

Summer-Fall 1999

REDCEDAR

R E V I E W



RED CEDAR REVIEW

Summer-Fall 1999

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Poems

Tongue

Surely the tongue is what grows first in the curled-up salamander body, tasting its salt-drenched future, hiding from ultrasounds in the private cave of the mouth. The body's first brain, waiting.

I have been reduced to tongue, tasting the slippery range between sweet and bitter. I have held the host on my tongue and let it rest, waiting hard for spirit, but the tongue said, *This is bread, that's all*, so chewed and chewed and let the spirit free. The tongue knows.

Its tip can tease the lips of a lover open, wander around inside the smoky, clove-scented mystery of mouth, entwine with its muscular, sinewy twin, retreat, dart back. Can trace each hidden ridge of ear, pulse point, birthmark, mole, each scar visible and invisible. Can memorize each lift of rib from the chest of the beloved. Can partner with the lips to pull the thick rush of life from the life-source, and swallow.

I have been reduced to tongue, licking a drip of soap from my infant's eye, wanting to lick the skin of my newborn all over, like a jaguar, like the tiger licks the new fur of her young, discovering dangers the fingertips could miss.

These days the tongue knows its proper place, safe between its cage of teeth, spending time curling into words, an occasional swipe of the postage stamp. On hot nights, though, the tongue's buds jump. Still sizzling in its warm, damp wisdom.

A Bird Flies by at Night

Meteor flurries
bleed into the night
etching sepia shadows
into the white sandstone and
negro slate of the earth's skin

Sore spots are worn into the rock
leaving cold dots on your finger tips
if you put them there
and rough pocks on your face
if you care

The northern seas
sip the gilded sky
like fine black tea
while white-faced waves slap the night
like a great cancan from sea to sand
one cold kick at a time

A gull flies by
hugging the bony shoulder of the shore
balancing
wind and velocity
dairy white and berry-eyed
hauling fish like a candy sack
into the night

Swimmer

Into the bay's curve and reflected
fur of the cedars,
she enters the water,
cold turning her feet
to steel, coating her silver
as she steps down
black rocks, deeper
past urchins and starfish,
the slip of kelp. Ivory

in the dark dish of water, she opens
and closes her arms in the sun's
grey light, moves, moves around
the rise of land and swell
of tide rushing up thick
roots of goose tongue and seagrass,
ferns arched like sickles.

How she embraces the island
and pulls herself up, water
beading down her spine like a row
of clear berries, dries
her legs and stands face
open to the water as if to say
goodbye to an amazed lover, gathers
her things and walks up the beach,
hair like long grass down her back.

*"Man Shoots Mayor over
Fifteen Dollar Water Bill before Making
Getaway on Riding Lawnmower"*

What could be worse
than death by absurdity —

my loved ones mourning
the news that I've been trampled
by a herd of purple dinosaurs or gunned
down by a gang called the Little Rascals.

Overwhelmed by fear of the ridiculous,
I dream of blundering into Ronald
McDonald's cocaine bust gone bad —
stretched out on the floor
of an abandoned Sea Monkey
factory while the Easter Bunny
snaps tabloid photos
of my bullet-ridden corpse.

And soon, all I can hope for is a simple,
dignified demise at the hands
of a serial killer or civil war

(the kind of traditional, old-fashion death
my family could solemnly
shake its head over)
instead of waiting for mortality
to show up in baggy pants —
honking the toy horn
of its John Deere lifemower,

cutting down anything
that happens to cross its path.

Interview

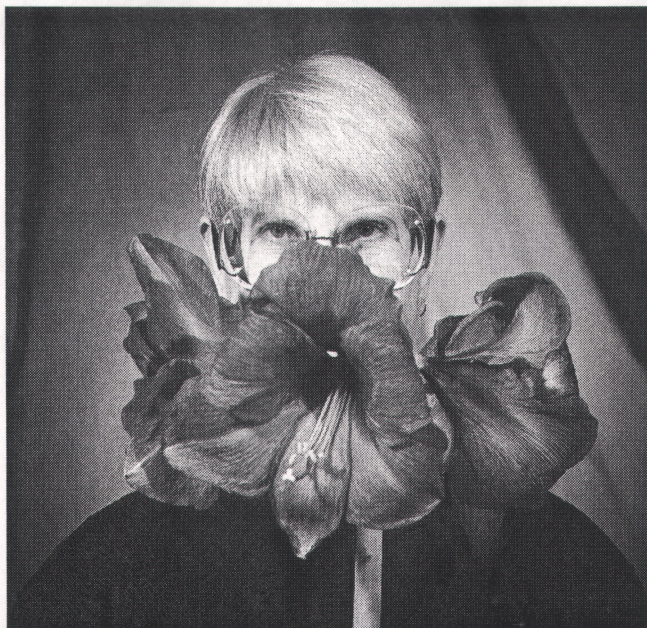


photo by Robert Turney

Diane Wakoski's poems are narratives of transformation that search for the beauty in the everyday and mine personal experience for its greater cultural and emotional significance. In her latest series, *The Archaeology of Movies and Books*, Wakoski unearths the familiar stories and myths of our time but filters them through her unique vision of the world. She explores betrayal in the myth of Jason and Medea, mistaken love in the myth of Orpheus, and the juggling of identities in *The Wizard of Oz*, but she brings to each of these stories the intimacy and truth of personal association and reflection. In this interweaving, her poetry becomes more than autobiography and more than mythology. The sensitive descriptions, eccentric details, and vivid images that fill her twenty plus collections create a body of work that is engaging and seductive.

On a steamy June afternoon in East Lansing, Diane Wakoski talked with *Red Cedar Review* over large glasses of iced tea flecked with slices of lemon. She discussed Volume V (as of yet untitled) in her continuing series, her position as Michigan State University's Writer in Residence, and her plans for the future. Still searching for love, sex, and romance in her poetry, Wakoski reflects on the illusion of fame, her fear of death, and the power of poetry to transcend both. She explained why she is not a painter, a dancer, or a musician but a poet who continues to construct the mythic Diane, the sorceress, the silver moon goddess.

Interview with Diane Wakoski

Red Cedar Review: In much of the poetry in *Argonaut Rose*, I notice a tension between what seems to be a transcendent quality and the physical nature of sex. In fact, sex seems to serve as an underlying trope for poems such as “Reading Bonjour Tristesse at the Florence Crittenden Home for Unwed Mothers” in which the speaker states that children and the flesh are not the part of sex that she believes in. What is the relationship between sex and poetry?

Diane Wakoski: I don’t think they are the same thing. But I think they are very close, and I think they have something to do with each other. When I was young, sex to me was everything. I didn’t know that it was; it just overrode everything else. And either fortunately or unfortunately—maybe neither one—my idea of sex was completely organized and created by my sense of romance. So, even though I’m part of the 60s generation that had lots of sex because we weren’t afraid of AIDS—basically, it didn’t exist for us—I was one of those people who felt that a sexual relationship or a sexual act with a man was a way for finding out whether or not I would want a relationship with him. Of course, that is not a very good way to approach things, at least not pragmatically. And it meant that if I liked the person or the sexual encounter, I wanted it to turn into a relationship, and if I didn’t, I was deeply hurt, wounded, rejected, etcetera—as people who engage in what I think is fair to call casual sex shouldn’t be. I wasn’t really suited for that whole, strange world of approach. And then when I would get involved with a person, sexually, and have a real relationship with that person, I assumed that meant we would be together forever. That was when I started writing and talking about betrayal. I didn’t think it was betrayal if I had sex with a man and he never showed up again. But if I lived with someone and they left me, that seemed like betrayal to me. In the context of the world I was living in, that was either out of place or old-fashioned.

I think a lot of my poetry has been trying to explore the idea of how love, sex, and romance fit together—why they seem to be so hard to focus in one life, one place, one person. I thought—and this is explained by the fact that I’m a fairly traditional Freudian—I just assumed this was everybody’s life pursuit. You looked for this; you found it or didn’t find. You kept looking until you found it. But along the way, when I was in college, I started putting the substance of these experiences, in some translated form, into my poems. In

fact, since I am a very socially awkward person and was truly painfully shy in those days, about the only way I would ever meet men would be in a class or in some way connected to poetry. I think I really saw poetry reading as a chance to seduce the perfect man in the audience. Which is why, one of the many reasons why, I didn't want to be considered a feminist or have an all female audience.

RCR: You spoke about sex as it relates to reading poetry, but how does it relate to the creation of poetry? You've said before that creating poetry is a feminine act.

DW: I know I've said that, and I might change my view in that I think, biologically, women are creators. I don't think anybody would dispute that. But maybe these days, I think men are creators too—and not just in terms of building cathedrals. I think that the creative urge is a huge and important biological urge. Women are constructed to have babies so, therefore, it is clear that they are part of this process. But it seems like men probably have just as much need to create something that is like a baby and to nurture it. I think that artists, who throughout history have notoriously been bad, irresponsible parents, might look at what they create in the same way that most people look at their children—something to take care of, that becomes their career, their lifework. Not that you keep a painting forever—in the same way that you don't, if you are a good parent, keep a child locked up in your house forever. You take care of it and hope that it goes out into the world to a place that people will see it and love it and appreciate it. I don't feel now that this is so exclusively women's property, but I felt, when I was younger, that it was.

In my mind and in my life, the whole idea of love, sex, and romance involved finding a male partner who is my counterpart and this is totally intertwined with what poetry does. I think the sex part obsessed me more when I was young, but was never satisfactory if love or romance didn't go with it. At various points in my life, I get obsessed with different parts of all of them. I think this is what led me to be so obsessed with the theme of beauty. Beauty for me is some kind of experience of fulfillment. You notice that when I write poems about beauty it is about engaging with some other, an object or person, and finding some kind of moment of perfect orgasm, if you want to use sexual terms—some kind of total romantic fulfillment where you and the object become one. It makes you feel complete.

RCR: Which objects do you consider to be objects of beauty?

DW: Traditional female beauty does attract me, although many of my poems, especially from the late 60s and early 70s, focus on the beauty of men in the macho tradition because I grew up without a father and without men in my

world. But I have a very idealized, romanticized view of the motorcycle rider or the cowboy. They're not full of shit and grease; they are very yuppified, I'm afraid, although that was not my intent. I want the kind of muscles you pump iron for in the gym instead of the real muscles that you get from laboring, which aren't as beautiful for the most part. I am very critical of romanticized, idealized visions. For part of my life, I've been trying to balance the artificial with the organic, the Appollonian with the Dionysian. I think that that's what poems in my most recent books, *The Archeology of Movies and Books: Medea, Jason, Emerald City, Argonaut Rose* are about. Instead of trying to balance love, sex, and romance in the physical way that I was trying to do earlier, they are attempting not to ignoring the physical, but to look for beauty in the everyday. Because, almost by definition, the everyday is not beautiful, it is ordinary, grubby.

RCR: Why do you think you've become so interested in finding beauty in the everyday, in the things around you?

DW: Because I finally grew up and realized that I was never going to have a fairy princess life with a castle and rich (therefore beautiful) things around me. For a long time, during the middle part of my life, I didn't think I was going to have the dream of fairy tale wealth and beauty that I fantasized when I was a poor child, but I thought that by being a successful artist/poet/writer, that I was going to get very famous. And fame is a great substitute for wealth. You travel in the same world when you're famous, even if you have no money. You are around that kind of rich beauty. As a step towards that, I took this job at MSU where I would have a regular income and my life got less and less and less and less professionally successful in the sense of being a star. It didn't get any less successful in terms of being a published poet but I no longer had that glitz. It wasn't just that I came here when I was almost forty. If I had continued to stomp around the world like I was doing and live my crazy life I would have had that starry glitter for another, however many years, until I started getting really old and creepy. I decided not to do that. I made a choice that I thought was the right choice. I now think that it was the wrong choice, but I've spent almost twenty-five years in East Lansing trying to come to terms with an ordinary life—where people don't recognize me on the street, where I'm not famous, where I'm not even really in fashion right at the moment and haven't been for some time (and maybe I never will be again)—but where I have a really good life. It wasn't what I wanted. So every day, I look for ways to enjoy what I have and to find beauty in it because it is not the beauty that I was looking for.

RCR: It is interesting to hear you talk about fame. In the *Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series*, you wrote that poetry fulfills the need to find

some kind of continuity between your contrasting feelings about yourself and the widely divergent views the world has of you. Do you still struggle to bridge the disparity between your self-understanding and the perceptions others have of you?

DW: Oh yes. There are times when I think I'm not doing anything different in my poetry now from what I've always done. There are times when I even think I'm still searching for love, sex, and romance in the same way even though I have a peaceful, middle class life with an extremely nice, handsome, sexy husband. In some ways, I have all of the things that I was looking for except fame and I even have the fringe of that. I still think that what drives me to write poetry is to want people to fall in love with me.

RCR: Do all art forms have this same capacity to explore the way the world views you? If you could choose any art form for the purpose of making someone fall in love with you, would you choose poetry? Is there something specific about the art of poetry that allows you to seduce—I don't know if that is the right word.

DW: That is exactly the right word. And you know, it is the seduction that interests me far more than anything else. For me, stories end once the seduction has been completed—life is boring. I'm sure that is why I like romantic movies.

I've spent my life wishing that I was a different kind of artist. What I really wanted to be when I was young was a musician—to play the piano—but I quickly realized that I didn't have the extreme musical talent needed to have that kind of career. Every time I go to a concert that turns me on, I think, "Oh, if I could only have been a cellist or oh, if I could only have been a harpsichordist." Then I go to a dance concert and I think that I wasted my life because I didn't become a dancer even though I don't have any talent for that. And then all I have to do is walk into a painter's studio and smell it and just wish that I could spend my whole life being a painter. One of the reasons that being a painter would be so fulfilling—I've written a poem about what it was like when I first learned that I could draw something. One day I sat down and I looked at one point in this flower and I drew a petal and then I looked at the next one and I drew it. It seems so obvious, but I actually made a good drawing. That's how you do it. I have to look at a specific thing. I've always loved landscape painting and still life painting. That is the kind of painter I would be. I'm much more interested in inanimate objects than people at this point in my life. Maybe I always have been; that's why I'm so awkward around people. That's why I love sex and romance: It eludes me.

RCR: Why did you pursue that through poetry rather than through any of

these other art forms?

DW: Well, that's what I could do. I think it goes without saying that if I felt I had talent as a fiction writer then that's what I would have chosen to do. I love reading stories and I would love to be able to tell stories. I've tried to find a way to do it in my poetry, but I would really like to tell stories that are big stories. Actually, I think that's one of the things that has driven me toward what I think of as a long term goal in my poetry, and that is wanting to make a body of work. I keep saying that my poetry is not an autobiography but it does tell a story. It tells a story of the mythic Diane or the imagined Diane or the Diane who is capable of these moments of beauty or participates in them, whereas in my real life I feel like I hardly ever do.

RCR: When I think of all of the characters that have appeared in this story that you are unraveling, I remember the twin brother, David, the Motorcycle Betrayer, George Washington, and most recently, Jason and Medea. Do you think there is a relationship between all of these characters? How have they influenced your poetry and your personal mythology?

DW: The more I write, the more pervasive they become, the more pervasively they are here, the more I have to respond to them. In the same way that a fiction writer says that at a certain point, the characters are telling you the story. I think that's part of what I try to get at when I talk about the revelation of the poem—that it comes out of the structure of the poem and when you make that structure as sound and efficient and sleek and orderly as you can, it's going to start telling you what is going on, what it leads to, what it creates, what it reveals. In one sense, you created it, but that wasn't your goal or your idea when you started with it or, if it was, that makes it even harder to construct the trope or the shape of the poem. Something in you is driving you to write a poem out of that experience that you know is more than just an experience—which is why you want to write a poem about it or make a painting of it.

I'm still trying to answer your question, and it is a good question but a very difficult subject, at least for me to talk about. Because, it seems to me that in a certain way, art is so personal and, in that sense, so ego driven, and yet at the point that it starts really being successful, at the point when you start making art and not just artifact, it has somehow gone beyond that. I don't know if it has transcended it but it has gone to another place. It isn't about you anymore. You're just using yourself. I think that this is in the mind of almost every writer: that certain kinds of people, maybe all people if they let themselves, without even willing it, find themselves just moving out of their bodies and sort of looking at themselves from the outside and just observing what is going on as if they were voyeurs of their own actions in life. Of

course, if you treat someone else as if you were just looking at them through a window glass, that is kind of cold blooded. But we treat ourselves that way all of the time. For me, that's just another, more metaphorical way, of describing what happens when you leave yourself behind. That experience of drawing that I was describing was a literal experience, but I don't want people to say to me after they read that, "Oh you should take a painting class." That's not what it's about. It's looking at that experience—and it was a wonderful experience when I first had it—and occasionally when I do draw something, I have that experience again and I think, my God, this isn't the way Diane sees the world—it's the way my hand does when it does these things. At that point, I may just be engaging in craftsmanship, but that is the step between your personal ego involvement and living your life and that far place that we call making art. It means stepping outside of yourself and into the craft of what you're doing. It isn't conscious—the separation between the personal and what the personal has been transformed into.

RCR: Is that the mythic or archetypal?

DW: No, I want to rearrange that question. Art, by my definition, reflects the mythic or archetypal in each culture and you have to find a way to get to that which also engages us as art—which goes beyond the sloppy and the personal and the everyday which is not beautiful, which is not art. I think the reason artists are so attracted to sloppy, unbeautiful subjects is they feel that it is their job to transform them into something that is beautiful. There is more of the real in the sloppy than in the girl who is perfectly coifed and dressed. There is a moment in the imperfection that makes the rest of the perfection truly beautiful.

RCR: How would you respond to what has been called the crisis in modern poetry? Poetry appears to have lost much of its readership; it has even been said that only other poets read poetry today. Do you think there is such a crisis, and can you talk about what might have caused it?

DW: I don't think it's as dramatic as those crisis spotters would like to think. We forget about history and what a huge percentage of every population in history was slaves or people who were totally uneducated or had no interest in art. We somehow think that we are in this different stage. We probably live in a time when, in terms of percentage of the population, more people are familiar with poetry and art than possibly ever before. Even if you look at the culture of the court, royalty were trained by poetry and music, entertained by plays and players—just as the wealthy are today. For us suddenly to expect that now you'll see people on buses reading poetry ... I don't know. Why would you want them to? I think that this crisis is manufactured. I think that it

comes out of an ignorance about what civilization is really about.

RCR: In the poem, “Crucified,” you write, “And now that words have passed the point where they could / ever have become song, now that words have become/ so physical, so pointed, / like nails...” I’ve noticed that many of your poems are about writing, and I heard a professor once say that all of the good works of literature are concerned with the language problem: the inability to write anything that will be understood universally, the concept of language as an arbitrary system of signs. Would you agree with this?

DW: All generalizations are false including this one. But, I do think that one of the things that postmodernism has done to all of us who are consciously involved in any kind of intellectual life is make us very aware of process—every kind of process. I think we particularly love looking at an object or an event and seeing contained in it all the elements of its process of creation. I think that we are noticing that because we are interested in it. I wouldn’t say this isn’t a mark of great art, but I’m very wary of generalizations. I think what your professor is expressing is something we are deeply interested in right now and when you get deeply interested in something, you can see vestiges of it everywhere you look. When you see it in a fully developed form, it so tantalizes you, seduces you, that you are tempted to say it is the greatest art.

Art about making art: this is a subject that fascinates us. What are we looking for? We’re looking for the secrets of creation. That is what technology has led our scientists to: the place where they can discover how the world was really created. They’ve conducted experiments in quantum physics, the Big Bang Theory. We’re looking for how to clone organs. We’ve always been looking for how to create gold from lead. We are at a place in history where we are very conscious of all these processes of creation going on. We are looking for art that shows us this—where we can see the double helix or the DNA chain of the art.

RCR: You mentioned quantum physics, and I’m interested in why you’ve incorporated quotes from Nick Herbert’s book, *Quantum Reality: Beyond the New Physics*, into your volumes.

DW: I, like many, many, many artists of this decade, have been fascinated by the postulating of these laws of quantum physics that sound so much like the philosophical or, if you will, poetic ways of conceptualizing the world. Like many people of my generation, maybe all 20th Century Americans, there is a great longing to put together the scientific and technological discoveries of our time with the art and intellectual activity that is going on. In this book that was so simple, there were all of these lovely statements that were like epigrams or little sayings which encapsulate the world. I think it was an

attempt on my part to use collage. I am not interested in paraphrasing what a physicist says because it is the poetry of the way he says it that is just as interesting as the idea. That is why I've quoted. It is the language of physics that is the poetry. It was a gesture at using some collage material but I did not want to collage it into my text. I wanted it to remain separate: This is what Nick Herbert says and this is my poem. You make the connection.

RCR: Do you believe that quantum physics has influenced your view of reality? I'm thinking specifically of an earlier interview in which you said that your poetry was your real life, what you had opted to be your reality.

DW: I said that before I discovered quantum physics. I fell in love with quantum physics because it sounded like those physicists were saying the same things I had been saying for a long time only they were doing it in terms of universal principles. As poets, we always fantasize or idealize ourselves as being the positors of universal principles that we have discovered. The poet as prophet or wise man is a very ingrained role in our culture and one that most of us don't totally reject. I believe I thought that if I quote these ideas but in the language of quantum physics, maybe someone will see that I'm really working with some very big ideas; I'm not just a confessional poet talking about a woman talking about her troubles. In one sense, it is all right to be a woman singing the blues. It is a perfectly good artistic facade, but it is also one that has been very dismissed by a lot of critics and readers. I wanted to give a clue that this wasn't all that I was doing.

RCR: You've spoken a lot about your dislike for the term, "confessional poet." You've also said that the poet has a heightened self awareness that can be very painful, very deadly. Do you think that there is a place for psychology in poetry?

DW: Absolutely. I'm becoming more and more reconciled to the term, "confessional," now that it has simply become a historical term. Living during the time when that term was coined, and it wasn't coined for me—it was coined, as you know, for Plath, Sexton, Lowell, and Berryman. It was coined by an academic critic who had to come to terms with the fact that these were extremely successful, powerful poets who had all been in mental institutions. Three of them were suicidal. That term "confessional": What does it mean? Religion—you're telling your sins; psychology—you're telling the things you're ashamed of; crime—you're telling a policeman the crime that you've committed. Here is a way of describing this poetry: an academic critic saying that this may be what everybody thinks is great but these people are confessing crimes, things they are ashamed of, and sins.

RCR: You've said that one of your salient characteristics is your lucidity or sanity in the midst of what you perceive to be a very insane world and yet you have also said that you live in your imagination where you are Medea or the silver moon woman with very white feet. Is this a contradiction?

DW: Well, don't you think that one of the ways we establish order out of chaos is to create our own order? Isn't that one of the things the imagination does? The imagination has a wide range of possibilities. For instance, I've written about this a lot in *The Archeology of Movies and Books*. I say that I live in Michigan and look out my backyard—you can look out that window right now and see all of those oak trees. I don't know what is on the other side of them, and in my imagination, the Pacific Ocean is on the other side. It is an extravagant fantasy in that the Pacific Ocean is really 2,000 miles away, but it is a very useful fantasy because it makes me very happy to sit out on that porch and not be wishing for an expensive vacation in California. How can I stand my life here because I can't see the Pacific Ocean every day? I can't see it because the trees cover it up. You see, imagination can be a very practical way of ordering the world. If what you need to be happy is to see the Pacific Ocean, you create a way to do that. It doesn't make you crazy.

RCR: How is it that the Medea stories so completely captured your imagination? Is it the betrayal? the seduction? the murder of the children?

DW: It is that she doesn't have to be ashamed of what she did. It's the power of her—righteousness is the wrong word—her transcending the cultural disapproval and escaping. She is never punished. She punishes the people who hurt her. She saves her children from slavery and exile, by killing them—not an attractive way but a very powerful one—and she escapes in her chariot drawn by dragons.

RCR: Why have you chosen it to be part of your personal mythology?

DW: It is a way of identifying with a woman who does not feel ashamed of things that my culture tells me I should be ashamed of. It empowers me. It makes me accept the betrayal of a man as part of the story that has to be told. It is her destiny. She doesn't have a choice. She falls in love with Jason because Hera and Athena conspire to get Eros to shoot an arrow into her. She is smitten with passion the minute she sees Jason, and she can't do anything about it. It is a very complex myth that has involved many different cultures and I only found that out by later discovering what classicists have to say as they trace this myth. I didn't realize when I first fell in love with the story which to me was the story of a man betraying a woman who had great power. Later I began to see that there was so much more. This is what we mean when

we talk about the archetypal in a story that becomes a myth. You may be seduced by or interested in certain aspects of that story and later you'll find that there is another element moving in a different direction. In ancient culture, it was a story about the terrible situation of being in exile.

RCR: What does the story mean in our culture? Has it changed?

DW: It means something different for everyone, but for me, it's still about empowerment for a woman who does things for love. It also is about how you rescue yourself when you're alienated from your culture. We talked a lot in the first half of this century about the alienation of the artist and the intellectual and we've sort of stopped talking about this for a while. It went hand in hand with our interest in existentialism where a person discovers that none of the big systems—religious or scientific—really answers the big questions unless you adopt blind faith in one of those systems. If you can't, you can still choose a system and say, "I know that I'm the limit of this system but I choose to put my faith in it." I think the story of Medea is the story of a woman who has been alienated from her culture and who takes a very powerful, angry stance against this. She says, "I create my own rules and I have the powers to do it." She becomes a sorceress, and she denies the system of Jason which replaced the system of her father.

RCR: It seems that the primary purpose of those systems you speak of is to help us cope with the idea of nonexistence—of death. I assume you see yourself as the Medea character who has denied those systems in many ways. How do you cope with the idea of death without one of those systems?

DW: I'm still waiting for my chariot drawn by dragons. I want to be immortal and I suppose that is why we want fame so much—because to us fame is a form of immortality. And yet, take Andy Warhol, the great guru of our postmodern second half of the 20th Century, with his popular statement that everybody is famous for fifteen minutes and that's about all you get. This attempts to debunk the myth of fame which he, himself, pursued relentlessly and which is still a major part of our youth culture. As you know, I'm a sucker for romantic movies. The great romantic movie, *Notting Hill*, came out this month which I've seen twice already. One of the themes of that movie which is quite wonderful and interesting in itself is the theme of Andy Warhol's fifteen minute fame. The plot involves an American Actress (played by Julia Roberts) at the height of her fame, and she makes a wonderful, sad little speech at a great scene in the movie when they go to a birthday party. One of the successes of this movie is a group of friends who all see themselves as losers but are all living perfectly happy, normal lives. The assumption is, and it is a nice kind of British assumption, that average people are losers. Here is the

winner coming into their lives—the Julia Roberts character. They have a competition for the last brownie of the meal—for whoever can tell the saddest story about what a loser they are. Everybody tells a story, and she says, “Wait a minute. I deserve a shot at it.” She says that she has been on a diet since she was 24 years old meaning that for ten years, she has been hungry. Everyone thinks she is the most beautiful woman in the world right now but in twenty years, they won’t even recognize her. She’ll be a woman who looks a little like that beautiful woman who used to be in the movies. They don’t give her the brownie, but this is something that we all contend with. I think this is our post-existential American response to death. If we can be famous, even for fifteen minutes.

RCR: Have you had your fifteen minutes?

DW: Well, I’ve had as close as I’ll come to it. Unfortunately, I was never really famous. I keep saying I was a has-been who never was. I was an almost. And I still have a longing and a fantasy that I can live for thirty more years, or forty even, and become a Georgia O’Keefe figure and become incredibly famous. Why do we love Georgia O’Keefe so much? Besides for those gorgeous flower paintings? She is a woman who became more beautiful when she became old. She didn’t become famous until she was old. Then she became one of the two most famous American painters.

RCR: What else do you want to do in your forty years?

DW: I think I want to keep doing the things I’m doing right now. I do want to retire in seven years when I plan to. But I might not want to stop teaching. I want to stop being a part of the corporate university, but I would like to always teach poetry workshops and perhaps give lectures and teach courses in contemporary American literature. That really turns me on. I love meeting the new readers and writers of the next generation.

RCR: Are you going to continue with *The Archaeology of Movies and Books*?

DW: Yes, at least for one more book and maybe more. The one I’m working on now, I’ve had a bunch of titles for it, but I currently don’t have a title for it. I was going to call it *The Neon Zebra*, which I think is a wonderful title but I don’t know if it is even remotely appropriate. I want as the—I don’t know if “theme” is the right word—but, as you know, I’ve always been involved in the brother—sister mythology. Medea doesn’t actually murder her brother but she watches Jason murder him. She sets him up so Jason can come and murder him, and they can all escape with the golden fleece. I’d like that image

to be at the center of this book and have something to do with the resolving of feelings of shame or guilt or responsibility that the Medea character carries with her as a result of doing these things.

RCR: I feel like the David character might return. Do you think the Motorcycle Betrayer or the George Washington character might reappear in the next forty years of your poetry?

DW: The David character has to return. I will pursue him. I'd like to write more George Washington poems and I'm working on another *Greed*. The other Greeds have exorcised a certain number of demons but have conjured up some others and now there needs to be another *Greed*.

RCR: At one time you made a very clear distinction between the teacher, the critic, and the poet. Do you find that distinction becoming less obvious in your life?

DW: I wasn't wrong in thinking that people who spend all of their energy being critics seldom really can write poetry and vice-versa. But there are exceptions to every rule. I think it is like the tides. The water comes in and you use it in some way—bathe in it, sit in it, or just enjoy it. And then it goes out. But it is part of a rhythm and I think that reading and writing are like that. You read, just taking in; you write, just letting out. I think that people need to be very careful about teaching if they are really involved in trying to produce something. Writing is letting out and so is teaching—a wonderful version of that. I don't understand why people want to teach when they're young. It seems greedy to me. They feel they have so much that they can send it out there and still be writing novels. And of course, I've always said this: What do you have to teach when you are young? What have you really learned? That sounds really arrogant. Obviously, at every stage in our lives we have something to offer other people.

RCR: What do you feel is the most significant insight you can offer now?

DW: I think that I have developed a very clear idea, although it takes an entire term to say it, of what poetry is and can be and some of the techniques for creating it. I don't feel that very many poets know that for certain. And I know that I have this in a way now that I didn't have twenty years ago. It is something that has evolved through my own writing and through my very self-critical approach to my own writing, and then in paying so much attention to my student's poetry and really trying to analyze what are possible ways for getting to that purity or clarity or beauty.

RCR: Has teaching changed the way you write poetry?

DW: It has changed one thing. I used to think that a poem was either there or it wasn't there. I now think that any poem could be there if you work on it with the right insights. It may be an older person's unwillingness not to try to salvage everything. You don't save things when you are young. You save everything as you get older because you think you could use that somehow or you could change it into something else. I have that attitude toward old poems now which makes me a very good teacher for beginners. Some people think that I run a very mean, rough-shod, dismissive poetry workshop, but I can wade through pages and pages of stuff and say, now, this is something worth salvaging. It's my input that is going to give the student the model for doing that for herself—when she begins to understand what really makes the poem vibrate, come alive.

RCR: What gives art that life? Do you believe that art can transcend death?

DW: I have a very traditional interest in historical immortality. I love the idea that my writing might live on. I still don't want to die. I still want that chariot drawn by dragons. Perhaps, in the next forty years, I will find—maybe through poetry—a more acceptable way of thinking about mortality and death.

Interviewed by Carrie Preston

Works by Diane Wakoski

Coins & Coffins (1962)

Four Young Lady Poets (1962)

Discrepancies and Apparitions (1966)

The George Washington Poems (1967)

Inside the Blood Factory (1968)

The Magellanic Clouds (1970)

The Motorcycle Betrayal Poems (1971)

Smudging (1972)

Dancing on the Grave of a Son of a Bitch (1973)

Trilogy: Coins & Coffins, Discrepancies and Apparitions, The George Washington Poems (1974)

The Wandering Tattler (1974)

Virtuoso Literature for Two and Four Hands (1975)

Waiting for the King of Spain (1976)

The Man Who Shook Hands (1978)

Trophies (1979)

Cap of Darkness (1980)

The Magician's Feastletters (1982)

The Collected Greed, Parts 1-13 (1984)

The Rings of Saturn (1986)

Emerald Ice: Selected Poems 1962—1987

Medea the Sorceress (1991)

Jason the Sailer (1993)

The Emerald City of Las Vegas (1995)

Argonaut Rose (1998)

Stories

Matisse in the Hospital

Lenore tells Martin she is calling from the hospital and then gives him the news. "Beth had an accident on her bike this morning. When she fell, her left foot must have been trapped in the toe clip. Both of the bones in her lower leg are broken." Lenore's voice betrays no emotion. "It looks like she may be here for a while."

Since the divorce, Beth has lived with Martin during the school year and spent summers with her mother. It'll take Martin two hours on a bus to get to his daughter. He lost his marriage to Lenore three years ago. He lost a car in a crash nine years ago and hasn't been behind the wheel since then. Without a wife to drive him, he has been forced to rely on buses.

Nights when he can't sleep, Martin recounts his losses as if his life were a rosary. The people, possessions, and identities he has lost bump against each other like so many beads reverberating on a string. When he imagines the final loss, of life itself, he can see the string break and all his losses spinning away into the universe. And sometimes he can even picture Beth, all grown up, lying under an evening sky, her hazel eyes peering between stars to catch a glimpse of him.

"Hi Daddy. I miss you." Lenore has relinquished the phone without a word of closing or comfort to Martin.

"I miss you too. How are you doing?"

"It hurts, but the doctors are giving me medicine. Don't I sound dopey? Anyway, will you come see me?"

"Of course I will. Do you want me to bring you anything from here?" He hopes for a task to help him manage the fear and worry which now threaten to overwhelm him.

"Maybe. This room they put me in is really ugly. Even Mom said so. There's just a big, stupid picture of a house plant hanging on the wall. Could you bring one of my pictures? The best would be my naked lady. Her lilacs are so pretty."

Martin looks down the hall into Beth's bedroom. A print of Matisse's painting *Odalisque* hangs over the bed. The bare-breasted woman in the picture seems to wink at him. "We're on our way, Sweetie."

Despite his aversion to being conspicuous in public places, Martin carries the large, framed reproduction into the bus terminal. He has wrapped it in brown paper. In line to buy his ticket, he holds his wallet open and studies a photo of Beth. The picture was taken a few months ago, on her fourteenth

birthday. Only traces of the child she was remain. The pearls he has been giving her since she was a baby, now amounting to more than half a strand, are around her neck.

Martin remembers shopping for the add-a-pearl necklace, the first gift he bought by himself for his new daughter. The jeweler showed him a selection of starter necklaces, one or two pearls on gold chains, and explained that as years go by more pearls could be given and added. Martin's goal was for Beth to have a full strand by the time she went off to college.

Some years later, the jeweler mentioned to Martin that when a strand is completed, it is sent back to the company and exchanged for one with uniform color and luster. Martin was dismayed. What about the sentimental value of the original pearls, he wondered, the occasions, people, and love they denote?

Martin waits in another line for the bus to pull into the station, the wallet still open in his hand. Just a few years ago, Martin had noticed that Beth's pearls were being threaded along a string which was then knotted to the gold chain. When asked why the chain didn't pass through the pearls, the jeweler explained that pearls are soft and can be worn away from the inside by a chain, even a delicate one. Martin was disappointed: until then he had assumed that these gifts to his daughter were hard and enduring, not vulnerable at their very core.

The bus arrives and he pulls the picture of Beth out of his wallet and places it in his shirt pocket. His heart beats against it.

The bus driver looks familiar to Martin, a former student perhaps. Martin has taught high school for almost twenty years. Lately, everyone looks like a former student to him.

Martin always sits in an aisle seat on a bus and close to the front. He needs to be able to watch the traffic through the windshield, as if some lapse in vigilance on his part might cause an accident. His legs are always tired after a bus trip. He tends to ram his feet into the floor each time the bus seems to come perilously close to colliding with another vehicle or crashing into an embankment. Is he steeling himself for the worst or trying to make up for the time when he didn't brake?

Once outside the city, the bus picks up speed. Soon the other few passengers nod off. Only Martin keeps watch as the bus tailgates the blinding red light of the setting sun up ahead.

Hospitals are like ghettos for the sick and injured, Martin thinks. A security guard stands by the hospital's entrance, his eyes trained on a woman getting into a cab, her short skirt riding up her thighs. Martin goes in, avoiding eye contact. He keeps his eyes averted from the information desk, from anyone who might keep him from seeing his daughter at this late hour. The bus didn't get in until after 8:00.

Further back in the lobby some other late visitors encircle an old man asleep in a wheelchair. They are blocking Martin's way to the elevators. He mutters, "Excuse me," as he squeezes by. The visitors close ranks a little more and continue chatting over an IV bag on a portable stand, as if it wasn't there. Martin marvels at how easily some people become acclimated to this alien world, to the ways of the ghetto. He waits a few moments for an elevator. One chimes and opens.

As he rides, he thinks back to his own brief stay in the hospital and how he had to keep himself together after the accident: through the ambulance ride, X-rays, IV, and sutures. The doctors held off the phone call to Lenore until they could determine the full extent of his injuries. Waiting alone was bad, but worse still was the moment when they wheeled him past the woman who was in the other car, one gurney gliding by another, just enough talking for her to tell him the accident had been his fault, a red light missed.

The elevator reopens onto a quiet corridor. Martin follows the signs to C844, Beth's room. Strange beds with wheels, pulleys, and torturous looking contraptions stand abandoned along the way. This is the orthopedics ward. He turns a corner and finds himself looking into a patient's room. A young Asian man sits up in his bed. He's wearing a metal brace around his head and down to his shoulders. It looks like the frame of a lampshade stripped of its paper. An old woman in a silk jacket sits in a chair at the foot of the bed. She stares out blankly into the hall. Martin bows his head and moves on.

Beth's room hums with a halo of fluorescent light. The sight of the full leg cast, horrifying in its massiveness and what he can imagine it hides, empties Martin's head of blood and he feels faint. The bed with its guard rails is like some giant crib for his—always will be his—baby. Beth's eyes are closed. Her hair is brushed back from her bruised face. Martin feels a sudden elation to see her again, to end the missing of her that each summer brings. His emotions are like beads on a Chinese abacus, pain and joy quickly being added and subtracted.

"Beth, your father is here," Lenore says without turning to look at Martin. She stands in front of the window, its blinds drawn. Her strong features look like the profile of an Indian blasted out of a mountain side. Martin wonders whether Beth has appreciated her mother's strength today, or has she wished for moments of maternal softness? He puts his bag and the Matisse print down on the floor beside the bed.

Beth slowly opens her eyes. He watches them drift and the lids shudder. Then there is a small, sudden explosion: her eyes pop and come blazing through the scrim of half-sleep. She stares up at his face and seems to be searching for something there. She asks, 'Are you OK, Daddy?' Martin is dragged back in time to another reunion with his daughter, the one after his accident.

After a day and a half in the hospital, Martin returned home with

Lenore. They walked in to find Beth napping on the sofa, her head in her grandmother's lap. He watched her sleep and waited for her to waken, worried that his cuts and bruises might frighten her. Then her hazel eyes gradually revealed themselves and looked into his with tenderness. Something burst inside him. A flash of tears drenched his face. Everything he had held inside while in the hospital, released. It was always this way for him: His emotions landed on Beth, stain and relief on pure white gesso.

"I'm glad you're here," Beth whispers. Martin looks away and sees Lenore hovering on the other side of the bed. She holds a plastic cup with a long, bent straw in her hand and offers it to Beth. I will not cry, Martin tells himself.

An aunt:

Today I rode the bus to some place new. Now I ride the bus back to my apartment.

There is a permanent in my hair to disguise how it is thinning, the scalp betrayed. The frog that closes my quilted silk jacket at the neck is frayed. I cover it with a jade pin. My hand is a mask across my mouth to muffle the dry hack that comes with the night air. I do not wish to disturb other people on the bus.

Twice a week I take a bus to see the acupuncturist. He is Caucasian, but studied in Hong Kong. He is helping me to move the fingers on my right hand again. The small stroke in my brain left the hand palsied. When he succeeds in getting my hand to close, will he also give it something to close upon? Another hand, a plait of hair, someone born of my body. I ride the bus and swallow hard, the mystery of what might have been leaves me empty, as empty as my womb has been since it shed the one life it tried to but could not carry.

Today I rode the bus to see my sister's son in the hospital. He has been hurt in an automobile accident. Tonight I will call my sister in Taiwan, and report her son's condition to her. She will treat me as her inferior because she has borne three sons. She will order me to take him things in the hospital, foods she thinks he likes, a scroll for the wall to ensure good health and longevity. I will serve her wishes. I have no right not to do so.

A spider crawls along a slat of the half closed window blinds. Martin thinks that this is unclean for a supposedly sanitary environment. He watches the spider while Beth naps.

As a child he worried about so many things. He had read in a magazine about the brown recluse spider, whose bite caused a hole in your flesh that spread and could not be closed. He had overheard some relatives talking about his uncle, who had burned his mouth on some extremely hot soup and could no longer taste food because of it. He had known of a child in his

school with leukemia and understood the disease to be one that changed your blood to water. He always checked his bed for spiders before going to sleep, blew on his food until his lips were dry, and felt relief when he cut himself and drops of thick, red blood appeared. It was a childhood led compulsively warding off what now seems so inconsequential and inevitable to him. He takes a sip from a styrofoam cup and cannot determine if it is tea or coffee. It's the start of Beth's third day in the hospital.

Beth sleeps only ten minutes and then awakens with a start. "Is it the pain, Sweetie?" She responds by pressing the button in her hand and dosing herself with morphine intravenously, even though she has complained it barely helps. Martin's fingernails leave imprints in the styrofoam.

A nurse appears and announces she will switch the arm receiving the morphine. Martin can see fear and regret in Beth's eyes, as if she wants to say: Why did I complain? Maybe it's OK the way it is.

The nurse pulls the IV brusquely out of one arm and then tries to jab a needle into Beth's other arm. It takes her three tries, and each time Beth lets out a yell. "Now dear, that didn't hurt as badly as you made out, did it?" the nurse asks smugly as she finishes the hook up. Martin strokes Beth's cheek. A web of anger has tightened over his chest. Sweat weeps from the skin over his heart like discharge from a wound and soaks the front of his shirt.

After the nurse leaves the room, his daughter breaks down and angrily sobs, "It's my body for God's sake. My pain, my bones, my future. How dare they tell me what hurts and what doesn't, what I need and don't need, what's good for me and what's unnecessary."

"I know, Baby. Telling you what's good for you used to be my job, and I gave it up a long time ago." Beth shifts position in her bed. Martin moves to adjust the stack of pillows under her encased leg.

"It's OK, Dad, just leave it." She reaches for the rolling table beside the bed and grabs for a tissue. "You know what you could do though? You could finally hang my picture." She points to the closet where the Matisse print has been stored since it arrived with Martin. Out of sight, out of mind, he had hoped.

Martin lays the print across his lap and carefully removes the wrapping. Beth sighs and smiles when he shows it to her. Martin looks from the odalisque to his daughter and notices both have their arms folded behind their heads. He leans the print against a chair. His hands shake a little as he removes the picture of a philodendron that is hanging on the wall.

"What should I do with it now?" Martin wonders out loud. He thinks he hears someone coming, the sound of rubber wheels or rubber soles on vinyl floors. He moves quickly and puts the picture in the closet.

Martin is a small man. He had been the tallest child in the fifth grade, but by high school he was one of the shortest, as if there had been an awful, immutable failure of his cells, a loss of courage, an inability to live up to some

promise. He has to stand on tiptoe and stretch to hang the Matisse, to catch its picture wire on the hook in the wall. The woman's unfathomable, dark eyes and simultaneously bored, amused, and patronizing expression hover above him. He has seen this look unfurl itself on the faces of other women, known what it was like to be the object of their pity, delight, and condescension. He saw it on the face of one of the nurses as she waved him aside to take Beth's temperature. And on Wendy's face, that girl who always sat in the front row of his last period English class but seemed to only half-listen to the poems he read aloud. Thinking back, he wonders whether Lenore wore this expression through most of their marriage. It seems to him that when he was a young man, just that look on a woman's face could arouse him.

He stands back to check if the picture is straight. His vision is drawn to the strand of yellow and black beads hanging between the woman's bare breasts. "Matisse painted that necklace to be as alive as a swarm of yellow jackets. Don't you think, Beth?"

"What's this about?" asks the nurse who has silently taken control of the doorway to Beth's room.

"It's my daughter's favorite painting, and I've hung it for her," Martin states firmly, even as his hands become suddenly too large to hide, too rigid to fold away.

"Yeah, right."

An ancient:

Monsieur Matisse came to our shop in Nice for the first time in 1919. I was a girl of twelve years then. My sweet mother was too shy to speak to the great painter, so it was left to me to show him around the shop. At that time Matisse was enchanted by anything vaguely Oriental. Rugs, ceramics, and of course beads. He was looking for beads of golden yellow that first visit.

I tried to interest him in the yellow bodom beads we had loose. They were still in the basket that they had traveled in from Ghana. Those powdered glass beads did intrigue him—the way their mottled surfaces held the light. It was their black inner cores that finally discouraged him, despite my guarantee that I could hide the darkness with a good tight stringing. "I will know those black hearts are there and this will distract me from their sun-like surfaces," he protested.

Allah's curse must surely be upon me for undoing an Islamic rosary of honey coloured amber for Matisse. This was the colour of bead he wanted and he could not be dissuaded. I had made a mistake, perhaps, to mention to him that in Morocco the Berbers believe that the owning of amber defends the holder against disease. I think he liked this bit of lore that I had learned from my mother. Maybe even then Monsieur's stomach distressed him. And so I took a third of the rosary's ninety-nine beads and strung them with black coral in an alternating pattern as Matisse stood over me, a cajoling

taskmaster. I saved the long terminal bead from the rosary and kept it in a silver box by my bed for many years. I would touch the box before I fell asleep each night. Superstitious girl that I was.

Over the years, my mother and I sold many beads to Monsieur. You can see them in his Odalisque paintings. Our beads decorate the women, hanging from their necks, resting between their breasts, embracing their ankles.

When I learned that Matisse was in the hospital for an operation to relieve the enteritis, I sent him my long-kept terminal bead, instructing him to hold it tightly in his hand and cry out the Father's name, as Muslims had shouted, 'Allah,' upon reaching the bead after naming the ninety-nine attributes of God. Now, as an old woman left alone, I truly know what it is to cry out in the night. I touch the place on the bedpost which will take no polish, the place where my old cat used to rub her toothless gums each night before falling asleep beside me, and I think about all the friends, lovers, and family who have left me behind. I stare at the moon in my window and feel the cold of their graves in my bones. Even my beloved cat has passed on now. I cry out for her, or for God. I don't know which.

The bones are not holding, the doctor reports. "I think it's time to go in and put on some hardware. I'll see you in the morning then." He pats the bed beside Beth's leg and is gone. It has taken four days and two casts for the doctor to arrive at his decision.

Martin sits beside Beth and watches her face. Her chin quivers beneath her clenched mouth. The now familiar beep of her self-dosing morphine machine sounds. From her post by the window Lenore scolds, "You really ought to try to go longer between doses. You don't want to become too dependent on narcotics, you know."

Beth and Martin share a silent moment of exasperation: rolling eyes, crooked grins. Martin can't see his daughter as Mary Tyrone or some Edwardian opium eater.

An ex-wife:

Last night I dreamed Beth was home with me again. Then I woke up. It was difficult to look into her room after that, but I ended up in her empty bed, watching the sun rise in her window.

Today I'll wash and wax the kitchen floor while I wait for news from the hospital. It's what I do. I'm sure Martin will be at the hospital, all teary-eyed and forlorn. That's what he does. All that emotional outpouring and unbounded softness: I find myself hardening in his presence.

He and Beth just don't know. Could they even imagine me standing here in her room, still in my nightgown at 8:00, holding her pearl necklace in my hand, against my wet cheek, the pearls in their element – salt water,

clear and cold.

Martin arrived at the hospital just after seven in the morning, but they had already taken Beth away. He sits on the bed in Beth's empty room. Lenore told him last night she would wait at home until Beth was out of surgery. The doctor or a nurse will call her. He looks at the phone beside the bed anyway.

Panic strikes him when he realizes he doesn't even know where the operating rooms are, where they've taken his little girl. He can imagine the operating rooms down in the bowels of the building—basement rooms that never see sunlight. Beth's room is alive with sunlight this morning. The walls shimmer. The glare on the glass over the Matisse print obliterates the odalisque's face. After barely five days, this room really has become Beth's. Teen magazines and scented candles on the night stand, stuffed animals resting against the metal rail at the foot of the bed, a double looped novelty straw in the hospital water cup, and a mobile of origami cranes suspended from the pull-up bar over the bed: all of these things hold a little of her spirit and bring peace to Martin for a moment.

Then with a start, Martin realizes that he and Beth have given in to the ghetto, have let it become a part of them. She has been diminished, labeled, marginalized. They have accepted that she is a "teenaged patient" and are making "the best of it," by bringing in bits of the old life. There is even a stack of Martin's own books on the window sill. The objects that had given him comfort a moment ago, now look eerie in this setting, like the salvaged artifacts of some destroyed civilization. His alternating emotions bump against each other, the beads of the abacus rattle.

"Please let her be all right," he suddenly and involuntarily utters. Who did he think he was speaking to? Is this how the original conception of a god arose, he wonders, from the need for someone to hear man's appeals? He's not a believer, but still the impetus is there to speak words akin to prayer. He's afraid that if he doesn't plead aloud he won't have done all he can for his daughter. "Please let her be all right," he whispers over and over, like puffs of air blown into a ball of liquid glass, the ardent wish pushing against the glowing walls of the room.

Detroit is Burning

It was late and still hot enough to feel you were breathing liquid. Leon had promised to come home, but he hadn't. In the double bed that nearly filled the room, Clarisse could not find an easy place to rest. Leon's absence was palpable. For almost two hours, some combination of nausea, backfiring cars, or gunshots worried her awake.

She got up, uncapped a beer, and slid through the living room window to the roof over the apartment's entrance. She moved across the gritty, still-warm shingles and sat in one that curved up. Hardly hearing the neighbor's high-pitched voices and slamming doors, she nursed the long-necked bottle and considered names starting with A.

Somewhere around names starting with G, the flashing lights of a cop car appeared. The people who were stopped were black. The cops were white. There was yelling. The race problem had been bad in Detroit all summer, and cities all over the country were popping like firecrackers.

A sweaty and worn-looking Leon appeared at the edge of the sidewalk. Although he had not changed physically from the man she'd met 18 months ago, he was different in other ways. His slender shoulder blades, for instance, now seemed sharp. His lips were pressed together so tightly, they might have been held in place by a vice. He had become a man you could cut yourself on.

She leaned forward and spoke softly. "I was worried."

He did not reassure her. He'd seen the cops too.

He came into the apartment, then climbed onto the roof. Although he sat four shingles away, Clarisse could feel the heat of his body.

The police car pulled away, passengers in the back seat.

"Been out here long?" Leon asked.

"Long enough."

"Feeling better?"

"Not really." She tried not to ask, but had to. "Where have you been?"

"With some SNCC people."

"You could have called."

"You knew where I was."

She had suspected, but talking about it would be as pointless as asking a Newark native for directions to the Ambassador Bridge. "This heat is killing me. Let's go to Belle Isle tomorrow."

He shook his head.

Her voice slipped toward sarcasm. "Your new friends won't be there to

see me.”

“I’m going to a Freedom Now meeting tomorrow.”

“Do the Freedom Now people know your woman is white?”

“My woman is my business.”

“Take me to the meeting.”

“I can’t.”

“Why not?”

Leon sounded tired. “I just can’t.”

“Explain it to me.”

“You wouldn’t understand.”

That was the trouble: she understood completely. To care about civil rights meant you had to be black. She wasn’t. She couldn’t do anything about it, except to try to hold on to Leon until he remembered whom they were beneath their skins. “What I understand is that these people see more of you than I do.”

“What these people are doing is important.”

She knew that, agreed with it, in part. “I’m not important?”

“I wouldn’t say that.” His tone was neutral.

“What would you say?”

“This Revolution is important, and I have to be a part of it,” he said.

“Something else important has already happened. You caused it,” she said. When he did not respond, she stood.

“Stay out here with me for awhile,” he asked. His voice was as soft as kid gloves.

This was his first request in weeks. A firefly of hope sparked inside her.

Leon reached for her hand and she sat. “Things don’t have to change for us.” This voice was heavier.

His sadness stopped Clarisse from reminding him that things had already changed. “Tell me something nice,” she said.

Although Leon answered with familiar words, his voice was not playful. He spoke mechanically, as if his suffering was so great, he hardly knew what to say. “I love you more than my momma’s biscuits. I love you more than my granny’s shortbread.”

They watched the yellow and white city lights flicker. Clarisse did not tell Leon she felt she was falling.

* * *

They sat at the back booth of Mickey’s B-B-Q. Clarisse, her spareribs long since abandoned, watched Leon launch the charred remains of his Soul Food Platter #4 toward the center of the sticky Formica table.

“I’m telling you,” he said. “Detroit’s ready to blow.” A paddle fan clattered overhead, slivers of light ricocheting across the ceiling.

Clarisse jammed her Camel into a square glass ashtray until the cigarette snapped. “Detroit’s the last thing on my mind. We have more important things

to talk about.”

Leon yanked a wad of napkins from the chrome-and-black tabletop dispenser, then wiped the grease and perspiration from his dark hands, mouth, and forehead. Clarisse waited for him to acknowledge their important thing.

Instead he said, “Nothing is more important than The Revolution.”

She looked hard, but saw almost nothing in him that would help her say what she wanted to say. She felt like a stone skipping across water, about to sink.

“Fuck you and The Revolution.” She grabbed her straw bag and headed toward the exit. Although her wooden sandals clopped hard on the linoleum, she heard Leon follow.

She opened the door. The shimmering air on Grand River Avenue clotted in the humidity and 96 degree heat. Clarisse rotated her sunglasses from the top of her head to her face.

“You should move back to Indian Crossing.” Leon said. “This city is too dangerous now.” He meant too dangerous for whites.

“I can take care of myself. Right now, I’m going home.” She meant for him to come, too. The piercing and persistent sound of a siren nearly drove her back inside.

These wooden and brick houses, duplexes, apartments, and trees offered little relief from the white midday sun. As they walked from Grand River to 12th Street, any observer would have wondered if they walked together or separately. At Piedmont Street, they crossed.

When Clarisse opened the door to the lobby, which was hot like an uninsulated attic, her knees buckled. She perched in the doorframe until she caught her breath. Leon went ahead of her.

When she reached the apartment, Leon was reading *The Detroit Free Press*. Clarisse looked at his 24th birthday photo hanging on the wall above the table. In the picture, she stood behind him, draping her arm around his neck and chest. Leon had laughed. Now the summer sunlight defined the back of his head and separated him from her. She remembered the time when he would have done anything for her.

“We have things to decide,” she said.

“Not now.” His face moved into the shadow. “I have to meet some people.”

She tried to draw him back, to her, to this place. “Stay home.”

He changed the subject. “Did you talk to Bonita?”

Clarisse answered quickly. “I don’t need advice from your 17-year-old sister. She said the room they did it in was dirty.”

“You’re not changing your mind, are you?”

The conversation was going badly.

“You thought Bonita should have gotten married,” Clarisse said. “We could get married.”

The word didn't seem to fit in his mouth. "Married?" He folded the newspaper. "No."

* * *

Clarisse needed help. She hadn't been to mass for nearly five years, and no one at St. Mary's knew her. If no one at this church knew her, no one would have to know her dilemma.

A basketball hoop marked the edge of the church parking lot, and six boys of varying skin colors sank a thudding orange basketball in a net-less hoop. The blacktop amplified the temperature, and the players were overheated and noisy. Their high tops slapped hard against the pavement. The boys laughed, jumped, and spun, as if they were dolphins playing in a blue diamond ocean. Without a shirt and sweating hard, a thin boy appeared almost fluid as he glided through the air, arching and lifting the ball. As the ball bounced off the backboard and into the rim, he shouted joyously, as if his name had gone off in lights. "Two points!"

"Just lucky," a boy in cut-offs said.

A third boy grabbed the ball with a hefty, muscled arm and sent the ball into a swift arc three-quarters the distance of the fenced-in court.

A short boy ran behind the others. His wide smile countered his short steps and slow speed.

"The Pistons want Dennis," a fifth boy said of the slow one. The speaker was big, wide at the shoulders and hips, and taller than Dennis was by a full nappy head.

A white woman yelled to the lightest boy, who halted, then looked toward his teammates. When the other players slowed, he went to the woman. She handed him something, a house key, probably. The boy shoved it into the pocket of his shorts. The woman who may have been the boy's mother watched and cheered for her son. Clarisse's heart bumped against her breastbone.

The priest waited for the last parishioner. Feeling the pressure under her waistband, Clarisse turned back toward Piedmont Street. She did not have to go where God and the priest would likely judge her. The mother of the boy playing basketball gave her what she needed.

* * *

Clarisse opened her eyes, emerging from sleeping as slowly as a scuba diver surfacing. Leon stood over her. "I found someone."

She made room for him to sit next to her, but he did not.

"The man's a retired Metro State doctor downstairs from the print shop."

"That place your SNCC friend works?"

Leon nodded. "It costs \$300."

It was too much. "No way we have that kind of money."

"Marcus can loan us \$80. Jewel and Eddie came up with \$50 each."

That's more than half."

She would not give up. "Why don't they loan us money for a bigger place instead?"

"You have to see him tomorrow at 9:00. You're so far along, he'll have to do it soon."

"I don't want this." She looked at him. "You don't want this. Not really."

"This is the wrong time for us," Leon said. "Anyway, he's a real doctor."

"If he's so good, you have the abortion," Clarisse said.

"If I could, I would."

All their talking had moved them backwards. If it hadn't been so God damn sad, Clarisse would have laughed.

* * *

At 8:50 the next morning, Leon tried the door of the darkened "Professional Services" office. It was locked.

Clarisse sat on the floor. Over the upstairs sounds of pulsing printing and copy machines, Leon paced as they discussed dinner and Leon's grandmother's upcoming birthday party. Clarisse wondered if she'd be going. Few members of Leon's family would miss her if she did not go.

Oddly, sometime after nine, the office light went on. A man with greasy white hair and ruddy skin opened the door from the inside. He was unshaven, and his collar stood up on one side. Had he slept in the office? When he held his hand out to Leon, it shook.

The man's eyes focused. He looked down the hallway. When he was sure they were alone, he held out his hand. Leon handed over the borrowed \$300. The man stuffed the bills into the pocket of his wrinkled brown pants. "Come back in 20 minutes," the man told Leon.

The man motioned Clarisse inside, then closed the door. The musty-smelling room had two chairs, a leather couch, battered putty-colored desk, four-drawer file cabinet, sink, and exam table with stirrups. The maroon linoleum floor had not been swept.

He sat behind the desk. She sat in the chair facing him.

The man scrounged for pen and paper. When he found them, he spoke. "Mrs. . . uh. . ."

Was this man like the one who performed Bonita's abortion, the man who hurt her? Clarisse would not think of Leon's sister now. The man drew invisible circles until the ballpoint marked the paper. "I need a name."

Clarisse thought of only one name. "Bonita Mulford." Leon's sister. The man wrote on the paper. "Date of last period?"

Clarisse's hands looked big wrapped around her purse. Her knuckles were pronounced, her fingers swollen. "I don't remember."

He looked up. "Try to estimate, Mrs. Mulford."

"I don't know. Two or three months, I guess." Her last period had been

over three months ago. Even Leon, especially Leon, didn't know that.

"We are at the end of the first trimester?"

"I guess." Maybe it was too late.

"We have a situation of some urgency." He put down the pen. "I will leave you. Remove your clothing, get onto the table, and place the drape over you."

After he closed the door, Clarisse followed his instructions, laying the wrinkled sheet over her. She thought of the boys at the basketball court and imagined the color of her baby's skin.

When the man opened the door, his eyes were glassy and his hands steadier. He was not rough when he examined her, but she winced nonetheless.

"The situation is more advanced than I expected. That means more risk." He cleared his throat. "For the patient, of course, but there are additional difficulties. For this procedure, I will need \$50 more."

She wanted him to charge more than \$50: \$500 or \$5000.

"Will the money be a problem?"

"I doubt it," she said. Leon would get it.

"How soon?"

"Monday."

Three days from now. Had she been standing, Clarisse's legs would have given way. The man wouldn't have noticed.

"Be here no later than 10:00, and don't eat or drink anything after 10:00 PM Sunday night. Have someone wait to take you home."

The room was dirty. The building was public. Anyone could see her coming in or going out.

"Don't forget the extra \$50." He walked into the hall and closed the door behind him. She wondered if he had a place to go or if he just disappeared.

Clarisse dressed, pulling on her purple flowered bikinis with the stretched-out elastic. After drawing the paisley shift over her head and slipping into her sandals, she opened the door.

Leon was waiting.

"He needs another \$50." She was firm. "I'm not borrowing more money."

"I'll get it from petty cash." Leon turned toward the stairs. "You may as well come." He'd never before taken her where his new friends were.

She followed him up ten steep stairs to a door labeled "Marquis Printing." The noise of the machines assaulted her, and music from an unfamiliar soul station crackled through a portable black radio. The room was filled with browns. The floor and counter were brown, the stacks of paper were skin-toned: white, off-white, ecru, beige, pink, and yellow.

A big-busted, short-waisted girl with skin darker than Leon's came from the back room. When she saw Leon, she smiled and straightened her shoulders. "Honey, we've been waiting all morning for you. Work's half done."

When she turned to Clarisse, her manner changed. "Can I help you, miss?"

Clarisse nearly said I'm Mrs. Mulford.

Leon said. "This is Clarisse, Jewel."

The girl talked to Leon. "She been downstairs?"

Clarisse crossed her arms.

"We need \$50 more," Leon said.

"That quack's always raising his rates. With the business we send him, he should give discounts."

"Eddie in the store room?"

"Go on in."

Leon lifted and walked behind a portion of the counter. "I'll be back in a minute."

"I guess you got some kind of trouble," Jewel said.

Clarisse wanted to say none of your business.

"Leon's a good man," Jewel said. "Don't be forgetting that."

Jewel had no idea. "Leon's a good man, all right," Clarisse said.

Clarisse couldn't remember where her winter clothes were.

* * *

As "Sunshine of Your Love" filtered from the clock radio, Clarisse's head touched Leon's shoulder. The sun danced on the gold spackled walls, like flames. The back of her knees and underarms were wet. Clarisse arched her back and stretched her knotted shoulders. It was Saturday, July 24th, 1967.

Leon smiled, not unkindly, and placed his hand on her hip. She felt dimly hopeful.

Clarisse put her hand on top of his. "I love you." He did not answer.

"I know you, Leon. You can't tell me you don't love me."

He put his chin on her head. His voice was almost tender. "Things'll be better after."

So that was how it was.

Clarisse put her mind to making lists.

* * *

When the phone rang that afternoon, Clarisse answered it. "Tell Kunta Ba 'Ka to meet me at the shop." The voice was familiar.

"Who is this?"

"It's Marcus." Marcus had a position in The Movement. "Put Leon on."

"Why didn't you ask for him?"

"He's using his African name now."

"Leon has an African name?" He did not acknowledge her question as he took the phone.

"Kunta Ba 'Ka here." Leon spoke briefly, then hung up, and collected his keys.

"I want to go with you."

"Not tonight." Before she could speak again, he held up a hand. "Don't start, Clarisse."

"Stay here with me."

"I'll be back in a couple of hours. Call Bonita or something."

"I don't want to call Bonita. I want to be with you."

Leon opened the door. Since she could not bear to watch him leave, Clarisse closed the apartment door before he reached the bottom of the stairs.

* * *

Clarisse woke in the morning, still alone. She wasn't surprised, not completely. She dressed, leaving the waist of her shorts unbuttoned, and started toward Rosa's. Some ten blocks northeast, the restaurant sat at the edge of Metro State's campus.

The air was still hot, very hot, but instead of bright, piercing heat, the sky was low, dense with heavy black clouds. A fire, maybe more than one, burned somewhere nearby. The streets seemed oddly deserted.

"What's going down?" she asked in Rosa's.

"Something bad." Heavy lines creased the waitress' face. "We're watching the TV in the bar, but there isn't any real news. None on the radio, either."

"What are people on the street saying?"

The waitress adjusted her granny glasses. "Radical Ron says it's the end of the world."

Clarisse thought he might be right.

She went back to the apartment. Her sensible Italian mother had always said, in an emergency, to stay put, and the family would find her. But her family wasn't looking for her anymore. Neither was Leon.

She began to pack, taking only the basics, including Leon's love letters and gifts: the brightly painted wooden African necklace and earrings, the silver and turquoise rings, the camera he'd given her. No telling how long she'd be gone, so she took most of her clothes. She left a slip in the top drawer, in case Leon tried to forget her.

She did not take the box of ticket stubs from the movies they'd seen together: *Lawrence of Arabia*, *Cool Hand Luke*, *In the Heat of the Night*. She did not take the program from Leroi Jones's "The Dutchman."

She did not take her \$27 used desk or the Italian flag they'd found at a flea market.

She did not take the warm white sweater, his Christmas gift that first year, or the scarf Bonita had made for her.

She did not pack her photographs of the Metro State Street Fair by the Detroit Art Museum.

She did not pack the Marvin Gaye albums or the massage oil they kept by the nightstand.

She did not pack the cookbooks they'd bought, the posters they had

selected for the living room, the wine glasses and place mats for the meals that celebrated private milestones like the day they declared they felt married and its subsequent anniversary.

She worked for several hours, uninterrupted.

* * *

Clarisse packed the car. Then she phoned Marcus and Eddie. No answer. She drove six blocks past Marquis Printing. No one was there. As she drove to a darkened Mickey's B-B-Q, a city cop car pulled beside her. The white cop on the passenger side leaned his elbow out the window. "What are you doing out, lady?" His accent was from somewhere south. Many beat officers were southern.

The back seam on her shorts dug into her backside, reminding her how poorly they fit now. "I'm getting medicine for my baby." Her baby.

"Get off the street." The driver leaned toward her. "The natives are restless."

In another time, she would have answered the redneck differently, but tonight she said only, "I'm on my way home now, officer." Her voice was so tight, it might have broken into pieces.

The cops turned away from her to answer a call on their radio. "He says to go to 12th Street," the driver said. "I hope that asshole knows what he's doing."

Clarisse did not go home, but turned toward Grand River and parked off Conyer Street. Although Conyer was part of the campus, it was still a mile from the worst trouble.

People came out of the shadows. Everyone wanted to see or be a part of the action, as if they might be extras on a movie set. A woman laughed. A man called to a friend.

Two more white cops stood behind a cruiser. Their radio sounded intermittently. The smaller cop leaned into the car and spoke into the mouthpiece.

A bottle broke.

The first police officer cracked his neck and moved as if he was balancing on a tightrope.

A boy who had danced with the basketball threw a rock that broke the window of a storefront church. Someone laughed. Someone else cheered.

"Shit," the boy said. "I got to try me another rock."

The rock-thrower met Clarisse's eyes, then looked away.

An older boy spoke to the younger boy, and they moved closer to the street, collecting bits of debris. The nearby fire illuminated their left sides, making their action seem highly dramatic. After the youngest boy lobbed a stone at the cops, the others joined in. The oldest cop grabbed the youngest boy.

Clarisse skittered over the broken sidewalk toward Betty's Beauty

Shope, the first floor of a two-story building with a green awning. As she hoped, the light in Betty's was on.

Something about the smell of the place seemed wrong. Near the sinks, Leon stood with three other men.

A man with long Afro looked at her as she entered, but spoke to Leon.

"Who's that?" Leon didn't answer.

Looking only at Leon, Clarisse moved toward him, a walk as long as a mile. Leon's face was grim and dirty as a farmer's was. He had helped plant and was now harvesting The Revolution.

"Kunta Ba 'Ka?" asked the man.

When Leon didn't answer, the man continued, "Help me over here."

Clarisse couldn't see what he was referring to. The man gave more directions and Leon joined him.

Behind Leon, a pile of rags collected on a five-gallon drum. The smell that troubled her was the combination of permanent wave chemicals and gasoline. "The baby and I need you," she said.

"My people need me," Kunta Ba 'Ka said. He was severing their connection as proof of his commitment to The Revolution. The place she had once belonged was going to burn. The man she loved would light the fuse.

There was her morning appointment with the man who drank gin before sterilizing his hands and his once-shiny metal instruments. If she waited, she would have to keep the appointment.

Outside of Betty's, rolling, bitter black smoke poured from a new fire in a nearby trash barrel. The heat and the smell on her skin nearly made her vomit. She had to get away from the smell, the fire, the crowd. From Kunta Ba 'Ka.

She started to run, then forced herself to slow. Fear seized her. It almost had a life of its own and was trying to overtake her. But the action on the street was as dangerous as a newly erupting volcano.

She shadowed the buildings and kept at the edges of the crowd, easily the number of people at the State Fair. A new siren began, this one more like an air raid. While she could hardly bear the nauseating sound, others seemed galvanized by it. Two boys ran past her, knocking her from each side. She refused to fall.

A lean, dark boy of about 14 threw something that popped at the police car. Clarisse crouched. People around her moved quickly, covering their heads.

From westerns she'd seen, Clarisse knew a neighborhood priest could calm this crowd, but no man of God appeared.

Four men got out of the police car. In their freshly pressed uniforms, they were as edgy as colts. The youngest drew his gun. Clarisse wanted to reach out, to grab the pistol before anyone else saw it. His weapon would change this crowd. His weapon was a gauntlet.

"Hey, pig," a boy hollered. "This ain't your street."

A whiskey bottle shattered on the sidewalk. Small pieces hit her leg and she suspected that she was bleeding. If she wasn't, someone else was. Clarisse moved faster.

Fingers of fire snuck up behind her. The wooden building at her back changed to red, yellow, and blue energy. Windows cracked. Wallpaper fell off the walls. Heat as hot as an open furnace lapped into the street. Clarisse ran to her car, falling only once.

The kids were out of control. The cops were out of control. This was The Revolution.

Holding on to the steering wheel as if her grip could squeeze the terror out of her, she sped home. She turned on the television, but the news coverage told her less than she already knew: something deep and angry was boiling and was going to boil until the earth was bare. Twice she thought she heard Leon coming up the stairs.

She wanted to hear Leon coming up the stairs.

She prayed to hear Leon coming up the stairs.

The abortion was eight hours away. Would the man with the hangover be there in the morning? Her mouth was dry; she was not supposed to eat or drink anything.

She did not hesitate, but walked directly to the refrigerator.

She inched on to the roof, taking her camera with her. She expected to hear gunshots over the shouts, cracking, breaking, but did not.

She had been transported to some alien world, filled with impenetrable dark space. Black, poisonous cotton candy smoke occluded the sky. The air was filled with chemicals, foul and heavy. These were smells of burning and weapons of crowd control. Her stomach would not settle.

Bringing the camera's viewfinder to her eye, Clarisse looked through the lens to see her city. She didn't look north: no fires would burn in suburbs. To the east, light and smoke moved like a muscular, angry snake, writhing its way through the sky. She snapped a picture.

South, there were dented trashcans, cars with smashed windshields and doors ripped from hinges, and collapsing buildings. By 12th Street, where Leon was, the damage would be worse.

Her hands stung as if they'd been burned. She braced the camera against her knees and rested her index finger on the camera's trigger. An obstruction of people poured from somewhere onto Third. Summer dresses pressed against their small legs and bellies, three black girls scrambled, as if looking for bunkers. White college students in second-story windows raised wineglasses and laughed, as if attending an atomic tailgate party. Sweat-drenched black boys on bikes pedaled like fools toward the action. A bare chested white man carried cases of Vernor's Ginger Ale. Fire and light exploded on Sixth, on Trumbull, on 12th. As if by sleight of hand, more fires on the horizon.

She moved the viewfinder to her own street corner and saw a white cop shove a black boy who tried to save his own windpipe from being crushed. A woman screamed. Another cop hit her and she collapsed, fragile as origami.

Blacks and whites appeared on flat roofs above the street. Kroger's window shattered. A group of 20 or 30 people heaved into the grocery store, knocking cans and boxes from shelves.

In the street, uniformed men in rows lifted rifles. A cracking sounded that was so loud and piercing it must have rung for miles. As if in Europe, as in WWII, as if in a war zone, tanks rolled down Second.

Clarisse put her camera in her lap.

She scrambled into the apartment. It was time to leave. She would drive north or west. She would know where she was going when she got there. Detroit was burning.

Contest Winners

My Father's Voice

I am waiting up for the 2 a.m. train,
I am imagining my father's voice.
He is always traveling, he is always in motion,
he is never still, he is never quiet, he is always quiet
when he speaks.

He was always talking to me,
he was always driving me back and forth
to Boston, to Washington, to Chicago.
He was always revealing his details,
details like his ink strokes on my pencil drawings:
flowerpots with Impatient Lucys or African Violets
on porches of my sketched houses.

I was always falling asleep in the car - his voice
puts me to sleep. He always stopped the car
in the gaps in Pennsylvania to peel away slivers
of mica in the rock highway walls, limestone,
quartz, all named and beautiful to him.

We stopped because he could not name
a mysterious wildflower at road's edge.
He had to photograph, to name, to say, to know.

His voice! It is too quiet. We have a bad connection
between here and overseas, no straight phone lines
matching our houses. He is counting the dollar fifty minutes
he speaks with me and he cuts it short, and besides,
there is a time delay.

I am trying to remember all the things he told me
in the car while smoke from his forbidden pipe
steamed out the window of the boxcar Volvo.

I am waiting because when I cannot sleep,
I love to imagine how he must have sounded
when he recited to Torah at his Bar Mitzvah,
to remember how he sounded
when he read the Kaddish for his mother
in faded Hebrew.

I am listening for the hush of motion.
I am waiting for the 2 a.m. train
because it sounds like my father's voice.

Forewarning

We four children sat silently at the table
for family dinner, wiener schnitzel
and potatoes steaming on plates at the center,
as my father finished the grace

Jesus, Mary and Joseph bless us. Amen.

He passed the food, but no one ate as he took
the first bite, swirled it in his mouth
as though testing the body of a wine,
spat into his napkin.

No one spoke as he pushed his plate away,
lighted a cigarette, turned to my mother.

We must make an example for the children.

He lightly ground the orange tip into her arm,
seared the flesh to a weeping crater
and my mother, who had suffered ill-fitting
dentures in Germany as a child —

We had no food, no good nutrition —
and who named her dentist *butcher*
because he used no anesthetic when he pulled
every tooth, kept silent for our sake.

Still, the smoke rose from her arm like a warning.

Miles de Milo

Greenville's drive-in
hid its screen
like a bedroom window.
The summer I lost my last tooth,
the screen swelled up
with naked bodies,
shows like *Silicone Sirens*.
My dad's friend Miles moonlit
as the drive-in scarecrow,
roamed the sumac thicket
behind the parking lot
to ward off eyes
without tickets.
Dad called him Miles de Milo:
his right forearm
plus a brand-new tattoo
lost in Da Lat.

Friday nights with Miles
de Milo I'd dine
on whole cans of spaghetti-o's,
dizzy my hands just stroking
bottles of Blue Ribbon beer
he'd line in rows
on card tables, salute,
send crashing to the floor.
Cloaked by a poncho I'd ride
past lines of cars
unseen — "Mostly men," Miles told,
"or kids in vans."
Left sunk in his El Dorado
parked in shadow,
my head in the mirror
small as a nut,
I'd strain to rise
like bodies on the screen.

The woods clean,
he'd stand beside me,
lay his stub on the car window
like a broken speaker.
"Don't you fret,"
once he bent to whisper,
while I chafed in vain
at my sprig of flesh,
"It's a beautiful thing,
a thing beginning."

One night, caught
stealing Dad's beer,
I told him all.
Dad swears
he broke nothing but
a tooth or two,
that Miles withdrew
from other wounds.
But something deep,
some bluster of outrage
blew through town that night,
blew till fall.
By September,
the drive-in's shell lay
strewn with sumac leaves
on fallow concrete.
Skulking across
the clutter,
I'd stomp hard,
imagine the crunch
was somebody's tooth,
somebody's bone.

Contributors

Lenore Balliro works at World Education in Boston as an editor of a publication for adult literacy practitioners. She has been published in *The Atlanta Review*, *the minnesota review*, and other journals, and her work appears in the anthology, *For a Living: The Poetry of Work*, University of Illinois Press.

Caroline Goodwin has published poetry in several journals throughout the United States and Canada and recently received the Earle Birney Award for poetry from Prism international.

Brett Hursey teaches creative writing and contemporary literature at East Carolina University. His work has appeared in over sixty journals across the United States and Canada and won National AWP Journal Awards in 1995, 1994, and 1993.

Alan Newton is a recent graduate of MSU's Creative Writing program, where he studied poetry and playwriting. In the Fall of 1999, he will begin a Ph.D. program at the University of Kansas, where he'll focus on contemporary dramatic literature.

Timothy S. Reid grew up in Northern Michigan (Gaylord) and has been living in Los Angeles since.

Claudia Skutar is a graduate student in English at Michigan State University.

Sarah Sword is a Ph.D. candidate in mathematics at MSU. She has been working with MSU Writer in Residence, Diane Wakoski for three years. Last year she won the Glen Swarthout Literary Prize.

Biographical information could not be obtained for Holly Holdman and Allen Kesten.



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and Alan Newton

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and Holly Holdman