

RED CEDAR REVIEW



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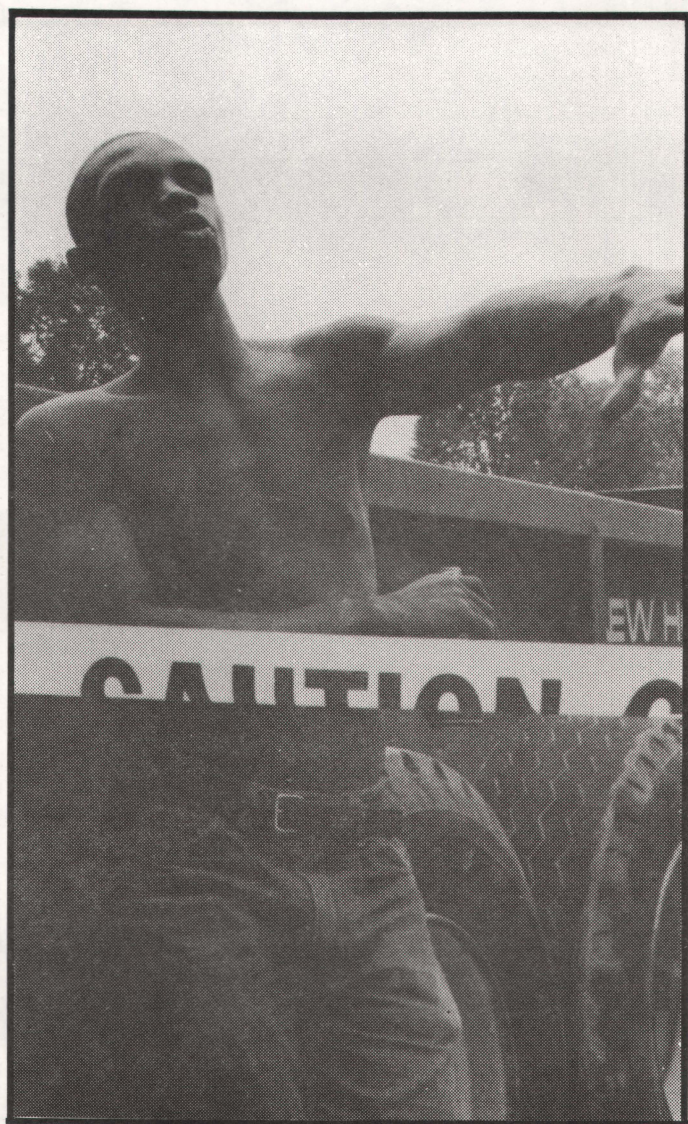
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Tombstone Saloon, 1990

Drinking my vacation,
a Jersey-talking
cowboy
brings beer

and a puzzle of
metal: handcuffs
tangled
through a
pinched steel
ring says,
"solve this one
pardner"

A smoking woman
three stools down
wears my
ex-wife's shoes
on longer legs,
tells someone
"you'll be
better
for trying"

The turbaned
man
bellies up
with curried

hellos orders
"anything!"
and gets it

I'm holding
knotted steel
waiting
to learn
the secret

When Spring Comes To Lansing

we'll get a car,
roll a hundred joints,
smoke them,
one by one by thirty two, each
number a fast-burning fuse, the air
thin with smoke and stare,
and lightning storms,
and ozone wisp,
and we'll be there,
a thousand feet above our niche,
fluttering hands, dripping
wax, a burning moon
above the clouds,
and April only,

man,
if we could just stay that high
all summer.

My Mother Who Can't Swallow

asks when
I think she's
sleeping about
the fish so
many she says
salmon, trout
haddock on sale,
their eyes open.
What mother, I
ask who and she
sinks back in
to the pillow
remembers salmon
and lobster days
when nothing
on her plate
was left and
she'd stand in
front of store
windows hating
her stomach,
belly 38 D
breasts she
pressed as a
college freshman
into her own
skin till she
flattened even

muscle wanting
to be skinny
enough to eat
as much as she
wanted, now
wishes she
could

Hating Pills, My Mother Wants More Demerol

when it hits
even before
i.v.'s she
says how she
loves me. All
night she moaned
"I can't, do it."
Twisting, writhing
arms double crossed
around a pillow
like someone
punching a bag in
rage or desperation
Outside dark jade
pines drip, on
an island, comorants
scream on network
tv on a coast
as far as what's
ahead I
wish.

The Women In My Family

tell me, don't take their crap
smell as elusive as lilacs
keep your tongue sharp & quick
to cut through bullshit and straitjackets
your eyes clear and distant
they want my skin to be
hard & cool as glass,
unsmudged

but i am made of ash
lungs heavy with smoke
and cannot tell them
how i melted and fumbled
how i once lived for the
smell of sweat and honeyed platitudes
cried on cue, clung weak as a vine
how i almost gave away
my name

Losing The Night

in the time
i look away
 her eye-lid
 falls shut.
a quiet span of cloud skin
 pulled over the rounded night sky.
lashes,
 at the cheek's horizon,
spread dormant
like fallen trees.

Tennessee Fangs

Summer in Cooke County: air,
a series of webs.

The boys were warned about the pond,
but trees hang over it--you can be
Tarzan, swear and nobody hears.

Billy strips faster than the rest,
climbs the tree, swings.
Green water pulls him under.

Water moccasins tighten to him.
A farmer fishes him out.

His friends never speak of it
again, but each has nightmares
for months--Billy's gone to Heaven,

says the minister--he entered
by fangs;
even still, the town drains the pond.

Untitled Poem For Peter Brueghel

A cruel place
the street.

I once saw a one-armed violinist
attempt a Wagnerian aire:
he jabbed the bow into his esophagus
and coaxed out the sweetest strains
I have ever heard.

The on-lookers, of course, requested:
 !camptownladies!
and were disappointed
when he didn't play it.
A cruel place,
the street.

(somewhere a blind man
paints
a Modigliani nude

Words for the skinny Flint man

I never run
like you did, stranger
racing the soot-covered bus
into Buick city.
Your cap fell twice
off close shaved, spongy hair
and the second time you only glanced
over your shoulder then
picked up speed without its added weight.

Two blocks past the starting line
your body straightened and slowed
like an exaggerated waltz ending.
You shook your head,
put hands on hips,
steadied the defeated breathing
in your stomach
and your lips swore
in my Honda's rearview mirror.

I watched the race
without stopping
or offering a ride,
just shifted into fourth gear
not asking if you needed that bus
to reach a lover
or the birth of your child
or to punch the time clock
on time.

Farts

I

At first we held them inside
all night while we french kissed
and rubbed our blue jeans together.
Gas bubbles squealed in our guts,

high-pitched pleas for release--
and only after we wrapped ourselves
in our separate beds would we
set each delicious raspberry free.

II

After months of sharing my twin bed,
we lost our blue jeans and curiosity
and shimmied around the livingroom
in only underwear. Soon, you started

farting on my head,
and I'd tackle you, tickling--
until we rolled away from each other
inhaling the ghosts or our come and sweat.

III

You spent your evenings in the barn
trying to catch a wild cat
with a handful of cat show.
I ate cans of Campbell's Split Pea Soup

on purpose and pulled the covers
over your head. Years later,
I can still hear that voice
I knew you would use on your children,

"Can't you do that some place else?"

The Architect

home: is in that pattern of nicks
scarred heel by heel
into wooden stairs,
where I drop my suitcase
in red carpet quiet

and smile
through the doorway
of my father's office;
at his back,
curled over drawingboard;
at those hands,
that designed this house;

and in the scrabbling
of pencil over blueprint
I hear
what could have been
the sound
of Sunday mornings:
when a father
might slip into his son's room,
scratch his cheek
with stubbled chin
until the boy woke,
laughing.

but he swivels around--
a frown of concentration,
offers an architect hand

and there is no heat of welcome
in that small embrace of palms,
no hint of perspiration;
only the dry silver
of lead-smeared fingers
smooth as that hallway carpet,
worn bald by the scuff
of bitter words.

The Blind Man

for W.

trying for goodbye--
the words seem dim, dissolved.
behind the Japanese restaurant
he brushes a finger
across her mouth
like a blind man
groping gently to understand
some message in braille;
watches her watch
sparrows gather in a tree;
feels the carp
flashing bright as desire
in the bricked fishpool
at his feet .
they hover,

slice
without ever wrinkling
the thin skin of surface water.

The Bicycle Song

I fell asleep to the sound of the highway
and the last of the bicycle gang hollers
whooping, shouting out their egos
as they rode away.

I awoke to the sound of the highway
and the first of the bicycle gangs
wired on sugar breakfast cereals,
knocking on my door.

We were commonly seen
wheeling around the town,
the block of Lexington and Arcade Avenue
the drugstore comics bubblegum
firecrackers matches and vacant lots.

Our day was governed by the sounds
of the city,
the Goodyear zeppelin lawnmower
blimp engine
in the distance droning its presence
like a foghorn.

Northwest it was heard and we
would follow,
fast riders ahead and upward looking,
sometimes rewarded with the sight of
the balloon
advertising great rubber glory rides,

sometimes it was the only cylinder pound of
old men mowing.

The war clash and trumpet blast of the high
school marching band

and the ring of the bell on the Amish
egg wagon,

the Rock n' Roll radio by the fat
lady suntanning,

Firecrackers blowing off in back-
yard alleyways.

Across the highway those greased
up workmen

singing their jackhammer wrecking
ball blues

as the traffic zoomed, bad breaks screeching,
carnival breezes blowing the music of the
merry-go-round,

sweet adrenaline drug love of a child,
motorcycle gears groaning on as those big
burly studded guys

scattered us like dust and out of the town
they went on to bigger city booms.

But we, the bicycle gangs
found our frenzy and out heartbeat in near-
by places.

Noises flashed like fire to spur us on,
keep us moving with the wail
like the siren we all chased one crimson
bleeding afternoon.

Angry ambulance siren,
desperation cutting the ear drum,
Oh my God! Oh my God! Oh my God!
it moaned,

but it was more than Oh my God,
it was Oh my Yawheh Zues Mohammed om
sweating acid on the asphalt of our end-
less road.

We found it by the bicycle bridge,
childhood catastrophe and the sudden
silence of recognition.

Jenny, poor pee the bed fat pig Jenny,
the one we pushed and hit with sticks.

She rode alone on her rusty old too
big wheeler

going too fast up and over the bridge to the
downward slope, her front wheel wobbled
and hit the railing,

threw her over, knocked out hard against
the pavement,

cracked down child trickling blood out of her
dusty hair.

I saw the trickle move into a puddle
and there was a silence in the sounds.

It was all there, the shouts of paramedics
packaging her away like a fish,
but it was all nothing more than breathing,
like Jenny's hard painful breathing,
like my own easy pants.

All meaningless heart beats and throbs
that continued on as the siren began to
wail again

through the crazy beat of city dances and we,
the bicycle gangs

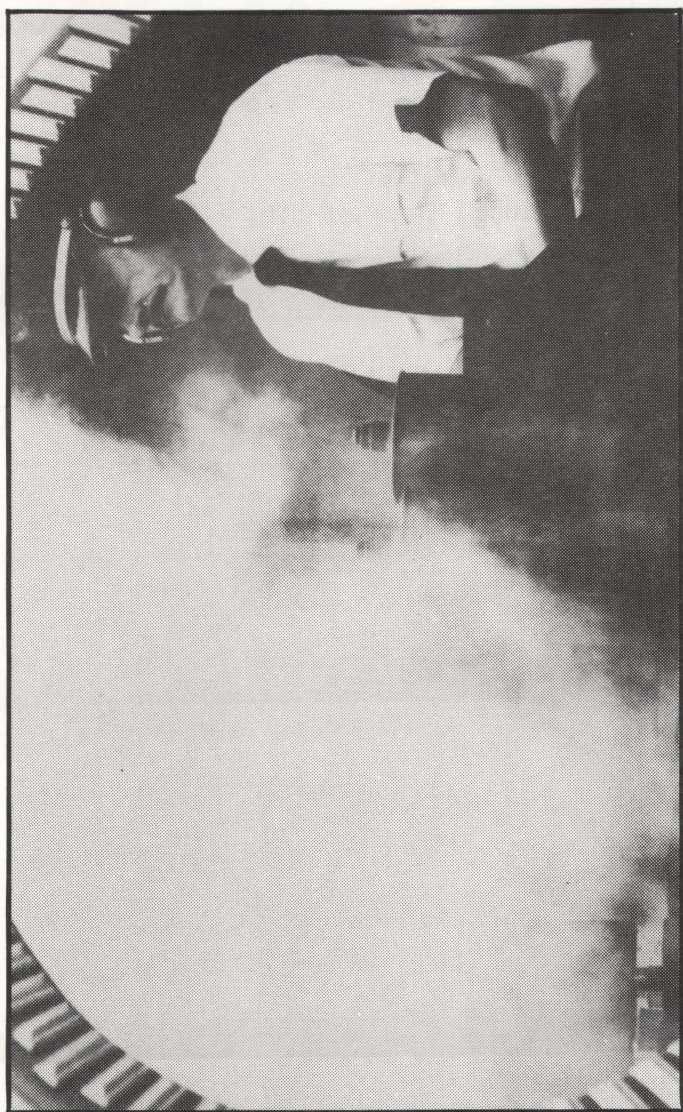
pedaled away screaming places to go
throughout the recklessly
descending evening.

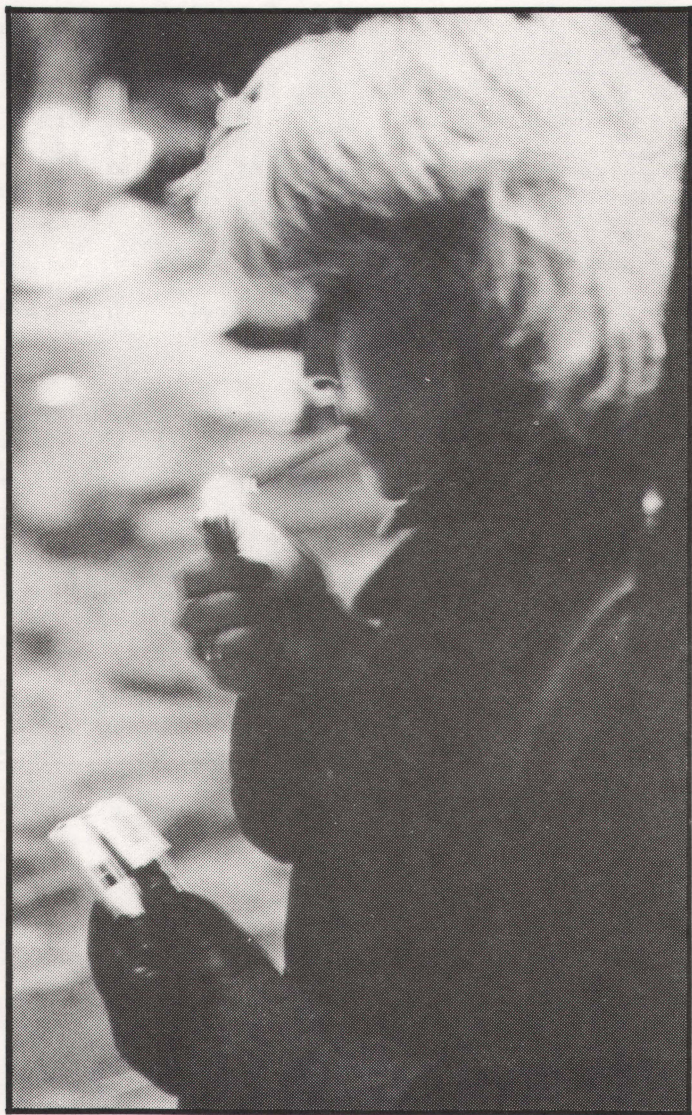
Red Leaves

Light falls rapidly as estrangement.
What passes between us passes away.
Yesterday, I saw a leaf fall, red
as a mitten. Sometimes the whole day
comes down like that-- quiet and small.
Sometimes I feel left behind.
See how the butterflies lift themselves
away: they do so gently as breath.
Soon we will scarcely remember them.
Soon I will hold nothing but red leaves
in my hands. I will look at them
with joy. Because all we are
rivals this: red leaves tossed up
suddenly, like fire, like breath.

Changeling

She woke up one morning
new. Stripped off
the layers of bedclothes
and sleep
and brushed all the dark
from her hair. Stepped out
vivid and unfocused
whirling too fast to affix
an address.
Slurring all the tempos
of an unpronounceable
music, she dances
in her skin veils.





WHITE BOY STUDIES BEER
FOR THE 1ST TIME, WHITE
BOY IS ASTONISHED TO SEE

WHITE BOY BEER

1. drinking keeps you young and vibrant
2. people have open & great relationships under alcohol's wet
3. beer consumption gives one the advantages of the upper middle class
4. sports are played far better & are enjoyed more with beer close by

WHITE BOY GOES TO DETOX
CENTERS HOPING TO RESTORE
EXPECTATIONS FOR ALKIES

WHITE BOY BEER

WHITE BOY BEER

WHITE BOY STUDIES BEER
ADS AND COMMERCIALS TO
REACH THE CONCLUSIONS:

- 1st. beer makes breasts bigger/voluptuous & in your face
- 2nd. laughter & smiles effect everyone
- 3rd. intimate, trusting relationships
- 4th. success, wealth & pursuit of happiness

AFTER DRINKING FOR TWO
WEEKS, WHITE BOY CRAWLS
OUT OF THE WEEDS TO GO
BACK & RETHINK FINDINGS

WHITE BOY BEER

WHITE BOY BEER

ATTACKING A LARGE PILE
OF SPUDS MACKENZIE T-
SHIRTS WITH BIG FIRE-
HOSE SQUIRTING MAYON-
NAISE, WHITE BOY ASKS
THIS OF THE COPS THAT
ARRIVE TO ARREST HIM:

1. Aren't you ashamed of yourselves?

LATER, THE POLICE LOOK
AT CENTERFOLDS WITH A
CAN OF BUD, LAUGHING
OVER KICKING WHITE BOY
HARD RT WHERE IT HURTS

WHITE BOY BEER

WHITE BOY BEER

WATCHING ALKIES POKE
IN TRASH CANS. WHITE
BOY THINKS RETURNABLE
CONTAINERS ARE GREAT

1. to keep our cities
clean
2. gives the unemployed
something to do
3. provides another
ave. of money-flow
4. supports major TV
sports sponsors

AFTER HUGGING 1008 IN
IN LINE TO CASH IN WHITE
BOY GOES FOR THREE SHOWER:

WHITE BOY BEER

WHITE BOY BEER

WHILE FINISHING UP LAST NIGHT'S
KEG, THE EXPRES. SHOWS R WHITE
BOY HOW HIS TRICKLE DOWN IDEAS
OF ECONOMIC JUSTICE HAVE WORKED
BY DEMONSTRATING IN THESE 3 WAYS

- 1st. - dapping at the corners
of his mouth with his
blue, flowered napkin
- 2nd. - rubbing his middle
finger under the hot,
dripping slice of
pizza
- 3rd. - pointing at the pecker
tracks down his pants

IN AMAZEMENT, WHITE BOY GETS
UP FOR 1 MORE WARM BUD LITE

WHITE BOY BEER

WHITE BOY BEER

THINKING THAT LATE NITE
BAR PEOPLE JUST DO NOT
KNOW THE MODERN WAY OF
DRINKING, WHITE BOY GOES
TO DIVES TO SHOW VIDEOS:

- a. of bouncing breasts
& balls at beaches
- b. plush couches
and silken thighs
- c. full lips just about
to press wet
- d. long fingers drawn
slowly over skin

NOT DISCOURAGED BY SLURRED
VOICES & STUMBLING BODIES,
WHITE BOY PLANS ON ADDING
DOLBY SOUND & 3D IN ORDER
TO UPGRADE AMER. ALCOHOLICS

WHITE BOY BEER

Killing Two Birds

Ginny sat slumped in the passenger seat while Will drove them south from Boston. She tore a wedge from the lid of her take-out cup, and a thin warm mist of coffee rose up, clouding the windshield. She rubbed at the fog with the heel of her palm. The dawn was cold, even for November. She wished she had remembered a blanket to spread over her legs.

They had reservations on the morning ferry. This weekend on the island had originally been planned for Labor Day, as a sort of homecoming for Will, who had spent the summer gillnetting salmon in Alaska. Ginny's parents owned a house in Vineyard Haven which they rented out during the tourist season. Behind the kitchen were two rooms with a separate entrance where Ginny and her friend Sue had waited out the warm months. The house would be empty now until spring.

"Marvin Hagler grew up here," Ginny said. She did not point to the sign which hung above the pavement like the blade of a guillotine. Short gusts of wind shook the car as she sipped.

"The former boxer," said Will, his hands following the wheel around a curve. He turned to face her but did not smile.

"He used to be something else." The road slipped straight again. Will's fingers relaxed as he looked away.

Ginny felt the heat of the coffee churn upward into her cheeks. She cracked the window for a moment and let the cold air rinse her face. She could not have slept more than an hour or two last night. Will had looked so glad to see her at the airport that she had taken his forgiveness for granted. After all, if he had come home in September like they had planned, none of it would have happened. But he had wanted to stay another two weeks for silvers, then another month for crab fishing, and then the captain had offered to pay him to take the boat down to Seattle for the winter.

When he called from port in Vancouver, she told him she had done something that she regretted, but it was nothing, or not anything that he should worry about. She had been saving her tips-and that's what mattered. With the money from his fishing they could take a long slow trip, take their time about settling down. They had planned it together and it would still work. She told him all that and the line went quiet; his voice seemed to move far from the receiver, as if he had put the phone down and was now talking to the air.

Last April, when Will first mentioned Alaska, Ginny had cried. She was happy with their life in Boston, happy with their sunny rooms overlooking the Fenway, with their day jobs at the restaurant on Beacon Street. Will seemed to have no idea of what he would do there, or when he would be back. They were walking across the Common, on their way to feed the ducks at the public garden. Ginny wanted Will to stop talking about moose and bear, about big money, about possibilities and long trips which didn't include her. She wanted him to say exactly why he was leaving, for that summer to mean something to their life together. He seemed aloof to her, embarrassed.

"How can I know what it means?" he said. "I don't have a crystal ball."

As they began to scatter lumps of bread the ducks gathered round, quacking. The nearer birds, jostled by the throng, edged onto their shoe tops. A green-headed drake nipped her fingers. She threw her last crust at him, hard.

"Quack, quack," said Will. "We're out of bread."

He turned the paper bag upside down and shook out the crumbs. A few hens on the perimeter ambled off to sit beneath the willows, while others stood gamely on one leg, looking around indecisively.

"All gone," said Ginny.

But he was home now, finally, and she could pick up the loose threads of her life. Last night Will had kicked and mumbled in his sleep. He kept reaching out for her until she found herself pinned against the cold wall of the room. Each time he grunted Ginny said "I'm sorry," in a small, soft voice. But Will never made an answer which she could decipher. He might as well have been wide awake.

"I'm too tired to drive," she had told him as he shaved under his chin. "Let's take your car."

Will scratched the back of his head, then held out his hand for the coffee cup. Asphalt heaves rocked the car. Coffee dribbled down his chin and soaked into his lap.

"Did he look like me?" he asked.

"No," said Ginny.

They drove on for a time, listening to the hum of the tires. The suburban malls gave way to scrub forest. Ginny watched the trees slip past, mostly grey bark and bare branches. Only the oaks had managed to keep their leaves. His hair was black and his fingers trembled while he held at a fork. That much she remembered clearly. He was not tall like Will. There were black hairs on his shoulders. At the beach he wobbled unsteadily in the surf, back to the waves.

"He had two kids," she said.

The road became rough. More signs appeared, warning of construction crews ahead. Ginny's stomach contracted into a hard wreath of pain. Will's silence did not calm her. Before he left for Alaska the same silence loomed. She had made promise after promise of love, while he had explained about seine nets, crew shares, and the weather in the North Pacific. He did not say that he wanted to meet someone new, and in the end grumbled that she could come too, if she liked. When she had refused, the fault became hers.

"I'm sorry," she said. "Sue warned me not to tell you."

By now the long line of cars heading south had slowed to a crawl. A flashing yellow light funnelled them into one lane near the shoulder.

"It's just as well," said Will.

He was married, she told him. He was married, he had two kids, both girls. The whole family had dinner every Thursday night at the Black Dog Cafe. On the Thursday before Labor Day he had come back in alone. His name was also Will. When her shift ended he was waiting outside. His eyes were bright almost bulging. "If you'll drive me home," he said, "I'll show you the most beautiful spot on the island."

He lay low across the back seat as she picked her way through town. One by one he told her the things that he liked about her.

"I like the way your nose wrinkles when you smile," he said. "The way your toes turn out when you walk. Your thin calves below the hemline. I like the way your eyes close when you list the specials of the day."

"You shouldn't make fun of me," said Ginny, looking over her shoulder at him.

"Keep your eyes on the road," he said solemnly. "You'll blow our cover."

Ginny pulled up to a stop sign, laughing. When another car idled alongside, she set her face and looked straight ahead.

"That's better," he told her. "People will think you laugh at your own jokes. Turn right. We'll take this road up island. I'll tell you when to stop."

Later that night they lay on the hood of the car, watching mackerel clouds scud across a thin slice of moon. Ginny held his head in her lap.

"I was nineteen when the first man walked on that moon," he said.

"I was six, I think. I don't remember."

"Didn't you look for footprints?" he asked.

"Where?"

"Up there," he said. "On the moon."

Men in hard hats crowded the shoulder. A section of the road ahead had been blasted through a steep, short hill and rock walls rose straight on either side to the height of telephone poles. A pair of large black birds pokes curiously at the ragged skeleton of a child's tennis shoe which lay trodden in the roadbed. As they neared the construction site, a flagman waved them to a stop.

"Couldn't you call him something else? William, or Bill maybe? I mean, if you have to talk about him."

"His name was Will," she said.

"You don't know that for sure. What did his wife call him?"

"Daddy, I think."

The earth trembled under the tread of heavy equipment. The flagman stepped to the shoulder as a truckload of fill came rumbling through the cut, tires spitting dirt and gravel. The cab windows were so dark with grime that Ginny could not make out the driver. The smaller of the two birds ran shrieking and flapping to the side of the road, but the other moved its wings clumsily against the air. An oncoming wheel caught one black wing and rolled it underneath the dead weight of the load.

The flagman motioned for them to proceed. Once past the site, the pavement was black and blank as a seam of coal. No lines had been painted on it.

Ginny looked at Will. "A bird got run over," she said. "By that big truck."

"I'm sorry," Will said. "I must have missed it."

Ginny turned her face to the wind to hold the tears back. She wanted to crush her guilt like a paper cup and toss it over the side. As soon as Will had arrived in Alaska and netted a job, he began to send enthusiastic letters home, about his plans for the money he'd make, about missing her. Now he stood silent at the rail, his hands deep in the pockets of his coat.

Grey gulls flew up, wheeled raucously, dove again to the water. A school of bluefish worked the rip where two currents collided, confusing the sea. The bigger fish walled the bait up against the tide, the slashed through. Two fisherman, their small boat rocked by the ferry's passage, brought one to gaff. The sharp steel bit easily through the back of the fish and emerged dripping from the other side. Some passengers cheered and clapped. Ginny set her feet wide on the deck. She closed her eyes, felt the surge of the engines far down in the ship.

"That was a nice fish," Will said, turning from the rail.

Ginny put her hands to her cheeks. "Are they red?" she asked.

"It's cold," Will said, taking her arm. "Let's go below."

The stale breath of the cabin turned her stomach. Will brought two cans of beer at the counter while Ginny found a seat in a corner booth. The summer flooded her thoughts. Over coffee the next morning, Sue had laughed at the whole affair. She called him the mysterious man-in-the-moon and pressed for an introduction.

Will finished his beer and started on hers. "He won't be there, will he?"

"I don't think so," she said. "They were summer people."

After leaving the ferry they drove by the cafe. Ginny poked her head into the kitchen, said hello to the cook, and joined Will at a table by the window. She sat with her back to the harbor, wondering what she would do if he walked in right then, as they were having lunch. She took all the sugar packets out of the rack and began to build a little house. She smoothed the envelopes, with their watercolor images of seascapes, and stood them on edge, like playing cards.

During the rest of the Labor Day weekend, she had been afraid to answer the phone. On

Tuesday, she drove by his house, unsure of what she hoped to see. On Thursday she called in sick. The following Sunday, Sue fixed a pitcher of rum and orange juice to take to the beach. "Last chance for the sun," she said. "I want to get drunk and read the comics."

The waves washed a slow, steady beat into the sand. They lay with their backs to the water, sipping at straws. The two daughters sported matching striped bikinis. They ran up to show Ginny their shovels and pails. He wore mirrored sunglasses. Black hairs curled thickly around his navel. He sank to one knee, as if he were planning to stay and talk, while his wife continued along the beach.

"This must be your roommate," he said, nodding to Sue, who squinted over her shoulder at him.

Ginny rolled away from her newspaper, then sat up, propped on one arm. She looked hard at the sharp points of his brows, the tiny gaps between his teeth. All the charm seemed to have left his smile.

"I won't disturb you," he said, still smiling. "We'll see you next Thursday. As usual."

The girls ran shrieking to the waterline. Their father made a mock salute, then sauntered away.

"Who was that jerk?" asked Sue, taking a long pull at her drink.

"That's the guy," said Ginny.

"That's him."

On Monday Ginny and Sue cleaned out the refrigerator, latched the shutters, and boarded the ferry for the mainland. When they reached the far shore, Ginny drove up the ramp on to the dock. She sat blinking awhile in the sun, feeling as though she had just been disgorged from the belly of a whale.

When Ginny attempted to add another brick to the foundation, her sugar house collapsed. The packets fell with the sound of sifting sand. She drew the heap close to her chest and began to file them by color. Every now and then the screen door slammed behind a new customer, mostly locals who nodded to Ginny and then quietly took a seat. Will rested his elbows on the table.

"You know I thought about this all summer," he said.

"You didn't trust me?"

"I trusted you," he said seriously. "I was thinking about coming here, just the two of us."

Two dark-haired girls stomped their feet by the door. An older man followed them in, but his hair was too grey, his shoes too well polished.

"I have to use the bathroom," said Ginny.

She pushed the lid down and sat on it until her stomach pains subsided. Then she combed her hair, which was knotted and tangled from the ferry trip. When she returned to the table, Will was stirring a bowl of chowder.

"I ordered the same for you," he said.

Ginny inspected her plate. "After we eat," she said, "let's drop our stuff off at the house and go for a drive. I want to show you around the island."

Will leaned forward and kissed her on the mouth. She slid into the chair next to him, and ate with her back to the door.

The road veered right and began to climb a low, wooded hill. Gravel crackled under the tires. From time to time Will turned to look at her face. She caught each glance like a ball thrown in her direction. He still wasn't talking, but she could live with that. She settled in behind the wheel and concentrated on steering gently through the ruts. They rounded the last bend and surveyed the western slope of the hill.

"This is it," said Ginny. "You have to walk up to the top."

"Where do we park?"

"I usually just pull over," she said. "We'll make a U-turn after."

Cold gusts rattled the trees, carried the report of car doors slamming out to sea. The ridge was hidden from the road by the bulk of the hill and a stand of oaks. A light swell rolled under the setting sun as she led Will up the trail. In the falling light she could imagine that she had never been there before. The climb was steep but short. When they reached the top, Ginny sat with her legs outstretched in the dry grass, winded.

Will walked to the edge of the clearing. He picked a crumpled beer can out of the grass and chucked it over the brink. Ginny lay on her back, sighting the sun through the tips of her shoes. She sniffed the faint salt scent of the Atlantic mingled with the almost dormant smell of autumn. When Will sat hunched over his knees beside her, she turned up her face to be kissed. The summer seemed far away. Ginny pulled him down, pillowed her head on his chest. She wished again that she had remembered a blanket.

"Where will we go?" she asked.

"Depends," said Will. "We have enough for Mexico. The Bahamas maybe."

"Would we work down there?"

"We might have to." Will's fingers were warm on her neck. "If I went back to Alaska next year, we could make it. South in the winter, north in the summer."

The sun shivered at the horizon, dipped into a thin line of haze and lit the clouds with color. When the bird landed on his foot, Will flinched. Ginny caught her breath with a sound which was not quite a sob. The bird's yellow eyes shone close. She heard the rustle of the jet black wings as they folded.

"A crow," said Will, as the bird, with short jabs of its beak, began to untie his shoelace.

"A crow," she echoed. The bird continued to peck and pull at the shoe. Dark, glossy hackles feathered its neck.

"I don't believe this," said Will. The bird had begun sidestepping along his leg. The head bobbed up and down with a curious undulating motion. It dipped and wove like a snake or a prizefighter. Ginny watched Will's hand twitch in the grass, readying to make a grab.

"Don't," she said. "It's tame. It must belong to somebody."

The bird opened and closed its beak, then spread its wings without making any move to fly. It seemed to choke, and regurgitated a small stone, which bounced off Will's thigh and into the grass.

Ginny offered her index finger to the bird as a perch. "Here bird," she coaxed. The crow turned tail and hopped cautiously out of arm's reach. It lingered once more at Will's

feet, feathers glistening black against the sunset, before venturing a suspicious, sideways leap onto her calf.

"Here bird," she called again, feeling the prick of its toes through her jeans.

"Here bird."

The crow cocked its head, training a bright eye on her beckoning hand. Ginny bent close. The bird bit her finger, just above the nail.

"Hey!" she said, examining her hand. "That hurt." She shook her fist at the crow.

Will waved his arms above his head. "That's enough," he said.

The bird unfurled its wings and set off down the hill, shining like a dark seam in the curtained sky.

Ginny hugged her knees to her chest and rocked silently back and forth. Will struggled to his feet, put his hands in his pockets. She picked up a twig and poked it into the grass. The small stone had disappeared.

Dusk descended. An evening chill slithered along the ground, rattling the dry leaves. The sun had long since dropped behind the sea.

"I'm cold," Ginny said aloud. "Let's go." She hooked one hand in Will's back pocket and hoisted herself to her feet. When she looked down again, only the rough outline of her rump remained printed in the grass. She dusted the seat of her pants.

They held hands all the way to the car. At the narrower spots on the trail, Ginny edged ahead, but as the path widened she would fall back again in step. She was the first to spot the bird.

"On the hood," she said.

The crow turned to look at her.

"It's giving us the eye," said Will.

The trunks of the trees grew dim, swathed in shadow. Ginny strode up to the driver's side of the car.

"I'll drive," she said. "Goodbye bird. We're going now."

She climbed in. Will walked around the front of the car, while the bird inched along the hood, maintaining a fixed distance between them. From her seat behind the wheel, Ginny could track the bird easily, but the line of the windshield cut Will off at the shoulder blades. When he gained the passenger side, the latch moved but the door did not open.

The crow cocked its head, threatened to fly. In the dull light, its wing quills reflected the dead grey sheen of gun metal. Ginny observed the tapered beak of the bird. When it pointed dangerously close to Will, she leaned across the seat and pushed the passenger door open.

Will yelped with surprise and pain. The sharp edge had caught him on the hip. He rubbed the spot.

"The bird," said Ginny. "It looked like it was going to attack."

Will sat down, swung his legs under the dash. The bird hopped onto the roof. Will pulled at the door. It thudded dully against the hem of his coat.

"You said it was tame," he said, clearing his coat from the door. "It's a tame crow."

"Sorry," said Ginny.

They heard the rasp of the crows feet on the roof. Will rolled down his window.

"Go home bird," he said, craning his neck out to get a better look.

"What's it doing?" Ginny asked. She put the key in the ignition.

Will gripped the edge of the roof, pulled himself higher. "It's gone," he said. "Must've flown off." As he slipped back down into the seat, his forehead thunked against the rain gutter.

"Let's go," he said.

Ginny started the engine, turned the wheel sharply, and backed into a small clump of saplings. When the bumper ground against the hillside, she cranked hard to the left, then eased onto the road. She flipped on

the headlamps, and the broad beams cast long shadows into the woods. She drove cautiously, listening for a faint scrape from the roof. Not far from the main highway, the car began to shake as if the road end had bottomed out. Ginny brought them clanking to a halt. She rested her chin on the wheel and sat tight. She heard the rustle of oak leaves, the muffled crash of the sea, a creak from the radiator, dissipating heat.

Will sighed. He fished under the seat and brought up a flashlight.

"I don't want to get out," said Ginny.

Will thumbed the switch back and forth. The beam shone white on the dashboard.

"You don't have to," he said. "Unless it's a flat."

She turned to watch his shadow move along the windows. Something had gone wrong again and the blame nearly stunned her. She saw the light flash up into the trees, down in a bright oval on the dirt, and then disappear behind the rear wheels. She felt two thuds as Will kicked the tires. A twig snapped under his feet. The light swung with the motion of his arm. He opened the door and peered inside.

"Just a stick," he said. "Nothing serious."

Ginny switched off the headlights. The moon had not yet risen. In the spaces

between stars, the sky clung to blue. She followed Will to the back of the car. A forked branch, about the thickness of three fingers at the base, was wedged between the bumper and the right fender. The main stem had ploughed a long furrow in the roadbed.

"You must have backed over it when we turned around," said Will.

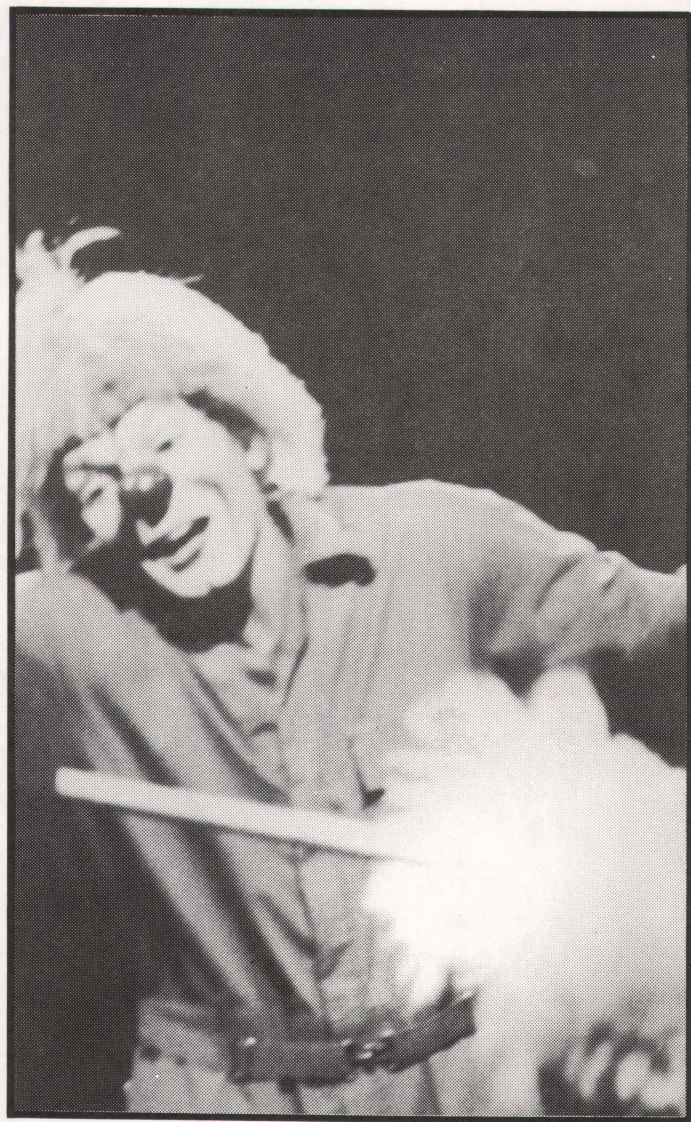
He gave the fork a few good yanks without loosening the branch. Then he jumped onto the bumper and rode up and down several times-- with all his weight--but the wood was still green and did not break. Finally, by laying on his back in the road, and kicking at the base, he was able to dislodge it.

Ginny knelt to retrieve the branch. She grasped it by the tines with both hands, like a divining rod. Will turned the flashlight on the damaged fender and ran his finger over the dent.

"We were lucky," he said. "It could've been worse."

(untitled)

half kilo short
the dealer laughs
nervously



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