

RED CEDAR REVIEW



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Table of Contents

PICTURE LONGING

- Choosing a Day to Remember 6
William Stafford

- Midwest Summer 7
Linda Wagner

- Snow showers are 8
H. S. Hamod

- Northern Lights 9
R. K. Meiners

- Appearances Under Snow 10
Lee Upton

- Presence 12
H. S. Hamod

- Teacher 13
Matthew McKay

- Summer Gloves 14
Lee Upton

- Ring Poem 16
Linda Wagner

- Birthday Poem for a Friend 18
Wendy Schultz

- Saturday Night with Scrabble 19
Ron Mieczkowski

- Final Performance of The Wild West Show 20
At Coney Island

- D. M. Rosenberg

- Having Lightning as a Neighbor 21
Joyce Benvenuto

- Birthday Questions 22
Lee Upton

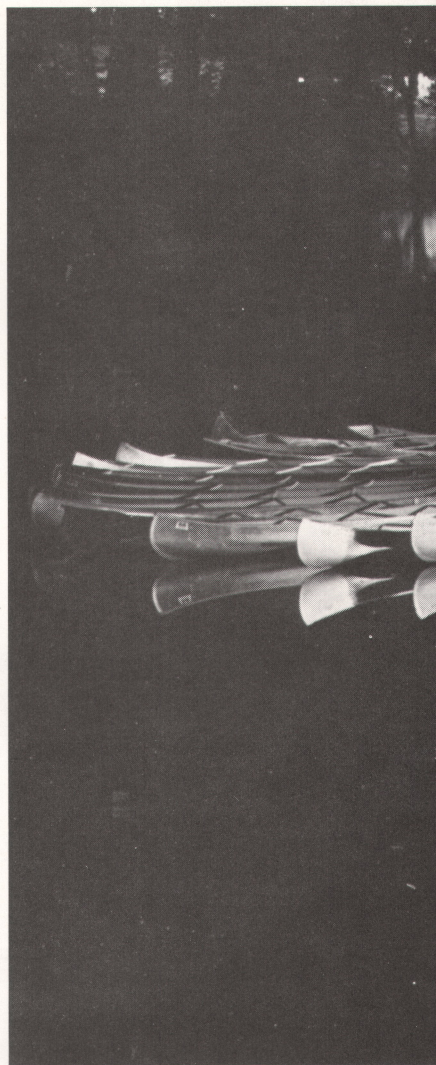
PUZZLE GROWTH

- Nickle Dirt 26
Mary Ann Rishel

- Hatikvah, Song of Hope: 1944 32
D. M. Rosenberg

Boca Grande	33
Peter H. Valentyne	
Sitting Still	34
Len Roberts	
House at Twilight	35
Charles Edward Eaton	
Erotic Photographs (15)	36
Ian Krieger	
Miami: View From a Fast Car	37
Sam Mills	
Summer Lightning	38
Lucky Jacobs	
ANIMAL BETRAYAL	
Seeing Poems in Animal Costume	42
R.K. Meiners	
Learned While Eating Popcorn at the Zoo	43
William Stafford	
Love Poem for a Centaur	44
Wendy Schultz	
Into Another Quarter Century and Keep the Change (For Bob's 26th Birthday)	45
Phillip Sterling	
The Log of Alain Bombard	46
Brad Donovan	
Barcelona on the 4th of July	47
Nicholas Christopher	
After the Screaming Stopped	48
Phillip Sterling	
A Handmaid of Dionysus	49
Mark Balhorn	
Contributor's Notes	62
Information	64

"a certain unchanging
picture came..."





Picture Longing

Choosing a Day to Remember

We went out slowly and stood in a field
where someone from far away was
going to speak to the senior class.

That was when the two of us happened to turn
together and see the line of geese passing
along the Arkansas River and on southward.

There are many grotesque scenes in life—
and this face I have, and a house that begins
to lean more and more every autumn—

But that was a time when a certain unchanging picture
came— the speaker and wisdom falling away
downwind, the V-shaped flock calling,

Myself a little speck of life on the prairie
always to bear like some sacred relic
that chance day, you and I chosen in the crowd—

And forever after the world to suffer this strange torque
when geese go by, the beat of their wings, in the autumn.

William Stafford

Midwest Summer

The stillness of a small mid-Western town
quiet library, quieter lake—
nothing especially old
no ivy growing

Sounds ricochet down empty hills
—wheelbarrows, roller skates, soft
voices shelling peas on softer
summer mornings, when morning glories
blue the porch and
heavy air tendrils hair.

Your face, trellised between flowers and
cobweb hair, spun summer-red
out of shabby brown shutters
into my mind, simply
existing and shining, summer-red
freckled with patchy shadows
where flowers interrupted sun.

You lived that stillness, and
days rolled slowly by. People slept
late, then carried coffee cups outside
to watch the growing earth,
the blue altars of morning.

Linda Wagner

Snow showers are

the most intimate form
of seduction
telephone lines dissolved
each breath
on my pillow was you
and you stayed there
moment to moment
shifting only slightly
as you came closer,
it went on this way
all afternoon

H. S. Hamod

Northern Lights

The last time I saw you, you were leaving,
going to some northern country
where the summer nights never darken
and everything is touched with strange light.
You looked back once, then vanished
through the darkening landscape
like a shadow at the edge of my dreams.
Did I ever tell you? I lived
in the north once myself,
but once you leave that place
there's no returning the way you came.

Northern lights, northern lights,
I can see them burning all around the horizon.
Maybe the old goddesses are still there,
waiting for you with strange bright eyes,
speaking their great names if you can hear them.
And maybe you'll find another world
at the end of the northern summer,
buried behind the cold like a troll's garden,
where all the living creatures speak your name
and all being sings in a language
that it almost seems you are remembering.

R. K. Meiners

Appearances Under Snow

My boy and I walk
across the snow.
There is ice underneath.
We could forget;
the snow so deep.
A frozen white rabbit
we wouldn't see
if not for the red
in its mouth.

My boy's hair is blonde
from his father's side.
I brush it under the cap
he wears.
We came to see trees pared
by wind, ice.
His father often came here
to hunt.
At home, shot into the mirror,
splintered glass.

Today, everything quiets,
soft where the hills slide
into the stream.

Last night limbs were struck.
Shells burst.
Ice slivered under trees.

Did you know this hidden
stream is a thin scar
in spring?
In summer reed blades
push up.
I remember wading here,
my hair clotted with burrs.

I show my boy where I built
a house in branches
as a girl.
Old planks I used, a screen door.
He turns his head,
full of his father's eyes.
I don't want to talk.

Lee Upton

Presence

It is that kind of evening,
slightly to the left
the chill of November catches,
slightly off guard
you turn into the wind
not quite a run
thinking you hear language
inside your ear, it's leaves
rustling
they churn across a schoolyard
while black bare branches click
into one another's memory,
then it's language again
that voice you hear as you drive alone
without radio

H. S. Hamod

Teacher

In September she unlocks the closet
With pre-primers and their workbooks
That follow chapter for chapter,
And the old monarch pressed in cotton
For the first science display.
She takes out the wooden clock
Her father made; his hands move
in wood upon the numbered stage.

She has begun charts of apple and zoo.
For thirty years,

Always on the first day
When she has finished arranging
Trays of crayons, scissors,
She looks for him,
The white-haired man
Standing erect beyond
The streaming windows of an afternoon.

She looks for him
As for the blood heard
In a quiet room leaving her heart.

He almost comes to her,
Girl eyes in that moment rising up . . .

This year teaching like the others
Because the autumn light
Slants in a certain way;

His easel leans without a flaw
And he was proud of her.

Matthew McKay

Summer Gloves

The summer glove on the arm of the chair
is a paper-thin tongue.
But the cloth fingers lift slowly in the wind,
warm from the open door.

The white glove moves
while the woman looks for another,
softer than her own hand, barely seamed,
more like a skin of cream.

The glove she wants is wadded on a shelf,
squeezed between a pair of shoes that are
black as burnt husks.
The toe of the right shoe is starting to curl
like a harem girl's slipper
curling like fingers of the glove.

If she wears the gloves
her skin will seem vulnerable,
the knuckles less than they are,
each hand tender as patches of skin
behind her knees, almost as smooth
as the underlip of a child.
She will feel more at ease for the soft layer,
the gentle comfort that ends at her wrist.

Otherwise, there's no sense to summer gloves.
Light as a peach peel, they could never keep her warm
even if she needed warmth.
They would hide the firm flesh underneath,
a subtle protection while they deceive;
the hands are stronger than anyone knows.

When the door is closed,
the glove on the arm of the chair
rises with a rush of wind.
The other glove hunches like a rabbit
pushing its white face into the wall.

The woman on the sidewalk is moving more slowly today.

Lee Upton

Ring Poem

Hauntingly calm
this straited sky
edges to nothing, a flat white
disc caught by a concrete
rim distance
distance and calm

My muddled mind
draws on the quiet
settles itself finds
this thin line of ring
here with the coins
shining inside the silk
To wear it or not
to wear disguise distance

“I have these children,
you see”... “And what
does your husband do?” Wearing
the ring makes me safe men
read my attention as kindly
Ringless I speak to some
threat aggressively moving
to parts and provinces
no man can stand
to share

Light settles in as the sun breaks
silvery shapes urge sound
into being shattering
quiet and tension

Wearing the ring I'm
an actress again playing
roles too heavy for doe-eyed
ingenues playing at Hedda
Blanche playing at sweetness and
life Eyes touch, hands, all in the guise
of friendship Ringless this hand
shines naked too old to be single
I walk with a stoop shoulders taut
warning *distance distance* my warmth
warms no one, caught in the fear of
possession *distance* belonging
flatness extended extending as far
as my eye can reach a slim silver
edge catching, catching then rolling
spun on its side
quiet
just past these
tentative
grasping
hands

Linda Wagner

Birthday Poem for a Friend

(E.A.S.)

I named her "When You Need One."
There was laughter in the grain of her wood and
in the luffing of her sails in those
not-quite-enough winds.
I hadn't learned to sail before I found her
and she wasn't very kind to my mistakes,
boom slapping, sheets tangled and tiller bucking
in my hand, until finally she'd knock me overboard.
She was quick to the wind, though, and
quick to reward a growing skill.
Each used the other, double keys to water and sun,
but it was the storms found us hard together.
I'd pound down the pier, rubber jarring old wood,
rain in my ears. The sailbags slung over my shoulders
swung and jostled the gear escaping from under elbows.
We'd set out watching other boats dock, their inward glides
and falling sails a skating collapsing surrender.
She sailed through thunder like waves,
the point of fear and freedom balanced on the mast,
the rain from the sails on the deck and the rain
on the deck in my shoes, and the rain and the wind
and the salt on my cheeks and the laughter in her long grain
and stunned of the whitecaps and stunned of the cold of the spray,
sluiced away.

Wendy Schultz

Saturday Night with Scrabble

—for Tom and Debbie

Behind closed doors
playing scrabble,
you two played on
the same side
against the rules.

But the rest of us
didn't mind,
drinking Pina Coladas
made with ice
crushed
by smashing cubes
inside a plastic bag.

The already green room
became tropical.
Ferns shot out
of our ceramic mugs
while a thick humidity
spread over us,
hanging on our laughter.

But when the door opened
your heads, raising,
caught sight of strangers.

Your smiles disappeared.
An orchid,
slow-motion photographed,
flowering in reverse,
shrunk into a small
hard bud.

Ron Mieczkowski

Final Performance of the Wild West Show at Coney Island

On his burly white horse he canters in
to a ragtime march, straight in the stirrups
silver hair flowing, and he holds aloft
in his spotty old hand a broad-rimmed hat.
Right from Indian Territory
bluffs and purple sky painted on a backdrop
he is a harmless old fool smelling
of gunpowder and popcorn who plays
to an empty tent. Too late to pass the hat
for an out-dated dream; they're going to kill
his act. The whole two-bit troupe-- sharpshooters,
rope-twirlers riding bareback who whistle
like whippoorwills, long-faced redskins straggling by
in their old blankets-- they must all clear out;
but Buffalo Bill, white as a dove
perched high on his rearing charger, thanks us
for our innocence, and with spotlight on him
gallops off into the dissembling west.

D. M. Rosenberg

Having Lightning as a Neighbor

Her storm drives me to the wall
My knees crawl to the top of the bed
I am afraid, afraid of her noise
the sudden jolts, the shadows of lightning
licking the straw curtain.
There is a woman dead out there
the wire squirms in the street river
an eel with crackling tongue
quicksilver let from a leash.

She has stolen her from the crowd
those that cringe beneath the store marquee
She has put out the streetlight, the store light
her light life, only her wind survives.
Rubbish faces cross my window
I am afraid, afraid of their puffing noise.

Joyce Benvenuto

Birthday Questions

What do I do with this year?
What small door opens inside me?
Who wants in?

Does anyone want in?
Do 16 year old
boys
eagerly plot
to ride out of magnolia bushes on banana bikes
just to press
warm caramels
over my shoulders?

Are my bosses,
especially the one with the flair of an electric fence,
are they planning to bring me
roses and violets?
Are they yearning to lick my envelopes?
To find new uses for my typewriter's roll bar?

Tonight,
will angels descend with vats of mayonnaise
and give me rubdowns?

Will complete strangers say they've respected me for years?

Will I greet them all
with one of those big,
banana-faced
grins?

Well, I'll tell you this.
I'm not going to be so tight
about those sort of things this year.

I'm gonna be loose---
loose as a long blue streamer,
loose as a cow on the highway,
loose as the green marble you lost when you were nine,
loose as a hair in the sink,
loose as a banana out of its
peel and jumping down the street
just like a Regular Joe.

After all, it's another year.
A new door opens inside me.
Somebody may want in.

Lee Upton

Puzzle Growth



"grownups rose by my side..."



Nickel Dirt

It wasn't a regular strainer like Marvin had, a scoop that you used for noodles, not that, but a whole window screen, twice as wide as we were, so large we had to prop it against the wall of the house, only torn in one corner with hardly any rust. Elizabeth found it propped against the stone wall down in the alley below her yard, the two of us carrying it up over the ash hump pile onto the grass, and Mrs. Shokletovich said it was okay with her if we took it. The others had nothing to say about our luck and they went home early.

Once we knew we were heading for big money, we started working right away. Before, we were scraping one stone at a time against the curb cement to make powder, thinking up this idea when we waited for the mailman and since the gate was broken and we couldn't swing. But now, we could strain whole handfuls of dirt through the screen and get pointed mounds of smooth powder the size of our yard, fine and light, not like the dry grey mixture by the hillside, full of lumps and stones and broken into parts, but real piles, velvet and silky, even and soft, as light as the sun that falls to the air, yet smelling deep.

And our plans were to bottle it and sell it as face powder, and when we tried it against our own skins, painting ourselves with different shades of brown made by the type of dirt we used to strain— we figured out all the customers we could get who would want to buy. Myself, mostly, it was just something quiet to touch.

We started making the dirt in our hideout, the place under the side porch that led to the back door of Elizabeth's house. Two sides of our hideout stayed open, one wall was the same as that of the house with a small window that looked down into Uncle Scratchy's barbershop, letting us to watch the customers, and the other wall was the back of the steps. Under the top and next to the top step we could stand up and still have some room. Lower than that, we had to stoop or sit but it was nice and cool there and the covering at the side of the lower steps kept us partly hidden, 'specially when we were sitting. There was alot of deep hiding places, too, such like behind the first step

where we could pretty much keep things dry.

And a dirt floor— but we almost never used it for making our powder. Usually we would dig up boxes of dirt from the alley or from the dump behind the alley. Sometimes we would take from near people's houses which was where the pretty rich sections were.

After we got to straining the dirt, right away I decided I didn't like to use a cup to push it through, but just my hands, even though it was slower, but when you feel the dirt with your fingers you can make double sure that not even the smallest lump doesn't get through the screen. And we had days for black dirt and dirt with yellow or red lines in it and my favorite, plain light brown. And just Elizabeth and me got to use the screen because there wasn't room for more and we were the ones who found it, so Norma would be the one who carried the dirt to us or search the garbage for old tin cans or wide-topped bottles, and Mary Margaret, littler than us, just watched, but sometimes we would let her scoop it into piles.

And for selling the powder we at first washed out the jars and cans that we used to hold the dirt, but the water never dried right and this would make bubbles meet the dirt around the edges, messing up our whole purpose of all-even powder, so later we just wiped the tin cans and put the dirt right in. Then we set up a display section on the lower side of Romine Avenue in front of Georgie's house. There we figured not only would we get the regular traffic of the men walking back up the hill from the mills after work, but we showed in a place too for the passing cars and trucks that came down the hill to see us. Norma put up the signs pasted to a lightpost— POWDER FOR SELL— and we lined up the tins along the curb and decorated our display with different kinds of lucky stones. But no one ever bought.

Yet we would still have stayed there because of the view up the street, but Georgie's mother got mad at us and said she didn't want us to sit in front of her house all the time, selling dirt, pushing down her grass. So she told us to move and after a while Norma said that it didn't matter because we could build up more sells if we put our campaign towards the people who knew us and that's why we moved back to our hideout, so we could stop and ask the men who came out the barbershop.

Then, as usual, Elizabeth backed out of it and said she wouldn't ask because she was saving her talk for when she got older and there was nothing we could do to change her and she sat there silent. But Norma said that the more you practice the stronger your talk gets and I said that I would be the one who would

ask the men since I didn't care about what happened when I grew up anyway.

So whenever anybody went in or out of the barbershop I would stop them and ask if they wanted to buy a can of powder, 5 cents each. And I was the only one who wasn't scared to go up to them and talk.

Most of the men I asked said no but to keep trying because we had a good product and it would only be a matter of time before we sold a jar, and we only got yelled at for bothering people one or two times— one from Mr. Podvitzski, the cripple because he fell off a ladder, and one from Rabbi Sush, just his name— not a real Jew rabbi, who took a girl down to West Virginia for square dancing and then wouldn't bring her back— she had to borrow money from the police.

And some of the men I didn't even ask, like Mr. Kadar, who my mother said not to be scared of, that he wasn't mean, it was just his way of doing, and he wouldn't hurt us. But he was a good worker down the mill, feeding the furnace and that was a hard job. Even so, he never talked or looked when he went past, so him I didn't ask.

And Mr. Mihalko we never asked because he was too good for people. He worked down the mill but he never looked dirty and was the only man who came to the barbershop every week instead of every two weeks with a suit with a vest and polished shoes, winter and summer. His hair was wavy and someone said that he had two wives but his married wife didn't know. We didn't like him but his daughter, Kathleen, was in my class at school and she was nice.

And Mr. Janowitz gave us a nickel and said that we could keep the dirt, he didn't want it— but we wouldn't take the money— we weren't there to beg.

After a while Norma left us because she wanted to do her other job that she got paid for— 5 cents a bag. She had to push plastic bags full of white butter until they got soft, then pinch the red belly button to make the butter colored. We couldn't get a job like hers because our mothers used grease, but we didn't care because if you put a yellow buttercup flower on a cracker it would taste like real butter anyway. Sometimes, Norma said, her hands got sore.

And that first month we made only ten cents— one nickel from my mother and one from my Uncle Scratchy— but it was fun to make the powder and let it pile up, scoop after scoop, on my hands and to put it against my cheek and somebody said that Kathleen's Dad bought her a real kitten with black fur so soft it almost wasn't there, but I thought the powder was just as nice and you could make different paths and piles with it when you weren't putting it into jars.

And we could have sold alot more dirt if we didn't have to stop early every day when the boys came down. They said we had to kiss them for practice for when we got older. Usually we did it on the cement porch of Mikey's apartment house right next to the double sewer that caught the curb water coming down Romine Avenue when it rained. Each side of the porch had two big rooms of beauty shops that one after the other didn't get people to come and quit. Most of the time the room space was used for junk storage and the Minski's would soap the windows. In the center of the porch was the pole we would usually lean against to kiss, but I mostly leaned against the door.

We would line up and the boys would choose which girl they wanted first to do it. They would hold one kiss for a couple of minutes, then the next girl would go. All of us had to take a turn with each of the boys. I was never first or last— Mary Margaret wasn't allowed to do it at all, being too young, not in kindergarten. And only one couple could fit behind the pole at a time— the others were lookouts— door corner against my back.

Georgie was the one that spied the new dirt in Mr. Kadar's yard and said that we should have that kind because it was fresher and darker and would give us a deeper base. Not that he cared because he wasn't in on it, but, he said, we had to improve our product if we wanted to pick up sales.

I didn't know. We had lots to work with right by our hideout and down by the alley but he was right, Mr. Kadar's did look much better. That was because the borough men had brought alot of new dirt in to fill sections of the land where houses had fallen from the tornado. So us girls and Georgie took a trial walk past Mr. Kadar's house— in a side street off where we lived next to an old shack that my Uncle Staus kept his car in. We looked over the fence at it, a beautiful pile, dark black, leaning up against a layer of broken wood. Georgie said that all we wanted was about one bushel full and Mr. Kadar probably wouldn't need his whole hump for leveling his yard anyway. Mary Margaret said it should be that we pay him back for not buying our powder, but Elizabeth, the most religious of us all, thought that it wasn't stealing because he had plenty of dirt and besides he gave Mrs. Chotner some of it the other day. She summed up that he probably wouldn't mind. I said we should ask, but we were all too scared to knock on his door. Finally we decided just to take some and figured that he probably wouldn't notice anything.

So the next day early, Georgie and Elizabeth climbed the fence holding an old bushel basket with wire handles between them while Mary Margaret and I

stood guard at the gate. But right away Mr. Kadar came at us. He grabbed a piece of wood and hit it at the air, chasing after us in a heavy way. Georgie dropped the bushel and everybody ran up the hill towards where they were building the new houses. I was last because I was the fattest and when my legs hurt and I couldn't move any more, I hid behind a mound of digging, hoping he couldn't see me. But he caught up to me easy, his hand dragging the wood along, and he dropped into the ditch where I sat huddled up. He grabbed at me and I had to say my name.

--Annie. Down the street. By my uncle--Scratchy Yankovich. The barber.

And then he made me walk in front of him to his house and I knew he was going to call my uncle. And I don't even know how it started-- he was just there and his eyes were strange-- and I tried to talk, then all I remember was the smell of sour-- and he was biting my chest-- how we got to the cellar I don't know-- that's where the toilet was-- but he must not have carried me down the steps-- they were so steep-- yet I can't think of me walking down them-- then through the front cellar into the back part, then we stood in front of the toilet and him just holding me beside him and then he shot himself past me into the toilet making my hand stay on him and afterwards I smelt the sour on my fingers and was glad he was done. Seeing him on the street after that, I never looked. And I never told, because I knew that if I did they would beat me and later stare at me in a funny way.

When he let me go, we washed our hands in his kitchen sink. There was an old smelly rag stuck there that wouldn't let the water through, and I let the water go up to the top of the sink, I didn't shut it off. After that I met the gang. They were sitting on the curb, halfway down Romie Avenue, waiting for me and talking about what we should do, all scared Mr. Kadar would tell our mothers that we were stealing. They asked me if Mr. Kadar yelled and I said he did and they said they knew he would. Then Georgie and Elizabeth started to fight because Elizabeth wanted him to take all the blame for everything and Mary Margaret started crying and finally I said that if we all go to my Uncle Scratchy and tell him all together and tell him not to tell, he'll forget about it and then it'll be done.

At the end we all just went home.

Later Georgie called and said that he told his mother and she said not to bother her. And around dinner time Mr. Kadar saw my aunt down the store and didn't say anything to her there. So we thought maybe everything was okay. But that night when we were sitting watching my Uncle Scratchy cut hair and

listening to the radio, we saw walking down past the window—Mr. Kadar—coming to get his hair cut. It wasn't by chance, I knew, for him to come. I got off the foot pedal of the barber chair and went behind the bottle rack. Elizabeth was too scared to do anything. She sat in the straw chair, thinking if she moved they would notice her. Mary Margaret kept saying that she didn't do anything because she was too young.

When he walked in, he pretended not to have anything to say. He sat down in the empty barber chair for a while and him and Uncle Scratchy talked politics. Then he finished saying it almost before I heard it.

Your kids tried to steal some of my good dirt today. Your daughter Annie.

Uncle Scratchy powdered Mr. Kadar's neck.

Oh yeah? That's not my daughter. That's Irene's. She's the widow, my wife's sister. Lives next door.

He swung Mr. Kadar around and they went into the next talk. It was over and we could leave. Free, we ran from the room to our hideout, to huddle deep in the corner of the second lowest step away from the barbershop window, our insides still shaky. And there we were, stooping on our shoes, our arms around each other, under the porch, the broken screen in front of us, and soon everything was safe again. Then we started making plans about how we could save people water by stuffing up the sewer.

Mary Ann Rishel

Hatikvah, Song of Hope: 1944

Despite the talk of siege and ghetto dread
my eye was on that silver-plated gun
in the five-and-dime, and I had to plod
through the grey, slushy neighborhood
to buy a comic book at the candy store.

In her babushka an old crone came near
rattling a coin box for the holy land.
I solemnly placed a buffalo nickel
in the slot, and the witch of Endor breathed,
“Next year in Jerusalem,” and was gone.

What I knew was mainly from faded prints—
old brown scenes of birds wading through tendril groves,
date palms in baking deserts, Rachel’s tomb,
the Dead Sea, and a cradle ark gliding
to Pharoah’s daughter among the flags.

How could I understand when grownups rose
by my side, and sang the song of hope
with such fervor? Their stormy voices rolled
like waves, and I was in the eye of the wind.
You would think they sang of heaven.

D. M. Rosenberg

Boca Grande

I was sitting in the school yard sandbox building God
when they chose me, with all my shots, papers and gentle eyes;
I had a little penis and no breasts, no shoes, no toy car,
I needed a room, they needed sturdy furniture and a gun rack.
I am put clean into bed, stuffed with prayers and empty stories.

Mother made me eat more vegetables when my stools were green,
father took my picture, washed his car, and drove me to the barbers.
Given crayons and paper and put in my latexed room, I drew a door;
When I got into mother's lipstick and fancy gowns, she cried,
and when I wouldn't play baseball, father died.

After the funeral, we drove 600 miles to the sea to sun and swim;
I was thin and dark and slept with the gulls, slept by the waves
that confess by the rhythms of their own breathing.
I would mourn father, walking the hot pavement to the beach, while
mother stiffened with the heat and crushed lizards beneath her shoe.

With suitcases full of shells and hard starfish, we drove the 600 miles back.
I'd get that job at Kroger's putting together trainsets of shiny steel carts.
Mother gave me father's shaver and a picture of his big blue buick;
at night I'd hold a hand-mirror up like a half-eaten apple and know
I'd make a boat of my room and find the sea.

Peter H. Valentyne

Sitting Still

Sitting still in a room 31 Olmstead Street in a private darkness
the shades pulled down on the world you drank beer and listened
to silence
alone near cobblestones and canal and the old women living twenty
years after their husbands died from coal mining or working in bath
shops twelve hours a day in Cohoes
you hear the sounds of cars and the muskrats crawling in dawn back
into the water and the women talking on porches about the price
of fish about the weather
with forty-seven years in bones you sit in a rocking chair on linoleum
with a lit cigarette rising and falling like waves in a night Atlantic
distance moves through eyes like giant leaves in autumn and turns to
thighs to whispers in bed the sounds of slippered feet walking
in kitchen
the smell of coffee rising like diamonds in the blue earth memory
you father begetter of my eyes my hands my private ache to connect
with something I have never seen and I fear like a winter bird I
never will
you after more than thirty women a war jungle rot malaria wife
homosexual son a mad son and a son who carries your eyes
you now sit and watch the days and nights of the only universe and
you count the years and the streets of each turn and you learn to
be quiet
you watch your various hard-ons the nakedness of young bodies in leaves
near the library the brown bottles of beer and the Golden Gloves trophy
you sold for your brother who is maimed and doesn't call any more
you rise and look in the mirror above the sink to see the light on
skull the holes in flesh rotted twenty-seven years ago the eyes
moving away from themselves
I celebrate your death father of my dreams my mother's man with
male member blasting one hot night in June of 1946 to create me
with two hands like yours I sit here in Germansville Pennsylvania
in early November and watch the sky turn dark blue

Len Roberts

House at Twilight

Today, Bluebeard fools no one with his lavish oriental dress
And authoritarian virility. That gesture of giving the key to his latest wife
Looks like nothing so much as a compulsion to confess.

Even our villains, so it seems, have gone to seed.
Curiosity not only killed the cat— it opened
Our legends far too wide and made them bleed.

Rather than hear our women calling tenderly, Bluebeard, come back, come back,
As if the locked room were crucial to happiness,
We sit in a perfectly open house, the resident, unrepressed, hemophiliac.

He was, after all, just a man who had a problem with a blue-black beard,
Essentially a lurid, extreme manifestation of five o'clock shadow,
And yet, more than anything on earth, he wished to be revered.

Does this suggest that when we had much more to hide,
Lush, beheaded corpses dumped like silk sacks in a room,
We maintained a tension that did not lead us blandly to deride?

Strange though, when the house is flooded with sun and the heart feels light
and drained
How blue the evening nudges some stray feeling a woman has aroused,
And one could swear she hides the key in hand, indelibly blood-stained.

Charles Edward Eaton

Erotic Photographs (15)

My brother's hands
are bound behind him
and you are inspecting him
up and down for flaws.
He is confused, standing there
in only his white underpants
and dirty hiking boots.
You told me once that this
was your fantasy, to see a
young man bound but curious,
to touch his skin and go
to the kitchen knowing
that he would be there
when you returned.
I asked you if there was
a point where you would
untie him, perhaps reverse
the roles. You said that you
would never let him touch you,
that you wanted to take him
out for a long ride in an
old automobile, leave him in
a park someplace, then come home
and find me in your bed
fascinated with what you'd done.
I've given you this thing
as a gift, eager to see what you
would really do given the opportunity.
My brother thinks it kinky, but
will cooperate in return for a similar
favor on my part. It's all yours now,
my half-naked brother, the voyeur in me,
a camera and plenty of blank film,
a night fit for anything.

Ian Krieger

Miami: View From a Fast Car

HOTEL HOTEL HOTEL
HOTEL HOTEL soft
waves of night against
the HOTEL HOTEL
HOTEL HOTEL clear
crescent moon HOTEL
HOTEL HOTEL giving
away the out HOTEL
HOTEL HOTEL line
of a beautiful HOTEL
HOTEL woman
wading thru the
white small surf

Sam Mills

Summer Lightning

Some say lightning is the fear of dying
at night in your sleep;
some say thunderstorms are cures for insomnia
or for washing away our sins
or both.

Well, some say funny things,
and I laugh too
but

I often wonder if most people
fear lightning
dream of lightning
are afraid to show fear of lightning.

Sometimes, most times, I am
the last one from car to house
during lightning
because most say that is expected of a man.

Well, most say funny things, too.

I remember reading about a game warden,
a man struck a dozen times,
now almost immune
like a milker of snakes.

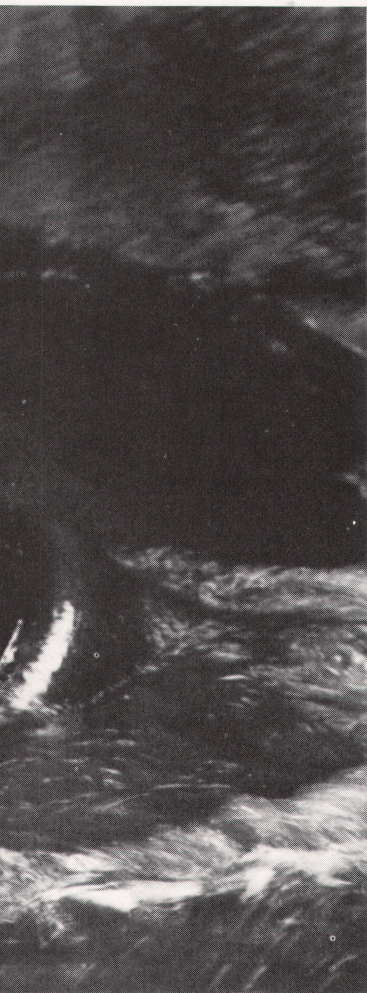
I used to be a collector,
looking for the banded watersnake
by turning over flat rocks.

On a given day, you catch
none or more.

It is night, the clouds
dark
and a storm coming.
Through the window
my flashlight catches the red eyes of skunks,
laughing in a flat-footed dance.
I remember that unborn babies kick
when it thunders,
that mother said I was a kicker,
that she laughed telling me how she
wore rubber-soled shoes under night sheets
that summer.
Lightning becomes beautiful and necessary
because it keeps you
awake.

Lucky Jacobs





Animal Betrayal

"we will die dreaming of it..."

Seeing Poems as Animals

Sometimes I have dreamed that small animals
poured forth from my pen and scurried
across the paper, looking for safety in corners,
dashing out doors and down corridors.

I have seen poems breeding in the corners of rooms,
appearing like mice generated miraculously
from little heaps of dust and the old draperies
hanging heavily in the margins of my vision.

How tired I am of all these cattle
milling about, bellowing for feed
within their closed fences and fattening-yards,
cramming themselves with rich grain and implication.

None of these chickens ever touch ground.
They flutter their obsolete feathers like similies,
producing an egg a day in their air-conditioned cages.
When the yield declines they will be slaughtered for soup.

Often I long to stand with coyote
and look at the moon through the thin clouds,
both of us singing that since we cannot live for love
we will die dreaming of it.

Before I die, one poem as sinuous and fine
as my small, black, secretive cat,
who masters the geometry of movement,
weaving through the debris of my cramped study.

R. K. Meiners

Learned While Eating Popcorn at the Zoo

They have other studies in their eyes
than anyone, the wolves that pace their bars,
priorities afar, and bonuses
no zoo-goer comprehends. "Invest a paw
and get a world," their shoulder says, when they
turn. They own you once when you arrive,
then give you away for good: no elaborate
trial— a glance— you don't exist.

William Stafford

Love Poem for a Centaur

This tunnel vision, this fog on the bridge,
this steam on the mirror mutes
the rug hugging my feet, the table nudging my fingers,
but highlights the hair on the rim of your cheek,
the dark green shadow in your eye of your eyelid folding;
it does not block the sense of autumn in your skin,
the tabacco and apples and coffee smell of you (my nose loves you
here as I taste your shoulder on the air), it does not block
the hard rise of your sides, muscles inhaling, as you stamp
in the cold, your breath warm in the damp.

You are pulling me behind you in a cart filled with straw,
we are on a Pennsylvania road in the fall and the fog
uncovers covered bridges and falls to their rivers,
loses itself downstream in shadowed trees, and only the lanterns
swinging with the sway of the harness and the cart
light this road, they illuminate only the hoofbeats,
the wheels circling; I travel slow surprised.

Wendy Schultz

Into Another Quarter Century and Keep the Change (for Bob's 26th Birthday)

We force each other's fantasy
into darkened rooms, switching
the channels and comparing them.
You still hold tight faith
in cowboys and prehistoric birds
while I have traded my autism
for a roll-top desk.

It bad-breaths me whenever
I begin to write. I thought
maybe you'd come and make it
play piano.

Phillip Sterling

Shortly after World War II, Alain Bombard, a French ex-seaman, set himself adrift in an open boat without provisions, hoping to cross the Atlantic. He made it. The subsequent fame probably caused Bombard's breakdown and suicide. Two years after the voyage he hung himself in his Paris flat.

The Log of Alain Bombard

There's drifting and something else.
Past the Azores I suck lemons, have nightmares:
waves drum the skiff's planking, native women
wear skirts of teeth under the moon's rose window.

I wasn't always crazy, or a hero;
although poor I ate often. Now the radio
is gutless, I drink lymph from flying fish
I've thrown over the mirror and tie myself in.

A freighter took me on, I tasted
stew and fresh coffee, chocolate and fruit.
I could eat my own sister:
survival is what you do.

I'm easily spoiled, what I eat won't stay down,
raw flesh and entrails retched back into the sea
as some blaspheme those lucky saints
roasting on bony stars.

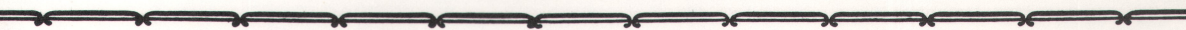
If I live I'll visit Disneyland.

Brad Donovan

Barcelona on the 4th of July

Lights go red, green
In and around the traffic,
Flash off afternoon glass
While sailors look for girls and dark bars.
Barcelona, a baby of mine, rides
Heat waves circled by burning brush—
Soldiers flushing the hills for rebels
With flamethrowers and grenades.
Franco in off-browns stares
From stamps and pesetas, his senility
Roped off like the public monuments;
Black cars with radio guts
Span eight-lane boulevards,
City of banks and big hotels,
Chromed casinos and strip joints
Where thin men line the walls,
Fish-faces hooked to the shadows;
Up the Costa Brava, motorcycle cops
Hide behind American billboards,
Machine guns strapped to khaki backs, cigarettes
Stuck like exhaust pipes between their lips.
The fountains spray rainbows,
Cathedrals shine against a brass sky;
In my hotel room restless curtains
Are pulled out over the balcony
By too many whispers, a dry wind.

Nicholas Christopher



After the Screaming Stopped

the dog licked

the linoleum

Phillip Sterling

A Handmaid of Dionysus

Though they sit at opposite ends of the car seat and are not touching, Boy is nestled in the complete power and goodness of his father. Boy may remain silent and gaze out of his window, but he is aware of his father's every pulse. From his father's soul extends an aura of heat and light that throbs to the beat of his heart. If Boy wanted to, he could see it beam from every pore of his father's arms and hands as they squeeze the steering wheel and slam the stick; but he feels no need to see it, and continues to gaze out of the window, satisfied to catch the light in the corner of his eye and sense the heat as it slips through his jacket and makes his skin tingle. In this torpor of warmth and power, Boy lifts his shoulders and yawns—a wisp of sound that drifts through the intense atmosphere to the ears of his father. Father turns to his son, and in the interim before he speaks the car swells with an energy that can hardly be contained.

“What do you see, Bud?”

“Nothing much.”

The radiance of the father is not seen or felt beyond the car windows. Out of doors the houses are in shadows as the sun has recently risen and only sits on top of the foremost row. With their porches sagging and their skins cracked and peeling, the houses silently bear the morning chill. Like old, gray soldiers they stand stiff and unmoving though this is their fifty-thousandth reveille and they are all well past their prime. In an unofficial inspection Boy's car flies past them and he looks for the slightest infractions in their hard, silent conduct; but none are to be seen except an occasional drivel of vapor from a little chimney.

As the car turns sharply, Boy feels his stomach lift and the nose of the car slip down. Out before him lies the street that his father's machine shop is on. In a single rush, this street sweeps down from the houses and stores of the avenue above into a gorge flanked on the right by a steep wooded slope and on the left by a naked, nearly perpendicular cliff. At a constant declivity, this street runs past the shop and ends, while still declining, at the twelve-foot fence of the power terminal. Except for the shop and the terminal, there are no other buildings on either side of the street; the wooded slope is unbroken in its leafless, early spring blackness; his father's building lies at the base of the cliff, alone

amidst a field overgrown with gnarled bushes and stunted oaks and littered with the refuse that has been thrown off of the cliff by the people in the houses of the avenue above.

Entering behind his father through the narrow door, Boy leaves the light, and for a few moments can see nothing. He walks along purblind, unable to see his next step and barely perceiving the wide silhouette of his father in front of him. The soft whirr of machines that he heard from outside, is within the building a strident whine that is continually broken with the discords of grinding wheel against metal. Soon he can see before him various points of light. Gradually their intensities grow to illuminate a bowed head, a dark body, and the blue machine over which the body works. With the cessation of the grinding wheels' screeches, the heads rise and turn to Boy and his father. The white faces blink their eyes; bare arms brush across foreheads; lips break into grins. With emphatic gesticulations and demonstrative expressions, Boy's father tells the workers about his son. Though Boy does not understand his father's gestures and cannot hear well enough the sounds he utters through the din, he knows that the message must be good, for the workers are chuckling to one another and nodding at him. They remain in good cheer until his father has no more to say and he signals them back to work with a wave of his hand. The smiles fade slowly and the bodies bend back over their machines.

"Making him earn his keep kind of early, aren't you, Fred."

This clear, brassy voice has penetrated the din, and when Boy turns to the source he finds himself looking up into the nostrils of a tall, slender worker. His eyes are black and unblinking, looking not fondly at Boy as he had expected, but gazing high above his head into the face of his father. He waits for a smile to break on his father's face and for him to begin his gesticulations, but nothing like this comes.

"Starting him out at minimum wage or is this just to pay for his room and board?"

Between his father's lips Boy can see teeth, and as he speaks his throat muscles flex and strain, "Are those five pieces I gave you yesterday sharpened yet?"

The worker picks at his whiskers and shrugs. Never do his eyes leave Boy's father's face. "Do you want quantity or quality, Fred. I mean everybody here knows what a stickler you are for quality."

"They're promised for Monday, Moreno."

The worker breaks his gaze with the father and looks down to Boy. The latter responds with a smile, but no sooner do their eyes meet, that he brings

his eyes back into the father's face.

"I'll tell you what, Fred. Let me have your kid here to help me. I'll break him in right. Make him just like his father."

"You had better get going."

His father's voice has failed him, and Boy did not hear his last statement. He follows his father through the shop and into the small office where his father takes his jacket from him and hangs it on a hook.

"Do you let your son drink pop, Fred?" says one of the workers as he comes walking through the office from the bathroom.

"Of course."

With his hands on his knees, the worker whirls around and is at eye level with Boy. His grin is more exuberant than any of the other workers and though he is nearly as old as Boy's father, his cheeks are youthfully dashed with freckles.

"What's your poison, Partner?"

Boy swallows. His smile begins to fall.

"What kind do you want, Fredrick?" his father interposes.

"Oh— I like orange."

The worker laughs and goes to get the pop. After he returns and Boy is working at the bottle, the worker stands beside Boy's father's desk and the two men begin talking.

"Let me tell you, Tom; I don't know how long Moreno will last. He has got to be one of the cockiest—" Boy's father looks around the room, but his restless son is already out in the shop, "—sons-of-a-bitch I've ever seen."

"I think you've taken too much already. Shit, he was late again today."

"How late," Boy's father asks as he slips off his street shoes and reaches for his boots.

"Ten minutes. But it's ten minutes two or three times a week. It adds up."

"I know. His work seems good enough, though. Don't you think so?"

"Sure, Fred, when he's working."

"What do you mean?"

"Hell, he must go out to smoke a cigarette every ten minutes."

Tom has a slight voice and when he is excited it becomes high and whining, like a child's. Boy's father looks up from tying his shoes, but says nothing.

"I'll bet he goes out for a cigarette five times a day, Fred. You should watch him sometime; I have."

Boy's father smiles at his employee.

The worker's lips tighten into a pout and his voice nearly cracks as he spits

out his words, "It's my job, isn't it?"

"I know, I know, Tom."

Boy's father sits up and rolls himself under the desk. He lifts a business letter and looks at it, but before reading, speaks, "He had just better have those five pieces ready by Monday."

When Boy returns Tom has gone. His father has put on both his work shirt and his boots and his radiance now is not only visual and thermal, but olfactorial. The pungent, penetrating scent of oil and sweat fills the room as his heat and light had filled the car earlier in the morning. The scent is pumped out from beneath his shirt with the rising and falling of his broad chest. It is blown into the room in great gusts as he sighs over his paperwork.

"Oh, Bud," he says, rising from his desk and walking towards the shop door, "here's a dime you can stick in the coffee can when Anita comes and you get her a pop."

As his hand reaches into his pocket, Boy sees the fabric of his father's pants pull taut around his legs to reveal the girth of his thigh muscles.

"And here's another dime in case you get thirsty again, too."

At the shipping and receiving end of the shop there are few machines and those that are there do not run. Boy has been playing here for many minutes and right now sits high up in the seat of the forklift where he can look out to see his father and all of the men bending over their machines. He is a tank commander and these men the infantry; he is a crane operator and these men the carpenters who must keep out of his way; he is a fighter pilot and these men awed spectators. But in all cases he remains in the sullen gray world within the shop walls and ceiling. Though he be at the controls of the largest tank, he cannot bull over the sooty cement walls. No plane goes high enough to lift him from the dry shop dust that continually drifts through the building. None of his day dreams can carry him from this most dismal of old, gray-black Hollywood sets. Boy must sit on top of an unmoving forklift squinting to see in the weak light, coughing to breathe in the thick atmosphere.

But his father has told him that Anita will soon be here and certainly she can take him from these grim surroundings. From the frequency and fondness with which his father speaks of her he knows that she must be someone who can make a person happy. She is not at all like the other kids that live around the shop, his father has told him, who throw rocks at the windows and sneak in the door to steal tools. She is a poor little girl, but a good little girl who stops by the shop sometimes after she gets out of school, wanting nothing better than to tell his father about her day and maybe wheedle a bottle of pop out of him. What

might she look like? She is poor, good, and always has a smile for him, and his father often adds the adjective "cute" to her epithet. Jill Andrewshevski who sits two rows from him is good and everyone says she is the prettiest girl in the class. Boy pulls at the largest lever before him on the forklift and his jet fighter lunges through the roof and into the clear morning air. He looks behind him for approval and Anita lays her head to one side and smiles placidly. Blond curls flail the air behind her head like streamers and the lace sleeves of her blouse flutter. Confident, Boy turns back around and presses the throttle even harder.

Minutes later Boy's father is waving to him. She must have arrived. He struggles out of the cockpit and with his short legs whirling is across the floor and to his father. Beside him stands a young girl. The door has been left open and through it the midmorning sun sends a bar of light so formidable that it dazzles on her white dress and nearly causes him to avert his eyes. But he does not look away, rather he steps firmly into the harsh light where his smarting eyes constrict and his face contorts. With a child on either side of him, his father herds the two children up the bar of light and out the door. The children face each other in the cool air and direct sunlight. Boy's father stands in the door.

"Anita, this is my son Fredrick. Fredrick, this is Anita."

The little girl shifts her weight and smiles toothlessly. Fredrick raises his hand and mutters a greeting.

"Why don't you two kids play. I'm sure Anita can find something to do."

His father leaves and Fredrick is left alone with the girl. Her eyes are so deep that even in the sunlight they remain dark. And her hair certainly is not blond. It is black and disheveled, a black tangle around her wide face and thick nose. Her white dress is wrinkled, and like one of his mother's aprons, old stains trail vaguely down the front of it. Smooth, appearing nearly viscous in texture, Fredrick would think her legs pretty if not for the white sidewalk scars flecked across the knees . . .

Through all these awkward moments, Fredrick has seen no new smiles. Her expression is of neither satisfaction nor disgust.

"My dad gave me a dime to get you a pop with."

"Great," she says, grinning suddenly and lunging forward, "give it here."

"No. I'll get it."

He leads her through the shop and into a little room where there is a refrigerator and a small table. He opens the refrigerator and begins rummaging around.

"What kind do you want?"

"One of those oranges."

He juxtaposes the two bottles on the table, but before he has an opener in

his hands, she, having already found one, takes the pop bottles and pries off their tops with two quick flicks of her elbow.

As Fredrick lifts his eyes to drink, he sees on the wall above Anita's head a calendar with a picture on it of a naked woman. She sits cross-legged against a fence, her vagina in plain view and her breasts uniform and round like two targets. He has seen this picture and others like it before, but he had forgotten that this particular one was here. Fredrick's muscles tighten and he can no longer get the liquid down his throat. Heat floods his face. What will she say when she sees it? What will she think of him? Has she already seen it and only pretends not to? What if she sees it, tells his father, and he finds out that he, Fredrick, brought her back here?

He pushes by her and out of the door, and walks quickly through the shop. His heart pounds hard and he keeps his gaze down as he knows his face is red. Passing by his father's machine, he glances up, but all of his father's concern is being poured over his machine. Once to the door, he stands beneath the archway and breathes deeply the air that is rushing into the shop. He watches her flirt with one of the workers.

"It's too bad you didn't come here in the winter," she tells him as a few minutes later they walk out into the dirt parking lot. "We could have gone sliding down the hill."

"What hill?"

"Right there, across the street."

"You can't sled there."

"C'mon, then."

He follows her across the street and down a little path. At the base of the hill he looks up to see the path continue narrow and rough through the trees. The path oozes with black mud and to get up it Anita jumps from one side to the other. Her thin shoes slap the damp earth as she leaps up and over the mud in the middle of the path and gains two or three feet on the hill with every effort. Fredrick is either not so nimble or his pants are too confining, for his lunges do not always carry him to the firmer dirt and when he lands, he splatters himself with mud. Finally he stops leaping and tries to climb up along one shoulder of the path. Only halfway, and out of breath, he sees Anita already at the top.

"C'mon, Fatboy."

She is laughing and stamping her feet.

"C'mon, Tubby."

Randy Hobbs had been the first to call him fat and he had knocked him down for it.

“It wasn’t too bad, was it, Fatboy?” she says as he comes panting over the crest.

“Don’t call me that.”

“Oh, Fatboy doesn’t like being called ‘Fatboy’.”

She will not stop laughing. Fredrick wants to change the subject, but it is too difficult to speak; so he endures her derision for a few more moments until he has his breath back and can take his hands off his knees.

“This isn’t a good sledding hill.”

“Who said anything about sledding? We get boxes from the shop and slide down on them.”

“That’s stupid.”

“Well, you can’t ride down here on a sled.”

Not even four feet at its widest point, the trail weaves like a stitch among the black tree trunks. It is so eroded, that in many spots boulders jut out of the earth and exposed tree roots lay across the path like railroad ties.

“I could ride a sled down here easy.”

“My brother tried and he cut his head open.”

“Who cares about your brother,” Fredrick says unflinchingly and looking directly at her.

Her smile falls and she turns from him. She begins leaping down the trail in the same manner that she came up; only this time gravity is pulling her along and her leaps span yards instead of feet.

“C’mon, Fatty.”

Back across the street she runs; and Fredrick follows. Wanting to catch up with her he bends his head and churns his arms, but it is for no purpose; she continues to pull ahead. Every few steps she turns around and laughs, her mouth wide open.

The next time Fredrick raises his eyes from his concentration, Anita is out of sight around the corner of the building and Moreno stands just outside of the shop door. He is a shadow. No light reflects from his faded red shirt or his dust-grayed denims. His skin does not shine for none of it is smooth; his face is rough and stubbled and his bare arms are matted with hair from the elbow to the knuckles.

As Fredrick slows to a trot, spittle clogs his throat and he can hardly utter a greeting. His hand is raised weakly. Though he keeps his eyes on the face of the worker as he passes beneath him, no acknowledgement is forthcoming. Rather, in response to his barely audible utterance, Fredrick watches blue smoke flush from between his lips and flared nostrils— a sudden fierce deluge of cigarette smoke that sweeps across Fredrick’s face and back up to billow

around Moreno's head. Fredrick quits breathing until he is well past the worker; and before turning around the corner of the building, glances back. With a jerk, Moreno's stiff arm sends the cigarette skipping across the parking lot and as he turns to go inside, smoke still streams from his nose and mouth. Above his head the wind catches the rising clouds and whisks them into the sky.

"Set sail," cries Anita. Then she whistles. She is standing in an old bathtub; its feet are buried in the soft earth. With her feet up on either side of the tub and her arms wrapped around a branch above her head, she rocks the tub. She begins to sing a nonsensical song and motions for Fredrick to join her.

Fredrick climbs up behind her and rocks the tub with her, but he does not know the words to her song, nor does he like to sing anyway. He does not really want to cruise.

"What kind of boat is this?"

"I don't know . . . a rowboat, I guess," she says, interrupting her singing, "why don't you row?"

"Have you ever been in a real boat?"

"No."

Her singing does not carry far. Not loud like a crow nor penetrating like a sparrow, her pigeon voice croons softly within a range not extending much farther than Fredrick's ears. He watches her hands gripping the branch. She has fingers as petite as a baby's. The cuticles flush pink and white as her fingers flex and relax to the rhythm of the rocking tub.

"Maybe this summer my dad could come pick you up and bring you out to the lake. We have a boat. It would be fun."

He awaits her answer, but for many seconds she only sings.

"What do you think," she blurts finally, spinning around and facing him, and all the while maintaining the rock of the tub, "that I don't have anything better to do than play with you? I'm only doing this because your father asked me to."

"All right, forget it then. I'll never take you anywhere."

"Good," she says, leaping from the tub and landing with a clatter on a pile of old cans and bottles, "because I would never go."

Kicking cans and leaping over dilapidated furniture as she goes, the little girl runs behind the shop. Fredrick follows.

The cliff behind the shop is made of loose gravel and sand and is constantly eroding; consequently the base of it has moved to the wall of the shop and has crept halfway up it. Though the shop is fifteen feet high from the foundation to the flat roof, back here it is only about eight feet from the sloping ground level to the roof. There is a large tree directly behind the shop that also has been par-

tially buried by the gradual landslide. On a high branch of this tree, above the roof of the shop, Anita sits with her legs waving.

“C’mon up.”

There are no branches near the ground and Fredrick does not think that he can leap up to the lowest one.

“How?”

“Just shinny up.”

Fredrick looks incomprehensively at the lowest branch, then to the little girl up in the tree. She climbs down to the lowest branch and jumps into the sand, where her feet get buried to the ankles.

“Like this.”

Though bare, her legs seem insensate to the corrugated bark of the tree. She wraps them around the trunk and with her arms begins to pull herself up. Once again in her perch, she catches her breath and waits for Fredrick, who, though slow, manages to pull himself to the lowest branch. In a moment he has climbed to the branch that she is sitting on.

“Now from here it’s nothing to get on the roof.”

“My dad told me not to. He said that you kids do it all the time and that someday one of you are going to fall right through the roof. It’s an old building, you know.”

“I’ve been doing it a long time and it’s never happened to me.”

Anita reaches out to a thin branch that she uses to balance herself as she stands up. Then she leaps. The thick branch that Fredrick is left sitting on lobs up and down with such force that he must grapple the tree trunk with both hands to keep from falling. Anita’s dress bunches up beneath her outstretched arms and when she lands, he can see the muscles of her thigh and buttocks go tight as they absorb the impact. After sliding a couple of feet across the gravelled roof, she stands up and triumphantly wipes her hands on her dress.

“C’mon.”

As she runs kicking an old, deflated ball that was long ago abandoned on the roof, Fredrick reaches for the thin branch and shakily stands.

“You won’t fall through,” she screams from across the roof, “and he’ll never know.”

To get from the branch to the roof he would only have to jump out about three feet and down about five. Fredrick knows that he is capable of such a leap, but he cannot help thinking that if his effort does not carry him to the roof he will fall nearly fifteen feet and probably smash his head against the edge of the building on the way down. He cannot stop swallowing and is having trouble getting

his breath.

"What's the matter?"

"I don't think I want to go out on the roof."

"You're scared, Fatboy."

"No, I just don't want to go out on the roof."

"You're just afraid of falling."

Anita has stopped kicking the ball and is now laughing and leaping around on the roof directly below Fredrick. "Fatboy is scared to jump," she taunts, over and over.

Fredrick knows how much she is enjoying his condition. Dark as her eyes may be he can look down the separate, deep caverns that they lie in to the mocking point of light that glows in the cornea of each one. Nothing he can say could extinguish the light. From his perch in the tree he has only one choice of action and if he ever hopes to see or talk to her again without confronting her as though he was in the tree and she on the roof laughing at him he has no choice at all. His heart beats fiercely and his every muscle, though tense and shaking, feels limp. His stomach floats up and threatens to lift him off the branch. Unable to speak, he motions with his hand for her to step back and hopes that he can command his legs to jump.

"All right, c'mon then," she says backing up and grinning with her whole face.

A siren resounds and becomes deafening within the second. Unlike most sirens that begin in a faint whine and grow more intense as the ambulance draws near, this one could not be heard coming. Anita's mouth closes in seriousness and she runs to the street end of the roof and looks over the edge.

"Hurry," she says, running back toward him. "It's just coming around the corner. We'll miss it if we don't get going."

Still shaking, Fredrick is slow to climb out of the tree, but nonetheless, his feet are in the sand before she even begins to swing down from the roof. He runs as hard as he can out from behind the building and down the length of it, not because he desires to see the ambulance, but because he hears her feet drawing ever closer and as soon as Boy sees his father he will tell him about Anita on the roof and show him where the children have been climbing up.

Out in front, the ambulance bounces up into the shop parking lot. Confused, Boy pauses and watches loose dirt fly as the big auto slides across the lot and stops in front of the door. Still confused, he runs into the shop, but there must stop again for he has been outside a long time and inside the shop he sees only black. He creeps forward and can distinguish a few feet before him the hunched figures of the workers seemingly assembled in a chorus. Anita runs in behind him, but being slower to realize her blindness, jolts Fredrick and steps on his heels. Though he has felt her driving into his back, he does not turn to complain; he likes to feel her hand on his shirt tail.

as he guides her through the darkness.

A second time Anita knocks against him. She waits for him to resume stepping forward, but he does not and she presses herself against him, burying her chin in the back of his neck. Still he does not relinquish any steps, so she takes her gaze over his shoulder. Like a resplendent dawn shooting shafts of light across the horizon, the scene exposes itself to Anita. Boy's father lies prostrate on the bare floor beneath the white glare of a fluorescent light. He is blood for the entire upper half of his body. All around his head a red syrup slowly spreads and grows darker as it mixes with the oil and dust of the shop floor. Beneath his head someone has wadded his shirt and it too is red. The workers stand mute. They swallow hard, and, looking to one another, shake their heads.

Through the door bound the ambulance men with their stretcher. Anita slips out of the way, but Fredrick does not, and he is knocked aside as the men rush past. After only a moment's hesitation, they lift the body onto the stretcher. Blood drips off the head and onto the vinyl even before the body is laid down. As the men begin to secure the body, the head rolls on its side and the wound is laid bare for everyone to see. The flesh has been gouged and torn from above the left ear to the left eye. As though the wound had been inflicted with an axe, it does not move around his head as it stretches from ear to eye, but through. Down the complete length of the wound nothing is distinguishable or separate; there is no eye left and pieces of shattered skull mix with the muscle and torn skin. The lips of Fredrick's father tap together lightly and his good eye remains open and blinking.

Because it was his shirt that lay beneath his boss's head, the upper half of Tom's body is naked as he animates himself in telling the silent, officious ambulance men about the accident. It is not too unusual, he tells them, for a grinding wheel to explode like that. When a wheel is spinning at several thousand r.p.m. and is brought down a few degrees too many and the metal piece is hard enough, the wheel sometimes shatters. But it is unusual for a shattered wheel to fly up into someone's face, he says, usually the shield deflects the debris to the floor. Tom's hands come to his head in expression of his disbelief. The ambulance men nod in response and sympathy, then lift the stretcher and walk out the door.

Tom stares at the red spot on the floor where his boss no longer lies and cannot think of what to do about the blood and his shirt that lies in it. Beside him Moreno smokes. As before when Fredrick saw him outside, blue smoke pours from his grim face; but unlike before, when the wind dissipated the smoke, now the smoke forms a cloud around his head that swells until it includes the head of Tom, who turns on him with his short arms stiff at his side and his underdeveloped

chest twitching. His collar bone appears about to burst through his skin.

"You know there's no smoking in the shop."

Moreno brings the cigarette to his lips and fills his lungs. He pauses, holding his breath with his mouth open, before speaking.

"There's not really anyone here who can do anything about it, is there?"

"If Fred wouldn't have been over here on your machine showing you how to do your work there would be."

"Well, you can sure as hell bet I didn't invite him over. I mean, shit, maybe he doesn't like the speed I work at, but I've never been stupid enough to let my head get torn off by a grinding wheel."

Tom's chest is rising and falling. Everyone can hear him breathe.

"Now get rid of that cigarette, you bastard."

He tosses the butt and while it hisses and foams in the blood, smoke again pours from his face to thicken the fog around the two men.

Tom is at him in a second. His head crashes into the taller man and the latter must step back to regain his balance. But before either can raise his fist, the other workers, in the middle of whom they stand, hold them apart until the tension eases.

"Just get out, Moreno," yells Tom in his high, excited, little-boy voice, "everybody go home."

Outside in the sunlight, Fredrick stands silent and unmoving beside his little companion. Uncomfortable in the presence of someone so torpid, she tries to make him responsive and pushes at his arm so that he will face her as she speaks.

"When my brother cut his head open we took him down to the emergency ward at the hospital. They sewed him up and we took him home and he was all-right. Your dad will probably be home tonight, too."

He looks directly into her eyes and watches them flit across his face in their nervousness, but he hears nothing that she says. His jowls are heavy and his lips quiver and he knows that there is nothing he can do to appear attentive and in control of himself.

"My brother was out playing the next day."

Moreno's big, decrepit Oldsmobile rattles loudly as it crashes through the potholed parking lot. Anita and Fredrick turn to watch it wobble out into the street and hear it roar as it grinds up the hill. She turns to him when it is gone, but he is still unresponsive. She knows what is forthcoming.

"I've got to go," she says as she backs up and begins to turn around. "Maybe you can come again. I'm sure your dad will tell me when you do."

When Tom approaches him after having said a last few words to the workers

in the parking lot, Fredrick's eyes are filling and his knees shake violently. Tom crouches next to him and wraps his arms around the child. The man's skin is milk white, so little does it see the sun, and there are freckles all across his shoulders.

"Your dad is going to be all-right. They'll fix him up. . . Now, how about me getting you a pop? You can drink it while you wait for your brother to come and pick you up. I called him and he said he would be here in a few minutes."

At first Fredrick turns to the source of the voice, but even in its attempt to sound soothing it is the voice of another little boy. Down the road Anita walks beneath the twelve-foot fence in front of the power terminal. She rattles a stick against the fence as she goes. For a moment he can watch the rise and fall of her brown legs, and see the loose shocks of her black hair bob around her head, but soon the flow of water into his eyes becomes too great for him to blink them clear again and he sees only the broken colors and forms of refracted light. Even in his trembling and misery he wishes to call her back, to run after her.

Mark Balhorn

Contributor's Notes

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