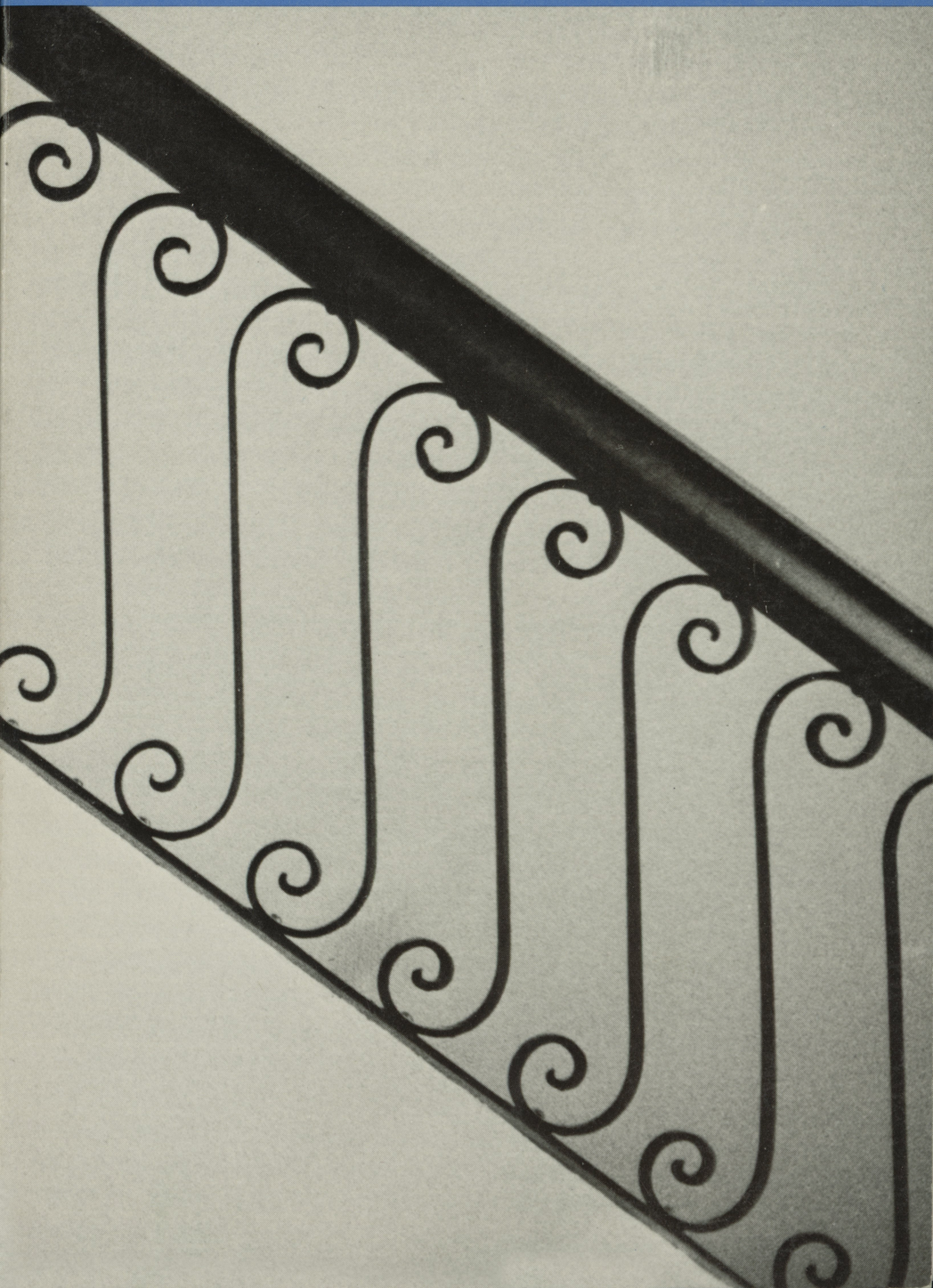
RED CEDAR REVIEW



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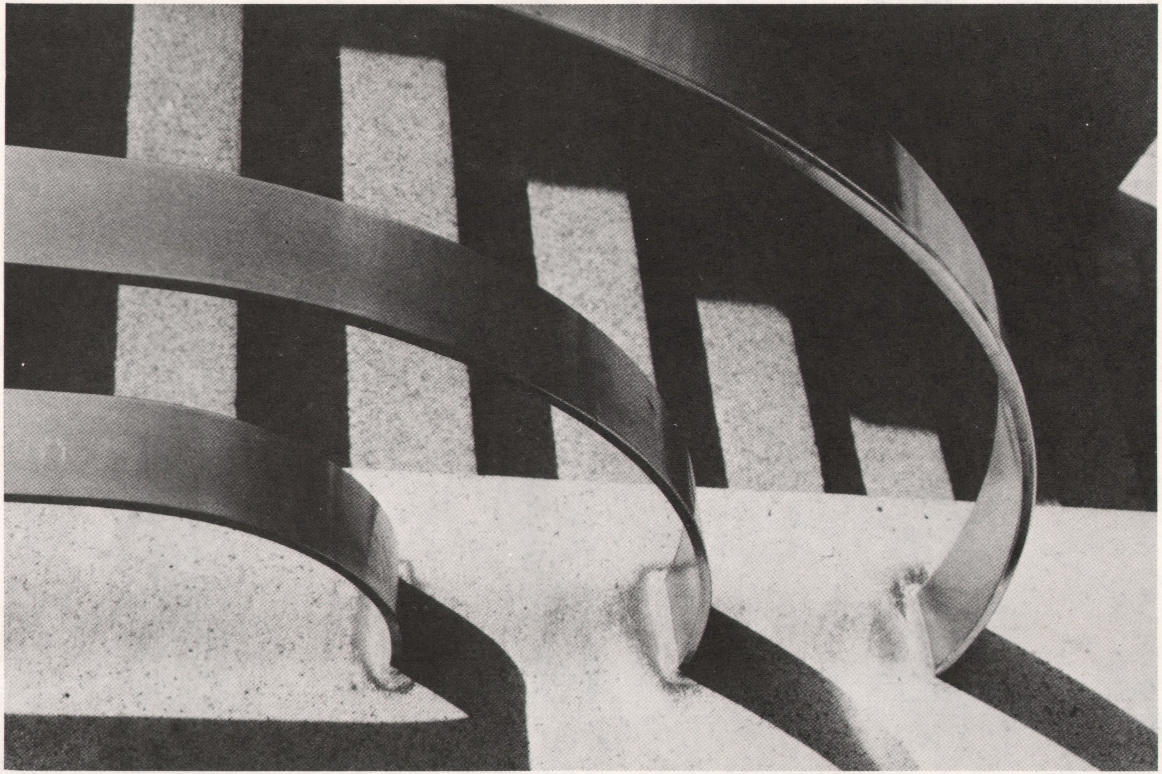

Kelly O'Keefe

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Kathy Manley

OPENING, from
THE BOOK OF FOLLOWINGS

Barbara Somers

Before you is a snowfield and a skyscape of leafless trees.
The sun will not be visible in this story
and the moon does not exist.
It will remain cold for days and days.

It begins to snow now
because I have drawn snow into the picture.
There will be no heroes in this story
and no animals that talk, tell truths
or do kindly deeds.
It begins to get even colder
so I have thrown some mittens onto the snow.

No one comes for the mittens.
They are blue, woolen mittens
and lie next to a thimbleberry bush.
These bushes are not native to this setting
but I have placed one here
because I want it to do magical things.
And people sometimes believe in magic
where there is a mysterious setting.
I have placed them with the initials
of whom they belong to face down.
You cannot turn them over, hard as you try
for they are frozen solid in their place.

I have darkened the sky.
The snow comes faster and faster.
I can stop it but I let it come and come.
The thimbleberry bush does not shake in the wind,
yet the trees bend and lean,
strain like dark legs bearing down on the earth.
You can hear their barks splitting.
Cracking and splitting apart.

Something stirs under a tree on the mounded snow ahead.
It stretches itself from a small center until it is long and dark.
It moves toward us across the snow on its belly
seeking each depression in the snow.
From here, it looks exactly like a long black glove
pulling itself along, looking for something or
someone.
Yet, it is not a glove, and as you see now
it is no animal.
I was going to have it be an animal,
just because I have already said there are no animals
in this story.
But the betrayal is yet to come.

This thing long and dark, which is not a glove or
animal, comes upon the mittens under the bush.
It is so cold now you feel as if you are sleeveless.
It should be apparent now that this thing long and dark
has the same bones as you do.
That they are arranged in a different way however,
is significant, for you are kindred spirits of sorts.
You are the only one shivering in this scene.

The black thing and you both seek possession
of the blue woolen mittens.
One of you will get them.
One will be able to move them from their immobile state.
Only one of you is
real.

The way of course, is through the thimbleberry bush.
The magic evoked from the bush will unthaw the mittens.
They will become limp and turnable,
and the secret revealed.
Black thing, long thing, you have three chances.
I listen and watch:

IT SINGS: Hey down, ho down
derry derry down,
among the leaves so oh
green oh.

IT SPEAKS,
TOUCHING THE BUSH: "By the pricking of my thumbs,
Something wicked this way comes:
Open, locks,
Whoever knocks!"

THE LONG BLACK THING
WRITES UNDER THE BUSH IN THE SNOW:
My name is Rumplestiltskin.
My name is Rumplestiltskin.
My name is Rumplestiltskin.

The mittens remain blue faced
flat down on the snow.
It is your turn.

Before you is a snowfield and a skyscape of leafless trees.
I lie here completely covered over by the snow.
No wind blows. Though, what sounds like wind
is you breathing.

I am leaving this setting entirely
for the opening act.
You can leave the blue mittens
and walk away.
Will you lift them?
Will you lift them?

BAPTISM & THE GOAT

Elizabeth Martin

She was riding with her father to the goat auction. She looked down at her legs stretched across the car seat. They seemed a normal size. They were the only legs she had. She remembered standing with the others in a shaded corner outside of the church, waiting for the photographer to arrive and snap some pictures of the baptismal group. The other girls were a year or two older than she and were wearing new summer dresses with flounces around the hem, or long cotton dresses with floral prints, but the sun had seemed to wash everything into a bland, egg-yolk color. It was just after the service and the noon sun was licking everything in sight; trickles of sweat ran down the girls' necks and the boys were adjusting their ties and looking scratched and tight in their suits. She hadn't thought about her legs then; she was proud to be standing with a group that had a very adult ring to its name: the Baptised.

It had been easy going down the aisle after her brother when the pastor had called for those who desired to have their sins forgiven and begin life as a "new creature." She had been intending to go forward anyway, because something was wrong with her, she knew, but when Dave slid past her and jabbed her behind the knee with his thumb, she tried to catch her laugh and ended up making a loud snort. So she slid onto the floor and crawled between the pews to the aisle, biting him in the calf and making him trip over the pianist who was seated next to them. She believed in Christ all right, but wasn't sure if her sins counted among those that could be transformed by the death of Christ: adultery, gambling, child-beating—a host of major offenses. She just seemed different from the other girls in the church. She wondered sometimes if she was made out of the same bucket of fiat resources God had dipped his hand into and drawn the other girls out of.

At her baptism, the pastor had covered her nose with a white handkerchief and tipped her back into the cool water.

She hadn't taken a bath that morning, and wondered whether she should have; the water seemed so pure. She could see the pattern on the metal of the bottom of the baptismal through the calm water. At communion afterwards, Dave had tipped his shot-sized glass of grape-juice to his mouth and tilted his head sideways, pretending to burp, and slurred, "One more for the new life, shweetheart." They giggled and the pastor glanced at the tittering row of converts; Dave tossed his glass in the air and caught it in the cuff of his pants. She was impressed. It was wonderful to have a brother who could make her laugh and feel as if the world might revolve on schedule. She, on the other hand, was always a little behind in everything. It was, her mother said, because she took everything so seriously. She decided to begin being a new person. So when David tipped the shot glass to his mouth, she did the same thing and that pastor just happened to look over at their pew as the glass slipped from her hand and flew over her shoulder at the pianist. Trickles of purple juice slid down the large lap of the pianist's orange shift. For that, Esther was made to apologize later. She suspected that she was regarded as a faithless one from the start.

Dave was much taller than the other boys his age and could go into the grocery store with her and see over most of the adults' heads. He'd point out people to avoid, or friends to compare tales with. Dave always knew the latest story concerning Doris Delavitche's precocious, 11-year-old breasts, or the cars that Hal Sweeting smashed when he was learning to do donuts in the school parking lot. Dave was always a step ahead in figuring out math and people.

"That's old lady Perkins," he'd say as they sauntered down the grocery-store aisle. "Keep away from her because she has a thorn under her fingernail. She'll call the cops on you for trespassing if you go by her grocery cart."

So Esther avoided Mrs. Perkins and followed Dave into the bean and noodle aisle. He'd tear the corner off of a spaghetti bag and pull out a long strand to suck on while they walked.

"Have a stick," he'd say, holding one up to her face so that she was cross-eyed looking at it. "Someone else will do it if you don't. And you don't want to be the cause of someone else stealing, do you?" His logic was loose at best, but she adored his freckles and sunburnt nose. That was why she ate spaghetti in the grocery store and tossed grape juice on the pianist. She wouldn't be surprised if Dave sprouted wings any day now, and turned into a beautiful sky-creature. Most boys got baggy and red at puberty; Dave would overnight become a Pegasus, completely overtaking the messiness of growing up. Now that she was baptized, she hoped it would happen to her, too.

But then the matter of her legs. After the baptismal group's pictures returned, there was one girl standing at the right of the bright, smiling group. She looked as if someone had caught her in the act of something very private; she was looking angry and awkward. There were dark shadows under her thin, scowling mouth and so many wrinkles across her forehead that it looked like the pianist's, who's face was almost irretrievable behind scrolls of fat that rolled down her face and neck. There were skinny arms and legs sticking out of that pale-blue dress. Esther recognized the girl in the picture as if she were looking at a relative. She had thought she looked like a princess or a fairy, but the girl in the picture looked like something that had been unearthed and was unaccustomed to the light.

One of the older baptized girls had glanced at Esther's dress and asked her when the baby was due. It seemed like a hysterical error to imagine that the girl in the blue dress was pregnant; Esther's body felt different from how she thought most girls felt about theirs. She didn't have the shape that Doris had, or even the shape of her best friend, Rochelle. Rochelle had lots of boy-friends who took her under the viaduct after junior-high basketball games. Esther would sit beside Rochelle at the games, feeling mature and important to be part of the older crowd. When Billy Sauter strutted up the bleachers to the top row where they were sitting and eyed the two of them, Esther knew he would notice the proud and knowledgeable look in her eyes and the straight

line of her thin shoulders under the tight grey sweater of Rochelle's that she had borrowed. He would immediately want to sweep her under the bleachers where they would kiss passionately.

Billy looked at Esther and twitched the right corner of his lips. Then he looked at Rochelle's breasts. Rochelle pretended to be telling Esther something, so Esther tipped her head in a secretive manner toward Rochelle and they giggled.

"You want to come to a party?" Billy asked.

Esther tried not to look off guard. "Oh, if you mean tonight," she started, but Billy's eyes were still transfixed on Rochelle's chest.

"Where's it at?" Rochelle asked.

"Oh, just me and some of my buddies are getting together at the viaduct after the game," Billy said. "Thought you might want to come. Just for a little while."

Esther looked down at her legs. "Maybe he doesn't like skinny legs," she thought. She remembered the girl in the picture, protruding from the billowing haze of pale-blue like four raw spaghettis with a shriveled turnip setting where a mysterious and adult looking face should have been. Did Billy think she looked like a sprouted turnip?

Now she was riding in the car, sitting next to her father, and looking at her legs. The car was heading for the hairpin turn where she was expected to say, "Daddy, watch out! There's a harfing dog in the woods!"

When she was four, she had confused the words hair and bark for some reason, and dad had liked this confused adjective so well that he egged her on to tease him with this silly, mis-spoken fear for seven years in a row.

"Estanne," he'd chuckle, "it's only a chained sheep dog. Daddy won't let him come near you. You're safe in the car."

She'd been comforted and calmed at four, curling next to him on the large seat of the dark-blue '59 Chevy, but the ritual was starting to anger her. They neared the corner.

"Estanne," daddy said, patting one of her protruding kneecaps, "hold on tight, it's a hairpin curve." She knew she should clutch the door handle and ape four-old-fear, but

was too concerned about the shape of her knees to ask for his ritual line.

"What's wrong with my little girl," he said, pushing her hair forward from the back of her head, which she hated.

She couldn't answer. If she did, something swelling inside her throat might choke her.

"Cat got your tongue, Liberty?" he laughed. She couldn't for the life of her figure out why he called her liberty. "Don't worry," he was playing the liturgy game alone, "daddy's got you safe."

And he started to make up a song about a little girl who was afraid of harfing dogs but who could bait a worm on a hook just as good as the fishermen in the fishermen's sea. The chorus was silly; Esther was tall and gangly, and lumpy or stretched out in the wrong places. But daddy sang about a "punkin' headed girl, just four-foot-two, yelping 'do, do, do, daddy do not let me be et by the harfy, bad, big dog'."

It was true that when he took her fishing, she could bait a worm on a hook as easily as she could thread a sewing needle, which her mother taught her to do. The reason she'd gone to the auction with her dad in the first place was because her mother was sewing Esther a new dress, which meant her mother would be nervous and chirpy, making Esther stand here and stop shifting her weight onto one foot, and "for heaven's sake, stop stooping! It makes the hem crooked!"

Then she would sew a seam up and inspect it and rip it out and Esther would have to hold stone still all over again. But since dad was going to a goat auction, Esther could go along and climb on the wooden slats of the animal pens. She would smell the damp hay and sweaty animal smells of the barns and maybe meet a cowboy who would tell her stories (she believed them all) about the birth of a baby horse, or about breaking a colt, or how to tell if a horse had bad tendons. All the local farmers went to the auctions and always had good horse stories that they told when they sat in the shade of the barns. No one told goat stories. But at home, her father was always amusing the family at supper over the latest antics of the old Billygoat who would eat

through his grain bin in search of the golden barley-stalk, or some other tale.

"If I had a goat's face," he laughed one night, "I'd hide it in an empty stall and never let anyone see the fiasco of a computer error God made when He was calculating the makings of Pegasus."

Esther thought about the goat and then she thought about Pegasus and being a grown-up. Women didn't have to worry about skinny legs or pregnant-lady dresses. They stood beside clean sinks all day, smiling, having organized refrigerators and shiny linoleum countertops. They had parties where everybody ate holiday food and said nice things, and then they went home to neatly made beds and slept soundly all night. Esther, just the opposite, thought that everything in her life kept creeping out of the corners where she tried to tie them neatly into a bundle. She'd draw the strings shut and at the same time, something like a wad of snarled hair or broken spaghetti stick would poke out of the sack. She'd try to stuff it back and something else would pop out. Like the way she kept waking up during the night, or couldn't get to sleep at all, even though she tried to force her mind to lie still next to her body and stay quiet for a while. But it would jump off somewhere, and she'd have to follow, looking for it, and sometimes found herself stuck in the branches of a tree, or running through a green maze, or chasing someone toward the viaduct, but it kept getting farther and farther away and she could never find out who it was she was chasing.

One night when she couldn't sleep, she counted the clock downstairs chiming the same note every half-hour through a long series of daydreams where she was looking up at the continuous spirals of a green maze and searching for the face of someone just a little older than herself who she knew well, but couldn't quite identify. After several reruns of the maze dream, she crawled stealthily over to Dave's bed where he was snoring like a violin bow on loose strings, and whispered his name two or three times.

"What do you want this time," he asked, and she told him there was a goat face in the mirror. He let her scoot

under the covers with him so she wouldn't be afraid, but when he started scratching on the loose strings again, she crept back to her own bed and had to get the sheets warm again. She tried praying, bargaining.

"Dear God," she said, "please help me get to sleep. I'll weed out the turnips for gramma tomorrow and do the dishes." But when that didn't work, and the clock chimed again while she was looking for a door in a green wall, she got out a candle from under the knee socks in her drawer and lit it and tried ouija, only without the board.

"Give me an answer, Aunt Tonya," she said. She tried for her Russian aunt because there was something more mysterious, and therefore spiritual, about foreigners. But when no one answered, she crawled back into bed and wondered what it was Aunt Tonya would be able to tell her anyway. She wasn't much interested in the life of the dead; streets paved with jewels, or a hugh rocky vat full of bubbling fire didn't seem as interesting to her as the woods behind the house, or the glimpse she'd had of Chicago. She'd rather stay here after she was dead, if God didn't mind. She decided that Aunt Tonya hadn't answered because God hadn't let her; then she got confused about God, Aunt Tonya and the ouija and decided she'd have to believe harder next time. Maybe God was hard of hearing and you really had to shout up at him with your soul. So she pushed the candle through the air-vent below the storm window and heard it plop into the snow covered bush below.

All these things were racing through her mind as the blue Chevy sped toward the hairpin curve. And then it really happened for the first time. Esther hadn't even asked for it, though daddy always wanted her to think something fearful was at the corner. There was a cattle truck full of goats just around the other side of the curve. It had been invisible because of the trees that slunk farther and farther toward the road from the woods each year. The tires of the Chevy licked the pavement, making a dry, scraping sound like teeth on gravel. There was a thud and Esther grabbed for the door handle, almost expecting daddy to say, "That's a good girl. Daddy will save you."

Her feet were above her and there were ferns and twigs rolling against her body and the next thing she knew, she was examining the face of a goat who was extending his nose within close range of her own. A large, wet looking eye contemplated her where she had landed in the cool stream of a ravine. The goat bent down to take a drink. Esther had never been on the same side of a fence with a goat, but had heard stories of sharp, goat horns pressed into rib-cages, or goat hoofs thumped against bony shins and jaws. The goat had thin horns that curled and twisted like branches of a dagwood tree, complete with an outer layer of scaley, bark looking bone. The horns looked even more like thick fingernails, she thought, twisting off of a freak thumb and pointing toward some presence settled in the tops of the trees or the barley field just above the ravine. The goat, refusing to move, established the stream as his territory. It was Esther against him on his ground. She imagined that the goat was one of the girls in the baptismal class; she would finally know their secret—they were goats at night in their sleep, but transformed themselves in the morning by some secret chant, no, by a drink from a magic cup of wine, and their long, angry faces became smooth and brown, or white, and their knotted, goat heads turned into yellow curls or long black hair.

"So this is your secret," she said out loud, getting ready to argue with the goat. She wasn't sure whether she should have talked to him, or whether she might even have thought he would reply. While the goat contemplated her, Esther saw that he had very crooked legs and his knees were off center. She looked at her own knees, spread at an angle she hadn't known she could put them, but was afraid to move from the position she had fallen into.

She noticed that her nose was bleeding; she must have hit it against the door handle when she tumbled out of the car. She slowly lowered her face to the water and let her nose submerge. The water, surprisingly, smelled like a clean, damp woods. She had seen the woods when dew had beaded everything into strands of green and brown and yellow, transforming trees and ferns and weeds into colored

drapes and webs like a huge prism made of millions of the tiniest blobs of water and stretched thin as a spider web. She looked at the goat feet submerged next to her, then back up to his face. He seemed to be grinning at her; his grey lips were drawn back and a contorted brey like a chuckle tumbled out.

She thought he might have known her from an auction. Suddenly Esther laughed; she was glad to be sitting there in the stream with her friend the goat. Then she scrambled onto all four feet and let out a ripple of jagged brays that sounded like little bells ringing up from under the leafy surface of the stream. So this is what it's like to be baptised, she thought. She trotted up the ravine after the laughing goat who was headed for the large field of barley. It looked like a street of gold in the August sun.

WINTER BLINDNESS

Ken Poyner

Everything becomes a predator:
The wood pile, the back porch,
The noises of stray dogs,
A cat cold on your windowsill.
Even the flames huddled in the fire place
Seem to be waiting your one mistake,
One thoughtless instant, a second to trap you with.
Any motion may lead you into hopelessness. Your feet
Dragging about the comfortless cold of the wooden floor
Await betrayal from the legs. Your hands in mastery
Shift the shawl on your shoulders.
Exhibitionists. The quiet of the house
Pulls against your skin like a gutter's knife.
In the next breath
The desire to push open the door,
To run for the wild safety of the forest,
Will freeze on your chin.
Your calves, gathering anger from the snow about you,
Cast revolt towards the hips still loyal to warmth—
And you bend into attack, lusting for the kill,
Summoning all the force left in your jaw.

THE ANIMAL

Ken Poyner

The boy could not sleep through winter.
Hands full of snow he has worn himself to spring.
The crows have taken shelter in the barn;
Our cows, huddled in one corner,
Will not come out to graze. Even the chickens
As garroulous as ever do not appear at the back door.
Last night, our collie left to run with wolves:
The boy stood at his window, pointing—
The woods, the stream, the free territory.
You've got to go to him.
He grows weed in his window box.
Already the corn has begun to show silk
And I cannot have it.
Each night he calls to the mice;
By day he has taken the place
Of the scarecrow. Naked, bent
By the fence, he has caught birds
Alive in his mouth. His brown body
Coils power like a snake's. Hunting bear
I have come down almost too soon on the trigger
And found him dodging from the brush into my sights.
Go to him.
I will stand by the door with the axe.
The music of him four-footed, mocking
The rabbit and the wolf timorous in snow
Is too much for a man to carry
And still pull food out of earth.
We shall have our son back from this season,
Or the memory.

Settling into the Earth

David James

rain in your eyes
like clear mercury
steaming with the heat
of your body
as you move
through the downpour
in this morning of invisible birds
you head into the wheat field
out back
your bare feet
sinking in dirt
& up through the clouds
the moon is still burning
to find its other half
for the first time in your life
you feel alive
just to be walking in the rain
for no reason at all
the sheaths of wheat
brushing drunk in wakes
but then you remember your awkward house
your fattening wife
your blood in the bodies of two children
and you have never felt so good
so right to keep walking
away from them
your face pointed up to the sky
with faucets of rain
soaking you
filling your pores
it is here alone
where you finally see
that you are a part of this rain
this field

that even your arms and legs
have sprouted out of the flesh
of this wet body

January 1

David James

It snowed all night again, hard. The radio says there's thirteen inches but I don't really care, I've got no place to go & sitting at the table here, I feel warm. Out the kitchen window a pine tree stands buried in snow. It looks like a statue but moves slightly as crosswinds spray the white powder against the shed, kennel. Then I see a clump of snow crumble off and a branch pop out, bouncing & waving. More snow falls & each time, a branch springs up & down, causing tiny avalanches on the branches below until the spray finally settles on the ground. Behind & to the right of the tree, the dog sticks his head out of the kennel, an inch of snow piled on his nose, & then pulls it back in. I should go out & give him some food but I'm too lazy, too warm. I sit here, drinking tea, rubbing my feet together. I spend the whole morning wondering why I feel so happy watching this pine tree wake up & climb out of the snow.

CRAVINGS

Albert Drake

Throughout the day rain fell, gusting against the house, blurring the outline of Mt. Scott until he thought the fog-shrouded dark figure resembled something out of his mother's fears.

Kneeling on the davenport, he watched rain fall against the screen, filling the small holes. The drainpipe gurgled like a frog. He and his mother had been in the house for two days, since his father had left for work.

"Oh, give me a nail and a hammer," his mother sang, sliding the iron across the fabric in slow, sure motions. The smell of slightly scorched fabric filled the frontroom, and reminded him of the taste of the metal window screen on his tongue.

"And a picture to hang on the wall." As she sang and folded the wool work shirt he imagined what the song was about: a thin woman with short wavey hair and a flowered dress stood on a step-ladder to hang a picture of his father. He wished that his father would return. He thought of the woods where his father worked, tall trees in a forest unbroken by roads from Portland to the ocean, and that made him think of other songs his mother sang: a sweet little nest way out in the west, rainbows, a small hotel, California here I come.

Often there was a rainbow to the east, but today the sky was gray, and around the top of Mt. Scott floated thin white clouds which scattered before the wind. Beyond those were dark gray clouds, and beyond those black thunderheads. White smoke came from the chimney of the house across the street, and as he watched it drift upward he wondered whether house smoke made the sky gray. His mother had said that the cloudy weather was due to the bombings in Manchuria and Europe: he imagined rows of cannon firing into the air and smoke rising to form dark, ominous clouds. He had mixed feelings about the rain; it kept him inside when he wanted to play in the sandbox, but being indoors

during a storm was cozy. They had had tomato soup and crackers for lunch; he liked the smell of food and the hot odor of ironed clothes and the sound of his mother's singing. They didn't need to go out. Later he would listen to the radio. He wished that his father would come home.

When he tired of watching the rain fall like bullets in the mudpuddles, churning up little umbrellas of water, he turned to the table beside the davenport and picked up the writing tablet. Real Irish Linen. Aeroplane tablet. There was a drawing of a monoplane flying through heavy clouds like those around Mt. Scott. On the lined paper was her familiar handwriting. He took a clean sheet and tried to print Real Irish Linen with the stubby pencil.

"Uh un, mustn't mess," she said, taking the tablet away. She held it while she went back and unplugged the iron, tapping the hot metal with a finger she had moistened against her tongue. She was always afraid of fire.

" 'Dear Bertha,' " she read aloud, as if to double-check what she had written. " 'We are all fine, hope you are too. Have had lots of rain but that makes things green (ha ha). Chris is getting bigger and soon he will have a baby sister. (In April.) Calvin has a real good job working on the road crew. That's WPA, they're camped at Wolf Creek. . .' " When her voice caught, dropped, he thought she was crying and he wanted to run and hug her but he felt confused and continued to look out the window where rain fell in sheets. Later he would listen to the radio. He wished his father was home. " 'How's everything on the farm? Real pretty this time of year I'll bet. Is Pa and the boys busy with. . .' "

She continued to read the letter but so softly he couldn't hear the words. He pictured the clouds collecting from the war in Manchuria, rolling across the ocean, passing over the mountains where his father worked, and skirting Mt. Scott on their way to the Cascades. Eventually they would travel to where his mother and father had come from; he could not picture that place except that it was like a big farm, and peopled with relatives that his mother longed to see. He imagined it smooth and level and safe; a place where, in his mother's opinion, there was nothing to fear. His father had

said that he didn't ever want to go back—he loved the mountains and tall trees and, yes, even the rain.

The tall, brown grass in the field across the street had been beaten flat by the rain. He remembered a morning when he had gone outside to play after breakfast and had looked up to see an older boy running across the field in long strides. A leg parted the high grass and extended; the boy bounced high in the air. He got closer and closer and ran past without looking at Chris. On his head was a cloth flyer's cap, and the chin straps flew up and down at every step. He wondered if the boy was a flyer; he wondered where he had come from, and what was beyond the field.

"Where did he come from?" he asked.

"Where did we come from?" his mother said, misunderstanding the question. "Don't you remember I told you?" She folded the letter, placed it in the envelope, and licked the edge with her tongue. "Don't you remember I told you about the train trip, and how long we were on the train, and the mountains we came across, I'd never seen mountains and we went up so high, gosh I was scared. I thought we'd fall right down." She laughed, and plugged the iron into the extension cord which came from bare lightbulb overhead; she continued to talk while the iron heated. "When we got here we didn't have any place to stay, we stayed in a hotel one night and then your father bought a tent and we found a place in North Portland, off Albina, where we put it up. That was real nice, it was summer and the weather was real nice. It was near a dump and there was always fire coming out of this crack in the ground and we cooked our food there. It was like camping out."

When the iron was hot she laid another workshirt on the ironing board and began to smooth the hard, wrinkled material, working with practiced movements. "One day the police chief came past and asked if he could inspect the tent. He said it was the best tent he'd ever seen—it was so clean. He said he envied young people who had a sense of adventure. The police chief said that! It was fun, but of course it wasn't all fun. We were so poor all we had to eat was beans, and we didn't even have salt for them. That first

Christmas your father found a Christmas tree that had fallen off a truck and he carried it home; for decorations we cut up tinfoil from cigarette packages he found along the street."

Chris thought about that tree and decided it must have been ugly with only tinfoil decorations. His mother had stopped ironing and was looking out the window. "That summer, in the evenings, we'd walk to the top of the bluff and look out over the Willamette River and watch the boats. At the bottom of the bluff was the railroad tracks, and every evening the City of Roses went past. I used to think about those people, and wonder where they were going. That was a real new and streamlined train, and we could see the people in the dining cars at their tables. Sometimes I used to wonder what they were eating."

Chris looked out the window; gray clouds filled the sky, blotting out Mt. Scott, and the wind whipped the neighbor's trees, which were like black brushstrokes against the dark gray sky.

For dinner they had fried potatoes and Beenee-Weenees, which they ate in the front room near the radio. Before his father had left for the woods he had gone to the new Fred Meyer store and had bought a case of tomato soup and a case of Beenee-Weenees; the boxes sat on the back porch and they ate one of each every day. The smells of cooking filled the small house with a friendly warmth, and as he huddled around the radio's familiar yellow dial he had a feeling of contentment.

His mother paced the small frontroom, shoes clacking against the faded linoleum; finally she opened the door and stood for a long time looking out at the gathering darkness. The man on the radio kept talking about "straight-shooters." "Be a Straight-Shooter," he said. Chris imagined a straight-shooter was someone who could throw a rock and have it maintain a straight course without flipping over. Earlier he and his mother had tried without success to decipher the Captain Midnight Secret Code; you needed a special ring to understand the secret message given at the end of each program, but his mother thought that they could figure it out. She substituted a letter for their numbers—a one was an

A, two was a B, etc., but the message remained garbled. Chris wondered if you had to be a Tom Mix Straight-shooter to understand Captain Midnight's secret messages.

Finally she shut the door and locked it, double-checking the lock. "Let's walk to Lents," she said, picking up their dishes and carrying them into the kitchen.

He was surprised that she would want to leave the warmth of the house. Usually she was afraid to go out in the evening—there were strange men and crazy drivers and dark streets and people in taverns. These were the dangers of the city. Even if nothing happened to you, you had to worry about high prices and being cheated by a slick sales clerk and that the house might burn down while you were gone.

"Why?" he said.

"Come on," she said, "I got this craving. And I have to mail this letter."

"Awwwww," he said, making movements against the radio casing with his feet. A program about an aviator had just started.

"Get your boots and jacket," she said, putting the letter in her purse. "I can't stand being cooped up. I got a craving to get out."

"Buy me a comic?" he asked, and when she agreed he stirred from the spot before the radio where his body had warmed the linoleum. He put on his rain gear; the yellow rubber had a slick smell, like the red and white oil cloth on the kitchen table. He waited beside the door while she put on her coat, and he saw her expression of impatience as she tried to button it over her stomach. That was the baby sister.

Then she took him by the hand and made him go with her while she checked the house. That was what she called it, "checking the house," and they did it not only when they went out but before they went to bed. He was forced to follow her through each room as she checked to see if one was on fire; she opened closets and pulled back curtains to see if someone was hiding there. She unplugged light cords, unplugged the radio and iron, and double-checked everything. "Bathroom, bathroom," she said, as if doubling the size of their small bathroom, "I pee-peed and ah-ahed. Bed-

room, bedroom, closet, closet." She locked the back door, and slid a heavy kitchen knife into the jamb of the back porch door so it could not be forced open. She was afraid of fire, burglars, strangers, salesmen, neighbors. Had she been afraid of these things on the farm? he wondered. In the city every day new fears materialized—an airplane might fall, a car could go out of control, and there were always the dangers associated with high buildings, the maze of streets, crooked clerks, running out of money, going on the dole.

"Kitchen, no fires on, front room, front room, radio's unplugged, no fire here. Got my key, money."

He waited impaitently by the front door, remembering how his father always laughed at this ritual of checking the house or when she hid the butcher knife each night. "If a guy wanted to kill us," his father had said, laughing, "he'd bring his own knife!"

"Got my key, money," she said, and then she bent to pull the plug on the light near the door. They stood in sudden darkness and he felt her hand lead him onto the porch and down the front steps.

Against all her fears, he sensed, there was this terrific craving—for something—and so she was willing to enter the maze of dark streets. They walked slowly, and Chris listened to the rain falling softly on his rubber rain hat. The streets were empty of traffic and lacked any kind of lighting, and sometimes the night was so dark he could barely see his mother. Sometimes the light from a house window would show them the way, and whenever they passed a house with a big window with the lights on and curtains drawn his mother would stop and from the darkness watch the people inside. "Look how fat that woman is," she'd say or "Fish, I wouldn't walk around in old pajamas like that." But usually she commented on the house and furnishings in a neutral voice which suggested that she was checking a stranger's possessions: "Table, chairs, lamp, mirror." Sometimes she'd comment on a particular detail, or rearrange the furniture. He got the idea that she was pretending to own these houses, and was always comparing them to the house she lived in, a house she didn't like.

They walked up Ramona, the only street nearby that had a sidewalk, and when they finally turned a corner the lights of Lents burned brightly. The street was glazed black, with ribbons of reflected neon. Chris grew excited by the sight of the stores, and began to walk faster.

Music came from the open door of the tavern, and a neon sign burned in the window: Acme Beer. Dim lights showed in the fruit market, Safeway, and Butterfield's grocery. The Rexall drug store glowed in the night, lights on in the windows and on the ceiling, and although the street was empty, people sat at the fountain counter.

His mother dropped the letter in the mailbox, and they went into the Rexall. He hurried to the magazine rack, to look through the comic books, and was immediately overwhelmed by the covers: *Sensational, The Blue Beetle, Funny Animals.* The characters, semi-human, semi-animal, projected a life so different from his own, a life of adventure and action like that he heard over the radio. Finally he decided on one and when he turned to look for her she was standing, pale and nervous, at the prescription counter.

"Can we buy this one?" he asked, holding up the *Action* comic.

She took it but handed it back without reading the cover. The man put the bottle of pills in the brown sack and she paid him and put the sack in her purse.

"God," she said, "I crave a soda, or something." He followed her to the fountain, where she shook the rain from his raincoat and laid it and his hat under the counter. When he climbed onto the high stool he felt light and unencumbered. The counter was swirly marble, and the sides were faced with blue and white tiles. When the woman came, his mother ordered two chocolate sodas, and while they waited she held her hand against the side of her face, peering around or through her fingers at the couple who sat on the stools near the door. They were young, and reminded Chris of the people in the Coke posters over the counter: both had blonde hair, were smiling, the man had a maroon sweater with a large F on the front, the woman wore a plaid wool dress and saddle shoes. They were happy, and seemed

unaware that they were being watched.

He kept the comic book on his lap, refusing to read it until they were back home when he could study each page. In the ash tray were wavy slips of paper each containing a person's name; they had come from the punch boards on the counter. He played with these, enjoying the warmth and the smells of the drug store.

The sodas came in tall glasses, the tops covered with chocolate-colored bubbles; the combination of ice cream and soda was so airy and delicious it seemed to be gone in only a few minutes. With a long spoon he dug out the last bits of ice cream and scraped the foam from the glass. He held the comic book beneath the counter, wanting to read it but knowing that if he did that it, like the soda, would be gone and the pleasure dissolved.

"Thirty cents for the sodas," the woman said, and when his mother had placed the coins on the counter, she added, "And ten cents for the comic the boy has."

His mother looked embarrassed and with two fingers reached around in her coin purse, finally finding a dime. "I wasn't. . .," she said, but never finished the sentence.

Quickly she got him into his raincoat and hat, and as they went out on the sidewalk, slick with rain, Chris heard the boy and girl laugh, a pleasant sound against the dark night. He put the comic book under his raincoat to keep it dry. A few stores away the lights ended and the darkness began. As if reluctant to enter the darkness, his mother hesitated outside Menashe's fruit store. The old man was closing up, carrying the wooden boxes of apples and peaches to the rear of the narrow building where a single light burned. The air smelled of ripe fruit and cedar boxes.

"I crave something," she said, picking up a peach and squeezing it. She smelled the furry surface. "These peaches, are they good and ripe?" She always felt that everyone was trying to cheat her.

"Very ripe, very good," the old man said, tilting his hat brim back so that she could see his face and know that he was telling the truth. "Very ripe."

Oh, I'll get six, I guess," she said, debating over the purchase even while she looked into her purse. When

Menashe went into the store to get a sack she said, "They're way too expensive."

She paid, and held the bag before her, as if she intended to eat one here on the sidewalk. But she stopped before the next building, Reilly's Tavern, and stared through the open door. Chris listened to the excited sounds of a juke box and laughter, and breathed the air which had a salty smell, like the ocean. He knew what went on in there—his mother had told him repeatedly how bums wasted their lives in taverns, rotted their brains, picked up diseases, and met bad women.

He was amazed when she handed him the bag of peaches and said, "Wait here—I'll be right out."

He expected her to say that she had this craving—for sodas, peaches, beer, for music and talk and companionship —but she walked into the tavern, the place she had always hated, and stood at the end of the bar and reached once again into her purse. The man came toward her with a glass of beer. As she drank, the purple and red neon glowed in her hair and on the plain brown coat pulled tightly around the bulge that was his sister. The juke box played a lonesome song about memories, and above the telephone pole the moon broke through a hole in the clouds. The stop light pulsed like a small red heart at the intersection. Menashe's dim light went out. A man emerged from the tavern, a logger, wearing knee-high boots and a plaid jacket, and walked up the sidewalk into the darkness without even looking at Chris.

He took a step toward the open door. He felt more lonesome than he ever had as he stood on the sidewalk, water beading around the rim of his hat, his clothes damp, the bag of peaches growing heavier. He wanted to go home where it was warm. He wanted to lie on the floor and read his comic book and listen to the radio. He wanted his father to come home.

His mother drank a second glass of beer quickly and left the tavern without talking to anyone. She took his hand and guided him down the sidewalk into the darkness. They passed two darkened stores, and when they reached the dark mouth of the alley his mother said, "Oh god," and

released his hand. She walked quickly into the alley and he heard her gasp, gag, and vomit—the soda, the beer, the things she thought she had craved.

All week the peaches remained in the yellow bowl on the kitchen table, getting so ripe that brown bruises appeared, and on Friday, when his father returned from working in the woods, they sagged under their red, furry skins. All week he and his mother had eaten tomato soup and Beenee-Weenees, but the peaches had been ignored, as if after their splurge they had decided to repudiate rich food and luxuries.

Toward dusk he heard his father's car pull into the driveway, and he ran to the back door to meet him. At the kitchen table his mother sat, unmoving, a scowl on her face. He jerked open the door to the back porch and his father appeared, grinning, wearing a battered snapbrim hat, leather jacket, twill shirt and pants, and knee-high laced boots topped with red socks. Chris ran to him and grabbed his legs.

"Hiya, twerp," he said, lifting Chris high into the air. Chris caught the smell of woods, fir trees, fern, smoke. "You been a good boy? You been taking care of the house?"

"Yep," he said, nodding. Now they would be able to figure out the Captain Midnight secret code. He could play with the boards while his father worked on the garage, or help him work on the old car. He would wake on Sunday to the sound of whistling in the kitchen.

His father put him down and turned to his wife. "Hiya, kiddo," he said, smiling, leaning over to kiss her, but she pushed him away.

"Go on."

"Hey, is that any way? What's the matter, didn't you guys have a..."

The peach skimmed his hat brim and splattered against the wall behind him.

His father looked surprised, and then he began to grin. This made her madder, and she reached into the bowl and grabbed another peach, richly brown, which she threw overhand. His father jumped sideways, an unnecessary move since the peach hit the wall near the ceiling; it split from its

skin and like a snail it slowly slid down the wall, leaving a slick trail behind.

His father jumped wildly like a dancer, laughing, waving his sweat-streaked hat.

"Damn you," she said, throwing another peach from where she sat. She threw awkwardly but Chris wondered how she could miss, the room was so small; that she did miss, and that his father danced before her, laughing, taunting her, made her even madder and anger ruined her aim.

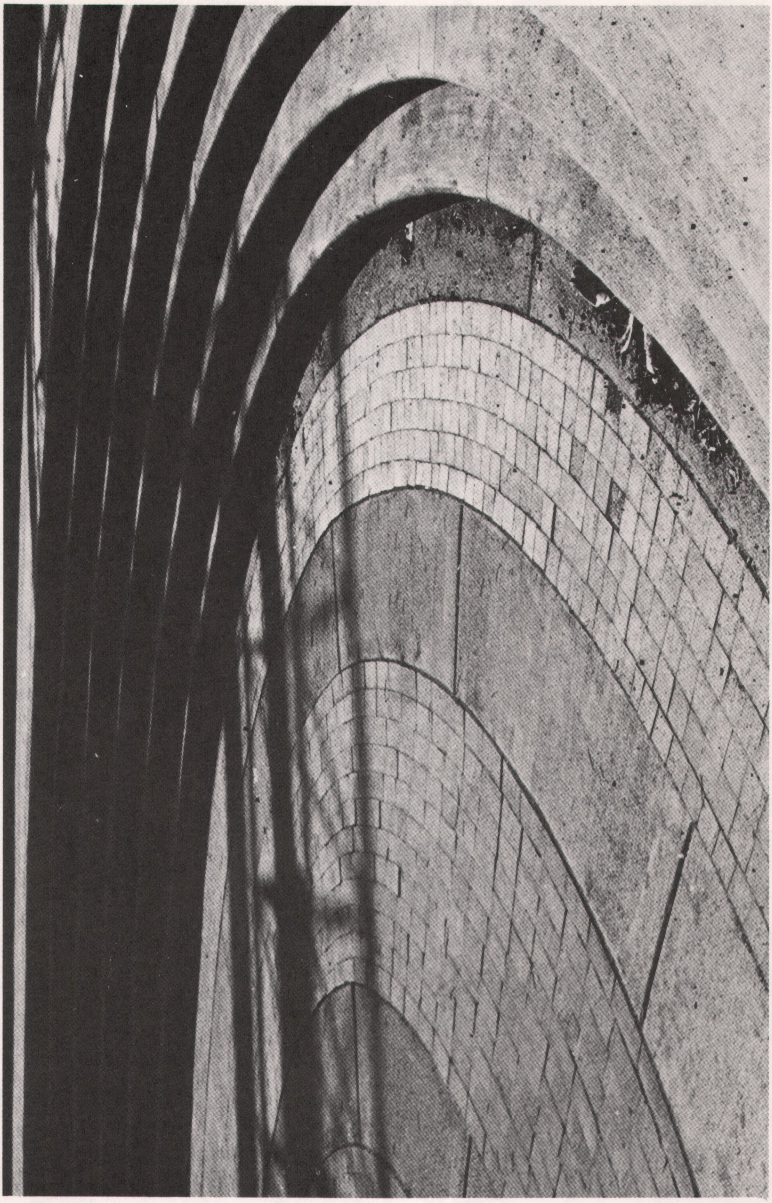
"Damn, damn," she said, throwing again.

"Yah, yah," his father said, thumbs in his ears, fingers waving.

Chris began to laugh as the last two peaches beat sloppily against the wall, and his mother began to cry, great sobs which began deep in her chest, somewhere near the bulk which was the baby.

His father was bent double with laughter, and when he was able to straighten up he took two steps forward and grabbed her, holding her tightly, and almost without a hitch her crying shifted to laughter and then they were both laughing.

Chris watched the peaches slide down the wall, freed of their skins, the yellow-brown meat already drying in the air. They would remain there for weeks, until well after his sister was born, because his mother refused to clean them up. After they were removed, by his father, and the wall scrubbed, and finally repainted, the brown splotches of the peaches would be evident for years, like violent stains.



Phil Pollard

HOLDING SACRED

Ruby Hoy

I see the relentless fall of snow
in November, its soft hammering,
feel something the earth will not yield.
I imagine you snug in the farmhouse
with that goodwoman, your wife,
your love of simple comforts—
fresh biscuits, coffee in the morning.
Days shorten towards the solstice,
it seems we live as we are willing
lives lost before us,
as winter snow covers only what we see
and we see so little.

We have yielded to this life
a part of us which does not long
for comfort or warmth, but belongs
in the cleansing cold
checking trap lines, reading signs
in the snow and the sky,
and what have we kept?
What shall we hold sacred
through these long winters of the blood?

Tonight I hold only bourbon
and walk alone as the Great Bear
tilts crazily overhead.
I curse comfort, warmth, and whiskey
feel the past move too clearly
across the fine ridges of my bones,
and wish that I did not love
that goodwoman, your wife.

THE DOMESTICATION OF ANIMALS

Marc J. Sheehan

First, their images
angular and harsh scratched
and painted on the walls of caves;
an intimacy
that will survive only as shadow:
now something of their spirit, by entering dreams,
is lost.
And after many children have eclipsed their parents
and gone dark behind their's,
by animals wounded or caught
hands come to know the rapid
heart-beat of fear slowing foolishly
under them.
First only for fur, meat, eggs, milk, cheese;
then as companions
who must be fed, kept warm and clean.
Rilke refused to care for a friend's dog
knowing it would fawn and lick at his hand
wanting a soul
and that he would care for it constantly.
And the kittens of a pregnant cat dropped off
at night near our house
made their home, as winter came on, in
the wood-pile under my bedroom window
where at night
I could hear them settling in for sleep and could
not sleep myself until they were silent.
Nor did I bury them under a cross
as I might have as a child,
but spaded them into the earth
near the swamp where the ground is soft.
I don't know how much longer the milk
left out for them kept them alive
than if the mother had been left to shift for them alone
slowly going feral in the first snow of the year;

but with the still bits of fur stiff
in my hand I knew then we would never again quite
be blameless.

PRELUDE

Marc J. Sheehan

1
A four bottomed plow turns dirt over
as if the earth could think that closely
about itself.
Wild perennial flowers
are blooming
around a house going to ruin;
a slice of moon still hangs over the dawn.

2
The farmer thinks only that his Ford
tractor is old
and will not last much longer.
He knows nothing
of almost, and all-too-
human hands;
hands that knew only tools of chipped flint
and how to lay flowers
with a dead child in a grave.
When unearthed it held barely
traceable spores
of pollen mixed
with bones gone to stone.

3
His wife takes an old knife
and with a whetstone again
sharpens the blade close to nothingness.
Their lives are becoming smaller,
already thin
as a last sliver of moon
cutting its way into dawn.

MAKING BREAKFAST

Len Roberts

Now, after four days, there is no fog on the window,
the sun a warm white-yellow on the empty field,
no wind but your hand stirring the distant ends
of my sleep. Something in the room asks if I remember
the house in Pennsylvania burning and I nod my head into
the pillow
as you ask if I am comfortable.

An hour later the strong smell of coffee rises alone
and I realize you've been gone, out into the house,
our house, turning things off and on,
letting me be alone, yet stretching your hands across
the rooms
as you put plates down and rattle spoons
with the brilliant flame of yourself telling me you're gone,
but not gone, bending your head to the broken eggs,
warming me back to this iron bed, out of the dream where
Bill and Jess
die many nights in fire out of control, there,
where my eyes burned and the Quakers' band of metal
angels
turned red hot, then cold.

MAP POEM

Elizabeth Kerlikowske

Where is my grandfather's arm?
Fife Lake
curled as if asleep
a tree snail
a spiralling fern.
Shake hands?
Impossible.
After fifty years
handshakes change.
An arm buried in the north woods
hasn't city savvy, knows
no Hiroshima or styrofoam.

His fingers twitch underground
remembering ragtime
And I
replaced the buried hand
thumping bass for his reversible melody.
There was never a more loyal or taller arm.
I walked in the shadow of his shoulder
wearing his empty sleeve like a sunbonnet.
I stood in for his severed arm.
We sailed Half Moon Lake
letting line whistle out
from between his teeth
stub squat on the rudder.

When he died
and they buried him south of the arm,
the hand began tunnelling downstate for him
mole marks longside the highway.
And I was freed to replace another family part
perhaps my father's conscience
or my sister's heart.

THE LIEUTENANT

Victor M. Depta

The men after dinner on Sunday the men sit in my grandfather's library and talk about black people and divorces and petroleum as if the sunlight filtering through the oaks and the window panes lifts the room up somewhere beyond gasoline.

I listen to them and think what a little hole the mouth is, and so rubbery. Soldiers march out of it and change clothes. They have nothing to eat but crumbs. They don't go back to a bird house but to a car wreck in a pond where a lily pad roots through the windshield. They're afraid mostly.

I watch a lieutenant they serve under—in fact he's my cousin Charles—unscrew the clamps around his eyes. He unhinges his square jaw, and handsome lips and nose. He loosens up his face.

A terrible wind flaps it. The soldiers and countries and himself, and all the planets, roar down the small holes of his eyes.

AMPUTATIONS I AND II

Terry J. McKenney

I.

I stopped him as he was going down.

"You won't like it," I said, hoping my tone of weary experience would serve as warning.

"I'd like to," he said, rising up so his pale skin looked faintly ghostlike in the winter darkness. "Would you mind?"

"No, of course not," I said and forced myself to think of other matters to lessen the nauseous feeling. I wasn't intending to go this far...seems like I can never say no anymore, not with any effect. I guess after the first time there isn't really a reason to. I hate all this freedom we have today. Sometimes I long for those days I never knew, when dorms had ten o'clock curfews, and you could be expelled for entertaining a gentleman in your room with the door closed. Now sex doesn't matter, unless you are too obviously gay and it makes the other women on your floor uncomfortable.

He's back up to my level, harsh breathing in my ear. I sort of enjoy that, it shows how much I've gotten to him. I'm trying to make the right moves, no reason for him to get frustrated. I feel like I'm looking in the window at two people I've never seen before. For a second I can't even remember his name.

"Feeling okay?" I ask, for the thrashing has stopped, and I have a sudden hope he's through and I can go wash up. I'm always getting teased about my dash for the bathroom but I don't like feeling unclean. Funny how they never mention the messiness in those romance novels. The hero and heroine always float on waves of rapture, plunging and moaning in ecstacy. I'm mostly the silent type myself, except for the cute comments I rarely can resist making. The whole situation is ridiculous, but I seem to be the only one who finds any humor about it. Occasionally I laugh out loud at a particularly trite line or move, only to provoke a hurt "What's so funny?" How can I say you are, and I am, and this whole mess is unbelievable.

He's moving again, and my hands stroke automatically. "Nice touch," he says, and I smother a smile. Men are so easy to please. No, maybe not all men—I shouldn't lump half the population together in one fell swoop. Maybe it's just the men *I* choose who are easy to please. Interesting thought...do I attract them, or am I attracted *to* them? Or both?

This is so awkward. Tangled sheets, clothes, bodies, lives. I should be living in New York, or somewhere where one night stands are the norm, instead of this on-campus rooming house that is more gossipy than my high school, for God's sake.

My philosophy professor, a very frightening, liberated lady, says the only way Woman (with a capital W) can be happy is with another Woman, because men are incapable of understanding Women. Well, this man, who is currently intently sucking on one of my fingers, is a contradiction. Sometimes I get the uncomfortable feeling he knows a great deal more about me than I do about myself, and likes me in spite of it. I hate it. Women spend so much time trying to get their mates to understand them, when really they should cultivate misunderstanding. There is so much freedom in confusion. Scott, here, is capable of astonishing revelations that are damn near impossible to cope with. Like last week, we were in about this same position, when he raised up on one elbow and said abruptly, "You're just tolerating me, aren't you?"

I was stunned and flustered. A slow panic began to creep up my spine and my voice came out high and false. "How can you say that? I love you. I love what you were doing. I'm very happy." He seemed more or less reassured. A long sigh escaped me, and he redoubled his efforts. But it was just relief. I don't want to lose him, and get back into that oh-my-God-it's-Friday-night-and-I-don't-have-a-date-yet syndrome. And I really do enjoy his company. He's wonderful to talk to, fun at parties, and misuderstands me beautifully, most of the time. It's just those flashes of insight that unnerve me.

He's playing with my ear, and I want to shake my head

like shooing an irritating fly. It interfers with my thoughts. I place his hand elsewhere and kiss his nose so he won't take offense. Like offering a baby a pacifier.

For something that's supposed to be so spontaneous, this sure seems mechanical to me. Do this and he does that. Move your body this way, and he moves his like that. Push his button and hope he finds yours. A couple of my friends say that they talk about sex like they would anything else they do: "Please touch here, now Don." "I feel very comfortable with what you are doing, Sharon." I'd die first. Sometimes I think real hard about what I'd like and hope he catches on, but usually I just lie back and let the sequence happen. After a point there is no need for words anyway.

"Beth and Andy are getting married." Scott has that same awed apprehension I hear in my own voice when I speak of another couple who are tying the knot. God, it's an epidemic, fourth so far this spring.

"I figure I'll buy you an engagement ring this summer if things continue the way they have been."

Did I hear correctly? His body is still and tense, the words not dropped as casually as he'd like me to believe. "Oh? Do I have any say in this matter?" I didn't mean to sound so sarcastic. It didn't help. He's on the defensive now.

"Of course. I thought we were in agreement." He's speaking so coolly I can almost see icicles hanging from the cartoon balloon over the bed.

"Uh, we are. Maybe someday we'll move in together, or get married or something. Maybe."

A long silence. I'm hoping he's gotten off the subject. His finger traces my necklace. "Pretty. Where'd you get it?"

Pause. I never know how to answer a question like that. Maybe the trappings left over from an affair should melt of their own accord when the relationship disolves. Maybe you shouldn't keep old cards, letters, locks of hair...presents. I think I'm a keeper because I'm afraid I won't get them again. Confucius say reading old love letters better than not having any to read at all. I like this necklace, and I intend to wear it. I start to answer defiantly, then notice he isn't listening. It

wasn't important. I make a mental note not to wear it on a date again.

He's still lying across me. I study the ceiling over his shoulders, warm miniature mountains, faintly freckled.

His voice is loud in the silence. "Mar, we aren't going to make it."

Be cautious, don't show any fear. "What makes you say that?" I say, my voice tinged with hysteria at the end, which I swallow like a bitter capsule. I push on his shoulders until I can see his eyes in the gloom.

"You're closed off from me. I can't reach you anymore."

I laugh. "Is that all? You had me scared. Of course you're reaching me. What do you call this?" I hold up a trembling hand, my standard reaction to upsetting news. "See? You've got me so excited I'm shaking. Let's quit talking and do something about it." I kiss him long and hard, closing my eyes and moaning whorishly. Scott responds hesitently at first, but my wildness convinces him, and we plunge and thrash for quite a while.

Eventually I run out of things to do, and just lie back. Scott halts abruptly and looks down at me. "You were faking, weren't you?"

"Don't start, I'm not up to this tonight," I say wearily. "Just go to sleep." I turn over and close my eyes, more wide awake than I have ever been in my life.

"No. We're going to talk, or else I'm leaving."

Since when does he have all this will-power and conviction? This is the guy who can't even decide where to meet me for lunch. I concentrate on breathing evenly and keep my eyes closed tightly. If I don't talk he can't make me say something awful.

"Mar? Talk to me." The silence is thick. Our breathing is momentarily in rhythm. I can smell the stale scent of our earlier love-making, almost touchable in the quiet.

The bed creaks as Scott's feet hit the floor. He gathers his clothes and resolutely begins to dress.

"Scott? Don't leave me. We can work it out," I say involuntarily. Was that me who whined like that? I press my lips together and vow not to beg again. Scott sits on the bed next to me. I turn my face to the wall.

"I'd talk until I turned blue, but it wouldn't help. You just aren't there sometimes, and I can't hack it. Maybe someone else can, but I can't. I thought I could...well, do something, change you...something, but it's not working." He smoothes my hair, and his touch irritates me. "I'm leaving now."

When he opens the door, the light from the hallway illuminates the bed. It narrows as the door shuts, and is extinguished by the muffled click of the lock. I stare at the ceiling for perhaps an hour, but the wrinkled bed sheets bother me, so I meticulously straighten the covers and tuck the corners in neatly. While fluffing the pillow I see it is covered with Scott's brown hairs. Carefully I pick up each one and put it in an envelope from my desk. The bed is now cold, so I switch on the electric blanket.

By now it is clear he isn't coming back. I can't tell how I feel about this, and probe each feeling like a tongue at a sore tooth. So what if he had stayed? Would it really have been that much better? I don't care much either way. I mean, well it was something to do.

I like sleeping alone, I don't do it enough. I stretch out precisely in the center of the bed, and run my hand down the legs I shaved for him this morning. I wait for the blanket to warm my chilled body.

II.

At first it was a matter of annoyance that the skirt wouldn't zip, and a mental note to cut out that second glass of wine I had lately begun to sip with dinner. Then came the sneaking suspicion that I had a problem that wouldn't go away as easily as cutting down on calories. But I didn't know if the sick feeling in my stomach was morning sickness or just fear.

So, I made a journey to the drug store, hoping to end the uncertainty with one of those home chemistry sets that clarifies your swelling belly. You know the type, they're advertised in leading women's magazines with quotes from happily married housewives who were just delighted to discover they had a long-awaited baby in the ol' tum-tum.

Well, I don't qualify on either of those counts. I'm hardly the happy homemaker type. In fact, if this nightmare is true, I doubt that dear DaDa will even get a whiff of the news.

Anyway, I drove far from home, to a large, impersonal store where a young woman conspiculously lacking a ring on her third finger would not look out of place buying a home pregnancy test. I roamed the store, dropping little essentials into a cart, casually hiding the E.P.T box under a magazine and a box of Valentine candy. If I *was* pregnant, then I deserved a little pampering. As a last impulse I tossed in a box of contraceptive foam. Talk about locking the barn door...

The cashier was the friendly, chatty type, who mercifully refrained from comment about the discretely flowered little box. I read a magazine to avoid conversation as she totaled my purchases. After skimming it, I found a story about a young wife's experience with a false pregnancy. I felt positively euphoric—our symptoms were the same.

"Have a nice day," the cashier bubbled, and I was able to answer cheerfully. Of course, all this was probably my body's way to tell me to slow down. I knew I'd been overextending myself, what with working, and all those exams. And I certainly was under emotional stress, especially after Scott walked out. I wondered briefly if he'd want a boy or girl. I'd rather have a puppy. Or a kitten...or a canary.

It really hit in the car, and I had to pull off the road and light a cigarette to stop the shaking. Shit, if I *was* pregnant. I examined my finances, and found they were not good. I wonder what abortions cost? I stubbed out the butt and started the car. Would Scott foot the bill? Damn all of my independent speeches anyway—what did *I* know?

By the time I'd parked the car and let myself into my apartment, I was brimming over with confidence. I put on a pot of coffee and sat at the kitchen table to read the literature that accompanied the home pregnancy test. First were the testimonials from Typical Housewives: "After 17 years of hoping for a child, E.P.T. told me I was at last pregnant. Thank-you!" Etc., etc. Yeah, but it sure was fun trying, wasn't it, sweetie? At least you wanted *your* little bundle of joy. And

you weren't carrying the child of some smuck who left *you* for no good reason...

Disgusted by my tears, I drank some coffee so hot it burned all the way down. Hope it got you, too, you little bastard, I thought, but immediately I reneged...I didn't mean it, God.

So, I have to put three drops of the first urine of morning into this test tube, swirl it around and let it sit undisturbed for two hours. If there is a brown ring around, then your problems are just beginning. Well, *that* sounds just charming. I rinsed out the coffee pot and swigged a couple of sleeping pills with the remaining residue in the bottom of my cup. The swill made me gag, and as I dashed for the bathroom I thought murderously of knitting needles and Coco-cola douches. Sleep was a long time coming, and my restless dreams were fragmented with screaming red wrinkled babies and visions of my disapproving parents.

When I woke, my pillow was clammy and wet—I didn't know if it was tears or sweat. I called the office and said I had bad cramps and wouldn't be in today. The always sympathetic secretary told me to stay in bed with a heating pad."Yeah, return to the scene of the crime," I thought as I hung up the phone.

The lucite box and test tube were still lying on the table. I don't know what I'd expected to happen during the night, but the sight of them was enough of a shock to send me retching to the bathroom. While in there I checked hopefully for some sign of staining on my underwear, but no such luck.

I scoured the kitchen for a dixie cup, unwilling to use something I'd have to drink from later. I returned to the bathroom and sat down. As usual, my shy bladder refused to perform at command, so I settled back with my magazine and read the account of the false pregnancy. The young wife was Catholic. Maybe a couple of Hail Marys would help?

Finally the mission was accomplished, and I made my way to the kitchen. If it spilled I'd have to wait until tomorrow, and I couldn't stand that. I put three precise drops into the test tube, and added the magic fluid, shaking vigorously

as directed. Except that it was my hands that were shaking, and not the test tube. I stared at the slim container for a moment, but nothing dramatic happened. Well, it was supposed to take two hours.

So, I had two hours to kill. And, maybe at the end of the two hours I'd have a baby to kill. Even I am shaken by my own thoughts.

Since I can't think of anything else to do, I take a long shower. The hot water relaxes me, and I examine myself critically. Are my breasts fuller than usual? I'd swear things are changing, but it could be the product of an overactive imagination. I also feel horny, but the thought of sex now is ridiculous. "Hey, Scott, could you come over and help me kill a couple hours? No, I can't come over there...I have something in the oven."

The second hour is worse. I've made the bed, swept, dusted, domestic as hell. I even did a couple self-conscious push-ups, made an attempt to study, and flipped through several magazines—even the article on the false pregnancy has lost its appeal. I also have resisted the urge to check the test tube. As my one act of willpower I avoid the contents of the tube resting on the kitchen table. I eat the entire box of valentine candy. Then I throw it up. Junior must not like chocolate.

Through the window I see students bundled in ski jackets and scarves hurrying to class with their heads bent against the wind. I envy them fiercely, but then, they have problems too, right?

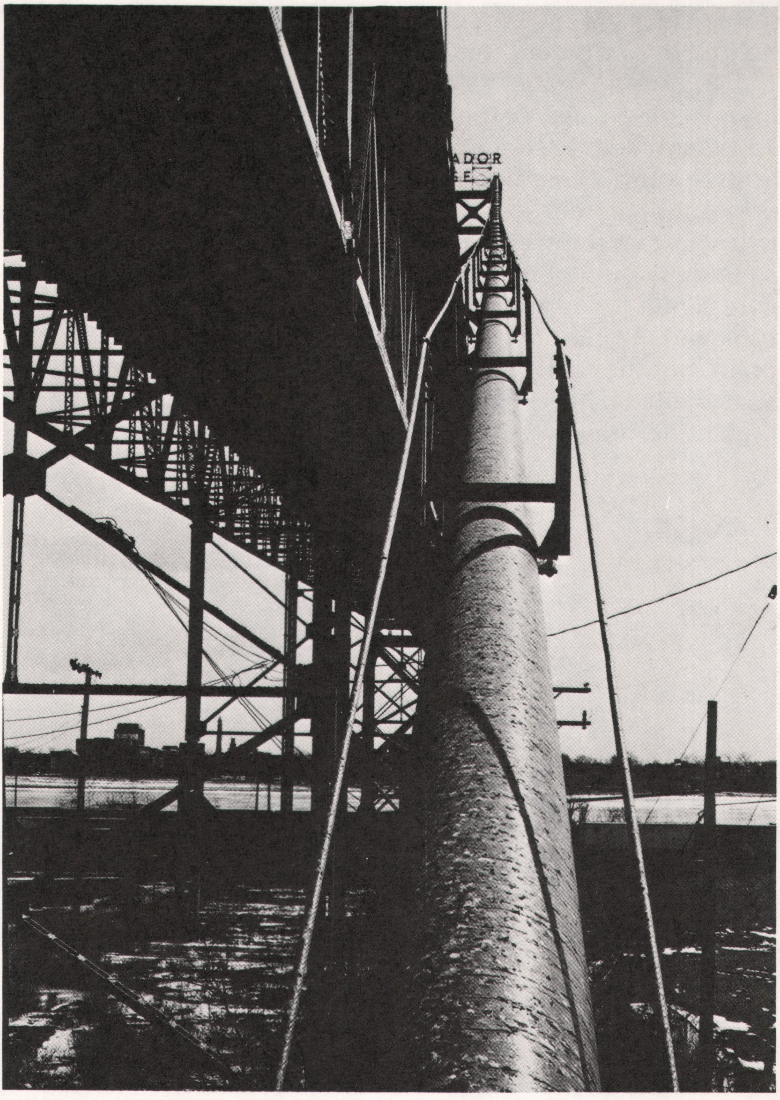
With fifteen minutes to go, I start edging toward the kitchen. The phone rings and saves me from ruining my streak of willpower.

"Hi, Mom." Oh shit, not *now*. "Nothing, I was just ...uh, leaving for class." She doesn't take the hint, knowing full well my class attendance is spotty at best. I talk rapidly, one eye on my watch. "Really? Who said that? Yeah...oh, hey, Mom, I gotta go—the kitchen timer is ringing. Yeah, got something in the oven. Okay, yeah...bye."

Now, with the timer ringing patiently, my feet turn leaden. Talk about your moments of truth. I feel like a quiz

show M.C. should be announcing the results: "And now, behind door number two..."

In a strange way, the clear fluid is a disappointment. I've been seeing rings in the air, in the shower, in my dreams ...everywhere except on my fingers and in that lovely clear little test tube. I let out a subdued whoop of relief and put on a pot of coffee. So, the Gods are on my side...my system is just a tad screwed up, that's all. But I can't shake the nagging feeling of disappointment, and phone the Woman-care center for an appointment this afternoon. I toast the test tube with my empty coffee mug. I wash the liquid down the drain, but the faint wet-diaper smell lingers through out my apartment. So how come I answered the Sixty-four thousand dollar question, and still feel like I got the booby prize?



Phil Pollard

GRAPEFRUIT

Gene Westervelt

Before the sun rose
I threw this sun
Into a black lunchbox;
Like hiding the day in darkness
To keep it to myself.
From six to ten
I looked forward
Down the line past
Prenatal truck bodies,
As if my grapefruit would come
Swimming to me in this giant womb,
Fertilize me with citrus.

The point of the knife
Pierces the rind
Which swallows its serrations.
Section and vivisection
Dividing each enough
To be freed by my plastic spoon.
Bits of fruit hide in corners.
I'd ravage further
If I had steel.
Ill-armed,
I squeeze it lovingly,
Catching each dribble
As if it held life's meaning.

A moment of sensitive contemplation.
Refreshed sour mouth;
More subtle than coffee,
Less sweet than an orange.
I dare not exhale
And lose this taste.
Is this breathless wonder?

A pink starfish in a cup.
A pink starfish in a cup.
Seeds ignored.
I have eaten my day
In a single sitting.
Its memories lie on
A sodden paper towel.
Nothing else to look forward to
But quitting time.

STRATEGIES

John Ditsky

dialogues in night streets:

the conversations of young men
leaning upon cars leaning
against fenders doors hoods:
failures losses counted
despaired of & resolved against

(peeking around street lights)
the awed stars align
themselves form & reform

GENA

Charles Hertz

Gena used to come into Zook's even before me, back when it was almost strictly a gay bar and few others even knew it existed, back before the music came there. Once I asked her how long she had been coming and she just rolled her eyes. "Since forever," she'd said, put out her cigarette and got up to dance.

For a long while she saw me as more a compatriot than anything, sharer of some unspoken philosophy that had more to do with attitude than anything else. Some nights when I had arrived before her I would watch her come in. She would stake out a table close to the stage then stand next to it and scan the crowd, noting the presence and absence of the regulars and mentally checking our names against some sort of attendance ledger she must have kept. She would finally spot me at the bar and I would tilt my beer to her. "Hey Marz," she would shout over the taped music, "you live here or what? They let you sleep under the bar? You got a *home,* Marz?" When she shouted like that it meant she wanted company. For a long time she did not, and would simply grin with her eyes and scan past me, but when she shouted I always picked up my beer and let the bar hold itself up and spent my time with Gena.

She bought me beers and we talked then, mostly about the music at first. I never knew a woman who loved music as much as she. She promised an especially good show from the band one night, a Friday, said "Marz you'll feel the bass drum in your chest like ten megatons. Man you'll want to just cry." I thought, if anyone would appreciate the sheer loudness of a nuclear holocaust it's Gena. Gena liked music monumentally loud, chaotic, anarchically distorted. She never said as much; never said the lyrics were mostly unintelligible but when you could hear them they were absurd and absolutely true, or that drummers sounded more like demolition experts than drummers, or that guitarists played the same chords so many times that there was real catharsis possible in

the repetition, that revelation increased directly in the proportion to volume—never analyzed her passion, it seemed, just *was* passionate. Blood rose in her cheeks then and she threw back her head to laugh. "I mean, this music is *dangerous* Marz, and you can dance to it without lessons. I mean, something is *up* here."

It was still early. Gena was buying me warm Guiness and looking exactly like the place itself that night. Zook's is red and black of a contemporary sleazy school of interior design, with thick red padded booth and chair seats and a black ceiling that looks like no ceiling. Picture this: everything that can be black *is* and what's left is red. Gena was red and black too, down to scarlet painted nails and charcoal eye shadow, looking vaguely like everyone our mothers at one time warn us about. I was having great difficulty keeping my eyes from her.

The band was setting up equipment, checking sound, and people were lined up outside the door and the noise level was beginning its inexorable rise. I could sense Gena starting to energize then as if someone had plugged her into a socket of low but unmistakable voltage—swaying slightly with some inner rhythm and watching people come through the door. I swung my chair around as hers was, leaned against a floor to ceiling pipe and studied the influx. It was quite a procession: leather boys with buttons and chains everywhere on their jackets; sophisticates dressed second hand chic in suits from other decades; factory toughs, freaks, queers. And women. So many women came to Zook's. Wait. There were often many women, but always *hoards* of girls. Gena would turn and say, "*Children.* I mean, these are *babies,* Marz." These were. They were girls who had never before set foot in a bar alongside girls who had washed their first Quaaludes with Southern Comfort before they'd been to high school. They were misinformed disco souls steered to the wrong place alongside punky chicks who knew the drummer's middle name and what he liked for breakfast. They were girls with laser stares whom Gena maintained would as soon kill you as smile alongside girls with wild or sad or frightened eyes whom Gena assured

would fuck you to your knees just for the kisses. I nodded and sipped my beer, enjoying the bitterness on my tongue and throat, and we watched them file in and light their cigarettes until the lights went down and everyone yelled; until the music began.

* * *

At various times she told me: 1) She held an MBA from Northwestern University and worked eight to six Monday through Friday, alternately riding herd over and placating a staff of sixty in the business office of Grosse Pointe's most impressive endeavor into public health, Cottage Hospital. 2) She had quit high school her senior year, drifted east from Wisconsin as far as Detroit until settling comfortably into her present day shift at Tough Alloy Welding Metals of Sterling Heights, where she band sawed chrome-copper and beryllium billets to be transformed presto chango into extruded coil of one sixty-fourth inch gradations and shipped "God knows where for God *only* knows what, Marz. Funky work. I worry plenty about breathing all that beryllium dust...." To substantiate this story she had worn earrings one evening made from union solidarity lapel pins. MESA—MECHANIC'S EDUCATIONAL SOCIETY OF AMERICA—AFFILIATED AFL-CIO, they had read. But her hands were uncallused as a kindergarten teacher's and I wondered from which industry thug that haunted Zook's she had gotten the blue collar gems. And 3) She was daughter to a wealthy Lansing financier—"Daddy deals for the Governor, the Lieutenant Governor, the justices. They're all golfing buddies with interest in diamond mines in darkest Africa. A real sweet group"—who had responded to her rebellious and somewhat latent adolescence with an open ended American Express card and the acquiescence that she had best get "this capriciousness" out of her pretty noggin while she might enjoy it. "Daddy says I have until thirty before the longing to bear children will *completely* overwhelm me," she smirked, "and I succumb forthwith to domesticity."

The stories varied, but among them I sensed fragments of truth like turquoise chips in a museum-front mosiac; also

the just perceptible hankering to be unmasked.

One particular Wednesday Zook's was a tomb. The band was not a band but a shaggy raven haired priestess of sorts who chanted morbid and profane space poetry in front of the electric guitar noodlings of a sinister youngster dressed in white. He did not look like her brother and frequently goosed her rump with the neck of his Stratocaster, at which time she would yelp and her poetics take on an added erotic dimension. We two or three handfuls in the bar were emitting a low hum of collective disregard toward the stagefront goings on; drinking was being taken fairly seriously this Wednesday. Even Gena, who was normally a sponge, was looking glazed. I had converted her to Guiness, she took to the stuff with a true beginner's zeal and I lost count of how many she bought us each.

"Where was I?" she tried to recall.

"Balise, Central America," I offered.

"Yes. Great discomfort there, Marz. Open sewers, voracious mosquitos. Much illness. Et cetera. But I endured, flourished even, teaching those poor Inca descended children to speak English as if —"

"Maya."

"Huh?"

"You must mean *Maya* descended children."

"Yes of course. Teaching them their own heritage, how Cortez raped their great great great grandmothers and —" She signalled to our waiter, Chivas, for more beer. "Where was I?"

"Cortez was raping," I said.

"Yes. But you know. What the fuck's the use? All the little Incas ever asked me about was whether I'd seen 'Star Wars'."

"I don't believe a word of it Gena."

"No?" I indicated no with my head and torso. She pursed a clove flavored cigarette between unusually unglossed lips for me to light and, once torched, the thing stank mercilessly. "None of it?" she said.

"Why bother," I said. If you don't want me to know about you, fine. I will not pursue it."

"Naturally you'll remain curious."

"Naturally. And for pure entertainment value I won't quell this need you have to fabricate your history. But entertainment alone makes ours a...an *unbalanced* friendship."

"It lacks...?"

"It lacks...well," I said, "there's honesty."

"Ah honesty. Yes." She turned her lips into a quick pout. "I mean, I admit to often being, uh, less than honest. Anything else?"

She was wearing a gray sort of wrap around Lauren Bacall get up and tossed a green shadowed, somehow Oriental glance across her beer glass. It did remind me of something else.

"There's the lack of, say, normal physical contact between us. Between friends, you know. We always seem to have a table separating us with a dozen bottles and a dirty ashtray on it." I shrugged, indifferently enough I hoped. "I couldn't help noticing. You understand that by normal—"

"Marz." She gurgled, cackled almost, sliding her chair around to mine. "I understand."

"I'm not so sure," I said, but her tongue muffled me with a probing, wondrously drunken and clove flavored exploration of my own.

We propped one another up as far as Gena's dented silver Volkswagen Rabbit, where she bit down with considerable force on my left ear just above the lobe. "Marz!" She was addressing the assaulted ear at a volume barely below the pain threshold. "Marz from now on honesty and... *friendly physical contact* will be the watchwords of our friendship, Marz. We will be so repulsively honest and lovey-fucking-dovey that acquaintances will think we belong on the Newlywed Game. We will instill new values of honesty and affection into that den of —" She flailed an arm at the west wall of Zooks, upon which a grotesquely handsome Marlboro Man stood inhaling deeply just above indecipherable tar and nicotine figures and, losing what balance had thus far remained hers, fell ass over tea kettle to the unpaved parking lot.

My quick inspection turned up only a minor cut on her

right elbow, so I loaded her into the Rabbit and stepped beneath the Marlboro Man to urinate. Around me I saw broken glass glisten, then blur and glisten again as if mirroring the glow from the stars, but when I looked up the sky was very cloudy; no stars, and it made me very dizzy to look up. Around me Detroit's midnight shift droned dull and metallic and I thanked something—I didn't know what, perhaps the Marlboro Man—for sparing me *that* end, however temporarily.

Gena snored the entire drive back to my house, where I stashed her in my bed and myself sank comatose into the sofa. She snored still—me finally coming to terms with the expression "sawing logs," which had until then always seemed ridiculous—when I left for work that morning over an hour late. No one snored when I returned. My bed was neatly made, which disoriented me because my bed was rarely made at all, and never *neatly* made. I picked up the note on the pillow and bounced down forcefully so as to rumple the covers and feel somewhat more in control of my own home before whatever comedy the note would reveal. Somehow I was sure it would reveal a comedy; after Gena's acrobatics the previous night and the incessant throb of my day long headache it seemed I deserved some levity. I read:

> Marz—just don't you think I need a guardian angel 'cause I already have one—just don't you pamper me or humor me or even *know* me 'cause I don't need it—I mean, nothing stupid Marz—just be my lover 'cause that's not so stupid—and come early tonight—

I thought, well *sure*. Sounds great, just be my lover. Especially Gena's lover. *Sure*. But damned if I didn't already know it would not be easy to not be stupid, and then damned if I didn't know great apprehension.

* * *

Onstage it was the priestess again. Somehow she had weasled a two day stint. Word had gotten round though, and the crowd was even sparser than the previous night.

Roland Caruthers was tending bar with his usual charm and grace. I watched him concoct a Galiano stinger for a cinnamon skinned lovely, then proceed to sip alternately with her at its stirring straw until she jotted something on a cocktail napkin and exited grinning for her friends at a rear booth. Roland tossed the napkin into his tip jar and refused payment for my first beer. It always made me happy to see Roland in good spirits.

"What's with the, uh, space cadets?" I pointed to the stage.

"The owner's niece," said Roland. "She wants to be a star."

"Oh. Please tell the owner for me that she hasn't a rat's ass of a chance."

Roland thought I was being much too harsh. "A little nepotism does no one any harm. Whatdaya think you'd be doing if your uncle owned a brewery?"

"Quality control." I toasted Roland, "Touché," then confided: "I'm waiting on a friend."

"Yeah. I assumed as much. She didn't look...*healthy* when you left last night. Had that pallor, you know. Greenish hue. Did she make it all right?"

"She had plenty of sleep. Listen, do you *know* her? Does anyone?"

"Know her," he said. "Don't you?"

"Well, we drink a good deal. If anything very enlightening was ever said, though, I think I would remember. We just talk ga ga goo goo, whatever."

"Know her," he said again. "Well she's very entertaining, very—"

"*Entertainment* I know. You're bailing out, Roland."

"Marz. Really. I'm on my honor."

"You're dying to. Come on. Pour me another one while you're not godawful busy. And *talk* to me." On stage the priestess let out an amplified hiss reminicent of fingernails scraping chalkboard. Roland glanced up at her and the guitar apprentice and said, "Oh, I don't anticipate being very busy tonight."

Get this: she's got culture, and not the cheap popular

variety with which each of us is bombarded until we either succumb and become slaves to it or tune out completely; no sir, Gena's got the authentic kind all right, purchased at a premium OUT EAST. Vassar. Phi Beta Kappa. And it's no wonder she's so familiar with the defacement of beryllium billets at Tough Alloy of Sterling Heights. She *owns* it, down to band saws, melting furnaces and the black and white fuck magazines which can be found on the stall floors of the shop's two men's rooms. You might say she's an industrial baron. Slow, slow—I promise I will ease the pace here and fill this thing in correctly, just the way Roland told me.

Roland, of course, is in a position to know, as it turns out he grew up down the block from her. And if "down the block" conjures visions of the old neighborhood and your first puppy and the mailman bringing the J.C. Penney Christmas catalog, forget it: this block was across town from you. It was the block just across Lakeshore Drive and to the south of the Grosse Pointe Yacht Club. As children Gena and Roland were neighbors, not to mention that both their families used the same landscaping service or that the Caruthers' family maid was younger sister to Gena's family maid. By almost any neighborliness standards then available the two clans might even have been considered friends, the two children, well, playmates. Until Roland was about thirteen.

"What happened at thirteen." I said.

"Gena was thirteen too."

"I don't follow."

"Well she began to look like she does now. Began to, anyway. And we ran out of names for it. Euphemisms. How long can you call it 'playing doctor' or 'playing house,' whichever it was? Until you're about nine if you stretch it. Then what was it? 'Exploring.' That one's durable. Exploring was legitimate for a solid few years anyway, but we outgrew it like you outgrow them all until it was *sex,* plain and simple, and *that* one wouldn't do for a name at all. It may not be the case today Marz, but thirteen year old princesses like her did not fuck back then. It just wasn't *done.*"

"Ah. And thirteen year old neighboring princes?"

"I was itching pretty bad to start, you understand,

though it would be a while yet. Gena understood too and redefined our relationship to that of the more casual, neighborly, wave-over-the-back-hedge type. We drifted apart."

"Uh huh." I said. "What about later adolescence, when she must have finally gotten itchy herself? High school rituals are such breeding grounds for malnourished lust. Ever realize the dream, Roland?"

His frown said no. "By then we ran in different crowds. She was into her artsy-fartsy scene. Fundamentals of bohemianism, whatever you care to call it. And me I picked up the first of this trail of irresponsibility and moral dereliction that's led to my standing here with you." He thought a moment and said, "Hey I'm not so sure all this probing into history is completely harmless."

"Nonsense," I assured. "It's good therapy. But we're off the track here. Tell some more and try to keep out of Gena's spotlight yourself."

* * *

You might say it was a short hop from artsy-fartsiness in Grosse Pointe to Duchess County, New York and Vassar's academic frivolity. Gena majored in music and minored in political science. She stayed east during summer vacations to teach violin at an arts workshop, and to study. She missed exactly five days of school her junior year to fly home for her mother's funeral.

Gena's mother, Roland explained, was only thirty-eight when she died. She had first learned to skydive while a student at the University of Michigan in the late 1950's. Roland recalled seeing photos in his neighbors' den of this unusually athletic mother grappling and tumbling with the multicolored parachutes. He recalled how for years he saw her on Saturday mornings load her gear into the family wagon, check things off on clipboard like an Army commander and drive away, Roland thought, to fly. He thought it wonderful that someone's mother could do something like that; his own mother preferred backyard badmitton for sport.

Gena's mother, it seemed, was very good. She had in the years piror to the accident been engaging in what

jumpers call *relative work*, that is, high altitude jumping involving a good deal of free fall and the making of group formations while in free fall with other jumpers; and she had, in fact, been a member of the largest relative formation ever made in Michigan. It was a fifty-four member, six pointed, lotus petal shaped star and Roland's parents told him it got her picture on page three of the Grosse Pointe Herald. It also got her fairly addicted to the peculiar nirvana skydivers experience during free fall, the soaring moments spent quite in limbo at a terminal velocity of one hundred twenty miles an hour until the pull at a nylon cord reestablishes one as only human after all. Her last jump was a solo out of a pleasingly rural airfield near Ann Arbor. PCA investigators determined that the free fall must have been particularly euphoric that bright blue day, since no attempt appeared to have been made to open either of the two perfectly packed, functioning chutes she was wearing. Among jumpers certified for relative work, the investigators also said, hers was a not altogether uncommon death.

Gena handled the whole affair for her father, who simply could not bear it, who had indeed always thought his wife slightly crazy for jumping out of airplanes, whose own taste for thrills ran to a more conventional and infinitely safer flirtation with fast cars and speedboats, and whose sudden widowhood left him feeling like an uncommunicative zombie. Roland's parents told Roland that Gena held up like an oak. It was after she'd been back to school several weeks and her father had begun to *function* again that he realized the extent of his daughter's stoicism and felt grateful, indebted even. He dug out her school records then, saw the grades and the classes, became aware of her *direction*, of a *drive* it seemed he barely remembered and which made him proud. She really was quite a talent, he guessed. And to his knowledge she had stayed off of drugs and not made love to anyone of a different race. Certainly that was something.

Roland knew all this because Gena's father had confided it to his attorney, who was *Roland's* father. As his attorney, Roland's father made the requested changes in Gena's father's will, changes which reflected recent widow-

hood and the confident approval of a daughter's lifestyle. Her father had experienced the sudden realization not that Gena might turn out to be okay, but that indeed she already *had,* and he'd almost let it escape him.

Vassar offered her graduate courses midway through her senior year and sent her home two years later MFA in hand, the Vassar woman; bring on the world. It was 1976 and the world around Detroit was busy making auto related whatnots and all the money it could before God only knew what socio-economic calamity. Roland's parents told him that Gena worked on her tan for exactly eleven days until it was just *so,* and went to see Angelo Morincini, then the conductor of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. As it happened, he encouraged her to hang around rehearsals. She very nearly made him cry at the emotional apex of her performance of the second movement, Mozart's Violin Concerto Number 4, and when she stopped he said he could offer her eighth chair for the upcoming season. Gena had a job.

"Jesus. Her taste in music is, uh..."

"Eclectic," Roland said.

"Yes. At least." I was disoriented again and stepped the wrong way toward the john. Zook's holds one john for all, very large and very mirrored with an adjacent "lounge" where recreational drugs are traded and abused. I stepped over a young lady napping near the urinals and she woke and brushed off her vest and jeans as if I might have in some way defiled them. I wondered what the impact from an eleven thousand foot fall does to a person's body. I wondered how closely the mutilation resembles, say, that of a massive cerebral hemmorage or a shotgun wound. I thought of Gena in the gowned and tuxedoed splendor of Ford Auditorium on Symphony opening night; the incongruity of this image with that of the woman I had lifted in a heap from the parking lot the night before started my head to pounding just behind my eyes.

"Roland," I said once back safely, "what kinda shit you handing me? If she's eighth chair violin with the DSO I'm an offensive tackle."

"Oh she never actually played," he said.

"What?"

"Never got the chance. Daddy died early that September when his yacht exploded taking fuel. The man had owned a boat most of his adult life, but he *forgot* to turn on the bilge fans before the ignition. It was so careless it almost seemed deliberate. Gena had him cremated, what was left of him, and scattered the ashes around an azalea in their back yard. My parents told me some of the neighbors thought it macabre, especially considering the house was up for sale within a week. They also told me she held up like an oak, but certain acquaintances in the retail, ah, pharmecutical trade tell me it was touch and go for a few months there."

"What was she doing?"

"Whatever they had. It's gotten better since. Anyway, she scattered him around that azalea, then spent a couple months learning about alloys. Opted for a weekly check and, I guess," he nodded toward the stage, "the more *aggressive* side of the musical spectrum."

I said, "Jesus. You know what Roland?"

"You're almost sorry you asked?"

* * *

I got in my car and drove, Woodward Avenue I think because there was neon gloating ALL MALE MOVIES and south I think because at one point an embankment of concrete and marble and glass loomed and I had to turn around completely. Drove anyway, and considered the ritual in general and Gena burying one and strewing the other's remains around a tree, until I could only think of her as a child, like an orphan. I wondered how old she would need to be for me to think otherwise, at what point she or anyone else is not a child, then, wiping grave dirt or ashes from fingers like so much spilt milk. *She held up like an oak.* There are those among us who do. There are those among us who run the whole fucking circus. *Clean up the mess.* Speak in whispers to the tall benevolent man with as many black suits as we have socks: *"We'll need more chairs in here for the eulogy."* Obtain and retain for our records

receipts from places with names like Eternal Peace and Mt. Olivet Lawns. Offer parched handerkerchiefs to those wet-faced and tissueless. Fool with our cufflinks or an unlit cigarette beside aunts and siblings who fool with rosaries. Become very angry and think, well that's something. Maybe we cry five weeks later or five years, maybe as soon as we have the time. I didn't know.

* * *

I don't remember making any turns off Woodward but I was suddenly on Trumbull and not terrifically certain which way was up, nor north. I cut off a Checker cabbie without a fare who had no sense of humor and had seen "The French Connection" too many times, but I lost him by sneaking the wrong way up Howard with my lights off. I crept into the parking lot of a building that I decided was evil, determined to piss on and shatter its clean glass door, but I just sat looking at its window display. It was a hub and rotor. A hub and rotor for a Cadillac Seville no less. What sort of flashlight batteries do cops use, plutonium?

"Must that be shined in my eyes?"

"I.D."

I compiled. He had a voice like Merv Griffin on sedatives, said "How many drinks you had tonight?"

"Drinks? Lemme ask you this you you you you *civil servant* you: Can you sing the third verse of OUR NATIONAL ANTHEM? *Can you?* Well I can, any tempo you choose and on key and I'll do it right here too if there's a single doubt in your head about my sobriety!"

Fucker had a doubt. He said, "Adagio," but I did not make a mistake. He handed back my I.D. at

"No refuge could save
the hereling and slave"

and disappeared down Howard Street to keep the night safe.

I found Woodward again. It had an Italian funeral parlor on the corner and I thought: there's no hope for WASPs in the mortician business, then: Christ I hope Gena waited at Zook's.

* * *

I sat down and she started in.

"My name is Gena Carroll. I was born in Detroit on February 12, 1956, the only child of Martin and Helen Carroll. When I was five we moved—are you getting all this?—we moved from our small unpretentious brick bungalow on Detroit's near east side to the large, very pretentious estate on Lakeshore Drive where I grew up. There—"

"Gena," I said.

"There," she scowled, "I attended school, first at Chittenden Elementary—"

"Gena I'm sorry."

"Later in life, much later, I underwent surveillance by a snooping amateur social worker and professional *bar fly* whom I was silly enough to befriend. Now that you know so much about me—" the look she shot at Roland behind the bar was venomous, but Roland was busy washing glasses which were already very clean—"maybe you can tell me if I meet your *approval.* I mean, will I *do* for you, Marz? My family background surely merits some distinction. Or is the money too *new?* And I meet the educational requirements, don't I Marz? I mean, I've watched you walk out of here with teen queens who struggle to speak in complete sentences, so obviously a brain like me will be a nice change of pace. Yeah, you're maturing, Marz."

"Look," I said, "I've done nothing to warrant this kind of abuse. I was only trying—"

"Shut up!" she said. "I've saved the best. I'm special because I'm a *sympathy* fuck, right? You're going to take the poor little orphan to bed and under your wing because her mommy died and her daddy blew himself away just as surely as if he'd put a pistol to his temple. Am I your first or do you specialize in sympathy fucking?"

It was almost two o'clock and there were probably ten or twelve people in Zook's besides us. The priestess was celebrating the end of her first big engagement at a stage-front table with her guitar player and a Black roadie. They seemed, from their gaiety, confinced of her impending stardom; they were alone in this respect. Bodies in varying stages of consciousness were scattered at tables, and a gay

couple flirted near the door, one man anxious to leave, the other dawdling. The anxious one seemed intent on wearing down the dawdler's resistance. All's fair.

Gena produced a joint from her pocketed green tee shirt. She was dressed down and vaguely militarily. She exhaled in my face, would not pass me the joint, smoked half of it without a word, then put it out carefully in the ashtray. She seemed calm; she was very quiet and was staring through me.

I said, "Your note. I don't know how not to be stupid."

She said, "Really."

I said, "Was your mother—"

"My mother's *dead.*"

"*Okay.*"

"I know, you seem to think I'm not dealing with all this mortality in a healthy way."

"I never said that."

"Oh stop."

"Stop what?"

"Stop *assuming* so much."

Roland turned the lights off and on one time and everyone else straggled out. He wiped off the tables around us, then brought us two large glasses of ice water. He didn't say anything, just went behind the bar to cash out. Gena reignited the half joint from the ashtray. She got it burning pretty good, toked at it absently. Then she put it out again, this time in my left arm just above the wrist. The burn smelled. Hurt too.

"Lots of anger," I said.

"There's more."

"Do you want me to ask Roland to get you something sharp?"

"Don't need anything sharp."

She relit the joint *again.* It smelled like my left forearm. I figured I'd be able to stand two more burns; after that I would probably break her jaw. I was hoping it would not come to that, but I was not confident.

She put out the joint again, this time in *her* left forearm.

Her teeth clenched noticeably and she took a swig of ice water.

I could hear two things very distinctly: Roland cashing out and my heartbeat. Roland cashing out sounded very loud, as if he were doing it right on our table instead of across the deserted club. My heartbeat on the other hand sounded very faint, though my being able to hear it at all attested to its considerable volume.

"I think," I said, "Roland wants to close up."

"Roland will let us sit here all night."

"Yeah of course he will." I looked at my arm and at hers. My burn hole was uglier. "But I'm not sure I *want* to."

"I'll tell you what *I* want to do, Marz." She sounded very assertive and I felt anything but. The flesh just below my right eye was doing a rapid fire and, I hoped, imperceptible twitch; it must have been the nervous after effect of my relief that I would not be burned again, that Gena's lovely angular jaw would remain whole. Whatever it was, I felt she could have said almost anything then and I would have accepted it. What she did say was, "I want you to give me a ride back to your house where I can sleep in your wonderful bed again. You have a wonderful bed."

"I see."

"Maybe not, because you Marz I want you to sleep on that wonderful couch again."

"Oh, Okay." The couch was not so wonderful.

She said, "I feel this need to convalesce."

"Sure," I said.

Roland did not make eye contact with either of us as we left. He was turning chairs over on top of tables, setting the place up for the next day's thorough cleaning.

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un vaquero irresistible
debe ser muy resistente
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EXCLUSIONS

Tim Keefe

the owls

Jan Zerfas

Her breathing was like an owl's breathing; her body wanting to be mute.

She thought of the owls in the nature center: one's talons burned by the farmer's electric wire, and the way the animal kept its food, bones and shells, in a cocoon in its mouth until satisfied. The unsettling while distributing the frozen, small prey of those who were hungry, weakened by their displacement. The owls were miniature Jews without numbers in small tiger cages. Sometimes she saw their features in ovals around their eyes, transparent moons, felt their desolation and animal loss. Her sadness was ovular also, a transparent moon around the eyelids, luminous and exposed.

willa cather on the moon

Jan Zerfas

Most of the women in Utah were divorced. They believed in cowboys, lassoes, the great plains, and wore their blue jeans in imitation of their cowboys. The small, neighborhood bars where their children waited outside in dense, unpainted cars were an escape from the profit-crashed towns, an escape where one could wonder what was mimetic about their lives. A gesture of their lives: the drive to the mountains in an area that was no longer pure, the way they were no longer vulnerable. Their Indian sisters attempted to keep the mountains self-contained, as their lives were. But the women saw no future, their relationships were like the clouds overhead reflected in the rear-view mirrors that seemed to extend the mountains into nebraska, a state that sheltered only one woman artist, who standing outside her tent in her self-portrait holding mulberries and a rose embossed opera program, was held only by her desire.

rites

Jan Zerfas

A dream, a dream vision within me?
An image of roses, petals of china, ceramic;
Straited her veins, a vulva, a vase.

A death, a dream of death within me?
A globe of women in a circular rite
Aborting the male fetus; a globe, a globe,
the moon, the pearled moon;
they want their mouths of bloodroot and lily.

A woman, an image of a woman within me?
the bloodroot, the bloodroot.

walking across the sea

Lynn Domina

it is not far
from a small village
outside Kiel
to the southernmost tip
of Sweden,

unless you are a small boy,
unless your red wool jacket
has grown a little thin
and tight at the shoulders,
unless this is the year
the Baltic Sea
has frozen
all the way across.

you could not know
that by next winter
every cousin
would be at the front.
you could not know
that you would have no children
in your own country,
that when a second great war
erupted,
you would grow silent,
and ache
from snowballs
hurled at your accent.

you could only know
the roughness of your father's mitten,
wind scratching your cheeks,
the size of your footprint
each time you turned around
to see how far you had come.

the ice felt like earth
beneath your boots,
but there were no empty hay lofts
to crawl into
when you grew too tired.
you played at being eskimo
the way your grandchildren
would play at being indian,
and you studied geography
in the snow,
each drift
a new continent,
a new country.

you still remember the names
you gave them
in that language
you invented,
each word
composed of three syllables,
english, german, dutch.

but you don't remember
the dutch words
for ocean, ship, this country.
unused languages
fade like photographs,
and your german relatives have been dead for years.
you must rely
on english
to tell me how it was,
until snow soaks through your boots,
until you see a small boy
with a sled,
a red wool jacket,
when something tugs
at your tongue
like a boy's excitement,
a mute son's desire.

souvenirs

Lynn Domina

in twenty-five years,
when you climb the steps to your attic,
looking for a china plate
your mother gave you,
or the quilt
that has been in the family
for five generations,
you may come across these frogs,
this family,
a mother and children.
they will be in the same box
as the old love letters
and trinkets
from every city
each of your friends has ever visited.
will you wipe the dust
from their backs,
wondering which of us
gave them to you?

will you realize
how i carried them next to my body,
protected them from customs officials and border police
through five countries,
wishing, finally, that i had bought something steel,
something neither of us
could break?

but there is nothing quite so delicate
as blown glass,
as tiny animals
either of us could crush
under our thumb,
though i have been told
thinking of delicacy

and me together
is like getting lost
in a house of mirrors,
a thousand images,
and not one of them accurate.

but i have never seen frogs this small,
although when i was fifteen
our back yard was invaded
by tiny toads.
every evening, these toads crept to me,
and i cupped them singly in my right palm,
like i would cup a daughter,
if she could ever be so small.
when you are not as large as anyone else,
when a raindrop is as big as your knuckle,
anything could be delicate.

the night after i bought these frogs,
i sat with two women,
beside the canale della guidecca,
our feet in the water,
the canal patterned with light,
rain trickling under our collars.
we'd seen san marco,
and photographs
of the whole place flooded in winter.

men leaned against the bridges,
"gondola, gondola," seductively,
their blue and white striped shirts,
their straw hats,
trying to sound american.

for all americans go to venice
for the canals, san marco,
for the murano glass.
yet, i bought only one small
delicate family,

to slip in my pocket,
to carry next to my skin,
to bring to you and say, here,
close your eyes,
hold this family
in your right palm.

Gipsy Moth IV

Lynn Domina

you puzzle me with that name,
Sir Francis,
for gipsies, even gipsy moths,
usually wander in bands,
and, in fact, you didn't wander so much as race.

had i known,
i would have stowed
beneath one of your sails,
until we were too far out to turn back,
until we were secure in the water
wrinkling against our yacht.

but in 1966, i merely wrote a class report
on Magellan, didn't realize explorers
had relinquished
new worlds for new times,
or that some made it all the way back.

travelling alone,
that is the darkest mystery,
and there was no haze
of foreign tongues
to sink into
when the night grew too black.
yet, what security
can there be
when constellations
hang in such unfamiliar places?
did you curl around the motor,
feeling its purr
like a heartbeat?
or did you switch frequencies
at regular intervals,
waiting for dolphins?

neither i
nor any pilot i know
flew over the ocean that year,
so i cannot say for sure
whether when that first small craft
emerged from the clouds,
you waved slightly,
whether you flicked a sail,
whether, recognizing you,
the plane circled
once, twice,
though i am certain
its reflection hovered in your eyes,
for perhaps it was similar
to the reflection of Gipsy Moth I,
that tiny seaplane
you landed safely on Sydney Harbor
before sputtering over Japan,
before abandoning air
for water.

when the sun grew too hot,
did you wipe the sweat
from your eyes
with a red bandana
your wife had stuck into your back pocket,
and think of her sleeping
on the other side of the world?
or did you forget what it is like
to know anything except water
even you could not drink?

did you remember
geography, biology,
did you know
that over one-half of the earth's surface,
over one-half of your body,
is water?
anything filled with so much liquid

could not take long
to dissolve,
once your helm suffered one large crack,
once you were thrown overboard.
do you have visions, even now,
of marlin resting against your ribs,
of your skeleton
increasing that fraction of the ocean
which is calcium?

the twin

Lynn Domina

my father
rubs the dice
between his palms,
breathes heavily.

i dread this story,
dread the double ones,
these snake eyes,
which promise
his pregnant wife
twins,
one boy, one girl
identical
in every other way.

father, father
this place makes a strange casino.
no dim lights, no crowds, no smoke.
no svelte women
handing you
drink after drink.
and aren't there usually people
to keep people like me
out of sight,
strange cripple,
one limb amputated,
though my nerves say otherwise.
still, you nearly beat the odds,
twenty-two years ago.

one boy, one girl.
i touch that place in back of my knee
scarred permanently smooth as a mirror
which says you are beautiful.

one boy, one girl.
yes, i robbed
my brother
of his birthright,
twisted as i was,
squirming out first,
my umbillical cord
clenched in my right fist
like a jump rope
i would later refuse.

one boy, one girl
identical,
except that i wasn't
already dead.

tonight i will drink to him,
toasting this anniversary of our conception,
and within these next few hours,
i will choose his name,
abel, esau, joseph,
for i can no longer call him
simply, your son.

though i will not apologize
for beating the odds,
for not being more siamese,
not growing with the skin
of a man,
not letting the others
decide which should survive,
for instead wrapping my leg
around his throat,
pulling him out behind me.

A. J. M. SMITH: REMEMBERING TED ROETHKE

Vince Clemente

Theodore Roethke was much on my mind that spring, teaching *The Far Field* to my contemporary lit class. I enjoyed, then, Peter Smith's anecdotes about the "lumbering bear." Peter, a colleague in the English Department, is also son of the Canadian poet, A. J. M. Smith.

When I learned his father "Art" was to visit, I asked if it would be possible to speak to him about his old Saginaw friend. I must add—Smith's poetry is little known to me. He emerges essentially as a figure in Roethke's life—in the Seager biography, *The Glass House,* and as correspondent in the *Selected Letters,* edited by Ralph J. Mills, Jr. But he stands in high relief, figure in a friendship Roethke valued, one that was to last for twenty-eight years. Theirs is a strange relationship, for we have at work antithetical temperaments. Smith, the classicist, tells me in our conversation: "Dryden and Pope are my heroes, not Blake; and so I think Ted felt as though I didn't appreciate his poetry as I ought to—and I probably didn't." Roethke insists: "We think by feeling. What is there to know?"

What follows, then, is an hour's conversation with A.J.M. Smith—Peter is with us—about his friend Ted, "The Catch of Back Bay." The talk a vivid presence with me, for I can see Art, glass in his hand, the Long Island sun through the glass into the eyes darting over those lost years. Yet I will remember him as he speaks in "The Archer," final poem in his latest book, *The Classic Shade:*

> So for a moment, motionless, serene,
> Fixed between time and time, I aim and wait;
> Nothing remains for breath now but to waive
> His prior claim and let the barb fly clean
> Into the heart of what I know and hate—
> That central black, the ringed and targeted grave.
>
> Setauket, Long Island
> April 1980

CLEMENTE: Had Roethke lived, he would be seventy next week, on May 25th. Where would he have gone after *The Far Field?* Was he still growing as a poet?

A.J.M. SMITH: I would think so, and I think he believed he was. He was writing steadily and keeping notebooks, and after his marriage—I think he had a kind of renewal of power. I don't know exactly in what direction, but I think it would have been more of the same following *The Far Field,* which is possibly his greatest book.

CLEMENTE: Repeatedly the notion that he felt *The Far Field* was his last book—do you believe that to be so, that he felt he was writing his last book?

A.J.M. SMITH: Well, I had no direct contact with him at that time, and so I really can't say. I didn't hear him ever say anything like that.

CLEMENTE: Art, let's go back many, many years; according to the Seager biography, *The Glass House,* you first met Roethke in September, 1935 at Michigan State. You, John Clark, Peter De Vries were young teachers together. What was Roethke like then?

A.J.M. SMITH: Well, he wrote to me, and we really got together to go to a literary conference at Olivet College, which was a small religious school, near East Lansing, twenty miles away. The President was named Joseph Brewer, a former Chicago publisher, and he got together a really quite outstanding group for a literary conference—Ford Madox Ford, Katherine Anne Porter, Allen Tate and his wife Caroline Gordon—those are the ones I remember, we were all planning to go down to the conference when I got a letter from Ted Roethke, saying he was a young poet, who had published a few poems in good magazines, and would it be all right if he came with us. He admired my poetry, he said, and so he came too. Another person at the conference was a young poet and student of Allen Tate's, Robert Lowell, a very modest fellow, and we met him too. Roethke got a job at Michigan State soon after that. He was quite rather unstable: he was drinking a good deal. I think he had been before coming to Michigan State.

A.J.M. SMITH: We had a horrible man as Dean at the time, Dean Emmons. Ted stayed with the De Vrieses for a while—

he had a breakdown. Well, he was a great lumbering bear of a fellow, you know, but he was very easily upset. He had a very, very good idea of himself and great ambition, which he always had, and was working on his career. Perhaps it was a little early to talk about his career as yet—it hadn't started—but all through, towards the end of his life, after his success of several books published, he thought he ought to get the Nobel Prize.

PETER SMITH: Was he at the time, poetically self-confident, knowing he had a great deal of talent?

A.J.M. SMITH: I don't know if he was self-confident at this time; I don't think he was. That's partly why he was drinking so much. When he was in a good mood—I think he was schizophrenic, he was up and he was down. When he was up, just fine, a charming fellow, very witty, amusing, a great person at parties, chase the girls around, tell them he was the Catch of Back Bay. He wasn't at Michigan State too long, for he got so unmanageable from the point of view of the administration that Dean Emmons fired him. He later seized the excuse to fire Peter De Vries, who refused to take a Ph.D. Emmons said he could get English teachers a dime a dozen, he didn't care. And when Ted was fired—Emmons had taught summer school at Harvard—Ted called him a Harvard son of a bitch. He often said afterwards it flattered the Dean so much; he was really pleased!

One time when Ted was teaching a freshman class of girls, on top floor of the home ec. building, he came down for an 8 o'clock class in bedroom slippers and dressing gown. He then climbed out a window, and onto a ledge four stories up. He then returned through a second window, asking them to record—give their impressions—just what they had witnessed.

CLEMENTE: About your relationship, I gather from the Seager biography and from the letters, that Roethke had an enormous respect for you as well as for your work. In a letter to Leonie Adams, in 1943, outlining his course in Verse Form, he wrote that the course would give him a "chance to deal with writers...for whom I have real enthusiasm...introduce little known people like Kunitz and Smith...." In fact, Art, you would be taught the sixth week, along with Blake and Yeats, dealing with the problems of revision. How would

you describe this friendship? Was he one to value friendship—say unlike Frost?

A.J.M. SMITH: Yes, I think he valued friendship very much. At Michigan State he was staying with the De Vrieses, Peter and Katherine. They really looked after him. Katherine knew how to handle him. And they went out walking in the woods one morning and Roethke said, "You know, I could just take you in the woods here, and drop you like this, and bury you under leaves." She didn't turn a hair. She just said, "Oh, go ahead, you sick thing." She might have been scared, but she wasn't.

And we had some wonderful parties at the De Vries' house with a great deal of drinking going on. Dean Emmons, who disliked the English Department anyway because they were all radicals and leftwing types and what not....

CLEMENTE: Here's another quote about Art Smith, from one of Roethke's letters: "Smith, a very bright and amusing guy, but somehow I think his verse a bit nutty...but some very good." But for the life of me—there are few things as "nutty" as his nonsense verse—what do you think he meant by that?

A.J.M. SMITH: "Nutty!" I don't know. I was going to tell you of a verse I wrote about Dean Emmons. He had a secretary named Mrs. Palm, who lived right next door to the De Vrieses. She'd see the parties going on, people running around in the back yard, drinks in their hands. Then she'd report to Emmons. Morrill Hall was the old building where the English Department offices were. So I made up this rhyme, which Ted liked. He used to make up this kind of stuff too:

> It was uptails all
> In Morrill Hall
> And the Dean was well-nigh drunk.
> And Madam Palm
> With a grand salon
> Cried *Screw me*
> *I'm a punk*
> But the Dean was too damn drunk!

And we used to recite this.

CLEMENTE: Again, about this enormous respect he had for you, as seen in the letters, he wrote to Princess Marguerite Caetani, in 1941, about "Last Class," from *On The Poet and His Craft,* that "Smith says it brings back into language that violent energy of the Elizabethan Pamphleteers." He placed enormous value on your judgment. Was he, however, like most of us, an ambivalent man? He didn't, like Frost, keep an "enemies list"—he wasn't paranoidal about competition was he?

A.J.M. SMITH: No I don't think so, although he was always trying to triumph over Richard Wilbur, whom I guess he respected and therefore feared a little as a rival.

CLEMENTE: Did he feel that way about Lowell also?

A.J.M. SMITH: No, I don't think he cared for Lowell or paid much attention to him.

CLEMENTE: He also said Lowell had "a tin ear"—but Wilbur you feel was the...

A.J.M. SMITH: But I don't think there was anything serious: half of this was kidding, you know.

CLEMENTE: Nothing malicious, the way Frost became malicious.

A.J.M. SMITH: No, no! I don't think he was ever malicious.

CLEMENTE: Art, I'm thinking of the Bread Loaf story: as MacLeish was reading, Frost set a match to the program—just out of spite! None of that in Roethke?

A.J.M. SMITH: No, no! He was very good natured. As a matter of fact, when he was teaching at the University of Washington, he had a course with graduate students, a seminar in poetry writing. It was a very good course, indeed. And one summer, he was supposed to be away and he got me...

CLEMENTE: Art, you anticipate the next question. I understand you even substituted for him at Washington, during his leaves—what kind of teacher was he?

A.J.M. SMITH: Oh, he was a great teacher of poetry writing—just as good or better than Paul Engle. He was in that class. He and Engle, I think, were generally regarded as the two best teachers.

CLEMENTE: Here's a list of some of his former students—all fine poets: Wright, Wagoner, Kizer, Hugo. Why did he touch his students so? What was his special quality as a teacher?

A.J.M. SMITH: He was a very, very vivid personality and very amusing too. Sort of a big, lumbering elephant with a great sense of wit and humor, and he would tell stories....

CLEMENTE: May one use the word *inspirational* to describe him as a teacher?

A.J.M. SMITH: Well, if you mean literally, inspired students —I would say that is very true. But he was so personal and intimate, you know. He would bring steaks and cook them for them—and all this kind of stuff.

PETER SMITH: Say what you were about to, when you did substitute for him.

A.J.M. SMITH: Summer school, couple of months. Bob Heilman was Head of the Department and he handled Ted—it was quite difficult at times—and with great skill. He defended him against people in the Administration, who were trying to get rid of "this clown," as they thought Ted to be. And the year that I went out to teach there, he was supposed to go away. And he didn't go away: he stayed there too. And he lived with us. He was great, fancied himself a gourmet cook—steak and all, sauces and all....

CLEMENTE: Was he?

A.J.M. SMITH: Yes, he was, though he never cleaned up. And I really had a very brilliant class, not a big one, eight or nine graduate students and talented poets. I still have a few of their poems somewhere, if I can find them in my files. And Ted would come in occasionally, not every meeting, and they all worshiped him, and they were very good too.

And then, it must have been about this time, that he had a sort of breakdown and Heilman handled it with a lovely letter in defense of academic freedom.

CLEMENTE: I recall a very sad moment in *The Glass House.* He broke down during a teaching day, and two of his former students, now his colleagues in the English Department, David Wagoner and Carolyn Kizer were forced to call the police, and as the police were leading Ted away, the Secretary of the English Department, Mrs. Dorothy Bowie said, "This is a very distinguished man and he is ill. All we want you to do is to take him to a sanitarium. No rough stuff." And this was one of Roethke's primal terrors: that they would take him to a mental institution—and forget about him.

A.J.M. SMITH: Yes, I know; he kept appealing to his sister not to commit him.

CLEMENTE: He really feared being committed.

A.J.M. SMITH: Oh, yes, he did. And I think at some affair in Heilman's house, I think they had to get the police, and Heilman handled that with great skill. He was always a defender of Ted Roethke, and still is. I met Heilman a couple of years ago in Vancouver. I was giving a poetry reading at U.B.C. and I was surprised to get a call from Bob Heilman, who was lecturing there, and he had seen the notice on the board and he knew I was there. So I went out to spend an evening with him. That was long after Ted's death.

CLEMENTE: If we may, Art, again, back to the Seager book, about Ted's father's death, Seager insists that, "His father's death was the most important thing that ever happened to him." Has this been exaggerated—was his father's death, indeed, a lifetime preoccupation?

A.J.M. SMITH: I don't know—when did his father die; he never talked to me about it.

CLEMENTE: Roethke was only thirteen and Seager insists, "His father's death was. . . ."

A.J.M. SMITH: Well, from his poetry you might find that to be so, but he never mentioned it to me, which might mean it *was* very important.

CLEMENTE: Art, let's talk about Roethke's poetry—maybe an assessment. Just off the top of your head—what do you feel are his finest poems, those you love most, those that will survive?

A.J.M. SMITH: I think *The Far Field* is by far the best.

CLEMENTE: What of the poems in *The Lost Son*—the Greenhouse poems—has their power been exaggerated?

A.J.M. SMITH: Well, they're not my kind of poetry. I'm a classicist; I'm a satirist, you know. Dryden and Pope are my heroes, not Blake, and so I think Ted felt as though I didn't appreciate his poetry as I ought to—and I probably didn't. But he liked the kind of poetry I wrote.

CLEMENTE: Why do you think he liked the kind of poetry you wrote?

A.J.M. SMITH: Because it was formally very—you don't know it, I suppose.

CLEMENTE: Art, I confess, I am not that familiar with it—Roethke felt you were doing things he couldn't do as a poet?

A.J.M. SMITH: Oh, I wouldn't say that—I guess they were things he didn't want to do. But when he was at Michigan State, he was just beginning, you know. We would show each other poems we were writing then. And I remember after the De Vrieses had left Michigan State, and were living in an apartment in Washington, where Peter was working with the Department of Agriculture, we were there visiting—Ted too. I think it was an MLA meeting that year, and we were at a party, and Ted had just made this breakthrough and written these very fine, original, new-type poems—not the Greenhouse poems—anyway, he was there, reading them in manuscript, saying how great they were. Now I was very doubtful about them because they didn't make sense. He got my wife, took her into the bedroom and piled all the

furniture at the door so nobody would enter. He read them to her.

CLEMENTE: Did he convince her of their greatness?

A.J.M. SMITH: Oh yes, surely!

CLEMENTE: Art, if we can get back to an assessment of his poetry. In looking over the body of Roethke's work, Karl Malkoff, in his long Roethke study concludes:

> The poetry of Theodore Roethke constitutes a kind of spiritual autobiography. Partly because of the nature of the poet's illness, the main concerns of this autobiography are the struggles, first to form the self, then to preserve it from the threat of imminent nonbeing. Following the manic-depressive patterns of his own behavior, the poems alternate between extreme joy at the miracle of his existence and unendurable anxiety at the thought of its tenuousness. However, using the depths and heights of his emotional states creatively, he was able to make them an intensification rather than a distortion of the human condition; the agony of his finest works is existential rather than pathological.

He's much more than just a "confessional" poet?

A.J.M. SMITH: Oh, yes, I agree with all this so far—and that's the source of their value, actually, and power.

CLEMENTE: What do you feel were his greatest shortcomings as a poet?

A.J.M. SMITH: Well, judging from the kind of poetry he was writing, and the experiences that gave rise to them, I don't think he had any notable shortcomings and defects. I don't think there is anything sloppy about his technique at all.

CLEMENTE: He is attacked for being derivative. We read this in one of his essays from *On the Poet and His Craft,* "How to Write Like Somebody Else." Maybe he had too good an ear—too much like Yeats or Leonie Adams!

A.J.M. SMITH: Oh, yes, though they may have been models, the poems are expressions of his own original personality—there's no doubt about that. I wouldn't call him a derivative poet at all.

CLEMENTE: Would you call him a major American poet—as major, say, as Frost or Eliot or Stevens?

A.J.M. SMITH: Well, not as major as them, certainly. But he is such a romantic poet, and I don't have any enthusiasm for romanticism at all. And if you call him a major American poet—you're kind of running down American poetry in general. I think he is a very excellent and original poet, but he is perhaps too personal to be really a major poet. I can imagine arguing with him.

CLEMENTE: Yes! Were he alive, how do you think he would assess his own career?

A.J.M. SMITH: He would affirm vividly, LOUDLY, that he was a major American poet. But half the time, they'd be just a sort of twinkle in his eye, you know, and a touch of ironic self-criticism. He was really, in spite of a lot of bragging and so on, a very modest fellow.

CLEMENTE: Are there any Roethke lines you'd like to quote—lines that stay with you?

A.J.M. SMITH: I can't. I have no memory—can't quote my own lines even.

CLEMENTE: He's been called, "King of the One-Liners": "Running from God's the longest race of all," "The Redeemer comes with a dark face," "From me to Thee's a long and terrible way," on and on and on. One reason for the critical barbs is that he does not hold up after the good line or two. I do think they've been overly severe with him here.

A.J.M. SMITH: I would think that too. I think most of his best poems—don't ask me to name them—are good as a whole, not in pieces here and there.

CLEMENTE: Do you remember much of "The North American Sequence"?

A.J.M. SMITH: No I can't—frankly, I don't read Roethke, not the kind of poetry I read.

CLEMENTE: This astounds me—the contradiction here of the classical and the romantic temperaments—yet such a long and abiding friendship. What sustained such a friendship?

A.J.M. SMITH: Oh, his personality, his person. He was friendly and very amusing. He was a great person to have around—the life of every party.

CLEMENTE: Peter, what have you to add?

PETER SMITH: In spite of the fact that you didn't live in clear proximity to him, you'd see him quite regularly, it seemed, over the years.

A.J.M. SMITH: Sure, he lived in Saginaw, not very far away, and during the summer he was free, and he brought his wife Beatrice to see us and stay with us, very soon after his marriage. And Jeannie, my wife, and Beatrice got along beautifully together. But before his marriage, as I've said, he'd come for parties, sometimes. I remember one time; he was chasing one of the secretaries at the party. He got quite drunk and wanted to take her home. He was staying with us, and my wife wouldn't let him take her. She was afraid what would happen to her, and so we drove her home, my wife and I. And when we got back, Ted had flown the coop—gone back to Saginaw. And a few days later, we got a letter, Ted apologizing and saying, "Great God! I left my pants behind." He didn't mean the pants he was wearing, so we had to bundle them up and send them to him.

CLEMENTE: Peter, some of your Roethke anecdotes....

PETER SMITH: As a person growing up, as a teenager or younger, I would see him every now and then. I remember driving from Ann Arbor to East Lansing—this was right after he was married. I picked them up in Ann Arbor: Beatrice was in the front seat of the little car, and Ted was in the back. It was a nice spring day; we were driving along and Ted was musing. "Oh, the sky, the clouds, the sun, the trees, the

beautiful farms, and all the cows lying in their shit." Then we got to a gas station; he gets out, takes me aside and whispers that he "didn't mind of course," but that his wife wished I would "slow down a bit."

CLEMENTE: What kind of woman was Beatrice?

A.J.M. SMITH: She was a beautiful girl.

CLEMENTE: Is it true that she pursued Roethke?

A.J.M. SMITH: I never knew her until after they were married.

CLEMENTE: It was a good marriage, wasn't it? I mean, she nurtured him, propped him up.

A.J.M. SMITH: I would think so. She helped him a great deal. And he was careless about money—checks and that kind of thing. He'd get checks from *The New Yorker* and magazines for his poems, and they'd be just lying around, all over the place. She got hold of that and organized it.

CLEMENTE: Were you interviewed at all for the Seager book, the biography?

A.J.M. SMITH: Yes, Allan Seager came up and interviewed me and John Clark. I had quite a lot of letters connected with Ted's hiring and firing at Michigan State. The Head of the English Department, when he was retiring, threw all the letters out, in a box—out in the hall! A graduate student picked them all up. These were the letters of application; for when he was applying for a job, he'd get letters of recommendation from hundreds of people—fire them all in. And so this graduate student brought them all to me. I got them all. I was going to give them to the Library at Washington—but I think they have copies from somewhere.

CLEMENTE: Art, why is it you haven't written critically about Roethke—even a memoir?

A.J.M. SMITH: Because he isn't my kind of poet. I'm too busy writing about Canadian poets.

CLEMENTE: Are there any contemporary American poets you are really fond of?

A.J.M. SMITH: Oh, Lowell—and the poets I really liked too were Leonie Adams, Robert Fitzgerald, Rolfe Humphries. I met Rolfe Humphries once.

CLEMENTE: Did you know Stanley Kunitz?

A.J.M. SMITH: No, I didn't know him. I do think that Stanley Kunitz, Rolfe Humphries, and Louise Bogan really admired Ted and helped him. I think they are the people who actually made his career a success when he needed it.

CLEMENTE: He certainly made it a point of expressing his indebtedness to them too—this is what I so admire in Roethke, unlike Frost, who often turned on those who helped him most. Yes, I think Roethke was deeply appreciative.

A.J.M. SMITH: Yes, he admired and liked these people and their poetry because they all valued craftsmanship and taught him to value craftsmanship. And he certainly worked very hard as a craftsman. They had an immense influence for good on his work, and they also helped his career. They were influential people.

CLEMENTE: Did Roethke have a critical sense—revisions and such?

A.J.M. SMITH: Yes, oh yes, he certainly did. I don't know if his notebooks have been published....

CLEMENTE: Yes, Wagoner edited *Straw for the Fire*—one volume at least.

A.J.M. SMITH: Oh, yes, he worked very hard at revisions.

CLEMENTE: When did you see him last—remember your final meeting with him?

A.J.M. SMITH: I don't remember...it was after his marriage. He and Beatrice came and stayed with us.

PETER SMITH: This was in '61 or '62.

A.J.M. SMITH: That would be true, I guess.

CLEMENTE: Well, we are talking about a friendship that spanned, what, almost twenty-eight years—it's a long friendship.

A.J.M. SMITH: In the latter part, it was more or less at a distance. He was up in Washington.

CLEMENTE: You kept in touch with him though.

A.J.M. SMITH: Oh yes, sure.

PETER SMITH: And you did see him, every now and then.

A.J.M. SMITH: Yes, if he came to Saginaw, he usually came down to East Lansing.

CLEMENTE: Art, what are the fruits of such a friendship—these fruits ever translate into your work, into his work?

A.J.M. SMITH: I doubt it—maybe encouragement.

CLEMENTE: Were you always honest with him—when he came to you, say, with a poem you felt just wasn't right—would you tell him so?

A.J.M. SMITH: Yes, but not really very seriously, because he wrote the kind of poetry that I didn't. He'd say, "I've written a great poem." And I'd say, "Ah, come on now."

CLEMENTE: Do you ever think of Roethke—ever come to you in your musings, in your dreams?

A.J.M. SMITH: Oh, I have memories of his good spirits, his friendship. I regret much his death.

CLEMENTE: How did you learn of his death?

A.J.M. SMITH: I read it in the paper, the summer we were in Canada.

CLEMENTE: Do you remember, Peter?

PETER SMITH: Yes, in the paper.

A.J.M. SMITH: After that, I got a few letters from friends, from Kathleen De Vries. I really didn't hear any details from

anybody over in Seattle. He had a heart attack, I think, while he was in the swimming pool. Did anybody try to suggest it was suicide?

CLEMENTE: No, God no!

A.J.M. SMITH: It certainly wasn't!

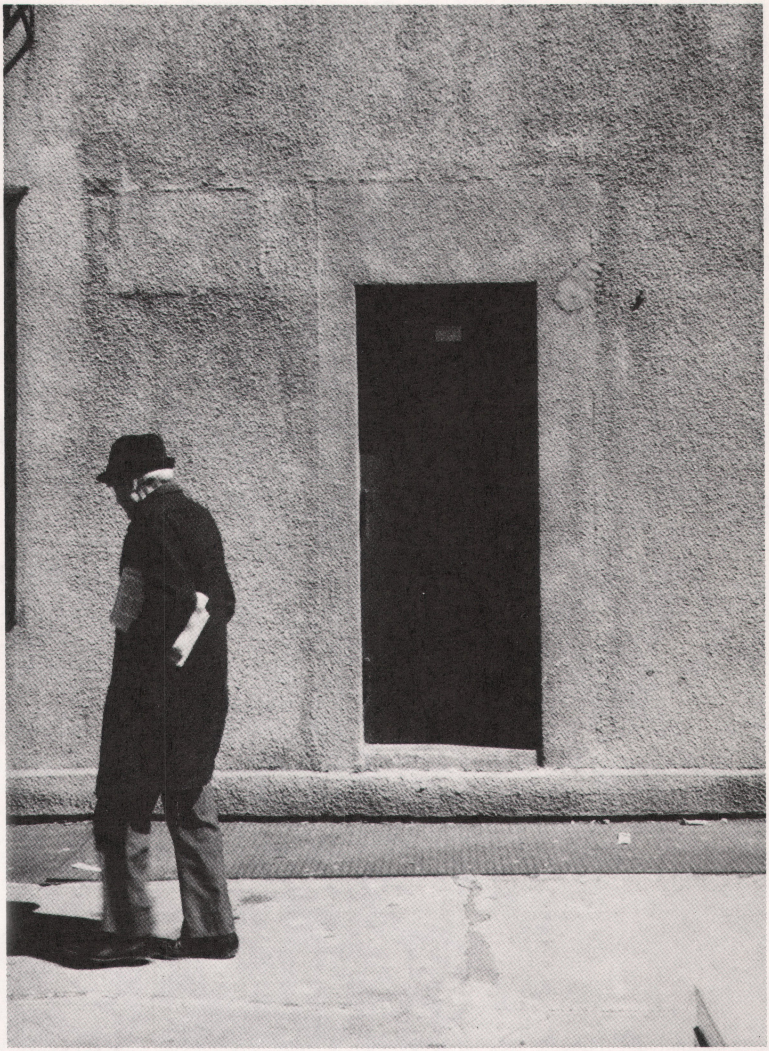
CLEMENTE: No, just at the time, people who knew him—that he really felt that *The Far Field* was his last book.

A.J.M. SMITH: I didn't have any letters about it from him—so that I never heard he thought it was to be his last book. I find it hard to believe that. I feel that after his marriage and so on, he felt he'd go on until he got the Nobel Prize.

PETER SMITH: He certainly seemed happy and very optimistic at that time—the drive from Ann Arbor.

A.J.M. SMITH: Well, he'd just had an honor given him there at Ann Arbor and just married to Beatrice. Auden was a great friend of his and lent him his villa at Ischia for their honeymoon. And the Irish poet, Murphy, came and gave a reading at Michigan State and stayed with us. He had met Roethke and Beatrice in Ireland, and Roethke, apparently, had been a very fine fellow there. There was very much of the Irish spirit—although he was German, of course—in Ted. Wit and good humor. I'm sure Roethke would have liked to have a big wake, with all his friends drinking themselves into a sentimental stupor.

Stony Brook, Long Island
21 May 1978



Kelly O'Keefe

Return to Derrynane

Scott H. Mulrane

This bourbon on ice
is an honest route
to crisp sheets
near an open window
through which the wind
in the early morning
has entered welcome
having wandered the mile
from the Kerry coast
like a boy from crabbing.

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