



WOMEN WRITE

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Blood-Tie

Gloria Dyc

Night
Crickets.
Crickets.

(She pulled the sleeping bag to her chin.)

Night Crickets.

One light from the barn.

Try and sleep now it's been a day.

Her legs hurt; they had said, "Jump! Go ahead!" as she clung to the rope looking down a gulf of hay. The first time was the hardest as they said, all these cousins (second? third? can't tell them apart) squealing "Jump! Go ahead! Put your feet around the knot and swing." All alike. Blondes. Pulling at their crotches and staring at this strange blood-tie. Following her from the yard to the barn, the barn to the house. Using her name. Blood-tie. Had they even recognized her at first? And did they really expect her to stay, to lie here on their couch? The one with the diamond pattern. With one light from the barn. The dog barked.

"I took care of you," Joan had said. Serving drinks with one hand. Pointing with the other. Mediator. Ring-leader. "I'll never forget the time you gave us when you had rheumatic fever." (Tell your cousins to get away from the chickens.) And would she spend the night? It was such a long way back.

Oh yes it was a long way back. Was there enough room? And you don't know how nice it is—what with living in the city and working so much and rarely getting away. Joan had looked with wonder (was this really the one...) and laughed of course when they had all lined up for rides and Clark had said his horse liked to "test" people and everyone was close by when she mounted because they were all ready to leave on the hayride and she got on and took right off in a gallop but she said (to herself) there will be no way he throws me not in front of all of them and hung on tight gripping with her thighs and someone yelled "ride that thing" and she had till they all started clapping and the horse tired of the performance and dropped anchor in his stall and she had walked back brushing her pants (stubborn thing); Joan had laughed of course. And would she spend the night? Yes. With the crickets. Here on the porch. On the diamond-patterned couch.

The one their grandmother had. It was such a long way back. And so quiet here. Such space. In the city you could go for—weeks—and not see the horizon. (And could she live here...turning the soil, clearing the wheat...pattering about on the cold morning wood of century-old houses where porches came much later, added later when they had time to sit in the evenings and just listen...)

Her shoe had dropped in a rut on the cleared field, slipped away as though on a conveyor; Ann, the blonde one with glasses, jumped from the wagon laughing and retrieved it. Running back she warned with country authority against sandals on hayrides. And Ann had looked back at her uncle perched high on a throne of feedbags and grimaced playfully as he once again broke out in a serenade—this time it was “You are my Sunshine” and then he moved into “By the Light of the Silvery Moon.” And it really got to Ann when they stopped at the bridge and everyone dismounted, relieving the cart of an extra 3,000 lbs or so and he remained, supine, refusing to give up his privileged place, still singing and sipping from his flask as they all hoofed it to the other side. So assembled and on their way the uncle resumed the games: “First one to spot an animal gets a quarter.” And of course all the older ones flinched lest it be the two locked in coitus and he had said, “A *wild* animal. Anybody that spots a wild animal—no, that’s an *insect*—gets a quarter.” It was almost dark. Ann took her hand and asked, “Are you spending the night?”

And Joan had yawned and dug her bare toes into the carpet and asked if she wanted a last drink and there was room on the front porch she added. On the diamond-patterned couch. It wasn’t very big. The one their grandmother used to keep in the house on Mason Street. Did she remember? Oh yes she did. And lifted the spread to make sure. She did. Yes. They really had a hard life and never had a big couch. But...did she remember the house on Mason? Oh yes, of course.

She was there sometimes in the distortion of dream floating down elongated halls, looking for lost rooms. They had closets with windows and they hid there behind clothes and the big room had three beds and they loved to sleep there or just visit because it was air-conditioned and smelled like Vicks and there was a picture of a very mellow christ pointing to a plum-colored heart which you could see right through his robe and one night she slept there and she swore it glowed and the next morning her grandmother said, “Turn your back. Grandpa has to put his pants on.” And she did. But she turned back early and saw *it* anyway and it was all red and shrivelled and her heart was in her throat like the time she crawled under the bedroom chair because she didn’t want an enema she only had a cold...

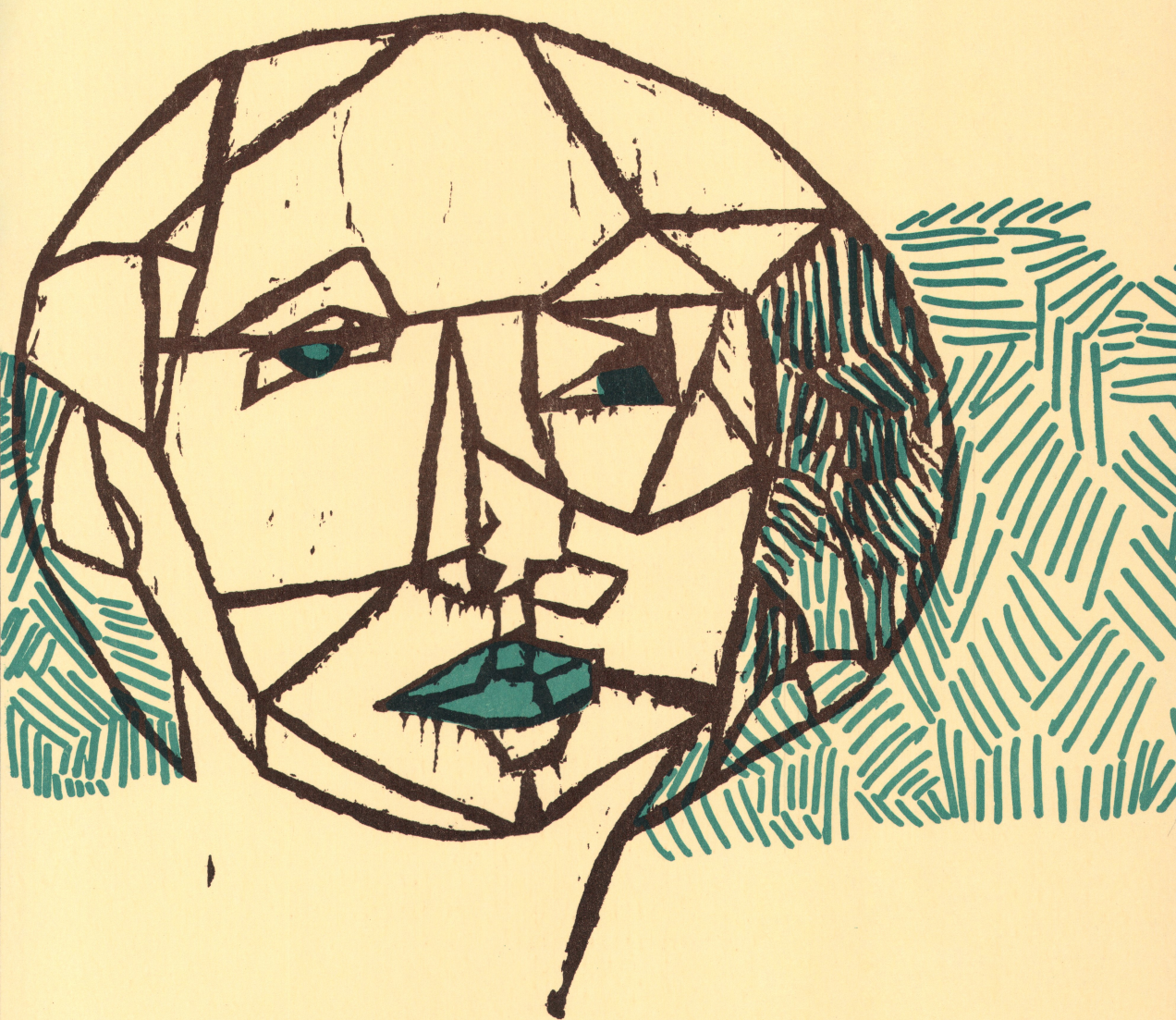
(Joan found one of her kids asleep on the staircase landing. She took inventory, decided who was in what room, who was in the tent.) She sucked on an ice cube. Yawned. “Grandpa was a mean man. Grandma had a hard life.”

He threw bricks at cats, swore he would kill one from the porch that was so high you could walk on the railing if no one was looking because if you fell onto the cement you’d crack your head open like a melon. He

swore and spit out the car and sometimes it landed on the window when they'd be on their way to the candy store where he'd tell them he was going to see a man about a horse and they would wait for him to come back and wonder if this time he'd really come back with one and what color would it be but grandma would shake her head and say, "He's only pulling your leg."

And Joan wanted to walk outside to make sure the kids were really all in the tent and not still in the barn, so they went; and Joan asked if she was going to have any kids and said this was the only way to bring them up. She agreed. Definitely there was no other way—the city was really unlivable. So they talked near the light from the barn where the flies made silent, perforated orbits. Joan said she hoped the couch would be long enough. It was. It was fine. The air was cool and clear and it was quiet except for the dog once in a while.

And the crickets.
On the diamond-patterned couch.
In the night.



Good Friends and First Impressions

Barbara Drake

"I got a sunburn on my ass today," you said,
and flipping your tennis skirt
like an east coast can-can girl
you gave the party a peek. It was red.

If I hadn't known you better I'd have thought,
Uh, uh, look out for that one.
But I don't think that way any more.

At another party, ten years ago at least,
when I met you the first time,
you reminded me of a Captain Easy lady.
Your legs were curvy
the way they looked in comic strips in 1940.
You looked energetic enough
to jump aboard a passing Chinese junk
or wave from the deck of an aircraft carrier
at Easy flying by.

But you'd a baby in the car, and we were all
too poor to be adventurers. "Women don't like me,"
you said. "Too much hair and lipstick."
But I liked you a lot. I'd see you pass our house
with the plaid stamp buggy full of bags and the baby.
You'd walk reading a *Vogue* or *Cosmopolitan*, such
other-than-grad-school worldly stuff, with a pint of Ripple,
red or white, in a paper sack—the girl from Smith.

You'd take a sip, push the buggy a few steps
and read of Jackie, whom someone told you
you resembled. Giving the baby a slice
of Wonder bread white as an angel, you'd stop,
offer me a snort from the bottle.
You've always been one of my most generous
and unsanitary friends.

Well, that's how you looked to me then.
Also: behind the hedge in your yard painting
enormous self-portraits. I thought
you were trying to find your own face
when all the rest of us dealt in words.
Or you, pulling something from a wrinkled
Goodwill sack and saying in your New England voice
that sounded foreign on our West Coast,
"I found this lovely gown today."

In the hospital, after my daughter was born
and I lay like a tube of toothpaste someone
had squeezed flat, you came
bringing your odds and ends of lotions,
lipstick, perfume, the kimona of rose-colored silk
to bring me back to life.

And you laughing heartily, and you in tears,
and you seeing whatever you have seen of me,
and now after ten years and moving with husbands
and children and dogs and rooms full of furnishings
thousands of miles we are: here again, in the same town,
turning up at the same parties, knowing
too many of each other's secrets to ever talk
at parties about anything but these
true and untrue first impressions.

Hungers

Judith Minty

Lately, a bulldog has been growling
in my stomach. I am always hungry.
I visit grocery stores at midnight,
dream of banquets, luaus and Roman feasts.
I send secret notes to handsome cakes in magazines
and fondle all the bismarks at the bakery.

I crave kisses soaked in butter,
arms around me like artichoke leaves,
hamburger hugs, and love songs
leaping out of the pan like popcorn.
I want roast beef whispers in my ear
and frankfurter fingers in my cunt.
I want to feel like lemon meringue pie again.

I'm looking for a gourmet cook
who recites recipes in iambic tetrameter,
whose cock rises like bread under his apron.
I need a man who wears his chef's hat to bed
and smells of garlic, who likes to taste the soup
every hour as it simmers on the back burner.

Night People

Judith Minty

They glide through caves, sensitive
as bats, as if lamps beamed out
from their foreheads. They mine

under the surface of things, sure-footed
moles in their tunnels. Bruce knows
ivy grows toward fluorescent tubes

in the factory where he feeds his machine.
The elevator man at the Pantlind Hotel
feels roots tangle in the shaft below him

and at Jimmy's Club, the piano player
hears leaves rustle. Sometimes
he orders brandy when he plays the blues.

In this house we are oblivious to vines.
We hibernate in sunken logs, make ropes
of the bedsheets, open our gills
to the stranger who swims slowly
in our ocean, and when sun bleeds
under the shade, we shudder into day.

We never see those night creatures
who sink slowly into loam as we rise
like the tide to a fading moon.

Driving the Back Roads

Judith Minty

Sunday, a crossing back
over back roads.
Slush sputters off wheels
like a covey of partridge
and our car
swerves, catches
the ruts again.

All day, the blackbird
high in a winter tree,
his eye raking the snowfield.
Now the sun gone, branches
lean and fade like smoke.
Ahead, cats' eyes
burning off tree trunks.

We see clearest sometimes
in darkness. Tonight
this wish to stay
with wild things, to follow
these twisted roads
and never cross
over to Monday.



Darcy Drew Greene

The Lake Road

Judith Minty

We drive along the lake road
toward water, the sky
so blue the two will blend together
at the horizon. We may never know
whether we swim or fly.

The talk is of breaking
through heat into waves, crashing
against foam. Father mother children, we will
flutter, stroke, spread out our arms,
float in again to shore.

We did not intend the splash of orange
at the road's edge, a family
of orioles scattered on the grass, broken
when they lifted, fell
in and out of currents.

The sun breaks its wings
against our windshield. On fire, we
soar over the rise to the lake.

Evanescence

Linda Susan Moore

What hurts most
about America
is the
way
it has
of disappearing folks,
inside out,
Black folks—
'specially
Black men—
It's like at
Easter time when
you blow the insides
out of an egg
and keep the shell
to decorate...until
later, purpose served, it's
disposed of.
America sucks the souls
from Black folks,
taking the warmth
and love
and vomiting it into void,
replacing it with
obsession to obtain
and prove—
Hollow shells are
oh so fragile
and much too easily disappeared.

miss america gives advice

Alison Hedlund

be sure to
joggle yr
hips the right way.

teeth not brite enuf?
use pepsodent/pearldrops/even
wy-ten will do/one must always
smile dazzlingly.

push up tits w/(yr a maid now)
maidenform. no cheap brassiere
remember judges go for size/"perfection
of form." they likum bouncy
(like rubber balls)

real or fake/behind cotton they can't tell.

evening gown: avoid hi neck, be sure
to have enuf filmy girly chiphony
stuff. emphasize figure, numbers count.
swimsuit most revealing—no: moles/

fat/wrinkles/
sags/muscles/
birthmarks. if you

are (in any way) human fix it or forget it.

don't worry a minute girls
about talent it's unwomanly so don't show
them up. just a little bit will do.

oh and above all fuck the lights.
they love it.



spiderwoman

Alison Hedlund

i have memorized
all the wrinkles on this quilt
the way a spider knows its web.
& with bone & skin wrapped tight
round your warmth
i have become that greedy spider.
i watch you sleep, my paralyzed prey.
i want to bite your neck
& lick the juice that oozes out—
but you breathe gently.

i watch & wait.

for mama

Alison Hedlund

one night
us all in bed
we heard
mama crying in the basement (we
had never heard/seen her crying before)
how frightening it was
to hear her
we arose feeling sad/guilty/ashamed
& wondering why,
we arose
feeling naked
in our loose pajamas
trooped three of us
through the house,
down the stairs,
saw mama washing clothes
hair wild as a witch's
we thought her an
angel or
ghost
till she
turned
smiled through her tears
hugged our worried shoulders
told us to go back to bed: saying
"everything is all right."
but we
 weren't sure
returned to bed
feeling
 for the first time
insecure

Was Birds

Julie Jensen

(Vita, the only character we see in this play, is not an old woman; she is middle-aged or just beyond. She has lived alone in a small country town for a long time. She is kind but strange. The play takes place in her small quarters. There is a kitchen area up left and a table with three chairs stage right. She has lived here for many years and has collected more things than the place will hold. In addition, there are several cages with birds. However, nothing is made of the birds; Vita does not talk to them or even acknowledge their presence. There are also two imaginary guests in the play. The older one, Ida, is someone Vita has invented to excuse her own unpleasant nature, a scapegoat, someone whom Vita can victimize. We must assume that Ida has lived with Vita for quite some time. She is seated at the center of the table. The other imaginary guest, Cleanth (pronounced Clean-eth), is more Vita's age and is definitely a visitor, someone Vita talks to maybe once a month, though she has known her over many years. Cleanth is seated right of the table.)

VITA:

(From the kitchen area where she is making cheese and cracker sandwiches.) You know, she got no sense no more. Old and mean. Used to be a sharp one. Not no more, though. Could sit up and remember things—like what happened on my stories. You probably don't watch the stories. I'd say to her something like, "Ida, what happened on Bradford and Mary Lee?" She'd be able to tell. She'd say back something like, "Well, Vita, Mary Lee's mother is come to stay and they's trouble with their neighbor's son. He's gone to the devil with dope and stealing and a wild lady friend from town much older than him." Things like that. *(Pause)* Well, don't matter. But I tell you it's been years since she could do that. Maybe five or more. And she's deaf. Deaf as a post. "Ida, you as deaf as a post," sometimes I say. "Deaf as a post and you don't know a thing." See, don't trouble her none. *(Setting down two plates of crackers and cheese, one for her and one for Cleanth.)* Help yourself. *(She sits in the chair left of the table.)* Now all she does is make them high peeps and drum her fingers till she's wore through the leather on the arm of that there chair. Won't sit in another one, won't stop drumming. I taped it up the other week, so's she couldn't get at it. But didn't do no good. Time end of the day come, she'd got through the tape anyway. Can't do *that* every day. *(Pause)* Said to her not to. *(She eats some of her crackers and cheese.)* Said, "Ida, you makin me nervous



Daray Drew Greene

and you makin a hole in the chair." But she don't stop. It's spite. Sometimes I think she's takin out on me the fact that she's lost all her sense. Well, ain't nothing to do with me. I only just take care of her. I'm just doing my job, getting paid. Not my fault. *(Silence)* Ain't ya hungry, Cleanth? Eat something. *(Pause)* You know, for a nickel I'd turn her back. Call up her daughter and just turn her back. Course she don't eat much. That's good. Cause if she did, I'd have to get rid of her. Call up her daughter and say, "Beverly, this here's Vita. Come and get her. Come and get yer ma. She's eatin me out of my pension. Now come get her." Beverly, that's her name. Ida's daughter. *(Pause)* Nice woman. Clean faced like a child...*(Pause)* But she don't do that. Hardly eats a thing. Used to like sausage. That was her favorite. That would always make her smile and go off into a story about making sausage when she was a girl. The same old story, over and over. Everytime we'd eat it. That's how I first knew she was losing her sense, the number of times she told the story. Over and over. Ever time we'd eat sausage. *(Imitating Ida.)* "You know, Vita," she'd say. Had this kinda high-pitched voice, you see. Like a bird. "You know, Vita, I know all about sausage. I made it with my pa when I was a girl. Take the leavins, grind em up..." Oh, would go on and on. Made you just sick. But she don't eat much anymore. Seems to know it ain't worth the money it costs. Sometimes she'll eat radishes or some garlick. She likes that. I just cut it up in small pieces for her, and she munches it a whole afternoon. Course, then she smells awful bad after that. So I don't give her the garlick very often. Can't sit next to her at all. Never give it to her when there's people coming. Now me, I'm more used to it, you know. So I've learned how to breathe around it. But others, well, I've watched them as they've come in the house. They jist can't stand sittin next to her. Comes out through their skin, don't you know. Nuff to make you sick right to your stomach right on the spot. *(Eats another cheese and cracker sandwich.)* Beats me how somebody could get their self attached to something like that for food. Guess I don't mind tellin you that more than once I've thought it was for spite. "She's only eatin them things to get back at me for something," I've said, "something she don't even remember now. Something more an likely I never done." Go ahead and stink up the house till she starves to death and then I get blamed for not feeding her good. Can't win, I tell you. *(Pause)* If she was my kin, I'd have her put in a home. She really needs that kind of care. Don't get it here. Can't expect no person like me to handle someone like that. Besides the other things I got to do. Go to the store, church. It's not exactly easy managing things and her too. So I do what I can and don't worry about all the rest of it. What do it matter with her anyway? Don't know the difference. What I always says to my son Melvin, the youngest one, I says, "Now, Melvin, you don't let me turn into a pest," I says. "Don't nobody want to have to do with a pest." *(Eats one of Cleanth's sandwiches.)* That's what I says and I still believe it. Now that old lady ain't nothing but a pest. She ain't worth a thing. A first-class pest. Now me, I be quite happy to go when my time come. Don't want to go hanging on and on, like her. That's not right. I mean, they is right and wrong in this world. And you got to abide by them things. Just like you got to abide by the law. Well, this here's the same thing. When you time is come, take it graceful and don't go round

tormentin people until it's over. Now with me, I got it all planned out. How I'm gonna go, and what's gonna git done with my remains. First, after not turning into no pest, well, I want to just drift off, like Wesley done. That was the simplest thing you ever seen. Like a sleepin dog. And I think you can do that if'n you just set your mind. I'm sure that's what Wesley don. Well, you know didn't take him more an a week after he decided it was time and he was gone. No trouble, no bother to no one, least wise not to me. Just kinda drifted off at the end of the week, on a Saturday, something like that. And that was that. (*Eats another one of Cleanth's sandwiches.*) Well, that's how I'll do it and after that, don't want very much made of my remains, no statues or nothing on the grave. A plain marker. Never exactly been used to a whole lot of fuss over me. So it wouldn't be fitting for me to have to spend eternity with a big fussy statue over top of me. Just plain. The name and the date. That's all. (*Silence*) Listen to that. That's her, peepin. Don't know what it means. She took to doing that a couple of months ago. Peepin like birds. It's like she forgot how to say words. Cept she still moves her mouth. Well, you can see that. Isn't it strange? You'd think something like your words would most likely be the last to leave you. But not with her. They left, well, about the same time as her sense. She wasn't very long without the one till she lost the other. It was right soon. I was noticing she was failing and I kept noticing how she was repeating things, well, like the sausage story. And it wasn't too long after that till she stopped altogether. Sort of turned herself into this bird then. "My god, Ida," I say to her sometimes, "you dumb, blind, stinking, and you forgot your words." But it don't make no difference to her. (*Pause*) It's enough for one person just to watch all that. Some, well, there's some would like to see it happen, I'm sure. Sitting around day after day, just waiting and watching for someone to well, move on, but I don't. Don't like it. It's eerie. You talk and say things, important and not so important, don't you know, it's not that, whether they're important or not, it's whether there's anyone who knows your words enough to acknowledge. Now Ida, there, she don't. I tell you, I can think of better companions. I can even think of people I'd rather watch to die. Even ones I'd rather talk to when they're deaf. Ida ain't one. (*Pause*) It's the way she's vicious that I don't like. Underneath that bird stuff and underneath that deafness and the smell is something mean. I can tell it. Course, you wouldn't want to go saying it. People, most of them, you know, wouldn't believe you. They take pity on anyone what'll show em a deaf ear and a silly nonsense way of talking like a bird, and they feel sorry for them, they'd swear this old lady was harmless, but she ain't. (*To Ida.*) Evil. Ain't ya, Ida? Ain't ya? Ya deaf old crow. Looka that, not a bit of knowing going on in there. Just some meanness, some evil. You can probably tell that. Well, you know she's spry in spite of being old, stinking, and deaf. She could out run a dog if you wanted to race her. Oh yeah, she's spry. And with that kind of situation, you gotta watch, cuz they don't know nothing and yet they're evil so's you can never be peaceful. They can always get you, if you don't watch it. Something could get into them and they could just up and take off after you. That's what you got to watch for. Got to guard against. (*Pause*) I mean she could come at you with a knife or a stick or something. And things like

that have happened, too. Ain't just idle fright. Even now, I don't like to go out in the yard till I've planned out where I'm going to be and till I've moved all the dangerous things away from my path, so just in case she took it into her head to do something, well, I'd have more of a chance to get away. You probably think it's wrong, being scared of a bird, little peeping, chirping bird of a woman—can't hear, can't talk, just peeps and don't eat. But birds can be dangerous. You probably heard that afore. It's true. They can. Birds can go at you. They're slow and they're small, but they know what's your weakness. They peck at it. They wear down your eyes. Make you want to be a bird yourself so's you can have something to fight with, be able to get away. Yeah, a bird is a terrible thing. Wouldn't wish no bird on no one. Wouldn't. I says to Melvin the other day, "Melvin, don't you ever give me no bird for a present. Don't want one of them near to me. And don't think something like a cage makes one bit of difference. It don't." I can tell you. It's like with Ida here, not so much with her or a bird in a cage—what they can do, but what their spirit does to you. Now them two, well, they can get into your mind with their spirits, with their vicious spirits, like with regular birds gettin in your eyes with their beaks. With these birds of the spirit, it's that they're like your diseases. Can't be seen. Wouldn't know they was there except for their effect on you. And it's the same thing. Your diseases and the spirit of the bird can both get you down deep, make you crazy-like. Give you fright and terrible visions. I've knowed it to happen. And wasn't crazy people neither, just your regular people what was suddenly seized by something vicious from the birds or from people, other people that was vicious and had the power. And the way you know the people what has it, the power, is by studying their looks and their ways. And the more they're like birds, the more they're likely to be vicious, evil on you. Turn up bad. *(Pause)* You don't believe none of this, do ya, Cleanth? Think I'm crazy, but I ain't. Know what I'm talking about. It's happened to me. They was strange things to happen when it did. Seen the strangest things right in the very world you're used to. And scares you, the visions. Makes you think of being a baby again with a mother, but ain't one. Ain't nothing to do but try to live through. I seen em. I seen em bad. Was water over my feet like, and down in the water was animals without no hair come rubbin their smooth bodies on me. And it was like you wasn't meant to see what there was there—them kind of animals. Didn't have no hair. They skin was soft and wet. And they was thousands of them, all different and all turning over in the water and opening their mouths. *(Silence)* You never seen such a time as that. Don't believe they ever was so much of the awful spirit as they was then. They come from Frank. When he was sick. And the birds was around. They caught it and passed it on. Frank diseased. Mind gone. Like Ida's here. And the spirit of them birds seized anyone was nearby. *(Silence. Slowly.)* And now we got Ida here doing the same thing. And the birds and the spirit of the birds. With the viciousness of their ways. And the way they wears at your eyes. *(Pause)* I feel it more in the late day. That's when your birds is tired and most vicious. They wear at you. That's how they get in. Wear their way in. And you might be feeling it a bit now. They doin it. Wearing. Can tell. Cause it's late. And they're more vicious in the late. Come out with

the dusk. Ain't nothing to do for it cept try and live through. Try and remember till the next day where you left your sense. But it's a terrible time. And the spirit is strong. Feel it now. The spirit of Ida. She's vicious. And lost all her sense to them birds. *(Her voice trails off. She becomes silent and motionless. She has a frightened, vacant look.)*

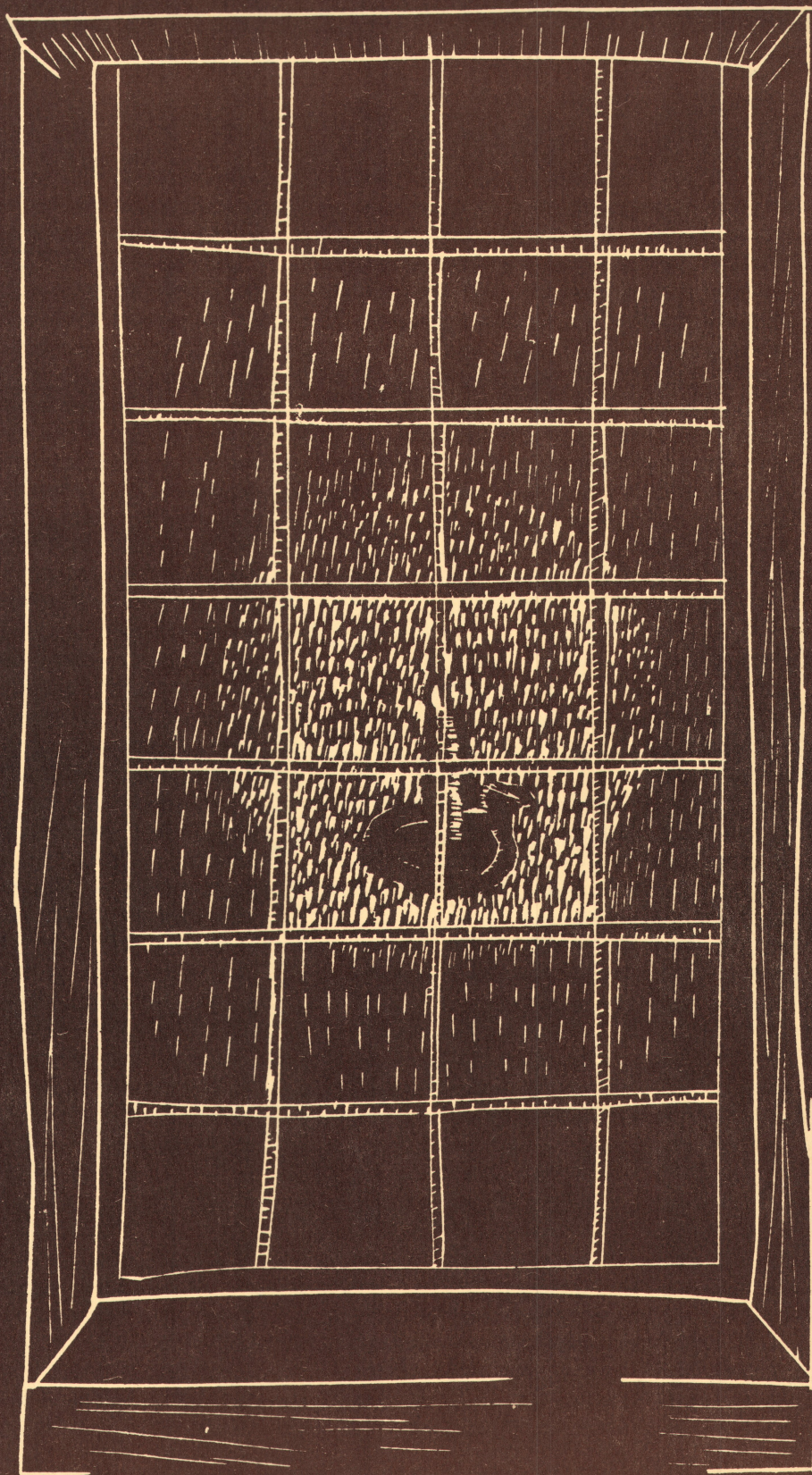
The First Apparition: Toward Sleep

Debbie Wiitala

Deep into night, when words come, lucid,
like deer, to feed,
a new face from under bears the old one up
to some extant-worldly light.
Eyes wider, luminescent
animal globes
as if the roots of night pushed up there
dark petals on pools of white
when moon skims on water like a single cell
extending black water cylindrically.
A skin
about to lose itself,
cells flaking snow-like toward sleep.
The last throb of light an opal in each heart
like the glow of candle fire beneath the stairs
blooming the bedroom wall.
Burning until morning and a new wax form.

Lumen.
Night invokes another world
in which we are the bearers of light.
Distinct.
Each movement lucid in its slowness
like the ice-edge of assassin light.
A fragile existence, crystalline,
carrying itself delicately, its own fetus.

My face grown more pale.
I wonder do I begin to glow
toward sleep
a lantern feeding on shallow breath
and dreams.
Eyes dark like pools in snow,
deliquescent.



Darcy Drew Greene

Second Apparition: The Drums in the Jungle-Heart of Night

Debbie Wiitala

I.

If I could speak now my voice would be
as a loon's,
my mouth moving to the sound of a water bird far off.

*

Night again, as far as we have ever been
into it.
We see only by the pale opalline
light of our faces.
Bodies gone out. Only the face sustains
its lamps, brain close to that surface
like a generator chugging softly its power transfer
wired by blood to an animal mask.
Only the eyes are dark,
windows to a pumping station,
inside machines make their own world
like planets orbiting in the bottom of a well,
two holes of small water
tapping a universe's powerpipe.
Eyes and brain ash hearts where fire leaps
extrapolating a network of heat and light.
All power in transfer;
that glow like the call of a loon—
we're never sure that we have not just
imagined it,
a trick of night, sorcery.

II.

Sonar.
All night voices
come up from the iron lung,
the deep-sea-diver's helmet.
We communicate by sonar,
at such times able to speak to dolphins
in a common language.
Translations made by the slow black tongue
of the hour of night which leads to death
through a watery hallway
if a certain hatch is opened.
Pressure necessitating the instant flowering
of an uncatalogued aquatic death root
at the base of the brain
from which we may speak to animals,
a language known in utero
—our hydrogen beginnings evolving to a life of deserts.

Mirages, of course. Dry and paperlike.
But we know, when night is almost fluid,
that under layers of ice, water, and silt
the rotten fossil mouth of a common ancestor
still sings,
through sediment,
obscenely.

Since Times Are So Hard, I Will Tell You Sweetheart Carolyn Forché

Out back the lake is a bath mirror.
Grapes and wire vines brush the field.

I boil soap and water in my pots.
Light my kitchen with pans of ice
And the stove burners heating soap.
Yams have grown shoots in the cupboard.
I would be crazy to open it.

My man is quiet, always quiet.
Fat on the divan, scootched to the heat.
Two sacks of his old tongues
Swish around in my dress.

My kid wants to suck but I'm dried up
I'm tired I'm talking again to myself

I go in the bathroom lift the shade
Snap on the light and strip.
Someone out sneaking through the fields
Could see me, pink in here, dusty with hot water.

Maybe it turns into blood, this shower
While my eyes are closed maybe no one
Is out tonight.

White Wings, They Never Grow Weary

Carolyn Forché

April stars, crisp in the deep plot
pulling off, late snow clouds
clean themselves.
But the river lets loose the carp
And coughs beneath the frozen part.
Slowly drippings on the roof hit the gutter.
Ice branches ripped off in wind are water born.

In the house, a rim of cheese is quiet.
There is a chunk of lard to be rendered.
I should hang pails on the trees and wait for sugar.

I want to tie off the time like a birth cord
chewn broken in a proud woman's teeth.
My navel is gone, the moon up.
In a month or two my breasts will be in pain.

Out here a woman wonders.
And if she has no man her arms get strong.
When the seasons change she can't believe
there will ever be milk in her body.

Ever believe there will be someone
asking something from her.

Kalaloch

Carolyn Forché

1

The bleached wood massed in bone piles,
we pulled it from a dark beach and built
fire in a fenced clearing.

The posts' blunt stubs were sunk down,
they circled and were roofed by milled
lumber dragged at one time to the coast.
We slept there.

Each morning the minus tide—
weeds flowed it like hair swimming.
The starfish gripped rock, pastel
rough. Fish bones lay in sun.

Each noon the milk fog sank
from cloud cover, came in
our clothes and held them
tighter on us. Sea stacks
stood and disappeared.
They came back when the sun
scrubbed out the inlet.

We went down to piles to get
mussels, I made my shirt
a bowl of mussel stones and carted
them to our grate where they smoked apart.
I pulled the mussel lip bodies out
and chewed their squeak.
We went up the path for fresh water, berries.
Hardly speaking, thinking.

During low tide we crossed
to the island, climbed
its wet summit. The red foots
and pelicans dropped for fish.
Oclets so silent fell
toward water with linked feet.

Jacynthe said little,
her tuk pulled on her hair, long
since we had spoken *Nova Scotia*,
Michigan, and knew beauty in saying nothing.
She told me about her mother who would
come at them with bread knives then
stop herself, her face emptied.



AMY RUFUS MILLER

I told her about me,
never lied. At night
at times the moon floated.
We sat with arms tight
watching flames spit and snap.
On stone and sand picking up
wood shaped like a body, like a gull.

I ran barefoot not only
on beach but harsh gravel
up through the woods.
I shit easy, covered my dropping.
Some nights, no fires, we watched
the sea pucker and get stabbed
by the beacon
circling on Tatoosh.

2
I stripped and spread
on the sea lip, stretched
to the slap of the foam
and the vast red dulce.
Jacynthe gripped the earth
in her fists, opened—
the boil of the tide
shuffled into her.

The beach revolved,
headlands behind us put
their pines in the sun.
Gulls turned a strong sky.
Their pained wings held,
they bit water quick, lifted.
Their looping eyes continually
measure the distance from us,
bare women who do not touch.

The rocks drowsed, holes
filled with suds from a distance.
A deep laugh bounced
in my flesh and sprayed her.

3
Flies crawled us,
Jacynthe crawled.
With her palms she
spread my calves she
moved my heels from each other.
A woman's mouth is

not different, sand moved
wild beneath me, her long
hair wiped my legs, with women
there is sucking, the water
slops our bodies. We come
clean, our clits beat like
twins to the loons rising up.

We are awake.
Snails sprinkle our gulps,
fish die in our grips.
There is sand in the anus
of dancing.
Tatoosh island
hardens in the distance.
We see its empty stones
sticking out of the sea
again. Jacynthe holds tinder
under fire to cook the night's wood.

If we had men I would make
milk in me simply. She is
quiet. *I like that you cover
your teeth.*

The Morning Baking

Carolyn Forché

Gramma come back, I forgot
how much lard for these rolls.
Think you can put yourself in the ground
like plain potatoes and grow in ohio?
I am damn sick of getting fat like you.

Think you can lie through your slovak?
Tell filthy stories about blood sausage?
Pish-pish nights at the virgin mary in detroit?
Hear your country on the radio and bitch.

I blame you for raising me up, making
my tongue slav, all this slapping and dancing.
I'll tell you I don't remember any kind of bread,
your wavy loaves of flesh in my sleep,
the stars on your silk robes.

But I'm glad I'll look when I'm old
like an old gypsy dusha hauling milk.



Amy Rufus Miller

One Woman and the Tailor

Dara Wier

Fine London fog, filigree
filaments every color thread,
one bare bulb bulges over
his table, over his head,
he works with a knife, (she
calls hers her scissors) slices
out shoulders, thighs, skirt,
bodice, breast to size.
Inventing with pique, batiste,
chiffon, tracing the seams
by bodkin, little penis,
pin-sharp in his pants, will she
wear this to a dance?

The tailor tries it on, looks
to his mirror, grabs a reel
of bobbin lace, pins in place
(she's up early learning Sears'
zigzag way). He does the darts,
tacks the seams, bastes, binds.
Fastidious with careful stitch,
he shapes the little buttonhole
lips, tip of his rattler's
tongue ties the thread. Will she
wear this when she's dead?

One Woman and the Lady Medical Assistant

Dara Wier

Assuming his masculinity, she
thinks I won't shy, telling me
to buy a slip, telling me not
to think of it.

She hands him the cake decorator
that opens me up, birthday
or wedding day one, eyes like lead
slits, he wears one shining light
on his head, am I smiling?
Jack-lighting game is outside
the law, he is no minor.

Her swishing skirts, she looks
at me hardest, she has names
for us all: Mohawk, city
mob, red swamp, pygmy lips, rabbit
breasts, slug, black fern, oyster bed.
I know, as I lay here, there is a mirror
at the foot of her bed.

One Woman's Words That Fall In the Night

Dara Wier

criss crossed kokomo roll
a pole candlestick finger
roll kumquat come squat and
roll bird roll

the taste of tubular roses
twang of tongue, tuft
of skin in the margin
roll of meat in the oven
power of darkness
fall of light, failure
of promise, pulse of pumpkin
fool of the night

kink in the switchblade
sandwich of his ankles
tongue of his skin
scaling my skin

pulse of this word
that falls in the night



Waiting for the Mail

Leonora Anderson

I am cutting the roast into small squares for Hungarian goulash. It is bloody work, but precise: there is some satisfaction in the symmetry of the squares. It will be a luxurious meal, the pieces of meat in the thick reddish sauce over the golden noodles. I am a good cook.

Roger and John have gone to water the garden and pull the weeds that wait to choke out the smaller plants. They will come home with armloads of zucchini squash that has grown too large to be tender and huge red tomatoes, one slice big enough for a sandwich. I seldom go myself anymore. I did the planting, put the tiny seeds in the ground and patted the earth over them. After that, I prefer to leave it. I hate pulling up the weeds and the wrench of the fruit twisting off the vine in my hand makes my stomach sink.

Besides, I appreciate the opportunity to be alone, the luxury of the meal I am making in the twilight, the feel of the knife in my hand. The pile of bloody squares grows very satisfactorily, in tribute to my work.

And as I slice, I dream about tomorrow's mail. Every day I wait for the mailman with excited anticipation, as though when I open the box I will find a paper bearing some secret formula for my life. 500 dollar a month income. Your own vacation home. An expense paid trip anywhere in the world. Some strange proposal, some sign. None of this has ever come, but my expectation increases through the years of my life.

Then something happens. I cannot say just what, but I put down the knife slowly and carefully and hold up my index finger to the light. I cannot believe it is my own finger. A precisely inscribed line runs lengthwise across the knuckle. And as I bend the finger I see, at the bottom of the crevasse, a white flash of bone. The cut is so bloodless and perfect at this moment, that it seems to have been put there purposely. I stare.

It is not painful: as a matter of fact, my hand feels nothing. I seem to be examining some peculiar exhibit in a museum of natural history. The flesh inside the slice is a palish color, whiter than the meat of any mammal I have ever seen. And the cut has been made so that the delicate blood vessels lie exposed on the surface. They are fine and beautiful, and do more than carry the blood, like a road map of some fairy world. I am transfixed.

Then the bone, the flesh, the blue threads, dissolve in red. The white of the kitchen cupboards shifts peculiarly before my eyes, straight lines moving in curves. What has happened here?

I am not a woman who faints at blood. I have cut myself many times, been injured, burned. A broken arm. When I was young, living in the country, my neighbor slit through the veins and tendons on her wrist while drying a drinking glass. The blood was spurting over her head as her heart beat, but I stopped it with the sash of my bathrobe, and held her arm while I drove her to the hospital. I am capable in emergencies. But this is different.

I try to decide what I should do about my finger. Something must be done, I know, but I cannot clear my mind of the picture of that white bone, and its brightness, down there under the flesh, blinds me. Underneath, through my whole body, the bones flash and the fine vessels quiver. I try to focus on the red comfort of the blood that drips out through the rag I have wrapped around the finger, but I know it is only a disguise for what lies beneath.

I sit on the kitchen chair, quietly staring at the peculiar movement of the light and the shifting of the lines around me. What is this place? What is happening to me? Something, I am sure, that can never be undone.

The blood runs down my arm and off my elbow into my lap. The feel of it on the inside of my thigh rouses me. I wrap the finger with a clean rag, peering at the slit for a sign of the bone. Perhaps it was only a trick of the imagination, or a vision of some sort. I cannot see anything but blood. Still, the bone haunts me.

I go to the telephone and call a taxi. I put on lipstick, carefully, in the mirror, and put on a clean skirt. It seems quite incredible that I am going on in this ordinary way as if nothing has happened. Inside, I am amazed, but the motions have a weight of their own that carries them.

I write a note, "I have cut myself. At the hospital. Back soon. Love, Shirley." Of course, that is not what I want to say at all. It is some kind of code that even I cannot decipher.

The taxi comes and we drive away toward the emergency room. The world passing the windows is one I do not recognize at all, as though I am in some alien place, though I have been this way many times before. The lights have an unaccustomed brightness and the corners of the buildings are askew.

The driver is a young man, curly-haired and blonde. I want to reach out and touch his neck with my white-wrapped hand and lift the curl off his shoulder. Perhaps he would turn off the meter and we could go off together, through the town and away.

But, of course, I do not touch his shoulder. We pull up at the emergency entrance of the hospital and I pay him with the money I have held carefully in my hand since leaving home. It is two dollars, but I do not have time to wait for change. I am very excited.

The blood is seeping through my bandage and dripping onto the floor and I stand there waiting for someone to do something. They will, I know. The walls are white and bare as bones and they gleam and shimmer in the fluorescent light. A nurse takes my name and vital statistics. Shirley Williams. Thirty years old. Social Security number 133-36-5257. Blue Cross. Is that who I am? She is satisfied with the information, but I am not. Some vital piece of information has been omitted. There is something more to be revealed.

"I cut myself," I say, holding up my finger. And she takes me to a small clean room with a narrow bed. I wait there for the doctor, still bleeding.

When he comes in the room, I open my eyes wide to him. He is a short, dapper man; not the one I might have chosen. But he is here.

"What happened?" he asks. What does he suspect, I wonder.

"I cut myself slicing roast beef," I say, "by accident," to make it very clear.

He places my hand on a white board and calls for sutures. I am not at all frightened of him, but I wish I were wearing a long silken gown that lay softly over my thighs and curved around my ankles. I smile at him gently, just curving my lips, eyes still wide, while he jabs the needle in my flesh. It does not hurt very much, but I arch my back and stiffen as is expected of me. And when the finger is numbed, he takes it in his right hand and pulls the edges of the flesh apart and looks down into my flesh and bone.

Then he washes it out with a sterile piece of gauze and begins to put in the sutures. He is meticulous at his work, his head bent over my finger, smiling with pleasure at the neatness of each stitch and tiny knot. I am being repaired.

"Did you see the bone?" I ask, though I know full well.

"Yes," he says, "It's a deep cut."

He keeps stitching, though he must know, as I do, that no amount of repair can hide that bone. He has looked down into my flesh and traced my blood vessels with his fingers, and is now connected with me intimately for the rest of our lives. He sews on, tying the knots with a flick of the hemostat as if he were a magician.

"How do you bear it?" I ask, "Seeing people this way."

"You do what has to be done," he says. "And in a certain way, you get used to it." I am grateful that he does not pretend not to understand, but I cannot believe that anyone can live with so much intimacy. Still, he has brown hair that curls over his ears and I could forgive him any lie he needs to tell. He can see the skull under my forehead as I brush the hair away from my face, and he knows the muscles that move my jaws. My bones, bare and gleaming, are in his hands. I am a network of nerves and veins.

The white walls of the room move as if in a dream and like a dream the time and the place and the man seem more real than life. I feel elated, as if anything is possible here.

"All done," he says, as he puts the tape around the gauze. But we both know that is a lie.

I get up from the bed and go out into the waiting room to call for a ride home. John and Roger will be there by now. They will come in the old pick-up, full of vegetables, to take me home. And I will finish dinner and the three of us will eat, quietly, pleasantly, in the dining room under the dim light.

But tonight in bed I will think about my flesh and my bone and about what has happened here. And I doubt that tomorrow I will wait so avidly for the mail.

Tripping

Allison Marlowe

On the way
to the Soviet Union
I stopped off
at a
McDonald's restaurant
in Tokyo
for a Big Mac and fries.
(They made
everyone
pay
with personal checks.)

We did a skit
in Russian
class;
I found myself
with a part
I did not want.
Fumbling the
words,
I fled
(the teacher in pursuit)
out into
the streets of
Leningrad.
Running, running
through the
streets and narrow
alleyways
and I finally
ran up the
flights of stairs
to the little
attic room
to tell
the young
Russian
with whom
I was living:
I can't play
this game
anymore.

Summer Session: Clatsop College, Astoria

Ví Gale

6 a.m. I press
a Japanese transistor to my ear.
Stretching out of sleep, history
held in rented walls, I tell
my body clock to set itself
for river weather, temperature
in cranberry bogs, new nasturtiums
twisting over old brick.
The city hassles dog control.
Man walks on the moon. Pain, private
and sharp as April three months back,
dulls, I begin to think
in terms of luck.

8 p.m. I sort
a first-day cache of student work
Shale-rough stories, tide-slosh poems
green as fresh kelp. Downstairs
a granddaughter, practicing Mozart, sways
like a reed. Her young sister
crowns herself cereal-box princess.
Students get my blood. Will the school
get its money's worth?
High ceiling. Wide staircase.
In this ship-sturdy house,
this rivermouth town, I breathe
salt air, march lilies,
water striders and shifting mud flats.
Personal adversity makes half-sense,
wasting hurt begins to heal
on a flute note, sure
as a cutout crown.

Snapshot

Grayce Scholt

Fading gray
your shadow slants across my face,
my eyes unsmiling, blind to dream
beyond the frame:

If I could call you back,
my mother, whisper, scream,
if I could rub your lips to life
(what-is-thirty-years-to-death),
my mama, if I could

Where is Monday morning now?

Your arms uplifted in a steam of clothes,
your jaw stiff set in struggle toward a grove
of poles that slant against a winter sky,
toward snapping sheets, toward crackling
underpants as cold as steel as sharply clean;
if I could call you back to only
automatic
wash
machine.

There's only this:
young and smiling, holding up
a small black box,
you point it at me: click.
You lock me in a kodak kiss.
I kneel beside your tulip bed,
my arms around our long
dead
dog.

Spelunking

Grayce Scholt

I would have said that
we had studied openings;
it was our course, exploring
cave and cove with torches and without;
on thread as tough as rope we traversed
distances as steep as time across abyss
as dark as space and cold.

I would have said that we had broken rock
together, mallet striking bright quick flecks
that opened bodies, ancient fins and wings;
I would have said that we had run our fingertips
across the age, had touched the flesh that dropped
a million years ago today. But now I know
the distances, dead as webs, that bound us
separately, that held us fast
within the tomb, were
voyages beyond the moon.

I would have said that we had studied
openings, but found instead
ourselves the relics
sealed within the ruins.



Amy Rufus Miller

Caress

Grayce Scholt

May apples grow
in our dark woods
in one small clearing

all around wet sunshafts
ravel down in cylinders aglow
with grains that rise and fall
(a glancing pain)

Remembering well that
silently you said
this ground was surely
where the child Eve
awoke to Adam first

I remember all the rest

Not daring now as then
to stop the rich contagion
I stand in velvet penetration
here again: in wild
ascent/descent
without one bee
I swear that I could
fertilize this earth
of trees

But only human
fuller than I've ever been
of love's distress, today

I turn and walk
(right-thigh-rubbing-left)
caress
(left-thigh-rubbing-right)
away.



Amy Rufus Miller

The Ladies

Jeanice Dagher

Laughing at old ladies
having martinis and
singing that they are
Miss America because
they all have fur coats
of sable or mink; how
it really could have been but
their mothers died and
their brothers cried and
they were all very young.
So they blink their powdered eyes
and woo another husband to
dance this one
Just for me.

Mary dances with Bob and
his cancer is worse and
he can't add anymore;
he excuses himself when you
step on his toes, but
that's only the years
with Virginia. So
valiantly sliding in
support hose and
green velvet shoes
the legs are too thin and
the belly hangs low through
an emerald green knit and
the ladies drink Beefeater's and
never ask where is the olive
because they're flying.

New Year's Eve and the Private Baptisms of My Brother-in-Law, the Fireman *Jeanice Dagher*

A first cigarette burn
in this still unfamiliar
carpet; it is my own,
I admit, and
Marvin's warnings
flash at me
as I flick an ash
the wrong way.
It was last New Year's Eve
and amidst an
exchange on J.P.
Sartre and a world
of contradictions
(surrounding us)
he told me about the
most dangerous fires
he had walked right
into. (Once he fell
through a hole in the roof;
once he cut a man's arm off to
set him free.)
I said, "Jesus, Marvin,
that's a very rough
line of work."
Only now,
I am increasingly
sure that an
unknown spark
will rise out
of the depths
of the rug and
when I am least aware,
swallow me in great
tongues of fire.

Fish Fry

Jeanice Dagher

Lonnie killed the great fish
last night in the darkness
behind my back.

I heard
the breath knocked
from him and
felt it was my own;
I heard his throat cut
and thought of his
great mouth gaping,
quiet now.
His flesh scraped carefully
for our dinner,
the angry pike now
lay harmless and
humble for our enjoyment.
I stared,
swatting at mosquitos,
and Lonnie said, "It's
survival, baby.
Just survival."

Very funny how
I can absently tear
a chicken apart,
crushing the bones,
ripping the joints,
just making supper
in a September afternoon.

The Way of Light

Phyllis Eyer

The Song

First you screamed, then we all
And now we cannot escape 31 kinds.
Who liked short shorts? You. Me. We.
Now you raise goat/goats, I raise goat/goats
We all scream for Denver.

The 15 Cent Hamburg

Red barn doors never close.
Old McDonald's cow is ground up everywhere.
The angle of incidence
Equals the angle of reflection.
We're caught between mirrors.

The Record Jacket

Why did you bring it in, Bob
When you brought it all back home?
The picture of you shows you
Holding the picture of you holding
The picture of you hold...

The Hockey Game

Once a cold climate game
Played on black river ice, quickly gouged;
Now on electric ice, machine swept,
Caught on camera mirrors
From Toronto to Atlanta.

The Writing Class

Write only what you know.
Mirror the life you see about you.
For experimental effects
Use warped mirrors, or slick round balls
That invert images.

Reflection

Mirrors reflect light rays
Only at the angle from which they come.
Bending glass is not enough.
Shatter mirrors, squeeze the eyes to blackness,
Turn in to see the light.

Female Misfortunes: Marge Piercy's Small Changes Joyce Ruddel Ladenson

The reluctance to admit that all art masks ideological assumptions is fast disappearing. Even Susan Sontag, the once high priestess of non-interpretation, has recently condemned the fascistic efforts of Leni Riefenstahl, Hitler's favorite film maker, and a current favorite among some American film critics. Dressed in more exotic garb than her early film, *Triumph of the Will*, Riefenstahl's recent, dazzling collection of color photographs, *The Last of the Nuba*, fascinates as it subtly nudges the deeply dangerous longings in too many of us for beauty and power. Sontag's point is unmistakable: we deceive ourselves merely to regard Riefenstahl's art for its own sake. We must examine carefully the strict hierarchical, authoritarian structures of the idealized societies she celebrates.¹

Fortunately, fascism has not cornered the market on fascination. Reversing right-wing ideological preoccupations, recent feminist novelists have begun to attract concern for more egalitarian and humanistic subjects. One such writer is Marge Piercy, whose reputation as an important novelist and poet has already been established through her first two novels, *Going Down Fast* and *Dance the Eagle to Sleep*, and her two volumes of poetry, *Breaking Camp* and *Hard Loving*. Her most recent novel, *Small Changes*, has been applauded by some as an extraordinarily important and serious feminist narrative, and has been denounced by others as a blurry ideological treatise which sacrifices clear focus, complex characterization and a comprehensive political canvas. Interestingly, very few of Piercy's hostile critics really specify how her so-called uncertain ideological intentions impair her art.²

I am tempted to guess that some of the hostile response is a reaction to Piercy's painfully honest vision and to the justifiably ambiguous implications of her prose. Although a dedicated feminist who no doubt wishes a brighter future for us all, she tells a story which does not promise paradise, nor does it include the full range of class and race experience. Piercy focuses on two young white women, whose lives in late sixties America intersect at moments, but take different directions almost from beginning to end. Although these

¹Susan Sontag, "Fascinating Fascism," *The New York Review of Books*, 22, No. 1 (6 February 1975), 23-30.

²The critical controversy over *Small Changes* began with Lucy Rosenthal's negative review ("Ideology and Fiction—A Delicate Balance," *Ms*, September, 1973, 29-31), and was followed by several positive rejoinders—Phyllis Chesler and Martha Shelley among them. Piercy's negative critics generally make the impossible demand that the novel conform to their particular feminist view of reality.

two lives cannot possibly represent all of womankind, they can shed new light on where a lot of us are at, or are headed, or have been.

Beth, the first of the two women protagonists, emerges from an average though backwater family into a more stifling early marriage. The novel traces her daring escape from that marriage and the sexist culture it represents, to the cosmopolitan milieu of the Boston-Cambridge late 1960's youth culture. Beth's feminist maturation leads her to lesbianism and an involvement with a communal counter culture. All this is told with pathos and humor, as the very shy Beth nonetheless discovers resources to dissemble against her husband and family, and finally, out of her own and her lover's volition, to forge a new life for herself.

Miriam, to whom we are introduced secondly, nevertheless occupies a central position in the novel, since she dominates most of its 557 pages and is realized far more complexly than Beth. Miriam's parallel emergence from her Brooklyn Jewish origins into the more cosmopolitan Boston youth circles comprises an intriguing and contradictory journey of self realization through work, conflict through heterosexuality, partial "adjustment" through marriage, and finally desolate isolation. Miriam's trials and tribulations with her two "movement" lovers and her eventual marriage to her boss, a relatively conventional though liberal man by whom she dutifully has two children, sounds on the surface like the script for an afternoon soap; but Miriam attracts us with her loquaciousness, vitality, intelligence and bohemian style, as she alternately evokes our sympathy and disappoints us with her weakness for men she cannot satisfy or be satisfied by.

Piercy's feminist biases are especially apparent as she details Miriam's life. Her protagonist's initiation into sex is more of a joy to her than to her lover-initiator Phil, an appealing counter-culture poet; yet Phil's macho need to brag about his conquest serio-comically underscores his male egocentricity. And, in a series of succeeding scenes, we see Miriam caught between the trauma of her mother's dying of cancer, and of Phil's overdosing on acid, the impact of which tears her apart. On the one hand her mother, even near death, stubbornly insists on conventional expectations for her daughter, despite the opposing reality of Miriam's life. And on the other, Phil demands everything of Miriam—her emotional and much of her financial support. Rejecting Phil, yet still clinging to an ethic of dedication to a worthy man, she turns next to Jackson, the taciturn, independent self protector and best friend of Phil, who poses the archetypal challenge to Miriam's feminine wiles. Yet, she is a pawn in this game too, since Jackson's perverse inability to give of himself drains her dry, and she turns more to her scientific work, to Beth and other women activists.

Miriam's subsequent marriage to her boss, Neil, an arrangement she relies on for normalcy and support, is actually that for a few years. The relaxation of tension comes as a welcome relief and a realistic turning point in Miriam's search for some security and communication with men. Neil does appear to be a sensible choice too: at first he encourages her research, applauds her culinary and domestic talents, and seems not to make the adolescent demands of his predecessors. Yet Piercy's vision is relentless. As Miriam continues to be woman acted upon, rather than woman acting, her

fortune reverses. Neil's desires for a family are realized and he casts Miriam in the role of mother-civilizer-domesticator, reversing his earlier approbation of her work, which she needs. And, more socially unyielding than Phil and Jackson, both of whom show capacity for personal change, Neil finally emerges as the worst threat to Miriam's dignity, and their marriage as an emotional and mental straightjacket.

Beth suffers parallel misfortunes, although she is symbolically at least more of a self-determined figure. Having found strength and personal meaning in her relationship with a woman choreographer, she helps her lover escape from a Grand Jury witch hunt that drives them both underground and isolates them from their supportive Boston circle. It is here in the concluding sections of *Small Changes*, that Piercy's refusal to soften the harsh realities of women's lives troubles some critics. Feminist sympathies and beliefs will not force her pen to propagandize; the gloomy implications of her conclusion are an outcome not only of her fiction but of contemporary American life, which, despite the women's movement, compels us to recognize, for the moment at least, genuine constraints upon our lives.

Some of the objections to the novel are valid. The rapid transitions from one phase of Beth's life and consciousness to another do reduce her complexity, and the conversations between Miriam and her two lovers occasionally seem staged; the repartee is too clever to be real. But the overall impact of the characters in their everyday situations is enormous, and I can recall no other novel in recent years which has engaged my interest as much as *Small Changes*.

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