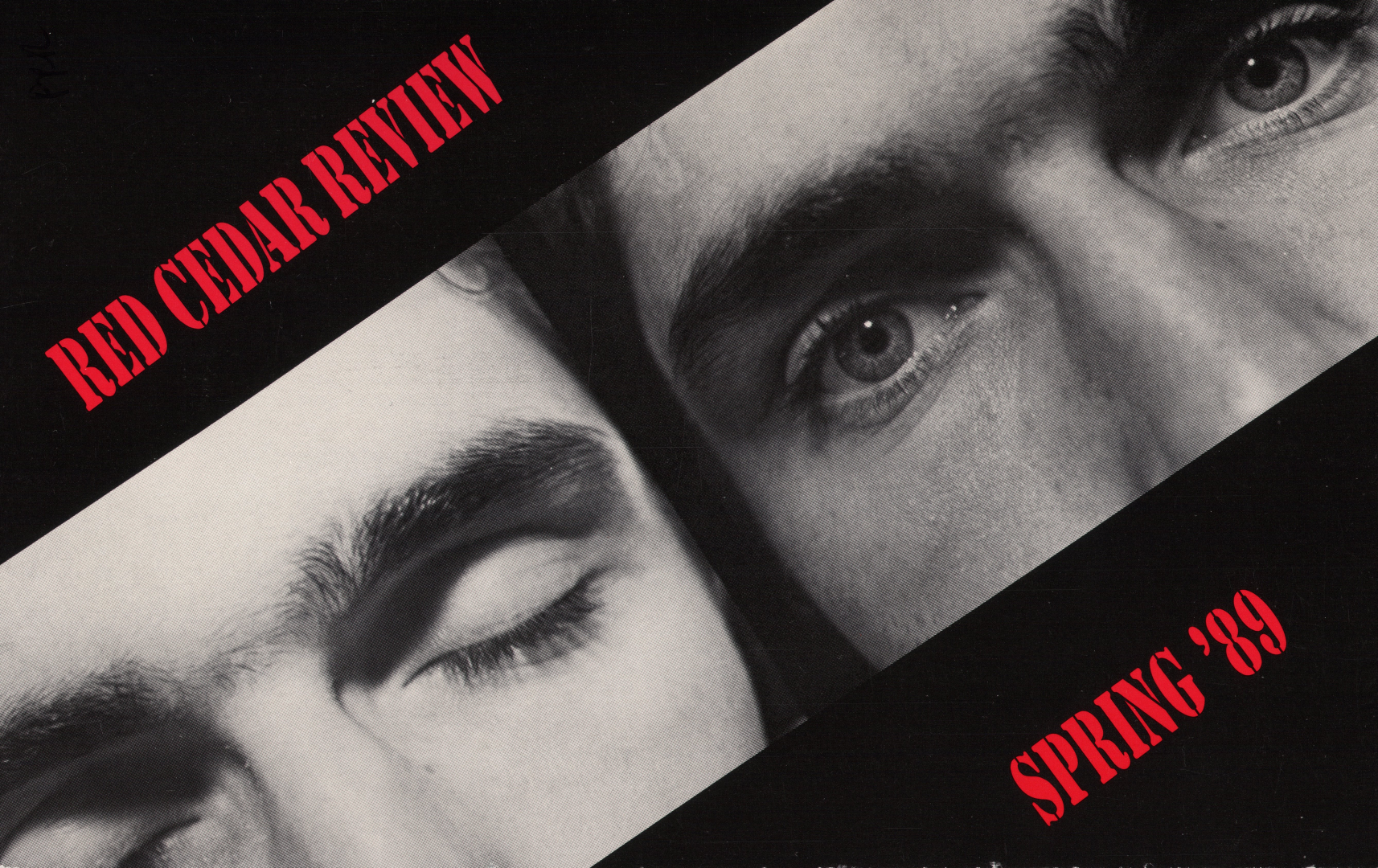
RED CEDAR REVIEW



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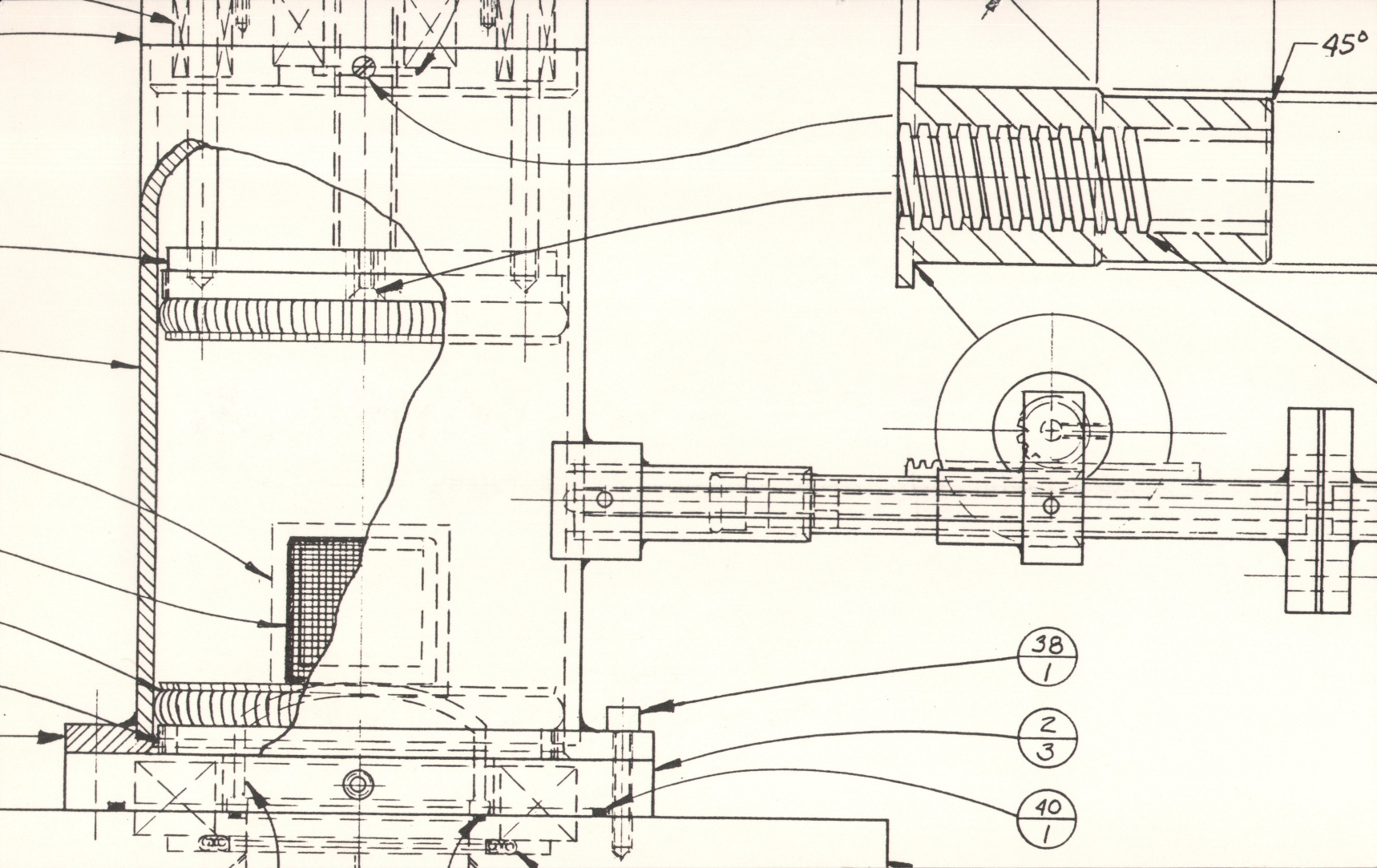
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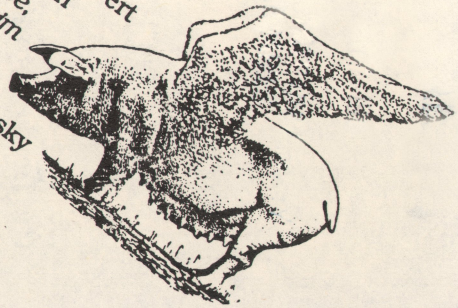

The Benvenuto Prize

The Benvenuto Prize was established last year to honor the late Richard Benvenuto, MSU Professor of English. Each year the prize is awarded for the best fiction, the best poetry, and the best graphic art appearing in the issues of the *Red Cedar Review* for the year. Contributions to the fund for the Prize are welcomed.

The winners of the Benvenuto Prize for this year are:

Jackie Bartley for:
The Terrible Boundaries of the Body in the last issue

Peter A. Christensen for:
The Goldilocks Syndrome in this issue

Grant Ryan for his photography in the last issue

All works published in the *Red Cedar Review* are automatically eligible for the Benvenuto Prize, except works published specifically because they are already winners of other literary contests. One may not submit works only for consideration for the Benvenuto Prize; only those works published in the *Review* issue(s) for the year will be considered for the Prize.

POETRY

Little Old Lady Ron Mills

Thank you for coming to get your little old lady.
She's been here in the lobby all evening, acting
confused, managed once to approach the desk,
scrunch her face into a question: phone booth?
We could hardly stand it, she smells so bad, sent
her to the phones—
she must have called you.
I hear memories of smell are keenest,
and your little old lady's odor tripped
one of an old refrigerator, its rackety old
compressor with the rap and creak of her cane.
Some rancid morsel slumbering in the airtight chest
ferments, harmless in its greasy wrap, loosed
in a rank gust that permeates every surface—
cutting board formica porcelaine skin.
The magnet gasket slits, the ripe wind staggers.
The phone booth reeked and the whole lobby
when I let you and your old lady out
and fresh night air in.
I breathed that air deeply.
Your Chevrolet, like a fridge, filled with light
when you let her in, when you finally got her home.
Could you afford a newer car without this burden?
Probably. But you really don't seem to mind.
It strikes me that you adore the little old lady.
Do children, these beautiful children, comfort?
Do you embarrass? Is there dignity, can I expect
dignity?
Upholstery is one of the porous things
that soaks up, that emanates smells if decay
to remind us not to tolerate, not to ignore it.
I hope your little old lady sleeps soundly
in her favorite chair in the glow of her
favorite show.
No sleep for me, I'm reconstructing
visions of a childless future, and that's the fear
that escorts youth to the morning room, where
Grandma's taking requests for breakfast, and
the carpet warms under window beams and the kids' feet
and the refrigerator has stayed shut all night.

Outside Beth Houston

Out here life is bursting her seams,
fat with her own being.
The juice of it all
drips from her chin,
and joy giggles from her marrow.
Her licked lips round
with sounds wise and sensual:
sounds of birth and more birth,
sounds of nests and nestling,
sounds of eating.
She stuffs countless blessings
in her mouth, and laughs.
Bare hands reaping,
teeth cracking the chaff -
she feeds them all herself.
Mouths suck her plump grapes
fermenting on the vine:
water turning to wine;
and chew her wild wheat
baking in the sun -
holy wonder melting on the tongue.
And their rolling bodies,
spiced of humus, consume
devoured in divine orgy.
Everything rushing into each other.
Everything wild with passionate being.
Everything frenzied, pregnant with God.

Inside, you count your money.

117 Simon Perchik

This woman with a dead conch
answering, whispers
the sea is still suffering

and the stars though each raindrop
has some white left over.
In winter it's unbearable

—she bites! her hands hollowed out
fill with waves still dragging the sea
flapping great oars —she's kneeling

The shell's too heavy, filled
with that light taken away
allowed to return

only on snowflakes flattened by thirst
and loneliness —she drinks this light
from which the sea was made, salted

by each death and her eyes
floating away. And deepening.

King-of-the-Mountain Robert Post

Schoolyard winter meant
king-of-the-mountain,
boys slamming each other
along the snowplow glaciers
that ringed the parking lot.

If our mothers only knew
layered sweaters and thermal knit
protected us not from wind and cold
but from body blows,
each might have written a note
damning us to dry pants
and lunch hour detention.
The taunts of little girls shivering outside
might have haunted our puberty.

But our mothers never knew.
And little girls huddled in the doorway,
the wind teasing their dresses,
never understood
why we risked bruised butts and pride,
wiped noses on chapped sleeves,
and heaved ourselves up the hill
again and again,
to slam one another,
tumble to the earth,
and scream with delight.

The Ways of Fishes Milt McLeod

Maybe we've known it all the time—
I mean the ways of fishes—
especially for one born under their sign,
two fish, a double sign of sorts,
like Gemini, heaped high with contradictions.
I've been watching them — these fish.
The one below is a scavenger: a redhorse, a buffalo,
or a frowning catfish, lying lazy in the ooze and slime,
or a tight-lipped grinnel, fattening itself in the murk,
growing larger and uglier and more alone,
or maybe a bayou carp who feeds on the mudflats,
foraging about with its snout in the silt,
not remembering Bavarian rivers,
where it swam swift with the trout. Yes, the trout,
the other fish, the one above,
a rainbow trout with rainbow dots, like your freckles
that multiply and flash and pirouette in the sun.
This one's you. Stay near. Don't swim away.
I'll never try to catch you,
but I'll never stop watching you from this man's shore,
where men feed on the parched air
and look down into your waters
and see you gliding sleek and free
in a softer, cooler place.

Old Men at the Y Swimming Pool

Joseph Bathanti

Old men amble from the showers,
scrubbed and limpid. They leave
canes and walkers at poolside and
ease into the shallows, puffing
like gigged bullfrogs. The pool
is unguarded and utilitarian.
They swim naked, corking along,
deliquescent,
backfloating and paddling -
gaffers in the skins of infants.
Their bodies light the water.

Craig Cotter

what do you do w/ the blues
when the refrigerator is full of food
being depressed
knows no economic boundaries
in my refrigerator now
is a bottle of soy sauce
a half pound of red seedless grapes
and half a watermelon
there is no way
you could assess from this
that i am poor.

and yet,
i'm fucked.

A toaster for sale
at the garage sale
and she admitted all tan
in a yellow bikini
that she was basically
a macrobiotic now
and didn't eat toast
and she feels so much better
but it's only temporary
while she needs it.
The regimen is a struggle
for her.

Richard Davignon

Pineapple Pizza

ordered,
uncalled for,
unsellable,
doomed to the dumpster,
where a bum called Tunafish
retrieved it
still warm.
We banqueted on cheap wine,
marvelling
at the taste,
our ingenuity
and will to survive.

Refrigerator Truck

returning north
to Portland and beyond
through heavy rain
at 3 A.M. -
inside the cab,
Luc Dubois,
(Look Doo-bwa)
no relation to Blanche,
sips take-out coffee
at 70 miles per hour,
anticipating dessert,
the Milky Way
in his shirt pocket,
hauling
Weight-Watchers
Frozen Entrees
from New Jersey
to feed the starving
fat ladies of Maine.

Three Examples of Why Humans Are Not Random Accretions of Pointless Desires

S. Gutierrez

1.

I want to paint the painting of all paintings
All the subjects all the objects all images
All symbols all abstractions all impressions
All colors all tones all hues
All sizes all scales all perspectives
All points all lines all planes
All riffles all smears all scratches

2.

I want to tie all the skirts embroidered with flowers
Of all the little girls to a club and pulverize all the humans
Until the earth is covered with pools of smashed flesh
Until the noise of the children of the flies
Sounds with one universal humming wind
Until the wind feeds my vocal chords

3.

I want to embalm your body
With the flakes of brine
Breaking from your lips sucking
Tenderly the marrow of my burning fingers
Breaching the thin skies
Embedded in your eyelids

The Tidepool S. Gutierrez

THIS IS WHAT THEY TOLD ME

Be very careful not to touch anything just look
the rocks are slippery use your hands see all the little
animals look at that bright red one all the animals live here
in these pools this is their home so be careful
we don't want to scare them if you are very very patient and
sit very still you might see a tiny fish look over there
see that purple thing it is an urchin no don't touch it honey
it can hurt you
no no no

THIS IS WHAT THEY SHOULD HAVE TOLD ME:

We are the pools that are picked clean
the little lives wavering in the shadow of the single
purple spine we are the homes of others
do not scare us with your inquisitive fingers
do not lift our stones
no no no

Afterglow Ralph Heibutzki

Running alone against
My 2nd skin 2nd nature 2nd wind
2nd sight slicing fog, darkness apart
My 2nd best friend struts across
City sidewalks stolen Cadillacs
City sirens sideswiped crosswalks
in an afterglow all my own:

The fog's 2nd chance rides shotgun
On my back with the little brother
I never had 15 crocked summers ago
his last breath a headstone's throw
from my running shoes:
His hands dial long distance
in my dreams his yellowed skin

Sends telegrams when I sweat so
If I reach closer, I may appear as a villain
Far from my litle brother the afterglow
Far from soil clumps
Flung into a smiling casket
Far from cars safely passing me
Flinging canned smiles, canned laughter

Their parting shot "...get a haircut" cast
against me & the afterglow I seek:
Michael never came home never
clinched 2nd base against 2 outs
Never chugged double Black Russians
Never faced double date trouble but
even out of breath rounding corners

even out in the fog minus an ally
I still stand tall behind
A cemetery stowaway
I love & celebrate
May his last lullaby &
2nd skin 2nd nature 2nd wind
snatch the afterglow back

Beauty Queens Ralph Heibutzki

at 16 i always wanted beauty queens
worthy of a rolled centerfold
All-American aluminum siding dream
till "Suck on a light socket sucker"
crushed my tux & limo rental bucks
back in my pocket but
still i pursued them
in 40-yard after game dance dashes
before our marathon prom
praying my flushed cheeks
might finally reside
in their little black books but
they never called because washing their hair
occupied all their additional time
so i played this game without
a varsity jacket security blanket
while a raftload of fellow outcasts
plodded through Saturday night euchre,
Monday Night Football with me
(one so clumsy he stuffed himself
in a tennis net) in reality playing
"wait till next year" never scoring
any grand slams nor home runs till
last week my tennis buddy
laid an ace on me:
"Remember Kelly? She jumped 46 stories
last in Chi & died it's true..."
the credits rolled on a prom queen,
Most Likely To Succeed
now always beyond reach &
while my partner gave directions
to the funeral home i debated
what tie what flowers what suit
& here i am still trying to impress
some things never change

Morgan's Merci David Lunde

Another inconclusive ending
and when Morgan thanked her
she asked what for—
a young girl
he'd casually desired,
casually approached
without expectation,
then her ardent response
soft interested mouth
inquisitive tongue
& breasts that barely
filled his palm, nipples
like huckleberries
he'd thumbed and fumbled
tongued and teased—
Morgan with throat gone thick
as Arabic said Thank You
and she asked What for?

Grand Forks Street Corner Jeffrey Falla

A woman walking three poodles
Turns the corner but doesn't acknowledge me
Behind a concrete tree pot
In which the tree has been stripped bare
By disorderlies the night before.

One poodle lifts his leg
By the street post Rick died beside
After being shot in the head
For firing at a policeman.
We were seventeen. A year later

I stood on the corner, caught myself
Toeing the concrete and checking
The cracks for blood residue. A girl
Carrying pamphlets smiled at me.

I wanted to unbutton her shirt
And bite...She handed me
A "Praise The Lord" bumper sticker
And said, "Jesus died for you."

Now it's early Sunday morning
Not a soul around but me
And this woman and three poodles
Only she doesn't see the relevance,
Preoccupied with poodles.

Thelma, the Widow, Talks to her Neighbor

Randy Phillis

You watch my mailbox and see,
that million dollars is coming from New York
any day now, so if I'm not here
you get it because
you can't trust this neighborhood anymore
and it's important
and then those damn kids won't mess with me,
no sir, I'm tired but
they won't put me in no home,
they never would if Earl was still here,
poor Earl, he smoked like you
and I told him but he wouldn't listen,
no sir, not to old Thelma,
but when they come to get me, I won't go,
I'll get me a dog like this one here,
that'll make them leave me alone,
I used to have a dog, you know,
but I had him put to sleep,
they get crazy and won't listen when they're old,
but those damn kids will listen
yes sir, in about a week, and I'll get
me that dog and maybe a cat and
I'll move to a nice neighborhood and
they won't ever find me
and they won't get a penny, no sir,
so when I'm gone to the hospital,
just tired, not sick,
you watch my mailbox and don't let
nobody get close and when I come back
I'll bring some doughnuts for you and this dog.

Time Debra Kaufman

Slippery and black as the eel
electric. As a kid you saw me
stretch wide and blank,
yawning your days:
you worried the sun
might burn itself out
before you grew up.
Now you're older, you notice me

spiralling down like a buzzard
onto some sick thing,
or swooping like a bat
to pick up on high frequencies.
You thought you'd always remember
just the way the baby said cookie;
next he's shooting baskets,
the steady throbbing
of ball against pavement
echoes the rhythm of the last seven years:
work talk eat talk
read sleep talk talk.
How many words did you say
just to let someone know
you were listening? All the while
I hissed or whined
or skimmed along the background.

Not that you thought yourself immune;
just how disappointing
you've become, how safe,
how unwilling to free fall, to fall
free. Write a diary,
sleep less, read shorter stories:
I'll still breathe beside you,
mocking the turing of light,
dark, light again. ☞

So everyone becomes sadder,
even the children and that tramp
of a cat. Why fight it?
Why not just wear me like a boa,
drape my good weight,
my cool dry beauty as I
wind around your limbs.
Lie down here, honey:
pay me some homage.

On Turning Thirty-Six in February

Dreaming again a city in grays,
slick streets empty;
a trembling starts underground
and moves up like a current
through skyscrapers and trees,
and the scene falls inward
as if a child crumples a drawing
he'd been trying to perfect.

Waking, another day pale as eggwash:
shower, wake kids, put the kettle on.
Why isn't it enough to love
what's familiar? I should be happy
just to kiss my husband awake,
listen to my children lilt over cereal.
A hundred other shoulds whisper
like fussing aunts in church.

I've always dwelt in the yet to be
(when I have the money, when I will write);
but what now seems likely is *I may never...*
I've stopped calling friends, find myself
ligering over labels on beauty jars,
hurrying past mirrors. I know the look
and I'm tired of it.

Yet even under this numbing,
something protests: dye your hair red,
find a lover, take Ecstasy,
become a Buddhist—
anything, but just shut up.

The Importance of Four and Seven, and, McGinty Feels the Need to Reach and Touch In Laffy Lemon's Happy Pan Cafe

David Linton

Aurora Zephyr slights particular
details, specific colors, tastes, smells, shapes,
and sounds explicitly set forth, distinct.
Magenta Snead and Rosey Lavineau,
bummed, jaded, poor Ghosts-At-Large, do not.

Our light becomes a buttery oil
producing gradations like colored smoke.
As we return the flesh above the eye,
between the nose and ear, we get
exact highlights and hues composing
oriental skin and hair, we think.

The Taoists make use of paradox,
says Morton Bardskald, Secondary Ghost.
The new, forgotten, old awareness is.
Relentless, Rosey Lavineau retorts.
Medieval Latin, says Maggie Snead.

McGinty, Do You Hear, You Smoke Too Much

Condone the act. Extract the vengeance due.
Forgive. Retaliate. Forget,
but keep in mind who perpetrates.

Magenta Snead and Rosey Lavineau
watch vistas shrink beneath a smokey pall
between our present place and Atman Peak
far outside the picture window east.
Sandstorms blow down declivities.
Horizons merge. We are aside, says Mort.

The old appeal of once upon a time
is sledom faithful to the time or place,
says Snead, and Lavineau agrees with her.
Amidst our presence set in the past, we
should re-invent ourselves, says Rose and adds,
then search fro time and place, but mostly time.

Underneath the forests that man has known,
the mountains he has cleared, Magenta Snead
and Rosey Lavineau make here their way
from Atman Peak. They sing in harmony:
The wild and great features of nature are
the mountainous forests that know not man.

McGinty, Do You See, You Drink Too Much

Emerging poet Bardskald keeps his watch
on Welshman's River out the window west.
Old avant-gardes were neo-anything.
The neo-avant-gardes are lying low
and Zephyr, still, prefers concrete be light.

The day the Flying Dutchman set his foot
on land the sky began to rain Bacchae
aware of Transcendental Solipsists
like Dutch who brook the bridge between themselves
and faith, who drink then run away to sea,
again betraying all objective trust.

Admirrers of Byronic Passion once
appeared upon unrippled waters but
belief in new soon hurried them away,
says Lavineau, and Snead agrees with her.

Eternal Worm returns to dance with Mort
who asks, What have we here for us to drink.
The fundamental element exists
beside intransigence, says Lavineau.
Egregious. War is hell, says Maggie Snead. ☞

McGinty, Smell and Taste the Bitterness

As we begin to cancel Zephyr's slights,
to neutralize, annul, invalidate,
and everyone consumes the services
and goods that give vitality to forms
like martial law, invade and liberate,
containment, covert rhetoric, detente,

watch Morton Bardskald demonstrate in chalk
a revelation of the paradox
of Flying Dutch, Eternal Worm, et al.,
beside a long enduring river bank.
Hear Rose and Maggie sing in harmony.

Become the generation seeking blank
between your presence here and Atman Peak.
Forget retaliate and vengence due,
then rid yourself of those who perpetrate.
Do not betray renewed subjective trust
in warning signs like bitter tastes and smells.

The importance of four and seven
is slight, ever so very, very slight.
McGinty, truly, all the best to you.

Exercise Michael D. Riley

Annie's buttocks rose like moons
Above the low brass bedstead,
Only to disappear with a dying fall
Of gauze.
In the intervals of exercise
She glowed and disappeared,
Pursuing her exquisite pink toes
As I had all these years
Pursued, too unconscious in my turn,
Her either-ended all:
That splendid haunch of soul
Suspended in a sky of perfect skin.

An Attempt to Write a "Longish" Syllabic Verse-piece

Bruce Hamilton

Yesterday, I fried some noodles.
Those turned out delectable — quite.
Today, I'll be frying some more —
noodles, that is —, & will, quite, hope
for a zest, a tanginess, or
at least something as wonderful
as yesterday's batch — which really
was, as I probably needn't
keep harping on, absolutely
out of this (or nearly any)
world. Good noodles, though not always
very hard to come by, always
have a certain fabulousness,
a certain ability to
knock all nows, & all yesterdays,
for gorgeous loops. So (anyway),
one of my big plans for today
is: to get out the pots-&-pans
& make some noodles that will, soon,
please, please, &—yes—please some more. Ha!

swirly clouds Winter Owen Calvert

Warm blood streamed
down his waiting
forehead.
it did not hurt.

he laid back
put his weight down
and took in the blue sky.
it was incredibly blue. clouds
swirled and waved.
still it did not hurt.

the weasel. the acid weasel
ran
screaming
thru his head.

not this. not this time.

wiping one eye clear with
his shoulder, he squinted.
he had always thought it would hurt more.
slowly, he reached
his hand skyward and waved.
he waved to the swirly clouds
...and smiled.

Setting

Richard Alan Bunch

Why? Need we ask? In quiet spokes of the setting
eye, the iris, cervix once bluish with prints of a
sun rising from laps of dawn, a dull shroud
envelopes your facial narrative, a valley where
your breathing barely sways mooring ropes,
intensive care in lines sketched with charcoal,
and prepares this journey, a mere hair's turn
through an aperture of skull.

And then stillness. You are gone. Done. And from
our eyes humanity flows. Your cousin, Marie, thinks
you are fodder for worms. But I remember how
you once came back, came back to tell us of that
spectrum, rainbow of your fashioned ribs, a glide
through dawns that sear so vast a sleep, the only
shooting is light, a spray of a thousand stars
radiate into the sun's throat, heartbeat of
mountains closer to dawn.

The Daughter I Don't Have

lyn lifshin

sinks into the dark
throat of the screen
like newscasters
when the tv's turned
off, a ghost behind
glass I could pull
back with a finger
she jolts up in the
middle of the night
to curl closer than
skin pink tongued
in a flannel dress
I wore once in some
story. I part her
hair braid her
to me as if to
keep what I can't
like hair wreathes
under glass in New
England or maybe
pull the hair into
a twist above the
nape of her neck
kiss what's exposed
so wildly part of
me stays with her,
can follow her like
signals placed in
birds set free

Mother and Daughter Swim Icy Cesapeak Bay

still and close as
glass beads bodies
oiled slick the
mother dreams this
fich once in her,
of that thrashing
that seemed as
endless. Water like
hours. Their arms
mirrors, scallop
shells that clasped
together. If their
hair escaped it
would frizz like
grape vines in
winter tangle
like hands of
those screaming
as the Titanic
slid down. Salt
and blood and
cramps feet apart
in the black weeds
no one can touch
down in, as separate
as they will be at
each other's death

Crying Rooms

Walter Kuchinsky

We rent crying rooms
here in Pheasant Glen,
rent and rent, both—
pay to use them,
and,
take pay for their use.

Crying rooms are like—
well, resting rooms,
or, sleeping rooms,
or, you know, rooms
in which people do
special, private things.

The times people might
need crying rooms
are when—well, say
a loved one dies,
or, a loved one
hasn't been born yet,
or, the in-betweens—
sad things like that.

Hands Duncan Moran

After making love we lay in bed barely touching
listening to the fog horn bellow its fecund bellows,
we lay there for hours, not talking, feeling the way
our passion rose and subsided like the waves below
the blanket of fog, the waves that rise out on the lake
and travel those miles in darkness, this direction. Your
hand brushing my hip, my lips still moist from your lips,
all moving through the fog toward that deep
wooded shore of sleep. The low horn the only sound.
Our breathing, muffled, close, like the occasional dipping
of an oar.

Waking late, the fog lifted, we walked the beach,
each of us giving to the sun our face as we had given
them
in darkness to the other. There was nothing more
we wanted that morning, the waves washing the rocks,
nothing we couldn't discover, remembering the way
our hands had travelled unguided through the moist
darkness toward each other, like small boats
moving on the still surface of the water.

Reality Carol Hamilton

That is where I want to be buried.
My bones would fit the curve of the earth there.
But it will not be. I left my sheered-off soul there.
Like an arm sliced clean by a locomotive.
Seventeen years ago. Phantom pains still
Confuse my wits from time to time.
It was a death. I have a burial plot
All paid for here, another in Missouri
Where an earlier generation tried to tidy
The future. Perhaps I could have pieces of me
Boxed and shipped here and there. For
That is how I am. But that place and
Time died and I was sucked under
With grief. I grieve now for my death
From you: the coffee, the shared hours,
the silence and talk and trust of friends
and how we made a regular space for each other.
I shall strive to keep you regular in my life.
I'll write at an ordained hour. One hour.
But deaths do not bend to our struggles.
My denials will not suffice.
You are gone.
We do grieve.
I shall be buried in Arlington Gardens,
Plot 185.

Bloods

Willie Williams

(DEDICATED TO THE BLACK VIETNAM VETS
WHO BLED OVER THERE AND THOSE STILL
BLEEDING including my brother Gentry
and Bill Brooks)

Bloods
Bleed
Blood
Bloods
Bleed
Blood red
Bloods
Bleed
Blood red Blood
Bloods
Bleed
Blood red Blood Blues
Bloods
Bleed
Blood red Blood Blues white
Bleed
Bloods
Blood red Blood Blues
Bleed
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Blood red Blood
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Bloods
Blood red
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Blood
Bleed
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Early Mornings Mike Garrison

At the kitchen table,
as in life,
words are to be chewed
and worshipped;

direct, from back of the box
beaten vigorously
till still peaks form,
then shipped and poured
served piping hot

in an instant
to reveal soul-hidden truths
released into table spoons:

pass

the milk

Honey.

The Mathematics of Breaking Objects

Tim Clark

Alice kept a tiny man in a jar. Inside the closet where she kept him the only illumination came from the jar — sometimes a cool blue light, and sometimes a warm orange one. When she opened the door, the light flared like a fire in the wind and the tiny man danced as if he stood upon hot coals. A red glow would rise from the base of the jar and his knees would jerk up toward the curved glass heaven of his world. Other times he danced in the spring rain that fell inside the jar, or in snow flying all around him. He never sat down, never rested, never slept. Often he seemed happy.

Alice's husband Paul Nathan was a mathematics professor. They lived in a house about fifteen miles or so northwest of Washington. Paul knew nothing about the little man, who was as inaccessible to his mind as Alice. He did not need to postulate little men, or jars, in order to live as he did.

Paul lived by mathematics, as some people, less alert, less deep, live by scripture, as mothers may live by their children. His disciplined existence allowed him to go on and on without reference to his actual physical environment.

Paul made money at his work but he did not need money. What he needed was sadness. It kept him going. Any loss in the domain of physical objects, the death of Alice's cat, her mastectomy, his brother's insanity and commitment, turned him right into his work like a sailboat turning into a strong wind on the Bay. A week after his father died he discovered a new way to represent arbitrary functions.

He would sit at his desk as the horizontal rays of evening pooled on the surfaces of his spectacles, and utterly new things would form in his mind. Theorems, lemmas, postulates, axioms, notations, mappings. Those new things would all settle down inside him like ice in a cocktail shaker and the brilliant coolness would eat him up from

the inside outward and he would feel a deep and permanent peace growing in him following the spread of the coolness over his body.

Paul and Alice had been married twelve years. By 1985 you could say the coolness was eating through Alice, too. More and more, she left him alone and could not speak to him. Often in the autumn evenings of that year she would drive in the rain, up and down 270, out 355 into the country, to Poolesville, to Sugarloaf, drive out somewhere and just go past wherever it was and return.

That was the year Paul spent working through the mathematics of breaking objects. Certain generalized functions could describe the growth of fissures, in an instant, through a building about to collapse. Pot shards in a ruin. A windshield yielding before a body flung out of a car. The shapes and distributions of fragments in an explosion. During the first month of his researches it became clear to Paul that breaking objects formed very, very beautiful shapes. Elegant shapes possessing complex forms of symmetry.

And yet they were shadows. The shadowiness of breaking and broken things troubled him, and it was a fact that for Paul the thing of importance and esthetic meaning was their function space. A space like this had to be imagined and built up carefully, bit by bit, until it dominated one's mind, leaving room for nothing extraneous.

The function space of broken objects grew inside Paul all year long until it was the size of his two-car garage and the chill as he sat at the desk in his study spread over the house. At first Alice welcomed the drop in temperature. Autumn! Wet, dead leaves flew in circles around their house. By the time the trees were stripped it had formed in her mind as a suggestion to leave Paul. At least, to go on a vacation, to get away. She phoned Rolf.

She and Rolf arranged to go skiing. Rolf knew all the mountains of France, Germany, Switzerland, Austria; he was a mountain climber and an excellent skier, the brother of her German sister-in-law. Rolf and Angela and Edward and Alice were to ski in the Jura. Before leaving, quite late at night, Alice opened the closet door.

As soon as she opened the door a blue light poured from the jar. Closer. The man running. The blue light shone on his back and in its midst needles of white electricity drove through him right across the jar. She walked closer putting her hands on it.

The light dimmed and the white electricity turned to dead leaves blowing past him and through him, disintegrating as they touched the jar's edge. His hair streamed out behind him and he did not know which way to turn. The leaves were wet. They were all over him. His sadness went straight out into her hands.

Alice told the man goodbye.

Paul could not understand her departure. It was as if one of the walls of the house had disappeared. He did not like to leave the house and this made it worse, for now he needed to go out by himself more frequently, shopping, performing various mundane tasks. Paul was not, however, upset. This was one of the losses he used to encourage himself in his work.

On the day of the winter solstice he drove out to see Alice's sister. Behind the shopping mall, glistening with rain, the western sky lay tangled in dark clouds. A thousand people moved through the rain in glossy cars toward Bloomingdale's, as if asleep.

Maxine's front door was unlocked. He climbed the stairs to the big bedroom with its fireplace and Victorian furniture where she lay in a queen-size bed. Back injury. Maxine had pulled something and could not move.

She lay wrapped in flannel, dark hair splayed across a white pillow and blue sheets, eyes invisible behind oversize lenses bathed in pale incandescence from the ceiling lamp. The fireplace sat bare and clean as it must have been on the day it was built.

On a table beside her television were *The Gospel According to Mark*, *Minor Feasts and Celebrations*, *Paul*, *A Concordance to the Gospels*, *The Holy Bible*, *Christ the Center*, *The Book of Common Prayer*, *The Courage to Be*. In front of the books lay a Toshiba phone with volume control, instant redial, hands-free speaker, and ten extension buttons. Next

to the phone were two amber plastic pill bottles.

Maxine wanted to be a priest. She had converted from Judaism three years ago and was very sincere. But she had a problem with the Bishop of Washington. The Bishop didn't like Maxine, didn't trust her not to make trouble for him. Therefore he made trouble for her. He kicked about everything, made her go through sessions with the Diocesan shrink, who reported back on her unresolved complexes. You could tell how upset Maxine was, if you knew her: the Episcopal Bishop of Washington was the first black man she had ever called a *schwartze*. It was good to know you could be forgiven for such things. Were already forgiven.

Maxine held out her hands, smiling. "I can't get up." He sat on the bed and hugged her awkwardly through the comforter. She kissed him on the cheek. "How have you been? How is Alice?"

Paul did not know how to put it. Finally he just said, "She's in Europe, skiing."

"I know. Edward told me. Haven't you heard from her?"

"No. Apparently she and Rolf just kept on skiing and wandering around." Pause. "Does Rolf do anything?"

"He teaches skiing, I think." Maxine stared at the light for a long moment, then turned her head in Paul's direction. He could see her eyes now, faintly green behind the oversize lenses. "I didn't know. I didn't hear from her, I didn't think there was a problem." She turned her head back again to an angle halfway between the lamp and Paul. Distorted copies of the lamp appeared on each lense. "What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to work on my paper."

"This must be some paper. I'm not sure I understand your attitude, unless you're blocking your emotions" — he saw her eyes again as her head shifted toward him — "which I suspect is true. And blocking isn't a very good thing for you right now..."

"I am not blocking anything. My emotions are all there one hundred percent. I just happen to be working on something that is rather important to me right now. You think I should let everything fall apart? No."

"Like I said, it must be some paper."

"It is, as you put it, some paper. Functional analysis. Same thing as before, different class of functions. Very absorbing, actually. Even Alice could appreciate, I think, how I felt...but I don't know...I mean there was no apparent reason for her to leave. Nothing was different. She was just gone."

"You don't have any idea why she left?"

"No. Look, Max, is this a quiz? I came out to visit." Paul stood up, looking tense.

"I didn't mean to upset you. I just think there must be a reason for her to go. It would be good for you to know it."

"It's a big mistake to think everything must have a reason. You think there's a reason? No evidence. Therefore you must guess. Fine. Guess. Tell me."

"I didn't say I knew why she left, but I do think she had a reason. I'm her sister, not her..." Maxine almost said confessor. She could not say this. "Sometimes people can't stand their lives anymore. Things just build up. It looks like there isn't a reason, but there is. I'm saying to look."

Paul's jaw had slowly become tight as wood. "If you hear from her, tell her to call me. There are some things she and I ought to go over."

"If she isn't calling you now, Paul, she won't call you just because I tell her to. If she likes, she'll call you. I don't even know what I'd say to her."

Paul was silent.

"There's a Hannukah present for you downstairs. It's under the tree."

Paul collected the package on his way out. Max's husband Randolph, the historian, was downstairs wiring something together, some kind of lights, on a dead fir tree propped before the front windows, and he was nearly hidden in cigarette smoke. An electric train passed in slow ellipses around his feet. Paul nodded towards the column of smoke and went out onto the wet flagstone path to the street and his car.

He pulled out into the middle of the street and drove for a long while in a straight line while the brick houses slid by in perfect order. Their tall windows glowed as if filled

with hot margarine and their elegant shapes changed subtly from street to street to street to street. He let his car inscribe a straight line directly across Bethesda as far as it could go, turning at last when there was no alternative, following a pull or suction inside his abdominal cavity. Things changed around him, things turned. Paul became lost.

Sometime in early April Alice phoned him. Paul had not heard from her since late November: the skiing was good, and with spring here she and Rolf would go mountaineering. She seemed very close to him, despite the static on the line like the rushing of a distant waterfall. When Alice had done speaking she waited to hear him, saying nothing.

She had told him only enough for him to know she was not in bad trouble. The things she had left out were what told, and she had left out everything. He listened to the static. Quantization noise. Mu-Law to A-Law conversion error. A little impulse noise.

With the spring weather they would go climbing in another place, very soon now, around Mont Blanc, she said. It's spring, he said. The snow is unstable, its coefficient of static friction is reduced. It gains density as it melts and the shear stresses build up. Tremendous forces.

Rolf knows the mountains Alice told him. Goodbye. She hung up.

Paul was beginning to know about the jar. He did not come upon it by accident, nor did he search for it. He began, simply, to see it as a blank shape looking down at him when he lay awake on the bed at night.

He continued his work on the function spaces of fragments, his very best work to date. Although Paul did not usually engage in physical measurements, he began to make exceptions. Exceptions to his ban on applied work could be tolerated providing the flow of abstraction was out, not in. It would be fine to move only in one direction: toward the function space.

He began to take the dimensions of various fragments. He kept a notebook in which he entered the nature of the

fragment, the manner of its creation, and in his own notation, definitions of the abstract functions capable of generating the shape and its trajectory from a previously whole object.

Paul did not wish to leave the house. Therefore he began to make use of opportunities for study presented to him in the normal routine of his life. As part of his investigations he destroyed all fifty of the old seventy-eights in his Jelly Roll Morton collection.

On April 7, Rolf and Alice and two other Americans were buried in an avalanche on the Aiguille du Chardonnet. Paul was at home when the call came. It startled him and he made the French-accented voice say the words again twice. "I see. Thank you," he replied finally. And hung up. There wasn't anything to do. Good chance, very good chance, they would never find anything. She was simply gone. To put it precisely, Alice was now more completely gone.

Now the work came more quickly and he slept less. When he wrote his fingers seemed charged with energy. His earlier intellectual vagueness and lack of focus were in the past. At first his grasp of the problem was incomplete: he felt he was standing at the door of a house, whose interior lay wrapped in fog. He would enter the house seeing only a meter or two in front of him as he moved. The more he moved through the house, the farther he could see. A few days after Alice's death, the mist had dispelled and Paul could see clearly into the house from its doorstep.

The key to understanding breaking objects, to seeing them at a sufficiently high level of abstraction, was given to him a few days after the avalanche by Alexander Baerman. Paul sat at his desk with paper and pencil before him, staring past the jar and out into the vacuous sky. At difficult points he found it useful to discuss with Baerman, who had been his thesis advisor. Baerman was dead. Given a suitable problem, suitable motivation, enough concentration and absorption, Paul could still discuss it with Baerman. He liked the fact that he could imagine a dialogue with his teacher after all these years, that he

could conjure the dead out of memory for mathematical purposes.

Baerman appeared in his brown corduroy jacket and chinos, staring at him from just inside the window frame. The habitual green shirt. The watery black eyes, long wiry black hair receding from his square brow. Long bony nose. Alex. He could smell Baerman's tobacco: Balkan Sobranie. I want to tell you about this problem. It has features of interest... you'll like it. I have gone so far with it, and now I am stuck. Dead stuck. What should I do, Alex?

The room filled up with Balkan Sobranie. You are dealing with the Hilbert space of which class of functions? Tell me. Yes. Good. I am going to tell you now how to solve this problem. I know you can do this. You are having a problem with perception because of the abstractness, the very large number of dimensions. This is not a problem for ordinary students, Paul. I am going to tell you how Riesz would solve this problem. Because, Paul, it isn't at all something to do with the mathematics, which you know as well as anybody. It is how you set up your mind to the problem. And the way you have to do it, is, to go into the Hilbert space. You enter the space of those functions and live there with your mind. I am sure this is not new to you because you've done this kind of thing before, but I want to remind you again, we are not talking formulaic solutions, but how to see more abstractly. More deeply. You enter the function space and stay there physically. You stay there until you become the solution, physically. Physically! If you don't find it you leave your bones there. Let it be that way. Do the problem that way, Paul.

Abruptly the tobacco smell was gone, and Baerman was gone, and the cool oxygenated spring air pressed up against his face and pushed him back in his chair. Physically. Paul Nathan never went against Baerman: Baerman had never sent him in a wrong direction. Baerman had sent him to Washington.

Paul attempted to follow his advisor's instructions. He slept at his desk, trying to remain physically inside the function space at all times. When he didn't answer Maxine's calls she came out and found him. Her back had

healed. She began to bring food to him every day, coming softly into the study to set it upon the desk, taking away things left scattered on the floor from the previous day.

Now he was deep enough into the problem to see everything. Every physical object - he tried to limit his contact with them - appeared to him now consistently in its true aspect. All changes, disintegrative changes most especially, destructive changes, which are the common rule, shone forth properly as functions. And that is what they are, nothing more. Paul was living, as Baerman had suggested, deep in the Hilbert space of breaking objects.

Finding his way back out had become non-trivial.

He tried speaking to Maxine when she came the next time but the thing located in his upper chest reached up and seized the muscles of his jaw, pressing the surfaces of his teeth down against one another. She refused to notice the ice crystals on his face, the mounds of snow heaped upon his shoulders. The Hilbert space had begun to fill up with snow. Physically. She spoke about their picnic in the mountains by Camp David last year, the chill vernal water roaring around the boulders, the trout feeding downstream. She had brought food.

Maxine sat in the room under the photograph of Gödel and the snow came up around her ankles. She looked calmly out the window. Seven fruit trees (he thought they might be pear trees, or apples) flowered in the field off toward the school.

She stayed for an hour, then left. Her visits annoyed him. He didn't want to eat her gifts of food — but they were always gone somehow by morning. Once consumed the food ceased to be an assemblage of merely physical objects. The food felt gritty on his tongue. It burned his mouth. He needed to see the problem again from outside, untainted by his physical presence, as it was in the beginning, but he could not leave the function space under his own power. Baerman stared at him again. Alex. I've wanted to go over this situation with you.

It's quite interesting. I really did as you asked, no-one can fault me, just your instructions, right into it, I know it top to bottom, nobody else can see this the way I do...but

this is not enough. This is not sufficient, to live the problem myself. Not without being able to return. It's like being dead.

Baerman opened his mouth slowly.

The edges of his lips stuck together for an instant glued by a film of spittle and then jumped apart unmasking his teeth. He looked gray. You are talking to the right man about being dead, that's for sure. I'm dead twelve years. Since nineteen seventy-four. You think I can come back every time with fresh ideas? Each time you need me? Listen to me Paul, I am used up as far as you're concerned. I personally cannot come back any more. So how can I tell you? I loved you as a student, Paul...and to see you now like this, covered in ice like a Mastodon! You are the only one of them I ever had who would take me so literally; that's what made you a great student. You are serious. But I can't help you. Not on this or any other problem. Baerman went a little grayer, losing contrast.

I'm not asking you to spell it out for me.

I know exactly what you aren't asking, Mr. Nathan. Also what you are asking, maybe more than you do yourself. And believe me. I would give it to you if I could give it. The contrast was almost all gone and Baerman seemed to be covered in fine gray ash.

Where is your self-confidence, Paul? You weren't like this when I knew you. Not at all. Not since you gave up that jazz business, playing outer space music. And you never stopped halfway like this before, or came back a second time, one hint was always enough.

Something began to slip out from under Paul.

This is a very special case. I have never been like this before, you never said physically before. Physically! You can help me, you are the only one, yet you refuse. What is the matter, what have I done? Look, anything you say, it doesn't matter. I'll do. I don't need to believe things, just to follow instructions. So give me something. Give me something.

You want something to think about? Baerman was a mere outline.

Yes.

I'll give you something. The voice was a whisper. One: I am dead as a doornail. Why are you talking to me? Two: Maxine brings you food every day, like an angel. You never speak to her. Why? Three: Kurt Gödel was the unhappiest man I ever knew. He loved mathematics and it made him sick inside, sick and lonely. Why do you have his picture on your wall? Four: Do you know why there is a jar on your desk? Five: It's April. Why don't you take a drive down the Parkway to see the cherry blossoms? Six: Where the hell did your wife go? To which function space? Seven: There was a seventh thing but Paul could not hear Baerman's whisper any more, though it kept coming like the singing of insects even after his lips had vanished.

Paul stared at the outline of the former silhouette of Alex Baerman against his window, ten, maybe fifteen minutes. Thirty minutes. Long after Alex had dissolved to ashes and floated across the pear trees, Paul was still straining to drag the words up, like a fisherman with a huge rotten fish caught at the bottom of a deep cold lake.

"Do you know who this is?" he asked Maxine when she came in. She wore a black silk top with a pair of designer jeans. Her arms were filled with plates on a tray.

Maxine set the food down. "I have something you'll like — real Indian curry, Paul. Bharatta made it herself - you know my next-door neighbor Bharatta - see how red it is! Red curry, homemade curry is red. See, look at it. You'll like this, Paul..."

"Do you know who this man is?" he repeated.

"Who?"

"This photograph."

"No I don't believe I do."

"This is Kurt Gödel..."

"A friend of yours?"

"...the so-called Time Bomb of Mathematics. Surely even in the liberal arts curriculum you learned about him."

Maxine sat down and watched Paul. His face looked ready to split in half. He opened the bottle of Miller she'd brought, paused, set it down without drinking from it, and

turned his face very slowly away toward the desk and the framed photograph of Gödel. Inside the frame a blackboard filled with set notation hovered behind Gödel — the Ten Commandments without God. Gödel's smooth face and round horn rims looked into Paul and right through him, into the function space of breaking objects. All the way through it. Gödel, he knew this now, Gödel could see objects moving on the other side of the function space. They were dark as the shadows of cars.

"I tried my best to stay away from Math," Maxine replied eventually. Long pause.

"Why are you doing this, Maxine?"

"Doing what?"

"Coming out here every day. Bringing things."

"Just accept it. Please. I do it, that's all. It's not a problem."

Paul's eyes tightened. "It's a problem to me. You have to have reasons for things. So what's yours? What's your motivation?"

Maxine took a risk and told him the truth. "Maybe as a way to worship God." It was entirely the wrong thing to say.

"I have nothing to do with him", he said. Already he had said too much and now he wanted her to go.

"That's not so. You are him."

Paul looked away from the photograph and directly at Maxine. "I'm no God, I'm a mathematician. Don't be ridiculous."

"That's your surface. What you have inside you — what every single person has — is a fragment, and you too, you too have..."

"Stop it. Just stop it Maxine. I'm a mathematician working on a problem. And you're using me for fantasy material. Go away."

Maxine stood up. "I'm leaving this dinner."

"I won't eat it. I don't need food..."

"You don't like to admit you need it, but you do."

"...and don't come back with your unresolved complex — whatever it is — what that shrink said — he was right. You're a menace."

"I'll be back tomorrow. You need to calm down."

"Look Maxine, you break my concentration every time you come in the house. You reek of phoniness. I can smell it on you when you enter, that sanctimonious odor, that stench of..."

Maxine put the dish on the desk with a cracking sound. Her voice was louder now. "This stuff is good for you and I don't think you're crazy so you're going to eat it. Nobody lives without eating, not even mathematicians. And you won't stop me by...insulting me, downing my intentions, belittling me. It's very simple. I want you to live, not die. And I'm not sensitive to your remarks."

Paul shook a little. "You should be." He stood up suddenly and swept the dish onto the floor, scattering its contents. "You should be!" He took hold of her shoulders and pushed, his face right up against hers. "Go away! Go away! Get out of my study you tart, you holy roller. Go!"

The physical contact changed her stance and the sound of her voice. She struck his hands away. "Get off of me. Pig! My sister is dead under the snow and you do these crossword puzzles when you are the one who put her there. You will eat this food!" She dropped to the floor and shoveled the food back onto the plate, mixing everything together, stood up again and slammed the plate down onto his desk. Half of the food scattered out over its surface, little dollops of Indian gravy-covered lamb and gritty sauced vegetables, grains of rice. "This food was made by a beautiful person who is *my* neighbor, and *I* brought it to you because *I* loved my sister and she's frozen somewhere in the Alps with a ski bum and you're alive. Barely! You're just barely alive and if God insists that your life be traded for hers, then I refuse to let you live this way, embalming yourself like a specimen, like a little *thing* in a jar of formaldehyde. You are living her life, breathing her air, taking up her space. You are all that's left of her, all, and I refuse to permit this terrible waste of a person, this stunted life of yours. You became sacred when you came into this dirty world, do you understand, you have *no right* to turn yourself into dust like this. *No right!* I loved her and I love you. Now eat this stuff before I smash you!" Tears streaked her face and she looked frightened for a second

at what she had said, like an animal caught in a car's headlights. Whether it was true or not. Her eyes flicked and she spun out of the room slamming the door.

Paul watched her drive away. He dropped the plate into the trash can and sponged his desk.

One morning four days later Paul awoke in the darkness before sunrise, the jar resting calmly upon his bureau. Bluish light leaked from the jar like poison and colored the room. Despite its inner illumination the jar seemed opaque. He walked carefully out of the bedroom and into his study where he dressed, went to his desk and began to work.

His window looked east. On both sides were books in high shelves to the ceiling. Beneath the window lay his desk, a wide expanse of white laminate resembling an ideal plane. Paul never allowed anything to remain upon it but a single sheet of paper and a black mechanical pencil. When the sheet was filled with notes he placed it in a tray beside his desk and took another one white and pure from the tray below it.

There was a stereo in the room, a very good one, but Paul did not listen to music. He had ten hours of white noise on tape. While Paul Nathan sat in darkness at his desk a long, blurry, salmon line grew from a point one hundred kilometers due east of him and spread forward through the spiky trees beyond the high school.

It became light enough to see. The last page of his treatise lay before him, between him and the daylight rolling toward him across Eastern Maryland and over the Bay. The work was complete in his mind. As he leaned over the rectangle of paper a breeze poured through the window and something arose like a molten blister in the distance and the jar sat between his paper and the sun.

He began to write, automatically, as if seized, remembering the drive yesterday on the Parkway, under Key Bridge. A beautiful structure! The arches could be generated by a simple function and they pleased the eye, the first thing after the Monument to strike any traveler entering Washington from the northwest. Whenever Paul drove

beneath them a spasm of love went through him, as if he had swallowed a block of wood. Yesterday he did this, following Baerman's instructions, trying to keep his mind as blank as his desk, car windows open and a wind laden with the scent of spring rushing pointlessly across his face. Arches. A row of seven bell jars suspended over the tan, sluggish river. His car passed beneath the bridge with a whoosh like a vacuum breaking open and he felt the oak block in his esophagus.

The paper was finished. He put aside his pencil, went into the bathroom and shaved, twice; brushed his teeth, put on a jacket and went out. As he walked to his car, bits of wet dismantled pear blossoms blown by the wind flashed up into his face. They struck him on the cheek, glued themselves to his glasses and his lips, his hands, and stung him with unexpected cold as he fumbled for his keys.

Inside Paul's study, the tiny skeleton of a man lay half-covered in snow and in shards of glass on the white desk and a cool, flower-scented breeze stirred the snow from the jar in circles around the room. Sunlight slanted directly in upon the desk, turning the fragments of the jar brittle white.

Nighttime
T.R. Healy

The door to the bedroom whispered open and suddenly the shadow of someone moved across the room, past the collage of pennants on the walls, and approached Tadd. He shuddered, imagining he was dreaming, and woke with a start, finding the figure above him, staring. And, quickly, he glanced to see if he had left the window open, remembering how his grandfather always believed that dreams came in through the windows at night. But it was closed.

"Wake up, Tadd." It was his mother, touching his left arm, peeling away the bedspread. "We're going next door for the night."

He groaned then rolled over on his side and drew the blankets back up around his throat.

"Come on, dear," she whispered. "Do you hear me?"

"Uh-huh," he muttered.

"Wake up now. You've got to hurry and get dressed."

He started to ask why, but already he knew the answer, having heard his parents quarreling in his sleep, so he got up and docilely pulled on a sweater and some jeans over his pajamas. The room was frigid. Then he slumped against the bookcase, still sluggish, and slowly rubbed the sleep from his eyes. Anxiously he stared at the closed bedroom door across the hallway where he could hear his parents arguing. His heart was pounding so hard, he pressed the heel of his hand against his ribs to muffle the sound. Urgently he bent over his brother and whispered. "Get up, Tobie. We're going." In a moment, the door across the hallway sprang open, he could just make out the shadow of his father at the edge of the bed, then his mother hurried into their room.

"Are you ready?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Now be quiet and we'll go out the back door."

They picked up their pillows and followed her out of the room, down the dark hallway, and into the kitchen.

The house was quiet. A copper bowl on the counter gleamed in a shaft of light from the street. She turned around a moment, hesitating, then opened the back door and ushered them onto the porch. "I called Miss Laurel and she said she'd be happy to have us spend the night with her. You know how lonely it is for her in that big house."

"Alma!...Alma!" they heard their father shout from somewhere in the house. "I want to talk to you."

The boys, frightened, stood paralyzed on the porch, staring back at the hallway, until their mother coaxed them outside, saying, "Now hurry. I'll be with you in a minute."

Quickly they tore down the porch steps into the night. They streaked around the garage, across a corner of the lawn, and started down the driveway. All the houses along the street were dark, it was so late, and Tadd was glad that no one could see them running around at this time of night. For a split second, Tobie looked back, and saw their father in the kitchen window, then looked away, sweating with fear. "Come on," Tadd urged him, pulling his hand as though it were the handle to a wagon. They turned at the end of the hedge that bordered their house, their footsteps whispering on the grass, and raced across Miss Laurel's parking. They ran up her bank, through the leaves, and up the porch, almost out of breath, and pressed the doorbell.

Miss Laurel, smiling tautly, pushed back the screen, saying, "Oh, come inside, children, before you turn into icicles." Her white hair, always pinned into a bun in the daytime, hung loosely across her shoulders. It's so nice of you to come over and visit me," she told them.

They had stayed overnight before and, as in the past, she had prepared the davenport for them to sleep on, one at each end, and drawn it near the fireplace. The logs sighed and crackled. The boys quickly huddled together in front of the fire, snug in Navajo blankets, and stared at the flames. They were entranced by her fires, regarded them as magical the way the pine cones burst into green and orange and blue sparks. As they

lay there, growing warm again, Miss Laurel sat between them with her photograph album as she often did when they came over and showed them pictures from her days as a young schoolteacher on an Indian reservation, reminiscing easily about those times as if they had occurred just the other week. Tadd only half believed her when she said she was the smiling woman in the photographs, and admitted her appearance had changed over the years, adding, with the same smile, that she would always remain ahead of time because she had been born a year before the turn of the century. But how could anyone change so much? he wondered. How could these two people be the same person? He remained skeptical despite what she said, but still he enjoyed listening to her reminiscences about the Indians she had taught on the reservation and looking at the photographs she had taken. He wished then the night would never end, they could stay over forever in front of her fire, also ahead of time.

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One summer, while still in high school, Tadd began to spend a couple of nights out of the week downtown at a small ecumenical center sponsored by the diocese and run by students from the university. It was located in a dreary corner of the city, in the cellar of a decrepit old tobacco shop along the river front. A slim blue cross, twisted out of tin, hung above the doorway. It was referred to, invariably, as the Cellar by almost everyone associated with it, including the chaplain. The center was something of a house church, offering services every night and providing food and counselling for the transients in the vicinity. Tadd mainly did menial work down there, scrubbing floors and washing dishes, following the example of one of his teachers at school, Mr. Nichols. Just recently having graduated from the university, where he had served as a volunteer at the center, Mr. Nichols encouraged many of the students to donate some of their spare time and help out at the center. Still single, he was there almost every night,

doing everything except celebrate Mass, and Tadd often helped him prepare the musty place for the service, arranging the folding chairs around the twin card tables that served as the altar, setting out the bread and wine, distributing the missals. He frequently cited Thoreau to Tadd during his first few weeks there, urging him to read his journals. He even had tacked a large photograph of Thoreau on the back wall, and during the service would sit beneath it on the floor and read excerpts from the journals as part of the liturgy. After a while, he began to refer to Teilhard de Chardin frequently, citing him as he had Thoreau, and later Orwell and others, finding someone different every few weeks. By the end of the summer the wall was covered with photographs of his sources.

Mr. Nichols was something of an eccentric, even at school, where once he had some of his classes simulate physical injuries so that they could better understand the difficulties of the handicapped. Tadd had hobbled around on crutches for several hours, while others assumed a while range of disabilities, including Mr. Nichols who rode around in a wheelchair all day. Tadd was not particularly surprised, then, when he appeared one night at the Cellar in torn clothes, with a trace of a beard, and explained he wanted to move around the streets as one of the transients so that he might appreciate their problems. He cited the advice of Paul: "With the Jews I live like a Jew, to win the Jews." Eventually, Tadd asked him if he could accompany him on one of his walks through the district, and he agreed so long as he wore some old clothes and didn't shave for a few days.

"You can become my shadow," he said, grinning.

They set out together a week later. It was a cold, violet night. Tightly Tadd held the collar of his jacket around his throat, his head bowed, trailing half a step behind Mr. Nichols as if he really were his shadow. He scarcely exchanged a word with Tadd at first, almost seemed to have forgotten that he was at his side as they left the Cellar. They walked cautiously down the sour

streets, past taverns and missions and secondhand stores, then across the boulevard, past more squalid buildings. A few tramps milled on the sidewalk, muttering to themselves, others lingered in doorways, against the sides of buildings. Mr. Nichols, pretending he was Orwell down and out in Paris, led Tadd into every grim little corner of the district. They wandered through an arcade, visited a tatoo parlor, drank gritty cups of coffee in a Korean cafe, lingered with some men outside a gutted pawnshop, browsed inside the lobby of a rooming house. They stood and listened to an evangelist band playing "Amazing Grace" on a bleak street corner. At another corner, a whore in a light brown raincoat stepped beside them, whistling, and asked if they wanted to have a night on the town, while two figures swore at one another in front of a steam bath across the street.

Tadd was puzzled at how reticent Mr. Nichols remained during the walk. He had expected him to be trying to minister to the needs of everyone they saw, inquiring about their troubles and inviting them down to the Cellar. Instead, he moved through the streets as if in a trance, seemingly oblivious to the people they passed, and Tadd began to wonder about his purpose in taking the walk. Finally, on the way back, he asked him why he had not spoken to a single person.

"Oh," he said, surprised. "I'm looking for someone."

"Down here?"

He shrugged, tiredly, and explained how he had come across a young girl begging in the street a week ago and had bought her some coffee and talked with her for a while about some of her problems at home, then had agreed to meet her the following night but she never appeared. "Ever since then I've been coming down here looking for her."

"Do you think you'll ever find her again?"

"I don't know. But I've nothing better to do than try. I'm not so different, really, than many of the people down here wandering the streets, trying to buy time for themselves. Maybe you aren't either. And I suppose

there's nothing wrong with that if times is all that remains on the shelf," he said, sounding like Celine.

Tadd denied this was his motive, but Mr. Nichols only smiled, and they returned in silence.

***

At the end of the summer the chaplain at the Cellar invited Tadd to spend a weekend at the Benedictine seminary with half a dozen other boys from the diocese. He asked him into his office one night after the service, poured him a cup of strong Turkish coffee, and extended the invitation.

"You are at the age now, Rudyard," he began gravely, touching his fingers together in a bridge underneath his sagging chin, "for a young man to start thinking seriously about his vocation. What he aspires to do with his life."

"Yes, sir."

"No doubt, like all young people, you have considered numerous avenues. Perhaps even the priesthood."

"Yes, I have, father."

He nodded. "It has been some time since anyone from here has entered the seminary, but this is not surprising. Only a few people are ever chosen for the religious life. To receive that call is, surely, the highest privilege Our Lord Jesus Christ can grant an individual."

Tadd, listening, stood quietly before the slouched priest.

"Maybe, son, He has chosen you to serve Him. So I thought you might be interested in visiting the seminary to help you determine if that is His intention."

The seminary, composed of a cluster of modest frame buildings, was nestled in some rolling hills downstate, approximately an hour by car from the city. Tadd rose in darkness his first morning there to the sound of bells ringing in the chapel and accompanied the seminarians to the early service, then enjoyed a large breakfast in the refectory. Afterward, he was shown around the premises by one of the older seminarians who wore a

black cassock, red socks, and cracked leather sandals. It was a crisp September morning. Patches of sunlight glimmered through the cobblestoned sky. They walked slowly across the immaculate grounds, past the refectory, then along a narrow gravel path, past the library and the auditorium. The sound of voices chanting in Latin floated from the windows. They continued along the path to a small grove of trees, chatting quietly together about the demands of being a seminarian, and came to the shrine to the Virgin Mother. A monk, meditating, crept through the shadows in silence. Tadd stared at him, momentarily trying to picture himself in his place. Then they climbed a grassy slope to the firehouse, where the seminarians maintained a fire engine to serve the entire community. Tadd spent the remainder of the morning there, talking with the crew, listening to them play esoteric passages of medieval religious music on a guitar they passed among one another. In the afternoon, he accompanied the crew on a drive through the hills in the fire engine, observed an hour of silence in his room, then helped some second year seminarians rake the grounds and retired with them to the dormitory where he solicited their impressions of their first year. He inquired about their daily routine, the sacrifices they were required to make, about the difficulty of their decision to enter the seminary. Some had known for half their lives, others in just the last year or two, a few continued to be in doubt. One young man, the nephew of a Jesuit, admitted he had never been sure, even though he and his family had always assumed he would follow the example of his uncle, so finally, one afternoon, he spread a deck of playing cards across the kitchen table and drew a single card, deciding if he picked one of the red suit he would enter the army, the black suit the priesthood. He drew a spade.

"It was sheer chance," he said. "But I guess, at times, one has to be willing to risk even the most important decisions on the draw of a card."

"Someone has been reading his *Pensees*," one of the others chided. "No more blackjack with him."

He smiled coyly, then removed a crumpled playing card from his wallet. "This is the card. The three of spades."

Tadd listened carefully, sometimes prodding the seminarians to help him with his own decision, right up until it was time for dinner. After benediction, he went upstairs to his room, intending to go to bed early because of the small amount of sleep he had had last night. But sleep eluded him as he tossed anxiously in bed, despite how tired he felt. He continued to be agitated by what he had observed during the long day, desperately tried to come to a decision about his future. His mind was a nest of nerves. At length, he got up and went downstairs to the chapel. Only a red sanctuary light burned in the darkness. Genuflecting, he slipped into one of the side benches, crossing himself. If he was going to brood all night about his future, he reckoned, he might as well do so in church where he could petition for some direction. At once, he tried to rid every concern, every shred of thought, from his mind, to make it absolutely blank, hoping to receive some guidance in his decision about entering the seminary. But after a few moments his attention wandered, and he became distracted by two monks he noticed at the communion railing, their heads in their hands, bent in supplication. Intently he watched them, once again imagining himself in their place. He could not deny the appeal of the priesthood at times. Frequently, during Mass, he pictured himself on the altar as the celebrant, lifting his hands in prayer, changing the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. And always the thought of being up there made him tremble with humility, convinced he was not worthy of being invested with such power. He marvelled at how still the monks were, absorbed in adoration, like the statues at the entrance to the chapel. He admired their discipline and piety, yet, recalling some of the priests he had known, he suspected they must be very lonely and frightened men.

Pensively he sank his face in his hands. He hated to admit it, but often he felt lonely and scared too, so he assumed he could easily adapt to the secure, disciplined life of the priesthood. Probably he would relish it, and he wondered if this was the primary appeal of the priesthood for him rather than the opportunity to serve the church - indeed, if it might not be an admission of weakness to enter the seminary, and if he had the strength to resist the temptation. He would be a fraud, his vows counterfeit, if he ever became a priest, he decided.

Silently, after another moment, he rose and left the chapel, realizing he did not belong there with the two monks.

***

It was close to midnight. Tadd sat on the edge of his bed, listening to his parents arguing in the kitchen, while he tried to complete a letter to Tobie who was away at school. Rain clattered on the roof. He tried hard not to listen to them, but, as usual, he could hear every word, his father angrily demanding his dinner, his mother refusing. He wished it would rain harder, louder, obliterating their voices. Sweat trickled down the sides of his arms. He was seething inside, and abruptly leaned back on the bed and clamped his ears with his hands. Through the oval window he could see across the street to the playground. A firelight burned by the slide. Then, turning away, he glimpsed his profile in shadow, and hooked two fingers behind his head, turning himself into a gargoyle. Staring back out the window, he doubted if they would every stop, they had been arguing with one another for as long as he could remember, their invectives echoing in every room in the house. And again he tried not to listen and resumed writing his letter.

He heard a door slam in the hallway, his father shouting, then another door. "Oh, Christ!" he railed bitterly. And he sprang from the bed, tore down the stairs into the living room, where he saw his father

peering into the fireplace, his face flushed, and suddenly, astonishingly, he struck him hard across the side of the mouth. His father slammed against the wall, and, terrified, Tadd thought the whole house was going to collapse, wall after wall, into clouds of dust.

***

Tadd leaned over the railing of the footbridge, staring at the circus caravan on the street. The murmur of the animals was exciting, fierce. Kneeling, he set his camera down on the railing and peered through the viewer, aimed, and snapped a photograph of an enormous African elephant swaying in the lamplight. Then he peered again, snapped another photograph then another, as the animals were assembled along the street for the procession across the river to the Coliseum. He was strictly a novice, through he went out a couple of nights a week with his camera, snapping whatever struck his curiosity. He always wanted to be where the apples were falling, as Mr. Nichols said once, at disasters and spectacles, and over the last year he had snapped pictures of a burning warehouse, some nasty traffic accidents, a beauty pageant, numerous basketball and football games. Mostly, though, he remained in the neighborhood, snapping pictures of cars and gardens and homes. Sometimes, bored, he even took pictures of himself, making faces in a mirror, approaching a store window. He seldom expressed much satisfaction with his pictures, often neglected even to develop many of them, because more than anything the camera was simply an excuse to get away from the house for a while, at night, away from all the quarrelling.

An attractive girl in a maroon dress sauntered past the lion cage, her long hair wandering down her shoulders. Tadd peered at her through his camera a moment, then began to follow her, nudging through the crowd. He wanted to take her picture, often he took pictures of people he saw on the street. She was standing beside a miniature horse, stroking its neck, when he approached and snapped her picture. She blushed, and

he snapped her again, then she insisted he let her take his picture, and he did, smiling with surprise.

"Are you on vacation?" she asked.

"No."

"You're not Japanese, are you?"

He laughed. "My camera maybe, not me."

They introduced one another, Tadd offered her a cigarette, and they chatted a few moments about the animals. Then along with the rest of the crowd they followed the procession across the bridge, continuing to become acquainted. Lisa lived downtown in an apartment with her spinster aunt, was already out of high school, and in another year intended to enter nursing school. Later, over coffee, Tadd told her about going out at night with his camera, described some of the pictures he had taken, especially the fires. She admitted she was also something of a night owl and recalled the belief of her aunt that everybody had a particular time of the day that suited them as surely as a shade of color or a brand of automobile. Sometimes, riding on the bus, she tried to identify the characteristic hours of other passengers, associating, for instance, the early hours of morning with brooding people, sleepwalkers, she explained, sunrise with the vigorous and athletic, midnight with the violent, the late afternoon with idle people with little ambition. And then, as she gazed around the blue cafe, she began to ascribe certain times to different customers, saying, "She's a noontime person...she's one in the morning...he's three in the afternoon." Then, regarding Tadd, she agreed that he belonged somewhere in the evening, the time for wanderers, she suggested, including herself. He smiled in amusement and invited her to accompany him some night, and she accepted tentatively.

A few nights later, Tadd met her downtown, and they walked together along the river front, smoking cigarettes and snapping pictures of the large Asian freighters. At the end of the seawall, his heart shivering, he kissed her, touching her tongue. They met again the following week, strolled through Chinatown, took each others'

picture beside a storefront dragon, sipped creme de menthe in a musty coffee house. Soon they were meeting two and three nights a week, usually at the library, and would wander through some corner of the city together, holding hands. He continued to bring his camera with him, but took very few pictures except of her at the different places they visited. She had become his excuse for leaving the house now, not the camera.

One night, walking through the university, they heard a sudden burst of applause from behind the fieldhouse, and, instinctively, headed in that direction. They walked around the fieldhouse, where they found a cluster of students gathered around a lopsided tower of old boxes and crates and furniture fragments, laughing and swilling beer. In a moment, several torches were tossed at the tower, igniting it into a fierce red cone. The students erupted into more applause. Tadd led Lisa through the crowd, past the bonfire, to a small slope on the other side of the field. They sat down on the grass by themselves and watched the tower burn. Lisa speculated she might enjoy going to college rather than nursing school, while Tadd dreaded the idea, detesting everything about school She leaned back on her elbows, her lavish hair hanging loosely behind her shoulders, and predicted he would go to college. He protested. "What's really important can't be taught. It has to be learned." She smiled, leaning back farther, revealing the shape of her small breasts. The crackle of the fire whispered through the trees. She lay there absolutely still as if asleep, her eyes closed, breathing slowly. He stared at her breasts, the tiny star in her left ear, the rings on her fingers, the soft down on the back of her neck. He wanted to touch her breasts, her mouth, to bury his head in her hair. He could smell the faint scent of her perfume, and, delicately, traced a finger along her arm. She opened her eyes, saw him staring, and leaned over and touched his cheek. He stared into her eyes, into her dreams, saw them still together, walking through strange, dark streets of other places, in other worlds, holding hands.

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"This fire was only a block from the Capitol building. You can see the dome in the distance."

Tadd sat next to Lisa on a striped cushion on the floor, showing her the photographs he had taken after the riot in Washington that spring. They were at her apartment high above the street. It was Saturday afternoon, he had only been home from college a few hours, and he was still tired from the long flight he had taken last night cross the country. She made him some peppermint tea, and, gratefully, he sipped it as he described the different photographs.

"It's awful," she said, looking at a picture of smoke pouring out of a doorway.

"It used to be a hardware store."

She sighed. "It's hard to believe this is America."

Quickly he rifled through the remaining pictures and handed her one of a short, bald-headed man descending some stairs. On the phonograph dropped an album of the Doors.

"Who is he?"

"Dos Passos."

"You mean the writer?"

He smiled. "The ambulance corps...Paris...the lost generation. I found him." He snapped his picture, he explained, coming out of the university library one afternoon, where he sometimes came to do research.

"He looks like a librarian."

"Everyone does, I suppose, if they live long enough."

Then he put away the snapshots, saying he was tired of looking at the past, and suddenly pulled a small camera out of his pocket and snapped her picture. She laughed and posed a moment, pushing back her hair. He snapped her profile, her back, her legs, her long hair. She undid her blouse and lifted out her left breast toward the camera, and he snapped it, and then her other breast as she let her blouse slide off her shoulders. He slid beside her on the floor, they kissed one another, and he held her in his arms. He could feel her

breasts swell beneath him as she breathed. Briefly, as they embraced, he caught himself in her eyes, his face appeared strained, fierce, and he looked away in fear. They loved one another abruptly, awkwardly, searching for a rhythm, then lay together in silence, listening to the Doors.

That evening, they wandered around town for a while, staring at the city lights, then walked to the courthouse. A demonstration against the war was to begin from there later, and Lisa intended to participate in the march through town. Tadd was surprised, not that she wanted to march, everybody was marching these days, but at the intensity of her anger. Just a short time ago, before he went away to school, she had seldom expressed the least interest in politics, but now, as they approached the courthouse, she told him about numerous other protests she had engaged in over the last six months, including her arrest for kneeling in prayer inside of the induction center. She had become obsessed with the war, like so many others their age, and he could hardly listen to her, having heard the arguments so many times already. He had grown cynical, he supposed, distrusting the views of everyone seemingly, even irresponsible, according to some people who resented his detachment.

A few hundred people milled in front of the courthouse. Behind them, a the top of the steps, a few others stood over a plain black coffin, holding candles in their hands to mourn the dead in Vietnam. A squad of policemen stood with nightsticks across the street, staring at the protesters.

"Hurry," she said. "It's going to start." She pushed through the crowd, urging Tadd to follow, but he declined, considering it a waste of time.

"You go ahead. I'll watch."

She glared at him a moment, her face reddening, then turned and quickly disappeared among all the protesters. Tadd remained on the corner, peering through his camera, as the march proceeded behind the truck carrying the coffin. He recognized several people

he had not seen since high school, including Mr. Nichols, who resembled Che Guevara more than Orwell now with his long, scraggly hair, and snapped some of their pictures as they wound down the street into the night, chanting "Hell, no, we won't go...Hell, no, we won't go...."

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They were alone together in the house, Tadd sitting at the bedside of his father. The room was filled with the sound of his breathing. Tadd bent over him, dampening his forehead with a moist cloth, still astonished at how terrible he appeared since coming home from the hospital, his eyes bulging, his complexion dry and sallow, his cheeks sunken. Sadly he gazed out the window at the moon. His father was dying, he knew; it was only a matter of time, according to the doctors, a week, a month, only a little while longer before it happened. And since they could not provide anymore treatment they discharged him, a week ago, to spend his remaining days with his family. He rolled up his father's pajama sleeve, patted his arm with cotton, and administered the injection, slowly introducing the medicine into his muscle. Then, setting the syringe on the nightstand, he rolled down his sleeve, propped up the pillows. Outside, a train rumbled through the night, its whistle blaring. His father scarcely noticed it, almost seemed asleep, although his eyes were open, staring across the dark room into the hallway. Solicitously Tadd brushed some lint from his collar, adjusted the blankets around his throat. "Do you want anything, Dad?" he whispered, after a moment. His father remained silent, staring into the hallway, and he doubted if he even understood him, half the time now he seemed in a daze from all the medicine he was taking. Absently he graced his long, smooth fingers, they felt like porcelain, he thought, as he watched his father close his eyes and fall asleep. Gently, he held his hand, caressing his knuckles. His own hand, to his surprise, was smaller, slighter, not nearly as firm as his father's hand, which

was a blunt as a baseball glove, and yet, he cringed, it was this hand that he had raised against his father one dark night. The memory sickened him, and, anxiously, he dismissed it from his mind. Instead, he recalled the long weekends he used to spend at the seaside when he was small and how, early every morning, his father would take him down to the beach and then, gripping his hand as tightly as he could, they would slowly wade into the water and jump the waves breaking across the beach, stepping farther and farther out, neither of them able to swim, but holding on to one another, the waves crashing against their legs. He had depended on the strength of his father's hand then, and now, pressing it against his cheek, he gripped it as though he were never going to let go, just as he had as a boy.

The Goldilocks Syndrome

Peter A. Christensen

"Unusual behavior? Bizarre? No, not him. He's an observer. He watches, eyes twinkling, drink in hand, as the other guests at the party jump fully clothed into the pool. He keeps buttoned a tight collar of reserve, not on principle nor out of arrogance or pretense, that's just the way he is. He's not a player at the rougher sports; the quiet conversations are what come to him.

Well, maybe there was one thing that you might be interested in. He showed up one night, unexpected and unannounced, a Thursday I think it was, a month, six weeks ago. An odd night at an odd hour. Shows up at ten-thirty with a six-pack of beer, wanting to shoot the breeze. Hadn't been drinking or anything, just said he was in the neighborhood and thought he'd take a chance on stopping by, maybe catch us up and induce us to share his beer. Sure we were glad to see him. Surprised, maybe even shoved a little off-balance, it was that out of character for him to show up like that. But, hell, we were just watching L.A. Law or something. Sure, come on in.

We sat in front of the T.V. gabbing, light informal chat about nothing in particular. Just old friends schmoozing while keeping an eye on the tube. Midway through the eleven o'clock news, he excuses himself to use the bathroom. Next thing we know, we hear the shower running. I mean he's in there taking a shower. Singing to himself, snatches of Rigoletto wafting out through the sound of the running water. Loud enough that Susan was afraid he'd wake the kids.

After a while he comes out, his damp hair combed straight back off his forehead. He looks good. Revitalized. We have another beer, watch a little of the Carson show and he leaves. 'Tomorrow's a working day' he says. 'I've kept you people up late enough.' Okay, we shook hands good night and promised to get together soon. Susan checked the bathroom out after he left. 'It's neat as a pin' she said."

"We had just finished breakfast" the police report quoted one Mrs. Thomas Sullivan. "My husband had left for work and I was in the foyer seeing the children off to school when a man appeared at the head of the stairway." The intruder, who was dressed in a dark business suit, proceeded down the stairs and out the front door.

"He wished us a 'good morning'" Mrs. Sullivan reported, allowing that "he made a good appearance" and "seemed freshly groomed," having about him the aroma of newly applied after- shave. The intruder also carried "an expensive looking leather portfolio of the kind that might belong to a successful attorney."

"It gave me a start" admitted Mrs. Sullivan, "but there was nothing threatening or self-conscious about his demeanor. He simply walked down the stairs and out of the house like a boarder going off to work. He was so at ease that I thought it might be one of my husband's friends or colleagues." As a result, Mrs. Sullivan delayed notifying the authorities and the trespasser was not, on that occasion, apprehended.

"What do you do for a living, Mr. Egner?"

"I'm an engineer."

"By whom are you employed?"

"Well, I'm not really a practicing engineer anymore, much is the pity, though I try to keep my hand in. I've taken on more of a management responsibility. I let the younger legs run the bases."

"And who do you work for?"

"Crown-Tiller Company. Here, I've got a card. Please take it. They gave me a box, has a thousand of them. I wouldn't use them up in ten years."

"You're a Vice-President and Senior Manager of Produce Development?"

"Yes. Well, actually Director of Research and Development. I was promoted last month. They've got a new card on order. I'll have to throw out all those unused old ones. Although I never do. I save them. Use them as bookmarks."

"He was in the kitchen when I came back from my morning run. He had a pot of coffee up. Was boiling an egg and cooking some toast. Reading the paper. Scared the bejabbers out of me. I thought for a minute maybe I was in the wrong house."

"How did he react?"

"I shook him up a little. He didn't expect me to come in as I did. He said something like 'My God, you're up early!' Yeah and it's a good thing I am, I said."

"What happened then?"

"I asked him what the hell he was doing, or who the hell he thought he was. Put a real edge of irritation on my voice. I didn't know what to think. The way he was dressed he might have been a real estate solicitor or an insurance salesman, somebody come to pester us on some kind of business; barged in through the door I'd left unlocked when I went out to run. Some of these people have colossal brass. But it was so damn early, not even seven o'clock. And, fact is, he didn't really fit the part. He had a more upscale look, executive suite class, and he was plainly unsettled by my aggressive posture. He didn't try to talk his way around me. Once he saw I was angry he was anxious to go."

"He left then?"

"Oh yeah. I told him to get the hell out and he went. Picked up his briefcase and left. Then I called the cops and checked on the wife and kids. Now I'm thinking this guy's maybe a lunatic, who knows these days. I had a moment of anxiety for my family's well-being. Had a vision of a tabloid headline - The Custom Tailored Killer. They were all right, of course. All still sound asleep. But it was then I found that the guest room had been slept in. And the toweling in the guest bath had been used."

"Was there anything missing, any of your possessions not accounted for?"

"No, he didn't take anything. In fact we found a fifty dollar bill under the pillow in the guest bed. I don't know what this guy was up to but he was no thief."

"I don't understand it. It's clear he's having some kind of breakdown. What was he doing in those houses?"

"Apparently spending the night."

"It's ridiculous. My brother is a successful man, has a place of his own. He's not a homeless person who needs to take shelter by breaking and entering. He does not require the charity of strangers."

"Of course not."

"The first time? It was last month. One of the Board members is an alumnus of a little school in Minnesota. Good academic reputation, Division III football champs as well, about an hour's drive from Minneapolis. He asked me to participate in a convocation they were having, 'American Technology On The Brink Of The Twenty-First Century'. Give a talk, sit in on a panel discussion, be available for a Q & A session with the students. He asked me to do it like it was a big favor, but in truth it's the kind of think I'm only too happy to do. It makes a nice day away from the office.

This one was particularly convivial. It ended with a spaghetti dinner at the Dean's house. I stayed a little longer than I should have. By the time I left there was a real chance I wouldn't make it back to Minneapolis in time for the plane. The Dean volunteered to put me up for the night and I was tempted - not just for the convenience, hell, after the long day I had no zeal for the trip back to Newark, I wasn't due to get back home until after two in the morning - but no, it wasn't just avoiding the hassle but something else, the comfort I felt in the circumstances. The midwestern charm of the campus, the beautiful October day it had been, the earnest enthusiasm the university people - faculty and students alike - seemed to invest in their pursuits. The place had the quality of pastoral sanctuary. I didn't want to leave. Not just because I was going to have to scramble to make a flight that wouldn't get me home 'till after midnight, but because there was something there, on that little campus in the middle of Minnesota farm country

- in the middle of nowhere by the standards of the world I inhabit - that I wanted to be a part of.

But I had a meeting the next day, 10 A.M. I had to get back. So I said good-bye, got behind the wheel of the rented Chevy, and promptly got lost. I couldn't find my way off the campus. Finally a gas station attendant straightened me out and got me on the highway to the Twin Cities. But I'd lost fifteen, twenty minutes and after a while it was pretty clear that I wasn't going to make the flight. I should have just kept going, of course. Taken a room at one of the airport motels and gotten the first flight out in the morning. Instead, I turned around and drove back to the campus. I guess the plan was to go back and belatedly take up the Dean on his invitation. But by the time I got back the town was virtually shut down. An all-night gas station, a diner, a couple of bars were all that were open.

I tried to find the Dean's house. I drove off into a residential area that could have been his neighborhood. It was after eleven. Most of the houses were dark. The streets were shade tree lined and the leaves had already turned and begun to fall. A wind was scattering them through the perspective of the headlights as I drove. I had an uncomfortable feeling of being left out, like a child coming home late and getting lost and suddenly sensing the world's magnitude and indifference, and panicking at the missed security of his parent's hearth.

I pulled up at a house that had on some downstairs lights and knocked at their door, hoping its occupants might direct me to the Dean's place. But no one answered. I pushed the bell and rapped at the face of the door. No response. I was then bold enough to peek in the windows but saw no one. Perhaps from a kind of desperation I convinced myself that the lights were decoys, left on by the absent residents to give the appearance of occupancy. Maybe that's not what people do, or need to do, or think of doing in Minnesota, maybe that's an East Coast ploy - and a weak one at that - but the place looked empty to me. That was my intuition. On impulse I tried the window. It was open. I had to pull on it some and it came up slowly, but it came up. And then I went inside.

At first I was anxious. I had a vision of myself encountering the owner, he pajama clad and toting a shotgun. I was cautious enough to take off my shoes and reconnoiter the site in stocking feet, like an errant husband returning home after a night out with the boys. First I checked out the downstairs and then the second floor. There were three bedrooms, the master and two set up for kids, boy's room both, one a high schooler's, the other dominated by posters of baseball heroes and model airplanes.

Nobody was home. There was no mail in the box and no paper on the stoop. The thermostat was turned down to 60. I figured, admittedly on scant evidence, that they were away for a period of days, at least overnight. I gave no concern to the possibility a neighbor might wonder at my car out front, or spot my movements through the windows, and call the police. I was in some strange realm, an intersection of the psyche and spirit I hadn't passed through in years. I slept that night in the older boy's bedroom. Beneath his wall-hung collection of Big Ten school pennants. Beneath his poster of Eddie Van Halen. Across from his Commodore PC, his bookshelf of science fiction paperbacks, Stephen King gothics, and stacks of Sports Illustrated. And I slept soundly. Like being rocked in my mother's arms. I hadn't realized, until then, how thin and spotty my sleep had become.

The next morning I called the office and withdrew myself from the ten o'clock meeting. Called the airport and got myself on a noon flight back east. Then I indulged myself. Cooked a big country breakfast, eggs and sausage, pancakes on the side, and brewed a pot of coffee. I felt entirely at home. I tidied the place up and left fifty dollars under the sugar bowl. I walked out to my car with a smile on my face, whistling. I hadn't felt so good in years."

"I don't know why he never married. He was always one of those men who didn't seem to have time for a family. You know the type, it's on their agenda, something they intend to do, but just haven't gotten around to. I think he's

really very shy of intimacy. It scares him. He's always been this very private man.

Our parents adored him. They thrived on his possibilities. His grades, his academic triumphs. Like misers compulsively sifting the stored coins of their wealth, they recounted the individual tokens of his gifts. Yes, he had gotten the highest scores on the aptitude tests given in high school. Yes, Miss Fisher, who had taught math in the junior high for twenty-five years, had told my mother that he was the most able student she'd ever had. Yes, he had, when still in grade school, amazed us all over one Thanksgiving dinner by multiplying numbers in his head faster than our cousin Richard who was home from his first semester at Lehigh, could do them on his slide rule.

They bragged on him. Shamelessly, embarrassingly. The naive dream-mongering of two innocent and discomfited people.

And we adored him too. His siblings. How could we not, at least early on. He lit such a light in our parents' eyes that we, for a long while, saw him only by that illumination. That all changed of course. He's not close to any of us now. There were resentments. Some hard feelings.

But what I saw that I think the others missed was that he had to work at it. Our parents' romantic view was that it was all God-given. The answers were whispered by divine voice directly in his ear. 'He doesn't have to crack a book' my father would say. Or 'He's got a photographic memory. He reads something through one time, he's got it, under lock and key.' Nonsense. The fact was he worked hard. Spent hours with the books. He logged more study time than the other three of us combined. He didn't spurn my parents' doting, he accepted the laurels all right, but he paid a price. At some point I realized he was carrying a hell of a burden. He was no demigod but just another workingman with a pick and shovel."

"When I came home from California I hitchhiked. Maybe I was playing the role a little but I had the look - long hair, a beard, thin as a poker. I was a newly-minted Ph.D.

from Berkeley but I looked like a pilgrim on the road to Woodstock. Even had a denim jacket with a patch of the Zig-Zag man.

Turned out I was no Dean Moriarity. Took me ten days and it was a grind. But, you know, people took me in. Not hippies either but ordinary folks, people with haircuts and regular jobs. Guy in Cheyenne, coming back from the movies with his pregnant wife, pulls over in a pick-up truck. 'Hey, buddy,' he says, 'we seen you standin' there on our way to the theater two hours ago. Doesn't look like you're going to catch one tonight, and it's lookin' to me like rain.' They took me home, gave me a sandwich and a beer, and made up the fold-out bed in the den.

Another guy, an accountant, picks me up about forty miles north of Chicago. A Saturday night. He and his wife had another couple over for bridge. They let me use the shower, run my clothes through the washer. Sent out for pizza. In the morning, he drove me out to the access to Route 80 and gave me ten bucks. This was a regular guy, two kids, a house in the suburbs. I could have been anybody, just another spaced-out drifter, but he took me in. That was almost twenty years ago."

"Do you think society is less generous in its treatment of you now?"

"I don't know. I'm not sure. Listen, I have this recurring dream. My mother is pulling me by the hand, almost dragging me, up a hill to school. I am a small boy, angry and resisting, furious in the deep violated way of children who are not given their way. I am yelling at her: 'I told you and told you, I don't want to go!' She ignores me, continues steadfastly up the hill while I persist, in vain, in struggling against her. I fight her all the way, the exertions active and intense enough to enter and disturb my sleep. It is an enduring effort, but after a time, near the top of the hill, I realize she is no longer pulling me. Alarmed and anxious, I turn around and see her standing by herself, far down the hill, watching me. As I look at her she waves, a long slow sad valedictory wave. And then she is gone, and there is no one on the hill but me."

"Mr. Egner, I don't understand. Why did you break into the Brownell home?"

"Don't you see, I had the best of reasons."

"And they were . . . ?"

"It was cold outside and the wind was blowing. They seemed such a happy family. And it looked so warm and safe inside."

Contributors

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Bruce Hamilton is a native Californian and Yale dropout and writes us that his "breezily ponderous" English has found numerous chopping blocks and a few slight markets.

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Willie Williams writes us that Detroit has been the center of his universe since is arrival 37 cycles ago. He has made repeated orbits to far places only to return to his family in Detroit.

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