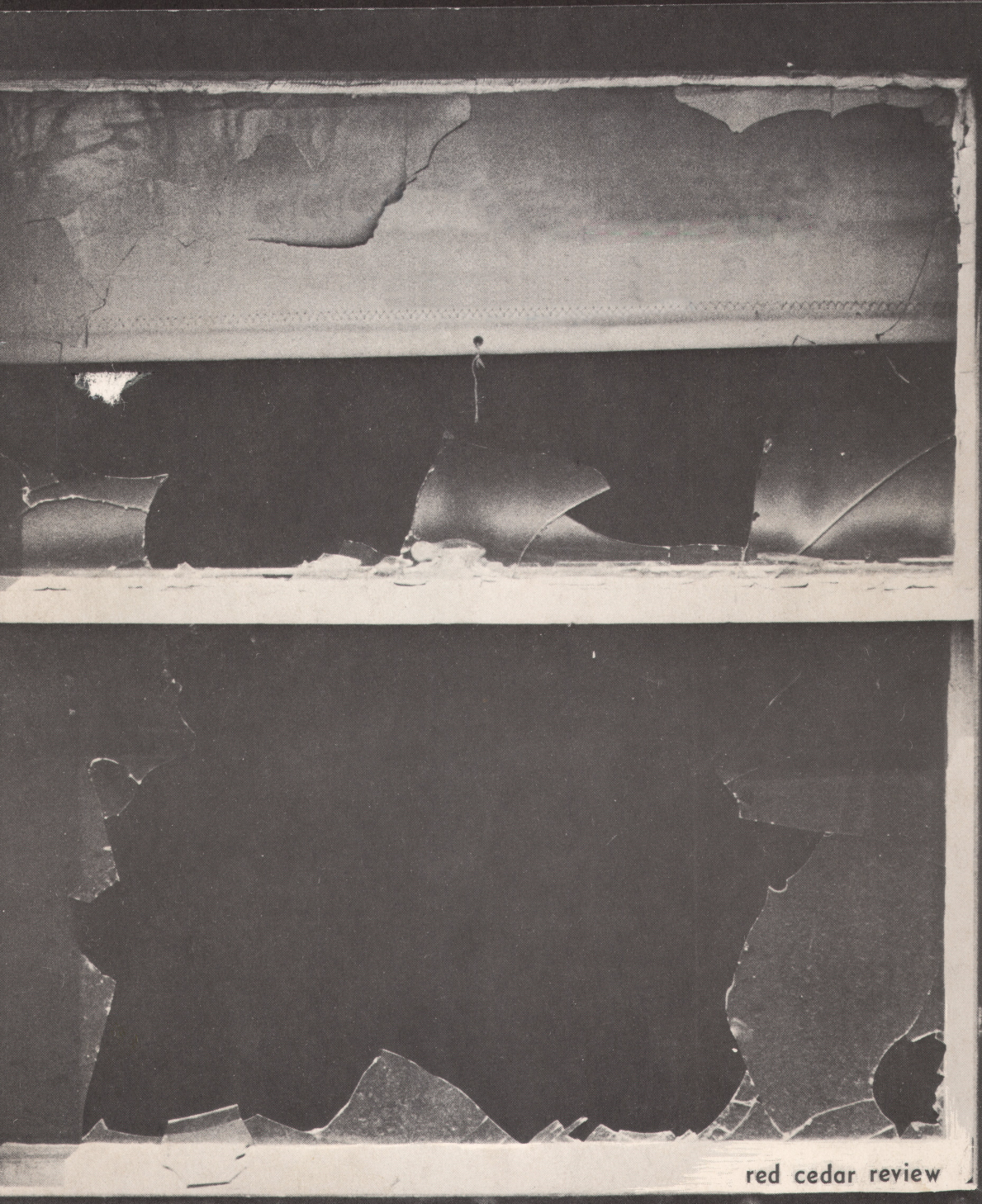


Chris Antonides

Grant Charles Guimond

Peter Fiore

Douglas Blazek

M. Aldenbrand

A. Poulin, Jr.

Robert Vander Molan

Harold Witt

Ron English

Peter Fiore

D. L. Rosochacki

Gary Gildner

Stanley Cooperman

Theodore Sjogren

William T. Sweet

RED CEDAR REVIEW

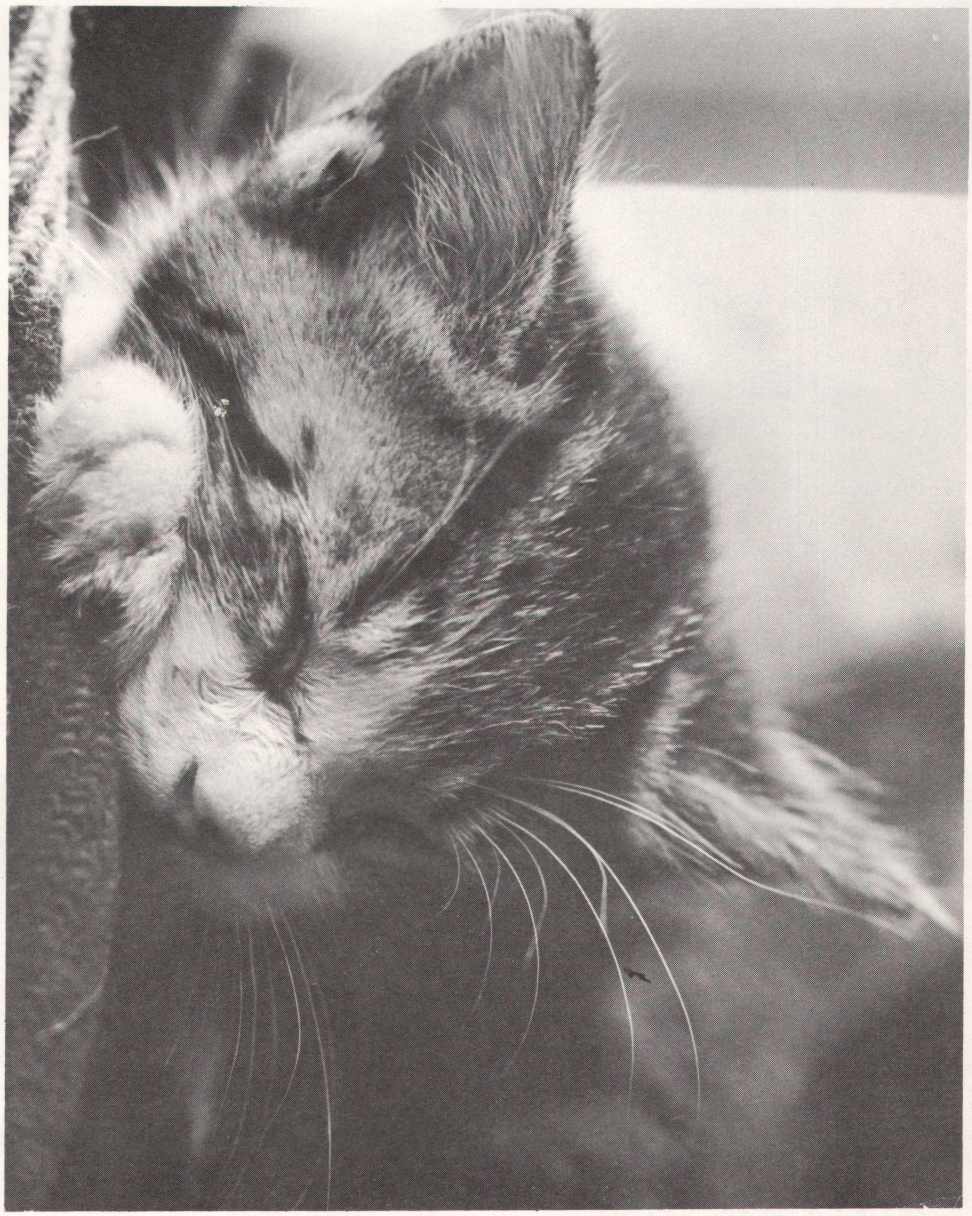
Volume VI Number 1

A quarterly magazine of the arts, published by students of Michigan State University. Manuscripts may be submitted to 325 Morrill Hall, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan 48823. Include return address and notes for contributors section of magazine. Contributions are not restricted to students of Michigan State.

Copyright by RED CEDAR REVIEW, January, 1968. Permission to reprint material herein must be obtained from the authors. We request that RED CEDAR REVIEW be cited as place of first publication on any reprinted material.

Red Cedar Review

Volume VI Number 1



Justin Kestenbaum

Chris Antonides

THE DAY OF THE BARBER

Every other day there is a barber in the shower room. Every other day, that is, if you observe a calendar one week long and do not count Sundays. There is no point to Sundays here, unless you are religious. And if you are religious, bear in mind that the calendar and not religion is the mark of civilization, so that there would be little point to the rest of the week, except that keeping track of the days preserves the illusion, if not the reality of civilization. You see, there is no civilization here. Here, everybody pretends to the point of barbering your outside to tame your inside. But if these do not match after barbering, your inside has to be tamed another way.

Somewhere a voice says, "Mouthgag," and behind a curtain of light there is a sensation of falling violently asleep. Then a well-remembered hand is shaking you awake so gently that you almost fall asleep again, and the voice of your Ma drifts through the veil. But the shaking becomes rougher, until finally the covers are impatiently snatched away from the bed, plunging you into a bath

of icy air. You fling up sitting on a bedsheet, turning to ice, and there is the blinding January sun, low on the horizon, slanting through the bedroom window. Still behind that curtain of light where existence is shapelessness and sounds, heavy motherly footsteps move off in the direction of the fitful starts and snorts that are your brother. Ma calls him gently with kisses, for each day begins gently with dew, "Eftikious, Eftikious, *anoige ta matia sou,*" open your eyes. And in a crafty appeal to his competitive spirit, "See, your brother is already awake." But Eftikious is a determined sleeper, even if he must wake up and annihilate everyone so that he can stay asleep. He struggles and thrashes under the covers, his voice a hoarse erupting volcano, "Lemme alone goddamit!" Easily defeated, her voice trembling, Ma paces her querulous grooved hurt out into the kitchen where it can shed tears and invoke the powers of malice, "*Ach, demonia, aphente ta paidia mou!*" oh, demons, leave alone my children. First you take away my husband, and now my children.

This capitulation to the supernatural presents you with a clear choice. Either you can get up, wash, and perform your et ceteras and be on time for school for a change, or you can get your moldy brother up so that he will not be fired—not, at least, for being late. You sigh at the sun, shiver, and turn into the room. The physical room condenses out of that primeval furnace you have been staring into, resolves out of pure glare into lines and planes shot through with kaleidoscopic purple-green fragments and pulsating spheres, and settles down at last, a prosaic bedroom in a prosaic morning light. The bare chassis of the secondhand table radio glints on its shaky secondhand stand, its plastic cabinet long since smashed. You pad over to it barefoot wondering if Ma will notice and make you wash your feet, switch it on, wait through its crackles, hash, and angry wasps, until, tearing strenuously out of something deep inside, comes the pure sweet sound of a Mozart string quintet—followed by a muffled roar. "Turn that crap off!" As you value life and limb, you move out of range as Eftikious gropes blindly across the room—he never has his eyes open the first time around. His hands are guided by sound alone but find the radio so fast that you unsportingly suspect that he is peeking. With a savage wrench he sends the radio on its way to the floor, the cord yanked out of the wall outlet, and the stand teetering drunkenly. And before a Galileo Galilei could have had time to make something of the decay characteristics of sound waves propagated in air, Eftikious is back in bed. After a few tentative snorts from his direction, it is safe to essay Stage Two of Reveille.

The antenna has now come unwound from the back of the chassis, but the game little radio gallantly hums on being plugged back into the outlet, loyally taking up Mozart a few bars from where Eftikious dropped him. This time it is necessary to dodge away very quickly, for although the lower sound level of a

string quintet has not masked the ominous sound of rippling sheets, it takes less time for Eftikious to mobilize during Stage Two, and his eyes are dangerously open. Once when the radio stoutly heaved out full-blown Wagner, it was impossible to hear what was coming up behind you, and you ended up down on the floor on your back, a blanket over your face, and murder in the heart beyond that darkness. Ma had come in then to protest against Wagner who was not "our own" music and sinfully loud, or things might have ended badly. As it was, I had been in tears by the time she managed to pull Eftikious off, simultaneously trying to soothe us both, all three of us gasping with the effort. She went "Oof, Eftikious!" to him and "Na, na, your brother loves you!" to me. But that was another time, and fortunately Mozart does not lay it on for effect, being more austere than brotherly love. Now Eftikious contents himself with strangling the tuning dial until the radio submissively squawks out a big band bleat, then he subsides on the edge of the bed to pick his nose and contemplate his snot.

There is really not much point to hurrying now. There is only one sink in our flat, and the outside john is taboo because Ma does not trust us to wash in the right places without her supervision. At some time during the morning abulations, Eftikious will overtake you and preempt the kitchen sink, roughly allaying all protest by the threat of his casual savagery if you make him late for work. Besides, it is quieter to give in, for Eftikious would start yelling, Ma would start yelling, the neighbors would start yelling, and when you had been yelled down, Eftikious would own the sink anyway. But you hurry along on the theory that each day you can get further in the washup before the inevitable and irrevocable, and for those golden moments that occasionally offer the opportunity of cutting a few corners from that list of "To's" posted over the sink:

EVERY DAY

to wash your hands and face
to wash your neck
to brush your teeth
to comb your hair
to not forget behind the ears
Mother

By the time Eftikious gets to his hair, his preparations have involved everybody in the kitchen. He ducks his head under the faucet until his hair is drenched, then combs the excess water out over his back in a shower like a big dog sharing its bath with the table, breakfast, and incidentally you. It does

no good to move to another spot, for he will aim wherever you go. If you try to sit it out in the bedroom, Ma will roust you out, suspicious that you are trying to sleep. It is even worse to try to share the mirror with him. The mirror is over the dresser and the dresser is in the kitchen instead of the bedroom because there is no room for it with all the beds, and the top drawers are handy for holding utensils that won't fit in the table drawer. If occasionally Ma does find a sock in among the dime-store silverware, it precipitates only a minor crisis. So the dresser is in the kitchen, and the mirror is three feet wide. But the temptation to watch Eftikious while he combs his hair instead of combing your own is too much. Having made his hair limp with water, he next pours sweet sticky smelling brilliantine over his head, and having poured oil, as it were, on troubled waters, combs and folds each wave meticulously into place. If a single hair strays across his righthanded part, he churns it all up in a rage and starts again, digging the comb through his scalp to make the watcher wince, his breath spouting from his nose, his mouth clamped. It is not wise to cramp him at times like that, and when he is through, it is time to eat.

At the kitchen table, you sit opposite the mirror, and sighting across Ma's shoulder at your incompleted image, you turn your head this way and that and wonder vaguely if Eftikious would miss a little of his brilliantine. But he notices your preoccupation with your reflection and jeeringly points it out to Ma. "Lookit him, lookit him! Goddog!" Ma is shocked more by self-admiration vanity than she is at Lord's name vanity, though vanity in all its forms is sinful as Wagner. Eftikious is raucous with glee as Ma grabs you by the arm and firmly plants you in her chair with your back to the mirror. Stung, you turn on Eftikious in a helpless rage, "What are you laughing at, you horse's ass!" Eftikious jumps up in a comic hunchback posture, minces over to you. aims his ass and farts. . . .

"Drink this." The sun is gone now in a taste of molasses and a watery glaze of intravenous dextrose, replaced by an overhead glare and an underfoot draft that makes your eyes water, your nose run, your face smart. Those lacrymose rills seem to flow down into your arms, turning them into fallen pillars of salt. To resurrect them and bring your hands within wiping distance of your face is to endanger them with crumbling away. Just as the black and blue welts on those livid arms register somatic shocks radiating out from coagulated punctures, so those blotches form the gravitational nexuses in that saturated solution, Time, around which the shock of memory precipitates Agony, pure and crystalline, the sediment of the soul. . . .

You are sitting at the kitchen table with your Ma, waiting for Eftikious. Supper is ready and waiting on the stove, and the recent cooking has steamed up the window where beads of moisture are forming and rolling down in

rivulets. The electric clock on the wall churns its gears and threatens to stop, now that its hands have reached the comfortable droop of half-past eight and will have to begin the long, slow curve up to nine o'clock. The noisy chirrupings of time seem to be working through your guts, for supper is bean soup with dandelion greens, eggplant fried in olive oil, and yogurt with fish roe. Eggplant can be gotten dehydrated from Halsted Street, if you really must have it out of season, and yogurt and fish roe are not seasonal problems. But where the hell did Ma get dandelion greens in January? And where had she conceived the notion that mixing yogurt with fish roe improved either one, things which you hated individually and passionately. Once when you had shown up for class late, Miss Rodney wanted to know what had delayed you, and the lame best excuse you could invent was a chewy breakfast. Miss Rodney invented an early, liquid breakfast of orange juice and milk, and turned back to the blackboard, Galileo, trajectories, and pendulums without a pause for breath or a bother for the churning in your stomach at her idea of breakfast and the mutilated version Ma would produce if she ever heard it. Ma would probably mix them together.

With your stomach rumbling, you remember the clock and wish that it would stop. There is a mechanical starter on its backside, a little knurled knob that is hard to get hold of with your fingertips and which it is necessary to set spinning in order to start the clock again. You seldom get the clock going in under fifteen minutes, and by then everyone has lost track of the time. This provides a good excuse to turn on the radio, and a chance that you might be able to hear the Beethoven symphony announced on a previous program, sponsored by an aspirin manufacturer. "Always ask for it by name, never by aspirin alone. Sold in tins of ten and twenty, and economical bottles of fifty and one hundred." But although Ma was given the name Calliope after the Greek Muse of Eloquence, Beethoven's music is not "our own" and therefore prohibited. It is a kind of anomaly to think of Eloquence chastising the deaf, dead, but still articulate Beethoven. When you brought home a clarinet from the school's band and began to practice scales, Ma wanted to know why you did not play church hymns instead of doorooroo doorooroo. Then it was complaints about the fifteen cents for a reed, and the clarinet days were over. Eloquence is muttering to herself and shaking her head now, as if disapproving of your thoughts.

"What's the matter, Ma?"

"Nothing. Nothing is the matter. There are people that bother you on your head, that's all."

"What people, Ma?" for you recognize the demons and it is a son's duty to comfort his Ma, no less than the duty of a first generation American to educate his ignorant Old Country Immigrant Mother.

"The same people who kill your father. The same people who steal our bread and put empty questions on your head!" And this is your uncle's sister, Uncle Theo who catechizes you when you come home from school full of American History while he visits Ma. The United States is a shit country, he says, and the Soviet Union is the biggest hit in the whole world.

"But Ma, we are poor. There is nothing to steal, so who could steal anything from us?"

"Well, they are mean," she says.

When Ma's sadly shaking head has told off the beads of silence, her wistful expression sets with an angry snap. She gets up, gets her coat, and waves a warning finger at you as you start to get up. "You stay right there, and not to go out. Do not to move from the table! I go to find your brother, always bumming around late at night. I say to come home early for supper so we can be together, eat together. I say to come home and do not to forget, to stay out all night. And see the time!" Her open hand sweeps to the clock and slaps down to her side in vexation. Tonight there will be fireworks over supper. Despite the maternal injunction against stirring from the table, you are in the bedroom tuning in Beethoven almost in the same sweep that carries Ma out the door. You lie on the bed, compose yourself for the ordeal sure to follow when Ma finds Eftikious, and you have almost drifted off into symphonic somnolence when a crash as of cymbals to cap a thundering coda splits the music in half, and a second crash quarters it before the shards of sound from the first have finished shredding the air in your throat. Could that be Beethoven? Wait, lie still. What if it is a burglar? No, don't be silly. The kitchen light is reassuringly on, and besides there isn't anything to steal. A shiver of glass whispers down through an orchestral caesura and makes your scalp crawl. There are mean people.

The symphony gathers itself and hurls into the finale. There is nothing more to hear but Beethoven. Heroic, deaf Beethoven, who could face a double crash like that without flinching. It is a frightened animal on a quaking bed afloat in a room gone dimensionally amuck, not the civilized synthesizer of auditory stimuli, that cringes at the room's crumbling dimensions. You have got to see what has happened, and somehow you manage to reach the threshold of the kitchen, afraid to cross it, your eye caught in an arc from the broken windowpane of the upper sash to the smashed mirror and a broken whisky bottle strewn in fragments across the top of the bureau. Spilled liquor fizzes in contact with some of the cheap cosmetics on the dresser, and a sharp smell cuts through the fried-in-olive oil kitchen. Glass is sprinkled across the table like artificial snow left over from Christmas, and a large splinter is on the seat of the chair you had been sitting in. How long you stand there, or how many

times your eye traces the trajectory from the window to the mirror, trying to change it through some intellectual exercise, is lost in fascinated horror. After the pint had come through the upper sash, breaking as it came and spewing whisky, the fragments struck the mirror in several places. That's all. If you had obeyed Ma, the glass would have severed your throat instead of the mirror. That's all.

You are still trembling there when Eftikious comes in, and you hear Ma down the hall. Eftikious says nothing, although he can see the glass strewn all around. He looks at you, then away. Ma comes in, asking why Eftikious ran away from her, freezes in the act of closing the door as you froze at the threshold ever since seeing what happened, and you all stand stupidly staring. For a second we are all dumb while Beethoven thunders behind deaf ears, forgotten, in the bedroom. Then Ma shrieks, over and over, doubling over as if she were going to throw up. Eftikious shouts himself hoarse at her, while a chorus of neighbors pound on the walls and ceiling and someone is calling down the stairwell. In a panic, Ma rushes to the overhead light string and yanks it so hard that it snaps as the light goes out. Clutching the string and groping for you in the dim light of the hall while the final chords of Beethoven's triumph over deafness rush out of the dark bedroom, Ma hugs you both to her bosom, crooning, and the sudden unisonal silence of Beethoven, neighbors, and Ma that follows is the most appalling you have ever heard. When the commercial begins, Ma begins to mutter about little birds, murdered husband, and thieves, and begins to cry.

"Ma. Don't cry, Ma." And you begin to cry.

"Sh! sh!"

"Oh, Ma!"

"Sh! sh! *Poulaikia mou,*" my little birds. She whispers the demons loose. You can feel them quite close, you squirm further away from Eftikious.

"Oh, Mama! what if I was sitting there. It might have cut off my head!"

"Aw, shut up you goddam cry baby!" says Eftikious. And that was what he was always saying to me. You remember the time he practiced knife-throwing at you and stuck you in the foot because you wouldn't dance. I was always crying when Eftikious was around.

"Na, na, Eftikious! There, there, my little bird, your brother loves you."

"Oh Mother of God!" And no one could hold you after that. You run out of the dark into the dim hall. You hear the hysterical scream of your mother and the neighbors' anvils pound again. A door throws open into your path and a sleepy old man in pajamas rumbles into you, struggling with his rope. "What's all the yelling? I'm a sick man. Here, boy, can't your mother stop that yelling?" And when he turns to yell at our part-open door about how sick

he is and how he needs quiet, you slip around him and out the front entrance.

The dark voice of Eftikious, "Come back, come back, or I'll kick the shit outta you when I catch you," slips out through the front door after you. Eftikious has broken away from Ma, for you can see him in the hall stopped by the old man, and the words "sleep" and "quiet" are the last you ever want to remember of that house. You plunge down the front stoop outside and are at the corner of the block before you dare turn around to see if Eftikious is coming. A light flings across the stairs after you, and a shadow flits through the fading bar as the door bangs to. A shaft of panic thrusts into your throat. You run desperately, for Eftikious can outstrip you on the straightaway. The dark in alleys and crouched among the parked cars beckons you, but a deeper void across Clark and the occasional tin clatter of the trolley pulls more strongly. It almost yanks you off your feet, that vortex of dark funneling down the sidestreet, drawing the volatile essence of speed out of your base-metal heart. The atoms of your shoes and feet mingle with the cement of the pavement, so that you must lift the sidewalk with each step of the run, while that effervescence bubbles away out of your heart, out of your mouth, a rare gas to make crystals under Eftikious' feet. The vortex groans, choked with trees and shrubs, their leaves long ago sucked into the heart of the great spiral. A hint of shimmer-blue inks across the sky behind Lincoln Park, and twigs begin to cut your face. The park, with its deep secret darknesses, will hide you. You dive into the thickets and brambles, exulting in the panic that tears at your clothing like branches but is really the snatching, clutching dark that lurks everywhere grabbing at movement. Now Eftikious paws the ground around the thickets too dark to see through. You hear him stamping and thrashing at the edges, for he knows that you are in there and that if he enters, he will surely snag his curly hair before he can reach you. That will give you time to slip away. He also knows that if he does not catch you in the thicket, you will still sneak away. You grow quiet and watchful as the night, and Eftikious comes quite close. The branches creak as he touches them, trying to usher in a glimmer or a moonbeam. But his inside is a great squid and his shadow all ink slips into each chink he opens into the fortress. You freeze in mid-breath as a branch he moves somewhere overhead gently grazes your hair. Then he is gone around the rough-curving trees, a curly hound sniffing at false scent. You move. A blade of grass-weed crinkles. Two pauses mark the silence, and a singing passes through your head. Another rustle, and the sweat leaps out on your body. You have not moved. Is something else here?

"Come out, come out! I see you, goddam you!" And a wild thrashing sets the patch of brambles trembling. He must have found a rabbit, and while he vents his rage on it, another rabbit is slipping away. You are so furry in

thought that you almost fall off a low wall which part of the thicket is mounded over. You scrape your hands and slide a loose slab of the wall, and a cry of rage says that Eftikious has realized his mistake. You slip down the wall and land on loose rubble that rolls you like marbles. The lake is at the bottom of a gentle slope, and you roll roughly to it. White and ghostly as the moon drifts idly through the clouds, then electric blue as the crystal frost on frost picks up the distant arc-lights, the lake is freezing up the latest of its unseasonable thaws, and blocks of thick floes stand fast in new-frozen cracks and rifts between them. An island stands, dark and formless mass, too black for ice, somewhere to the right of the center of the lake, and a distant, star-blue fly-eye pierces through the sticks of trees on it. The surface of the lake is thin, and warning saw-horses hulk askew and half-sunk into it. The lake squeaks and hisses as it congeals under the wind, and a shout across the wind behind you startles you into stepping recklessly out onto the ice. There is a loud crack and you are ankle-deep in icy water. You jerk back to the pavement and stagger away from the gurgling, swirling water. And through the dark and furry fear of Eftikious, a new cave of panic opens hung with icy daggers that cut into your throat. A new vapor seeps out into the night. Stepping off onto the ice again, quickly but carefully, a virtuoso tight-walking strands of cobwebs stretched between eggshells, serenely planting each step flat-footed on the undulating surface, you are lost in the patterns spider-webbing from your feet. The ice, delicate as translucent birdshell, barely supporting you, creaks and cracks.

Hardness whizzes past you and skitters away on the ice. Sharpness rips at your shirtsleeve, leaving a sting in your upper arm, then it too whisks away over the ice. Over your shoulder is Eftikious, cautiously placing a foot on the ice, taking a few steps. Cold horror, almost a daredevil unconcern stop you in your tracks to watch his feet. The ice is holding under his greater weight, and you are both so engrossed in the fact that you allow him to get dangerously near. Suddenly, an abysmal groan, a shriek of rage, a loud splash, and Eftikious is waist-deep in the freezing black water not two yards away. Slowly, you back away as he tries to pull himself out onto the ice supporting you, but each time he is halfway out, exercising great care, the ice with equal care lets him back into the water. The shelf of ice you stand on is slowly flaked away, but finally, the water gets too deep for him, and he can only wade back to shore, lifting his feet high with each step to break the ice and spare himself the frustration of being dumped back into the water. He is shouting as he goes.

"Come back, come back, goddam you, or I'll kick the shit outta you when I catch you!" But he is on the shore and you are standing near the middle of the lake, by the island. You can watch his tiny shadow now, shrunken and harmless, for his threat is idle at the distance. But you whimper and begin to

tremble in the midst of your terrible triumph. You did not notice the cold when the threat of Eftikious was near, but now the sting of the wind and the cold take you both, and he turns away. You tread carefully around the island, looking for an opening in the shrubbery which grows right down to the water's edge. It scratches and will not yield, and you think of the distance to the shore. You almost turn and call to Eftikious for help, for now the ice begins to crack under your shoes, and water begins to ooze out in a thin film. Crying aloud in frustration, you turn helplessly around. The water around the island is deep, and in summertime, boats come right up to the edge of the shrubbery without running aground.

Eftikious is gone, and you are alone with the whistling wind, the squealing ice, and shreds of streaming filaments of moon spun out from catches in the trees. Whimpering, miserable, and cold, there is nothing left for you to do but go back. Each step back is a terror that replaces the terror of the steps of running away from Eftikious. It comes out of the undulating, gaping blackness left behind from where it sucked at Eftikious. He was, after all, a recognizable terror that you could run away from. But this ghostly, deep, brooding lake was not of the same stuff, and, like a miasma, you could not be sure that you were running away from it, wherever you went. You keep your eyes on the ice, not wanting to trust it out of sight. It is almost a shock to see the pavement under your feet again. Somehow, going back is always faster than coming out.

The relief at having escaped the lake brings tears again, but it is like an animal outside of yourself wailing at the moon. The crying jag carries you through the park unseeing, stumbling. Across the trolley tracks you see a cherry glow that flashes on and off. When you are near enough to see that it is a corner drug-store, you hear it buzzing and read, by this intermittent neon pulse, NEVER . . . ASK FOR ASPIRIN . . . ALONE . . . TINS OF TEN AND TWENTY . . . ECONOMICAL BOTTLES . . . FIFTY AND ONE HUNDRED, and look in at the display in the window. At the curb, in the gutter, lie an empty liquor bottle and an old brick. You pick up the bottle and try to read the label, but the printing is in red and cannot be read by the light of the neon. Grasping the bottle by the neck, you hurl it at the window. It makes a terrifying clank as it strikes the window, but bounces off and smashes against the pavement. You pick up the brick and feel the rime crusting its porous surface, come back to the display in the window, panting at what you are going to do. The brick seems to be attached to the building and you raise it with an effort that might raise the supporting wall around the window. It is too heavy to hold, it is falling. The brick comes down on the window with a sickening, shuddering crash. The plate glass has toppled in on the display

in great jagged sheets. You push your hand through the splinters to grab at the large, economical bottles. When you jerk your hand back clutching one of the bottles, there is an ugly cut across the back of your fingers. You cannot run, for somehow the weight of the brick has gotten into your blood and turned it into wet clay. You pant and gulp for the cruel air that eludes you. But you must get away, though you can hardly walk.

Once more at the lake, that same ghostly thing that cannot be run away from, stronger, heavier than before, lies imprisoned underneath the gelatinous surface of new-formed ice, probing for an outlet. Finding the place where Eftikious fell through, you throw yourself down on the pavement near the lake's edge, open the bottle of aspirin, and shake out a handful of white capsules. You stuff the bitter white pills into your mouth and scoop up handfuls of lake water, punching through the blackish membrane, to wash them down. You do this over and over until there are none left, and you stare idiotically at the empty bottle. You set the bottle afloat in the hole you have opened, and go dazedly back across the lake to the island. You wonder if the ice will break and you will drown as you search the shrubbery again for an opening onto the island. A small gap that you must have missed before leads up from the lake, and you crawl through, huddling behind the thickest shrubs to keep away the wind, and cover yourself with woods litter.

Listening to the sift of the wind over the ice, and feeling the granular tendrils of cold air trailing through the meshwork brush, it is possible to believe that it is the animus of the lake sieving for you. Scrabbling movements mouse through the brittle, dead ground cover, then leap in sudden, formless rushes through the treetops. Grotesquely swaying polyrhythms flow into mystic circles and dance into fantastic frenzies against the somber, eerie night-glow over the island.

The cold is turning bitter, and the ice is harder. The stiff ice might now support a heavier weight. You almost wish that Eftikious would come back. Even running away from him, you are not so awfully alone. There is comfort in the presence of another human being, even if you have to run away from him. Company is a matter of degree, and you wonder how close a person has to be before he becomes company, and how far away, before he is absent.

The island begins to move into the vortex that drew you into the park, and the darkness overhead begins to churn. There is a tightening in your throat and a twisting in your stomach. Your mouth is full of salt, and your bowels wrench you double, racked and squeezed and strangled all together. The churning subsides only momentarily, leaving you shaking and chattering in your own sweat, and the cold is sinking deeper into you. Then wave after wave of cramps twist you into the loose ground, a spiral seed trying to plant itself in the frozen

soil. You are numb with cold, but your head feels unbelievably hot and flushed, and the intolerably jagged, broken twigs on the ground stab into your tender sides. You grope and stagger up, grasping at dead brittle branches which snap under your weight, plunging you crashing and sprawling down. Transfigured cries for help that you do not recognize echo back and forth across the lake, and you cringe to listen. But the cries are not repeated, and you are somehow glad because you fear what might come out to your rescue. Struggling up and through the brush, half standing, half staggering, careening and deflecting drunkenly from every obstruction in your path, movement for the sake of movement, you burst suddenly through the standing twigs and sticks, and there is nothing to arrest your fall to the ice. There is a horrendous lurch as you strike the ice full length in a belly-flop. The ice starts to buckle and fold under, but you are so near unconsciousness that there is only a dim awareness of some peril. In a freezing panic, you crawl along the surface, eyes tearing, salt blinding, retching and slipping in your own slime as you vomit, hands sticking to the ice, frigid needles stabbing into your hands, arms, and legs, skin tingling and the knife-edged wind cutting deeper and deeper through your unresisting pores. The ice is harder and more slippery than before, so in your weakness you cannot get up. You are not even sure that the movement of your hands and feet is taking you anywhere, that you may be simply floundering fish-like in your own freezing slime, or that you are congealing some part of your body in contact with the ice, while only deluding yourself that you are actually progressing to the shore. The translucent bowl of night seems inverted over your ears like a double-funneled irridescent black sea-shell, a roaring, drunken horn screwing into your head and trumpeting there. Your dizziness is like that convoluted horn, and you are only faintly puzzled that trees now seem to be growing in the ice on the lake. But you have stopped sliding around, and the ice seems to have taken on an abrasive quality. You struggle to your knees and crawl on a streamer of this new quality, lighted on your way by glowing, throbbing lights. When you are able to stand uncertainly, you walk until an unexpected form looms in the shadow of a ring of trees. You back into a thick-trunked poplar and collapse against it while you stare at the gaunt form. Still as a statue, it broods in the flakes of light that seem to be fragmenting from the haloed streetlamps, and you realize that that is what the strange apparition is, a statue. You wait to see whether, like the Commandatore in *Don Giovanni*, this ghastly thing has come to take you melodiously to Hell. Gossamer trolley-threads glimmer in the near distance, and the brusque, grinding roar of a streetcar fails to stir life into it, and you cautiously approach, climb dizzily onto its pedestal, and place your hand defiantly into the frigid bronze fingers. The effect of the touch is electric, and you snatch your fingers away

and stumble from the pedestal reeling. You rip your trousers and twist your ankle, and limp numbly away.

The streets beyond the park shimmer now in new-falling snow. You take a sidestreet at random, determined to walk it out to its end, wherever that may be. You scrape thin snow off parked automobiles and lick it from your hand, and wonder if you do this because you are thirsty or because you feel colder outside than inside. The path follows the winking lights, and you notice a brightly lit yellow leaking out of a tall squat building. A large, plate glass door frightens you when you get nearer, and you tremble, approaching it with empty hands. When it hisses loudly and swings inward, you step awkwardly back, almost stumbling, and cover your face with your arm. But the glass does not lurch and collapse, and the open door breathes warmth at you.

The air in the hall is so warm after the outdoors that your face and ears and toes ache at it. Two women in white uniforms look up as you enter a small office opening off the hall, and their eyes are wide with fright. You stumble forward to assure them that they have nothing to fear from you, but your voice is broken by a sob as you start to fall. Your head hits the floor and absorbs it, so that there is nothing but blackness underneath you and you are falling. When the floor has flowed out of your head and back under you, you are sitting in a wheel chair wrapped in blankets. The two nurses are still there and look up. They have noticed that the blackness has left, look at one another, and one of them walks rapidly out of the room. The nurse that stays behind has steely eyes behind steely spectacles to hide the fact that she has no soul.

"What happened?" she says. "Can you tell me what happened to you?"

"I — I've been poisoned." You wish that she would go away and let you sit there with the floor flowing back into your head.

"Poisoned," she says, getting up but pretending to be unconcerned. "Oh, how? Where have you been, and how did you get into such a mess?" She is ugly and you want to cry.

"I don't know. I think I've taken an overdose of aspirin."

"You think! Well just how many do you think you have taken?"

"What?"

"I said how many," and her voice is hard as her eyes behind the hard glasses. You want to break into the hardness and expose the emptiness within. Besides, you don't remember how many.

"You don't remember. Well, how many would you say? Just at a guess, you know. More than ten?"

"Yes. More than ten." She comes over to the wheel chair and stands so high you get dizzy looking up.

"Now," she says, "the doctor is coming down in a minute, and he is going to be very interested in knowing exactly how many. You had better try to remember." The other nurse returns, followed by an angry-looking man in a white coat. The steel-rimmed nurse stops him at the door and whispers to him, and he looks even crosser. You can see his mouth form the words, how many? It is no surprise when he stands over you, dizzy as the steel-rimmed nurse, and demands.

"How many did you take?" he says angrily.

"More than ten," you answer innocently.

"Can that shit! Exactly how many? Ten? Twenty? Fifty? A hundred?"

"Economical," you mutter, turning away, and that seems to satisfy the man. He writes something on a clipboard that steel-rims hands him, and she comes behind you and starts to push the wheelchair into an adjoining room. It is a cold, gray room with sweaty walls and another door at the far end. There is a table or stretcher on wheels, and they tell you to get on it and lie down. The other nurse rolls a small stand with equipment on it over to the wheeled stretcher. The doctor stands over you again, holding a long rubber tube in his hand.

"Now I'm going to push this tube through your nose and down into your stomach so that we can wash that poison out. When the tube gets down into your throat, I want you to swallow. Understand?"

You nod, not understanding at all, but too frightened to disagree. He introduces the tube into your right nostril, but something stops it. He tries to force, but it will not go through. "Is there something wrong with your nose?"

"Deviated septum."

"Is there any obstruction—anything with the other nostril?" You shake your head, and he begins to push the tube into the other nostril. The edge of the tube feels raw and scrapes against the lining of your nose. You feel the tube in your throat and try to swallow, but everything comes rushing up out of your stomach. Seeing you start to gag, the doctor shouts, "Swallow! swallow!" One of the nurses grabs an aluminum pan and a towel, covers your mouth with the towel and turns your face over the pan. But too late, some of the vomitus rushes out onto the doctor's hand before he can snatch it away. "Goddamit, I said swallow!" He wipes his hand in disgust on part of the towel the nurse is holding over your mouth. He pushes the tube more sharply, clumsily, for the nurse's hand is in the way. "Now, swallow," he says, "and keep swallowing." You can feel the tube in your stomach, and want to tell the doctor that he can quit shoving, but you submit dumbly until he realizes that the tube has gone as far as it can go. Cool liquid siphons through the

tube and you can feel the coolness in your hot stomach. It turns the liquid warm and there is a suction drawing out the contents of your stomach. The process is repeated several times. Cool in, warm out. The door at the far end of the room opens, and a tired, embarrassed-looking policeman in uniform comes in and joins the group at the table, looking down at you. The doctor nods, pulls the tube harshly out, and leaves with the nurses and the equipment. No one has told you what to do, but you lie still and wait. The cop pats your shoulder.

"What's the matter, sonny, you disgusted?"

You turn away from the look on his face. A kind face. He is trying to understand, but he is too goddammed stupid and kind to understand. The doctor and the nurses understood, but he does not. So there is pain on his face, and you are afraid to look at it because it will hurt and you will cry at its understanding, its kindness, and its stupidity. He pats your shoulder again. Somebody's father.

Two men in plain clothes come in through the door the doctor and his nurses wheeled you through. The kind cop walks away from the table and talks to them. "Is he o.k.?" "Yes." "Why did he do it, such a young kid?" "Who knows? Why do any of them do it? *A goyische Kop.*" They are delaying, but all of you know it is time to go. The doctor and the nurses come back again, and the doctor speaks to the policemen quietly. You can see that he is telling them how many, and you start to get up. But you feel weak and almost fall off the table. The two plainclothesmen reach your side quickly and take firm hold of your arms.

"The doc says you're o.k. now. Take it easy."

Still wavering in their grasp, you begin to feel sick. This time you say what you feel. "I think I'm going to be sick again."

"You're o.k. says the doc."

"Oh, let him," says the kind cop, "let him a few minutes. He looks pretty shaky." They relent a bit, uncertain what to do. "He's o.k.," says the doctor, and you look pitifully at the steel-rimmed nurse. "If you feel that you're going to be sick, just open your mouth wide and breathe deeply through it," she says helpfully.

"O.k.? Want to try it now?" say the policemen. "Do you think you can make it if we give you a hand?"

You do not answer in words, but start to get off the table, the policemen holding you under your armpits. "Here, get the wheelchair," one of them says to the kind cop, and he rolls the chair under you. They push you out through the door at the far end and up to the squad car, and at sight of it you feel another wave of nausea.

"Can I sit by the window?" you ask as they take you under the armpits again. They hesitate at the open door of the car. "I think I'm going to be sick again."

"Quit faking," says one of the plainclothesmen. "You're all right now. The doc says so." He tries to push you into the car but you cling to it and retch at the plainclothesman's shoes. He steps easily aside and you miss. "All right. Sit by the door." And you sit by the door, the window open, and the plainclothesman sits next to you, his arm resting easily over your shoulders. At first it seems friendly, and then you realize that it is not for comfort that his arm is on your shoulders, but because he thinks you might do something crude and uncivilized, like jumping out the door.

"How do you feel now?" he asks. Maybe he is being kind after all.

At the station house, they ask you why you did what you did, and you are too tired to care. You admit to everything they say until they mention home. Then you shrink and shrivel inside and yell and pound and will not go, and get very sick. Then they have to promise that they will not take you home, book you for attempted suicide, and take you into a cell block adjoining the office. There is a vacant steel bunk in one of the cells, and they open the door and lead you to it. Inside the cell is a seatless toilet bowl, and next to it, a sink. There is another bunk across from yours, and someone lies on it in a snoring stupor. They lock you in, and you are not sure whether you lie down before you fall asleep.

You are on your back and it is very dark when you open your eyes again to a faint moaning. The pitiful sound is very near, and you think of the man stupefied in the other bunk. Through the dark his darker form rocks to and fro on the edge of the bunk. There are words in his moan, and by degrees you can understand them. "Oh, Lord, yes Lord." A deep, dark voice, almost night, quavers there. You cringe from the rocking form, oh, Lord, yes, Lord, and doze from time to time. And when the morning light begins to print prison bars on the floor of your cell, oh, Lord, yes, Lord, the voice is still there. Then a policeman brings you scalding black coffee and a huge chunk of bologna between two slices of pasty white bread. The man rocking on the bunk opposite does not stop his chanting, nor look up. You sip at the tin cup and burn your tongue, oh, Lord, yes, Lord, and are shattered from your breakfast reverie when the chant is broken by screaming and a white man runs his cup back and forth across his cell bars. The guard comes and takes away the cup, oh, Lord, yes, Lord, and for a few moments there is a surprised silence down the cell block. Everyone listens to the Negro chanting, oh, Lord. Then a sound of running water, a flushed toilet, and the sound of running water, louder than before, yes, Lord. You can hear the water on the

floor, oh, Lord, and voices starting to protest, yes, Lord, and the chanting growing louder to rise above the disturbance. The water sounds like a flood, and you can hear the water splashing on the floor. More guards come and go, and they open your cell and several more prisoners come in. The new prisoners talk about the insane white man who bangs his metal cup on the bars and floods the floor, oh, Lord, yes, Lord, and there is singing down the block. At the sound of the hymning, the white's voice rises to join in, madly off pitch. It is bedlam, and the cell seems to spin around you. Some of the Negroes in the cell with you also join in the singing, and you are stunned at what they are doing. There are women's voices among the strong, wild men's, and the mad white's loudest of all, washed in the blood of the lamb. You can see the new arrivals now, Salvation Army men and women, passing out leaflets to the men in the cells as they sing. A soldier passing out leaflets proclaiming God's love turns away as one of the Negroes reaches out a hand to accept it. Realizing what he has done, the man turns back apologetically, gives him a leaflet. "Didn't mean to pass you by," he says, smiling. "We're all brothers under God." Then he looks at you. "How about you?" he says heartily, "wouldn't you like to learn of God's love?"

"No."

The soldier pauses, having drawn fire. You can see clearly he has not given up. But he goes away, returning with a little, grayhaired old lady in uniform. She is wearing a bonnet and has snapping blue eyes. She leads the men in your cell in prayer, and you turn back to your corner. But you know she is watching you. When she is finished praying, she leads another hymn. And you know she is watching you.

"Young man." She says it with terrible authority. "Come here and speak to me." You go to the bars and look between them at her. "Aren't you interested in God's love?"

"No." But you hang your head.

"Look at me." It is hard to meet her eyes.

"No."

"Don't you believe in God?"

"No."

"Then how do you think we all got here? Where did we come from?"

"I don't know. There are other explanations besides God."

"You mean you think man came from the monkey?"

You look at her between the bars. "Why not? It's possible."

"Well, maybe *you* came from the monkey," she says, "but God made me." Oh, Lord, yes, Lord. . . .

Somewhere beyond the raveling threads of light stitching in, stitching out

of your eyes, sewing your head to the pillow, a flag is being unfurled, a company is being formed, and a white bedsheet draped over a mobile metal-framed screen in the hall outside the shower room is the barber's summons. To this standard the patients rally. Sixteen chairs rank the gray stone floor, and we sit still on the late morning gray to longterm inmates who lather faces white out of gray stainless steel stoups with pasty hands that catch hangnails in fleshfolds while suds go up your nose. Chairs scrape and people rustle into chairs closer to skin scraping and blade stropping, and to the occasional slits of red that spot the white faces. Between red gashes the barber tells a man that he needs a haircut and an electric bee begins to buzz in the wrinkled hand of the longest-termed mate in the barber's retinue. Wrinkle-hands shakes an electric swath over ears and neck, leaving a bowl of hair inverted over the man's head. When the next man being shaved sees that knob of hair and jerks his head, the barber cuts him badly.

"Sit still," says the barber, "I'm not through."

"You're through," says the man.

"Then get outta here you sonnofabitch!" The barber whips away the man's bib full of suds and blood, and a ward attendant comes up grabbing the man's arm and neck and heaves the patient out of the room. "You're not a barber, you're a butcher!" yells the man. "You're a butcher-r-r!" he yells from down the hall. Then a rapidly closing door cuts off his cries.

When the barber shaves your face and you begin to feel the little nicks, you start to work your mouth and chin to smooth your face and try to give that blade less chance to catch in your skin.

"Keep still." The barber is impatient. "Keep your face still."

"I'm trying to help."

"Don't help."

You need help. But it is a good dodge. It sometimes distracts him enough so that he does not notice how long and curly your hair is growing. When you have been in the ward two months and your vanity begins to grow as long and curly as your hair, you don't want to see that circle of naked skin with the knob on top exposed to the rest of the naked necks. When the question of a haircut cannot be avoided by wriggling your chin, maybe the barber can be stalled a little longer by telling him that the doctor is going to take you off shock treatments and soon you will be able to go home for weekends and have your hair cut by a decent barber. As you wipe your face on the bloody bedsheet hanging outside the shower room, you must remember not to put it quite that crudely. That would be uncivilized. But it's the only way to get out of here with your scalp intact. *A goyische Kop.*

JOHN & ROBBI KNAGGS







GRANT CHARLES GUIMOND

East Lansing

from Loves of Attrition

Don't Stir

I love the sky tonight.
Clear and brittle,
Bright tiny cubes crackling high in it
As sighs of warmth pour over them,
Quietly on their way to a far off place.

Shhh . . . Don't stir . . .
It's just the whirrr of the refrigerator . . .

Soft as a hum your damp hair on me
Takes me back to a time in Barbados.
A small room like this,
The same refrigerator
Catching and holding its breath,
Catching and holding its breath . . .

After our tears were spent
And her belly returned to normal
(though we paid dearly for that, we cried)
We listened to the sobbing refrigerator
As it tried to catch its breath.
It must have cried too, we thought
(though we hadn't noticed.)

Then we slept,
Her hair damp and soft as a hum on me,
And the sky was clear and brittle
And bright tiny cubes crackled in it
As sighs of warmth poured over them
(though we didn't notice . . .)

Shhh . . . Don't stir . . .
It's just the whirrr of the refrigerator . . .
We're reminiscing . . .

Krabbin Snalesong

Awhy allong ondune assong
A krab uv sunkind wawkin kame,
A sidewise wawkin krabbie kame
        On dinno deemta leve is naim,
Bud juss sed "Kirak Heriam"
        (Assiffa krab kould tawk.)

Bayside im sunkind singin snale
Di slyde hymnsellv allong,
On donna sorduv C-horse sittar
        Strummda sorda snalie sortie
        Kinda krabbie liddle diddie
        Inna kinda rithim tootha wawk.
(Inn-a kinda Hollydai rithim two-tha sly-din sigh-dwise wawk.)

Sew strain ja payras thiz
        Eyed Neva scene install miy ears,
Annihilate moneya slowwish dai
        Unmangey a slewwish bitch.
(Mindja mania slow-wish dias unmania slew-wish beat-ch.)

Apun daresong day wawktalung
Damm manly am i lassand,
Thad Kirak Heriam sighed-whys krab
Ondit singking sordid slightding snale
        (Weather strumpet C-whores innis ham.)

Eye nevasore thet paragon
        (Butthive erd tails abottom,)
Inseams thayv pigtop a hummin clom
        On maid clomshouter oven.

(* To be read aloud in a run-together, phonetic, Scottish brogue. — Ed. note)

ring-a-ling a tinkling bell

I

ring-a-ling a tinkling bell
around the town it runs,
past little boys
with little toys
resembling real-life guns.

all assorted gorgeous flavors
chocolate cherry lime,
past little girls
with hair in swirls
who haven't got the time.

II

Lay down your toys!
you blue-eyed boys
Your swirls!
you lovely girls, forget—
the flavors soon are few,

and little boys will soon be gone
and little girls will too.
and you'll be left
with no good humor,
no good humor left for you.

III

ride the ring-a-linging tinkling bell all 'round the town
and feel its tones
until you're grown
from ticklish toes
to brainy crown.

its ting-a-ling ringing will be your transition
your wrinkling bodies will riseup no more,
and reason and quickwit replace your good humor
and you will belie you,
and love you no more.

and flavors of chocolate and cherry and lime
will leave you behind
analytical doors,
and the make-up of icecream will fade from your faces
and Revlon and ManTan will clog up your pores.

Peter Fiore

East Lansing

These Foolish Things

At three o'clock in the morning it's always Billie Holiday. When we tear at words trying to make them stick in our blood. And there's only the violence of that death, burning our souls clean, and Billie Holiday in a dark room with a few empty tables, the blue lights. They have to lead her up to the mike now and the band can't get the key right. When she tries to fire the piano player, the manager comes out on stage and after almost five minutes she starts singing, joy and tears, its all there, pure and dying.

Or it's the first Billie Holiday I ever heard, an old 78 my father has, with the chipped edge so you miss half of Teddy Wilson's opening solo. The label's scarred up from where the needle on an old wind up ran over and dug into the paper and I had pasted a 1948 Christmas seal on my favorite side. The needle crackles through the grooves and when you hear Billie it's like she's singing from the other side of the world with the saxophone coming in from somewhere on 52nd Street.

And so you're mixed up in that too, now. Because joy began one morning at three o'clock and on the flip side of my mind Billie Holiday was singing, fine and mellow, revolving somewhere in the center of the red Christmas seal, the blue lights and a white gardenia in her hair. I could taste her on your lips, dying for us in your black hair.

For Three Dead Astronauts

Perhaps because we don't count the dead and don't believe in death but tonight the television people couldn't even pronounce your names correctly and kept stumbling over their prepared lines and outside it kept on snowing and when I got drunk enough I jumped off the roof into a snowbank. The announcer spent about five minutes telling us how one of you was born in Michigan and another had once lived here, and President Johnson mentioned something about our hearts going out to you, like Richard II.

Because the moon's already been bombed and even lovers don't believe in it anymore. Only life can go boom but now there's no more cold beers after work and no more screwing, no more hot throb in your throats when you wake up and maybe if I could think of the moon as something other than another Super Bowl I wouldn't have to corner the maid in the cellar.

This brave new celebration for fatherless children's fathers. Buck Rogers.

Milestones

For John Stacy

Mary said you would have appreciated how the *Tribune* reported your death: AUTHOR KILLED IN CAR ACCIDENT. A scared teenager in stovepipe pants running away from the cops in a stolen car. But that's not what got me. I can only remember meeting you twice and both times you were drunk and needed a shave. Thanksgiving at Mardee's when you came in with a group of people I didn't know and listened to a description of the play I was writing and then launched questions at me until there wasn't any play left and everybody apologized for you because you were drunk. And then over a year later at Steve and Roberta's and we were all eating tacos and listening to something on the FM and you were sitting on the bed reading Ian Fleming out loud.

But even that was over four years ago so I guess it was the headlines that got me. And the first thing I thought of was hearing about you and Jim setting up that shop in Gaslight Square in St. Louis and making money faster than the register could ring it up because you discovered if you put 19th Century lithographs on kleenex boxes you could sell them for a dollar, and a lot of other things people come to Gaslight Square for. And then coming back up to Chicago and starting the *Revue* you had written at The Rising Moon. The critics liked it and I guess somebody must have told you then you were a writer.

And then I didn't hear anything till I heard you were dead and that was three years later and the newspapers said an author had been killed and the police were charging the scared teenie-bopper with manslaughter.

And that's what got me. Thinking of Chicago on that Thanksgiving night in the crowded room and of Roberta's basement apartment with tulips blooming outside the front window, wondering if you had ever thought to yourself *I am a writer* or if someone had ever told you or what. And when did you tell yourself. In St. Louis, but you were in business then. I guess you had told yourself by the time you went to Washington to contract the film, which will probably never be produced now. And when did they tell you or better when do they recognize behind the three day stubble, the clothes that didn't match and the shoes that didn't shine the man who writes. Or do they only tell you when you're dead, in headlines.

DOUGLAS BLAZEK

San Francisco

Radar of the No-Tongue Words

A little boy is playing
w/a balloon
hitting it down
as it comes
floating up.

if I were to ask him
what he was doing
he wd ask me to
flip his balloon
to him.

there is also a fly
in the room
zooming thru the atmosphere
& when it gets
near me it
shoots off in another direction.

if I were to tie a string
to the balloon
& to the fly
allowing each
to manifest their activity
yet allowing
a curtailment of their sweep
I wd be able to speak
to them like radar
& know the most
of their phenomena.

M. ALDENBRAND

East Lansing

You are so outside of me
that my tongue shivers
when it touches you
        as a winter worm
        awakens to morning
        climbing the more-frosted,
        more-frosted tunnels
        toward the outside air
it frightens me to find you so warm
knocking from the outside
so warm
to burrow into you, my tongue,
your skin is so hard
my tongue pushes at you
nudges at you
while part of me
between me and you
is always outside.

At Dusk

The line of red-yellow wall,
the translucent red-yellow window dust
forces
the evening into me
like a cat meowing
throughout the kitchen—
I am here—
stomach through esophagus
I am here in this urgent outness
inness—slowly inness—
draughted outness
at this moment
in and outness
a bicycle wheel
spinning
through afternoons
of making ice cream.

A. POULIN, JR.

Iowa City

Ode to Peter

This day, Peter, was an aquarium
with angel and gold fish flashing
through branches of grey coral
at the bottom of a circulated sky.

This day, Peter, was a supermarket
produce counter piled ceiling
to treetop to mountain to skyhigh
with blank pumpkin faces, ears
of corn, huge organs of gourds.

This day, Peter, was Woolworth
plastic Halloween monster masks
monstering kids into creatures
they're scared of but want to be
and are one moonless night a year.

This day, Peter, was the siren
of those kids' laughter ringing
ruin of the afternoon as they came
up from wells and ponds and lakes
of leaves smelling of a cool
and heaving slime we've forgotten
and avoid like a sea of death.

This day, Peter, was
quartz under a cat's eyes.

This day, Peter, was a pumpkin
carved last week-end for David,
a goddamn nice toothed and smiling
orange glowing king of a pumpkin
perched on the Porsche we watched
from the living room while sipping
mulled wine, a peach of a pumpkin
caving in now on the porch corner
like a boxer's face to frost's punch.

But most of all, this day, Peter, was
a quick exploding bloom of an autumn
erection of a conception of and dying
of and of an orgasm of and resurrection
of and ascension of one eternal and
beatific vision of one blessed madness.

ROBERT VANDER MOLEN

East Lansing

from Morning and Night

I

In the morning I slept late
        She working
Fixed coffee and sat on the half sun terrace
        This was a memory
And the grass I can smell
Before the sun baked it flat

        And alone
        Is the majesty
                Is the shadow
        That succeeds
        The reading willow

The pine boughs
Shift to themselves over
The sullen
Brown grass
The snow finds melting shale
Plates
The needles
Changing faces

The air must
Be sweet

Leaves are
Small since they blew
In the fall
Around the pine ground base

The desk where I sit is touched
With mist
The black tree there
Close to the peeling eaves
Is thick crumpled bark
Dry on this side to white motions

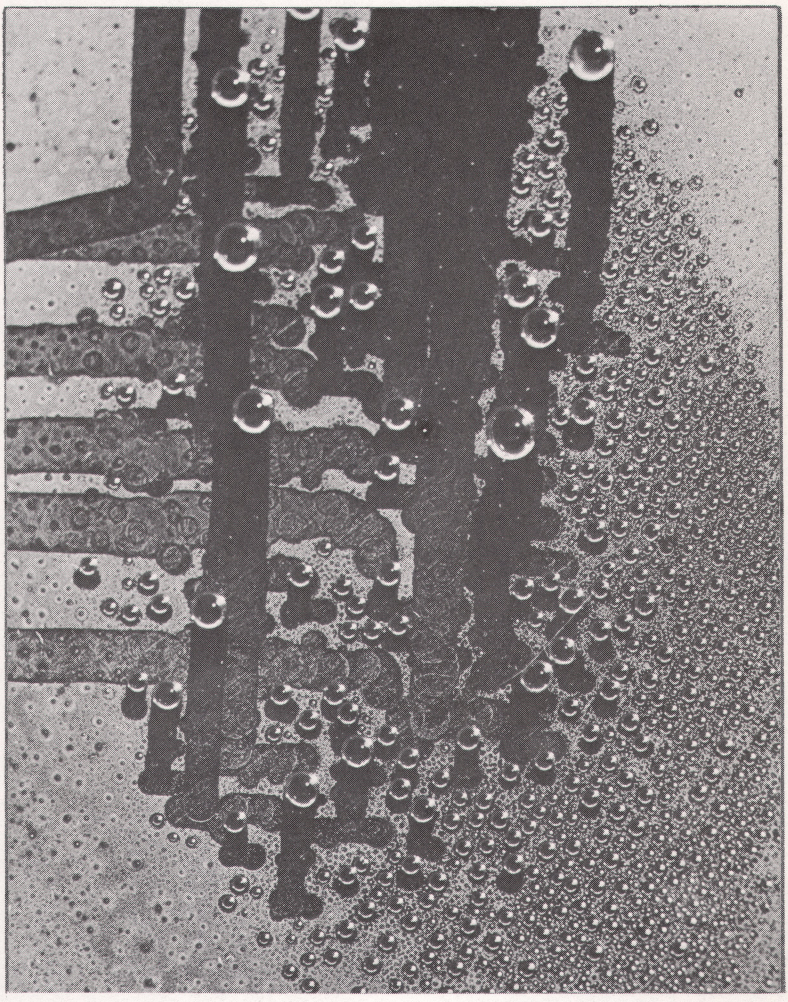
The ground is wet
And tire treaded

Last year once
When I was home
I walked to the creek
In my hunting shirt
And there was a low ceiling
The mist crowded in the tall barkless trees

My feet were wet
In last years grass

JUSTIN KESTENBAUM





HAROLD WITT
Orinda, California

I'VE LOOKED FOR YOU, WALT,
at the next bend of the country
not far from the highway noise, your whitebeard, redcheeked
open necked mystical Santa Claus flowing along,
with a timothy sprig in your teeth—
to clap you on the back and ask, "Where have you been,
camerado, brother, good old friend?"
and take your big glad hand.

Walt, I wished to fly beside you through
the land of your rosy vision, starting from Paumanok
where your perfect mother rocked, over the cloverleaves
of concrete, above the black
and poisonous hazes of decaying cities,
out across the prairies that from a height
still look bright.

I waited in the Chicago night and thought I saw you
at that fluorescent station of en masse,
wearing your old hat and bootstraps, broadly smiling,
trying to sell "Leaves of Grass"—
but it was a grim gramps who whispered, less beguiling,
"Buy some postcards, fella? Look at those—
six poses without no clothes."

Then on the train from there, I hoped to find you
telling tall tales in the observation car,
an anachronistic Buffalo Bill with an enthusiastic twinkle,
but, from the scuffed bar,
the waiter brought glum drinks that made a tinkle
to desperate hairsprayed ladies and one gent
bored by the continent.

I was sure you'd be in Hollywood where I got off
and where many writers of stature are sooner or later hired,
but in reality's foolish studios I saw
poetry wasn't required—
and drifted to where you might be lifting, along Skid Row
(a Blakean angel fallen to modern hell)
disillusion's Muscatel.

I went to a meeting of weehaired, longbeard Beats
who claimed you their Messiah, but if you were there
among the pot and jargon and the LSD
you appeared as a light blur
of ectoplasm in a dark picture, who could be
Christ, Longfellow, D.H. Lawrence
or even H.D.,

and when they did stripteases while reciting,
and finally smashed the piano with hatchets, I decided
in spite of the enjoyable jolts you got from thinking of naked bodies
you probably would have derided,
if you could ever have been satirical, displays like these as oddities—
and you never did care much for the silence
of anything after violence—

Walt, you couldn't have imagined such bludgeoned music,
much less, O Pioneer, these phases, phrases and crazes
that make a quaint antique of your supposedly robust century,
still, in many places,
if there are no souls to invite, there's grass to mow if not loaf in,
and wrong as you might have been about nature and standing at ease in it
there are still the birds and the bees in it.

Something you didn't perceive, omitted from your long lists
of large acceptances, a feeling under a rock
in the mind's dark, hissed ideas out
through the air of atomic shock
while your beloved mankind revealed his ugly snout
and bristled lips, piping what you denied—
a song of suicide.

I wanted to tell you, but you had already overreadily eddied
into the everything—it isn't possible now
to be a clean and not a Nietzschean superman,
knowing the whys that we know,
and to go on, as if Hiroshima hadn't happened, or Viet Nam,
denying the murderous aspect of the eagle
as an American ego.

No hard feelings, Walt—I looked for a long time and waited
thinking you'd like to know the latest dope
of codes on cards and numbers and data that numb
the yes of your yawp—
but you were as outdated as your overcompensated repression,
and, ignorant that the power you glorified always corrupts,
too much out of touch.

RON ENGLISH

Ann Arbor

Collapse, Robbers
The mains are burst
the city stinks; I
LIVE here, this is
wrong, this place should
run straight up through me
I am supposed
to know the language

What am I to make
of street signs set up in alien
characters, weird tongues, the citizens
giggling in outlandish hats,
insistent games with the rubble dead?
unless
        the electric streets are drowned
in the birth of strangely familiar animals, & I
Rear them
in the ruins of shattered hotels
where I
was

A Resistance

Anybody's hip
pocket is a trap
reach in sly &
Whap
you got somebody's split
cowhide & personal
papers lunching on yr
Real hand.

Charge/for monks

Pulse & gore of a naked
tomato slice
beckons;
angular violence of love;
Walk in the garden / murder aphids —
a Flower is at war

I won't talk about
beef. Gun
defies imagination.

A slug of cheese invites atrocity.

Now, go
back.
Measure.

At Grand Mother's

When he was nine he was always ashamed

In the parlor
where sun would have vaporized the walls
light leaked in
lost itself among swollen plants
or suffocated in the stuffing of immovable chairs.

With his sister, he would go in
On the ancient piano,
cinder dry and tall as a father,
tuned by age and the slow weathers of the house
they played stubborn duets
that scared the dogs
and made the pictures buzz
over the piano's dusty mouth.

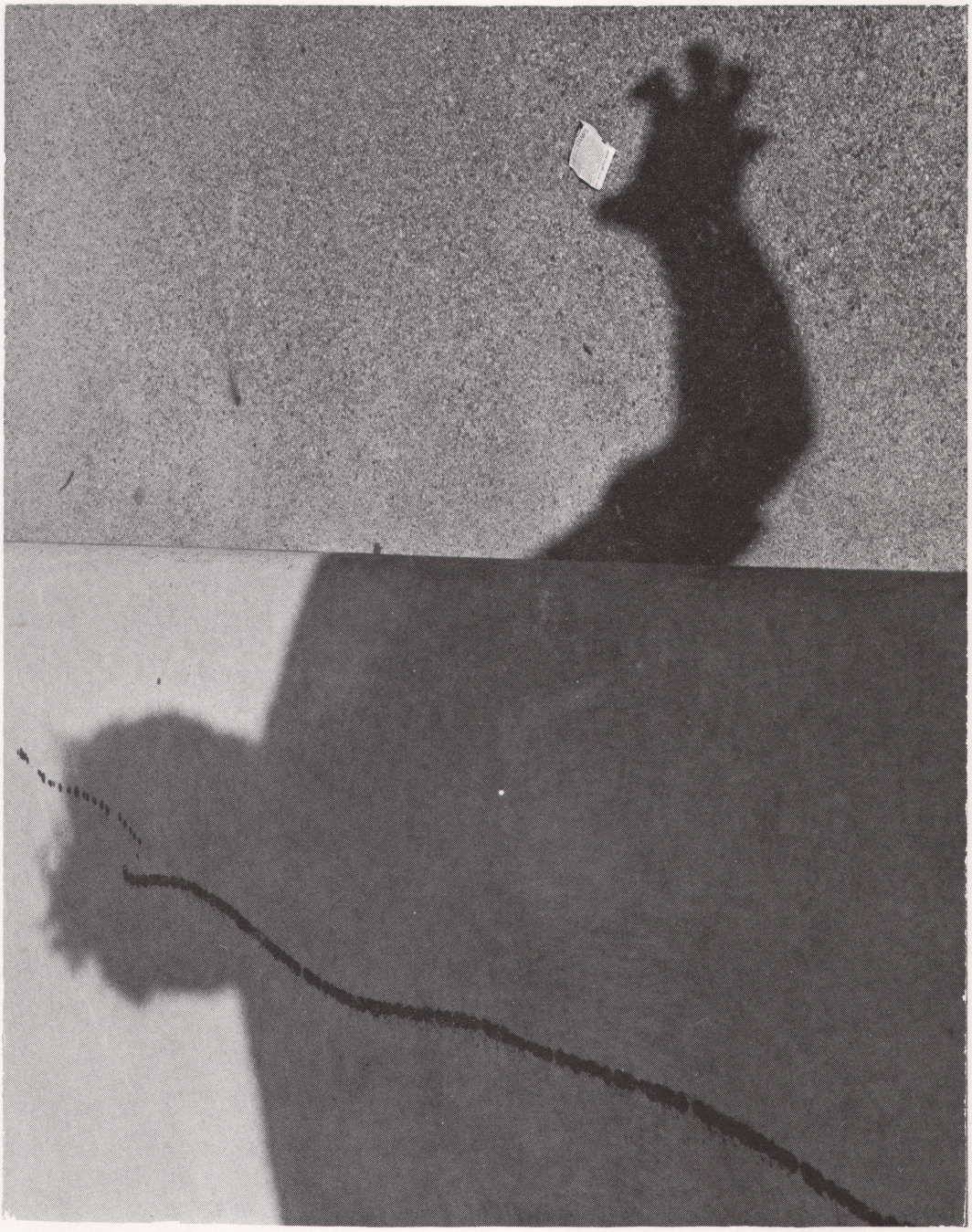
When she wouldn't stop
he had to grab, shove her off
hate the plump shoulder,
wrinkle and slap of her thigh on the bench.

Alone, he played savage and monotonous tunes
five notes
on a scale like a family of skulls

In the kitchen he shouted
Milk, Please?
When his grandmother bent close to hear
he made a sign of pouring

When he was nine he was always ashamed.

CHRIS EDICK



PETER FIORE

East Lansing

Faces and Places

For Malcolm X

The time of white fathers and mothers
But you were black, man,
carmel fudge really,
Like the wiseman at Herod's court.
Malcolm, it's like a Holland Tunnel
always and with no billboards
but men step out from the walls
and gesture and give you the finger—
A twenty-one jewel CIA man the color of
LSD and green berets.

Malcolm is the metaphor,
The blinding clarity of blackness
And the crying pierce liquid noises
of Eric Dolphy and we can
never catch them again.
Pearl Harbor was good to the last drop—
But hungary it's like being shot on a
February afternoon
like castration
at three o'clock on Sunday
like a burning cross
only they don't play Wagner
like
being kicked out of the world
like
the cold side of the moon.

When they poison your food
it's grey and milky.
It's what it feels like, Malcolm,
And now it's ten minutes to three.

You stayed with Whitman on your way
to Canada
and later with John Brown in Virginia
And policemen in wailing cars.
Nigger sounds like bombs that don't blow
up
hot summers in yellow backroom apartments
buttons for sale
basketball chains
bird feathers
Paul Revere on rollerskates
saddlebags filled with god
and
barn burning in Queens.

Landmarks only tell you New York
sixteen miles and where once
ten indians and three hessians fell
and not black women waiting for the
White Plains bus.
All time is motionless
at the back entrance to tomorrow.
Make the wind howl, Malcolm,
and rip off the door.
Say the wind was god
when the world began.
In the beginning was the wind
And the wind was with Malcolm
And they strung him up on a stage
and shelled his guts with a
sawed-off shot gun
and hammered a stake
through his black heart.

And in less than three years he rose.

D. L. ROSOCHACKI

East Lansing

Stilled Life

four poems

I

raw glass
eye
stareway
to the uninhibited
green
grain
of a memory
sworn before this
court as authentic
reality be
cause that hurts
when grippled in
the singularity
of the eleventh
birth
day.

II

tangled berries of a sweetness
spent
relent
        less in its departure
from the tongue of belief
aware in strangled conceit
that cores of laughter
                        bleat
into surrounding after
                        taste
whispers bitter on another tongue

        the night of closing
        the closing of night
        aches and stretches.

III

a flake of Beatrice was all
I brought away
a tempera day
ago
passion lifted the chip
of her lip
from canvas kitchen and bath
four windows from a home—
less manner

as a story goes of a flake

Beatrice's stretched
canvassing brain
washed from the sky
pink and rye
floated home below the blue—
nessessary for discretion—
airy sounds of painterly
on the sides of barns
a gaudy chip
of a red 'lip
put there.

IV

in the hickory
        washes of eyes
my days wandered
        piling
end upon end upon
        the snare
at the back of a glance

rily rivers screamed
        in courses
out to a fool
        who stared
out too long
        at flashes of sun—
                smile

I was burned beyond
a branch in wind in

        hickory washes
        too cautious
        to be plain brown.

GARY GILDNER

Iowa

Lady in the Ring

Rider of your bare back beast
riding tight to him your beast
your hair burning in the wind

if I took off my old skin
and hugged his ribs his lean
dancing in the ring

if I could press to him as you
press happy in your hips
prancing in the ring

if I could whisper to his neck
stroke his naked pace breathing
pulsing in the ring

I'd find a way to find my thighs
I'd find a way to raise them
from the darkness of the night.

Miss Endicotta T. Briskett

Miss Endicotta T. Briskett, fifty-three,
who went to the State University every summer off
and on for twenty years to keep up her teaching eligibility
(she had all six grades in Rock County School since '31—
or from the day her father,

old Sam T. Briskett,
ran off young Albert Cook with a gun
for reading Miss Endicotta Edna Millay): was taken back—
O my!—the summer of '64 when in the classroom door
walked her instructor,

to sigh, pointing out the window,
"That pure blue sky, that mellow sun, those miraculous fat
birds—why I believe this day is Heaven-sent!
Now tell me, do you think of Wordsworth? Thoreau? Or"—
and he bent a strange

cool eye toward them—
"are you thinking, 'Gee, maybe I'm pregnant!' "
Well. Miss Endicotta T. Briskett, like Coolidge,
chose not to run (also she needed the grade)—
but it wasn't much fun,

she could tell you,
hearing this man day after day sway the class
his Devilish way. So one night when curled fast asleep
under her duckdown quilt tippet, she got her thimble,
yarn, and colored thread,

made a soft little man
with a mouth all red, then without a peep
took her favorite hat pin, and struck the fellow
stark dead.

STANLEY COOPERMAN

Vancouver, B.C.

Elegy in a Suburb

Like prancing pachyderms
the joyous quake
of his flesh
could tickle every corner
of the breasted girls
who burned
after Friday candles;
irridescent bagels
ringed
his nose,
and when he danced
a crazy fiddler
leaped from the wall, shouting
for blue cossacks.

He invented
Chagall,
mated with amazons
in all our dreams,
a boy so astonished with the
miracle of breath
that skullcaps
floated on the air
like birds . . .
and it seemed as though the Brooklyn
rawness
of still unsated meat
would somehow redeem its weight
and turn to white music,
giggling
above the stars.

Marty, Martin,
where is the jewel that you wore
on the knuckles of time?
I see you now
burdened by monthlies,
choking on furniture polish:
between your legs a roll
of unpaid broadloom
dangles among children,
and your wife
picks the holy drumstick of God
with toothpaste teeth.

Where is the silk that you kept
in the closet of your skull?
Where are the purple hats
trimmed
with circles
of grapes and moons?
Why is it, Marty,
Martin,
when I leave your house
my mouth
is filled with a flavor
of grease?

Programme for a Wednesday Afternoon

Small worms
shaped
like yesterday
kneel between the toes
of North Shore Ladies, who

leech
at each other's breasts,
remembering other
kisses
tasting of leaves.

Yet nothing like green
should lovers be
whose dossiers indicate
potential for
perhaps . . .

Because they require
jewels beneath the lid
and worms to praise
limbs
of predictable
gold,

they gather together
in perpetual
cubes,
a landscape
of matchsticks and wire

where no tigers laugh:
only parakeets, who
sometimes
wink
among the begonias.

Theodore Sjogren

THE STORM

PART I

Uncle Al moved forward. I saw him standing up high in the bow up against the dawn gray sky in the rain. He had his hand up with the spear in it, up over his head poised and ready to slash down with that gut-yell he gave whenever he saw one move, his blood cry like some maniac you saw in a movie chasing a girl with an ax or one of those wolf characters with the two fangs dripping spit.

We went along the creek bank and I hated him then, hated my old man too but it was not the same with him, seeing him there in front of me slouched in the rain, the wind lashing the hair that dangled down his neck from under the soggy, crumpled captain's hat. But captain of what? A crudding dory with a bunch of slimy eels flopping in the bottom. I didn't hate him like Al because it was only the cold, and the rain, and being up all night in a stinking creek on some crazy idea that made me frightened too because now I felt he was losing his mind.

Then Al gave the yell and I saw his arm drop. The spear hissed but I couldn't see it in the water and the water made me sick, having to look at it. Acid cold sucking around the oar, the creek was dirt gray like the sky and the slanted rain bubbled its skin. I backed the oar hard against the current but I didn't care and Al was leaning over stretching for the spear handle that I could see now, the very end just above the surface, quivering and ducking, and I knew he'd got it but I still didn't give a damn and then Al yelled,

"Get the hell over,"

and I thought, fall in, you bastard, seeing him out over the water trying

to get the handle to yank it out of the muck on the bottom; but my old man was there leaning forward now, and still I could only see his neck, white-cold under the perpetual weather burn of years and years in winter and sun, straining forward to see Al bring it in and if it was a big one, a heavy one, another few pennies to buy the boat back, crazy or not.

So I dug harder with the oar. The wind skipped over the creek bank and swung the stern but I accelerated the swing and brought the bow up. Al leaned out and got the spear. I saw the black eel-shape twisted around the shaft, the bright needle teeth biting where two of the three prongs ripped its side. Grabbing it by the tail, Al tore it away, let the spear fall in the bottom and then, as with all the others, whipped it back over his shoulder, his square face and tiny animal eyes burning with glee—wielding his ax, his two fangs gleaming like the maniac he was—brought it down in a high swing ending with a loud thwack on the seat next to my old man.

"That's another," he said.

It lay there, its skull crushed, twitching.

"We got a whole damn boat full," he said.

The eel's tail and most of its thick body dangled in the bloody bilge water, slopping back and forth with the slap of the quick waves of the creek. I watched it slither off the seat into the slime puddle. We had a pail but the pail had been full halfway through the night and now the eels, not all dead, covered the bottom so I could feel them moving around my ankles.

"That's enough," I said.

"We got to get as many as we can," my old man insisted.

"Sure," said Al, "we can't stop."

"I'm cold," I said. "The tide's in. We ain't going to get any more."

"We can't stop now," said Al. He had the spear up, already panting for more.

"Blood-sucker," I said to him.

"Come on," said Al. "Move her over. It's too deep here."

"Son-of-a-bitching blood-sucker."

"Shut up," said my old man. "We got to get what we can."

"I'm cold. I can't stand this rain. The wind's picking up and we've got an hour before home."

"I don't like it, but we got to get more. Give me that spear," said my old man and he got up where Al was and took the spear, had to pull it away because Al had his fangs sharpened killing all night and couldn't feel the cold or the rain or the wind either, he was so hot to kill more. I heard my old man say it happened in the army, why when he starts to kill, ants or fish or any damn thing, he goes out of his head like a fever. But I thought he was

just a maniac and always had been.

"You stupid son of a bitch," I said to him. But he was so dazed he didn't even hear me.

"Follow the bank, get over," he said. "It's too deep."

"Sure," I said. "I told you the tide's in. Any idiot knows that."

Then I raised my voice so my old man could hear it through the wind and the rain.

"We can't get more. The tide's in."

But he didn't even turn around. I felt like I was in a loony world, like it was all a crazy dream. How many times had my old man told me about tides? Any kid knew about getting eels. And if they were worth money why'd we always before either throw them away or take them home to eat? Al wanted to kill all right; he thought it was great with the spear and he didn't care; that's why he got the idea but my old man didn't have to listen. He was getting desperate and he would listen to anything.

"We're gonna get stuck here. The winds whipping up. We'll never get across the bay!"

Nobody listened. I was scared and cold. In the night it had been all right until the sudden wind change—all at once you could hear it crossing the marsh, whipping the tall reeds a good mile or so away and rushing across, but you didn't know until it hit how icy cold the wind would be and then the rain came. You could smell the rain in the cold wind and it drove inside you. We didn't have slickers or anything. In five minutes we were all wet all the way through.

That was hours before light. And when the dawn came it was worse because then you could see the gray clouds boiling close overhead and you knew it was the first of the fall storms and would last for days, and I saw my old man watching the clouds, sitting slouched in the center seat letting Al have his fun, not caring about killing eels except to get the boat back and now he knew there was no hope, he had to know that except he wouldn't admit it. Even before in the good weather we hadn't been able to go out far enough to get the right fish and before that when we had the boat with the nets and all the equipment and could go for weeks out to the reefs and to the other coastal islands and do everything we knew, we couldn't get enough. Not to keep the whole family going. But in the good weather there was always hope before the winter came. Now it was here.

I didn't feel the cold then because I saw my old man, huge and thick in the bow waiting in the rain, and I knew he wouldn't see any more eels and I knew he knew it, somehow, but he waited. The bottom of his shirt was untucked and I watched it whip about in the wind and I could see the bare skin on his

back exposed to the rain and I could feel my teeth gritting.

We went up the right bank a half mile or so, and I was able to steer with one oar astern as we went with the wind. I sat huddled in a ball with my feet up out of the bilge water watching the dark mud of the bank slide by and now I could see over the reeds, the tide was so high, all the way to the point where the rocks appeared and disappeared in the torrents of rain.

Al was cold, now he couldn't kill.

"The kid's right," he said. "We better get out."

And I hated him double, because he didn't care about my old man or anything. If he couldn't kill he didn't want it.

"Shut your fat mouth," I said then.

"Watch it, kid," he said, and he gave me those small eyes, like I could see him in the army peering over a rifle killing whoever he had to kill or whatever moved.

"Screw you," I said, and I was afraid of him all right only I hated him more. Hated him through the cold even if he came at me.

"Sit still!" my old man yelled. Al had started back at me. Now he had the head of the spear a foot behind his neck, ready to jab. "I told you what I'd do if you ever touch that boy."

Al looked back at my old man, looked straight into the spear head.

"He's a wise kid," said Al. "I wasn't gonna hurt him, just make him a little wiser."

"Sit down, like I said."

You could tell my old man didn't want any of this business; his voice was flat and hard and he scared even me. But I had a loose mouth I couldn't stop.

"I can take care of myself," I said. "You don't have to worry about me."

"Some smart kid," said Al.

"I want the both of you to shut up," he said firmly.

"He got you out here," I said to my old man. "All he wants to do is kill those eels. He doesn't care about the boat or anything. It was his idea and it's crazy. Why didn't we ever sell eels before if it's such a good idea?"

I can still see it now, the wind lashing the rain in his rough, whiskered face and the spear pointing back at the two of us. Each time a strong puff burst across the creek, his hat squashed flat on the one side of his head. For a long time he stood like that, then he put the spear down and sat in a sudden, heavy lump in the bow.

"I guess the tide's full in," he said. "We better go."

"We won't get any more," I repeated. "We got a boat full anyway."

"Sure," said Al, "and I got most of them. You think it's a bad idea, well I got them for you all right."

"They're not sold yet," I reminded him.

"We got to sell them," my old man said. His voice was dead in his throat and empty. The boat had drifted up into the reeds. He sat there surrounded by reeds in the wind and the rain, and that captain's hat looked so ridiculous now I had to look away.

"I guess we'll sell them," I said then. I had to say it. "If we get a good price we can come back when the weather breaks."

He looked up at the sky again, and I could imagine all the things he was thinking, and then he said,

"All right. Start the engine."

We broke out of the creek into the first line of sharp, cresting seas and headed out into it until we cleared the shallows around the mouth and then we swung west along the south shore but the shore was nearly out of sight in the rain. You could see the isolated squalls slanting far out, slanting in the hard wind until each squall blew itself out and then there were others. I watched a big one driving towards us, coming from the north and spreading, but by the time it got to us it was only a sudden slap of increased wind and a drilling of rain. While we were in it you couldn't see. I kept the speed up, so all you knew was the thump thump thump of the bow sending spray and I watched the spray to judge the direction by how we hit each wave. Sometimes the wet on your lips was salt and other times it was clear sweet from the rain. But all the time you had water washing over your face, burning in eyes and on lips.

Then we were out of the squall and I could see the shore again. In the bow, I heard my old man talking but I couldn't hear over the outboard. It was colder now in the open; the wind pressed my shirt tight against my skin and my hands were white and wrinkled. For a while I kept my feet out of the water, in the bottom, but the air was colder so I put them back down with the eels. I felt one biting me, and I tried to kick him away but his teeth were in my shoe. I let him nibble, then he bit through and I felt the needle teeth in my foot. I kicked hard then, and the dory swung around. I heard the engine racing and my old man shouting and Al laughing like a bastard but I was in the bilge on my back and the eels sloshed up over me. The slime and blood covered me, an eel flapped in my face and I fell down again trying to get up.

"Shut the hell up," I said.

It was Al's laughing face in the rain and I wanted to smack him. I knew one day I would, too. But just then I couldn't move. I was on the seat again and the new wet turned me blue; my teeth chattered and the slime was on my hands. I tried to crowd around the outboard to steal its warmth.

I didn't know how my old man could stand it, there in the bow. Then I remembered days when he had the boat in the winter and he'd come home with ice in his beard and cylinders glazed solid on his arms and legs except where the joints were, and when you went out to see the boat there were silver streamers in the rigging, high mounds of ice in the bow as though one huge wave broke and froze solid, in one second, and the deck ice was three inches thick.

I remembered all that and I knew he was something I'd never be. But I didn't want it like that, not the way I saw him now, without the boat; it took your life but gave you nothing. I saw what it did.

Ahead then we could see the fleet, the gas barge, and the first of the channel markers appearing from the haze. I couldn't see the west shore, where the town was, but I knew the two large fishing smacks, lurching at their moorings, and from there I remembered how to go. Jamming my hand against the throttle, I tried to get more speed, but we were wide open. My feet were numb now and the tips of my fingers burned. Constantly, with shudders that began in my guts, my body twitched and jerked like a fish flopped out on a deck. I had to grip the outboard to keep from shivering right off the seat and my feet kept jumping in the bilge water, splashing strings of slime in the air and on Al's back, which was all right.

There were lights in the town; you could see the main street leading down to the wharf; the fishery was there and when we passed the town dock you could see my old man's boat tied up along the lee side of the inlet right under the shack where the guard was. Alongside it, on the outside, was the patrol boat, not out on a day like this; as my old man said, when it was rough and you might need help, they were in the shack playing cards and when it was bright sun and pleasant they were roaring around wasting gas. And he said that before they took his boat, so there was no reason to lie, and as long as I remember I never saw them out on a day like this.

Finally we were past the town far enough to see the house and I headed in toward shore. I felt then no matter how near it was, I'd never make it, I was that cold. We had the wind behind us now and the dory began to plane on the waves, lifting high on a crest and then dropping in the bow in the long rush in the trough. I couldn't steer right I was so stiff and shivering and the dory lurched sideways but kept going and the engine was on full, racing us toward the shore, and through the rain I could see the gray patch of sand between the rocks and the rocks were smothered in foam and spray.

"What are you doing!" yelled my old man.

But I couldn't move. I sat huddled gripping the outboard and all I could see was that spot of sand rushing at us. My old man kept yelling to cut it but I didn't cut it until the very end and by that time it was too late to cut it.

We lifted in the last breaker, bounced down in the foam and then crunched up on the sand so hard Al and I flew forward and crashed into my old man.

For a moment we all lay there in a pile. Then I climbed out and began jumping from one foot to another on the sand.

"I'm sorry. I had to get in. I can't stand this cold."

"Well, you're in," said my old man.

"That's the dumbest kid I've ever seen," grumbled Al.

"Shut up," said my old man.

I felt like an ass. But I couldn't control myself, not now.

"Go up to the house. Al and I'll get the eels in."

"Like hell," said Al.

He was already out of the dory and part way up the slope.

"Get back here," yelled my old man.

"The hell with you," said Al. "I'm getting in where it's warm."

Then I couldn't believe what I saw. In an instant my old man was out of the dory with an oar and before Al could even get running in the thick mud the oar had thwacked the back of his head and he fell forward with his arms outstretched face down in the mud. He made a loud plop in the mud and then lay still.

By that time I was running for the house and I was afraid he'd come for me too. But all I knew was to get out of the cold. I crashed through the back door and Ma was standing there, so I almost knocked her down getting to the stove.

"What is it, boy? What's the matter?"

But I couldn't answer. I got the burners going and put my hands over them. My teeth began to chatter louder.

"Where's your Pa? Where's Al?"

Finally Ma came over and shook me. But I just stared at her with that wet from my hair running in my eyes. I saw where my shoes had brought thick globs of mud all across the kitchen. Then Ma shook me again and all I could say was,

"Al's in the mud."

"What?"

"Al's in the mud. He's lying there in the mud."

"Where's your father? What happened?"

"He's out there."

Then suddenly I felt like a coward and I ran back out. The wind and rain hit me and I fell down in the wet grass. I could see my old man in the dory stuffing eels in sacks. So I went to the shed and got more sacks and ran down past Al who was still lying there and I said,

"I got more sacks."

"Listen, boy, get up into the house. Get warm."

"I'm all right."

"I'm sick of that bastard Al."

"You gave it to him all right."

"Sure. But he had it coming."

I didn't feel cold any more and I liked my old man the way he was and I felt stupid for running to the house like I did.

"There must be a hundred eels," I said.

"We got to get the boat back."

"We will," I said. "I know we will."

I had forgotten that the whole idea was crazy. I felt proud of my old man conking Al and of how he could take the cold. Now it seemed we were doing something sensible all right like true men saving the family. It wasn't until later I'd remember how crazy it all was and my old man would seem again like some wreck cast up on the beach.

It wasn't until later that I'd remember how everything was falling apart.

We got the eels in sacks and there were five of them. We each took one and then came back and this time my old man took two and I got the one left and followed him toward the shack. We threw the eels in the shack.

"After breakfast we'll get them to market," he said.

When we came out into the rain on the way to the house I looked toward the bay and there was Al still lying face down in all that muck.

"What do you want to do about Al?" I asked.

"Let the bastard lie there," he answered. You see he was Ma's brother and my old man never liked him much anyway. Only after the war he'd been sick and they let him stay, then he worked on the boat but when the boat was gone there was not much he could do. And he ate plenty, too, and always bitching.

"I'll be right in," I said, and I went toward Al.

I thought he might be dead or something but I could see him breathing, although I didn't know how he could get air with his face in the mud to his ears.

I grabbed him by the hair and pulled his face up. His eyes flapped open through the mire and he made grunting noises with his mouth.

"You stupid son-of-a-bitch," I said to him.

He looked at me but I saw the emptiness in his eyes.

"How do you feel now?" I asked him, but he could only grunt. His eyes flapped at me and tried to focus. "Maybe I'll go get the spear and cram it up your rear. How would you like that, you big jerk?"

Then my arm got tired and I let his face flop back in the mud. His arms and legs made weak movements but he couldn't raise himself. I was getting cold again, and I thought about going back, but then I had something else I wanted to say, while I had the chance.

I pulled his head up.

"You know what? I'm going to go get all those magazines of yours and bring 'em downstairs and take my damn time looking through. Then I'm going to take all the best broads and color their tits purple and put a big black mustache on each one. And when I'm done, I'm gonna take a crap and wipe my ass with them."

I let his face plop down again and I went toward the house. But I came back and yanked his head up one more time.

"You know, you look pretty stupid lying here. How come you like to lie around in the rain in all this mud? It's funny, I always thought you were pretty big stuff, about the army and eels and all that. But now all you look is funny. You wiener."

Then I crammed his face down good and far in the slime and left him there soaking up rain.

It was warm in the house and the two kids were up but I didn't see Cindy. My old man was sitting at the kitchen table with a puddle all around him, and Ma was getting coffee.

"You get changed," she said to me when I came in. "You get up there right now."

"The boy's been out all night like that. It won't hurt him one minute longer, will it, son?"

"Heck no," I said.

"Have some coffee if you want."

"All right," I said.

It was great there the two of us now it was over but being what she was Ma wouldn't understand. I could see her getting all excited but not knowing what to do about it. She wouldn't understand about staying in the wet clothes, now, the way my old man did, why it was necessary after a night like that.

"You haven't told me about Al. What happened to Al?"

"He's outside," my old man said. "You think he'll be in soon, son?"

"Sure," I said, "I was just talking to him."

"You got to learn not to worry," my old man said. "You got to take it calm and easy. Now, Mary, you sit here and be still. And let the boy alone. He's not a boy—he's a man, after a long cold night like that."

I knew Ma didn't believe what he said and I didn't believe it either,

except because I wanted to. He wasn't taking anything easy. And I was too busy being all tough and guts in the warm house after whining all the way home to realize how scared he was now because all this time he didn't believe the eels would pay and he had done it only because it was the only thing he could think of to do. And now he was back home and would find out soon.

"I'll go get dry," I said.

Now I didn't want to stay in the wet clothes, not now after seeing what a punk I was really.

"All right, son," he said.

"Put the wet ones over the tub," said Ma.

Running up the stairs, I was thinking about eels and the boat so when I opened up the door to the room where I had all my clothes I didn't expect to see Cindy there in her underwear.

"Get out!" she screamed at me.

"What the hell are you doing," I said, which was another dumb thing because as anyone could see she was dressing.

"Get out of here!"

But I couldn't move, and I couldn't take my eyes off her. It was the way she made me feel, every time I saw her, and her being my sister and all. Seeing that figure of hers I knew what a young squirt I was, how next to her every human was ugly and useless. Sometimes I wanted to kill her for having to be around her always and never able to do anything. I knew then why Al had all those magazines.

"Why the hell should I?" I yelled back. But it was stupid and I knew it. My face was burning and I was angry because that was the only thing I could think of to be. And somehow I couldn't leave the room like that and be a man too. "I need some dry clothes," I said.

By now she had a blanket from the closet wrapped around her. Her face was red too and flared her anger.

"I've got a right to privacy," she said. "I don't have to stand for being walked in on."

"When you sleep this late you don't have any right," I said.

"Listen," she said, "get out of here."

"After I get my clothes," I said. "Don't rush me."

And I forced myself to walk slowly across the room and then fumble in the dresser for something, anything, to wear. I came up with a pair of pajamas.

"You going to bed?" she said, all smart-ass like, and I went on as though I had to bluff it, pretend that's what I'd wanted in the first place.

"Why not? I've been up all night. I wasn't in bed all warm all night."

"I don't care what you were doing, you better get out of here right now or I'll call downstairs."

"Big deal," I said, "some hot stuff. Listen, I'm seventeen now and whether you think so or not I know what a dame looks like."

"You don't know anything," she said. "All you know is from those magazines,"

"Oh, yeah," I said. "Oh, yeah?"

"You and Al and those magazines. It's all you two deserve."

"You better shut your mouth," I said.

"If you're so big, have you ever even kissed a girl?"

"I've kissed plenty girls," I said.

"I'll bet," she said. "I'll bet the only girls you kiss are in those magazines. I'll bet you sleep with them under your pillow and take them to the bathroom with you."

"You better shut up," I said, "or I'll tell you what you can kiss right now."

And just as I was going out the door one of the bars of soap from the closet hit me in the back of the head but I was glad enough just to get out.

"Damn," I said to myself, standing in the hall, "damn!"

I'd show her; I'd show her somehow some day. But all I had were pajamas and now I had to go to bed.

I went downstairs and flopped on the couch. Then I got up to build a big fire and when it was going strong I got on the couch again and put on my pajamas and then in one minute next to the warm fire I was sound asleep.

I dreamed of killing eels only then I was Al chasing some girl with an ax and the girl was Cindy all right, but I didn't get her. Then there was yelling and I woke. It was Al and my old man going at it, but if Al didn't watch it he'd get another oar on his head. I slept again then and the next I knew my old man was shaking me.

"We got to get the eels in."

"What?" I said. "What?"

"Eels. Are you awake, boy?"

"Sure." I tried to get my eyes working, but I was tired now the way I should have been before but wasn't until the fire. "Yeah, I'm awake. Sure."

"It's afternoon. Those eels ain't clean so we'll get them to market in a hurry."

"Listen, I'm tired as hell."

"I know, boy, and I wouldn't ask you if it wasn't important. But it's the last thing I can think of."

"I didn't mean that," I said. I didn't want him to think I meant it that

way, that I didn't understand. "It's just that I need a minute."

"Take your time and get dressed. It's raining hard and the wind's up."

I got up into dry clothes and I put the slicker on over them. On the north side of the house, the side facing the bay, the rain splattered against the windows, and when the wind hit hard you could feel the house shudder.

I went out backwards into the rain. My old man was in the shed and I could see three sacks of eels in the wagon and then my old man slung the other two on his back and he turned to yell at me through the rain,

"See you can pull that,"

and I grabbed the handle and got it going where it was hard gravel in the drive but then we were in the road and the mud was too deep and I fell down when the wheels went in to the axles and then the wind knocked me down again. I got up swearing, and I gave a good yank but the wagon turned over.

"It's another damn year," I screamed, "rain and wind and snow and stinking storms and fog and nothing to show for it. What do you care, anyway? Why the hell?"

"I don't know what you're saying. Boy, when you talk like that—"

"Get off the island. Why stay? Let's cross over and all get jobs. I can work. I can get in some gas station or factory or anything."

He was yelling at me, through the rain. The wind took his words, and the eels were out of the sacks slithering in the mud, as though they were alive. He stood and yelled, and I couldn't hear him, and then I was in the mud getting the eels back but all I could think was what I had just said, how I had wanted to hurt him then, how I hated the island and what it was doing to us and I wanted him to quit, him and his damn eels. Only I didn't feel that either. I was only tired and cold again and all wet. I couldn't take it like him.

"It's just these eels," I yelled.

"I know," he yelled back, and his words stopped.

I looked at him standing, crouched under the sacks to rest without putting the load down, the rain washing over his face. He was looking at me, waiting; his face was white under the tan like I'd never seen it before.

"I din't mean what I said," I told him.

"You got reason," he said.

"No. I didn't mean it. It was this lousy wagon. I can't pull it in the mud."

"You better grab one sack. Leave the others here. If we sell them all right we can come back."

"All right."

I got one of the sacks up.

"You look pretty funny," he said. He was smiling at me now, trying to make me laugh.

I tried to laugh for him. But I felt hollow and cold.

"I guess I used to like playing in the mud. I guess it's funny all right."

"You're getting to be a man now. You don't think playing in the mud is so funny. That's one of the things that change."

"I guess so," I said.

We were walking now, heading for the town along the shore.

"You're getting to be a man," he said again. "You're the only boy I got."

I could remember back. When I was young on the island it was all right. I could remember sailing in the dory and swimming on the hot days in the summer and spearfishing and stealing beer with some of the guys and how it was at night in the interior drinking it in the woods and then even the winter storms with the wild wind and snow and being inside, so you could look out the window and see the bay, and beyond the bay the ocean if the snow wasn't too thick. But then I went in the boat and it was different. It was exciting at first, but I began to see how we were losing money and it was serious then and I watched my old man working three days at a time without sleep and never getting enough, and then getting the loan, and then the boat was gone.

But it wasn't in my blood. I knew my old man loved it even with what it did to him, but I began to think of getting off. That time I went to the mainland with Alfy, seeing the city for the first time, how much there was to do. On the island you either fished or bought fish or sold groceries. And there was such a difference in the chics. I remember watching them in the town, all dressed in clothes in the day nobody on the island would even think to wear ever, dressed like that just to work. It was like there were two kinds of women, island broads and then all the ones on the mainland, and there was no connection at all.

The only difference was Cindy. Around that time I began to notice that. She was like a city chic, not that she had clothes, but the way she acted and looked. It was a trial being around her. When I thought of the mainland I thought of finding one like that. Every time I saw her I thought of the mainland, of all there was out there beyond the island, not just girls but everything, and I wanted to get out.

That was why at times I couldn't take my old man, the way he held on and on. It was obvious to anyone, anyone but him. The fish had gone, and the market was different. It was harder and harder to get the right load, and when you did you'd used so much gas it didn't matter, and the crud at the market yelled about having to ship it across and how the fisheries on the main-

land had it better for this or that reason, and all it meant was that my old man went out to get drunk.

But it was in his blood. He was part Indian, part of the Indian that used to own the island, long ago. Now there were no pure ones left. They'd been the best fishermen, and when the people from the mainland came over they'd lived well because all the boats wanted them. You'd see them go out with the twenty foot harpoon lashed to the shrouds, the high pulpit arching against the sky. Even I remembered that, although I'd only seen the few old ones and if they were around now they were too old to go out. So now there was my old man, and he was going too, but the Indian part wouldn't let him.

We came to the town then and it was a thing to see. The wind drove the rain up the one street and rivers of water rushed deep and wide down from the hill as though any minute the whole town would wash into the bay. Only the center, where the street humped, was clear, but the mud was so deep there you couldn't lift a foot out.

We crossed the wood pier, and from there you could see the lights in the backs of stores, faintly through the rain, and it was all gray like the days the heavy fog rolls in, all gray like the bay that churned its five miles from the inlet to smack its icy wet against the bulkhead of the main wharf, the only thing that kept the sea from eating the town.

We crossed the street and got up on the wooden walk, and suddenly the rain pulled away because of the eaves over head. Walls of water ran off the eaves, and it was like jumping through a waterfall to get to the walk. Up the street I could see the cafe, the only place that had plenty of light, and we went along past the marine store and stopped in front of the fishery.

My old man flopped his two sacks on the walk.

"Listen, boy," he said, "do me this one thing. Go in and talk to the bastard. See what you can get."

I was about to tell him no, I sure as hell wouldn't, but before I could even say it he said, "I'll be at the cafe. I'll wait for you there," and he turned and walked off, not even giving me a chance.

I wasn't going to do it. I started to run after him to tell him that, but I saw him there all huddled in the rain running across the street and I knew why. Here he was, back with a load of eels, five sacks of eels it took all night to get in a creek, something a couple of kids would do one night in the summer for fun. Not like when he had the boat, several tons of good fish, back from a week's cruise, all clean and good. Now he had five sacks of muddy eels. From a creek.

I thought a minute about dumping them in the bay. But I knew I couldn't without giving it a try. Taking only one sack, I went through the door to the fishery. It was suddenly warm and the rain roared on the tin roof over

head. I stood by the door and waited for Otto to look up, fat Otto who I hated, a greedy German bastard who took everything and gave nothing.

He didn't even look up to see who I was.

So I dragged the sack of eels across to the counter at the back, waited for him to look up which he didn't, and I felt like calling him something good then, but all I said was,

"I got eels. How much do you give for eels?"

He just kept cutting on a piece of thick fish with his stinking knife.

"I got five sacks of eels, all caught last night, I got 'em right here. How much do you give me?"

He looked up then. It was like just that minute he realized someone was in his place. He looked at me with his squinty eyes, his phony face.

"What do I want eels for?" he asked. "Eels?"

"That's right," I said. "Five sacks."

The laugh began in his belly; I could see the tubes of flesh flopping under his apron, and the whole mound heaved. Then it got all the way to his mouth and the laugh made a sound.

"Eels?" he asked again. And it was difficult for him to talk he was laughing so hard, inside the fat. I thought how it would be to take that knife of his and stick it a foot or so into his gut, not touch anything vital, just tickle him a little.

But of course all I did was wait for him to stop. He choked a couple times, and when he stopped he was breathing pretty hard.

"Well," I said.

"I don't buy eels," he said. He said it just like that, cold, final; not laughing any more.

"I got five sacks," I said. "Five full sacks of dead eels."

"That's too bad," he said.

"I got to sell them."

"I don't care what you do with them. Go ahead and sell them."

"But you're the only one who can use them."

"I told you. I don't buy eels."

He started cutting on his fish. You could see he was through with it. But suddenly I thought of my old man sitting in the cafe, waiting to hear about the eels, even though he had to know it wouldn't work. I thought about all those times he came home through the ice in the winter, doing everything he could to get fish, keeping us all going. And now I couldn't do this one thing.

"Listen," I said, "you don't understand. I have to sell these eels."

The knife slid back and forth slicing thick slabs of fish, working rapidly and steadily like the knife and man were one big machine.

"Lots of people eat eels," I explained. "People on the island here eat them. You don't have to ship them or anything, just keep them and sell them. They got to be worth something."

He went on with the knife. Not even listening.

"It's not like any other guy coming in with eels. This is important. You know my old man. He's given you plenty good fish. Now we got eels to sell."

At last the knife stopped, the thick head looked up and the heavy lips formed words.

"Now, look, kid, if you don't get out of here, I'll come around and throw you out."

"Ha," I said. "You couldn't get around that counter."

"I'll show you what I can do."

I could see what trouble I was getting into. But my old man was there watching Al spear eels in a creek to get his boat back. I could still see him in the rain.

"Everybody calls you fat Otto," I said. "And I think you're a stupid son-of-a-bitch too. And if you didn't have this fishery here you'd be nothing. And I hope all your fish turn into eels!"

He got around the counter all right but I got to the door first.

"I'd like to give you a sack of dead eels right in the head," I yelled back. "You big tub of guts!"

And then I was out the door. In the rain again.

I stood outside the fishery for a long time.

I looked at the town in the icy rain with winter coming on and I wanted to crush it. I imagined I was some giant and with one swipe of my hand I could crush it. I would crush the whole island. I didn't know how I'd stood it so long. I knew sometime I'd get off.

I kicked one of the sacks of eels off the walk into the river of rain water. All the eels came out and I saw them twisting in the current as though they were alive. Suddenly I realized they were all killed for nothing. I felt sorry for eels. They were twisting in the gutter water trying to get down to the bay. It was a lousy place to be, in the gutter.

I struggled to get the other two sacks up. I got down into the street and walked to the wharf. But before I got there I fell down in the mud and one of the sacks spilled out all over the street. I had mud from one end of me to the other, but it didn't matter any more. I took the one sack and spilled it over the bulkhead into the rough water smacking against the wharf. Then I went back and got the eels into the second sack and dumped them into the bay. For a moment I could see them coiling and thrashing in the surf, before they went under, and I was glad when they were gone.

Then I saw all the eels I'd dumped by the fishery. They'd come all the way down the slope in the street and now they were jammed up by the grate that blocked the big pipe that drained the street into the bay. Every now and then one would get in at the right angle, and be gone into the pipe. But most of them were lumped up, blocked by the grate.

I was going to go over and push them into the pipe. But then I saw Uncle Al spearing them, practically in a frenzy, and I saw fat Otto who was the reason they were wasted—and they made me sick. I went back up to the cafe.

I saw my old man sitting at the back. He was drinking alone.

"You want something to drink?" he asked.

I said no and sat down.

"You know, it used to be on a day like this the whole place'd be full."

I didn't say anything. There were the two niggers that worked on the ferry and one old guy I'd never seen before. He looked like one of the tourists that came in the summer.

"Why don't we go home," I said.

"We will," he said, "in a minute."

My old man motioned to Johnny to fill it up, and Johnny came over with a bottle.

"Hello, kid," he said.

"Hi," I said.

"Listen," said Johnny, "I can't do this any more. You can see how it is."

"I was just saying to the boy about it. I can remember we'd all be in here, when the boats couldn't go."

"It's different now," said Johnny. "It's all in the summer now."

"That's only two months. How can you live a year on two months?"

"We better go," I said. "I want to get back."

"A man can't even get drunk on two months," he said.

"How do you mean?" asked Johnny.

"I don't know. I guess we were talking about you."

"I'm doing all right. It's a different way of living. They come in strong in the summer and then you stretch it out, make it all at once. There's less people on the island. Pretty soon we'll all just live here in the summer."

My old man picked up his glass and emptied the little left in the bottom.

"I can't tell you I know I can pay. I'll have to get the boat back."

"I can go one more," said Johnny, "for you. But I can't do more."

He poured into the glass slowly from the bottle.

"I'm sorry," he said.

"I'll get it back all right," said my old man.

"You ought to get off. There's no point living here any more."

"I think I can make it. I'll get the boat back and it'll be all right."

And all this time he hadn't even asked about the eels. It was as though he didn't remember last night or dragging them all the way up here or nothing.

"There's no point though," said Johnny. "The big fishing is from Bedford. You don't stand to ever make it with that Otto running the only market around."

"Let's get home," I said.

"In a minute," my old man said, "I'm talking to Johnny here."

"Sure, I'd like to see you stay," Johnny went on. "There's few enough left. I saw the old Indian the other day; he's walking around with a bad heart. He's gonna die soon and that'll be the end."

"I don't like to see it," said my old man.

"No. Who does?"

"They all come over here, all of them in the summer. It's not the same place. Then when they go everything goes with 'em. I don't know where the fish went."

"You think the fish have gone too?"

"No. The fish are there. It's the big companies now that got the market. You can't make it in one boat no more."

"You ought to get off."

"No. I'm going to get the boat back and then I'll make it."

"You can't make it. I know what I'm saying."

"I'm going to make it all right."

"Let's go," I said.

My old man looked at me.

"You want to go home?" he asked.

"Sure," I said.

"All right."

He stood up and then I stood up.

"I want to thank you," he said to Johnny. "I'll get it back to you, I promise,"

"You don't have to worry about this."

"No. But I will."

"Good-by," said Johnny.

We stood outside in the stiff wind and the hard driving wet. We looked down the street to the bay and across to the other shore and out to where the ocean would be if you could see it.

"I guess you didn't sell those eels," he said at last.

"No," I said.

"I didn't think so. I was crazy to consider it."

"It might have been a good idea," I said.

"Sure, but all this time I knew it was crazy. That's why I hit Al with the oar. I guess I decided to go out there just to have something to do. It was Al who brought it up. But I shouldn't have hit him."

We went along the walk as far as the pier, and then we were right out in the rain, and all across the bay you could see the sky darkening and the clouds boiling and the wind hadn't let up at all. The few boats at anchor were tossing wildly and the channel lights had come on; behind us the town was lit but the rain made the lights dull yellow in the gray.

"You see that out there?" he said. "That'll kill you. Just like that."

We stood and looked out and the cold was not so cold any more and I didn't think about it because I knew what he meant and it wasn't about it killing you—it was something I didn't want to see.

"I'm glad you're my boy," he said, and I couldn't look at him then. "I like the girls all right, but it's different. You're a man now with man's problems. I've been letting you take some of the burden of the family; lately I've been counting on you a lot."

I kept looking straight out. We were getting the rain full in the face but it didn't seem to matter; suddenly it got dark and it was night.

"I don't know what we're gonna do now," he said.

The night had come up like one giant cloud. It closed around the island and the wind was somehow softer and the rain was more warm.

"I don't know what we're gonna do," he repeated.

We stood there for a long time, looking out. Then all at once it was cold again and it was very dark.

"We better go home," he said at last.

And we started away from the pier, going up along the shore away from the town in the rain.

PART II

Now the Indian was asleep. But from his cabin a shout rose in the night and thinned away in the cold air that came in off the ocean as the dawn approached.

All along the shore the night was quiet, and there was only the hint of lighter gray coming up out of the sea. When the shout was gone, the surf was there, low and thick as though the ocean got sluggish this early in the cold, and you could not hear the wind. The wind was full, moving high in the tall trees, but you could not hear it as you did in the day.

Behind the cabin the trees were dark and moving silently. The sky, the ocean, even the white sand of the beach merged in the night. And when that first shout was gone, there came another.

There came from the cabin the sounds of a struggle. It was a strange sort of turbulance, echoing across the quiet shore, out where only the birds and animals should have been, quiet in the night. But the struggle grew more desperate, almost frantic, and the shouts came regularly now.

The cabin sat back against the trees facing the ocean and there were miles of empty forest and still beach where the sound of the struggle could travel each night without anyone hearing it. It began in the early morning, just as

the dawn appeared, and it continued and increased in violence until there was a loud crash, and that was the Indian falling out of his cot.

As soon as he landed he woke. He looked around him bewildered. On his face there were mats of sweat that gathered together into rivulets and ran down to the end of his nose or chin and his eyes were clouded with the burning liquid that was like poison from his own body.

His heart was thudding. It seemed right under the skin, thumping, swelling, bursting to get out. For a long time he was afraid to move, as though any unbalance might start the pain, and he lay there next to the overturned cot on his back looking up at the dark wood ceiling that seemed now to be pressing down.

Clearly he remembered the dream. It was the same one, every night since that one day on the boat with Fred. And in a sense it was not a dream; it was a memory, almost exactly as he had felt it that first day.

Although it was the dream that produced the struggle, most of it was not violent. The sea stretched flat and gray endlessly in every direction away from the boat. Windless, hazy with the glare of the hot sun, the surface of the ocean was like a skin, or membrane, stretched between two skys. The tension between the two worlds was seen by the smooth swells moving listlessly across the horizon, dipping, rising, and as the boat lifted, slowly, soundlessly, and fell, yawning as over that second sky below, he knew it could not hold, the skin was breaking and his body was a figure with arms and legs outstretched tumbling, falling in slow motion through boiling and silent clouds of water.

He opened his eyes and saw the deck again two inches away out of his right eye. His left eye and his nose were smashed against the wood in puddles of slime.

"Old man! Your eyes. Can you see?"

Fred's rough face hovered above him, filling his dream. The lips moved, but no sound came.

He blinked his eyes. He tried to speak.

"I fell in the ocean."

"No. You're all right. You're here."

He was there, alone in the cabin, feeling his heart. He remembered the nets were stretched out on the deck and he had been lying in them. He remembered his head against one of the wooden floats.

"Can you get up? Can you get below?"

"I got this pain."

With the memory he put his hand under his shirt. Now his chest was heaving and he was afraid to move to get back on the cot. His one arm was

twisted under him, but he lay there looking up at the ceiling. His mouth was dry and had a queer taste like blood.

"It's your nose," Fred informed him. "You fell on it."

In order to feel it he had lifted his hand but it trembled so much he twitched his own nose and shot a pain up to his eyes. The boat rocked against him.

He tried to laugh.

"Take it easy," said Fred.

"I don't think it's anything," he said.

"Shit," said Fred.

"I'm all right."

"You can't even move."

He could not move to get his arm out or to get off the floor. He felt the blood pounding in his arm and the needles of sleep began to prick in it. He eased on his side and flopped the arm out. He was alone in the cabin and the dark of night made him frightened in a senseless, unreasonable way.

"Like a child," he said.

But the sound of his voice did not help—it made things worse. He wished the cat would come. He needed to see something alive.

"I know I'm not dead."

But he did not know that with any real conviction. It was something he said to get the dark away. It was the dark that made him lie there, sweating; he could not move until the dawn.

"I think I see the gray now. Some day I'll do this in the middle of the night and have to lie here all night."

But the gray was there all right and now it all began to leave him.

"I don't believe that. If it happened in the middle of the night, I would get up and get back on the cot. I'm not a fool. Lying here is a luxury because I knew the dawn was near. I would get up if I had to."

Saying that he knew he could move now. The gray was all the way in the cabin, and he sat up, steadied himself against the side of the overturned cot and got all the way up. He was dizzy at first but he expected that now.

"How long can it go on without sleep?"

All night for months ever since that day in the boat he had not been able to sleep until the morning was close and then as soon as he slept he had that dream. He suspected he lay there not sleeping for fear of having the dream too soon with the long night ahead before day. Although he suspected that he did not say it to himself, or even think it directly, because it made him feel like an idiot or perhaps that he was losing his mind along with his heart.

"I'll get food today. I don't want to do what I did before."

When he felt he could walk without detecting weakness in himself, he went to the cabin door and opened it. The sun was down still but the glow was bright where it would come up from behind the bank of heavy clouds on the horizon. He looked out across the beach leaning against the door. The surf was low, and the wind was soft but rising. He let his eyes close, and there were pictures in there and one of them was on the boat, returning, watching the island appear below the evening haze of the dying sun. He thought it was funny that in the morning he should have a picture of evening. But it was not funny because then he saw his wife and it hurt him. She was standing before the cabin, watching him come across the beach from the path; she was closer and closer until her face was all he could see; then her eyes were in front of him, and suddenly he passed through them into her head and the child ran from her body into the cabin and he was laughing and singing.

Suddenly the shark flipped over, snapped its heavy jaws shut with a loud clack. The club came down and thunked solidly against the rock of its skull. He felt the shock of the blow tear at his hand and pull his arm away from his shoulder, but he struck again, and this time the heavy club whacked the top of its snout where all its nerves were. The shark lay still and the boy rolled into his arms. He saw him laugh and his wife laughed soundlessly. The child ran and his wife laughed, soundlessly. Her eyes. Then her face.

Then the island was closer.

"What are you thinking?" said Fred.

"I was remembering, once with my father, how we killed a shark."

"He was a fine terrific fisherman."

"My father? He was the sea itself."

And the sea then was cold and flat like sheets of thin ice. Early in the morning the gulls flew erratically, across the heatless sun, and his father was like a bear with his heavy arms exposed to the chill and his big face dark and round. Together they crossed the pier, his father carrying one of the nets he had mended the night before, and he with the head of a newly sharpened harpoon or with coils of line.

"You'll do this every day of your life," he had said. "You're a fisherman now."

"I've heard much about him," said Fred. "All my life I've heard the older men, the ones that are dead now and my own father too, they always talked about him. He's a legend on the island."

"He went out in any weather. Nothing stopped him."

The Indian opened his eyes and looked out across the beach to the low line of surf that broke in a sudden sharp slap rather than the slow, high

buckling of the huge combers of a storm.

"I would like a good storm any day now," he said to the sky. But in the sky he did not see the storm yet.

In the sky he saw only a clear day but cool now with the winter coming. Any day now they would have to get the first of the fall storms. He did not exactly know why he wanted a storm, except it was like an anger he felt but could not seem to get out, not now when his body was so foolish. At first he had been sure he would get back on the boat. For a long time Fred went without him, and did not get anybody else.

After the incident with the net Fred came on his way home in the evenings to talk with him about it.

"How are you?" he would ask.

The Indian would be lying on his back looking up at the roof. "I'm all right."

He lay with his one arm on the cot tucked by his side so Fred could not see it. He had a feeling that even to look at it would tell, as though it had shrunk to half its normal size or was twisted like a claw. Every day now when he got up it flopped down at his side and, in moving it, it never went where he planned, or it did not go at all.

"It won't be long now," he said.

Fred would nod and look grave. For weeks it had been serious, but now it was a fiction they both maintained.

"It was a bad day. There's something wrong with the tides."

"I think the tides are all right. But they trick you."

"Sure. But you can't figure it. There's a storm out there somewhere, somewhere far out, but it's driven the fish away."

"I'll come back soon."

"It'll be good to have you back."

"We'll have to go far out. I've been thinking about the banks off the peninsula."

"That's a chance all right."

"I've been thinking a lot about it."

"We might try it."

"I lie here and I think about it. I can fish the whole ocean in my mind. I lie here and I can see it all."

Suddenly Fred was silent. The Indian stopped talking too and the air grew heavy. Neither one could think of any more to say. Fred looked around the cabin. The old Indian lay on the cot. Outside the dark began to come on and the air in the cabin looked dense.

"Why don't I send the boy again?" asked Fred.

"No," he said.

At first Fred's son had come down to make the meals and bring food. Then one day he had sent him away.

"I don't see how you eat."

"That's funny for you to say, a fisherman. There's food everywhere in the ocean, even at the edges."

"I don't mean that. I mean—"

He knew what Fred meant. He had not eaten for days and he looked it.

"I can take care of myself all right."

"Of course," said Fred.

"Any day now I'll come back."

"I know."

"I've been thinking about places to go. I know how to get a lot of fish."

"The fishing is plenty bad now."

"I know how to get them."

"Well, you get better."

"I will."

"If you need anything I can always send the boy again."

"He's a good boy."

"All right," said Fred.

"Good-by," he said.

Now the sun was up, and standing in the door of the cabin he could feel the warmth and the air was full of the smell along the shore and far out the day wind was a dark line on the surface creeping toward the island. The light wind of morning was always fresh but there was never anything final about it. It puffed and lagged and then fled altogether when the heavy day wind came. He stood and watched it, striking toward the island in thick fingers jutting from the main body, and then the first gust of one of the fingers hit and passed away through the trees behind, and when the main body came it was steady and full of the warmth of the sun.

The beach was bright white now and the sea was blue. All the gray was gone as though a film had been washed from his eyes. He went inside the cabin and left the door open to bring the breeze in. A triangle of sunlight came through and angled across the floor. It was pleasant to see it there, in his cabin. He lay down on the cot. The warm breeze was pleasant. It was good to hear the wind in the trees behind the cabin. He liked it better in the day. He no longer liked nights. He thought now he might be able to sleep.

He closed his eyes and thought about the gulls flying over the ocean, and for a while he even heard them.

The Indian opened his eyes. Another scream had filled the small cabin. His wife was across the room and by the bed before he could get himself to move.

She held the child against her breast and rocked him. The nightmare shone out, from deep within his young eyes, and his small face dripped with the poison of fever.

Then it was over and he saw out the open door and he was alone and it was still light. He could hear the surf rolling higher now, and the wind was loud in the trees. Against the wooden walls of the cabin the tall reeds scratched in the wind.

"What am I doing?" he thought. "They're dead."

But the surf took his words, and his eyes were not eyes but pockets of memory.

"I'm going crazy. I see everything at once."

He got off the cot and stood up. The dizziness struck hard and for a moment he thought he was carrying the net again: his knees began to go out and he sat down in a sweat. At once it all began all over.

"It needs mending. I'll take the net home tonight."

"You don't have to," said Fred.

"What do you want, all the fish to swim through it? If it's a net it doesn't have holes."

"Listen," said Fred, "do what you want."

So he rolled up the net—it made a large, heavy pile—and threw it across his back and shoulders, supporting part of it with his head.

"It'll give me something to do by the fire."

With the net on his back, his two arms reaching back over his shoulders to secure it, leaning forward and bent under the weight, he walked to the end of the pier and then stopped. He seemed unusually tired and the net heavier than it really was. For a moment he saw his father, large, husky, also carrying the net as he did now, but in comparing he forgot his father had not lived to be old.

"What's happening?" he said to himself.

He moved forward and straightened against the pressure of the shifting net. His mouth was dry and the air rasped through his closing throat.

"What am I doing?"

He turned and looked back in confusion along the pier to the fishery, where men were still busily unloading. Then he looked across the strip of white sand to the shed and the wagon where he had to get the net.

His mind raced crazily and he tried to slow it down. Then he shifted the bulk of the net and, balancing it, judging the drop, he stepped off the end of the pier to the soft sand below. He never felt the sand.

"Damn!" he yelled, jumping up.

He flew off the cot and stumbled forward in his weakness. He steadied himself against the door frame and looked out.

"Why do I go over it like this? Over and over."

He stepped outside the cabin and stood in the sand breathing deeply.

"It's because I don't have a life any more. All I have is what happened, all the big things and even the little ones."

He began to walk down to the water. When he got to the wash of the surf he turned and walked east along the shoreline.

"I've heard it's like this, getting old, dying. But there was nothing like it when I worked."

It was near sundown when he stopped walking. The cabin was out of sight behind but ahead there was nothing. Even this walking went nowhere.

"Why do I let it go on?" he asked the empty twilight. His voice frightened some gulls and they flew up into the sky.

"It's crazy."

Suddenly he stopped walking in the one direction and turned back toward the cabin. A fear of the empty beach and the vast gray ocean before him worked inside him. His eyes were burning as though any moment he might break down and cry, like some woman or a child, and he hated what he had become. Nevertheless he headed back almost at a run.

When he reached the cabin he was exhausted. His legs had buckled twice on the way back and he had fallen, once face down in the sand and for minutes he had not been able to get up. It was clear he was about to starve; he knew for at least a week he had not eaten—and now he knew he would never eat, never continue what he was, not another year or a month or even a week.

He entered the cabin and stretched out on the cot. Inside where the twilight could not penetrate it was dark and quiet. He lay still and for a long time his breathing was all he could hear.

In the dark the cat entered the cabin and began to circle the room. He was in there for quite a while, but the Indian had his head buried in the pillow of old clothes and he did not look up. At last the cat came over and brushed against the old man's hand.

"No more," he mumbled into the clothes, "I'm not getting out of bed."

The cat circled again, sniffed at the empty coffee tin by the door, then came back.

"No. I'm here for good. You're the last thing I must send away."

But then he turned over in the cot and in the dark watched the cat pace the room. When it came near him, he put his right arm down and lifted it and put it on the cot.

At being held so tightly, the old tom shuddered.

"You're not used to being held," he said to it. "You live wild, by your own means."

For a long time now the cat was the only living thing that came near him. He put his hand on the cat's back and felt the roughness of its coat. In its old, thick, tomcat head, its eyes were bright and live.

"All right," he said. He put it down. The feel of the cat, the warm thing alive, was worth something.

With an effort he did not enjoy he got himself up. In the dark he walked crookedly across the dunes to the line of black rocks that crept from the beach out into the ocean. His arm hung down like a dead thing at his side, and his head was clouded and dizzy. By instinct he knew just where to go; he did not need a light or a net. He waded in, studied the tops of the rocks until he remembered them, then thrust his arm down through the seaweed to a ledge where he felt the sudden movement but missed it. He went in a little deeper, to another rock he knew, and thrust again. This time he caught a crusty leg between his fingers. He pulled it out, ignored the spiny legs and claws that dug at his hand, carried the crab back to the cabin and killed it on a rock. Then he put all the meat in the cat's coffee tin and sat on the cot to watch.

"That's all you get. I'm not feeding you again."

The cat ate noisily in the dark. While he did the Indian watched him and felt a little happy. But he did not think about feeding himself.

"You're an old cat," he said to it. "Soon you'll die under a rock, or in a bush."

He did not feel happy thinking that.

"I'm sorry I can't do anything to help you. But you see I can't even help myself."

Then the cat was finished and the old man could see his eyes in the dark.

"Go on. Get out. That's all you get. I don't want you to come back."

The cat stood in the doorway and looked back where the voice was.

"Go on. Get out!"

The cat leaped out the door and was gone.

For a while the Indian sat there and looked out the door without thinking anything he could definitely feel. There was a dullness in all his body and in his head. After some time he was compelled to lie down but the dullness remained and there was nothing about it which allowed sleep. As the hours passed, the wind went down. The night became very quiet and there was no moon. For a time now the most important thing about a night was whether there was a moon or not. It was good to see, and it opened up the night and let the cabin breathe as did the sun in the morning. But this night the air was tight and dark and the cabin was crushed by the sky, squeezed against

the trees by the slow pulse of the wall of ocean in front of it.

"I'll think of all the things now because I know it's the last time."

He was not sure how long it would take. But if it took another week or two he would not rise—there was no point in it.

"I'm glad Fred has stopped coming."

But after he said that he was not so sure that was how he felt. He knew Fred would try to get him to eat, there would be argument and perhaps things said. But as long as he had kept coming there was a door open to that other world. Now all the doors were closed.

He realized he would like to see Fred. Or the boy. Or anyone.

"I don't have to pretend. It's true I'm afraid. But what does it matter?"

It didn't matter. He tried to remember the good things now. However he could not seem to remember what he wanted.

It was later by several hours. He could tell by how the night felt.

Once he fell asleep, suddenly, as though slipping into warm water. Then when he woke there was a difference: the night was waiting; the Indian could sense it. He almost got out of the cot to look outside, but he felt he knew without looking. The ocean was gathering. The sky was heavy and rushing forward, descending on the island.

The first gust swept through the trees, high, without touching the cabin. The island gave a sigh and bent in the wind, then a line of sand slashed against the wall and the wind began to sing. There was rain and a sudden cold washed through the cabin and already the surf was churning in a constant thrashing rumble.

He lay still, listening, for as long as he could. In an instant he was up; he flung the door open. The rain swept in and a dark turmoil rushed around the cabin on all sides. He stood in the door and gave a long, loud, raucous laugh. "Good Christ!" he yelled. It was the first of the fall storms. He could see it building in a greater darkness across the dark sky. It was a solid front advancing all along the horizon, a wild, cold, miserable storm to flatten the island and everything in its way.

"It's about time," he screamed at it. "Where the hell were you?"

He leaned against the door and got it shut to keep the rain out. But already he was soaked and his thin body vibrated with excitement. He stood there and shook and waited for something to happen. But the pain didn't come, and he wasn't dizzy. He felt he could do anything now, and all at once the answer was there. It was as plain as anything he had ever thought.

"Sure," he said, "yes."

His body was tense and alive with the new thought. He couldn't hold it in one moment more.

"I'll tell Fred right now."

In the dark he found the path and stumbled along it in the fresh mud. The wind was behind him and seemed to lift his whole body, so all the pains were forgotten; his dead arm began to swing with his walk, and his head sang.

The road turned and ran deeper into the island. The wind was stronger, and the trees were snapping their branches overhead. Then he left the path, walked through the trees and up a hill, breathing hoarsely and painfully but not realizing it, almost running to where Fred's house sat in darkness in a small clearing.

He gained the porch and knocked on the door, then he was pounding and he yelled, "Fred, come out! Come out!" His head was rushing with the wind and he could hear the crashing of the waves on the shore in the distance. "Come out, Fred!"

Fred's face peeked out the door, then the door opened wide and he said, "Christ! Old man! It's early morning and this storm. Are you crazy?"

"Fred, listen," he said.

"How did you get here? What are you doing away from the cabin?"

"I must say. I want you to listen."

"Come in. Get in fast. You can't stand in that rain."

"I came to tell you right away."

"Sit down. You look like a ghost. I can't believe you didn't die getting here. I can't believe how thin—I can't believe—"

"Shut up, Fred. Be quiet a minute."

"I can't—"

Fred stopped talking, but his mouth hung open and his eyes retreated from what they saw. The Indian looked too thin, too sunken; he was dripping wet and his hair was blown in a wild tangle. He was frightening and Fred stepped back.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"I want you to listen. I know where to get fish. Nobody knows like I do. I've been fishing in my mind all these months. I know just how to go. You've got to take me now. I can work and I know what to do and I can't die like this in that cabin. You've got to take me."

For a while all Fred could do was look at him. Then he said,

"You're crazy."

"I want to go. I must work and not lie away like this. I must work again."

But Fred's face was twisted, gaping in something like horror.

"You're not well. The fall storms are near, and the work would kill you."

"It won't kill me."

"It will."

"Then all right. Let it kill me."

"No," said Fred. "You don't understand. I'm sorry, but I got somebody else. I got Harry."

For the first time the Indian was silent. He stood in his puddle of rain water and looked across the room at Fred and he couldn't think of anything to say.

"I had to get somebody," explained Fred. "He's got a wife, and a young girl."

The Indian stood very tall and his thin body began to weave back and forth.

"Are you all right?" asked Fred.

The Indian nodded, but his voice was low and dead. "I didn't think of that. Of course. I didn't realize."

"I had to get him," repeated Fred. "It's been months."

"I'll find a way," he said.

"You better sit down. Here, sit down here."

"I'm not going to go back. I'm not going to die in that cabin."

"You better stay," said Fred. "You can't go out now."

"I'll find some way. I don't know what it is yet."

"I can't let you go," insisted Fred. "You have to stay here."

"I'm not going to. I'm not going to die like that."

"Who said you were going to die? Like what?"

"Get out of my way."

"Listen," said Fred, holding him, "there's a storm out there."

"Get out of my way. I'm telling you to let me go."

"You're crazy," said Fred excitedly. "You've got to lie down."

"I won't!"

He pushed with all the strength he had and Fred let him go. The door crashed open in the wind, and for a moment the Indian stood there in the rain. Then he was gone and Fred ran to the door and looked out. But all he could see was darkness and streaks of rain slashing across the clearing and the wild dancing of the tree tops.

He leaned out and yelled into the dark.

"Old man, come back!"

But the sound of the storm took his words, so he could barely hear himself. In a moment it seemed the old man could not possibly have been there.

Again he leaned out and yelled. He waited, with the door open.

"Come back! Old man!"

But the old man did not come back.

WILLIAM T. SWEET

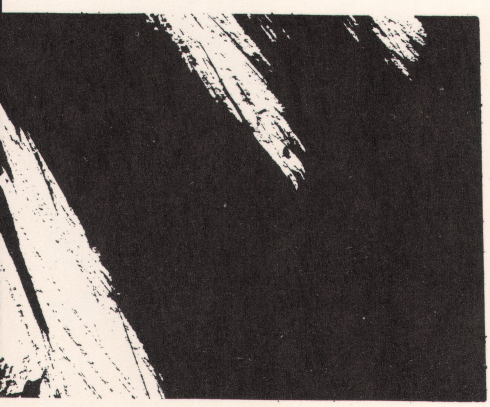
Dry Ice

You know, it didn't come up exactly like thunder.
It more or less squeaked over the prickly ledge
like a rusted orange balloon, too cold to bridge
the gap left by night, it pushed hard up and under
the yellow eaves of the milky sky to wander
listlessly towards noon and then slid frig-
idly over the ridge; almost cracked by the wedge
of blackness piercing the frail liquid lavender
shell. Exploding, it swirled into blackness.
I sat numbed by the rush of winter silence
and, even though frozen, my blood felt the quickness
of warm spring and plunged into pools of brilliance.
You turned from gray to darkness that day of winter
fire, and I knew the heat of night much better.

Cover Design

Wells Hall
1905-1966
R.I.P.

photograph by Justin Kestenbaum



RCR STAFF

Editor	Peggy Case
Managing Editor	Etta Abrahams
Prose	Will Albert D. L. Rosochacki
Poetry	Martha Aldenbrand Peter Fiore Francisco Llaguno



