Gaia

A JOURNAL OF LITERARY & ENVIRONMENTAL ARTS

Nos. 1 & 2 April / July 1993
First electronic edition September 1996

Published by

Whistle Press, INC.

a nonprofit corporation dedicated
to literature, art, and the environment

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Acknowledgments

Original printed version design and front cover art by William Reeves. Thanks to Diane Kistner for her diligent proofing of copy. A special thanks to charter subscribers of *Gaia:* Your support has helped and encouraged us to go much further!

"Escape into the Sea" by Donn Irving first appeared in the *Crescent Review.*

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Gale Warner

two poems

If

I know it is indulgent,
that the low sound in the distance
is only the stream, nearby, shuddering
through rocks. But if this
were it, we would not
think it so strange if no
dayhikers came tomorrow,
or the day after. And if
the sky was oddly hazed, we'd think
it some peculiarity of local
weather, and go on with our journals
and singing. And so I conclude
(with a certain admitted satisfaction)
that we would be among the last
to know. How would it come? Would some
shocked and dutiful warden,
holding to his post (why
not) be the one
to tell us, or would
it come to us slowly, in the flakes
of ash, the smell (the winds here
come off the sea) of burning
Siberian villages? And then
there would be pity, or perhaps
only anger, from the Canadians.
"We don't want their kind here." Or,
perhaps, silence would survive
the ashes. So we would avoid
the telephone, newspapers, the road
now turned one way. Perhaps
we would try to farm. Hid our birth.
Plow under memory, and plant
whatever was left.
Stumble back to the meadow, swim
in the stream, grasp at brambles,
burrow in the earth, begging
forgiveness, tearing our flesh, worshipping
the astonishingly harmless lives
of the beasts.

Myxomatosis*

*"Myxomatosis: an infectious and fatal disease of rabbits, artificially introduced into Great Britain in recent years to keep down the rabbit population."

She would not go back to familiar
brambles and tangled stems
                but crept on the trail
between my boots

waiting for deliverance
from swollen eyes
and fur dampened to black needles
prickling every breath

Sat in the open as she had been taught
never to do
                sides pushing against rain
fear of stoats and kestrels gone
vision piercing pus-clad eyes

Clearly I was supposed to do
something
                about the white crusts
sodden feet
recalcitrant breath

She licked her side revealing
the tawny glow behind her ears

In much the way
we cover faces of the dead
I tried to nudge her off the trail
sweep her under brush
out of sight

She would not go but
huddled stiffly there
withdrawing to a deeper
stillness
                ears laid flat
eyes no longer straining
feet primly
retracted underneath
as puddles swelled around her

She would not go

A cough of wind spat raindrops on our faces
She had dared
openness
invulnerable
in rain-soaked dignity
she waited for me
to go.

Michael Hettich

Common Birds

—Miami, June 1992

After days of rain have made ponds in fields
we wandered last autumn on picnics, tonight
is suddenly full-moon clear; tall birds
have landed to stalk the edges of these lawn-lakes
as inside their modest houses, surrounded
by new ponds, families eat dinner, watch tv.
We admire the tall white birds as we drive past,
the blue light that glows from the livingroom windows,
the light of the full moon reflected in the new ponds,
the reflection of the white birds as they fly back to living
water, startled by our passing car.

And in this morning's *Times,* a brief
story about children who had been nailed to trees,
whose parents had been forced to watch them die there.
Many of these children, the *Times* said, had seemed
to turn into branches after only a few minutes.
The trees will wear children's skeletons now
for branches. Birds will nest there, sing.

Common birds: Last night when I went
to bed, late, a mockingbird sat
on the telephone wire that runs along
our street, singing his array of imitations,
calling a mate. The night was otherwise
silent below the constant distant
rush of traffic. I listened for awhile—
standing naked in the dark—and then
I slipped into bed beside my sleeping wife.
When I work this morning, at dawn, he was still
singing, still alone, perched
in the same place, still surrounded by silence,
hurling his best songs against the graying dark.

Marcia Cohee

Forcing the Muse to Stay Up All Night

The poem she is trying to write begins
with the buzz of cactus and its perfumes
and the crush of hooves in the humming wind.

As the sun's orange scarves unpin
their silks, suede hills and twilight loom,
so the poem he is trying to write begins

its waltz with sycamores frail as tin
in the ivory throb of a full winter moon
through the crush of hooves and the humming wind.

And the meadow wears moonlight like an old drum skin,
gathering velvet owls and lush raccoons.
Now the poem she is trying to write begins

its plaintive music, moonlight thins
memory's blue arc and the moon consumes
the crush of hooves in the humming wind.

But deer and crow and mistletoe win,
fill the sun-piercing hills as the day resumes,
while t he poems they have failed to write begin
and end with hooves, stall in the wind.

Susan Medenica

Red Tail Sin

My sins are brought to me
like the red tails of squirrels
the cat has eaten. Fan-tail arrayed
they brush the threshold to catch my eye,
to remind me of the natural law
of what has been and what will be,
of how I can't accept, of how
I've strayed;

but somehow still, I've found myself
on earth.

The cat has eaten nine red squirrels
so far this year, a total she's
too proud of, evil cat, not blessed;
so says the church and natural law,
et alia citing fact and certainty.

For lack of goodness, strength will do.
And staying power. And the gentle
error of living pardoned
by the squirrel.

Ellen LaConte

Reunion

In the beginning there was talk I'd be twins. I was unusually long at birth and my shoulders were exceptionally broad. For carrying others' sins and worry, Aunt Phil boasted to anyone on Cape Anne who would listen, even when I was only ten and carried hers. Mostly I bore her worry when Uncle Tim was at sea, though sometimes I wished I could bear her anger for her when it was tight like a fist in the room, raised by fear for his safety. My size has only been comfortably accommodated by generic Jesuit's rags. Until recently.

From the beginning I heard I'd killed my mother, my shoulders had. I try not to imagine the hump of resentment my father must have grown until, bent double, he couldn't carry it any more. He left me with Aunt Phil when I was two and went off to drink himself to death, having in my mother's absence no reason not to. I can't look at that place in a woman's skirt or think of the place between spread thighs without wincing, pulling myself in, making myself as small as I can.

I was told by friends of Aunt Phil's who meant to be helpful, that some infants are born with a mucilagenous cowl that hides their shame at having to become merely human. Those ladies sometimes laid their rough palms on my head in benediction. They thought my bi-colored eyes were a mark, a warning laid on me from the time before I drew air. They *are* a manifestation of what I've felt in my heart: dislocation, imperfection on a gross scale. It's no good that I'm considered handsome, that size brings with it a certain respect, the single green eye an exotic appeal. Others' opinions don't mean much to me.

God Help me, I suppose it's possible that I became a priest partly in order to leave my body behind. Within the transcendent embrace of God's Body in the Church, I believed I might discipline, flail, pray my own body into insignificance. No doubt I "chose" the Society of Jesus because the world is their territory and the world, I believed at an early age looking out to sea, was large enough to hide me in. There's little a militant Jesuit cannot "put his mind to." I was persuaded my mind *could* operate separately from its vehicle flesh, work on it as on wood or stone. We're taught that mind is closer to spirit, a bridge to God. The body, of course, is Satan's fool, the things of the body the tools *He* uses to work on us.

Perhaps because of the wild eyes it was said that I had a Gift well before it was said that I had a calling. Aunt Phil pushed me into mental olympiads at school and at Church gatherings, where unusual memory and discernment in a child, especially in a down-at-the-heels fishing community, were a sign of precocious blessing. God knew, I had no physical graces, no athletic prowess, nor any competitive spirit. Further reason to detest my physical person. My gift, whatever it was, spooked Uncle Tim once I was old enough to work next to Willits and him and the others on the "Morna Mary." Uncle Tim felt guilty asking his barren wife's adored priestling to work with his hands. And his crew, whose simple faith permitted them a wide range of functional superstitions, crossed themselves and mumbled words to ward me off. I'd have liked to be able to do the same.

Mind you, I don't presume to think I was any more conscious of my self-loathing than any awkward teenager whose nose or feet or acne preceed him into a room full of judgmental peers. Such unfocussed adolescent angst as mine was, is legion. Aunt Phil and Uncle Tim were as parental as any mother and father could be. I was unquestioningly happy with them. As a boy I would as soon have grown up to be a fisherman as a priest. At the time I would not have understood the irony. But Aunt Phil had different plans for me, and my Gift was as obvious to everyone in Gloucester as Ren O'Flaherty's jumpshot.

Not that I took my vocation lightly. When the other boys were hiding in their rooms or under bridges or behind the warehouses along the quay smoking or planning their escapes into the big leagues or the big city or some girl's crotch, I stalked the empty beaches and salt marshes alone. Awash in oceanic imaginings, drowning in nothing smaller than God, I plumbed the depths of me where light didn't go, and came back empty handed. When I enjoyed my surroundings too much, when I was too happy just being on the marshes, I went back in the house and shut myself up in my room. I reined in all pubertal urges, translated repression into deeply suffered echoes of Christ's passion. I followed directions, went through all the steps, wrestled with demons largely of my own making. I experienced in the aftermaths periods of sublime intellectual immersion, disembodied holiness, and exquisite joy—which, whenever it became too physical, I squelched. I fell easily into self-denial.

"Just look at our Egan. The spells are upon him, Timothy Doyle," Aunt Phil said. But Uncle Tim just looked embarrassed and anxious. "The angels are speakin' to him already," she whispered, elbowing my leery uncle in the ribs and making my already difficult position on the "Morna Mary" worse still. Her angels were my demons, my longtime companions.

But when vocation came, the *way* it came, and that's the point, it was far more irresistible than the more mundane matches "made in Heaven" that my friends entered into haphazardly with those same local girls they'd already "known." This insight has come late and hard.

On the wall over my desk in St. Louis I've kept a hand-calligraphed excerpt from the "Spiritual Exercises" given to me by a fellow novitiate on the day of his departure.

> Man was created for this end, that he might praise and reverence the Lord his God, and, serving Him, at length be saved. But the other things which are placed on the earth were created for man's sake, that they might assist him in pursuing the end of creation; whence it follows, they are to be used or abstained from in proportion as they benefit or hinder him in pursuing that end. Wherefore we ought to be indifferent towards all created things. . . . And it is fitting to consider myself: who or of what kind I am, adding comparisons which may bring me to a greater contempt of myself. After these things I must consider what, in fact, all the creation is in comparison with God the Creator Himself. Lastly, let me look at the corruption of my whole self . . . and the pollution of my body, and account of myself to be a kind of ulcer or boil, from which so great and foul a flood of sins, so great a pestilence of vices, has flowed down.

Were not Loyola's words echoes of my congenital self-despising? A barnacle my body was, a polyp, an excrescence, a murderer's husk, and I'd willingly have rubbed it off against any available rock.

With maturity I stopped suffering quite so plainly and got on with the noble Jesuitical business of the secondary and superior education of youth. I revelled in the life of a mind only temporarily stuck in the physical world, through which I passed paying it almost no attention, on my way to Heaven.

It's really quite remarkable how easily we persuade ourselves that if we don't think of a thing, if we simply ignore or forget it, it ceases to exist. As though we each were God.

♢

And so my body slept, and ate and eliminated and got me around. It and its correlates in the physical world were of little consequence to me. I spent the next two decades supervising curriculae, eventually directing the Colleges and Universities. I lived safe behind walls. I survived the ravages of GC32 and Arrupe's modernization, some say desecration, of the Order. I was fitted by my disregard for self to be one of his "men-for-others," an agent of positive change in a changing world. The journey, not the arrival, matters.

Then, some years ago, I heard Passionist Father Thomas Berry speak on his "Dream of Earth in the Ecological Age." He reported, as if it were well known, that our whole culture is "a conspiracy against the natural world" and that we are exhausting the planet, the implication being that we are destroying God's gift to us of a place to live and to act out His Will to Love. He elucidated his astounding claim with statistics. "We need," he concluded, "a constitution [I heard 'curriculum'] for the North American continent." He suggested, as if it were self-evident that the "ultimate lesson of. . . . all the sciences, the fundamental teaching of the great civilizations" must be "the understanding of and response to forces that will bring about a proper unfolding of the earth process. . . . We need to go to the earth as the source, the *physical* source whence we came and ask for its guidance. To assist in bringing this about is the present task of the New Education, the New Man."

What did it mean that humans have evolved as the conscious aspect of the Earth body? Surely it meant that we are a product, like any nematode or tree, of dust and clay and water. The earth and all upon it might be only God's creation, but it and they are at least that and, Father Berry suggested, they are worthy of our protection on that account alone, quite apart from their usefulness in our effort to transcend the physical plane. I was caught. I took the hook and followed his line back toward the causes and consequences of being a human on Earth. I read voraciously, but that was tantamount to attempting brain surgery when you'd only read about it in a book. Like only *reading* the "Spiritual Exercises," or Shakespeare. I chafed and squirmed with undirected energy, insufficient understanding. I bothered everyone who would listen.

Finally I put my finger down the throats of my superiors often enough that they spitted me up and out onto a wonderer's quest in search of mission. It was a quest in search of Earth that took me to the Tongass and Olympic and Siskiyou Forests, the Mississippi's mouth, the upper reaches of the Allagash and the lower trickles of the Colorado, Lake Okeechobee and the Miami Canal, the bitter red salt-bogs of Cape Cod

and the flyruns of the shore birds up to Quivira and the Cheyenne Bottoms. And all the while of my travels, over two years, I felt an unreasoning, unprecedented anger rise in me. Not against God the Father. Onto His bosom still would I fall and be spared the rest of this inconsequential manifestation. No, it was anger directed at my blind-self. I felt as a man must who finds that he is a murderer, that he and those around him are *all* murderers and he hadn't noticed. Ecocide is a holocaust of broader and subtler dimensions than any we've confessed. Its victims are protected by no general theory of ethics or Geneva Convention. Value is assigned to those innocents according to the whims of the market place, as was value assigned by Hitler's *Herrenvolk* to the skins and teeth and hair of Jews. This time, for all time, Earth's skin, teeth, hair. Our own. Satan's turf or no, I could not hate Earth or even ignore it any longer.

Harder to deal with was my anger with the nomad armies of Jesuits, the Church Catholic and her scarcely protest-ant offspring who are proud of our endless warfare against the "pagan" and our heedless trek across the movable boundaries of nations, over the bodies of the native dead, and straight on. And Earth—God's visible body—desacralized, is our dwindling kit and materiel. I took the risk of offending conservatives in the Order and gathered around me a merry band of men and women, lay and religious, eco-activists, healers looking for a way to bind mankind to Earth again, to end the ecocide, to offer a different vision. And we took up in our small way a new Holy Crusade mounted not against the heathen infidel, who never were either of those, but to rout civilization itself which had taken a wrong turning round about the Renaissance and gotten creature-proud.

We succeeded in small things, too well, too busily. Campaigns, lectures, courses, sit-downs, blockages, pamphlets, events. A mass, "Requiem and Ressurrection: Earth Rising," which should be soon performed at the Church of St. John the Divine. We devised a radically new curriculum. Heady stuff, and clever. Even removed from their undeserved adulatory stares, I can see the wide eyes of my comrades looking up at me and almost comprehend the press's description of me: ". . . lanky Lincolnesque charisma, up from humble Irish-Catholic beginnings." When that article came out in Chicago, I waited to hear the snapped retort: "You, sir, are no Lincoln!" One of the newspapers, repeating Aunt Phil, said mine were "the shoulders of Atlas, suited to carry the beleaguered Earth and her burdens." Devoutly to be wished. Yet does it require an effort of will for me to associate those descriptives with this infirm, divided self I have lately been.

Then I was called "Father Earth, S.J." on a magazine cover, which made my humble comrades weep and laugh for joy. But I feared the distinction. I deflected camera flashes with my arm and undue, misdirected praise with accounts of my merry band's valiant collective labors to create the Earth Saving Curriculum. My Dean castigated me for unseemly self-glorification, though none of that promotion had been of my doing.

Breakdown, my dark night of the soul, arrived in precisely the month in my forty-sixth year that I "arrived."

Summoned to Rome, I anticipated being called on the carpet for "lack of humility befitting a professed of the Society." I anticipated dismissal, severance, at least

Dominican Father Matthew Fox's fate: censure, silencing, or reprimand for circus tricks and theatricals. But, no. A rising star, I was promoted!

The journey, not the arrival, matters.

In that first audience, I sat subdued on a crimson- and gold-threaded Rococo divan under a ceiling of painted cloud between the elegant, effete, Roman-shod Cardinal Rafiel diBrescia and my immediate superior, Father Allyn Culbert, the top of whose gleaming head I had often enough looked down upon that at that moment I could hardly remember his features. But this time I attended carefully to him and so I saw as well as heard his words, which did not seem to implicate either his dark eyes or his vein-shot skin, emerge from the thin lips in the narrow jaw.

We'd murdered the Earth and now we were going to rewrite the rules of good behavior! . . . We have postulated that everything else in Creation was made 'for man that it might help him attain the end for which he was created,' which evidently is to consume the Creation.

In the moments of preliminary small-talk I noticed that Superior Culbert stared upwards at some spot over my head as if I were rising to it. I was full-up on dread, exhausted by months of doing eco-battle and by jet-lag. While his mouth told me what their intentions were, I fixated on his upturned gaze and telescoped myself obediently to reach that point in the air where he looked for me. My flesh stretched, my bones creaked and squeaked. Couldn't they hear the racket? I attenuated myself until the two fathers appeared very far away below me in the salon. Their voices came as from a great distance.

I heard something about someone assembling an international commission from the universities whose purpose would be to—I think this was it—"refine and where appropriate, redefine, the aims and methods of those aspects of the Ratio as regard the teachings on the relationship of the faithful to the Creation." Good God, someone was to help rewrite Genesis—again! It would be someone's job to redress not only their own incompetencies, but the Church's whole history of environmental abuse.

And suddenly, when I realized they were speaking about me, the telescope collapsed. Click . . . click . . . click . . . click. . . . I shrank down into the size of an object easily held in the hand and stored in the capacious sleeve of ritual vestments alongside a prayer scroll. Time compressed. It and I were out of whack. I operated on machine time then, infinitely plodding, incremental and slow. And before me, belching fire, hot coals for eyes, were the stokers. Gargantua and Pantagruel, the ultimate consumers, heroes of the market economy, were packaging my ecological revolution as fast food. We'd murdered Earth and now we were going to rewrite the rules of good behavior! Irony sundered me then and there, sanity reeled and fled.

Back and back further still til I'm got again by the first fish. Ruth the dead seas, keen the yellow air, cry back the sloughed-off land. Back and back, four-foot, fur, feather, claw, eight-leg, tri-lobe, serpant, gill. . . . Back to Leviathan that fathered me. Son of Man and God no more. Child of the sea that mothered me. Make me the fish in the frozen pool, going round and round in ignorance.

In that moment I saw the whole of the situation we are in more clearly than I saw the two who sat before me. We were not "stewards," as in caretaker/ protectors, or passionate children raised up out of the rock and the water. No, we were the household servants to a Rabelaisian mansion hauling up Earth's spoils on silver salvers for the mouths of the corporate milords and their lady-wives, for two-bit dictators and their sponsors in the official palaces to which we had been sent everywhere.

Culbert and diBrescia were still talking at me, awaiting my response. Cleaved by then, more wild-eyed than ever, I'm sure, I sensed rather than heard a hollow metallic voice reply to their proposal. I felt the other of my two heads, the one that belonged to the body I thought I'd quitted, nod robotically and say: "Ah, yes. Timely. Inspired. Excellent notion. We can simply change the words for it: dominion, domain, domineer, dominate, dominum. We have postulated that everything else in Creation was made 'for man that it might help him attain the end for which *he* is created,' which evidently is to consume the Creation. The old order rendered all things relative according to their utility. The new order, I take it, will simply render all things utilitarian?"

They didn't demur.

"Ah. And if we can just get the words right, Gentlemen Fathers, perhaps it will seem never to have happened. Our oversights have for centuries substituted for overseeing. And if we teach this new version to the children," my automated twin's *basso profundo* labored on, "perhaps *they* can save the Earth—if we leave them any. Perhaps they can steward God's dream of Earth into sustained fruition along with themselves and the billions. Our universe, this Earth, *are* God's only manifest dream so far as we know, but that's alright. Back to the feast."

"Fish, oh Fish, So little matters! What price your *bread upon the waters? You and the naked element Sway-wave. . . . Nothing more."* With the supernatural clarity of the madman I knew D.H. Lawrence's irony would be lost on them.

I heard my twin's hollow voice continue prophetically. "And if it doesn't succeed—"Did I see them cross themselves?"—if we're too late or if this minor revision is too little, well then, the children and their children shall live as barred bandicoots. They shall wear the stripes of their convictions for our misbegotten ways. They shall nibble in a new aboriginal night at the edges of the tips and dumps of our global landfill and gnaw on the congealed air." But I must not really have said those things. I must only have imagined I said them because the two faces never changed. Rafiel and Culbert looked unphased as if they were still waiting. They were still sane.

In one of my last moments as an integrated man I wondered if I should join the Pharisees and Saducees, work from the inside, win them over . . . or go out and overturn the tables? What did integrity demand? But the click and swoosh, the crunch and cleave by then had done me in. I couldn't think for the roar of engines in my head, the white heat searing my eyes and lungs.

My breakdown was mechanical, unnatural in the extreme. A thing of cogs and wheels, a locking up in jaw and joint, loss of viscosity, boiling over of oils and fluids, freezing up at the bone. The sounds of metal on metal.

I slammed my hands over my ears—like a madman, yes—to keep out the sound of my ironic voice, recalling my most relevant desires, repeating them over and over: "'The eyes of his understanding began to open; it was not that he beheld any vision, but rather

he comprehended and understood many things with an illumination so great that all things appeared to be something new. He seemed to himself another man and to have an understanding different from what he had previously.'" *An illumination so great. . . .* I staggered down the long corridors whose walls receded before me. The voices, which were not my own, resounded in my head—

. . . And shed legs for fins and slatted lungs to swim back through the waves of the Living Water, tending always downwards and into the dark, if we would arrive at the Source. And weave the Light through the pleated waters, stitch Life to the sides of the still borning earth. . . .

I was Siamesed. Each of us—my mechanical physical twin and the more ethereal mental me—was halt. Each dragged its monstrous Other into hiding. Throwing ourselves back against the door, we knew we'd lost it. We could scarcely focus out of the wild eyes which then seemed to see differently one from the other as the eyes must on either side of a victim's head while the swooping raptor's eyes are fixed with his single vision in front, where are also his talons.

For several days our long limbs locked as if they were someone else's, and obeyed no command. Our hands crabbed like untrained prosthetic claws when we tried to write with them words out of memory, from Ignatius' Cardoner experience again: "an illumination so great, he seemed to himself another man." And *Ad majorum Dei gloriam*. . . . Words, any words that would haul us back into the world of the two Fathers who would be waiting at the door, or their minions would. The fluid in our veins ran alternately hot and fast, then gelled and slow.

Rafe did come and Culbert. His head, a reflecting mirror, blinded me in my dimlit cell. They laid their clean hands on my hot forehead as the crones had done all those years before, and wondered did we need a physician? No. It would pass. Not the first time, we lied. We begged patience, claimed influenza and exhaustion, the shock of our promotion. We pleaded for time, perhaps leave to pray alone, thus to mend. They would have meals sent. They retreated bowing and scraping, deferring to our protestations of sufficiency. The Holy Spirit, we said, would mend us. *Even grotesque as we have become*, though this we did not say. They bought our story. How else account for Father Earth's setting like a prodigal sun behind the walls of the Papal Palace? How else explain the rising star's inexplicable descent, more like a plummet to Earth? And we were quite willing to go find the hole we'd made and move in, a cenobite awaiting grace in silence within the rock.

The fever persisted. The merest movement grated, ground us down. Our breakdown felt fatal. We had become as one of the legion of dead cars found in back yards which, rusted and themselves useless, are fit only to be scavenged for their few remaining useful parts. We saw faces mashed up against the window. We saw breasts and loins behind the curtain. Harlots and charlatans rode night-mares around the walls. Goblins gloated over the recumbent form of Lady Mother Earth, tempting us to join in their taking of her blood and body. We heard voices in the dark, neither ours nor the angels' or saints'. Animal voices we thought and vegetable, and screams like high winds through winter trees flying from a great distance towards us. The lines of the dead approached us. Some of their names we'd never heard nor would anyone now. Cloven-footed beasts offered

us goblets of poisoned wine, loaves of empty bread and glass-eyed fishes, kin smothered in crude oil.

We awoke howling, bathed in blood or sweat, temples throbbing, and heaved ourself toward the bathroom and when we turned on the light to see, we saw through the red storm behind our eyes that there was no one reflected in the mirror we stood in front of. Neither spirit nor body made an impression on the glass. We waved our hands, but there were no hands in the mirror. Only the shimmering red veil.

Food came and went. I suppose we ate. No one troubled us about untouched trays. Then, after days, we slept. First, vividly dreaming. A general craving to be held. A repeated physical sensation of plunging loss, as when the bed seems to be pulled away, and of longing. And we were searching for something dear and precious which we'd lost. "As the consequence of your inattention," said a male voice, not ours. Searching and again searching. Then a total blanking out. When we came to it was to hear a clear, solitary voice.

"Ask Willits."

Was it Temptation? We recoiled at the thought of going outside the Church for help. Years of indoctrination make us suspicious of our intuition, of voices which might come to us privately, and of the opinions of those who are not professed. In any case, the Holy Spirit, the loving long arm of God's emissary surely would reach down inside our ailing soul and haul out what was morbid there. Immersion in the Exercises, accountings of conscience, collective prayer. . . .

"Yet we are instructed," I argued aloud on one day or another, "to pray in closets, alone. That assumes," I proposed to no one in particular, "that God would not find us suspect for solitary prayer, even though our human peers might."

Words, our voice, had returned. With them the familiar cerebral give-and-take of casuistry and disputation. The one of me that was thinking again trusted the prompting: "Ask Willits."

I was given ordinary sick leave, though my superiors must have heard our ravings, must have suspected I was mad or drunk. Rather I was experiencing something like a soldier's flashbacks. I had been to the killing-fields, had stood ankle deep in carcass, wrapped in the stench of burning stump and limb. I had sipped toxic waters, chewed the bitter acidic leaf and held in my palm between me and the grimy air a feathered fetal form with three legs, and not one of them was whole.

♢

All the way home on the plane from Rome to London to Boston, I—more often we—struggled with this decision to seek help outside the Church. It was not that we wished to leave the Church. It was not that God was wrong or that we were wrong with God. But we *were* wrong, we nearly all are, with everything else. It seemed to us that we had been conjured up in some solitary frenzy of God's, the divine equivalent of an opium dream. And we had been let loose too soon, like Frankenstein's creature, haplessly to wander the skin of unsuspecting Earth in bodies that housed unfinished souls. Our job? To make sacred again. To find our way back into the dream and join the twains—body to soul, human to Earth, reason to dream.

We continued to think that somehow Willets, who was all we had left of family, would know what to do. He'd always been seamless, organic all through.

Rockport is practically deserted in October. The artists' shanteys and gift shops on the granite breakwater are boarded up, the streets clean. I wander around the boathouses and picking sheds. Their metal stacks are already puffing woodsmoke. I only see working boats like the "Morna Mary" coming around Thatcher Island late in the day.

I prayed this room off the innkeeper. He looked at me askance over his half-glasses when I signed in and chewed at his lower lip. To someone unprepared, I might easily seem to be the reincarnate Father Grigori Yefimovich Rasputin.

It has been cold in my room at the far end of the inn. Early on in my stay I reclined on the bed from which I'd stripped the covers, scarcely closing my eyes for the welter of feeling and the continuous halluci . . . visitations. Like an anchorite in his cave, short of haircloth and flagellants, I let discomfort enliven every inch of my alienated form—that cozening twin, my merely physical body. I wished him stillborn, but took him with me as best I could, hoping to learn to exit him and return at will. That would be practice for entering and exiting Earth's body in similar fashion. We've shed it as surely as any skin or vestment or shell. At least we think we have.

My sliding door opens onto a wooden deck stilted several feet above the sloping beach. I've heard storm seas gurgling and sucking under my bed and felt the tremors, like my own, as the footings under my room responded to the persuasive undertow and the beating of foaming surf. Afterwards the beach is smooth. It fluffs again when the sun dries and wind combs it. There were painted lobster buoys, pieces of shell, bits of net and spar, and also scavenges of human trash—plastic, bottle caps, styrofoam, glass, aluminum—all over the beach after the last storm. I felt trespassed, violated by people's private and extravagant waste and so I collected the lot of it in a bag; straightaway the sun came up. In the morning the beach is loud with gulls whose half-eaten feasts left in pungent tide pools—which I'm told smell like a woman's crotch, but I wouldn't know—are as loud in the nose as the gulls are in the ear. The chartreuse sun comes up just to the right of my room dead ahead at the horizon. Sometimes seasmoke drapes a veil across its arrival. Sometimes phalanxes of white-helmeted grey cloud off Cape Cod march across the horizon and make a blood-red rising.

For some days after my arrival I had mundane conversations with the unshaven, T-shirted fellow at the tobacconist's where I get the Boston *Globes* I scarcely read, with the patrons of the coffee shop, and with my waitress and the evening regulars at the "Groaning Board." Those interchanges, harmless, entirely kindly, neither showed light nor threw ropes into any of the depths into which I had wandered and become lost. I was for a time devoid of meaningful comradeship, except for Lady Mother Earth and her smooth belly of sea rounding over the horizon. The natural company I've found myself in—the company of wind and wave-sound, vast star-riddled night skies, endless expanses of glaring sea, provocative fog, forgiving sand and unbiased rock— has been appropriate and entirely welcome. Deaf to words, She out there is alive to meanings.

But then, in those first days here I was in no way equipped to grasp them. I—we—needed something more, a jolt to bring us around. And together.

♢

"It's your height, m' lad," Willetts joked, keeping it simple and bringing me with each homely phrase closer to Earth again. I felt myself healing under the application of his voice. "It's rare air you breath at six foot and four, a life done on a different scale entirely from the rest of us foreshortened lot. Then there's the green eye, like a feral dog or a gypsy—nor wild nor tame. One green, one brown eye, which to trust? And who's at home *between* the both of 'em? No one knows which one to look into, including your Almighty, I shouldn't wonder." Simple statements of fact, it might seem, but when Willits Finlayson knocks back his third stout, he sees things. Not things that aren't there, such as I had seen, but things inside a man that might be.

He's a man's man and not religious. He's shorter than me by half a foot. His cap of close-cut auburn curls is now nearly overcome with white and the way it has receded in a semicircle away from his forehead, he looks like a Baccanalian leprechaun. But the steady blue eyes under their ledge of brow and the horizontal creases in his forehead signify dues paid. That night Will's voice wrapped around me some event common to our pasts and I settled into the crook of it. . . .

. . . And right while I was sitting there having small-talk and the consolation of Willits' undivided attention, I felt the wind blowing along the shaft, heard the ratchet tighten, felt the piston seize. My heart thudded, falling out of gear, and my breath came hard. These were the harbingers of another wave of separation. I trembled at the thought. . . . And I told Will so.

"Mid-life crisis, boyo, the panic attacks of welcome uncertainty," says he. "Findin' that your heroes and their myths are fallible and needin' something bigger than they are or than you've been. It means you're still salvageable and growing. Growing's where the pain comes from. And there's the Gift. . . . We've all got it, Egan," he assuaged. "The crisis, that is, not the Gift. It comes with a certain age. And that, we've also got." The words seemed to have no bearing on what I'd been going through. They trivialized my private hell, but it didn't matter. His lilting voice was a soporific. The spell passed. "You're at that number o' years, Egan, where yesterday looks further away than tomorrow does. Old ways are precious and slippery as new fish, but young ones are slow to show up. And our sins and errors have piled up a whole league behind us like a mountain, next to which our accomplishments are nil. The crisis comes when we've had all we thought we ever wanted and more, and we *still* haven't got what we really need. . . . or maybe we *aren't* it. And we're all at the end of the old ways of being but we can't see yet what the next ways are. . . . and what we've done can't be undone, can't be put back like it was." He leaned closer to me over the scarred wooden table and put his calloused hand over mine.

"Egan, you're a man divided since birth, twins badly welded in the womb, I've sworn it. To your Uncle, for one, when he couldn't keep you straight in his mind. And to your dear Aunt Phillipa, God rest her for He hasn't me since she's gone. She could see only the budding St. Christopher in her parlor and not the boy who'd as soon go down to the sea. It's one o' your gifts, this dual personality, for all it's a horror for you. But reunion is your fate, Egan Doyle, to get the both o' you together again behind your wild two-colored eyes."

"Reunion." When he'd said it there was truth ringing in it that I've held onto these two weeks since.

"Go to ground for a while, Egan. Do your homework like you've always done. You're wingin' it now on the crest of some wave you haven't got the measure of and it's carryin' you out to sea. Worry it some and sit with it, walk with it . . . roll in it a while if you must. Then let it go. If you ever mate up to something your size, you're not to be stopped, Egan Doyle."

"I thought the Church was—"

"Think again."

Willits sighed, shook his head and leaned back and I thought he was done by the way he stared at his glass, eyes heavy-lidded almost as if he would sleep. Then he looked up, grinning a revelation. "Or maybe you should just change jobs, Egan. . . . Maybe take up fishin' again." And he roared over his beer so hard that the force of his laughter made amber waves in his glass.

They came years apart, but that was the second hook. I lept out of the cocoon of words he'd woven around me, holding me safe in his regard, and took it. *Fishing again.* I ran with it deeper and deeper while I drove back here. And by the time I got here I'd remembered what I'd lost, what in the Roman dream I'd been looking for.

It was not for old guilts I'd gone mad. Rather it was for one inconceivably large. Pride and gluttony, avarice, anger, *acedia*, lust, vainglory. All these are contained within the one act of murdering Earth, which we have scarcely confessed let alone repented. They are contained even as I had been contained within God's Earth that time years ago that Willets had reminded me of. Since then I'd gotten the idea of Earth fully in mind again, but I'd lost the feel of ground under my palm and spine, the memory of myself as cloud and rock, leaf and rainbow.

That night of Willit's revelation I took the hook he threw me down and down to the Time of my First Election, the "consolation without previous cause." I'd been hauling nets. Feet planted wide, riding easy, I was relearning the gait of the "Morna Mary" under me as she slid over the rolling water. I'd worried I'd be out of practice after years of school and college, the novitiate and scholarship, having had few even of my summers free. The coarse lines made my academic's palms raw as they played out and we pulled in. The sea heaved off Cape Ann and black cloud rose up over the tip of Cape Cod. But it felt natural to be back on the boat with Uncle Tim, to be out of doors with all my senses working overtime. And it felt good to be so physically concentrated on the simple tasks of untangling, feeding out and pulling in—working at it but not too hard—and keeping my balance as the water gathered under the gusts into grey-green hills.

While my soul waited, gulls shrieked and circled overhead, hung on veed wings and hoped for the leavings. I was pure attention. And the smell was terrific and comforting and intense, of the sea and the steaming innards of gutted fish, the sodden lines and creosote, the oily engine huffing and belching, and our sweaty oilcloth slickers. Uncle Tim rarely spoke when we worked. And I was always waiting for that, too, for his voice that would say it was time to turn back or that we'd done well or how was I doing. And the wait was good, because I could almost hear the conversation while I was waiting for

it. And the conversation I heard while I waited was probably better than the real one would have been.

At twenty-six I was waiting for certainty to settle on me, grab me by the neck, or well up in me—however it would come. I knew that when it took me I could make my profession, bind myself to the Society, my Church, my God. I longed for it. I assumed I would be taken when I was back within the walls.

But the feeling came when I was least busy seeking and least expecting it. It came when I was most involved in untangling lines that might get wrapped around my legs, for fear they'd drag me over the side, and I was muttering prayers almost mindlessly like sea chanty that won't leave your head and keeps repeating. And I was waiting for Uncle Tim to say the storm was too close and we'd have to go in. While I was waiting, while my fingers were working furiously, I entered and became the prayer. And suddenly, as if they were someone else's fingers and the muttering was someone else's voice, I could see myself from the outside, almost as clearly as I have these last few weeks, and I could also see the sea for the first time from within as the fish must.

"*As the waters wash, You wash in oneness. And never emerge. Lying only with the waters; One touch. . . . Fish and the naked element, Sway-wave. . . . Himself all silvery himself In the element." No more.* Lawrence must have gone into the sea Jonah-wise, too.

As a fish must, I saw not the top of the sea through which I'd believed I might fall as if through a glass and disappear. But the whole of it above, below and around me, like the sky with which I filled my lungs and blood—everywhere and continuous without and within. The sea was my element. And also I saw the other beings surging in it and all of us were rocking and drifting, breathing as one common life, undivided, inseparable. The salt water played over my slatted gills, mingled with my blood, riffled my metalic scales, washed my liquid eye. *And His hand reached in to lift me out of Galilee and He multiplied me. And sunlight shot off my myriad slides into the eyes of the disbelievers.* There and then on the deck of the "Morna Mary" I comprehended it all and I was within it, a fingerling again and not too big this time.

And the sensation in my chest was the warm bright sensation I got when Aunt Phil rocked me after I'd had a nightmare. She rocked me and showed me the pictures of saints and told me their suffering stories so that my nightmares were nothing to fear by comparison. I'd felt safe when she held me in her lap, and also I'd felt charged to be worthy of the saints and of her, to hold her safe in the same way she held me and to hold them in my heart. And on the boat that day I felt that way joined to everything, held by the sea, the day, the coming storm, everything God was still making and me with it. Joined and charged to be worthy. God called to me in everything and I responded. That was the feeling. That was all. Nothing more.

And I forgot it almost as soon as I learned it. I mistook my succeeding to membership in the Creation for a graduation to something beyond. I mistook the event for an arrival. I didn't recognize it for a station along the path, a point of entry. I will not make the same mistake again.

♢

I suffered the possession only once during that first night after seeing Willits. I got up from myself and looked back and watched my body lie there rigid and mechanical,

locked-up in its long angular frame under a mound of covers. I felt sorry for the poor limited thing. Then I saw myself as I might have been: a pliable boy, all-of-a-piece, untwinned, *sans* demons, spread-eagled innocently, and I regretted briefly all that I may once have known but had forgotten so that I had to learn it in this life again. And the screaming voices that had begun to haunt me in Rome became, if not less intense, less intent on me. My anger diminished.

The experience has remembered for me William James' heretical observation that "The unreasoned and immediate assurance is the deep thing in us, the reasoned argument is but a surface exhibition. Instinct leads, intelligence does but follow." I see now that the Jesuit's ever-mindfulness—guarding himself from the illusions of the Devil, closing the gates of his senses against exotic disorder, and keeping to mental aeries—blocks the chaotic arrival of revelation. It is nothing less than Ignatius' own messy mystic passion toward which we must all strive, that physically experienced knowledge which flows from the unification and harmony of *all* one's faculties. And their harmony and unification with all that lives and breaths and grows and is recreated in every moment around us, *ad majorum Dei gloriam*.

I comprehend now, at the level of instinct, *and* with all my faculties—body, mind and soul—that it is not the Devil who lies in wait "out there" intending to waylay and confuse the unwary soul, but the soul's best companions are out there inhabiting every corner of the Creation. I am most fully myself when I live most fully among them and within the vital, erotic, tumultuous life of Earth.

♢

I have begun my return, whether to Earth or God or me is still uncertain, though I suspect to each. Creator, Creation, Creature, self—the distinctions between us have never been as clear as I believed. The day after my meeting with Will broke windy and clear. After dawn I went down to the end of the breakwater, out beyond the town so that I felt I was on the leading edge of land and time. I coiled myself like a snake, my first organic incarnation in days, and I lay down and melded myself to a particular rock I had noticed some days before. It had a cup shape, like a granite palm, and in it I would lie until I became well.

Minutes and hours are meaningless in Earth-time which is the mediator between God-time and ours. But in time my colors changed. The one green eye was fixed on tree-top and sky. The brown one on the other side looked down into Earth's core. I took her pulse through my skin until that pulse and mine, as those colors and mine, were the same. And the rock closed its fist and held me. And then, again in time, I detached, uncoiled, rose and was able to leave, knowing I could return.

The clicks and ratchets, the cogs and wheels, the swooshings and locking receded like a bad dream. The unfolding mechanical limbs were resilient again. I ceased being a burden to me.

Since then I have engaged and mated in a similar way with several rocks on the breakwater and with an especially deep area of my beach where sand had been piled high by the tide against a rise. There I can burrow in and sniff air through my protruding toes like any clam through his foot. I have gone eye to eye with crabs here, and befriended a gimpy gull. I have danced with a companion fog, felt her fingers discover my face,

watched her make and unmake her self for my pleasure inside her shimmering veils. I learned the names of the tobacconist and my waitress, Frank and Lily. I hug total strangers on the street and feel the stirrings in my sacred heart of something more intimate than tolerance or comprehension, perhaps the beginning of real love.

The distant screaming is white noise now, as must have been the case at Auschwitz and Dachau, but I know whose the voices are and they are real. I wait for the day others will hear them, too, and verify my concern. The faces at this window are familiar. They are Lady Mother Earth's envoys—fairies if you wish, or stigmata—returning my visits.

There is a terrific temptation to know the sea with my body in the same way I knew her in my mind on that day twenty years ago, but I have resisted. I know I might not be able to detach from that primal reunion as I have from these terrestrial ones. In the embrace of these I have almost become human again. Tamed by Earth, foregoing transcendence, I will keep to wild eyes looking out from a sound mind in a single body.

That these thoughts are heretical suggests that more than Genesis needs to be reconsidered. This is the present task of man. In this instance, the journey and the arrival matter.

Sheri Foley Allen

Matreshka

Silly doll with your bright, dead eyes,
The others shut inside you,
Each painted smile, jubilee cheek;
Red dollops—sad masks,
Dead trollops of wood:
How many live inside
Dazed and hollow?

I twist off my head to see
Arms, legs reversed,
Faces floating free,
Then give the next doll a spin
And touch a just bloodied mouth,
Blood grin at the sin
Of losing oneself

Until out I crawl,
The last tiny one
Simple and clean,
Gloss red and green,
Black spots for eyes,
A lipless mirth—
No top to pop off

And me at the core,
A thin sheath of wood
Wound round a soul
Limbless and smooth,
The last little doll
Small and mute and free,
Changing into me.

Rex West

An Image Comes

Eyes closed, we listen
to inner music . . .
—Lu Chi (from *Wen Fu*)

Loom in the warm mist of woods at night,
among sullen weeds and spiny leaves—
go find this place and loom there out of sight.

Orange-throat poppies give pure opium: bit
the ovary, wipe your swollen lips upon a sleeve.
There, in the warm mist of woods tonight,

on your knees, crouch down: gibbous light
and seeds caught in webs grass spiders weave
hang there, loom there out of sight.

Lift handfuls of earth—wet clay and parasites—
to your mouth and nose and breathe
what lives in the warm mist of woods at night.

Taste feathers, shells, scales: they all excite
the tongue. Turn gray stones. See
what lives beneath, what looms out of sight.

Bashō's ghost is right:
Hitori naorishi ("the mind is now relieved").
Loom in warm mist in the woods at night.
Believe and loom here out of sight.

Ann Struthers

Spirit Lake and Shang-lin Park

(after a poem by Ssu-ma Hsian-Ju)

Between Little Spirit Lake on the west
and Great Spirit Lake on the east, this isthmus—
where green, mud-colored salamanders with yellow pin dots,
black pearl eyes and dragon eyelids lie sunning
on the bank above the rushes and water sedge,
where snow geese rest, spring and fall from their migrations
down the jet streams of the Missouri flyway.
Here are mallards with iridescent green heads; and teal,
spruce blue triangles marking their brown and white wings.
On Great Spirit's beach, gulls walk clumsy on the shore.
White heron stands on one leg in the shade, his knee the gnarl
in a water stalk, and the blue one, color of fog after sundown,
comes in for a landing, his feet stretched straight
behind him like storks in Turkey. Owls, too, hoot owls
cluck like fat chickens, cry like lost children,
and the great horned owl perches on the old windmill's
dry cistern as stars fade onto the sky and fireflies
begin their phosphorescent tick-tack-toe.

Oh Ssu-ma Hsian-Ju, you have the Shang-lin Park
of the Sea of Heaven located where eight rivers come together;
sturgeon in your water, dace, bream and gudgeon,
and grey lizards sun on the uncut jade of the banks. Wild geese,
black swans with snake necks, coral beaks, and suspicious,
coral-rimmed eyes, greylegs, coromants, grebes, and night herons.
The hornless red dragon sleeps in the cinnamon forest;
the golden-scaled dragon hides in bamboo thickets.
At Great Spirit Lake, no dragons under the cottonwoods
but tanned girls in bikinis; tanned boys
drive speed boats; water skiers plow the lake,
and fishing boats rock in clusters, wait for perch to bite.

The rich, second-hand car dealer from Sioux City
drinks Cutty Sark on the rocks, watches boats and swimmers—
blind to polliwogs hatching and cat tails' brown cigars
exploding, spitting their generations to the wind.
Joe Gooddeal sees foxfire in the night. The tax-paying Republican
goes to the window, alarmed, but it's gone. After he lies down,
its flicker lights the ceiling again. He tells himself

it's nothing, but lies awake,
listens to the distant waves tom-tom the shore.
In dark inlets carp remember their first phonemes;
in nearby fields Chinese pheasants chant Mandarin songs,
and he dreams he's crossed the border,
a stranger in a foreign country,
can't read the signs, can't speak the language,
can't buy anything with his murderous currency.

Waking at Night

Last night the owls called—three notes,
sometimes six. Oboe and bassoon. At 3:40
they sang in the tree tops.

This morning I wait for tea kettle's whistle,
look through leaded glass panes
fringed with icy lashes.
Watch pines' grey shins. My eye travels up
to their arms sleeved in snow.
The transparent air
moves slightly, shivers from Arctic breathing,
or disturbed momentarily by a passage
of improbable angels. Were they, were you
in the woods last night with the owls,
cold out there, bereft of flesh or feathers?

I will hang silk ski underwear on a branch
where the beloved dead can find it tonight,
and I will dream of them
flitting through the woods, light as bird's notes,
warmed, knowing that I remember,
trust their invisible journeys.

Jean LeBlanc

Shell and Stone

The best kept secret: Cape Cod in April. The sun is just strong enough to warm the sand; your spirit, glad to be free of winter, radiates its own warmth. Daffodils, hyacinths, and tulips are in bloom, and forsythia droop their yellow sprays over fences and sidewalks. What better place to celebrate this awakening than by the sea?

The ocean modifies the climate of coastal regions. A shopkeeper in Provincetown told me that their mild weather lasts longer than the tourists, long past Labor Day and even into October. Spring weather also arrives earlier, coaxing the spring bulbs and forsythia into bloom a week or two before these flowers bloom in my hometown, fifty miles inland.

In April I danced barefoot in the sand on a beach in Truro. I was wearing a wool coat and sweater, but the sand was warm under my feet. Its touch repaired the damage done to my psyche by winter.

What is it about beach rubble that is so attractive? My dance in the sand was interrupted countless times by the lure of a broken shell or smooth rock that I simply had to pocket. These shells and stones were not much different from the ones I have collected up and down the coast of New England. From where I sit at this moment, I can look around the room and see dogwinkles and limpets from Singing Beach in Manchester-by-the-Sea, smooth milk-white stones from Martha's Vineyard, a jar of broken shells from I can't remember where, and of course, assorted mussel and moon snail shells from Truro. I can feel the warm sand on my toes again.

This doesn't explain what made me collect these trinkets, or even notice them in the first place. At the moment I stooped to pick up this razor clam, I wasn't thinking, "This will make me happy in November when I see it on the window sill." November—or any other time, past or future—didn't exist for me as I danced in the warm sand. There was only that sunny afternoon in April; there was only that stretch of sand in Truro.

Everything humankind throughout history has been trying to describe by means of poetry and geometry was also there on that beach, in the form of a razor clam shell washed up by the last high tide. Everything was a dogwinkle bleaching in the sun on a beach in Marblehead, broken to reveal the internal axis of the shell. Everything was a handful of small stones tossed by the breaking waves near Dutcher Dock on Martha's Vineyard.

Of course, that wasn't what I was thinking either as I inspected the broken bits of shell and stone. I was drawn to the beauty of these objects, a beauty inherent in the form and function of the shells. In nature, form follows function. The razor clam and the dogwinkle are not shaped the way they are to please us, nor is their shape arbitrary. The dogwinkle fills an ecological niche; this specie's form is the one best suited for that niche. Function pure and simple, and form to carry out that function. Objectified by the beauty of the dogwinkle shell and the razor clam and all the life on this planet is a central paradox: The grand design is an accident of evolution.

What does this have to do with beauty? The poet Keats wrote, "Beauty is truth, truth beauty." If he had been a biologist, he might have expressed it this way: "Beauty is function, function beauty." To see if I could find an actual example of a scientist saying something similar to this, I selected the first book I thought of, a paean to the relationship between form and function in the natural world: Charles Darwin's *The Various Contrivances by Which Orchids Are Fertilised by Insects.* In the first sentence of this introduction, Darwin writes, "The object of the following work is to show that the contrivances by which Orchids are fertilised, are as varied and almost as perfect as any of the most beautiful adaptations in the animal kingdom. . . ." With his very first sentence, Darwin links the concepts of perfection and beauty with the study of form and function. Again, in the next paragraph: "An examination of their many beautiful contrivances will exalt the whole vegetable kingdom in most persons' estimation." Beauty and exaltation.

In the final paragraph of what is perhaps his most famous work, *The Origin of Species By Means of Natural Selection,* Darwin writes:

> It is interesting to contemplate an entangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth, and to reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent on each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around. . . . Thus, from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving, namely, the production of the higher animals, directly follows. There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.

Exaltation, grandeur, beauty, wonder—all evoked by form. No wonder I stopped my dance in the sand to get a closer look.

The rocks have form, but no function *per se.* They are, however, tangible symbols of the power of the ocean. Like the shells, they are beautiful to see and touch. "Touch" is important here; the need to satisfy this sense further explains the desire to pick one's way through the wrack washed up by the tide.

Once, as I stood before Monet's *Water Lilies (I)* at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, it suddenly occurred to me that, if I were to touch this painting, I would be touching something that Monet himself touched. I had the sensation that somehow my touch would meet his, transcending time; this object would bring us together, not physically, but in understanding. I would *understand* something—I'm not sure what; something about the nature of art and beauty and creative force.

As I stood in the Impressionist Painting gallery half-entranced, I had the good sense to realize that actually touching one of the paintings would cause me to understand what it would be like to be thrown out onto Huntington Avenue on my kiester. But it is this same desire to make physical contact with a beautiful object that compels me to hold

sea-smoothed stones and pieces of shell. I want to understand more about the art of nature, the artifice of beauty, the creative force.

The art of nature was under my feet again as I walked down Commercial Street one foggy Provincetown midnight. This natural artifice was in the form of land snails with yellow and tan-striped shells about one inch in diameter. These snails, English garden snails, are not native to the North American coast. As their common name implies, they are from the British Isles and other parts of Europe, where they hang out in moist, sheltered gardens and on ivy-covered walls.

The ancestors of these snails came over on the Molluscan equivalent of the *Mayflower.* Some might have been introduced by accident when vegetation was transplanted from the mother country. I know of one naturalist who purposely put some of these snails into his garden in back of his suburban home near Boston, and this is probably the main reason these little creatures can today be found in numerous discrete localities in New England, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and Canada. W. G. Binney, a naturalist specializing in molluscs, wrote in a publication dated 1859,

> In 1857 I imported some hundred living specimens from near Sheffield, England, and freed them in my garden, in Burlington, New Jersey. They have thriven well and increased with great rapidity, so that now (1865) the whole town is full of them.

But deliberate introduction doesn't seem to fully explain the American distribution of the two closely related species of English garden snails. In 1939, the malacologist Henry A. Pilsbry wrote of these snails, "The presence of this species of European type on the islets of a thousands miles of American coast has been an enigma. . . . The question seems to be still an open one."

It is a happy moment when two or more things that give us pleasure come together and complement each other. This often happens for me in relation to my love of shells and my love of books, as those last two paragraphs demonstrate. I have several old books with titles similar to Pilsbry's *Land mollusca of North America (North of Mexico)* and Binney and Bland's *Land and Fresh Water Shells of North America.* These books, especially those from the nineteenth century, were written and published in a different world from ours. Though vile smoke from factories and trains blackened trees for miles around cities, the cities themselves were, by today's standards, contained islands of dirt and noise. The Industrial Revolution was still an infant war. On a smaller scale, the books themselves were works of art, full of data and drawings by people (mostly gentlemen naturalists) to whom creatures such as snails were evidence of the ingeniousness of Nature or the Creator. In the opening remarks of an 1841 work on the molluscs of Massachusetts, Augustus A. Gould wrote of the shells:

> The arrangement and study of these marble dwellings, so beautiful in their models, so inimitable in their external sculpture and coloring, and oftentimes having their interior lined with pearl, constitutes the science of Conchology. This science is ordinarily understood to embrace the study of the shells only, without reference to the structure and habits of their occupants. This, it will be at once

> seen, is altogether unphilosophical, as much so as it would be to characterize any people with whom we had no previous acquaintance, by the style of their architecture, instead of making our observations, directly, upon the people themselves.

This metaphorical language would be considered worse than quaint in a scientific publication of today; in fact, it would not be published at all. But these old books, like the English garden snails in a Provincetown garden, can remind us of a time when things moved more slowly, when it was enough to directly experience science, when microscope technology was crude and the butterfly net was the naturalist's best friend.

The pages of these old books crumble in my hand if I turn them too quickly. The nostalgic images evoked by that last paragraph crumble under even the slightest bit of scrutiny. That any period of time was "gentler, kinder" than our own—or even that the near future can be gentler, kinder than the present—is a myth perpetuated by those who would deny reality for the opium of nostalgia. Our museums of natural history are stuffed with the stuffed skins of animals killed in the name of science (comparative zoology and anatomy).

Museums are the subject of quiet controversy. Most are, it can be argued, warehouses of death, draws and draws of dead meadow voles and hummingbirds and shells and bones. They are reminders of the days of the shotgun school of zoology, when people like Audubon shot and killed the very animals they admired and studied. Scientists today still do this, trapping, netting, and otherwise collecting organisms.

Many universities with large biology departments have museums. Not all of these museums are open to the public; many are behind-the-scenes museums of specimens viewed only by people doing research. These reference collections provide depositories for examples of every organism from flatworms to whales.

I too have killed: thousands of snails and mussels, over two thousand in one summer alone. I have looked through museum collections of tiny land snails and freshwater mussels, all neatly organized according to taxonomic rank, collecting dust in the name of science. I have sat silently by while museum directors and biologists advocated putting some of these organisms on federal and state endangered species lists, while at the same time these people were clearing streams and ponds of molluscan fauna for their museums and private collections. I still have a shell collection consisting of snails plucked from the tropical forests of the Philippines—a region no doubt succumbing to unkind and non-gentle pressures.

As I stood beside a row of shrubs in Provincetown on a foggy April night and watched the English garden snails crawling on the sidewalk, I remembered a conversation I had once with a fellow biology major in college. I was a sophomore at the time; she was a senior. I was telling her about my independent study, a zoogeographic study of the land snails of north-central Massachusetts.

Her replay was a stare as blank as her imagination, and a "Why?" that betrayed her absolute ignorance of the philosophy and principles of biology. In that instant I knew I was looking into the eyes of someone with no knowledge of natural history, no feel for the intricacy of the web of life, no understanding of why she had spent four years learning to observe the sublime ballet of genes in a dividing cell or the complexity of an

ecosystem. Sophomores are prone to lofty thoughts like this, I guess. I was incensed that she was considered eligible for graduation.

I can now stoop to pick snails off the sidewalk and return them to the shelter of the moist garden a few inches away from which they've strayed. I am no longer a biologist-in-training; I do not carry jars into the woods to collect land snails. I can now go whale watching and snail watching without having to poke, prod, dissect, pith, or maim. I do not consider myself an animal rights supporter; I have not gone from one extreme to the other. But the English garden snails on the sidewalks of Provincetown can rest assured that I am not after their lovely yellow and brown shells for my collection. I only keep shells whose inhabitants have already met their demise within the strands of the web of life.

I still enjoy going to museums, and I openly acknowledge the mixed emotions I experience when looking at the stuffed and mounted specimen of a Siberian tiger or a bald eagle. But I want the killing to stop, the extinctions caused by human interference to cease. If science cannot improve its own methods to achieve more humanitarian interaction with the other species on this planet, then there is little hope for society as a whole.

If we further diminish the diversity of life on this planet . . . we can only diminish the quality of our own lives.

I find land snails beautiful and fascinating for the same reasons I think spotted owls and humpback whales and white rhinos should be saved from extinction: If we further diminish the diversity of life on this planet and keep breaking what might be vital links on the web of life through which all life on this planet is united, we can only diminish the quality of our own lives, perhaps to the point of our own extinction. Depending on whose party you are at these days, it is either unfashionable or chic to believe that life on Earth cannot be thought of as steps in a ladder with *Homo sapiens* on the top rung. From the woman who could not begin to comprehend my reasons for studying land snails, to people who would gladly and without remorse cut down the last redwood tree to build a few more hot tubs, there are serious gaps in the conscience of our species.

Exaltation, grandeur, beauty, wonder. Dance in the sand; walk in the fog. Visit a museum and imagine that bald eagle soaring through the clouds. Only destruction is arbitrary; the forms around us in nature are there for reasons beyond our need to control. It is time we did more touching—from a single shell at the edge of the sea to the bark of a tree in an old growth forest (touch with your hands, not with a chain saw). By touching and seeing and listening, we might finally *understand* something about the nature of art and beauty and creative force.

Gianna Russo

Directions for Driving the Tamiami Trail

After you've done it,
if anyone asks,
say the sky there unfolds itself like a riddle
and part of it is a godly blue
and part of it is puckered with clouds
of summer thunder

Tell them
beneath the bell of the sky
the Miccosukee still honor the Everglades,
the flowing womb
spreads out like an altar
the cypress lift their humble knees
the sabal palm stand reverent as priests

Say
the gators and moccasins own the swamps
but when sunset blooms like a sacred fruit,
all gold and wine,
the great-winged waterbirds soar like deities
then mosquitos and bullfrogs
rule the night

After this,
if you're really pressed,
explain what happened years ago,
that the life-waters were drained like a pox,
put in a straight-jacket of canals
now poisons thread the pulse of the land
Tell anyone who wants to know
under the brilliant hibiscus sky
the final panthers lie bloody
by the roads

Then,
use the closing of your choice:
that over the ancient river of grass
the healing prayers of the Seminole
still hover
or
that like the woodstork
and the great blue heron
they have lifted their wings
and gone.

Walt Franklin

two poems

Sycamore Bridge

The fallen sycamore
with massive roots unearthed
sprawls across the creek
like a giant bone
half-buried in lichen.
Water's surface
pirouettes and bows
beneath, then, rising,
opens to an olive pool
beyond. Climbing
on the tree to bridge
myself across, I see
how a mink treads tension
at the pool's far edge,
how a small explosion
of its body drives
the dace bottomward
like shrapnel. I imagine
how the March waters rose,
how the current arched
its back in a dance—
a sweep of broken branches,
monofilament, tangled
hook and sinker, plastic
bottles, and worn tires
breathing like summer
carp. It is April.
An assuring pulse
holds the fallen tree
regaining its leaves.
Pausing in the branches
I can hear the water's
murmured invitation
to cowslip and
Dutchman's-breeches,
to arrive, convulse
into bloom, to clothe
brown banks and shroud
the seasons' dead.

Oak

Gathered from a woodlot,
sawn to 16” lengths
for the axe to split
in cold mountain air,
deep January rhythms—
wind, bird, snow, thought—
as stored summer energy
like memory is released.
Cracking thru the center
ring, year one, the axe
unleashes green air, heat
for the house, the poem.

Sharon Kourous

two poems

Each Leaf Individual

O each leaf individual and lone and each
and every several shining leaf filled,
fed first before it flung beyond all reach
or all returning. Each leaf milled,
swilled all summer long, feasted scarlet light
now lilting earthward; held such sweet gold
along its veins—stored still and april nights
all tender-green. And each leaf individual holds
a summerful, a radiant array; where woods become
bold with that rich light. No easy miracle:
these tall saints lean into amazing flame
and cast their colors down, and each one will

accept the flash
where fire subsumes
all colors into ash
each leaf, each leaf alone.

Fire Frets Uneasily on Leaf

Fire frets uneasily on leaf where sunset spilled
its speeding scarlet flame; green grieves, clings,
flings autumn edge against steel sky. Though fire fills
its every heart, no leaf dreams of dying, brings
the embers nearer willing; though scarlet flame
sears and seizes, leaf lingers, longs
against all october-of-its-knowing when winds came
cold along the upper branches. I move among
these motley autumn days aflame with dream,
green and lovely as that leaf, gold
with summer sun and tall as trees; and still I claim
the earlyrising sap, the tender bud,
and fret uneasily along desires and griefs
seared too soon to autumn, flame-touched as leaf.

Mary Winters

Taunted

Important plan: get some dirt bare
earth a bit of land some naked dust
press your marl-craving body and soul
into it front and back back and forth
over and over but such lay

no good where sod comes on a truck
thick rolls of rough green spears

superimposed a wall-to-wall carpet
hacked to fit the curves and corners
then nailed ear-splitting into place.

No good where grass like hair
spray-painted onto balding spot—
your hard-aging neighbor's tack.

Must be ur-turf unimproved:
ground sniffed out behind
college boyfriend's rented house

but once you bellied down and
embraced it, disarming slant and
spiky pebbles fought you off, both
hid at first by stone-cold violets.

Must be land used real:
ancient Cape Cod cemetery where
you stretched out so thrilled to
welcome truly deepest spirits

but mosquitoes rose right up instead
made you spurn a further bond.

Too late my dear both evolution
and a constant city-dwelling—
your lust for dirt a fooling crust

your love for earth just painted on.

Annette Lynch

On this earth,

seeds can seem exposed, alive,
like cat eyes in certain lights.
The air can touch the land's lap
but not reveal what hides below.

Those rooted seeds push their plants
above. The breath from their leaves
grants mine to me. I give them thanks
in long drinks and nursery care.

Their leaves also breathe a whisper
that draws me like a kettle song.
In this earth, I plant with fingers
that, every day, fall more in love.

Hope Athearn

GeeGee's Room

On a bright morning in the late fall of 2022, Dulcie Burke and Pete Wilmerding pedaled across the Golden Gate Bridge on Pete's second-hand torus bike.

Dulcie, on pillion, molded herself to Pete's back, held hard to his waist, pressed her chin to his shoulder. Stands of his hair blew across her cheek. She felt herself flooded with love.

Wind was strong on the upper deck, but to save the fee for a wider lane they had chosen to leave the side car and dome of the bike in the City. For more than three years now, Dulcie and Pete had saved a third of each paycheck toward buying a room. They were no longer demanding—any kind of a starter room would do—yet it seemed to Dulcie that the more they saved, the higher the prices rose and the scarcer the rooms became. Even the rare indulgence of a night in a decent hotel had them scrimping for weeks.

Clinging to Pete as a shield from the wind, Dulcie tried to put from her mind the disheartening image of her present home—a seven-foot slot in a basement dorm in the downtown compartment store where she worked. And Pete's situation was as bad as her own; he lived in an illegal pup-tent in the backyard of his grandparents' house, a house which the elderly couple shared with Pete's parents and unmarried sister, while his older brother with a wife and child claimed the basement garage. Nine people of four generations lived in the tiny, two-bedroom house.

At times Dulcie's yearning for a stable home gave rise to such overwhelming frustration she felt she would have to give up altogether—resign from her job, stop seeing Pete, go back to the suburb where her parents lived. But that was impossible too. Her parents had only a one-room apartment, and how could she live without Pete?

But today the whole world and everything in it glittered with sun. White wakes of boats livened the bay. Headlands and hills looped their bold curves up the blue of the sky. Both Dulcie and Pete had arranged to be free of their jobs; they could spend hours together.

Dulcie nuzzled Pete's neck. "Look up at the Towers," she called into his ear, over the electric buzz of the traffic. "Is GeeGee's room in that tallest one?"

At the north end of the bridge, on the highest point of the Headlands, Marin Towers, Pete and Dulcie's destination for the day, flaunted their elegant spires. Layered and peeled in a post-humanist vegetoid style, the flower-pink walls molded shadow and light into patterns of growth. Elevators, tiny and persistent as ants, crawled up the high walls.

Pete pointed an arm, shouted into the wind. "Eighty-fifth floor. Amaryllis North."

Dulcie stared upward. In the three years of her engagement to Pete, she had been to a number of Wilmerding family gatherings held in one of the domed reception halls at the base of the Towers, but GeeGee, as yet, had not invited her up to the room. GeeGee was Pete's great-grandmother. She was a hundred and six and had lived a good twenty-three years at the Towers, where the youngest permissible entry age was eighty.

Dulcie was thinking of GeeGee and picturing a white head at each of the hundreds of windows as the bike neared the end of the bridge and Pete signaled to turn for the exit pass. At that moment, three men, speeding on a bull-bike, crossed without warning into their lane. Pete braked and swerved, leaving no more than an inch of space between himself and the rail. The bull-bike kept coming. Torn plastic crunched. Somebody screamed. Dulcie felt a red moment of pain.

The next thing she knew, she was lying at the edge of the underpass with her head on Pete's lap. She opened her eyes. The torus had bloomed to cushion the fall. Now it lay like a half-dead jellyfish surrounding the bike. The back wheel was still spinning. Nobody stopped, but at the far end of the underpass a sudden shaft of light struck the third man on the bull-bike. Under a striped helmet, red on black, a fall of blond hair shone in the sun.

"You O.K.?" Pete asked.

Dulcie sat up, stretched a few muscles, tested her shoulders and back. The parts seemed to work alright. One of her leggings was torn and the ankle was bleeding a little, but it didn't hurt much.

"I think so," she said. "How about you?"

Pete was staring at the tunnel of the underpass with an expression of anger Dulcie had seldom seen on his face.

"Those crots," he said. "They didn't even stop, and you might have been dead. That tail-rider gave me the finger."

They rode battery juice up the Headlands road, past a clutter of ragged tents to the service stop, a good place to wash up and trade batteries. Dulcie threw out her torn legging. The accordion-pleated shorts, paprika on sage, looked O.K. with bare legs and slogs.

While they were patching the torus, a six-seater solar car drove by with eight or ten people shouting and waving out of the windows. Dulcie thought she'd seen them before.

"Was that some more Wilmerdings?" she asked.

Pete nodded. "It's the Andreas. You met them at GeeGee's on the Fourth of July. Now that Andrea's turned eighty, she's standing in line for GeeGee's room with the other three, on the off chance that GeeGee won't live forever."

The other three, Dulcie knew, were Peter the Great, Uncle Arthur, and Sibyl. Peter the Great was Pete's grandad, the eldest of GeeGee's four, with Arthur and Sibyl next in that order.

"I think Claudia's an Andrea," Dulcie said. "The one with her head shaved. About your age. I really liked her a lot. She had a man with her named Maxwell."

"Um," said Pete. He was trying to read the directions for replacing the torus. Dulcie looked over his shoulder. They seemed to be written in Arabic with touches of Javanese.

"I think the Andreas need GeeGee's room just as much as you Peters do," Dulcie said. "That girl cousin of yours who went off the bridge a few years ago—was she an Andrea?"

"That was Claudia's sister," Pete said. "Every family in the state needs GeeGee's room. Every family in the whole damn world."

♢

With the torus folded and packed, they set off again. Traffic was surprisingly thick. When the guards waved them into the parking lot at Amaryllis Tower, even the bicycle rack was almost full.

"Yo, Pete, look at that," Dulcie said. She pointed to a slate-gray bull-bike with three red and black helmets chained to the bar.

Pete locked his wheels and went over to look. "That's it," he said. "There's a big dent with flakes of green paint from my bike." He rubbed an examining finger over the dent.

"They're not Wilmerdings, are they?" Dulcie asked. "Or Andreas of something?"

"Spare me," Pete said. "But maybe they've got a great-grandmother up there in the tower. From the number of cars, a lot's going on today, and it's not even a holiday."

There was no one in sight as they hurried across the parking lot, but when they neared the main entrance a young couple with a child came forward to meet them. The man looked embarrassed as he held out an empty hand. "Please," he said. "Something toward a room." A blue placard with a government stamp was pinned to his shirt. *Arizona evacuation,* it said, *Radiation Free.*

Pete reached for his wallet. "Me, too," he said wryly, yet he dug out a bill and handed it over.

Dulcie said nothing, though she saw that the bill Pete had given away represented the sum they had saved by using the cheapest lane on the bridge. Still, being Pete, what else could he do? In no way would she change him.

As they moved on, Pete said, "There's a squatters' camp on the other side of the wall. GeeGee told me once that after each meal there's beggars like seagulls beside the back doors."

The main bulletin board at the entranceway was crowded with listings. Mrs. Wilmerding's luncheon, they learned, could be found in Dome B, Suite 32.

This proved to be a long, high-ceilinged room buzzing with a crowd of Wilmerdings of various ages and shapes. It was the largest gathering Dulcie had seen. New third and fourth cousins arrived each year from the polluted states to the east. As she entered with Pete, Dulcie felt a familiar tremor of hesitation, a nagging awareness that she wasn't a bona fide Wilmerding, that for lack of a room she and Pete were not registered roommates, and she didn't belong here at all. The family, she knew, understood their predicament and seemed to accept Dulcie as one of its own. But still, without logical reason, her misgivings continued.

A cheerful group, with drinks in their hands, stood at the bar laughing uproariously at some kind of joke. Dulcie scanned them quickly to see if she had chosen appropriate clothes. She decided she looked O.K. Most of the women wore multicolored shorts or diaphanous harem pants. Men favored the casual headband look.

Beyond the bar, a smaller group was clustered beside the buffet where a handsome arrangement of autumn leaves presided over platters of food.

At one end of the room, the older crowd, mostly white-haired, had claimed a long table where they were talking and eating together. At the opposite end, a number of children were busy with toys and computer games behind a wire-mesh sonic screen.

"I don't see GeeGee," Dulcie said.

Pete studied the table at the end of the room. “She hasn’t come down yet. Let’s get a drink.”

“Go ahead,” Dulcie said. “I want to say hello to some of the elders first.”

As she pressed through the room toward the long table, everyone seemed to be talking at once. Bits of conversation took shape in her mind.

“A hundred thousand from Texas . . .”

“. . . vigilantes at the border.”

“I heard that the lunar dome’s finished.”

There were greetings from friends. “Yo, Dulcie, have you found a room?”

She chatted a bit with Pete’s parents, and then, at the elders’ table, with his grandparents, Peter the Great and Penelope. Peter the Great, now eighty-six and the eldest of GeeGee’s four, was considered the prime contender to inherit the room. If that should occur, Dulcie believed, each of those who now lived in his house in the City would move upward a notch. And there might be a place for Dulcie and Pete.

After a time, Dulcie moved on, eventually finding herself at the bar with Claudia, one of the group of Andreas who had waved from the car.

Claudia seemed eager to talk. She steered Dulcie to the buffet, then found a small table in a reasonably quiet spot. When they were settled and eating, she got to the point.

“Listen,” she said. “Have you any idea what this party’s about? There’s always been a reason before—GeeGee’s birthday, or New Years, or something like that.”

“Pete mentioned it, too,” Dulcie said. “He doesn’t know why.” She was admiring the shape of Claudia’s head. She thought she’d look awful, herself, without any hair, but Claudia looked pretty good.

Claudia said, “Something’s up, for sure. There’s too many parties on the same day. Some people say the Centenarian Club’s going to make an announcement about changing the rules.”

Dulcie was surprised. “Can the Club do that?”

“Sure they can. There’s more than four hundred Centenarians here. It’s a real gerontocracy. They passed the over-eighty rule in the first place and it’s they who enforce it. Try the kelp Florentine, it’s divine.”

Dulcie said, “Surely nobody here at the Towers would change the over-eighty rule. That’s the whole point of the place.”

Claudia looked around and then lowered her voice. “They wouldn’t change that, but Andrea thinks they’ve cancelled the secrecy rule so the owners can tell us who’s going to inherit.”

Dulcie was numb with amazement. Her heart seemed to lurch. She couldn’t lift her eyes from Claudia’s face. If they knew for sure that Peter the Great would inherit, she and Pete would be free to make plans, to think about marriage, to consider a permit for a child one day. With an effort she managed to speak.

“Now?” she said. “You mean GeeGee might tell us today?”

Claudia shrugged. “That’s what Andrea says, but Arthur and Sibyl have other ideas. Arthur thinks they’re selling the Towers to a Portuguese billionaire and we’ll all get a piece of the loot. Sibyl’s as silly as ever; she thinks there’s a plot to levitate Amaryllis to the far side of the moon.” With a brief shrug she added: “Whatever it is, it can’t matter much to me. But I think we’re going to learn that it’s Peter the Great.”

Dulcie felt a small tremor of joy though she knew very well that nothing would change, since GeeGee, already a hundred and six, had many more years to live; scores of the Centenarians were over a hundred and twenty.

And then, for a terrible instant, she found herself wishing that GeeGee would die. As always, the sly uncontrollable thought was followed at once by an ocean of guilt. How could she sit there—a friend and a guest—enjoying that kindly woman's food, while wishing her dead?

At that moment, the expression on Claudia's face caught all her attention. It was a look of such total despair she remembered the bridge and Claudia's sister.

Impulsively, she reached out a hand. "Claudia, what is it? Has something else happened?"

"It's Maxwell," Claudia said. "He couldn't stand living the way we did. A couple of weeks ago, right after the rain came, he found someone else. With a room of her own."

Her expression, like a carved theatrical mask, remained unchanged, and Dulcie understood that any tears to be shed had already been shed. The two sat without speaking—an island of silence in the stream of the party.

Then Claudia said, "Look, I think GeeGee's here."

Dulcie turned in her chair as a ripple of expectation flowed through the room. The doorway stood open and empty, then a couple appeared—a stout middle-aged man in a conventional business suit supporting a tiny old woman, frail as the froth on a spider web, who clung to his arm. GeeGee wore a long caftan of ivory moire, touched with a tracery of pewter and black. Her thin hair, sparse and fly-away, was contained by a black velvet ribbon bearing an artificial fall of chalk-white hair that reached to her waist.

She raised a small hand to signal for silence. Her voice, as she welcomed her guests, was stronger than her meager frame implied. Everyone murmured approval. That done, she introduced her companion: Wilson Carter, Chairman and First Vice President of the Rubicon Lunar Project.

"Many of my family and friends," she continued, "have followed the progress of the Lunar Dome since its conception in those terrible decades of the Fourth World War. Now, in this era of peace, with the dome and its caverns no longer required for defense, the Rubicon Project has accepted the job of preparing a haven for those who have lived on this crowded world for more than a hundred years. Today there is wonderful news. The Lunar Dome is complete."

Claudia gave Dulcie a look, lifted an eyebrow. If GeeGee intended to move to the dome, the future for Dulcie might be different indeed.

After the applause trailed off, GeeGee asked Mr. Carter to describe for her guests the remarkable benefits of low gravity and high oxygen for the elderly. Carter at once launched into his speech, and GeeGee's nurse Millicent, as if by arrangement, came quietly forward to give GeeGee her arm and lead her to her place at the head of the elder's table.

Claudia whispered, "I knew Millicent at Berkeley High; maybe she'll join us here."

Carter had finished his talk and was answering questions with a drink in his hand when Pete pulled up a chair to their table. "Hi, Claudia," he said, and to Dulcie, "Take a look at who's giving out the brochures."

It was the three from the bull-bike. The red and black helmets had been replaced by conventional headbands, but Dulcie was sure it was they. One was standing with Carter while the other two wandered the room handing out leaflets.

The blond tail-rider came to their table, gave Claudia, then Dulcie, an appraising stare. With a brief glance at Pete, he dropped three brochures on the table.

Pete said: "Nice bull-bike."

His blank expression and flat tone of voice told Dulcie the extent of his anger. She knew he would not make a scene here at GeeGee's place, but what about the biker? He might have recognized Pete from the crash on the bridge and could hardly have missed the tone of his voice. But the biker, to Dulcie's relief, moved away to a nearby group. Still, she got the impression he was watching Pete with glances from the corner of an eye.

GeeGee's nurse, Millicent, with a sandwich and coffee from the buffet, came to their table and the talk turned to GeeGee's health.

"It's not bad for her age," Milly said, "and last week we got hold of a gadget that helps me keep her more comfortable. It's one of those agonometers, to measure pain. You know how it used to be—the squeaky wheel gets the grease? Now we can see for ourselves who's really suffering and who's just a complainer. I'll tell you one thing, Gladys Grace Wilmerding is not a complainer."

All of them knew that GeeGee was often in pain; now they learned it was constant. Her pain quotient was six and a half and seldom went lower than four.

Pete asked the question in all of their minds. "Is GeeGee planning to go to the Rubicon Dome?"

Milly murmured that she didn't know. "I can only guess," she said.

A voice from the elders' table caught their attention. GeeGee had risen to speak. It was clear she was tiring. Her hands trembled a little, she seemed more frail, yet her words carried down the full length of the room.

"My dear family, dear friends," she said, "I have wonderful news. Soon, I set off on a journey. I will travel by rocketship to the moon."

A flurry of exclamations interrupted her words. Some of the guests rose from their seats and moved toward the head table, while a number of children, sensing excitement, pushed open the sonic screen and ran to their parents.

Dulcie, to her own dismay, found herself thinking not of GeeGee's plans, but of GeeGee's room. She made an effort to banish the thought, but Claudia shared it with a conspiratorial glance.

Milly rose to her feet, spoke over her shoulder. "She'll need me," she said and moved briskly away down the room.

Dulcie tried to read Pete's expression. He looked thoughtful, worried perhaps, then smiled and reached over to press her hand.

In a low voice, Claudia quoted from a familiar nursery rhyme. "There was an old woman went up in a basket, seventeen times as high as the moon . . ."

At the main table, someone signalled for quiet. GeeGee was speaking again. "You have heard Mr. Carter and seen the brochure. You now understand the great benefits offered by the Rubicon dome, foremost of which is relief from pain. A project of this

nature is costly. Yet thanks to the Centenarian Club and the financial advice of Mr. Carter, fifty-six of our members have arranged to go."

GeeGee paused to smile over the group. "We leave together, three days from today."

With a pale hand, GeeGee quieted comments. "Now I shall speak of my room." She turned her face upward, and some of the listeners, as if they might see to the eighty-fifth floor, looked upward too. "If I had dozens of rooms I could give them with joy. As it is, I have only one, and that one I now leave to my elder son—Peter junior to me, but Peter the Great to many of you—to share with his wife Penelope."

Everyone clapped, no one seemed surprised. Dulcie's heart lost a beat then doubled its pace. She found herself smiling, laughing. Pete leaned over to give her a kiss. Poor Claudia, Dulcie thought, but Claudia smiled with all the rest.

The crowd seemed impenetrable at the elders' table, yet it opened at once when Milly, now equipped with a wheelchair, insisted that GeeGee must go to her room to rest. Dulcie could only wave goodbye as they moved out of sight. Then she pressed through the crowd, stopping often to chat, on the way to congratulate Peter the Great and Penelope.

Pete's brother, Richard, met her there and, grinning with happiness, told her that he and his wife and their five-year-old son were moving upstairs in the house in the City to a real bedroom with bathroom and closet—thus leaving the basement garage to Pete. Soon this assurance was echoed by Peter the Great himself.

Dulcie was dizzy with happiness. She and Pete together! Each morning, each night, they would share the small plans of each day while the years of frustration slipped into the past. She thought of the crowded cubicle in the basement dorm where she lived, and the image of a private garage with a carpet, a window, a big double bed in the corner, seemed a fairy tale palace.

Euphoric with this magnificent news, and wanting to share it with Pete, she looked through the nearby groups, then wandered toward the opposite end of the room. Pete wasn't there, but just as she neared the main entranceway he came through the door. His face was drawn, every muscle in his body tense.

Dulcie ran to his side. "What is it?" she said.

"I've got to find GeeGee." He grabbed Dulcie's arm, pulled her out of the room toward a long, carpeted corridor. "They've got to be stopped. The whole thing's a hoax. There isn't any Rubicon Project."

Dulcie felt only confusion. "Why?" she said. "Why? How do you know?"

"I followed those three, the bikers. I hid in the men's room. They said enough for me to figure it out."

With a tight grip on her arm, Pete hurried her down the long corridor, past groups of people clustered in doorways, toward the bank of elevators serving the tower. They stopped at the edge of a group by a sign that said: *floors 75 to 90.*

Pete spoke softly so only Dulcie could hear. "The spaceship they're taking is obsolete—insured, I suppose. Those three are the crew. After blastoff, they plan to come back in a launch, but the ship and all of the passengers will head for deep space and fall into the sun."

The door to the elevator opened. Dulcie and Pete were swept in with the group. There, standing together in silence, they waited for the eighty-fifth floor and Pete's conversation with GeeGee.

Dulcie loosened her hold on his hand. A black wave of despair rose up to engulf her. She felt herself drowning in hopelessness while her small dream of a cozy garage faded into the dark.

After a moment, without any tangible feeling of motion, the elevator car cleared the base of the tower, burst into full sunlight. Dazzled with brilliance, Dulcie stared through the glass. Far below her, the rust-red bridge, the cobalt bay, the white city beyond them, glowed with perfection. Gulls, like confetti, drifted beneath her. Red spires of the bridge, clean in the sunlight, guided a flickering ribbon of traffic toward the hills and spires of the city. Eastward, the skyline of Oakland and Berkeley rose over the nation, curved over the world. Dulcie knew in that moment, she would never give up. She tightened her grip on Pete's hand.

♢

In the hall on the eighty-fifth floor, Pete pressed the button beside a small card marked *Gladys Grace Wilmerding.*

"You know how I feel," he said softly. "But what can I do?"

Dulcie stared at the floor. "We haven't any choice," she said, and after a moment, "Poor GeeGee, she really wanted to go."

The door buzzed. They entered a large, sun-flooded room where GeeGee sat alone at a table, her back to the west-facing windows. The overheated room held a faint odor of medication and age.

GeeGee called, "Who is it?" But almost at once recognition came. "Youngest Pete," she said. "And Lucy. How good of you to come."

"It's Dulcie," Pete said. He walked quickly to the table where GeeGee sat, pressed the palms of his hands on its surface, stared into her face. "GeeGee, I found something out. You can't possibly go. No one can go."

GeeGee sighed. She looked hunched, forlorn, unbelievably old. Her hand toyed with a bottle of pills on the table.

"Dear children," she said, "please tell me exactly what you have heard."

Dulcie stared through the window. The wrinkled Pacific seemed to curve upward to blend with the empty sky.

"It's a hoax," Pete said. "The Rubicon Project doesn't exist. That ship will never land on the moon."

GeeGee held her gaze on his face, heard him out to the end. When he was done, she asked only one question. "Do the others know?" And on learning he thought they did not, she made a single request.

"I ask you to keep this a secret. It will not be an easy thing to do, but the welfare of fifty-six people, indeed of the whole Centenarian Club, rests on your decision. Our Club, after years of sober debate, reached an agreement at odds with the view of society. We voted to purchase a spaceship. We invented a tale. Now, fifty-six members, each of us over one hundred and five, and each for a serious reason, have been voted approval by our peers for the journey."

GeeGee paused. She glanced briefly at Dulcie, then back to Pete. “Help us,” she said. “Help us keep this a secret.”

Dulcie felt that if she were in GeeGee’s position, she might choose the same course. Beyond that, she saw the full nature of GeeGee’s demand. GeeGee was asking, not compliance alone, but the full guild of complicity.

Dulcie glanced at Pete, then waited in silence, and the silence grew until GeeGee spoke. “Come with me, there’s something I want you to see.” With an effort she pressed herself to her feet, crossed the room to the west window.

“Look downward,” she said, and standing together they stared through the glass.

Eighty-five stories below, diminished by distance, lay the domes of the towers’ reception halls, each flanked by a parking lot studded with glittering cars. The whole was surrounded by a massive wall, and outside the wall, extending as far as the blue of the ocean, lay an alien world—dun-colored, crowded, bleak. Here were the huts and tents of the homeless. Row upon row, massed on the ridges, balanced on cliff-sides, they stretched to the rim of the continent, to the land’s end of the earth.

“Please understand,” said GeeGee. “We consider it best to go.”

Gilbert Allen

two poems

Trouble, Maybe

The landing gear might be down
or out, no telling, because minus
his idiot light the pilot's

blind as a boil. But first class
is still a perfect seventy degrees
while the August sun

pours through the perfect windows
like granulated sugar from a torn
yellow bag. It's just life

as usual up here in blue
heaven, nobody's talking
while a ghost in panty hose

spills free Scotch on the suits
relishing the end of the disaster
movie on the giant screen.

Until one of them—you
know the type, so busy
he needs an appointment

to see himself—wags
his whiskey and says *Hey Honey*
Gimme some vertical hold

while a 747 shudders
like an albatross who's shot
his last bird at the NRA.

The Age of Nostalgia

With Doonesbury dead and resurrected
and Dennis the Menace fighting
for Social Security, enter
The Age of Nostalgia—

that great hall of cedar
and camphor, from which no mind
or mirror has ever returned.
Here, the newspapers

have no dates, and the pix
on the front pages, except
for the names of the corpses,
wax eternal as the comics

that we've finally learned
to unfold first.
Turn on the radio
and you'll find anything

but the present—Glenn Miller,
Elvis, The Stones, Springsteen, and now
Michael Jackson, who still
looks like an open casket.

Spin the dial and you're inside
my favorite, what I used to call
thirty years ago, right between
The Crickets and The Beatles—

those grand days
when cars could go faster
than they could stop,
when you drank for three years

then voted, when Kennedy
and King were alive
and perfect, when television
came only in black and white.

Kathleen Lignell

two poems

Groundwork

1
Words fall from the cedars.
They fall in swamps,
along mountain slopes
and old pastures
where the soil is moist,
a forest
where the air will meet the earth,
wanting to be born
and erase all other forests.

And if in falling,
words find what is their own,
it seems something durable exists,
stones, heartwood, words
spoken between you and me,
piling up on the earth
in the human place
where words will always be words,
where the earth will not forget the flesh.

2
Sometimes, in a trick of the eye,
the wall of trees grows indiscrete,
even though we move closer and closer,
and suddenly we see
that trees are a love of light
reaching beyond themselves,
a form of love that steps back
and remains detached.

But it's no use trying
to see the forest for the trees,
even by loving the trees,
because we can't tell the cedars
from the hemlocks,
we can't see that love,
when it approaches,
is a gesture of freedom,
as the light becomes free of the earth
or the tree becomes free of us
and surrounds itself with forest.

Measuring the Coastline

All day we've tried to measure
the length of our existence.
We started out with a scale
of one hundred miles to an inch,
weaving in and out of bays
and smoothing estuaries and capes.

Next, we made a map on a smaller scale,
opening up new bays and promontories.
We kept going back, adding
the circumference of islands.
And then we were crawling around
on hands and knees, measuring
distances around small rocks.

We got so close to the earth,
we hardly recognized where we were
and wondered if there's a coast at all,
knowing in practice there are limits
the geometers call *cuttoffs*
to stop us from becoming too small
to know which is water, which sky.

Now, in the dark,
I feel only regret for us,
the makers of maps,
the shapers of fictions,
because I have seen the process
that creates likenesses, pretending
everything represents everything else,
and have understood
there is no end, but an abyss
where we who measure the human
passage on the surface of the earth
are the beings whose size is perfectly
camouflaged above, below,
we who know nothing of that meeting
between green clouds of treetops above,
green clouds of algae below.

Michael Scott Cain

Carolyn Hester and the Spirit of Folk Music

The Sufi Inayat Khan wrote that music is nothing less than the picture of our beloved. Music, he says, allows us to touch our beloved, which is both our source and our goal. Folksinger Carolyn Hester says Inayat Khan has it right; music gives us power and strengthens the qualities we have in common. It is both a source of the mystery and a way to spread the mystery, to share it with others.

For Carolyn Hester, folk music is a celebration, a way for humans to bless each other, a means of building and maintaining the elements that bring us together. In short, a spiritual experience.

"Music offers a unity, a connection," she says, "and we are all connected. I truly believe every last soul is a part of my extended family."

For more than thirty years now, Carolyn Hester has been using folk music to unite her extended family. "Growing up in Texas was like being raised in musical heaven," she says, "Folk and country music were everywhere." Norman Petty, who produced Buddy Holly and the Crickets, produced her first album *Scarlet Ribbons,* which launched a career that is entering its fourth decade. She has recorded a dozen albums and has performed in concert and on television all over the world. Critics have called her voice "arrestingly beautiful" and the *New York Times* wrote that she "has a broad vocal range, from a rooftop soprano to some stunning alto chest tones."

When she talks about her work, though, Hester doesn't speak in terms of building a career. To her, folk singing is a way to promote spiritual and ecological ideas, a bridge to peace and justice. "Folk music brings people together," she says. "We are a community and folk music gets us to be a global community. It is a healing process."

One of her albums is, in fact, called *Music Medicine;* the title song is about the way music "sends away the curse. It clears up confusion" and "can be your guide." She sees folk music as a way of healing the divisions that keep up apart, keep us from being whole. From the beginning, her music has not been traditionally religious, but always deeply spiritual.

Hester, though, has never just expressed her spirit on record; she also lives it. She has a long history of work in the civil rights struggle. Her activism, however, is not a matter of trendiness or convenience but conscience. Describing her initiation into civil rights work, she says, "I felt I had to do something. I went to Mississippi for the civil rights marches, not because I could help but because I felt I should at least be a witness, even if I couldn't do anything to directly change things. That was what my conscience told me to do and I didn't feel I could live in this country if I did otherwise."

Folksinger Gil Turner, author of the civil rights anthem, "Carry It On," which appears on her recently re-issued album, *Carolyn Hester at Town Hall,* accompanied her on those trips to Mississippi. Years later, at the Kerrville Folk Festival, where she serves on the board of directors, Carolyn met Kate Wolfe, an acclaimed singer-songwriter from northern California. "When we met," she says, "Kate said right off, 'I have Gil Turner's guitar.' That almost killed me. Obviously, she knew him well enough that he said something to her about me and when he died he gave her his guitar. She remembered

and shared the moment with me first thing, right off the bat, and it just touched me so much. It's odd how it all comes round like that, how everything's connected." She smiles and says, "There are no accidents."

She remembers the casual racism that existed in her native Southwest with horror. "I was with Norman Petty when he got the news that Buddy Holly had married Maria Elena. He was furious. 'How could he do that?' he said, 'Marry a Puerto Rican girl? He can never bring her home to his family.' Norman wasn't a bad man, but he shared the prejudices of the time and thought it was a mixed marriage and he just couldn't take it. I was horrified. That's the kind of thing I've fought all my life."

She traces the development of her values to her lifelong interest in Native American cultures and religions. Her song "The Flatlands of Texas" describes how, as a little girl, driving through Texas with her family, she noticed that Native Americans were viewed and treated differently from other Americans. "Can I speak to them?" she asked her father, "Can I learn from them?"

She has been learning from them all of her life and, as a result, is deeply immersed in Native American mysticism, an immersion that causes her to use her art to try to help unify Native American and traditional American cultures. Her most recent album, *Warriors of the Rainbow,* explores the ecological and spiritual values of that culture. "I had to write that album," she says, "it was a mission. I wrote the album for people like ourselves who relate to the message. We are not indians, were not born indians, but we can learn from them, but maybe we can become them in some ways. We can gain spiritually and all other ways."

The album reflects Carolyn's belief that we are not merely different groups of people living on the earth, but that we are all a part of a living earth. The songs take ecology, politics and spirituality and show how they all come together to create the unity that characterizes all of life. The starting point of the record is that no matter what else we are, we are all warriors of the Rainbow, every one of us.

"By taking the native culture seriously," she says, "we enhance our own. It's all one, but a lot of people don't realize that yet, and most of us don't live it."

Although all of Carolyn's earlier albums affirmed life, containing folk spirituals and songs that celebrated unity, the outpouring of the Gaia spirit on *Warriors of the Rainbow* is overwhelming. Rather than an outsider's stance, the record reflects the lived experience of beauty and ecstacy, the affirmation of people and human history.

Ascending Woman, the young indian woman who symbolizes the triumph of the spirit for Hester, came to her in a dream, as did the song "Geronimo," in which the chief becomes a symbol for the acquisition of wisdom in order to empower mercy.

The night she debuted "Ascending Woman" at the Kerrville Folk Festival, the song was accompanied by a mystical experience. "As I was singing it, a thunder and lightning show broke out, the lightning swirling in circles above us. Just as the song ended, lightning hit the stage, knocking out all the lights and sound. Then, ten or fifteen seconds later, everything snapped back on. I haven't recovered yet."

Warriors of the Rainbow is very personal to her—she says, "Folk music allows you to sing what you would be embarrassed to say"—so Carolyn did very little promotion when it was released in 1986, but she is thrilled to see it has become the record that refused to die, taking on a life of its own, finding a continually growing and receptive

audience around the world. Although the record has a very accessible ecological message, it goes beyond that; its thrust is more spiritual than political, capturing the spirit of Native American ways and insisting that white America has much to learn from that culture. It calls for both a new way of thinking, one that embraces the earth and the life it sustains, while calling simultaneously for action on behalf of justice and peace. It's not enough to believe, the records says, we must also act on our beliefs. We must visualize the possibility of justice for all peoples and then work to make that vision real.

Carolyn Hester's spirit causes her to be out there helping to build that global community, celebrating the just life, being joyful and bringing community to others. "It's important," she says, "Everything we do here is important."

For more than thirty years, Carolyn Hester has been on the road creating the community that will recognize and act on that sense of importance.

Donna Henderson

two poems

Dawn

When the tanker tripped
over the shoal & broke
open, greasing the whole sea & everything
relying on it the men said
oops then quarreled about blame,
exact tallies of gallons
& who should do what
next about everything. Meanwhile

in Valdez the women, who knew
what to do when you spill
things began doing it, wiping the dirty
faces of murres, clearing seals'
nostrils of the mucousy blackness,
cradling each one as if it were the most
important one in the whole world to save,
the same way they would wash their own
children. Knowing, though no one had told them
so, everything depends upon this.
Lifted, soaped even the beach
stones & their interstices like
so many toes.

& when someone finally thought
to interview one of the women he asked
what did they use for the washing &
she said with authority "Dawn."
"Nothing else works. Dawn is
The thing we are counting on."

Cave Painting

Writing by candlelight before dawn

in a drafty bedroom these words flicker,
forming, and the shadows hand and pen make

pulling them across the pale page to waver
there like painted animals in the Les Eyzies

caves—see how the delicate bull on the wall
by torchlight quivers and huffs—

I know why they made them there,

entered that slim passage between stone
& stone to follow the widening

darkness into its cavernous
heart where the darkness was wide enough,

and by fire/light drew the new beings
out from the cold walls

breathing.

Elizabeth R. Curry

Harvest

we sit and shuffle dollar bills
your eyes have dimmed
like the expression on a road kill
the room is hot
garbage piles up
in the yard a harvest pumpkin
pays for having had a face, lies deflated
the home team is losing

when you got back from work
a marauder was there
some animal in the path
you shone your flashlight over the house
wife sleeping, windows steamed over
the night has a thousand closed eyes
the night breathes, unconscious,
discrete.

you look at the money
it is never enough
your beautiful hands reach out
the kettle whistles
something is clicking
a dog's nails on the floor, your nails
she is going to leave now
wife cleaning the yard
that while you were away
lost its summer beauty
she smiles and says o well

you and I are alone
as, at your beginning,
we were together, dreaming
before the bright light of birth
stopped the darkness:
born in the garbage of blood
we all pay, child,
for having had a face.

S. Ramnath

two reflections

Crazy Mountains, Montana

Kathryn Marshall writes in the April 15, 1992 issue of *American Way* about the Crazy Mountains in central Montana that rise starkly from rolling grasslands. The story, according to her essay, is that a woman traveling with a wagonload of emigrants went insane and bolted into the mountains. Ms. Marshall, lying on pine needles at the top of the mountain, wonders about the woman. What drove her crazy? What happened to her? What was her fate? These questions and the answers we may come up with are for me more interesting than any geological inquiry about the mountains. I have seen this mad woman who ran into the mountains sitting on park benches in the downtown area. She may not even be a woman. She has an androgenous quality. But she is mad. There is that blank stare, a posture that conveys clearly a sense of separation from the world as we normally see it, an aura of alienation. She did not have to run into the mountains; the mountains came to her, with their jagged, illogical shapes, with their generous offerings of shelter from the mad noise of human beings, travelers on her wagon seeking who knows what—riches, gold, adventure, romance. In the mountains she embraced she found silence, maybe some peace. But look at her, under the shadow of the elm, on a park bench, looking past the grasslands, listening past April's song birds. How the two realities are separated, and how important it is that we remember her, and if we cannot remember that we invent her, and place her in that world before the mountains moved and the birds fell silent.

The Neem Tree

I see on TV that America has discovered the Neem Tree for its medicinal value. The tree produces natural pesticides which keep moths, insects, locusts away from its bark and leaves. The Neem is an old, old tree in my mind. A Neem used to grow outside the iron gates of 91 Rash Behari Avenue, my last address in India before I moved to the United States. Early in the morning it was a familiar sight to watch the rickshaw pullers sitting beneath the Neem chewing on the twigs of the tree which was considered good for the gums and teeth. Like a lot of things, the Neem had slipped in my mind and needed the TV spot to needle it back to the forefront. Hema, the old woman who came to our house in the morning and evenings to do the dishes, cook our meals, and bring water from the artesian well (we employed her services after my mother passed away) also used to chew on the Neem. It was the poor person's toothpaste but now it may come in vogue. Anyhow, a two-minute spot on TV triggered an entire world of memory. Now that the Big Nation has discovered the Neem Tree, we will no doubt hear about it, and the more we hear about it, the greater the likelihood its leaves and extracts will start appearing in pharmaceutical bottles. And quite suddenly, the rickshaw puller in Calcutta will find his tree without leaves or entirely gone. And then the landscape changes and we will have arrived at a place, once idyllic and enchanting, we no longer recognize.

Len Blanchard

Beach Sight

I myself am nearly as ready
as most to call it an illusion and,
therefore, to dismiss it, much
as most educated people or people wanting
to appear educated write off
belief in a benevolent God, calling such
belief a crutch, since the sight is
enough to make me
laugh out loud with a happiness calling
into question not only grief, human sorrow,
but the very reality of any experience
of the mortal body clipping the heart's
wings. Why, watching the windsurfers
skim t he dazzling verdant mirror
of the Atlantic shimmering on this New Year's
Day afternoon without clouds, muscles taut astride
boards designed to slice the waves and rigged
with sails, banners in combinations of blue,
yellow, green, white, red and shades in between and
translucent plastic, no two alike, ensnaring
the wind and using it—the wind
not caring, not knowing, feeling no loss or
constraint—to coast in space and time
as if neither were real, space infinity, time
eternity, even hate seems, if real at all,
only and at worst an aberration.

Five minutes reading the daily
newspaper even in Key West, however,
will do enough to remind even me even
this afternoon that, if an aberration, hate's
an aberration assuming the proportions
of the normal condition. An assemblyman
retired after thirty-five years with GM
has shot a black teenager selling newspaper
subscriptions fatally who approached his door
yesterday morning because *no black dude would want
anything with me but to rob and kill.* A young
man has assaulted a middle-aged man, stripping
him and struggling to rape him, kicking
out his teeth, bruising his testicles,

because *I hate gays.* A group of boys who
had shaved their skulls have used
a homemade bomb to blow up a synagogue
and killed accidentally an elderly man
at prayer inside *in defense of the Messiah.*
An investment banker accustomed
to success who has been for years an avid
patron of prostitutes commanding
high prices has stabbed twenty-eight times
and to death a sixteen years-old runaway
because *I've always despised whores* and,
besides, *she laughed at me and used heavy makeup.*

Tossing aside the paper, careless of the sand
quickly starting to bury it, almost wanting the breeze
to claim it, to dribble it along some gutter like
so much drivel, the flotsam and jetsam
of landlubbers, out of sight, I have to look
up and out to sea to see the windsurfers
to remember newspapers don't report all
the news. Or perhaps they do, for I notice
that even when the direction of the wind changes
suddenly or an unexpected waves rises higher
and stronger than anticipated, knocking
a windsurfer with the board he's riding
into the ocean, nothing's *really* changed. Striving
to mount the board, to right the sail, a surfer
remains one with the water and the wind.
Too much a part of the world he's chosen
to curse either himself or the world for the abrupt
cessation of flight, he devotes his energy instead
to making the adjustment which will make it
possible to ride once again as the wind
the undulating surface of the earth. Seeing that
nothing here is out of sorts, at odds
with the life within or around it, I rise
to leave the beach and, leaning on my happiness
as if it is in fact a crutch, I find it true, sure
as nothing made by the hands or the mind of man.

Donn Irving

Escape into the Sea

I was always a loner. Essential I tell you that. Worst kind, too: *Canis lupus;* alone yet never lonely. Even among a pack, a wolf is alone. A tree in a forest. This bin of spoiled fruit they've tossed me into is perfect. Our rinds are full while we rot inside, secretly, separately. The light is bilious, nauseates ostensible normals. I'm here because I swim against the current. Our species believes life, being perishable, is cherishable and takes umbrage at fools who seek leakage for the superabundance, an unstoppable bung for life to gush out of. Alone without loneliness: right thinking for a wolf. But I'm a family man. Father of four. Make that "was."

Gene stands here deaf; a white-clad stone. I guess it could be called quiet . . . except for one poor fool down the hall protesting discrepancy by higher pitch and hammering decibel. Injustice detected, disclosed by a siren. So what. A tidal wave of grief will wash over us, a pounding surf of his pain. Acid in my gullet risen from breakfast is enough to satisfy me.

Had a place I'd go on our farm where I'd hide out to read Cioran, Kundera, anything long or complex. Novels of ideas. Never, but never for outcome. I'd resist the end, never wanted to know how anything ends . . . we all know that, don't we? To go on, that was the thing, to read and never stop and never return to tedium . . . except for milking, twice a day, seven a week. Cows lull one's wanderlust. Cows, by God, are America's last hope of law and order. No one who milks is a felon. You're too tired. And besides the milking, the summer's haying in the glory of Michigan's thick greening, hot in the sun, chilly in shade from lake breezes, back on with your shirt while you sat in the shade on a break and sipped cold lemonade from the house. House? From a wife.

A wife. A life. As I said, we know how it all ends.

White is how they want your mind, here, white like these walls. Calcined, unrelieved, not even a Van Gogh for kindred spirit glaring from them but what the hell. Where am I going after this? More on that.

While in the fictional dream I was really most alive. Unoriginal, yes, but no less true. What life of a man compares? Think of cows. Think of Gene. The author's lived the life of the mind and he's letting you in to look around. Years of research and observation, five more in the writing. The lives he's made between the covers of the book are more interesting than those made between covers on a bed, infinitely more interesting than your own, given most of our chances, the stupidity of our choices. Or choices forced upon us we think we've made ourselves.

Does Battle Creek mean anything to you, say 1972? Probably not. If you were a farmer, it might. Terrible wreck. No, not the Edmund Fitzgerald. Massive poisoning of beasts and man, so they'll not be singing of this wreck and a watery grave. And all because some simple soul or simpleton, I won't say which, fey as I am, read some bag labels wrong. If Michigan is shaped like a catcher's mitt, then Battle Creek lies well onto the heel of the hand, an easy miss if that's where the ball hits. Someone dropped the ball

and we got a magical new livestock feed which ended up a kind of fallout. Scientists wrote this one up in jargon, not poets, and no ore-laden vessel to be eulogized in song.

Still, there were heroes. Any battle has one. There was a vet who sensed the strange cases fit a pattern . . . but he's dead now. Heart attack, heart failure, something. All a failure of the heart as I see it now. We know how it ends. It's the processes that twist and writhe and hide in the smoke.

He's stopped his infernal yelling. Gene looks the same. Like something by Henry Moore, his bronzed boar, maybe. My pajamas . . . well, I don't wish to think on them, so I just got to thinking some more on cows and dairy farming. Dairy farmers are a paradigm of wholesomeness. What's wholesome as milk? Babies? Law-abiding yes, but best, he's too tired to do either of two things: Succeed (Shrewd Management Yields Success boom the extension men, dangling the carrot) or Intimidate (which is what it takes to succeed in business). But the wholesomeness? Ironic. And I'm not a purveyor of sour grapes, here.

My lousy pajamas, this robe, stick to me like orderlies. Like Gene. He's watching me now. When I use a pencil he has to stand over me. Not his preference, I'm sure. His duty. Some day he'll probably let me do my pencil tricks. I can do tricks on myself with goddam near anything I can get my hands on. I could admit to him that though I have this rendezvous with death, this is not the day. Not the appointed barricade. I won't. But these "clothes" they issue us stick to me because I have these weeping ulcers all over my skin. Don't be misled. These are not epic, biblical afflictions. I'm a peanut unlike Job . . . a man who was chosen! I was not singled out. This was a blanket job, nominees' names less personal than a laundry list, like with acid rain, dispassionate. Meaningless in the scheme of things. My skin condition was known as chloracne before progressing to the ulcers. Chloracne has a nice ring, doesn't it? Youthful.

Dwell a moment on Gene. I do daily. He's got this job. I'm his job. All day he watches me or some other poor joker if I'm in the grip of the shrinks. What kind of life? Where's *his* life of the mind? What if the joke in his case goes like this: Bulbous Gene, my junior, dies suddenly. A heart attack. After having lived by his wits like this for fifteen years; watching idiots who want to erase themselves and save the world space, fools he does not wish to join in quest of the mortality they esteem. I'm better off than Gene. His ward is better off, think of that. See why he should be reading like I used to do? Escapism could give him a life, his only. He stands, hands clasped, feigning sleep against the wall, looking like advertising people picture big, dumb cops . . . cerebrally dead, behind mirrored glasses . . . watching us like we're flies stuck on pins under glass. I should read scripture over him, get on with the carving of the stone.

My son used to counter my agitation with one of this slogans: "Hey Dad, it'll all work out." I guess it will. Did for him. A fighter, too. Believed he mattered, that the world, that God, held a place open for him. There were injustices, sure, but only to test our mettle, like a clutch of teething rings. Benign and annealing. They'd make us better. We'd have teeth. So he coined little epigrams to live by . . . Lessons he'd learned, he said.

He approached our farming that way, no job too heavy, no task too daunting. Some grease, spit, baling wire, solder or a tiny tack of weld here and there. Great help. To me and all of us. Gave me more reading time to steal. Well hey, we do what we're best at and he was good at work, sticking things together, getting everything done. Even got a kick

out of the hopeless dreams I was. Liked it, really, laughed about my cryptic solitude, my secretive habits. Oh, he was a father's son, my Gerrit, Jr.

Cro-Magnon Gene's motioning now. His only movement above belly height, a gesture, a nod. Won't be kept waiting. Believes in schedules, though they doom him to treadmill living. What will he do with the time "saved"? Watch the walls peel? Or can he "spend" the extra later? It's all going, one ticking moment after another until the mainspring breaks. He'll take me over for my medication, first, to include an appetite stimulant. What boon companions. He takes my arm like a bridegroom. How lovely we are. I wave to the others, toss my bouquet as we stroll. Where is the Lohengrin? He is the perfect mate. Nothing stirs him. Nothing.

A voice. Behind me. "Flesh and blood already, what, reincarnation? You, Van Veen. Dead they said you were and here you are, schlepping around."

Moishe. He holds back, glancing at Gene. Gene's imposing. Moishe, my sometime friend. Sometime, because people like us don't really have friends . . . we can't get past ourselves . . . and because they take him to another floor part of the time. Why, I don't know. Moishe is not his real name. He won't tell it or doesn't know. From Detroit. Used to sell insurance, real estate, bonds, something. Anything.

He smells like sour milk, another *why* I don't now about. What he lacks in hair, he makes up for in fat. He's sallow and fat, but something about his face makes me think he was handsome, once. Fine features, maybe. One more thing: we never speak about why he's here. He won't abide it. He knows about me, though. Unavoidable. Everybody's heard the stories.

"They're right, Moishe. I'm dead. Ask Gene, here. Right Gene? Gene's dead too, aren't you, Gene? Everyone is, all but you."

"So where you going? To eat? Do the dead eat?"

"Yes. Only not so much, so they can afford us."

He looks pensive. "Maybe I'm dead, too, because I can't eat the stuff they got, thanks God. I puke. Their hospitality my guts reject."

"Saves your life."

"For what? This is the question."

He says that out of empathy. About living, he's confirmed. They can trust him to go about his job, assisting in the pool with the hydro-therapy. He's good. He knows and he's patient. A model inmate; a trusty.

"Maybe I'll see you later?" I am whisked off on my lover's whim, his hand on my arm. Gene, the behemoth.

"Who knows?" He waves.

Yes, who knows. You can tell the real crazies. They sit near *me.* Ulcers and boils notwithstanding. The others? Recoverables? They give wide berth. Ulcers and boils diminish an appetite already blunted by sloppy refectory tables bathed in grease, food tipped over on them, saliva in the soup and tears diluting it further . . . an appetite suffering from knowledge of the food.

Today? Not so bad. A meatloaf made of real sawdust instead of fakery, like plastic extrusions. I have method, today. I eat like a survivor of the death camps. If they see appetite, they relax the vigil. Ever so little. Maybe enough.

Food. Got scarce for us after the thing with the feed. I'm back now to the dairy farm. The stuff they mistook for supplement was a fire retardant, full of PCBs. PCBs no one knew as poisons. Made up megatons of feed with it. Amazing, in the twentieth century. By the time the sickness showed up in our cows, we had drunk a river of milk. The cows were on the side of folly. Concentrated the PCBs; their systems, adapting, began to require them or their breakdown products. Perverse. Ain't science grand? By concentrated, I mean to say they put more metabolites into the milk than they retained in tissue. It's crazy really. Like Hercules' hydra: Cut off the head and two more appear.

Anyway, before they knew all these cows had the same problem, a new disease, and before they traced it to the common mill, we drank the milk and ate the steer we'd fattened, a nice, rolypoly holstein calf my youngest daughter raised like a pet (requiring deception to get her to eat; "It's not Toby, dear, no it's from the store"; and now, the thought of that . . . but it was not our worst lie to her).

Our whole neighborhood ate and drank tainted meat and milk. "Neighborhood," died thirty years ago, like haying and threshing dinners. Neighborhood died of machinery. I know I digress. Machinery will kill the family farm, mark my words. Big, blue Harvestore silos rising above our barns, rising beyond our means. Cost more than our homes by a lot. Called them blue tombstones. Stored the finest feed in them, just beautiful stuff . . . so we could mix it with grain laced with PCBs. Rich and ruin in bed together; such irony.

Well then, the vet came, the one who'd found the key, traced it back. He convinced others, showed them the pattern. It took time for them to believe he had a new disease under scrutiny but when they did, look out; stand aside. University scientists . . . publish or perish . . . jumped in, bumped him out so he could go have his heart failure. Brought in bureaucrats, FDA, CDC, EPA . . . initials you never heard of. A disease of a sort, also. Drove over each other, us, our farms. A crusade. Don't Drink the Milk, they warned, about five hundred gallons late. Cows not visibly sick, not visibly dead, we still milked and we drank the milk. We ate. We had to live. When they found the hopeless levels of contamination in those cows and from the cows to us, in the feed, in our soils, they drove our herd into a pit and shot every one. Hauled off our soil, even. Too late. We'd long been broke. Bank owned more of our cows than we did, so we ate illicitly. A stolen melon does not taste better. More irony: We ate the cows not ours to the consternation of bankers who owned them, yet the value of the cows was nil. Condemned. They in turn condemned us. The midwest has twisters, but none so wry as that. Oh, yes, the government paid indemnity for cows they shot. Banks took it, were entitled to it. We were spectators, chattels, serfs of the bank, residents of a partly paid-for farm eating illicit, worthless, mortgaged, toxic beef. Paradoxical, no? Killing ourselves by eating a business not ours to keep from dying of starvation.

Not quite Sophocles, but pretty good. Pretty good.

If he can only get the key, Moishe, now he's back. When I need it. Or tell me how.

The dreams are back.

No books in my sour dreams. No safe places. Nor rich-textured covers to crawl between to wait it out. Until sanity returns to a mad, mad world. There's just cloudy, dreary, gray old Michigan around us, cold and lake-slate with clouds made over water to our west where live the happier tribes, the Chingachgooks. Read "Chicagoans." And

the cows, bawling orders, snapping whips, slamming gates behind us, herding us in to milk us dry. And my three daughters, poor Angie and Golda and Gert, naked also, their lovely, long yellow hair trailing them, herded in with us, but at night? They belong to the leering head herdsman, a fearsome minotaur; a bull; gigantic; merciless. A face like Gene's but with horns. He thrives on a chemical diet. PCBs give him libido.

Ask me now, go ahead, what I want most out of life.

"All right, Gene. Lovely repast. My compliments . . . and so on . . . to our chef. Can we go now?"

He takes my arm. The Lake Michigan clouds outside the windows are deep as the lake itself. Dark water in the sky.

"I don't deserve such caring, Gene."

I wink at him; he remains impassive. He moves me along like a ski-lift; just hook on and go.

Along our hallways, just here now, you can survey the bodies. The sit on hard chairs, on hard benches, bare stuff they can't rip weapons from, heads bowed, some, the churchly ones, so they can see between their slippers the burnished linoleum titles, while others . . . a vacant stare from eyes wide as their open mouths, waiting for God or Shane or Indiana Jones to come back. Rarely will one notice the passage of another, as with Gene and me. Nothing. Nothing is about equal to their chances of rehabilitation, of leaving this, their concrete grave. I am looking, of course, for Moishe. Yet I know he'll be behind the dead ones, in a room somewhere, the day room maybe, someplace where a coherent voice can join with his or where hands are dealing cards; shoving a shuffleboard puck. Arguing. Figuring the percentages, the angles, conning.

Weapons they'd only use on themselves; make no mistake. Walls and tiles stare back at them. I see no sign of Moishe.

"Hey schlemiel," says he, coming out of the janitor's closet. He has me by the sleeve before I'm turned. "Come on along with me, here. The pool." He holds a mop. "Gonna tidy up a little, then a body or two for therapy you should help me."

"You know I can't go in," I remind him. "Not with the ulcers. Chlorine sets me afire like a Laotian monk."

"Not *in.* With the wheelchairs, the clothes and such. Gene needs you like he needs another hole in his bottom."

Gene glares. He shows no sign of liking Moishe better than anyone else.

"Gene, my dear," I say. "Manners."

"Whattayou, Gene," says Moishe, "think we'll commit some unnatural acts together? Spoil your fun, you creep?"

"Take care," I warn him. "He's in there even though it may seem empty."

Gene studies Moishe, who grins. He follows us to the pool, Moishe holding white-knuckled to the mop. Just down a side hall. Moishe unlocks the door with a key he slides out of his trousers. Jesus, they trust him, implicitly; that hasn't changed.

Inside, he falls to mopping. I find a chair and sit staring into soothing green water, yellows wriggling in its depths. Gene stands, cradling his thick arms, watching intently, a mopping scholar.

I love the close, heavy smell in here. The warmth and the heavy damp. Reminds me . . . I must be crazy . . . of the sea. The ocean. I imagine their smells are, if not the same, then similar. I *am* crazy, after all, so even that's all right.

Golda it was loved to . . . *lived* to swim. Like a dolphin in water, as if she was made terrestrial by mistake. I used to take her, no, I did not. It was Olga, my wife, saw to things like that. I saw one meet. One. Golda was untouchable. So lithe and lovely, wet. All limbs. Her coach said, "She's our great hope."

We had a stream on our place. Smallish, slim. A trout stream, alive with them. Rainbows. Silt bottom, so I had to learn to cast upstream, wading against the current. Strange feeling, watching the fly slide down to me faster than I could take up line. Real soft and lazy. You can love a stream. Until the cattle droppings . . . full of PCBs . . . leached into it. Trout all floated on their sides, their rainbows gone out. Very sensitive, trout.

The cattle, what a thing to watch them drying up, gone thin, twitching in tremors, slobbering over their grain but unable to eat it. Brought me out of my reading reverie. No more books. Drama under my nose, Brave New World. No, Silent Spring in living color. Documentary.

More and more with each new week, the cows came down with "it," more dying, no end to the bills. Got so all you could do was to laugh, hysterically, at the thought of some joker **DEMANDING** payment. Banker would call: "I don't know if we can renew at all without a payment at least on the interest." I'd look at Olga, already a bit pale, and she'd look at me. I'm thinking, "All right; don't renew; you're the proud new owner of a hundred counterfeit milkers. Which teller's cage will hold old #635 and which for old #23?" For awhile, they went along. What could they do?

I've thought a lot about the guy. The little guy these packaging experts consider so dumb he can only be trusted with color-coded bags. The little guys stop reading altogether. Yet . . . colors fade. Turns out the brand name of the fire retardant was only a couple of letters off from that of the protein supplement . . . and all the bags the same graphic design. When he learned how it all came down, later, the whole dairy sector in panic, destroyed, how did *he* live with the news he was the new dean of poisoners, the main rat carrying the plague? This hapless klutz the experts all looked down upon, then printed in colors he could read the means to his villainy? Did he use a mirror like I did and get the same long scars down his wrists? Or did he have success?

God knows. Maybe he drank our milk, ate our beef. Maybe it's all over with him, now, or his family. The cows got revenge.

I don't know how anyone could hate a poor, suffering dupe like that. I can't even hate him over Golda, or Gert with her great, swollen belly, pregnant with cancer. Our youngest, Gert. Twelve when diagnosed. Ten when we saw the signs in our cows. she never knew love with a man; never knew whether she'd play the piano in concert or to please a suitor, or the children she will never have. I was too hard on her . . . just *because* I saw something there. With her music. Too hard on her, too easy on myself. First two years, she'd walk half a mile, each way, to the neighbors' piano; rain or snow; I was hard to persuade. After, with the expensive Baldwin in our den, I was hard to *dis*suade. "Practice! Did you practice? For how long? How much milk do you suppose it takes to pay for lessons, for the piano?" The look on her face I remember. Giving up her friends for the music for me was not enough. My falling asleep, inside from the Michigan wind,

while she'd proudly play some new Satie or maybe Handel's water music? Something new for me. "Sorry Dear . . . I'm sure it was fine, Dad was tired was all. I'll . . . why don't I hear it another time, okay?"

I read a *National Geographic* out in the lounge. You almost get the feeling all's right with the world to read such a handsome publication. It was an article on aquatic animals off our coastline, a team that studied them for years. From time to time, they'd have to capture one, say a California Seal. Implant one of those electronic beepers or a heart monitor, transponder . . . They had been using a new capture agent, a sedative drug. One of the dangers turned out to be its slow onset after darting the seal. the creeping onset gave some seals time to escape into the sea. Sedated, growing sleepier by the moment, they would "escape into the sea." Escape being a euphemism for drowning while asleep. But what a nice ring, no? "Escape into the sea."

Better weather, there.

My boy, Gerrit, Jr., could predict weather like a salt-dried old sea captain, certainly like a venerable farmer. He got a kick out of meteorologists and their stacks of sensitive instruments that made observation obsolete. "If they'd just look outside, or go there once in awhile," he'd lament, "where the weather is, sniff it, use their eyes, their memories. Clouds like those," he'd point at some forming masses, "wind like that from the east . . . only one thing: snow tomorrow. Blizzard." It would snow. He observed the elemental things . . . like a jeweler, a cabinet maker. Rudimentary. Deadly accurate. Such a talent. Planned many a day by his senses, every one a success.

Hope there's better weather where he is.

"You are helping me here, or you are part of the problem."

"Wheelchairs, yes," I tell him. "Wheelchairs I know. I am helping." I begin the tedious business on the upside, lowering the chair to Moishe. I think of Olga, my wife, in hers, a victim of peripheral neuropathy, albeit a stoical and cheerful one. I wheeled her about outside on the rough ground, but inside? She'd spin around our kitchen . . . cooking, setting the table . . . while she could, calling herself Meals on Wheels. Moishe is already in the pool to receive the chair I ease down to him, pushing against my lowering from below. The chair-jockey I've already gotten into trunks. Moishe will work his legs right in the chair; maybe he'll get the guy out, into the water, if he's up to it. I have to stay out. The chlorine. I can go get another one ready. Into trunks. Actually, the work helps the forgetting. A little. In a way, these guys are worse off than *any*body here. Moishe's strategy: Thinks I'll rejoice in the song and dance of contrast, that I'll want to wait around for a great world's better tomorrow.

Sign on the wall says: "Enter Pool Only Under Supervision." I'll try to remember.

I do get relief. I was a long time learning that. Angie would hate to hear it. My eldest, thank the . . . who? Spielberg's special effects man? . . . she is untouched. I keep thinking maybe she'll escape the whole debacle. Full of a bracing hatred for me. Made me sick at first, her hating my half-hearted farming, called it sham, my shirking under pretext of improving my mind. She blames me for the others. Amazing how that helps. I had a friend, years back, a guy always on edge about our joint projects. I used to say he worried for both of us. Angie's hatred is so comprehensive my self-hatred is puny by her standard. She keeps away, writes me letters, a long, serialized diatribe I absolutely

relish. Lively reading. I feint and counter, I circumvent, or I recognize when she's right on target. I almost cheer aloud. Oh, she's my daughter, all right.

Angie, the last of us, keeps up the legal affairs. Suits brought in the names of Olga, Gerrit Jr., Gold and Gert. I'm named, too. I'm a recoverable expense. The defendants are the chemical fire retardant manufacturer, the bag designers, the mill people (little guys paid by big guys), the owners and the owners of the owners, the state extension people, various government agencies that licensed the supplement or the PCB stuff, and so on. An endless litigious chain of culpability . . . or perpetrators of accident.

When is a misfortune an accident? Doesn't "accident" mean no one planned all this? Not done on purpose? I'm not defending. How could I? They took my family, my way of life, left me with internal hatreds and external ulcers. But were they Nazis conducting sadistic experiments? Would they incur bad press and endless expense to avert quotidian boredom? I wish all the attorneys could try running feed mills or dairy farms on some twenty grand a year job in ag extension, say, instead of scheming up ideas of judgment-for-profit. Redress? None in this world. What would I do with money? Don't even ask. A colossal insult, money for the dead, too late with too little, the dead I jeopardized by farming in the first place. Jeopardized? Did in!

Why am I here with the nutmeg? Wrong question. Why are not more of them here with us, those who want money for recompense of dead loves? Those who think we're primitive as starfish; our lost loved ones are broken off parts we'll grow back again once we get money.

When other sick farmers in the area came around to enlist us, saying, "Let's all band together; class action; punish perps for pay," etc., etc., I said to Olga . . . slumped in her chair with peripheral neuropathy, meaning not in the brain but the body's dead as if it were . . . I said, "Let's say no! Bet these expectant litigants haven't heard *that* one yet." She was incredulous: "We're gone under here with bills. Have you done daft?" I still had that to look forward to. I said, "Listen" . . . and here's where I made a grave mistake . . . "before this is over, the money will not matter one whit." Gerrit, Jr. was very ill and so was Golda, my water-sprite. Olga, desperately ill and aware her children were sliding downhill like Michigan winter sporters, gave up. Gert and I were showing signs. She said, "No, promise me! Sue for them. Not me. For Gerrit and Golda and for Gert and Angie . . . who'll be left with the bills." We did. But the spirit was already all gone out of her. I supplanted her spirit with truth, stupid truth! Died in less than two months . . . but with my promise we'd sue.

The lawyers were already retained by the time she passed. Detroit firm. Guys that could grind like augers, all cryptic language and business. "Mr. Van Veen, meet Mr. Paul Girder, of Steel, Cable and Girder. I want you to be assured this man will take the battle to them in your name, sir." Oh boy! I let him squish my boneless squid of a hand in his. "Mr. Van Veen," he said, "you've been dealt a cruel hand. I promise you we'll take them on with all we've got. Now, first, we must have an autopsy on Mrs. Van Veen. Sign here." Hell, had she been alive she'd have lain herself down and submitted if she'd have thought it would do a smidgin of good for her last daughter. It was me did not want her chopped into kibbles. Crazy. I knew she was not in that ravaged carcass. But part of me said: "What good is this anyway?" If there's a next life, a huge, dark, howling void like the Steppes or a white nothing akin to Antarctica, or static, will an autopsy prevent the

fire next time (forgive me, Baldwin)? Will it make little guys better readers? Convince them to read despite color coding courtesy of white-collar idiots? "Mr. Van Veen," said this wickedest troll Detroit provided, poised to pin back ears of the apathetic, "if we ever hope to relate peripheral neuropathy to the chemical . . . some of the others have it too . . . we need all the medical evidence we can get. Moreover, if we don't, won't they wonder why? Won't a jury be told to wonder what we are trying to hide of the lady's health prior to exposure?"

Wordsworth said: "We kill to dissect." What does a lawyer hold sacred? What if it were his family's dignity in death vs. his professional ambition to lock horns with a peer and win? I think they hoped the toll would go much higher, hence the case much easier. Perverse romanticists: the more death and dying, the more the perps must cough up. Where next, Sancho Panza? A lawyer could ride Rocinante backward.

Aghhh. This guy Al shat in his drawers. Here I've just got him changed into trunks . . . what a mess. "Gene, go get some paper, some rags, some new trunks for Al, there," and I wonder if he'll leave me and do it. He does. But Al's pouty. "It's all right, Al, no tears, huh? We all take a shit once in awhile. Even Gene." There. Little smile. Al's a humor man, despite all.

Later, in my room and the clouds driven off by a front and my day of Christian Nightingaling done with (think of the Jew and the Dutch agnostic), I sit with sunlight washing in, splashing golden pools over me and everything. Light I regard as a grace; always read novels with light in their titles: *Light in August, October Light, Children of Light,* the *Unbearable* Light-*ness of Being* (aha, got you there). I'm able to think again, to plan a peaceful end to this nonsense. I have had too much hand in too many passages booked from earth. I have remanded crazy Van Veen, ineligible for pardon, to death row.

It is Seconal I seek.

Barbiturates one never trusts by themselves. A load, a bottleful, and people have been known to awaken . . . brain-damaged, of course. But if sedated when one enters the pool? Water, a rite in itself, sacred waters; water fills empty spaces, rushes into vacuums that nature abhors. The world is born again within it. Without me, thank Spielberg, Indiana Jones, whoever's collecting.

Ah, what slips under my door? Long white envelope. I am too sleepy, sunning here, the ulcers unscreaming. How goes the trial? Who cares, this many years. No. It's the biweekly diatribe! Yes. It is in Angie's hand, my squinting eye reveals. I'm at peace. I will save it for a time of anguish; her hatred heals.

The suit dissolved the family. The Beaver Cleaver folks on-stage. But we were human . . . fools treating each other as fools, as if there's always time to rectify. Suddenly, some are dying. The dying are not made virtuous by their passage; suffering and death do not expunge the meanness. Our failings, though, are magnified in proportion to the window-dressing and flatter from the witness stand. We felt dirty in each other's presence. Angie clearly saw how little I knew of my family. Books had taken me to distant lands; work had taken me the rest of the time. I saw the fog burned away by the sun of insight, how deep her resentments toward my abdications, my weaknesses of the spirit.

Even though the sun soothes my weeping skin, I notice my gaze wandering over and falling upon Angie's envelope, emotionless as the gaze of a lizard. Angie who? Once, I would have snatched up the missive for her latest trenchance . . . the way you'd use cobra venom to repeatedly inoculate yourself against a fatal dose.

They hired spiritual cosmetologists for us. "Best dog and pony show win, Van Veen," and they'd call the jurors the "twelve cabbages." We were shown how not to look like dumb farmers, how not to look K-Mart, how not to look wealthy. The last was easy. We were shown how conservatism pulls on like a new skin, how respectability can be induced to come to the big lottery; to model our ethics; answer in language of principle; smile like honesty, smell like honor, sit with the composure of the just. Here were attorneys wanting me to stiffen up and embrace conservatism . . . whose surfaces deny human life is made up of fruit *and* pits . . . when what I envision when I see "conservative" is a ridiculously lavish hotel room with a phone in the bath by the stool where the conservative businessman can send out for a drug-ripped whore with kids to feed like he'd order a pizza, while he empties his principles into pipes leading to the river. Next, before cleaning himself, before she arrives, he'll call home, see about the wife and kiddies. I refused such upholstery. Angie said (how well I remember): "Dad, it's for someone else, not you. That's the reason you refuse and you know it."

Pinnipeds. That's what they're known as biologically, the California seals. I savored the word. I like new words. Helps me to see things from new angles. Escape into the sea. Tonight? Moishe's back. And I've a little stash of Seconal. Al was grateful. When I dressed him again in the locker room, away from Gene's gimlet eyes, I took what he'd saved from sleeping pills he hadn't needed and replaced the cotton in the toe of my oversized slippers with a nest of little colored eggs, cotton behind them. All I need is Moishe's key. I can "take the waters" as they say.

Tomorrow, though, time enough. I'll read the latest evil from Angie. The rare western Michigan sun is sweet, my ulcers in detente. The Great Flannel Sky-Weaver of Lake Michigan's western shore has taken a rare day off. I hear birds beyond our chicken-wired-glass windows.

After the inevitable paper cut I get from her letters . . . how she'd love to know . . . I'm stopped. What is this? Angie's borrowed stationery, her company's letterhead on the backside and upside down, brings new material: "Dad," she addresses me? Since when? Years ago? "We must make peace." What will that serve? "I don't know if I can ever forgive you. Maybe not. But we must agree on peace." There are inconsequential things, not a long letter, something cryptic. Why peace when tomorrow it comes . . . for me? Sorry, Angie. Peace comes too late for the dead. For lizards.

So Moishe is not around. All day. Where the hell now? I insult a nurse, unusual for me. Gene glares, as usual, but says nothing. Some ward who thinks he's Tex Beneke leads a visible-only-to-him orchestra, with a reedy front line, clarinets smothering saxes while he sings, in Beneke's nasal voice, "Oh, oh, oh, oh I got a ga-a-al-l-l in Kalamazoo . . ."

It clings. Angie lives there. I want to pull his union card.

Word comes. Al hails me. He is due back in the pool today. Moishe, unable to locate me, has gone ahead with another of his limp wards. I am to wheel Al there.

"A problem," I tell Al. "A key. Or can we knock?"

A knock can't be heard, he explains, sound caroming over water and noise of reverberating voices swallowing all. Key is in the door, so we must hurry. KEY IN THE DOOR, I handle with nonchalance for Gene's benefit. "Oh well, let's get to it before some nut gets in there by mistake."

Gene follows along.

Maybe they can't hear inside, but we hear them. Yelling, full bore. Gene turns the key and rips open the heavy metal door, plunges through. Such speed. I wheel Al to the door and, opening it, remove the key and pocket it swiftly, sail Al in.

Gene is in the pool, beside Moishe, helping hold up the head of a slicked-down weasel, drowned and dead. Voices and shadows and light spill and vibrate and ripple over the troubled waters. Sounds bounce off tiled walls and floor. Gene sweeps under the wretch with gargantuan arms, sweeps him up over the side and flips himself out like a seal onto a rock. He rolls the weasel face down, pumps, then rolls him back for mouth-to-mouth. The weasel coughs water back at him, continues to cough. Moishe looks pathetic with defeat. Gene shows no emotion but the weasel looks recoverable. Moishe waves his arms about: "Who would think he would panic? He is pulling me under. Meshuganah. I can't save him because I too am drowning, thanks to this Herschel, the fucking king of fears. Wonderful, Gene, you were wonderful. Sheesh, what would I have done?"

I am glad Herschel will live but I am ecstatic I have the key. If only Gene won't miss it.

Moishe continues to rave: "Like a Baptist he is with water, trying to wash all our sins away. What about *my* slant on this sin-shtick?" He jokes with euphoria, now. "Gene, you don't need words when you act so well. Eloquent. Magnificent, this man Gene."

Gene is a stone. Flattered, though, I can see. No thought of keys. If Moishe forgets.

"Hey," says Al. "I'm no Baptist. Why not take me in?"

Moishe looks all in, declines with a wave of the hand. Gene, wet to the neck, motions to me to get him ready.

I cannot but believe now in flattery as ambrosia; he is a temporary altruist. I am mad with possibility. I fly into getting Al out of pajamas and robe and into trunks. "Sleep better last night?" I tell Al yes, I can't thank him enough for his sharing squirrelled Seconals with me. Gene cannot hear this. He waits like a savior with knowledge of all our destinies encoded in his brain.

I almost laugh when I get Al peeled down to his skin. He has a near-erection. How can a paraplegic have what is neurologically impossible? I don't laugh. Moishe struggles with his.

"Al breaks all the rules," says Moishe, admiringly.

Al grins and says, almost whimpering, "What kind of God is there? A joker?" He is unhappy, even though grinning.

Something curls at Gene's lips. Can he be human?

I lose it, still fighting for composure. "I'm sorry Al, but I see it your way. A joker, yes. Has to be."

Al says: "One good leg and I can't even walk on *it.*"

That does it. We are all in convulsive throes of the male fraternity's worst joke on earth. Even Gene. Our quartet resounds over water like some weird and hopeless cry for help after a shipwreck. Mayday.

♢

A new day, new feeling. My ulcers are jellyfish stings. A thousand piranhas taste my flesh. I have this immune system leakage . . . like logic leaks mugged by emotion. Something is missing, as with AIDS. Looked at another way: one substance my system refuses to tolerate is the sludge of PCBs that remain residues inside. My liver keeps them around like souvenirs.

So I'm told. It never mattered less. Saturday, visitors, things relax. I'll be free to slip-slide away, yes indeedy. Poured my morning coffee in the drain. No stimulants. Seconal fills my slipper toe as I gather letters, yesterday's included and one slid under moments ago. Don't want them pinning this on Angie. Every shrink in Michigan would descend upon her like crows in a field of shattered grain. Social activism, that's Michigan. Come right through your keyhole: "Make her well . . . like *us.* Ha!" Psychodelic Michigan. Deli in the mall will serve you instant peace or cole slaw for two dollars. I'll scuttle Angie's letters in the trash barrel by the pool.

Early, and the halls abuzz with trundling chairs, fingers tapping on tables and walls, voices raised, all idle as hope. Visitors to shout at us crazies, like we're deaf or deep inside our cuticles, distant and withdrawn, and volume will raise us up. A shouting, staccato forest I'm slipping through: "Can I get you something . . ." I say, CAN I GET YOU SOMETHING, POP?" . . . yes, get him loose from this peanut brittle he got stuck in. I slide unnoticed, with my paper bundle, into the pool hallway. No pool until late afternoon, today, so I take care. My ulcers fire, anticipating the chlorined air. I use the key and . . . tick-a-lock. Inside, like when we were kids, eh? "Tick-a-lock, can't get me now."

Womb-sounds, here, or like inside the conch you hold to your ear. The same? It's a supercharged silence, pregnant with implication, like God *wants* to tell, but won't without court order. I wait for the whisper that will roll into deafening thunder. Even now, cynical as spit, I crazily expect to hear what reason tells me cannot exist, much less emote.

I pop four Seconals, wash them down with sea water. Myth. Ritual, I realize, for I will drink much more ere done. My ulcers bake in the chlorined air.

The letters. What harm though, if I open the last one? I slit today's open cut my finger, and skip over it until a paragraph leaps at my throat, clutching: "So this is why we must reconcile. I am pregnant, yes, and I want this baby to have a grandfather. I want us all connected. A chain, even a flimsy one, through the best and worst of time." The fragile continuum.

I stuff it and the rest deep in the barrel. I hurry to the deep end, peeling my robe, already woozy. I survey the wavering blues, the light rippling over the sea's lovely water, an impressionist painting. I climb down and hand over the depths with my arms outstretched behind me in the gutter. As I sleep deeper into sedation I will fall to the waiting arms of my mother, the sea. The perfect continuum. I will see the light I've read about, the beckoning, the mother . . . the mermaid, Golda?

Heavy with weariness . . . spinning awfully in the head . . . I use the last of my strength to pull myself to the ladder and I pull, I climb, and I slide out like a lizard onto a rock, awaiting the sun.

Robert Miltner

Orphanesque

My brother sleeps at the bus station again
while my little sister stays at The Shelter.
I can still hear my momma
crying herself to sleep
where the storm of my father's fists
can't rain on her anymore;
she sleeps, along with the other
battered women, hugging tight
the safety of yesterday's dreams.

Plenty of heat rises from this grate
to keep me warm. I've been in tighter spots
than this old cardboard box
where I'm wrapped up like used coffee grounds
in the comics, or the sports pages
which I can identify by the pictures.
It's loud enough here on the street
to wake me in the mornings before the garbage
trucks gather trash for the crusher;
it's not like those dead-quiet bum alleys
where you only oversleep once.

The Mission Lady told momma
one out of every five kids is poor,
but since I'm not in school anymore,
I've been running some envelopes for men
who pay me some money to eat with,
and I've been learning how to sell
crack and grass to the rich kids
over at the private school playground;
I might be only twelve years old,
but I'm going to be my own man soon,
soon enough to buy a home for all of us,
honest, momma.

Martha M. Vertreace

An Acceptable Sacrifice

> *If all goes according to plan, one day next month, a 100-foot steel-frame figure of a man, stuffed with 20,000 loaves of bread, will be towed into the North Sea and sunk.*—Chicago Tribune

At the Field Museum, a herring chokes
on its last catch, a little fish too large

to swallow. The stretched mouth traps the head;
ribs feather along both spines.

Double rows
of fins moor victor and meal in bottom ooze,

locked in limestone 52 million years ago
when southwest Wyoming's buttes spawn

palm fronds, lily pads, cattails, shrimp,
dragonflies, crayfish, stingrays—

Fossil Lake, near Green River.

Plate glass

frames red faces of schoolgirls clustered
like poinciana blooms near Sunset Pier

at the foot of Duvall Street, Key West,
hurricane season.

Open-air bars fill
as barrel-chested fear stares at stacked clouds

men name cumulonimbus.
Blue angelfish swim
circles in pools of moonlight.
My face rides

burnished mirrors of waves as if I drown,
dreaming of my grandmother standing

on the riverbank, the hem of her long skirt
caked with mud.

When Venus and Mars align,
she feeds the Ohio which threatens every year
after the thaw; drops the yoke
of her flowery apron over my head,

sashes my waist.
From her pocket, she spills

chunks of cornbread, dried maize kernels
which tickle my fingers

with next year's harvest.
"You're small," she

laughs, the apron falls like a drape of willows
off my shoulders, "but not small enough."

On the ground, broken bodies of auburn hens,
flight feathers plucked by her guiltless hands.

Jackie Sheeler

Inheritance

the child picks up a shell
grimed by the tar-tides
and turns it in his hands like an obscene thing.
now, the sun that split its beams
scattering light off the back of that
salt- and sea-bound creature which once
confronted currents from the curved
embrace of this layered shell,
brings the greased form into too sharp a relief
and the sea recoils, curls back
into itself like a lie. the moon is kinder,
blurring moss and boulder in a thin light, imposing
an onyx gleam on abalone long burdened by remains
ejected from our dream machines.
he lifts the shell and listens . . .
but the sea is too ashamed
to whisper its once-sweet secrets here: silence
and a whorl of black around his ear
are all the child carries home.

Charles Fishman

two poems

A Space Telescope

When did the sea rise here?

For the new century, we will write a poem
that remembers Earth Day 3, Earth Day 2, Earth Day
1 . . . how easily we count backward, dreaming
toward some original vastness of the soul,
something primordial and a little violent,
earlier than the Hubble telescope's disobedient lens
can grope. We go backward, flying past Whitman
and Thoreau, descending, or ascending—who can tell?
rapidly transiting the moon of the young planet.

Let the sun go, let starlight go. For the millennium,
we are sailing home, through sheer force of will, calm
now and endlessly distant from death. Yes, from this
elevated throne, we can permit ourselves to remember:
seas, forests, air green with new-moon grass: earth's
palpable and perishable body. *Ah, lords and ladies,*
take these hands. Let us orbit the heart's pure sadness.

A Goddess

A Flotilla of medical debris
continued its eastern migration
along Long Island's south shore . . .

Just back from her bath
in the sludge and muck
of the Atlantic, she bakes
the upper slopes of her breasts
in July sun. Suspended on her back
over the deaf sands of the Island,
she listens to the harsh mutter
of surf. In her gold-and-buff
bikini, she dreams a sea voyage—
she will drift beneath the moon.

Hers is the old journey,
the pure lift and clear soaring
between continents: here, the wind
turns its cold edge and light scatters
from the dark prism of evening . . .
This is the pledge and mystery
of water, and she sails now—
this goddess—on a safe and tranquil
ocean, not this slush of junk
and horror I pilot with my arms.

*

America, you were home country,
and I entered the hush and thunder
of your tides, tugged by my deep love
of beauty and taken by your power.
But now I begin to dream again: solo
migration toward some dim, untrackable
star, or a deeper shift in the wave-
length of the spirit. I give myself
to you—to you, my country—but with fear
and pain, with untold anger and sorrow.

Stuart Friebert

Dolly Varden

Around these parts they will run ten, twenty pounds.
We know where they hide out, how to hook them, net
them, clean them, eat them up with a quick prayer

but no one know how Dickens got into the act. Sure,
those red dots sprinkled along its side add up to quite
a costume, but we can't figure out why you'd want to

ignore *bull trout, red spotted trout, Oregon char,* or
especially *malma,* which smacks of fjords where it might
have strayed from, before you or I were born. One of those

academic fisherman types contends it reflects the male's
penchant for possessing them, mourning them, the ladies
who wouldn't go with him to do his life some good. He

waves a helpless hand. It's no use talking, pal, you can
never get her back, by hook or by crook. Suggest you turn
to another creature, reel in that thin green thread of line,

smooth & musical, through water, air, all pain, no memory.

E. G. Burrows

two poems

Dust

There is some dust my own,
a barrenness across which the winds sweeps
at dry times of the year,
kicking up yellow soil from the riverbed,
anything easily torn loose
like the stars by their shallow roots.

"Plains" they are called,
a flat land where particles are born
to blow into black sheets
hung out to hide Oklahoma,
where emptiness vegetates
and waits its next move.

Nothing plain about it:
a face apparently without beauty
yet indecipherable,
hiding within its plain features
infinities of grass, of sage,
the dancing grouse of prairies,

a dust my own
into which I settled or gathered in
to still the natural longing
for a sea, an ocean shore, a wet wind.
I need the stability of sand, of deserts,
of horned larks and mice leaping

through acres of dense moonlight,
over the heads of gorged snakes and lizards,
owls at their entrances
and a house stripped of its paint
by storms and hailstones. Here's
where I happened, first felt the air sting.

Allow it to vanish, plant it,
plough it up, pave or build over,
and you have lost me,
you have swept me up with the yellow dust,
bridged the arroyos

only one of us knows and cherishes.

A wooden steeple is not enough
nor the stone spire that replaced it,
it's not enough a hundred stores
shine through the night with red neon
or the airfield beacon turns
and swivels over the filled holes of owls.

Derricks bob here and there,
nodding birds dipping for oil,
but it's not enough. Where
is the curtain of dust at midday,
the howl and trample of wind,
the grit of my teeth?

I have come to the edge of the sea
as if it were better than nothing,
not a birthplace
but a moment of cleansing, a chance
to blend with emptiness again,
to come to terms with the rattle
of loose boards over my head.

Bog Life, Lake and Outlet

A log lies in the water.
It is held up by dragonflies
and the claws of a green heron.
A beer can bumps the log,
rising and falling as if
the pond had exhaled
and a wave was set into motion
at the back of my mind
just beyond the boardwalk,
the roots of bald cypress
and the thick arteries of fig.

I wonder what country I am in
and whether I heard correctly
the pulsation of crocodiles
with small pecking birds
riding their backs like commuters.
The Cretaceous is under my skin,
and age of ooze and marsh blood,
this wrist waterlogged, a heaviness
not even the heart can lift.

How can the limpkin walk so well
over the lilypads
that rock like skateboards?
The eyes of the log are closed.
If it weren't for herons
who seem to be brooding on fate,
hunched helpless, staring
with only a few
of the old flashes of rancor,

if it weren't for the dragonflies
pretending to flutter,
irresolute, their lives too short
to permit decisions
or more than tremors of self-pity,
the log would sink
and the unobserved mind with it,
the sense of a shore and my foot
planted firmly on it.

Lawrence Millman

Woman on the Ice

Ilulisat, Greenland: 1912

At Arnatsiq's death feast her sons called back her life for her. Remember when you were shared by four husbands, Old One? Four husbands who happened to be brothers . . .

Aja, the old woman said. How I remember. They were big men, those brothers. Big in every respect. Fine hunters, too.

Remember the time you fed us reindeer shit?

Yes, of course. It was a very hard winter, with little food. I gathered the reindeer shit and cooked it in some seal grease. It wasn't bad at all.

Right, said one of the sons. It wasn't bad. It was truly awful. Even today I gag whenever I look at a reindeer.

Ungrateful cur, laughed Arnatsiq. I should have thrown you in the snow with all the others.

Just how many babies did you throw in the snow, mother?

The old woman counted on her gnarled fingers. Seven baby girls and two baby boys I threw in the snow. Two others, twins, I strangled.

White People would call you a murderer, the son said.

If they call me that, they know nothing of starvation.

Added the *angakok:* White People only know how to be too many. And one day they will suffer for being too many . . .

A while later the old woman was led from the feasting house to the cliffs. The sun was bright, snow and ice glistened like gemstones. It was a beautiful day to die.

Push! she told her eldest son.

Eldest son pushed his dear mother off the cliff and down she tumbled, onto an ice mountain far below. Every bone in her ancient body broke. Her stomach and bladder broke. Her nose vanished from her face.

But she did not die.

And it was such a good push, too, she lamented.

The ice held old Arnatsiq all through the night. The next night also. It held her like a husband would hold her. And just as if it were a husband, she stung it with her tongue. Where's your penis, good-for-nothing? You seem not to possess one. No asshole, either. Which means your soul has no home, no home at all. Perhaps that's why you refuse to give me my death.

The ice did not seem to hear her. It floated out the fjord, into the open sea. It floated away from the tall mountain where Erdlaversissoq welcomes guests to the Other World. It floated farther and farther from the old woman's death.

They were heading southwards, toward the country of White People.

One night her father and mother visited her. We're waiting for you, daughter, they said. Why will you not come?

Because this stupid ice won't let me, she told them.

Well, the drum cannot be beaten for you much longer, they said. The skin will break and you know what that means.

Yes, I know. Eternal cold.

Another night the Northern Lights Children danced with their afterbirths across the sky, singing, Join us! Join us!

I wish I could, Arnatsiq told them, but I seem unable to die.

And t hen she saw a dark shape moving near to her. It was the size of an ice mountain, but it wasn't an ice mountain. At least it wasn't an ice mountain like the one on which she lay. Maybe it was a *tupilaq*, all bone and gaping jaws, that would torment her even more.

Then she saw "Titanic" written on it in big white letters. A White Person's word. So this thing belonged to White People. Perhaps the word meant: We are too many. She did not know. Did not care. She just wanted her death.

All at once there came a great jolt. Old Arnatsiq's ice flung her into the arms of the sea. She sank down, down, and never breathed air again.

At last I am content, she said to herself.

Paul Grant

The Father's Life, The Mother's Death

In the father's life, the son found blood
the central issue: carrier of sugar
into the brain, evidence of the killing
that paid his way—pool in the woods
behind the slaughterhouse and stain on the hunter's
vest when he came home—

and no place ever really home.
The father had a wanderer's blood
but had settled down in the half-ass way a hunter
makes a camp to come back to—for sugar
in his coffee, to wash the woods
off himself, to stop the killing

for a little while before more killing
needed to be done. The father's home
was always out in those woods,
something that stayed in his blood
as it did in his son's, both of them sugar
lovers, both of them hunters.

In the mother's death, the son—hunter,
now, only of secrets—saw a mirror of all the killing
when she related dreams of murder, sugar—
coated with the fictions she'd filled their home
with: novels in which all the blood
shed was human, for reasons hidden in a wood

behind the manor. These proper mysteries she would
translate into her nursing home: a hunter
for the mob, out for an orderly's blood
and wiping up all evidence of the killing
behind him, seen only by her. The nursing home
might as well have been made of spun sugar,

for all she knew. But the son had drained the sugar
from his fathered blood, had walked in the woods
unarmed, and now loved what he'd forgiven. He was at home
with her dreams, though, and played the Hero-Hunter—
reassuring her there in her bed—until the last killing
worked its way through her blood

to the end of her. Home for the hunters
was wherever sugar was melting in the woods,
killing itself without spilling a drop of blood.

Velada
(Night Vigil)

That night, a west wind blew the last two day's snow
out of the locusts in our back yard and sent
it flying through the porch's searchlight
horizontally, a second-hand blizzard.

We had friends over for dinner: an artist's stew
(since we were all artists) and rice and chocolate,
but no alcohol. We were all safely out
of danger now and intended to stay that way.

Then we watched a movie about a wondrous meal
served centuries ago to righteous people
who assumed they were closer to God than was the cook
whose artistry nonetheless brought them closer,

so that though they never admitted being wrong,
they afterwards found themselves in unaccustomed joy.
We laughed and cried as it ended, telling us:
An artists is never poor, since we all hoped it was true.

Then I remembered the story being told
had been written by a woman who starved herself
to death on a diet of all white foods:
oysters, grapes, champagne. I didn't tell the others.

My best friend had devised a computer sound
he called *metawind,* and he played us a tape
as the night got old and the women went to sleep.
We smoked cigarettes and watched them sleep,

stringing words on the smoke and draping the strings
over each other's shoulders like gifts, occasionally
taking them back and polishing the words
or replacing them with better ones,

still watching the women sleep. Eventually,
they woke and caught us watching them, and we all
had to pretend it was only amusing. The wind was down,
so they dug their car out and said goodnight.

We went to bed, but the dog and I came back
downstairs around three and made a fire.
The metawind was back up. In the yard,
spirits were dancing the world back into being.

Notes on Contributors

Gilbert Allen (Greenville, SC) has taught at Furman University since 1977. His two collections of verse are *In Everything* (Lotus, 1982) and *Second Chances* (Orchises, 1991). Recent poems have appeared in *The Lullwater Review, The Other Side,* and *The Southern Review.*

Sheri Foley Allen (Lake Ridge, VA) has a B.S. in English Education and, though currently unemployed, has taught high school and adult education English and creative writing classes.

Hope Athearn (Greenbrae, CA) describes herself as "an idolatrous San Franciscan, and usually a poet." Her work has appeared in a variety of places, including *Ploughshares* and *Blue Unicorn*. "GeeGee's Room" is her first published short story.

Len Blanchard (Siesta Key, FL) earned his Ph.D. from Emory University and is now employed as manager of Fun Rentals of Siesta Key. His poems have appeared in a number of journals, such as *The Greensboro review, Outerbridge,* and *Habersham Review.* His poem "A Teleology of Pain" won first place in Snake Nation Press' 1992 spring contest.

E. G. Burrows (Edmonds, WA) is a widely published poet whose most recent work has appeared in *Slant, Zone 3, Ascent, Cream City Review, Fine Madness,* and others.

Michael Scott Cain (Catonsville, MD) teaches English at Catonsville Community College. Recent work has appeared in *Crystal* and *Dirty Linen* and his latest book, a study of adult learning (Meta-Learning), will be issued by Gulf Publishing Company.

Marcia Cohee (Laguna Beach, CA) has published two books of poetry: *Sexual Terrain* (1986) and *Laguna Canyon Was Once a River* (1991).

Elizabeth R. Curry (Slippery Rock, PA) has published poetry for the last five years in *The Colorado North Review, Centennial Review, Oxford Magazine,* and *Taproot,* among others. She is chief advisor to *Ginger Hill* and is professor of creative writing, Shakespeare, and women's studies at Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania.

Charles Fishman (Wantagh, NY) is Distinguished Service Professor of English and Humanities at SUNY Farmingdale, where he has directed the Visiting Writers Program since 1979. His most recent books include *Catlives,* a translation of Sarah Kirsch's *Katzenleben* and *Blood to Remember: American Poets on the Holocaust,* both released in 1991 by Texas Tech University Press. His sequence of poems, *As the Sun Goes Down in Fire,* won the 1992 Anabiosis Press chapbook competition.

Walt Franklin (Rexville, NY) edits Great Elm Press, works for his natural environment and teaches school part-time. His latest book is *Uplands Haunted by the Sea.*

Stuart Friebert (Oberlin, OH) directs the writing program at Oberlin and co-edits Oberlin College Press and *Field*. He has recently published two books, one of poetry *(The Darmstadt Orchids)* and another of translations *(What'll We Do with this Life: Selected Poems by Karl Krolow).*

Paul Grant (Iowa City, IA), a native of Louisiana, recently traded Washington, DC for Iowa City. His poems have appeared in *Sewanee Review, The Georgia Review, Poetry Northwest,* and many other magazines.

Donna Henderson (Monmouth, OR) is a writer and psychotherapist living in the hills of rural western Oregon. Her poems have most recently appeared in *Writers' Forum, Cutbank, A Room of One's Own,* and *Immediate as Air* (a 1990 anthology of work by Squaw Valley Community of Poets members).

Michael Hettich (N. Miami Beach, FL) was born in Brooklyn, NY and grew up in the NYC area. He has lived in Vermont, Colorado, northern Florida, and Miami, where he teaches at Miami Dade Community College and coordinates "Write in Our Midst," a yearly series of poetry and fiction readings. He has published two full-length books of poetry: *Lathe* and *A Small Post.* "Common Birds" is from a new collection, *The Night Blooming.*

Donn Irving (Merriam, KS) is a practicing veterinarian and has conducted pharamceutical research for others; he's now into forensic investigations of adverse incidents involving pharmaceuticals, vaccines, and chemicals. His experience has "colored" his fiction which has appeared in many journals, including *Chariton Review, Farmer's Market, Cream City Review,* and *Negative Capability.*

Sharon Kourous (Toledo, OH) has work in *The Formalist, The Lyric, Poem, Roanoke Review, Tucumcari,* and *Piedmont Literary Review*. She teaches English in a suburban high school just south of Toledo and started submitting her poems to journals about three years ago.

Ellen LaConte (Boardman, OH), author of the forthcoming novel, *The Other Woman: An Ecological Romance,* writes on environmental, spiritual, organic gardening and futures themes. She is working on a second novel and collecting contemporary short fiction, nonfiction, and poetry for an anthology on living consciously in place. She gardens in Maine during the summer, harvests firewood in Ohio in the winter, and rakes leaves for compost in both places.

Jean LeBlanc (Fitchburg, MA) has a undergraduate degree in biology and will soon have a Master's from the Middlebury College Bread Loaf School of English. After taking a course in nature writing, she discovered that she could combine her love for natural history with her love for literature. To pay her rent and support a book habit, she works in a law office in her hometown (Fitchburg).

Kathleen Lignell (Bucksport, ME) teaches literature and creative writing at the University of Maine in Orono and has published two collections of poetry: *Red Horses* (1991) and *The Calamity Jane Poems* (1981). Individual poems have appeared in many publications, such as *Antioch Review, New York Quarterly, Kansas Quarterly,* and *North American Review.* She has received several grants and awards.

Annette Lynch (South Pasadena, CA) is a long-time teacher at Mt. San Antonio College and editor of its literary magazine. Her poems appear in her chapbook, *Ways Around the Heart*, and in literary journals, such as *Christian Science Monitor, Maryland Poetry Review, Poem, Poet Lore,* and *Wisconsin Review,* among others.

Susan Medenica (Presque Isle, WI) is a former concert pianist and chamber musician. At present she is a dressage rider and trainer and a regular contributor to *Dressage and CT,* an international sport horse magazine. She recently received prizes in *The New Press Literary Quarterly* poetry competition and the *Paper Salad Poetry Journal* contest. *Poet* magazine has nominated her for *The Pushcart Prize,* 1993.

Lawrence Millman (Cambridge, MA) has published a number of books, including *Our Like Will Not Be There Again, Hero Jesse, A Kayak Full of Ghosts, The Wrong Handed Man, Smell of Earth and Clay, Last Places,* and *Wolverine Creates the World.* "Woman on the Ice" is from an in-progress collection called *St. Kilda Amen.*

Robert Miltner (North Canton, OH) is a program coordinator and English instructor at Kent State University—Stark campus. His poetry and fiction have appeared in, among others, *The New York Quarterly, Birmingham Poetry Review, The Wastelands Review, Bluff City,* and *The Rockford Review.*

Chuck Moore (Athens, GA) is a photographer who remembers REM when they were children and, quite frankly, would rather be sailing.

S. Ramnath (El Paso, TX) works as an elementary school teacher and has a degree in Physics from the University of Calcutta and in English Literature from SUNY-Albany. His poetry, fiction, and essays have appeared in *The Review of Contemporary Fiction, Arkansas Quarterly, The Christian Science Monitor,* and many others. He has two collections of poetry: *Rings in a Tree Trunk* (Writers Workshop, Calcutta, 1975) and *In the Belly of the Flower* (Buzzard's Roost Press, 1991).

Gianna Russo (Tampa, FL) has poems published or forthcoming in *Heaven Bone, Poet Lore, Calyx, South Florida Poetry Review, New Collage, Palmetto Review, Organica,* and others. She was a winner in the 1990 Hillsborough County Arts Council Statewide Poetry Competition. She has designed and conducts fiction and poetry workshops for the Tampa Museum of Art. She teaches creative writing at the University of South Florida and is a managing editor for the *Tampa Bay Review.*

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Pat Smith (Statham, GA) is a freelance still photographer and video cameraman working nationwide.

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Ann Struthers (Cedar Rapids, IA) was born and grew up on a northwest Iowa farm. She has a Ph.D. from the University of Iowa and is currently Visiting Associate Professor at Coe College where she is also Writer in Residence. Her latest volume of poetry is *Stoneboat* (Pterodactyl Press). Another collection, *The Alcott Family Arrives,* is forthcoming. Individuals poems and short stories have appeared widely in journals such as *The Hudson Review, Poetry,* and *The American Scholar.*

Rick Vanderpool (Athens, GA) is an artist/photographer and a University of Georgia journalism graduate. He and his wife Judy have an art studio, The Ware Street Design Group, where they create original work for sale and exhibition internationally.

Martha M. Vertreace (Chicago, IL) is poet-in-residence and associate professor of English at Kennedy-King College. Her poems, stories, and essays appear frequently in literary magazines and have earned her three Illinois Arts Council Literary Awards. Her first full-length poetry collection is *Under a Cat's-Eye Moon*

(Clockwatch Review Press). Two children's books are forthcoming from Albert Whitman Publishers.

Gale Warner (1960-1991) was an environmental journalist and educator, and an instigator of innovative citizen exchanges with the former Soviet Union. She was the author of *Citizen Diplomats: Pathfinders in Soviet-American Relations* (1987) and *Invisible Threads: Independent Soviets Working for Global Awareness and Social Transformation* (1991). Her poetry won an Academy of American Poets prize and is forthcoming in a number of periodicals, including *Agni* and *West Branch.*

Rex West (Tallahassee, FL) received his Master's from Oregon State University and is currently working on a Ph.D. at Florida State University where he also teaches writing. His poetry has appeared in *The Cincinnati Poets' Collective*, *Lost Creek Letters*, *Soundings*, *Lake Effect*, and *Fireweed.* An essay is forthcoming in *Stet.*

Mary Winters (New York City) published law-related materials until 1991. Since then, her poems have appeared in many journals, including *Descant*, *Northeast Journal*, and *Poetry Motel.* She works as an attorney in a civil legal aid office.