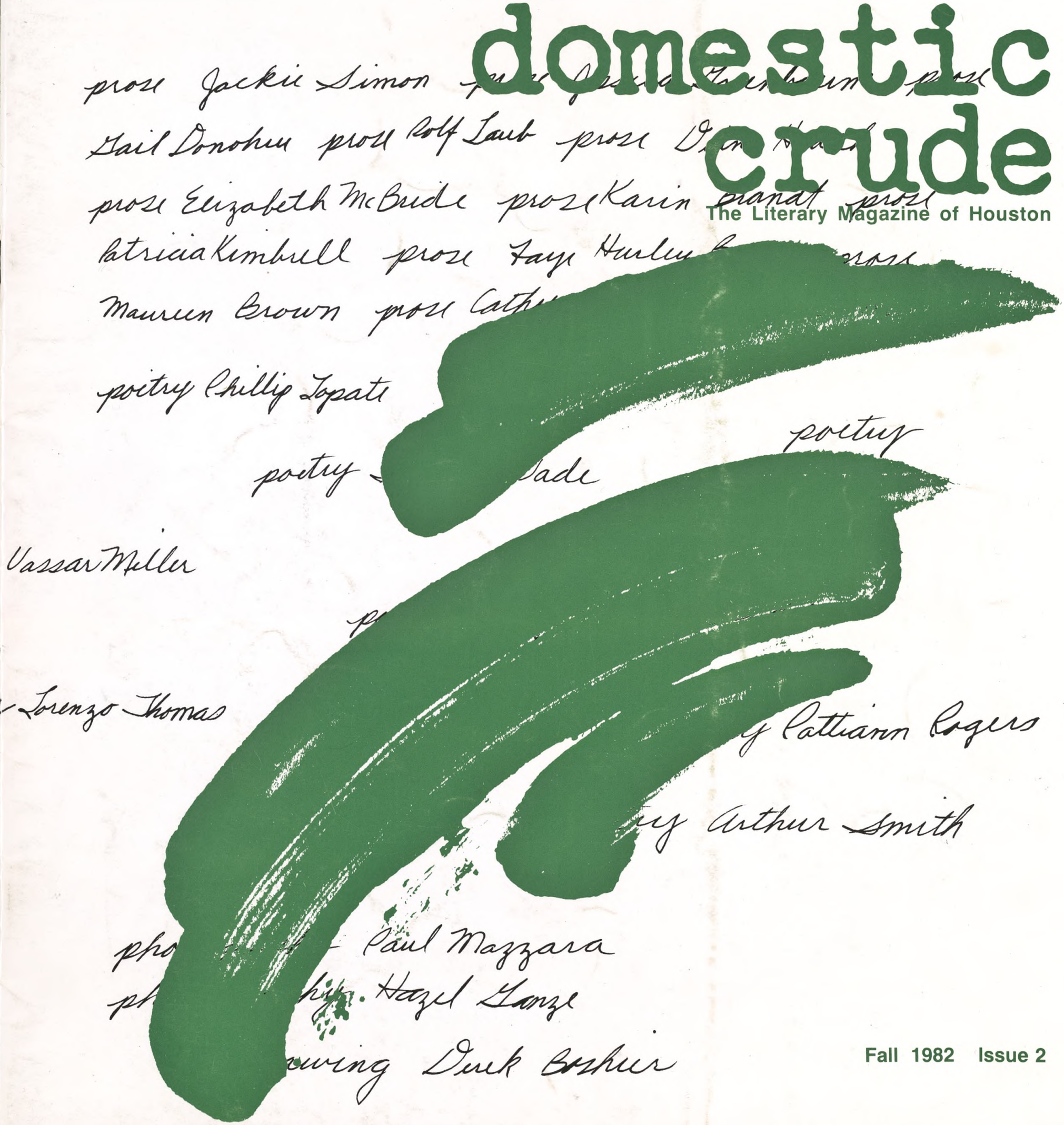
# domestic crude

The Literary Magazine of Houston



prose Jackie Simon prose Jessica Treadwell prose Gail Donohue prose Rolf Laub prose Dan [illegible] prose Elizabeth McBride prose Karin Brandt prose Patricia Kimbrell prose Faye Hurlbut prose Maureen Brown prose Cathy [illegible]

poetry Phillip Lopate

poetry [illegible] Wade

poetry Vassar Miller

[illegible] Lorenzo Thomas

[illegible] Pattiann Rogers

[illegible] Arthur Smith

[illegible] Paul Mazzara

[illegible] Hazel Lonze

[illegible] Dick Barker

Fall 1982 Issue 2

For Display

# domestic crude

Fall 1982 Issue 2

Marilyn Stablein

We would like to thank Shearer Publishing for permission to print "Sisters" by Jackie Simon, which will appear in their forthcoming anthology of Texas women writers.

Funding was provided for this issue by the University of Houston, Office of the Chancellor and Provost and the Students' Association of the University of Houston.

Monetary donations to the magazine will be gratefully accepted.



For future issues, submissions of poetry, prose, photographs and line drawings should be sent with a stamped, self-addressed envelope to:

DOMESTIC CRUDE c/o Phillip Lopate
English Department
Roy Cullen Building
University of Houston
Houston, Texas 77004

# Photography

*Hazel Ganze*
*Paul Mazzara*

# Drawings

*Derek Boshier*

# Prose and Poetry


| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 5 | *Gail Donohue* | I Know How To Make You Happy If I Feel Like It |
| 6 | *Arthur Smith* | Two Rooms |
| 7 | *Arthur Smith* | Good-Bye. Sweet Dreams. Come Back. |
| 7 | *Jessica Greenbaum* | Having the Temperament of a Venetian Blind |
| 8 | *Pattiann Rogers* | Observing the Questions of a Gray Sky |
| 8 | *Pattiann Rogers* | The Body As Evidence |
| 10 | *Jackie Simon* | Sisters |
| 12 | *Aldona Middlesworth* | To the Roach |
| 13 | *Rolf Laub* | Bicycles |
| 14 | *Lorenzo Thomas* | Things Could Be Worse |
| 16 | *Diane Heath* | Dust |
| 16 | *Jane P. Moreland* | Mineral Oil |
| 16 | *Jane P. Moreland* | On Your Somnambulism |
| 17 | *Nancy Luton Tynan* | Art For Art's Sake |
| 18 | *Elizabeth McBride* | Artificial Light |
| 20 | *Vassar Miller* | Morning Person |
| 20 | *Sidney Wade* | Salt Kiln |
| 20 | *Patty Clark* | First Names |
| 21 | *Karin Brandt* | Telephone Company |
| 23 | *Lucille Joy* | The Sasanqua Tree |
| 24 | *Patricia Kimbrell* | House Special |
| 26 | *Faye Hurley Burke* | If I Wanted To Make A New Friend |
| 27 | *Elizabeth McBride* | Diversions |
| 27 | *Elizabeth McBride* | Biloxi, 1945 |
| 28 | *Maureen Brown* | The Robins Come In January |
| 30 | *Olive Hershey* | Leonardo's Water |
| 30 | *Rachel Norton* | Burial |
| 30 | *Cathy Stern* | Middle-Aged Words |
| 31 | *Cathy Stern* | Harriet |
| 33 | *Phillip Lopate* | Anger Showers |
| 34 | *Rabie Harris* | Smith |

Derek Boshier "Frightened Cowboy"

# I Know How to Make You Happy If I Feel Like It

*Gail Donohue*

"How do I feel today?" I asked Dr. Pigeon.

"I don't know," Dr. Pigeon said. He looked baffled but wary. I never believed for a minute he was baffled, but he was certainly always wary, unlike my mother who was not only wary but certainly baffled. When I was a baby and she picked me up, she spread her fingers and the flats of her palms were like tongs.

It was confusing. I didn't know why I was there. Dr. Pigeon didn't know why I was there either, but he gave the impression that he was in touch with the people who did know, and if I cried in all the right places and laughed in all the right places, then he would ask them for me. What was so confusing was that part of the reason I was there was that I was crying and laughing in all the wrong places.

"Like at the Flamingo," I said.

"Would you care to elaborate on that?" Dr. Pigeon said. It drove me just crazy the way the tone of his question never matched any answer I could possibly give.

One night Thor and I were at the Flamingo. What I had observed was that most of the girls in these exotic dance bars lacked imagination. They went too fast, they chewed gum, and worst of all, they looked bored.

"They don't need imagination," Thor observed, "they have tits! Didn't tits sell billions of dollars worth of *National Geographic?*"

"But couldn't I do better than that?" I wondered out loud. The buckle on Thor's bar stool seatbelt burst open across his lap from the sheer power of this single thought.

So that was how I wound up on the bar stage at the Flamingo, in my navy blue dressed-for-success suit. I pull out a small black mask I carried in my purse, in case my mother or my boss walked in. The other dancer tripped off and the jukebox started again. Thor was chewing his ice.

It took me a long time to get it all off—my designer scarf, my suit jacket, my vest, my clean white Oxford shirt. By the time I tossed one earring to the jubilant bartender and the other to the bouncer, men were taking off their ties, banging their martini glasses, hugging each other, singing and yelling along with the jukebox, and there was a line at the door to get in. After my slip I put all those yoga and aerobic dance lessons to good use. I was wearing my black lace everything, just in case I got taken to the hospital on a stretcher. Everyone was clapping and sticking five dollar bills in my black lace garter belt and in the straps of my high heels. Thor was holding his hand over his heart.

Then all hell broke loose. Men took off their clothes and tried to scramble over the bar and across the moat between the bar and the stage. The bartender ran up and down in a panic. I sat on top of the silver cash register and slid backwards down the front of it, pressing all the buttons. The drawer rang open and the bartender rushed over and stuffed all the money at me.

"Stop, please, stop," he pleaded.

I looked down at all those dear, earnest faces. Aren't they dear, I thought.

Then I reached into my purse and pulled out the water pistol I carried around with gin in it, and squirted right into somebody's gape. It was so funny I got to laughing until I thought I'd die.

Dr. Pigeon didn't say a thing. He was asleep. I squirted him with my water pistol, and jumped up and ran out the In door.

I slithered into bed next to Thor, in my black lace everything, such as it was, and black stockings with seams up the back. Thor was in his pajamas, but he sat straight up in bed and threw back the covers. It reminded me of how in "The Night Before Christmas" the man "sprang from his bed to see what was the matter."

"You still have your socks on," Thor said.

"I know," I said. "I have cold feet."

Thor rolled over and went right to sleep.

At the women's college I went to, if you had cold feet someone would offer to sit on them. Down in the recreation room, in the library, anywhere. People were very thoughtful. It was different out here, in premarital sex. Besides, it wasn't premarital, it was non-marital. Most of us would never get married. Intimacy was dead. If I were to get married I would be in it for the cake. Thor didn't like to *be* married, he just liked to *get* married. He had been married five times. Maybe he was in it for the presents, since he'd lost five houses full of presents.

When he left the gas on and slid out my window and the evidence pointed to attempted murder I was intrigued. I had dreamed for some time that the future was growing shorter. I was interested in whether he had a good reason or was simply capricious, like life, or consciousness.

"Consciousness, consciousness, consciousness," Thor said, exasperated. "You have a one-track mind. Most girls are interested in clothes and restaurants, and even serious girls are interested at worst in the Relationship. 'Let's talk about us,' they say, and you know you're in real trouble but at least you know what kind."

But I considered Thor a closet metaphysician because he loved money in the abstract—financing, contracts, debits and credits, assets and liabilities. Phenomenologically, his world was Monopoly. I myself kept my money in a cloud bank.

All five of his former wives were charge-account chickies.

"Ever know people with extra things?" he asked. "Extra T.V.'s, extra vacuum cleaners, extra Mercedes, extra dishes and glasses, extra diaphragms, extra everything in case the first one breaks or gets lost or someone bites a hole in it. That's what's so great about bigamy because then you have a marriage to fall back on."

So after all these extra wives left successively with both sets of everything, Thor got a cat—Precious.

"I know how to make you happy if I feel like it," Thor said.

I didn't know if he did or not, but I liked his attitude better than the one where the boy says, "Nothing I can do can make you happy." That type usually says you're too good for him, and he's usually right.

By the time I met Thor, more presents had stuck to him, and he had all this museum-quality furniture and bric-a-brac. ("Not bric-a-brac," Thor corrected me, "objets d'art.") Figurines that cost thousands of dollars on little shelves with mirrors behind them and lots of French antiques, Louis Quinze and Seize. The sofa and chairs had green velvet cushions that Precious loved to shit on. But Thor wouldn't part with Precious. It drove him crazy when Precious ran away from home and Thor would usually find her in a better neighborhood. Thor said he got a letter from the SPCA saying Precious wanted alimony. Thor refused and Precious said she was dying of leukemia. While they were rushing to Beauty and the Beast Veterinary Hospital and Convalescent Home, Precious committed

suicide by jumping out the car window. Thor was beside himself with grief. His heart hurt him so much he went around with his hand over it. It was pretty terrible, but I felt when he lost Precious was when he began to need me.

"I'm scared," he said.

"I'm scared too," I said.

"Nothing to be scared about," he said in a hurry, pretending he hadn't said it first.

I rubbed his back, hugging him. I didn't know how he was going to pull if off, but I wished him luck in loving me. I became his ally in the battle to win my heart, and he became my ally in the battle to win his.

But almost from the beginning our relationship was booby-trapped. He followed me around the kitchen and I closed the refrigerator door on his penis.

"Don't go away mad?" I said.

I woke up at his house and asked what time it was.

"I'm not going to tell you, it's my clock," he said.

At breakfast I stepped on his doughnut.

"If only we'd met a long time ago so by now you'd be just a memory," he groaned.

"If only I weren't a Born-Again Pagan and it were Lent and I could give you up for moritification," I said.

We tried to be nice.

"Tell me a time when you were pleased with me so I can relate to myself," I begged.

"Just cooperate and you won't get hurt," he said.

Worst of all, when I said that I loved him, he said it didn't matter.

I had to go back to Dr. Pigeon the next Tuesday. Dr. Pigeon was wearing a new suit and a lot of equanimity.

"Were you indicating you were ashamed because of your behavior at the Flamingo?" he asked.

"No," I said.

Even if Dr. Pigeon wouldn't tell me how not to laugh at the Flamingo or how not to cry when I was telling him about it, I went back because I had to find out about the birds. Somewhere in his office there were hidden birds—I knew because I had heard them. They made a little "cheep" sound at intervals. Dr. Pigeon raised his eyebrows as if he suspected me of auditory hallucinations. This went on for several Tuesdays, these electronic-sounding cheeps. Jesus, I'm being taped, I said to myself, warily.

I made up my mind to discover the tape recorder and confront him with it. It was up to me to make him face reality. Then maybe he would think I was so smart that he would give in and ask the people who knew why I was laughing and crying in all the wrong places.

Meanwhile, Thor was driving me crazy worrying about what to be for Halloween. We were going to the VFW Ball, and last year Thor had just missed First Prize. He was an electric nurse and at the crucial moment he wouldn't light up, then on the way home we got a flat tire and a policeman almost helped but when he saw Thor as an electric nurse he said "Let Florence Nightingale change it!" and roared off. Then the next morning Thor had to leave my house in broad daylight in his nurse's uniform, nurse's shoes, and hairy legs, because he had left his clothes somewhere.

Since he had been married five times already, I decided it would be good if we went as bride and groom, only he was the bride and I was the groom. First there was a Spatula Party for Thor and a bachelor party for me. But our Halloween wedding itself got into the newspapers.

According to county police, "everybody was carrying on and somebody apparently said something to someone else," Lt. Bumps Synder said. Police are uncertain what sparked the fight but the bride's mother was charged with having palms like tongs.

After that, Thor moved in and everything was fine in the housekeeping department, he having an eye for grunge and I having one for litter, except that we spent a lot more time on the phone because one of us was always calling the other from somewhere else to say we were sorry.

So the next Tuesday I walked into Dr. Pigeon's office and sat down in his chair and there was no place left for him but the couch. He sat down on it warily, then, even more warily, he lay down on it. Meanwhile, I was frantically feeling around and under his chair for the tape recorder.

"How do you feel today?" I asked him.

"I feel as if you feel you have to have a feeling of being in control today," he said.

"Would I care to elaborate on that?" I asked.

What I really wanted to elaborate on was him. I wanted to make him tell me everything about himself. What was the content of his fantasy?

"Would you care to elaborate on anything?" I asked, as kindly as possible.

He sighed.

"If you don't care to elaborate on it, would you care to elaborate on why you don't care to elaborate on it?" I probed, still more gently and kindly.

But he was growing hostile and resistant. If I had time, I could look in his psychiatric journals and figure out what to do next. I looked at him carefully. He looked like a man in possession of some knowledge about himself that he would never tell me.

Then I invited him to get up off the couch to help me look for the tape recorder or the birds, whichever it turned out to be.

At night, I put my ear to Thor's chest until his heartbeat grew in my ear, and I tried to hear I was loved■



# Two Rooms

The bed shook,
I heard a whistle fall,
and then an engine
dragging its heavy sound.
I rose, unsteady
in a small room, the curtain
lit up like a lamp.
My face cooled
on the window
and the light rushed in.
I remembered how the bus
idled in its stall,
how the doors folded open
and then clamped shut,
how each time counting the thin bills
I came up short.
I stood there,
at a hotel window
stitched with rain, staring
while a boy coasted over the walk,
the slick papers skipping
a doorstep at a time.

I had forgotten how small
my old room was,
how near the tracks
my father's house had been built,
how often late at night
I woke to boxcars
rocking on the rails,
to a window shattered with frost
and a fire close
behind the oleanders,
those spikes of heat blocked
by shadows back and forth.
I had forgotten how many times
those men got up and
sat back down,
how cold they must have been,
and later how they must have swayed
as those freight cars slowed
into the grey terminals
of Stockton or Sacramento,
the shapes of men
flickering in the chutes.

*Arthur Smith*

# Good-bye.
# Sweet dreams.
# Come back.

A porchlight flared over the lawn,
and you were just in love, leaving,
your whole body bronze.

You had planned to go on counting
down the block, one house, one house,
cross over at the frosted lamp, and

then look back. And as
she should have been, she was,

forward on the porch,
waving good-bye, yours.

All you could think of then
was growing old wonderfully together,
down the years, on and on,

a lane of oaks first- and second-growth,
sparrows that had been
chattering and boxing in the leaves

long since settled into grass and fluff.

In the cold, in her yellow cotton dress,
she couldn't stay, and was gone

by the time you stopped and
turned to see her, as she should have been,
dark and forward, back-lit, waving.

*Arthur Smith*

# Having the Temperament of a Venetian Blind

*Jessica Greenbaum*

Dear So and So. As mentioned to you last night in *Paolini's*, I am singularly unimpressed with your theory of the continents, and am now at my leisure to dispute it and tie up the other ends of our conversation. Geography is a vast gossip, as Marilyn Hacker says, although she says it much better than that in a poem lost among the slag heap of paper on my desk. So few of these papers are worth saving, one wonders why I cannot be more like you, efficient and mathematical in all designs. As for myself, I defend Hacker's proposition and rally against yours, using for my defense the largest state in our nation.

Aside from the fact that distance breeds talk, land masses themselves seem to embody a certain global conversation. Preceded by a trail of islands and peninsula, not unlike the bubbles leading to a cartoon thought, Alaska rises above the body of this nation, the great bulk of it like a flashy idea the Pacific is constantly having. From here, we think of Alaska as a flatfooted kind of state, *but one with a rich composition.* Quite simply, we condescend to it, as we would to a terribly immature but *brilliant* high school mate. No doubt part of this bias is conveyed by cartographers, by how palely they portray land masses in extreme latitudes. A teacher once told me that Iceland is quite green and beautiful, but that the man who discovered it wished to keep it to himself. As for Alaska, my friend H—berg[1] is there presently, and says that opportunities are quite abundant, jobs with paid vacations, grants for film making, etc. So unlike the small talk of New England.

Writing to H—berg at his Anchorage address is painful in itself, that he should be so far away, in such an unimaginable, big state, and with so few other people around. One wonders how there can be a W. 88th Ave. in Anchorage. But there is, and poor H—berg is holed up in apartment 312. Actually, his last letter sounded chipper and forced me to stop thinking of Alaska as America's Siberia. For you, with your heedless logic cutting all corners from imagination, this is all understood. Doesn't it seem a wonderful kind of test, whether you believe in the system of the mails or not, that a letter written from our semi-tropical Houston can reach him in a state whose landscape can't be far from the coloring of the envelope? H—berg says there are a lot of nutty people there, as one would expect to find in an annex, but that Anchorage is the first place in which he feels he can do whatever he likes. If you ask me, he has carried our modern alacrity for traveling too far, that is, he has traveled too far, and I wish he'd return. But you can see through me and know I am merely envious, that for all my travel exotica, the man has outdone me.

Although it is difficult for a person of my temperament to allow, envy does well out in the open: I believe that the fortune of a dear friend should not too far outweigh what I can imagine for myself. How else can one profess to know her friends thoroughly, and with the appropriate amount of empathy? However, I am fairly sure that if my next letter to Anchorage included a statement of my envy of H—berg's good fortune, that is, his good fortune to have escaped the competitive realm of our northeastern peers, his next letter to me would attempt to alleviate my discomfort and rebalance our situations by listing all the things absent which leave Alaska so blank: how impossible it is to get good meat, the lack of street life, the lack of revival theatres. Unfortunately, I might say the same absences color Houston.

Knowing your penchant for coherency, I feel I should tie this whole thing up, as in a furoshiki,[2] the elements of our conversation last night and my responses weighing (heavily) in its center: dear friends should not travel as far as they do. And if they must, we have little choice but to constantly try to learn what they are up to. We mustn't believe that land masses are moving away from each other, as you say they are. When one of our various hearts leaves the body, our envy arises from the fear that they might stay away and make wonderful a place we may never be a part of. This fear can only be overcome by knowing how our age old friend is doing, what it could possibly be besides indifference to promote such a rendering distance, and what souvenir of their experience, what kind of life, they'll bring to us later on■

[1] Daniel Housberg, close friend of Greenbaum's since they met in 1964, in second grade.

[2] Wide Japanese kerchief in which any number of gifts are wrapped and carried.

# Observing the Questions of a Grey Sky

> What we observe is not
> nature itself but nature
> exposed to our method of
> questioning.
> *Werner Heisenberg*

Who would suppose that one sky by itself
Could contain so many colors called grey—
Blue grey, beige grey, toad grey and broken grey,
Birch grey, severe grey, and barely perceived,
Sable grey at mid-heart, and never perceived but postulated,
The lavender grey of flowers found in winter moss
Beneath juniper trees? To the north a lateral column
Of soldier grey rises like smoke, forced without wind
To its own statuesque devices. Low in the south
An illusion of grey covers the sun.

And the sky above possesses the same multiple greys
As the sky in the lake below. Which sky is it then
That moves backwards through the flight of five black birds
Skimming the tundra grey surfaces? And which sky holds
The five black shadows with wings in its clouds?
If the birds should soar, in which direction
Would they fall? If the birds should dive,
Into which clouds would they disappear?

Does the grey body of the wooden shed beside the lake
Find an aspect of itself in the slivered grey
Of the eleventh layer of cloud above? Does the loon
Learn something new of its breast matched perfectly
In color with the knife grey edge of the sky
Against which it perches? Does the meadow vole
Become forever related to cumulous vapor
By being its identical brother in grey this afternoon?
What if the brown grey grasses of the field
Are simply the limited vision of the sky making seeds?

Where is the grey parting of the sky
Made by the bow of the boat moving across the lake?
And in this wide expanse, who can find the grey shoulder
Of father's coat or the grey separation of your footsteps
On the path or the grey ring of the rock thrown in anger
Into the sky? Does the entire history of grey descend
Forever beyond the bottom of the lake or can it disappear
Diagonally into the dark line of the circular horizon?
Remember how the motion of grey can come suddenly like rain
Breaking the sky into overlapping circles in the lake below.

Any question occasioned by the grey sky this evening
Must be part of the sky and a metallic grey itself,
Easily observed in the mirror of grey
Found in a reflective eye.

*Pattiann Rogers*

# The Body as Evidence

Beauty has a physical presence
In the body. It can be felt—the expansion
Caused by the ivory moon forcing a wide blue circle
Of night behind the eyes, the hard pressure
In the throat made by the bullfrog's pearl-black gaze
Holding at nose-level in the pond.

Beauty is the detectable fluctuation of the breath coming
When kingbirds dive to take berries on the wing.
It enters with the scream of the open-beaked jay at noon
As the rearrangement of balance in the chest.
And evening, slowly drawing in, gathering
Violet on its coral string, is the corresponding
Tightening of the groin, the contraction in the lungs.
A sophisticated meter might track
Its careful turning in the pulse.

And by the body, the maroon beauty of the pineweed brush
Possesses a blood of its own. The splendor
Of the morning light making gold
And purple threads among the sumac
Is given dimension, is given weight, is given fact
By its actual alteration of the eyes.
When shifting cells, caused
By birth shadows moving over snowy hills,
Are recognized inside the brain, they are called
The marked glory of dusk.

Strange, how the existence of beauty
Is proved so absolutely
When the delicate points of the spraddling
Water skimmers are found again
In infinite and spiraling manipulations
In the marrow of the spine.

*Pattiann Rogers*

Hazel Ganze

# Sisters

*Jackie Simon*

When I was a child I took piano lessons from my Aunt Gabrielle. She taught me the scales, the progressions of chords, the position of the hands. "The fingers must rest lightly over the keyboard," she said. "Thumbs are not straight"—she bent my thumbs into their proper crook—"and wrists are up. Stacatto comes from the arms, not the wrists. From the arms!" She demonstrated with a Beethovian attack on the keyboard. "You must feel it here," she said, pressing both of her hands against her chest. "It keeps the bosom firm." Her bosom was very large and firm. "Will it make my bosom big?" I asked. "Yes," she promised, "if you practice at least three hours a day." It did not affect my bosom—I was ten years old at the time—but then I didn't practice three hours a day, either.

Sometimes I stayed at her house when my parents went out of town. Gabrielle not only played the piano, she sang opera. She sang with all the windows of the house open, because she liked fresh air; the neighbors heard arias from *Cosi fan tutti* and *La Boheme*. Gabe was a coloratura; she could sing a high E as pure as holy water. *Mi piaccion quelle cose che han si dolce malia*. "I love all things that have a sweet enchantment." As she sang Mimi's song, she flung open windows, she heaved her ample bosom. *Che parlano di sogni e di chimere, quelle cose che han nome poesia*—"That speak of dreams and fancies, the wonders called poetry."

And the neighbors next door would turn up their radio. Lutetia Street had changed over the years, and the neighbors weren't what they used to be. "Such a shame," Gabe said when I mentioned the radio. "They don't know music. Listen!" We listened, for a moment, to the top tune of the day—Patti Page asking "How Much Is That Doggie in the Window?"—and then Gabe would really let go: *Il primo sole e mio, Il primo bacio Dell'aprile e mio!* That was 1953, before anybody had stereo, and my Aunt Gabrielle could drown out the likes of Patti Page without half trying.

In her youth, Gabe had wanted to be a great performer, either as a singer with the Met or as a concert pianist. "I could have made it as either," she confided, "though you wouldn't know it now, to listen to me. But when I was in practice . . ." It's easy to deceive oneself about such things, but Gabrielle's dreams seemed possible. She had been the leading soprano with the New Orleans Grand Opera Company; her voice had been heard throughout the South. "Professor Hilar knew I had it. He said I could have made it in New York."

Professor Hilar had been her teacher, a Dutch Jew in his seventies whose body, as frangible as a sparrow's, housed a giant in the defense of talent. He had come from The Hague to escape the war; before that, he and his wife had been at the Paris Conservatory. His brother, another emigre, played with the New York Philharmonic.

"Professor Hilar knew his music," Gabe said. "He used to tell me, Gabrielle, you are one in a thousand. One in ten thousand."

"So why didn't you go to New York?"

"My sister. She didn't want me to go."

"Which sister?" Gabe was my favorite aunt, but I had four aunts on my father's side alone: two nuns, a married sister, and Aline.

"Aline. She was against it."

Aline was her oldest sister, dead now; her mass had been said when I was a very small girl.

"Why didn't you just go anyway?" I asked. I guess I should admit it; I was burning up, even then, to be a great performer myself. I would have gone to New York, I thought, sister or no sister. But of course I wouldn't have said that to my aunt.

Gabe didn't answer. I knew it made older people sad to talk about someone close who was dead; my mother had taught me that. So I didn't press her, but only listened to Mimi's song: *I fior ch'io faccio, Ahime non hanno odore*. "But these rosebuds I make, alas have no fragrance." The singing thrilled me; often I wanted to sing along, to soar with her, but I knew Gabe wanted to listen to herself, not to me. Which was all right; I was never a singer. Who would have blamed her?

2

As for Aline: although she died when I was very young, as I have said, there are certain things that I still remember. She was immaculate, even in our small Louisiana town's sticky summers. She wore linen dresses all made from the same pattern, but each in a different color: persimmon, pink, cool blue, lilac. These dresses emitted a remote fragrance; when I stood close to her, I could detect it, the way one detects the fragrance of a plant not known for its perfume. She was like a ligustrum, which flowers even when it is clipped into a hedge.

Aline was the chief housekeeper for the rectory that adjoined Our Sacred Lady Church. I do not mean that she cleaned house for Father Trahan—he who preached the series of sermons about St. Jerome whipping the harlot out of his room—but she supervised the maids and the cook, and she kept records of the Sunday offerings. She let me help her count the money from the offerings by putting all of the pennies, nickles, dimes, and quarters into stacks of ten. We were in a large room—it must have been the priests' study—with wide floor-to-ceiling windows which made the room cold in winter but which admitted the clear Sunday morning light. Near the door, cut flowers bloomed as though their roots were still in the earth. There were many books—*Codex Juris Caroris* would have been there, and Tanquery's *Dogmatic Theologiae*. Sabetti-Barret, Cardinal Mercier, Thomas Acquinas. There wasn't much furniture, except for a long mahogany table in which I could see my face reflected. Aline sat at the end of the long table, counting out dollar bills. There were many ones, few fives; it wasn't a rich county. Still, Louisiana Catholics are devout; they gave what they had. My stacks of coins shone deep into the wood. Against one wall was a large aquarium filled with tropical fish; one of the fathers was a pisciculturist. Aline told me the fishes' names: Angels, Red Scats, one Discus with a green fluorescent stripe glowing down its side. The room was so quiet that the loudest sounds were the clinking of coins and the bubbling of the aquarium.

3

Aline was a fragrant memory, but Gabe was my ideal. Even before I was ten, I decided I was going to be exactly like her. I would have a piano like hers, I would have a house like hers, I would dress like her. She had hats with pheasants' feathers, silk dresses that brushed one's arms, black patent shoes with open toes and double-octave heels. She had rings that she removed when she sat at the keyboard; my favorite was a Japanese turquoise (better, she said, than the American Indian stones) that was surrounded by twenty-two garnets. The ring covered her finger down to the knuckle.

"It's vulgar," said Monet, who was Gabe's married sister. "You don't have money to throw away." Monet had a maid, a big house, and seven children. She painted roses on teacups.

"I love your ring," I whispered. It was a ring Scheherazade would wear and Lilith would covet.

"You may have it," Gabe promised, "if I ever die."

Monet didn't approve of Gabe's piano, either. One day—it was a month before Christmas, 1948, a year after Aline had died and Gabe had moved into the house on Lutetia Street—Gabe decided she wasn't going to play on a spinet forever. She went down to Carter Music and bought a Steinway concert grand. Just like that, nine feet of piano. In 1948 a Steinway grand cost six thousand, three hundred, twenty-five dollars; Gabe didn't make that much from giving piano lessons for three years. But Aline had left her the money and Gabe was going to spend it, all of it, on a Steinway concert grand.

Monet was disgusted. "You're a fool," she said. She called in my father, who refused to participate in the argument. Monet pointed out that Gabe didn't have a room in her house big enough to hold a Steinway grand.

"I've thought of that," Gabe answered. "I'm going to knock out the dining room wall and open up the porch. Then there'll be room."

"You're wasteful," said Monet, "and you'll spend your old age in penury."

"What's penury?" I asked my father. "Is it like purgatory?"

"Very like."

"Well," Gabe said, "at least I'll have my piano in penury."

The Steinway took up all of the living room and most of the ex-dining room. The audience—when there was an audience—sat on the porch, on a tiny loveseat covered with a fringed scarf from Hawaii, a souvenir from one of Gabe's old beaus. But what a wonderful piano! Black, smooth, hard, cool, polished as an Ethiopian king. And the music! What music came out of that instrument. When my lessons were over, I would beg Gabe to play, Gershwin if we felt snappy, Chopin if we were full of sentiment. It wouldn't have mattered if the piano had stuck into the street. It was worth it. It was music.

Over the piano Gabe had hung a photograph of herself as a young girl, black-haired, black-eyed. In this photograph she stood on a stage, her arms full of roses: double beauties, Don Juans, Joseph's Coats. She wore a dress of rose-colored satin, simple and severe.

But when she was giving me her lessons, in her middle age, the only performances she gave were at church. Each Christmas Eve, at Midnight Mass, she sang "O Holy Night" with Our Sacred Lady's choir. When her voice floated from the loft into the nave, to mingle there with the scent and flicker of votive candles and the incense flung from the censor, when her voice rang into the silence, *o night! o night divine!* women and men bowed their heads. Even Father Trahan, now dead several years, would have been moved to hear it.

4

When I was grown Gabe told me that it was Aline's earnings at our town's rectory that had supported Gabe's youthful singing in New Orleans; the New Orleans Grand Opera Company paid practically nothing. Aline's money also paid Professor Hilar. Now Aline was the oldest in the family, nineteen years older than Gabe. Their parents had died when Gabe was only a child—their mother of a heart attack in 1922, their father, a year later—and after that, it was Aline who heated Gabe's bath water and poured it into the big wooden tub in the kitchen, Aline who laid Gabe's convent dresses on her bed and saw that they were mended and clean. So, a dozen years later, when the honorariums given to Gabe by the New Orleans Grand Opera Company proved inadequate to pay for even a single room in a New Orleans boarding house, it was to Aline that Gabe naturally came for help.

"She would have given me anything she had," Gabe told me one afternoon when we were sitting over coffee. I hadn't seen her in years. She had gained weight, but her face was still smooth, unlined as an innocents' and her hands were still those of an artist. "She would have helped me, but Father Trahan was against it."

"Father Trahan? What did he have to do with it?"

"Everything. He had absolute control over her life. I heard them talking once, when I was visiting Aline at the rectory. They were talking about me, in French."

Gabe imitated them, wrinkling up her nose and pursing her lips to mock Father Trahan's heavy accent. "'Her way of life,'" she said, sounding for all the world like a feminized ghost of the priest, "'is not becoming to the spirit. *As ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.*'

"'Father,'"—soft tones here, for Aline—"'I'm sure she does nothing wrong.'

"'No doubt. But it's the temptation of that life. The temptations. Better she were here at Our Lady. Let her sing with our choir.'

"'She wants to go to New York . . .'

"'What if she were to go? And there meet an unbelieving man? And marry, out of the Church?'" Here Gabe twitched her eyebrows at the thought, then carried on with her impersonations.

"'She doesn't want to marry, Father,'

"'How is a young girl to know what she wants? Remember Paul. A good Catholic man is what she needs.'

"'Father—'

"'You mustn't contribute to a way of life that might jeapordize your sister's soul.'" Gabe emphasized every word of the next part. "'Do everything in your power to bring her here.'"

Then she let her face relax. "That's what they said," she finished. "And believe me, the money stopped."

"That's horrible," I said. "What happened then?"

"Professor Hilar was wonderful. 'You will take your lessons free,' he told me. 'Pay me what you can, when you can.' And my friends! They said, 'Get a job. Type. File.'"

She continued, "Aline bought this house I'm in on Father Trahan's advice. Oh yes, he told her how to spend her money, too. He said that she and I could live together, that I'd come home as soon as she cut off the money.

"But Professor Hilar was adamant. 'I will get you a loan,' he said. 'You'll go to New York. My brother knows people. He'll vouch for you.'

"As for Monet, she thought I should give piano lessons at the convent. 'Wouldn't that be better than typing?' she said. I tell you, everyone had his own plan for my life. But the company said, 'Nobody sings like you, Gabe.'" She leaned back in her chair, triumphant. "I stayed in New Orleans."

"Exactly right," I said.

"New Orleans was so wonderful then! There were parties every night. We'd rehearse all afternoon and then sing in Jackson Square at four o'clock in the morning. Tourists staying out late and black people going to the markets early would stop together and watch us. They'd clap and watch us. I had a purple cotton dress with a red sash and a man from Minneapolis tried to give me his lapis ring because he said it was my color and no one else ought ever to wear it. That was some dress. I was in love with a boy from Loyola who lost his legs in the next war. I gave him my red sash. He had on white pants that night and a flowered Hawaiian shirt. They called them victory shirts. Then we'd all go down to the Morning Call and have beignets and eat, eat. The sun would come up and make the Mississippi look like rosewater. It was a time."

She gathered our cups and went back for more coffee.

"Let me help," I said.

"No, everything's here." She came back and stirred my coffee the way I like it, almost white.

"The bad of it," she continued as though there were no interruption, "was that Aline blamed herself for what happened with Stanley."

"Tell me about Stanley," I said. No one discussed Stanley. In a family in which two sisters were nuns, a third sister was a respectable housewife with seven children, and the fourth had lived and worked most of her life in a rectory, there was only one appropriate intimate relationship with a man, and it lasted forever. Even the nuns, Sister Lucienne and Sister Helene, wore wedding bands; they were married to God.

"Tell me about Stanley," I repeated.

"We met shortly after the war began," Gabe said, waiting for her coffee to cool. "On Sunday nights my performances were broadcast over the radio—Station WWL, fifty thousand watts, The Voice of the South."

She settled into the loveseat crowded into the corner of the room. "Now, I don't know how to explain this—a scientist might, but not me—it was over the radio that I met Stanley."

"Over the radio?"

"Yes. On a ship, in the Pacific. He was the radio officer. He picked up WWL as clear as if he had been here. I was singing *Norma—bel canto*, he said, *bel canto*. He wrote me a letter in care of the station. I still have it."

"Let me see!"

She went to her bedroom, where I heard her moving boxes in her cedar chest. When she returned, it was with a wooden box heavily carved and inlaid with yellow ivory. The letter was on top. In the faded calligraphy of a more formal generation, on thin blue paper embellished with golden anchors, the young ensign in the Pacific had written: "My dear Miss D—, I have heard your singing and I admire it with all my heart. . . ." He had enclosed a photograph of himself, a black and white print of an aquiline young man with eyes limpid and unsmiling, a mouth that could never lie and never kiss.

"We wrote to each other. He loved the opera, he loved my singing. He couldn't get WWL again, but he didn't forget *Norma*. As soon as he got leave—"

"He came to see you?"

"Yes. And on his next leave, we were married."

"Just like that?"

"Exactly like that. Then he went back. We wrote long, romantic letters all during the rest of the war. I prayed the rosary ten times a night that he would come home safely. And he did"—here she smiled—"but then he wanted me to go live with him in Ohio. That's where he lived, in Ohio. On a farm."

"You didn't want to go?"

"I had no use for a farm. What opera company is in Ohio? What radio station?"

"Surely radio stations—"

"Professor Hilar was in New Orleans. No, I didn't want to go. I thought Stanley would want to move to Louisiana. But he didn't."

"You hadn't talked about it?"

"I talked about music. He talked about my hair, my eyes. And my feet." She stretched out a foot, still the diva. "He thought I had divine toes."

Now it was my turn to smile. "So you stayed in New Orleans—"

"And he went back to Ohio. It was sad. Aline was terribly upset. Father Trahan, Sister Lucienne, Sister Helene—back home they acted as though I had died. They tried to get an annulment; there had never been a divorce in our family. Nothing worked. But I couldn't give up my singing just to go to Ohio."

"Did you still want to go to New York?"

"Absolutely. The opera broadcasts on Sunday nights were very popular. There was talk that NBC was going to contract with WWL and broadcast the performances all over the United States. Well—! This was it. You never know what could have happened. The Met? Why not? Professor Hilar was ecstatic. I was going to be another Lily Pons."

"Did NBC actually do it?"

"Yes." Gabe smoothed her hands over the old loveseat. The photograph of herself as a young artist, in the rose-colored satin dress, slender, dark-haired, beautiful, hung over the piano in counterpoint to the woman, no longer young, but still an artist, across from me now.

"NBC contracted for six performances. They were going to be broadcast live in New Orleans during the winter season. It was 1946."

"I never knew you were on NBC."

"I never was." Gabe looked at me. "You see, the week that the auditions started, something happened to Aline."

"What happened?"

"It was the night before my audition—the *night before*. That night Aline called long distance. I wasn't home, I was at a friend's to get a good night's sleep. My roommate stayed up all hours, reading. When I got home, she gave me the message: Aline had a lump in her breast. She was going into surgery immediately. That day."

She lifted her hands as though holding her words. "How could I sing with that? The doctors thought she might die. And she wanted me with her."

"Why didn't she say anything before? Or else"—I jumped up, I practically stalked around the room—"my God, why didn't she wait one more day?"

"She didn't know."

"How could she not know?"

"I hadn't said anything." Gabe shook her head. "I wanted to surprise her."

"What about Monet? Had you said anything to Monet?"

"I don't know."

I must have looked incredulous, for she continued, "Who can remember? What difference does it make?" She pulled at the hem of her dress, too short for the current fashion. "Aline had ignored herself for years. When she finally showed the lump to Monet, you could actually see it." Gabe pushed back her shoulder and held her breast. "You could see it, a lump as big as a tennis ball."

It was scary to think of it.

"I forgot everything, I left immediately. Aline was so good," Gabe finally finished. "She never complained, not even at the end. She asked only that I be there."

The long-slanting winter light spread in the room, almost tangible. I heard Gabe's watch ticking like a metronome.

"She lived five months. I was with her every day."

For a while, neither of us talked. The light fell in shafts upon the wall, the piano, the portrait, ourselves. In the winter like that, it comes in a room so suddenly and brightly that everything seems almost to glow; then the moment is past and everything diminishes. Finally I asked, because I had to ask, "Why didn't you go back to New Orleans after she died? It was there for you. Why didn't you take it?"

My aunt looked at me, her eyes black as hours burned. "You're too young," she said.

I waited; we both knew there was a better answer.

"By the time they buried her, it was over. I had been replaced. WWL wanted me back, but NBC wasn't going to do another series." She smiled with one side of her mouth. "The first wasn't that great a success, frankly. I like to think I might have made a difference. Professor Hilar never gave up, but it wouldn't be two years before he was dead, too. No, I was here."

Gabe pushed her hands together, got up, and moved to her piano bench. She removed her rings and watch and placed them on top of the Steinway. She still had her turquoise and garnets.

"It doesn't do to talk like this," she said. I agreed; besides, nothing was left to be said. But in the softer light, the portrait over the piano more nearly resembled the woman at the keyboard. Her back was still straight, and her hands rested lightly on the keys, thumbs curved, wrists up.

"Would you like to hear me sing?" she asked■



# To the Roach

I have come a way since first disgusted
by how your carob color would move
across dishes and spoons to hurry retreat
into a dark crack.
Your body repelled by the unexpected light
would flatten until you could disappear
before my eyes. Henri Fabre would not even
mention your name in *The Social Life of Insects.* And I,
for my part, kept everything
that I could away from you—
damp tea cloths tied to the overhead string,
toothbrush and paste in the refrigerator,
every crumb taken care of
until the night I woke up, sweating
from a dream, and found you, boogie man,
next to me in the covers. I remember
what happened, how I pounded the mattress,
bouncing you up and down
to teach you what it means to go to bed.
You finally landed
and I killed you on the pillow,
the softest thing there.

*Aldona Middlesworth*

# Bicycles

*Rolf Laub*

*Excerpt from the novella,* Christian Beck

The soldiers overran the train station, dropping their packs wherever they found space, and set their black assault rifles on the barrel supports. Muzzles were pointing up from the ground in all directions. The platform and the adjoining lot were cluttered with bicycles lying on the ground. A big tangle of black iron pipes, spokes, and wheels. More bicycles were leaning in long files against the walls of the station building and the warehouse, ready for pick-up.

Christian Beck fumbled for the luggage receipt through the many pockets of his coat. Finally, he found the small piece of paper and showed it to a railroad worker in a blue overcoat.

"Eighty-three! That's over there by the shack," the man said, and pointed toward the far end of the yard.

Beck went up the stairs to the ramp, passing several files of bicycles, and checked their number tags. Finally, he could make out the eighty-three. It was the second to last bike in a row of maybe twenty. He tried to pull it out, but it was jammed in by other bikes which leaned heavily against his. He started to work through the file, pushing the bicycles to the left and to the right. Other cyclists came and took theirs out of the row. He could free his at last. He checked it. It was still intact. The spokes and rims were not bent. He took good care of it. He liked the way it rolled, weightily, smoothly, and silently. It was the only item of the personal gear he liked. Like all the other gear, he had to store it at home. Had to keep it ready and in shape for doomsday. There were only two things which could be used outside of the service: the rifle and the bicycle. The rifle he used only once a year when he had to fulfill the mandatory target practice on one of the many rifle ranges.

Six shots at
the circle target.
Six shots and
six shots within
sixty seconds at
the man target.
Smell of gunpowder,
smoke,
and the detonations which numb his senses.

In sloping meadows between target and rifle house, dairy cows were grazing. The shooting from rifle ranges and the ringing of church bells had set the sound for Sunday morning from spring to fall for as long as he could remember.

Never again was he tired enough to reach his score from boot camp, but he was numb enough to exceed the requirement.

He had a strange relation to this rifle. When he was a boy, he openly liked rifles. At one time, he had possessed several carbines with bayonets, a .22, and a powerful and precise air rifle. He had had them on a rack in his room. With the .22 and the air rifle he used to shoot rats in a little shack where the garbage cans were stored. One time he had shot a small bird. He had not killed it with the first shot and he had had to shoot it again as it was lying in the gravel before his feet.

After boot camp, he had sold all his rifles and the bayonets. He did not allow himself to like the flat-shiny assault rifle with the powerful impact on his shoulder.

He felt different about the bicycle. It too could be used outside of the service. At any time. "For training purposes," it said in the regulations. Unlike the rifle, it was an innocent object, and the fact that it was an army bicycle did not distinguish it from the other bicycle he had. A light ten-speed touring bike. Twelve years ago he had seen it in a display window at a bicycle shop. In the evenings he would walk down to the shop and stand in front of the window, daydreaming about riding it. He had absorbed each detail. The soft-blue frame, the metallic-red pump, the chrome fenders around slim rims, and the impressive and complicated looking ten-speed transmission. Its brand name was Orion.

He had imagined a man coming up to him, seeing his desire, and buying him the bicycle. The man never came. He also wanted to work for it, as a hand in the forest. Shortly before his family moved away from this town, his mother bought him the Orion. Then he would go for rides after school. He would listen to the gentle rattle of the well-lubricated chain, the whispering of the tires on the asphalt road, and the rustling of the wind. On free afternoons he would go on trips. Suddenly he could break the confinement of the neighborhood, the town, and the network of public transportation. He could explore his region. He would take some road and become intrigued by a destination sign.

"Stein am Rhein, 25 km."

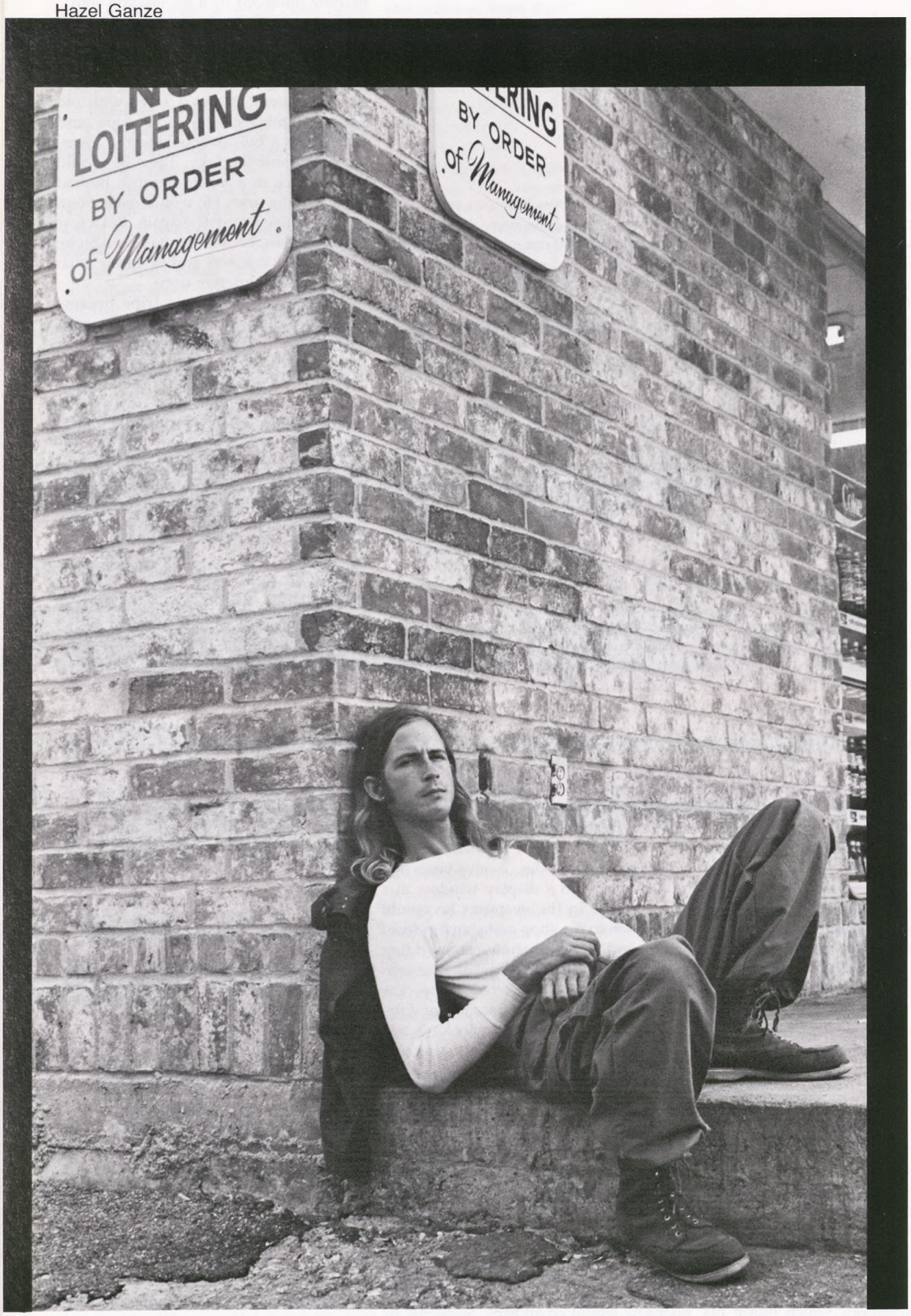
And he had nailed himself on this road and peddled, peddled twenty-five kilometers to Stein. And the name was not just a word anymore. It was a town with old houses, fountains, shops, and people, and a castle on a hill, overlooking the town, the river, and the lake. Then he would peddle back in a hurry, because he had forgotten the time. He would make Stein to twenty-five kilometers again. But it was different then, because he had seen Stein; he knew what it was and he knew what twenty-five kilometers were.

As he grew older, his trips became longer. Day-trips at first. Then, day-trips without return. Peddling silently through moist, foggy autumn mornings.

When he was fifteen, he started to venture south through the Alps, down to the border to Italy, where he could not understand the language, where the houses were different, and where the coffee tasted stronger. He peddled towards this wall of mountains, at an easy pace at first, and then went into a struggle with the mountain road, wrestling meter after meter from it till he had reached the pass. He would take the flat stretch leading over the pass, gaining speed steadily, pushing the gear levers gently from one to ten. By the time he reached the point where the road dropped into the other valley, his speed became a fury. He leaped into the grade, thrusting himself downward, passing cars, and threw himself into the switchbacks so that the tires were almost torn from the rims. He had won the pass and was now paying it back, meter for meter, in fractions of seconds.

"Hey, Beck! Mo-o-o-ve!" a corporal yelled at him. He swung himself into the saddle and rolled down the gentle slope of the ramp■

Hazel Ganze




# Things Could Be Worse

*for Susan Joy in the Ozarks*

I who have never given to you
But taken with every favor
I, who have sneered at meekness,
Pledge and vow
And every tender tentative gesture of care
Wrapping me closer to you
Though a hand's touch is as far away
As the patio light that shines on a leaf
Of prized caladium
Waiting for the dew that would glisten
That it might heat the dew into more subtlety

Life should be a gas!
Amazing buttes and roadside joints
Slide by unnoticed
Glum at the wheel of our cramped Winnebago
Fleeing into the cramp of the country,
I am jealous of the more contented in their cars
Mexicans negroes & our own strayed breed
Old beat-up Valiants, radios loud
Over-priced vans full of stoned ne'er-do-wells
Transporting trust fund surfboards
Through the desert of our flight

You, without the children, brew up cares
Spoiling the view and demanding
Escape the confinement of space
That my impatience has made miserable,

Must admit that your closeness is precious
So precious
Absence makes me feel like someone grown
Well-liked and respected in a one-horse town
Airstream
For fleeing all celebrity and blame
Having been once a wealthy entertainer
Beloved franchisee or discount County judge
Leo Romero
In a late night television dream.
Brought back to fame in a special limited offer
Caught so drowsy in America's sleep
Singing nonsense songs to lonely losers
Who hear their own guilts laboring on the spools
Of temporary popularity
Made dearer by elapsing moments
Lapses gulp of fortune noted by the press
Of actual feelings creeping into mind

Loved, then, for settling
As an old house is not so ramshackled remembered
Headaches of not having the rent
Are easily construed to fits of fondness
Engorged with warming reliefs of surviving
First one's memories and, later, time
After time has distilled the harsh actual

At the entrance hall to the solarium:
The Corning Ware anniversary blown up
In colored plexiglass based on the Polaroid pictures
Flawed Polavision nudist antics Airstream gleaming
Me and the kids behind you, smugly gleaming
The carport ceiling depicts in bronzed aluminum
Posting the banns, your sister's husband
Reeling drunk into the downstairs bathroom
A trail of cigar ashes on the brand new carpet
Me on the lawn with the birthday Weed Eater

It will be enough for me to accept this new fame,
Pleased with the secret of my scrapbooks
15 years being quietly weird without note
Knowing the genesis of my mildness
Only you
Recycled of the ragged consciousness of loneliness
Blurred nights and days becoming faint as footsteps leaving
While the kiss cools on the cheek
And arms ache from the last embrace
That common sense told us to break
To satisfy the artificial needs of all creatures:
Turtles.

The sparrow waiting at the hedge to be startled.
Children impatient to wave "bye." A neighbor pleased.
This is the only lesson age has taught me:
If fear of nature or just mankind's tinkerings
Turtle's neck works

The magics of our youth return in our dual solitudes
To haunt us
Throat of a Christmas sweater knit with love
Though distant, delivered by United Parcel Service
Too large too small
Wool
Spinning and Sennett
Husbandry and coy devices
Flannel pyjamas grown as we have grown
Stalking us all the days of our lives
Rotating and flapping
In amusements of clotheslines and dryers
Finally, now, catching up. And, again, us.

Oh
Soft soft hair finally allowed to gray by nature
Outweighs any inflation of our golden years,
old woman

I didn't
Really
Need another pack of Luckies
Then
I need one now

Times like these, those
Are the things I remember.

The service in this restaurant is poor
And the girl from the office, while attractive
She's also young and greedy. She's a bore!

Aha
A *déjà vu* before your change
And my retiring

It's a good thing there's no current
In these circuits, you'd be shocked
Just to know the thoughts I've thrown away
Could help or harm you only if you knew
Betty Furness beside her Frigidaire
The duty of effort required to return
At last, without rancor or fear, simply and
Humbly to the blunt unvarnished statement

I who have given nothing cher
Fully or under pain
Of facing what is true about evasions
Recognizing finally shortcomings
Are always built-in aspects of confession
I, who am taken with your unsure presence,
Have abandoned all hope of seance or phone call
Given up the dream of suddenly
Suddenly seeing you in that chair
Again
Admitting the cruelty of choosing not to please you
For fear you would know that I'm pleased
I walked away for that, you know
To see or hear or touch you, near or far from me
Whatever elusive force connects us is persistent

It takes a man to say that

*Lorenzo Thomas*

# Dust

*Diane Heath*

In my living room the parachutists begin their descent from the vaulted ceiling. Except when I'm very sick, I don't see them in the morning sunlight because at that time the light through the windows is new and cool, and I'm busy beginning the day. Perhaps mid-morning, after I'm dressed and groomed, is the earliest I've spotted their ranks. Walking back and forth from one activity to the next, I might glance up and notice groups gathering in the corners or where air from vents have blown them into stringy transports. Also, with the sun more mellow, a little warmer, and I standing just right, I can spot glimmers of their canopies as they float to the ground. I try to ignore them on Mondays and Tuesdays.

By Wednesday late afternoon I begin to get annoyed, though, and I swipe at the troops with a rag. They congregate, after their fall, on furniture, which is against all the rules in my domain. But they're imperturbable in the face of my damp cloth: even though their bodies are visible on the shroud, I know after I wash it and the dirty water drains into a sewer, then a bayou or river, and the water evaporates, and the wind carries them, they likely become someone else's airborne army or maybe even mine again.

Evenings are the worst of any day. I turn on my spotlights so I can go on with living and then I see them swirling in the shafts, mocking me in their seeming suspension. However, I know others drift surely downward in the shadows.

And I inhale the parachutists! Thank goodness I can't taste or smell the battalions entering my nose and mouth every few seconds; I give them *that* kindness. Sure, once in awhile a sky diver will fall into my eye and it'll tear until I or a doctor drag him out, but I don't feel them settling *en masse* onto my shoulders and into my hair or along my body as I lay stretched out reading, sleeping.

I am grave in my awareness that the parachutists will last every day for as long as I exist. Sometimes I tire of my awareness, but their shimmering and gathering in silken layers all around me remind me to fight. I drag out my heavy artillery from the closet on Saturdays for pogroms. I suck them up in a Eureka, empty out the bag onto my compost pile, but before I turn to go some have jumped up on my back or have clung to my shoes and I track them into the house, showing me the fool that I am■

# Mineral Oil

It was bought to polish shells
brought up from deep water,
picked and cleaned of soft meat.
It seeps into crevices, brightens the knobs
on a sea urchin's case, the striations
on a whelk's whorl. My fingers slip over pearl lining
of a quahog, a cockle's speckled ridges,
wanting to know every shell, the space within.

I examine my breasts with the same oil.
It seeps into pores. Wet skin shines.
The fingers slide, sensitized to flesh
between skin and bone. They move in circular motion,
follow each rib to a center, double back
over scars, moving faster, pressing more softly
than with shells. Some things
they don't want to know.

*Jane P. Moreland*

# On Your Somnambulism

Demons pursue you. You roll off the bed
in flight, march between sheets
to worms burrowing in your legs. Arms flap out,
startle my ribs, my windpipe. All night
I am the witch who won't bring aspirin.

I steal to the wing chair, listen
to elephantine lumbering, bumping
at closed doors, my name screamed through darkness.
I fear for the stairwell rail.
Found, I am blamed for leaving the conjugal bed.

At breakfast you are smiles and sunshine,
but night words stain like bruises.
Your halves never fit. I wonder
what of this I will remember
one day when my bed is dead still.

*Jane P. Moreland*

# Art for Art's Sake

*for V.L.F.*

**Past Perfect**

At his request, the artist had been introduced
with a biography that ignored 20 years
of his life. "He was born in Fort Worth
and went to college. . . ." the museum lady
had said, but he had recognized my face anyway
from that 20 year void and waved, then started
to talk about the stages of his work as if
they were children sent off on their own.
He began in air-brushed clouds, concentric
colors planed and wedged, pastel-edged slices
of pie; then came dark vinyl landscapes
contoured with stitches, scenes sewn with tucks
and darts by machines. The guided tour shifted
to the gallery walls as he described how words
that looked burned through photographs to tell
his stories were actually paper sanded away
over type, stories formed by surrounding paper,
narratives of air. In one piece he branded
cattle with Barbara Rose saying "You can't
make great art in Texas because all you have
to look at are cows," which he doesn't believe
or he wouldn't stay. Then he moved the tour
on toward a New Mexico mountain silhouetted
and cut with a story of unidentified flying
objects and he confided, "If I saw a UFO
I couldn't make art anymore." I laughed then
trying to believe he meant what he said and how
he would be if seeing the real left nothing
to his imagination.

**Past**

Some people laughed at the reports to the media,
discounting the artist's sketches because
they resembled a cartoon conception in
Mad Magazine and all the humanoids, though
intelligent, appeared to speak in balloons
like Nancy and Sluggo. Then in a TV interview
outside her dress shop, the artist's mother
said, "Yes, he could have been unduly influenced
in his formative years by small town life
and things he didn't read, but Art has always
been a good boy and I believe his story now."
He stuck by his sketches as truth not art, a sign
he was already changing, and told how he noticed
first the lights cutting through clouds, rearranging
spectrums, then how the space ship broke through,
illuminating the landscape, melting rocks into
pyroplastic flows for a soft landing. He said,
"I understood the visitors' words because I saw
them like laser lights burning holes in the
air, and the sounds of the ship were whirring
spirals of sparkling light that seemed to sear
clear to the center of vision. Water washed
over ideas for paintings that were written in
chalk in my mind and the slate was clean.
And I was not afraid."

**Present Perfect**

The sewing machines have been whirring madly
in the dress factory Art inherited from his father,
though he branched out from his father's basic
line of two-piece, peach-colored, double-knit
pantsuits and is into accessories like pastel
canvas bags shaped like clouds and hung
with braided rainbowed shoulder straps. The expert
cutter slices out hundreds in an hour and the
seamstresses can stitch in vinyl linings and have
them ready for market in no time at all.
On Sundays Art drives to the Baptist Church
where his mother used to play the organ, there
where he was born again and reBaptized
in the water of the Word; there where he said
as he was lifted up from the font, "Yea, verily,
I have seen the Light and I have been washed
clean. I will go and sin no more."

*Nancy Luton Tynan*

Hazel Ganze

# Artificial Light

*Elizabeth McBride*

Amelia looked at herself in the upstairs bathroom mirror. She lifted her head until the skin on her neck was tight below the bone white slopes of her face. Her fingers drummed on her cheeks, testing the thick paste of the masque, hardened now to a smooth surface. After dinner, she had gone straight upstairs and applied the masque from a small ceramic jar the skin doctor had given her. It smelled like sulphur but it had gone on easily enough.

She thought she heard the door, first the knob turning and when the door wouldn't open, the key turning in the lock. She walked out of the bathroom, still drumming, and stood in the hall barefoot, waiting. When she heard his footsteps in the living room, she ran one hand over a plump shoulder and down her arm, pinching at the flesh. If you can pinch an inch, it means you're obese. With the other hand, she pulled at the skirt of her sundress. When he reached the top of the stairs, his jacket hooked on one finger and thrown back over his shoulder, she turned her face up, but he merely leaned closer and kissed at her ear. The masque. He was still warm from driving home in the afternoon heat, and he smelled vaguely of smoke. Probably spent the day in meetings.

Amelia followed David into the bedroom where he hung his jacket and loosened his tie, pulling the knot out and hanging it on a tie rack.

"Sorry I'm late. If I hadn't finished what I was doing, I'd have been back there tomorrow morning. Five days a week is all I can stand. Something's wrong with the Rabbit. I'll have to do some work on it. I need to change that back tire anyway."

"I saved you some dinner. Mandy's spending the night with Renee. I called Cindy to see if it would be all right. They picked her up right after dinner."

"What's going on? What happened to your face?"

"Nothing. I went to the dermatologist. If I told you what he did to me today, it would make you sick."

"What did he do to you?"

"The nicest thing he did was to burn my skin with acid and freeze it with dry ice."

"Don't tell me any more. I'm too old for torture stories."

Amelia watched him sit on the edge of the bed and take his shoes off. Then he placed them side by side in the back of the closet and changed out of his pants into a pair of stringy cutoffs.

"David."

"Yeah."

"I called you today but you weren't there and no one knew where you were. Where were you?"

"Probably on the way from one account to another."

"Aren't you supposed to check in?"

"Yeah." He walked down the stairs and into the kitchen. Amelia followed him. He opened the freezer.

"You got some Sealtest. Thanks. Julia Child says it's the best—you read that *Time* article about ice cream? Sealtest. She says it's creamy." He got a spoon and sat down at the kitchen table.

"You need to be eating more than ice cream." Amelia took a clean plate out of the dishwasher and the rest of the spinach salad out of a tupperware container. She dribbled a thin stream of dressing from a pint jar, leaving two cloves of garlic in the bottom.

"Yeah," David answered, looking down at the spoon, turning it over to see if his face were reflected in the back. Then he took another bite. He looked up at Amelia. "You know, sometimes I get tired of calling in for messages; every time I call in, the dispatcher gives me more calls to make. If I work it right, I call in the right number of times and then stop, I can finish my calls on Friday about the time the office closes and get back there to finish my paper work. That way I get everything done on Friday night so I don't have to go back the next morning. If I keep calling in, they just give me more and more calls, and I can't get back to my desk until it's too late to wrap it all up. Today was a mess anyway, another long meeting, sell this, sell that, find out who needs what. Sometimes I think nobody needs any of this stuff."

"Please eat some salad, David. You need some real food. There's chicken in the icebox."

"Yeah. This *is* real food—creamy, just like Julia Child says."

"David, I called you today because I couldn't go home. After I went to the dermatologist I drove up in front of the house and I couldn't come in. I had slowed down and was ready to pull into the driveway; I had even downshifted, when I started crying. Those kids, waiting . . . I couldn't do it. So I drove over to Peggy's house and I woke her up, knocking on the door. She was taking a nap; she seemed to be mad at me so I left. Then I drove to the French bakery and bought three cinnamon rolls and ate them. I started to buy more but the woman behind the counter was looking at me and I realized I was crying again, real tears, rolling right down my cheeks. So I went out and got into the car. After I had sat there about fifteen minutes, I drove to the Exxon station and called you from one of the pay phones."

She poked at David's salad with a fork and took some crackers from a tin on the table. Nabisco Saltines, just like she had eaten with Campbell's vegetable soup when she was a little girl. David got a small piece of chicken out of the refrigerator, and put it on a saucer, took a knife and a fork out of the drawer. When he sat down, he cut it up into small pieces, inspecting each one before he put it into his mouth.

"What's on this chicken?"

"Some soy sauce. And some honey. A little garlic powder. I thought you liked soy sauce."

"I thought so, too."

He pulled the newspaper closer to his plate and opened it to the second section.

"More about that honeymoon. They say that wedding cost over a million dollars. Just because you're a prince doesn't mean you need to spend that kind of money on a wedding."

"I wish we were going on a honeymoon. That's something I always wanted to do." She broke one of the crackers into four pieces and laid them on the edge of the plate.

"Do you know what I did today?" She pushed at the spinach leaves with a piece of cracker, then picked up a slice of mushroom with her fingers and chewed on it while she talked.

"I took your son to the dentist because he got up too late to ride his bike. Then I picked up Mandy from the slumber party. Of course she wasn't ready, so I took Prince Charming home and went back to get her. When we got home, Mandy tried to put in her contact lenses and got one stuck in the corner of her eye, over by her nose. She was hysterical, screaming and crying, and she wouldn't stop. I called the doctor and he told me exactly what to do but she wouldn't stop screaming. She wouldn't even let me touch her. So I drove her all the way out Griggs Road and the doctor got it out in about three seconds. Then I brought her home. When we got here, Prince Charming wanted to be driven to the swimming pool, so I got back into the car. . . ."

"His name is Charles, remember, just like the real prince. And he's your son, too."

"Yeah. Charles. Well, Charles wanted to stop at Eckerds for a new swimming mask and I told him I didn't have enough money. He started screaming and I started screaming and then I slapped him. I was about to have a wreck, he was making so much noise. So I drove around the block and came home. With him screaming all the way. He threatened to beat me up, do you know that, threatened to beat up his own mother. 'Go ahead, hit me again, I'll show you, I'll beat the shit out of you,' he was screaming. Then he got out of the car and ran off. He's still gone and I don't know where he is. Anyway, this afternoon after he left I went to the dermatologist and when I came home I started crying and couldn't come in the house."

"He's probably over at the Castro's watching cable TV. I'll call in a minute. Did Dr. Warner call you today?"

"Yeah. He said to keep on taking those pills. I told him I was crying a lot. He said that wasn't surprising for a woman in my condition; whatever happens, just keep taking the pills. I think that's what's making my face break out. I asked the dermatologist and he just looked at me."

Amelia rinsed the salad plate and put it in the drainer. "I'm going upstairs."

David looked up at her and watched her until she had left the kitchen. Then he stood up and dialed the Castro's house on the wall phone.

"Hi. This is David." He leaned against the pantry door while he listened.

"Ok. That's fine. He can walk home when it's over . . . Right. Thanks a lot."

Pressing the receiver down with his left hand, David held the phone cord up in the air with his right so the ear piece could dangle. He watched it turning in tight little circles just above the floor, banging now and then against the wall, until the cord had worked its kinks out. When it was swinging slowly back and forth, David was satisfied that the cord was completely unwound and hung up the phone. After a minute during which he buttoned and then unbuttoned the top button of his short-sleeved shirt, he dialed another number. He listened to the busy signal for a while before he hung up. Then, whistling a formless, unrecognizable tune, he raked the rest of the chicken into the empty ice cream carton and put it into the trash, leaving his silverware and saucer in the sink.

Amelia was lying under the covers, her face clean now and her hair damp at the edges. David lay down on the pink chenille bedspread, facing her and resting his head on her plump shoulder. He moved one finger slowly down the side of her breast, smooth under the smooth melon fabric of her nightgown. She took his hand and held it, running her thumb over the outline of his fingernails. With her other hand, she picked up a book from the stack beside the bed.

"I think I'll read for a while. I think I'd just like to lie here and read and then go to sleep."

"Ok." He got up and walked to the other side of the bed. With both hands, he pulled the sheet close around her waist and then he turned on the track lights above her head. When he went out into the hall and downstairs, his bare feet stuck slightly on the slick, polished wood.

Amelia opened her book. Downstairs David had put on a record, "Blue," by Joni Mitchell—his favorite. She could hear it. She turned a page and stared at the print. Then she slipped her hand under the sheet, under her nightgown, under the stretched elastic of her underpants■

# Morning Person

God, best at making in the morning, tossed
planets and stars, singing and dancing, rolled
Saturn's rings spinning and humming twirled the earth
so hard it coughed and spat the moon up, brilliant
bubble floating around it for good, stretched holy
hands till bird in nervous sparks flew forth from
them and beasts—lizards, big and little, apes,
lions, elephants, dogs, and cats cavorting,
tumbling over themselves, dizzy with joy when
God made us in the morning too, both man
and woman, leaving Adam no time for
sleep so nimble was Eve bouncing out of
his side until as night came everything
and every one grew tired, declined, and sat
down in one soft descended Hallelujah.

*Vassar Miller*

# Salt Kiln

Dust depends on the leaves of the olive trees
to give it substance. No sound. No sound
but the hiss of the drying grass and flies
whose crystalline eyes shatter the world

into brilliant repetitions. I stand
here often, fabricating delicate lies
that repeat the green to gold to sere
turn of the earth, my stories a whorl

of facets. They fight with memory
in the way that lovers struggle, each
giving passion and form to the other's
variant body. Drops of sweat, small pearls,

hang from the branches. The grays and greens
weave their own web: lashes for my eyes.

*Sidney Wade*

# First Names

Mother sometimes mixed up our names,
a wrong coin pulled from her purse.
Ann, Kathy, and Jean, voices from a choir loft,
voices from the backyard under the pear tree,
I watched the tousled heads of my sisters
as they bent over dandelion crowns
lost in the cut grass. Chris, John, Dan,
Michael, one summer we crossed mountains
and I sang with the others in the dark,
keeping father on the road. I remember
the upstairs room where I first awoke, rabbits
freed from their hutch eating the Hammerstroms'
carrots, a pigeon fallen from the eaves,
and a name sailing toward me, like a song.

*Patty Clark*

# Telephone Company

*Karin Brandt*

As long as I was working days, I was a perfect angel. "Operator. Yes, sir. Did you know that you could dial that number yourself by dialing one, the area code and then the? Please tell Mr. Jones to call Operator 88 in Rapid City, South Dakota. Operator. Sorry, ma'am, the circuits to Omaha are busy right now. Would you like to try your call a little later? (pause) Or would you like me to try it for? Operator. That number's d.a., operator. I have a collect call from Connie in Custer. Would you accept the? Operator. Calling Denver for a Mr. Mulberry on Mayberry. Operator. Long distance calling for. Operator. When do you expect her? Operator."

Reach out. Reach out and touch someone.

I had a 99 index—out of 100 observed calls, I had made only one error. I was also very good about working overtime and coming in on my days off when they needed me. And I never broke a single rule: I never wore slacks or showed up for work with rollers in my hair. I was never late to my position. I never left my position without being relieved by another operator or by my supervisor. I never talked unnecessarily. I never let a signal stand for 15 seconds without answering it. (One time when all of my cords were busy, I even tied into a vacant position next to me and answered a signal from there.) I was never rude to a single customer. I was never overly friendly with customers. I never made or received a personal call at the board. I never ate, drank or chewed gum at the board. And I certainly never—no, not even thought about listening in on a call.

Destined for greatness. Miss Bishop told me so. In a few years, I could be a supervisor, then Chief Operator, and someday, possibly, after Miss Bishop's retirement, maybe even (whisper) Traffic Manager. When I graduated from high school, my classification had changed from "permanent part-time" to "temporary full time." Miss Bishop wanted more than anything for me to be "permanent full time." But when I said, "No, thank you very much. I want to go to college and marry a rich boy," she put me on late evenings. Going to college she could forgive. Getting married, she could not.

The phone company hadn't even been my first choice as a place to work that summer. I had wanted to work at Donaldson's Department Store or at one of the three dress stores in town, where you could get a 15-percent discount, but those jobs were pretty much reserved for the cheerleader types, daughters and nieces and cousins of friends and neighbors of the store owners. However, the phone company, as it turned out, wasn't a bad second choice. In those days it was the only place in Rapid City that paid girls the minimum wage. It also paid overtime and doubletime for Sundays and holidays. The best part of the job, though, was that after I got switched to the late tricks, I learned a whole lot more about life than I ever would have by selling Ship 'N Shore blouses and Pendleton skirts, a lot more than I had learned up to that point by reading books, and even a lot more than my big-time college boyfriend Bruno Sorenson could teach me.

Reach out. Reach out and touch someone.

The long-distance rates changed at eight in those days, so from eight to nine, the board was very busy—all those tourists visiting their loved ones by long distance—but after nine, things got slow. The last Chief Operator went home then and so did most of the other operators—the number at the board dropped from nearly 20 to less than five. Ironically, besides those who had been banished like me, the only other women who worked the after-nine limbo were those who had enough seniority to choose any trick they wanted—women like Alma, Virginia, and Rosalie, who had worked for the phone company almost 20 years, yet for some reason or another weren't Chief Operators. Both Alma and Virignia had been at one time but didn't like it and asked to be returned to the board. Rosalie was one-half Ogallala Sioux.

That first night I worked past nine, I sat on the end next to Alma, a big buxom woman with a big buxom laugh, and by 9:15 I had already broken two rules: (1) unnecessary talking and (2) eating at the board. But I wasn't the only one. It was Rosalie who gave me the chocolate chip cookies. She was also late to her position. Virginia put a stick of Dentyne in her mouth as soon as the Chief Operator checked in her headset. And Alma left her position without being relieved.

"Take this call for me, will you, Honey? I gotta take a leak."

It was a LeRoy call, and LeRoy calls bored Alma to death. It was my first, Alma's initiation present to me. Two or three times a week, some woman—never the same one—would place a person-to-person call from a coin phone to LeRoy (no last name) in Hot Springs. "Sorry, operator, LeRoy just left. Try the Silver Dollar Saloon. (745-9924) He ain't here, operator. Try the Golden Nugget. (745-9890) Sorry, operator. You might try the Top Hat (745-9990) Sorry, he hasn't been in yet tonight. Try City Bar. (745-9791) Sorry, operator. Have you tried Rosie's? (745-9898) Sorry, operator." By the rules, we only had to try three different numbers, but I always ended up ringing every pay phone in every bar in Hot Springs, South Dakota. When Alma got back to the board that first night, she laughed to see me scribbling numbers on the back of my third ticket.

"Give up, Honey. You'll never find him."

But I didn't give up—not once that whole summer. As bored with them as Alma was, the other operators always gave me their LeRoy calls, and I never gave up hope of finally connecting with the voice of the man who could command such tenacity from so many women, including me.

"Can you believe it?" I asked Alma. "If that many women are trying to reach him from Rapid City, how many more are there in Hot Springs? He's got to have all those bartenders *lying* for him. It's despicable."

But Alma just laughed. "The way I see it, Honey, it's a lot better to burn your candle at both ends than stick it in a closet and let the mice eat it."

(Next to her laugh, the thing I liked best about Alma was that although she had never been married, she had been around and was full of good advice. Years later, when I graduated from college she sent me a card. It had a picture of a dog on it with a Band-Aid, a real one, taped to its stomach. "Good luck" it said inside, and underneath in Alma's buxom handwriting, "Never take anything too seriously—especially yourself.")

"With all the ends he's been burning lately, that LeRoy must have one heckuva big candle," giggled Rosalie, blushing.

"Hmph," said Virginia.

Unlike Rosalie, Virginia never giggled, and unlike Alma, she never laughed. She hardly ever smiled, and even then you had to look close. She took her job very seriously and had the most perfect posture I had ever seen. The only reason I wasn't afraid of her was that she wore spike heels and lots of costume jewelry, including an ankle bracelet with a double heart on it. She also painted her long, against-the-rules fingernails (toenails, too, I suppose) with red nail polish, leaving a bare white crescent at the base of each one. On her days off, Virginia rode to Winner and back with her boyfriend, a Trailways bus driver. They had been engaged for 13 years.

Rosalie, who had a tiny round body and legs too thin to support it, was a widow, who had raised 14 kids and now spent her days raising her grandkids while their mothers worked, did their time in jail, or ran off to Denver. A couple of her sons or maybe grandsons were linemen for the phone company. She was proud of that. Her shopping bag on the shelf below her position always contained homemade cookies or cupcakes. One time, on Virginia's birthday, she even brought some raspberry Kool-Aid in a quart-size Mason jar with ice in it. Alma contributed as mixer a half-pint of vodka, which she and I finished off because Rosalie was dead-set against drinking ("It killed my husband and three of my kids.") and Virginia never drank anything but sloe gin and 7-Up.

At about 9:30 that first night, after we finished the chocolate chip cookies, Alma placed a personal call from the board.

Reach out. Reach out and touch someone.

"Who are you calling?" I whispered, trying not to look shocked. Although not the greatest of sins, making personal calls from the board was definitely in a different category than unnecessary talking or eating at the board.

"Sonny. I always call him about this time just to let him know I'm O.K."

"Who's Sonny?" I asked, but Alma just laughed.

"Just once I'd like to see that dog of yours answer one of your calls," giggled Rosalie. "That'd give you one heckuva shock."

"Hmph," said Virginia.

"You mean Sonny's a dog?" I asked.

"Not just any dog, Honey. A real *good* dog."

By ten that night, I figured we had broken just about every commandment Ma Bell had ever chunked out of stone. I even called Bruno Sorenson long distance in Washington, where he was spending two weeks at ROTC summer camp. I should have known, should have guessed that Alma, Virginia and Rosalie wouldn't stop with just the minor infractions. And they didn't. Unlike the punishment for lesser sins, which was a sharp rap on the shoulder from the Chief Operator, a talking-to behind the glass walls of Miss Bishop's office, or three dozen "Hail, Ma Bells," the punishment for THE BIG ONE—listening in on a customer call *under any*

*circumstances whatsoever*—was immediate dismissal, possible criminal prosecution, and the loss of your Communications-Workers-of-America card. In a word: excommunication.

That's not to say nobody ever did it. To do it before nine when you could get caught was pretty stupid, but then so were the calls. I never did understand how people could spend all that money on a long-distance call just to find out what time it was back in Cleveland. But sometime after ten or so, the hard-core phonographers would start lighting up on the board, and before long, you'd hear Alma or Rosalie say, "Lawanda and Pearl on 14" or "Doctor Daddy on 21." Virginia could never bring herself to actually put words around this kind of information—she'd simply reach over to your board, plug your cord into the proper jack, and flip your key into monitor.

At first, of course, I was shocked that good operators like Alma, Virginia, Rosalie—and me—could do anything as unconscionable as listen in on a call and do it so openly, but not nearly as shocked as I was when I figured out—or had Alma explain—what the calls were about. Like all games, this one, too, had its rules. For one thing, although in a town the size of Rapid City, it might have been fairly easy to find out who our callers were in real life, we never even speculated. For us, they didn't exist outside the four walls of that windowless, third-story room. In fact, they didn't exist corporally anywhere. We didn't either. And although for our own protection we had to develop that same kind of hardened objectivity that hospital workers do, we cared.

Reach out. Reach out and touch someone.

Alma's favorite was the Air Force chaplain who called his mother collect in Garden City, Kansas (area code 316, 622-7431) every Thursday. We figured that was the day he prepared his sermon. Sometimes he would be in almost orgasmic ecstasy and other times he would be so depressed about his lack of faith that all he could do was cry. He was suicidal in either case. The first time I heard him threaten to put his head in the oven, I was still unaware of the rules and stupidly blurted out, "Shouldn't we *do* something?" Alma, Virginia and Rosalie just stared at me. I caught on fairly quickly after that.

The whole time the Chaplain cried into the phone, Alma would direct an unheard monologue toward his mother. "Don't you worry about it, Honey. If he was gonna kill himself, don't you think he'd have done it by now? He's been praying too hard again, that's all. Even if he did do it this time, you'd survive. Let him go to his Maker—maybe he'll be happy there and stop making your life miserable. Knowing him, though, he'd probably get a phone installed in Heaven. You'd be better off with a good dog, Honey. Believe me. Sonny gets crazy sometimes, but he never threatens suicide. If he was gonna do it, he'd just up and do it, not talk about it all the time."

Virginia wasn't much interested in the Chaplain. Her favorites were Lawanda and Pearl, two lesbians (my first introduction to the word) with heavy Black New York accents. Lawanda was married to an Air Police sergeant stationed at Ellsworth, but she'd call her loved-one Pearl (area code 212, 555-3441) just about every night, and they'd keep us entertained for hours. Sometimes they would say sweet and loving things to each other and talk about what they'd do if they were together right that minute. Other times Lawanda would be upset because she thought Pearl was seeing someone else, a "white bitch" named Jill. And sometimes Pearl would be upset about the size of her phone bill, which was running more than $200 a month. Lawanda always called collect so her husband wouldn't find out. That's why she still had to go through the switchboard even after we got Direct Distance Dialing.

The whole time Lawanda and Pearl would be on the line, Virignia wouldn't take another call unless she absolutely had to. I must admit I didn't like to either—I was finally getting some sex education that was a lot sexier and a lot more educational than a half of an avocado drawn on a biology blackboard. And I thought some of the stuff I was learning might be adaptable to what Bruno and I would be doing in the back of his '57 Chevy as soon as he got back from ROTC summer camp. I was constantly asking for explanations.

"What's a . . . ?"

Rosalie giggled and blushed, "That's something on a woman youknowdownthere that's real sensitive sorta like a man's youknowwhatchamacallit."

"Like a man's penis," said Alma.

"Shhsh," said Virginia, "I can't hear what they're saying."

"She's going to do *what?*" I asked.

"Shhsh," said Virginia.

"What they need is a good dog," said Alma.

"Sounds to me like that's the last thing they need," said Rosalie.

"Shhsh," said Virginia. "Shhsh."

Although Doctor Daddy didn't call collect, he always went through the switchboard, too—despite the fact that each of us had given him our memorized DDD sales pitch a dozen times. Maybe that's why we decided he was a doctor—the only people in a town like Rapid City who don't have to care about saving money are the doctors and maybe a few lawyers. The loved one Doctor Daddy visited every night was his daughter (area code 203, 521-2020) in boarding school back East. I guessed she was a couple of years younger than me. Her name was Melanie, she was homesick, and her daddy loved her very much—too much. Although he always started out sounding like a normal father, Melanie, especially if she wanted something—like to come home—would begin flirting a little, and pretty soon he was off the deep end. He'd tell her how much he missed her, how unhappy he was with her mother, and how he wanted to take her away to Europe or Jamaica, where they could live happily ever after—just the two of them. Then, just when the conversation started getting unbearable, even for us, Melanie would finally say, "Please, Daddy, please don't talk that way. What if Momma should hear you?" He'd apologize then and say he'd never do it again.

"He needs to go down to the SPCA and get himself a good dog," said Alma. "Better yet, his wife should take him to the vet and get him fixed."

"Get him put to sleep, you mean," I said.

"*Some*body should kill the sonofabitch," said Rosalie who never swore.

"Hmpf," said Virginia.

We had other regulars, too—husbands and wives, sons and mothers, mothers and lovers, lovers and daughters, daughters and sons, even priests and nuns. And for comic relief, I had LeRoy. Most of them came and went, and most of the time, we never got to hear the end of their stories. We lost Lawanda and Pearl when Pearl decided to come West for a visit. For two weeks before she left New York, we shared in their fantasies about what she and Lawanda would do when they were reunited at Rapid City Airport, what they would do in the car before driving back to Lawanda's duplex, what they would do while they were driving back to Lawanda's duplex, what they would do when they got to Lawanda's duplex, and what they would do when they got into Lawanda's duplex bed. Pearl was only supposed to stay a week, but at the end of that time, the calls did not resume. Maybe they both went back to New York or maybe they broke it off or maybe they were shot in bed with Lawanda's husband's Air Police revolver.

The calls to Melanie stopped, too, without warning. We figured her mother must have found out what was going on or maybe Melanie took an overdose of sleeping pills. The ending we favored most, though, was that Doctor Daddy had taken an overdose of sleeping pills, administered either by (1) himself, (2) his wife (who was subsequently tried and sent to prison), (3) his daughter (who was subsequently tried and acquitted), or (4) his daughter's dog (who was very smart and didn't get caught). In any case, the death was not pretty.

The Chaplain never stopped *talking* about an overdose of sleeping pills—and carbon monoxide and Plymouths off cliffs and razored wrists—but he never did it either, as far as we knew. He got transferred to Stuttgart, Germany, right before I left for college, and we worried about how his mother was going to be able to afford all those collect calls from overseas.

The LeRoy calls went on right up to my last night on the board, but I never did reach him■

# The Sasanqua Tree

It is October through my window
and the Sasanqua tree is blooming,
pale pink snow dancing on the tips
of a slate green throne. Planted
in your honor, while you were in Japan
fighting World War Two.
Your first wife burned
her body waiting at the same window,
alone, while you marched
without real guns, with men
in dull costumes; hardly a uniform
described the shape of a soldier.

Years later you told me every morning
at breakfast, how when you were in Manila
you stepped over dead Japs, bloated
by the roadside, waiting for their dark
and perfect women, like your perfect wife
waiting under the Sasanqua in your garden.
You are not leaving your place,
a nest with her feathers still clinging;
though the hungry, small birds have flown;
and I with my own grown children,
visiting them only in dreams,
have at last won the prize.

We rake the dry leaves together,
to pile on your first wife's mulch bed,
where she asked to be buried.
But she is certainly not there—
you can hear her singing from the
throat of that mockingbird,
clear and free, she sings from the top
of the Sasanqua tree in our garden.

*Lucille Joy*

# What Are Mothers For

Waiting, the angel of death
Spread out his wings
Flat against cold corridors
Of a half life.

You slide your good looks
Through the iron bars
Crawling out onto the ledge,
Quietly judge the jump.

As a crow arches its wings
Against the white sky
Multiplied a million times—
You make your calculations.

I stand there holding your jacket
Dark red tie, size eleven shoes;
Your lucky number always
Held carelessly by you.

I jump first to break your fall,
Spreading an electric blanket
To keep you warm on the way down—
Then you smile your suicide smile.

*Lucille Joy*

# House Special

*Patricia Kimbrell*

Mona rewound her hair and fastened it on top of her head, her eyes watching the man reflected in the mirror. Richard stood at the door, jiggling keys. Finally, he walked back to the bar. Her fair complexion flushed with annoyance. He kissed her cheek.

"I'm not overly fond of running this place alone," she said. "Fourth of July sometimes brings out the crazies." This argument had been going on since they opened the bar. "Too long," Richard thought.

"What are the odds that some nut is going to single out this pig in a poke? Holidays are just like any other days. You'll be fine."

"You don't know if there's going to be trouble. You can't tell things like that."

"O.K., I'll stay. I don't have ten thousand errands to do. No, I've a better idea. Let's just shut the whole place down." He reached to flick off the under counter light. Mona stopped his hand. "I'll be O.K.," she said. "I'll do it." She began to turn away. He caught the upper part of her arm, rubbing his thumb slowly on her skin. "I won't be long."

As soon as he left, she double locked the back door, turned the dimmer, checked the supply room and bathrooms, then put a handful of quarters in the jukebox, turning the volume down. As she moved toward the bar, wiping red leather chairs, she hummed, her voice too high for the music. She stopped when she neared the bar.

"Hello, hello," Stanley's voice—a thin, reedy, high voice—wavered around the wall of plants at the front door. He removed his hat and swept his arm back as if to begin a bow. He caught himself stiffly in the way of older, drunk people and turned to the barstool.

"Happy Fourth," she said, bringing out a pitcher of grapefruit juice. "How about a Salty Dog? A drink on the house?"

He leaned over confidentially and pointed to a bottle behind her. "Mix that with a bit of water, darlin', that will be perfect."

Stanley nodded to the man at the other end of the bar, then turned to Mona. "Not what I'd call a big crowd tonight."

"It's early. We still have hope."

"Your charm alone should draw crowds." He raised his glass.

Jan and Jim walked in as Mona moved down the counter and picked up the man's drink. "Grab that pitcher at the sink," she called. "I'll bring the ice in a second."

"How about you?" she asked the man. "Another?"

He handed her his glass. "You have any good music in that contraption?" He inclined his head toward the back.

"Picked it myself."

"A person can dance to it?"

"No problem." She put a white napkin with blue and red stripes under his drink and turned, picking up the ice and a bottle of vodka. "First one is on the house," she said, sitting down with Jan and Jim.

"One hundred and one degrees today," Jan said. "Those fireworks are going to go off by themselves."

"I've decided not ot let it get to me this year," Jim said, brushing light dust from his white linen suit. "I keep telling myself I'm not in the middle of Kansas. I'm in Colorado. This is not the largest fireworks stand under the biggest tent on the hottest piece of concrete in the city. The snow is coming and I'm going skiing."

"Tonight's the last night we'll be open," Jan said. "Come out and we'll celebrate."

"If Richard gets back by closing, we'll do it."

"I can't believe he left you alone tonight," Jan said. "What are you going to do if this place fills up?"

"I can handle crowds. A little dancing, a few drinks. That doesn't bother me."

The man at the bar leaned over. "Little lady," his whisper caused Jan and Jim to exchange glances. "Are you ready for that dance?"

"Not until later," she said. She turned to Jan and dropped her voice. "It's the loners in here, if the place is empty, that I worry about. Something to do with the holidays."

"Where did Richard go?"

"Across town. Lots of errands," she said.

"It's too hot to run errands during the day," Jim said. "You should have seen those people jump out of their car and wilt." They started at a crash from the bar. Stanley was leaning over the counter, his hand almost within reach of a bottle.

"How are you doing, Stanley?" Mona asked as she intercepted the bottle and filled his glass.

"Fine," Stanley said, "but we," he nodded to the man who ignored Stanley, "missed your company."

Mona refilled his glass and put a swizzle stick with a plastic American flag into it. She walked down the bar and dropped one in the man's glass. He touched her hand. "You've got a fine dance floor. Am I wrong in thinking you might like to dance?"

"I might later. I don't know."

A few more couples came into the bar, then some singles. Mona stopped long enough to turn the music up, then stayed busy. Jan caught up with her at the cash register. "You don't seem to be having any problems. That guy asked you to dance anymore?"

"No, it's going fine."

"Call me if you need me."

"Looks like you need to plug in the coffee pot for that gentleman," Jim said, as he handed her money. Mona reached over and removed Stanley's cigarette.

About eleven o'clock, Richard called.

"Yes, it's going fine," she yelled, a finger stuck in one ear. "A dozen people, maybe two. Yes, I'm keeping track of the receipts. When are you coming?"

As she turned to the bar, the man stepped in front of her. "Dance?" he asked. She checked the tables. People were absentmindedly watching the dance floor. She agreed. He reached for her, guiding her arm around his waist. His nylon shirt clung thinly to her palm. "You could hum," he said into her hair. "Like you were earlier." He pulled her close, she could feel his hand pushing at her skin. He danced well but too closely. She stepped back quickly when the music stopped.

At eleven thirty, the crowd thinned to the two men at the bar. Stanley was asleep but sitting straight, tilted, with his head in his palm. The man gathered his drink and napkin and moved down to Mona, where she was taking out receipts.

"What's he doing?" the man asked. Stanley had thrown his head back.

"He does that all the time. He thinks he's a gladiator getting ready to face the lions," she said.

Stanley twisted his face into the strangest expression and opened his mouth. His expression was one of disbelief. A tear dropped.

"The lions don't seem to pay any attention to him," the man said, jokingly.

"Stanley," she said. "Wake up. How about coffee?"

Stanley responded by putting his head on the counter. The man walked behind the bar. Mona began to figure his check.

"You ever go out?" he asked.

"With my husband."

"Where do you go?"

"Drag races. Sandpits."

"You swim?"

"No. I lay on the beach."

"What color is your swimming suit?"

"Red."

He pulled one of the long wisps of her hair in front of her ear. "How about a dance?" he asked.

"No thanks," she said, handing him his check. He encircled her wrist with his fingers. "I've been thinking about that house special," he said, holding her arm up, forcing her toward him. She placed her palm on his chest, pushing. He let her go abruptly and she stumbled back against the shelves. Stanley leaned up and reached vaguely in their direction. Mona pressed back against the counter as the man's hand took her waist and forced her towards him. He moved fast but she was able to grab a bottle and bring it down on the side of his head. He looked at her contemptuously and for a moment she thought he was not hurt. Then he sagged to the floor.

Mona propped Stanley in a chair, wiping his face with a cloth, folding it gently, putting it on his forehead. Richard and the ambulance arrived at the same time. Mona sat on the edge of her chair, her head in her hands.

"Tell me about it," Richard said, after escorting the officers out and shutting the door. "How are you doing?" He set a glass of wine in front of her. "Not a lot of damage back behind the bar if you're all right. How are you doing?" he pulled his chair close and put his arm around her. She put her head in his shoulder. "It all happened so fast. I can't believe it."

"Do you hurt anywhere?" He picked up her wrist, first looking at it, then kissing it. "You're doing fine. You got him good."

"Richard, I didn't know what he was going to do. He scared me when he stepped behind the bar."

"You did just right. I'm proud of you." He moved his arm slightly and she sat up. "What about him?" He pointed to Stanley. The washcloth had slipped over one eye. "He never knew what happened," Richard said. "I'll take him home and come get you. Did you get the receipts by any chance?"

"Richard, I don't want to be alone."

"We'll take him then. Then home, what do you say? You could do with a rest."

"Jim and Jan invited us out to the fireworks."

"It's late," he said.

"I'm going," she said. "I'll drop you by the house if you want me to."

"I thought you didn't want to be alone."

"I don't but I also want to go out there."

Two canvas backed chairs were waiting for them in the parking lot. Jan put a glass into Mona's hand while Richard followed Jim into the blackness of the tent. The two women watched them.

"To the fourth," Jan said, raising her glass. Mona lifted hers off her knee. "To the day after the fourth," she said.

"How's it going for you two."

"Pretty awful."

"Richard was late?"

"Very. That man at the bar made a pass at me and I had to call the police."

"God, why didn't you call me? How are you?"

"Shaky. I'm a mess." She ran her hand to the back of her head, unsteadily, then began patting her head. "My comb's gone," she laughed, and then laughed again. Suddenly she was crying.

"Did you tell her what happened at the bar?" Richard said, walking up. Jan looked at him while Mona dug in her purse for a kleenex. "She should have never been left alone."

"She handled it, didn't she?"

"Richard, that was pure luck," Mona's voice was soft, delicate.

A flare at the end of the driveway signalled the start of the fireworks—a series of lights emitting from a platform where they had been placed. The Roman candles went off slowly, with a soft sound. The fountains hissed gold and yellow. Occasionally a small white light would sail into the sky and cause a boom. "Those are the bummers," Jan said. "Real duds."

Mona scooted next to Richard. "I'm still jumpy," she said.

"You probably will be for a couple of days," he said, kissing her forehead. "Jim's got a great show. It will take your mind off your problems."

Suddenly, a series of quick bright light opened above them. Jan yelled. "Cover your ears." Noise shook them. Mona stood. "I can't stand those duds," she yelled. "I'm going home."

Richard grabbed for her hand and missed. "That's probably the last of those. I think you're going to love the finale."

Mona moved away from him, her hand in her pocket, pulling out keys. She turned, walking to the car, stopping to unlock the door. Overhead light filled the ground when she opened the door. She climbed in behind the driver's seat and rolled up the windows, shutting off the noise. She glanced briefly at Richard in the rearview mirror as she drove away■

# If I Wanted To Make a New Friend

*Faye Hurley Burke*

In grade school if I wanted to make a new friend, I gave her a tour of my house. On the day I'm thinking about now, the guest was Monkey Modlin. She was new in the fourth grade but her name indicated to me that she would like my house. She was a runner on our way home from school, and I had to tell her she'd miss the beginning of the tour if she ran when we got to the front porch.

There he was, in the first window of the living room, looking out between the thirty-foot high porch columns at the fifty-foot high hemlock. He had on his red felt skull cap to keep his bald spot warm. And since it was already September, he had on the plaid wool neck scarf. Monkey asked me if he were a rabbi. I didn't know then about prayer shawls or even really about rabbis, but I thought it was a wonderful thing to say. It made me say, "You know the eagle and lion in front of the library? He's more like that." I usually just said, "That's my grandfather, Papoo. You'll get to meet him later." I liked this new start better.

My next usual speech was for the grand entrance. "When you open the door, look up at the chandelier and think how you would clean the bugs out of the globe of it for a party." Before Monkey made her guess I climbed the staircase that curved around the entrance hall and leaned over the balcony. "Watch this." I shook the banister and it shook all the way down. "We lay a ladder across the banister from the top of the stairs here to the end of the balcony. Around here. It's about twenty-five feet up from you." Monkey climbed the stairs. Everybody on the tour came up to look down. "Would you slide out on a ladder?" My timing was down pat on all of this. "I'll show you the people who do that."

John was finishing eating something. I never saw him eat a meal. He chewed on things, but I never saw what they were. He sat at his kitchen window like Papoo sat at his front window. I told Monkey that he was our big fat colored man and that he would be there waiting to play chest with me. That's what he called chess. Or ride our bikes over roots and banks on our obstacle course. John rode my brother Don's adult bike but he has to pedal with his knees out to the sides. She could see now that only part of his bottom was sitting on the stool and part of his belly leaned over the counter. I got him to pull up his pant leg and show Monkey the cowhide ankle strap he got in It-ly when he was running from a bomb and fell in a foxhole. It made his leg look like a wooden post. That was the only way I got to see his legs at all.

Mother had a chair in our library that she folded up in and still had room to knit and read at the same time. Monkey saw for herself that Mother was the likely one. I said, "Most of the time they do it right: John holds; Mother slides out. But sometimes Mother holds and John slides out." Monkey asked if she could come over when it was John's turn. I liked Monkey a lot.

My best tours were when my uncle and aunt, Guy and Faye Faye, were home and Guy's Chinese friends from the war were visiting us, or his English Department colleagues were churning our ice cream out the back door. It was the best when Faye Faye was playing the piano and one of her friends was playing the violin beside her. Guy was supposed to pass me and my guest, carrying a coffee cup and chanting the Gregorian Chant or saying words to a poem the same way he chants, holding notes. If he were asleep on the hearth rug, that was good too. Len should be marching in from military academy and the university boys who boarded in the basement should put me and Monkey on their shoulders and not let us get down.

It was enough, though, that day, for Don's ninth grade friends to carry the pan of brownies past us on their way from the basement pool room to the library to read the magazines and get up a bird watching trip with Mother. I got Monkey to sit in one of the library chairs with me long enough to hear one boy say he was an agnostic. It was something about Mother's reading-group book. Mother did what she called egging him on, and she made squealing laughs. We had to leave so I could tell her that Mother squealed a lot when there were people around. "Even before people get here, John says she gets on her high horse and he has to work hard, especially on the wainscots. We get a piece of paper and he draws her big pointing nose and her glasses and draws a chicken body underneath. You know? And a puddle under that. He prints 'Old Wet Hen' at the top and we leave it in an ashtray or something. Where Mother won't notice but the company will see it and know who it is."

Monkey nodded when she laughed at that. I had another thing to say but Monkey had thought of something about how mean her mother was. On the outside I listened to her story, which I was curious about, and on the inside I told the rest about our parties. It went: "During the party, John and I make balls with his leftover dough and we throw them at the kitchen ceiling right above the breakfast room door. Make them a little wet so they stick. Stick, that is, long enough to fall on Mother's head, or somebody's head when they walk in with bowls to refill. John has on his white coat those times and serves the heavy trays. If it's a supper, Mother hits the buzzer under her end of the dining room table and calls, 'John, we need some hotties.' I asked her one time why she calls the biscuits 'hotties.' She said it made people feel more at home in our house. But I know it sounds dumb. When I get to eat in the kitchen and Mother buzzes and makes us jump, John says it to me the way it really sounds, and then he bangs the swinging door to the breakfast room with his bottom and steps through it and into the dining room like hotties are the most important thing to him in the world."

By then Monkey was through talking. It came out in her story that she has a maid once a week, like most of my friends. I took her to the dining room to see if she could find the buzzer. And I acted out Hotties.

Sometime during the afternoon I worked in the trip to Mamoo's closet for chewing gum. Part of the tour was finding gum in her pocketbooks and tasting on it the talc and toilet water and face paint that she kept in the pocketbooks with it. Mamoo was treadling her Singer machine in her dressing room, which was a bonus for Monkey's tour. And when Daddy came home at 5:15, I covered him quickly for Monkey by having her smell his hat in the cloak closet. "I found what it is at his office that makes that smell: ink from the adding machines and typewriters. Same smell as here on Monday nights. Daddy's wise men from the YMCA play four tables full of bridge and snort and one passes around cigars and one passes peppermints. I set in their laps and they smell like this."

Monkey wasn't afraid to walk up close to Papoo. That was lucky because that afternoon Papoo called me into his corner of the living room. He picked up his tweezers, dipped them into his cup of Varsol, lifted out the insides of my wristwatch, drained the Varsol on his rag, pointed to the mainspring with the end of the tweezers, clamped the watch cover back on, and handed me my watch. There was no sound in the house while we looked. I wanted to say, "Don't you think his fingers are long yellow-brown candles," or "remember the magician's hands in *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, or I wanted to say something. But of course I didn't. "Rabbi" and "eagle" were perfect outside his window, but now we were right next to him. Now his mouth moved, going up and down between the ridges of cheek skin that made parentheses from his nose to his chin. His lips had blue and red and pink speckles under the surface, like they were made of composition rock, and they fit over his false teeth tight and rounded. Made him have a puppet mouth. He said, "It's clean again. Let me see you wind it until you feel the tension on the mainspring. Then stop." Each time I wound my watch until I broke the mainspring, Papoo assembled it in front of me and asked me to wind it. Monkey had gotten in on something so important I hadn't even thought to tell about it on tours.

Her getting in on that made me think I could show her John's room. I wasn't supposed to go in there. It was under the front stairs to the basement. Mother said John might like to sit back in there and smoke a cigarette by himself, but the chair she meant him to sit in looked to me like a pile of throwaway spreads and curtains. Mainly it was where John changed from his outdoor clothes to his cooking clothes at 4:30 every afternoon. I wanted to smell the sweet compost on John's work clothes, and I wanted Monkey to smell it too, and to know about the salty other smell that was on his sweat rags. Monkey hadn't seen John take off his grey felt business hat and wipe his shining chocolate maltball head with his rag and laugh. We stood next to the hat stand Mother gave him and I told her that the pink moved in every direction when he laughed. "His tongue fills up the middle of his mouth. Like a dog's tongue when it pants. Only not sticking out, of course, and very soft-looking. His air squirts out behind his back teeth. I don't know what the noise is that it makes." I told her and told her: He rolled up newspapers and taped them to make lances for us and we jousted on our bikes. He brought me French toast and bacon on a bed tray every morning in the summer. "'Here you are Little Lady. I lie in bed and see his maltball head coming around the curve of the stairs."

And then I started to say that I got him

to tell me Uncle Remus stories, after I went to see *Song of the South*. But I couldn't keep telling. So I stood there by the hanging light bulb and Monkey dug around on the shelves, and I said it to myself. "He didn't know the Uncle Remus stories as well as I did. I wished I hadn't gotten those stories started. I had to go away from him for a while. The same way I stayed away after the girls next door told me about kissing a black person. I knew I wouldn't turn black if I kissed John, because I had already kissed him. Or maybe I hadn't. Maybe I had just held onto his hand and felt the white cracks in the knuckles that I always looked at when he was building my treasure boxes and kites. Maybe I had hugged him a lot, but that was all right. I could never get my arms around his middle, so his middle wasn't like a real person's waist. Just the hard, round, open place of John. Like his head. But not his face." I looked at Monkey's skinny arms reaching behind the stacks of paperback books that the boarders left. I wanted to tell her that I wanted to kiss John's face. I kissed the Santa Claus men in Daddy's Wise Men club. I kissed the English professors. But I didn't kiss the face I looked at more than any face in the world. No. It was like winding my watch too hard. It was enough that she had been in his room.

At the end of the house tour I showed my company where we stored, hung, the life-size papier mache reindeer in the attic, and I took my company out a window onto the top of the front porch and up the tiles of the roof. But for company like Monkey, I added a special ending. I put her at the attic steps door and I flipped the fan switch. I took my place behind her where I could see the fan start up but she couldn't. It stood up taller than a grown person and I could be strapped on one of the blades and all of me would fit on it. I never touched it. Of course, it had a screen wall in front of it in the attic, but it was open to the stairwell behind. Monkey pushed her hands against the door frame. All over us came the warm air from the den that only has one window, and cold air from the brick and plaster walls of the basement. Maybe I couldn't feel different airs coming up, but it was pulling everything up and I looked at the roar and the black above the stairwell and I reached down and just as I lay out on the wind my finger touched the switch and I let Monkey see the fan wind down. She gave me an important look. I thought someday I would let her see the fan when it goes shaking-hard black■

# Diversions

When my brother is born,
I cut off the curtains behind the bed,

hide with my books under the house
where they mildew and warp. I never touch him.

I play outside with my coloring books
and watch the crayons melt in the dirt,

undress in the woods with the neighborhood boys.
My mother washes the clothes with a scrubboard

since the day I caught my arm in the wringer-washer.
The starch she puts in them scratches my skin.

My father's pillow cases are always wet.
When we go to the zoo in the summer,

my mother pushes my brother around in the stroller.
She changes his diapers. I watch

while the elephants shuffle back and forth,
their trunks hanging and lifting, lifting and hanging.

*Elizabeth McBride*

# Biloxi, 1945

In the aftermath
of the hurricane, houses float
in the water and boats, wrecked,
lean on the beach. You come home
from the war. You take off
your uniform, pull wet branches
off your old black Ford, and sleep
all afternoon with my mother.
She stands in the kitchen
that evening frying chicken.
I watch while you lift her
head back and kiss her,
watch while you slap her
across the table at dinner.
Bent with her face wet
over the ironing board,
she tells me her ear hurts but
never to tell. With the light
coming in through the window
beginning to dim, I put on
her faded orange skirt
and run out in the street,
the first huge drops of rain
turning the cotton fabric
the color of blood.

*Elizabeth McBride*

# The Robins Come in January

*Maureen Brown*

"So, how's the boyfriend?" Dad asked.

"Fine. He proposed, you know."

"No kidding. Honey that's great!"

"I haven't said yes, so don't get excited."

"What are you waiting for?"

"Oh, Dad. This isn't easy. You know as soon as I marry, Aunt Rose will practically move in."

"Your ole man will be fine. I don't expect you to stay here with me. And don't worry about Rose, I can handle her. Hey, I want some grandkids!"

And that was as deep as any conversation with my Dad went. No matter what he said, he depended on Aunt Rose to take up the slack; Aunt Rose was supposed to provide the details.

"So, when's the wedding?" Dad asked during my Thanksgiving break from college. It was already cold in Buffalo and it had snowed.

"I said no."

"You're not getting married?"

"It wouldn't have worked," I attempted to explain but Dad stopped me.

"It's okay, sometimes it's for the best. I broke an engagement once. It was in '42 and I was just out of boot camp, was stationed in Newfoundland. I met a Canadian WAC, and I proposed, but because I was a private I had to get permission from my C.O. So, she goes home on leave and I'm supposed to show up and get married. All on a weekend pass. I buy a gold wedding ring and I head for her home. I can still see that house. It was a mansion! And a butler answered the door. Well, look at me! A private in this man's army, a poor kid out of the East Side, no high school education. God, I said to myself, I can't marry her. I can't take care of her in the manner she's accustomed. So, I broke the engagement."

"What did you do?" I asked; he had my curiosity piqued.

"I told her I didn't get permission from the C.O. I didn't even stay overnight.

"You know, there were ferries back then, between the mainland and the island. I threw the ring into the sea."

I watched Dad closely. I saw an aging, dreamy man reminiscing about a romantic gesture.

He boxed his nose with a half fist, and said, "So, see, it's okay. Happens to everyone. Now how about supper?"

I wanted to commemorate this night. This commemorative spirit had roots in my childhood. I was never satisfied with the quiet physical changes that marked growing up. Maybe I was not satisfied because my mother was dead and I did not feel comfortable with Aunt Rose's lessons. She did explain menstruation to me and she did her best to scare me about intercourse and being a bad girl. But when my first period arrived I wondered why all the fuss over a little red trickle. If I had passed into womanhood, I reasoned, something more must happen. I was eleven. I had not played with dolls or stuffed animals for years but they were still laying around my bedroom. To commemorate the day I began menstruation I packed up the dolls and animals and marched them to the Good Will receptacle.

"Why on earth did you do that?" Dad had asked.

I couldn't explain.

While I was in college I had my first sexual experience. Again, only a silent physical change occurred, and again, I needed more. I started buying and wearing hats. With suits I wore small, pill-box hats, with slacks I wore breezy Panama hats. Blue jeans called for a floppy straw hat. But the hats that gave me a sophisticated air were the hats I loved to wear the most.

"So, what's with all the hats?" Dad had asked.

"It's my new style. Don't you think it makes me look older?"

"I don't know. It's different," Dad replied with skepticism.

And this Thanksgiving break my Dad addressed me as an adult, shared a piece of his personal life, a piece that pre-dated even my mother, and he removed any feeling of guilt I might have had over breaking the engagement, thus disappointing him.

"Dad, let's go to a football game."

"What? You don't even like football."

"Yes I do! You didn't know that did you? Come on, let's get tickets to see the Bills."

And we did. The old stadium was a standard open stadium. Dad had said that it was built during the New Deal as a track stadium. In Buffalo, braving the weather was more than half the battle for attending a ball game. The game was so regimented, four downs to make ten yards, fifteen minutes per quarter, four quarters make a game. We yelled until our throats were sore. The volume of the crowd increased during the game. The air above the stadium walls sucked out our breath, our energy. We left the game exhausted and exhilarated. After that, I tried to get back to Buffalo for every Bill's home game.

During Christmas break the snow was knee deep and an ice bridge had formed on the Niagara River joining Buffalo and Ontario. It was beautiful; the sun shimmered on the ice crust that frosted the snow banks. Icicles hung from gutters and tree limbs looked like silver Christmas tree ornaments. I was home with Dad and we were enjoying a newfound friendship.

"Dad, let's take a vacation together this summer."

"What?"

"It would be great fun! Think of all the stuff we could share. Let's go to New York, or Chicago. How about Washington. You've never been to Washington, have you?"

"Wait, wait! What's gotten into you?"

"Dad, it would be so much fun. Maybe we could go by train, they still run between Buffalo and New York. Come on, Dad. We never had a vacation while I was growing up; let's take one this summer."

"Okay, okay. Let's."

I was so excited, we hugged and hugged. I had found my Dad. He was no longer afraid of his girl-child, he was comfortable with the adult-daughter. Aunt Rose sensed this and didn't come around during my vacation.

Delighted, I returned to college after the first of January. I told all the girls on my floor of the dorm about our plans. Our first vacation, Dad and me in New York. Then, about two weeks later Aunt Rose called. Dad died suddenly of a heart attack. I returned to Buffalo immediately.

The winter was so severe and cold the ground was frozen. The undertaker could not dig a grave. The alternative was to store Dad's body until spring. We had a memorial service and left the bronze coffin with the undertaker.

I dropped out of school. My first external symptom that labeled the internal change. It was strange in the house alone. In the morning I wanted to find Dad making coffee, in the evening I wanted to see Dad in front of the T.V. I was just getting to know Dad, I cried, why did he have to die now?

In March the robins arrived, the crocuses poked their purple buds through the ground and the undertaker called. Spring thaw was early, wasn't that fortunate, he commented. But the day was eerie. The men worked easily shoveling the heavy, wet mud. They lofted each spade-full and it hit the ground with a thud. The sun was muted, not reflected, off white, over-salted streets, brown grass, skeleton trees, and dirty, dirty cars. Dad's grave was close to the cemetery's iron fence. Looking past the fence Buffalo's downtown Sears stood in mid-day shadows and was uninviting. Its neon sign read "EARS." Heavyset black women wearing heavy winter coats and heavy boots carried laden shopping bags. The wet mud thudded to the ground echoing the women's march to the bus stop, an informal (unknowing to them), funeral parade.

I had to bury Dad. While his casket was stored I could believe he was alive. This was the most painful commemorative thing I ever did because it was final. I had run back to the Good Will receptacle and grabbed my favorite rag doll, and I eventually gave up wearing hats, but this was final. And it was closure; the mud hit the lowered box burying the friendship I knew now I had always longed for.

I returned to the house and sat in the living room alone, silently, no T.V., no radio, for about thirty minutes. It was limbo; I was between states and I needed to move to the next. But I could not define what that state was. I got up and removed a large pair of shears from the desk. In the bathroom I stood before the mirror, took a hunk of hair and cut. Then another hunk of hair and cut. Again, cut, and again. I had no pattern, no style. I cut at random.

I moved to Houston, Texas. Houston was nothing like Buffalo, and that was all I needed to know. Still symptomatic of my pain. It was April and sunny and humid and the foliage was vividly green. I embraced all of Houston's peculiarities, adopted Texas as practically my birthplace.

And spring brought baseball fever to Houston. Baseball was the diversion I needed.

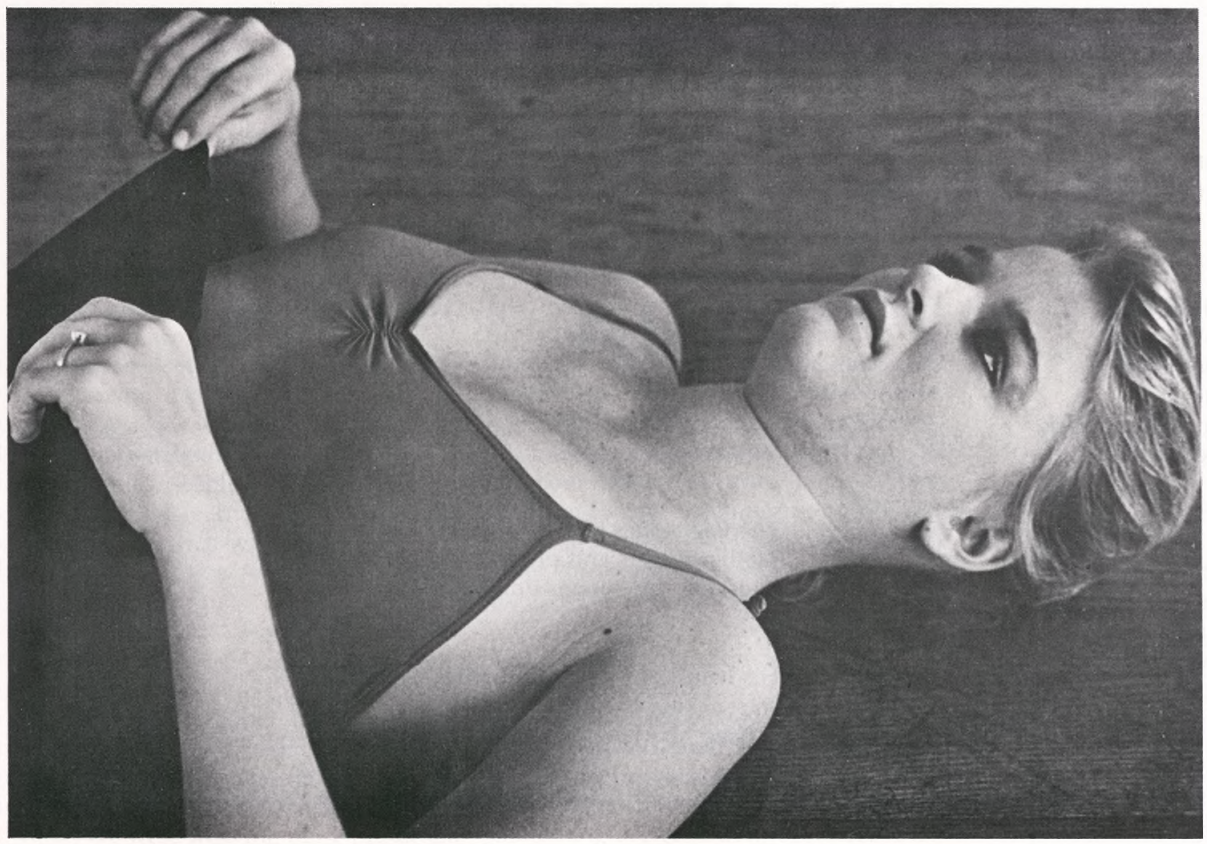
There is something about baseball in the Dome, on cushioned seats and artificial turf. The roof trapped the illusion that I escaped. Baseball is a timeless game. It's over when it's over, either two hours and eight-and-a-half innings or eight hours and twenty-one innings. The Dome prevents the air from aspirating energy and breath from the crowd. The aura is one of suspended animation. Football required my constant emotions, more than half the time I was on my feet, all the time I was yelling. But baseball was less physically demanding. I had to concentrate on subtle strategy, on pitching, on changes in the batting order. And when the batter is at the plate the Dome is a tomb of silence.

By mid-season I watched the game sit-

ting on the edge of my seat. The batter comes to the plate. And now the war of nerves begins. The pitcher has no time limit. A quarterback has only thirty seconds to put the ball into play. A pitch is delivered. Ball one. The batter steps out of the batting box. Steps back in, the pitcher steps off the mound. Sometimes it takes one dozen pitches before the next batter comes to the plate. Compared to football, baseball is hypnotic.

This batter hit a high pop fly. The catcher was on his feet, mask flipped off, he was fading back to the screen. I was on my feet, my eyes were following that ball. It sailed up, past mezzanine, past press boxes, past the yellow upper deck. For a second it was lost in the lights. But then its white surface was seen contrasted against the grey steel girders, against grey painted roof. Against the Dome. It came close enough to kiss the overhead structure, but not quite. The ball graciously hesitated and began its fall.

In January the robins came. When I first saw them I thought, "Spring!" But I remembered it was only January. As long as I lived in Houston the robins would arrive in January. As long as I lived, Dad would not return, would remain dead. Somehow the early arrival of the robins, the predictable, out-of-sync unprovoked arrival of the robins was the commemorative milestone I needed. Each January the robins would come and I would know, I reassured myself. I ran my fingers through my hair, which had grown, and was taking shape, once more■



Paul Mazzara

*(After Seeing Da Vinci's Nature Studies)*

# Leonardo's Water

wasn't as black as this
mountain stream. His pen
drew sepia current's fall
to rocks, braid through eddies,
drift into pools.

Water's contours held him,
no brisk mirror, lacey foam,
but moving muscle curved
over and around itself,
braced and swelling against rock,
swept flat in quick race
beneath willows.

We watch the molten mica hurl
cobbles down, bits of tamarack,
a long stem from upstream meadow.
"A brook is on the move," you say,
"forever speaking, no matter who
waits to listen."

Our smiles bleed
across the pool;
your pale hand rises
to brush my hair,
falls away to ripples.
I walk down stream,
kneeling to touch the hollow
our bodies made in the moss
one night in May.

A year from now the stream
will make its rush to river
under the same birches.
Still the water breaks
and still is whole,
plucking white voiced strings,
folding its burden of memories
like the words of a friend
I no longer speak to,
thin faded brush strokes
five hundred years old.

*Olive Hershey*

# Burial

The flag settles like a lap on my father's coffin.
Mother fidgets and primps, her spectacles
knocking like spoons down her dress.

His hands asked like a mouth—now
she's taking back her name,
leaving him here in a new suit.

Nothing makes a sound.
The preacher talks soft as hair.
Someone lifts and shuts the casket,
rustling a pot of chrysanthemums.
The stars are gathering gentle as a noose over the roof.

*Rachel Norton*

# Middle-Aged Words

*Cathy Stern*

I attended a reading the other night at which the host of the evening said a few words about the poet who was first on the program. In the course of these remarks, he stated that Mr. L____'s work was dense. I felt terribly embarrassed for both the host and the poet, but when I looked carefully at their faces, neither one seemed anything but pleased. "Dense," according to my middle-aged lexicon, means—at least it used to mean—"stupid." (Actually, it meant worse than stupid, carrying with it connotations of mental retardation.) Nevertheless, I let it pass and listened to the poet read, believing the host had blundered, and deciding the poet was conveniently deaf, or at least forgiving. The second reader was a novelist, a Ms. H____, who accepted a flawless introduction from the host saying, to my utter astonishment, that she was delighted that the dust jacket on her new book characterized *her* work as dense—an accolade she had long been waiting for. Well, I am not dense. I finally figured it out. And if anyone calls me dense in the future, I will take it as a compliment.

Of course "dense" wasn't my first encounter with the insidious changes that have taken place in the language since I was in college. The first one was "grass," and the second was "gay" (a wonderful word shot to hell from my point of view), but everyone knows about them. There have been numerous others. One of the more interesting is "needy." In my youth, if a person said her boyfriend was needy, you felt terribly sorry for her; if she married him, she might be committing herself to a poverty-stricken existence for life. About five or six years ago, I began hearing "needy" in what I considered to be a very peculiar context. A friend—a younger, more with-it friend—might say, "My husband is very needy; I'm going to stay in this weekend and give him my full attention." I never could see how that could change one's economic status. But, after a while, I had to reevaluate my relationship to that word, and move it out of my socio-economic category and into my socio-

psychological one.

"Relationship" itself is a word that has become peculiarly poisoned in the past decade. It used to be a fairly neutral word that could be used to cover any kind of relation that might exist among human beings, whether in the political structure, at work, in the family, or between lovers. Interestingly enough, it was rarely used in the latter sense. Now its connotation of lovers, or sexual partners, has made the rare use the *only* use. There are very few people today who dare make such (formerly innocent) statements as, "I have a terrific relationship with my secretary," or "I just love my butcher; we've had a wonderful relationship for over fifteen years."

Now that I think about it, even "partner" has come in for its share of degradation. Partners used to be for business or for dancing, not for sex. *Those* persons were lovers. You can see I'm finding it hard to give up my middle-aged words. As far as I'm concerned, I'll always prefer a lover to a sex partner; the latter sounds so functional, so single-minded, so unfit for anything else.

**"Harriet"**

I have never liked the name "Harriet." Whenever I am introduced to anyone by that name, I instinctively back away; it is almost an involuntary reflex. This has nothing to do with the name itself, its shape or its sound, although certain other names set up an attraction or revulsion for me on just those aesthetic grounds: fictional heroines named "Ariadne" attract me, real baby boys named "Max" repel me—not because of what they are, but because of what they are called. My distaste for "Harriet" works somewhat the other way around. It isn't so much the name that is repellent, but the person: or rather, I'm always afraid that I'll find the person repulsive because of a certain unpleasant, acrid smell I associate with the name—and my fears have always been justified.

It all goes back to my early childhood, when I was about six years old and living in Staten Island. I don't remember when Harriet first appeared in my life; it seems that she was just always there, my unwelcome seatmate on the bus back and forth to elementary school. Strangely enough, I don't remember her *in* school—only as a movable bus fixture. For wherever I sat, she sat; and if I moved, she moved. I could not escape her. She was one of those pitifully ingratiating little girls who never have any friends of their own and who seem impelled to attach themselves permanently to the first person they see.

I couldn't stand Harriet. Her skin was yellow-olive and her wide nose flared to frame two dark, cavernous nostrils which I found both mysterious and disgusting. She always wore a green leather jacket, and a green wool tam that was pulled down over her brownish curly hair. I think everything she wore was green. But Harriet's most overwhelming characteristic was an almost indescribable odor, a strange, sickening smell—leathery, metallic, sour, musty, *green*—that was unforgettable.

I don't know how long those awful bus rides went on, but I don't think it was more than a school year. In any case, my family moved away from Staten Island when I was eight and the Harriet experience was long forgotten by that time.

I didn't meet another Harriet until I was ten, at a summer camp in Ohio. It was during the first week, in an arts and crafts class. We were weaving those plastic lanyards you put a whistle on and wear around your neck—you can't go to any camp without making one. Mine was blue and white and I was making good progress on it, when a girl sat down beside me and said, "Hi. I'm Harriet. Mine's got a knot."

I'm not exactly sure what the second Harriet looked like, or what she was wearing—but it wasn't a green leather jacket, and I hadn't even thought of the first Harriet for at least four years. But as soon as she sat down, I began to be aware of that distinctive and overpowering odor. My memory of the first Harriet returned instantly, a chilling shock that made me almost afraid of what I was experiencing. There really were no visible similarities between the girls—of looks or of clothing. All they shared was a name, and an unmistakable smell.

At ten I was a tomboy, in love with baseball above all else, and I was not at all aware of psychic phenomena; my only concept of things "supernatural" came from the ghost stories the counselors told around the night campfires. Yet, I had an intuitive and eerie sense that I was involved in something unusual and strange, something I had better not tell anyone about, and I didn't.

I dropped arts and crafts and signed up for nature hikes—something I hated—and I tried to steer completely clear of the second Harriet for the rest of the camp session, not only because of the smell, but also, I guess, because I wanted to avoid thinking about it. When the summer ended, I finally put all this out of my mind.

It was a good many years later—I was a sophomore in a small high school in Connecticut—that I met my third Harriet, at a Friday afternoon tea dance in the school library. The setting was awkward and traumatic. Ninth and tenth grade girls, in velvet dresses and patent leather pumps, were trying to look nonchalant while standing next to the punch table, secretly hoping that some boy, any boy, even a very short boy with sweaty palms, would ask them to dance.

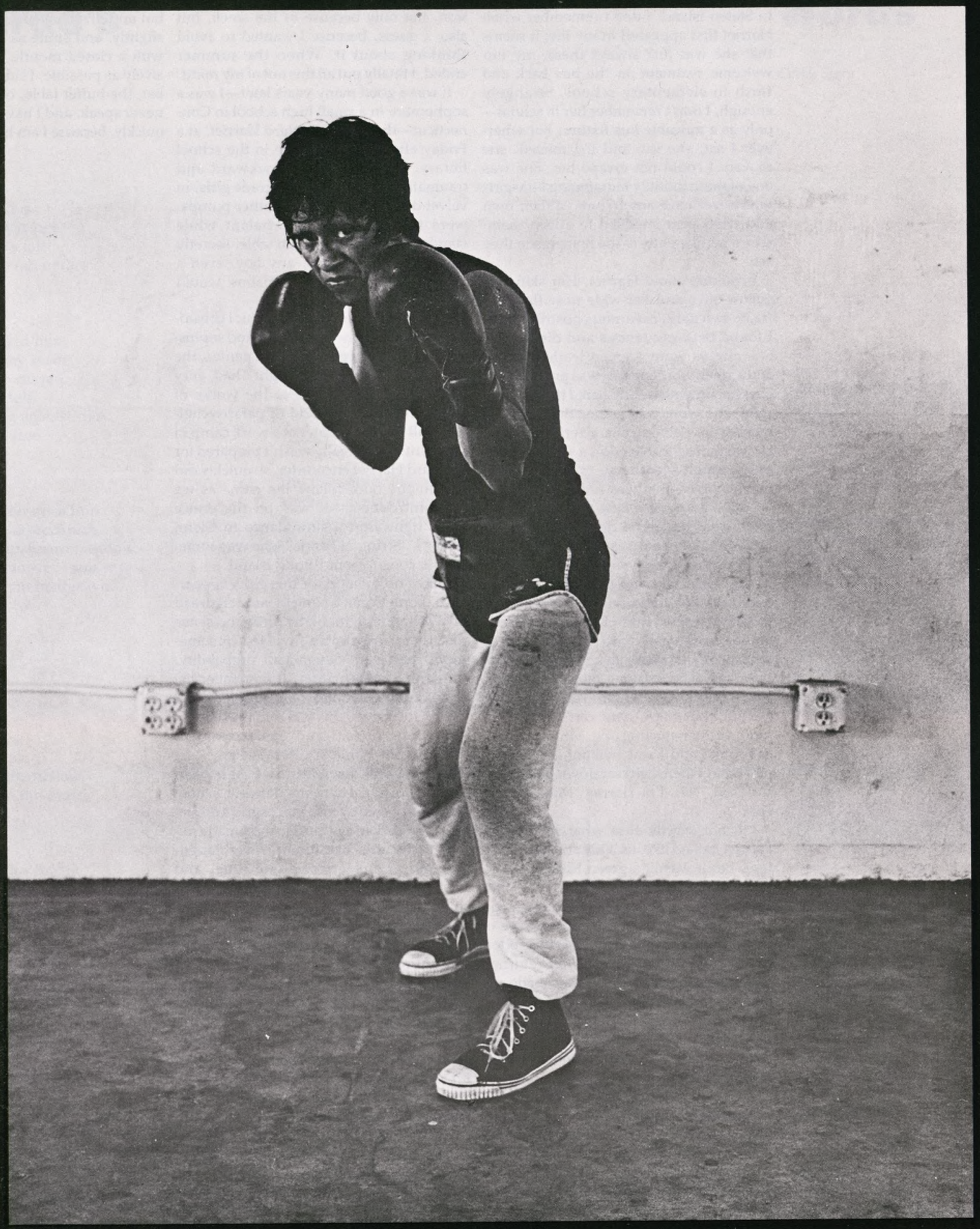
Despite this adolescent milieu, I considered myself somewhat worldly and sophisticated because a pimply-faced genius, the son of a famous playwright, had very recently introduced me to the works of Nietzsche and the world of parapsychology—all in one summer at a work camp in Vermont. Still, I really wasn't prepared for the third Harriet encounter, so quickly did the unique odor follow the name as we were introduced—it was on the dance floor, right after a slow dance to Glenn Miller's "String of Pearls"; she was somebody's cousin from Rhode Island.

I have no memory of this girl's appearance. I only recall a pang of sudden dread in my chest and, then, the profound sense that I was irrevocably involved in something that went beyond all probability, something preternatural. I remember listening to my own nervous laughter as if I were a spectator of myself, and the rushing sensations of fear and embarrassment made me feel almost disembodied. I excused myself discreetly, we had been taught how in ballroom dancing school (you cough gently into your hand and say you'll be back in a minute), and I made my way to the girls' bathroom, where, laughing and crying at the same time, and wishing I had never met the genius, I tried to convince myself I wasn't some sort of psychic with superhuman powers.

At college I became a psychology major, not entirely because of "Harriet," and I did try to find some natural and reasonable explanation for my odd experiences. Unfortunately, four years of undergraduate study in this discipline were insufficient for the task of unraveling the cause and effect factors in a proper name/body chemistry connection that was perceivable only by a single experimental subject—me.

As my college years drew to a close, and in the decades that followed, I tried to make my peace with the Harriets of this world, if not finally in the arena of understanding, at least minimally in terms of my own behavior—for the episodes, though infrequent, remained invariably the same each time. I eventually worked out a procedure that has gotten me through.

Whenever I meet a Harriet, I greet her with a casual composure that belies the effort it costs me, and impresses no one but myself. I shake hands, bowing ever so slightly, and smile as graciously as I can with a closed mouth. Then, as unobtrusively as possible, I sidle away toward the bar, the buffet table, or the nearest exit. I never speak, and I have to make my move quickly, because I am holding my breath■



Paul Mazzara

# Anger Showers

Under the shower
for half an hour
after our big fights:
the steam, the heat
had to beat it out of you—
frustration of never
being able to get me to see
how wrong I was, how
I distorted everything!

Once in a motel room,
when you wouldn't let me touch you
I'd insisted that you'd
never really loved me,
that your vanity alone
was wounded when I wouldn't marry you,
and instead of saying, You stupid idiot
I did love you and now I don't,
you just cried Oh I can't stand it!
and rushed into the shower.

Steamclouds whitened the room
and I waited for you to come out.
After twenty minutes I crept
into the bathroom, afraid
you were slitting your
wrists in the sink
(projection: I was
the suicidal one) and,
half-feeling like
Norman Bates in *Psycho*,
spied on your form against
the glass shower stall . . .

When you finished at last
you swept by me, skin
pink and resilient,
and cinched an orange towel
around your waist, like
Joan of Arc her breastplate,
self-righteously sure
I was trying to drive you crazy.

"Don't say a word,
I'll kill you if you speak!"
I did; you ran out the door
then returned, realizing
we were off some godforsaken
highway in Vermont. You'd have had
to hitch in that towel. Scared
you were mad enough to do it,
I promised to be silent. You pulled
a mattress onto the floor,
very Japanese, like a futon,
to keep from lying beside me.
"You like drama," was all you'd say
the next day.

*Phillip Lopate*

# Smith

*Rabie Harris*

As Cynthia walked through the high, narrow archway of St. Ann's, the breeze blowing into the small church through its opened windows hit against her face and her arms and lifted lightly her blue cotton skirt.

Children standing in a section set off exclusively for them were singing, "Get thee behind me Satan," with voices rising as they proclaimed, "I want to be a Christian Soldier. . . ."

Cynthia took a seat at the end of one of the long, dark mahogany benches, slid quietly down to the other end of the bench and joined four children who were standing for the hymn.

The song ended and the children moved quickly toward their Sunday school teachers seated in different sections throughout the church. Cynthia's Bible study group had been given the Ten Commandments the prior week for study. Mrs. Broome, her teacher, asked each child in her group to recite the Commandments. Mary, the first girl called upon, spoke rapidly and without hesitation. When Cynthia was called upon she started with the fifth Commandment, "Honor thy mother and thy father. . . ." Mrs. Broome corrected her, "It's honor thy father and thy mother." "That's what I said," Cynthia said to herself. Cynthia went on to, "Thou shalt not steal," "Thou shalt not kill." Mrs. Broome asked Cynthia to start over, from the beginning, but Cynthia couldn't. Classes ended, and the other six children in the class received a small card with a gold star in recognition of their mastery of the Commandments. Cynthia was given an admonition and was told to be prepared with all the Commandments the following week.

The children walked quietly back to their section for the final prayer and hymn. Cynthia moved her hand along the top of one of the benches as she walked between a narrow aisle. As she came to the end of the bench, she saw a dark brown patent leather purse lying on the thick cushion. The purse had a shiny gold clasp and a short strap. Cynthia looked at the purse for a few seconds, then she reached down and picked it up. She wrapped the strap around the purse, tucked the purse under her arm and walked towards a door leading to the rear of the church. Before reaching the back door, she turned and walked quickly between two benches and left the church through a side door.

Cynthia walked fast, stepping on and off the narrowing sidewalk. As she approached her yard, she smelled fried chicken, her usual Sunday dinner. She lifted the wooden latch at the gate without a sound, eased her way through the gate and hastily went to the back of her parents' flat. She could hear her mother talking with the two other women tenants who shared the same kitchen.

With both hands on the window sill and her right foot pressed against the wall of the house, Cynthia pulled herself up the wall and peeped through the window that looked into her parents' bedroom to see if her father was sleeping. He was asleep. She jumped down from the wall, pulled her skirt between her knees, stooped down and went under the house. As Cynthia made her way under the house, she thought for a moment of the consequences she would suffer for dirtying her Sunday clothes, but she continued moving farther and farther under the house, digging her fingers into the fine sand. She lay on her stomach and the coolness of the sand relaxed her. She put the purse in front of her in the sand and opened it. A white lace handkerchief neatly folded, two dollar bills and a small bottle of cologne were immediately visible. There was a small zippered section, and Cynthia pulled the zipper open. There was an envelope folded in half, addressed to Smith Henry with a return address but no name. The unsealed envelope contained a letter. Cynthia opened the letter and read:

"Darling." Cynthia smiled, but read on:

"I'm sorry I wasn't able to reach you before leaving for Puerto Rico, but Horace gave me no warning. I will miss you terribly. I will phone you next week when I get back. I can't wait to see you. —Marcia."

Cynthia repeated the names Horace and Marcia to herself over and over. It came to her that Shirley Thompson's parents' names were Marcia and Horace. Rich Shirley Thompson. Her father had his own accounting business. "So Mrs. Thompson has a man." Cynthia laughed to herself. She heard footsteps on the stairs that led to her flat. She crawled over to a corner at the side of the house, dug into the sand and dirt, buried the purse and then crawled out from under the house. She brushed dirt from her skirt and blouse and walked around the side of the flat and around to the front door.

"I didn't hear the front gate," said Mrs. Powell, Cynthia's mother, as Cynthia came in.

"What you do in Sunday school today?"

"The Ten Commandments."

"You know all a them?"

"No mamma."

"You don't take your studies serious; a big girl like you—you play too much. A keep telling you you have to get serious. You going to be thirteen next month. When I was your age, I was working and helping out my mother."

Cynthia had heard this story many many times before, but she had to look at her mother as she spoke, or else risk getting a box across the face. Mamma was still working, Cynthia thought: cooking, washing, and selling her tomatoes, callaloo, and pears that papa usually brought back from the country every Friday.

Poor mamma. Cynthia felt a little proud and a little ashamed of her mother. Proud, because her mother had a lot of friends. People were always coming by to talk and ask her for advice. But she was ashamed because her mother sold vegetables on the street and the children at school called her the higgler's daughter. Cynthia would be particularly embarrassed if she was with a friend and met her mother selling on a street corner. Mrs. Powell would greet Cynthia and her friend with a big smile, give Cynthia's friend a tomato and tell the child to take it home for her mother. Cynthia would be furious with her mother at those times. Not that Cynthia looked down on her mother or the other industrious street vendors, but she wanted her mother to be more, a teacher perhaps, or maybe a nurse.

Papa, she didn't know exactly how she felt about Papa. He was rarely home. He was gone from Sunday night until Friday evening, driving a milk truck. When he came home on Fridays he was too tired to do anything but sleep. On Saturdays he would get dressed and go to visit his friends. On Sundays he would have dinner with Cynthia and Mrs. Powell and then wait for the truck to come by that would take him to the dairy in May Pen, where he would prepare for his milk run.

"Go and wake up you faddah and tell him his dinner is ready and den come set the table," Mrs. Powell said to Cynthia.

Mr. Powell still looked sleepy as he sat at the small dining table on the verandah waiting for his dinner. A lizard crawled through the latticework surrounding the verandah; it crawled under a picture of Christ hanging on the wall. Mrs. Powell and Cynthia sat down at the table, and the family bowed their heads as Mrs. Powell thanked the Lord for what they were about to receive. Mr. Powell picked up his knife and fork and started cutting his chicken breast.

"Cynthia, did you polish me shoes?"

"Yes papa."

"I leave a fifty cents for you on the bureau."

"Thank you papa."

"Where were you earlier? A don't want you running up and down the streets."

"I went to Sunday school papa."

"Oh. Them teaching you anything worthwhile there?"

"I don't know if it's worthwhile papa."

"Then why you going?"

"Mr. Powell, it's important for the child to learn about her maker," Mrs. Powell stated.

"Well mamma, if you feel Cynthia needs to know about her other maker, all right," replied Mr. Powell.

Mrs. Powell looked quizzically at Mr. Powell.

"What you mean her other maker?"

"As far as I know, you and me are her maker."

"Oh, Mr. Powell."

"Didn't you birth the child?"

"There are things beyond your understanding. If only you would open you heart."

"Me heart well open. Don't I good to you and Cynthia?"

Mrs. Powell did not respond and Mr. Powell said to Cynthia:

"Don't I good to you Cynthia?"

On Monday after Cynthia left school she ran all seven streets to Shirley Thompson's house. She leaned against the black wrought iron fence behind which stood a large white and brown masonry and wood house. The house was built on a quarter acre of land. Tall slender palm trees lined the long walk that led to the front door. A thick green lawn covered the front yard and surrounded the mounds of soil where bougainvillea, hibiscus and tamarind trees grew. Thick shrubberies of crotons and ginger lilies touched the side of the house. Cynthia felt out of place, but she was determined to wait for Shirley, that's if Shirley hadn't gotten home already.

Cynthia heard voices of laughter and she turned her head to see who was coming down the street. Three girls dressed in white pleated skirts, white blouses and short blue ties (the uniform for St. Francis' School) were walking toward her. After a day of school the girls still looked immaculate. Shirley, a thin tall girl with small and very black eyes, as black as an ackee's seed, walked over to Cynthia.

"Yes?" Shirley questioned as she stood in front of Cynthia.

"I have to speak to you, privately."

Shirley looked suspiciously at Cynthia. The two girls said good-bye to Shirley and walked away.

"What do you want?" Shirley turned to Cynthia again.

"It's about your purse, your brown purse."

"You found my purse?" Shirley spoke hesitantly as Cynthia stared at her.

"Did you find my purse . . . or did you steal it?"

"Both. I found it, and I stole it."

"You are a fresh girl. The nerve of you."

"I thought you might want back the letter."

"What letter?" Shirley asked softly.

"You know what letter."

"Did you read it?"

"Yes I read it."

Shirley turned her head aside and Cynthia saw tears in Shirley's eyes. Cynthia opened her notebook and took out the letter.

"Here's the letter."

"Where's my purse? How come you didn't bring back my purse? Just because you brought back the letter you thought I would tell you to keep the purse, didn't you?"

Cynthia turned away from Shirley and started walking away. Shirley ran after Cynthia, touching her shoulders.

"What's your name?"

"Cynthia, Cynthia Powell."

"Cynthia, did you tell anyone about the letter?"

"No."

"Please, I beg of you, don't."

"How come you have your mother's letter in your bag?"

"Please don't tell anyone."

"You call me a thief. I bet you stole your mother's letter."

"I didn't," Shirley shouted.

"She gave it to you?"

"No—please say you won't say anything."

"Just because I say so, you think I won't?"

"Would you break a promise?"

"I don't know you—I know your name and where you live, everybody at Sunday school knows that, but I don't know you."

"Does that mean you are going to say something?"

"No, it doesn't mean that at all."

Suddenly a car pulled up in front of the two girls. Shirley whispered,

"My mother—meet me tomorrow after school by Morris Road—please."

Mrs. Thompson came out of a small Renault. A tall, thin, shapely woman, she wore her hair pulled back in a bun. Her light blue dress fit closely to her brown body. Shirley walked over to her mother and Mrs. Thompson put her arm around her daughter's shoulder. They walked together slowly toward the house.

Cynthia arrived at the appointed place the following day before Shirley. Shirley approached Cynthia shyly.

"I thought you wouldn't come."

Cynthia shrugged. "I'm not going to promise you anything."

"All right. My father doesn't know about the letter; he doesn't know about anything."

"I know that they are your mother and father, but my mother always say, never interfere with other people's business."

"I think my father would die if he found out."

"And you don't want your father to die? He's going to die anyway—one day."

"You are a mean wicked person—you know that. Well, he's my father and I care about what happens to him."

"What about your mother?—dog don't stray for no reason."

"I care about my mother, but it's her fault, getting involved with Smith. Suppose I hadn't seen the letter before daddy did. She forgot to put a stamp on the envelope."

"Maybe your father wouldn't have opened the letter."

"I want to go and speak to him, to tell him to leave my mother alone."

"You are looking for trouble. Suppose he tells your mother you spoke to him? Suppose she asks him about the letter, and he tells her he never received it. She will know right away that you have her letter. Of course, she might suppose that it got lost in the mail. . . ."

"Will you stop with your supposes, will you just stop."

Shirley looked at Cynthia for a long time.

"Cynthia, you are not going to tell anyone are you?"

"Just who do you think I'm going to tell anyway?"

"I don't know. Anybody."

"When are you going to speak to Smith?"

"Soon."

"Want me to come with you? I know all about it anyway."

Shirley thought for awhile, but she finally said, "Yes."

"My mother goes to her Association meetings on Wednesdays, so let's go then."

Two days later Cynthia rushed home from school, did her homework, swept the front yard and watered down the dirt to keep it from blowing into the flats. After dinner she washed and dried the dishes. It was about seven o'clock when Mrs. Powell told Cynthia that she was leaving for her meeting. Mrs. Powell left, and Cynthia waited for five minutes before she left for Shirley's house. Shirley was waiting for her by the gate.

"How will we get to his house? The bus that runs down Vauxhall stops running at seven," Cynthia said.

"We can use my bicycles."

The girls walked quickly up the long driveway and went into a small shed adjoining the garage. Shirley walked over to her ten-speed bicycle. In a corner, covered with oilcloth, was a smaller bicycle. Cynthia stared at it.

"You expect me to ride that? It's almost as small as a tricycle."

"Try and see if you can ride it."

Cynthia got on the bicycle and found that her knees came above the handlebars. She also discovered that if she spread her legs wide apart, she was able to pedal.

Shirley was almost at the next corner before she realized that Cynthia was far behind her. She stopped and waited for Cynthia to catch up to her.

"Shirley, you have to ride slower or leave me—how you expect me to keep pace with you on this thing?"

"All right, I'll ride slower, but let's go."

The girls turned into Vauxhall Road slowly, and stopped their bicycles at the corner for awhile as they decided who would knock at Smith's door. It was decided that Shirley would knock. Smith was not home, however, and the girls waited restlessly at the street corner. After about a half an hour they saw a young man of about twenty-four approach the gate and walk up the steps.

"That can't be him," said Shirley. "He is so young . . . he . . ."

Before Shirley could continue, Cynthia yelled out, "Smith." The young man came down the steps and looked in the direction of the voice, but Cynthia had pulled Shirley back from the corner, out of sight, when she saw Smith react to his name.

"That's him all right. The man knows his name," said Cynthia.

"He is so young; how could mommy?"

"Well if she is going to stray, she may as well do it right. He is nice looking."

Shirley looked angrily at Cynthia.

Smith, not seeing anyone, had gone into his apartment. Shirley was too nervous to think, so they decided to wait until Saturday to speak to him. The girls started off on their bicycles and Cynthia fell behind again.

"What's the matter?" Shirley asked and Cynthia rode up beside her.

"Boy, my dress got caught on the handlebar. Just look at this rip. My mother is going to be so vexed."

"I'll sew it up for you when we get back to my house."

"All right, but I have to hurry and get home."

Cynthia was immediately affected by the inside of Shirley's home. Shirley took Cynthia through the dining room on her way to the stairs that led to the upper level of the house. The dining room was big. In the center of the room was a large dining table whose finish glistened under the lights of the chandelier that hung above it. There were several chairs and a magnificent china closet. A watercolor reprint by Monet hung on one wall; on another wall hung a print of a landscape done in oils, by a local artist. The girls went up the stairs to Shirley's room. Shirley's room was covered with wall to wall carpet. White lace curtains hung from the windows. On the headboard of her bed, were books, stuffed animals and a radio. A desk was in one corner and a sewing machine was on a small table next to a bureau. There were posters of Bob Marley, Trevor Dennis and Johnny Mathis on the wall. On the wide window sills there were ceramic flower pots, filled with crotons and ginger lilies, and in one pot were three pink roses.

Shirley went over to her sewing machine, plugged it in, and asked Cynthia to take off her dress. Shirley quickly sewed the dress and gave it back to Cynthia.

"Do you make your own clothes?"

"Some of them. Mommy sent me to one of those Singer classes for six months."

"Mamma always says, when dog has money him buy cheese."

"Let's not get into that all right? I am tired of hearing about how fortunate I am."

"I have to leave. Thanks for sewing up my dress."

"Will you still go with me tomorrow?"

"Why would I change my mind?"

Shirley smiled. "See you tomorrow."

At nine o'clock on Saturday morning the girls were standing at the corner of Vauxhall Road looking down the street at Smith's apartment house. They had decided to wait until ten o'clock before knocking on his door. They were surprised when after a short while they saw Smith coming out of his gate with a woman walking beside him. The girls looked at each other. Cynthia noticed that Shirley was watching the couple with concentrated interest.

"She looks even older than mommy,"

Derek Boshier "Couple Dancing in Mexican Masks"

Shirley finally said.

"The man likes older women."

Smith and his woman friend came through the gate and walked down the street, in the direction away from Shirley and Cynthia. The girls immediately began following the couple. Smith and his friend stopped at a vegetable and fruit stand, a supermarket, and then they returned to Smith's house. The girls waited at the corner. After what seemed like forever to them, the couple came out of the house again. This time Smith was wearing shorts and his lady friend was in slacks and in a bathing suit top.

"It looks as if they are going to the beach," said Cynthia.

They followed the man and woman to the bus stop and stood talking to each other while watching Smith. The bus pulled up close to the curb and the couple got on. Shirley immediately raced to the door of the bus and Cynthia followed her.

"Shirley, I don't have any bus fare."

"I have money. Get on."

Within ten minutes the bus was at the downtown terminal. The couple got off the bus and ran to catch another bus that was about to pull out of the station. Cynthia and Shirley ran after the couple.

"Boy, I sure hope I know what I'm doing." Look, if they are not getting off at Port Halley's Beach, let's get off anyway. I can't go too far; I am going to get a murdering from my mother when I get home," Cynthia complained.

Shirley had been quiet for a long time, and she made no replies to Cynthia's comments. The couple got off the bus for Port Halley's Beach. There was a mile's walk before actually reaching the beach area.

At the beach, the couple spread their large beach towels on the white sand under a low hanging palm tree. The woman took off her slacks and Shirley and Cynthia both turned and looked at each other at the same time. Shirley said:

"Just look at those thighs."

"They look like a gathered skirt."

"Mommy is so much more attractive."

"Oh, so now you feeling jealous for your mother."

"I don't. Mommy is just better looking, that's all."

"Why don't we just sit down on that tree trunk over there."

The girls sat down on the tree stump and were shaded by an old almond tree. Shirley watched the twosome constantly. Smith was very attentive to his woman friend. They lay close together. After a time they went into the warm sea and then returned to their towels. Smith dried the woman's back and touched her shoulders and her arms gently.

"He is some man," Cynthia said.

"He doesn't even seem to mind that he is in public. I mean, suppose mommy—"

"Or one of his other women," Cynthia interrupted Shirley.

". . . were to see him."

"Maybe he doesn't care."

"Let's go, Cynthia. Just let's go."

"What?"

"Let's go."

The girls stopped at a roadside fruit stall to get a water coconut for Cynthia; then they boarded a bus and returned to downtown Kingston, where they took another bus that took them home. They parted, but arranged to meet each other at seven o'clock.

"There are no lights on. He probably went out. It's Saturday night," Cynthia said, after the girls had waited on the corner for thirty minutes.

"Well, let's wait for a little while longer."

It was after eight and the street was quiet, with the exception of the sound of crickets and frogs. A full moon and hundreds of stars decorated and lit the sky.

A car turned into Vauxhall Road and stopped in front of Smith's house. Cynthia pushed Shirley and both girls gave the car their full attention. Smith and a woman came out of the car. They said good-bye to someone in the car and walked toward his door.

"Shirley, it's a different woman."

"I know."

"He's a real dog."

"Let's go, Cynthia."

"You are always with 'let's go.'"

"Well, we saw him. He will probably stay in for the rest of the night."

"You're right. That one was young."

"Cynthia, I must speak to him, but he never seems to be alone."

"Let's try again tomorrow."

"All right. I will see you in church."

The girls left church right after Bible study and took a bus to Vauxhall Road. Shirley walked up the four steps that led to Smith's apartment. Cynthia was right behind her. Shirley knocked on the door, and it seemed only seconds that the door was opened and Smith stood facing both girls. He was in a merino and shorts. He was barefooted and his medium length hair was matted. In a businesslike voice Shirley said:

"I'm Shirley Thompson, may I speak to you?"

He looked puzzled, and she quickly added, "Marcia Thompson's daughter."

A soundless "Oh," came from Smith as he stepped aside and let the girls walk past him. He offered them seats and they both sat down on a small green sofa. The small drawing room was decorated mostly with records. There were records on the floor, on tables, and on chairs. He scooped up some records from an armchair and sat down. Cynthia looked down and caught sight of his feet. They were small, neat, and nicely put together, and they were manicured with a natural glossy polish. A smile crossed Cynthia's lips and she covered her mouth with her hands.

"Yes?" Smith questioned.

"Shirley, fingering the hairs on the nape of her neck, said,

"This is Cynthia Powell."

He glanced at Cynthia, and then his eyes went back to Shirley.

"What do you want with my mother?" Shirley asked, almost in a whisper.

"Excuse me—I didn't hear you."

"I said what do you want with my mother?"

He took a while to answer.

"I don't see where that's any of your business—but I like your mother."

"You have plenty of other women to like."

Annoyance came over Smith's face.

"Your mother likes me. We enjoy being with each other."

"My father loves her—you'll only hurt her, with all your women."

"Look, your mother knows all about my friends, and how your father feels about your mother is their business."

"You like her, but you don't care if she gets into trouble," Shirley started crying.

Cynthia and Smith glanced at each other, each looking helpless. Cynthia asked Shirley if she wanted to leave, but Shirley did not answer; she continued crying softly. Cynthia touched Shirley's shoulders and reminded her that they were there to talk. Shirley stopped crying and red-eyed, she looked hard at Smith.

"Will you leave my mother alone," she threatened, pleaded.

"No. If your mother doesn't want to see me, all right, but not until then."

"Don't you care if she gets into trouble?"

"I care very much, but your mother knows what she is doing."

"If she did, I wouldn't have found out about you."

"Perhaps you trust her less than your father."

Shirley cut him a vicious look.

"Your mother and I are friends because we both want it that way."

"She is married; she doesn't need you."

Smith started to say something but changed his mind. Shirley looked as if she might start to cry again.

"Would you like something to drink?" Smith asked, and his eyes extended the offer to Cynthia also.

"No thank you," Shirley pouted.

"I would like something," Cynthia said.

Shirley looked at Cynthia with a look that said "traitor." Smith got up and walked through a room divider of colored beads into a small kitchen. Cynthia immediately pleaded with Shirley not to cry anymore.

"He'll think you are a crybaby."

"Do you think I care what he thinks—the animal."

"He's not so bad, Shirley. I mean, he doesn't have to talk to you."

Smith returned with a tall glass of lemonade and handed it to Cynthia. Shirley watched Cynthia as she drank, and as soon as Cynthia was finished, Shirley got up to leave. Cynthia thanked Smith for the drink, and the girls left.

"What are you going to do now?" Cynthia asked, as the girls walked away from Smith's apartment.

"I don't know. I can't speak to mommy."

"Why don't you just leave everything alone."

"Cynthia, if daddy ever finds out. He is such a good kind man."

"Your mother isn't?"

"Yes," Shirley answered in a weak, tired voice. "Cynthia, I feel so sick."

"My father is hardly ever home, and my mother just works hard all the time."

"Does your mother have a man?"

"No. My mother believes in suffering."

"And you think my mother doesn't?" Shirley said angrily.

"Shirley, there is nothing good about suffering. You crazy, you know."

"You know something—you will grow up to be just like my mother, unfaithful."

"My mother always says, you have to keep living till you dead. She lives her way—your mother lives her way—besides, I bet your father has a woman."

"He does not, and besides, if he did, it's different."

"Don't ever swear for anybody, and don't forget what's good for the gander is good for the goose."

"You are vulgar. You are one of those girls who end up having one baby after another without being married."

It occurred to Cynthia that Shirley was sounding like her mother. Mamma was always talking about all the bastard children that were being born. She cautioned Cynthia about not being loose, and learning to keep her legs closed. It was all right to be poor; poverty was something people couldn't help, but a person could help being respectable. Mrs. Powell felt that rich people didn't have to worry when their daughters made mistakes; they could always afford to say that the baby was adopted, or that it was a cousin's child from abroad.

"So now you can tell fortunes," Cynthia said. "I don't even know if I want children. You worry about your life, my dear, and I'll worry about mine. Besides, men don't overwhelm me."

"You talk like a woman."

"And I act like one, too."

"Cynthia, let's stop this. I am going to see Miss T."

"What!" Cynthia shouted. "That obeah woman—mamma says when you play with fire you get burn."

"I'm sick and tired of your mother. Don't you see that I have to go."

"The only thing you have to do is die. Don't get mixed up with evil."

"You believe that those things work?"

"I know that I have seen things; my mother and a lot of people that I know have seen things that are strange. I leave it at that."

"Then if there is a possibility it might

work, why shouldn't I at least try? Maybe she can do something to make mommy stop seeing Smith."

"Stay away from her."

"I'm going home. I'll see you tomorrow. No school, remember."

Cynthia was anxious to speak to Shirley the next morning, but her mother had several things she wanted Cynthia to do. Cynthia sat in front of a big metal tub filled with water and suds and her soiled school clothes. With a scrub board she rubbed her white blouses, paying particular attention to the collars. Mrs. Powell walked back and forth from the small pipe cistern in the yard to the clothesline. As Cynthia washed, Mrs. Powell rinsed, adding blue to whiten the white clothes. Cynthia's thoughts were on Shirley and Miss T. There were many men and women who had paid Miss T money to get back lovers. Some of these people had indeed gotten exactly what they wanted—Mrs. Brown had gotten back her husband; still, Cynthia did not want Shirley to see Miss T. Cynthia thought about Shirley's mother. Suddenly she remembered that purse that she had left buried under the house.

Cynthia finished her wash, polished and shined the verandah floor, and dusted the furniture. While her mother was in the kitchen, she stole quietly under the house, dug up the purse, unbuttoned the top of her dress and put the purse under her arm. The metal clasp felt cool next to her skin, and she felt the uncomfortable lump of the straps under her armpit, but she buttoned her dress and ran off to Shirley's house. Miss Beryl, the housekeeper, opened the door. Cynthia said good day, and ran upstairs to Shirley's room.

"Well?" Cynthia asked as she entered Shirley's room.

"Well, what?"

"Have you decided to see Miss T?"

"Oh, no—I'm not going to see her."

"I'm glad."

"Let's go see Smith."

"What for?"

"I just want to talk to him again."

"When are you going to stop this?"

"Not until mommy stops seeing him."

Cynthia shook her head and said, "All right."

The girls started walking out of the room, when Cynthia stopped, unbuttoned her dress front, took the purse from under her arm and handed it to Shirley. Cynthia looked intently at Shirley, who took the purse with downcast eyes. Shirley walked over to her bed, opened the purse, and threw its contents on the bed. She held out the empty purse to Cynthia. They looked at each other in silence and Cynthia smiled, but did not take the purse.

"As mamma would say, cow read their laws unto themselves."

Shirley smiled. "I never heard that one before."

"Let's go see Smith," Cynthia said.

Shirley dropped the purse on the bed and the girls left the room.

Shirley walked up to Smith's apartment, opened the gate and held it for Cynthia; hesitantly they walked up the steps and knocked on the door. Shirley knocked twice before Smith opened the door. He looked politely at Shirley and then he looked over her shoulders at Cynthia.

"Come in," he said.

"Thank you," Shirley said.

"Here on your mother's behalf again, little lady?"

"My name is Shirley."

"Right, and you are Sandra," he said to Cynthia.

"Cynthia," Cynthia corrected him.

"Have a seat, ladies. Can I get you something to drink?"

Shirley shot Cynthia a quick glance that said "we are not here for entertainment, remember."

"No, thank you," both girls answered.

"Well then?" Smith questioned, after the girls were seated.

"Are you still going to continue seeing my mother?"

"No."

The girls looked at each other in surprise.

"You aren't?" Shirley said.

"I am getting married."

"So, you never cared about the fact that my mother was married."

"Your mother cares about the fact that I am getting married."

"She doesn't want to be with a married man. Women, good Lord," Cynthia mumbled to herself.

"My mother said that she didn't want to see you anymore?"

"Not exactly. We will still be friends. I like your mother very much."

"You said before that you weren't going to see her."

Cynthia went over to Shirley's chair, said excuse to Smith for whispering, and said softly in Shirley's ear, "What he means is that they won't be going to bed together anymore."

Shirley moved her head away from Cynthia and looked, embarrassed, at Smith. She sucked in on her lips, moistening them. Cynthia remained seated on the arm of Shirley's chair.

"When are you getting married?" Cynthia asked.

"You girls are inquisitive. When I was your age, I could never question an adult the way you children do." He hestitated. "Next month."

"Well, I hope you can do it," Cynthia said.

"Do what?"

"Stay married and keep all your women."

Smith laughed. "Cynthia, you are something else."

"We better go," Shirley said, getting up.

"What day are you getting married?" Shirley asked, as he opened the door.

"Why, do you want to come, just to make sure that I get married? You should stop being a worrywart. Your mother is a good person and she can take care of her own affairs."

"Affairs is right," Cynthia said to herself.

"You didnt' say what day you're getting married," Shirley continued.

"The third of the month. At three o'clock," he added quickly.

On the third of March, a Saturday, the girls waited at the corner of Vauxhall Road. At two fifteen a small green Volkswagen pulled up in front of Smith's gate. A man wearing a black tuxedo, white shirt, and a black bow tie came out of the car, went up the steps, and knocked at Smith's door and then went inside the house. Within a few minutes Smith came out of the house with the man. Smith was also in a black tuxedo. The man opened the door of the car and bowed as Smith got into the passenger side of the car. From the corner the girls looked at each other.

"The man looks sharp," Cynthia said.

The driver of the car made a U turn in the middle of the street, and before the girls realized what was happening, the car was passing them. Smith put his hand out of the window and waved at the girls.

"Well, we can't follow them to the church since we don't know where it is, but he really looks as if he is going to get married," Cynthia said.

Shirley nodded her head in agreement. The girls walked slowly to the bus stop■

prose

prose

poetry Olive Hershey

poetry Rachael Bolton

poetry Lucille Joy

poetry

poetry Patty Clark

poetry Jane P. Moreland

poetry

poetry Aldona Middleworth

photography

photography

drawing