends there. One Sunday night when he dropped off the girls, Otto packed all his medical books into his car along with the fondue pot and a pair of pewter candlesticks. In her free time she had learned to draw a supply curve, took a course in economics, and read a book on Thorstein Veblen, the man who coined the phrase "conspicuous consumption." Together he and she wrote a song about it. Truly, she was committed. She concluded that the total communion she felt with this man was a deep and eternal love. What else could it be?

What exactly he felt about her was harder for her to determine. After two years, while she slept alone, he slept with plump Louise. Daily, he said he loved her. He wanted nothing more than to make love to her eight hours straight, but although he liked to describe it in every erotic detail, he never actually did it, not for eight hours, not for eight minutes.

He said, aghast, "To actually do it while I'm married to Louise would be adultery."

She said, "Then divorce Louise."

He took her into his arms. "My rainbow, the other half of my soul, divorcing Louise is a bit complicated. But I don't love her. I never tell her I love her. I love you, only you."

One snowy January day she sat alone before her fireplace with a letter from her husband's lawyer in her lap. It said that Otto hoped to resolve their awkward situation in an amicable divorce. She was startled. Time seemed to be slipping out of her hands like a runaway balloon. She thought about her lover snug behind his desk.
"Fiery words are not doing much to warm my hearth," she said.
She went to his office
She said, "Leave Louise. Marry me. We are not getting any younger."
He locked the door
"I think some of the professors are getting suspicious," he said
She sat in the student chair next to his desk. He took her hand in both of his
"You are my only peace," he said, slowly sucking her fingertips
"Constantly, I think about how perfect life with you could be. We would have
ehatch another for breakfast every morning in an old farm house in Flourtown.
We'd make all the furniture together. And in the afternoon you would
make us mint tea, and we would dance to Kristofferson or maybe Willie
Nelson."
She took her hand back.
"When?" she asked.
He looked at her as though she were a thief.
"Leaving Louise is not something I can just suddenly do."
"I would hardly call leaving Louise after being in love with someone
else for two years, eight months and three days lightning bolt sudden."
"I don't know what to say to my children or to my parents. It would
break my mother's heart. My father would never talk to me again."
"When?"
"Who knows what would happen to Louise? She might lose her mind
And what about God? Without an annulment, it would be adultery."
"Silver tongue devil," she said.
She left his office. When she got home, she put the colored bottles in
the trash bag she kept to take to the recycling station.
Later, after she moved out of her house, she took the money she got
from her divorce settlement, and opened a shop selling "antiques" which
she trash-picked or purchased at garage sales. She lived alone in the tiny
apartment upstairs because the girls preferred to live with their dad and
Sara and visit her on alternate weekends. She only listened to classical music.
She found that she preferred songs without words.
LETTERS FROM CANADA

tell of the cold,
the drifts piled high
on the edge of prairies,
how the flowers
struggle
to push through
the stillness.

a snowshoe rabbit
bounds over fields,
his nose in the air,
leaving no trace
where boots stumble.

They have seasons
in Canada,
autumns full of gold and brown,
green springs, red summers,
but they come as guests
who stay a time
in rooms reserved
for winter
THE LESSON

A rain drop
is enough

The stars,
at a distance,
seem small

This world
must do
for the lessons
to be won,

but seems too large

The sky dwindles
to fill an eyelid

These tattered trees,
like an old man's whiskers,
must do
THE OTHER ONE

I am pornography
That slipped past the censor;
The book you read a chapter at a time
On your weekly visits to the library
You take me down from the shelf each time
But you never borrow me
You don't want to spread me
On your desk at home
Under the antique lamp
You don't want me open and face-down
On your chest as you fall asleep
You want me catalogued and numbered,
Locked behind someone else's doors
Until you come for me again.
The beginnings of this group of photographs were rooted in the tradition of spontaneous street portraits, but, in an effort to understand the lives of the subjects, I photographed them for one and one-half years, and the photographs evolved into a series of portraits. During this time, we developed a mutual trust, and the people who became the subjects of the photographs understood my reasons for making the photographs: to fulfill my ideas of beauty, and to portray the basic human dignity present in even the most difficult of situations. They also shared personal information that was extremely important to the work.

All the photographs were made in Philadelphia.

Mark Pardovich
AFTER LOVE

On a bus traveling north
in the dark, away from you,
I lick my lips,
fingers, burnt arms,
and taste salt from the sea
though the sea is far away
now, further each moment.

By the shore you wait
for the moon to rise, to pull
the waters high around you—
you will wake to the sand soft
in your hand, you will think of me

Before dawn, as the fishermen
pull in their glistening nets,
leaving their boats to bob
empty on quiet waters,
I will reach my home in the hills,
sleep in the strange silence
of winds that have suddenly subsided.
WHERE GRIEF HOVERS

in doorways,
where grief will close her thick wings
around him, bend shoulders to the dark
darkened heart when she is carried out,
he waits the weekend of her dying.

Her wrists, he whispers, look
at her wrists, and turns away
But the last night he strokes
those sharp bones, cuts
through her distance, calls:
Rebecca, open your eyes
and she does.

There, where light enters, turns,
he sees himself as she sees
him; beloved, o beloved,
but glimpses, too, all he never knew
of her, will never know now, and more

for Ouma & Oupa
NIGHT SONG

Hill stones hum white
nip at the heels of night

climbers who count strides
through empty rock reservoirs
where boulders gleam still

as if there were water

Sweat down backs and dizzy
from the dark they stray
into valleys where silvered
mists lap at tree-trunks
rustle leaves, and there

they lie down

All other longings
fade
are forgotten

Jacob wrestled with no angel
it was night

smooth and starless

who held him tight
taught him to fall.
WHAT YOU WANT

You want shoes to come in.
You want that pink and green of Florida which
Creates that vertigo we all try to self-induce
You want that foreign last name
That rolls off girls’ tongues as if they practiced it for days
As they congregate in the bathroom
Passing a lipstick in a shade called "Dangerous Cherry."
I’ll tell you what you want. I know
You want swing shift sleep, passing out
When the postman delivers, then waking
When the world goes away and no one is watching
You want hands soft enough to make lace,
Soft enough to feel a girl’s face without hurting her,
And have her remember it when she’s bored in church
You want to survive like street sweat in August,
To be left alone while the night moves like
The thighs of a carnivorous woman in a red dress
You want, somewhere inside you, that
Ultimate silence, not white, but black and void—
Somewhere to lay into when you become tired
You want the fanciest of everything
And enough of it to make you sick.
You want something cheap and shiny,
And its inventor and all his diaries
You want your heart, bigger than China,
And to have it seen by only those
Who don’t know what they want,
But know what they don’t
AT THE MECCA BAR WITH SETH

It'll be another long drive through Phoenix,
then a jukebox regurgitating Elvis
endlessly while I struggle to remember
how to enjoy gin. Halfway through the first drink
you'll begin looking like so many men, then
looking just like you,
the only other man I've thought about
in exactly this way. There'll be my awkwardness,

always having to set something down—a purse, a pizza box
As long as your eyes are still
a particular warm brown, I'll be thinking
I tried watercolor but never got them right,
though I have a photograph of your back
in a drawer. As we were leaving
my apartment for Mecca, the girl next door
lifted her kid sister off the safe sidewalk,

placed her directly in front of your truck, and glared
into the cab where we couldn't believe
the cloudy sky would confine us in one place,
one specific moment. You're almost someone I could
love forever, I'll say, careful not to see your face,
careful to ignore the police
stacked throughout the neighborhood,
the billiards game to our left as frightening as
the occasional bottles I can't identify
YOUR WIFE

A warbler lectures the twilight air; my cat lifts his head and carefully licks the end of his wheat-colored tail.

And what do you say to your wife as you take your seat in her imported car, engine running in front of the arriving passenger zone at LAX, and she asks, "How was your trip?"

Do you answer, "It was okay"? And do you remember, as you smile and lean over to kiss her, do you remember me? Do you hear the war cry I hollered when the breath shot from my lungs as I plunged into the spring-fed waters that were sunk in the green heat. And do you remember pulling me naked out of the cold black water onto a floating dock which creaked and tottered under my cumbersome arrival? I pushed you in, and yelled "Timber!" You! Shivering and panicked, swimming to make sure your long, white limbs weren't frozen.

Your eyes had the coolness of mint leaves and the carefree glance of a light summer breeze; your wet hair dried stiffly like corn husks. Lying back on the planks of the dock, I gazed up at the ring of tree tops above us, and I remember that I felt like a white candle melting away from the wick.

How much of me have you given up already? How much more when you lie down on fresh sheets with patterns of blue flowers, sliding your knees between your wife's? I feel like the skin of a wild beast staked upon the ground—sad, impotent, laughable.

My friends gather around me with empty consolations "How complicated these men are," my younger sister says in between bites of her avocado omelet.

My food goes uneaten and I stare lost in the black color of my coffee. "He's such a spontaneous person," I tell her.

"Maybe that's the problem," she says. She has just dyed her hair red and I feel as if I'm talking to a stranger.

"Did I tell you about the time someone was playing the piano in the lobby of the hotel and he suddenly let loose like Baryshnikov on these wide marble steps with his size 12 feet? I laughed so hard I had to sit down to keep from peeing on myself." Even as I tell the story I want to laugh.

She says, "He sounds like a great guy, Marisa. I guess he can afford to be I mean, married men don't have anything to lose by being wonderful."

Later my roommate, Barbara, and I go out for happy hour. I think the New Yorkers who call it "wretched hour" are the ones who know, who understand. She says, "Why did you give up without a fight?"

I hadn't told her as readily as I'd told the others. I had simply mentioned "someone else." She is the one who read the Ann Landers column aloud to me in the mornings over her peppermint tea. Finally, my elbows drop to the table for support, and I answer, "Well, he's married to her."

What does she look like this person called wife? Is she thin and tall like you? Is your wife beautiful? I doubt it. Common beauty is not your style. She must be gracious, well-educated, considerate, clean of mouth and mind. She is cool and dry like California Pinot Noir while I am the swamp of
your primordial dreams.

This is the emptying of the long river. A bloody milelong snake. Had we really only first kissed a month earlier? You were the record producer behind the glass and I was the back up pianist. For a week that glass separated us, and quite by accident we met in a museum and then we went for dinner at a Sushi bar in the Grove. There was so much to say, as if we had to unleash every bit of information we’d gathered in our lives right then and right there. Sinkholes often suck in the ground swiftly and without warning.

Something says you fell in love with me as landscape—the way someone falls under some southern cabala when he first reads Faulkner. You saw the mothering warm ocean singing against the sands of Miami Beach—a peaceful, comforting fable. You took off your shoes, waded in at night and said “How amazingly warm this water.”

When I asked you that night, leaning from the balcony at the Alexander Hotel, if you were married, I was half-joking and did not expect you to say yes. I remember the reeling way I felt, and then the insidious logical voice in my head, which said, it’s too late to matter now. You love him.

I drove us down to Key West where we slipped on green stones, laughed in our drenched clothes, drank margueritas in Captain Tony’s and pretended that we would live there on the southern end of life forever. We spent that first evening drinking Zinfandel on the breezy moonlit deck of a restaurant where we ate rabbit fricassee, duck and fresh swordfish and talked about ancient Greek music.

“They didn’t just have a minor mode and a major mode,” you leaned over to me to say. “They had four different modes—what variety.”


“Too soft—wimpy,” I said. And your eyes softened.

“The way you play,” you said. “It’s like a war of love.”

You halted and then continued, “I have never known anyone as intense as you.”

“I have never felt anything so intensely before,” I admitted.

We watched the ocean, and the exchange of looks between the full moon and its reflection I thought that the moonlight lay like slivers of white glass on that shouldering creature.

What would she say if she knew that after the record was cut and my winter gig was over, you followed me four hundred miles from one end of Florida to the other, to a place where the oak trees wrapped their roots around my ankles, and my very voice changed from the frantic velocity of my Miami persona to a low, laughing alligator croak, each vowel spread-eagled in southern pines. I took you to places that fed us hushpuppies and grits and biscuits and gravy until we both ached and laughed and said we could be in the Macy’s parade on Thanksgiving, tied down to the world by cords.

“The absence of happiness is not unhappiness,” I told you later, trying to cheer myself up, as we rocked back and forth on a newly painted porch
swing at an inn in Crawfordville. You stroked my fingers, sighed, and looked up to the sky as a translucent cloud passed over the moon like one of those cheap sheer curtains. We meshed together in the square of the four mahogany posts. My flesh could not feel enough of yours. How I wanted to unwrap my skin so that every square inch of our bodies could touch. When your mouth held my breast and your hand licked at my thigh, I could no longer tell one part of my body from another.

Why now do I circle the concept of wifeness over and over in my mind as if it were a piece of candy that I was rotating in my mouth trying to discern the flavor. She is wife; then I must be anti-wife.

On the day that you left to go home, I wanted to offer some token gesture, some nod to my domestic leanings as few and meager as they are. I offered to press your shirt.

"You know how to iron?" you said as if I'd said I could fly.

I took your shirt into another room, and as the time got later, and the flight came nearer, I carefully nosed the stern of the black GE along the button holes and over the collar. I ironed both sides of each sleeve. I circled the broad back in heat; steam landed on my cheeks. I paced each front panel of your khaki shirt until finally there was only perfectly smooth linen left, and you put it on to leave.

II

Gil, Lenny and I all played together in a band in high school. Gil gave up music; he wasn't very good. We've all come together again and are on the road as in the old days. Lenny keeps us entertained just as he always did before.

Here's the situation: Fred and Gloria are lying on the floor dead. The room is empty except for a puddle of water and some broken glass. The window is open. How did Fred and Gloria die?

We come across the bridge and pass a green and white Hess Station. The sky is the color of blue jeans which have been bleached over and over again, and a song by Phil Collins tangles up in the air-conditioning. Mexico Beach is 14 miles away, but we're not in Mexico. We're in the Florida Panhandle.

"Was there any blood anywhere around or on Fred and Gloria?" I ask.

"No." Lenny says.

"Just like this all the way to Port St. Joe," Gil says in a flat voice. He is tall, hunched over the steering wheel. We drive through a military compound. A pine forest lurks on either side of the road.

"Were Fred and Gloria killed by a person?"

"No."

Gil asks, "Were they killed by more than one person?"

"No."

On the right side of the road, the pine trees are young and bright green. A long trail of tall green weeds topped with yellow flowers looks almost like a road running parallel to Highway 98. The color of the flowers is the
same as the broken line which has been painted down the middle of the road.

Were Fred and Gloria killed by an animal? Yes A bear? No A gorilla?
No. A mammal? Yes

"Those were the worst margueritas," Gil says, referring to the ones we had last night which came out of a machine—like a convenience store slurpee or something

Was the mammal rabid?

"No. Don’t assume anything," Lenny says. Lenny wears an old t-shirt, inside out. He is lying across the middle seat of the van, and calmly cleans his nails while Gil drives, and I watch the landscape alter.

Did Fred and Gloria drown? In a manner of speaking.

Mexico Beach stretches forgotten and disused beside us, but it isn’t as bad as Panama City, which you should see. Every quarter of a mile, a goofy golf course—sometimes deserted—appears like a zoo of stiff, colorful monsters. Next to the hotels fake stone waterfalls rise up like abandoned pagan deities. A stone waterfall in Florida? Who are they kidding? But even more rampant than miniature golf and goofy golf and family golf courses are the ubiquitous air brush stores.

When we passed the first air brush parlor, Lenny said, "Take note of that." I asked why. He answered, "You’ll see." Then on every block, one, sometimes two or three parlors advertised in hues of blue and green and yellow: Air Brush  We air brush anything.

"It’s air brush heaven," I said, forgetting the game briefly. Lenny used to play guitar in this town.

One noteworthy billboard depicted a woman lying on the beach, but only from the waist down—mutilated. An abdomen with legs, nothing more.

But that was Panama City, and this is the open road. I have told Gil and Lenny about you, your wife, your forthcoming child. They do not know what to say, because they see the way my head turns as we pass the ocean. How quiet I become.

Were Fred and Gloria married? Not legally. Was the killer on a jealous rampage? No. Did the killer kill for money? No

Mexico Beach vanishes—an ugly wart which we easily forget. The sea oats nod beside us. Signs say "Unlawful to pick sea oats."

"I wish I were a sea oat. Or that I just had a sign that said it was unlawful to pick me," I say. Gil reaches over and takes my hand.

Gil and Lenny and I have gone into business: the seafood business. We are traveling from one part of the state to another, buying tuna in the panhandle to sell to restaurants on the suncoast, and buying grouper from the suncoast to sell to restaurants in the keys and buying lobster from the keys to sell to restaurants in Orlando. We’re not making much money, but Gil sold his business, Lenny has graduated from college and, my doctor has said my voice needs a rest. Besides music depressed me, and there will be no paying gigs in Tallahassee until the fall. None of us knows what to do with himself, and this idea seemed as good as any
I spend most of my time writing to you, thinking of you, remembering how you called me to tell me about your wife’s pregnancy. I want to die.

I drank terribly when we first left Tallahassee, but it only made things worse. Gil gets mad at me when I drink; he wants my voice to get better. He thinks I should be my manager and that Lenny and I should use the time to write songs, but I am no longer the funky folk-singer with the contralto voice and the spiked hair. I want to hear a steel guitar and sing cheating songs.

Gil is getting close to solving the mystery, I think. Don’t assume anything, Lenny says. Somehow, I stumble upon it.

Are Fred and Gloria human? No. Gil solves the riddle. They’re fish, and they are in a fishbowl.

Gil says, “The killer is a cat, right.” And Lenny just laughs like the kid that he always will be.

III

Our travels have brought us to the northeast coast of Florida—the umber-gray region. You taught me that color: umber-gray. I lingered on the sound of it, tried it on, felt so beautiful, so frighteningly on target. We came to Fernandina Beach, and I body surfed and landed laughing against the sand.

I caroused in those waters and grew strong—the transfusion that happened you cannot know. What guides a life? Of all the things I showed you, I did not show you this. This is me—the gray beach being grazed by the white lips of the gray-green Atlantic and wearing the soft gray-blue cloak of the horizon with just the faintest rose bled in.

I am facing East. You face West. This ocean bore down on me like something honing me down.

But that night I stumble towards the water in my black bathing suit, too melodramatic for words, wailing and weakened again. Gil, who has known me forever, comes slowly trotting after me, his jeans get soaked as he finally grabs and holds onto me while I sink into the shallow water.

“Marisa, Marisa, please stop it,” he says, and people walk by, and stare and then walk on when I begin to fervently kiss him.

“Do you want me to sleep with you?” he asks. A wave surges around us and the sand flows back to the deep. I nod and put my head against his neck.

“No to have sex,” he says.

“Why not?” By now I am petulant and prehensile.

“Well, just look what it does to you,” he says.

I thought about you all day today and this is what I imagined: I am wearing a green dress sleeveless with a low waist like those simple dresses that were so popular last year and made out of that soft, sweatshirt type material. You meet me at an airport in Mexico, but just before we leave the airport I slip into a bathroom and remove my underwear.

In a taxi, you kiss me. My leg crosses over yours. You kiss me again.
My arms encircle your neck. Your hand slips along my thigh and then you discover my naked slide of bone. You look up at me startled. I smile. You close your eyes and stiffen against me. Somehow we make it to the hotel room.

Did I tell you about the tuna we bought in Panama City? The boat brought in 136 head of yellow fin tuna. The term head could be misleading, because all you really get are these three foot long bodies with bright yellow trimming on the top like dabs of thick yellow oil paint. The fishermen decapitate the creatures at sea, and when they bring them out of the hold, hanging them from a hook attached to a pulley, the circular rim of white-yellow entrails looms like a monster's mouth. I gagged and so did Lenny. We will sell the tuna meat to Sushi bars.

IV

Gil and Lenny and I each made five hundred dollars on our little venture. Now, I am back living with my sister and working at a music store. Yesterday was my birthday, and I got two calls. The first call came from Gil who asked me how I felt. He has gotten Lenny and me a job playing in a small bar on Thursday nights, and already we're getting our old following.

"Marisa, I've talked to the guy at the radio station. They want you to play a live concert, but they want some of your old happier tunes," he said after he wished me happy birthday. I think he is the one who wants to hear them. Gil is back with his second wife now.

Then, of course, you called. You were on your way to buy infrared lamps for your bathroom. The toilet had overflowed. It was a nightmare, you said. You bought a wet-dry vacuum cleaner and, God, it pulled up three gallons of water.

"What a nightmare," I agreed, dryly.
"I got a new car," you told me.
"What is it?" I asked.
"A black Volvo, turbo-charged. It's incredible." "What does your black Volvo run on?" I said softly, "Blood?"
Your response was a canyon of silence. And finally, I hung up.

The hills of Southern California rest like the sad, swollen hands of an extinct race. You have taken the California Incline, absentmindedly noticing the sage plants and pale amber-green oleander bushes with their dead blossoms intact. That little luxury hearse of yours takes you everywhere, but on the Santa Monica Freeway, in the midst of the violent traffic, carbon monoxide making a sunset so vivid it could hypnotize, a red light on the dash of your black Volvo indicates that you only have seven miles left to go before you run out of fuel.

But then Ah, damn me. There is a figure coming between the cars that choke the freeway, a bare-breasted woman on a Harley, and she stops to pick you up when you run out of gas. It's me, and on my breast is tattooed the word, "Eternally"
OUR LAST DAY

Me and my lover go peacefully
perhaps in a gondola
thru the wide open wastes of a Love Canal
happy that we can die together
perhaps of cancer, an unbreakable tryst!

We drift in our little skiff
thru the needles and dead fish
while clouds from Chernobyl swing lazily
over a peaceful Sweden
of the mind,—dripping down acid dew
on scenic reindeer in Lapland.

It’s all very beautiful, this day
like none other—
The heat of this blocked in summer’s day,
and ozone
I can almost grasp in my fist Finally
to leave our little colonized cottage
and the invisible guests
of silent ethers,
to bask in the pleasures of this, our last day.
A LA FAVEUR DE LA NUIT

Se glisser dans ton ombre à la faveur de la nuit.
Suivre tes pas, ton ombre à la fenêtre,
Cette ombre à la fenêtre c’est toi, ce n’est pas une autre, c’est toi.
N’ouvre pas cette fenêtre derrière les rideaux de laquelle tu bouges.
Ferme les yeux.
Je voudrais les fermer avec mes lèvres
Mais la fenêtre s’ouvre et le vent, le vent qui balance bizarrement la flamme et le drapeau entoure ma fuite de son manteau
La fenêtre s’ouvre: ce n’est pas toi.
Je le savais bien.
UNDER COVER OF NIGHT

Glide into your shadow under cover of night.
Follow your steps, your shadow, to the window.
That shadow at the window is you, it’s no one else, it’s you.
Do not open that window behind the curtains you’re fingering
Close your eyes
I want to close them with my lips.
But the window opens itself and the wind, the wind which weirdly
   wavers flame and flag, allows, circling, my escape from night’s cloak
The window opens itself: this is not you
That I know well

translated by Karl Patten
COWBOYS AND INDIANS

Gus said he didn't know what was going on when his mother took him to school that first day when he was only six years old and just getting good at playing cowboys and indians he figured it was just a temporary inconvenience and sooner or later he'd be back on the streets killing and being killed by imaginary bullets and arrows eight years tops he thought cause no one told him anything when he was in first grade about high school which seemed to him like just another four year delay of games penalty and then somebody let something slip about this other thing called college and then a job and Gus said just hold on a minute would someone like to tell me just what the hell is going on and what the hell am I supposed to tell the cowboys and the indians who've been waiting on me all these years
JUST AS THE WOMAN BEING TURNED OVER TO SOOTHER HER CHAFED SKIN

stops breathing,
someone sews rhine stones on a cashmere skin that will tear before she wears it that rose that never exploded in flowers browns the astronaut zips up a suit the milky way spitting light out like rice at the wedding the 66 year old woman at a nature retreat can't remember tho she holds a picture of the school nurse telling her of her lovely smile, teeth and tells it, finds this fragile small woman there who doesn't recognize her but holds her as if she does
THE PHONE BELCHES

a dying old woman
near you in Intensive
Care moaning help,
I need even the
stillness, the sound
of flesh cut
thru anesthesia
skin you see part of
you could be 50
dollar bills you
see on the road
and want to pick
up your heart
beating as if brush
ing dust from your
shoe. Each bell, a
shriek of pain you
can’t tell isn’t
from you haunting as
the dead who come
back in dreams
THE THING IS, I AM BREAD

People who are doors spread back
To let everything in untouched.
Something touches only on the way out.
Movers seem to be the ones who tear up doors

For those who are chairs,
One great gesture is enough: a war,
An epidemic, The Depression. As still as wood,
They give up whatever is taken from them.

The people of curtain continue to keep out
Whatever would get in, spending their lives in corrugation
Before the window like a conscience.
The dull side faces out, the bright side looks in.

The brotherhood of bread is composed of soft souls
Who conspire like acrobats to be pyramids
Mountains encourage them. They want to grow stronger than a box.
It is the air that reduces their billowy hopes to crumbs

Most bricks are benefactors, simple folk
Who believe in what they can do. They fit in wherever
They go. Shunning the rustic life of rock,
They live in cities, like their ancestors

People like cups are travelers It takes
Strong heat and starving cold to fill their attention.
When they have a home, they seem to sit about
Useless and empty, looking for the dining car.
THE RED JEEP

nothing much matters about

a red jeep up-ended in the median

snow flakes melting on the hood
JUDY JETSON (ON HER BACK, TATTOOED)

wanna squat above you primal
june of the sacrificial measure
the artificial pleasure
juice of the jujube squad
queen of the aquanet set
just because of the way boys think
they want you
beauty in the eye
of the hand that holds the cock
wanna reach to rim the hole
of your future where nothing will be
simple
wanna crowd you in your clubland
as the lights flash faster faster
wanna push you from your pose
your play-dough destruction
i want the blonde lie
of your dark roots
i wanna taste what is there
to be tasted
because in my playground
experience will suck us off
judy, why settle for time
on your knees in a john
it’s no adventure
for a wrecked age where
love is my name
hissed in your ear
as he pumps you full
of an anger you don’t understand
where your self is left
on a shelf behind
another morning’s ravage
and last year’s record
time is not redeemable
memories are not preassembled
my intentions are hard
and not always honorable
and i know you don’t know me
i am more than revenge
but i certainly know you
BY APPOINTMENT ONLY

The day my gynecologist,
after years of perfunctory
poking around with speculum
and finger-cock, of keeping me
waiting, in a waiting room
lacy as a box of bonbons &
crammed with cream-filled women
cherry cordials, rumballs
& the like, years
of That's my girl! &
Very, very good! —sixty
seconds in the semi-dark
of his sanctum sanctorum, where
(even the rumballs were sober)
he was Dr Doctor
and I was Robyn dear,
found out I was a writer
and not just another pretty vagina:
he kept me long past five
& told me how his two-year-old,
a boy—fruit of the womb
of a second marriage
to a woman half his age—
walked at seven months
types forty words per minute
and is writing an article
for the Sunday New York Times
ROOFTOPS & DREAMS

I wake with my elbows pointed, my hands wrapped around my shoulders. It’s 1988 and I’m still female and the world is still temporary.

On the roof of my building, I look over Brooklyn thinking about Detroit.

Someone plays the blues on the piano and calls out to us—come come, come.

Some shoot heroin in bedrooms, while others play on the street

Flower children, love children, long hair, worn levis with unusual patches, snickering as they watch Watergate trials on acid

Children watch teachers with dragon tails swoop across the room, wiping the blackboards clean

And we send notes to each other: Who do you like? And who do you like?

On a kidney machine, Judy tends gas in her Gratiot Avenue dreams

Joe tucks a gold watch into a pocket, his wallet on a chain, a black eye, he staggers out of the Irish American Club, shooting up in a dark apartment on Seward Street

Eric waters his plants, drinks wine from his mother’s fine china while the boy lover sleeps in the alcove

They lie still with their hands folded and their eyes closed, smiling, smacked, their fine rough hair in their eyes

Odd—I keep saying to myself as a few cumulous clouds pass through the sky.

An old man rocks perpetually on the porch on Commonwealth Street in Detroit.
My mother stubs out a cigarette in a glass ashtray And the rest of us keep walking along, our hands warm in our coat pockets.

I'm on Avenue A at 3:00 with a drunk poet and a young man who usually sits in his room wired up to two synthesizers and a television set—he eats Twinkies and I think I have something to say as I walk past a few hookers who want some change and cigarettes.

A piece of apple pie and ice cream People talk at other tables My dog. My dog followed me here They laugh. On the floor, I have a bag of history books I took from an unlocked locker.

History, the flow of words in the space between you and me, words drop on paper, white decorated with holes on the left and right, words march out of machines, line by line, words tell other words what to say. I say nothing but what the words tell me, a scrambled recording, phrases fit into phrases, words to words, sentences, paragraphs out of control.

Everything is simply out of place, lonely, America, the airplane routes criss cross each other, cut up the linear sense we might make of it: San Francisco, white and pink houses, buses, hills, rain, and a room with green and pink carpeting. Dallas, flat, flat, flat. Atlanta, a shopping center and a hotel with a television screen in the room and a meter that keeps track of everything.

How I know I am alive: I now live in fear of my children's mistakes.
IT HAPPENS TO US ALL

There is a hidden code to seek
in the language of strangers and birds.
It hides a perfect peace or loneliness.
The grass sighs and swallows the tracks;
trees shift to darken the light
Once children climbed up your laughing arms;
now the children all climb down
Unreal as a giant’s, as simple and wide,
your grief. Shaking the leaves you go on.
How alone someone can be
Yet, this, too, shall pass
and you will know enough to ask
for a bedtime story and sleep
THIS IS WHAT YOU WANTED

Has this day achieved simple reality?
Röike

This is what
you wanted
food on the plate
hand over hand
in prayer
birds in the yard
eating crumbs
day without waste
night with dreams
worth the sleep
a slow ride
on the earth
around the sun
with the moon re-
assuringly near
words on the page
and the book
opened here
REDEMPTION IN A HOTEL ROOM

for Jean Rhys

The slightest light
of a bracelet-sized moon
sulks against her scented gloves.
Hope dims to a cheap brooch
studded with artificial tomorrows
Icy feathers of pain spread through her chest.
The liquor burns like
a deceptive lover departing
down an intestinal street.
It is quite like an old time
to get down on this back-street bed,
soaked in a cheap whiskey imitation of herself.
First, however, she insists on washing her hands.
She wants to hold moonlight on her palms,
immaculately.
SNOW TALK

Silence recalls shared reasons for failure
Our time falls away over the bleak rim of winter
In the February air,
warnings freeze around us, and
a hard moment of searching is a pretense.
Pushing fingers toward the bottom,
we pocket our warmth Our chances,
like the snow, go on falling.
We fumble away from each other,
hearts tightened by mind-darkening truth.
BLUES WALK I

She says no again
he takes the words
puts them in a sack across his back
and walks in the humped backed rain
with one shoulder lower than the other,
he sees no reflection of himself
in rain splashed windows
Kathleen Anderson is a native Philadelphian, and has been published in The Poetry Newsletter, Philadelphia Poets, and the South Street Star.

Jabari Asim works as a feature writer for a weekly St. Louis newspaper, and is co-editor of WordWalkers. His poetry has appeared in Black American Literature Forum and Obsidian II.

Rachel Tzvia Back has lived in Israel for the past eight years, and is now temporarily residing in Philadelphia.

Steve Cleveland lives in Albion, California, works in a bookstore, and has been published in Pinchpenny, Poet News, and Ridge Review.

Robert Desnos (1900-1945) was a poet, playwright, and essayist. One of the most inventive practitioners of "automatic writing," Desnos was excommunicated by Breton from the Surrealists.

Joseph Farley lives and works in Philadelphia. He is an editor of The Axe Factory Review. His poems have appeared in Ball State Forum, PBQ, Slipstream, and Widener Review.

Al Ferber is from Bensalem and has published two chapbooks: Gus (Pudding Press) and Inventory in the Badlands (Johnston Green Pub, Scotland).

Carol Gordon lives in Olympia, Washington, and has had work in Calyx, Jeopardy, Bellingham Review, Fine Madness, Crab Creek Review, Snapdragon, Poetry Seattle, Kalliope, and a Tacoma City Bus.

Barbara Henning is from Brooklyn, and is author of Smoking in the Twilight Bar (United Artists).


Lorrie Jackson lives in Chicago, has read her work at St. Mark's Church in New York, and has been published in Long Shot and New American Writing.

Candy Kaucher lives and works in Philadelphia, and has been published in NYQ, Magic Bullet, and Big Hammer.

Lyn Lifshin has been published in numerous journals.
Doughtry "Doc" Long was born in Atlanta, Georgia, and is a teacher in the Trenton Public School System. His poetry has appeared in various publications and several anthologies, including Giant Talk (Random House).

Pat MacEnulty has recently had a story published in Apalachee Quarterly, received a Master of Arts in Creative Writing from Florida State, and writes for the Fort Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel.

R. Nikolas Macioeci was born and lives in Columbus, Ohio, received his Ph D from Ohio State University, and has been published in Negative Capability, Amelia, and The Windless Orchard.

Mary Ann Mannino was born in Philadelphia, and finishing her Ph D at Temple University where she teaches creative writing and other courses. She has published twelve stories in small reviews in the USA, England and Italy.

S.J. Marks is the author of Lines (Cummington Press, 1972), and has published poetry in APR, Animoeh Review, Iowa Review, and The New Yorker. He lives in Radnor, Pennsylvania, is married, and has four daughters.

Mark Pardovich is a Philadelphia artist now attending Parsons School of Design.

Karl Patren spent much of last year at the Virginia Colony for the Arts, the Millay Colony, and Yaddo, during which he completed a new volume of poems. In January he received the Millay Award for Poetry for 1988. He is co-editor of West Branch and teaches at Bucknell.

Fred Slaven lives in New Brunswick, New Jersey.

Robyn Supraner has published many children's books, and has worked as a lyricist and a teacher. Her poems have appeared in Ploughshares, Prairie Schooner, The Massachusetts Review, Beloit, Tendril, and elsewhere.

Sharan Flynn Tette's work has appeared, or is soon to appear, in Yankee, The Syracuse Herald-Journal, and Deros. She lives in Stanley, New York.

Becky Turnbull recently returned to the San Francisco Bay area, where she was born, after twenty years in Arizona. Her poems have previously appeared in PBQ and Prairie Schooner.

Lydia Tomkiw has had work in The Best American Poetry 1988, Exquisite Corpse, B-City, Joe Soap's canoe, among others. Her forthcoming collection is The Dreadful Swimmers (Wide Skirt Press, England).

Michelle Waughtel is a Philadelphia writer.
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