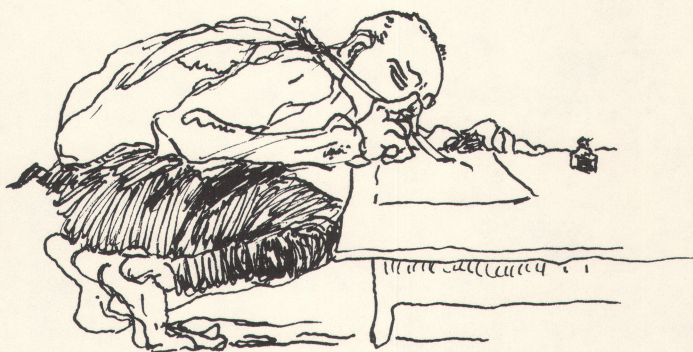
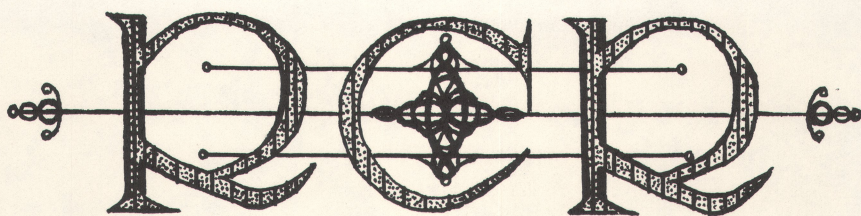


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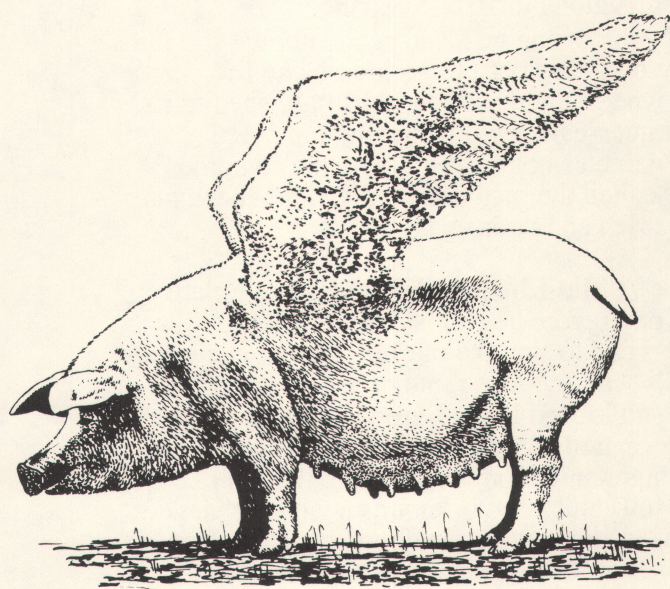
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**Andover Price
An 8 X 10
with Cleire da Silva-Gray**

I. Equality? And Moot
Predestined Mateless Man? And Equals Poor
Like some zygotic unicellular
primeval twerp with a memory impaired
he drifts along unable to expand.
It's been so long he has forgotten how
the world admires a huge success like fire
and wheels and passing on distinguished traits.
And guesses--"i will be among the failed
like gametes not recalling why they'd come."
He's called the mateless man and he's been here
since rich and poor relationships began.

A Mid-Life Man? And Equals Relative
The day before he reached his fifty-first
And woke to find the rates of change increased,
like Nova time-lapse studies speeded up.
The sun looked like a figure eight that looped
the loop with Capricorn and Cancer lines.
Midnight and noon occurred a pulse apart.
The fulls and news of moons position changed
as fast as teen-aged honeymooners can,
and Albert Einstein called him up to say--
"Price pal, it's relative to getting old."

A Calculating Man? And Equals Zilch
Suppose he takes his more than fifty years
then rounds it to the nearest integer
and adds to that the meaning of his life.
"That done i'd find my sum-- it's fifty-one."
And quickly multiplied reminds him that--
"a zero multiplied by anything
remains a zero at the bottom line."
What is the use? The answer always comes
to zip, no matter how you work it out.
"By being nothing, nothing have i lost."

A Weighty Man? And Equals Waste Retained

A man who lives a burden to the earth,
he seeks to make redemption in a book
that lightens him as burdensome. And is
the man who wanted to redeem himself,
to sacrifice his life and load to print.
He was surprised when he got heavier
and heavier with every passing year--

"the books i wrote not worth their weight in waste."

It's time to ascertain his current load--
he's body burden heavy, full of waste.

II. Equality? Poetic And Beyond

A Spacey Man? And Equal To This Time

The troubles of time were threatening And
the man to test creative innocence.
His mind space called for help from heart's
and soul's amazing miracles of poetry.
These sainted miracles preserved his space
for innocence by urging time in mind
dimension sit-- "sit still, recover, sit,
think back." So troubled time sat back to wait
a future test of Price's innocence.
At fifty-one, his time test passed, And went.

Dichotomous? And Equals "Blame It, Yes"

"When It comes down to It we all are twins
who haven't anything worthwhile to write
to one another living, as we do,
in different hemispheres." Is this the source,
the bottom source, or sources as It were,
of constant struggle, father-mother-child
of all the world? Could this be It And Price,
the double-dealing underpin of sex
and war and violence, of life Itself?
No wonder It destroys the thing It loves.

A Man Beyond? And Equals Here With Us
Beyond his test his actions are rear guard.
In this regard he's learned to trust the blurb--
"This poet seeks to rectify his life.
He claims he did it all for poetry."
Attaching blame is part of humanness,
that part and parcel growing out of guilt.
In poetry dichotomy is healed.
"My poetry is me, me poetry."
Beyond his test his actions are appeased
and all And's blaming poetry assuaged.

Dead-Failed Man? And Equals Real Gone Space Man
Dead-failed indeed, he lives and knows the way
the living live, continue to remain
by definition with solidity,
substantial--not imaginary, real,
pertaining to an image formed by light.
And's differential rays converge in space--
"Shazam, a zillion reals to see at once."
Indeed dead-failed, he's known his share of fire
but can't communicate with us unless
we live and write with hearts and souls like And.

--Andover Prive with Cleire da Silva-Gray,
for Verdant City's Midnight Arts Review

**A Youthful Couple of the Times
As Eavesdropped On by Rosey Lavineau
in Laffy Lemon's Happy Pan Cafe**

They waited for a good fish soup
they'd read about in Kosmic P. Cookbook,
a ghost-write-by-committee coterie
and Verdant City monthly magazine.

My father called me Nowhere first,
he said,
then wed my ma and called me Sacrifice,
but you can call me Masculine for now
and later Powerful and Lionized.

My mother called me Shy Sedate and her
Reflection, later on her Emptiness
and Reverie. I am Sensational
for now, but you can call me Pulchritude,
then later All Dimensional,
she said.

The waiter served their hot fish soup.
They wolfed it down impatiently.
It tasted better than it read,
she said.
Said he,
if only it were called
Eternal Present soup.

--by Rosey Lavineau, a Ghost-At Large,
with David Owlinton, the Editor
and Ghosting Principal---for KPC

Robert Cooperman

Lady Mortmain Thinks of Her Daughter

The act of love revolts her,
she admitted in whispers
on her last visit, her husband
looking blacker than the panther
exhibited at the zoo.

We left him with my husband,
smoking cigars and pacing the library.
I patted her hand and kissed her,
mouthed the usual platitudes
about the will of the church,
the purpose of all life,
a husband's conjugal rights--
all the while my poor girl
cringed farther from me,
her sweating silence a castigation
of what I had lived by
even before my hastily arranged
marriage. Then all pretence
fell from me, like weights
I had carried all my life.

"You blame me, child, as is only
right. I never enjoyed it either,
at least not with your Pappa,
a good man, better than your William,
who will never understand the mind
of a sensitive woman like you.
Don't fidget, my dove, we'll see
about an annulment. Thank God
your Pappa can afford it, even if
your oldest brother runs through
our fortune like a bear after honey.
Don't cry, your eyes will be ruined
for the fancy stitch work
you turn out so delightfully."

When I sent her to her old room,
she looked lighthearted as a girl.
I sighed, shook my head, rang for tea
and a discreet glass of sherry.
Poor angel, poor unnatural daughter,
the logical product of a mother
saluted by more gallants and beaux
than half the actresses who rouge
their faces to cover the marks
of French pox, my own acting
competent enough to fool
better audiences than her father.

Alone

Your second mother-in-law advised you
to forget the child of your first marriage,
after the judge awarded custody
to her father. Your back stiffened
as if a plank had been set into your spine,
and you muttered something between teeth
clenched like a wolf determined
to tear its paw from the steel of a trap.

Now you feel like the desperate heroines
of Victorian novels, wanting first
a separate bedroom, next a separate life:
unable to say exactly, even to the therapist,
what it is about your husband that makes
your skin crawl as if his hands
were slithery hooves of slaughtered hogs:
so much his mother's finicky, ambitious
son, so little the man who seemed
all lips and tongue when you courted.

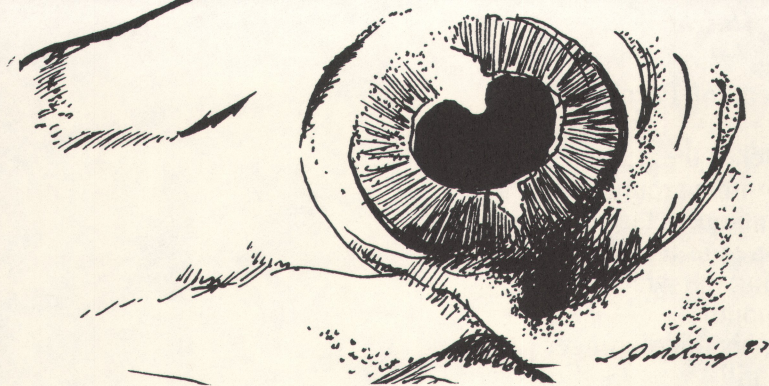
You can't say even that, so you shout
that you're much better at breaking
things than at patching them together.
But it's your second daughter you think of,
how she pushed out of you and into
the proud arms of this husband, when all
the time you were pregnant you thought
she was yours alone, a bond between you
no cutting of the birth cord could sever.

Almost

It was almost a love story from a book:
after two dates, you knew he
was the man you wanted to marry,
not because he made bells go off
when you kissed--because he didn't.
The ones who did, the long-limbed,
good looking boys who knew it,
driving their fast cars and handing
you beers on love-wild rides
when romance was an obligation
of the flesh and nothing more--
those boys were in love with their faces
in their rearview mirrors; they dropped
you, or you them, after a night
or two of thrashing by a river,
in a rented room, an absent friend's
apartment; when you called and another
young woman answered, all fluttery
that was she now number one. "Honey,"
you wanted to say, "just wait a week."

But if there were no bells with this one,
there was something much better: a certainty
that there was nothing he wouldn't do
for you, maybe because he had been
a senior life guard, as silly as that sounded,
and had saved a child from drowning once.
something he had told you, not to brag,
but because you had asked him,
and he had admitted to the bravery
as if still amazed himself
to have performed such a feat.
But looking at him while he drove
you home, you knew he'd be
dependable in every emergency.

And when he kissed you that night,
he seemed so old-fashioned and shy
you wanted to cry afterwards, not
for balked pleasure, but that one
chaste knight still drove the highways,
thinking his girlfriend a princess
in a fairy tale he was dreaming awake.



Robert Haight

The Muskellunge Remembers

The muskellunge remembers
the previous life when he was Ojibwa:
a scent of burning cedar,
the hiss of its juices,
the long tongue of fire
snaking into corners of night.

He learned from flame
to flick his arm until a trout
squirmed in his grip,
so quick he could crawl out on a log,
snap his neck--jaw--teeth. . .

The muskellunge remembers
who called him Great Pike,
remembers the sentence
to settle inside whiskey bottles
and his escape when he dropped his arms
and swam away like an arrow.

Because the muskellunge remembers,
woodsmoke makes better bait
thought it is fit to be tied
only in the full of darkness.

And because he remembers,
you must throw him back.
Try to eat him and his bones
will choke you.

The Fear of Perch

He watches the dentist
slowly circle around him
and remembers the perch
he tortured as a child,
shredding the white plastic
of its mouth,
forcing his middle finger
into its gill.
Now the perch smiles
pliers glistening from its fin.

For hours the perch pulls
at the hooks in the man's mouth,
twisting them in circles,
stirring small eddies of blood.
Finally the tip of a treble hook appears!
The man gags on his stomach
rising into his throat.

The perch pulls half the man's gut
out his mouth and cuts the hook off.
The man listens to his own gills
sucking at air.

The dentist hangs up the pliers and smiles.
The man will pay a nonimal fee.

Alex Argyros

The Kitchen Table For Amy

Often in the late morning, when
you're alone, and you try to sum
things up, you think of the girl
you were when you made important
decisions over a similar table,
when you were drunk with the bouquet
of fermenting fruit and your spirit
as hard as the bones of the hardest boy.
You're a wife now, and a mother.

The table is a father's parable,
you think, or a husband's, in any case,
it was never yours. It's their carving
of worlds out of wood and privilege,
it's their voice that survives
the generations in the table's
carefully bevelled edges.

You don't work, as they say, your days
are spent caring for the house
and for the child. But, dear wife,
you make worlds too, when you wake up
three times a night to comfort our
screaming baby, and hold her tight
against your breast for hours
until her fear subsides,
when you teach her the alchemy of
words, the sacrifice of touch,
the palimpsest of spirit and chance
she draws when with your help she gropes
in the dark for her lost toys.

It's your father's table, or mine,
but you're its heirophant.
If you were to open the window
some night as you return to bed
after comforting our daughter you
might see the moonflowers you planted
underneath the trellis and remember
the song you started humming
in our garden one night ten years ago.
Look around you, Amy, the silence
you hear is a violin string tuning
itself to the rhythm of your blood.
Yours is the noblest art, the ancient
ritual of drumming spirit out of
earth. Shake your sleepy head, clear
your eyes, run your fingers
through your reddish hair, then look up
at the sky and you might see
the pale gauze wings you laid
on the linden tree, and me, pretending
to sleep, but transported by the music
that still wells up inside me.

Driving Under the Influence

--Hair of Dog Woven into Shaggy Tale--
headline to AP wire story

Just when I think life's flat
as a deserted highway in Texas,
I read in the morning paper
about a blind man who let his dog
help him drive, and am reminded
of the blindfolded knife-thrower
I saw once, tossing his cutlery
at his wife spinning on a wooden wheel.
He didn't miss,

nor did the dog
(named Bud and now most likely a star)
who was trained, said the owner,
to bark twice for green, once for red.
Upon hearing dogs are
color blind, the owner said his friend
could distinguish changing lights.

The knife-thrower, when
questioned by the audience
on how he did his feat, said
he visualized each throw
before he threw it.

I wonder if
the blind man projected the street
onto his skull, but the paper says
the cops stopped him for weaving
and charged him with driving
while under the influence,

which makes me doubt the concept
of mental rehearsal because I, too,
have put the theory to the test:

I don't think the blind driver
envisioned himself behind the wheel--
that's why he had the dog,
putting his faith into the simple,
knowing everyone gropes their way
along the road, knowing there's no point
in even trying to practice, that
everyone has to adjust his own blindfold,
grip the wheel of his own car,
and set off for his own dear life
under the influence of his own dog.



The Hut

On the street, Barb felt as if she had escaped. I don't really like her, that woman Maria, Barb thought. She's nice enough, inviting me over for "a real Mexican meal," taking an interest in my poems, but I don't like her, her type.

Even though the air seemed hot liquid and the heat rising in slow waves from the cement threatened to implode her skull,

Barb walked briskly, with long strides that ate the sidewalk and put buildings quickly behind her. She was trying to make the mile home before dark when she felt it--a swelling of gravity that seemed to pull her guts through her vagina to the hot stone. This is not how she usually felt when it started. She didn't count days or anything but she always had a little warning discomfort early on and then was ready. Suddenly nauseous and bloated, too heavy to stand, she thought maybe she should sit on someone's steps and wait for it to pass.

"Hey, chica!" a boy hollered from across the street where he had unthreaded himself from other boys and men knotted on front of the liquor store. "Guapa! Guapa!" he called, waving her over with his arm. He shouted something else in Spanish, a language Barb didn't understand, and his group laughed. She didn't live in this neighborhood and she had been told she got yelled at around here because she was blond, that the calls were harmless, part of Latin culture. Still, she was nervous and wanted to get back to her own street where the harassment would at least be in English.

Why didn't I go into that store to get something to use? she would wonder later. At the time, however, the thought actually did not occur to her. The store might offer rubbers or Preparation H, but never something as offensive and exclusively feminine as tampons. Sick, hot and not thinking too clearly, she kept walking, staring straight ahead, and pretended to ignore the boy, the group of men and the green/red flash of "Package Liquor". The territory seemed theirs.

Also, she was afraid she was beginning to show. Originally, she had chosen to walk in order to blow off steam after the scene at Maria's. She probably doesn't know how uncomfortable I was. Maria had even asked Barb back again, apologizing that she had never actually had a chance to look at her writing. Maybe she did know, though. Maybe she's cursed me, Barb thought and forced a smile.

Now a bus was out of the question. Barb's yellow shorts would be soaked through pretty quick and getting on a crowded, meandering city bus with red streams running down her legs into her sandals, well, she just couldn't. Thinking about it, about the color combination, made her more nauseous. Without checking her wallet, Barb knew she didn't have money for a taxi. And there would be no restaurants to duck into for blocks yet.

Maybe a friend will come for me, she thought. She felt embarrassed about asking but, feeling sick and out of options, she started to look around for a pay phone. Turning the corner, just a block ahead, the golden shell of a service station beckoned. Gas stations were pretty rare in this part of the city and since Barb didn't drive, she'd never paid attention to the few there were. She hadn't expected it, but she was sure glad to see it.

Some older men hung around outside, leaning against the station or sitting on the ledge where plate glass fitted into the cement wall. Barb wondered why the men were there; they didn't seem to be waiting for their cars. Most people around here used public transportation. She walked past them with tiny, mincing steps, holding her thighs together. The men, older than those at the store, were quiet, looking her over and, she thought, probably thinking she had to pee bad.

Catching her reflection in the glass as she opened the door, she thought the attendant might think she was a junkie who needed to shoot up or get sick or something. She looked that bad. She tried to smile.

"Could I please use your ladies room?" she asked. He hesitated and for a moment Barb felt like when she was eleven and had to buy her first box of pads; walking up to the counter, she had been sure that the old, hawk-nosed druggist, a man who had been in the store, at that counter, all her life, could look through her clothes and see it. That was ten years ago and only in the last couple had she felt comfortable buying a box of tampons without hiding them in with groceries or other purchases.

As Barb waited for a response, she noticed a sign--slick, neon poster board that screamed "BATHROOMS ARE FOR PATRONS ONLY" in hand-scrawled black felt--hanging just above the attendant's oily head, but he paused only a moment before handing over the key.

Barb moved dreamily out of air-conditioning into the pressing heat and walked, almost doubled over, to the ladies' room. The smell was pretty wretched and there was liquid on the floor but she gratefully pulled down her shorts and sat on the warm, sweating toilet seat. She thought about disease. Leaning forward, embracing her abdomen, she rested her head against the white tile wall that was only inches from her knees. The tile was wet with condensation. She thought, if I can just sit here for a while until I feel a little better, maybe I'll be able to figure out a way to get home.

Barb thought of Maria and the irony of the situation made her smile. Maria made bloodprints and would have something to say about this if she knew. Barb had discovered the prints only that afternoon, when she went to Maria's for dinner. Not that Maria kept them secret. They hung on the walls of her apartment.

Entering Maria's living room, Barb had noticed the pictures and while Maria peeled an avocado, she decided to get a better look at the sheets of spongy, gray newsprint covered with what looked like brown inkblots in symmetrical, freudian shapes. One looked like two men, lizard men with ridges along their backs, fighting over a gift-wrapped package; another was a skinny angel complete with wings and floor-length gown. All were surrounded by feathery, whispery strokes or impressions. Barb tried to think of something to say about them. She didn't know much about art--not even what she liked--but she was afraid that saying this looks like this or that looks like that would make her seem shallow.

She saw through the open door to the kitchen that Maria glanced at her from time to time while slipping rough-bark skin from the green, slimy flesh. Barb walked over to the kitchen and leaned against the door frame as Maria, her movements very precise, halved the avocado and scooped the brown moon seed from the pale cream center. Barb hated avocados; she thought they tasted like lard. She was afraid she wasn't going to care much for this dinner.

"What do you think of my prints?" Maria asked. "They are of my blood." Recoiling mentally, Barb did not answer. She had always been squeamish about blood. "What do you think?" Maria asked again.

"Did you cut yourself for them?"

"No," Maria laughed gently--but, Barb thought, as if what I said was truly amusing to her--and dropped avocado halves into a blender, "I did not have to. They are made from my menstrual blood."

Barb remembered a friend of hers who had a series of photographs taken during the birth of her first child--spread crotch, first liquid gush, crown of hairy head, wrinkled face bathed in blood, hands gripping shoulders, etc.--and then showed them to a group over for drinks one evening. That time, Barb had not known better than to act embarrassed and say what she thought, that the photos were disgusting. "In poor taste" were the words she had actually used, waiting until the hostess had left the room for a minute to check on the baby. Everyone in the small group, men and women, jumped. Pregnancy, birth was beautiful; the beauty needed to be demystified; how could we face our deaths if we couldn't face our births. And, throughout the intellectual harangue, the garish, polaroid snapshots lay, face-up, bleeding over onto the coffee table. Really, she thought some things, like shitting, should be kept personal.

But she wasn't going to say this to Maria. For one thing, Maria, a widow whose "paying job" was as an accountant, seemed like a good person to know. She had started coming to the writer's group a couple weeks before. The group didn't take itself too seriously, as a group or as individuals, but Maria was very serious and pushed for public readings. Barb didn't wish to make a bad impression on the woman and, more important, she really liked Maria, or had. Now she was afraid Maria might be very odd, somehow threatening, and she weighed her fear of offending Maria against her desire to skip dinner and leave. Eating at Maria's struck Barb as not being very hygienic.

Maybe I'm being racist, Barb thought. Latinos were, after all, into graphic portrayals of blood. The stuff oozed from statues and paintings of their holiest saints. She was about to comment on this when it occurred to her that her observation might itself be racist. She decided not to say anything.

"Menstrual blood is very powerful, don't you think?" Maria asked as she walked past Barb into the living room. She was wiping the green from her hands onto a towel so white it looked cold.

"I hadn't actually thought of it in those terms," Barb said, turning to follow. She searched desperately for another topic and tried to avoid looking at the walls that now seemed obscene.

"Well, it has always been a powerful image for me," Maria said. "I have been doing much work on the subject."

"I can see that," Barb said. About twenty of the things were plastered to the wall.

"No, not these. These are for effect. For my mood." Maria pushed down the corner of a page that was beginning to curl. "I do my real work in a studio a couple blocks from here. These are to keep me thinking."

A car without a muffler roared in the gas station drive and jarred Barb into her surroundings. Leaning back on the toilet and shifting her legs to rearrange the cramps, she let her head flop against the wall behind her. She opened her eyes and peered at the neon light ring on the ceiling. Sluggishly moving aside matted hair that had stuck to her face, she looked around the room. No napkin dispenser. No toilet paper. No way out.

She knew she didn't have any tissue in her purse but looked anyway. Maybe she had stuffed a napkin from a fast food restaurant in there at some point. Nope. Nothing but a sheaf of her poetry and her wallet, which she knew contained her driver's license, library card, one dollar and some change.

Maria would probably not mind this situation at all, Barb thought. She would probably make something mystical of it. She had said she liked to look at "the flower" of her blood on a pad.

Staring at her stained underwear, Barb thought, so where's the power, Maria? Sometime soon she was going to have to get out of this cubicle but the idea of the sticky shorts rubbing against her was so distasteful that she held her breath, hoping this might help keep her from being sick. The nausea let up a little.

"There is a power in it that I am trying to discover," Maria had continued the conversation as she pounded out a tortilla between the palms of her hands. "Discover and communicate," she added. "It is an event for which I try to recover and create ritual."

"I'm not sure....," Barb began and broke off, not wanting to encourage Maria. Not understanding either.

"My personal ritual, such things as wearing red during my menstrual flow," Maria said, moving her hand in a way that Barb feared indicated Maria planned to enumerate all of her period fascinations. Barb was relieved to see that Maria wore a crisp, white shirt and black jeans. She looked very clean. "The red is for celebration. I use certain herbs at this time and certain incense." She stopped, looked at Barb and laughed gently. "You think this is strange?"

"I," Barb began, "I just never think of such things." She was sitting at the kitchen table watching Maria finish up the meal. The air in here was especially hot but Barb felt uncomfortable in the living room. "It's just a bodily function."

"Well, of course," Maria said. She turned toward the stove and slapped a flat disk of dough onto the cast-iron skillet. "I just had so much shame for a long time. The first time I bled I did not know what was happening. Nobody had told me of this blood. My mother must also have been ashamed. Now I think of it as power that has been denied, at least hidden or lost."

Barb was, at last, on familiar ground. Maria must be one of those goddess-worshippers, healing with crystals and burning sage for purification. She seemed more obsessed than any of that type Barb had met. And Barb was surprised. She wouldn't have guessed it of Maria, who seemed so efficient and modern.

Getting up from the table, Barb went over to the stove to see how tortillas were cooked. After less than a minute, the dry-looking dough bubbled and Maria turned it for a few seconds on the other side. She patted out another one.

"You think I am something like a witch?" Maria asked, which was exactly what Barb had been thinking. However, Barb knew a few witches--or people who claimed to be witches--young women who talked endlessly of feminine principles, held secret rituals with candles and did not eat meat. Maria had never seemed like that to Barb. Barb looked at the middle-aged, dark Maria. With her large brown eyes and full, scattered, black hair, Maria actually did resemble a witch and in a more sinister way than the others; Barb didn't need much imagination to picture Maria as Snow White's aging, beautiful stepmother. Barb chuckled and, trying to put things on a lighter note, told Maria that she did have something of an evil look about her. Maria laughed. A kindly laugh? Soft and lilting, it hung on the heat like a spell. "Yes, but, you see, I am Christian," Maria said.

"I don't really care about that, about any of that god stuff," Barb replied quickly, picking up on a possible subject shift. Religion, politics, even the weather would be better. She would try to force herself to banter lightly. "My family was very religious but with me, it never really caught."

"I use what I wish from religion," Maria replied. "From Christianity I take certain things that I weave with others. It is all an attempt at a whole pattern that will fit me." She scooped up a tortilla with a spatula.

"You mean you just take what you want? You make your own tortillas but you don't grind your own corn. Something like that?" Barb said, trying to maintain the tone.

"Something like that," Maria laughed. "I don't embrace my culture entirely." She seemed to be lost in the thought as she stared at the last tortilla cooking. "What it is," she said, stacking the tortilla on top of the others, "is that I try, by studying religion, art, culture, to choose things for my life that will give me power rather than drain me. It is like finding the power of menstruation. In many cultures women were forced to go off in to the menstrual huts during their bleeding. They were considered too unclean to handle the food men ate or the items men might touch. So there they were, with no work, no kids, talking to each other. There would be steam, herbs, soothing teas. It is a ritual worth reestablishing. And, of course, the power of the blood was acknowledged. These things have been lost but not the myth of uncleanness. I attempt a refocusing."

Barb wondered how far women would get in their careers if they took four or five days off each month to sit in a hut. Maybe the women could all be artists, sitting on blotting paper and then comparing the images. They could be creative and save on menstrual products at the same time. Barb watched as Maria glopped the guacamole from the blender into a bowl. The smell of something cheesey was in the air and Barb began to feel faint.

"It's the heat," she said, grabbing her purse from the back of the kitchen chair. "Really, I am sorry but I have to go. I think I'm going to be sick."

"You shouldn't go if you're sick. Lie down on the couch for a while," Maria said, bustling over and placing her hand on Barb's shoulder. "Well, let me borrow a car and drive you home then," she offered when Barb said she just wanted to go.

"No, I think I just need air," Barb said. "I can't eat anything right now and I'm going to be lousy company if I stay."

"Has this happened before?" Maria asked. "Maybe it's something you should have checked."

"No, I'm sure it's the heat," Barb said, stepping out the door with her guilt at leaving Maria in the sweltering apartment with all the food that she had prepared especially for Barb.

Someone knocked on the door of the bathroom.

"It's taken," yelled Barb, afraid it might be the attendant coming to check on her. But no one said anything and the knocking ceased. Probably someone playing around, she thought. She was feeling better now. In fact, she felt completely recovered. How long had she been here? How was she going to get out? The bathroom didn't even have a sink so she could splash her face. She examined her shorts. They were ruined, soaked in the crotch and the insides of both legs.

Looking in her purse again, she decided she only had one option. Maybe, if she shredded the poems and stuffed them into her underwear, they would be absorbent enough to do the trick. She removed about five of them and started to rip them when the title of the top one caught her eye. She had never had any confidence that the poems were worthwhile. But these were her only copies. Even if they weren't very good, they were a start. Home was only a mile away and it must be dark by now. If she walked and kept out of the light, she'd make it. She pulled up her shorts, and, turning, opened the door.

Night had fallen but the city was its own sun and for a moment she hesitated. Would she be able to avoid the light? Not wanting to face the attendant she left the key inside the bathroom and walked past the quiet men outside.

She walked a block, ignoring the car that pulled up and continued alongside her a ways. Staring straight ahead, she didn't realize that her stride had become long, almost loping. As she turned onto the street that led directly to her apartment, an early moon swung out from behind a row of buildings and hung, glugged, above the concrete like a beacon.

Rod Murphy

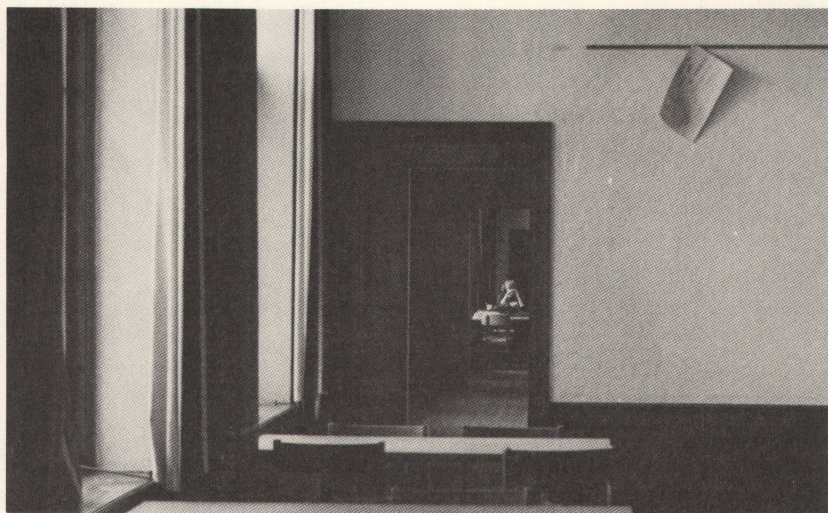
THE TIME AT MY AUNT SANDY'S

I Late September, 1962

It's just Aunt Sandy and I
with Uncle Joe gone to Newark each day for work.
Her freckled hands smell of Jergen's lotion
when she folds kleenex into squares
to put under her china coffee cup.
She dries the bathroom sink with a towel
each time the water is run.
At lunchtime she makes breast of turkey sandwiches,
fills out my plate with orange slices and cookies.
I am nine years old in Avon-by-the-sea, New Jersey
and when we walk up Fourth Street to the ocean
the beach looks to me like my aunt
without her make-up on.
All the sturdy umbrellas are gone, the canvas windscreens
with their salt-crushed stakes have been rolled away.
Adele, Gordon and all the bridge players
have moved their game indoors.
The lifeguards are back at Montclair State.
My older sister has gone home to Pittsburgh without me
because my elbow is still shattered
packed in plaster and itching.
For the first time in my six summers here
I have stayed on past Labor Day--
two extra weeks of mending at my Aunt Sandy's
where coffee percolated every morning,
where the meals are all on time,
where every bed gets made.
Late afternoon when we walk along the boardwalk
past the closed salt water taffy stand,
only the old men
with hair coming out of their ears and noses
are still interested in the ocean.

II. Early November, 1985

Uncle Joe hugs my wife,
picks up our two children.
We were here just last summer.
Today we arrive before the other out-of-towners.
Aunt Sandy had wanted an extra month at the shore,
had stayed in Avon late into October.
I can remember the look of Avon without the tourists,
but I cannot picture Aunt Sandy like this.
A stroke, an aneurysm, death.
In the morning, while my uncle showers upstairs,
I make coffee in her kitchen:
scoop grounds from a yellow and black can,
plug in her electric coffeepot and
wait for it to perk.



Letter To Gorbachev

"Only a madman would have walked away from the proposals we had on the table."--Mikhail Gorbachev
after the Reykjavik talks in 1986.

Open it now, now that the alarum has been given.

We've been stockpiling for this very moment.

You have seven minutes.

Karanganda has nine.

Push your own buttons, if you so insist.

It won't matter

You've seen the reports.

Nothing you can launch will get through.

All that wasted throw-weight. Pity.

Eighteen of ours will be enough.

You know which cities. You know.

Open the little package.

Why not?

Have you found the porkpie hat? Put it on.

Oppy's shadow.

Press the finger circles as indicated.

Repeat many times.

Hear the ticking? Hear your pulse?

Continue.

Smell the square.



It's the cologne I wear.

Your wife remarked on it.

Go on.

Rip off the rectangular slip at the bottom.

Eat it.

Do you have Stolichnaya close by?

Taste how paper
goes down. Why not?

Care to press the finger circles again?

Here, do this.

We've been waiting.

Kiss the paper.

I had a black Lab once
who kissed the vet's hand that put him down.

Kiss the paper.

It is your summer at Sevastopol.

Kiss it goodbye.

Boogie In Bougival

(un homage 'a Renoir)

My red beard will be grown out by then,
my straw hat pale as Sauterne and pulled down low
will provide the proper dash of whimsey and style, and

you in the holiday dress with bustle and scalloped edges,
bursting with crinoline, will bend back from the waist,
your weight given to me as I want you to give me

your eyes, your eyes dark as the mussels served to us
in a tidal pool of private herbs and clarified butter,
your eyes that I would savor like each feel of each shell.

My lips will be perfumed with Margaux, my tongue
will swirl with Boursin and freshly steamed artichokes
when we began with a gavotte, a country waltz,

a remembered turn from the Slavonic dances.
You will laugh at my Celtic kickings and together
we will promenade in a ritual for two.

All those top hat bon hommes and ruffle-sleeve grande dames
will see their first Texas Two Step, will have to
step aside for our double dipsy-doodle.

Will we show them the funky chicken, the freaky-deak,
the oak tree, the dead bug and the pogo?
We can jitterbug like bees in the noonday mums,

We will moonwalk and cakewalk twice around,
will slamdance like desperate Houdinians
trying to extricate you from your skirt hoops.

When they come to collect the wilted beer, empty carafes,
the bread crusts, the oozing slabs of camembert,
we'll boogie there in Bougival until the paint runs dry.

Mark Rozema

Biking West Virginia

Her copper hair is in a bun,
some loose strands floating
silky as milkweed
to her freckled shoulders.
She smiles at you, placid
as your coffee; with one look
you know her name is Norma
and she has worked eleven years
in this truckstop
ministering to vagrants.

In the men's room you give in
to curiosity and buy a SCREAMER
for only fifty cents. Guarenteed
to drive your lover wild.
It looks like a spiked collar
for a squirrel. You stuff it
in your pocket before Norma
sees you with it. Suspecting
your depravity, she loves you
anyway, and has left a pocket-size
Gospel According to John
next to your plate.

Through Blue Ridge towns
thick with the Holy Spirit
into the emerald sweep
of hills shrouded in mist
and the tight-weave
of dogwood and alder
mitten hands of sassafras
sudden jump and tumble of streams
speaking in tongues
merging in a frenzy of praise.

Which language is that,
you ask an old man with a voice
like a barbed wire fence.
Holy Ghost language, he says.
Which way to Phillipi?
Doesn't much matter which way
the road turns in West Virginia,
you always wind up in the next town.

In a cow pasture
there are three crosses
welded of five inch pipe
and painted pastel blue.
You sleep at the foot of the cross
and wake to bellowing Holsteins.
First rays of the sun
split into rainbow
by dew that gathers itself
and drips from the downy
underside of tall grass.

You ride hard and arrive spent
in Parkersburg at dusk, where
nothing moves but the Ohio.
Metallic, old, inscrutable,
the way a thing is itself
and nothing else. All at once
you are free to plunge into it,
leaving your old life on the surface
like a film of dirty oil, until
what remains is only yourself,
transparent, glistening
on the far bank.

APRICOTS

The madwoman has beautiful eyes, light brown with flecks of green in them like the first leaves; they flash when she talks. No one can get over how beautiful they are, how beautiful she is. In fact, she is admired extravagantly. She shrugs off the compliments, but secretly she is pleased, secretly she lives for them.

I tell her that all that praise isn't good for her, but she never listens.

The madwoman sings when she works in her garden, sometimes loudly, sometimes in a small and private voice. She sings songs that no one else in the world knows, songs she learned before she was ever set down on this earth. Her knowledge is from worlds away from this world, from the time she was a creature of swiftness and light, so glorious she would blind us all if we could see her as she was then. Once, when she was a child, the madwoman saw a Roman candle. She had been like that, yes, but instead of flaring and dying, she had burned for centuries, and she flew from planet to planet like a shooting star. She tells me that she remembers, just before she goes to sleep, certain details from that life, before she was trapped in the insignificant and uncertain body she has now. Of course, I don't believe her.

The madwoman loves her garden. "If we could live at the center of the earth, we would all be healed," she tells me sometimes. "The power is there. Our desires would be satisfied." As a child, she traveled once to the core of the world, tunnelling like a mole, determined and gray with dirt. At the center of the earth were diamonds as large as houses, filled with a gold light. There were regal people who walked slowly, so that one had time to admire them. They acknowledged her as a person of power, and were kind to her, but they sent her back in the end, to her yard, to her garden. "Someday, you will come back and stay forever," they told her, to console her. Now, she is able to see the plants breathe, and if she looks long enough, she can see through the earth as if it were glass. She sees the roots stretching down, as we all stretch, toward that faint glow of light. She sees worms turning the earth in a tedious, steady motion, hoping to go far enough, but never reaching that promising, gold-colored glow. Then the madwoman turns over herself, and watches the leaves opening and closing like mouths, drinking the air.

When she was a child, the madwoman was so aware of the breathing around her that there were days, weeks, when she was unable to move. She knew the floorboards were still living plants, straining and groaning in their efforts to free themselves. The walls were filled with mice and beetles, she could hear the secret scraping of their feet. She felt the blood in her veins pulling her down, moving toward some conclusion, toward some ocean. It was effort enough to sit very still, rocking only a little back and forth, keeping time with the turning of the earth. At night, she would go to bed exhausted, limp, one arm hanging over the edge of her narrow bed, a salute to a stronger opponent. When she got a little older, the madwoman nearly died. Her blood gathered its strength in an effort to escape from her, pumping faster and faster, heading toward the tips of her fingers, and she knew it would burst through her fingernails and she would die. Her blood would shoot like cannon fire across the room, exploding over the window and wall. But she was wise with other knowledge, as I've said before, and she clenched her hands to keep her blood inside her. She dug her fingernails into the palms of her hands to bury them, to brace them against the pressure; a little of the blood leaked out but she kept the rest back. Her mother and father tried to pry her hands open, because they had always wanted her to die, but she was stronger than they were. When the doctor came, she screamed an explanation to him, and he understood her, even over her parents' echoing voices. He gave her a shot to slow the blood down, to slow its monstrous race toward her fingertips, and it saved her life. At the age of eight, the madwoman fell in love with him.

But not in love, I tell her. Not at eight. She only smiles, a knowing smile that I particularly hate, and says nothing.

When the madwoman has to go to the hospital, she takes three things with her: her own toothbrush, a ring which (she says) was given to her by the doctor who saved her life, and a copy of Shakespeare's sonnets, which she bought for herself on her fifteenth birthday. As a teenager, the madwoman lived, so as not to provoke her parents, a "normal" life, "insipid and stupid," she says now. She made the honor roll and went to dances in the gymnasium, sewed clothes in home economics class and made love to her boyfriend in the finished basement of his family's home. She lost her virginity at fifteen, and liked sex because she found she could separate herself during it, floating above the struggling bodies on the floor, pleased and a little amused. She liked the way her skin looked, dressed in the silk of her sweat;

she liked her boyfriend's astonished gratitude. It made her feel powerful, it was a way to tap into her other, unearthly knowledge. Her other source of power came from the sonnets. She memorized each one as if it was an incantation, and even now, if you say to her, "One hundred and sixteen," she will answer, "Let me not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments love is not love which alters when it alteration finds. . . ." She repeats this sonnet to herself in the hospital, surrounding herself with those favorite words, a charm worked against the people there and the things they do. She tells me of her plans, scores of them, to get even with the hospital people for their probing drugs and needling questions. Burning her bed with matches stolen from a nurse. Separating from her body for good, and watching them scramble around her with paddles and wires. Unclenching her fists so that the blood would shoot like fireworks over the clean white walls. "I keep my own counsel," she says. "Just wait."

I tell her that maybe it would be best to give up her struggle against this world, her attempts to move toward her other, older place; that she'd be happier if she led her life at a low and even level: her garden, her sonnets. Not the doctor. Not the core of the earth. But, as I think I said before, she never listens to me.

When she was nineteen, in college, the madwoman lived through a particularly satisfying phase, taking lots of drugs and sleeping with a different man nearly every night, surrounded by the sweet and biting haze of marijuana smoke. It was her strongest period, and she had complete control--over herself, her lovers, and even the physical world. One night, she fell asleep and dreamed that her dorm room was a different color, with new posters on the walls, a red and green quilt on her bed, and a flowering plant on her windowsill. When she woke in the morning, her room had changed to please her, to fit her dream. And, there on her hand when she reached out to touch the quilt, was a ring set with a pale blue stone. She knew at once it was a gift from the doctor who had treated her as a child, the doctor she loved. He had died in a car crash three years before, on her sixteenth birthday. Now he was in touch with her again, as she had known he would be.

The madwoman was twenty when she became pregnant with the doctor's child. Her mother began to cry instantly when the madwoman told her, as if she had a tiny hose hidden behind her eyes. Her father said she must marry the man who'd gotten

her into this, or else get an abortion, he didn't care which. The madwoman did neither, of course. She stood the pain as long as she could--waves of nausea with the force to pitch her sideways--enduring it because she wanted the doctor's child. When she couldn't stand it any longer, she asked a woman in her dorm what she should do. "Apricot juice," the woman said promptly, as if, the madwoman said later, she had been waiting to be asked. "It's the best thing for the first three months, to help with the morning sickness. Are you keeping the baby?" The madwoman drank apricot juice every day, many times a day, until everything in her field of vision seemed to take on a gold-orange cast, until time became liquid. Things dissolved in front of the madwoman's eyes. "It was a trick," she says now. "That woman was paid by my father to tell me about apricot juice. Now I know it causes miscarriages." The madwoman had a miscarriage, or believes she did. She is sure she did not have the baby, but at this point nothing seems to have remained very clear in her memory. At times she remembers having killed the woman in her dorm, and at other times she can only remember slashing the side of the woman's face with a piece of glass. She remembers the glass, thin and cold in her hand.

During her most recent stay in the hospital, something disturbing happened to the madwoman. One evening, when she was sitting quietly on her bed, watching the particles of air turn gold and then blue, an orderly brought her dinner to her on a tray. Veal and broccoli. Nothing with bones, everything cut up nicely and arranged on the plate. And, in one corner of the tray, a dish of apricots.

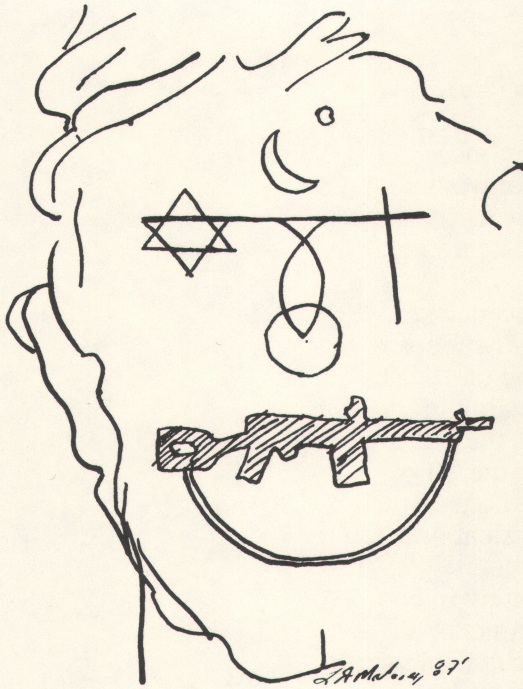
"I acted without dignity," the madwoman tells me. She threw the dish under the bed and got her hands around the orderly's throat. The orderly was a tall man, but the madwoman has large hands, long fingers, and she is the strongest person in the world. She would have killed him without trouble, but other people came running from everywhere, from the halls and closets, from under the bed and out of the walls, like beetles. She had been caught off guard, and caught hanging from the guard's throat. She had made a mistake.

While people shouted to each other and brought restraining straps and needles, the madwoman struggled on the floor like a fish on a dock. I feel her struggle, her heartbeat in my ears, her arms pinned to the cold linoleum but still trying to fly upward. She frees one hand. I feel it shake, and the ring is a blur of blue light.

North of Jericho

North of Jericho
you bus the military road
born amid the earthen huts
napalmed in a recent war,
skirt the brooding mountain
of the forty days and nights
now capped by cloistered monks,
escape the baked Judean floor
and rise into the treeless
former bedouin hills
now greened by water from the sea
sanctified with chemicals
amid Zion diplomacy,
flirt for miles with the barbs
of the double fence
a short commando crawl
west of the river used by John
once to christen God.

On this road on recent noon
a schoolbus of children
received a lifelong lesson
from their neighbors' bullets
bought from bartering nations
bewildered by their surplus arms
and recently on this road
a busload of believers
following in their Lord's footsteps
was gunned down in the Israeli dirt
by people dispossessed
of what was Palestine
and you momentarily expect
the sullen work party
milling by the road to pull
their rifles from their robes,
splinter glass and give you
hot black desert death.



Then the bus emerges
from the heat for lunch
beside the Sea of Galilee,
an hour and a half relief
from the conscientious guide's
grating righteousness
ever since Jerusalem;
you delight in fish descended
from Peter's blessed catch,
gaze at the moving palms
whose fathers shaded Lazarus,
and full of food and thought
don rented swimming trunks
and in the heat and dust
north of Jericho
immerse yourself at last
in the sweet cool Jesus water.

Mediterranea

A branch whips once
in a coincidental wind
and sends its fruit
into the grass.

I am standing somewhere
near Epidaurus I suppose
--I feel the spirit of
Euripedes. Resting in
its uselessness, the olive
forces itself on me. It
wants to be the conceit
of my metaphysical poem.

My poem, wanting to be
properly tragic, not
expecting to be metaphysical,
protests, for its subject
was to be a man,

a man who hid from his
insignificance like an olive
drying uselessly in the growing grass,
inhaling vapors in the hope
of inflating wrinkled skin,
but instead,
infecting the sweet air
with exhalations of bitterness.

My poem hoped to be about a man
who would turn his face away
from every glassy surface
that might have flashed it back at him,

a man who could never know himself
but in the meanings of his own words,
the words which others now erase
wherever he had written them,

a man reduced to smudged and
partial phrases and garbled memories
that still rattle in the ears
of people weary of redundancy,

a man reduced to dust
that collects at the base of walls.

His face is there,
erased and disassembled,
in a residue of thin words
waiting for coincidental wind.

Scott Russell

Killing A Bat

When you have to kill a bat
 dread comes
 with his rat-skin wallet,
 in it a piece of chalk
to drag across the black
 backdrop
 of your thoughts.

In these thoughts mathematics plays
 its part. The bat's ears,
 you deduce, must be
 parabolic
to retrieve the signals it sends,
 in them dread's outline,
 dread's table of contents.

And in the workings of its wings
 there are equations
 for lift, drag, propulsion, deVinci's
 strange ideas about
what people could devise
 if they would dream
 if only they would try.

The Washer Repairman

The woman's eyebrows, he notices, are plucked to death.
There is a kid crying, smelly, mouth
surrounded by hour-old jelly smear,
red barrette hung at the end of a blond lock.
And there the woman sits, frowning
through the haze of her cigaret,
about life, about ever becoming a high-fashion model.

He sees the issue of *Vogue* laid
open before her on the formica dinette table top.
He leans his bare elbows upon the surface
and feels the slight colloquial chill,
the disposable life,
seep into his joints.
He wants to ask her
why she doesn't wipe the kid's
face clean, open the window
to let in the neighborhood air
full of the trike squeak
and chained dog bark, run off
and become a high-fashion model

just like that. Under her thin brows
she is an attractive woman.
She would look into her coffee a long time,
look as if for one of those deep sea fish
with transparent bodies and needles
for teeth to surface, to poison
the compliment. "Do you
really think so?" she would think.
"Gimme a break," she would say,
tossing a glare at the kid.
The whole time, the kid
would scream as if to be let out
of this life, this place
thin enough to slip
between pages.
"No, really, I mean it," he would say,
as he closes his tool box,
gives his belt a hike,
and sits again, across from her
like her future.

Portraits of Food

The challenge is not to make
the mashed potatoes look
like ice cream, the gravy
hot fudge. It is all
context like Chinese,
one color meaning many things,
depending on texture,
smell, temperature.
Wavy vertical lines mean heat,
or anger, or party streamers,
but when placed above a hot fudge sundae
mean mashed potatoes and gravy,
the way ketchup on a street
means tragedy, or blood
on a hotdog means sports.

What color is tuna salad, gray?
Why do we eat gray?
And then the river valleys
in lettuce. What
am I saying? But just imagine
the farms along the Loire,
the fat blue coveralls, the black
moustaches, the cat
about to lunge from the hay.
The olive is
all knowing, an
Arab custom.

And who weeps for the coney island?
Bits of glass in an open wound?
You cannot open your mouth wide enough
to contain it all before it spills
making a muck of things
like honesty or true love,
all the photographs
of hunger in the world.

Essential Rituals

Since I live alone I usually need
to take out the trash once a week.
A quick blitz Saturday morning starts
in the study with a basket of drafts
and the empty envelopes my poems came back in,
into and out of the bathroom, out the back door,
eight steps in, out the back door with the garbage,
in the back door, turn the lock, turn the bolt,
return the wastebaskets--done.

I don't know what happened
about wastebaskets when we all lived at home,
but the garbage went out every day,
spilling out over the small white can,
soggy in extra bags: refuse and rejected food,
old salad, wrappings from Safeway's best beef,
Cheerios boxes, chicken bones, fish bones, dog food cans,
tooth-scraped artichoke leaves and asparagus stems,
cracked crab shells, leftover lunch we forgot to take,
mashed Baby Ruths from my father's pants pocket,
cookies my mother gave in and admitted had died.

"I'll give you a dime to eat these raisins," she said.

"Make it a quarter and you've got a deal."

"A *quarter* ? For a quarter I'll feed them to the dog."

"Feed them to the dog."

"*Seriously*. I'll give you a dime to eat these raisins."

She began dinner at 3:00. With an on-going shopping list
she sat and asked, "What do people *eat* ?"

She honked for us to come out and help
with the grocery bags which became garbage bags
as the slow sinks heaped with shreds, utensils, pots and pans,
limp vegetation, trimmings, layers of lettuce.
Sometime before 6:00 she called us into the kitchen
and gave each one a damp and dangerous bag.
Taking the fifth herself, she said, "Please walk this way,"
stepped out in some outrageous style, and led us
past the dog pen to where three great green garbage cans
rusted and bulged. She put her bag in first and
left us to somehow smash the lids back on.

Five Points Church Revival

A rigid pyramid of Food Club
creamed corn flanked
by two cans of Joan of Arc kidney
beans grace the altar. "Jesus, come fill
your lambs!" Pastor Ed exhorts,
his bald head shining like the collection
plate, while plump penitents with bellies
full of Johnny Marzetti sidle alongside
the benches like so many fair goers
now resting tired feet for a slide
show on "The Grains of Pickaway County."

White shirts and red bow ties straightjacket
three towheaded brothers who methodically
kick the front pew. Edgy already,
do they envision the path to heaven
as endless acres of soybeans to be tirelessly
mown down with a gleaming green John Deere?

The congregation raises strains of Old One Hundred
while Pastor Ed lifts the crumpled bills skyward
and the Kingdom Seed, three plump teens, thump
tambourines, sing "Magnify the Lord" and ask God
to keep them pure as Mama's bleached
sheets flapping on the line.

A box of Gideon's International Testaments yawns
half-opened in front of the piano; wooden fans stir
the air like an overworked mother unable to ease
the lumps from her mashed potatoes.

And all the while, Jesus, bathed
in the green light of what appears to be
a comet's tail, kneels by a boulder
in the Garden, prays
for these souls who pray
for calves to be delivered,
bottom land to be salvaged, and Dear God,
mortgages to be met.

They're Learning

I sell midnight groceries.
He came in and nearly fell,
having forgotten to stomp the snow from his shoes.
His coat was unzipped
and the buttons of his shirt
were not aligned as intended
by the long-dead original designer of the button-up shirt,
(God rest his soul).

"Box a' condoms," he uttered
red faced and in a hurry.
"Anything else today," I said,
in worn-smooth delivery.

Lincoln's face on the crumpled five,
he rolled like dice across the counter,
had lost all ol' Abe's reputed patience.

I handed him the first box I could grab,
having grasped the urgency of his errand.
Ringing it up, I looked up just in time
to see him rushing the door,
(a 'keep-the-change' gesture if ever I saw one).
"Your change," I offered.
"She's waiting," were his departing words.
The door closed, deflecting my customary,
"Thank you and come again soon."

A fiftyish-looking woman with her loaf of Wonder Bread
and a jar of Jif cradled in her arms
stood before me staring at that door,
a look of exasperation and disgust
gaining momentum across her brow.
"Will that be all," rescued her from her bout
with the morality of her likely successors.

**Ten Year Prelude To:
"Fuck Off, Dad, Do Your Own Lawn"**

Having shoveled half the walk,
I was met by a strange creature
who had my four year old son's face
but the body of Mr. Olympia.
He was bundled up that much.
If he'd have had a stamp on him anywhere
I'd have hidden him from any passing mail trucks.
I was relieved that I'd already
shoveled closest to the mailbox.
My wife could have been a postal Michelangelo;
our son being her packaging masterpiece.

He greeted me with his miniature
pink plastic version of a shovel.
It's amazing how many children's toys are work implements.
The poor children.
Even the toy industry is conspiring
to enslave them into the labor jungle
even before they're out of diapers.
He was so enthusiastic about "helping Daddy."
I suppose anything is fun the first time.
I could see the toy scam had already gotten its grip on him.

As we finished I instinctively gathered
this package of a son into my arms as if to say,
"you don't know what you're getting yourself into."

Yin/ 3ueλ

I've resorted to hugging
my laundry
immediately upon its
liberation from the dryer.

They appreciate it,
and I appreciate it
but for converse reasons.
I, for the warmth,
they for the chill.

We compliment each other nicely.

Predictions of Love

The first time I saw Lisa, she was standing in the shadow of a dormitory, clinging to a dark haired man, and crying. They were swaying together, in that painful, upright embrace couples use when there is no place for privacy. I was walking up the dorm steps just before curfew. No men were allowed in the dorm then, except for the parlor, where they lounged ill-at-ease against the piano, or sat spraddle legged by Chinese vases used as umbrella stands. I couldn't help looking at Lisa and her friend huddled together. Her blond hair glowed in the door's opening light, and I could see the outline of the boy she was with, slight, short, wiry, turned away from me.

The dorm boasted heavy mahogany tables, clumps of dust on the floor and canned pineapple with each meal. The women who lived there, referred to as "upperclassmen," were juniors, seniors, and graduate students. One of the women was married to a student in France. Another had married, and divorced, a man from Traverse city. They had both been warned not to speak to virgins in the dorm.

In spite of the dust, the pretension, and the crowding, I am not sorry I stayed there that year. I met an extraordinary set of women: a freckled, blond Jewish woman who talked of nothing but sex; a six foot two Swedish girl who talked only to her plate; Boston socialites who stole the Chinese vases and dropped them out of windows; my ethereal red haired roommate, who could and did say "fuck a duck" in French, Latin and Greek.

One of the women I met that year was Lisa. Her roommate, Annette, a rotund, comfortable brunette, confided to me that Lisa was in love with an Irish poet. They had been friends since childhood, Lisa and Tom. Now Lisa wished to break off the friendship. I thought of them rocking against each other, and said nothing at all.

Second semester, Annette married a law student. My roommate became a housemother and moved to the first floor, where she kept a shrine, with votive candles, burning under her boyfriend's picture. Lisa and I moved in together and became friends in that slow, drifting way some friendships have. We did not talk to each other about personal things.

She was earning a teaching degree in special education, and minored in Spanish to further an interest in South American poets. She had a record called "Una Quena A Traves De Los Andes," high, thin piped recorder music she played constantly. She loved Capote's "Christmas Memory," and walking barefoot. She had the thickest soled feet of anyone I knew.

Of Tom, I knew only that he and Lisa went hunting near Chelsea. They took potshots at rabbits and drank bourbon from a bottle. They went off together wearing bluejeans, wool shirts, and boots. I also knew they did not make love.

Tom had heavy eyebrows, a boxer's jaw, and the catlike cleanliness of some blue collar workers. His fingernails were broken and looked as though they ought to be dirty, but never were. He took an occasional class at Eastern, worked in a factory, and treated both efforts with equal disdain, seeming at ease only when tramping through the woods. I never saw any of his poetry.

I could understand why he would be in love with Lisa. She had short, straight blond hair she cut with nail scissors, blue eyes that held compressed amusement, and skin so fair it showed the underlying tracing of blue veins. Her nose had been broken when she was a child, and was slightly thickened near the short, straight bridge. That and the short hair gave her almost Roman beauty. Her face was oval. She was tall, with long thighs, a small waist, and full breasts she tried to conceal by wearing men's shirts over her clothing. The dorm's art students did charcoal sketches of her, nude.

I had coffee with Annette and told her how much I liked Lisa.

"She'll have an unhappy life," Annette prophesied. "Have you been home with her?"

"No," I said, startled.

"She's going to marry her father someday," Annette said. "You wait and see."

I stayed with Lisa at her parents' home in Marshall, that summer. They lived in an old brick house with cavernous high ceilings and a garden full of intertwined tomato and four o'clock vines. It took me a while just to get used to the feel of the place. For instance, their bathtub was never clean! When I first noticed,

I stood with my eyes averted, as though staring at the grime would be a breach of privacy. Her brother remained shut in his room, playing Bob Dylan albums at top volume. Her father's father, a spent irascible Irishman, virtually lived in a great, walnut four-poster bed. Their dining room was shrouded in viscous floor to ceiling curtains. Blue oriental rugs were soft underfoot.

It was Lisa's mother who impressed me the most deeply. A tall, heavy breasted woman with a chignon of thinning blond hair, she kept a blue painted rocking chair in the kitchen, and rocked and read and talked to anyone who floated in. She wore old fashioned cotton dresses, heavy shoes and cotton aprons. She fixed us smoky tasting tea and marvelous fresh brewed coffee, insisting on serving us from thin pale blue china cups. She fed us white coconut cake with thick white coconut frosting. She made her own bread, picked cherries and made her own cherry pie. A gold eyed calico cat followed her about the kitchen waiting for the chance to jump into her lap. She hung upon our every word, relaxed and laughing. The basement was filled with dirty laundry from the landing down, but Lisa's mother seemed to own all the time in the world.

While I was there, a phone call from my parents told me my grandmother had died. That night I could not get to sleep. Lisa's mother brought me a tray with a bowl of potato soup that looked oddly white in the dark of the room. I've never liked cream soups, but she propped up my pillows, and sat with me while I swallowed it down, soothing and bland. I soon slept and woke in the morning feeling oddly rested, as though her silent offering had absorbed my pain.

In contrast, Lisa's father, small, short, dark and good looking, was a fit, abrupt man, with a jockey's build. Every morning he appeared at the breakfast table, wanting his two eggs over easy, his lightly cooked bacon, his buttered toast with homemade jam, his coffee in a china cup and his copy of the Wall Street Journal, which he promptly retired behind. The sound of his chewing was as regular as the cat's purring. He rarely spoke to us. When he did, evenings, it most often had to do with politics. He would put the paper down and drill us with questions about an editorial he thought we should read. He was a Democrat, which impressed me, because Democrats were

liberal, whereas my parents were Republicans. He read The New Yorker sitting in his chair evenings while his wife took his father a supper tray.

I asked Lisa's mother if she tired of waiting on people.

She clasped her hands in her lap and looked at me thoughtfully.

"My parents died when I was very young" she told me. "I quickly learned I could live without someone to love me, but I couldn't stand living without someone to love."

Lisa and I separated after graduation. We wrote one another and her letters were more personal than our conversations in the dorm. She stopped writing Tom and dated a series of besotted athletes, dark, trim, jutting jawed, held at platonic arms length. Then she fell in love. She sent a picture of the fifty-five-year-old, twice divorced jazz professor, who taught her to try drugs and like John Hurt's "Coffee Blues." Jack was, she said, very smart, and very very funny. She had a prescription for birth control pills. I looked at the picture with unease in the pit of my stomach. The jazz professor was small and dark, with horn rim glasses and wiry hair.

It's funny how you want, need your friends to be happy. I had taken a liking to Lisa that is hard to explain. She was in some way without affectation and, like a child, very vulnerable. She could have been beautiful, but she never bothered. Her eyes focused out, as though looking for the glint of waves slapped back by wind.

She sent me long letters from California, enclosing pictures of seals basking off the northern coast. The letters were, however, not very happy. She was working at a private school for educable adults. One of her pupils, a thirty year old who came barely to her waist, was passionately attached to his transistor radio, and when it bounced out of a truck in which he was riding, he dove after it and broke both legs. The principal where Lisa worked became psychotic and thought the staff was planning her demise. Lisa was the only trusted instructor. The principal babbled for hours about teachers attacking with knives, and Lisa helped have the principal sent away. Lisa and the jazz professor contemplated marriage.

Then Lisa was in Michigan, married, not to the jazz professor.

"Macchu Picchu," she repeated. She looked much the same as she'd looked in the dormitory, except more tan. Her nose was peeling and her face was freckled and thin. Her husband looked--well, you must know how her husband looks.

He is dark haired, slight, inches shorter than Lisa. He then had a rough short beard, and eyes that glanced from face to face as though he expected one of us to strike him.

"This is Marc," she said. "We were married in Lima."

He reached over and shook my hand, then shook his head.

"Lisa," he said. "I am tired. You will forgive me?"

She spoke in a quick undertone to him in Spanish. They waved at each other and he found a spare bed and collapsed.

"Poor Marc," she said, sinking into an armchair. "He's going through what I did when I met his parents. They're Swiss. He speaks mostly French, you know. Some Spanish. That's our best language. Sometimes," she shrugged, "it just wears you out."

"You met him in Peru, then?"

"On my way back from Macchu Picchu. My second trip," she said. "The Inca ruins are eerie...granite cliffs and everything so green you'd swear you were underwater. And the birds...the birdsong is fabulous. I'd been before, with Jack. But I wanted, just once, to go back on my own."

"You met him on the way back from Macchu Picchu," I repeated.

"You needn't make it sound like a television romance. To begin with, I had dysentery," she recalled. "Then I got pneumonia, or so the doctors tell me by looking at scars on my lungs. Then I got my period. All of this, jolting along on a local bus, having cramps, sitting stuck between wicker baskets of garlic and wood cages of table-bound guinea pigs. I was running a fever and I must have been delirious, because I left my backpack...Tampax, underclothes, medicine, everything at a rest stop. I got off the bus not knowing what I was doing, only that I shouldn't bleed all over the seats. I walked off the path, spread my sleeping bag and collapsed."

I tried not to squawk with alarm.

"I was so miserable." She explained. "All I wanted was to curl up with my knees to my chest."

"And your friend came?"

She nodded. "Marc had noticed I was turning green. He followed me and found me...he looked after me for three days. Dosed me with antibiotics, gave me his T shirts to clean myself, fed me tea, told me French nursery rhymes. My sleeping bag was ruined," she said with a grimace. "We slept in his sleeping bag and he never, you know, touched me. He left as soon as I could fix my own fire and food."

She paused, head tipped on one side, remembering.

"I tracked him down," she told me. "It wasn't hard. He's with the Swiss Peace Corps in La Oroya. It's a little town in the mountains, near Lima. Marc was dipping goats when I found him. Goat dip is nasty stuff...very purple, very smelly. He smelled as bad, I think, as I did when he met me."

"He's Swiss," I said, trying to put my thoughts in order. All I could think of were watches and chocolate, very orderly.

"He went to school in France," she said, "but grew up on a farm. White stucco barns, bee hives, goats. He's big on goats for poor countries. He says goats are hardy, easy to feed, and don't exhaust the soil."

"Do you help him in La Oroya?" I asked.

"I have my own job there, thanks to all that Spanish. I work with the women and write up what they say."

Marc emerged from the room where he had been sleeping. He no longer looked shell shocked. Lisa put her arms around him and he smiled at me.

"She's been telling you how she chased me, yes? You know, she was relentless. I had to marry her to control her shamelessness."

They visit us now and then, Marc and Lisa. He is studying in Florida, learning how to make things grow without pesticides. When he finishes they will go backs to La Oroya, back to the sheep dip and pumpkins weighing fifty pounds.

They have a daughter whose name from Peru is Yusha, the nickname of a bird that flutters through green tress. Yusha's eyes are gray. She has a small round mushroom face and soft blond hair. The last time I saw her, she had a barrel of bone and feathers showing under a flopping, borrowed, red snow suit hood.

Yusha wanted to stay and wallow in snow drifts. The whole family is tri-lingual; Lisa speaking French, Marc

conversant in English. They all speak Spanish when they are irritated. Nevertheless it was in English that Yusha attacked her mother.

"You big stupid-dumb," she said. "I don't want to go home."

"Come here, Yusha," Marc answered. "Come here and I will help you take off your wet things."

I looked at Lisa and we grinned at each other. The kitchen was redolent of the meal we had shared. I had served home-made wine. Marc had brought black bean soup, and his own home-made bread. The kitchen had that special feeling rooms achieve so rarely...when they are full of people who are taking care of friends, and who feel that for a while, they have all the time in the world.

I do not think it was her father Lisa married. She is not, you know, a big stupid dumb.

Steve Is Really Good

(a found poem)

Lisa--

Steve is really good
and if you like him when you meet him
try to get him to talk
(don't be afraid to talk yourself,
about anything sincere
whether it's deep or not.)
But if he starts to say ANYTHING
LISTEN hard and tune in.
If you like him.
I'm open for questions.
Vicki

Vicki,

This seems to be a strange situation
but I will take your advice.
I am looking forward to meeting this person.
Lisa

Lisa--

Don't be afraid to pull out a cigarette
but make him light it.
Later, if you can stand Winstons,
make him want to give you one.
Love, Vicki



WHO LOST MANITOU TO BIG SCREEN TV'S & OTHER TINY SCIENCES

(In response to William Barillas)

WHO runs with their eyeballs open to the sun
WHO sets colored paper to the wind because there are no more leaves
to fall from the trees

WHO wants to catch big snowflakes with a butterfly net
because monarchs have given up Michigan for Kansas

WHO peels the dead lips from a burnt frog and pastes them
on his older sister's forehead while she sleeps

WHO are all these people running around scratching their
heads and biting their nails

WHO chortles like gut-busting hyenas when something isn't funny

WHO will build us the skyscrapers to climb up and jump off of

WHO must put a brick in thier toilet

WHO must wonder why the brown-dirt-brown garden no longer
harvests ruby-crowned tomatoes and the sacred enemies of cold:
onions and garlic

WHO must use grandmother's Arm and Hammer Baking Soda
instead of toothpaste with flouride

WHO says the call of a hawk reminds him that birds are not symbolic
that Manitou can tell you birds have changed

WHO says seagulls were never seen so far inland. Swans did not
always mimic pigeons

WHO masturbates with his eyes open to the trees, to a cuckoos third
clutch of young

WHO bangs a drumstick on broken sewer tops
(broken bum rhythm, broken bum weapon)

WHO picks flowers for their hats, throwing pennies at brick walls

WHO is sipping papaya juice in the shade--behind the bars and
all day drunks of life

WHO listens anymore anyhow

WHO must scream obscenities to be heard

WHO MUST BLOW THEIR BRAINS ALL OVER THE PUBLIC
TO SAY YOU ARE WRONG ABOUT ME

WHO never opens their eyes at all

SHADOW TALKING

leave the light, I feel like talking

SAYING THINGS LIKE when I've been drinking I change my mind a lot

saying THINGS like how to bend a WASPS ear

SAYING THINGS LIKE AN APPLE A DAY

saying things like you eat what a monkey eats

and you get thyroid problems

saying things like oh, you know, I want to lie on your braided rug

saying things like YOU PISS ME OFF

saying things like lets pack bean bag snow chairs in your backyard

lets pile a soft hill and jump out your bedroom window

saying things like your not fair, you spoke twice in one breath

saying things like only you would invest the time to prove a fact

saying things like go jump in the lake

saying things like I have that gift for you that I haved saved and saved

but you never came to pick it up

(so I opened it myself)

saying things like drop dead

saying things like love it or leave it

saying things like I bet I know who'll win the game

saying things like so do I

saying things like I want to suck your dick

saying things like when I am quiet I am happy

saying things like I knocked my friends knuckle half way down his wrist

with my pelvis when I was 12

saying things like I fell from a tree at McCabe's lot when I was 12

saying things like you'd think we were in Seattle with all the sullen

gray faces we have here

with you in your room above the backed up toilet

across town in a Michigan snowstorm

saying things like turn off the light, I'm tired, let's go to sleep

YOU WILL NEVER UNDERSTAND WHY I DO NOT LIKE TO GO FISHING

You never understood why I didn't like to go fishing.

I didn't like the wet cloudy worms we'd have to pull up from undersod
that left little brown and clay clumps under my fingernails
I never knew if it was dirt or entrails
but I knew the smell, and the smell remained with me for many years,
On rainy days in April I would not leave the house until the sun had
come and dried all the asphaltworms
and every time I would try and knot one onto a hook
he would squirm, break open and ooze all over me
writhing a tortuous wriggling
You used to slice them into three with your father's deer-hunting knife
so you would have more bait to catch more fish
but I knew these worms had three hearts

Once you caught a garter snake near the lake, remember
how we tried to hang him by the neck, and failing
we threw him over the drop-off and watched a big black bass
swim away with the snake's tail trailing from his mouth
whipping side to side
fighting a death in this large-mouthed stomach
how I laughed when you laughed

And whenever you caught a little fish
the marginal sunfish, bullhead or bluegill
you would rack it against a tree or
lay it in the grass and watch it slowly waste and die, poking the eyes
out with a stick
But I think your true triumph over the little fishes came
when you would cake them in the sand and watch them drown
in the dirt
clogged gills
sun parched

Well, the last time I went swimming I saw a fish with big staring eyes
and I thought he might have recognized me
because wherever I swam, I saw the fish staring at me
not really afraid, just staring at me

And you will never understand why I do not like to go fishing.

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