Gulf Coast

VOLUME IX, NUMBER 2
SPRING/SUMMER 1997

Gulf Coast

Volume IX, Number Two
Spring/Summer 1997

Gulf Coast: A Journal of Literature and Fine Arts
is funded largely by Inprint, Inc.,
National Endowment for the Arts,
the City of Houston and the Texas Commission for the Arts through
the Cultural Arts Council of Houston/Harris County,
and the University of Houston English Department.

Our thanks to the following people and organizations for their support and
assistance: Faith Venverloh of the Creative Writing Program
at the University of Houston; the Department of English at the University of
Houston; Glenys Wolff; Rich Levy of Inprint, Inc.; Stephanie and Edgar Larsen;
Angela and Howard Moench; Charlotte Hall Banham;
Elizabeth H. Carrell; Brazos Bookstore

Gulf Coast is published twice yearly:
Fall/Winter (December) and Spring/Summer (June) issues.
Queries and manuscripts should be sent to *Gulf Coast*, Department of English,
University of Houston, Houston, TX 77204-3012.
Please specify fiction, poetry, or nonfiction on the outside of your envelope.
All queries and submissions must be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped
envelope if they are to be returned. Response time is two to six months.

Gulf Coast does not read unsolicited work between June 1 to Aug 15.

A two-year subscription is $22.00. A one-year subscription is $12.00. Back issues are
$5.00. Barthelme Memorial issue is $12.00. *Gulf Coast* is listed in the American
Humanities Index. The magazine is distributed in North America by
Fine Print, Austin, TX, 800/874-7082, and B. DeBoer, Inc., Nutley, NJ, 201/667-9300.

ISSN: 0896-2251
ISBN: 0-9628811-5-5

FICTION

POETRY

NONFICTION

ART

Cover art by
Jeff Elrod
Hit It, 1997
Acrylic on Canvas, 72"x72"
Courtesy the artist and Texas Gallery

ROMAN D. DUCHNOWSKI

MY FATHER LOVES A WESTERN

We came in the front door and made a lot of noise. From the next room, my father said hello. We were visiting for the first time in a long time. We'd been shopping all night. My mother had been called away on business shortly after our arrival the day before. We walked into the back end of the den. My father was sitting back on the couch, watching a Western.

"My father loves a Western," I said, and my father and my wife smiled.

It was true. Westerns were what my father loved to watch best. I can't even remember him watching anything else, although I'm sure that he did.

I walked over to a shelf by the television and looked at the numerous videos that my father had either bought or rented: Westerns, Westerns, Westerns.

When I was a little guy, I wore a cowboy hat wherever I went. I shot a little gun. It was a lot of fun.

But then one day my father did the strangest thing. First he had a barber buzz off all my hair, then he left me in a community park in a town where I didn't know anybody. "See you at noon."

Straightening my hat, I strode through the grass under the trees.

"Hey, partner," somebody said to me.

I turned around. It was a boy and a girl, both older than me.

"I might have to run you out of town, partner," he said. "Where you from?"

I didn't say anything. I was nervous. I felt bald.

They laughed and walked away.

My bathing suit and a towel tucked under my arm, I headed for the pool.

The locker room experience was a combination of quiet and chaos. Boys were sitting on benches in front of lockers when I arrived. I found a spot and sat down. After a few minutes of sitting there, I turned to the fella next to me and said, "What's going on here?"

A man holding two baskets of keys with pins on them entered the room before the fella next to me could answer. Like all the other boys, he jumped to his feet and started asking for a token.

It seemed the louder you asked, the faster you got it.

"Hey, token!"

"Token! Token!"

I waited until the baskets were almost empty. Then, standing, I said, "Hey, token!"

"Here you go, cowboy." He tossed me a token.

I got into my black Ocean Champion. My hat didn't fit too well in my locker. I pinned my token on my towel and headed for the pool.

It was a big pool, comprising of five different sections. Young men were doing some incredible diving at the end opposite where I laid my towel. For a while, I just watched them. I loved diving.

Just when I'd begun to think that there wasn't a female in the place, I heard, and then turned and saw one with a guy in the back of the area. She was on her back, he was standing. She wore a black bikini. He wore a blue Ocean Champion. He had the biggest set of balls that I'd ever seen anywhere, as big as apples. Later on, I would look at him only to see that he was hard. Very hard.

Then I could've sworn that I saw my father, walking between tables set up behind the diving area. Assuming that he was looking for me, I got up and walked in his direction. He was the only fully clothed person in sight.

A little boy collided with my leg. When I looked up, the man that I'd taken to be my father was gone. I went back to my towel, to sun.

I walked to the end of the medium board to check its spring. Somebody on line complained. I was surprised. I thought everybody checked the spring. I dove in the pool.

I swam into the next section, over the racing lanes, and into the largest section, which was several inches over my head.

"Hey, partner," a familiar voice said to me.

As I turned, I was splashed in the face. Wading and bouncing, I looked at who had splashed me. It was the same boy and girl. They splashed me again. I headed for the side of the pool.

They swam after me. They grabbed at my feet. I kicked at them. I broke away. But as I climbed out of the pool, he grabbed one of my legs and pulled me back in the pool.

When I came up, they were out of the pool and smiling down at me.

"Y'look bald, partner."

At noon, my father didn't show up, so I roamed the grounds. I walked from swings and shuffleboard to horseshoes and handball to a grassy field that continued to the open, fenced-off end of the park. I don't know why I went this way. It was the least attractive part of the park. Cars were stopped at a light.

I saw something stick its head out of the ground thirty feet away. I walked over to investigate, thinking it was a rabbit or a ground hog.

It was three young dogs, wild dogs probably, standing up in the mouth of a tunnel that looked like it was dug deep. The little dogs were covered with dark red hair that stood straight up. They seemed glad to see me.

"All right, partner, watch it."

Somebody grabbed me by the neck and shoulder and threw me to the ground.

It was the same boy and girl. He was dark and round. She was blonde and round.

I felt like punching him.

And then he came at me, his fist in the air, his hand around my neck. "You leave our doggies alone. You stay away from here."

He pushed me away, and I thought that if I could just get one good shot in, he'd be sorry.

He was all over me again. He wrestled me to the ground. I looked up at the girl. "Make him stop," I said.

She smiled sympathetically.

"Ow!" I cried, for he had grazed my balls.

"Aw," she said, and dropped to one knee to pout in my face.

I suddenly felt sick. "Get off me! I'm sick! Get up!"

I stood, picked up my hat, straightened my clothes, realized the nausea had already passed, and ran away from them as fast as I could.

"I'll catch up with you, partner," I heard him say.

I found an opening in the fence, crossed the street, and walked right up to a stranger, a gentlemen with blonde hair, and said, "Could you help me?"

"Maybe. What's the problem?"

"I am advanced in karate. I know I don't look it. I'm not a black belt, but I can smash bricks."

"What belt are you?"

"Wait. There's a guy and a girl chasing me. My father dropped me off at the park this morning, and ever since the two of them have been all over me. I haven't had to use karate yet, but I'm afraid that . . . ."

"Yes, yes, go on." He was very understanding.

"I don't want to hurt anybody," I said. "So I thought that I'd ask somebody older, such as yourself, to hold me back when they come after me again."

"I will," he said.

It was getting late, and I was getting hungry. I wanted to go to the snack stand but didn't want to get beaten up and humiliated again. I had a feeling that that's where they were. Finally, I went anyway.

That's where they were.

I bought a hot dog and a soda and sat down at a metal picnic table several tables away from them.

I finished eating and went for a walk by the bay. I took out my gun and aimed it at the bugs in the air. Then I walked with it by my side. There weren't any other people around. The water was very still. I admired boats off the docks. One baby-blue boat had a glass cabin. Another boat had an interior that looked like an elegant living room. I wandered down to the old boats and barges while shooting pursuers in every direction. One man came along and held up his hands. I let him pass.

I walked back the way I'd come. At the top of the steps, I saw them at play by the water to my right. I went down the stairs and stayed to the left.

"Hey, partner."

I was going to ignore them. I had nothing to say. But then I glanced their way and saw something that I'd not noticed before. The girl was beautiful.

I walked up to her and tried to strike up a conversation. She was the best-looking female I'd ever seen, which was exactly what I said to her.

He grabbed my arm and pushed me away from her. "Come on, partner, let's fight!" I rushed towards the girl and he tackled me. I tried to break free, and he laughed. He let go, and I got up and went for the girl. He hit me with his full weight in the middle of my back.

This went on for quite a while, until I was slogging up and down for the beautiful girl, and he was laughing and pushing me away so hard that I felt like quitting. Then he almost hurt my hat.

"Just hold on a minute," I said, and removed my hat. They watched me examine it.

"What a haircut," the boy said to me.

I put my hat back on and lunged for the beautiful girl. I lunged while they laughed. They left me in the sand.

I was on my way to meet my father. It was late in the afternoon, and the trees were blowing. Rain seemed imminent.

I turned a corner and saw my father sitting in his car along the inner edge of the parking lot. He was talking to somebody.

As I neared my father, I saw who he was talking to: the same boy and girl.

At first, I was angry, but as I drew closer and heard them referring to my father by his first name, I had to laugh; it sounded so funny coming from them. They stood by the window talking long after I'd sat down next to my father.

My father was loading a Western at eleven o'clock in the morning. He was off from work, so it was all right. Under any other circumstances, not even he would watch a Western at eleven o'clock in the morning.

We were eating breakfast while watching him cozy up to one of his favorites, *Big Guns at Battle Creek*. He wedged five pillows around himself, propped up his feet, and spread a blanket over his legs. No sooner had the film begun than he was entranced.

Later, before he could load another Western, I asked my father, "Remember the day you left me in a community park, wearing a cowboy hat and carrying a gun?"

"I didn't leave you there," he said. "I dropped you off."

"Why were you talking to those two kids?"

"What two kids?"

He was lying. "You know which two. By the car, in the parking lot."

"No, I don't recall."

He was lying, and he didn't really care if it showed. He beamed me one of his frozen grins of patronage. He was lying all along.

KARLA KUBAN

Mixed Signals

After rehearsal, J.B., a soprano in the church choir, spent the afternoon at the home of her new girlfriend, Belinda, who sang alto, and was also in the church choir. The two women made a fire, had soup, and talked about their bad marriages. J.B. could not get pregnant and her husband blamed it on her. Belinda's husband was cheating on her. At one point Belinda began to cry, and J.B. put her arms around her.

At four-thirty Belinda's husband, a lawyer, came home from work. He said to J.B., "The roads are glare ice. You're driving that pickup out there? Is it four-wheel drive?" He began to unzip his galoshes.

J.B. shook her head. "Unfortunately not."

He was not a bad-looking man: short and thin, a camel coat, rubber boots that zipped up the front. His face was round, made rounder with wire glasses. She said good-bye to her new girlfriend and the husband, put on her coat and gloves, then went out to the truck.

The sky was gray and filled with sleet like hard salt. A layer of ice had glazed her truck's windows. She scraped them, got inside, and proceeded along the driveway, which sloped up. The wheels spun and she found herself going sideways into the yard. She put the truck in reverse and revved the engine, then shifted to first, but the tires kept spinning. Finally, she went to her friend's door and rang the bell.

"Let Michael try to get you out," Belinda suggested.

"I don't know," J.B. said. "It's really stuck."

The husband put on his coat and gloves, then zipped the galoshes back over his shoes. The two women watched from the window as he tried to work the truck out of the rut, but he had no better luck than J.B. The left wheel was spinning.

J.B. went outside and the sleet stung her face.

The husband rolled down the window. "The back end of this is so light. Maybe if you sit over the wheel," he suggested. "The left wheel."

"All right," she said, swinging her leg over the bed of the truck, climbing in, and sitting down.

He slammed the truck in reverse. It slipped back. Exhaust clouds blew from the tailpipe, the tires screamed, sharp fumes rose to J.B.'s nose. She began to rock with the truck. In first gear she went forward, in reverse she went back. With the whole of her body she rocked. Finally, she could not stand it.

"I have to push!" she shouted, getting out, angling down, digging her heels into the snow, her hands on the bed, right shoulder in, her head low. She saw his face in the side mirror, the lines deep in his forehead, his mouth grimacing and closed. He watched her.

He threw it in first. She grunted and groaned. She panted, sweated, pushed with all her might.

"That's it," he called to her.

"Yes, yes," she called back.

"Yes," he shouted.

"Yes!" she said with a guttural moan as she pushed with everything she had.

They suddenly cleared the hump and she ran with the truck, still pushing, as if her hands were glued to it. The rear fishtailed along the driveway and she loped along until he reached the crest where the road ahead was downhill. He stopped and put the truck in neutral. When the truck finally let go of her, she went around to his window. His face was damp with sweat, and she wondered why.

"You did very well," he said.

"What a time," she said, gasping.

"I myself was excited," he said. "Very much so." He looked her directly in the eyes and one of his eyebrows shifted up.

"It was like giving birth," she said.

"Oh." His face looked both shocked and disappointed, as if he had been smacked by some invisible hand.

Belinda came outside, her face lit, clapping gloved hands, the record music of a harp and flute concerto rushing out of the house through the open door, picked up and swallowed by the wind. "Bravo!" she said.

"Bravo!" J.B. echoed.

The husband got out of the truck. J.B. watched as he slogged through the slush and stood next to his wife. He put his arm around her, and she smiled. J.B. sighed and smiled, too; but her smile was edged with self-doubt and embarrassment. She did not want to stand in the sleet and draw conclusions, and be struck with new truths or assessments of men and marriage and life. That would be ridiculous. She said to Belinda, "See you Thursday at rehearsal." Then she got in her truck and drove away.

AARON BELZ

Train to Mehlville

I have been sponsored by a local society
To sever these melons with this black mallet.

Or pulverize them, more like, and prepare
Their squooshed innards for the pies

Some of the ladies are baking. But the sky
Is filling with green clouds like ink

In a glass of water, and a few dark drops
Have fallen and are beading up along the tops

Of violets here, by an old wooden shed.
I know my wife is home busily on the phone

With her sister in Oklahoma. If it's nearly
Night that means my daughter is just walking out

Of her cello lesson at the old college, out
Onto the darkening quad where her carpool waits.

And I am supposed to crack these canteloupes
With all my strength for an hour? Heaven

And earth could be colliding and I would have
To cherish this humble chore as if it were

A kiss with my new bride. On that day she
waited beautifully on the platform, and I was late.

ALLAN PETERSON

COMPLETE METAMORPHOSIS

What happened to Betsy opening her coat,
locusts split open on her sleeves.
She remembers giving the business to a visiting consultant
and the last two husbands, then everything went blank.
She sat back and opened her body to relief
like a full-page ad for cucumber facials, mud-packs, oil.
It was the end of obligation. She softened like pears
in a plastic bag.

When drowned leaves look like luggage on the floor,
when photos can be taken with a shoebox, these are the Last Days
before vacation. And what emerges after a swoon is a little princess
potter wasp from its brick container after snacking on worms.
In April, royalty is sucked from the dirt where the males are waiting,
vermin, and supplemental flycatchers.

This is another season of give and take, her blue eyes giving,
the bystanders taking away. What could be more glaucomatic.
Having already visited the wild islands, Blindfold and Perfidy,
where color was useless and hoodwink lasted forever, she had status.
She could say blinkers, short-sight, screw up the eyes.
She could in new plumage, pumping her wings, say glow-worm,
gravel-blind, specter of the Brocken-wraith.
She could double her lover like strabismus

One Day in Texas History

when Austin-born Mrs. Jones stepped out for a message,
Mike Terrell, who came in his pants when Missy kissed him,
tried to get most of the people in the row along the window
to faint, since they had the widest aisle.
Seven deep breaths, sink to a knee-bend, then hold your nose
while blowing and rise slowly.
By the time they were upright, three of the five
had a muffled silence surround them like the flooding Brazos.
They crumpled like Santa Ana's troops after a volley.
The plains around San Jacinto lifted to meet them.
Howie missed the ledge by inches.

Sound/light in the same sense as space/time, closed over them
they said, a dimming diminishing, as if the world entire
came to a point, like a living pencil that stopped writing
consciousness and lifted from the page.
Before Mrs. Jones reentered the room we had glimpsed details
of poignancy as clearly as the shapes of soap film deforming on a wire,
seen how, counter to intuition, a sweeping movement of recognition
formed a bubble from it, like Sam Houston saw the Republic of Texas
fully developed instead of a flat platter of detergent moon,
that we were captured by our bodies, how the wind in a gust might separate
feathers of a mockingbird and we glimpse the heart-breaking
tiny and pathetic body inside. Or anoxia, stating the limits of rebellion.

SIDNEY WADE

My soul took itself out for a walk the other day
It hasn't yet returned and I'm slightly concerned

it used to say it always wanted to travel the world
it used to say it couldn't help it if its heart was larger than the room
in which we lived
it used to say it's terrible how it longed to converse with other flesh

So what should I do?

should I allow myself the rich dark honey of a jealous rage?
should I breathe slowly and count to ten thousand several hundred times?
should I harrow the black soil of my body for clues?

Perhaps I'll just sit quietly and swing my foot
Perhaps I'll just listen to this fatal thudding in my chest

BRIAN LĒUNG

Fire Walk

Gideon dials slowly, leaning against the wall of his empty kitchen. He closes his eyes, allowing everything around him to fall away. The ringing on the other end of the phone sounds like the reverberation of a hammer on nails. When it stops, his mother is on the line. Gideon takes a breath of the warm autumn air.

She waits silently—and he says, finally "Mother, it's time. I've gone as far as I can go."

It will take her three hours to arrive from San Diego. Gideon walks into the living room with its picture windows allowing the late morning light to intensify the white of the now barren walls. In the corner stands a vacuum. It has become a kind of urn, sucking up the large gray flakes falling from Gideon more frequently now. He uses it to remove the evidence of his presence from the dark upholstery of his chairs and most recently has begun running the hose down his arms to the tips of his dry, opaque fingers. "Death by evaporation," he tells friends. The treatments are over. His illness is no longer a dismissible visitor but has, in fact, become his primary companion.

After the final hospital stay, Gideon removed the photographs from the walls of his home and now sits himself among them, chilled by a thin band of air hovering above the oak floor. He considers the photos an index of his life. There are the baked, porcelain-framed pictures of friends with red reflecting eyes at parties, and a trip in 1988 to Brazil for a television project. A single black and white of a little girl rests in a small gold plated frame, the only picture his family has of an aunt he never met. The photos of himself record the high cheek bones and sepia toned skin inherited from his mother. He feels as if he is viewing a former lover. The appeal or even chance of posterity is some hectic blue gesture like a last affair.

He picks up a single 5x7, stepping over the piles of photos. Someone will want the frames, he thinks. The redwood chaise on the sun deck is not facing exactly as he prefers but he seldom bothers with this kind of correction anymore. Most of the flowers in his backyard have died back, but seven white roses remain, clustered together like the flared underside of a Spanish skirt. When it is clear, he can see the Hollywood sign on his right and downtown Los Angeles on the left. But it is one of those windless days when the air is imperfectly still and embalmed with a white haze, leaving

the impression of something vacant and ruined you expect to come upon at the equator. Gideon has this sense more often now, of a failed civilization offering the invention of time and then surrendering under the force of the millennium it created.

He considers the 5x7 of the family reunion nine months earlier sent to him by his mother. The photograph was taken on the porch of his mother's white dairy house in San Diego—five rows, eight and ten across, of women in pink and green pastel sun dresses and men folding their thick brown arms across their chests or using them to pull someone closer. His mother was frozen in a laugh, her black hair scrunched back in a pencil-secured bun, enhancing his resemblance to her. She was leaning on his Uncle Stan. One of her hands rested on his stomach, the other held a rifle by its barrel. It was her trademark, the playful, deadpan threat to shoot anyone who complained about the food. She had come out of the kitchen spinning the weapon, walking across the wood porch when his uncle grabbed her. "Soak that apron in a pot of hot water," he said, "and we'll all have soup." And then the picture.

Gideon notices in the photograph for the first time that his mother is looking at him in the front row, reclined across the laps of several of his cousins. It is that kind of search done in large groups when seeking the connection of an intimate. Had she caught his eye? He remembers avoiding her most of the day. He entertained his relatives as they always expected, but stayed away from her. Gideon wonders, looking at his glassy hands, if he had been doing the same thing all along. The doctor's best estimate was two months, the ironically phrased deadline which had at last convinced him to ask his mother to come get him.

He has gotten out of Los Angeles just twice since he moved here, the first time for his father's funeral, and the second for the reunion in the El Monte valley in San Diego. He left for his mother's house two days before the reunion to help her prepare. He drove down Interstate 5, cutting along the edge of the Pacific at 6 a.m. It was the only time he had seen this ocean when it was not remarkable to him. Fog the color of lead hung tight above the quelled water, releasing infrequent spots of light. He felt superstitious.

Gideon pulled off the freeway at San Onofre and got out of his car. He was close enough to hear waves manipulating the sand. Leaning on the open door of his car, he allowed his face to collect a mist which felt as cold and sharp as metal shavings. He considered the indefinite shore and this fifth year in which he had gone beyond positive. The apocalypse has fooled us all, he thought. It has come up the back road. While we look to the stars it overtakes the avenues. This is its method. The canals are almost captured and the boulevards are collapsing like bad veins. We have read the Bible and thought we would get off easy. It's too late to run, Gideon realized. He listened for the silken pressure just before a breaking wave, wanting to simply be with his mother.

This quiet desire, to be home, to be someone's son again, propelled the

rest of his trip. As he pulled onto the gravel driveway of the former dairy, Gideon focused on the changes his mother had made, surprised at how much she had forced out of the old, hoof-packed ground. Thick, controlled stands of bird of paradise led up from the mailbox like purple and orange flocks at the edge of a river. The bougainvillea, pruned from its former mounded sprawl, now trellised over the broadest side of the house so that its greenish white bracts looked like pods of ripening fruit. She had brought the lawn back all the way to the drive and he imagined her coaxing it with weekly increments of water.

The sky was a heavy blue, a ceramic shade which made the house look freshly painted white. Pansies and California poppies grew all around in tin sauce pans and old pressure cookers. "You going to gawk all day?" his mother said from an upstairs window. "Put some work clothes on and meet me out back." Her voice was to him light and direct, like falling ash. How could he tell this woman he was sick, he wondered. He blocked the sun from his eyes to locate her, but only saw the empty space where she had been. All the windows on the second floor were original; wavy looking, even from the outside. His mother liked the effect and he was not surprised there were still no screens.

Knowing she would not come out front, he went to his old room to change into jeans and a Dodger T-shirt. Gideon stood still, looking at the new wallpaper—lime green with lateral rows of purple specks, visible up close as African violets. His mother had replaced his single bed with a queen size, covered by a white chenille spread hanging to the floor. He opened the closet door and looked directly to the center of the empty hanger pole. His deeply scratched initials stained with black ink were preserved, everything around them recently painted.

Gideon threw his bags on the bed and lay back.

He listened for the sounds a house makes when it seems there are no sounds at all. When he was young his mother told him there were people who lived in the walls and the creaks he heard were their tiny doors opening and closing. Over a period of time, his mother named these little beings, gave them each a story, and told him how they visited with her at midnight. Now, as he stared up at the old ceiling, a broad, private smile came over his face. He remembered the room cast in a dark, cloistered blue and the times he left his closet door cracked open, pretending to sleep in order to catch a miniature person walking across the floor. Sometimes he convinced himself he could see a head peeking around the bottom edge. In the morning he would tell his mother and it would be a secret between them.

Now he heard a pop of the old wood and he got up from the bed. Despite the changes, it was still his room.

After he put on his yard clothes, Gideon located his mother in back of the house pulling chaparral stumps from the ground. She breathed through a red bandanna tied at the back of her head. The dust and pollen she stirred were primary to him, like the peppery smell before a thunderstorm. He

walked to his mother, twigs crushing beneath his feet. "Anna Jo Cavanaugh, your son is here," he said.

"Gideon James Cavanaugh, grab a pick." She turned around and slipped off the bandanna revealing the distinct swath of dirt on her upper face. Standing next to his mother, he felt the perspective of looking up even though he was eight inches taller than she. She was still beautiful to him; something produced by the West, he thought, rugged and exotic like manzanita in September. She hugged him, leaving her gloves on. "How's television production?" she continued. "Still brainwashing?"

"You taught me well."

Anna smiled quickly and pulled her son by the arm to the cleared area to mark out where the roasting pits would be. They startled a covey of quail out of the brush, the birds flying just over their heads, a dozen brown spades disappearing into the sage on the upper hillside.

"This is where we had the fire walk," Gideon said, remembering the scarred ground left by a bed of oak cinders. When he was eleven his mother hosted a self-confidence seminar culminating in a walk across fifteen feet of hot coals. The cinderous gash in the lawn was the only source of light other than two red paper lanterns moving in the night like hot cigarette tips. The guests sat listening to the speaker who wore a black jumpsuit, making his head look detached from his body in the dim glow. Gideon detected a pattern early—the repeated words "conquer" and "overcome" and "visualize."

After three hours, the guests moved to the edge of the fire bed. One by one they stepped across the coals like they were charging a door. The objective was to focus on the end, concentrate on the wetted grass and feel nothing during the dash over the coals. Gideon watched the participants' faces as they finished their crossings. No one smiled or spoke. A woman squinted and checked her feet for blisters. She came and sat close to Gideon, watching the rest of the group go through the process. Their faces were cast in a hot, bleached orange. "What did it feel like?" Gideon asked the woman.

She was quiet for a moment, running her nails across the dark bottoms of her feet. "I don't remember how it felt."

Even years later, Gideon could pick out the bare spot in the ground where the coals had been and where he sat with the woman on the grass. "We're going to cook three lambs and a pig," Anna continued, breaking Gideon out of thought. "I'm expecting about two hundred, everybody that's even slightly related. You're the only one I wasn't sure would make it. Your track record isn't so great."

"I told you I was coming," Gideon said. But there was no heart in his reply. He thought of all the times he had been invited home but canceled at the last minute. His family had been the casualty of his success and he knew it. He had given them up for evenings watching friends sing at the CineGrill, or going dancing at warehouse clubs which changed locations every weekend. But most often, Gideon was simply immersed in

production, and looking back, he realized his family was the first part of him he let go.

"You're here now," Gideon's mother said. "I guess I better put you to work." She smiled and pulled the bandanna over her mouth again. Gideon quickly surveyed the area she had already cleared. It was not large enough and he was glad he was there to help her. They began removing the remaining dandelion and wild mustard, working together on a larger perimeter.

The night of the reunion, when most of the relatives had gone, a few remained in the anesthesia of the warm evening. They sat in the bourbon-tinted light of the living room, finishing dishes of vanilla ice cream as the chime of spoons on glass gave way to the sound of crickets and air seasoned by pomegranate and trampled grass.

Gideon tried not to look tired and wondered if anyone noticed. It made him nervous, allowing for a clarity of thought he had given up in Los Angeles.

"I can't believe we did it," his mother said, putting her hands behind her head. "One hundred and eighty-three people and not one argument. That's a record on both counts for this family."

But Gideon was not listening. He sat at the edge of the room near the windows, aware of his own breathing, of his chest rising and falling, keeping time to the quiet pace of night. He wondered whether he had missed some change in himself which was only obvious to those who hadn't seen him in a long time.

Anna hit Gideon in the head with a pillow. "What's the matter with you? I was gloating. Fall in line."

"You were amazing," Gideon said, lobbing the pillow back. "I can't believe you got everyone to come." He looked at the few family members sitting around the room. His Great Uncle Ed slept, leaning on Gideon's grandmother. Ed junior sat across from his father, looking like a before picture, black hair and wide shoulders, always wearing an optimistic smile. Gideon felt that he should have said more but he had no words and the small group turned to his grandmother as she began to straighten out the lineages of people who had been there that day, doubling back on herself to correct links, then lingering over certain details. Gideon watched his family and thought about the black and white photograph at home of his Aunt Helen as a young girl. His mother had sent it to him. Except for her, he had rarely heard anyone speak of his aunt.

"Your grandparents had a farmhouse just like this in Missouri," Gideon's grandmother said to his mother. "By now they would've been in bed two hours already.

"It's funny how you forget about time. When I was a little girl I clocked the day by how the sun hit my body." She stopped for a moment, raking Great Uncle Ed's white hair as he continued to sleep, then turned to Gideon's mother.

"Your father and I would sit straight through the summer on the wood porch, in earshot of our parents, of course. If it was late, twilight divided the barnyard into purple and black. He'd hold my hand and tell me what they had planted. All they tried to do all day was keep the insects away and the ground wet. He told me he fell asleep at night imagining the crickets were saying my name. He was a good man."

"What about Aunt Helen?" Gideon said, the words leaving his mouth as quickly as he thought them.

The family sat for a moment, still and uncomfortable in the ticking surge of yellow light. Anna got up and nervously gathered their ice cream dishes, taking them into the summer kitchen. The door flapped dull in its frame. Years of paint left tiny enamel stalactites hanging from the hinges.

"We don't talk about that," Gideon's grandmother said, nudging Great Uncle Ed off her shoulder.

But Gideon had not wanted to talk about Helen either. It had just come out, perhaps a simple claim of space for his aunt, the girl in the picture with two long braids and a plaid dress. Now, Gideon listened for sounds from the kitchen, for the clap of a closing cupboard or drawer. There was nothing. Outside, the breeze changed direction over the roasting pits, sending the smell of their insulation into the house, tin roofing, burlap and palm fronds—the mixture buttery and toxic like a serum for fever.

Gideon walked to the door and pushed through towards his mother. He adjusted his eyes to the near darkness of the kitchen. He reached for the light switch. "Leave it off. It's cooler," his mother said. He followed her voice to the pine breakfast table where she sat. Her face was patched by shadows of pepper leaves from outside. She spoke again when he saw her. "This is the postmortem." Her glistening black eyes looked like floating enamel chips. "The truth is, half the people who came today have practically forgotten your Aunt Helen and the other half don't know anything about her."

Gideon knew of his aunt only from the fragments of information he had collected over the years, brief unintended disclosures prompted by family parties and quilted photo albums. Helen was fourteen years older than his mother. On her eighteenth birthday she announced she was going to be married to a man whose name changed in the family stories. Sometimes it was Chavez, other times Rodriguez. There was not much more reliable in Gideon's memory. The rest was his deduction that she was also pregnant and that his grandfather disowned her.

"I thought I could get through this," Anna said. "Today was going to be a new starting point. Family is the one thing in life we should count on."

"I shouldn't have brought it up," Gideon said.

"Somebody should have years ago. Of all people, family members should be honest with each other."

Gideon leaned back in his chair. He looked for words. The kitchen was ventilated on three sides by open windows lined with depression

glassware. In the only closed window, a slip of ivy had invaded an old bullet hole in the pane. The vine wound in and out of the creamers, tea cups, and saucers which tossed pastel clumps of pink and green light on the wood floor. Originally, the room had been used for cooking in the summer but Gideon remembered his mother rarely used the other kitchen. She liked it here because no matter what she was cooking, it smelled of the yard.

"This is a starting point," Gideon began. "You have to know something about me."

Anna got up and went to the cupboard, pulling down two cans of cat food, then cranking them on an opener bolted to the wall. "I'm your mother. Don't you think I already know? I understand the difference between best friend and boy friend." Anna took the opened containers and set them on the stairs outside. She stood watching out the screen door. "The possums will be up shortly."

"Why didn't you say something?"

"Because I wonder. For your sake, do you want to bring that into this family? When I left that room, you were the only one who came after me. They can turn things off so easily. I don't want my son forgotten."

Gideon stood up and walked to his mother, feeling armed. He heard the cat food already being dragged down the steps. They might have more than one reason to forget, he thought to himself. The dark was warm and uncomfortably familiar. Gideon shook because he had been to this precipice before. It had ended his last relationship. We mark time by the calm of night, he thought. It is a coalescence of disclosure, words filtered over candles or bridged between pillows. "Mom, I'm sick," he said.

Anna looked outside, squinting her eyes to catch the tiny bodies carrying the cans away. "Yes. I thought so," she said, finally, quietly.

She pulled the pencil from the bun in her hair, something she did when she was most relaxed. Gideon remembered this was how she appeared when she read to him at night when he was a boy, her black hair stricken white by reflection. She reached out from her side without turning to him. "Is this between us, Gideon?" She allowed her son to consider the history of the people who had come to the reunion that day, knowing he would not want to become a family myth. "You can come home," his mother said.

"I'm no better than them, Mom. I've pushed my family to the back of my life."

Anna took her son's hands in hers. "It's too late to live any other way for both of us," she said. "And would we really want to?"

It is this night he thinks of as he sits on his deck, waiting for his mother to arrive from San Diego. A pair of jets make vapor trail sutures across the sky, the scars healing from their farthest point. He knows it is 5 o'clock by the specific gradation of yellow. It is the easiest time for him to breathe, looking at the back-lit olive trees and Spanish style homes, the increasing

sound of traffic washing insinuation from the air. He realizes he is waiting for that transition which never comes to Los Angeles: people, like certain perennials, coaxed into extended seasons. He examines his hands, convinced he can feel the skin pulling back from his nails. They are dry and peeling in minute strands.

Gideon looks at the adjacent hill a mile off, everything behind it a vague, petroleum orange. At the top of the hill stands a single palm, a black and accidental keyhole after the sunset. He drove to it once. The tree's base was covered with nails and staples from years of lost dogs and yard sales. It seemed unaffected, its rustling crown of fronds thick and new, making the air sound carbonated. But now its form is simply dark and distant.

Looking out at Los Angeles from his home, he begins to understand the geometry of lights, a plain of red dust and halogen shards. It is like a bed of hot coals he has just crossed. A quarter moon sits low in the sky, tinted orange like a dim lantern. The light falls on Gideon's skin like dying flame. He feels the oncoming night and people like himself making decisions that will change their lives. We are consumed like fuel, he thinks, and we are cautious because every twilight is a fire walk.

He considers the intricate processes of preparation and how he will be remembered. They will say he was successful. He had a career and a house with a view. But it has all come down to reversion, as if he has recreated an expectant mother waiting for his birth. I have relinquished myself, Gideon thinks. He had counted on his life's momentum and now it is leaving him as he sits alone on the deck of his back yard. He accepts the conditions of this final inertia, the feeling he is slipping, falling back, and he hopes his mother will arrive in time to catch him.

KATHLEEN MCGOOKEY

First Month, New House

Still, we keep beginning. We believe we can start fresh, forget arguments over water in the basement or whose cat scratched our screens. We agree a limit exists though it's hard to pinpoint. Of course its location changes: the lake lies further away and noise from cars and trucks breaks through any calm, any silence I find. We compare new and old: no doves and swans, just a rooster crowing without regard to the day—started without his bidding—which he cannot call back. A cricket calls from the front hall closet. There is a field here but no other sense of possibility. It is never evening, just night and day and night. The radio tower's red lights blink in the front yard long enough I realize it's no signal, it's not even a sign. Maybe this is the sign: the moon stays in the sky into the morning, the moon must love the world; I can't imagine loving anything so much.

Bird In The Pines

It is easier to be compassionate when one has time: I took strawberries to the old woman who lives down the road. I helped another one to her car. A butterfly lay on the dirt road and I picked it up by its wing. Already in writing it, the event has changed; say I saw right away the butterfly's body was crushed, say its wing smudged my thumb. Say it rained all day and all yesterday and ruined the strawberries in the field, so that leaves me at the old lady's door empty-handed. I am done with compassion: I wish someone would tell me to stop, to get down on the floor with the dog, where I could admire light from the window coming through glass vases. So it is a small thing, change of self, change of light. Already what I meant to say is further away than when I began; the question is reduced to whether the dog barked when our real estate agent unrolled her yellow tape measure. Or whether the lilting bird in the pines kept calling its two-step call into the day, into me.

REBECCA DUNHAM

Early Morning at Our Beach House

Clouds scud the shadowed sky.
On my hands and knees
I spade the hard soil of April
and turn it over. Trowel tight

in my grip, I chop each clod
to pieces. The black seeds
rattle in their packet: dill,
basil, chives. Each dark
speck stares rodent-bright

from its pocket of earth
before I tamp the dirt down.

Beyond this garden plot, beyond
this split-rail fence, the dunes
erode down to the cliffs,
to the shore. Open water rips

and strains, stitched loosely
by the buoy's clanging. Waves splinter
against the black-rocked coast,
and their spume banners long.

I pluck a severed worm
from the earth, and bury the pink twins
of its body together. Amazing
how each plant will shoot
from its casing like a bird

from its egg. A flash of wind,
the shattering cry of gulls,
and the slow dawn scatters its debris

along the margin of shore.
How I love it all, because it is broken.

The Silver Saddle

Another roadside motel, another bed hollowed
in the center by couples before us. Tonight
we sleep back to back, denying the bed's gravity.

Outside, the sun sets behind a stand of flaring aspen,
their lines neat as the row of tranquilizers that rest
on my night table. The map beside them

has been our bible to the west. Its blue and red
roadways run beautifully over the land
as arteries and veins. Each city an organ.

I don't know which is the heart: I'm traveling
for the answer, all the way back
to my mother ironing. White shirts

fly in the laundry room, loose arms like a flock
of snow geese lifting from the dryer. She must
have hated this chore she did it so often,

the arms of my father's shirts made young again.
Wrinkles in the crotch of his pants erased and forgotten.
She was granting him forgiveness, smooth hot iron

in hand. Knowing how not to burn the white cotton
is knowing how to love. When I see the shirts of yours
I've ironed, I know I am not enough like her.

A stiff geometry of wrinkles scissoring their backs.

Widower at Sunrise

It will go like this: an old man
rising from the lake like a bird
from flame. Arms out, water
and the fabric of his good white shirt
drape the limbs until he is winged.

The cataracts have spread.
His cottage and the lake swathed
in a mist that blooms, rash-like.

Blue dress, white hair. She hands over
the same bowl of apples
as she did in life. They are sliced
white and curved as the clippings
from her fingers, their daughter's

small hands. The old man can't
eat them fast enough, before brown
pulls up over their flesh like a sheet.

I'll never forgive you, he wants to yell.
Throws the bowl against the doorframe
and watches: half-moons fall around her
like a god in the sky.
But no. That is never how it could happen.

It's himself he can't forgive.
He should have kept the apples.
They were important, a birth certificate
or passport which were his.

Or will it go like this: an old man
stooping to lift a wooden bowl.
Inside, her absence sticky
as its curves. And out, smooth
and beautiful as a finely-sanded skull.

SARAH HANNAH

Read The House

You try to read it in the windows:
the mood of the house.
You count the panes,
the silent ivy movements.
When the lights are out
the glass looks like water.

Inside, a floorboard is creaking;
it chimes in like a clock
even when no one crosses.
Some nights all the lamps are lighted.
The oriental carpet glows,
a record plays on the stereo.

The house welcomes you then.
But on the night you return very late
there is no mistaking it.
The house is shut, pitch-blackened;
the screen door is locked from inside.

You will have to rip a hole
in the wire mesh, reach through the barbs,
and unlatch it. While you were out,
there burned a small, protesting fire —
a token pile of matches
and grocery lists in the kitchen.

Do not go in.
You have frolicked across strange floors
and found pleasure;
you have found your own house lacking.
Wait on the edge of the lawn —
the hedges are neutral.

Wait until the windows are blue with morning,
and daylight comes
with all its indications.

The house does not forgive you.

Post Meridiem

Nights simply themselves:
wires hum, the tap drips, your pulse
syncopates itself to nothing.

It is then you know what Bashō meant
when he wrote of phantom dwellings.
That's where you live. The lost days

take their ghost-cloaks from a peg,
rattle a few chains and hoot for fun.
They gather near and whisper
the only story they care to tell:

how all the small lights you sigh over
are dead, while mountains stand deaf
to your rapture, which will also pass.
How birds and beasts need no names.

Listen then to the lungs that do not fret
and forget their purpose. Look at your hands
that never cease to search for solace,

culling from air a body, a task,
some way to take measure. They know
no better. They simply endure.

LINDA ILENE SOLOMON

In The Cradle of Mankind

In Turkana, near Kenya's Ethiopian border, I saw what starvation really looks like. No beings, human or animal, had meat on their bones. The people we passed the thirty miles approaching Turkana looked so emaciated the wind seemed certain to carry them away. But the people didn't blow away. They stared into the bus, and as I stared back, I imagined I recognized the defining features of hunger from the rare times I'd felt hunger myself — exhaustion, headaches, low blood sugar, sudden rage.

The first night in the dusty Turkana campground, a makeshift female market assembled around us just as the head cook, a small weary man in his early sixties, unstrapped the cooler and said, "Would anyone like a beer?" The other cook stoked the campfire where we were seated in a circle awaiting braised goat while the Turkana women approached from the shadows and formed a large ring around us. The women looked like beautiful skeletons in their indigo wraps, ivory nose pendants, and stiff beaded necklaces resting on clavicles which jutted out. By contrast we, from England, Australia, America, Denmark, Germany and Japan, each appeared fat. The marketing hype that had lured us on this tour to the destitute campground was the beauty of Lake Turkana, the world's biggest desert lake. The publicity hadn't mentioned that we'd dine amongst people who starved.

The thirty skeletal women unfolded their mats and lay out their wares. They watched unsmiling as we eighteen plump travelers loaded our plates with goat's meat and potatoes and sat down on folding chairs. A brawny Australian named Richard popped the top off a beer with his teeth, spit it to the ground, drank and gazed at the Turkanas with a troubled frown. I looked from my plate to the grim, fierce women and my stomach muscles knotted. Goat meat melted against my tongue, but was hard to swallow with the women's eyes roaming from my face to my food.

The Australian leapt from his seat. "Bloody hell." He shook his beer. "Can't you see we're trying to enjoy our goddamned meal?" His face grew ruddy and his beard bobbed, as he repeatedly shouted "go home!" flicking his hand, as if the women would obey him and leave.

An old woman's lips smacked, then she coughed. Her companions remained still. They stared stone-faced back. Perhaps the hunger had stolen their words. Perhaps it had made them insane.

The rest of us ate in silence. It was one of the least enjoyable meals I'd eaten in my life. It rivaled miserable childhood family meals when something unspoken and terrible between my parents hovered over the dining room table and, although I ate, I couldn't stomach the food and later threw it up. Some meals are simply indigestible no matter how fresh the ingredients or tasty the spice. Here we were near an area scientists called the "Cradle of Mankind," site of one of the most significant fossil discoveries of the twentieth century. Here Richard Leaky found the skull of the mammal he labeled Ramapithicus, the generation that transformed from ape to human, but where had this leap taken us this far? It didn't occur to me to offer my plate to the women. I ate uneasily, but finished my meal. I glanced at the Turkanas before climbing inside my tent and zipping up the flap. They sat on their mats silent and immobile, while I tried to sleep on this dark, moonless night.

The women were still seated on their mats when I got up in the morning. As we whites ate eggs and toast for breakfast, the women murmured "come" and beckoned for us to look at their carvings and drums. I followed the call of the twig like arms and bony fingers and bought three small drums made of gourd and leather, feeling guilty I couldn't carry more.

The cooks and the driver loaded up the bus. As we waited for them to finish, the Australian pointed his camera at some Turkanas and the driver shouted, "Stop!" He lunged towards Richard and covered his hand over the fancy camera lens. "The price of photographs is higher than the price of their wares. You must strike a deal before you shoot."

"Shit." Richard stomped his foot, disturbing the dust. His blonde hair lay matted above his brow. "I'm not paying for a bloody picture." He pushed the driver's hand away.

The driver shook his finger at Richard. "If you don't, their men will ambush us down the road. Believe me, you'll wish you had."

"Negotiate a price," Richard said, spitting and shaking his head.

We each paid five dollars to photograph three groups of Turkana women who posed unsmiling, but dignified as hell. It was a huge sum of money in these parts. Just before the bus made a turn onto the road that led to the famed lake, I looked back to see the women huddling together counting what they'd made.

"Witches." Richard leaned his head against the window where he'd squeezed in at the last minute beside me, mashing his leg against mine and shoving me over, then smiling, as if to flirt.

The Danish couple up front sang patriotic songs with their six blonde sons, as the truck climbed for hours until the road became nothing but a path in the sand. Bone-white remains of cows and goats lay on the side of the road, reminders of the ten-year-old drought. I'd read in my guide book that the Turkanas were nomads, following the grass with their herds. Lack

of water and grazing grounds had killed a way of life. Dust flew into my eyes, coated my hair, caked my nostrils, and settled in my pores. The bus seats were like church pews and although we were strangers, Richard pressed against me more, as the vehicle lurched over ruts.

Little did I know how drunk he was until the truck crested a hill and the dry white valley of Turkana opened before us in, the lake to our right turquoise and flat. Plains rolled out on the other side of the road to the red Kulal mountains. I had never a landscape that was so utterly forsaken and awe-inspiring at once. Just as I was telling myself I'd been right to make this difficult trip, Richard hung his head out the window and belched. It sounded like someone tossing a bucket of water against the side of the truck as he vomited, gasped for air, then heaved another bucketful out. As he belched again and threw a third bucketful out, I leaned as far away from him as I could, a mere quarter inch and vowed to leave this group behind in Turkana. I couldn't stand it one more day, this association with strangers, their anthem singing and their eating. Richard's face came into focus as he leaned back into the truck, wiping his mouth with his arm. A sour smell hung in the air.

"Jesus," he said, as if we'd all retched our guts out, as if we astonished him.

As we entered Loiyangalani, an agglomeration of grass and mud huts, tin shacks, a police station, and a school, children ran after us, slapping the sides of the bus. There was nothing to stop for, only five forlorn shops selling overheated soda and dry goods. The driver said you couldn't even find beer in the stores. Someone asked if we could swim in the shimmering lake. People did swim, the driver answered, but loose stones on the shore sheltered vipers and the alluring waters sheltered crocodiles which occasionally dined on locals who swam despite the risks.

In a blink of the eye, we left Loiyangali and, out pacing the children, turned onto a driveway with a large sign that read "Welcome Campground." Other than the sign, there wasn't much welcoming about the unshaded sites numbered one through twenty eight and the surrounding dining areas of picnic tables beneath a bent tin roof. A friendly young man whose Western style shirt and pants implied he was not Turkana but a hired hand of Kikuyu lineage invited us to the far area of the campground. The Kikuyu tribe formed the majority population in Kenya and owned some of the country's most fertile lands. I figured he was like many men in Kenya forced to take work hundreds of miles from their families. The young man introduced himself as Samuel and offered to help find me a site for my tent. He said he came from the Nyeri highlands, a few hours from Nairobi, that his parents were tenant farmers, that he worked for the Italian company that operated the campground as well as the airport with its one flight a week. He pounded a tent pole into the ground and said nothing ever happened here, then asked for my name and wondered why I had come.

I told him my name, that I was a journalist on assignment in Nairobi, but that I'd had a few days off.

"You are American?"

"Yes. "

"Then you are Christian. Do you live in L.A.?"

"I'm Jewish. And I live in Paris."

"Strange," he shook his head. "I have been told the Jews killed Jesus."

"The Jews killed many people, not just Jesus."

"Then let's shake hands. I am a Christian. I finished university last year. I am saving to go to the Baptist camp in Nairobi next summer. Maybe you could help me."

The campfire crackled that night as we finished dinner under an orgasmic night sky of galaxies, planets and nothingness. The Danish mother read a book written in English by Elisabeth Huxley, a British woman who lived in Kenya for over fifty years. Her sons drank beer and listened to her politely.

"Women do all the work at home and most of the cultivating," she read in her heavily accented English. "The day starts at 5 a.m. and does not finish until they retire with the rest of the household about 10 p.m. The diet is millet, meal, milk, meat blood and green vegetable. Girls sweep out the hut with a broom made roughly of green twigs tied together which lasts about a week. Women go off for water, which is carried in two or three large gourds placed in a carrier made of very strong laced twigs and strapped to the women's backs. These tasks completed, the women go off to work in the fields, taking with them their naked babies. They work till about 3 p.m. then go off in small parties to collect firewood. Burdening themselves with as much as they can carry, they make their long journey back to their homes, chatting. They then grind the grain for the evening meal and fetch the water. At 7 p.m., the family assembles for the meal. At 10 p.m., the adults go to bed."

The mention of family evoked so much sadness, I wandered off towards the sound of laughter. Sam stood with our driver beyond the fence that encircled the campground, conversing in Kikuyu. Everyone here spoke their own tribal dialect, decent Swahili and excellent-to-poor English. I leaned against the fence. Sam saw me and came over. "Want to take a walk?"

Ten minutes from the campground, the sparkling stars, the dark outline of the mountain and the vast expanse of open uninhabited space made me euphoric. Near town, the sound of a woman singing, distant and sweet, came clear. The young singer sat in the open doorway of a shop beside a young man. Sam said the song was a Christian hymn sung in Turkana. When the woman saw my face, she stopped and stared. The night fell silent. She eyed me without smiling. When we passed and were well out of town, the singing resumed.

They don't even like me," Sam said. "The Turkana have never liked foreigners. It is a historical fact. I am here seven months now and I have not

been able to come close to a girl. They stick to themselves. I have noticed it is the same with the Europeans who come here. The buses are full of them, but they don't help each other. They are like strangers. How come none of them was helping you put up your tent today? You put Africans together a few days on a bus like that and they will surely be like family when they get off — except for those Turkanas. Even those Black Americans that visit from time to time. They are funny. They tell me in America they think we in Africa are uncivilized." He laughed. "They won't have anything to do with us when they are here. As if they are ashamed. Of what? What is wrong with them? They are Africans, too, are they not?"

"African-Americans."

"Yes," he said, "But this is their past."

"In America, I was raised to forget my past. I was told to focus on the present and the future. My older relatives were all born in Eastern Europe, but they didn't talk about it. In Paris, I live like the French." I laughed.

"Strange," he said, and shook his head.

We continued on in silence, a silence more complete than any I could remember. The twinkling of the stars in the hard black sky heightened my euphoria. We sat down and I tilted my head back, drinking in the supreme blackness and trying to engrave it in my memory. So this was Night. Night as the ancients had seen it.

"Where is your husband? And where are your children? Are they with your husband now?" Sam's arm brushed against mine.

"We don't have children." My spirits sank.

He gave me a half-smile, testing to see if this was a joke.

"I'm serious."

"Why not?"

"We're waiting. We only want to have one or two."

"Ha, I looked over at you when you arrived this afternoon, trying to put up that tent all alone and said, ha, here is this young girl, even younger than myself, out here all by herself, without her husband and children, how can this be?"

I smiled. "I'm much older than you."

"No."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-three."

"I'm twenty-six," I lied.

"Then you should already have children."

I shrugged and wondered why I didn't tell him that I was thirty-six and had never been married, that I was miserable about my latest boyfriend and would probably never have kids. I was too proud to tell him. Sam would think I was a freak. He had no context for such female singleness, not from what I knew of his society where bearing offspring to hold you in their memory when you died was as important as life itself and where only the lame or retarded were unmarried at my age. Plus, if I told him the facts,

what could he possibly make of me lying here by his side under the romantic sky, not another human being in sight? He could only understand it as an invitation I wasn't ready to make. I got up, brushing fine grains of lava rock off my pants. I regretted the fact I couldn't lie here all night without confusing both of us, that I couldn't remain in the middle of this valley whose magic seemed only to have multiplied when the sun went down.

"Let's go," I said.

Back at camp, the Danes were drinking. Richard, the Australian, sat there too, nodding, and waking when his head touched his chest. Only a Japanese man and two German women were not to be seen. I was tired. I wanted to go to sleep more than anything in the world but there wasn't much chance of it with this brawling crowd. The Huxley book was still in the Danish woman's hands. Every few sentences, her husband burst out laughing and she disintegrated into hilarity, too.

"I hate to interrupt you, but it's late and I'd like to go to sleep," I said.

The rosy, athletic sons looked up, their blue eyes seeming to register my existence for the first time since I boarded the bus three days ago.

"Why don't you join us?" the father said.

I backed away. "If you could just keep it down."

"Sure, sure." He nodded vigorously.

They whispered as I climbed into my tent, a good fifty feet away, found my flashlight and unzipped my sleeping bag, examining it carefully for scorpions. By the time I climbed inside, the mother had resumed reading and her voice amplified each time the father's loud laughter interrupted her again. Every so often the sons exploded into chatter. As they babbled, I listened to the harsh unintelligible words and fantasized escape.

Next morning a German woman was brushing her teeth when I arrived at the water pump.

"Damned Danes," I said. "Did you get any sleep?"

She shook her head no, looked over her shoulder, then in a low voice said, "The eldest son died in an automobile accident. He was a surgeon." She spit toothpaste on the ground, rinsed her toothbrush, and glanced over her shoulder again. "The mother was driving him to the airport after a family visit. He'd come with his wife and three young sons. She was taking a curve too fast and ran off the road. The car rolled and everyone was thrown out but her. But she wasn't hurt. The wife is paralyzed. The children and the surgeon died. It was all over the newspapers last year in Europe. Didn't you see?"

"No."

"Well, she is a little crazy now. That's what one of the sons told me. The sons and the father have brought her on safari, hoping to make her sane again. She loves wild animals and the light and the space." She sighed and glanced over her shoulder again. "They should have hired their own bus with a psychoanalyst."

Now, more than ever, I wanted to escape.

I knew *from* whom I wanted to escape, but was much less certain of *to* whom I wished to escape. I might lie to Sam but I couldn't lie to myself, I thought as I brushed my teeth. I had no one waiting for me, no engineer husband, only a middle-aged boyfriend whose emotional distance had driven me away. In fact, I didn't know a soul in this tourist trampled country who cared if I was alive.

Perhaps I was in a delusional state brought on by lack of sleep and the sun which burst upon the morning like a bonfire, but I felt utterly forsaken, and at the same time, reckless and free. I looked up to see Richard stumbling towards me on his way to the pump.

"Do you know what's for breakfast?" he asked, scraping sand from the corners of his eyes.

"Pancakes," I lied, staring right at him. His face became childlike. He rushed towards the dining area without brushing his teeth.

"Pancakes," I heard the cook laugh. "This morning we've got leftover goat and beans."

Outside the campground, a crowd of fifteen Turkana teenage boys were hanging out around a big boulder the way their American counterparts might do at a mall. A vast blue sky stretched behind them. I started toward the road, hoping to avoid them.

"Madame, guide, " their voices chorused.

I stopped and turned, already perspiring.

A tall young man came forward. "I am Nkoke. Let me show you Turkana."

"How much will it cost?

He named a price that was the equivalent of two dollars.

And so Nkoke and I trudged towards town. Nkoke's plastic jelly shoes squeaked with each step. A worn belt held up his pants. His red t-shirt said *Thumbs Up* on the back. We turned left and followed a garbage-strewn path past dust-filled plots marked off by rocks, past the mud and grass huts, past women who called their children to them and burst into giggles, as if I were a high-budget Hollywood comedy. It was so damned hot, each step took tremendous effort. I stopped, took my water bottle out of my knapsack and drank. The children stood staring. They giggled and turned their faces away when I smiled. All at once it seemed pointless to go anywhere. It was much too hot to walk very far.

Nkoke touched my arm. "I want you to meet the priest at the mission. He will tell you how well I do in school. He is my benefactor. Maybe you will be, too."

I sighed, too hot and listless to explain how unfit a benefactor I felt myself to be, given the enormity of my own personal needs. "Okay."

The mothers let their children follow us up to the school and crowd around the screenless windows, pointing and laughing as Nkoke introduced me to the Italian priest who ran the mission, a weary, handsome,

gray-haired man who said he came from Ghiffa on Lago Maggiore. He told me how Nkoke's mother had brought him to the school for IQ testing and how brilliant Nkoke was but his mother had six other sons as well and couldn't afford school fees. Nkoke looked at his long, slender hands as the priest told how Nkoke raised school fees by working as a guide. He patted Nkoke on the shoulder but rested his eyes on me. His smile seemed to say, "God has told me you will do the right thing."

As I looked at his handsome face, I wondered if he could tell me what was the right thing to do. He walked me and Nkoke to the door, shouting at the children who'd gathered around the window in a blast of authoritative rage. "Well, good-bye, then," he said, folding his hands together when the children had scattered and run for their huts. His face softened and suddenly looked sad. No, the priest couldn't help me, I thought, as I thanked him for his time. He was too much like me. Some kind of longing had caused him to roam to where people were starving. But my longing was hunger, too — and I suspected so was his — a hunger of the heart, that I knew left unfulfilled in its own way could be deadly.

"Ready?" Nkoke said.

If Nkoke was brilliant, maybe he could get me out of town. He listened intently as I explained that I preferred to see more of the country than the tour offered and that I wished to find a private vehicle with which to travel. He told me he would introduce me to Mariano, another white man who had settled in town. Mariano could tell me what to do. I half believed him and followed Nkoke as he skirted town on a path that led to a cluster of small buildings and Mariano's concrete house. Brilliant pink bougainvilleas blossomed by the front door, a sign of wealth in this thirsty land. "Here," Nkoke said. He pushed aside a pink cotton cloth hanging over the doorway and we entered a cool concrete cavern, empty except for a hot plate on the floor.

"Maybe he is fishing," Nkoke said, looking around.

I leaned back against a white-washed wall. "Is it okay if I just sit here until Mariano comes home?"

Nkoke nodded, then went outside and sat by the door. Soon, he was asleep. I hoped Mariano would stay away for hours. I was drowsy. I wanted privacy. I also wanted to sleep. Nkoke snored and I heard the sounds of children playing, but the cool, dark stillness made them seem far away. I closed my eyes and pictured Mariano with a fishing pole, casting his line at the edge of the shore. I wondered what the others from my tour were doing this morning and figured they'd gone in the bus to the lake. I saw them all standing in a group by the shore. How painful the desire to swim in those waters. How good it would feel to dive right in.

NUAR ALSADIR

What Is Denied

Everything tastes like dog,
The sun won't come up
And the neighbors are hiding behind their doors.

I walk from my bedroom to my kitchen
Which is my bedroom
But still I am hungry.

Will the dream's caul now be denied to me;
The fatty film, the kiss
That tastes like sapphire and stains my knees?

What about the pocked door,
Orange man, jelly on the hand
That won't wipe off?

These bricks turn their walls on me,
A car alarm preaches abstinence
In four ways like a Pre-Raphaelite painting

Saying *this marry like this*
So the girls cross their legs
Against the cuckoo throb of spring —

JOSIP NOVAKOVICH

Downtown

"I support the Lazarus deal," said the city council candidate, William Armstrong. "We should do whatever it takes to keep our downtown working. It's easier to keep Lazaarus alive than to resurrect it."

He stood on his toes and looked past a shaved head of a lawyer. In his field of vision, above the lawyer's ear and past his glistening temple, William's wife sat in a baroque window; through the old-style German stained windows, sunlight cast an amber glow over her auburn hair. He marveled at her back-lit aura, and at her, at himself--just three months before, he was single, not only single, he could not get a decent date, and now look at this, ever since he began to run for office, how things have changed; he'd not only got laid but also married the sexiest pianist in the city, Molly Gladstone. At this rate, he was bound to win the election.

The audience thoughtfully rattled their ice cubes, diluting Black and Red Labels.

"We must stop the business exodus from downtown Cincinnati," William said. "It's cheaper to stimulate the economy than to fight drugs, crime, and poverty with taxpayers' money. The Riverfront stadium, PG headquarters, any big project you can think of, they were all designed by architects outside Cincinnati and built by workers from out of state. We can't let that happen again. So remember on November 2, vote for three r's--reinvest, restructure, revitalize. A Revolution of sorts."

"Shouldn't whoever comes up with the best project be awarded to do it?" the skinhead lawyer asked. "Are you against free-market principles?"

"Do you call our taxpayers' money free market? Grabs for the outsiders while our people stay unemployed?" William grinned with patronizing self-assurance, and passed his fingers slowly through his thick brown hair combed upwarad, Viennese composer style. A hair got stuck in his heavy wedding ring.

In response, in a dialogue of rings, his wife's diamond earrings flickered, sending lines of light, which made him momentarily lose sight of the darkening room. But he could sense the people's attention; not even the ice cubes rattled.

"What about crime? Are you for the teenage curfew? What about cigarette ads?" Questions came, and he dealt with them readily, but when he looked for the shafts of light from his wife to keep him in rhythm, the way a concerto soloist looks toward a conductor's baton, no light came. She was whispering to

a tieless Bohemian with a blond pony-tail and a black beard. Bill opened his mouth, and kept it open even while the host, a John Updike scholar, stepped up to the lectern and thanked everyone for supporting candidate Bill. "The plate for contributions is next to the clock." The host pointed to a clock standing up from the floor like a fat giant mummy. Instead of a tie, the giant wore two bronze weights, down his neck, and on his round elephantine face the sharp minute hand formed a nose, and the hour hand, half a mustache. Two holes for winding the springs formed the eyes, through which jaded Time squinted at this scene, and then sent nine steeply bangs of brass to reverberate deep, slow, self-confident buzzes, until red velvet curtains and upholstery swallowed them, and kept them, so that when you sat on the love sofas you felt this noble quality of silenced ages warm your buttocks so much that they too calmly emitted their interpretation of the rhythmic and circular nature of time, and this interpretation sank into the velvet, without ever gaining the stature of sound, or even smell, for the gladioli and other gladiatorial flowers relentlessly reshaped all the aromas, so that not even whiskey smelled like whiskey but like a synthetic medicine, whose original formula was derived from some extinct rain forest flowers which devoured bees.

As Mr. and Mrs. William Armstrong drove home in their red Jaguar, listening to Dvorak's "Fantasy for the Winds," Mrs. Armstrong said, "You did not mention the arts. We ought to support the downtown arts, especially after that Mapplethorpe disaster. The country laughs at Cincinnati, many businesses scoff at us because of the backward politics here. Bill, you can change this, promise me you will!"

"What's the rush? First the economy, then the art."

"They are related. Arts give the right image, image attracts business from the outside."

"I'm interested in the inside."

"That's what I mean, when there's business, which has to come from out there somewhere, then our local artists can make a living."

"You want downtown to be some cute little boutiquey string of galleries? So the rich can practice elitism?"

"I don't mean that, though that would be nice, too, but large sculptures. Paintings secluded in galleries may be elitism, but sculptures are people's art. They can be outside for everybody. When you go to Rome or Paris, there are sculptures at every corner. Why not here? Let's commission a sculptor to set an example!"

"Why? Do you know a sculptor? Is that all this is about?"

"I know several great ones."

"Who is he?"

"Ah, so that's why you are so grumpy. You are jealous! How charming, Billy!" She stroked his arms with her long quick fingers, as though playing a Ravel sonata for the left hand; his hairs rose, like a threatened cat's. "Let's have a baby!"

"But who's your sculptor, that pig-tail bum?"

"There're sculptors everywhere, a penny a dozen."

As they drove past the cemetery, with old stones tilting every which way, Bill unbuttoned his top shirt button, loosened his red tie, scratched his chest hairs.

So Molly and Bill commissioned the Pony-tail sculptor, John Marble, to erect a downtown sculpture to Cincinnati workers. Bill was elected a councilman, and he cut down his opthalmology practice to part time. A month later during the first snowfall of the year, among premature Christmas lights and uprooted pines, the Armstrongs strolled hand-in-elbow from the skywalk of Omni-Netherland, and down into the street to Fountain Square, where, on the northern edge, a white cloth covered the sculpture. There was a small crowd, consisting mostly of reporters, TV cameramen, an art students and teachers. Bill gave a speech, which culminated in these words: "Do you know that Cincinnati is the number two city in the country in new manufacturing jobs? So here, with this beautiful work of art, we hope to celebrate the Cincinnati worker and to invite him downtown! This is where it's at! For a working America!" Bill had not seen the sculpture before, so he pulled the sheet, while the auience clapped their soft hands (with an occasional blister from holding a tennis racket), he gasped. The bare-chested worker made in stone was rising from a lying position, his body relaxed, like a Roman reaching for grapes. He had a goatee, full lips deliberately pursed so they would not look soft, a huge bald skull, polished to a mrble shine, and large eyes, gazing empty toward the Omni Hotel suites, as though he'd prefer to lounge there.

The sculptor in blue clothes cupped his beard with his bruised fingers, as though congratulating himself on a much richer beard than the sculpture's. "Any resemblance to persons living or dead is purely coincidental."

"Wonderful humor!" Molly said. "Isn't it, Billy honeycake? Humor in a sculpture, what an accomplishment!"

Armstrong touched the worker's stony hands, and then carefully blew the dust off his fingers because he did not want to smudge his black suit.

"What statement did you intend with all this?" Armstrong interrupted him and pointed with his double chin toward the sculpture.

"I don't belive that an artist should speak for his work. Let the stone speak for itself, if it has to say something."

Molly said, "What's the title?"

"Let's not have abstract conversations," the sculptor addressed Bill. "I'm grateful to you for the dinero. What a wonderful break for me, Sir."

"My pleasure. But if you want to know the truth, Molly commissiond you."

"Really?" The sculptor smiled and gave Molly a hug, squeezing her breasts against his and resting his chin over her shoulder-pad.

She smiled. "Oh, these old hippies still hug."

The night after the unveiling of the sculpture, Armstrong dreamed. He and the Bengal's manager are walking down the Riverfront football stadium. They come upon a Lenin monument; Lenin stands, cloak high up in the wind behind him. He holds a hammer in his right hand a large nail in his left, between his thumb and the forefingers, while the pinkie sticks out as though he were

drinking from an espresso cup, where there's not enough room for a pinkie, so the pinkie is doomed for its own subtle solitaire gestures, a kind of understated side-ways fuck you sign.

Isn't that marvelous, the manager says. We have Lenin's tomb.

Impossible, Armstrong says.

We got him in exchange for the white tigers from the zoo. What a deal! Those tigers were seventeen years old, rheumatic, half blind.

What nonsense. Lenin's in the Red Square Mausoleum, or is it a Mausoleum? What does a mouse have to do with soleum?

Don't ask me, spelling's not my hobby. My hobby's screwing in the lobby.

Lenin's in the Red Square.

You mean the Cincinnati Reds got him? No pal, I know they want to have everything we have, but we got him.

But you lost every game this season, and you want to pull out of Cincinnati. You are broke. How could you go around buying unique antiques?

That's because we are smart. Why play? We no longer need to, we have Lenin. We simply need to charge admission to the tomb, and you'll see who's broke! More people have visited his Mausoleum than all the U.S. ball parks combined. We've got it made!

Is he right below this atrocious monument?

I am not sure whether he's right below it, but somewhere around. Maybe three yards west, maybe five east, maybe a hundred feet to the right, maybe a mile north, but somewhere not far below our feet.

At this, Armstrong woke up, bolt--and nuts--upright. "I got it," he shouted. "That's Lenin's sculpture, isn't it?"

"Don't wake me up, please! Your snoring kept me up half the night and now you shriek."

"Listen, people from all over will throng the place--the liveliest downtown in the world!"

"Billy, you ought to consider surgery to get rid of your apanea. You could die in sleep. And I don't get any. You must, you'll see how much energy you'll have. You'll be able to run for Governor."

"I wonder what this project would cost? The whole deal, with the base. What would you guess?"

"Ten grand, no more. Besides, your insurance ought to cover it. Anyhow, what kind of doctor are you, not to know the going rates!"

"You're nuts. It could be a quarter billion."

"Look how you're talking. Your brain's starved for oxygen. Dangerous, I tell you. Do it tomorrow."

"What do you think? That you can buy the biggest tourist attraction in the world for less? Disneyland in France cost at least twenty billion, and you think you could get Lenin for peanuts?"

Bill hired a Russian-speaking secretary, (a young immigrant from Leningrad) who wore enough perfume that the mosquitoes in Bill's office (who had survived on tax-[ayer's money in the well-heated office with sultry tropical

plants) dropped dead. She wore high heels even taller than Bill's. (Not that Bill was short, but since he read that no U.S. president had been shorter than six feet, and he was five-ten, he made up the difference by wearing elevated shoes a la Rod Stewart, with his bell-bottoms wiping the dust off the hard wood floor as he paced around the immigrant.) Her heels were so pointed that she stood precariously; she must have sprained her ankles quite a few times--they were thick and a little blue.

"Who, me, to speak to Yeltsin?" She panicked and would have fallen if not catching hold of the table.

"Yeah, I got his number from the State Department. I'll pay you ten dollars every minute we manage to keep him on the phone."

"But he's too important. I can't speak to him!"

"I'm important, too, and you are speaking to me. Anyway, he's got ears, and so do you, and you have a mouth, so what's the big deal? You can talk to him."

He handed her questions she was supposed to translate into Russian and type up. "See, all you got to do is read this to him."

An hour later, the young woman crossed herself in the orthodox fashion, dialed, trembled, said something and hurriedly hung up the phone.

"What did he say?" Bill asked.

"I did not get through. But I left him your telephone number."

"He can't know who the hell I am. You better keep trying."

After a week of holding the phone in her left hand, which she kept massaging for arthritic pain, she got through to the white-haired democrat, who had just burned down parliament. Yeltsin was on the line, in a conference call. The secretary read the questions in a voice that slid through her phleghm.

Then Yeltsin said something in Russian, and his secretary translated it into monotonous English. "How much are you offering for Lenin?"

"Tell him, ten million dollars," Bill said.

"No, for that little, you couldn't even buy Lenin's dick, shriveled as it is," the reply came. Yeltsin laughed in the background. "All right, we'd let you have his dick for that much, and if you want, for one million more, I'll declare St. Petersburg and Cincinnati sister cities."

"No, we want him whole. Thirty million."

"But the transportation is costly. For that much we could burn the corpse and send it in shoe-box, in Khruschev's shoe, if you'd like, for an extra five million. The same one that he used to bang on the table to scare Marilyn Monroe's dead boyfriend. Is that a deal?"

"No, we want him whole, the corpse, the mini-climate mechanism, the works."

"The works?" the secretary asked Bill. "What do you mean by that?"

"Don't worry about it."

The secretary translated this, "We want him whole, the corpse, the mini-climate mechanism, and the don't worry about it.."

Yeltsin cleared his throat, shouted Na Zdarovlye, perhaps to his secretary

or to Kozyrev. "They are drinking cognac, Napoleon," said the secretary.

"Not vodka? How do you know?"

The conversation got stuck at many places, but finally Yeltsin agreed to send Lenin's brutto corpse for seventy million dollaras and ten thousand bottles of Jack Daniel's, directly to Cincinnati.

Bill was so elated, and his secretary so relieved, that they hugged, and pretty soon, before they had time to contemplate what they were doing, they did something else, without condoms. Forgetting to button up his fly, he rushed out, drove home to his new residence, a mansion clone on Madison street. He wanted to share the news with his wife, though it occurred to him that now he could probably get a richer, more illustrious girlfriend, perhaps an actress, the way Bob Kerry from Nebraska did when he ran for office. Now he could impress some of those good-cause oriented actress.

Anyway, Molly pointed out to him his unbuttoned fly, and said to keep his lewd cheer and corpses to himself.

William kept analyzing various locatiosn for the Mausoleum transplant. Cincinnati would be the greatest--perhaps the only real--tourist city in the Midwest. Later, with the Mausoleum revenues, he could transplant the St. Basil's Cathedral with those beautiful domes that look like colorful balloons. He was so absorbed in his schemes that he barely noticed that Molly sulked, spent a lot of time out of the house, and that later she did not sulk but spent even more time out.

William did remember, however, the probable source of his inspiration, the sculptor John, whom he invited home to dinner. William asked him how he came up with the idea for Lenin's sculpture.

"But, you wanted a worker's monument?" John said.

"Yeah, but Lenin's no worker."

"Oh, yes, he was," said the sculptor. "He had the greatest work habits."

"But was he as muscular as you made him out to be?"

"Oh, yes. He did sixty push-ups and biked for an hour a day, hiked, wrestled, took cold baths; he was if you don't mind my saying so, a precursor of our fitness age. Without the Cold War and competition for gold medals, do you think we'd. . ."

"But what have you named the sculpture?" Molly asked. "How about Tomb to a Billion Unknown workers?"

"Thank you, John," Bill said. "I'm sure your sculpture gave me the idea for this project." Bill tapped John on the shoulder with admiration and gave him a present, an antique silver pocket-watch which could display the phases of the moon and the zodiac.

After that, John stopped by several times a week, sometimes at odd hours, and talked with Molly, and showed Bill his new sketches.

One evening Molly showed Bill an Enquirer review praising her latest recital, but he said, "Don't bother me, I'm reading about Lenin's 'Testament.' What a shame Trostsky didn't get to see it in time."

Molly shouted: "It's either me or Lenin. I can't take it anymore! Choose right now!"

"How could I choose. Lenin is destiny."

She left. But Bill's attention was focused on the Kremlin, and on money raising. Just try raising 70 million dollars, and your attention won't be at home either.

The city council received the idea with guarded enthusiasm--if such a mood can be guarded--but under pressure from their fiscal planners, the council contributed only 20 million from city taxes. This came at the expense of the school budget, unemployment extension program, and welfare. Bill convinced them that money would soon come back tenfold, and if the city suffered, it would not be for long. Fifty million to go, plus the ten thousand bottles of bourbon.

Jack Daniel's executives would gladly contribute the liquor, provided that Lenin wore a Jack Daniel's baseball cap or a Jack Daniel's tee-shirt--it wouldn't be that hard to open up the jacket and get rid of that neck-squeezing Russian shirt. After all, Lenin should adapt to American ways, if he's going to spend hundreds of years here. When Bill pointed out that it would be in poor taste to have a corpse endorse the liquor so directly--moreoever, it seemed disrespectful for the dead--the negotiators reached a compromise. The base of the glass cage would carry a black inscirption, Made Possible with the Generosity of the Jack Daniel's Foundation. But since in the meanwhile, Bill couldn't raise much money, he offered that Lenin could carry a little discrete bottle of Jack Daniel's, half a pint, in his jacket pocket, so that the bottle neck would stick out. People would notice--the subtler the detail, the more attention it could attract. Two million dollars.

Proctor & Gamble agreed to pay three million dollars for Lenin's endorsement of their productsions, but the only P & G thing that we could wear would be the diapers. "That's fine," Bill said. "Before Lenin died, he was incontinent, so diapers would fit. And if nobody could see them, no problem. My sculptor, a reliable artist, would make a plaque on the wall, stating that Lenin wore Proctor & Gamble diapers."

Forty-five million to go. Not easy to stay subtle with that much money to raise. So Bill yeilded and let Lenin endorse all kinds of blatantly visible products. Lenin would wear Planet Reebok sneakers for five million. He'd even appear in commercials, aided by computer graphics, playing basketball with Charles Barkley. This would be a double commercial--Gillette would pay three million dollars to have these two shave their craniums together.

Lenin landed at Covington International Airport in a thin Aeroflot. Several hours later, in his office in City Hall, with dentist's gloves and a gas mask, Bill crawled into the glass cage to examine Lenin. Lenin's face was pale yellow and gray, unwrinkled, calm. Bill moved Lenin's right fist--slightly clenched as though in defiance of death, history, dialectical materialism. But he could not move it much--not that Lenin's rigor mortis seemed that stiff, but Bill was afraid to tear the previous body. He took a tape and measured Lenin's arms to see whether one was longer than the other. Yes, by an inch, because of wounds that Fanny Kaplan had inflicted upon Lenin, because she had detested his food

policies. Since she'd shot him from close up, and Lenin hadn't had doctors nearby, he hadn't fared as well as Reagan would. Bill pulled off Lenin's pants. There was no penis. It was plainly cut off. What a bummer! The testes, too, were missing. the thighs surprised him with their thickness. The muscles were hard, but then, in the dead, that was the usual fare. Bill opened the shirt. It was buttoned high, probably to hide the neck scar, where the second bullet entered Lenin's left lung, above the heart. (Despite extensive vacations in Switzerland, these lungs took a lot of beating--technically, Lenin had died of paralysis of the respiratory centers, six years after the shot. Between these events, he forbade smoking in his presence.) Still lower, the rib cage was torn open; this could have nothing to do with the assassination attempt. Bill slid his fingers into the rib-cage. No left lung. No heart--in its place, probably to support the rib cage, lay a Krups coffee grinder, with an electrical cord like a pulmonary vein. Bill pushed the eyelids up, and found two stainless steel bearing balls. He knocked on the skull. It resounded like an empty pumpkin, something you could make a sitar of. The KGB collected brains, didn't it? No huge loss--after the sclerosis of the brain arteries and the brain hemorrhages, the brain wouldn't be that pretty anyhow. Bill slightly parted the lips, which felt like a thick carton just beginning to defrost, and shined his flashlight past the smalal yellow teeth. Instead of a tongue, inside reposed an ornamental Easter egg with intricate designs, stars, crosses, sickles, in blue and red.

Fucking thug that Yeltsin! Sent me just the hides and bones. Like some kind of panther skin, or a stuffed monkey. But that's all right. Who's gonna know?

From a couple of yards away, Lenin looked quite fine as far as mummies go, not like those Egyptian ones that shriveled in natrum to the size of a doll, shrinking through the millennia, with ever-widening grins, which kept sinking into the oral cavity. This guy's mummy stayed stretched out, though pale gray and dusty.

With Lenin came special air-conditioners, chemicals, and a manual on how to operate him. The secretary translated the manual for Bill, who read it, tense, like a great mystery novel. Since Lenin could not be exposed to much light--if direct sunlight damaged the living, even a moderate amount of photons damaged the dead--Bill called for an exhibit deeper underground than the previous Mausoleum; here, temperature could be kept naturally cool.

In the meanwhile, the Bengals moved to Nashville, and Bill once again had to raise money to keep the Cincinnati Reds from buying the stadium.

He won; after all, the most successful revolutionary of the twentieth century was on his side, and this worked better even than his wife's charm used to. Anyway, Molly was back. Now that Bill got ahead with his obsession, he became a tender husband who walked around with his fly buttoned. Molly participated in the Lenin project. She recruited sculptors--John above all--to make Lenin statues all around the town. Bill protested that there were a thousand more authentic ones to be had for peanuts in the former Soviet Union--many of them in garbage dumps, others decapitated, left behind in the storage rooms of defunct factories.

"But remember, it was your plan to employ our people!" she said. She

renamed the stadium, Lenin's Bills. This had a nicely double meaning (besides imparting an impression of stability--like the Buffalo Bills, the perpetual finalists): Lenin would attract dollar bills; and, her husband's name would be acknowledged, alongside Clinton's, for at that time, the Armstrongs planned to have the President cut the Mausoleum tape. However, Clinton declined because he feared it would lower his popularity rating. But Jerry Brown and Jimmy Carter said they would come. Councilman Bill Armstrong called up Ronald Reagan, too, because he did not want this to be a one-party event. "Mr. Reagan, would you like to come to Cincinnati for the opening of Lenin's Gardens? You know there was an assassination attempt on his life, similar to Hinckley's on yours."

"Oh, dear," said Reagan. "Is he all right?"

"He's in stable condition. But your presence would certainly mean much to us all."

"Oh yes, I will certainly come if you find me a good speechwriter. Cincinnati's been very good to me. By the way, how's the Ronald Ragan Expressway holding up?"

"It's the only highway that needs no repairs; it's as solid as the Indy 500 racetrack."

So on Labor Day, at nine in the evening, there was a spectacular opening of the redesigned stadium. Bill and Molly walked with Jimmy and Rosalyn Carter to the Mausoleum, ahead of a crowd, which fought its way past KKK hoodlums burning crosses, evangelicals of all kinds, gay pride, young Republicans--yet despite all this opposition, numbering perhaps thirty thousand radicals bent in all directions, together with numerous policemen wedging through the protesters with tear gas, the procession was a hundred thousand strong.

Blimps with Agfa and Kodak signs hovered above the stadium. Before the Mausoleum entrance of pink marble, young policemen stood stiff. On the green field, cheerleaders in red formed letters, Welcome Vladimir. They kept leaping, lifting their shaved, jogged, and lotiond legs high, showing their impeccably laundered and bleached underwear, which, in every other city would mostly bore the spectators. However, in Cincinnati, where no pornography was available, many of the young in the procession craned their flushed red necks and walked awkwardly.

In a clockless velvety silence, Marines with pentagonal jaws kept hushing the people on their way down and past the corpse. In sparse pink light, Lenin, looking a little less somber than hitherto, wore a Gap workshirt. The base of the glass cage took on the name of Nivea Cream--thanks to which Lenin's skin would not crease for a thousand years--and a dozen other salubrious products.

Lenin's presence has imparted multiple blessings on Cincinnati. Fifty new barber shops opened up--forget Elvis impersonators, there are more Lenin impersonators in Cincinnati. the Cincinnati Reds are at the top of their division--but of course, Lenin's presence has inspired the Reds to strike. Thanks to Lenin's allergy to cigarette smoke, Cincinnati's legislature is the first in the world to outlaw cigarette ads. Cincinnati is now the most livable city in the United States, according to the Best Places Almanac, which actually means that Cincinnati is a good place to die.

ROBERT CLARK YOUNG

The Final Exit of Xavier Jones

Going up in the elevator-cage at the Hotel Cecil in Alexandria, Egypt, Steve Armentrout reviewed the tour he would give Unter Liechtensteiner that day: Pompey's Pillar; the Roman Amphitheater; the Greco-Roman Museum. He rode to the fifth floor, then walked down the red-carpeted hallway to room 505, and knocked.

Unter Liechtensteiner, hand extended, opened the door in a velour smoking jacket, ruffled shirt, and brown moleskin pants. "Ja," he said as they shook hands, "ja, you come early. You would like some kiwi? The only kiwi in all of Egypt, some Australians in the hotel, they give it to me. It is not true what you hear of Australians. Not all of them are—*betrunken, betrunken*," he said helplessly, searching the air for words. "Ah, but I have *mein Berlitz Wörterbuch*."

Armentrout went to the breakfast table, where sliced kiwi lay on a tray with quarters of orange and grapefruit. Peeled fruit, when consumed immediately, was safe; he picked up the wedges and sucked them greedily. "Thanks," he said through the pulp. The kiwi tasted like sherbet and snow-cones and key-lime pie—half-forgotten, western treats.

Unter returned with a yellow Berlitz dictionary, the pocket size, for travelers.

"In-e-bri-a-tion," he said. "Australians are not so inebriation. Ja, is right."

"I hope you're not planning to go out like that—your clothes. Egypt's a dirty country." He was aware of sounding too much like an American. "A dusty country. All that pharaonic dust, swirling around the ruins."

Unter was a short, blockishly-built man. He stepped closer, placed his hands on his wide hips, and turned his short-potato nose to a befuddled angle. "How do you say? Baronic dots, sverling?"

"Pharaonic dust, swirling—no matter. Go change your clothes."

"I will wear the three-piece suit from Milano."

"Don't you have anything more casual?"

"I do not know this word." Unter handed him the dictionary. "Please look for the German."

Armentrout flipped the pages. Finally he said, "*Zwanglos*."

"*Zwanglos*! You think I am a homeless? You think I am with the drugs? *Mein Gott, das ist ja absurd*!"

Unter selected his suit, shirt and tie from the antique standing dresser and went to the bathroom to change. Armentrout, sitting at the table, chewing kiwi, idly read the dictionary. He wished he could speak a foreign language. His work required only that he speak the international language of commerce and tourism, English; he had mastered enough Arabic to deal with cab drivers: *shemel* (left), *yemeen* (right), *alatool* (straight), *henna quoyas* (I'll get off here).

He was forty, originally from Ohio, and had traveled a zig-zag around the world—Australia, Thailand, Spain, Africa—working sometimes as a tour guide, sometimes as an English tutor, sometimes not at all. Half a life ago, he had majored in art history at Ohio State. America was a demanding country; not a place for an art historian. He liked Egypt. He liked to sit in cafes for hours with the other expatriates and smoke hooka pipes. He was getting fat.

The clients, mostly wealthy Europeans, were tolerable. A few of them were crazy. There had been the American linguist who had wanted Armentrout to teach him Coptic. The British dowager who had complained because none of the Arab men grabbed her ass in the market. The Belgian candy heiress, insane and bejeweled, who had been arrested at the airport with a purse full of mummified pharaoh-penises.

And now, Unter Liechtensteiner. Director of the Reincarnation Institute, Zurich. Convinced he had lived in Egypt during Dynasty XII. Visiting home, as it were.

In the dictionary, Armentrout found the German for "There's no need to dress up." When Unter emerged in his three-piece suit and silk tie, Armentrout said, "Sollte man sich besonders anziehen."

"Oof, but your accent it is the terrible. Anyway, I must wear the good clothes. We must go see my American friend right away."

"We're scheduled for Pompey's Pillar, the Roman Amphitheater, and the museum. We only have four hours."

"But I must see my friend every day, he is the reason I come to Egypt. You must see him—it is good for him to see other Americans." Unter splayed his fingers and looked down at them appraisingly. "My friend will be dead very soon."

After he'd processed the creepiness of the idea, Armentrout realized that four hours were four hours, and that he was paid by his employer, Hercules Tours, either way. It was his policy to avoid Americans, who never understood why he lived here, but he didn't suppose he minded meeting a new one if Hercules were paying for the afternoon.

"We will be there only a short time," Unter said in the lurching cab. The taxi bounced past grey peeling buildings, a greasy-yellow tram discharging passengers, and a crowd of women in black, leaping all over each other to catch loaves thrown from the roof of a government store.

The apartment building was a concrete block, its entryway a dim hollow. The elevator rattled and coughed as it lifted them nine flights.

"This isn't a bad building," said Armentrout, stepping out of the elevator. "Not the worst I've seen. No sheep slaughtered in the hall."

They stopped at a door, where Unter pressed a button which made no sound. "Ach," he said as though remembering, "but it is no good." He knocked three times.

A short Arab, young with a triangular face, opened the door and looked at Unter with relief. "Fine. I can go shopping now." His English was surprisingly good; Armentrout decided he had lived in the States.

"This is Herr Armentrout, mein guide. He is going to take me to the museum, but first I must see Xavier. He is well?"

"He's been a perfect little bitch. Now that he's taken his pills, he's quiet." He turned to Armentrout. "My friend is dying of brain cancer. I'm Hasheem. We're from Boulder, Colorado. I've known him since before he knew his past. I was his link, you might say. My parents are Palestinian, so it all makes sense in that flawless karmic way."

"Of course," said Armentrout. Why did every nut in the world have to make a pit stop in Egypt?

"So I can go shopping?"

"Ja, go, it is okay."

"Well, you know where he is."

Unter led Armentrout down the hall.

The hospital bed was a shocking white in the French colonial room with its dark, lavender wallpaper, its gilded Versailles chairs, its dusty chandelier. Xavier lay in bed, propped up, reading a book. He looked like Gandhi: shriveled, wrapped in white, wearing round glasses, completely bald. Xavier had the face of a boy. Armentrout tried to guess his age—sixty-eight? forty-eight? eighteen? He settled on thirty-eight as a closer guess.

"How is it you are feeling?" said Unter.

Without looking up, Xavier said slowly, "I drooled on my book."

"This is Herr Armentrout. He is expert about Egypt."

Xavier looked up, a pale baby in adult glasses. "I'm Xavier Jones. I lived in Egypt during the Fourth Dynasty." He had a big-tongued way of talking, as though pain-killers had thickened his mouth.

"Is that right?" said Armentrout, on his guard against the odd circumstances and strange talk. "Well, that was a long time ago, wasn't it?" He had come close enough to read the book's cover: *My Fourteen Lives: From the Congo to the Alps*, by Unter Liechtensteiner.

"Unter?" said Xavier. "Could you do me a favor? Could you empty my urine?"

A row of plastic containers hung from the bed's railing. One of them was full and yellow. Unter detached the catheter from the full one, attached it to an empty one, then took the full container to the bathroom.

"That's karmic," said Xavier. "Karmic piss."

"Ja, is so," said Unter from the other room, pouring, loudly, the urine into the toilet.

"Big points for you in the hereafter," said Xavier.

"Big points for me," said Unter, and flushed the toilet. He returned to the bed, snapped the container onto the railing, drew up two chairs from against the wall, sat in one, and motioned quickly for Armentrout to sit in the other.

Xavier put down his book; it lay open on his chest, beneath a limp hand. Between his fingers, on the back cover, Armentrout could make out the round, pink, boat-nosed face of Unter Liechtensteiner. Armentrout didn't wonder what lay between the covers of the book—he had already decided it was New Age pap, translated from Swiss German into American English, placed prominently in the self-help / recovery / spirituality section at B. Dalton, and purchased and read by the kind of people who thought Plato was a cartoon.

"I think I'm going to have a bowel movement," said Xavier, " . . . tonight. That'll be mega-points for you, cleaning that up."

"Can I get anything for you?" said Unter.

"I dropped my cigarettes a while ago."

"But you should stop smoking, no?"

"I have two months to live," said Xavier. "Tell me about smoking."

"I'll get them," said Armentrout. He found the pack at the base of the night table. He shook out a cigarette, placed it in Xavier's eager, clumsy mouth, found the lighter and held down for the flame while Xavier sucked the cigarette to life. He was like a newly hatched bird, elbow-necked, bald, living for the mouth.

"Mini-points," said Xavier, the cigarette bobbing on his lips.

"That's all right," said Armentrout. "I'm on salary till three o'clock, I don't need a lot of points."

"I was in a service profession," said Xavier. "I think that's important."

"Ja, the hair salon—ja, this is so."

"I couldn't have built it up without Unter's principles, the karmic training. Hundred thousand a year. Hair-styling. Now look at me, I'm a fucking melon head."

"Will you go to the hospital?" said Armentrout. "More chemo?" He sensed it was hopeless, but felt he should ask something.

Xavier opened his mouth, but no words came out. His mouth stayed open as though it were stuck. A line of saliva ran down his chin. Finally he shook his head.

He had dropped the cigarette. Unter rose, plucked the cigarette from the sheet, and tapped it out in an ashtray on the night table. "You must stop the smoking." Wordless, his mouth still open, Xavier watched the cigarette smolder.

"He can say nothing," Unter explained to Armentrout. "The parts of the brain which are for *Sprache* — *Sprache* — They do not make connection, always, with the cords for the vocal. Maybe in a week or two weeks, the brain will stop controlling all things, all the time."

"I see." Armentrout was very uncomfortable with all this, and wished he'd insisted on giving his tour; he was now stuck.

"No hospital," said Xavier, brain and vocal cords reconnected, "no more chemo. I want to stay here with Hasheem, he's the boy who let you in. I want the end to be with him. Seven years."

"Ja, seven years is a long time. You teached him to cut hair in Colorado, that is good. He can go back to America."

"It wasn't a coincidence, him and me, I know that now. My most important incarnation—Egypt—makes sense I would hook up with an Arab boy."

"What about your family?" said Armentrout. "Won't they want to be with you when—well—be with you?"

Xavier limply held up Unter's book. "Families are a barrier to self-actualization. That's a basic."

"Oh," said Armentrout. He would have tested the concept, but he had stopped thinking about his own family a long time ago. They were not only in America, but in the past; they had nothing to do with today, with this place.

"Unter," said Xavier. "You have a convertible."

"Ja."

"Could you do me a favor? Could we go for a ride?"

"Das auto ist in Zurich."

"You can lease one in Cairo, maybe. I want to ride in a convertible—can you see me?—in a convertible, with my plastic boxes of urine?"

Unter smiled. "All the boys will love you."

Xavier opened his mouth, perhaps to laugh, but no sound came out. After a moment he said, "I ride the train every day in my head."

His visitors looked at him expectantly.

"A locomotive. It runs . . . chuga-chuga-chug . . . twenty-four hours a day. I bet you didn't know you could hear brain cancer running like a hundred fucking boxcars IN YOUR HEAD." He had risen on both elbows, momentarily vital, angry, then he sank into bed, his eyes fixed on some imaginary point.

Unter nodded with a tight mouth. "He was my student, ja, for many years, when I do my seminars in Colorado. But now—he know things I cannot know. Soon he will know all the secrets. The cosmos. It is strange!"

"You're afraid," said Xavier, subdued and objective. "I'm not afraid—I'm the one it's happening to, but I'm not scared. In twenty years I'll be back—thirty, at the most."

"This is so," said Unter, clasping his hands.

"I'm studying Spanish." Xavier turned his head. On the night table, next to the ashtray, stood a pile of paperbacks: *See It Say It in Spanish, Edgar Cayce on Reincarnation, Spanish for Travelers, Mapping the Cosmos with Shirley MacLaine.*

"I dreamt the whole thing," said Xavier. "I was a banker in Seville. I looked at the calendar on the wall and it said 2052."

Armentrout couldn't help himself: "Get any stock tips?"

Xavier laughed soundlessly and said, "I'm studying Spanish for the rhythms, obviously the vocabulary doesn't stick with you much during the actual soul-migration."

"You will like Europe very much," said Unter. "Spanien is very high in the mystical list of countries. It is Zivilisation, ja."

"List?" said Armentrout. "What list?"

"In the reincarnation," said Unter, "some countries they are for more advanced souls. In the bottom is Africa—any person can be born there. After many good lives, maybe comes a time in Japan. Then maybe America."

"Europe," Xavier said proudly, "is the final stage."

"This is so," said Unter. "Very low is Italien and Portugal, higher is England and Frankreich, more higher is Deutschland, and the most highest—after many good lifetimes—is Schweiz. Switzerland, in the English."

"How nice for you," said Armentrout.

"Have you ever been to Switzerland?" said Xavier. "Everything is perfect there."

"Then why are you choosing Egypt to—to die in?"

"I have unfinished karma here."

"I see," said Armentrout, though he didn't.

* * * * *

Xavier lay in bed, dozing with a cigarette in his mouth. Unter took the cigarette and mashed it into the ashtray.

Armentrout, checking his watch, saw that there was still time for Pompey's Pillar and the Roman Amphitheater, but not for the Greco-Roman Museum. "How long are we going to watch him sleep?"

"He has a timepiece inside."

"How long?" said Armentrout, ignoring the Swiss metaphor.

"A man who is dying is like the watch that is broken. He will sleep for two minutes, maybe for two hours, maybe for two days. Or he will be awake for two days, ja, awake but not speaking. Or awake and speaking without stopping. Speaking and smoking."

Armentrout studied the dying, sleeping man. His head was white and large and bald, a skull with marble-veined skin. Time would peel it down to nothing. And what of Xavier, the man inside, sleeping and waking by a broken watch? He was freeing himself, hour by hour, from time itself, ambling toward a long chasm of perpetual sleep. Armentrout did not believe there was any more to it.

"We will go now," said Unter.

"It's okay to leave him?"

"Ja, this is okay. The boy who cleans will come in ten minutes." Unter

offered a wrist, chubby and blond, adorned with a sparkling amalgamation of gold and jewels and crystal—a watch, too dazzling to be read quickly—and then it was gone. "Many lives ago, Xavier was—" Unter searched the walls for English. "Priester," he said desperately, "der Priester. Mein Berlitz Wörterbuch ist in the hotel."

"He was a priest?"

"Ja, in Egypt, in the thousands of years behind Christ. Xavier was der Priester. This is why he must come here to die, for the god to take him, for the soul to go in the Egyptian boat across the water."

"You believe that stuff."

"What is this word? What is 'stuff'?"

"You believe in life after death."

"Americans," Unter said, "do not understand about death, the reincarnation, the lives of the future and the past. You are afraid to die, more afraid than any other people. But I sell many books in America! I will give one of my books to you, so you will not be afraid."

The pop psychology, tinted with national insult, irritated Armentrout.

"Hasheem henna? Mish magood?" It was the cleaning boy, clanking through the front door with pails and rug-beaters. Armentrout was relieved. He would take his tourist to the ruins.

*****

Two days later, Armentrout's telephone rang. It was Unter:

"Xavier is dead."

"Dead! Already?"

"Ja."

"Well, I'm sorry. At least he got his wish, to die in Egypt."

"His wish is not complete—Xavier must be buried in Egypt. I must speak of many things with you. Can you come to the hotel?"

Riding in the taxi, he wished there were no decay in the world, that he was not getting fat and old, that he had not lived alone for so many years. He wished there were no happy vultures like Unter, flying around the world collecting self-help royalties and corpses. The taxi raced past the Ibrahemeya Sports Club, past Ramleh Station, past the tall brown cube—disintegrating, windowless—of the medical school—everything was sinking and he was sinking with it—sliding, falling, depressed—Armentrout wished to escape the modern world, he wished to be alone in a different time, in the reading room of the ancient library of Alexandria, communing with the linear purity and syllogistic logic of Euclid and Archimedes.

The grey busses, the yellow trolley cars, the black-and-orange taxis were engaged in a continuously honking, coughing, screeching marathon around Saad Zaghloul Square, along the boulevard of the Corniche, up and down the five streets that scissored out from the plaza. The banks and

hotels and apartment houses that rose along the beach looked like blocks of white cheese pitted with holes, gnawed by the punitive teeth of neglect and time and sea air. Eaves and moldings and balconies were battered, collapsing, or missing, and nothing had been painted since the night in 1952 when Farouk and the British had left the country to Colonel Nasser.

The Arabs had finally prevailed; the hotels and sphinxes and Hellenic columns might crack and crumble, but not the mosques. Armentrout heard them now, their calls to prayer, starting up across the city—one electrified loudspeaker seeming to set off another, dominoes of sound tumbling across ten miles of decaying skyline: "Waaallah, waaadahaa, waadfut!"

The taxi stopped in front of the hotel, breaking sharply, and Armentrout opened the door and stepped onto the dusty street of "modern," imperfect Egypt, into the lobby of a hotel which had once hosted kings, but now needed paint. The art-deco trimming insisted that the year was 1935, that Haile Selasie and Neville Chamberlin would soon be returning from their walk. Why did so many buildings in Alexandria tell lies about themselves? The elevator took him to the fifth floor, but slowly . . . he did not feel that he was going up.

Unter answered the door in his smoking jacket, ruffled shirt, and moleskin pants. He was smiling; he took Armentrout's hand in both of his.

Armentrout said, "Why do you look so happy?"

"Would you like a Perrier Wasser? The maitre d'hotel found old bottles for me in the Untergeschoss—Untergeschoss—bah!" He took the Berlitz off the table and pressed it into Armentrout's hand. "You Americans must learn European languages—you make it very hard for foreign peoples."

Armentrout sat at the table with the dictionary while Unter went to the black antique telephone, square with a dial that stuck. He spoke commandingly to the front desk. "Kann ich bitte den Direktor sprechen? . . . Ja, there is no ice. . . . Excuse me? . . . Ich hatte gern Eis! Eis! Eis!" Unter slammed the phone down. "How will we bury Xavier when even simple things are not possible?" He took two bottles of Perrier from the top of the dresser and uncapped them. "I am sorry. These are warm. And there are no glasses."

"That's okay," said Armentrout. "Where's the body now?" A corpse was not something to be kept around the house in Egyptian heat.

"We must bury Xavier in the soil of Egypt." He offered the bottle.

"We?" said Armentrout, taking it.

"You and me and the boy—the lover—Hasheem."

"And where do you intend to bury him?"

"Xavier's final Egyptian life was in the time of Romans. He lived in Alexandria. He was the manager of tombs. So we must put him in a tomb."

"What tomb?"

"Kam-el-Shuqqafa. Tonight."

Armentrout stood up, his hand gripping the Perrier, his heart trotting. "The Roman catacombs? Are you out of your head?"

"You are a guide, you know the tombs, you are the only one who can help us. Xavier has already pait to be buried there."

"I'm leaving."

"No!" Unter stood up. "You are speaking this way because you have not read mein books. They explain many things—they explain things about you. If you knew these things, you would not leave."

"What things?"

Unter came close, angling his fat nose up at Armentrout's. "You are an intelligent man, a man of reason, I know this already about you. But these things are not enough. You have no spiritualism, nothing inside. You are an empty man! The empty, rational man is the terrible evil of the twentieth century. How many times have you lived? Many hundred times, but you learn nothing. You are like a fish, dying, born, dying, born again and again, jumping and disappearing in the wasser many thousands of times. You have no purpose, the life means nothing to you."

"I have a job—"

"It is a job that helps no person in a spiritual way. You know the history about the long-ago, but not the karma."

"Good-bye." He went for the door.

"Wait! If you go, there is one thing more I must say to you. You are a sick man, Herr Armentrout. A sick empty man, in the spirit. If you do not make changes, you will die in an empty way. You say, 'I am still a young man.' Xavier was more young than you. If you do not begin to do good things, you will die empty, and you will come back in a bad way, not better like Xavier. One good thing you can do is to help me to bury Xavier. It is an honest, good thing to do."

"I'm not going to do it."

"Then I will say one last thing. Please let me say it." Unter went quickly to the dresser, opened it, and retrieved a Louis-Vuitton attache case. He brought it to the table and laid it flat. "Here is the only thing Americans will listen to. The only thing!" Exasperated, his grey hair falling over his forehead, Unter snapped the briefcase open. "Five thousand Swiss francs," he said, and pulled out a banded stack of currency. "I think it is about one thousand dollars in the exchange of this week. If you come back to the hotel at nine o'clock, this night, the money is in your hand. I have already made payment to the officials. I need a guide."

"That's why you signed on for tours!"

"Five thousand."

"Good-bye!" said Armentrout.

*****

Instead of hailing a taxi, Armentrout went for a walk along the Corniche. Below the seawall, the beach was rocky and narrow, dirty with tar. The Mediterranean was a dark blue heaving thing, dangerously alive, crashing whitely against the rocks and sand. On the horizon, there was a long shoe box, flat on top except for a blockish protrusion—a French aircraft carrier, flying its immense tricolor off the bow. Below the carrier was Unter Liechtensteiner's water, with its millions of helplessly reincarnating fish; above the carrier was Unter's sky, a blue emptiness without clouds, a cypher which no rational person could read.

The aircraft carrier was small against water and sky; Armentrout felt minuscule. Unter had called him a nothing. To hell with him! So what if a person was rational rather than spiritual? He'd heard Unter's criticisms before. They had come in less sophisticated form, but it was the same abusive argument, and it filled him with resentment—

At the age of eleven, on a Saturday afternoon, he had preferred to read Collier's Encyclopedia—the section on the solar system—than try out for Pop Warner football, and his father had said, "It's okay to be smart, Steven, but if you get too smart you'll be unfit for anything," and he'd hated his father for being a stupid, thick-necked man who had carried, for four decades, a U.S. mail bag on his round shoulders for a certified distance of 358,000 miles—a pile of Sears-Roebuck catalogues to the moon and back.

And when he was twelve, on an Easter morning before church, he had enraged his mother by saying, "No, I'm not dressed, and I'm not getting dressed. Religion's not an intelligent thing. Ask anyone who's smart. You can't prove Jesus is the son of God—it's just a thing people believe," and his mother had ordered his father to yell at him, and they had forced him to go, and he had hated them in their stiff twice-a-year clothing.

And when he was fourteen, on a Monday morning in geometry class at Riverfront High School, he had been, once again, the only student to have done the extra-credit assignment, and the teacher, Mr. Perry, had told him in front of the whole class, "Steve, it's not normal to do the extra-credit every time. Why don't you go to the dance next weekend?" Everyone had laughed, and he had hated that jeans-and-sweater idiot who claimed to be a teacher.

He could remember a hundred painful incidents. Everyone in high school had called him "Nerd" or "Professor" or "Poindexter." He would live in Egypt forever, would never go home. After taking a B.A. in art history, he had discovered there was nothing for him in America.

A load of rotting fish and a load of tar had been dumped on the section of beach he was passing. The smell had him walking fast, but it was no worse than the industrial stink of the Ohio River.

Near the center of Saad Zaghloul Square, the site of the ancient Caesarium, where Antony and Cleopatra had made love, mourners had set

up a temporary funeral tent. Armentrout had seen these tents often. They appeared in alleys or streets or squares—huge red rectangular tents, lit festively from within, bombarding the neighborhood with wild Arabic music. The men inside—only men allowed—drank tea and smoked hookas and sang and danced around the sheet-covered corpse. In the morning, the tent would be gone, reappearing on whichever street Death came to next.

Armentrout hurried past the funeral tent in the square.

As he passed the baroque palace of the Italian Consulate, then the great mosque on the far side of the square, he felt confused and morose and hungry. He entered Chez Gaby, a French restaurant on Mahufza Street, authentic and luxurious and ridiculously affordable—six dollars for five courses—and he wondered, for the first time, at the many things he could have in Egypt for five thousand Swiss francs.

*****

At nine o'clock he was standing in front of the door marked 505. He rapped only twice. When the door opened, Unter's expression went from guarded curiosity to expansive relief. "You have come!" He was dressed in a cashmere sweater and grey twill pants.

"You're looking casual," said Armentrout. "Expecting dirty work?"

"Ja, this job will be dirty. That is the way with life. If we are human, our hands cannot be clean."

"I want you to know," Armentrout said as he slunk anxiously into the room, hands in pockets, "that I think you're a kook. The only reason I'm doing this is for the money."

Armentrout was lying. At Chez Gaby, as he'd lingered over the Sole Dugléré with sauce béchamel, the poularde Derby with sauce velouté, the Tournedos Rossini with sauce espagnole, the pêche melba, the Château Montagne de Reims '88 and a demitasse, he'd worried about Unter's plan. Armentrout had promised his superiors at the tour agency to keep foreigners out of trouble; there had been too many crazy tourists in their charge; the Ministry of Tourism would not be happy if Armentrout's clients began depositing dead friends under national monuments.

At the same time, there was no way to stop Unter. The man believed in God, the Devil, the migration of souls, the spiritual superiority of the Swiss—he was not likely to listen to reason. And the claim that he had bribed local officials was wholly believable.

What was the worst scenario? Unter and Hasheem would stumble loudly into the tombs, struggling down 247 hand-carved steps with a corpse, shovels, flashlights, and E.M. Forster's 1922 guidebook—the best and most recent authority. Unter and Hasheem would become lost, injure themselves, make enough noise to draw a police officer not acquainted with the contents of Unter's briefcase. Arrest. Public humiliation. And, for everyone at the tourist agency, deportation.

This was the thing to do: Go with them, finish the business quickly,

safely, quietly. It was stupid and dangerous . . . yet if he didn't do it, the Egyptian Government might throw him on a plane back to Cincinnati. He hadn't been there in seventeen years, and had no intention of seeing that smug midwestern skyline again.

Armentrout went nervously to the window while Unter fumbled with the dictionary. "Kook? Kook? What is this word?"

Armentrout looked down on the illuminated square, the groups of Arab men holding hands and singing as they walked, the women talking to one another as they went by with sacks of flour balanced on their heads, the funeral tent glowing red in the night, the tram rushing by in a yellow blur as the driver tortured the brakes. The world below was a mad foreign swirl. His stomach swirled with it.

One false step, and he could lose himself permanently in that world. Forget Cincinnati—try an Egyptian jail. Frightened, he turned to Unter.

"What you're planning is completely crazy."

"Kook. It is not in the book!" He said it to rhyme with kook.

"If I hadn't come here, what would you do?"

Unter flung the uncooperative dictionary on the bed. "I must do the great and necessary things, no matter what the small men do. This is mein motto."

"If I let you go get caught in that tomb by yourselves, you're going to fuck up the agency. And if I get caught with you, it's even worse. So what am I supposed to do?"

Unter held up the five thousand francs, a brick of blue-and-yellow bills reflecting the amber light from an ancient ceiling fixture of cracked plastic. "You will do the honest thing. You will help a dead man. You will advance your soul. You will take this money, ja."

*****

Hasheem was in the bedroom with the corpse. The room was hotly lit. Xavier was propped up in bed, his glasses still resting on his face. Behind them, the dead eyes were open, staring wetly into the next world.

Open on his lap was Unter Liechtensteiner's paperback, *Between Lives: Facts You Should Know About the Ghost World.*

"We have much work," said Unter. "Where is the bag for laundry?"

"I'll get it," said Hasheem and went out.

"What are you going to do," said Armentrout, "have him dry-cleaned?"

"You think I am a silly man, but I am smart. We cannot go in the street carrying the body of Xavier. We will have him in a bag. On the side of the bag is the word 'laundry' in Arabic writing. Nobody will make trouble for us."

Hasheem returned with the laundry bag. It was a dirty canvas bag, large, like a sail folded back on itself and sewn jaggedly down the side.

Large black Arabic script made the laundry announcement. "This is the best one I could get. I had to pay that smelly laundry woman two pounds and thirty piasters."

Armentrout watched as Unter and Hasheem took the glasses and book off the body, placed them carefully, for the last time, on the end table, then pulled back the sheet, revealing an emaciated, naked dead man. They pulled the laundry bag over his feet, up his legs, around the flat bony hips, up the lean torso and over the large bald head. They tied a knot.

Hasheem was sobbing. "Open the bag—I forgot to kiss him good-bye."

*****

Down on the street, around the nearest corner, in an alley, a car was waiting. Like half the cars in Egypt, it was a heavily dented Fiat. Hasheem had a lot of trouble opening the trunk. When it finally squeaked open, he and Unter lay the bagged corpse on top of the shovels and flashlights.

"Are you sure," said Armentrout, "this is the way the ancients did it? I think Nefertiti would've preferred a Mercedes."

"Shut up."

Hasheem drove. It was evident he had learned to drive in America—unlike Egyptian drivers, he kept to the right of the road, obeyed semaphores, and gave the right-of-way to pedestrians. These habits were causing him trouble. Cars came straight for him on the wrong side, others rushed at him through red lights, others honked angrily when he stopped to let a woman cross—drivers shoved their heads out of car windows to gesture at Hasheem and damn his soul in Arabic.

"You'd better start driving like an Egyptian," Armentrout said in terror from the backseat, "before you kill us all."

"Ja, ja," said Unter, "please drive much more stupid. Drive like Italians in Mexico. Drive like Mexicans in Roma." He laughed squeakily, the Chief Elf. Hasheem gave him a sharp look, and the square elf's face became long like a bishop's, as though Unter were reminding himself that this was a solemn, even strange occasion, and that he must project, before his client, seriousness if he could not manage grief.

"How are we getting into the crypts?" Armentrout asked.

Unter held up a long old-fashioned key, the kind with two square teeth at the end. "I have paid ten thousand Egyptian pounds to the manager of Kam-el-Shuqqafa. Also, das ist his auto."

"And you trust him? He'll probably be waiting at the gate with the police, have us arrested for bribery, grand-theft auto, who knows how many trumped-up charges."

Unter shrugged. "Then I will give money to the police."

"You have a spiritual answer for everything, don't you?"

They parked in front of the place. There was a wrought-iron fence

around a concrete plaza, which the Ministry of Tourism had decorated with headless statues and broken columns from the Greek Age. Beyond this, the ticket office, dark. And beyond that, unseen but certainly there, the black hole in the ground—the hand-carved steps, 247 of them, going down.

Unter and Hasheem turned and looked expectantly at Armentrout. From this point, he would manage the expedition. The particulars had been easy to decide: since the floors of the catacombs were covered in various depths of water, the only practical site for Xavier's entombment would be a wall. There were hundreds of wall-crypts to choose from—robbers had emptied them fifteen hundred years ago, taking even the bones, grinding them into aphrodisiacs for the last of the Roman hedonists. Xavier would be shoved into one of the empty slots, beyond the main sarcophagus, in the rear of the final chamber, in a dark corner where no one would suspect anything; they would cover him with the ancient mud and get out.

"I'll carry the flashlight and shovels," he instructed. "You two carry the laundry."

They had parked in the shadows, just around the corner from the main entrance, which was lit by an anemic-yellow bulb. Still, he moved discreetly, carrying the shovels over-shoulder and the unlit flashlight under-arm, as nonchalantly as he could carry these items—and Unter and Hasheem followed with the drooping laundry sack.

Nobody spoke. They rounded the corner.

"The key," Armentrout hissed as they approached the gate.

"Ja, I have it here." They had to put the bag down while Unter searched his pockets.

"*Shanta kabir*!" somebody said, and Armentrout's heart stopped for an awful moment as he dropped the shovels—the loudest shovels in the world, heard clanging all over Egypt, he was sure.

It was a dark car, no headlights, being shoved stealthily down the street by a group of silent youths who, all at once, were laughing at the laundry men with shovels. The boys left the car and came closer, four of them.

"Hasheem," said Armentrout, "what is '*shanta kabir*'?"

"It means 'big bag.'"

"Get rid of them."

Hasheem spoke to them in quick, proficient Arabic. Were they hoodlums? They looked no different from any of the young men Armentrout had seen walking Egyptian streets at night, holding hands and singing—innocent, provincial, too quick to laugh at strangers, too eager to shout broken English at foreigners. But these boys, oddly, had no interest in trying their English with Armentrout. One of them poked the bag with the point of his shoe.

Unter, hands clutched behind his back, gazed through the bars at the circle of broken statues and columns, as though he were a tourist not affiliated with the crazymen.

"What do they want?" said Armentrout.

"They want our laundry."

"What!"

"They think it's expensive western clothes from America. We have so much, we have to use shovels."

"Tell them it's cheap Egyptian shit."

Hasheem translated, but he only made the boys shout and laugh at him. One of them took the knot of the bag, ready to drag it away.

"They don't believe us," Hasheem said desperately. "In Egypt, only women do laundry. They think we're pussies—they're going to beat us up and take our clothes!"

Unter approached Hasheem impatiently. "Tell them I will give them money to fix their car. We are wasting time."

Hasheem tried to convey the offer, but the boys were quickly hoisting the laundry bag and then they were trotting across the street with it. Hasheem and Armentrout—and even Unter, waddling like an immense goose—chased them, Hasheem shouting in Arabic. Then he said in English: "It's no good! Anyone can get a car repaired! They want American clothes!"

Armentrout was surprised that the boys could run so fast with the deadweight of Xavier Jones hanging between them in the bag, but Armentrout was hardly in Olympic shape, and neither of course was Unter, and Hasheem was too emotionally jangled—screaming and crying—to put in more than a trotting effort. The boys went around a corner and Armentrout knew, with a sick hollowness in his stomach, that he would never see them again. He stopped running, and so did Hasheem, and Hasheem's mouth was an open frown of anguished disbelief. Unter caught up with them.

"We have to call the cops," Hasheem said wildly. "We have to find a fucking pay phone and call the cops."

"In Egypt," Unter said calmly, "there is no public telephone."

"We have to call the goddam police!"

"And what're you going to tell them?" Armentrout shouted back. "That somebody stole your dead queer lover?"

"This guy's not one of us," Hasheem said to Unter. "He's never been to a Reincarnation Training Seminar, we shouldn't've brought him!"

Armentrout took a step toward Hasheem. "What's this Reincarnation Training done for you? You can't change anything—Xavier's dead, and now he's—dead and gone."

Arrogance broke through the despair on Hasheem's face, and he looked narrowly at Armentrout, like a peasant who has suffered at the hands of landowners but fancies he cannot be broken. "You think you're so fucking smart, just 'cause you probably went to college. I've got bad news for you: You're a nobody. Before I got on the program, I was a loser like you. My parents immigrated from Palestine to New Jersey in 1967 with ten

dollars in their pockets—I didn't have jack shit when I was growing up—last year I made a hundred thousand dollars—I'm half-owner of a hair salon in Boulder, Colorado." Hasheem looked desperately, and then self-confidently, down the alley where Xavier had disappeared, then looked back at Armentrout: "Full owner. This is all because of the Liechtensteiner Reincarnation Training Program. And not only that, my next life is going to be even better, I won't even be an Arab next time. I'm going to be an Austrian textile manufacturer and I'm going to be rich, so fuck you!"

"I didn't ask for your life story," said Armentrout. "Or your next one."

"We have their car," said Hasheem. "They have to come back for their car."

"That's right," said Armentrout. "And when they do, they'll bring half the army with them. Let's get the hell out of here."

Hasheem gave Unter a ravaged, pleading look.

Unter nodded soberly, as though someone had just recommended a stock-option plan which was not only prudent but obvious. "Ja, Herr Armentrout is right."

They went back to the car. Hasheem drove like an Egyptian now, ignoring all the semaphores and road-markings which local drivers routinely ignored, going over a curb here and there, sobbing and swearing as he pounded the wheel, and Armentrout was afraid Hasheem would wreck the car. He asked to be left off at Ramleh Station, then took a taxi the rest of the way home.

The block of currency, the five thousand Swiss francs which Unter had given him at the hotel, was a pleasant bulge in Armentrout's hip pocket.

*****

He never heard from Unter again. However, three days after the trip to the catacombs, he ran into Hasheem at the Thomas Cook near Saad Zaghloul Square. Hasheem was not friendly.

"I've been cheated out of my life savings and if you don't tell me where the fuck Liechtensteiner is, I'm going to break your fucking arm. You may think I'm just an angry little faggot, but I studied Tae-Kwan-Do in Colorado for seven years." He threw back his shoulders, displaying his short stocky form.

"Oh," Armentrout said with relief. "That's all? Unter took your money? I thought maybe it was something bad—Xavier and the cops. He ever turn up?"

"No, I'm looking for Liechtensteiner, checked out of his hotel two nights ago. I called home and talked to our lawyer and found out Xavier left his half of the business to that Swiss phony. What do the Swiss know about perms? They know cheese and chocolate and watches—they don't know shit about the hair industry. Where's Unter?"

"I don't know. Try Switzerland."

"Would the tour agency have his address? I've got Swiss Air tickets for tomorrow—just got them here." He gestured toward the Thomas Cook travel counter.

"I'd rather not bother my bosses about this."

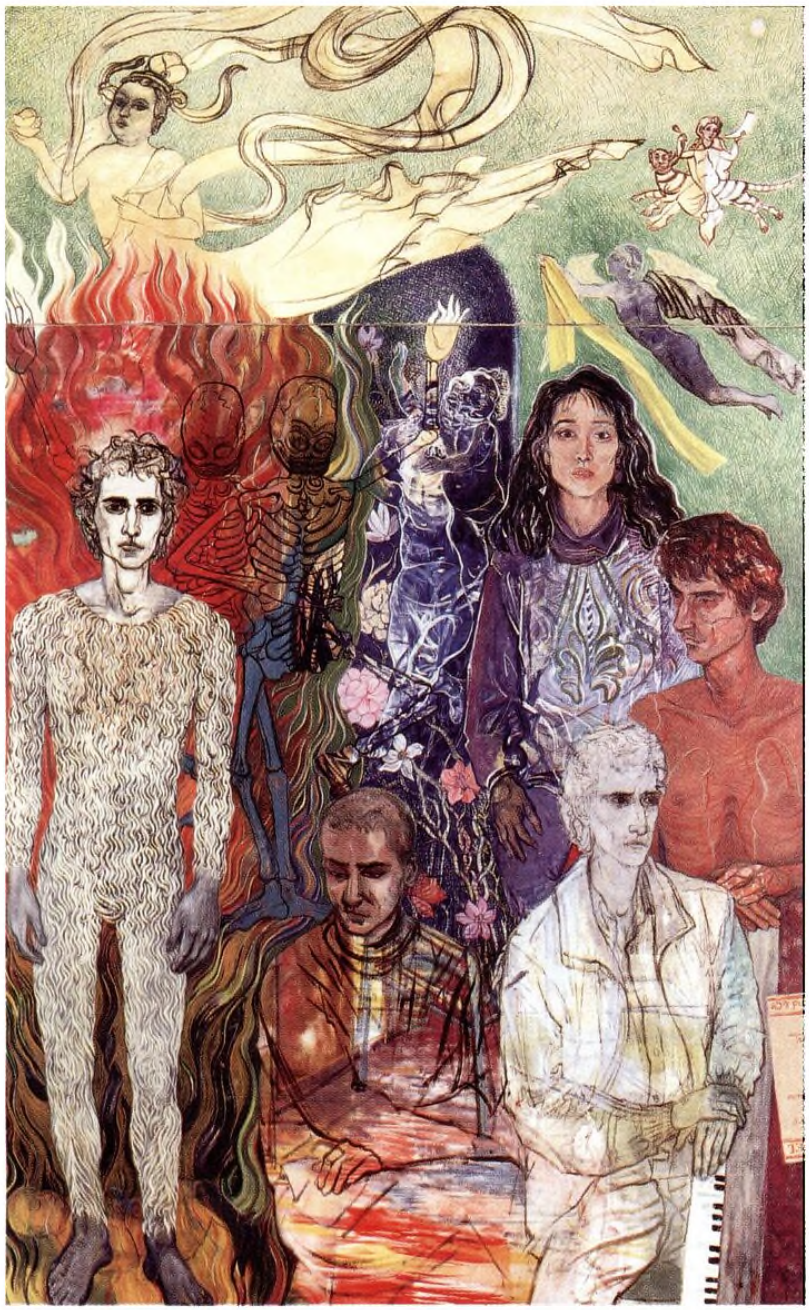
"Give me their address—I'll bother them. Give me their address or I'll break your fucking leg!"

"Number 88, Mahmoud Babili Street." It was the address of the Lebanese Trade Commission, which had been closed for fourteen years. It was one of Armentrout's favorite, abandoned, neo-rococo buildings, twenty kilometers from Saad Zaghloul Square. It would take Hasheem a good while to find the dilapidated building.

Time enough for Armentrout to cash his paycheck at Thomas Cook. Time enough to go to a street cafe, the kind with backgammon tables and domino sets. Time to drink his favorite tea and have a long smoke on a hooka pipe. He was a fat, middle-aged American who would never allow himself to worry about love, money, or death. All he had was time.

Yet a Stranger in the World
1989-1996
Oil on Canvas, 79" x 65.5"
Courtesy the artist

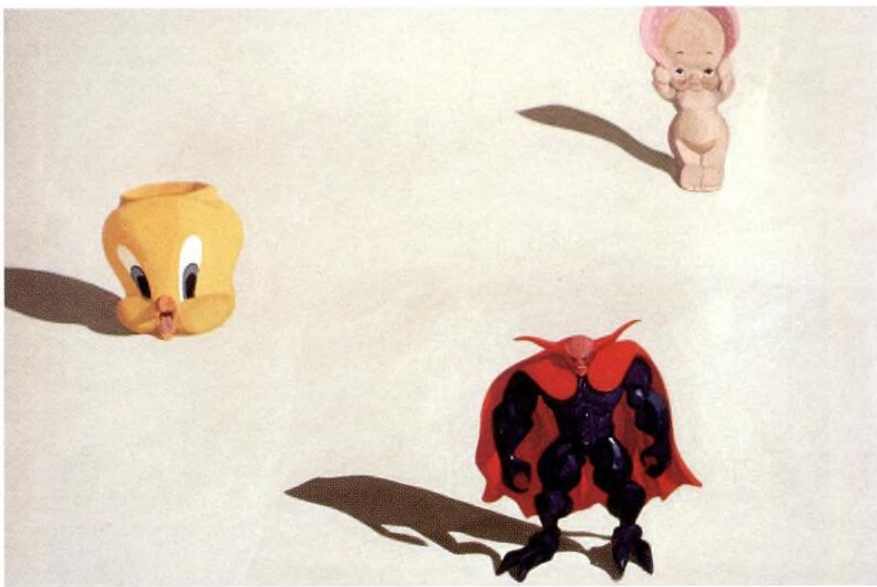
In the Ten Directions
1993-1996
Oil on Canvas, 96″ x 64″
Courtesy the artist



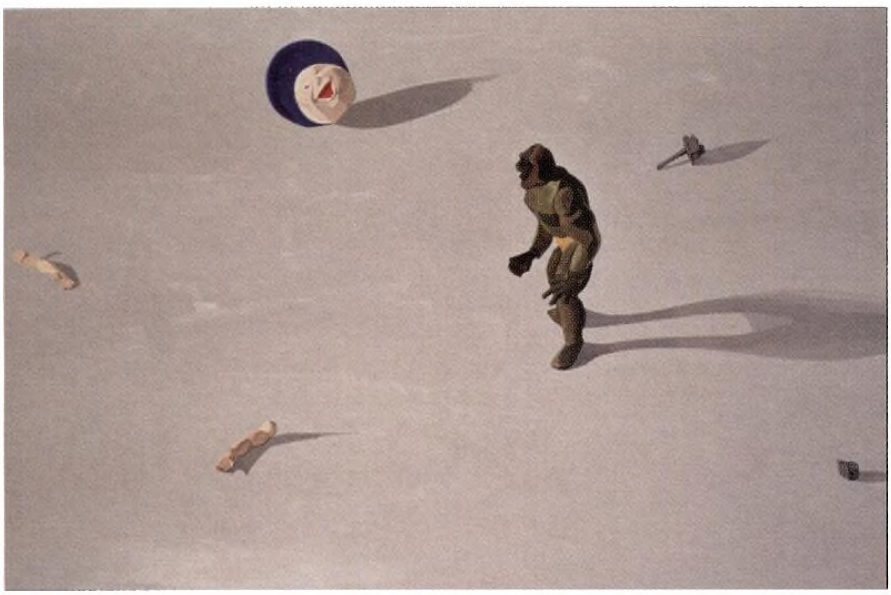
The Trails of Justin Page
1993-1996
Oil on Canvas, 96.5" x 60"
Courtesy the artist

Renunciation
1993-1996
Oil on Canvas, 80" x 66"
Courtesy the artist

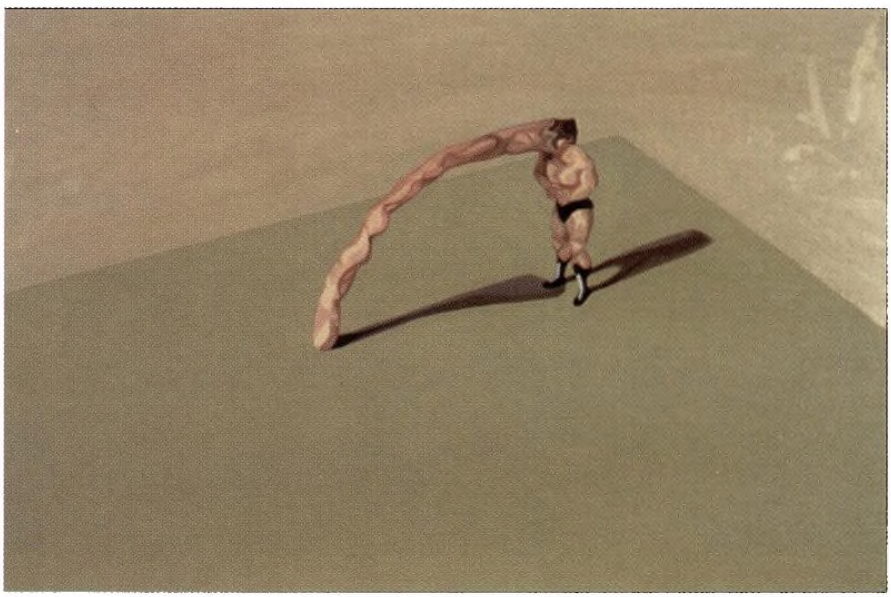
Untitled
1996
Oil on Canvas, 9″ x 9″
Courtesy the artist



Untitled
1997
Oil on Canvas, 24″ x 36″
Courtesy the artist



Proposing, Slicing, Disposing
1996
Oil on Canvas, 24" x 36"
Courtesy the artist



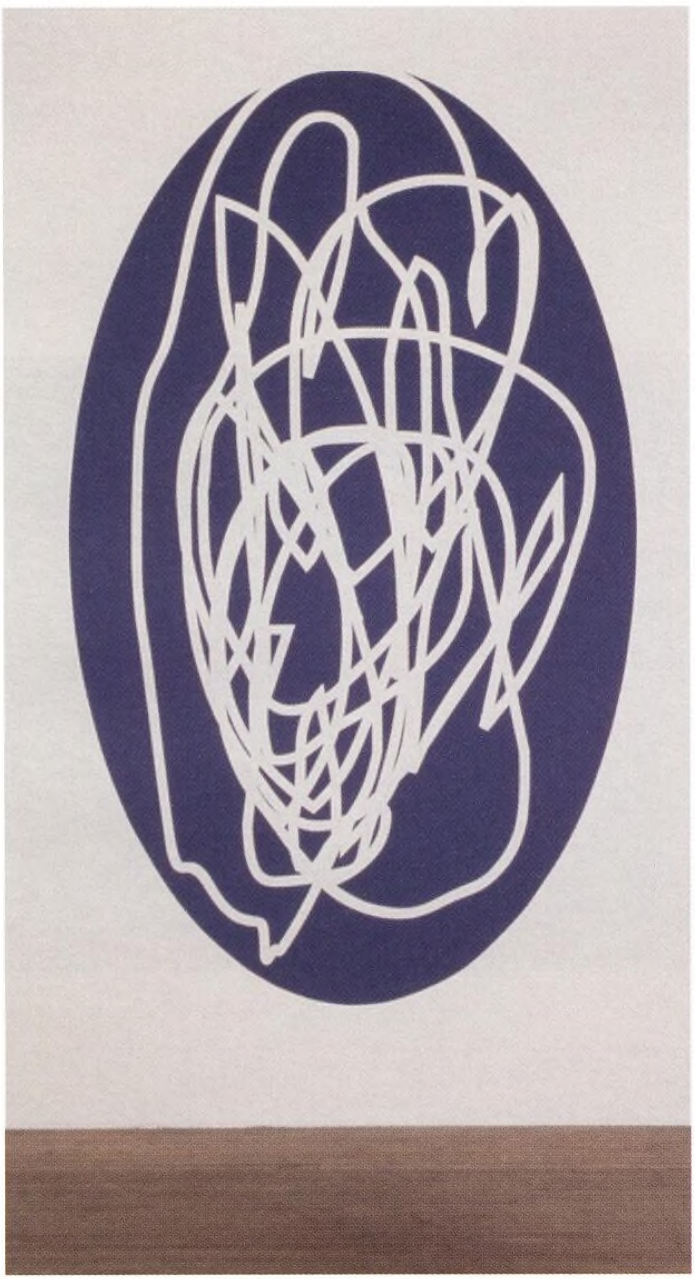
Inaccurate Dreamer
1995
Oil on Canvas, 24″ x 36″
Courtesy the artist

Beggar's Joys
1996
Oil enamel on Canvas, 75" x 75"
Courtesy the artist and Texas Gallery

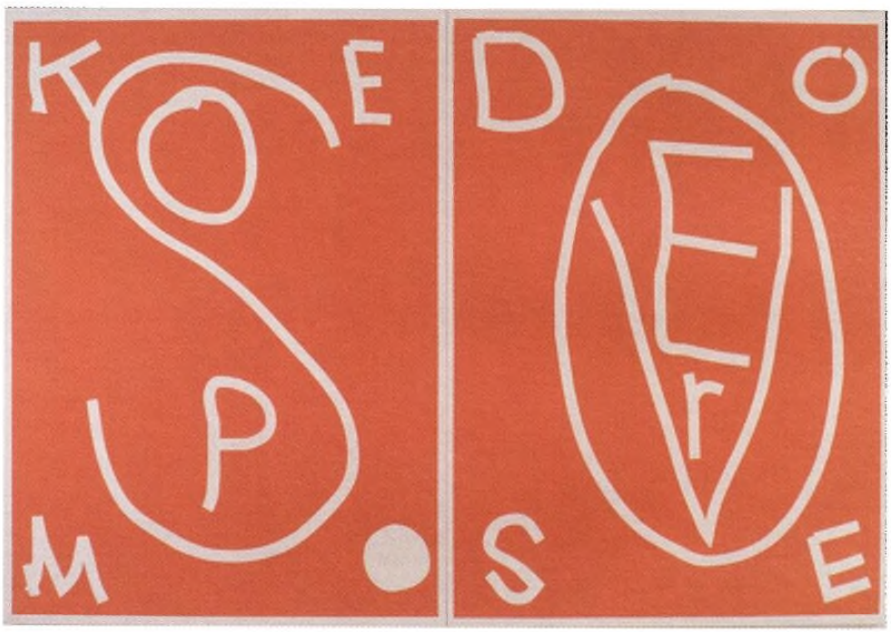
Chief
1997
Oil enamel on Canvas, 84" x 84"
Courtesy the artist and Texas Gallery

Horizon Light
1997
Oil enamel on Canvas, 75″ x 75″
Courtesy the artist and Texas Gallery

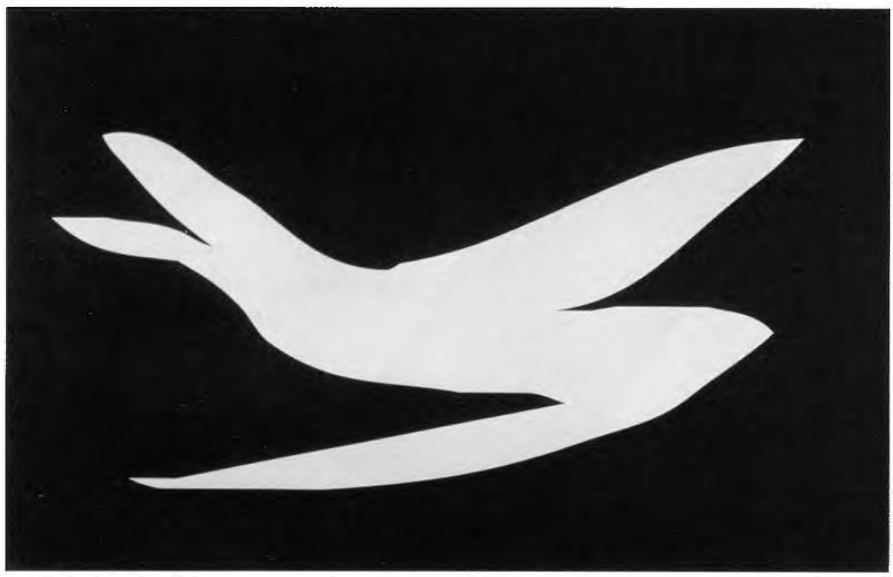
J'Taime No. 3 with Loaf of Bread
1996
Oil enamel on Canvas, 84" x 84"
Courtesy the artist and Texas Gallery



Lasso
1997
Acrylic wall drawing, 116″ x 70″
Courtesy the artist and Texas Gallery



R.S.V.P.
1997
Acrylic on Canvas, 104″ x 150″
Courtesy the artist and Texas Gallery



Insane Bird
1997
Unique Laser Print, 11″ x 17″
Courtesy the artist and Texas Gallery

Delete
1997
Acrylic wall drawing, 98″ x 76″
Courtesy the artist and Texas Gallery

iii . 9
Lydia and Her Lover Talking

"When you loved me the best
And I thought there was nobody else,
Before you preferred to mine
Calais' arms around
Your beautiful shoulders, then,
I was happy as can be,
Happier than the King
Of Persia is, I was."

"When you loved me the best
And I thought there was nobody else,
And Chloe wasn't first
On the list in your heart (I was),
Why then I thought I was
The toast of everyone;
I was happier than Mars'
Beloved Ilia was."

"Now I love Chloë best,
Chloë, whose singing and
Her playing on the lyre
Charms everyone who hears her.
Chloë is the one
I'd die for if I had to,
If the Fates would only spare her
To live happily ever after."

"I love Calais best,
Who is Ornytus' son;
Calais loves me too;
It's entirely mutual.
Calais is the one
I would die for if I had to,
If the Fates would only allow him
To live happily ever after."

"What if Venus took it
Into her head to join
Together once again
Those whom she had parted?
How would it be if lovely
Chloë were shown the door,
And the door were left wide open
For Lydia to come back in?"

"Calais is fairer than
Any star in the sky;
And you are lighter than
A cork bobbing upon
The waters of the stormy
Adriatic Sea —
But if you say you love me
I'll love you truly forever."

Translated by David Ferry

i.13
To Lydia

Lydia, when you praise your Telephus,
"His beautiful rosy neck," "his beautiful arms,"
Your praise of Telephus throws me into confusion,
My mind is all unsettled, my heart swells up,

The tears in my eyes are the visible evidence
Of the fire that burns inside me and torments me.
I suffer this way whether I think the bruise
That mars your snow-white shoulder is the sign

Of a lovers' quarrel brought on by too much wine
Or the mark on your lip the mark of his savage kiss.
If you listened to me you wouldn't give your trust
To one who would so barbarously treat

The lips that Venus imbued with essence of nectar.
Those lovers are happy and more than happy who
Are peacefully bound together in amity.
Love will not part such lovers until death parts them.

Translated by David Ferry

i.33
To Albius Tibullus

Albius, don't feel
    So sorry for yourself,
Going on the way you do
    With your lovelorn love songs, just
Because Glycera has fallen
    For somebody younger than you.
Lycoris of the beautiful
    Forehead burns with love
For Cyrus, and Cyrus burns
    With love for Pholoë,
But a doe is just about
    As likely to mate with a wolf
As Pholoë with him.

It is the will of Venus,
    Who has a lot of fun
With the cruel joke of putting
    Like and unlike together
In the same brazen yoke.
    Thus I, although a better
Finds me the object of
    Her unrequited passion,
Find I'm bound by passion
    To slave-born Myrtale,
A woman stormier than
    The stormy waters off
The wild Calabrian shore.

Translated by David Ferry

ELIZABETH SPENCER

Becoming a Writer: How Do You Start?

My master's degree in hand after a year of graduate study at Vanderbilt during the war, I spent a year teaching at a small junior college in Mississippi. But before I could decide whether to return, I was offered a job at a rather ritzy finishing school in Nashville. I had longed to return there and pick up on the creative contacts I had had to shelve in leaving. I accepted with high hopes.

And so, back to Nashville. I expected things I craved most to open up again for me there. Eventually, they did. But not at first.

At Ward-Belmont I found myself in an isolated situation. There was little contact with the world outside, at least not for me. Manners and deportment were up for their accustomed work out. The war rolled on monotonously; the heavy news rolled in.

At school, the girls I had to teach were bright and eager, but once more a sense of confinement closed in, and I knew I would not be there long.

Who told me about it, I don't remember, but I began going by bus to downtown Nashville to a night school called Watkins Institute, which specialized in vocational training courses, and had, tucked away in its curriculum, a so-called "workshop group" in fiction writing. I was shy at showing up, but did it anyway. It was conducted by a mystery story writer named Raymond Goldman. He was a little crippled man, a victim of polio. He taught to supplement his income, and also sold men's shoes in a local department store.

A kinder, more receptive and earnest character than Raymond Goldman was never born. He took to my writing with a delight which all but stunned me. He was a natural enthusiast anyway, born to chuckle, encourage and understand. He not only limped, but wore thick glasses and a hearing aid. He thought that life was glorious.

His approach to writing was a little odd. He listed a number of possible plots—I think there were fifteen in all. "The biter bit" . . . "Nothing ever happens here" . . . "'Ain't love grand?" . . . "Grandeur in unexpected places" . . . etc. If a story that didn't fit turned up, he would sometimes add another one. Being from an old Nashville family, he knew or knew of all the famous names clustered around Vanderbilt.

Mr. Goldman took the time to talk with me often. He thought teaching

at Ward-Belmont was not the thing for me, and wondered about newspaper work. One thing led to another: I found myself angling for a job on the *Nashville Tennessean.* With my Vanderbilt mentor Donald Davidson's help, I got it, though Davidson scarcely approved of the move. "Why on earth anybody wants to work on a newspaper . . .!" he raged. I slunk away feeling permanently dashed, but then found he had done one of his amazing turn arounds, and had called the managing editor on my behalf. I think I would never have landed anything there except for the war. As reporters, men were definitely preferred. But now they were scattered far and wide—ETO, the Pacific, the Middle East. And so the bright young faces in the city room were often those of girls like myself, observant of a world laced with rough talk and cynicism; hard-boiled, more than a little relentless, often out to trip us up.

Still, it was another start.

On assignment from the city desk I wrote up minor stories, obituaries, and "re-writes." I got some hard knocks, but on the whole, the experience was a good one. For one thing, newspaper writing gets right to the point, with no frills, no browsing about for descriptive glimpses or eloquent meditation. We reporters who worked in the city room had as boss a growling city editor, who seemed right out of plays or movies about a city room with a growling city editor. Maybe he had seen some. He was said to sometimes have fist fights out on the pavement with rebellious reporters. He volubly resented having so many women around; he lived for the day when the "real" reporters would come home.

It was while I was at work in the city room that news came through of Germany's surrender. It seemed we had lived so long with war—war feared, war coming, war not coming, war come anyway, piles of censored mail, news of killing and dying, soldiers everywhere, headlines and radio, speeches and disasters, more speeches, and tides turning—that war was part of the air we breathed, that life without it would not even be life. The European theatre was silenced, but the war with Japan went fiercely on. My uncle Sidney, now Admiral McCain, was in the thick of it, commanding an aircraft carrier under the general command of Admiral Halsey. I followed the intense action in the Pacific.

I was again in the city room, checking re-writes, when the news broke about Hiroshima. The European war ending had been breathtaking—dizziness, wonder, and general rejoicing were part of everybody's shared feelings. But this was different. We looked at the great black headlines pouring from the Associated Press rooms, read news so shocking that the print, which kept pouring out a flood of detail, seemed to rise up off the page.

A strange thing occurred. Two of the girls who worked as reporters—especially well-dressed, chic, and knowledgeable types—became charged-up, elated, voluble. You would have thought some bacchanal was in progress, mounting to heights of sexual excitement. They thought it was

wonderful, that nothing so marvelous had ever occurred, it was the world's greatest event! One might say, of course, that they rejoiced at the war's ending, soon to follow. But, no, that was not what it meant. It meant something else: the consummation of power.

This little scene being near, before my eyes, continuing through the stunned feelings of the afternoon, frightened me almost as much as the news of the bomb. You needed no imagination to see them as mad revelers, dancing around a blood-drenched god of war.

Coming home from work to my rooming house, I found Melba Sherman, a Vanderbilt graduate student from Mississippi, who had a room down the hall from me. She was in a similar state to myself, be-numbed with awe, and we sat down together with the Bible and read chapter after chapter from Revelations. Were "vials of wrath" being poured out upon the earth? We agreed that the world would be different now, and that a frightening era had dawned. Being brought up in religion-centered homes, we both had fearful thoughts. The Second Coming might really be at hand.

In those days my lodgings were in a widow's house near Vanderbilt, owned by Mrs. Susan Souby, who taught at Ward-Belmont. It was on Dixie Place, a street long since swallowed up by the massive extensions of Vanderbilt Hospital. The long bus ride from the newspaper office home was trying, as I had to work until midnight. But two days off a week left me time to write. I was writing more and more. Stories I could finally begin to believe in had begun to form around characters much like those I had grown up with in the little towns of Mississippi. The distance from Tennessee to Mississippi helped me frame scenes I had lived among, to make whatever was extraneous drop away and leave important outlines clear to view and so able to be described.

I kept up acquaintance by one means or another with students at Vanderbilt. I went in to see my much admired professor Donald Davidson and others from time to time. The important threads in life are the major veins in experience, and must have the blood stream flowing through them, to be kept active and alive. Losing contact is like losing life. I felt Vanderbilt as a source for me and I did what I could to maintain its power. My stories that went out to magazines such as *Accent, Story, Kenyon Review* did not place, but often stirred editors to return them with personal notes. I began to find a recurrent phrase in these notes. It said, "Have you ever tried a novel?" "Why not try a novel?" "You should try a novel." Finally I thought, Well, why not?

Specific encouragement to break loose from jobs entirely and concentrate solely on writing came from a young Alabama man, just back from war. This was Edward McGehee (pronounced McGhee). He was aiming for a writing future himself, having done a good many poems in the modern complex manner, and was now deep into a novel. He had been given the Vanderbilt writing fellowship under Donald Davidson's supervision.

This coveted residency paid only $500 a year, and it is amazing to note that at that long ago time a single person could live a year on such a meagre sum. You could not, of course, own and run a car, take taxis, afford the best seats at the theatre, have your own private bathroom and telephone, or eat many good dinners at downtown restaurants. But you could go drink beer at Butch Petrone's, or walk with your date over to Al's Tavern out near Centennial Park. You could go to the picture show. I reflected that I had, because of a tight-fisted Scottish streak, or perhaps because of being brought up during the Depression, saved up a bank account of about $500. It wasn't much; I had to measure and weigh; but I decided to risk it.

Back in Mississippi, my father objected strenuously to my decision. His view was that I had held three good jobs and given them up one after another, that the road ahead for writing was too chancy and difficult, that I would have immense trouble getting anyone to hire me should I fail. I couldn't think like that. I knew he had wanted me to accept the first marriage proposal which had come my way at age seventeen or thereabouts. I thought for a long time that he was considering my happiness when he favored the match, though both my mother and I told him I was not in love with that eager young man. "What does he want to do?" Dad demanded. "He wants to write," I said. "That boy's got too much sense to write." Dad's judgments were always ready.

I was still at Mrs. Souby's when he telephoned one evening. The denunciation was long and severe. Melba Sherman overheard some of this dialogue. Confidences we had shared let her guess what had transpired. She heard me crying. Melba searched out a passage in Julius Caesar and came in to read it to me. "There is a tide in the affairs of men / Which taken at the flood lead on to fortune . . ." She said she believed I had come to that point. I always thanked her for that encouragement—two Mississippi girls, clinging at crucial moments to the King James Bible and William Shakespeare.

I moved from Mrs. Souby's to an apartment in a shabby rundown rooming house on neighboring Highland Avenue. Someone I knew had lived in this family home and recommended me as a lodger. The apartment consisted of a large bedroom with one window and no view at all. There was a bed, a dresser, and a wardrobe for hanging up clothes. Part of the plastered ceiling was dislodged and hung dangerously over the bed. The bath was shared by three other apartments. A rickety outside stairway led up from the backyard into a small back porch, private for myself, where I had an old-fashioned wooden ice box. Twice a week, the ice man came, and left a large cube of ice fitted into its zinc-lined top compartment. I kept a small trunk out there and what with chairs from the kitchen, where I worked each day at a table, I could seat whoever came by to call.

I had some considerable acquaintance by now among the students at Vanderbilt. There was not only Edward, who since I had met him had been cheering me on, but others who were in touch with the events and characters in and around the department.

I found now more than ever the real joy of a writing life.

The formula is simple: Get up. Eat breakfast. Sit down to write. Spend a long morning writing. Feel the stops and starts, the flow that often will be meagre and hesitant, but on some magical days will run freely, never wanting to stop. Pause and look up to realize the clock says three o'clock and you are hungry. But now you are something else: you are happy.

I also had guys calling up for dates. Mostly the interest was friendly, not intense, though one was special enough to feel strongly about for many years. Except for the first few wonderful months, it was an unfortunate relationship to a man doomed by recurrent neurosis and other unhappy symptoms I was ill-equipped to judge. What with meetings and partings, it came and went through the years, as we each strove to recapture something of that first marvellous time.

But nothing could really cancel or weaken the delight I found when writing is emptying itself out, onto the waiting page. This is the way to live, I thought, glad to be aware of it.

So I continued through the summer of 1946. One day I got a call from Donald Davidson.

He knew of my decision to write. Previously, before I left the paper, I had come over to his office to speak to him about it. He was like a second father, one I feared but also by now, one that I felt that I could talk to, as I could never talk with my own. He knew how through the years of my studies and my return to Nashville, I had kept on trying to write fiction. But besides a draft of an early novel I had started at Belhaven, then abandoned, I had not showed him my efforts. When I confided my plans he thought things over in his own way. "You would do better to get married," he said sternly. But then he smiled. "I'm glad you're taking the plunge." It was enough of a blessing, and what I'd come for.

The morning he telephoned and said someone was in his office he wanted me to meet, I dropped everything without question and hastened there. The man in Davidson's office, waiting to meet me, was David Clay.

David Clay was exceptionally handsome, a dark-haired, solidly built, youthful looking man. He was excessively polite, wonderfully attentive to every chance remark. He had studied at Vanderbilt and was now an editor at Dodd Mead, a New York publishing house. After introducing us, Davidson picked up some books and left for class.

"Don says you are working on a novel," Clay said. "May I see it?" I said I didn't bring it with me, anyway it wasn't finished. Just the same he persisted, so we walked together back to Highland Avenue and I handed over to him about two hundred typed pages. I felt nervous about doing this. I had planned the novel carefully, and thought I had foreseen everything that was going to go into it, but as the characters had taken hold, unplanned events had occurred, while others might as well have fallen in the creek. At that point I had only the sketchiest idea about how the book would end. Suppose I couldn't "bring it off" at all? Still, a New York editor was waiting

down in Miss Geering's shabby parlor, and taking a long breath at the head of the stairs, I descended with my typescript, and gave it to him.

Then he was gone, brown envelope tucked beneath his arm. It seemed he was walking away, an all but total stranger, with a good part of my life. I am now astonished to remember that it was my only copy! I worked from drafts, each typed out with revisions to make it better than the one I gave up, but seeking out a copying machine in some university office was not a thing of a moment, and something told me the moment was now.

Before a month was out, I had good news. Dodd, Mead would offer a contract. I was invited to New York, to talk over the manuscript and discuss the closing chapters.

NEW YORK??!!

I telephoned home. The news did not excite them. They had thought I might be engaged.

In those days travel by Pullman was the way to go, and friends came down to put me on the train. We were a seedy bunch, having sat up till late hours on my little back porch drinking beer and celebrating, but I had got myself a new dress and suit, and hoped to revive on the train. Raymond Goldman had got a room for me at a hotel he knew. An appointment at the publisher's offices had been set up. Good wishes were flying over me like flags.

I reached old Pennsylvania Station, and immediately one thing I had never thought about occurred: nobody in New York could understand a word I said. I think that now in the media age, television has ironed many oddments out of deep South accents. But in those days, mine was so thick I couldn't even make the hotel clerk understand that I was reserved there. Sometimes I had to write down what I was saying. Some made a joke of it; others brusque and hurried, were merely annoyed. "What kinda lankidge is that!" Strangers teased: "Don't tell me where you came from!"

At the publishing offices on what was then Fourth Avenue I was presented to the head of the firm, a pleasant man named Edward Dodd, and a few of his assistants. It seemed they liked the book and thought that I could finish it ably. David Clay was to be my helpful editor. I little foresaw that I was beginning a relationship that would take primal importance in my life.

David was from Athens, Alabama, a town I have never seen, but which he spoke of as being much like my home town; and actually towns in the "deep South" are remarkably similar, especially in architecture, family attitudes, large numbers of relatives, and a high concentration of Anglo-Saxon descent. He had moved to New York some years before, and I often thought that I was calling back to his memory how life was in the place he had left. He was of course for that reason an excellent sounding board for my own characters and impressions as they surfaced in my writing. What might have been mysterious or wildly eccentric to a Yankee editor was clear as day to him.

David's important relationship at that time, and throughout his life, was with Robert Penn Warren. They had become friends as students at Vanderbilt, and since Warren now lived out of the south and was frequently in New York, their friendship continued. They were part of an inner circle, mainly Southern, who were fully conscious of the great effect of Vanderbilt on American writing, and who were involved in writing and publishing.

David had worked with Warren on his most successful novel, *All the King's Men.* This triumphant book, always to be regarded as a classic of our literature, had come blazing out a year or so before, just as I had begun to write my own novel. Everyone talked of it; everyone bought it and read it. Warren's name was golden everywhere. Blessed they who could talk about "Red."

Warren's novel had been dedicated to David and his wife Justine. He had had an important part in its editing.

Though David looked the part of the sophisticated New York editor, his character was so excessively upright he seemed an anomaly. Even back then I found him puzzling. Many of his remarks struck me as deriving from ideas that seemed far afield from anything familiar. I had to learn later that he and his wife and mother-in-law were devout Christian Scientists, the mother-in-law being a practitioner in that faith.

However, at the time I didn't know this. New York in itself was exciting, new, untried. It filled me with eagerness to know more about it. If David was trying to change many of my attitudes, I judged he was only giving helpful hints to someone who must obviously seem like a "country girl," awkward and unsure of what was right to do and say. The novel was the main thing for me anyway, and he gave me to understand this was true of him as well. I returned to Nashville and finished the manuscript without too much difficulty, meeting my contract deadline and taking my modest $500 advance with pride. There was a publication date ahead, there was the check in hand (the kind of proof my father would recognize), and there was the beautiful old home town, Carrollton, always the same, waiting. I returned home with the sense of a job done, and thought of myself as having worked hard and now wanting a much needed break.

Little did I dream what I would encounter.

I had always been able to discuss favored books or movies at least with my mother, and so without much trepidation I showed her my manuscript. It was not to my total surprise, but certainly I was disappointed when both my parents became terribly upset. Before I knew it I was the center of a major family crisis.

The book was called *Fire in the Morning.* The title now seems to me a very youthful choice, overblown and poetic, but back then I thought it was fine. It dealt with conflict between two families in a small Southern town. Who would think, I argued, that anyone we knew was actually in it? But, they asked, didn't everyone in it resemble somebody we knew? Who in

Carrollton, I inquired, would even bother to read it? Well, of course, they said, everyone would.

Furthermore, how did a well-brought-up girl from a strict Presbyterian household get to know words like "damn" and "hell," and others even less proper, including dreadful phrases like "God damn" and "Go to hell"? And how did this same proper girl learn anything at all about sex? To my parents' thinking my small triumph was ashes of shame poured on their heads. Years later, my cousin Jamie said that my father stayed home from work for weeks, ashamed to show his face in public. (Jamie exaggerates.)

Fire in the Morning had not yet appeared when I knew I would have to find work outside Carrollton. My love of Mississippi was such a constant with me that though I did write Louisiana State University at Baton Rouge, and one or two other schools, I had the strongest hopes of going to Ole Miss. I had actually wanted to go to university there when the family had decided on Belhaven. My brother had gone there, and my mother's brothers. It was less than fifty miles away and driving home would be easy. I got an immediate response, the interviews went well, and my course was set for the next few years, teaching as an instructor in freshman English and "sophomore lit."

My novel came out during my first year at Ole Miss. It was widely and well reviewed, with considerable excitement from the national press at finding a "new Southern talent." David Clay's able work had paid off, though he thought the advertising Dodd, Mead was willing to commit to the book was too scanty, and soon after, to my surprise, he left the firm. I was given to understand from various sources that he had done this in protest for the lack of support given my book. This created for me a feeling of indebtedness to David, and I determined to pay him back for his support whenever I could.

Oxford was constantly aware of William Faulkner. Whether in California or at Rowan Oak, he was a felt presence, a subject of endless gossip and speculation.

But the ways in which Oxford at large viewed Faulkner were a strange and wonderful carload. These have been written about often. For one thing, the town at large seemed full of derision and dislike. The stories of his contemptuous behavior were widely circulated, with whatever truth in them being constantly at stake: Southerners exaggerate. The "Count No 'Count" label was freely applied. His arrogant incompetence as university postmaster was fully noted. His tendency to drink limitless quantities of whisky, his long absences in Hollywood, his scandalous way of dress and shocking attitude toward. . . . It all became repetitious, a bore.

The Southern Literary Festival was still meeting annually, and the turn of Ole Miss to host it came round that very spring.

It was April, one of Mississippi's most ravishing spring times, a riot of bloom and fresh green and soft nights laced with scent. Ella Somerville would figure largely in this university occasion, for her old friend Stark Young was invited to speak.

"Mr. Stark," as I later came to call him, was originally from Como, Mississippi. He was, in fact, a distant cousin, deriving from another branch of the same Young family as my grandmother. He had gone to New York many years before, bent on a literary career, and had built a strong reputation as America's leading drama critic. But he was also a novelist, author of *So Red the Rose,* which to my mind still ranks as a fine novel. Others now consider it a romanticized version of Mississippi society; I prefer to think he wrote from established facts, out of genuine admiration for some great characters, the likes of whom he had personally known. His translations from Chekhov, which were performed in New York and elsewhere for years, perhaps still have a place. He had done the first English translation of Machiavelli's comedy *La Mandrogola.* He had travelled extensively, especially in Italy, had known Eleanor Duse, as well as Eugene O'Neill and a host of other names of note in the theatre.

Stark Young's speech at the festival was beyond a doubt the highpoint of that or any other year. He titled it "Oil From Strange Lamps." He wished to encourage young writers to read literature in the original languages, to find a second language (at least one) and come to know what its writers were actually saying in their own tongue. To illustrate he chose among others the Greek inscription at Thermopylae—"Go tell the Lacaedonians that we lie here still obeying the commands of the fathers"—also Francesca di Rimini's speech from Dante: "The book was to us a Galahad. In it we read no more that day." There were others from Virgil, from St. Jean of the Cross, from the French dramatists—I quite lose my way trying to remember them all. Like the whole audience, I sat enthralled. It was approaching noon of a fine April day, the windows open, the soft air entering. I even remember the dress I wore: it was lavender.

Also among us was John Crowe Ransom, whom I had heard once lecturing at Ward Belmont. I was delighted that someone had sent him my novel, and that he had read it and sought me out to compliment me on it.

Ransom was formidable in a way one was liable to miss, it was so quiet and understated. To look at him, a small well-brushed man, you would have thought him a high school principal, or some long-time academic dean in a minor college. He flew high in those days as a great poet and a leading voice among American critics, but showed nothing of the arrogant manner he might have acquired. His lecture, though hardly enthralling, came with the starch of authority, while Stark Young, though scarcely arrogant either, had a theatrical bent, and his speech came over to us as a thrilling performance.

That afternoon Ella gave her reception. It was in especial honor of Stark Young but the other festival guests were invited, and so was I.

Such an afternoon could never come again. We came in small groups up the steps to her white two-story Victorian house on Fifth Street. We were swept at once into the greetings, the good feelings, the murmurous talk.

William Faulkner, while he had declined to attend any of the program, had accepted his old friend's invitation and had actually appeared. Dressed in a tweed jacket with leather patches at the elbows, he stood in one corner silently throughout, smoking a pipe, holding a glass but drinking nothing. He was a small, handsome man, his greying hair youthfully thick, his moustache a becoming touch. What he most resembled was a portrait, an introspective study of himself.

That day he neither moved nor spoke to anyone, and most everybody was wise enough not to try speaking to him. I have always wondered at the irony of it—a man so taciturn, so devoid of the gregarious nature native to Southerners, moving on to the world stage. Was he ever mistaken as typical of what we normally are? Stark Young remarked on his behavior later. "He hides behind a wall of silence," he said. "I hide behind a wall of words."

In the after glow of favorable attention to my novel, I was ready to find an even more expanding world. I never dreamed of leaving my roots, and the world which Oxford had generously made accessible to me was something to cherish and return to.

Still, my feelings nagged at me. They whispered that the South drew one continually inward toward its motherly bosom. This inwardness of regard had been for Eudora Welty and many others a wondrous source. But for me it just didn't work that way. I did not want to deny, discard, leave behind, or denigrate any of my upbringing. But I had to recognize that I had a seeking nature, something that related me to others of my kin—to my mother's brothers far-flung in military service, not the least to my father's brother, the long lost Willie, who had simply disappeared, setting out to discover—what?

Two years before, a dear friend Carolyn Pugh, who wrote me steadily, had gotten an appointment to go to Europe to work in the American team with the Nuremberg trials! She had been employed in Washington and had learned of the chance to apply for secretarial work in the cadres who were needed as assistants in that process. Also a seeker, more courageous than I, she had prepared herself as best she might, and set out by boat with others who were to work for the American team in Germany. Her letters were filled with details of her adventures. She not only experienced Germany with all its post-war difficulties, but also had visited Paris, Switzerland, and Italy.

My friend Edward McGehee was now in Paris, working on a novel and meeting many of the writers and others who now felt Europe was opening to them once more. It was certainly cheap, with the dollar at a great advantage against foreign currencies.

I had made a little money on my book, which had gone into a second printing, and I had, as usual, saved up a little from my teaching. It seemed the moment for a real leap across the ocean. I searched out ways and means. As summer came nearer my head was full of plans.

ADRIENNE SHARP

A Short Season

May 1995 Laurel Avenue, West Hollywood
She was sitting there when he got back from the party, which had been a bad party, one in which he had not been his good self. He had stumbled through it feeling both hideous and superior, and now he was home, where it was dark, and Jules was there on the couch and he hadn't seen her in three years. Her face caused him the shock it always caused him when he had seen it after an absence, though whether it was because it was the face he loved or the face of a movie star he was never sure. He knelt before her and put his hands on that face, in that hair, but he wouldn't kiss her: she would taste how much he had been drinking, his tongue, his teeth, his gums, soaked in the alcohol she hated and feared and because of which she had left him. But then he had to kiss her, had to put his hands beneath her clothing and bring her body out, had to listen to her as he held his head between her thighs. He was too drunk to fuck her, and too frightened. He was Alexander Konstantin, once the young star of the Bolshoi Ballet, temporarily an American dancing comet, an American movie actor, now 45 years old and nothing at all. He lay his head on the leather sofa at her finish and the street lights of West Hollywood cut their bodies in two—her limbs white, her torso and face hidden. His hair was blond and long; he was so tall his legs were thrust beneath the coffee table to the edge of the Persian rug he'd bought in a Paris flea market when he toured there with American Ballet Theater two years ago.This was Los Angeles. This was Los Angeles, it was supposed to be far away and full of lotus blossoms you could scoop up off the street and stuff in your mouth at any time, any time a moment surfaced you wished to forget.

May 1968 Kirov Ballet School, Leningrad
In the corner of the studio stood a watering can and Alexander grabbed it, ran in big circles around the worn floor, wetting it down until Pushkin said, "enough." Alexander stomped on the big clumps of glowing resin in the box and then stood before Pushkin on the center stage mark, the taped X. Pushkin clapped his hands, gently, and the rehearsal pianist began a stripped-down, plinking version of the male variation from the Act III "Sleeping Beauty" adagio, Alexander's variation for the graduating class

performance. He was almost 18, but already developing a style, in the studio and out, wearing his hair long, wearing his American blue jeans and his American cowboy boots, his shirts unbuttoned low, but none of this mattered in the studio, where he worshipped Pushkin, worked for his approval, as they all did. In the studio he was a boy, moving his feet, his hands, his head, as Pushkin told him, impersonating a prince, the power of a prince as it was revealed through the slicing entrechats, the controlled, almost molasses-like quality of the perfectly balanced pirouette. His feet were bad, still sloppy, almost flapping at times; occasionally his limbs shot out too wildly. Pushkin worked quietly, with his hands, with his soft laced shoes, correcting it all, he saw everything, he was a master, the most famous, most beloved teacher of the older boys at the school. Alexander would be moving to Moscow next month, and now, sweating in his white tee shirt, he wanted to embrace his teacher, his god, but saw in the studio door window Vasiliev's face. Vasiliev would be staying in Leningrad, joining the Kirov. Pushkin coached him, too. Alexander turned away. His own father had died when Alexander was 7, in the train depot in Riga, where he worked.

November 1972 Savoy Hotel, Moscow
Katya was a soloist in the Bolshoi, not a principal dancer like he, and she liked to drink, like he. The bar was crowded, and he had her at a table against the wall. He could barely hear her, but he could see she had that look on her face. She was difficult. She was difficult. He liked that about her. She was wearing the dress he had bought her, black market. She looked better dressed than in the studio, better in the mink hat, the black heels, the cigarette held between the ring finger and the third, looking at him, ready to pick him apart, to crush him with her words. She was smart. He was an oaf. Even naked, she looked fierce. She would fight him, hit him, when they fucked. It was only when dressed down like a doll in her pink tights, her tutu, her hair scooped back, that she looked bland, uninteresting, not at all like herself, and it was only then that he didn't love her. Of course, she knew that.

July 1974 Sverdlov Square, Moscow
On his motorcycle he took off down Petrovka, away from the square, from the theater, going 120 kilometers an hour. His leather jacket split open and cracked like bat wings beneath his arms and against his spine. He could barely see, his hair had grown so long. It made a fury around him. During rehearsal the word had spread: Vasiliev had defected in London while the Kirov was on tour. Alexander drove away from the old city into the pillars of concrete office buildings and apartments north of the Kremlin. If he looked back, he could see it, the cathedrals with their yellow caps, stooped, against the vast modernity, stooped like old men.

February 1978 Bolshoi Theater, Moscow, Performance of "Le Corsaire"
The braided cords of the costume chafed his bare chest by the end of the ballet. He was now wet, his hair stinging as it slapped his face during his final variation. He was the lion with the long Roman face, the American hair. With the last twisting turn his arms whipped the finish into something Spanish, something Tartar, and then Galina was out from the wings for the coda, so quick it seemed seconds until he was stretched on the floor at her feet for the final posture, back arched, arm raised, head in its feathered turban thrown back to gaze at her, both of them triumphant. The curtain dropped, tremendous, resplendent, red and gold, hammers, sickles and stars, wheat, fleur de lis, fringes, and Cyrillic lettering: CCCP. They took their last call in front of it, before the two thousand stamping, cheering people who came to sup at his table every night.

January 1979 JFK International Airport, New York
He could see the plane, swollen and gray, as he paced. On the tarmac below it, photographers, U.S. officials, Party escorts. The translator was telling him, "She's saying ëno,' she's still saying ëno,'" and he grabbed the ledge of the window to stare at the grounded plane, cordoned off, isolated on the airfield, as if with his stare he could climb into the bird and find the smoking section where Katya sat with her sulky, determined face, her lips framing that contrary Nyet. In their old apartment, the walls pasted with old newspapers, the phonograph playing, they had discussed this, they had discussed this. What was she doing now. He stared. He saw the legs and asses of the girls he had fucked, the girls from the corps, the soloists, the girls he could not stop fucking no matter what she said, no matter what she did. Back in Moscow, she would be awarded a medal, a dacha, she would be a heroine for choosing the motherland over her husband. It was a brilliant maneuver. He had to roar.

March 1979 Metropolitan Opera House, New York, Performance of "Swan Lake"
Her tutu was stiff and just an inch or so longer than the Russian cut he was used to; it threw off his partnering just that much. Cynthia was being a bitch about it, her thickly made up face beneath its crown was unforgiving. He was sweating, the lights were so bright and the stage so flat, and Cynthia was heavy and particular. The hands had to be just so, here and nowhere else; for finger pirouettes, the arm raised just to this angle, there were a million things to remember. The front was black, the wings full of young company dancers, some in street clothes, come to catch his debut. It felt like a hundred of them there, packed in. The stage was cleared for his Act II solo, and he ran down to the center mark, long blond hair flying, taller and leaner than most dancers, so his feet weren't refined, his arms stiff, he had jump, and when he did the wide circle of barrel jetes, he heard the quiet audience out front rouse itself delicately, and he thought, I traveled all this way for that, fuck you.

October 1979 W. 54th Street, New York
He lay on the sofa with his Stolichnaya, his divorce papers, his Tchiakovsky on the stereo. The music was so beautiful, so Russian to him, and the sky outside his apartment was so dark. He found himself longing for Moscow, for his wife, now his ex-wife, for his mother, for his teacher, for the buildings and streets and studios of memory. He loved his vodka, it was all those things he missed brought inside of him, and he was lonely, he hadn't fucked anybody in months; he'd been afraid, some reticence, the language, the bodies, the manners were all so different. He was listening to Eugene Onegin. To sigh and sigh and sigh, as if I'd lost my mind.

May 1981 Metropolitan Opera House, ABT Gala, Performance of "Rodeo"
In chaps, spurs, hats, they squared off for the centerpiece of the de Mille ballet: the competition. Two Russian cowboys from the American west. John Kriza and Harold Lang, originators of the roles and two real Americans, had appeared in their tuxedos, done a few signature steps, and bowed to youth; Alexander and Vasiliev were the third generation of dancers to inherit these roles, and the face of this generation was the red hammer and sickle. Vasiliev was a tiny man, further diminished by the western gear, made faintly buffoonish; with his long limbs, his big American smile, the finger on the brim of the cowboy hat, Alexander owned the rodeo, and by extension the stage. When Alexander let Vasiliev dance, the audience waited with him, for him. At the music's crescendo, Alexander fell to his knees, put his hat into the air where it spun like a lasso, like an American eagle, spread his arms to the catwalk above the beautiful American stage, and the audience gave him his reward: you are the beloved.

June 1982 American Ballet Theater Offices, New York
Vasiliev would not look at him. He was dressed, he had the advantage. Alexander was in his damp tee shirt, holding his towel, his bag, he had just finished class. The office was ornate, newly decorated, a bust of Tchiakovsky on the desk. Vasiliev had become director of the company two months ago. Almost immediately the cast lists had changed. Alexander had not danced. Vasiliev was talking to him in Russian—there were not enough parts, there were so many boys, he himself still had to dance, there were many good companies in America, it took a while to find one's place. What other place? Other companies did Balanchine, modern, pop. This was the one place in America for a prince. Alexander thrust his face to Vasiliev's. "You were always afraid of me. And now you can toss me away like a potato peel."

September 1984, Shrine Auditorium, Los Angeles, Konstantin and Stars of the American Ballet

It was a cavernous, concrete space and they had sold only a quarter of the house. It would be a hideous matinee, and it had required, like every date, unbelievable machinery to negotiate and set. He propped open the stage door with a box and the Los Angeles heat immediately immobilized him. He smoked, squinting and cringing in the brightness. Behind him, the ten dancers he'd hired dressed communally; he had the private dressing room, with its white ledge, its black mirror, the folding chair, and a manager, who carried around with her spread sheets, shipping estimates, and payroll documents, which she was constantly making him look at and approve. His technique had become spotty; he was too distracted to give the instrument the focus it required. He sucked his cigarette, squatted in his American blue jeans.

September 1984 Bryn Mawr Drive, Hollywood Hills

"I've shocked you. I'm sorry."

Jules' voice was low and thick and in the dark he could see only her luminous dress, white and strapless, the one she had worn backstage to meet him. It was a bold dress. She shut the door to her car. The air around them was riven, crazed, with honeysuckle and eucalyptus. They stood on the gravel path before her house, elaborate as a basilica. It had, on him, the same humbling effect. She was rich, and famous, and she had just propositioned him.

"You have a beautiful face," she said. "Camera ready."

She put his fingers into her mouth.

March 1985 Dorchester County, Pennsylvania, Movie Set

In the bright sun of the Pennsylvania countryside, he felt good. To the left he could see the two-story barn, to the right, the loop of the hill as it tipped upward. He would turn his back to the confusion of the set, block it out as he had blocked out the chaos in the wings of every performance he'd ever danced, and he was simply there, an Amish man flytrapped in the 20th century. And it was better than dancing because you could do it over and over, getting it right, the moment didn't fly away from you as it did in the theater, and he knew when he got it right, it would appear that way, over and over, on the screen, for as long as anyone cared to look at it.

July 1985 Los Angeles, Johnny Carson Show

The cult of the self was a marvelous thing, he felt, as he looked out at the studio audience assembled to admire him. The lights were up because he was supposed to embrace this audience, as opposed to the movie audience he could only imagine, or the ballet audience he was supposed to ignore. He was, here, under the golden lights with them, the lover of an American movie star, a movie star now, himself, in his unbuttoned shirt, his cowboy boots. The questions were about his defection, his days in Russia, his life with Jules, his impressions of Los Angeles. With his terrible English he

explored the tendrils of celebrity. In Moscow he was celebrated for his prowess as a dancer, which was a difficult, tedious thing to maintain. Here, fame was about who you kissed, what you wore, how pretty was your face. It was so easy.

January 1986 The Russian Tea Room, New York
The four defectors drank. Nureyev, Konstantin, Vasiliev, Panov. The room was red. The tables around them were bare. Theirs alone had layers of cloths, and many glasses. Nureyev sat on the banquette, elevated slightly above them. He pointed to Alexander with his fist full of bread and caviar, "Movie star." Alexander laughed and watched Nureyev eat. Such a king. King Louis of the Paris Opera, now. Alexander tipped back his head and took a shot of Stolichnaya. Vasiliev was staring at him when he set his glass down on the table. The two of them had not spoken all night. He growled at Vasiliev, stuffed a napkin in his mouth and shook his head, a coyote tearing flesh. Vasiliev looked away. It was 4 A.M. and Alexander no longer felt civil. He let the napkin drop, shoved back his chair. They were all old men now. Panov was almost bald, his dark curling hair vaporized by the long wait for his exit visa. He was the only emigre among them. He lost his position at the Kirov, his big apartment. Year after year, day after day, he had done a barre in his in-laws' small apartment, with his beautiful wife, the two of them scraping the floors of the place raw. By the time he got his seat on the Aeroflot, he was 40 years old. Bad fortune had stolen his chance in the west. Nureyev and Vasiliev were pigs, snuffling up more than their share of the world's spoils, dividing the continents and the big companies between them, lords of the dance.

February 1987 Laurel Avenue, West Hollywood
From Riga they had sent him her medallion and her wedding ring, all she had. He was drunk. He was lying on the floor of his bedroom closet. His mother had aged early, becoming a babushka with glasses in her fifties, dead at sixty. He held her pieces of metal in his hands and smelled the polluted gulf, the sweet mestinsh he'd loved to drink after supper, the pews in the synagogue on Peitaras Street he'd visited with Katya. He'd brought his bride on a single visit to Riga because his mother could not make the 14 hour train journey to Moscow. She's Jewish! his mother had said when she saw her. Yes. Yes, he'd shrugged. So? His mother had stared at him. She'd given him his first ballet lessons on Kalka Street; later, at the State school on Aspazia he'd met Vasiliev, and they had begun, as boys, their annihilating 25 year competition. He put the medallion around his neck, the wedding band on his pinkie, crossed his arms over his chest. She had been buried last week in Rainus Cemetery, in the old city, given a spot there because of him, because she was the mother of a Latvian artist, not her fault he was now so disgraced. He looked up at the row of clothing bags that held the costumes he had had tailored for himself—all the finery of princes.

June 1989 Rancho Mirage, Betty Ford Substance Abuse Treatment Center
"Leave me. Leave me, then," he said. He was rolling his clothes into his satchel that stood open, stiff as a doctor's bag on the bed, the narrow bed like a prison cot, the whole place was a prison! where you had to pose as if meek, as if penitent, as if you had been a terrible boy. He'd had enough. He was checking out. She stood at the window, smoking, against regulation herself, which he almost, but did not quite, point out to her. Her face was terribly sad, not angry like Katya's, and she would not rail back at him, as Katya would, fists and nails. And so, slowly, his terrible anger wound down, until finally he sat on the bed as stiff as his neighbor the satchel, as empty as it was full, and said, "Jules, leave me."

January 1991 Burbank, Movie Set
"I liked the part."

He stumbled about the set of his laboratory, his face ravaged and dark, his hair tufted and teased, his whole visage a parody of madness, he was the madman of the waxworks! and he cracked test tubes and threw dummy body parts as the cameras filmed, this time doing the close-ups. It was an easy role, it would not be reviewed. He had been good in the first movies he made because of beginner's luck, but he knew he had no technique, no training, no craft, and soon he would be found out, and he would stumble. Better to stumble here, over the top, in his ridiculous getup, where, beyond criticism, he could clutch the torso of a wax maiden or spit into the camera's eye.

April 1993 Doctor's Office, Beverly Hills
The kidneys, the liver were plush, swollen black velvet on the screen. The probe moved over his abdomen, over the body that sheathed it all like a terrible lie. The doctor was talking: it was almost too late. No, it would take too long. A white cloth covered his genitals and legs, the powerful legs of a dancer from the Bolshoi Ballet; uncovered lay the beautiful head and arms of a dancer from the Bolshoi Ballet. In one American moment, the ultrasound had exhumed the corpse of his father, which had stunk of vodka even as they had buried it. It was a painless death, in a chair in the station master's room in the Riga depot, his life unwinding like the clocks on the wall that told the time in Riga, Leningrad, Moscow, Stalingrad, in every city and zone of Russia. His father had his eye on the world as he left it.

October 1994 Sunset Boulevard, West Hollywood
The store windows were black with wigs, leather, rock and roll attire, and he slid along them in the blinding heat of Los Angeles in October. The pavement was a white flash; the car exhaust burned his flesh and clothes. He crouched beneath the lowered sky, lumbering the few blocks from his manager's office to his apartment. His shirt flapped, his hair was damp, greasy. It had been a few days. He stank. He had a roll of hundreds in his

pocket. He went into Tower Records and shoveled CD's into his basket: Tchiakovsky, Adam, Stravinsky, Debussy, Glazounov, Mendelssohn, Liszt, Ravel, Delibes, Chopin, Prokofiev, Shostakovich. French, German, Russian—above all Russian. None of them American. He knew all the ballets that went to this music, every goddam step, all the staging. He was not a lion, but an encyclopedia. He had given his touring company a repertory by setting the ballets himself, from memory. The vodka had taken away everything, carved away everything else until there was just this white light in the center, very clear: just the dance.

May 1995 Laurel Avenue, West Hollywood

After Jules left, he lay on the sofa where she had lain, the leather already cold in the minute it took her to get to the door. He tapped the stereo remote: "Sleeping Beauty." The Rose Adagio. The precision of the movements, the clockwork-like transfer of Aurora's hand from one bachelor's to another's as she held an attitude en pointe. He remembered the studio at the Bolshoi, the clock on the wall, his legs in woolen tights, trying to keep his muscles warm as they all watched Svetlana struggle for balance with the four suitors. Every day—class, rehearsal, performance. Every class—barre, center, adagio, allegro, turns, jumps, reverence. Every barre—plies, tendus, rond de jambs, developes, grand battements. He needed that order, that discipline, the discipline of class, of ballet, of the Party, of Russia itself. He would return to it. He would return. The plane would approach from the west, soar over the Moscow River, beneath its metal belly St. Anne's church, the Kremlin with its golden spires. The light was northern, thin. It was winter. It was snowing. There was snow everywhere. The plane would land in the square. He had on his boots, his fur hat. He went slowly up the steps of the opera house. They were heaped with snow. His arms, his legs, were wet. His body stirred on the sofa. The pillars and pediments were unruly white shapes. A sudden flurry took his sight away, but in that moment before it was gone he saw what was ahead of him.

JOHN VINCENT

Full moon and plenty

Full moon and plenty will change, plenty; in fact, right now
Down the street: empty chairs circle a hatful of cards.
Plenty and dogs all over the block arch in corners
Like uncomfortable furniture — you may not notice
But your cells are pulling down membranes, calling junior
In for the night. I myself am remembering a time
When the moon could pull scalps from my heart. A huge red moon
As I drove from my parents' house made me wonder:
"When does the thing stop. When does the pause come. When do I
And all the springs gears and blinkers fall to bits at once,
As if, concentrating on how to work, we
Utterly forgot." I must have recourse to this moon.
If the world ends, remember, there's sure as I can be
Whole oceans of milk up there, whole oceans, cows flown over.

Arthur Rimbaud (seated)

The way that box-headed bird
With a man shoved up its ass
Could transmute the church's dingy reds
To dignified grays amazed him.

Fading out to be squared off
Photos were rooms
Heated by the furnaces of occupants.

The horse urinating
Arranged its bulk on its strong axis of piss
Just as the gaze steadies the head.

He imagined distracting captions:
Latin-Prize Winner
Draft Horse.

God taught him a good effect.
Dusk and horizon each, another.

At seventeen finally, his pale irises
Soaked through to the background.

NICK BARRETT

Late-Night Corporeal

By three a.m. she was home from the night shift,
and shortly thereafter, so was I. Half-stoned from pot
and a vicious blend of unmeasured booze, I wore

my breath like a spiked emblem for her to see.
I wanted to be bad-ass, to show my mother
that a man is what I would become at all cost,

but she seemed to forgive me for being like that,
wanting even to know how the night had gone
with a girl whom I would love for years to come.

At the kitchen table, she kicked her shoes
into the nook by the back door, and shimmied out
of her thigh-length hose. I could smell fried food

in her hair, and when she poured me a cup
of strong coffee, out of habit almost, she asked
if I wanted anything else. Mother, of course

I did, but how does a boy ask or even tell
of the broken-down mattress he'd discovered
with his girlfriend under Brush Creek Bridge,

of the half-conscious bums who returned
to their roost to find two bodies, shirtless,
and skin-to-skin? I wanted to know how I should

touch this girl—her young chest not so different
from my own, her perfume that tasted
bitter when I kissed her skin. But how does a boy

ask that? Maybe three a.m. is the right time,
when the unsatiated lovers are going strong,
and the lonely insomniac turns the final page

of his all-night novel and reads Be gentle.
Dream. Maybe that is the right time for a mother
to walk with her son to the living room

and sit for a while on the couch.
When I laid my chest across her lap,
she pulled my shirt to my shoulders,

and ran one hand sleepily through my hair,
and with the other, she swept her fingertips
rhythmically back and forth across the skinny flat

of my back. I think of how easily she might have
dome something else: said nothing, or delivered
the proselyte's diatribe about the tempting evils

of flesh. I think of how easily she might have
dismissed my awkward self, growing unrehearsed
into its skin. More Eros than Logos my mother

loved the body and saw no shame
in loving her son that way, and for the better part
of an hour she talked quietly about leaving

work while she ran her hands across my back,
trying to teach me her simple lessons:
cadence, empathy, pleasure without sin.

The Night Dave Attempts to Kill Himself We Wrap up Another Typical 2-12 Season

We were the worst in the city. To lose to us
was to generate enough self-hate and shame
to last a person a lifetime. As screwed up

as most adolescents and with only five guys
in our small school who wanted to play ball,
we could never compete. So when Dave jumped

out at the light at 89th and told us we would remember
this day, we were immediately down to four,
our crazy, often-in-foul-trouble forward dashing

across the expanse of Holmes Park because
we never addressed him by his name. The Colonel
we called him because he refused to remove

an army trench coat he claimed was a present
from his absentee father. Even during warm-ups
he'd wear it. His spindly, white legs shot out

from under his khaki robe as he did lay-ups,
and when we had to play, he would stand
solemnly for a moment and the fold it

like an American flag before he slipped it
into his bag. And our coach, a typical cliché
himself, hurled his insults as adeptly as he

must have hurled grenades during his "tour,"
and refused to call anybody anything but subordinate.
His scurrilous attacks were infamous. They would rise

in intensity and pitch until he began to stutter a bit,
banging like a mad piston on a single, verbal note
that seemed to epitomize and mechanize the undescribable

loathing he harbored for Dave. But losing was always
simpler and less violent. We could run no offensive sets—
a series of picks that required impeccable timing

to keep the refrain of our bodies moving. We would not find
our best shooter (we rarely did) open on the baseline,
nor our center, a.k.a. Baby Killer, posted up down low.

Instead, we four subordinates would character build,
learn to play through the difficult position our teammate
had put us in. About the time our big-man set himself for the jump,

and Chris wiped the dust off his shoes, Dave had
miraculously managed to grab hold of the Holmes
Park Tower rungs. Parks and Rec couldn't figure it out.

I think he stood on the shoulders of another like him,
some guy in a half-T who would do anything for a little
camaraderie or a good, stiff drink. So while Dave

scaled the tower, Steve fouled out, purposely,
and went home. Lindsey in the last few seconds collected
enough to send him packing early in the second half,

which left Chris and me, outnumbered and stunned
by the strong sun that poured in through the west-facing
panes of the gym. It seems unlikely, but I like to think

Dave was stunned by the same sun, unaware of the portentous
name graffitied behind him and how poorly executed it was—
the last two letters smashed together, the arc of the "b"

distended and much larger than the other characters so that
it read Bolo instead of Bob. I like to think that I would have
walked out of that blinding light sooner if I had known how.

There was no contemplative arc to Dave's body as he fell,
no wild fans to last his memory the rest of his life, and the only thing
that snapped like a clean shot through the net was his back

and our faith in what we were taught: to make excuses
for our losses, and to be damned sure we passed the pain down.

CORINNE LEE

Poena

My pain began like a love affair. Dozens of times each day, a tingle shot from skull crown to fingertips. The feeling was provocative, delicious. Bored in stalled traffic, long lines, or professional conferences, I would half-smile as the electricity rocketed. I was distracted by the greed of my senses, blinded by the tingle as if by a new beau: I never questioned its source, character, or fate.

After a few months, the tingle uncloaked itself. My hands and forearms felt as if they were simultaneously being stripped of skin, compressed in vises, and immersed in hot oil. Only short-sleeved clothing was tolerable because cuffs chafed like sandpaper. Whenever able to do so, I slathered cream on my arms and bundled them in icy, wet towels. Years later I read a description of pain that echoed what I felt. Doctor S. W. Mitchell, in 1872, relates the condition of a soldier who was shot in the elbow during the American Civil War:

> He keeps his hand wrapped in a rag, wetted with cold water, and covered with oiled silk . . . . Moisture is more essential than cold. Friction outside of the clothes, at any point of the entire surface, "shoots" into the hand, increasing the burning [pain] . . . he will allow no one to touch his skin, save with a wetted hand . . . . He describes the pain "as if a rough bar of iron were thrust to and fro through the knuckles, a red-hot iron placed at the juncture of the palm and [thumb], with a heavy weight on it, and the skin was being rasped off [the] finger ends."

* * * * *

We are silent and unrecognizable, but we are legion. At least twenty-five million Americans suffer from chronic pain, approximately one in every ten. Ordinarily, pain is the body's miraculous warning signal, more effective than a bullet-train pony express. Notification of a skin prick flies to the brain at ninety-eight feet per second, and soreness and burning are telegraphed at six-and-a-half feet per second. Pain is a protective message that is essential to our survival—twinges in the arm frequently presage a

heart attack, and aching accompanies a broken bone. Yet chronic pain, the aimless ghost in the machine, has no long-term vital function. One of my doctors compared it to a burglar alarm that, after serving its initial purpose, cannot be silenced.

The longer the alarm screeches, the more havoc it wreaks. The entire body is affected by pain—blood pressure, heart, and respiration rates increase; pupils dilate; and sweat glands pump. The stress of chronic pain that continues for six months or more transforms the mind as well, often permanently. The brain's limbic system, which controls emotions, and its reticular activating network, which governs arousal, become suppressed from the strain. Sufferers of chronic pain usually have decreased immunity, are depressed and irritable, lose interest in sex, and tire easily. They also experience impaired production of natural painkillers, such as endorphins, which they especially need. Over time, the brains of some persons with chronic pain begin to misinterpret pain messages. Such people are acutely, unreasonably sensitive to minor injuries; a bruise can feel like a split bone.

Chronic pain is an insatiable beast. Irritated nerves at the injury site continually agitate surrounding tissue, triggering muscle spasms that produce additional pain by tugging on the joints, ligaments, and tendons. Most people with chronic pain also have "pain bracing syndrome." Normally, the body protectively, instinctively tightens muscles that surround a painful area. Because muscles in a chronic pain site are constantly contracted, they become weak and rigid—and generate more pain.

An insanity of the body, chronic pain spawns desperation. The extreme treatments endured by chronic pain patients are ghoulish. Drug pumps are permanently implanted next to spines; electrified acupuncture needles are attached to pain trigger points; nerves are sectioned, sheared, burned, frozen, and injected with toxins that destroy their fibers; adrenal gland cells are transplanted into spinal cords; and needles are pushed through holes drilled in the cranium.

*****

Within a year, my pain had become constant, and sleeping pill slumber was my only refuge. Like a fox in a trap, I wanted escape at any price, even if it meant gnawing off each arm at the elbow. I quickly progressed from general practitioners to medical specialists, who adopted me as their darling. A half-dozen diagnoses were collected: causalgia, fybromyalgia, Lyme disease, lupus, arthritis, and even, briefly, cancer. Everyone yet no one knew the cause of my pain.

Baffled, my doctors prescribed a cornucopia of drugs. Steroids reduced my inflammation but caused water retention. Diuretics were therefore necessary, yet they produced leg cramps due to lost potassium. A potassium supplement was required. Two anti-inflammatory medications—

one kosher, one experimental—decreased swelling. They also scoured my stomach. The painkillers I constantly popped irritated my digestive system, too, albeit indirectly; I became a coffee addict to counteract the brain fog they created, and my gastric juices did not take kindly to the caffeine. Ulcer pills thus became essential. These dominoes continued to fall until I was taking a fistful of capsules and tablets every four hours.

As the years passed without accurate diagnosis, my pain flourished and became incarnate. Fingers began to twist like corkscrews, and the lacy, minute wrinkles on my hands vanished. The nerves in my arms stopped speaking to the muscles, which began to shrink. One day, while picking up the telephone, I noticed that the ball of my thumb—a previously unnoticed muscle—had become a concave skin flap. I began to lose sensation in my palms, and my arms became twig-like and feeble. I needed hand and forearm braces to brush my teeth, to button my clothes. Soon I wore braces all day. Eventually, I also had to wear them while I slept.

Anxiety and depression consumed me, even while I was unconscious. My husband had difficulty sleeping because I frequently muttered and cried during dreams. In one repeated nightmare, my forearms, inexplicably severed, suddenly dropped to the ground. I was in a public place; bus stops and theaters were favored sets. Blood seeped from the open ends of the fallen limbs, and cut tendons writhed like snakes. Aghast onlookers stared. Humiliated, I scrambled to screw my forearms to my elbows. This was of course unsuccessful because I had no hands.

My pain began when I was twenty-six.

* * * * *

By the time I turned twenty-eight, my personality had begun to be sculpted by my pain. Relentlessly interior, chronic pain inevitably makes its host a loner, a wolf of the steppes. I became guarded, circumspect, and humorless. This sea change affected my appearance. Strangers stopped me almost every day and ordered me to smile. "Having a bad day?" many asked. Slowly, my taste in reading altered, too. Once a fan of whimsical short stories and of passionate, indiscriminate Romantic-Period poetry, I became most moved by the works of contemporary writers intimately acquainted with physical suffering—Andre Dubus and his paralysis, Reynolds Price and his spinal tumor, Flannery O'Connor and her lupus, Stanley Elkin and his multiple sclerosis.

I also began to lie through evasion. People blanched when, each time they asked about my pain, I told them I still felt horrible. I therefore stopped telling the truth. "I'm hanging in there," I mumbled instead of being honest—it seemed to satisfy. If I did attempt to describe my pain to others, inevitably, I became frustrated. One cannot ever communicate the intricacies of pain because we have limited language for physical distress. *Poena*, the Latin root of "pain," means "penalty," and perhaps our fear of the lash has prevented us from developing vocabulary to describe it.

The perverse wisdom that lasting pain generates is impossible to communicate, too. Unable to escape consciousness of the body, people with chronic pain are constantly reminded of mortality; their end has become their present. My chronic pain therefore makes me feel ancient, more jaded than friends decades older.

Frida Kahlo understood. Referring to the accident in which she was skewered on the steel rod of a crushed train, she wrote, "Now I live in a painful planet, transparent as ice; but it is as if I had learned everything at once in seconds . . .. I became old in instants and today everything is bland and lucid." Frustrated and isolated by her chronic pain, Kahlo turned her body inside out in her art. Her paintings commemorate her pain and thirty-two operations—her chest or back is often shown ripped open so that her severed spine can acquire an audience, and her heart is usually depicted as being wrapped with thorns. At the end of Kahlo's life, the incision from a surgery did not heal. She delighted in showing friends the open wound, where they could at last see her broken spine and better comprehend her misery.

*****

Two years of doctor roulette made me so cynical that I decided to diagnose myself. After hours at a university medical library reading arcane articles about hand and forearm pain, I decided that I had carpal tunnel syndrome, a repetitive motion injury involving damage to nerves that run through a tunnel of ligaments in the wrist. Over the years, my fingers and palms had begun to hurt more than my forearms; the symptoms of carpal tunnel syndrome—tingling, numbness, and pain in the hands—partially matched what I felt. And because I was an writer, editor, and near-constant computer user, it seemed logical that I would have a repetitive stress disorder.

Yet the doctor of the moment was doubtful. He decided to conduct nerve tests. At the hospital, an intern inserted needles into my nerves; the needles were attached to wires that would conduct electricity into my neck, shoulders, and arms. Each wire coiled from a computer that would calculate how quickly the current traveled through my nerves (damaged nerves transmit electricity slower than healthy ones). I concentrated on a fat spider in the ceiling's corner as the intern repeatedly shocked me—with each surge, my arms lifted from the table and shuddered. The computer spat rolls of data showing nerve deterioration so severe that my doctor did not believe the results and insisted the tests be repeated. They were, and produced even worse numbers. He agreed that I probably had carpal tunnel syndrome and scheduled two surgeries, one on each hand.

However, the surgeries—in which my palms and wrists were slit, ligaments cut to free the swollen nerves, and the nerves separated from scar tissue—were not successful. They temporarily took a slight edge off my

pain, perchance only because I was forced to rest a few weeks. My desperation became explosive. One morning while wracked with medicine-induced diarrhea, coiled on the bathroom floor, I came to the belated conclusion that the medical profession had not solved my problem. I melodramatically flushed my drugs down the toilet, but after three bottles' worth, the bowl overflowed, and I was surrounded by a slush of candy-colored pills. I tossed the remainder in the trash and embarked on a clichéd path: I began a strict macrobiotic diet; acquired an acupuncturist, a herbalist, and a chiropractor; and practiced yoga and meditation.

I began to feel marginally better, but the pain still howled. So I joined a pain clinic, where doctors who specialize in pain, angologists, treat it with an interdisciplinary approach—they believe that pain can be treated emotionally and psychologically as well as physically. A century ago, Ivan Pavlov, who fed his famous dogs immediately following electric shocks, proved angologists correct by establishing the power of mental conditioning over pain (the animals would salivate and wag their tails in response to the jolts because they anticipated a meal). And of course there is the mysterious placebo effect, caused by a sugar pill that often works not only as well, but also better than prescribed medication.

The daughter of a Swiss mother and a father of German descent, I was typical of clinic patients. Americans of Western European ancestry crowded the corridors. Divided by the scientific revolution, addled by the Enlightenment, hammered into steel by materialism, empiricism, and stoicism, Westerners define the mind-body relationship as a problem. We break; we do not yield.

In clinic classes in biofeedback and hypnosis, I learned to yield, and relaxation briefly reduced my pain far more than any drug. The brain produces painkillers, such as serotonins, that are hundreds of times stronger than pharmaceutical narcotics. In biofeedback training, I became expert at attaining temporary relief by slowing my breathing and heart, and in a hypnosis course, I learned to mesmerize myself into bliss by imagining descent in a slow elevator to the bottom of a deep, black lake.

*****

After my last hypnosis class, I was summoned to the clinic director's office, where he explained that patients with chronic or terminal maladies are healthier and survive longer if they speak of their affliction with others. The isolation endemic to chronic pain patients only exacerbates their torment. By crumpling further and further into themselves, they become rigid, angry, and unable to enjoy life. They therefore are less apt to manufacture internal opiates like enkephalins. As I had discovered, though, chronic pain patients cannot run amok continually telling everyone about their discomfort. Thus the need for chronic pain support groups—at the clinic, attendance was mandatory.

I had been subjected to the clinic director's lecture because I had refused to attend rap sessions with other patients. Raised in a home where every emotion but anger was verboten, I feared that exploring feelings about my pain would mire me in self pity. Instead of thinking why me? I had always tried to think why not? Pain is the price life exacts for the luxury of living.

Yet the clinic director's arguments swayed me, and I finally agreed to try the support group. It was a relief to encounter others like me—I could feel my constricted spirit expanding. Everyone knows that the well are uncomfortable in the company of the unwell. Yet the unwell are equally snobbish. People with chronic pain are Narcissus, and the pond reflects only their pain. I therefore felt an instant kinship with the similarly afflicted. There was Stan, who had broken his back twice; Paulie, with his unhinged jawbone; one-legged Eloise; Andy and his migraines; Deborah, battling artificial hips and knees; and Anne, troubled by rampant shingles. ("I think Christ had it easy," Anne told us. "I'd give anything for just one day on the cross.") We became as close as people can be in a clinical setting, and even discussed our sex lives—if there is an excess of pleasure, as in sex, the brain becomes confused and momentarily forgets pain exists.

Throughout our meetings, the women, who spoke far more than the men, seemed at home in the country of pain. For the men, pain was something to be borne, but for the women, it was a bridge allowing them to connect with others. I noticed this in waiting rooms, too, where women who were complete strangers chatted about everything from severed fingers to bowel difficulties. One doctor told me that women have higher pain thresholds than men, perhaps simply because we have more practice through menstrual cramps, childbirth, and other vagaries of female plumbing. There is, though, a macho element to pain; for example, men can be horribly injured during war, even lose limbs, and feel nothing until the battle ceases. But what to do after war concludes? I recently edited ancillary materials for a British literature textbook, and I was surprised by how men's keep-at-arm's-length, grin-and-bear-it perception of pain had infiltrated the canon, including the work of women authors. Emotional and psychological, not physical, pain dominate Western literature.

* * * * *

In the support group we decided there is a hierarchy of illness, and the well allocate sympathy accordingly. For example, at the height of my pain, a woman where I worked underwent surgeries for a recurring benign jaw tumor. She deserved and was given tremendous sympathy—markedly more than I received for my chronic pain. A tumor is fathomable and concrete, yet pain is intangible, invisible. People fear the ambiguity of chronic pain. Bogeymen are best kept at the door. If the chronic pain sufferer is perceived as being weak, or as causing or exaggerating the pain, it is reassuring to the well.

Because everyone has had physical pain, each person has a specific idea of how it feels. Someone whose most intense experience of pain is, say, a sprained ankle finds it difficult to imagine the particular agonies of phantom limb pain. And perhaps because most people have pain that disappears quickly, they subconsciously assume that everyone else's does, too. Perhaps this is why I sometimes sensed people thought I was malingering, inventing my pain to satisfy a bizarre psychological need. Medical journals report, however, that less than five percent of those with chronic pain invent it.

The popular misconception that chronic pain is a form of hypochondria can be oppressive. It makes it difficult for people with chronic pain to forgive themselves—for a crime they did not commit. I frequently struggle against the idea that my pain exists because I somehow did not give right answers or behaved incorrectly. *Mea culpa.* Perhaps if I had seen a doctor immediately after the tingle began . . . perhaps if I had seen only the very best doctors in the country . . . perhaps . . .. As Joan Didion wrote of her migraines, "That in fact I spend one or two days a week almost unconscious with pain seemed a shameful secret, evidence not merely of some chemical inferiority but of all my bad attributes, unpleasant tempers, wrongthink."

Westerners' fusion of suffering, guilt, and wisdom runs deep. In the Garden of Eden, pain is part of the punishment for eating the tree of knowledge's fruit. Theologians assert that souls in Purgatory quietly, smilingly enjoy pain because it is the purifying ticket to Heaven; in contrast, inhabitants of Hell are said to wail and writhe in torment. Pain is the price Job pays for not being morally perfect, and the disasters he suffers are instructive, enlightening. Like saints and martyrs, who welcome and exult in pain, Job is improved by his torture. Job claims that "when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold," and God agrees, blessing the "latter end of [him] more than the beginning."

In response to our association of sin, pain, and wisdom, Susan Sontag protests in *Illness as Metaphor* how we define disease in punitive language and blame people with incurable or incomprehensible illnesses. She complains about the sentimentalizing and spiritualizing of maladies. "Nothing is more punitive than to give disease a meaning," she writes, "that meaning being invariably a moralistic one." However, I could not survive without mythologizing my pain. If I transform myself into an icon, I can rise above earthly discomfort. To analyze and battle my pain distances me from the sadness in which I otherwise would wallow.

Further, my pain often is punitive and moralistic. For example, if I drink too much alcohol in the evening, my pain protests the next day. When the most ordinary actions, such as polishing a shoe, cause pain, life is suffused with meaning and value. At the height of my pain, when I was thirty, my arms had a finite amount of strength. I was constantly forced to decide what was important to me. Lifting my niece was far more exhausting than cleaning the kitchen counter, but it was delightful. The counter

remained filthy.

* * * * *

Pain is a knife that slices everything away but itself. By age thirty, I had become obsessed with the need to eliminate my pain. The biofeedback and hypnosis techniques I had learned at the pain clinic gave only temporary relief. The rest of the time, I was in misery. I pored over medical journals and books, and I trekked to an ever-increasing number of doctors. Like those with a terminal illness, I clutched at hopes for a magic bullet medicine. Once I read that camels have extraordinarily high pain thresholds because their brains create a biochemical that decreases sensation; when this chemical is injected into other animals, it makes them, too, insensitive to pain. I pestered a doctor. "What is this substance? Can it be manufactured synthetically, and if so, have there been clinical trials on human beings?" He laughed and called a nurse into the room. "Get this . . . ," he said.

During this period, I also developed a disorder I dubbed "hand-arm envy." I had to look away from nail polish, watch, and bracelet advertisements because I was jealous of the models' hands. While watching a volleyball tournament at a friend's home, I rushed out mid-game; I was overcome with the realization that the women athletes' strong, sinewy arms were forever unattainable for me. One day at work, a co-worker casually invited me to play Frisbee, and I hid in the bathroom for an hour because I could not stop my dry sobs. Most difficult to bear were the successes of other writers my age. Dazed with painkillers, I was working fourteen-hour days (further aggravating my hands and arms) to pay medical bills. Time to write was an impossible luxury.

To soothe myself, I became fond of images of hands and arms in pain, especially paintings of the crucifixion. I loved Grünewald's realistic Passion portraits—Christ's arms are stretched up with rippled muscles, the fingers splayed from the thick stake through each palm. I also derived strange solace from a photograph of Alberto Giacometti's "Caught Hand" sculpture, in which a disembodied arm, severed at the elbow, is trapped in a mechanical contraption of belts and wheels.

* * * * *

Finally, at thirty-one, a half-decade into my pain, I found a young physician who discovered its source. He was, remarkably, the first doctor who thought to take x-rays of my elbows. I had a birth defect, a bone "process" halfway up each arm—the equivalent of an extra elbow. Only eight-tenths of one percent of human beings have processes. One other mammal, the cat, has this oddity. In every case discovered in humans and felines, processes are pea-sized waves. In contrast, mine were the size of plums, the first that large in medical history. Because of the extra bone, each arm's ulnar, or "funny bone," nerve had slid out of place. These nerves were

sawing back and forth between the processes and elbow bones.

The doctor's revelation had the lightning-bolt force of an epiphany that was at once mental, emotional, and physical. Suddenly, I knew the source of my pain—the nerves were being torn and scraped whenever I moved my hands or arms. In that same instant, I knew that I was not, as I had sometimes feared, a crazy attention-seeker who had imagined the pain. My arms began to feel as if they were part of my body again; they were no longer hostile, alien limbs that had tortured me without cause. And my past began to make sense. I understood why for years before my pain began, my hands had often become so tired that I could not write—my ulnar nerves had been compressed into numbness (I had consulted many psychologists about this problem, and they had told me it was psychosomatic). I also stopped blaming myself because most efforts I had made to eliminate pain, such as my macrobiotic diet, had been ineffective.

The new doctor performed two sets of intricate surgery in which the extra bone was sawed off, the ulnar nerves moved, and a third of my original elbow bones shaved away. But the traumatized bones bled a great deal, creating scar tissue that again trapped the nerves. My fingers began to claw, contracting into my palms from ulnar neuropathy; without additional intervention, within a few years I would have had hands that were permanent fists. I therefore had to have more surgeries to dissect the nerves from the scar tissue, and to cut muscles so that the nerves could be buried in the centers of my forearms.

After the surgeries, I fostered dreams of grand malpractice settlements, but several lawyers advised me not to sue the physicians who had misdiagnosed me for so many years. My congenital deformity was so unusual, they said, that no doctor could be "reasonably expected" to diagnose it properly. The fact that my pain was stronger in my hands was problematic, too, because most physicians had understandably focused on that area. Ironically, my chance of good settlements was decreased further because no matter how fiercely my pain had burned, I had always worked (while fortified with painkillers). Government disability payments had not been feasible because they would not have covered my medical bills, student loan payments, food, and rent.

In the wake of the decision not to litigate, I struggled to harness the firestorm of blame I had been set to unleash on the physicians. All anxiety about my pain and its fallout had metamorphosed into fury. For months, this blame demon charged about in my mind seeking someone to attack—one moment it was my mother, from whom the new doctor said I had inherited the birth defect (however, x-rays showed that her processes, in comparison to mine, were minuscule); next it was my husband, who had not always been supportive during my ordeal. Nothing could satiate this devil. Luckily, as time passed it began to starve, eventually expiring because it never found a satisfying victim.

* * * * *

In countless hours of physical therapy, I have regained much of the feeling in my arms—eighty-five percent, according to most recent tests. My hands and arms almost appear normal now. Any stranger would think me ordinary. After each surgery, I was touched by others' desire to see me whole. "No more pain!" they'd say. Unfortunately not. Although my pain originally had a purpose—for years, it spoke of nerve damage—it was corrupted over time. The surgeries were too much, too late. My ulnar nerves, irreparably damaged by years of bone stress, were punished even more by being repeatedly moved and dissected. And although the surgeries stopped all injury, the nerves are still confused and irritated. They continue to relay pain messages even though no source exists. My pain does not boil anymore, but it simmers, and I no longer dream that it will leave. Through years of devotion, my pain has won me. Our relationship is an inescapable marriage of sorts; my pain is my partner, a destroying angel who both erodes and ennobles everything that I am and all that I will be.

I have been wedded to my pain for almost a decade, and during that time I have met dozens of long-term chronic pain sufferers who have professed gratitude for their nemesis. At first, I scoffed. I thought they were like brainwashed kidnapping victims who out of necessity begin to adore their captors. But I, too, have come to embrace my pain, and if I lived again, would choose to have it. Chronic pain is now the foundation of my individualism—outside I am the same as others, but within I am radically different. It is a purifying acid bath that strips away ego and artifice. Once expert at scaling the heights of arrogance, I am now constantly attuned to suffering. I therefore am more inclined to be compassionate and kind.

Most important, because my pain marginalizes me, it is a source of creative insight. The essential prerequisites for a writer, adversity and isolation, are produced by chronic pain continuously and in generous measure. And when the very act of writing is physically difficult, every letter is precious. The writer's block I occasionally confronted ten years ago has departed; words rush from me so quickly that paper can barely contain them.

* * * * *

Parts of our bodies feel no pain. Paradoxically, the human brain, processor of all pain signals, can sustain injury without pain. Some forms of brain surgery are done while the patient is conscious; experiencing no discomfort when incisions are made in the cerebral cortex, the patient is able to chat with the doctor. Our guts, gallbladders, and ureters do not experience pain, and are sensate only if they are stretched a great deal.

But without pain, we would soon cease to exist. Persons with

congenital analgesia, insensitivity to pain, often do not seek help until an injury or illness has progressed far beyond the possibility of repair. They usually die young from a ruptured appendix or other treatable malady. Many sufferers of this disorder experience severe burns without sensation. Some chew their tongues off while eating.

Pain is as necessary to our lives as breath. Yet like Prometheus—eternally chained to a boulder, a black vulture picking at his liver—those of us with chronic pain must constantly transcend the realities of the body to survive. Forced to live beyond the moment, we are more acutely alive because our present and future are lost, no longer ordinary.

The past is another life.

HENRIETTE VAN DER SLUIJS

Summerhouses

When I arrived in the United States in the 1960's, I expected to stay for only five years. At that time I thought I would continue my nomadic life forever. Moving, traveling, that used to be the story of my life, that's what I knew best. My life has always been patched with different cultures. I am the daughter of Dutch missionaries who were stationed in Java and the wife of an official with an international organization. Even though I have been living in the suburban area called Tara in Northern Virginia for a long time, I still go through periodic spells of being pulled back to other places. When I give a hint of these feelings to my friends, they tell me, "Surely you aren't going to move anymore. You've been here too long. After all, you're one of us now." When they tell me this, I want to flee the entrenchment of suburban life. But it's no use; I know my friends are right, I'll stay.

From the moment I was shown the Tara neighborhood, I was ensnared. I sought a home but I did not realize it at the time. In this area the houses with Greek columns seemed to play hide-and-seek between tall oak and tulip trees.

"That subdivision is called Tara," the real estate agent told me when he noticed my interest. Tara, the house Scarlett returned to after her war was over. I felt a bond with this fictional heroine for, like her, my war was over, too.

Unlike Scarlettt, I never returned to our house in Malang, a city on the eastern part of Java where I lived with my family before World War II broke out. After liberation from a Japanese internment camp, we were evacuated to a strange house in Bandung, a city on the west coast. It was one of those houses whose former owners, like us, had been marched off to Japanese camps.

Neighbors told me that a lady had died in this house because medical treatment had been unavailable during the war. This lady and her family were Eurasians, a class of people generally excluded from internment. They moved into the house after its former occupants, a Dutch family, were interned. The Dutch people never returned. Yet in dark corners throughout the house the rebellion and sadness of leaving a full life behind remained. Nobody knew if the former owners perished in the camps or left for Holland immediately after the war, bitter that this tropical world had betrayed them.

One day, as a child, I tried to take possession of our new house, the way an animal in the wild marks its territory. I walked through all the rooms trying to establish a feeling of being at home again. I kept comparing it to the house in Malang. There the rooms were furnished with djati (teak) wood. The sitting room had wicker with pink and green flowered cushions on the chairs. I remembered it as all very bright and cheerful. But here in this house there were no patterns. Only old, scattered, mismatched pieces of furniture.

I entered the bedroom where the Eurasian lady had died. My parents slept here now. From where I stood in the doorway, I looked at the bed. At that moment I saw her, the lady, lying on her deathbed, feverish, her damp hair sticking to her forehead, looking for help from her family. It was a scene I had imagined many times in the camp. There, I was afraid to wake up in the morning to find my mother dead beside me on the mattress we shared, her body cold, her eyes closed, her arms and legs lifeless.

Quickly I left the room and its apparitions. I remembered too well living with the fear of my mother's death, the fear of being left alone in the camp. But that hopeless feeling that I might never return home again remained with me, palpable, real.

In my father's study, I met Scarlett for the first time in a book left behind by its former owners. The book had lovely, colored pictures of Vivien Leigh and Clark Gable. Since I was unable to read English, I asked my dad what the book was about.

"Oh, that book," he said looking cursorily at the many pictures, "that book is about the American Civil War."

He could tell from my eager face I wanted to know more, especially about Scarlett and Captain Butler. He said, "I'll tell you about it later. Right now I don't want to talk about it."

But later never came. He never talked about the war, his own or other wars, ever.

In the shady garden of one of the houses for sale at Tara sat a kind of bower, a primitive structure of poles and wires covered and overgrown by wisteria. That bower reminded me of my mother's summerhouse in Malang, which had been overgrown by pink and white bougainvilleas. Here she had hosted tea parties in the afternoon where her friends talked about the war in Europe. One of them had said that it would be safer to stay here on this far-away island. But my mother disagreed.

"There will be a world war. If the Japanese occupy Java, it would be better to be with our own people in our own country," she said.

But we did not get away from Java. My family and all of my mother's friends were interned in Japanese P.O.W. camps on that beautiful, terrible isle I thought of as home.

We bought the house at Tara, which I called "The Pajong."
I remembered how as a child I'd watch from the safety of our stoop people under their pajongs (paper umbrellas) wading the knee-deep water from the monsoon rains sweeping down our street.

Shortly after my move to Tara, I met my neighbors at a luncheon. They were a group of women who had known each other for more than forty years. All of them had moved into Tara when this suburb had just been built. For years they shared each other's joys and sorrows. At this luncheon, they talked about their church, about how to decorate their Christmas trees, and where to get the pine cones for the wreaths this year. They were also concerned about Dottie, their children's former elementary school teacher who was now too weak from illness and old age to comb out her long gray hair. They assigned each other turns to help the old lady.

The Tara women reminded me of the Spanish moss I had seen in Florida, clinging decoratively to the trees. They talked and breathed stability into the soil, a rootedness I did not have.

This fact had been revealed to me recently at my daughter's international dinner night at the local high school. The mothers and fathers had talked about Arizona, California and other parts of the country where they grew up. When my turn came to say something, they expected me to talk about Holland. But I couldn't. Tulips and windmills, the usual tourists's gabble, could not close the fissure within me, the pain of not really having a country.

After the war my parents, united in spirit with many Dutch people, refused to accept Indonesia's inexorable, future independence. "This is our country. Here we'll live and here we'll die," they used to tell my brother and me.

But at the Dutch schools teachers taught the Bahasa Indonesia (the new language of Indonesia) and the geography of Indonesia and Asia only. In order to operate in the new republic, Dutch schools had to teach these classes. Here, at school, away from my family, I saw it coming, the inevitable change. I daydreamed of sailing to the outer islands of Java, to Celebes, Timor, Ambon and Bali. And of visiting our house in Malang, on Sophia Street, although it wouldn't be called Sophia Street any longer. Later, later, I promised myself. But later never came. At home again, surrounded by my family's inability to accept changes, I felt like them, prisoners of a colonial world.

At home, after the international dinner, my daughter complained to me, "Mom, why didn't you say something? You were so quiet." Never had I admitted to anyone I knew little of Holland. I wasn't born there, I didn't grow up there. I could never have the same feelings for Holland as I do for that shiny, green island, Java, Indonesia, the Netherlands East Indies. Whatever its name, it will always be my home.

My hostess must have sensed my derailment about Holland. She showed me a picture of her aunt, a lady in colonial dress.

"This is my aunt Nell, the curator of the James Madison House," she told me proudly. "Do you know that she's in her eighties and still loves her work?"

And another lady showed me the hostess's books, autobiographies of Presidents Truman and Eisenhower. Before I could say something, she continued, "I have been to Holland. I thought I was in the garden of Eden when I saw the tulips in bloom." Then she waited for me to add something to her vacation memories.

Later, I thought, when I get to know you better I will tell you about President Truman. After the war was over, our family received free clothing and food from President Truman's Marshall Plan, a plan provided for people who had lost everything in the war.

After being freed from the internment camps, we were invited to come to a building. There we were outfitted with the first new clothes we'd had since our internment three-and-a-half years before. On top of a pile of clothing, I spotted a dark blue dress with a white, smocked bodice. It looked like the dresses my mother used to smock for me when we lived in Malang. One of them, a light blue one, had a circle skirt. In this dress I always pretended to be a ballerina. I would turn around and around, the light blue skirt swirling up in the air baring my legs. It was the only dress I was allowed to take with me into the camp. I still had it at the time of our liberation, a relic of the past. The dark blue dress with the white, smocked bodice, compliments of Mr. Truman, became my favorite one.

After I came home from the luncheon, I knew I had a house at Tara but I didn't have a home yet. And, although I didn't know it at that time, over the years I managed to stamp my own history upon this area, upon Tara.

On exploring the area around Tara, I discovered a small shopping mall on Market Street that looked like a shopping center in Arnhem, Holland, where I had lived for four years with my family, after our repatriation from the East Indies. On Market Street the grocery store and a few diners clustered cozily together. When I shopped in the small grocery store, I did not feel the confusion I had in the big supermarkets. The shelves only offered one or two brands of soups or tomato paste, or whatever. In the big supermarkets I usually panicked at the sight of the endless choice in brands.

But the building I loved most was the old post office built in the 1930's. If only they had left the soldier's picture in the new post office which replaced the square red brick building. In the old post office, standing in line to mail my letters and packages, I would stare at Lewis Wilson's picture up on the wall of the hall entrance flanked by the American flag and his brief obituary.

"Lewis Wilson, 1920-1944. Died in France, serving his country." I imagined myself talking to the black-and-white picture of the young man in his military uniform. He had been an employee of this post office, sent away to war never to return.

"Lewis, what did your family call you? Lew, Lewi or just Lewis? Did you have a girl friend when you went to war and did you send her letters from the battle fields in France?"

His picture made me feel a little closer to Europe where my parents lay, like the soldier, at peace. But I am not sure if my parents really are at peace. Even today, I still see them on Java, in the little white church where my father preached on Sundays and my mother sang solos at special festive occasions. She had a beautiful voice.

And Lewis Wilson? Is he at peace now? He must have been brimming with hope to return to his job, maybe start his own family under these wings of Tara.

Still the modern hi-tech world has not succeeded in erasing the past for me. Even though Lewis' picture is absent from the anemic, desensitized white walls, I feel connected to him. I am thinking, Lewis, we are home now, we, the wandering birds going home at night to their nests. I still see the old post office building and Lewis' picture on its wall. My camera of the mind refuses to accept this new building.

The years went by at Tara and just when I thought that a certain part of my life would never bloom again, I fell in love. That happened in the autumn and throughout that season the splendor of the colors in a park near Tara surrounded me. I fell in love with all the reds, greens, yellows and browns of my new love. A love I had not been able to find anywhere else. But it could not last and it ended.

I wanted to leave the area then. But I didn't. I still visit that part in the autumn and feel surrounded by that love, my love now wed to the soil, fed to the roots of the trees in this park in Northern Virginia, the United States, North America, the Western Hemisphere.

During a late summer rain, I am in my summerhouse. I look up at the green double canopy above me, the trees stretching out their branches over the wisteria embracing my summerhouse, giving me double protection from the raindrops. I try not to think of the future - when the cold strips down the boughs to bare brown antlers, when icy, steel winter imprisons and immobilizes my private green world.

While the rain attacks my protective cover, I am thinking of that corner in my basement, where boxes and crates are neatly stacked, the remnants of my nomadic existence. I know I cannot go home anymore, ever. But I don't have to. My childhood in Indonesia, my parents buried in Holland now, all of it has found a seedbed here at Tara.

IRVING FELDMAN

SAY PARDON

Yes, I pardon you, but—because, offended
and aggrieved, I have been set above you
and made to be and to seem in the right
—I ask you first, please, to forgive me.

THE PARTING

Though the heavens shall undergo revision
and new constellations wheel into space
their fresh, unfabulated imagery,
they will not hide the blacked-out sky they brighten.

PRAYER

Let no unkindness, however minuscule,
go lost in the world's welter of cruelties,
lie hidden behind the major maimings!

OUCH!

So very pleased to learn your friend
is serious about whips and things.
So many these days are not
(why flogging's gotten a bad name)
—frivolous sadists who are in it
just for the pain.

TANTRUM

From the doorway he saw the next room
was empty, so empty that if he were
to step inside, it would remain empty
—unless by means of this chaos he should
almost almost inhabit it, though never
in any form be able to leave.

ERIC McHENRY

Backfires

What happens, in general, is mostly dull.
— Scott Cairns

Bullshit.
And thank your lucky tonic-light
if my *Bullshit* is bullshit, you've evaded
the curse, you find the times
less than interesting. I'll tell you
about times: 1966 was a *wild summer*
in all respects, indelibly etched
upon my father's memory.
June 8: a mile-wide tornado
rearranged Topeka. Dad just dodged it;
he was up in Ohio marrying Mom *that very day.*
Still, there was the private maelstrom
of rites and rice, dervish-dust
rasping his radio, blustering
newsanchors throwing RV's around in his head.

Bound to "its" harbinger, the marriage failed.
But first, Dad had to dodge a bullet or two
hour's worth — Charles Whitman sniping
from the tower, meting out peculiar death
like lightning while a Peace Corps trainee,
my father, piss and adrenaline, skinnied
himself behind a tree.

It was astonishing. We were expected
simply to go on as though nothing
had happened. We ended up forming our own
little, what you'd today call "support groups."
For years I'd buckle every time a car backfired.

This figures: Back
when my father was just a brother, he'd wait
until Christmas-very morning to produce

his hermetic packages. No
sizing, no shaking, no guessing allowed.

"No surprises in my lifetime."
Every year for several, he's distributed
tidy binders of genealogy. In 1991, it was a tree.
Most recently, a series of profiles:

Mr. Hebbard was a genuine Connecticut
Yankee, very formal and precise
in his manner of speech. In an earlier
day, he had a claim in Northern Kansas,
and as he was returning to his boarding
house one evening with a hoe on his shoulder,
he was viciously attacked by a dog.
The dog was repulsed and as Mr. Hebbard joined
his friends, they wondered if the tussle
would at all throw him off his usual balance
of correct speech. "You had a serious time,
did you not?" said one of his friends. "Comparatively
speaking," replied Mr. Hebbard, "yes; the canine
advanced upon me in a combative
manner, but, sir, I introduced this hoe
as a means of defence and he fled."

Hospital bed-
bound after back surgery, my father
came and went with morphine swells,
eyes rolling back, ideas merging. When he is gone
I will anathematize the memory
of those dulled moments, the words finally
at a loss for my father, the man sinking
into his sheets, submitting like a child, mid-sentence,
to sleep. *These medications...*

Summer is uncursed. My father
burns easily, but saves his breath. Back pain
is the obelisk. It is pointed like a canine.
At the family reunion in Vail, I watched it contort
Dad and a pair of uncles. For five long August days,
buckling men smiled over their teeth,
worked wincingly at recreation.

And cars backfire. Weathermen yammer.
Cyclones pivot toward town on their nadirs. Lightning-

bolts spill from the clouds, scorch the same gravesite again
and again. It is all arbitrary. It is all pointed. It is all
acute. Some of it is barbed. My father
borrows terms from his physicians. When the pain
sits him down, he speaks of *flare-ups,*
and something too precise is blessedly dulled.
I don't understand its therapy, but I'll tell you
he throws the word like a blanket.

ANDREW FELD

Poetry Reviews

The Lord and the General Din of the World
Jane Mead
Sarabande Books, 1996

United Artists
S.X. Rosenstock
University of South Carolina Press, 1996

Crash's Law
Karen Volkman
W.W. Norton & CO, 1996

The first book contest has become, in America, the primary means by which new poets are introduced to the book-buying (as opposed to the journal-buying) public. To publish a first book means more than just the start of a career (although, of course, it also means that): it demonstrates that the young — or, frequently, not so young — poet has written not just a few good poems, but a cohesive body of work, a group of poems that can stand as a whole, unified by an aesthetic, a theme, a voice, a vision: something that has enabled the writer to rise above the fiercely competitive world of the manuscript contest. These thin volumes, with their narrow spines, carry the weight of all the ambitions and hopes of what could turn out to be America's next generation of poets.

Judged by America's premier established poets (the books discussed in this article were selected by Richard Howard, Philip Levine and Heather McHugh), and published by small and university presses, America now boasts an impressive number of first book contests, all of which are inundated by thousands of manuscripts, testifying to the bewildering — and encouraging — health of contemporary poetry, if the intensity of the fight for a prize can be used as a measure for determining its worth. The oldest and most prestigious of these contests, the Yale Series of Younger Poets, with its astonishing role-call of debuts (Ashbery, Dugan, Forché, Hass, Hollander, Kelly, Merwin, Rich, Tate, James Wright, Valentine and others), forms a sort of Who's Who in modern American poetry. But the Yale contest is by no means alone in its position as a forum for the

introduction of important new artists: The Walt Whitman Prize and the National Poetry series (which chooses not one but five books) are attaining a similar level of status; and close on their heels are a number of other contests, with new contests entering the field every year.

Selected by Richard Howard as the first volume in the James Dickey Contemporary Poetry Series (published by the University of South Carolina Press), S.X. Rosenstock's *United Artists* presents the reader with a dizzying array of iconic figures: Plath, Beardsley, Barth, Bataille, Goya, Madame Bovary's daughter, Mary Pickford and the Hong Kong high body-count action-movie maker John Woo all make appearances in her poetry, often in close quarters, in startling juxtapositions which blur, if they do not completely disintegrate, the boundaries between high and low culture. The poems in this collection are distinguished by the clear impression of an extraordinarily quick mind working in and with language and drawing on a startling range of arts and artists, all united by Rosenstock's personalizing concern with the sexuality of creativity and the creativity of sexuality.

For Rosenstock, artistic creativity is a fundamentally (and mentally) erotic event, driven by a poetics of pleasure. In "Close Your Eyes and Think of England," (a highly facetious title, given the erotic concerns of her subjects here) she presents us with three short poems, each one dedicated to a different British artist or thinker: Francis Bacon, D.W. Winnicott and Helen Mirren. The first section, "Affective Vision," goes beyond the kind of sympathetic imagining common in ekphrastic poetry, subsuming Bacon's affective vision into her own:

> A gavage has crashed my chance at manhood
> By being me turning on a toilet,
> Bleary and doubling back, imperiled near
> The flat cache I, aching, am and ape, a
>
> Sack of one eye, grafted paint in a sort
> Of gouge, and a remove, a remove of
> paint.

The surface of the poem, like the surface of the painting, allows the audience to enter only to the degree to which they are informed of the artist's concerns. Knowing what a "gavage" is ("a method of forcible feeding by means of a force-pump and a stomach-tube" — O.E.D) helps, but not as much as knowing that the painting is a portrait of one of Francis Bacon's lovers, a man who killed himself on a toilet. The assumption of shared knowledge of different kinds of cultural and artistic arcana is one of the signifying marks of the relationship between Rosenstock and her audience, a relationship in which she must frequently leave the reader behind (I'm sure that she knows things about the sex life of Hollywood stars far beyond anything in Hollywood Babylon). Still, with the quickness,

the turnings, and the tightness of language in a line like "The flat cache I, aching, am and ape" Rosentock leaves the reader admiring the technique and vision that makes the pathos flesh, in the same way that one reacts to a painting by Francis Bacon.

The second section of "Close Your Eyes and Think of England," "Ego Orgasm," is dedicated to the British psychologist D.W. Winnicott, who once wrote that "the ultimate pleasure is to be found and used" — an idea that Rosenstock both shares and reverses, finding and using.

> I haven't lost myself to cerebration;
> My history comes with me as I think
> The world of the world, and my body isn't gone.
> I haven't lost myself to cerebration:
> My body's come: I am someone alone:
> I am accomplished zeal. (It's my instinct.)
> I haven't lost myself to cerebration.
> My history comes with me as I think.

The invented form, a sort of villanelle/rondeau hybrid, illustrates Rosenstock's mastery of an informal formalism (she writes easily and fluently in both free verse and iambics) while the insistance on erotic cerebration demonstrates the extent to which language and ideas as play excite the poet's imagination.

If there is a problem with these poems (aside from the garish painting on the jacket sleeve) it would be the possibility that Rosenstock's obsessive play in the fields of culture might threaten to lapse into a sort of hyper-cleverness, divorced from the painful contingencies of life as actually lived. Still, the startling reach of these poems, as revealed by the titles ("Of All Literature, Art, Philosophy, Politics, &Cuisine Now or Ever," "Aubrey Beardsley on the Subject of His Own Willful Ignorance of the Caprichos of Francisco Goya," "John Fowler Thinking of Pinking Pure Silk Taffeta Triangles On Behalf of Pauline de Rothschild") unites the collection by providing a cogent argument for her all-inclusive principle of pleasure, as does the clear fact that Rosenstock does indeed "think the world of the world."

The first poetry title published by Sarabande Books and winner of the Kathryn A. Morton Prize in Poetry, Jane Mead's *The Lord and the General Din of the World* (selected by Philip Levine) offers a bleak counterpoint to Rosenstock's road of imaginative excess. For Mead, the world presents itself as problem and crisis and the vision is that of the psyche struggling, through the medium of poetry, to construct a self that can encompass, and perhaps reconcile itself to, the difficult actualities of the world, without denying or minimalizing these actualities. As Philip Levine writes in his introduction to the volume, "the truths Mead tells us have less to do with the sights, smells and sounds of a place and far more to do with the taste of loss, grief and madness in a community that has spun out of control."

The first poem in the collection, "Concerning That Prayer I Cannot Make," opens with a painfully naked summation of the poet's emotional and spiritual isolation :

> *Jesus, I am cruelly lonely*
> and I do not know what I have done
> nor do I suspect that you will answer me.

The clarity of the language here is dictated by the necessity of the utterance: Mead writes an imperative poetry, situated in the center of that world which is always "too much with us." The spirituality here is not a way out of the world, but a Job-like attempt at comprehension, embodying one of the earliest, and perhaps the most urgent, forms of poetry: the prayer. As she asks in "Sparrow, My Sparrow," "What is prayer but a song of longing / turning on the thread of its own history?" In "Concerning That Prayer I Cannot Make," Mead reiterates the essential poetic quest of internalizing the external world:

> And, what is more, I have spent
> these bare months bargaining
> with my soul as if I could make her
> promise to love me when now it seems
> that what I meant when I said "soul"
> was that the river reflects
> the railway bridge just as the sky
> says it should — it speaks that language.

While it is in the particulars of time and place that Mead locates her crisis, it is also in location, in the perception of the difficult truths of the natural world, (as she asks in the title poem, "Lord, is the general din of the world your own?") that she finds that which comes closest to salvation:

> Listen—
> all you bare trees
> burrs
> brambles
> pile of twigs
> red and green lights flashing
> muddy bottle shards
> shoe half buried — listen
>
> listen, I am holy.

While at times Mead's poems skirt the edge of recovery rhetoric ("On the Lawn at the Drug Rehab Center," "Substance Abuse Trial," "After

Detox" "To Nobody: February 20, 1985") the spirituality evinced here should remind the reader more of Dr. Vigil's claim, in Malcolm Lowery's *Under the Volcano*, that "sickness is not only in the body, but in that part that used to be called: soul." The implied question (and crisis) is: if we are no longer able to call that part "the soul," what are we to call it? Mead's poetry is frequently concerned with the struggle of this definition. For Mead, transcendence is too far away to be wished for: she is busy wrestling with the catastrophic real.

In "Mapping the Mind" "In Need of the World" and "LaGuardia, the Story," we see Mead constructing narratives and then examining, evaluating the created artifact, to expose the way art attempts to become fact, and to question the procedure of the story-making process. This heightened sensibility to the ordering processes of the mind is particularly revealed in the stunning "A Note on the Present State of the Future," which begins with the poet interrupted in the act of reading — "Just when he's finally buttering her a roll" — by the sound of fire trucks, the noise threatening destruction, as the house she lives in has already burned down once before. Mead is aware of the human need to establish a final version, to reach for some kind of certainty, but she resists conclusion, remaining in the moment of the impulse, " working by candlelight on a description/ of fire, taking comfort in the notion / of the poverty of description." While the poem that she's working on may be "insisting on closure now," Mead is able to resist the defining (and limiting) moment, and the poem ends still located in the moment of possibility:

> when somewhere there's still an image
> on the loose — the one that contains the moment
> at which she might say might — say yes, say no.

With a title taken from Emily Dickinson's poem #997, which begins "Crumbling is not an instant's act" and concludes "Fail in an instant, no man did / Slipping is Crash's law," Karen Volkman's *Crash's Law* (chosen by Heather McHugh for the 1995 National Poetry Series) maps out the punishing landscape of a country where conflict and loss, resignation and uneasy alliances determine all the relationships. Which is not to say that Volkman is at all interested in the phraseology of victimhood; instead her highly lyric impulse, informed by the examples of Plath and Rilke, frequently situates itself in the center of the moment of crisis, and then, with the practiced skill and coolness of a surgeon, removes the heart of the situation for our inspection. While the subject matter of the poems in *Crash's Law* may seem, at times, subjective, it isn't. As Volkman writes in the poem "Infidel," "If the impersonal made personal isn't personal, then what is there?"

The first poem in the collection, "Infernal," starts with the impossible question "Is it better to die by the hand of an intimate / or to die by the

hand of a stranger?" The unsolvable dilemma starts a poem of brilliant oppositions, where the differences are vital and tragic. Located in both the country where we live and in the maker's imagination, the poem skirts between a fabled Florida that belongs to both Stevens and Rimbaud and one that is unmistakably ours: "It is Miami in the world and in the mind, / the antique candy-striped umbrellas give no protection." In this imagined and lived in place, there is ample room for Volkman's dark wit, the surprising humor she finds in these catastrophic navigations: "The time her lover hit her and she ran crying to the door / he said don't run out in the dark, he said I'll drive you." The poem ends with a sudden and startling address to an other (Volkman's best poems are full of twists and turns, lyric jumps and connections), who is measured by a crucial difference: "You stay close to the water / I stay close to the shore." Water and escape, land and the rooted: the situation, the shore, is the same, but the separation is irreconcilable.

In "The Case," (which was chosen by Adrienne Rich for the *Best American Poetry 1996*) Volkman conjures up a mythic dreamscape, made up of Brothers' Grimm style ingredients, but with wholly adult ramifications:

> Old wolf, I said,
> Leave a tatter
> for my family,
> a scrap, a rag,
> a bone, a button — something
> to bury.
>
> Because, I said,
> I've chased
> the fast fox from
> the henhouse, and twisted
> the livid blossoms
> from failing stems,
> mercy, spare a rag,
> a bone, a button,
> for my family.
>
> And because, I said, I sang
> the names of saints
> on Sunday, and lay
> with another woman's
> husband Monday eve, leave
> a scrap, a rag,
> a bone, a button —
> to bury.

And he said:
It will take
whatever is given. It will
be still.

While there is an implied recognition in this poem that some of the presences we wrestle with are sent from other places, the struggle presented here is markedly internal: the undomesticated impulse that claims expression in action and poetry. The poem's final statement — the wolf's answer to the writer's prayer, not closure so much as summation — leaves us in a moment of both a new awareness and stasis, that place where the poem begins again, to be reconsidered in the light of its discoveries. Volkman's poems ask for, and hold up to, continual re-reading.

Some of the best poems in this volume are Volkman's flower poems, "Gladioli," "Tulips," "The Rose Garden," "White Lily" and "Daffodils." The symbol of the flower, its brief, flamingly sexual life, is not exactly the least common trope in poetry, but in these pages it takes on an urgency and a vibrant scope. While Wallace Stevens, in "Sunday Morning," may have termed the trope "trivial," (in the same way that life is trivial) he still posited that it "reveals a way of truth. / Our bloom is gone. We are the fruit thereof." Volkman's poetry, however, is situated in the bloom. Knowing, as she writes in "Tulips," that "Immoderation is the seasonal edict," her poetry takes chances, is full of the risk of feeling, the risk-taking without which nothing is vital: this helps account for the vitality, the insistent presence, of the poems collected here. Simultaneously inside and outside of her poems, she obeys, while studying, her own nature and the metaphorical, imagined nature of her visualized world, as in the end of "The Rose Garden":

Confident and young,

we hold hands and watch, we wonder
what power drives us
to bow to every blossom,
even the scentless.

While these books are all enough, in their unity and passionate focus, to stand as distinct wholes, it still remains true that every good first book always raises the question of what will follow, what the recently emerged poet's work will evolve into. Every first book is, to a certain extent, a promise meant to be kept; and all three of these collections leave us where poetry should: waiting to hear more.

ALAN AINSWORTH

Fiction Reviews

Read This and Tell Me What It Says
A. Manette Ansay
University of Massachusetts Press, 1995

A. Manette Ansay's *Read This and Tell Me What it Says*, winner of the Associated Writing Programs Award for Short Fiction, is a book of stories about the neighbors of Raymond Carver's characters; the neighbors who are religious, or dealing with the religious. They're younger than Carver's characters, but they inhabit the same tract houses, the same trailers. Instead of working through a hangover on Sunday morning, they go to church, or they deal with not going to church.

The title story is of a daughter trying to interpret the world for a father whose stress is transmitted to his daughter. It starts "My father took pills to make him calm, but they never worked the way they were supposed to." The daughter is given the burden to succeed for the family, for the father's hyperactivity, for the mother's attempts to keep the family together, and for the brother's drug problems. All should be made right by the daughter going off to school. The daughter does not succeed in school, but she does well in trying to figure out the sensations that make her calm. She loves to steal, and when she does, her "mind grew absolutely still, that stillness you get when you walk into a church and know that you are safe there." The story takes odd turns, but they all seem right, right in the that-could-happen way. The kid who steals has a talent; all the kids seem numb, but they don't seem any more numb than the adults.

Other stories involve religion more directly, as in "Ohio," when a son raised by a religious mother goes to see his ex-preacher now-hippie father. Ansay has both of these camps right, and she doesn't condescend to either. She tells the stories, and lets the reader see for himself. In the first story of the collection, "Lost Objects," the narrator, a girl, deals with the stories her brother tells her of wolves in the corn juxtaposed with a rather normal life with their mother and grandmother on a farm in Wisconsin. Their father has left to hitch to California with a woman named Marge. This girl seems exactly right, and the gestures she makes are ones that seem true. Ansay even gets dreams right: "But I began to have dreams about my fingers. I

dreamed I saw them dangling like earrings from a stranger's pierced ears. I dreamed I was chewing a tough piece of meat: I spat, and out came my fingers." The narrator's family prays. It does not help.

Ansay is even able to pull off the elusive second person narrator story. "Spot Weaknesses" is a wonderful story of a mother trying to understand her daughter, the "you" of the story. Of course, I've always felt most hard-pressed to understand those closest to me because there is where the most hope of understanding is. This story shows the contradictory nature of such a hope. It's beautifully written, and it could have easily gone to cliché. Instead if feels real, and the mother speaks to a listener who seems present. People leave in these stories, and there are problems with that leaving. Here they return to religion for the small comforts it provides, and mostly that is not enough.

The Stupefaction Stories and a Novella
Diane Williams
Knopf, 1996

Diane Williams' little stories are troublesome indeed. I read these delicious two-pagers (a couple of which appeared in *Gulf Coast*) at the bus stop and I couldn't stop; now three weeks later, I cannot fathom what it was I read. Little bits of sexual energy, little scenes on the edge of life. I recall I thought they were Barthelmesque without the humor, without the philosophy, without the references to popular and high culture. What does that leave? It leaves the observations of the troubles of men and women, of a gesture here, a look there, a voice heard for a moment and then that voice's disappearance. In this way, then, Williams is more like Beckett than Barthelme. "Customary noise can come in thick clumps, all of which can be turned sideways." There are tons and tons of stories here — many sexual, scatalogical — and then a collection of snippets which form chapters of a novella. Chapter 33, "Just As A Joke," in its entirety:

> I put my lemonade on a table.
> I try to run past you, just as a joke, but you catch me up in your arms.
> After a while, you say hoarsely, "I wish I lived here."
> "But you do!" I tell you. "We have a lot to be thankful for."
> I haven't been complaining. After all, something seems to have happened.
> Did you think you would not be invited back?

The sexual energy of the woman first person narrator trying to escape, "just as a joke," is made weird by all the details that are left in, all the details that are left out. The novella, and in fact, most of the stories, starting with

that are left out. The novella, and in fact, most of the stories, starting with the beginning one, seem to be 90s versions of Charotte Perkins Gillman's "The Yellow Wallpaper." Creepy, poignant, stuck in the bathroom. *The Stupefaction's* strength is the individual moment that might interest a reader at the bus stop in the rain. After all, something seems to be happening.

Hawaiian Cowboys
John Yau
Black Sparrow Press, 1995

John Yau works his way through odd stories of an alienated character, who often narrates, who goes to bars, hangs out with artists, who often feels without a place in the world because he doesn't have the sense of community to his ethnic roots or to the "normal" people of America. In "A New Set of Rules Every Other Day," a story told in small named sections, there are several poignant aphorisms between fragments of narratives. The story adds up to the narrator feeling outside the expectations of his parents (Chinese-Americans) and the expectations of the other students have for him. It is well put here: "Image I look like one, but I don't act like one." The only escape for this character is sex, which can masquerade as "true romance." Other stories involve this or a similar character growing up and spending his days drinking, doing odd jobs, meeting women, being an artist, and drinking some more. Almost all of the stories seem to be set in New York, and all seem to say that the narrator has no home except the city which allows him to lose himself in drink, in art. Some are more effective than others.

My favorite story is a departure, however. In the title story "Hawaiian Cowboys," the narrator goes on a trip to Hawaii, which is both a beautiful place, a place that should be ideal and a place which might have been home. "Why didn't my parents stop here instead of going to the mainland from China?" Even here, Yau makes the narrator hear tunes which inspire a false (or is it?) American nostalgia. And then the narrator and his wife run into a Hawaiian ranch which includes many Asian ethnicities of cowboys: "Most of the men are dressed like cowboys, and almost all of them are Asian or Hawaiian. Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Polynesian, and Samoan. They're all sizes and shapes." The narrator doesn't know what to make of this surreal moment near the volcano of natural beauty that is Hawaii. The mix of the narrator's American "roots" with the physical ethnicity of the cowboys leaves the narrator even more mixed up, even less grounded than before. Yau's stories here are more accessible, if less fun, than his poems. His poems work on contradiction, on jokes, on mixed up metaphors. The stories are straight ahead evocations of a longing for identity and for community, a longing that is not fulfilled in the melting pot of New York, in the far away place of China, or for that matter anyplace else.

ALAN AINSWORTH'S poems, reviews, and stories have appeared in *The Atlantic, The Paris Review, New England Review, Chelsea,* and other journals.

NUAR ALSADIR was a 1995-96 Writing Fellow at The Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown. Recent poems of hers have appeared or are forthcoming in *Agni, Callaloo, Phoebe* and *Ribot.* She lives in New York City.

NICK BARRETT has his M.F.A. from the University of Oregon. He is teaching at a community college in Seattle. He is orginally from Kansas City, Missouri.

AARON BELZ graduated from the NYU Creative Writing program in 1995. His poetry has appeared previously in *Exquisite Corpse* and is forthcoming in *Mudfish;* he's also a freelance writer for *Wired* magazine and *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch,* and *The Riverfront Times.* Aaron and his wife live in St. Louis where he is a co-founder of Schwa Digital Design (http://www.schwa.com).

ROMAN D. DUCHNOWSKI is a writer from the New York area.

REBECCA DUNHAM teaches creative writing at Hollins College and composition at Virginia Western Community College in Roanoke, Virginia. Originally from Maine, she received her B.A. at the University of Virginia and her M.A. in Writing at Hollins. Her work has most recently appeared in *Sycamore Review* and *Jacaranda.* She was a fellow at the 1994 Bucknell Seminar for Younger Poets.

JEFF ELROD received his B.F.A. from University of North Texas in Denton in 1990 and studied in Amsterdam, Holland in 1992. He had a solo exhibition at Texas Gallery in Houston in April of this year. In 1998 he will begin a residency at the Chinati Foundation in Marfa, Texas.

ANDREW FELD has been published in *Ploughshares, The Paris Review,* and *The Boston Phoenix.*

DAVID FERRY'S most recent books are *Gilgamesh: A New Rendering in English Verse* and *Dwelling Places: Poems and Translations.* His translation of the complete *Odes of Horace* will be published in 1997 by Farrar Straus & Giroux.

IRVING FELDMAN'S last collection of poems was *The Life and The Letters* . He teaches English at SUNY Buffalo. He was awarded the MacArthur Fellow in 1992

SARAH HANNAH grew up in Waban, Massachusetts. She received her B.A. from Wesleyan University and her M.F.A. in writing from Columbia University. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Poetry Northwest, Sou'wester, Chants, Poet Lore, Nightsun,* and *Interim.* Her full-length manuscript, "The Haunted Way," is currently seeking a publisher.

KAREN HIRSCH received her B.A. from Barnard College and her M.F.A. from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, where she was a Randall Jarrell Fellow, AWP Intro Award winner, semi-finalist in The Nation/"Discovery" contest, and Poetry Editor of *The Greensboro Review.* Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Tampa Review, Cottonwood,* and *Brooklyn Review.* She is the editor of *Mind Riot: Coming of Age in Comix,* a book for young adults recently released by Simon & Schuster. After several years in children's book publishing, she is currently working as a freelance editor and writer.

KATIE KAHN, who lives in Chicago, is an Assistant Professor in the School of Art at Northern Illinois University. She received a National Endowment for the Arts Individual Artist Fellowship in 1993-94. Her most recent solo exhibition was in April, 1997 at Gallery 1756 in Chicago.

KARLA KUBAN received her M.A. from Johns Hopkins and was a James A. Michener fellow for two years. Her novel, *Marchlands,* will be published by Scribner in March, 1998.

CORINNE LEE has been published in more than a dozen literary magazines, including *The Cimarron Review, The Seattle Review, Iowa Woman,* and *The Washington Review.* She attended the Iowa Writer's Workshop and is a freelance writer and editor based in Austin.

BRIAN LEUNG is a Southern California native and is currently working on his M.F.A. in Creative Writing at Indiana University, Bloomington. His work has most recently appeared in *Kinesis* and *Grain.* He is working on a novel in short stories dealing with the conflict of having Caucasian and Chinese ancestry.

KATHLEEN MCGOOKEY'S work has recently appeared in *Indiana Review, Sycamore Review, Epoch,* and *The Party Train: A Collection of North American Prose Poetry.* Poems are forthcoming in *The Journal, Phoebe, Puerto del Sol,* and *Quarter After Eight.*

ERIC MCHENRY is completing his M.A. in creative writing at Boston University, where he won the Academy of American Poets Award and the Robert Fitzgerald Translation Prize. In the fall, he will teach the university's undergraduate poetry workshop. His work has recently appeared or is forthcoming in *Bostonia, The Formalist, New Letters, Phoebe* and other journals.

JOSIP NOVAKOVICH teaches at the University of Cincinnati. Graywolf published his book of stories, *Yolk,* and his collection of essays, *Apricots from Chernobyl,* and Story Press published his *Fiction Writer's Workshop, a book of practical criticism.* His short pieces have appeared in *The New York Times Magazine, DoubleTake, Antaeus, The European Magazine,* and in two Pushcart Prize anthologies.

AARON PARAZETTE received his M.F.A. from Claremont Graduate School in Claremont, California. He is an Assistant Professor in Painting at the University of Houston. In 1997 he had a solo exhibition at Texas Gallery in Houston.

ALLAN PETERSON Chapbooks: *Small Charities, # 7 in the Panhandler Press Series; Stars On A Wire, Parallel Editions,* University of Alabama Institute for the Book Arts. Recent publications: *Agni, Green Mountains Review, Indiana Review, The Journal.* Work forthcoming in the *Gettysburg Review, Pleiades.* NEA Fellowship in Poetry, 1992

ADRIENNE SHARP'S short fiction about dancers has appeared in *The Northwest Review, The Madison Review, The North Dakota Quarterly, Permafrost,* and other quarterlies.

LINDA ILENE SOLOMON has lived for the past ten years in Paris where she has taught creative writing and journalism to adults, and has freelanced for newspapers and magazines including *The International Herald Tribune, The L.A. Times,* and *New Age Journal* (where she is currently contributing editor). She has published in literary journals such as *The Cimarron Review* and *Alabama Literary Review.* She is currently working on a travel memoir titled, *Fearless Women,* from which "In the Cradle of Mankind" is excerpted.

JOHN SPARAGANA was born in Rochester, New York in 1958. He is an Associate Professor in the Department of Art and Art History at Rice University in Houston. This summer he was in group exhibitions in New York, Chicago and Houston. He resides in Houston and Chicago.

ELIZABETH SPENCER has published numerous works of fiction, including *The Light in the Piazza and Other Italian Tales* (with a foreward by Robert Phillips) and *The Stories of Elizabeth Spencer* (with a foreward by Eudora Welty). She has won five O'Henry prizes and the Award of Merit Medal for the Short Story given by the American Academy of Arts and Letters. *Landscape of the Heart: A Memoir,* will be published in early 1998 by Random House.

HENRIETTE VAN DER SLUIJIS earned her B.A. in English Literature from George Mason University. *Union Street Review* published her memoir in 1984.

JOHN VINCENT is completing his Ph.D. in English at Duke. He received his M.F.A. from Warren Wilson College and has published poems in *The Beloit Poetry Journal, The Plum Review, The Cream City Review,* and other journals.

SIDNEY WADE'S second collection of poems, *Green,* was chosen by Richard Howard to be published in the University of South Carolina Press's James Dickey Series of Contemporary Poery. It is scheduled for spring, 1998. Her first, *Empty Sleeves,* was published by the University of Georgia Press in 1991. She is a graduate of Houston's Creative Writing Program.

ROBERT CLARK YOUNG has had work anthologized by Penguin Books, has won an Ohio Arts Council Grant for Fiction, and recently won first place in the New Millennium Writings essay contest. His work has appeared in *AWP Chronicle, Black Warrior Review, ZYZZYVA, Another Chicago Magazine, New Orleans Review, West Branch, San Diego Review,* and many other journals. On a trip around the world seven years ago, he made a pit-stop in Alexandria, Egypt which lasted six months and inspired the story printed here.

Gulf Coast

A Journal of Literature and Fine Arts

University of Houston
Department of English
Houston, Texas 77204-3012

- ❒ 1 year (2 issues) $12.00
- ❒ 2 years (4 issues) $22.00
- ❒ Lifetime subscription (for individual only) $250.00

Start with issue: (please circle one)

Vol. IX, No. 1	Winter '96	Vol. X, No. 2	Summer '98
Vol. IX, No. 2	Summer '97	Vol. XI, No. 1	Winter '98
Vol. X, No. 1	Winter '97	Vol. XI, No. 2	Summer '99

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

❒ Renewal ❒ Gift Subscription Begin with Volume No. _____

❒ Payment enclosed (check or money order)

❒ Foreign subscription, add $2.00 postage

NIMROD INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL

20TH *NIMROD*/HARDMAN AWARDS COMPETITION

THE KATHERINE ANNE PORTER PRIZE FOR FICTION
& THE PABLO NERUDA PRIZE FOR POETRY

DEADLINE : APRIL 18, 1998

FIRST PRIZE POETRY & FICTION $2000 & publication
SECOND PRIZE POETRY & FICTION $1000 & publication
POETRY: along single poem or a selection of poems– 5,000 words max.
FICTION: 7500 words maximum

No previously published works or works accepted for publication elsewhere. Author's name must not appear on manuscript. Include a cover sheet containing major title and subtitles, author's name, address & #s. "Contest Entry" must be on envelope. Manuscripts will not be returned. *NIMROD* retains the right to publish any submission. Works not accepted for publication will be released. SASE for results only.

CONTEST INFORMATION
Make $20 check payable to *NIMROD*. Enclose with manuscript.
$20.00 includes 1 year subscription (two issues).

SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION
Subscribe and receive a one year subscription: *from Time to Time* (V. 40, No. 2) and *Awards 19 (V. 41, No. 1)*, or a 2 year subscription (4 issues).

$17.50/1 year (outside USA $19) $30/2 years (outside USA $33)

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Country _____

Mail to:

NIMROD
THE UNIVERSITY OF TULSA,
600 S. COLLEGE
TULSA, OKLAHOMA 74104-3189
(918) 631-3080

ELINOR BENEDICT POETRY PRIZE

WINNING POEM $500

Two Honorable Mentions

The winning poem and the two Honorable Mention poems will be published in the Summer '98 issue of Passages North.

Entry Fees:
First two poems $4 each,
additional poems $3 each.
A four-poem entry receives a free contest issue.
A six-poem entry receives a one year subscription to Passages North (2 issues).

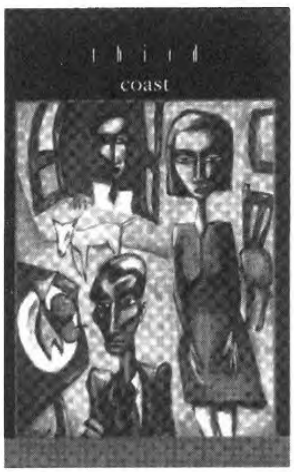
Entries accepted September 1 - December 1, 1997
No simultaneous submissions
Unpublished poetry only
All entries considered for publication
No manuscripts will be returned
Send a #10 SASE for winners list only

Make check or money order payable to:

Elinor Benedict Poetry Prize
Passages North, Department of English
Northern Michigan University
1401 Presque Isle Ave.
Marquette MI 49855

Special Contest Entry Offer: Sample Copy of Passages North, $5

third coast



"A lively new literary magazine on the rise."
—Ronald Spatz, Executive Editor, *Alaska Quarterly Review*

"The journal looks wonderful–both its content and design. The fiction is very fresh, and at the same time polished–a more exciting selection than I've seen in a journal in a while."
—Debra Monroe, author of *A Wild, Cold State, New Fangled,* and *The Source of Trouble*

Advisory Editors

Stuart Dybek
Nancy Eimers
Jaimy Gordon
Arnie Johnston
William Olsen
Herbert Scott

Former Contributors

Kim Addonizio
Michelle Boisseau
Mark Cox
Peter Ho Davies
Alison Hawthorne Deming
Denise Duhamel
Anne Finger
Alice B. Fogel
Greg Glazner
Albert Goldbarth
John Haines
Edward Hirsch
Lynda Hull
Richard Jackson
Brigit Pegeen Kelly
Lisa Lewis
Michael Martone
William Matthews
Wang Ping
Alane Rollings
David Rivard
Leon Rooke
David Shields
Maura Stanton
Jean Thompson
Roger Weingarten
Dean Young
and many others...

Subscriptions

Subscription orders may be sent to:

Attention Business Manager
Third Coast, Department of English
Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI 49008-5092

Rates are as follows:

Single Copy: $6
One Year Subscription/Two Issues: $11
Two Year Subscription/Four Issues: $20
Three Year Subscription/Six Issues: $29

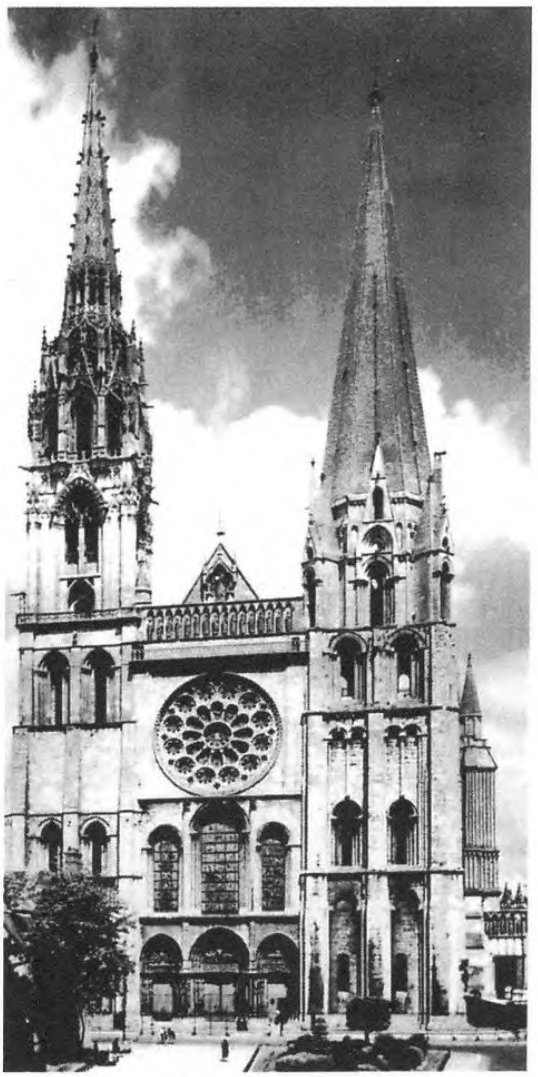
Please include your address and telephone number with your check or money order.

VQR THE VIRGINIA QUARTERLY REVIEW
A National Journal of Literature and Discussion

SUMMER 1997 *Volume 73, Number 3*

FIVE DOLLARS

The Virginia Quarterly Review
One West Range
Charlottesville, VA 22903



Chartres Cathedral, France

ALAN AINSWORTH

NUAR ALSADIR

NICK BARRETT

AARON BELZ

ROMAN D. DUCHNOWSKI

REBECCA DUNHAM

JEFF ELROD

ANDREW FELD

IRVING FELDMAN

DAVID FERRY

SARAH HANNAH

KAREN HIRSCH

KATIE KAHN

KARLA KUBAN

CORINNE LEE

BRIAN LEUNG

KATHLEEN MCGOOKEY

ERIC MCHENRY

JOSIP NOVAKOVICH

AARON PARAZETTE

ALLEN PETERSON

ADRIENNE SHARP

LINDA ILENE SOLOMON

JOHN SPARAGANA

ELIZABETH SPENCER

HENRIETTE VAN DER SLUIJS

JOHN VINCENT

SIDNEY WADE

ROBERT CLARK YOUNG

$7.00