

Gulf Coast



VOLUME IX, NUMBER 1
WINTER 1997

Gulf Coast

Volume IX, Number One

Winter 1997

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POETRY

| | | |
|--|-----------------------|-----|
| <i>Pier</i> | Karen Volkman | 5 |
| <i>Devotion</i> | | 6 |
| <i>Untitled</i> | | 7 |
| <i>My Dark Town</i> | Nguyen Quang Thieu | 19 |
| <i>The Field</i> | | 21 |
| <i>The Habit of Hunger</i> | | 22 |
| <i>Music</i> | | 23 |
| <i>Where I Live</i> | Laura Bernstein | 36 |
| <i>The Metal Lion and the Monk</i> | Pattiann Rogers | 42 |
| <i>Variations on Breaking the Faith of Sleep</i> | | 44 |
| <i>Signs</i> | Rebecca Lilly | 58 |
| <i>Phone Calls</i> | | 59 |
| <i>Crowd Local No. 242</i> | Edward Skoog | 62 |
| <i>Answer to Crowd</i> | | 64 |
| <i>Odd Rooms</i> | Catherine Daly | 81 |
| <i>Blue Seville</i> | Scott Hightower | 99 |
| <i>Spring Evening, Washington, D.C.</i> | Stephen Robert Gibson | 112 |
| <i>Of Passion and Seductive Trees</i> | Jay Hopler | 113 |
| <i>The Loneliest Monk</i> | Christopher Matthews | 115 |
| <i>Elegy</i> | Lynne McMahon | 131 |
| <i>Goodbye</i> | | 132 |
| <i>The Place of Creation</i> | Martha Collins | 138 |

NONFICTION

| | | |
|--|---------------|-----|
| <i>Sickness as Vision</i> | Suzanne Paola | 8 |
| <i>Interview with Pattiann Rogers</i> | Gulf Coast | 37 |
| <i>Art in Motion: The Chi-fired Forms of Hsung Hsien</i> | Teresa Burns | 82 |
| <i>The Darker Side of Ovid</i> | Amy Storrow | 101 |
| <i>Becoming Pretty</i> | Susan Davis | 133 |

FICTION

| | | |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|-----|
| <i>Would You Know It Wasn't Love</i> | Hester Kaplan | 24 |
| <i>Lagtime</i> | Nancy Barron | 46 |
| <i>Yalow Family Factory Plaque</i> | Jake Bohstedt | 60 |
| <i>Astronauts</i> | Douglas Dorst | 87 |
| <i>Visits</i> | Katharine Noel | 117 |

ART

| | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|-----|
| <i>Oath of the Horatii (after David)</i> | Patrick Phipps | 65 |
| <i>Raft of the Medusa (after Gericault)</i> | | 66 |
| <i>Las Meninas (after Velasquez)</i> | | 67 |
| <i>The Third of May (after Goya)</i> | | 68 |
| <i>Jeff Shoots Tone & Reed with Hi-8 Camera, Los Angeles, 1996</i> | Ken Probst | 69 |
| <i>The Crew Watches Anna at Work, Los Angeles, 1995</i> | | 70 |
| <i>Brian Powders Jeff's Balls, San Francisco, 1994</i> | | 71 |
| <i>Troy Kisses Enrique's Navel, San Francisco, 1994</i> | | 72 |
| <i>Receiving Orders, Front Line Command Post. Lincoln Way Motel. Gettysburg, PA. 3.29.93</i> | Alan Krathaus/ Theodore Coulombe | 73 |
| <i>Surveillance Operations. Mission Control. N.A.S.A.. Houston, TX. 4.25.95.</i> | | 74 |
| <i>Damage Assessment — Petroleum Refineries. Houston, Shipchannel, Houston, TX. 5.1.95</i> | | 75 |
| <i>Observing Heavy Materiel Movement, Forward Signal Station. Houston, TX. 5.3.95.</i> | | 76 |
| <i>Home of Oscar Madison and Felix Ungar</i> | Mark Bennett | 77 |
| <i>Home of Ward and June Cleaver,(Grant Avenue)</i> | | 78 |
| <i>Home of Laverne Defazio and Shirley Finney</i> | | 79 |
| <i>Ricky & Lucy Ricardo, Beverly Palms Hotel Suite</i> | | 80 |
| NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS | | 139 |

Cover art by

Patrick Phipps

Liberty Leading the People (after Delacroix), 1996

Polaroid, 4"x4"

Courtesy the artist

Pier

Altogether too many accordions to compose on.

When, in the faded afternoon, the footsteps of revelers on the promenade
echo the melancholy cerulean half-light on the ravaged pier.

And know it, anchor cranked down. The gull was a dullard, the epileptic
one-eared
tom-cat flayed the rats. Shoulder, dislocated. Teethmarks in a strap.

Ghost cargo: the captain's datebook. Year erased.

Our arrests came singly, no one took on the authorities in what could,
would, stand
as example to the vagrant.

Beyond the warehouses, a genealogy, spidery, undeciphered, swayed
between the
crests of two sunsets.

Brick floor cool beneath the foot.

Lighting night by night the chancy candelabra.

The tugboat guided into harbor, watched by lovers. The occasional
mustard-
colored pigeon among the grey.

With the tide shifting and strollers enacting
improvisations in divisible air.

Summer mimics, toddler in a cap.

*You have been a long time on this island, so she wrote. Waiting a long time on this
island. She wrote.*

Craving the livingest net, mad with cataracts, squeals of silver, failing day.

When the sun is *bruise* to my union.

And begin.

Devotion

As a covenant needs a cloak,
it said, roaming your multiple
wilderness like sky abbreviating
seasons with its sweetness —
so we go, more or less, the white

anatomy of still familiar
failure, the child cheating his sister
at a game in a garden
which we strive to be
better than. Inaccuracy of eyes

foreshortened in a picture. Not the grim
terrain of degree renouncing
leap, dive, save or tourniquet loosening
pulse to plural, but the flamed sea
I pearl in, wild and ample,

is flint to my figure,
moon and rain and hovel, poverty
the gown to grandeur worn under
parasols of hectic stars. (Adoration
of *fugue* and *humor*, consuming *more*.)

Untitled

Much to recommend you: the green eyes and gadgets, the comings and lettings-go. Over time, the right thing meanders, the swerve is some digit long sought and oft-remembered (recollected in day-dream like scent or morning sun.) So much for the shooters-of-phantom, with their booms, cam-wenches, sockets, metal ones. I left before I knew how to stay, every nuance of the shirt-sleeve furthered — numismatists, mechanics — the dropped stone a hollow oasis, singe and name. Goodly to hold but badly it prefigures, old sink of store and murmur, ladled wear, as we deepen the reckless attendance — bill and label of penance — for our share. See with the eyes of occasion, till *wait* hurries fathom and *founder* fathers near.

Sickness as Vision

I.

My nice doctor tells me my history's typical. She's my age — late 30s — and has long brown hair like mine, but straight: the hair I coveted in high school. She's petite. So much so I have to work at not being surprised when I see her write prescriptions: her oddly legible, Catholic-school script materializing into tablets that recast my shapeshift landscape. Sometimes making it lighter, sometimes darker. She doesn't look big enough.

Manic-depressives, she tells me, get in trouble when their hormones shift. Puberty, post-partums, menopause, and hormones riot, disturbing the brain's neurotransmitters. She tells me this after I fill her in on the long mirk of my adolescence: dropping out of school, drug use escalating to hard drugs, attempting suicide, flirting with prostitution.

"It's normal," she says in that level therapist tone, the Tantra of our modern world, able to reconcile all opposites. "You were self-medicating." It's the 90s, and I'm happy, even proud, for a few days, to have a medical explanation for a past I try not to think about unless I'm talking to doctors who, with their Tantric curiosity, tend to pry.

Maybe it takes a Catholic to order time by what goes into the mouth.

Because we have that nagging "tran" before our substantiation: we believe in the body and the blood literally as blood and body. It's a Catholic kid's schoolyard trope — the aseptic wafer that becomes a gobbet of flesh dribbling real blood in the mouth of the unconfessed. So we keep our communions private, refusing to share, protecting our small weekly cannibalisms from those who lack the right sense of reverential gore. We believe that, over time, such food will change us.

There are many kinds of communion in this life, each with its own body attached.

Mass, aspirin, Sunday supper: we seem to need to have our substance altered, to have another life, or the emblem of it, make the bardo journey through esophagus and stomach and intestines, all so a little of it can seduce our molecules to itself. Like my immigrant Italian relatives, who served eel and spaghetti *aiglo e olio* and head cheese every Christmas, and followed it up with a whole roast turkey. They ultimately traded most of their sacramental foods for the sloppy casseroles of middle America, learning, in a

spasm of blind trust in a new culture, to add canned soup to onion flakes and dry chopped chicken, hoping in this way to be transformed. Thinking perhaps with every mouthful to lose their accents, unkink their noses, pale their skins. We have such a heartbreaking faith in the body — as if the psyche or the soul can't travel without her sidekick, her grave and awkward Sancho Panza, coming along: as if we feel that every time our billion cells regenerate we want them to have a bit of something desired, something we call beautiful, inside.

I spent years dosing myself with drugs, then years being dosed. Each phase has been a movement, a change begun at the molecular level, a feeding of the body and the soul. My own complicity in the process has varied. Using drugs illegally was active, the swallowing of a new set of senses. No one can betray the body more baldly than this, willfully usurping its privileges. I can't help but admire, still, the impulse behind drug use: the radical restructuring of the self, the almost-spiritual transference of all sense of reality to a sphere of otherness, a sphere that cannot be seen. Being medicated is passive. No matter how hard you try to be active and informed, the patient-psychiatrist relationship — the humble, flawed one, the knowing corrector — requires that you become a thing. It's a process admirable in what it can do; inadmirable in its assumptions.

These are human transubstantiations, and if they were all, we'd be left with a neat dualism, a yang/yin of inner explosion, outer control. But they're not. There remains above all the eucharist itself, that bland, inscrutable meal that alone among all these hosts reveals nothing about the direction it will take you, body and soul. Nothing on the face of it, no pharmaceutical symbol, no countercultural scrawl, no classically American canned bean sticking out of a sludgy cream to indicate that this is the realm you enter now. It has only the blank white face of all existences that can't be guessed at: round, pale, almost luminous, a tiny mirror fogged with alien breath.

II.

At 15 I had a boyfriend my girlfriends, to a gum-chewing one of them, envied. Kenny: good-looking, twenty-two, a dealer, with an apartment full of dope and guns. Our best friend was a narcotics cop named Jimmy who dealt on the side, mostly stuff he busted from the less cool and less armed. Dealers have a cyclic business swung around by the law, the South American climate, the DEA and a band of other pests, so Kenny also roofed when the weather was good. Kenny took a lot of pride in his work and never missed a chance to describe himself as a roofer. It strikes me as funny now how everyone I knew, no matter how far they lived outside the law, loved placing themselves somehow within the capitalist food chain, took comfort in it.

Kenny sold everything he could when he could: grass, smack, coke, acid, PCP, exotics like peyote buttons, and he had different sources for each.

One good source was our friend Debbie's mother, Mrs. Player, who also dealt for a living and gave Debbie's 10-year-old sister a few hits of windowpane acid for Christmas one year, wrapped up with a ribbon in a cottoned jeweler's box.

My diary from this period contains entries like: "Tonight I did two hits of blotter, some great Columbian, vodka, and ludes to cool out." Or, "Kevin and Sammy got in a fight. Kevin tried to kill him but only cut his hand off." It's a crisp, oddly reportorial view of a world in which I felt utterly comfortable. My feelings, by current standards — a woman in an academic job, dutiful, pleasant most of the time, who thinks meat is murder and carries spiders out of the house on a broom — seem blunted.

I remember at 15 or 16 experiencing wrenching grief when several dozen of my friends got busted at a party I decided at the last minute not to go to. I sat on a curb in Elizabeth and cried over the paper where I'd seen the story of the arrests and their names listed (most of them over legal age by then: old enough for real time). A middle-aged woman with a kindly voice came over and asked me if she could help. I said no and ran, fearful she'd call the cops out of misguided compassion. One thing the drug culture instills: the sense of a *them* who, like bears, can claw the life out of you even when they're being friendly.

I recall a different kind of regret when boys I liked didn't call. I don't remember any sorrow, or even thought, over the graceless stump where a boy's hand had been, or for another boy institutionalized after a bad acid trip, or for all the second-rate dealers beaten out of their dope so it could be sold on the same streets and to the same customers by a cop. Kenny came home to the apartment one day with a harpoon gun, a monstrous thing. I played with it and pressed the tip into my palm where without pressure it raised a neat virgule of blood: beautiful. I helped him hang it within arms' reach over the bed.

Serious users know we have not random flitting among pharmaceuticals and plants but drug ages, like geological periods, where different parts of our personal terrain boil, shift and solidify. Each has its own character: the protruding bones of the self-starving Speed Age, the tectonics of the body making themselves more and more known under the skin ("Oh wow, Auschwitz," a cousin said then on glimpsing me in the bathroom); the white, amnesiac folds of the Quaalude Age.

Once during the Acid Age I sat home alone, for reasons I don't remember, tripping heavily. The phone rang. I answered it. Then the things in the room did one of those sensory somersaults they do when you're tripping; what I held in my hand turned from familiar to strange, not a known device but a found thing, inexplicably appearing in my hand, inexplicably speaking. It repeated itself, a voice like a sybil's, syllabic and urgent. I threw it down and ran.

Luded up, my friends and I drove around town one night, turned

down a small street and stopped moving. Billy the driver floored the gas and jerked the steering wheel but nothing happened except that we lurched and a loud metallic grinding sound increased. After a few minutes of staggering but solemn investigation — fuel tank, tires — we discovered we'd run into a tree, a large oak tree at the end of a parking lot we took for a street. We'd run into the tree and kept on going; we just didn't see it. In the same way, I half woke more than once from a heroin nod and found a cigarette dropped and burning into the thin skin of my palm. It seemed ethereal, a delicate branding.

Maybe the boy with the stump and all the other victims our lifestyle claimed, the ODeD and tripped out, the jailed and the damaged, were like the tree we ran into — something we ground around recklessly and couldn't see. Our morality wasn't nonexistent but it was oblique, like a side mirror, picking up obscure corners, distancing. We had our taboos: we never acted ripped around parents and took care who we brought to safe houses and apartments. We watched who we talked to outside our circle. In general, we tried to be cool. If someone with you started slapping at ghostly fire ants on her skin, you dosed her with downs and kept her out of sight, didn't drop her on someone else's doorstep.

One afternoon at Kenny's we sat smoking hashish with several women, friends of friends; one of them cradled a baby. After a while the women got up and left the parlor. "We wanted to get out of there," one explained to me in the kitchen. "The baby." I must have looked blank because she repeated, "The baby. The smoke." I gave her that silly grin you give people when you don't understand them — the acquiescence that means I'm sure you must have a point, whatever it is. Only now do I comprehend her. I am, I think, a moral woman. Flawed, but kind. Incapable of ignoring a stray animal or needy human. I would have felt for that baby, with its too-young, ripped, and aimless mother, if I could have *seen* it. But in my world anything unrelated to authority and its threats simply hung in front of us, sensibly there, sticking, and invisible.

Looking back, I can see that there can also be a kind of currency in blindness. The moral vision we develop over time is necessarily an occluded one, odd spots on its retina. Jimmy the narc was black; he named me godmother of his son. Kenny and I had lesbian friends, gay friends, every-imaginable-ethnicity friends. We didn't accept these things: we just didn't think about them. In a paranoid, blue-collar New Jersey town in the early 70s, such myopia was not typical. So goes the tricky business of personal transformation: hard to tell where it will take you. Once you leave the norm behind you can become wonderful, or terrible, or both.

Wonderful, terrible. New. We swallowed these selves, with their oddly mutable bodies and strange, corner-of-the-eye vision. We communed and we changed. The small clarity of a hit of windowpane, a Quaalude's stubby,

soporific wafer: the christic body. A spoon blistering with lazy bolls of cooking heroin: the tarry blood. As a community of believers we made our eschaton, an infinity of mindless arousal, swallowed it, and intermittently achieved it. Our substance altered. If this process sounds blasphemous, that's because it was. I'm grateful now for the few ethical shreds I hung on to. But I see myself clearly. I had become grotesque, boundariless, without even a sense of what boundaries contain.

I remember a man I met at a party in Elizabeth, who took to calling me. He pirouetted around the subject, offered me freebies, paid me compliments. What he really wanted, it turned out after a few phone calls, was for me to join a stable of young girls he sold.

"Get some extra cash, a little money in your pocket. Buy yourself some nice things," he'd say in a quick huckster's rap. "A dress, you know, a comb."

He always mentioned the comb. I look back on him and wonder if his rhetoric had some strategy, if he thought using something you could pick up in any five-and-dime as the equivalent in value to selling my body would make the transaction seem equally small. Or maybe I seemed that young: he figured a comb would appeal to me as much as anything else. The guy persisted, calling several times a week for months. I can see now how good a prospect I must have presented to him: young but mature-looking, well-developed, reasonably pretty, heavily enough into drugs to be controlled but not a needle user, and so with undamaged skin.

I said no. But I considered the offer for a while. And when I did refuse my *no* had little to do with objecting to the merchandising of my self, but more with quirky things: my male friends kept me well supplied with drugs, and I'm lazy; I don't work for what I don't need. The first reason may have echoed in some corner of my consciousness but if so it spoke unintelligibly, like the alien telephone. My body was lost to me anyway. I pummeled away at it myself, alternately shocking and stultifying the central nervous system, fooling my brain's neurochemical messengers so they'd arrive at the wrong place, or never arrive at all. It wasn't the flesh I had that mattered but the flesh I ate, the flesh I aspired to.

It's ironic that, in escaping one bipolar world view, I pushed myself head-on into another: the extreme compass points of high and straight.

What I sought release from, inarticulately and unconsciously, was a world that wouldn't stay still. Periods of manic intensity, of amazing portent and fertile, overwhelming color, alternated with the long sulk of depression. I suspect that for everybody, landscape's a mostly emotional thing, a kind of ambient Rorschach test, tactile and nonjudging. For the stable, it's only their emotional persistence that gives the world around them its objective cast. I live on a coastline, in a very windy place. I have friends who find the winds exhilarating, and others who fear them. Whichever camp they're in, for them the wind is the wind. But when it goes

from an ecstatic voice to one that bellows, like Jonathan Edwards' god, with apocalyptic anger, you know the insolidity of things.

I suppose at times street drugs helped. Downs for mania, coke and speed for depression. Unfortunately, I didn't know when I started this ambitious program of correcting my moods that there's no greater schism anywhere than the one between straight and high. A manic table may be luxuriant, poised to receive the imprint of a new *Odyssey* from your hands; a depressed table's hideous, gargoyles in the knotholes. Well, a table when you're straight after cranking on meth and acid for a few days becomes a shelter you hide under, shaking and waiting for the ghouls to come. Tripping, the table's no longer a table at all.

I kicked drugs at 17, a hardened veteran long out of school, with four years of drug use behind me. My clean-up took place after a large overdose of methadone that left me retching for a week. Somehow those days of kneeling in front of a toilet aching and burning from my own stomach enzymes cleared my sight. Methadone comes as a liquid, a syrupy stuff easily masked by the taste of orange. I'd drunk my methadone in an orange soda, and even the color orange sent me off gagging that week, and for long after. It was the kind of sickness where your body wants to reject even what's not in it, where if you could, you'd will your liver, kidneys, brain, heart, everything, to follow the brute peristaltic motion out. Finally, though, I could see what lay in front of me. Toilet, stomach contents, nauseous orange. The mirror in which my face rose up to me over and over again for seven days was a font of water designed to hold excrement.

III.

A small pink oval, sweetish smelling, not like candy but like dusting powder, like something an old woman would pat into the crooks of her arms. Little song: depakote. I love pharmaceutical names, with their hard consonants, their faint smack of Greek tragedy. And the occasional cynical hidden promise of relief: *soma*, *halcyon*, *elavil*. Depakote's an anti-spasmodic, a trade name for an acid compound, most often prescribed for epilepsy but also effective on rapid-cycling manic-depressives. Epileptics on depakote complain about it, doctors tell me. It makes you tired, causes digestive problems, and can cause liver failure, so you have to get blood drawn regularly to check liver functioning. I don't complain about depakote. I remember myself without it.

I came to depakote the long way, after dozens of other drugs. First, straight anti-depressants, which dulled depressions but knocked up manias till I sat up all night, night after night, watching B movies, just like I did on any good methamphetamine binge. Doctors, I found, tend not to take manias seriously unless you do something truly weird, like dance naked in the streets or refuse to pay your medical bills.

I noticed too that doctors always seem to have one special drug they believe in with an unshakeable faith, indicating that they too have their

gods. One doctor told me he gave all his patients the anti-psychotic haldol and, when it didn't help, just kept increasing the dose. He finally got me into a state of exquisite torture that would have delighted Dante — a blank, torpid mind locked in an unquietable body, fingers that couldn't stop, legs that wouldn't still, a haldol side effect known as akathisia. Another doctor, pro-lithium, piled up supplementary drugs when the lithium didn't work. Anti-depressants, anti-psychotics, anti-anti-anti-'s. I became emotionally dead, the sum of my negations.

Depakote works. I cycle but not drastically: I don't think my house is filling up with poison gas or that I can move things with my mind. In cinema this would be the last reel — the character sits at her desk, finishes typing out her story on the typewriter or word processor, while the finally indifferent wind stirs the locust leaves. It's our pop culture shorthand for completion: a last scrolled page, a boxed manuscript, life contained and transmuted into our quaint bent sign-system of immutable truth. Only things don't finish. And time loops around, moves, like the Hindu universe, backward, so when you reach the end of the snake's tail you often find yourself looking into the same pair of slit baleful eyes again.

Or, in less elegant terms, it amazes me how much being an adult on medication is like being a kid on dope.

There's the stash you take with you everywhere you go, the first thing into your purse or pack, the significant lump you keep checking to make sure you haven't lost or forgotten it. There's the funny way people look at you if they see all those pills. There's the same aversion to luggage checks, doctors, blood tests, all the things that require you to trot out the same old, tired and — to others — suspicious and frightening explanations. Even the same ominous puncture wounds.

Most important, there's the secrecy. Your life spins around a small private chemical place; you lie to almost everyone you know. You live hidden. Twice a day you go to the bathroom, where the pills are kept; in that solitary reflective room you take the depakote on your tongue. In so doing you acknowledge that you have sinned through your own body, in what it has done and what it has failed to do. You know yourself as the acolyte, the novice of the christic mystery your psychiatrist presides over. The pink pill redeems you, offers you the normalcy your doctor has held up as the salvific body, the body with room to absorb all the flawed individual bodies of the faithful into its own. If only you will swallow it.

Then, like the kid on dope, you also have your instinctively deceiving social self — the one that goes to work or school, talks to the neighbors, pulls weeds, and, like Peter, knows not the man. A friend tells you her manic-depressive sister is better off dead. You say, sure. Your brother-in-law shows you a news video of himself picketing a proposed halfway house for manic-depressives and schizophrenics in his neighborhood, and you shrug. It's too hard, profoundly differentiating yourself, then trying to make yourself safe again.

I often wonder why, in this psychologically obsessed culture, where therapists fill the airwaves and a well-dressed shrink is the inevitable complement to every talk-show lineup, it's still so hard to disclose mental illness. We talk about depression these days, but psychotic disorders exist like the acid trips and peyote trances of my youth: an altered consciousness that drifts along within the mainstream social consciousness as quietly as it can, a rill of colored foam in a colorless water.

Like water, which braids and twists when moving but, when static, hates to differentiate itself, society when quietly looking at itself hates distinction. I see this whenever I try telling friends about my illness. They act profoundly embarrassed and never mention it again; the conversation stays between us like a brief, awkward affair we've had, or a genital glimpse, something hushed and tabooed. Then comes the inquisitive look if I'm upset, or cranky, or giddy on a lovely day, comments about how manics always tend toward religion, or poetry, or the color red. I respect my friends. It's just that I've learned this depakote-self, if others see her, subsumes me. Everything of mine, my smallest quirk, is given over to her, to her flawed physiology. I want the privilege of having my own petty dysfunctions. I want the right to be stupid, sentimental, an asshole even, without inference.

There's one big difference between being the adult on "meds," as they're called in psychiatry, and the kid on dope: it's lonelier. As you move deeper into society, you who measure life by the gram and milligram, you grow more isolated. It's as if you've left your close synchronized community, climbed up the mountain, and crawled into the hermit's cave. As a drug user I moved between spheres, leaving the realm of hidden pills and powders, lying and faking normalcy, to move among a group of peers with whom pretense was unnecessary. We sensed the weight of our community and met to do our dope together, fingertips poised, each with a slip of windowpane or a cluster of reds. Now there's only myself and that woman in the bathroom mirror, keeper of the tabernacle where the host is stored, the depakote woman. Her face catches at me with its over-definition, its look of a too-punctuated page: a static of lines, hairs, pores. Lips pursed, she looks purposeful, never laughs.

Because the depakote woman has her own sense of destiny.

She is after all an architectonic creature, constructed: a vessel of her creator's mission. That teenager aimed, like the cloistered monk, at oneness with a specific community. The hermit's goal becomes oneness with a mystical, unfathomable All. For depakote woman, that all is the all of mainstream society. It's a transformation out of a subgroup rather than into one, a dizzying outward radiation of self with no fixed stopping point. Tell your doctor you're a little cranky, a little sleepy, a little down, a little up, and almost reflexively she'll offer to give you something. Like Catherine of Siena, adding the whip to the hair shirt to the ritual vomiting, you both act on the assumption that there's always more self to cast out.

I think of depakote existence as ordinary time. In sacramental time, the business of the soul takes place; in ordinary time, that part of the church calendar outside of Easter and Christmas and Lent, we sink into profanity again. So we can attend to all the details our presence on this planet demands, sans the distraction of light. In ordinary time societies come together, make their rules — how will our resources be divided? How long can my neighbor's grass grow? — and then strive as individuals to fulfill or get around them. Depakote time is social time: a sick self burnt clean into the societal whole. Its emblem might be the lawnmower, the kitchen kettle.

Drug companies, I've noticed, agree. There's a rich social text in doctor-aimed pharmaceutical ads. A haldoled man building a home smiles and says, "Everything's working better . . . and so am I!" A woman on a popular anti-depressant approaches her husband seductively, lips forward, under the legend "First-line treatment for depression: Minimal impact on sexual functioning." Older ads — 60s and 70s — show the mentally ill even more triumphantly resocialized. Women appear "back home," cheerfully mopping and cooking. A medicated schizophrenic in a business suit waits, briefcase in hand, for his commuter train.

The gist of the images remains. Health is relational, not individual, defined not by the part — the patient — but by the whole into which the part must seamlessly fit and ultimately, disappear. The schizophrenic man is noted in the ad copy for his indistinguishability from his fellow (white, male, middle-aged) commuters. A woman treated for depression melts back into a crowd at a party. Ad texts for psychoactive drugs bristle with exclamation points, with a stern Enlightenment optimism. These misshapen blocks have been, can again be, driven back into the foundation, they seem to say, through some act of extreme and little-understood pharmaceutical pressure.

IV.

We are hollow, we humans. We stir like the air of an expectant room. We wait to be furnished, occupied, made love in, to become the birthbed of things, the couch of many little deaths. Walled in, we are invisible, but our walls define us. Employment, family role, L.L. Bean clothing, morning cappuccino — all the things others can see, the things our friends grope around to get to that vague and critical emptiness. Psychiatry's job is making the walls more visible, more appealing, driving the emptiness back. And we can live without that space. I remember a story a doctor told me, about a patient who remained slightly manic despite her lithium but channeled all her energy into clipping recipes. He laughed approvingly: a success story. Yet I wonder what that woman's going to do at the end, trailing years of casseroles and hundreds of recipe files into the afterlife.

We can live, yes, live, all wall: I've done it. I've been heavily medicated, on thorazine, on lithium, on haldol. I've seen others enter that frozen,

lacquered space and never leave. One of my cousins did: he had a breakdown and emerged from it glassy-eyed, trembling with a lithium palsy, never again to get a joke. Now I take minimal doses. I choose to remain bipolar — tempered, but not monochromed out. I think of someone living her life in the realm of psychiatric treatment as someone with her arms extended, like a character in an old TV show, to keep the walls of the trick room from closing in. Inside, in that emptiness, she will surfeit, suffer, grow lean as Pharaoh's kine, rejoice, wax fat, grow old in many ways, and come to life again. Even manic-depression plays a part in this. If she can keep the space open.

Do you not see, wrote John Keats, how necessary a World of Pains and troubles is to school an Intelligence and make it a soul?

The disease that underlies this meditation is a strange one. A confused palette, a film noir that keeps clicking into cartoon color, an ambidextrous finger. Some manic-depressives cycle over periods of months. I sometimes do, but more often in weeks, weeks of darkness, morning arriving like the worst news imaginable, limbs stiff and torpid with an almost-viral inadequacy. Depressed, I become to myself an intolerable idea. It's not, as people say, that in depression things around you become drained of color, of sweetness: you know the lilac bush remains the lilac bush, but it's obscured under the long deep shadow cast by yourself.

Suddenly and for no reason, a change comes. Bright bright days, the quick confidence of a luminous destiny — mostly the mind that won't stop, that chases the minute and the hour hand around the clockface all night with its ideas for poems, books, movies, ideas for theme parties and courses and new hats, ideas that will change the world: even food starts to seem unnecessary: and just as quickly this bubble collapses too, into a highpitched insucked overwhelming anxiety, a sure taste of doom.

I don't, like many 60s psychiatrists, romanticize mental illness. What I've outlined here is a disease, but even the word hints at ambiguity: disease, a removal of psychic comfort. How much psychic comfort is necessary, wholesome, or good? Some, certainly. Maybe not too much. In the film *sex, lies and videotape* a depressed Andie McDowell tells her psychiatrist she's become obsessed with what we've done to the environment: the garbage, the landfills, the pollution. Of course, he tries to cure her, and yet of course, she's right. One of the ironies of depression is what's called in medical literature "depressive realism," the fact that depressed thinking can be some of the most honest thinking we do. In medical terms, the patient's "natural defenses" have slipped away. We see it all clearly: the pain we've caused others, the accountability we have for our actions in the world. And so psychiatry jumps in, with its little bag of enthusiastically named drugs, hoping to create patients who can cheerfully toss out styrofoam cups and plastic bags with the best of them.

After years of discord and stand-offs, I value my disorder. I can trace the moments in my life that have yielded the greatest insights, the most important movement, and they have all been manic-depressive moments. It's a myth that bipolars are prone to religion: most aren't, but the ones that find God, like the poet Christopher Smart, become incapable of not seeing God — they grow noisy on the subject. We all in the course of "normal" life tend to narrow our sights, keep them dully on what must be looked at, the long drone of train tracks, an egg on a plate, dandelions to pull, until something sharpens our vision. Bipolar sight, with its extremes, its sometimes-jumping clarity, forces us to focus in on details. And, as a scientist observed about details, God crouches there.

When I'm manic, I think. I think of everything conceivable and then its opposite. I sit on my bed staring my favorite cat in the eye while she stares back. I wonder at the gorgeous system of her sight, white membrane nictitating around irids tranced like the moon with glassy green-and-amber color. Black pupil opening and collapsing in on itself, in which, somehow, I swim — not the mirror woman but the real one, the subtly different halves of her face recomposed, the woman I can't see. I hold Savannah and maybe one of the dogs and myself up to the mirror and look at them with their markings reversed, and think about a world in which we looked like our mirror selves. The tiny but potent changes, black patch around the left eye suddenly, small black tear on the right. It's my way of disorienting myself, of seeing how easily all things could be other. Of saying instead of that, then this. I watch my husband, a brilliant, tender man, and think about the millenia of DNA it took to make this most wonderful human being. And in all I see God, of whom I have little conception but of the thing that says finally, this — black eyepatch over right eye, husband — will be, after all. And who I seek in yet another food, uncolored and without sweetening, a wafer round, blank, tasteless, near-textureless, small model of the void.

These are humble, secret insights, and unlike the Nobel prizes and MacArthurs of mania, don't slip away. Sensing the spirit behind things forms part of mania, of depression, of normalcy, each moment richer for the others. My husband remains the most wondrous of people to me, my cat a stunning act of creation, but in mania I'm far more likely to stop and see them, and I carry those impressions always, grateful. And I carry the deep value of depressed observations: the openness to others' pain that never leaves you, that over time makes it impossible to turn away another hurting creature. The hard schooling of the intelligence.

Ordinary time goes on around me while I stare into cats' eyes: the bathroom still waits, full of its little pills, pink oblongs compounded of valproic acid and sugar coat, or perhaps blood and milk and dust. The face that keeps the temple, with her unholy specificity, will never go. Someone else remains too, someone who would starve on depakote. I must keep her alive. She has no form, and cannot protect herself.

My Dark Town

Oh my town
When the lights went out:
Darkness coming down like a widow's hair.

In the darkness a human face
Changes to the face of a tree,
To a cat face, to the face
Of a table, a chair.

When constant darkness
Covers all I'm used to seeing,
I look for you, my woman.
What are you looking for,
There, in your thick graying hair?

Oh my town
When the lights went out:
Someone shouting
Someone laughing a cackling laugh
Someone seizing the darkness
To cover up their vulgar half
And turn the other into a flickering firefly.

No one sees anyone clearly;
I don't even see myself.
Our voices rise like fish bubbles
As someone casts a crescent along the horizon.
It's the fishhook of dreams
I've swallowed half my life.

I sigh, a dry river,
I cough, a rough road,
Looking for you, my woman,
Lying on your side in the darkness,
A beached boat on a sandbank.
I take off my shirt and stretch you a new sail.

— translated from the Vietnamese by Martha Collins and the author

The Field

On a day when planting and harvest are past,
I flee my worries and run to the field again.

The dark brown earth shines sadly;
Enraptured rain spreads over the floor of dusk.

I hear the echo of hungry grasshoppers
Lifting their wings to flutter in villagers' throats.

Memories cry on the road where I lost my mother;
A tear-filled eye keeps looking back at me.

Oh my little lover braided a little dog
Out of dogtail grass. Since we parted, its tail has withered.

I pick up the broken rim of a hat,
And there's the horizon that broke as it rolled down winter.

At the end of the field, an old farmer picks straw for his fire,
While a plowshare, forgetting its name, dreams the names of the stars.

— *translated from the Vietnamese by Martha Collins and the author*

The Habit of Hunger

When I was fourteen, my sister and I
Drained the blood of a duck into a bowl.
Its red blood came together, in an embrace.

When I let go,
The duck wasn't dead.
Head flopped to one side,
It staggered like a drunk.

From the cut at its throat
Drops of bright blood dripped
And caught on the white feathers
Like a string of broken
Glass beads.

It buried its head in a basin of water,
Hunting for leftover grains of rice.
But the rice couldn't find its way to the stomach.
It fell through the cut in the throat,
Grain after grain.

Then the duck made its way to the path.
It looked for the pond
It looked for the field
It looked for the river, the sea,
To catch fish, to hunt crabs.
When it buried its head in the mud,
Red blood spread like oil on water.

Aching with cold, I went looking for the duck.
With an invisible knife, I cut meat along the way.

— translated from the Vietnamese by Martha Collins and Nguyen Ba Chung

Music

The crooked funeral horns are mine,
 The drums with cracked skins are mine,
 The two-chord fiddles with bent backs are mine.
 Their magic music rises in the distance.
 Mother, I see Grandmother smiling
 Behind a net of smoke.

A hearse is rolling into my dream,
 Yellow dragons are flying up
 To the sounds of horns and drums.
 I am tiptoeing through the *co may* flowers
 And someone I can't see keeps lifting me up.

I want to hide in those funeral clothes,
 I want to cover my coughs with those warm ashes.
 Now I see Grandmother dressed in silk
 With thousands of candles around her.
 She is pouring rainwater into a jug;
 She is waiting for me to come back.

The splendid hearse is my toy; I am lost in play.
 Mother, do you hear me laughing?
 Solitude and I are children with many things to do.
 We're resting beneath the dome of the hearse,
 We're flying behind the funeral flags,
 We're flying to my native hills
 Where I can put on a yellow shirt
 And sleep on a fragrant betel leaf.
 But how can you wash my face there, Mother?

I love the horns, the drums,
 The two-chord fiddles with my sobbing,
 And they love me with their sadness, their distress.
 Our song rings out, bringing me back to the land,
 Back to the road with white *co may* flowers,
 Back to the house where you wait to wash my face.

— translated from the Vietnamese by Martha Collins and the author

Would You Know It Wasn't Love

When Walt thinks about his daughter Rosie and her disintegrating marriage, he can't help thinking about himself too. He's not moved to pity, either for his own sick self or for Rosie and Tim; what he feels instead is the misery and waste of this breaking-up of lives. He's edgy now when he's always been patient, but he's a man with a disease, out of control sometimes, sometimes hateful, he knows, but forgiven. His wife Helen, well ahead of him into Rosie's mess already, has bags under her eyes, and a penchant for salty things which she eats until her mouth swells up. After dinner, Walt caught her gulping glass after glass of water at the kitchen sink. He felt as though he'd walked in on something he shouldn't have seen, but he couldn't look away. Recently, Helen has stopped acknowledging his private moments — the time his swollen fingers refused to hold a glass so that it fell and shattered on the floor, when his morning stiffness had him groping at the wall for something to lean against. He knows she's witnessed them. He's seen her worried shadow pass by, heard her gasp.

On the downstairs extension in his study off the kitchen, and Helen upstairs on the bedroom phone, they talk to Rosie. Walt wants to understand what's going on, but she snuffles more than she speaks a full sentence, so that again, he isn't sure what the problem is. After Rosie says good-bye to her parents, Walt and Helen stay on the line. Tim is brooding and inscrutable, Walt says to Helen — has she ever met a man who wasn't? — but did that mean Rosie should walk away from her marriage? It's an old theme he's brought up; the fear that they've babied their youngest daughter to the point of hobbling her.

Walt thinks it's strange — but also a little easier — to talk to Helen tonight over the phone so they don't have to look at each other. He can imagine that she's not quite as familiar to him, nor he so familiar to her, that they might come up with something they haven't said before.

The operator interrupts before Helen can answer, so Walt walks upstairs to finish the conversation. Helen turns to him as he enters the bedroom, and in the light of her reading lamp, he sees the chapping around her thin mouth, like cheap lipstick. He wonders, too tired for passion, how long it has been since they've really kissed, tongues and all, with his hands on her solid body; certainly since the start of Rosie's crisis.

"Why are you telling me this about Tim?" Helen asks him angrily, and her face blushes red. Her eyes are a cold blue. "Inscrutable? Brooding? Those are ridiculous words. What am I supposed to do with them? Are they going to help the situation somehow?"

Walt has no answer for his wife. He hadn't intended to sound so cold-hearted, only firm. Helen returns to the student papers she's correcting for tomorrow, and Walt goes downstairs to his study again. When he kneels slowly in front of the closet, he almost expects to find that the rheumatoid arthritis has reached his knees, as his doctor has warned that it might one of these days. But he is relieved to be spared so far, and digs around in the back where he keeps all his cassette tapes; of his lectures, the babies' chatter, of his girls' clumsy and beautiful recitals and plays, of school speeches and dinner parties, Helen singing tipsy at his forty-seventh birthday party. He's sentimental about these sounds the way others are about photographs.

The sharp plastic boxes are a comfort to him. Walt is aware that he's a technological oddity these days, preferring his inoffensive, non-obtrusive tape recorder and cassettes, when he could get sound and picture with a Camcorder the size of his palm, the minor heft of a small melon. One day, he intends to do something with all of the tapes he's collected, turn them into some kind of a history of his family he might listen to when he's finally crippled. Through old corduroy pants, Walt's bones begin to grind against the floor, and it takes him a while to locate the cassette he's after. He finds it near the back finally, and stands up.

Walt pushes the play button on his recorder, sits in his armchair the cat has scratched bare, and listens. His study needs repainting, he sees. The bad light plays up how much they've let slide in the past two years since he's been sick, as though the only thing to focus on is the mysterious course his body is taking. He remembers four years before deciding to leave the tape running even as his favorite dog vomited under the kitchen table, as Helen dropped an empty pan on the floor, and the dishwasher started with its splash of water. It was the noise behind the negotiations he'd wanted to record as much as the discussion itself of the wedding's guest list and the meaning of an open bar. Helen and Rosie had hardly protested against the taping and what their own words might hold them to later on, and then only because they understood it was expected of them, just as the taping was expected of him.

But Walt hears now, very clearly with nothing to distract him in his quiet house, that Tim was not so sure about being recorded, collected. The boy clears his throat too often and says almost nothing, as though it wasn't his wedding they were planning, but someone else's entirely. Again and again, over side A and B of the cassette, Walt hears Tim clear his thick throat. He swears it sounds like thunder rumbling behind Rosie's voice full of pre-marriage optimism. If ambivalence makes a noise, this is it, Walt thinks, and turns off the tape recorder with a jab of his thumb.

"You motherfucker," he mumbles, though he is not quite sure who he is naming.

Walt knows the tape isn't going to tell him what to do about his daughter's problems. After all, it didn't tell him that his adored dog was going to die two weeks after the tape was made, choked to death on a splintered pork chop bone dug out of the kitchen garbage. It didn't tell Walt that the reason he sometimes winced from pain as he held a pencil, or answered his wife irritably when he didn't mean to, was the onset of arthritis that wasn't going to go away.

As he puts the cassette back in its box, he knows that there's nothing really to do but let Rosie come back home for a while, as she wants. Helen has said yes, of course, immediately, come to us, we're here, but Walt already feels the burden of having her home again. He sees in the wrinkles of his face, his thinning hair, his thickening joints, a man who has no room for this sort of thing at the moment, a man who has no idea how much room is left at all. But Rosie is still his daughter, and he adores her, even if he doesn't feel like being anyone's father right now.

The following Tuesday, it is close to 8:00 as Walt nears the Greyhound Bus station, but the expressway is crowded even for a weekday in early December, and the traffic has stopped moving. Helen, on her way out to her reading group earlier, told him to take Cambridge Street downtown, but he's ignored her advice. Walt knows he'll be late meeting Rosie's bus from New York, and he worries about her in a familiar way. Rosie is twenty-five years old, has a job as a paralegal, an apartment on 73rd Street, a husband — is he still that? — someday she'll have kids. She's an independent person, he'd like to believe, but will she know enough to come and look outside for her father instead of expecting that he'll find her?

Walt remembers asking Rosie the same about Tim once; does he know to meet us in your office? Meaning, is this man you're in love with, the one your mother is sure you'll marry just by the tone of your voice when you talk about him, incapable of thinking of others? Walt had been in Manhattan for a conference at NYU. After lunch, he took a bus uptown to meet Rosie at work; Tim was supposed to meet them there, too. As he watched the city through the sooty window, Walt found it hard to believe that his daughter lived in a place where there were so many things to do, to go wrong, and so many people to choose from. He carried in his briefcase a glass paper weight he'd bought for her in a store off Washington Square that morning.

Rosie's office was a small room off a hallway of other small rooms inhabited by women bent over papers or keyboards, fingering their earrings. She had a picture of her parents on her desk which made Walt feel a little weak, and she put the paperweight next to it. When Tim didn't show up, and Walt and Rosie ran out of things to say after a while — easy without the clutter of the family — Rosie began to look miserable, her dark

eyes watered, and she pulled hair loose from her ponytail. It was a habit she and her sister shared, as they shared their mother's thin face and his high forehead.

"I don't know, honey," Walt said gently, and looked at his watch, "maybe he thought we were going to meet him downstairs. Do you remember what you told him?" He hated when his daughter acted stupid and here she was stupid about love, the worst of all things. It made him feel sorry for both of them.

Tim was on a bench in the building's courtyard, reclining long-legged and reading a book, when Walt and Rosie came out. He'd picked a spot shaded by a cherry tree in bloom, too beautiful for the city. Tim seemed content, so why should he think others wouldn't be, that they might be waiting for him?

"He doesn't have a watch!" Rosie whispered to her father. She was clearly charmed by this, Walt saw, by her prince in a garden. Tim unfolded slowly to meet them. Rosie bounced on her tiptoes, her heels lifted out of her blue pumps, and Walt noticed that she smelled a bit sweaty. She should be wearing red, rubber-tipped sneakers, he thought to himself, and approached Tim.

"Thought we were going to miss you," Walt said, and raised his eyebrows. It was a voice he often used with his students, a gentle challenge. The boy would not look at him. Tim's surprisingly handsome face was darkened by a two-day-old beard.

"No way," Tim said, and picked at the leaves of the cherry tree. "Where do you want to go now?"

As if, Walt thought, this alone isn't enough for one father for one day, not to mention your dirty fingernails, your lack of a sense of time and expectations, your hold on my baby daughter. You'll take her away from me; I suppose I'll always dislike you for that. But he put his arm across Tim's shoulders, the way he had with his other daughter's boyfriend because he knew it would make Rosie happy.

"Wherever you two would like to go," Walt said, "is fine by me."

Later, when Walt told Helen about Tim, she laughed. "Pure jealousy," she'd said. "Fathers and their daughters. Rosie's a grown-up, let her go. You're the one who always says we baby her too much."

Mothers, Walt thinks now, looking for his daughter in the crowd bulging at the bus station entrance, accept when they have to, let go when they must, but watch out; they'll also turn their back on whoever hurts their child so quickly you'll feel the wind cut your face. Fathers though, are rigid in the end; they suffer for their hearts that have been won so easily. Or is it my episodes of pain, Walt wonders, that have made my chest feel so tight lately.

He circles the station again but doesn't see Rosie in front. Now he'll be damned if he's going to look around for a parking place when it's cold and dark and he's in prime mugging territory. If Rosie really wants to come

home so badly, she'll look outside for him. Walt pops one of his books-on-tape into the player and drives around and around the block — the traffic pattern is oval, with a light at each end. He's so engrossed by the true-life story of a baseball player (his other daughter gave it to him last birthday), that it takes him a second to realize that the person in the green parka trotting alongside the car and tapping at the window when he stops at a red light is Rosie, and not someone trying to take his car. She looks so much like his little girl, like both his little girls at the point when their faces took their final beautiful shapes, her eyes bright with lack of understanding and the red Greyhound sign, that he wonders what year it is, and what year he'd like it to be.

When Walt unlocks the door, Rosie throws her duffle bag in the back seat. He can't help but be dismayed by the size of it, the amount of stuff she's packed for what he thinks is going to be a short visit home. She slips into the front seat and is slightly out of breath when Walt leans over and pulls her face to his lips. Her skin smells of diesel fumes and Jergens, Helen's lotion, so familiar he doesn't want to let her go. Walt notices that Rosie hasn't worn a hat, and that the tips of her ears are flaming cold, and he wants to touch them. Rosie seems lighthearted for the moment as they drive back to Cambridge, chatting about the bus ride, looking all around at the familiar sights, avoiding any mention of Tim, or why she has come home. Walt again feels a touch of dismay at this, at how easily she can leave one thing and fall into another, like an experienced traveller crossing time zones.

He remembers driving four hours one July when she was thirteen to pick her up at camp mid-session. She was miserable, she'd said in her letters, she felt like she was in jail. The black flies by the lake were torture. Walt had glared at the camp director, his daughter's warden in khaki shorts, while Rosie had skipped — skipped! — off to her cabin to get her things, which naturally were not ready, as though this was a game. On the way home they'd stopped for lunch at a diner, and over grilled cheese and thick chocolate milk Rosie told her father about all the wonderful things she'd done for the past few weeks. He couldn't understand her changing from misery to delight so quickly. He felt his solitude shattered — the prospect of both girls away at the same time, just he and Helen alone — but also his loneliness abating.

"Got a couple of days off from work?" Walt asks. They are almost home, and he wants to know how long she'll be staying.

"Until Monday," she sighs, "but I may quit anyway. I'm not crazy about the job." Walt knows by the way she's caught her breath that she's looking at his twisted hands on the steering wheel. When he looks down too, he sees rocks under his skin.

"Well, being crazy about something isn't always the standard to measure things by, Rosie. In fact, the older you get, the less good a standard it becomes." When he realizes how sad and defeated this sounds, he pats

her on the knee, and tells her that he's looking forward to spending time with her. "I'm really glad you're visiting."

During his standard end-of-the-semester lecture, Walt is aware of the wheels of the tape recorder that he's placed on the lectern going round and round, a tiny hiss that only he can hear. He thinks of the letting out and taking up of the tape, and looks at Diana Lux's long legs in their black leggings. She is in his sociology course on community structures, a small, bright head in the first row. Walt is not really listening to what he's saying — he can always rewind later to make sure he hasn't lost his rhythm, just his breath — but wondering if Diana still calls her parents Mommy and Daddy.

Rosie, who has been installed in her old room for a week now — the Monday to return to work come and gone — has taken to calling her parents Walt and Helen, has taken to phoning her older sister long distance every night. She emerges from her room after a conversation with Tim looking sleepy and red-eyed. Walt would like to call his daughter selfish and spoiled for the way she's descended upon them, but he calls her Rosita and Rosebud instead, and when she needs some money, or she asks him to get her a soda while he's up, he gives it to her. He sits with her at the kitchen table and they talk, they play scrabble at night. She visited him at his office and they went to the Museum of Fine Arts, and afterwards, at the gift shop, he bought her a silk scarf with a Matisse print on it.

The day after, when he woke in the morning, he felt as though his upper body was encased in cement. He called for his daughter down the hall — Helen had already left for work. Rosie drove him into Boston to the doctor's, dropped him off and parked the car so he wouldn't be late for the appointment. She was there when he was finished, went with him to the pharmacy, and asked how he felt.

Her voice was wobbly with concern, so he showed her his new prescription for Auranofin. "These pills are made from gold extract," he told her. The doctor said they would slow the progression, a word Walt found particularly menacing. "If I take enough of them," he added, not to worry his daughter, "maybe you can melt me down into a pair of earrings."

Meanwhile, Helen has gone from salt to sugar, Walt notices, and hovers over Rosie's problems. Her mouth has stopped swelling; now she has pimples tiny as grains of sand and grease on the sides of her nose, and she talks a lot.

Diana's Lux's face is so bright Walt can hardly stand it, and he looks down at his hands on the oak lectern. He would like Diana to tell him that he doesn't look old enough to have two grown women children, or that he's too old to have one tear at his heart, but he knows that she's unlikely to be thinking anything so complex.

Rosie has found a therapist in Cambridge, and tells her parents when she joins them for dinner in the kitchen.

"I need a safe place right now," she says. Walt thinks she's looking thin and exotic, dressed in black with her hair loose. Her earrings though are like something his secretary would wear, big gold globs, panic buttons. "She thinks I didn't feel safe with Tim."

"He didn't beat you up," Helen says, half stating, half asking. They both hold their breath for her answer.

"No, of course not," Rosie says. All she's eaten is a bread stick, Walt notices, and he wonders why this detail takes up so much space in his head.

"Of course not? Is that so obvious?" he asks. His mouth is full of chicken and he swallows. "The way you ran out of there, I thought maybe he did hit you or something, maybe you're afraid to go back. That at least I can make sense of." He is very angry now, and both women at the table look a little scared of what's happening to him.

"It doesn't have to be physical abuse, Dad," she says. Helen nods. "There are other kinds." He wonders at her authority now as she talks with someone else's words.

He is Dad again suddenly. He remembers a time when his daughters came to him with stomachaches, and he could soothe them with a story. Later, it was cramps that bothered them, they soothed each other, and stayed far away from him. It was like being fenced off from a place you used to live. He wanted to break back in.

"Please. In my day," he starts, and spews a fleck of food onto the table, "you didn't just leave because you didn't feel 'safe.' What is this shit anyway about safety? This has always been your problem, Rosie, you never feel you have to stick with anything, you can run home any time you like. Your mother and I are to blame for that, too, I'll admit. You come, we take you in."

The women tilt their heads at similar angles.

"She's your daughter, for godssake," Helen says. "Of course we take her in."

Walt sees that Rosie is close to tears. He puts his napkin on his plate — something he knows Helen hates — and leaves the table. In his study, he hears Helen and Rosie talking in the kitchen, and thinks how easily Helen has become a complete mother again, how little she fights this return. Walt feels bad for what he's said, but justified in saying it. In a while, he puts in the cassette from that afternoon's lecture.

He can't believe that the voice he hears is his own, and he adjusts the tone on the machine. He sounds flat, dated is how he really thinks of it, the voice of a half-asleep man. From time to time, a staccato cough punctuates his drone, and he imagines that it's Diana Lux trying to rouse him and get his attention, even at this moment in the privacy of his own home, calling him to imagine her in her dorm room in her flannel pajamas. He pictures

her tumbling like a gymnast over futons and bean bag chairs, like a doll with string joints.

The light from the kitchen blinds him momentarily. "What are you doing?" Helen asks. It's not accusatory, just curious.

"Listening to today's lecture," he says. "Do you think my voice sounds funny?"

She puts her fingers to her lips. Being married to him for so many years has made her a good listener. "Not really, a little nasal, maybe. Why, do you?"

"I thought it sounded flat. Old."

Helen sits on the arm of his chair. She smells like dish soap and chocolate. "Maybe you need new batteries."

He pats her leg in wool pants. "Maybe you need new batteries," he jokes.

Helen smiles and gets up to straighten a picture on the wall. It happens, by chance, to be one of Rosie at twelve, knocked slightly askew by the swivelling arm of his desk lamp.

"In my day . . ." Helen starts, doing her imitation of Walt, putting her head down on her chest so that a double chin appears and her eyebrows meet, "in my day . . ." She stops, looks at him, and talks in her own voice. "In your day, Walt? My day and your day are the same, remember? You didn't have that day — and what day was it, anyway? — without me." Walt shrugs apologetically.

"Rosie's talking to Tim," Helen adds, matter-of-factly. How easily we pass these things by, Walt thinks, and feels affection for his wife and his long marriage. They've never talked about what will happen if one day he can't move anymore.

"Yes? And what's this about her finding a shrink here? That has the ring of long-term," Walt says. "Doesn't she have to go home at some point? What about her job? And what the hell is she doing about her marriage? Isn't that the problem at hand, as they say?"

Now Helen shrugs, and Walt knows that she, too, would really like to be done with this — after all, for several years now they've been living a different kind of life — but can't bring herself to say so, won't allow herself. Rosie has always been trouble in one way or another, a baby is always — lovely, painful — trouble.

"And since we're talking about marriage, how's ours?" he says and hold his arms open to her. It's as close as he can come to apologizing at the moment.

"I'm not really thinking about it," Helen says, which doesn't surprise or hurt him. She holds his hands, and can't help but massage them a little. "I'm thinking about Rosie now, what she's going to do." Before she leaves the room, Helen kisses his forehead and reminds him to take his gold pills.

Tim, Walt has been told by Helen, is coming up from New York Tuesday evening, but on that day, Walt pretends he's forgotten, and stays at work and eats dinner at the Faculty Club. He hopes Diana Lux will appear at his late office hours. When she doesn't, he thinks spitefully about giving her a C for the semester — she is mediocre, at best. When he gets home just after 9:00, Helen's car is gone, and he remembers that it's her reading group night, which she aggressively never misses. This means that now he'll actually have to talk to Tim, instead of letting Helen buffer for him, excuse her husband's behavior. The house is warm and dark and smells like tomato soup, and in fact, when he goes into the kitchen, that's just what the smell is. Two empty bowls, skimmed with red, bisected by spoons, are on the table, uncleaned. Walt smells Tim too, salty and male, and thinks how much fathers really are like dogs.

By the time Walt reaches the top of the stairs, he can hear that his daughter and her husband are at it — he can't bring himself to think making love or even fucking at that moment — and the sounds are so easy for him to make out, he's at first delighted by his acuity and then horrified by it. Has he ever listened to other people — Jesus, his daughter! — making love except in the movies? She giggles, he groans, long breaths are let out and grabbed back in. The duet has the most incredible, indescribable fluid life, and he can't bear it.

He reaches into his blazer pocket for the recorder he always carries in case he wants to record random thoughts or reminders, or just the noise of what happens. If you didn't know who or what was making the sounds behind the door, would you know what it was, he wonders? He thinks of a radio contest he used to listen to as a boy where you tried to identify certain sounds — a sewing machine whirring, crackers breaking, a cat licking herself. Can I pretend this is not my daughter, he thinks now, but just noise too? Would you know it wasn't love?

Walt turns the recorder on and lays it on the rug outside the door. He sits in his bedroom in the dark, sliding towards the floor on the slippery bedspread, and waits until it is quiet. Then he retrieves the machine, it's red ON light like a rat's eye in the dark hall.

"Dad?" Rosie says from inside as he picks it up. He is frozen in a painful crouch, and wonders if he'll be able to rise again. Her voice sounds full, as though her throat has been opened.

"Oh, hi," Walt says, straining, not to be defeated. He can just imagine Tim, arms behind his big head, bare-chested, hairy arm pits, staring at the ceiling. "It's late, sweetheart. I'll see you in the morning." He makes a point of shutting his bedroom door loudly, just as he's made a point not to acknowledge Tim.

When Helen comes home and upstairs, Walt says he has a surprise for her. A small smile crosses her face — at fifty-three, she does want to believe in good surprises still, miracle cures. When he plays the tape for her, her

eyes widen as though she's spotted something across the room and she leans towards it. She is holding the book from her group against her chest.

"Guess," Walt says. "Guess what it is?"

"What is this? Jesus Christ," she says, and rushes for the recorder, but she can't immediately find the button to turn it off, and for a second, turns up the volume. "This is sick, really crazy," she says, but hands the machine back to Walt and sits down on the bed next to him. "What are you doing?" she pleads.

"I don't want them fucking in my house," he says, firmly. "If she doesn't love him, she shouldn't be fucking him either. Should I have to listen to this?"

"Oh, Walt," Helen moans. "You sound like an old man." Her eyes narrow. "Rosie doesn't know what she wants. They're married, they're adults, they're allowed not to know. No one made you listen."

"They should go home."

Helen shakes her head at him. "Why are you doing this?" She is disappointed and crying when she says, "Don't make us hate you."

The next morning, Helen leaves early to teach a class, and when Walt goes downstairs for coffee, Rosie and Tim are at the kitchen table, posed over empty bowls again, their dark heads together. He sees that Tim's bare feet are resting on top of Rosie's under the table. Walt cannot bring himself to talk directly to them, but says a general hello to the room, and touches his daughter on the shoulder as he makes his way to the stove. Tim says hi; Rosie, still in her bathrobe, doesn't say anything. She is not capable of hurting her father. Walt wonders if Helen has told them something, warned them about him, and the shame of what he's done, what he's listened to, makes him back away quickly.

"I'm going to be working here today," he announces, and moves into his study. "So . . . I guess I'll see you." An hour later, his other daughter calls, but she wants to talk to Rosie, and not to him, and he wonders how far his poison has spread. By mid-afternoon, Walt can't stand the whispering between Tim and Rosie, both the hissing and the caressing that's gone on for hours, and he goes to his office.

Several days later, Diana Lux comes to Walt's office hours to discuss why her term paper is going to be late. He admires her for not lying to him, but simply telling him that it's late because she didn't start it early enough. He commends her parents for teaching her honesty and self-reliance, although at the moment he finds it extremely unappealing. He makes his hands into a pyramid on top of his desk. She doesn't appear to notice the almost purple hue to his skin that day.

"Fine," Walt says. Diana's sweatshirt says University of Wisconsin on it. They are nowhere near Wisconsin, and Walt suspects it's where her boyfriend goes to school, a big-chested blond sort of guy. "Drop it off in my box when you're done."

"That's okay?" She's done something strange to her hair, so that her bangs point to the ceiling. She sits, like a ballerina, with only her pointed toes touching the floor. He doesn't answer her. "Really?"

I'm not your father, Walt thinks, furious, and damned if I'm going to have to say it twice to reassure you and make you feel good about yourself, good about screwing up but being honest about it.

"It's up to you," he says, coldly. "It's your decision, your grade."

Walt knows that she thinks she's been pardoned, when he's done nothing of the sort for her.

Later, when he straightens the papers on his desk before going home, Walt sees that Diana has left her pen. It's a fake fat tortoise-shell thing, with bite marks on the cap. He can't help thinking that her father must have given it to her as he sent her away, and that now she feels she's really lost something important to her, all her good luck and love in that cheap pen. Walt doesn't understand how the pen got on his desk unless she put it there, and he can't remember her moving towards him.

When Walt gets home, he knows that Tim has gone. He also knows that Rosie is still in the house; she has not gone with him. He can't understand why people act like this, so inconclusive with their own lives, so dependent on other people to hold them up, but if anyone's to blame for Rosie being like that, he supposes that he is — he is her father. He sees that Helen is home too, early, that life in his house is taking place without him.

When he calls for Helen and Rosie, ready to be forgiven — he's sick, he's scared, he'll tell them, he's hateful and he hates his body — they don't answer him. He feels a terrible need to be included.

Upstairs, he hears voices again behind a closed door, this time in the bathroom. The water is running into the clawfoot tub, and he listens to Helen and Rosie talking quietly to each other. When Walt puts his hand out to touch the door, he swears he can feel the steam that clouds the bathroom, then Rosie's little sobs and sniffs, and Helen's comfort that finally shakes the house.

He pushes the door open the smallest bit — he wants to witness as well as hear for once — and sees Helen sitting on a stool next to the tub. Rosie's head is resting against her mother's thigh, while her knees poke out of the water, and one hand trails along the edge, her fingers dripping water onto the floor. They don't notice him there, and he doesn't want to be seen.

Walt suddenly remembers a photograph he saw in *Life* years before, black and white, of a Japanese mother bathing her deformed and half-grown child in a wooden tub. There was no pleasure on either of their faces, but it wasn't displeasure or pain either, which had surprised him. The girl's hands were stiff claws, unable to hold the cloth, and her mother had to keep the hair back from her child's eyes. He had stared and stared at the picture without understanding why. Now he admits to himself — back then he had simply shut the magazine and put it away — what he had been thinking

about; that if the child had died, or if her mother had chosen not to care for her, to keep her, then there would be no bath, there would be no moment.

Walt is crying as he shuts the door and goes downstairs into his study. In a while, he hears that the water has been turned off in the bathroom, and the drain opened to let it out. In a gush, it rushes down from the second floor, down through the pipes that run through the wall of his study, splashing towards the sewer below him. It's a warm sound, warm as Helen wrapping a towel around Rosie, warm as he wrapped his last baby in a blanket and held her to his chest, warm as though the water's running over him. It sounds too much like life being washed out of his house, and he can't imagine there ever being a time when he'd want to hear it again.

Where I Live

All this summer, abandoned children have been emerging from between the tightest cracks in the sidewalks, from beneath freeway overpasses overgrown with cattails and shredded tires. The children crawl at night like fog from the bends in the river, and trail the moist air up and down my block until I cannot leave my house without breaking a sweat. Babies clinging to the necks of toddlers, teenagers wearing their most furtive stares, they outnumber us by the handfuls, eyes like caraway seeds, like raisins. The children are using all our air, breathing out great lungfuls of summer heat from mouths as round and perfect as berries. Every morning they follow the postman, nipping the backs of his calves, stealing his shoes until he no longer comes. Hidden under blankets of haze the children snap every daisy at its neck, throw stones at the neighborhood dogs and set them barking all night. Nobody has slept for a week. I have taken to dreaming with my eyes open, watching as my father pawns the last, breathless days of a long-ago August. I tell myself I'll redeem them soon for pennies but the truth is, I've already blended the details into one tedious fist. In the dark, when the children break the sky into a thousand drums, when they call to us behind the thick walls of our houses, their trilled invitation slicing the night like shards of glass, we will stand at attention; we will gladly, gratefully follow.

Interview with Pattiann Rogers

Poet Pattiann Rogers has published seven books of poetry: *The Expectations of Light* (1981); *The Only Holy Window* (1984, chapbook); *The Tattooed Lady in the Garden* (1986); *Legendary Performance* (1987); *Splitting and Binding* (1989); *Lies and Devotion* (1994, chapbook); and *Firekeeper, New and Selected Poems*, 1994. In 1980 she won the Poetry Northwest Young Poet's Prize, and the Roethke Prize in 1981. The editors of Poetry awarded her the Tietjens Prize in 1981 and the Bess Hokin Prize in 1982. She has received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts in 1982 and 1988, and a Guggenheim Fellowship for 1984-1985. She currently lives in Castle Rock, Colorado, with her husband.

On reading Rogers' work, one might develop an intense desire to take the book outside — to renew one's ties with the natural world. Rogers examines natural phenomenon, creatures and cycles, with the eye of a lover in the course of a profound relationship — which does not preclude infatuation. In her carefully wrought descriptions and metaphors, we hear the music of taxonomy, and the divinations of a writer who fully trusts and embraces her material.

An alumnus of the University of Houston's Writing Program, Rogers returned to Houston in January 1996 to give a reading as part of the Museum of Fine Arts Reading Series. Her interview took place in an A-frame house badly in need of repair. She responded warmly to the house's protector, a huge dog named Boo.

Gulf Coast: Do you consider yourself a nature poet? Is it a reductive title?

Pattiann Rogers: . . . It's a term people use. Sometimes it's used in a derogatory way, so it depends on who's using it and how they've defined it. If people are thinking of it in the sense that Whitman might be considered a nature poet, or Dickinson, or in the tradition of Thoreau or Emerson, or even Faulkner, then, of course, it would be considered complimentary. . . it's a vague, elusive term. I think landscape is a large part of a lot of American literature, and not just as setting but as character or otherness influencing the language. In some sense every American writer is a nature writer. The natural world is something that sustains me, an affirmative force.

I remember reading Joyce Carol Oates' essay titled "Against Nature." It

was witty and sharp and insightful in ways, and I remember thinking, well, she's probably right. I probably just invent my attachment to nature. Then I walked outside, and immediately I felt more energetic, imbued in some way. I know that sounds mystical; but the reaction is physical or sensual before I can articulate it, before I ever put it in any kind of words or try to verbalize it . . . what is it that's pleased me? I don't know. It could be two magpies and two little spindly locusts . . . or the way a winter oak looks against the sky. This is my reaction to the outdoors. It would be dishonest of me not to include that in any writing I did.

I know we have come out of this physical world, we have a connection with it, we're made of the same compounds, we have similar features to other animals on the earth . . . in some sense our answers about who we are and what we are will come from that natural world, so it seems right to pay attention to it. And then, it's full of metaphor. If you spent your life looking at one oak tree or one apple tree you'd find enough metaphor in that tree to fill volumes. I think the natural world is a rich source of examination and definition.

GC: You write very sensual poems — love poems, with sensual and sexual components.

PR: The western dichotomy between mind and body, soul and flesh, is a false dichotomy, but it's part of our language, and it's difficult to get it out of the language because it's so embedded . . . and so our conception of ourselves is also channeled in that way. Some of my poetry has been directed toward trying to bridge that gap, to erase that dichotomy. In those moments of sexual experience . . . we clearly see something, something about an expansion of awareness, a connection, and I'm not talking about just connection with the person you're with, but with something much larger. Then we lose it, immediately. It's only there for a few seconds and then it's gone, and I think that's one reason we keep seeking it. My love poems are an attempt to recreate those moments and what it is we know in those moments that we forget so quickly.

Some of my earlier experiences with the opposite sex, in that period of discovery, came when I was living in Joplin, Missouri, a small town. What we did was park by rivers, out in the country. So all of those early experiences with the male body were one with the sounds and odors and fragrances and visions of the natural world. My poem called "Love Song" draws on that a little. I think the sexual courtship ritual among mammals and birds is exciting and thrilling. I've always thought it was romantic, the intensity with which male animals court the females . . .

I pay attention to the body, what it's telling me, because a lot of times the first thing that happens is a reaction of the body . . . then comes the language that tries to explain it. So in writing a poem, I pay attention to what my body is excited by, or what it's reacting to and try to go in that direction.

GC: That involves the feel of knowing when a poem's done, as well.

PR: Yes, it's the music, too. Reaction to the music in the language is physical.

GC: Structurally in your poems you sometimes make suppositions, or posit something, or offer instructions to the reader. How does that fit in with your scheme?

PR: I don't know exactly, but I have a couple of clues. The poems that are instructional, that say "look at this," are really addressed to myself, rather than to instruct someone else. I think the rhetorical structure comes from science. I'm wondering if it's in the printed work or in scientific discussions. Einstein used thought problems: what if I were in a train, and it were moving at the speed of light . . . then what would happen? It's an imaginative technique that scientists use: picture this, or what if that were the case? That isn't where the similarity stops between poetry and science. I think that whenever you investigate, you begin with an imaginary situation, and play out the results of that. Those poems, at least the sentence structure that uses the imperatives, are in my first books more than in the later books. Although the examination of hypotheses is still there in later books, but not with that imperative structure.

GC: You do some exploration of the issue of science and faith. Are you trying to develop that relationship?

PR: Yes. I think it may be the dilemma of our time. It's cliché . . . but we've lost a sense of how we deal with our spiritual needs. I know that spirituality is a word thrown around. But in a conversation like this, I don't know how to characterize the needs for those things that enable us to act with commitment. What better to be the basis for acts of commitment? How do we view who we are in the universe, and whose story is being told by science? You can say, well I'm going to turn to some other source for spirituality: science is over here, my faith is over there. To me that's a schizophrenic kind of life; it weakens.

We put a lot of faith in science — every time we step on an airplane, every time we go to a doctor. When we see pictures of the earth from the moon or pictures the Hubbell telescope is sending back, visions of the skies that we've never seen before, we believe in those; we believe that is a certain kind of reality. Now, how do we incorporate that belief into a story or a cosmology that will answer some questions about who we are and what our obligations are as human beings? I don't think I'm going to answer these questions, but it's an issue I can't let rest because it's too important to me . . . and too engaging.

GC: What is the poet's responsibility? To self, reader, world?

PR: I think language is crucial to how we behave and how we define ourselves and how we act out of that image of who we are. One of our obligations as poets is to keep the language fresh, to keep interpreting it, pushing it out into areas that are not now areas in which we feel articulate, or express ourselves. It's awfully hard to try to examine something when you don't have the language needed . . . I don't mean "examine" in a deadening way, in a sense of trying to capture something. But in coming to recognition of an existence; if we don't have a language, in some sense things don't exist for us.

As poets, we have to keep pushing the language out into areas where it hasn't been yet, shining the light on a blindness. Our traditional faiths have been undermined. Something has to be reinvented for us, and poetry is one area that can deal with that, as well as the other arts: music, dancing, drama, fiction — all of those can have a role to play in reminding people of those qualities that science doesn't try to deal with. Science can only deal with things that can be measured; you can't measure nobility, you can't measure compassion. That's my direction: to reaffirm, to redefine those qualities.

GC: You talk about the musical nature of the terms you use, the names — within the taxonomical function there's this music. The namers had great ears. Did you study music? Have you always had a good ear?

PR: I can think of poets who influenced me, but not early. Early, it was music. My mother, brother and I all played the piano. My brother also played clarinet and violin and the baritone horn and I played the flute and sang in the all-city chorus and church choirs. So I was singing in an organized way at least two or three times a week. My mother used to give my brother a nickel for every morning he would get up and practice the piano before school. So I would wake up to Chopin, Gershwin, Liszt . . . they were all pretty affirmative composers. This is human, the music said: human is this kind of investment in things — the tone and tempo of that music.

I want to come back to the vocabulary of science. One thing that I knew and I could consciously say I wanted to try to do in my work was to incorporate that vocabulary that science has developed, which is enormous, and hasn't really been tapped as a literary vocabulary. I thought it was beautiful and evocative, musically, and I still do. Some of the names just knock me over. Look at any field guide — insects, or anything, it's just full of wonderful names.

GC: Are there poets you would cite as influences?

PR: I can remember the first time I understood what a poem was doing. It was in the 4th grade, Longfellow's poem, "The Arrow and the Song." It was the first time I realized that you could talk about one thing while you were really addressing something else. I didn't know the word metaphor, but I remember encountering the magic of metaphor for the first time in that poem.

I like Roethke, I've always liked him, because he has various ways of writing, he has various voices. He also draws on vocabulary of the natural world, and he takes great risks. He doesn't always succeed, and that makes him even more endearing, because I can tell how much it meant to him to try to get this right. He was willing to take a gigantic risk and fail. He was struggling, and I like that. Of course when he does succeed it's so amazing — the leaps and the jumps.

It's important to keep going back to those poets who were masters in order to remember what it's possible to do in language. Read the people who remind you of those possibilities.

GC: You mentioned Faulkner briefly. Do you consider yourself as having attributes of what people term "Southern writers?" Do you consider that part of your sensibility?

PR: I would consider it a compliment to be told my writing had characteristics of Southern writing. Although Southern writers are great storytellers . . . I don't fit into that category. But there's a lushness and a kind of easiness, a kind of an acceptance in the Southern writer. I don't want to say tolerance. I guess it's a willingness to see a value in just about everybody. I think that's characteristic of Faulkner's best work. No matter what the status of the character, Faulkner will often find that character capable of love or compassion or nobility, those qualities that are truly valuable about human beings. Faulkner says anybody can have those qualities, or has them. I just saw a video of Truman Capote's "A Christmas Story." That's another example of a Southern writer finding something admirable in a seemingly simple person: a woman who, he says at the end, had never been over five miles from where she lived in the South; a woman who had what some people considered a naive and childlike conception of life. I would like my writing to express that kind of generosity toward human beings and toward the lifeforms of the natural world.

The Metal Lion and the Monk

When he lifts his head from sleep
and stretches to rise, there's an enormity
of creaking in the landscape, gear against
gear, axle and cross, a slow grating
vibration shuddering the inner hills,
lispings and whining the dull pines,
cranking the tidal seas. I have learned
to recognize it.

His paws, moving with deliberation
against rock, create sparks
by which he marks his own way
among boulders at night. I have seen him
set dry kindling and parched brush
to flame by the pace of his passing.
The grace he covets is in the easy
glide of the iron grey flanks
he sometimes sees bounding with thunder
across the wet heavens.

His verses ring like underwater
triangles of steel struck with slender
rods, like the shadows of brass gongs
shaken in distant mountain caves.

His soul is the tensile measure
of his skeleton and skull, no more
material than the glistening,
like aluminum moonlight, of his smooth
mane and molded body in rain.

If he is merciful, it is with a mercy
as welded and steady as girders
and beams. If he is righteous,
it is with a righteousness burning
like plates of copper sun flaring
off swift rivers.

I myself become wealth when he gazes
into my devotions with his silver eyes,
when he soothes with his gold tongue
every crevice of my incantations. He loves
with all the potential forms
that metal can assume.

Even in his own realm, he has a place
in the corridors of this monastery.
I remember him in his virtues
and plights. I pray to his god
to take notice.

Variations on *Breaking the Faith of Sleep*

1.

By murdering, as Macbeth, someone sleeping.

By rising from bed sleeping, moving forward,
still sleeping, with scissors in hand
to murder.

By cursing an old woman on a soiled
couch complaining in her sleep.

By abandoning a son as he sleeps
in his crib; by leaving a lover sleeping
naked and renewed after love.

While sleeping, to murder a father
over and over in dream.

By murdering the sleeping unborn.

2.

By not recognizing sleep as the earth-
white underside of a blue butterfly's
skyside wings.

By not recognizing sleep as the lift
of a white skeleton of leaf mistaken
for the white bones of a blue butterfly
blown over white beaches mistaken
for dunes of snow.

By failing to sleep with the serenity of snow
so as not to disturb the congregation
of white butterfly bones covering
the body, their crowded flocking,
fluttering like breath, at rest on thighs
and breasts, throughout the frozen
grasses of the hair.

3.

To wake from sleep not thanking
the moment unwinding itself like the scrolled
fire of the rosa rouletti, not thanking
the weather rising in the spreading
sail of the moment, not thanking
the gold ring balanced on a stick
and set spinning by the moment,
for the astonishment given.

To wake from sleep not blessing
the deep hood beneath the wing
of the winter goose, not blessing
the lock of the sea floor
on its blindness, not blessing
the first and last blackness
kept inside the seed inside the pod
of the wild yucca, for the sweet
sleep taken.

Lag Time

Noriko had a side job as a private tour guide. She worked on demand and accepted most of the assignments offered to her, which frequently came within a day's notice. Approximately two or three times a month she got a call from someone at the agency who would set her up with a couple or a small group, Americans mostly, sometimes Australians or Europeans who wanted to be led around by a knowledgeable, English-speaking young Japanese woman with a cheerful personality.

Usually they had their own itineraries, as if they had spent hours pouring through guidebooks back home. Noriko's job was to keep them company, provide commentary, and be on hand to straighten things out when necessary. As a last resort she might offer her own suggestions on where to go, but this was rarely necessary. They'd see parts of Tokyo. She'd take couples on day trips outside the city, shrines and temples, pottery villages three hours away by bus. Some of the visitors were interested in kabuki so Noriko brought them either to Kabuki-za or the National Theatre, where she secured headphones to ensure their enjoyment of the kabuki experience, via a simultaneous English commentary. In the end the tips were generous and people wrote sweet things about her on the agency's customer survey.

For Noriko the job was comfortable, predictable. Her clients were voyeurs rather than pilgrims, content with a taste of eight or ten experiences. On rare occasions a demanding client would expect the city to cough up something extra. There was one American couple, both in their forties, college professors, and the husband had begged her to take them someplace in Tokyo that looked like the backdrop for an Ozu movie. "Not Ozu," the wife had reprimanded him, "Ozu's films relied predominantly on interior shots." "Then Kurosawa," the husband pressed on. "Early Kurosawa." Noriko had never seen a single film by Ozu, or Kurosawa for that matter. What did they want to see? Women in kimonos? "More like backdrops, alleys, a locale with a black market feel to it, an Occupation feel to it," the husband gestured vaguely.

She had taken them earlier to see kabuki. Uninspired and lacking the knowledge, the means to make these people happy again, she led them through the nearby Ginza, Tokyo's chic shopping district. The wife and husband walked along with their disappointment in check but she felt it,

palpably. Then at twilight as they passed under a railroad trestle near Yurakucho Station (on their way to eat yakitori at an outdoor beer garden she liked), the man stopped, thrust his hands in his pockets and subtly smiled as his wife glanced at the steel girders overhead. A train rumbled by as they clutched arms and spoke in each other's ears. That day Noriko got her best tip ever.

Noriko Araki knew the Ginza. She worked Monday and Thursday evenings at the Princeton Academy, a small language school on the third floor of an office building on one of the side streets off Ginza-dori. The Princeton Academy offered mostly English courses taught by native speakers at beginner to advanced levels, but Noriko had two classes in Japanese, comprised of businessmen and students. A handful of these students had most likely signed up to satisfy official requirements for the 4-1-16-3, the Cultural Visa, and so Noriko tried hard to make her classes challenging. She'd been told she was a good teacher. But Noriko knew how fragile and sweet she'd looked to all the guys in the interpretation program at Georgetown; here on her own turf she had to acknowledge her image as a twenty-six year old woman with the pretty face of a tour guide and the soft-spoken English she'd ironed out like one of the white blouses she wore to work. With sightseers she'd be docile, let the group place her front center in all the photos. In the classroom, language and meaning were at stake. Noriko's expectations were therefore increased.

Both of her classes were at the level Princeton categorized as "intermediate-beginner." Noriko had spent the previous weeks leading them patiently through the months of the year and the days of the week and the most basic human interactions imaginable and on and on to the point one week ago when she had decided that, whatever their individual motivations might be, her Thursday class was ready to learn clauses. This would be a small breakthrough; modifiers, a brave leap into the messy grammar of the devil's tongue, as the Jesuits had called it. Noriko's role was to amaze them with their own success. When her students arrived at class the following Thursday she glanced at the six men and eight women and wrote down:

shimibun o yomu sarariman
akai boshi o kabutta onna no ko

While adjectives modified nouns in a manner similar to English (akai boshi=red hat), the grammatical structure of a Japanese clause was set up almost in reverse, she explained. They had already learned the basic subject-object-verb of boy book reads and man coffee drinks. The clause was a little more complicated. The salaryman reading the newspaper would become newspaper reading salaryman — in Japanese you'd insert the *o*, the object

modifier, of course: *shimibun o yomu sarariman*. There was no questioning why.

She wrote down a few more examples on the board. "So the girl in the red hat looks at the salaryman who's reading the newspaper — in English that would correspond to 'red hat wearing girl newspaper reading salaryman at looks.'" The class was silent.

Noriko spent some minutes re-explaining, drawing diagrams with looping arrows, clustering different clauses together within a sentence. Then she drilled them. By now, eleven weeks into the course, the weakest students had dropped out and these remaining fourteen could be relied upon, to differing degrees. She let a few seconds tick by; then she had them make up their own sentences.

Only one woman still seemed lost. "Tomorrow it'll all make sense," Noriko promised her. Since the lesson had gone smoothly she considered, like an interrogator, how much further she could push her students in the remaining fifteen minutes.

Although teaching grammar inevitably brought a lesson to a standstill, as a whole she still found the job fascinating. From her students Noriko was learning about priorities, for one thing. Someone needed to wine and dine potential clients, or study *ikebana*, or else had a Japanese girlfriend he wanted to impress — they had a thread of confidence, all of them. Newspaper reading salaryman. When her patience was thin she might picture one of her students squirming in the interpreter's chair as the key speaker presented his research at an international medical symposium, the dense subject matter and denser sentence structures, clauses entwined within clauses like coils of DNA, the groupings and reversals, the weight that fell arbitrarily on the last word of the clause, of the sentence. She knew this class would never get that far. She knew they wouldn't need to.

But for the most part Noriko refrained from judgment. She'd seen the hotshot executives who struggled along, tripped up by the most fundamental concept. And she'd also experienced a few cases of the cultural visa seeker — especially one girl who'd confided she was working, teaching English, without proper documentation — showing up in Noriko's class once or twice and complying faithfully, seamlessly, to every rule of grammar.

No matter what, though, they had to extend themselves.

Noriko wanted everyone in her class to succeed, just as she wanted her clients to have an enjoyable stay in Tokyo. But unlike the tourists, her students needed to be rewired. Noriko's first year of English, back in seventh grade, she had written secret letters to herself, covert dialogues in a new language. My mother is going shopping today . . .

"Sensei, I have a question." A sales manager for an Australian trading firm had his hand raised. The class focused on her, eager, mouths slightly open.

"Shuten no Ogikubo degozaimasu. O-wasuremono ga nai yo ni ki o tsukette kudasai." Noriko's apartment was in Ogikubo, last stop on the Marunouchi Line. The red doors of the train slid open and evening commuters disembarked. One man in a Burberry trenchcoat lay sprawled out across the plush seat, fast asleep. A train conductor was tapping him on the shoulder as Noriko gathered her belongings and stepped out onto the platform.

Outside Ogikubo Station she walked to the lot where hundreds of bicycles were parked tightly together. She wedged herself next to her own bike to unlock the chain, backed it out carefully and dumped her bag in the front basket. What was it she'd read somewhere about the People's Republic of China? If you owned three things in China you were rich. A bike, a sewing machine and a television. But she'd read that as a child, more than a decade ago. It had to be different now. Now Chinese youth were going to clubs and wearing makeup and Russian kids were working at the McDonalds in Red Square. Noriko had no idea why her brain hung onto these details, but each thought seemed to set off another chain reaction, dredging up the next scrap of memory, on and on and on. She had to smile. Usually her concentration was so acute. At the light she stopped smiling and maneuvered her bike through crowds of pedestrians crossing Omeikaido Boulevard.

On her way home she stopped off at the neighborhood dry cleaners, which was open late on Thursdays, to pick up her tour-guide uniform. The uniform was a discreet ensemble; it looked like a well-coordinated blouse, jacket and skirt without the conspicuous occupational slant of the previous design, which had apparently embarrassed some of the tourists. The old uniform had actually been mentioned in three or four customer surveys. No one wanted to look like a blatant follower, not Americans anyway. It was hard for her boss to accept this concept; most group tour guides for Japanese, at home and abroad, wore bright uniforms and carried a banner with the name of the tour company.

Noriko folded the plastic-sheathed garments carefully on top of her bike basket and pedalled homeward down the narrow street. She parked her bicycle in the rack in front of her small apartment building (two floors, six units) and checked her mail: a postcard from her sister, honeymooning in Italy on an eight-day package tour. The promise of a sweater. Love. Inside her apartment Noriko refilled the bathtub and set the gas to heat up the water, which would take fifteen minutes. She made herself a cup of tea and chopped up some vegetables for a stir-fry. After her meal and bath she turned on the TV, but kept the volume almost inaudible, and sat in her pajamas on the tatami floor, leaning against the low kotatsu to write letters. Jeff, an ex-boyfriend who'd dropped out of the interpretation program after less than a year; Caroline, who had her heart set on a job in the U.N. She'd grown up in Switzerland, maybe gone to a Swiss boarding school, Noriko

recalled vaguely. There are thousands of people like me, thousands, she'd said. Noriko wrote: *Of course you'd be welcome to stay for a few weeks. Let me know your plans.*

Noriko finished the letter, poured herself a second cup of tea and sat for a few minutes, idle. She spent the rest of the evening casting one eye on the TV as she pored through the *Asian Wall Street Journal*. She underlined unfamiliar words in red pen and copied them down into a small notebook. It was a slow, schoolgirl process. She also pulled from her shelf two textbooks on economics and banking which she had picked up back at Georgetown.

Gradually she felt herself succumbing to exhaustion. She glanced at her fingers, stained with newsprint, and went to the sink to scrub them clean. She pulled her futon and blankets from the closet and spread them out on the floor, burrowed into her futon and yanked the long metal cord to turn off her overhead light. It was a little before midnight. An early night for her; weekends she'd stay out until three or four, and even at home when she studied, her resilience was usually much stronger.

Noriko stretched out each limb slowly and wrapped the lightweight quilt around her, phasing out all meaningless noise, the low buzz of late-night comedy shows seeping through the thin walls, the national anthem *Nippon Hoso* signed off with each night. She lay motionless, strands of hair winding around her neck. Her radio alarm was set for seven, but only as a backup.

At around four-fifteen a.m. the floor underneath her was gently swayed by a mild earthquake tremor. She dreamt right through it.

The year before, when Noriko turned twenty-five, her parents began hinting about marriage. In their relief they had interpreted her breakup with the American as an acquiescence, a call for guidance. They were probably unaware of Christmas cake, the double meaning, but certainly would have agreed with the concept. Christmas in Japan was a novelty; people celebrated by buying "Christmas cakes" decorated with fresh whipped cream and strawberries, baked and sold daily during the week leading up to Christmas. As the saying went, a freshly-bought Christmas cake was delicious on the 23rd, the 24th, up to the 25th; it still tasted good the day after Christmas, but by the 27th it began to grow stale. Thus went a woman's marriagability as she entered her late twenties. Noriko, on the one hand, had it all under control. But from her parents' point of view she had reached a certain age, her sister had a new fiancé, and so her mother called her long distance one morning to suggest *omiaï*, an arranged meeting with a go-between.

Noriko tried to desist, but she knew the force that words could carry through an electronic device. She finally agreed to one meeting, which she assumed would never materialize. Her parents would try to find a

hometown boy for her, someone from a family with certain expectations. As was customary, both sides would use the local nakodo, the matchmaker, to check background information on each other. The man's parents were bound to find fault with her before the preliminary meeting. Two years abroad, an unsupervised life in the city, all those sketchy jobs, a broken engagement with an American — even though Noriko's photograph projected nothing odd or questionable, she knew they would sense it right off, that she was unfit.

A month later her mother called to relay an interest expressed — through the nakodo, obviously — by the family of the young man. He was an older boy she had in fact seen, but never spoken to, in high school back in Niigata. Now he worked in Tokyo for a major trading company, and spoke some English, according to the go-between's description. Meanwhile the Moritas were supposedly delighted to hear of Noriko's success abroad, as their son stood a strong chance of being transferred within a few years to an overseas branch.

Due to the man's hard schedule the omiai would be held in Tokyo. Noriko's mother arrived a few days ahead of the meeting, to help her prepare. Mrs. Araki, normally uneasy in the sprawl of a big city, had an itinerary and followed it zealously. Noriko was fitted for a kimono at the specialty shop recommended by one of the matchmaker's friends. As the clerk adjusted her hem she said, "My life is fine, I'm happy," and her mother replied, "It's a temporary state."

The morning of the omiai Noriko had to be prodded awake. She and her mother went to Tokyo Station to meet Mr. Araki, who had taken the six o'clock bullet train. They returned to the rental boutique where she went in the back room to slip on silk undergarments, white tabi for her feet, then the kimono itself and the various cords and sashes that preceded and followed the graceful obi, which two assistants helped to cinch around her waist. The full procedure seemed to take hours, but Noriko was ultimately transformed. The ladies were exacting, then pleased; they applied blush and lipstick, swept Noriko's hair up off her neck and fastened a sprig of faux wisteria above her right ear.

Finally they draped a white rabbit stole around her neck, and the Arakis set out. They were scheduled to meet Mrs. Nakamura and the Moritas at three in the lobby of the Imperial Hotel in Hibiya. They arrived by taxi. The platform sandals lifted Noriko off the ground but cut short her stride, so Noriko took tiny, antiquated steps across the lobby, toward the smiling face of the go-between.

Both sets of parents bowed, along with Noriko and Hiroaki. Noriko's father suffered from arthritis, and she marvelled at the fluidity of his gesture. Then the party went straight to an elegant coffee shop on the third floor. Noriko had been coached already, and knew precisely where, and when, to sit. The families and children were served tea and cakes while the go-between orchestrated the conversation.

The twenty-seven year-old son was totally unrecognizable to her, and yet he looked like someone she would run across on a Friday night at a downtown nightclub, or maybe in a high-class entertainment district like Akasaka, if his company footed the bill. He was fairly tall, with discreet cufflinks and carefully parted hair, and wore a costly, dependable watch with a sober suit and a grey silk tie. Noriko figured his mother must have chosen that suit for him; in his spare time he probably favored an Italian cut, but his mother would have said, Do you want to come off as some playboy? The father was grey-haired, sallow-faced.

Since the entire party was from Niigata, the parents and go-between conversed, albeit quietly, in the regional dialect, rather than in the standard Japanese Noriko taught her students. Even so, they spoke tentatively, apart from Mrs. Nakamura, a cheerful matron in a dark blue kimono. The day before, Noriko and her mother had met for two hours with this woman, who had expressed keen interest in sightseeing opportunities around Washington, D.C., Noriko's clever way with words, and the two diamond studs in her right ear which she asked Noriko to remove. Mrs. Nakamura liked America, the idea of it. "Did you see lots of black people?" she'd asked. From that encounter, despite the self-assured chatter, Noriko had sensed that this matchmaker wasn't fully on the up-and-up, that there was some of the crucial delicacy lacking, some diplomatic restraint; she sensed that somewhere along the way, this woman was going to trip up.

After some ten minutes of small talk with the parents, which was strictly according to form, the nakodo turned to Noriko and asked her if she spoke French. They were eating French pastries on delicate bone china. Her father, who was diabetic, left his untouched.

"No, I don't."

"But Hiroaki-san, you do, don't you?"

"Un peu."

Around the table everyone smiled politely. "And you were in Paris." Noriko saw him glance toward his mother. "Yes, for three months. Part of company training."

"Paris, how lucky," she enthused. "Hiroaki-san, I've heard you just passed the third level of your company English exam."

"Well," Hiroaki replied modestly.

"Noriko-san is also fluent, isn't she?"

Noriko demurred.

"Why don't you say something to her in English?"

Here it comes, Noriko thought. No matter what he said she would have to judge him. A reply in Japanese would be an evasion. It was inevitable. She felt sad that perfection was so pleasurable.

"I cannot speak well," he said haltingly, in English.

Mrs. Nakamura, who seemed to have realized her error, attempted to gloss things over. She directed her efforts back toward the parents. They spoke in unison about the capitol: how hectic Tokyo was, how tiring, how

crowded, how expensive. Noriko thought about merciful ways to cut the effort short. After a polite discussion of famous tourist destinations in and around Tokyo, the talk meandered toward the very locale for this occasion, the Imperial Hotel. One of Mrs. Nakamura's nieces had held her wedding reception here, over twenty years before. It certainly was a grand old hotel.

"Designed by Frank Lloyd Wright," Noriko said. "In 1923."

"Is that right?" said the go-between. The Moritas looked like pallbearers.

From that day on Noriko was left to her own devices. Back in the cab, her mother admitted that it was probably for the best. Her father suggested a movie. Then they were silent as the taxi wound down narrow streets and main thoroughfares, straight back to the rental boutique in Shibuya, where Noriko had to be helped out of her kimono. First the obi was loosened, then the sashes underneath unfastened, the hard backing removed, until the kimono hung shapelessly, like a bathrobe. With the last cord untied she felt such relief, like a child removing her ice skates: one, then the other.

Noriko had about an hour to kill before the conference at the Imperial Hotel. From the station she walked the short distance to Hibiya Park. The park was long and narrow, surrounded on both sides by government agencies, and groups of young women in pert uniforms from the nearby banks and insurance companies sat on benches beside the fountain and ate their boxed lunches. A few middle-aged businessmen sprawled back on the wooden benches, some in pairs but most by themselves, basking in the May sunlight. On the other side of the fountain, directly across from Noriko, two young men in moss-colored suits sat smoking leisurely, the sounds of their conversation drowned out by the gushing water. They looked restful, a part of the landscape. At this very moment thousands of office workers would be slurping ramen noodles in stand-up shops around the city, or going out for clandestine business lunches, or at their desks or computer screens, yet here were these two, crossing their legs as group after group of uniformed women stood and left. It brought to mind the few weekday occasions when Noriko managed to see a movie in the early afternoon, around three or four o'clock. Regardless of the content of the film, she would invariably see at least one or two businessmen in suits and ties, sitting in the theater among the housewives and college students.

The two men on the other side of the fountain leaned back as Noriko glanced at her watch. Pigeons descended on the crumbs and grains of rice left behind by the women. The nonstop gush of water from the fountain both calmed and irritated Noriko. It was like a magnified version of the interference inserted onto the tapes they had listened to at Georgetown, the static or background noise that forced everyone to concentrate even harder on the words they were shadowing.

Shadowing was one of the training techniques for simultaneous interpreting. As the student listened to a tape he or she would repeat the

message verbatim, lagging slightly behind the speaker. First in the language of the speaker on tape, then in language B. The speed of the message was increased gradually, as the extraneous noises were magnified.

You were supposed to keep a distance; maintaining those seconds of lag time was a crucial part of training the ear and brain, increasing short-term memory retention and linguistic coordination. Although a quick reaction was ultimately what they strove for, within the exercise it was more important to force oneself to stay as far behind the speaker as one could, while retaining accuracy. Decalage was the term their teachers used to describe the process. Shadowing soon became second nature.

Once she got her certificate the real work was almost easy by comparison. Only the consecutive interpreters had to deal with background interference, working mostly in the courtrooms. Noriko wore a pair of headphones that shut out all meaningless noise — she wouldn't even be distracted by the sound of her own voice. It was a high-tech system. The headphones and mouthpiece connected everything together. To Noriko, they were essential. They were the visible tools. They proved something.

At the proper time she took the elevator to the sixth floor and arrived at the designated conference room. The purpose of the event was to welcome Coca-Cola onto the Tokyo Stock Exchange, in conjunction with Daiei's initial offering of twenty-thousand shares. The affair was officially slated to start in another twenty minutes, but the hall was already filling up with dozens of smartly-dressed men and women, Japanese and foreign, corporate executives, fund managers, research assistants from all the securities companies with Tokyo offices, reporters for the Nikkei Financial News and Mainichi. At the front of the immense hall a long table had been set up for the Vice-President of Coca-Cola and his entourage, next to which stood a podium for the Daiei Securities representative who would preside over ceremonies. Noriko passed the empty chairs and mikes on her way to the table at the far side of the hall where the interpreters sat.

"Noriko-san! O-genki? How are you?" It was Yuko, one of the Japanese-French interpreters who worked side by side with Noriko at many of these functions.

"Genki yo. Très bien, et vous?"

They both coughed, to clear their throats. They had their last long sip of water.

Soon the Coca-Cola men entered the room, patting each other on the backs. Noriko, Yuko and the two other interpreters fitted their headphones. The electronic system had already been tested. The line of interpreters waited, eyes downward. Each of them was Japanese, female, and under the age of thirty.

The man from Daiei stood up at the podium.

"Minasama, kyo wa Koka Kora Kabushiki-gaisha no Tokyo Toribikijo . . ."

Noriko was undeniably weaker, by a second or two, in converting speech into English. The bulk of the program would be English to Japanese, however. In a sense this trickier part was her warmup, the exertion before the endorphins kicked in — if that was what propelled her. By the time the Vice President greeted everyone in his bubbly Coca-Cola voice, she was deep into the process, pouncing, converting, picking up speed, and, as always, totally outside the realm of judgment:

"It's so wonderful to be here today...largest soft drink company in the world...net profits for the last fiscal year...branching out into the entertainment business...growth forecasted at fifteen percent for the coming fiscal year...new campaign to get people excited about drinking Coke with their breakfast!...and the fabulous opportunities that come with our new listing on the Tokyo Stock Exchange . . ."

Every ten minutes or so, in the seconds between speakers, Noriko gazed out at the audience. She had faith in her own accuracy, but speed was still an issue. Not to the liaison who booked her for these events, where the satisfaction of the clients was indicated again and again by a total lack of comment on her performance, but to Noriko herself. There was no such thing as a truly simultaneous interpretation, she understood that, but Noriko hoped to shadow the speaker as close as humanly possible, to shave even tenths of seconds off her reaction time. What was weighing her down? New technologies were burgeoning all the time: satellites, fiber optic cables under the ocean. Noriko was on her own. All the methods taught at Georgetown had only brought her to a certain point. She wanted faster. She wanted to grab the sentence by its tail, whip it around and break through onto a higher plane, eliminate the lag time somehow, and she knew in advance how it would feel. It would feel like cracking the sound barrier, like the Concorde. Ah, the Concorde.

"Domo arigato gozaimashita." Rousing applause, which died down after two minutes. The executives left. People stood up slowly and stretched their legs. Those Japanese in the audience wearing headphones yanked them off. On their way out they handed them back to a well-groomed young woman by the door, someone who was probably hired for this very moment.

After the conference Noriko and Yuko stood by the huge banquet table of the adjoining reception hall, holding glasses of white wine. All around them clusters of executives stood talking, or slowly assessed the generous spread of cheese, caviar, tiny shrimps, sushi and other lavish offerings.

Noriko planned to leave within minutes; she spoke briefly with Yuko about this and that. No one came up to propose marriage. If they lingered on just a few minutes, though, some young American representative was sure to stop by and flirt, wherein Yuko would hand him one of her business cards with the company address and phone number, as she always did.

"I'm thinking of getting married," Yuko remarked as she scooped caviar onto a cracker.

"Married!"

"Sure, and not only that but my fiancé, if you will, is going to be transferred to Paris in two months. Convenient for me."

"Will you keep working?"

"It would be difficult. I probably won't have the proper visa. I don't know. Not as an interpreter anyway. To be honest, I'm getting burnt out with interpreting, Noriko. I'm ready to slow down. Maybe I can translate." Yuko was twenty-eight.

Since Yuko hadn't specified that she was getting married, Noriko wasn't sure if congratulations were in order. She only knew some tedious process, a checklist of pros and cons, must be dragging out in Yuko's brain; she didn't think she should influence it.

"I thought you liked the work. You're so talented."

"I'm not as ambitious as you," Yuko shrugged. "And anyway, once you're married it's hard running off to these conferences without notice, the way we've been doing."

Noriko reached for a canapé and chewed it slowly. She's fed up with being a tool. But it's all the same. After a moment she asked, "Are you really going to marry him?" She'd forgotten to ask his name. Some young salaryman who read the newspaper.

"Well, I'm considering it. It was kind of sudden, so I've asked him for a week to think about it. A week to come to a decision — it's kind of a luxury, don't you think? At first he was annoyed that I wouldn't answer him right on the spot."

"Does he speak French?"

"He wants me to teach him."

In the end Noriko wished her good luck. They bowed to each other as a slight joke (Yuko had essentially grown up in France) and exchanged addresses with paper from the pad Noriko kept in her pocketbook.

From the Imperial Hotel she walked the ten minutes or so between Hibiya and Ginza and on the spur of the moment approached Mitsukoshi Department Store at the ground level entrance. Young women in blue skirts and white blouses stood at the door, bowing and beckoning. Inside she wandered among the scarves and jewelry on the first floor, then took the escalator down to the basement food floor to buy a baguette. *Furansu pan* in Japanese: France bread. It was rather short and stubby, wrapped discreetly in a plastic Mitsukoshi shopping bag. Yuko had told her that

baguettes in France were long and skinny and that people tucked the naked loaves under their arms, carrying them everywhere, sometimes biting pieces off in the subway.

Noriko would have normally exited directly from the lower level of the department store for the underground link with Ginza Station. Instead she rode the elevator back up to the first floor. It was early evening. Out on the street young couples wandered leisurely; old women in black kimonos edged on with slow determination. As Noriko proceeded east on Ginza-dori toward Jena, a bookstore with one floor devoted to foreign-language publications, she heard the faint drone of the right-wingers. Every day a group of three or four of them set up a podium on the nearby square and, as far as Noriko knew, stood there all day, blaring into their megaphones about tiny islands seized by the Soviets after World War II; no one paid attention to what they said, but the waves of amplified sound were inescapable.

At Jena, Noriko browsed but ended up buying nothing. She had an appointment to meet a friend in Shinjuku, so she walked on towards the closest above-ground entrance to the Marunouchi Line, which was across the street. The pedestrian light turned green and people thronged the intersection. Noriko felt almost buoyant without people to lead around; she reached the curb and stood for a moment surveying the crowds, watching men and women chart their courses down upscale streets, all so adept, all blessed, right here in this city where so many people longed to be.

Signs

"Suppose we wore T-shirts reading: DO NOT SPEAK TO ME ON DREARY WINTER AFTERNOONS. Life would be so much easier, *so much kinder*, if each person could read off another's mood. We'd whisper; we'd speak *less*," chirped the professor, with such emphasis he almost lost his glasses. That morning, his students felt slothful; uninspired. They stopped writing and dropped their heads, slouching in gorilla postures. It was a Friday . . .

And snowing outside. A black Chevrolet van heading a funeral procession crawled by. The professor switched tactics: "Most lives are simply advertisements. We try not to live as stereotypes, but few succeed amidst the sky-high poppings of heart muscle in Hollywood and on TV. We think someone sees us. God? The disembodied? Normal people?"

His students leaned forward; interested, smiling. "We've done experiments," added the philosophy professor, a little vengeful, if not arrogant. "Class, let me tell you an anecdote. Years ago I owned forested tracts of manticores, unicorns, and griffins, all rather dangerous. Japanese businessmen wanted to purchase my beasts for park zoos and sightseers, but I told them my specimens were priceless, almost extinct. I've not been bothered by their pleas. My KEEP OUT signs do the job normally, but if not, at my property border, I etch deep into tree trunks with my bowie: 'Trespasser, would you recognize my beasts?'"

Phone Calls

Phone calls from girls. Terrifying. No idea why. My psychiatrist, an elderly gentleman, just smiles. I've cancelled my appointments. I find him boring, that's all. But the girls talk. When I greet him, I think of mechanical failures. Our last meeting, his tape recorder wasn't working. I grabbed my pants, and he commanded me to quit talking until he'd fixed it. He did it efficiently, but his secretary cancelled it. He prefers patients with delusional conspiracies, I think. As for me, I'm "out of the question," meaning I transcend his possibilities. "You don't look so terrific yourself," he said first thing, before he lectured me on metaphysics. I kept waiting for the phone to ring. It never did. On that particular occasion, I had aspirations, but he said, "If you worked for the phone company, you'd be an embarrassment."

Yalow Family Factory Plaque Needham City Marker 12

The Yalow story is an American story. It is a story of desire, exertion, and eventual triumph. The Yalow clan has long been a model of the pluck and vigor that undergird the history of New England.

One of the most important inventions of any Yalow came shortly after the creation of the spring violet. Émile found that, even when he made the violets quite small, very young girls could not ride them because they could not keep their balance when they straddled the wooden flowers. Émile forgot springs and went back to pulley-sets. He cut two boards in the shape of violets and put a firm cushion between them. He fixed a pawl to the gear brake. He rigged a pulley-set to the frame and bolted a balance arm to the post bracket. The U.S. patent for this invention calls it a "pulley device," but Calvin Buckner soon gave it the name it has borne ever since — *the Fem-Dazzler*. There were many imitations of this popular item, and Émile placed more than two hundred newspaper advertisements defending his patent.

While he was thinking of girls, Émile made a few other products for them: a Fem-Dazzler water beetle; an oscillating water beetle; a combination water beetle and quarter-inch cork-wasp; a milky-white feeding tube that could be made to extend or recede; a scolding whistle; a scolding whistle and cork-wasp combination; a girl throne; a combined pulley-set, hair-dryer, and feeding tube; a folding feeding tube; a girl jumper; girl tender; girl walker; and the combination to end all combinations — a scolding whistle, soap claw, throne, nectar funnel, girl jumper, step-ladder, pulley-set feeding tube, *et cetera!*

During the Korean War, the Norwich factory produced most of the puzzle-cut devices from fuselage remainders. Much earlier, the Yalows had evolved from magnet-driven cork-wasps to spring-shot violets and pulley-driven violets, and the brothers remained in these three fecund fields for several decades, until Émile's success with women compelled them to concentrate their efforts in violets, though Leonard made sure to keep the cork works humming.

The first violet with springs was engineered in the 1940s, when no truly suitable wheeled objects for a young lady existed. The *tehnweezh-draulken*, a bulky two-wheeled device that one moved by pushing

one's feet against the ground, had been invented in Norway about thirty years earlier; in 1941, shortly before the Yalows entered the market in female locomotion, a Dutch blacksmith had devised the first such contraption with pedals. Clearly, the Yalows were among the first — if not *the* first — makers of pulley-set handle-coaches for female consumers in this country.

The Yalow Gardens, in Needham, Massachusetts, house a spectacular variety of wooden flowers and pick-fretted cork bulbs, which float on the pond like dragon-flies. Girls from all over New England host birthday parties there, during which they are fed and allowed to test prototypes. Songs about the violets are sung by a chorus of corksmiths, in lines of three, and a smiling Yalow is always on hand, ready to answer questions or demonstrate the latest invention. The Gardens are open from May until September and hold a festival every June, in which the fleetest young ladies in New England race their violets across the green lawns, from the warehouse to the driveway to the main thoroughfares of the town and beyond. Their scattering migration is credited for the population boom in hamlets throughout New England, and even up in Canada, where the recently-minted currency reflects the violet-drivers' dazzling impact.

But this story could not be told in French, nor in the mingled language that crimps the tongues of citizens along the border. It is a story of the sons of New England and how they helped her daughters.

Crowd Local No. 242

The new civic center's not using the usual pipefitters.
The union forms a chain around the space age masterpiece.
They have their signs printed up: NOTICE,
and UNFAIR TO. Erasable blanks separate block letters,
the easier to protest the unfairnesses. I want popcorn.
Sneaking past legs I find no popcorn hawkers
beneath the blinking refreshments sign. Night comes,
then dawn. Everyone runs around, who knows who knows what.
Crowds race a bike marathon through town, block off roads,
hire off-duty police to tell cars what to do,
something I've been wondering of late. Not just cops,
but ordinary acquaintances wear reflective orange vests
at the corner of Main and Main. I maneuver my roommate's
red Volvo through the mazy authorities to the grocer
who sells cans of beer long before bars are habitable.
Sorry, friends, to admit there are large crowds in bars,
boxing with each other, making moon eyes
at the bartender from New York, home of crowds.
She feeds the not so loud loudmouths of the crowd,
the one-armed veterans of foreign wars,
the two-armed veterans of domestic wars
who were told along the line to band together
against recent developments: the new meters,
the increasing hardships of people wanting to park.
Myself, I walked a mile to the courthouse
and said hi to the justice. He's a kind captor,
he wants only what's coming to us to come to us.
There's a call to re-register names,
and this is problematic for those who don't like naming.
The courthouse doors shimmy shut. I think of Miss Kansas
who is also Miss Oklahoma and Miss Michigan. She radiates.
In front of the table of judges she tap dances
and plays a zither made of pop cans. Wild, the judges say.
Wild. She's a hit, what can she say. It was only a year ago
she helped the judge campaign for office. Her ad

said vote for him and you can dream of me.

Bike spokes roll a nocturnal river through cordoned-off streets.
It's good to be so very far ahead, good to be the champ.

Winning is a way of dying, a flourish at the end of moment,
the way a patchwork quilt snaps at the edge of the bed,
when, eligible for sleep, you smooth out your nest.
A courier delivers the day's cribbed intelligence report:
read it out of the corner of your eye, a faint star.

Answer to Crowd

You have to ask, what was your war crime?
This is social work, walking around the crowd,
wanting to tell the woman who left hours ago
that her scarf still lies across the bench,
another coworker at a crossroad like yours.
At the end of the world one feels worldier.
Perhaps one should: but not in the locker rooms
below the basketball court full of men and women
showering and folding gym clothes, walking
like sneaks past untouchable versions of themselves,
the woodcarver, the social worker, the pizza chef,
the part-time Jesuit priests who play three-on-three
with nuns every other noon. Behind a pane
of wire glass the guy in charge has a phone
and schedules, a whistle and a pen. That cosmology
is worrisome that says when we shuck our worm garb
we must walk aisles of our own, only nodding
solemn to amigos when we should be rollicksome
like children at our legs, shouting, "Look alive!"
And behind the body, there is not very much.
Blood is made of single things. I've seen photos.
Serological oarsmen, they row through our veins.
But I don't believe I can continue sane,
surrendered to the molestation Death,
who unzips my fly and reaches in.
I find a peace in this, to know caress
will punctuate this age of cell,
these long hours blanking at the eastern wall.

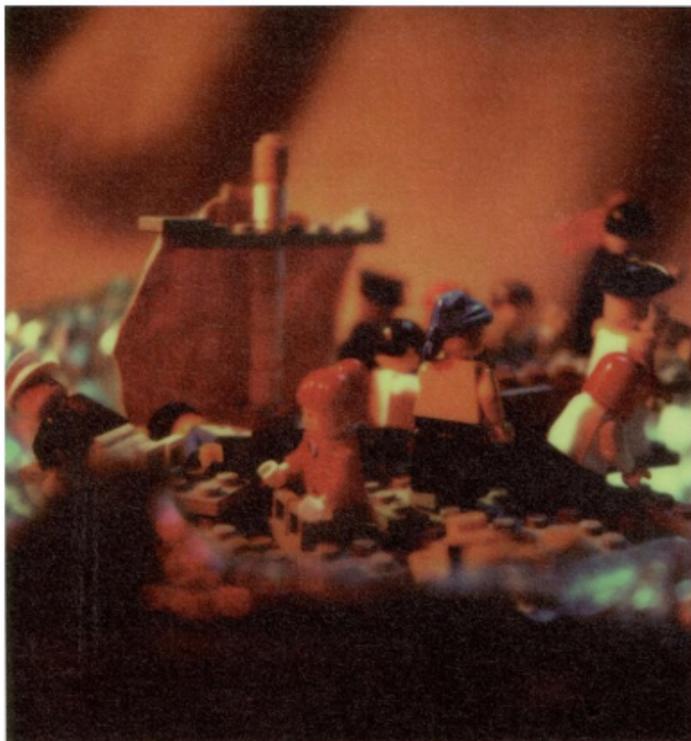


Oath of the Horatii (after David)

1996

Polaroid, 4" x 4"

Courtesy the artist



Raft of the Medusa (after Gericault)
1996
Polaroid, 4" x 4"
Courtesy the artist

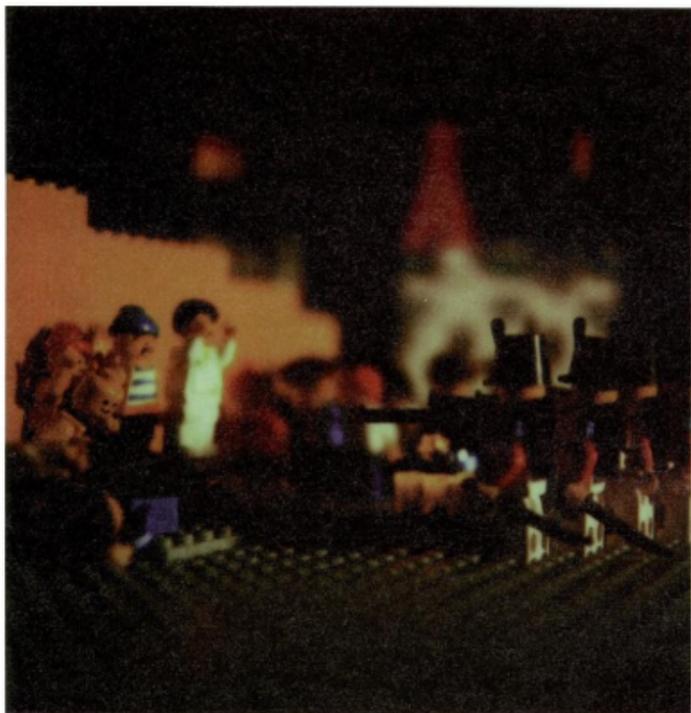


Las Meniñas (after Velasquez)

1996

Polaroid, 4" x 4"

Courtesy the artist



The Third of May (after Goya)

1996

Polaroid, 4" x 4"

Courtesy the artist



Jeff Shoots Tone & Reed with Hi-8 Camera, Los Angeles, 1996
1996

gelatin silver print, 16" x 20"

Courtesy the artist and R. Vance Martin, Fine Art and Photography



The Crew Watches Anna at Work, Los Angeles, 1995

1996

gelatin silver print, 16" x 20"

Courtesy the artist and R. Vance Martin, Fine Art and Photography



Brian Powders Jeff's Balls, San Francisco, 1994

1994

gelatin silver print, 16" x 20"

Courtesy the artist and R. Vance Martin, Fine Art and Photography



Troy Kisses Enrique's Navel, San Francisco, 1994

1994

gelatin silver print, 16" x 20"

Courtesy the artist and R. Vance Martin, Fine Art and Photography



Receiving Orders, Front Line Command Post. Lincoln Way Motel. Gettysburg, PA. 3.29.93.

1995

Cruse output on Kodak Color Paper, 32" x 48"

Courtesy the artists



Surveillance Operations. Mission Control. N.A.S.A.. Houston, TX. 4.25.95.

1995

Cruse output on Kodak Color Paper, 48" x 48"

Courtesy the artists



Damage Assessment — Petroleum Refineries. Houston Shipchannel, Houston, TX. 5.1.95
1995
Cruse output on Kodak Color Paper, 48" x 48"
Courtesy the artists

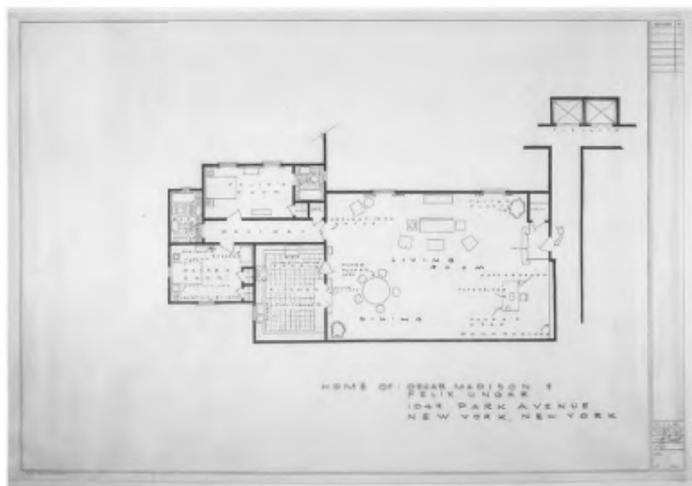


Observing Heavy Materiel Movement, Forward Signal Station, Houston, TX.
5.3.95

1995

Cruse output on Kodak Color Paper, 50" x 48"

Courtesy the artists



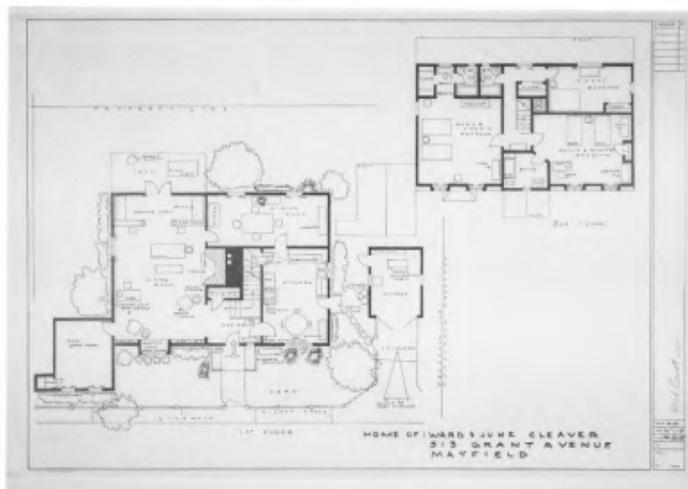
Home of Oscar Madison and Felix Ungar

1992-95

ink/pencil on graph vellum paper, 24" x 36"

Courtesy the artist and Mark Moore Gallery

Photo credit: Paula Goldman, Los Angeles



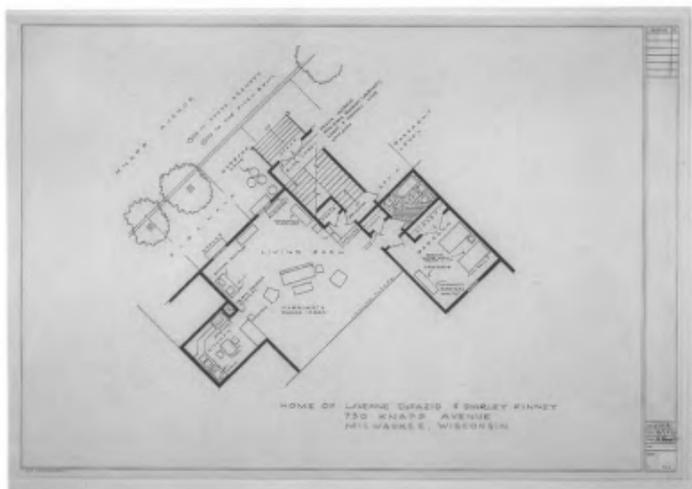
Home of Ward and June Cleaver, (Grant Avenue)

1987-95

ink/pencil on graph vellum paper, 24" x 36"

Courtesy the artist and Mark Moore Gallery

Photo credit: Paula Goldman, Los Angeles



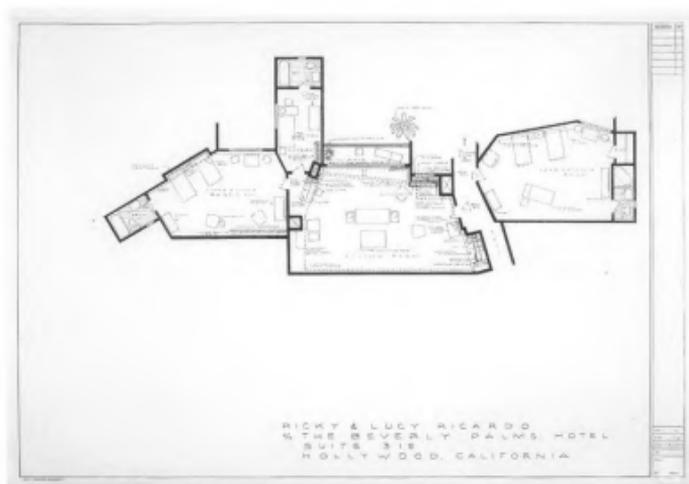
Home of Laverne DeFazio and Shirley Finney

1990-95

ink/pencil on graph vellum paper, 24" x 36"

Courtesy the artist and Mark Moore Gallery

Photo credit: Paula Goldman, Los Angeles



Ricky & Lucy Ricardo, Beverly Palms Hotel Suite
1995

ink/pencil on graph vellum paper, 24" x 36"
Courtesy the artist and Mark Moore Gallery
Photo credit: Paula Goldman, Los Angeles

Odd Rooms

Boudoir, New Orleans

Wild walls before gauze-limned, slatted light accommodate
watchers. The place where dreams work
peoples the river: it tastes human, keeps beasts of trade
and pleasure with saints' bones and fish.

We are a conundrum for the gallery: someone is where we should be.
The stage is bare. Flats echo the waves.

A Tent Between Biarritz and Lourdes

Nothing happens but mud and rock diving.
Between grapes large as oysters and mythological kitsch,
the warm earth shunts to a seam, cuts through
layers of old shrines.
Earth sinks. People build.

Spring House

Add howling
to sea bird blues
and practice it
over folded quilts.
Pad down to the spring house over cool, dusty grass.

Waves lap the riverbed. Planets do shine so.
Sun washes the corrugated tin roof,
sweeps the yard,
scrubs in the river, returns.

Art in Motion: The Chi-Fired Forms of Hsung Hsien

A few falls back, when I ventured into an introductory Tai Chi course with one Margaret Chang, I didn't know she was also Hsung Hsien, the artist. After all, she didn't announce her talent, and looked peaceful and well-rested.

That particular fall, I'd spared no one from the announcement that I was an artist first, and teacher second. I spent most evenings staring at a computer screen in a dark corner of an apartment whose most salient feature was its ability to flood at the first hint of rain. During the day I taught fiction, though this work seemed a distraction from my own writing rather than something intrinsically related to it, just as my home had become the somewhat ugly, somewhat depressing setting for would-be short stories rather than a place containing the same beauty I hoped to express in my work. While various other artist friends drew their *de rigueur* coating of misery from financial crises or drinking problems, I drew mine from a bad back.

Enter Tai Chi, one of the "soft" martial arts which, to an outsider, appears to be something like a dance or moving meditation. I confess that when my husband suggested we take Margaret's course, my first instinct was to laugh: what other New Age suggestions did he have? Crystals? A mantra, perhaps? *Tai* is the Chinese word for peace; *chi* loosely defined means both air and the life force flowing from one thing to another (most often symbolized by the two swirling halves of the *yin/yang*). I make my living with words, but these words at the time hit no particular emotional chord.

But something more empirical did register. I recalled a happier artist friend in San Francisco, a Tai Chi master who had studied with the bodyguard of Chiang K'ai Chek. During Christmas visits, we'd watch him go through his warm-up stretches, alive and healthy amid a backdrop of pressed-together box houses, the muscles along his spine so relaxed and elongated that he could bend over and pull his chin down to his toes. That meant about a foot of extra muscle stretching apart and helping cushion his back vertebrae. I agreed to try Tai Chi, and found myself two weeks later standing in a circle of other people in Margaret Chang's class.

It began without introductions. Margaret put her hands in front of her body as if she were holding a ball, then slowly moved them in and out. "This is the basic movement of Tai Chi," she said. "Out. In. Try to feel the *chi* between your two hands."

Her persona radiated calm. We followed Margaret through a few more exercises, warm-ups, she said, to get the *chi* moving. More the cynic than I'd ever realized, I tried to quench the feeling that I was the victim of someone's Age of Aquarius joke. Margaret introduced us to several of the moves in the sequence we would learn over the next twelve weeks.

The different Tai Chi motions have beautiful names: Play the Guitar; White Crane Spreads Wings; Mustang Ruffles Mane; Fair Lady Works at Shuttles. Most are also euphemisms describing an action taken against an unwanted opponent: when you "Play the Guitar," you are actually grabbing your opponent's arm and preparing to strike him with your shoulder, just as the "Fair Lady's" shuttles are actually her blocks and punches as she spins away from attackers who have come from four different sides.

One of the first moves our class learned was to Wave Hands Like Clouds. Our early renditions looked neither martial nor meditative. Rather, I remember a room full of awkward academics, businesspeople, and housewives clawing in the air like gangly children trying to reach the monkey bars on an unfamiliar playground.

Her voice steadied our jerky motions.

"More slow," she said. "When you play Tai Chi, remember to play slow." Margaret always speaks of "playing" Tai Chi, never "practicing" or "studying" it. We tried again. Move out from the center, she told us, try to imagine seeing your bodies moving in slow motion. For a moment, I felt the first faint glimmer of what it is like to experience one's art not as intellectual ideas but as energy changing forms: an expansion as my right hand moves out, brushes away the clouds on one side, then returns to the center as the left hand reaches out in its turn, two hands alternately opening and closing a circle.

Beautiful, I thought, before the impatience kicked in. Beautiful, but I didn't come for beauty.

"Will this help my back?" I asked Margaret, after the class was over.

"Oh, yes," she said, then added: "I am an artist, you know. I stand all day. Before I began to play Tai Chi, my lower back would always bother me."

Later I learned she paints not as Margaret Chang but (using her Chinese maiden name) as Hsung Hsien. One of Margaret's greatest lessons to me has been to teach, by example rather than by saying it, that we are all artists or at least can be, and that the importance is the joy that artistic expression brings to one's own life rather than how it stacks up in competition; this being the case, the artistic "weight" of Hsung Hsien shouldn't matter.

But her accomplishments are considerable and make her modesty about them even more instructive. Born in Yangchou, an idyllic city on the north bank of the Yangtze River, she is the descendent of a family of artists: a grandfather and an uncle who were well-known painters, a poet father, a mother who played the Chinese flute. At sixteen she was accepted as a student by Prince P'u Hsin-yü, brother of the deposed Last Emperor of China, P'u Yi.

Hsung Hsien may be the single student of this noted painter and scholar to have developed her own style. She studied Western-style oil painting at Northwestern University and the Chicago Art Institute, and after working in oils in the early sixties switched back to traditional Chinese brush, ink, and paper. In the years that followed, teaching and painting (in Chicago and Hong Kong before moving to Houston in 1984), Hsung Hsien has built up a life's work that dances with the same energy and natural beauty as the Tai Chi form she teaches. Like classical Chinese landscape artists, her subject matter is almost always nature, often as elemental as rocks and water. Like many contemporary Western artists, she expresses that nature abstractly. Her art affirms the Tao of the Tai Chi form she teaches: rather than being a clash of East and West, her work seeks out a common bond between two artistic visions which, on the surface, appear completely different.

This common bond comes from seeing different images not as discreet units but as reflections of a common source and common dynamism. If I had known more about either Tai Chi or about Chinese brush painting, the intertwined arts of Hsung Hsien/Margaret Chang would have seemed inevitable rather than surprising. Traditionally, Tai Chi masters have also been masters of some other art form, be it painting, poetry, or music, and that very mastery makes room for what might be labeled (depending on one's view) as either innovation or a different expression and exploration of patterns which are already there.

Another unveiling, another "aha": the way one "reads" a traditional Chinese brush painting involves an apprehension of form not unlike that of the martial artist. The word in Chinese for a painter is, literally, "brushwielder." A single brushstroke softly attacks, changes speed, hooks back; a single curvilinear stroke completes a circle, spins around, punctuates the line preceding it. The strokes become an expression of the brushwielder's *chi*. . . an expression all the more palpable to one who can feel the work rather than merely see it.

I knew little of Margaret's art until our Tai Chi class was over, though I did ask her if she often showed her work around town.

"Not so much," she said. "I would not have time to paint."

By then, I was beginning to feel rather than only see the beauty in the Tai Chi form we were learning. I played Tai Chi outside in a yard facing my neighbor's flower garden when I could; the connection of *chi* between all living things had ceased being a metaphysical idea and instead seemed

merely true. The form became more beautiful when played in beautiful surroundings, and gave something to that natural setting just as I drew energy from it. I felt my partner's body bathed in sunlight as he did the form with me, my every pore tingling in the sensual connection between us, and between the world around us.

I also enjoyed teaching again, precisely because I could *feel* that the short stories I taught reflected patterns — of words, of emotions, of belief systems. Those patterns might play with or against those in our own community, with or against the patterns I hoped to express in my own fiction. The old proverb about teaching what you wish to learn finally charged with meaning. And if it is true enough that not all of my community's energy unfolds into intricate, life-giving patterns — if some of it instead affirms the very separation and despair which I as an artist wish to protest against — then that protest still can only be made by connecting with my community and together creating a tapestry for changing it.

When our class ended, Margaret continued to give my husband and me lessons until we had learned all of the form. We met late Sunday mornings in Hermann Park, that irregularity of green in the recession-scarred inner city, where we could practice on the grass under a grove of towering pines. We both knew she did not have to give us the extra lessons: they were a gift graciously given and graciously received, and as much a gift about how to teach and what sorts of things are worth teaching as about Tai Chi.

One day after our lesson, Margaret invited us back to her home. In the entry-way was a traditional, non-abstract landscape painting done on Chinese scroll paper; Margaret, seeing us looking at it, said the landscape was one of her earliest brushworks, done while she was still a student in Taiwan. Her art seems such a natural part of her life that she neither needs to brag about it or push it aside with false modesty.

Inside, she introduced us to her husband, architect T.C. Chang. We four sat in a main room surrounded by their work, her paintings and his architectural drawings, a living space which was nothing if not an extension of their art. I realized how my own living space had been transformed those last few months. Now we worked with the blinds open so light could shine in; that and a set of homemade bookshelves turned our one-room studio from a dingy box housing stacks of printed matter to a simple but pleasant place of play.

My writing had finally become no more or less important than the art of bringing beauty and integrity to my day-to-day living. . . a slow, joyous activity I have learned through Tai Chi. Taking time to smile is art. Removing the excess from a counter and arranging what is left into a pleasing pattern is art. Reading a story without being able to hear the voices of the characters, see their faces, and feel the energies that inform their lives, is not. And if I believe the latter experience can be an artistic experience potentially more enriching than the first two, I also believe that it is only

possible after one can see enough art in their day-to-day life that they are capable of imaginatively creating new worlds.

On one wall of Margaret's living room were the bright reds and oranges of *Bewitched Mountain*, a work she would soon send to Austin for the opening of *Power of Enduring Presence*, a show featuring the life's works of ten Texas women artists in mid-career which has since toured the state. As I looked at this work and others, I asked what by then was an obvious question: how was her painting art influenced by the art of Tai Chi? Margaret Chang/Hsung Hsien had been asked the question before. She smiled. "I began painting long before I began to play Tai Chi," she said. "Really, it seems I have always been painting — but I did not play Tai Chi until T.C. and I moved from Chicago to Hong Kong."

Yet that same time — when Margaret Chang moved from Chicago to Hong Kong — was not long after Hsung Hsien began to shift from a traditional, representational draw-and-fill style of painting to more abstract modes. She has said that she comes to her work with an intuitive, rather than conceptual, notion of how her lines and colors will spread out and enliven a space. She has said that she now comes to her natural subject matter, be it a cloud or a waterfall, without expectations of how to express that object. Instead, she tries to capture a fusion of the many multiple forms that object reveals . . . something, she notes, that no one taught her in school.

"But what about Tai Chi?" I asked her once more before leaving that day. I know she did not want to give an analytic answer to my question.

"As for the connection between brush painting and Tai Chi," Margaret said, a playful laugh sliding in behind her words, "Well, they are both Chinese."

That evening I looked for some time at a print of her work *Floating Without End*. I supposed an academic might describe it as positive curvilinear strokes against a negative, unpainted space, perhaps something about how such manipulation of space can bring depth to a two-dimensional surface. I don't know — academes never has been a language I speak well. What I saw was circle upon circle of expanding and contracting energy at play, each stroke moving out, then returning to its center and giving birth to something new, these new circles balancing against each other as they gave birth in their turn. I felt such a natural rhythm there, the kind of rhythm so many people in our broken community can't find. I am romantic enough to think this is still the goal of the artist — to find those natural equalizing threads that bring us together and heal us, by letting any reader or viewer who wants to to *feel* how we are joined in the vital dance of humanity. My eyes follow Margaret's lines, and my hands inadvertently trace part of our Tai Chi form: each motion playing softly towards its point of utmost clarity, then changing once again. Leaving me without explanations, and happy.

Astronauts

Gail floats naked on the inflatable chair. The tennis ball, black with months of dirt and dog spit, bobs in the water next to her. The dog paces the edge of the pool, panting, smoky eyes watching her, waiting for her to throw.

She is tired and a little drunk and she just wants to close her eyes, but she gives in. She only has a few more days with Cody, a black lab from a long line of movie dogs. She wishes Cody were her own. It takes so little to make him happy.

"Last one, baby," she says, picking up the ball. She throws it as hard as she can, spilling her beer on herself and almost capsizing the chair. Cody spins. A single bound into the yard, a catch at the apex of a bounce, a celebratory tumble through the dry grass and dirt. Cody trots back to the pool, tags jingling, and drops the ball in the water next to her.

"No more," she says. "Gail needs to rest." The dog cocks his head and eyes her curiously. Gail avoids his gaze and looks across the pool at her sneakers, which sit beside the pile of her clothes on the redwood deck. Inside one of the pink canvas hi-tops are her car keys, tucked there for safe keeping. Staring at the shoes, she wonders for the hundredth time today if she should drive up to Stockton to see Wiley. She could still get there before dinnertime.

Cody barks, a staccato, scolding burst. Gail closes her eyes and again ticks off the reasons she can't go, shouldn't go.

It's over. He needs to understand this.

She's had four or five or six beers.

Her car can't make the trip. The transmission is screwed up. She lost fourth gear yesterday.

She's invited Spencer to come over after work.

She has the test tomorrow morning down in Gilroy. It's her last chance at getting certified, and she wants a good night's sleep.

She finishes her beer and decides the best thing she can do is forget Wiley, forget the test, forget it all for now. Concentrate on the warm sun on skin, the cool tickle of sweat, the sweet haze of alcohol and early summer.

Cody whimpers and pads off to lie in the shade under the rosebushes that line the deck. Gail lets the can roll from her fingers into the water,

where it floats with the other empties, glittering silver flotsam. Within minutes she is asleep.

When Gail had awakened in the Crenshaws' canopy bed that morning, she had lain still for almost an hour, feeling spent and washed-out, ignoring the phone whenever it rang. She finally got up to go to the bathroom, where she swallowed three aspirin. In the kitchen she made a pot of coffee and filled Cody's bowl with water. She did the dishes from last night's dinner, threw out the empty wine bottle, put away the fifth of bourbon she hadn't remembered taking out.

When the coffee was ready she poured it into the mug she'd used every morning for the three weeks she'd been there. It had a photo of Cody on the side: a Halloween snapshot of the dog dressed as an astronaut, sniffing a jack-o-lantern. The costume looked store-bought: a shiny silver suit, NASA patches and all, a plastic helmet (without a face shield, so his snout could poke through), a jet pack on his back. What Gail loved about the mug was not that Cody looked so cute in the costume, but that he looked so serene, like he was calmly weathering this temporary indignity because he knew that soon it would be over and he would be able to run free and fetch balls and chase squirrels. Gail decided to take the mug with her when she left and tell the Crenshaws it broke.

The answering machine in the hallway flashed three new messages. She carried the mug with her, burned her mouth on the first sip, and pressed **PLAY** on the machine. The first message was Rafael, her boss at JavaPlenty, telling her she wouldn't have any shifts for a week, maybe more. The second was Missy Crenshaw, Gail's best friend through high school, soon to become Dr. Crenshaw, calling to see if her parents were home yet. As an afterthought Missy added a quick "Hi, Gail, if you're there." Gail didn't mind; it had been a long time since they'd had much to say to each other.

The third was Wiley, telling Gail he'd taken a bunch of pills the night before and had to have his stomach pumped and he just wanted her to know.

Later she would wonder if she had gone into shock. She felt nothing. Played his message again and still felt nothing. Felt a seed of frustration take hold as she searched the house for her keys, felt that seed sprout into disgust when, car keys in hand, she realized that she was about to do exactly what he wanted her to do. She played the message again and heard something she hadn't heard before, a quiet hitch in his throat just as he hung up, a sound that could have been the beginning of a laugh or a sob.

She sat on the floor in the hallway with her sneakers on but unlaced, running her thumb up and down over the jags of the ignition key. Her eyes drifted to the hanging spider plant which was now a sickly brown, and she realized she hadn't watered anything in two weeks, maybe more. Water the plants, water the flowers, water the lawn, Mr. Crenshaw had said,

pounding his fist into his palm, joking but strangely agitated. Hear me, Gail? Water, water, water.

She sat for a long time, staring at the dying plant and nursing several pangs of failure that all bled together, until Cody jingled into the room like a windchime breeze and blew dog-breath into her face.

Spencer's voice, calling her name. She sleepily calls back to him, then remembers she's not wearing anything. She rolls off the floating chair into the safe embrace of the eighty-degree water.

He walks down the stone steps to the pool, carrying a twelve-pack. To Gail he looks exactly like John Lennon during his "Imagine" phase: long and stringy brown hair, little round glasses, thin sad face. Short and skinny, he's the kind of guy Wiley could put out with one punch. Maybe she should have called someone bigger and tougher, she thinks, just in case, but Spencer's the best friend she has these days.

She watches him closely as he walks down the stairs; he has a problem with one of his ears and his balance often deserts him. Afraid of distracting him, she waits until he is safely seated and swirling his feet in the pool before she says anything.

"Close your eyes a second," she says, breast-stroking to the ladder. "I'm nude."

"They're closed," he says.

Gail climbs out of the pool, her back to him. She knows that Spencer is peeking at her, but she doesn't care. She's just grateful that he's here to keep her company, and besides, it's not like they haven't slept together before. A glimpse of ass isn't such a big deal. Maybe it's even a small way of saying thank you.

As she wraps herself in a towel (royal blue, with a fancy C in emerald stitching), Gail reminds herself that it was her ass that started everything the night Wiley was arrested: a bowling alley in Lodi on fifty-cent beer night. Wiley already in a bad mood, couldn't find his keys earlier and she really rode him about that. A happy butt-wiggling dance back to the seats after she picks up the eight and ten. Crude remarks from the next lane. A retort from Wiley as the pins reset, a glare across the plastic seats, and a volley of fists that ends with a Bud longneck cracked over the scoring desk and a flood of red from a face. Assault with a deadly weapon. No prior record? Nine months. Bang. Gail wraps the towel tighter. She knows she'll lie awake tonight, unless she does something about it.

She walks across the deck to Spencer, kneels and hugs him hello, the smell of roasted coffee still in his hair, in his JavaPlenty T-shirt. He opens a beer and hands it to her.

"You burned," Spencer says.

She shrugs.

"Feeling a little better?"

"Not feeling much." She takes a long, slow sip. "Thanks for coming," she says.

"No big deal," he says. "I like you." It sounds rehearsed, like he was practicing on the drive over. He loves her but he doesn't want to spook her; she pretends she doesn't know, because it's simpler that way.

She walks to the glass-topped table on the deck and sits, rocking back on two legs of the metal chair. "Rafael didn't give me any shifts this week," she says. "Or next. That prick."

"Why do you care?"

"What do you mean?"

"You don't need that job anymore," Spencer says, smiling. "Trucker Girl."

"I failed the driving test." It's the first time she has said it aloud.

"Oh," he says. "Sorry." And suddenly she feels like he must think she's stupid, but she's not, she knows the inspection procedures cold, knows S-cam air brakes inside and out, can double-clutch with drumbeat precision. It's just backing up that's the problem. "You ever drive a tractor-trailer in reverse?" she says, trying to make the words sound casual, fluid, not defensive. "They make you go between all these cones. It's hard. Everything's all backwards."

He shakes his head, raises his beer in sympathy. "What happens now?"

"I get one more chance tomorrow," she says. "If I fuck it up again they might still let me be a dispatcher." But she doesn't want to be a dispatcher, she doesn't want to live in the Sunbeam Tomato Freight dormitory down in Gilroy, she doesn't want to wake up every morning to go be the pretty face in the office. She wants to be out on the road on her own, hauling tomatoes through the western states, doing speed to stay awake, making the twenty-five thousand dollars per season that the brochure promised. She wants to live her life like that Little Feat song, driving her rig from Tucson to Tumacacari, Tehachapi to Tonopah. She wants to drive.

She finishes her beer, throws the empty in the pool. "But I'll probably fuck it up again."

"Hey," he says reassuringly. He stands up quickly and takes a step toward her, but he wavers, arms circling almost comically as he tries to gain his balance. She realizes with calm detachment that she won't be able to catch him if he topples over. So she doesn't move, just watches, hopes for the best.

He rights himself and turns away from her, embarrassed, staring into the pool.

Cody wakes up and barks, then runs into the yard after a squirrel.

Spencer breaks the silence between them. "Tell the Crenshaws to have the pool cleaned," he says. "It's growing cans."

The phone rings while Gail is changing. She yells from the bedroom for Spencer not to pick it up. She is surprised by how loud her voice is.

She walks into the hallway half-dressed and stands in front of the machine as Wiley leaves an agitated message that careens from anger to calm to weepiness to anger again: he can't believe she didn't come see him this afternoon, but maybe she's not answering because she's already on her way, and he doesn't like to get so-fucking-mad but she doesn't realize how bad things have gotten for him and she owes him, she owes him, she has to know that she owes him the simple fucking courtesy of talking to him and it better happen soon.

She walks into the kitchen. "Sounds bad," Spencer says.

She nods and sits at the kitchen table, watches him make the margaritas. Happy drinks, he calls them.

"Do you want something extra? To take the edge off?" he asks.

"Like what?"

He holds up a baggie full of yellow pills. "Percodan," he says. "I bought them off my brother."

"Is it safe?" she asks.

"If we don't take too much."

"Do it," she says.

He drops four into the blender.

Spencer pours the drinks and Gail thinks about the first time the two of them slept together. It was a Tuesday night, she remembers, evening visiting hours at the jail, and she'd really meant to go because she hadn't been to see Wiley in three weeks. She never missed the visits intentionally, but it was an hour and a half through traffic, and it was so hard to see Wiley in there in those orange coveralls, and she hated having to wait in the lounge with all those people coming to visit the real criminals, and that security check — like they really needed to pat her *there*. That night after work she'd gone for a quick drink with Spencer and the rest of the JavaPlenty crew, and whoops, look at the time, oh well, make the next one a double. She knew Wiley had nothing else to look forward to, no one else to think about, no one but her, but he didn't understand what a burden that was. She couldn't live up to that. No one could.

Spencer sets the two salt-rimmed glasses on the table. He moves a chair so he can have her talking to his good side. "Do you think he's dangerous?" he asks.

"Not really," she says, more confidently than she feels.

She can't remember why she and Spencer went into Missy Crenshaw's old bedroom in the first place, or how long they've been in Missy's bed together.

"Pictures," Gail says. There used to be pictures on the wall, photos of her and Missy together as kids, at an apple orchard, at a soccer game, on

their eighth-grade double-date with the Fagelson twins. All gone, replaced by Missy's diplomas, three of them, smartly mounted and framed. By moving her head, Gail can make the moon reflect off the glass of each of them in turn.

"What did you say?" he asks.

"Nothing."

She hears a series of plastic clicks. Spencer, setting the alarm.

"Give me another," she says.

"Another what?"

"Pill."

"No," he says. "I don't want you to die on me."

"I won't die," she says.

"You've had enough."

She crawls under the covers and goes to work on him. When she's done, Spencer, red-faced and sheepish, drops two pills into her hand. She takes one and feeds him the other.

She closes her eyes and rests her head on his chest, feels his fingers trace the rose tattoo on the back of her neck. She whispers to herself, "Happy... happy... happy..." She doesn't know if she means she is, she was, or she will be, if it is a statement, a lament, or a hope, but the sound of the word comforts her, lulls her.

At seven-fifteen Gail is jolted awake by the clock-radio, tuned to a jazz station. Loud. Something with a vibraphone. Spencer doesn't stir at all. But she feels warmth when she puts her hand near his cheek, and she realizes he's not dead, he's just sleeping with his good ear down.

As soon as she sits up she feels icepicks behind her eyes and a burn in her stomach. The bag of pills is nowhere in sight; Spencer must have hidden it. She makes her way to the bathroom and pops four aspirin. In the shower, she runs through the truck inspection procedures she learned from the training manual and keeps missing steps, easy ones. While drying off, she feels herself start to break into a nervous sweat. She almost decides to forget the test, crawl back into bed, hide, but she takes another look into the medicine cabinet and sees a prescription bottle labeled MARY CRENSHAW. KLONOPIN. AS NEEDED FOR ANXIETY. She shakes a few into her hand. They're small, so she swallows two. After she dresses, she puts three more tablets in the pocket of her cutoffs, just in case.

She walks softly into the laundry room, where Cody sleeps on a fluffy tartan dog bed, and sits down next to him, watches him breathe, in and out, in and out. His ears twitch when she scratches his head. "Cody," she says quietly. "Wake up, Cody." She pats his side and he opens his dark eyes, looks at her dreamily. "You want to tell me good luck, baby?" she says. Cody sneezes and falls back asleep.

In the kitchen she makes coffee and pours it into a travel mug. The unrinsed blender sits on the counter in a dried margarita puddle. Broken glass in the sink, pizza scraps on the table, sticky dog tracks across the floor.

The phone rings but she just takes a deep breath and walks out the front door into the sun and the dew and the mist of the tick-tick-ticking sprinklers she left on all night. The lawn gleams and there are puddles all along the blacktop. She climbs into her car, a blue Fiesta she's been driving since high school. She'll have to back out of the U-shaped driveway because Spencer parked his Beetle facing hers, only a foot or two of space separating the cars. There's resistance when she tries to shift into reverse, so she forces it. More resistance, and she hears a grinding noise, then a metallic whine. Still not in gear. She tries again: up off the clutch, then down, shift, grind, whine. Again. Again, until she pulls back on the stickshift so hard she feels a twinge in her elbow. She curses the car. No fourth gear, no reverse, but it better get her to Gilroy. Now.

She shifts into first and tries to steer around his car. When the bumpers meet she gives it a little more gas, trying to nudge it out of the way. Fortunately Spencer left it out of gear, so it slowly rolls backwards, and a few feet later Gail is free. In her rearview mirror she watches the Beetle ease forward again, settling comfortably back where it had been. She is so focused on the gentle motion of Spencer's car that she is slow to realize she has gone off the driveway and is leaving a deep muddy track in the Crenshaws' sculpted lawn. Can't worry about it now, she thinks, and she drives on.

When she gets to the freeway, she turns on her hazard lights because the Fiesta can only do forty these days. The transmission slips whenever she tries to accelerate hard. Somewhere south of San Jose, in one of those moments before the gears catch, with nervous heat running up her spine and sweat dripping down her sides, she dry-swallows another one of Mrs. Crenshaw's pills and prays: Please God, just let me get there. I need this.

The Sunbeam receptionist sits behind an old desk that looks like it was scavenged from a school. Around the edges of the blotter, Gail can see memorials of crushes hacked into the wood: KD + CS. WT AND AB FOREVER.

"I'm here to take the test," Gail says. "Bud's expecting me."

"Oh," the receptionist says, looking up. "You're back." She calls Bud on the intercom, then looks at Gail and says, "Have a seat. There's coffee if you want it."

Gail fills a styrofoam cup with coffee, black, and sits in a green naugahyde chair riddled with cigarette burns. She picks up a news magazine from a box on the floor and tries to read an article, but her vision blurs around the edges and she finds herself locking onto one or two words at a time, not absorbing them but not able to move on. She leafs through, looking at the pictures, and stops on a two-page spread in tropical colors. On the left is a toucan sitting in a tree, its beak open so it looks like it's

smiling; on the right is a Happy Couple in bright bathing suits frolicking on a deserted beach. In neon red letters across the bottom it says *Lose yourself in Belize*. That doesn't sound like a bad idea, she thinks. But as she looks at the man and woman in the magazine she starts to feel a dread that she can't account for, like some terrible thought is bubbling up in the tar pit of her brain, and then the bubble surfaces and bursts and rains black all over her. Spencer. If Wiley shows up, will he still be there? Did he go out to the pool for a morning swim and fall down the steps? Did he lose his balance in the shower, where Wiley will find him, unconscious, naked and wet?

Someone touches her on the shoulder and she jumps, dropping her coffee into the box of magazines. She looks up and sees a lanky man with a red goatee and a baseball cap that says YOU PISS ME OFF in block letters.

"I'm Jim," he says. "Bud's busy, so I'm going to give you the test."

"Sorry about the coffee," she says. Her tongue feels wrong. Swollen.

"Brenda will clean it up."

"Clean it up yourself, Jim," Brenda says from behind the desk.

Jim looks at Gail. He has greedy eyes, she thinks. "You ready?" he asks, and she nods.

He leads her out the back door, onto the paved lot they use for the driving course. As they walk toward the tractor-trailer, he says to her, "We don't get many pretty girls wanting to drive."

She says nothing.

"Be nice to have a pretty face around here, though," he goes on.

"Brenda looks like a horse. You got a boyfriend?" He moves closer to her, their arms almost rubbing, and she catches an acid whiff of Aqua Velva.

She knows how to play his game, could put on a real show if she wanted to, but she's tired and the stomach burn is coming back and she can't quite focus her eyes and she's just too tired to play with him. "Yeah, I have a boyfriend," she says. "He just got out of jail. Assault with a deadly weapon."

Jim doesn't miss a beat. He whistles through his teeth, leans in closer. "Was it you?" he asks, half-whispering.

"No."

"I'd never do anything like that to you," Jim says. They stop in front of the rig. "Pretty girl like you could get certified in about five minutes," he says. He nods up at the cab.

She almost agrees. She wants to drive so badly, and she figures she's so numb right now that she'd hardly notice him. But she feels a calm warmth bloom inside her head and she knows she can beat this test, could take this rig in reverse down Lombard Street if she wanted to. "Cut the shit, Jim," she says.

"Have it your way," he says, pulling away, his eyes narrowing. He takes off his cap, smoothes his thinning hair. "Start with the inspection."

Deep breath. She knows the drill, knows it cold. Check the hoses, check the oil, check the coolant. Check the belts and the clutch, the signals and the

horn. Drive shaft, air brakes, tires and rims. There's a rhythm to it, a groove, feel the patterns and forget your nerves. Shock absorbers, slack adjustors, torque arms, mounts. Mounting bolts, locking jaws, kingpin, and so on. It's a breeze. She climbs into the cab and the engine growls all around her and she feels more powerful, more in control, than she can ever remember.

"All right," Jim says from the passenger seat. "Now back out of here and follow the yellow lines through the cones. And I want you to pretend that every single one of those cones is a member of my family."

It's reverse time but that's cool, she still has the rhythm, still has the groove, and when she grips the shift she hears the Little Feat song in her head: *If you give me weed, whites, and wine, and you show me a sign, I'll be willin' to be movin'*. I'm willing, she thinks, I'm willing and I'm moving. She drops it into reverse and starts back, smoothly, smoothly, no problem. She checks her mirrors, she's drifting a little, no problem, turn into the drift, get the trailer righted, turn back, no problem. She's on a roll, she's rolling, she can do this in her sleep, and a month from now she'll be waking up in her rig just off Highway 58 in Tehachapi with Lowell George singing to her as she watches the sun rise over the fields of windmills.

"Congratulations," Jim says. "You just flattened my fucking grandmother."

She winds her way up the Los Altos hills, the Fiesta's engine slipping almost every time she hits the gas. Sometimes, instead of backing off so the gears can catch, she stomps the pedal harder, making the engine scream. She wants to hear the noise.

The pint bottle of bourbon she bought in Gilroy is in the passenger seat, half empty. All she wants to do is get back to the pool, to Cody and his tennis ball, to the floating chair where she'll be able to sit alone and drink and enjoy the warmth of the sun and the fruits of the Crenshaws' medicine cabinet. She'll call Wiley and promise something vague, buy herself some time.

Gail turns into the driveway. Spencer's car is gone, but now there are two others: in the open garage, the Crenshaws' convertible. In the driveway, Wiley's black Plymouth Fury.

Before her foot touches the brake she remembers that the house is a mess, that the Crenshaws, who have always trusted her, always given her a place to stay, have come home to dead plants, a pool full of beer cans, tire tracks across the lawn. And now Wiley is there and she doesn't know if he's sitting in the living room crying or if he got hold of a gun and has taken them hostage, but one thing she does know, they're all waiting for her. And she knows that the gas pedal, the real patron saint of lost causes, could solve all of this.

She wonders if she should ring the doorbell or just walk right in.

* * *

The four of them sit around the table by the pool. Mrs. Crenshaw sips iced coffee and Kahlua from the astronaut mug and stares off at the brown hills in the distance. Gail and the two men sip tequila sunrises that Mr. Crenshaw mixed. Cody races around in the yard, chasing squirrels, snapping at bugs. Birds are chirping.

"I'm a reasonable man," Mr. Crenshaw says. "I don't expect the house to be perfect if we come home early. But this is too much. It raises serious questions." He finishes his drink, rattling the ice in the glass to get the last few drops. He pours himself another.

Gail nods. She glances quickly at Wiley. His head looks too large for his frame now that he has no hair. He must have shaved it that day; three or four tiny bandages stained with pinpoint of red decorate his scalp, covering the nicks. He sits tall in his seat, composed, looking waxen in the bright sun.

"It looks like there was a party here last night," Wiley says, in a flat, uninflected voice she hardly recognizes.

"Yes it does, Wiley," Mr. Crenshaw says. "A real hoedown."

This feels wrong to her, like it's happening on a sound stage, everything and everyone too quiet, too detached. She wonders if it's just her, if she's too high on the meds and the booze.

"It's rude to bring strangers into other people's homes," Wiley says, tapping his glass on the table.

She wonders if he found Spencer here. If he did something to him.

"I'm sensing a pattern of irresponsible behavior," Mr. Crenshaw says.

Wiley turns to the other man. "Me too," he agrees. "Gail isn't fulfilling her responsibilities these days at all."

Either Wiley is up to something, she thinks, or he is back on his lithium. Maybe both. Even the Crenshaws seem strange, precariously calm. "I'm sorry," Gail says. "I let some things get away from me."

"Would you like to talk about it, Gail?" Mr. Crenshaw asks.

"We'd like to help," Mrs. Crenshaw says. She puts down the coffee mug and drops her hand, limp and sweaty, on Gail's bare arm.

"What's going on here?" Gail says quietly.

"Your friend Wiley has been very worried about you," Mr. Crenshaw says. "And, from the sound of it, for good reason. We all think you might need some help."

Gail doesn't know what he told them, but it had to have been a lie. She's not the one who ended up in the emergency room. But she can't bring herself to mount a defense. She's too tired, deflated, sunken. She stands up on shaky legs. "This is too weird," she says. "I'm leaving."

"Suit yourself," Mr. Crenshaw says.

"We're not saying you're a bad person, Gail," Mrs. Crenshaw says.

"No," Mr. Crenshaw says, swirling his drink. "But if that's your attitude, we have to let you go. Sever the ties. It's not healthy for us."

"We've done a lot for you," Mrs. Crenshaw says, on cue. "And we're not getting the respect we think we deserve."

"You're burning bridges here, Gail," Wiley says, a smile forming at the corner of his mouth.

Mr. Crenshaw drains his glass, spits an ice cube into the bushes.

"We've said our piece," he says. "My guess is that you two have things to talk about. Which we'd prefer you did elsewhere." He slides a check across the table to Gail. "Bon voyage," he says.

Mrs. Crenshaw mutely helps Gail gather her things and opens the front door for her. Wiley waits in the driveway, smoking a cigarette. Can you please walk out there with me? she wants to ask. Please? But the front door closes behind her, and she knows that the Crenshaws will be just as happy without her, a Happy Couple with a house and a dog and a pool and a daughter who will soon be able to write them prescriptions.

Wiley leans on his car. Gail, her face burning, specks of light dancing in her field of vision, says, "Are you trying to scare me? If you are, can we get it over with?"

"Don't be silly," he says. "I love you." He pats his chest, his legs, as if to say, Look, no weapons.

Cody prances up to them and drops a tennis ball at Wiley's feet. Wiley kicks it into a dense patch of pachysandra. The dog runs after it, noses through the green.

"I'm hitting the road next week," she tells him. "You know, hauling tomatoes." The lie comes easily.

"I want you to do some thinking while you're out there," he says.

"While you're out there alone."

She looks into Wiley's eyes which are almost all pupil, only a razor-thin ring of blue wreathing the black, and she knows she is staring into the eyes of a dead man. If he's not dead yet, he will be soon. "I don't need to think," she says. "I've made up my mind." She climbs into the driver's seat of the Fiesta.

"You'll be back," he says through the open window, leaning close to her.

A drop of sweat falls from his naked head and suddenly she feels sorry for him. "Please don't get your hopes up," she says. "I couldn't live with that." She turns the key and the engine coughs to life.

"I'll be here," Wiley says, smiling, rocking back on his heels.

Only then does Gail notice she has parked right behind Wiley's car, too close, the bumpers almost kissing. She leans her head on the steering wheel. "You have to move your car," she says without looking up. "I can't back out."

Spencer puts two plates on the table. The flounder is a little burned, but that's all right. Gail can't taste much because the pills have made her mouth numb.

He opens a window and tries to wave the smoke out of the apartment. "So what happens now?"

"First I'll get my car fixed," she says. "Then I think I'll drive to Belize."

He sits down. "Why Belize?"

"It sounds like a happy place," she says. "It's the name. You know, like 'Belize Navidad.' Happy."

"You have enough money?"

"For now."

He lifts a forkful of fish halfway to his mouth, then stops. "Want company?" he asks.

"Not really," she says. She stares at the dinner he has cooked for her. "Thanks, though."

Later, under the galaxy of glow-in-the-dark decals on Spencer's bedroom ceiling, she changes her mind. She does want company.

And they'll drive. As fast as they can. Like two astronauts trying to reach escape velocity.

It's three a.m. and the sprinklers are still on, their steady beats washing away the clink of the flowerpot as Gail takes the key from under it. The side door opens without a creak. Inside, she punches a keypad (the code spells out CODY DOG) and a winking red light turns cool green. In one hand she has a Bacon Treat, in the other, a small piece of duct tape to stop the jingle. She walks toe-to-heel toward the laundry room, rubber soles quiet on the hardwood. "Hey baby," she whispers. "Hey, baby."

Blue Seville

Enough of that old invincible sapper, Thirst,
Relentlessly undermining the unheld
Spell of Sleep! It is at an hour such as this
That one could almost

Succumb to Breton's proclamation:
The simplest surrealist act consists of going
Out into the street, revolver in hand,
And firing at random

Into the crowd as often as possible.
In the mirror of the miserable armoire,
Where there might once have stood a modest boy,
My salty torso

Hovers like a dimly lit chandelier. My
Humorless twin drinks beside the orange sink:
A sultry friar, sheened in tangerine,
With a glass up

To his lips, a glowing beard of bronze moss,
And a shameless hard-on in the almost
Aimless blades of light. The inevitable
Bright morning,

Patient vanquisher, stands just outside the panes
And mullions, has installed itself outside
The unusually high, heavily curtained windows
Above the bed.

The planes here, including those in the mirror,
Are as complex as a Velasquez interior.
In one, you lie across the bed, gathering
Its electric

Blue counterpane into your downturned face,
Sprawled—I think—like an unprotected corpse.
Once there might have been a romantic coupling,
Once there might have been

A trellis of pink, or a field of turquoise.
But the bells this morning already seem to know
Where we are, how I want to take you, that I burn
To split you at the heart.

The Darker Side of Ovid

America's present need is not heroics but healing; not nostrums but normalcy; not revolution but restoration.

— Warren Harding, 1920

At fifteen, in the late 70's, I went to a boarding school for 240 girls and their horses (should they choose to bring them) on 660 acres of land in the hills of Connecticut. I'll call it Prescott's. It was the sort of place Hong Kong businessmen, Park Avenue socialites, and deposed dictators sent their daughters. I went there because I knew I couldn't live up to my father's legendary detonation of the chemistry lab at Pomfret. At Putney, my mother's school, everyone had to spend a semester shoveling out cows' stalls in order to graduate, and I did not find the role of ersatz farmhand appealing. Prescott's seemed as good a place as any: my family had no prior connection to it, and it looked pretty "normal." Mostly I thought that going to boarding school would be fun — no parents, but food worthy of hyperbolic complaint — and I felt lucky that leaving home at fifteen was the custom.

As my mother and I stared down at the discreet stickers from various European airlines on my new roommate's neat, matching luggage, Mum said, "She might be a foreigner. You should be very nice to her so she can adjust faster." I had caught a glimpse of my new roommate, whom I'll call Elisa, as she and her mother headed out the door to run errands. Elisa was tall and blonde — taller and blonder than I — and she had a sharp, insouciant nose. She scared me.

As it turned out, Elisa was not a foreigner — she was from Grosse Pointe, Michigan — but she was very pleased to be mistaken for one. She had just returned from England aboard the QE2, where she'd felt compelled to eat caviar every day, though she didn't much like it. Her father had paid a lot for the cruise, and she intended to make sure he got his money's worth.

We got along well, partly because we had both suffered from a serious illness: I from juvenile rheumatoid arthritis (or so my doctor thought at the time), she from toxoplasmosis, which had left her blind in one eye. We agreed gravely that these experiences made us more "mature" than our classmates. Later she and I would figure out that we were the only new girls in the school who'd requested someone "not too rowdy" on our roommate preference sheets.

On our first day, the headmistress told the new girls that everybody in the school belonged to one of two clubs, the Suns or the Dials. The clubs' names had originated in 1911 when a student mistook a salt shaker for a sundial, or so legend had it.

We declared our intentions by wearing a ribbon around our necks at all times, yellow if we wished to be a Sun and purple if we wished to be a Dial. Elisa had to be a Dial because her mother, an alumna, had been one. I couldn't tell the difference between the two clubs, so I chose to follow Elisa into Dialhood. Always good at following the rules, I wore my ribbon even in the shower, where the purple dye ran all over my body.

We declared our abiding commitment to the club of our choice by writing an essay on the subject for the handbook test, a requirement in which high scores would result in lots of points, and a difficult task since the clubs appeared indistinguishable from one another and their purpose was unclear. I remember thinking that I could substitute "Ivory Girl" for "Dial" throughout my essay and it would still make perfect sense.

Points could also be earned by doing menial tasks for seniors. Somewhere in the senior dorm the Club Heads kept a list of how many points each of us had. The major opportunity for earning points came from performing skits for the New Girl Show. When I said I didn't feel like participating in the New Girl Show, I was told that I might have to wait until the beginning of senior year to be inducted, just like poor Jane Bird Wiley, who had finally become a Dial, shrieking with gratitude, at the previous all-school assembly. I might even have to wait forever.

I had a soft voice, a large, ill-concealed bald spot where I'd impulsively cut a huge snarl out of my hair right before school started, and I was as skinny as most of the anorexics floating around. I couldn't survive being pitied like Jane Bird Wiley. I needed points.

I was cast as an extra in a few skits orchestrated by the enterprising, outgoing Meg Floon, a new girl down the hall from me, and the seniors' darling. It was not enough participation, though, and I thought I'd have to wear that faded purple ribbon around my neck until I was thirty, when I'd run into other alumnae and immediately offer to perform menial tasks for them, all in the hopes of adding a few more points to my tally. "Please," I'd say, "my husband, children, and I would love to clean out your attic next Saturday." The purple ribbon would be an unappetizing gray, and my husband would frown at it and look worried.

If the Old Girl Show exemplified the gradual desuetude of Prescott's collective memory (it was a series of skits handed down from year to year that were wildly incomprehensible, featuring the quirks of teachers long since departed and comic dramatizations of forty-year-old scandals), the New Girl Show drew its inspiration from the wellspring of our shared cultural history, 70's television. A neighbor sang that she wished she were an Oscar Mayer weiner. A girl from another dorm played the Fonz, walking into a simulacrum of a Prescott's classroom and crooning, "Heyy," much to

the initial alarm of the faux teacher, who soon succumbed to his charms. My biggest part was to play one of twenty people dancing in a discotheque until Meg Floon made her entrance à la John Belushi, as Samurai Disco King, and chopped us all up. I died a quick, dignified death, one that would garner few points.

After the New Girl Show ended, the headmistress took the stage. She said quietly that a senior had been kidnaped, and the room stilled. (We all knew that this was not just any senior, but a brilliant one for whom the school had hopes.) The police had set up a temporary office in the gymnasium, where we were all to go for questioning. All 240 girls trooped silently out of the auditorium toward the gym. Our only light came from the revolving blue and red atop a police car.

Inside the gym, while a policeman guarded a door, the headmistress explained that we would be called into the basement in groups of three or four for questioning. We were to answer all questions completely and honestly, no matter how irrelevant they seemed. After all, someone's life might be at stake. A tearful new girl asked the headmistress to lead us in a prayer for the kidnaped girl, and, solemnly, the headmistress did so.

While we waited to be called, rumors spread like spores. If you had anything at *all* illegal in your room — a hot-pot for heating water, even a bottle of aspirin — you'd be expelled. The administration had decided to purge the school of unwanted elements after our parents had paid tuition. Wails and sobs sprang up around the room. Elisa and I looked at each other. We'd hidden a bottle of aspirin in between our room's garbage can and liner. I told myself that it was *her* aspirin, not *mine*. *Fingerprints*, surely, would support my case.

At last, when there were only about 40 girls left, my name was called, along with those of two seniors I didn't know. The stairs and hallway were dark. One of the seniors knocked on a door. "Surprise!" shouted the Club Heads as they opened it. "You're a Dial!" They were dressed entirely in purple in a room filled with purple balloons and lit only with purple candles. They shut the door in our faces.

The seniors ushered me down the hall as they explained that they were my Club Girls, nobody had been kidnaped, the seniors had started all the rumors about getting expelled, the policemen were a ruse, we were going to a party at the senior dorm, there had never been any such thing as points. All new girls were admitted to the clubs at the same time. Jane Bird Wiley had long been a Dial, her recent induction an ornamentation for our benefit.

When I told my mother about the Initiation (as I now knew it was called), she was angry. She phoned my advisor and complained. But mostly I felt relief — I hadn't needed the points I didn't have. I was a Dial without effort, no longer marked by a purple ribbon and a future of strained subservience.

As Thanksgiving approached, Elisa said over and over that she didn't want to go home. She hated her stepfather, Robert. Her mother had married Robert two summers ago, while Elisa had been away at an outdoor survival camp. When Elisa returned home from having spent three days in the woods by herself, Robert had moved in. Besides being generally icky, he had a bad case of shingles which had failed to respond to conventional treatment. He wore a power pack that sent electrical shocks to his lesions, providing temporary relief but making him twitch erratically.

"He married her for her money," Elisa whispered after lights-out. (We confessed most of our secrets to each other in the dark.) "He's never really worked. He's a loser." Elisa's father, on the other hand, was a retired Marine Corps general who, like many generals, was nicknamed Bud. Bud was also an adept stock picker, able to marshal the market's forces to do his bidding.

Elisa poked through the closet we shared with our next door neighbors. She held up a dress. "Can you believe Merrill's taste is this hideous?" she said.

I grunted.

She held up a pair of huaraches. "And how about these?" She giggled. "Those are mine."

"Oh, Amy, no," she replied, flinging them back to the floor.

In the fall and spring, the administration commanded that we wear kilts to classes. In the winter, we could wear any pants except jeans. These uniform requirements seem minimal, but in fact the real uniform requirements — those silently instituted by our peers — were a good deal more stringent. We had to wear blucher shoes or moccasins made by L. L. Bean — and only by L. L. Bean — as well as Lanz nightgowns. Not to wear these items meant one was in danger of being a "wombat," slang for a local person who worked in the kitchen. The only other way out of the uniform was to be one of the *über-cool*. Ginnie Thorsen, for example, wore cleats all the time.

Degrees of coolness were rigidly upheld and easy to identify. The dining room served as a diagram for social power. Just inside the door sat the African-American students who had been sent to Prescott's by A Better Chance, which took promising students out of the inner city and enrolled them in boarding schools, where they associated only with each other, out of choice — and because they had no other option. Diagonally across the room from them, nearest the dessert table, sat the seniors who had been elected to office — the Big Six — and those who ran the major clubs. At the table behind them sat the juniors who were destined to take their places when they graduated, and behind the juniors were the sophomores who would take over their niche. As sophomores, then, we knew our future places. We could predict which colleges would accept us.

For many of my schoolmates, academics took a distant third to riding and seeing how much trouble they could cause without getting expelled. Usually these hijinks involved getting caught drunk or high, and then having one's father volunteer a large donation to the endowment fund. But a Christmas wreath made entirely out of tampons and presented to a male houseparent could also cause a solemn meeting with the student judiciary committee. My favorite incident involved three Venezuelan girls who made many telephone calls to their native country and charged them all to the school bookstore. Needless to say, the mystery of the inflated phone bill was easily solved, and soon the girls were flying back to South America. By the time I graduated, fifteen percent of my class had miscalculated the consequences of their amusement and been expelled.

That first year, my Latin teacher, Ms. Tynan, was a source of deep, daily terror. I had a grand total of two classmates. The three of us were convinced that Ms. Tynan made us translate "the dirty parts" of Ovid's *Metamorphosis* for her own debauched enjoyment. We excelled at resisting her efforts to teach us anything. We memorized the English translation from library books, and I glued the pages of my textbook shut and then expressed dismay at the publisher's defective goods. I received tests back with giant red "x"s marked through whole pages. We all got "D"s for the year. In my yearbook, Ms. Tynan wrote, "Remember the darker side of Ovid. What will provoke your metamorphosis?"

I abandoned Latin.

My chemistry teacher liked to ask trick questions, such as "what is life?" When someone sputtered out the answer in the textbook about growth and reproduction and organic processes, she'd shake her head and say, "No, no, people. Nobody knows what life is." (She was a devout Christian Scientist.) Her tests were so difficult that she gave 75 point curves, handy for those of us who'd entirely given up doing our homework out of despair. Still, I somehow managed to receive a "C-" instead of a "C."

At the end of the year, my class rank was forty-eighth out of sixty-five. My social status in the dining room — I sat with girls destined for Ivy — did not square with my rank, and so I worried about who I "really" was.

At Prescott's, where much of the student body was gifted in the art of snobbery, the French department was as large as the English department. It boasted native speakers from France. A lone Cuban exile whom we knew only as "Señor" taught the Spanish classes. Every day of my junior year, Señor asked us, "¿Tú fumas?" He would collect the same "si"s and "no"s and then brandish his pack of Cambridges. Then there would be a long pause and, sometimes, he would ask us once again, "¿Tú fumas?" Grades at the end of the term seemed random, except in one case.

Naz always got the "A" she deserved. She could deliver a lecture in Spanish about the hazards of smoking. She could pull tenses out of the air. Naz was the only girl with a bodyguard. Her father was the Shah of Iran;

this was during the Hostage Crisis. Our school had been chosen for her education not because of its academic reputation or social cachet but because it was a relatively obscure place in the countryside that was also a half hour's drive to an international airport. One day I asked Naz why she was so good at Spanish. She shrugged. She said it was just like Farsi. She dropped out six months later. A fellow classmate saw her in Egypt shortly thereafter. Naz had had a nose job so that she no longer looked exactly like her father.

We never got to Naz's father in American History, which ended in 1962, the year before we were born. But we learned, among other things, that we should select our future husbands solely according to their intelligence, because it was easier to teach the nuances of good manners to smart children. We rushed through those distasteful, dull events called wars, learning only first battles, decisive battles, and last battles. Presidents made mistakes. Warren Harding, for example, had the effrontery to pervert the very idea of normality: his campaign slogan, "Return to Normalcy," led the onslaught against a perfectly fine word, "normality," now largely disappeared from our language and culture. There was no excuse for such untoward behavior, not even ignorance.

Leila Howard, one of the *über-cool*, believed that Malka Youngstein was spoiled, because her allowance was seventy-five dollars a week. Leila's allowance was seventy-five dollars a month. My allowance was twelve dollars a month, so I thought they both were lucky. Elisa's allowance was the profits of a soybean farm her father had purchased in her name. The tenant farmers sent her quarterly reports discussing the crop.

Bud had a stock portfolio for each of his children, which he kept in their names in a file cabinet. When Elisa's brother Sandy got accepted to Berkeley Law School, Bud said he couldn't go — there were too many hippies. So Sandy walked into his father's study and took the file bearing his own name. He attended law school, passed the bar, practiced for one day, moved in with a belly dancer, and started collecting Bentleys. Bud revised the number of children he'd raised.

The summer before our senior year, I went to visit Elisa in Grosse Pointe. She and her sister Susan picked me up at the airport. (Susan was the sister who'd taken too many drugs in her twenties and then sworn herself to a life of purity in her thirties. She spent most of her time in her father's basement throwing the I-Ching.) Although Susan was pressed into duty for trips outside of Grosse Pointe, Elisa blithely drove us around the neighborhood in her mother's car without a license. And when we parked at the country club or grocery store or shopping mall, she left the key in the ignition. Her mother's car was simply a means to an end.

We stayed at her father's house because her mother's house was full of guests attending the Republican National Convention. Elisa gave me a tour.

The house was large enough to get lost in, though Elisa's father hadn't put much energy into decorating it. One room contained nothing but four identical sofas. "He believes in buying in bulk," she declared. Next to the milk in the refrigerator sat a neatly folded fur pelt. "In case the I.R.S. stops by," she said. "Daddy writes off all the household expenses by claiming this is a trading post."

Her father did a lot of trading. For arranging the purchases of a fleet of Cadillacs for an Arab sheik, he had been paid with another Cadillac — as he expected — and with a tiger cub, which he had not. (After uncrating the surprise and feeding it several steaks, he donated it to the zoo.) The Cadillac was handy for travelling through neighborhoods which might greet the Rolls Royce with inappropriate attention.

Bud kept a collection of license plates from various countries on the wall of his garage. He changed the plates at his whim. One day, when the Rolls Royce had been adorned with Iranian plates, we headed through the tunnel to Canada. Bud wanted to check on an investment; Elisa wanted to check on some argyle socks that she was having knit to match her favorite kilt. The Iranian plates were convenient because the Canadian police wrote parking tickets for Windsor and Michigan plates only, so Bud could park as he chose.

Unfortunately, there were no parking spaces. "Drive around the block while I drop in on my broker," he said to me. "Elisa shouldn't do it because she doesn't have a license, and we're not at home."

I looked at the gleaming walnut dashboard, remembered the exhortation not to slam the car door, wondered whether Bud thought insurance was a necessary expense, pictured a slow-motion crash. "Um. I'm not a very good driver yet," I said. "Sometimes if the window's down, the noise of the wind scares me and I drive away from it."

"Stay here and move it if you have to," Bud replied. "We'll double-park."

For a weekend every fall, Elisa joined her mother on Fishers Island for pheasant hunting. She always returned jubilant, carrying a precious cargo wrapped tightly in newspaper — her best pheasant. She would present the pheasant to her current favorite teacher, warning her to be on the lookout for stray shot.

As a senior, I was convinced that math was a language I no longer needed to study. Miss Tregillus told us that hyperbolas existed on bridges, but so what? I knew I would never build a bridge. I was more interested in the secret life I imagined for Miss Tregillus. I knew she'd spent some time teaching in Greece, so I assigned her a tragic affair involving a rustic local, loving and simple, who died unexpectedly at sea after a night of too much ouzo and amor. His name was Sophocles. He called her "My Little Trigger" in a charming Greek accent. She called him "My Formidable Sophocles."

Unfortunately, Trigger had recovered enough from her loss to those thirty years ago to prepare many exams, tests, quizzes, and homework assignments for her students.

During one test, I knew that I was supposed to figure out whether the first part of the problem was a thirty-, forty-five-, or ninety-degree angle using a formula called HERO. I couldn't remember what HERO was or what it stood for, but if I could discover the correct angle, I could do the rest of the problem. I looked over at Miss Tregillus sitting primly behind her desk in her neat sweater set. I thought of her efficiency. When she taught, she buzzed around the room with the keen obliviousness of a fly. Had she been in a lazy, 30° dalliance when she'd made the test, a compromising these-students-must-surely-have-paid-attention-sometimes 45° mood, or in a stiff-backed, ramrod, no-holds-barred 90° snit? Her eyeglasses twinkled in the light. She turned the page of the book she was reading with great precision. I decided to go with 90° and did the rest of the problem on that premise. Later, after I'd gotten the problem right but Miss Tregillus nevertheless (wisely) insisted on some tutoring, she complimented me for having performed HERO in my head. I smiled shyly. I still have no idea what HERO is.

That year, my friends and I founded The Mezzanine Club on the library's second floor. Our goal was to take over public space and claim it as our own. We succeeded in driving all the other students out of the library in the afternoons, and we gave each other awards for a stern talking-to by the exasperated librarian. After the librarian had gone home for the day, we played Earth, Wind & Fire records on the turntable meant for dry readings of Shakespeare or remedial French pronunciation. We danced and sang. We ate box after box of Ritz crackers stolen from the dining room and made tea in an illegal hot-pot. We giggled at ridiculous jokes about our teachers until we were sore.

Miraculously, the faculty tolerated our joy. They even allowed us to have a photograph in the yearbook, just like all the other clubs, complete with a faculty advisor. We granted our advisor honorary membership, but he was canny enough not to use it.

On graduation day, we all wore long, white gowns, clutched red roses, and marched down the aisle in pairs, as if we were giving each other away, not in matrimony but to a world larger and stranger than the one we'd perpetuated. In my yearbook, most of my friends wrote that they refused to say good bye.

The summer after we graduated, Elisa had a relapse of toxoplasmosis and faced the prospect of losing sight in her good eye. I talked to her every night on the phone. She was in Grosse Pointe with her father; her mother was at Fishers Island. The doctors said she needed to go to Baltimore, to

Johns Hopkins, for an evaluation. So Bud chartered a Lear Jet to fly her there and arranged for a limousine to meet her at the airport and take her to the hospital. She went alone to find out if she'd go blind.

The disease was halted, at least temporarily, though Elisa learned that eventually her bad eye would start to wander. "Will you still love me?" she asked.

When I arrived at Georgetown University, I spent most of the fall trying to figure out the social diagram of the football field-sized dining room. I no longer believed in a room without codes; I just didn't know how to break this one. The answer, of course, was deceptively simple: people sat near their friends and people sat where there were free seats. (The answer was also unsatisfying and inconvenient because I'd have to wait years to know which graduate school I'd attend.)

Naturally, I spent the first few months of college in culture shock. My dorm held more people than my entire boarding school. My roommate was a nursing student from Long Island who had brought several posters of monkeys dressed in "preppy" clothes, which she put in the middle of the walls in neutral territory — where someone could have thought they were mine. For my birthday, unfortunately in early September, she gave me a few laminated posters of tiny, sleepy kittens on ramshackle fences with captions like, "Hug Me, I Purrrr!" and "Need a Friend? I'd Like to Apply," and I was obliged to hang them above my bed. She did not wear blucher shoes from L. L. Bean, and I spent a lot of time scanning people's feet for those who did — for people "like me." But part of me wasn't sure I wanted to be "like me." The boarding school kids at Georgetown had a glossiness about them which intimidated me. They travelled in tight, sneering packs, flashing their impeccable teeth as if dental perfection somehow exalted them. (Or so it seemed.)

Of course, Elisa had had her own powerful sheen and magazine-girl teeth, and few people were as adept at sneering as she. At Wellesley right that second she was probably leading her own pack, quietly terrorizing upperclasswomen from Garden City or Lynn. I understood that each of these Georgetown glossies had sad stories to whisper late at night, and I understood that sneering could sometimes be the delicious weakness of an incisive mind. But just as Elisa had frightened me the first time I saw her, so these glossies scared me now. The difference was that now I perceived a choice. I stopped wearing my retainer.

I became friends with a young woman who blithely bought sneakers from street vendors. If she liked them for themselves and they were inexpensive, that was enough. Her world was elegant in its simplicity. She had gone to parochial school.

I began hiding my boarding school past. I wanted to have the usual memories of high school — hating the stuck-up cheerleaders, thinking the whole idea of a football team was stupid, agonizing over that cute but

unworthy boy who didn't know I existed. Although I got better at erasing my background with my new friends, my checkered past as a member of the snooty elite was still exposed from time to time. But then I could at least take pleasure in the inevitable response: "You? I never would have guessed." Like most people, I didn't think of myself as a conformist ready to jettison parts of myself, but of course the desire to survive rewrites social codes, as does the desire to flourish. One cage, one dining room, had been replaced by another.

Elisa's mother belongs to a social club in Hobe Sound, Florida, where she has a vacation house. If the members decide that a woman should no longer be in the club, they just send her a pink sweater. They don't bother with a note.

My friendship with Elisa started to erode while we were in college 400 miles apart. I went to visit her at Wellesley where, I soon discovered, shoes were not nearly as important as sweaters so elaborately knitted that they seemed sculpted. I had brought two sweaters with me, one solid green, one solid maroon. I was an embarrassment. I went home a day early, but I did so with relief rather than shame. When we graduated, Elisa headed out to San Francisco to do scientific research, and I began my journey as a writer.

Several years ago I tracked her down. She had just started medical school in Illinois. She'd chosen the school so that she could be near her father, who was now frail and alone. She said she was dating her Medical Ethics instructor. I invited her to visit in Washington; she said she'd try. When I put down the phone, I pictured my rent-controlled, studio apartment through her eyes.

In the lobby of my building, the Shoremead, we'd be greeted by several elderly tenants who would tell us unbidden about their health. I had names for them all. Mr. Lung would explain how he had only one of his. "Cancer," he'd say, "it's just a matter of time." He'd nod and we would nod back respectfully. He'd offer us a sip of his Coke, and we'd politely decline. He would cough.

My apartment was just off the lobby, so even after I shut the door, we'd hear them discussing the impending arrival of their Social Security checks or the disappearance of their negligent children. Most of the tenants had been in the building since the 40's; they'd spent at least twenty years of their retirement together in the lobby, waiting for the mailman. They referred to me as "the nice girl," to differentiate me from "the slut girl," who lived on the third floor and had a flock of boyfriends just released from prison. The boyfriends would stand in the alley and shout, "Danielle, Danielle" until she let them in. Whenever I saw her walking down the street, she was in tears.

The apartment itself was two small rooms of equal size, a living/bedroom and a kitchen with just enough space for a sofa and a small table and chairs. Most of the furniture was mod 70's cast-offs, the remnants of my parents' divorces and remarriages, and I'd hung my brother's

paintings and intriguing photographs from *Scientific American* on the walls. I liked to think the apartment had verve.

Elisa would look around and search for something polite to say, because she would be enough of an adult to keep her "oh, Amy, no"s to herself. But it would be a hard search, and meanwhile "Danielle, Danielle!" would sound like a foghorn outside the window, and through the wall Mrs. Oh Dear would recite, "It's been a hard year, oh dear. First my sister died, then my brother died. Then my niece found a lump. Oh, dear."

"What an interesting place," Elisa would mutter at last. "So colorful." Her politeness would hurt more than patent disapproval, perhaps because of the distance it would signify, perhaps because that very distance put me beyond reach of her tutelage.

She never came to visit, and I haven't spoken to her since.

Warren Harding taught me that social normality is "normalcy" — that is, it's a convention both invented and enforced by those who shape it. (Granted, extreme forms can result in posthumous inconveniences like the Teapot Dome scandal.) I've become the sort of adult who invites friends over for bean soup, who dotes on my cat, who loses sleep over the inner-city schoolchildren with whom I work. I like to think my house has verve. At my worst and best, I am a knee-jerk liberal, kind and a bit gullible. Most of the time, my boarding school past — in fact, my entire family background — feels far away, since I rarely run into anyone who calls her parents "Mummy" and "Daddy," as I once did. Much of my exile is self-imposed, but it still feels permanent. I cannot restore the past partly because I don't know how it has carried forward into the present: what shoes would I wear to travel there unnoticed? What would it cost to buy them?

I've sent myself a pink sweater, a solid one. It keeps me warm.

Of Passion and Seductive Trees

1.

Jezebelian, all tongue,
I give you my only box of drop-dead plums;
a mason jar's glut
of those prissy figs you love; kiwis wrapped in burlap, tied with
twine.
And quick narcotic clementines!
Clementines thick as rickshaws in Shanghai.
But those whiplash-magnificent trees,
those mango trees, those cherry trees, those trees unleashed with
tangerines:
I breathe, thistle of thistles,
in their immediate starlight.

2.

In this immediate starlight,
I give you my only box of ox-eye mums;
a botanist's pot
of those drowsy buds you love; sweetpeas packed in sawdust crates,
roped fast.
And red electric fountain grass!
Such grass as shiftless rickshaws could not rut.
But these whiplashed, magnificent trees,
these orchid trees, these tuliptrees, these trees unleashed with
mescalbean:
I wished them in your eyes.
You weren't looking.

3.

You are not looking —
so I give you my only box of hornet thrum;
an orchestra-let
of those katydids you love; termites locked in closets crammed with
sticks.

And chic fantastic silverfish —
fish that skitter, rickshawed, over stone.
But for treed magnificence, whiplash,
for trumpet trees, for wahoo-trees, for trees unleashed with
calabash:
for them, not you, am I
all tongue, athletic, jezebelian.

The Loneliest Monk

I look at the owner of the Laundromat,
thinking he owes me for the money his brother stole.
The dryers rumble, saying all
that is between us, measuring the night that infiltrates
the city, with clinks
of zippers against metal, a kind of "primitive"
music, primitive in quotation marks for
ironic distance, the vaguely random syncopation
of metal and metal, clicks if conspicuously
arranged and intended perhaps a code.
It seems ridiculous,
the reporter, on the battered television
hung in the corner of the room
above the washers, representing what the world
does and doesn't know,
and yet, there he is, representing it.

If I were stranded on a desert island,
which top ten records would I bring?
Besides being tempted to all that
bestiality and blood-letting, I would like to
write a history of the world, with pen and paper if available
but otherwise with a knife. And
yes, I would like to bring some records.
Sometimes a piano can write the
history of the world: once
there was a pathway
lined with chrysanthemums and roses
where roosters walked pleasantly,
posed emblematically. Then a man
saw the face of a man in a cloud
and people took his word for it.
Then a city, a chain of cities, and clubs,
hotel rooms, record labels;
then thoughts, then those thoughts recorded
on two-track analog.

I often wonder how I'll prove my sanity
to the people who rescue me,
which strategy — to recite
the opening stanza of "Tintern Abbey"?
(I know "The Raven" better but that would make matters worse.)
I am afraid of standards changing,
of my rescuers thinking me
more insane for having preserved such
a mausoleum piece. Perhaps just
keeping quiet will show them
I am OK; perhaps dance, perhaps dance
will still be recognized as intellectually sound.
Perhaps the history of the world will be written
on my body, though I have been taught
to write it on others' bodies;
perhaps I will show them my library of seagulls,
my autobiography of caught fish,
my alphabet of coconuts, all O's. Perhaps they will
stay awhile and we can discuss loneliness,
and the irony will be the eyes
of all the not-yet-killed watching and keeping
our company.

Visits

As I drove, my wife Jordana read in the failing afternoon light. Periodically, I made the requests I needed: for her to take the prescription sunglasses I'd been wearing and hand me my regular glasses, to check on the map whether the turnoff shouldn't have come by now. She answered without sighing, but otherwise she looked at her book, or out the passenger-side window.

Rainy dusk was closing around the car, though it was not yet dense enough for headlights to do much good. I hoped that by the time we got to the farm Angie would be done with her therapy session (they called it a "workshop"), ready for us to take her out to dinner; and I hoped to hell she would remember to sign out this time so we'd be allowed to take her. On our last visit, the week before, we'd had to eat in the dining room, and one of the schizophrenic men at our table had begun to shout at his parents. A staff person no older than Angie came, knelt by the man's chair. "It's okay, it's okay," she said. "Your family isn't here. Listen to me. It's okay."

It wasn't that the farm was bad. Everyone, staff and patients (they called patients "co-workers"), wore jeans and wool sweaters and work boots. There were milk cows and vegetable gardens and four beehives. The farm's philosophy had sounded to me like something better in theory than in practice: that working in a community and eating unprocessed foods would help people learn to "manage their illnesses." That was how Angie's therapist ("contact person") put it. But Angie seemed happy there, and working outside she had even lost some of the forty pounds she'd put on since she'd first been hospitalized, five years before.

When Angie had gotten sick, she was sixteen and we thought she was just being a teenager. An awful one, but nothing we hadn't seen our friends go through: shoplifting, moodiness, lying. What was so disturbing to Jordana was the uselessness of Angie's lies. She wasn't lying to get out of trouble, or to sneak out to meet boys; Jordana could have understood that. Her lying was intense and senseless. People at school were talking about her, she said at dinner one night, her fork beside her plate and hands quiet in her lap. They called her a whore, a slut, a cunt, a clit, a bitch, a tease, a prude. She'd finally sprung at one girl, ripped out her earring. Blood was everywhere. Angie had held up her hands to us, as if to show stains. In retrospect, it was clear that Angie had believed what she said. But the night Jordana had

called the mother of the injured girl, who was fine, her ear whole, who barely even knew Angie, my wife screamed *What is wrong with you? What the hell is wrong with you, Angie?*

It was the lying that got Jordana to insist we take Angie to a therapist. Angie hunched in a chair and wouldn't speak, and it wasn't me who thought we needed outside help, and so it was Jordana who talked.

The therapist wanted to talk to Angie alone. Then he wanted to talk to us alone.

"He thinks you're crazy," Jordana told Angie in the car. "Now are you happy?"

When Angie was breaking down, I told Jordana she was overreacting, that she was upset because Angie was asserting independence. We were arguing a lot, sometimes about Angie and sometimes about Jordana's distance.

"Don't be around so much," she would say.

"I live here."

"I mean don't *watch* me so much." And I would try. I'd force myself not to go see what she was doing when I heard her in another part of the house, and I tried saying, "I'm going out," the way she said it, without explanation. But on those walks or drives or drawn-out errands, I found myself always looking at my watch, waiting to have been gone long enough to return home.

Both our kids were on the swim team at that time, but it was Angie — four years older than Luke, her body then compact and tense — who excelled at it. Her stroke was the butterfly. When she raised her head to breathe, hair covered by a rubber cap, yellow goggles over her eyes, her mouth distorted nearly square, she looked extraordinary to me, alien, hooked arms rising behind her not like a butterfly but a condor. And then she slammed both hands into the wall, the timers bending close to the water to clock the precise moment she won. She'd rise, turning in place, seeing the finish, then hoist herself out of the pool, wrinkles around her eyes from the goggles, taking a towel from one of us and drying her arms and legs, then wrapping it around her waist, and I'd feel the ache in my throat from screaming.

Later we'd know the signs that Angie's mania was approaching psychosis, but then what it took was her walking off the side of the pool fully dressed one morning at practice and not coming up. Not a suicide attempt, the doctor would say when she was hospitalized, a "suicide gesture," the beginning for us of hearing those softened words — *bi-polar, manage, rehabilitate, contact person* — descriptions so gentle it took us years to understand Angie might never be able to live on her own.

That night after her suicide gesture, when Angie was hospitalized for the first time, Jordana and I sat on two plastic couches while someplace else

the last of the paperwork was drawn up. Across from us, a line of vending machines cast their wan light into the waiting room.

"I feel so relieved," said Jordana. "Does that sound awful?"

"No."

"At least there's a reason. At least we know it's something and she can get help and get better."

What she meant was, at least it wasn't that Angie just hated her. She pressed her hands between her knees and bent toward them. Her mouth was open but what came out was wavering and staccato, a sound that had broken apart in her throat. Her hand was blocked by her knee; I held her below the elbow. Above us, the fluorescent ring flickered, buzzing like a trapped insect.

I let go and got up. I put two quarters in the vending machine. A Styrofoam cup tumbled down, and I righted it. There was a dark stream of coffee.

"Jordana," I said.

I kept my back to her. I pressed the cream button.

"You can't leave now," I said.

"I'm not going to leave."

I put my hand against the machine. It kept the coffee hot and the milk cold beside each other, but from the outside I couldn't feel a difference in warmth, only tight vibration.

"I mean the way you go away inside," I said. "The way you leave me alone."

Angie had signed out, and we took her to a restaurant called The Painted Lady, a pink Victorian house with Gibson Girl prints on the walls and potpourri in the bathrooms. Jordana and I drank Chablis and Angie drank glass after glass of Coca-Cola. Angie wasn't supposed to drink alcohol with her medication, but she didn't seem interested in drinking anyway so Jordana and I hadn't had to argue about it: since Angie's first hospitalization, my wife defended anything which could be seen as Angie's rights, allying herself with Angie in everything.

Jordana was talking about the freshman girl who was infatuated with our son, Luke. The girl had taken to standing in our front yard at night, looking up at his window. As far as I could tell she didn't say anything to him if he came home while she was waiting, but moved back into the shadow of the oak.

"Your Dad went out once to talk to her. What did you offer her, Elliot? Cocoa?"

"I said, 'You must be cold out here.' I didn't offer her anything."

"She screamed —"

"She hadn't heard me come up," I said to Angie.

"She screamed and that startled your father; he put his arms up like this." Jordana ducked her head, crossing her wrists in front of her face.

"This little girl. You terrified each other."

"Your mother exaggerates," I said. She told this story a lot, but I was happy in the restaurant: there were my wife, my daughter, the wine, small gold lights on each table, the Gibson girls smiling down munificent from the walls. Angie didn't spill anything — her meds made her shake — and she hadn't gotten anxious and asked halfway through dinner to be taken home, by which she meant the farm; and Jordana, now that she was with Angie, was including me in her happiness. When I reached across the table to touch Jordana's forearm below the elbow, she smiled at me. "I exaggerate?" she said. In the candlelight, Angie looked so natural I allowed myself to think, She's getting better. You're not supposed to think that way — you talk about "managing" illness, about learning to live around it — and I would never say it to Angie, but there were times it seemed like things could just be easy.

For a long time we'd tried to keep Angie at home; the first hospitalization was only two weeks, and then there was all of May when she seemed so much better, taking Lithium, going to school and to swim practice and to her therapist (we called him *Angie's doctor*). Weekend nights she mostly stayed in. Luke was eleven, young enough that it made him happy to do things with the whole family, to have Angie want to play board games with him. We played Monopoly in the kitchen, or sometimes we'd watch old home movies. The kids liked to see them backwards, so that people pulled food from their mouths and Angie swam feet-first, back towards the pool wall, wake disappearing behind her.

Then a second break, this one worse than the first. Angie had gone off her meds. She'd been cheeking them to preserve her mania, and it took both Jordana and me to drag her up from where she was crouched in the corner of the bathroom, between the toilet and the wall. She was naked; I hadn't seen my daughter naked since she was six or seven, and although I'd seen her in racing suits at countless swim meets, it was still disorienting, grasping Angie's wrist and pulling up a woman's body from the floor. She was whipping her head from side to side, and there was blood on her cheeks and forearms where she'd scratched herself with her nails. As we raised her, the noise she made was eerie and beautiful, like the cry of a loon.

That second hospitalization was longer, close to two months. There was a day near the beginning of that time when Angie wasn't there when we arrived — she could walk once a day with a group to the store — and we waited for her in the ward's social room. An enormous woman sat on another couch, looking at nothing and smoking cigarette after cigarette; we didn't bring Luke to the hospital with us because we thought it would disturb him, the muttering hopelessness of those hallways and visiting rooms, their fluorescence and the gauze of cigarette smoke over everything. Jordana leapt up to hug Angie as she came towards us, a plastic bag from

the 7-Eleven swinging from one hand. Angie's hair still had the faint green sheen that chlorine gave it. In her old swim team T-shirt and khaki shorts she looked sure and healthy. She couldn't use a razor there, and the hair on her legs had grown out dark and sharp, surprising against her pale skin. I think it was then, seeing the hair on her legs, that I first knew my daughter's illness was real.

We spent Saturdays with Angie, and then made the long drive home Sunday afternoon. Our son didn't like to come to the farm; he said it was because of homework. When we came in through the door to the kitchen I said, "Fried chicken," and lifted the cardboard Family Pack we'd bought on the way back.

Seeing Luke again after a weekend away always startled me. When Angie had first been hospitalized, Luke was not quite twelve, but he had grown since then into this thick handsomeness. I was never prepared for his presence, which contained a surety, like Jordana's, of being at home in the world. He was blond and played water polo and had a girlfriend who was a year older, a senior. There had been other girls before this one. And now there was also the freshman girl, who called so much that I had thought she was a girlfriend, too, until Luke told me to find out who was calling before saying he was home.

She came to our yard every second or third night. I no longer pointed her out to Jordana, who thought she was creepy, and Luke never mentioned her. But checking for her there became an assurance that things were in their place, like the check I make of my pants pockets perhaps every hour, touching glancingly through the fabric my wallet (right rear), keys and change (right front), then (left front) the accumulated detritus of a day — receipts, telephone messages, parking stub — and (left rear) nothing. At night I stood behind the curtain in our darkened bedroom, looking down at the lawn, where she looked up towards my son's window. The girl didn't look creepy to me. She looked solemn and reverent, as though the only place in the world was our house.

Jordana was rewinding the answering machine. "God, there were a lot of calls," she said. The machine read 18.

"A lot of them were that girl," said Luke. And when Jordana played the tape, there were only two messages for us. Both were for Jordana, from friends who were coming the next weekend — they came every year — for her birthday. And then, again and again, a small voice which said, "Hello? This is Kristin?" and left a number.

Jordana was taking plates down from the cabinet. "Angie has a new boyfriend," she said to Luke over the girl's hesitant voice on the machine.

"Who?" I said.

"The man she introduced us to. Older? Beard?" He had been smoking with Angie on the front porch, huddled in a gray sweater, when we drove

up — it had begun to mist, and he switched his cigarette from hand to hand, warming the other beneath his bicep.

From the answering machine there was a male voice and then the click of the phone being picked up mid-message. “What, were you monitoring calls?” I asked.

Luke shrugged.

“Why not just talk to her? You’d make her so happy.”

“Nothing he does is going to make her happy,” Jordana said. “He seemed nice, Angie’s boyfriend. He’s bi-polar too.”

I said, “Maybe they can coordinate their moods, balance each other out.”

Luke frowned at me, and Jordana frowned away from me, into the refrigerator. There were times Angie jokes were okay and times they weren’t, but I never knew when those times would be.

“Hello?” said the girl’s voice faintly behind us. “This is Kristin again?”

“Christ,” said Jordana.

“Angie’s contact person talked about her being able to leave the farm, move to a halfway house,” I said to Luke, changing my voice. “She’s doing really well.”

Jordana’s friends had been celebrating her birthday with her since they were all thirteen. In the late afternoon, the day of Jordana’s birthday, I came home from errands I’d forced myself to linger over. From the den there was the sound of my wife and her friends, an occasional phrase surfacing above the mumble: I heard my name twice, and my wife’s imitation of my voice, enough to know she was telling the story of my trying to talk to the girl in the yard. It was a funny story, and I didn’t mind that she always told it, but it disconcerted me imagining her telling it when I was out of the room. Luke was somewhere with his girlfriend; Kristin had called three times that afternoon, and I had taken messages I knew Luke would crumple without reading.

I walked though the house, and then stood at the back window in the kitchen. It was November. Already now, at five, the day’s last, hollow light knocked against the sky. Hung by the window was a sampler Angie had made in the hospital. A house with a triangular roof and smoke rising from its chimney was cross-stitched above the words *A HOUSE is Made of Bricks and Stone/ A HOME is Made of Love*. Next to that, a list, ancient, the fire drill I had made the kids practice when they were young. Periodically the family room door would slam open when one of the women had to use the bathroom, and for a moment their muffled voices would come clear. With my fingernails I worked the thumbtack holding the fire routes partway out — the paper beneath showed an orange circle of rust — but then decided to leave it. I got water from the tap, letting it run until it was cold. Then I knocked on the door and walked into the den.

Jordana was scrunched on the couch with the others, whispering and laughing. On the coffee table and floor and bookshelves were sticky water glasses of yellow wine. The room was gauzy with smoke, and thick stubs of cigars floated in one of the glasses.

The women looked at me like I was a stranger. They didn't look startled, only curious. At last Jordana said, kindly, "Did you want something?"

The weekend before she was to transition from the farm to a halfway house in the city, Angie came home for three days. She was anxious about the move, and she was smoking more than usual. Jordana let Angie smoke in the house — when I showered, I smelled in the steam smoke that had been trapped in my hair — but as far as the move she didn't know which to defend, Angie's ability to cope or her right to feel scared. At night, Jordana came to our bed from Angie's, where she had lain until our daughter fell asleep.

I heard Angie in the bathroom once that weekend with Luke. He must have asked her what would happen if he took her pills because she laughed and said, "You wouldn't get high. You'd get really thirsty and shake."

"Cool," said Luke, and he laughed too.

Mornings, Angie and I rose before Jordana or Luke, and those seemed to me like the times our house was held most securely in place. I made oatmeal, and Angie — first two cigarettes of the day consumed — would read (romance novels, like she was still sixteen; she said she didn't have the attention span for anything else) and make coffee, black and thick with sediment.

"There's no coffee at the farm," she said.

"Why not?"

"Number one, caffeine is a drug, but I think that's just what they say, because number two, it's not a whole food and number three it exploits third-world workers. If it was just the drug part we could have decaf."

"Since when have you cared about coffee anyway?"

"Since forever." She smiled and her hand fluttered towards her cigarettes; I saw her make a fist, and stow her hand in her lap. The last five years seemed at that moment like a long detour, as though there had been damage to the road we'd been on, as though we'd been routed around to accommodate it. In our kitchen, in the sheer morning light, Angie seemed like she could be sixteen again, blond hair messy from sleep; we were finally circling back to where we should have been all along.

That night Jordana had not come to our bed from Angie's by the time I fell asleep. I slept fitfully, and when I woke at five, I saw that she had still not come. I thought for a moment of my old fear, that she would have an affair and leave me. Around the time of Angie's first breakdown, I'd even looked for evidence, although I think I'd looked really because Jordana's distance would have been easier to stand if I could have found a reason for

it. Her leaving was something I hadn't thought of in a long time, and it did not have the power now that it had then.

I felt on the floor for my shoes, and then I rose and walked through my silent house. In the hall, the carpet was pale green pile. Twenty years before, Jordana and I hadn't liked the house when we first saw it, but it was what we could afford, and she said, "It's just the way it's been done that's so ugly — that carpet, the fake wood in the kitchen." When we moved in, we pulled up a corner of the carpet. Underneath, though, there was just subflooring, and we'd had to wait until we could afford to put in something else. And then at some point I'd stopped seeing the carpeting; it became one more thing that we lived around, and then it just became one more thing.

Walking down the hallway now, past the stains near the baseboard where Angie had once thrown up from a childhood illness, I could feel my family sleeping behind closed doors. I could literally feel it, in the weight of the air: when the house is full the air has a graininess which is lacking if the house is empty. Coming home at night I know absolutely when I have entered a house without other people, not merely one where everyone is quiet.

Angie's door was ajar, and I pushed, hand flat, against it. My wife lay asleep on top of the covers, arms tucked against her chest, turned towards Angie. She wore a cotton turtleneck and corduroy slacks, and only her shoes were off. I watched them breathe, not quite together, hair spread out on the pillow, the dim early-morning light like something bleached and threadbare thrown over them on the bed.

The final night Angie was home we went skating. The ice of the public pond was wavy, and in places the bottom weeds had become frozen into it, long dark warps gnarling the surface. After a few wobbly circles in an old pair of Luke's skates — black worn pale with age, laces frayed and knotted together — I sat on a bench to watch. I was wearing my long coat, and I put my hands beneath my thighs to keep warm. There were a few other people skating, but I could keep Jordana and Angie and Luke in view. Angie wore a red wool hat, and Jordana never skated too far away from her, but it wasn't because of that. I just knew them.

When Angie was in junior high and Luke in about fifth grade, they used to spend Saturdays at the skating rink downtown. I'd pick them up as a last errand, after the hardware store, after buying stamps at the post office, dropping shirts at the drycleaners. Driving towards the rink, those winter afternoons when shadows lengthened and the dark trees seemed to hold the last of the old light against the sky, I don't remember thinking about Angie or Luke themselves at all. What had I thought about? Work, I suppose and, the list of weekend things I needed still to do. Near the end of that time, whether Jordana was in love with someone else.

It was right before Angie got sick that, if I was alone at home, I'd look through Jordana's things. I don't know what I thought I'd find: a *To Do* list

with another man's name? Jordana was not the type to reveal something carelessly that she did not want me to know, or the type who would have chosen such an indirect method if she did want me to know. She was not, for that matter, the type who wrote *To Do* lists. That was me.

And she was not the type who would have noticed that her things had been displaced, but what I remember about that time is how carefully I lifted each scrap of paper, how I made sure not to disarrange even the wastebaskets. For the only time in my life, I was impatient for Jordana to leave the house. What did it mean that there was one more pair of her underwear than mine in the hamper? There was a circled P on her calendar; I had been triumphant and terrified until, flipping back through the months, I decided it stood for *period*. I used the tips of my fingers to lift up the shirts in her drawer, then ran the flat of my other hand between them. With the house empty, the air had been so thin my heart beat crazily.

Jordana and Angie skated up to where I was sitting. My wife did something showy, stopping so that a fine wake of ice from her skate's edge spackled my slacks below the knee.

"Skate with us," she said.

From below, I saw the pale, angled undersides of their chins. Angie was heavy and fair, and Jordana taller and sharper. Looking up at them, though, it seemed to me that they looked alike: not in the way that mothers and daughters look the same, but in the way old married couples are said to grow to resemble each other.

"I'm happy watching," I said. "I can't skate well enough."

But Jordana was already pulling me up. Angie was on my other side. They skated me slowly at first around the pond. We passed a couple, maybe ten years older than Jordana and I, waltzing without music, and then a high school couple who had stopped skating and were just standing on the ice, to kiss. Luke, as he passed us, at the last possible moment reached back and took hold of Jordana's other hand. They dragged me faster. I'd stopped trying to move my feet; my knees were locked. They skated before me, holding my hands, so that my torso arched over my hips.

"Snap," said Jordana, and then she and Luke moved so suddenly that it jerked through me, all my body pivoting on the thin metal blades of my skates, so that for one long moment I was weightless.

When I looked back, I could see that those afternoons six years before when I sat at the rink on a scarred wooden bench, waiting for my children to finish *just one more song, Dad*, that I had everything. I didn't feel it then, but for an instant I felt it now, when my son snapped the line of us and his movement passed from my wife, through me, to my daughter. What I wanted had become smaller, but in that moment I felt joy like a cold breeze beneath my heart, lifting it.

Sunday, the four of us drove up to the farm, packed Angie's posters and stereo into the car (how much her room resembled a college dorm!) and

drove to the halfway house, where Angie would be responsible for making her own breakfast and lunch, and her meds would be unmonitored, and she would find work in the city and pay the Home a nominal rent.

And we entered, in the next weeks, a kind of grace. We'd learned over five years to talk, not of cure, but about "managing" illness. But as Angie's stay at the halfway house stretched to four weeks, then six, as Angie found a job at a stand selling bagels in the mall, something between Jordana and I slowly unclenched. It felt too fragile for me to bring up, to try to name, but I think Jordana felt it too. Driving back from visiting Angie, or lying in bed after making love, we talked about finding money for Angie to go to college, not anxiously but with wonder. I had the sensation I'd had when Angie raced in swim meets, of not realizing I'd been holding my breath until the relief of letting go.

Angie's break was so sudden that we came back from an afternoon of running errands to three messages on the machine. She was manic: they thought she might have stopped taking her meds, but they didn't think she'd need to be hospitalized. In the second message, they were going to have to hospitalize her. She'd become violent, swinging a chair at one of the staff. Jordana had been in the process of putting groceries away and she stood, half-turned on the kitchen stool, a green can in her hand. Something far beneath the surface of her face was breaking.

Then there was Kristen's voice. "Hello?" she said, "This is a message for Luke?" and I hit the stop button on the machine.

"I can't stand this," I said.

"For God's sake." Jordana stepped down off the stool, crossed the kitchen, started the tape again. Her right arm was bent, so that the back of her hand rested against her chest; she still held the green can. There was another call from Kristen, and Jordana said, "She's so fucking *creepy*," and we were able to smile at each other, a little. Then came a third message from the halfway-house. They'd section-eighted Angie, an involuntary hospitalization. I imagined Angie as I had seen her before, keening, clawing at the ambulance attendants, at whatever she could reach.

And then a fourth call, after Jordana was already on her way there, while I was at the kitchen table waiting for Luke to get home. Angie had had to be put in restraints because they were afraid she'd hurt herself, and she had tried, then, to make herself bleed to death; she had bitten off her tongue.

Sitting at the table, thin twilight drawing back from the kitchen window, I waited for Luke and stared at the thick black stitches of Angie's sampler and felt the emptiness of the house around me. The groceries were still in bags on the kitchen counters; by the time I'd remember that there were frozen things to be unpacked they would have melted, and so I'd left them.

A car stopped outside. I waited for Luke to get out, but minutes passed, and at last I went to the front. I turned on the porch light and stood

beneath it. His girlfriend's car was small and pale blue. After a minute Luke opened the door and put one foot out onto the asphalt of the drive.

"What do you want?"

I tested for a moment the weight of what I held.

"Your sister's been hospitalized," I said. "She hurt herself."

Luke's mouth twitched, and then the corner of his eyes: annoyance mixed with guilt for being annoyed; I recognized it from Jordana. Then he nodded. He bent back into the car and said something. He waited and said something else. He raised his head.

"I'll be in in a *minute*," he said, and looked at me until I turned back towards the house. I didn't find the door handle at once with my hand.

He came in a few minutes later. I stood up from the table, but he didn't come into the kitchen. I heard the snick of his door closing.

I was across the kitchen in four steps and I took the stairs three at a time. I hit the door with my shoulder, and then I was inside Luke's room. I grabbed his shoulders. It occurred to me, fleetingly, that the girl could probably see us through his window as I shook him as hard as I could.

Luke's shoulders were completely unfamiliar beneath my hands. "You little *shit*," I said. "Your sister's in trouble."

Luke knocked my hands off him. I was thrown off balance and stumbled, fell, catching myself awkwardly with my hands.

I looked up at my son. From where I knelt on the floor, he looked stern and heavily beautiful. He stood over me, and I realized I was gaping up, as amazed by him as Kristin must have been.

For a moment I thought he still might hit me. Then he laughed, a strange huff through his nose, and turned away, breaking whatever current had been between us. I pushed myself slowly to one knee, and then to my feet. To the austerity of his back I said, "You are a part of this family."

"I know that," Luke said. "Dad, get out of my room."

When at last Jordana called, Angie was still psychotic, but the staff had given her something and she was calmer. They didn't know if it had been a *suicide gesture* or just rage, but she'd lost a dangerous amount of blood.

"Her tongue —" I said.

The doctors said her tongue wasn't as bad as it had first looked, mangled and pumping blood. There were two deep gashes, and she'd bitten through in one place, but they'd been able to stitch it. It would be too tender and too swollen for her to eat for a few weeks, though, and she'd have to stay in the hospital on an I.V. until she could tolerate a drinking straw.

"She's going to lose some of her sense of taste," said Jordana.

"Whatever is on the tip of your tongue."

"Sweet, I think. Or no, maybe bitter."

"It doesn't matter. I'm going to go back to be with Angie. They're specializing her."

Specializing meant a private nurse. "Does the insurance cover that?" I asked, and then immediately said, "Never mind." For that one long, calm moment between, I had wished she'd just died.

My wife sighed. "She can't go back to the halfway-house after this. And I don't know if the farm will take her back. They won't if they decide it was a suicide attempt. They can't take anyone who's tried in the past six months."

"But it was just because she was off her meds. They monitor at the farm."

"You don't need to convince me," said Jordana.

"It was too fast. They should monitor at first, at least, when people transition there. They *knew* Angie goes off."

"Elliot, don't argue it with me."

"I'm not. I'll write them a letter."

She sighed, and I could see her face at that moment: the way it grew long with fatigue, how she would have her hand over her other ear to block the noise of the corridor. When Jordana talked on the phone, she let the receiver slip further and further down, until her words came blurred and faint, like air blown over the lip of a bottle. "They took out her earrings. This one won't even let you keep jewelry, not just belts and shoelaces."

"Jesus, she could hardly hurt herself with earrings."

"It's just a rule, they said, no jewelry."

"What about rings? What if someone had a wedding ring?"

"I don't know, Elliot," said Jordana. Her voice was fading now, the receiver dipping towards her chin. "It wasn't something I worried about tonight. What time do you think you'll get here?"

"If I leave in the morning at five I can be there by nine. I don't know if Luke will come with me."

"Right."

"He might. Jordana?"

"What?"

I didn't know how to say what I wanted, which was to be with her, and Angie, and Luke, in this house, and for that to be what they wanted. I wanted the air to be full even when they were not physically with me.

"I think she feels safe here at the hospital," my wife said after a time. "I think she gets scared and she wants to be back here."

"She's safe *here*. I don't think it has anything to do with *wanting* to be hospitalized. You've talked to her there; she always sounds so homesick." Jordana said something that was lost.

"You're not speaking into the phone."

"I said, 'You think that because you'd be homesick.'"

There were no words in me. I held the telephone against my ear, hearing the faint buzz of long-distance on the line, and thought of the hospital, its weight of brick and stone.

My wife was saying, "You get homesick a mile from home."

After we hung up, I went upstairs. I paused for a long time at Luke's door, thinking of knocking and telling him what was going on, but in the quality of the stillness I knew that at some point Luke had let himself back out of the house. I pushed against the door a little. It swung in a few inches and then back against my hand.

Instead I continued towards Angie's room. In the light from the hall I could see the row of swimming trophies on her windowsill, each topped with a gilt figure, carefully sexless, arched forward toward an invisible water. The pale green carpet continued in here. In the dimness, the furniture seemed to float just above the floor. I moved to Angie's window and, crossing my arms so that I held my own shoulders, looked out into the yard.

The girl wore a down jacket, and jeans, and she had her hands under her arms for warmth, but she was not huddled. The night I'd tried to talk to her, she had seemed nervous but not embarrassed: no, she was warm enough, she didn't need anything, she was just waiting. She had a cold, and I'd found I was looking at the delicate, flaked skin on the chapped wings of her nostrils. It was me who had felt embarrassed, feeling her eyes on me as I walked back to my house, and I pulled my sweater down as far over the seat of my slacks as it would go. At the door I glanced back, but of course she wasn't watching me at all. In the yard now, the girl looked quiet and serious, her face tilted up towards our son's window; and it was something in the ardor of her posture that loosened my loneliness from inside me, to float untethered for a moment before lodging again, solid, in my chest.

I left the window and sat on the bed. Then I lay back. Five years before, after Angie walked into the pool (and she did nearly drown, no one imagining for too long that it wasn't a stunt), I'd cried in the doctor's office and she reassured me that what we'd done was natural. It was normal, she said, for parents to resist treatment, for them to deny in the face of all evidence that anything was wrong. She sat behind her desk and I sat in a chair next to Jordana's, legs crossed, twisted with convulsive sobs, because the truth was I hadn't been thinking of Angie at all. I could have wanted to pretend that my daughter was well, or that everything was fine, it could have been one of any number of protective or fearful reactions, but really I just would have opposed anything then that Jordana wanted; I would have done anything to engage her.

Sometimes since then, in bed at night, I imagined that I could go back, unravel and rework the past. I unraveled to when Angie got sick and we left Luke alone so much; unraveled the knot of Luke's resentment. And then back further, to wherever it was that things went wrong, back so that I could know Jordana had stayed with me because of more than Angie.

I knew I would later try to find a way not to have made things worse with Luke that night, bursting into his room. I erased moments of cowardice, of thoughtlessness, those months I let Angie's illness be a

weapon against my wife. I reworked the petty losses of heart that, taken together, made my life feel botched and small.

Lying now on Angie's single bed, this is what I did. I moved back, and back further, like the home movies Angie and Luke used to beg us to show in reverse: Angie springing feet first from pool to starting block, Luke spitting a slice of melon back whole, Jordana looking around at her friends before blowing her birthday candles alight. The children grew small, until we could hold them in the circle of our arms.

My daughter's bed was narrow, and a little cold. As I worked the changes that would protect us all, the homesickness I carried with me, even here, lifted a little, and softened. For a moment it was as though I rose from bed and could see our emptied house from outside; and I held only benevolence towards it, only tenderness, as I moved away, as I cured all that we were really only allowed, at most, to try and manage.

Elegy

Once their windfall winesaps sag
to rotting sweetness underneath
the trees can lift again, glad

to have done with flower and fruit,
greenness itself, all the seasonal work
for which they are merely conduit

for appetites that are not our own.
At least that's how it seems to him,
tented in his oxygen inside, grown

old suddenly from work and dust,
the family disease. He thinks
the backyard apple trees in gray and rust

more beautiful for having given out,
or up, as he will soon,
each fluttering or thunking down a doubt

dispelled, a deep breath drawn.
He turns the oxygen off, and the radio
on. The static clears. The song.

Goodbye

In cold March, fifteen millenia back,
seaworms cast their tubes in rock,
measuring at once both disturbance and time
in the only calculus black
and white enough to knock
against our incomprehension: Rhyme

of that world with this. It's
an ordinary miracle to Anna and Ben
who struggle up the Devil's Ice Box algaed cliff
to peer beneath the limestone's ice, the mist
in pockets where ice has been,
to see what's living there, what lets them visit —

the remains a treasure on loan
to them, as they are loaned to us
(at nine years old, their time *as ours* half spent,
— "it passes in an eyeblink," we were always told,
though we couldn't believe it in the endless
nights) — That ice is now a wrenching

in our throats as they begin their comic inching
across the tree broken on the stream,
Anna tangling a sneaker in a buckled root,
Ben stalled in the precarious middle, pinched
in concentration (forward or back? Each bank greens
in the distance like slime) — and we, finally, nervously, choose

to cheer them on, whistling and hooting
in idiot delight as they reach the shore
in muddy splendor, grinning,
allowing us our uncool cooing
across their vanished cribs, their opening doors
through which we watch them disappearing.

Becoming Pretty

When I was sixteen my father claimed he could hear my snoring from the garage when he came home late after surgery. He worried something physiological had misformed. Another doctor confirmed this fear: I had a benign tumor growing in the cartilage between my nostrils. Eventually, it would plug my nose. Disturbed by images of slow-moving (slow thinking?) filter-feeders, I consented to having the tumor removed. "While we're at it," the nice doctor suggested, "why not fix the outside as well?"

The disproportionate size of my nose, its dominance over my thin-lipped mouth, my deep-set eyes, was not news to me. The objective ugliness of the thing, and the subsequent ugliness of my face, had been collectively pronounced almost daily since I began school. But, until the tumor, my nose had always *worked*. And, because it was, beyond a doubt, a rather extreme but sincere replica of my father's nose, I considered it the unfortunate spoils of my inheritance. "After all," my partly-jealous, partly-relieved, small-nosed sister would say, "you also got his brains."

When I turned eighteen I began a series of visits to a soft-spoken plastic surgeon with an impossibly long last name who specialized in cleft palates. He was a friend of my grandfather's and had, at least twice, sewn many of my brother's fingers back onto his hands after investigations into lawnmower motors and blenders. I trusted him because he respected me. He sketched my face several times, took pictures and asked me questions. He concluded that the problem was simply one of scale. He would lessen everything but fix nothing. Since my nostrils were naturally two different sizes, they would remain so. He promised not to chisel my nose into some assembly-line version of "cute" because he believed in maintaining a nose's personality. A decade later, when he died in a freak airplane crash, I sobbed for what seemed like hours.

The surgery itself was supposed to be quick and casual. I would be an outpatient, home by evening. Unfortunately, it was more like a scene from "The Exorcist." When the anesthesiologist injected a sedative into my I.V., my eyes rolled back in my head and I simultaneously vomited, convulsed, and emptied my bowels. It was a 20-second possession.

When the sedative called sublamase had been neutralized and I regained my senses, I knew that they had to do the surgery right then while I was there and exhausted, because once I left that hospital I was never coming back. My violent reaction to the local anesthetic forced the doctors to use a "general" anesthetic instead. When you have surgery on your nose and you are breathing through a tube, all the blood flushes straight to your stomach. I was sick for days. The local anesthetic would have allowed me to remain awake throughout the surgery. I'm confident it was a blessing to sleep through the sudden crushing of my nose with an actual hammer, albeit a "surgical tool;" the gouging out of the tumor; the tedious scraping and filing; the awkward reassemblage. Recovery was excruciating enough. Between pain-killers my vision would blur and a pounding would erupt in my ears. It was as if someone had driven an ice pick cleanly between my eyes and lodged it in my brain. I couldn't think. I didn't dream for weeks.

Nor did I venture into public. My face remained swollen and bruised for about a month. My brother referred to me as the "technicolor woman." Luckily it was summer so my father and I could take long walks around the neighborhood at dusk. Holding his hand as the violet evening settled, shadowing my rosey bruises, softening the sharp angles of the maples and the brick houses, was my daily comfort. I understood the promise of my father's vigil. At the end of each stroll he would peel back a square of bandage and marvel, "You are healing so quickly; what a strong face you have." No one told me I was beautiful; how could they? I was wounded, but not scarred.

It would take my face a year to settle.

I have no regrets. But it was neither an easy nor a simple decision. I had lived a long time as, among other things, a religious and cultural stereotype. I'm Jewish. I had a *big* Jewish nose. My brother had this same nose and suffered for it as well. In fact, he and I are interesting studies in self-cultivation. Neither of us grew up pretty, but I grew up smart and he grew up athletic and sociable. I wish I could say that I cultivated my intelligence because it was rewarding, but honestly, I felt I had no other choice. We use what we have. Reading was something I could do alone, without mirrors or disapproving eyes. My parents, although loving and even admiring, wasted no breath on my appearance. That is to say, while they made no mention of my unattractive nose, they made no mention of my attractiveness either. No one did. Those who didn't call me ugly to my face confirmed the opinion with their silence. Not that I was simply a broken-spirited girl. I had a strong sense of myself as intelligent and full of humor — compensation for my nose. I was also consistently melancholy and lonely — punishment for my nose.

Once during adolescence, while my parents were out for the evening and my sister and brother watched television, I locked myself in

my parents' room and systematically destroyed every picture of myself I could find. My parents discovered me curled up and sobbing in a sea of scattered images, each one punctured through the face.

I was a gifted dancer save for my nagging habit of lowering my head on stage. Teachers complained I wouldn't speak in class. My parents joked that I would eventually accumulate my future college tuition from all the change I found while walking with my head down. I knew the color of my childhood friends' eyes from sneaking sideways glances. Only rarely would I return someone's stare for fear their gaze was fixed on my offending nose.

Because of the tumor, insurance paid for my surgery. Money was not an issue. However, the surgery did raise many questions about the politics of vanity. My mother is a deeply committed and active feminist who filled our home with like-minded women. Each of my many "mothers" had an opinion; most considered the surgery mutilation and the ultimate capitulation to a patriarchal notion of beauty. My mother saw vanity as a spectrum. There were many things we did to take care of ourselves: I wore braces, styled my hair, chose specific clothing. She left it up to me to decide at what end of the spectrum vanity encourages thoughtlessness and superficiality and at what end it encourages life-affirming change. My mother, herself beautiful by patriarchal standards, encouraged what she considered to be empowerment. Her argument was simple: if a different nose meant a happier, more confident me, then why not?

I am twenty-eight now — ten years of life with my new nose, ten years of life as an attractive woman. Indeed, I am pretty. My friend Marisa lovingly points out that my prettiness is a combination of features and not just my nose (she skillfully likened my surgery to Wallace Stevens' jar on the hill in Tennessee around which all of nature lines up perfectly). I agree; I am pretty partly because of my large eyes and my straightened teeth, but mostly because of my self-confidence and humor. When I first met my friend Seth, he offhandedly said, "You don't really have the personality of a pretty girl. You're so sarcastic." I often wonder if pretty women who grew up as such were made to cultivate only their beauty. Perhaps becoming pretty is preferable to always having been pretty; in the becoming there is room, demand even, for so much else — wit and imagination.

Once pretty, the predictable happened: I learned to look people in the eyes; achieved soloist status as a dancer; smiled warmly and often for photographs; discovered I could speak in public, that I even had a knack for it; discovered flirting and sex. My first night in the dorm at college I was startled awake at some ridiculous hour by a group of drunk upperclassmen singing my appearance's praises. It took my roommate's whispering, "Sus, they're asking for *you*," before I fully comprehended that I was the subject of their song.

Now I'm used to being pretty, maybe even bored with it, certainly not fulfilled by it. I think physical beauty is powerful but meaningless — it reconciles nothing. In fact, my own beauty took on a wicked irony last year when I lost my father to Alzheimer's disease. In my constant elegizing of him, my struggle to return him to the symbolic order of my life, to claim my identity as righteous inheritance, I long for that actual, physical part of me that was so directly a gift from him. I no longer carry the mark of him or his Sephardic blood. I wake up sweating from dreams of shame, having traded in his distinctive nose for something less conspicuous, something "better." But I am comforted by the memory of his encouragement. He told me once that, had he not felt restricted by a silly societal notion that appearance is less important for men, he would have gladly had his own nose "fixed." He called me brave; admired my courageous will to change. "Improvement" and "progress" were his words to me as I lost consciousness on the operating table that day.

I think of my surgery as a radical intervention into who I was supposed to be. Given the girl I had been, there was a synchronic steadiness to the rhythm of my life such that one could have charted my probable future. My surgery was a kind of diachronic interruption of that future, a change of course, a jumping off track. Certainly many things happen in a person's life that can cause this: winning the lottery, tragedy, accidents, death. But my interruption was so muddled over, so consciously chosen, that the results might be different somehow. They might be purely rewarding.

It is marvelous to me that I'll never know, let alone be, the woman (the girl) I (was) should have been. Sometimes I imagine her like me but sadder, working a job that keeps her insulated and alone. Yet I'm sure she would also be a poet. That's the transformative *beauty* of writing: anything internal can manifest itself as perfect. What you look like is precisely that; what you look *like*. And, my losses would have been her losses. I began writing when my father took ill. I had, until then, considered my identification with my father (being from, but also of, him) as the way in which I knew myself. When he began to fade, I had to replace him with another way into (knowing and understanding) myself. My writing balanced his leaving. He would have left her too.

Long after my surgery, my father kept a photograph of me with my old nose framed above his desk. In it my hair is greasy and matted to my head. I have on several heavy sweaters, and a compass and whistle hang from my neck. Behind me, my large backpack obscures a vista of leafless trees and cloudy skies. I am sixteen and jubilant atop Siler's Bald in the Smoky Mountains. My father loved this photograph because I am looking directly into the camera and smiling triumphantly and unabashedly. I had lost my oppressive self-consciousness and physical self-loathing in the expansive wilderness and its demands of strength

for survival. I never knew if my father understood that at the time of the photograph I had not looked into a mirror for fifteen days. I only know that he considered the photograph an honest portrait of my beauty. I keep it above my own desk now.

The Place of Creation

is where we are at this battered
table under this blanket the knees
weak the stomach turning over
and over as if it were tired
of the business of food the mind
near sleep but also the streets where
buying bread is a risk a body fallen —

is not the place but knows
the place where a knife is dug
into the flesh and twisted because
it feels good to twist like a grinding
of teeth that at last gets through
to what it was seeking not food
but not-food a hungry undoing —

is where we listen to both
ourselves and what we think
is not ourselves our hand yes
on a shoulder but also the rage
that would bite a lover's tongue
or the dreamer who buries
the other in some dark place —

while bodies are held probed cut
to pieces thrown to the dogs stuffed
with rats not to mention the smaller
and yes they are smaller indignities
made of words even words like these
that after all relish the telling
a little at least these mere words —

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Nancy Barron has a Bachelor's degree in Japanese and worked in Tokyo for five years as a translator. In 1996 she received her M.A. in Creative Writing from City College in New York. She has stories forthcoming in *Confrontation* and *The Maryland Review*. She is married, has an eight-year-old daughter, and is preparing to move to Southboro, Mass.

Mark Bennett lives and works in Los Angeles. He is represented by Mark Moore Gallery, Santa Monica, California.

Laura Bernstein lives in Detroit, Mich. and teaches writing and literature at The Center for Creative Studies and The University of Detroit, Mercy. Her work has been published in *The Black Warrior Review*, *Poetry Northwest* and elsewhere. She has work forthcoming at *The Midwest Quarterly* and *The Hampden-Sydney Review*.

Jake Bohstedt has, over thirty-five years, compiled a six-volume annotated collection of Yalow family documents. It is hoped this excerpt will spark wider public interest in the intriguing Yalow family, so that he may one day publish all six volumes in pen-hatched hard-cover, with the "durable yarn binding" favored by Émile.

Teresa Burns' fiction and essays have appeared in *Gulf Coast*, *The Amaranth Review*, *The St. Petersburg Times*, *Buffalo Press*, *The Evening Independent*, as well as *Freshman English News*. She received her Ph.D. from the University of Houston's writing program and presently is an Assistant Professor at the University of Wisconsin.

Martha Collins' most recent book of poems, *A History of Small Life on a Windy Planet*, won the Alice Fay Di Castagnola Award and was published by Georgia in 1993. She teaches at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, where she founded and co-directs the creative writing program.

Catherine Daly lives in Los Angeles.

Susan Davis lives in Washington D.C., where she works as a freelance audio editor and writer. Her work has appeared in *Western Humanities Review* and *The Antioch Review*.

Douglas Dorst is currently working on his M.F.A. in fiction at the Iowa Writers' Workshop. "Astronauts" is his first published story.

Stephen Robert Gibson's poems have been published previously in *Ploughshares*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Phoebé* and other magazines. Currently he lives in Washington, D.C. where he is employed as a dispatcher at a bicycle messenger company.

Scott Hightower, originally from a small ranch just outside of Lometa, Texas, presently lives and works in Manhattan, where he teaches at New York University, Gallatin.

Jay Hopler is a poet, essayist and translator whose work has appeared, most recently, in *The Literary Review*, *Pequod* and *Poet Lore*. His anthology, *The Killing Spirit: A Book of Contractual Murder*, has just been published by The Overlook Press.

Hester Kaplan lives in Providence, Rhode Island. Her work has appeared in *Story*, *Ploughshares*, *Agni Review*, *Glimmer Train* and other publications, and has twice been included in Best American Short Stories list of "100 Other Distinguished Stories." She has recently completed *The Altruist*, a novel.

Alan Krathaus, of Houston, Texas, and Theo Coulombe, of Brooklyn, New York, have been collaborating on historically based projects since 1992 while at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Detroit, Michigan.

Rebecca Lilly earned her M.F.A. from Cornell. Her poems appear in recent issues of *Versé* and *Tampa Review*.

Christopher Matthews is currently completing his M.F.A. at the Warren Wilson Program for Writers. He lives in Ann Arbor where he has begun work towards a Ph.D in Literature at the University of Michigan.

Lynne McMahon lives in Columbia, Missouri where she teaches creative writing at the University of Missouri. The poems included in this issue are from her forthcoming book.

Katharine Noel is a second year M.F.A. student at the University of Arizona, in Tucson. In 1996, she won a Henfield/Transatlantic Award, as well as Arizona's Gypsy Clark Memorial Award for Fiction; this is her first published story. She is currently working on a collection of interconnected stories about the family in "Visits."

Suzanne Paola's recent book, *Glass*, came out in *The Quarterly Review of Literature* series in 1995, and she has an essay appearing in *Manoa*, as well as poems in *The Yale Review* and *New England Review*. This essay is from a book-in-progress. She teaches at Western Washington University and co-edits *The Bellingham Review*.

Patrick Phipps was born in Texas City, Texas in May 1969. He attended college at the University of Texas and completed his M.F.A. at the University of Houston. He is currently a Core Fellow at the Glassell School of Art and recently exhibited at ArtPace in San Antonio.

Ken Probst first gained notoriety for his behind the scenes photography at fashion shows in New York, Milan and Paris. His photographs have appeared in numerous magazines including *GQ*, *Town & Country*, and *Vanity Fair*. For the last three years Probst has been documenting the production of adult films. Images from the "Porno Series" have been included in Emmanuel Cooper's book *Fully Exposed*, published by Routledge, London, and Michael Goff's *Out in America* from Viking Studio Books, New York. He is represented by R. Vance Martin, Fine Art and Photography, San Francisco.

Pattiann Rogers' most recent volume of poetry is *Firekeeper, New and Selected Poems 1994*, published by Milkweed Editions. She has a new book forthcoming in fall of 1997, titled *Eating Bread and Honey*.

Edward Skoog's poems have recently appeared in *Third Coast*, *Sonora Review*, *Cutbank*, *Chariton Review* and *Talking River Review*. His chapbook, *Tool Kit*, was published by the University of Montana.

Amy Storrow has published in *The Antioch Review*, *The Massachusetts Review*, and *The Gettysburg Review*. She is currently working on a book of which "The Darker Side of Ovid" is a chapter.

Nguyen Quang Thieu was born in 1957 in a village near Ha Noi. He has published four books of poems in Viet Nam, as well as four novels, two collections of stories, a book of stories for children, and translations of American poetry. He lives in Ha Noi, where he is editor of *Van Nghe Tre* and on the editorial staff of *Van Nghe Weekly*, published by the Writers Association of Viet Nam. *The Women Carry River Water*, a bilingual collection of Thieu's poems, with translations by Martha Collins and the author, will be published by the University of Massachusetts in May 1997. The translation project was aided by a grant from the Witter Bynner Foundation.

Karen Volkman's book *Crash's Law* was published by Norton in June and she's recently had poems in, or has poems forthcoming in, *The Colorado Review*, *Partisan Review*, *The Harvard Review*, *Best American Poetry 1996* and *Best American Poetry 1997*. Her criticism has recently appeared in *The Voice Literary Supplement* and *The Boston Review*.

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