Gaia

A JOURNAL OF LITERARY & ENVIRONMENTAL ARTS

Number 4, June 1994
First electronic edition September 1996

Published by

Whistle Press, INC.

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

Contents

Note: This document does not yet contain the original artwork and photography appearing in the printed version. We are planning to add that to the copy in the near future. This document does contain all the original literature.

Whistle Press, Inc.

Acknowledgments

Original printed version design and computer illustrations by William Reeves, with front cover photo by Chuck Moore.

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Maia

two poems

*Stars on the Water**

**an ancient star-group in Egyptian lore*

As below, so above The Milkyway
has many names Polynesians say
long blue cloud-eating shark
The Ottawa say silty water
stirred up by a turtle swimming
along the bottom of the sky

Starlight swarms on the sea's back, it dies
if you trap it on a map Even islands once
were free, drifting like infant galaxies
in their bright nightgowns or barnacles
before the chosen bedrock is found,
the foot sealed down for good

As above, so below The sea knows
nothing permanent Waves rock back
from the shore, crossing and cancelling
Runes on the water drawn by a find mind
inventing vocabularies of stress and resistance
Chaotic attractors Cardinal and imaginary numbers
Hydrometry Astronomy Stars on the water
Hammermarks across space, our fate
rippling toward us
We are like those fish without a tribe
Lonely Wandering dots and spirals, dashing comets
Our story is written on the bottom of the sea
and in the nightsky We cannot remember
who we are or where we came from
Therefore we are possessed by the spirit
of possession, of weeping and wailing
and of cruelty The woman, Andromeda,
chained to a rock Orion, his glittering
sword called Slayer

Below, the peaceable urchins
rise and set Consider the sea lily
arrayed in glory, consider the dolphin
neither toiling nor spinning

If you want to find true north, lie back
on the belly of the ocean, gaze up
like the otter with his small salty book,
clamshell ephemeris telling
how we drift like sandgrains
in the wake of the turtle, how the cosmos churns
and wheels like the shark
with its great blue fin

Talking in our Sleep

for Will Inman

The cello is murmuring again,
rubbing against me all night
Riddles and warnings, a brilliant
swift zigzag far down the dark

Voice of the earth that is tortured
Voice of the earth eternally caressing
Black nerveroot deep in the leafmold,
crooning spirituals, blues
for liberty and justice

The cello in the tree
where Joan first kneeled,
putting her ear to the wood,
crow and blackbird, the band
of hungry angels gathered
She was a woman who listened
Cast the ashes of this body, she said,
around the roots of my beloved tree
The tree where my voices rose,
a sweet mist in my ears,
a humming of bees, a ringing of ice
The whole of creation converses through me—
even through you, my tormentors, she said

The cello is crying again
I am ravished by the moan
of her strings, whale-song of dry land,
swan-song of desert and forest
I hear the bagpipe, the goddess
in the stone, I hear the oatgrass

breaking the back of the drought
I remember the wild turkey
and the salmon in the pool,
the mad sea groaning
for its lost limbs

We are on our hands and knees again,
an infant, a toad, a salamander
A spider dragging its severed leg
back to the starry loom
Our palms are bruised, can you
feel how much bone there is
in the human body, how it presses
into the watery flesh, bloody saltsea
swirling its bulbs and fans?
There is no rest, no matter
how you sit or stand, the nerves rage
contorted, constricted, passing
through notches and fissures of bone,
back to the eye of heaven

Listen, we must listen
to the voice in the wood
*we must join our nerves in a circle,**
make blood from the sun
like the blessed thistle,
the Balm of Saint Joan
The animals will lose their fear of us,
we will lie down with the wolf
and the scorpion The dead will rumble
and rise to the surface
The asphalt will eat itself
and be covered with flowers
The hole in the sky will heal

*Paula Gunn Allen, *Grandmothers of the Light*

They say once wounded, always
weakness likes secretly
along the faultline Nothing
mends absolutely Nevertheless
the earth is addressing you
Listen, every night when you lie down—
lie down on your bed of oblivion, lie down
on your bed of love—listen . . .
the cello, the voicebox, earth
talking in our sleep

Mordecai Marcus

Edward Hopper's "Excursion into Philosophy"

He sits at the bed's edge.
Behind him
the woman is turned away,
her buttocks, thighs, and legs
quietly withdrawn.

He looks only down,
not at the lines and forms
that make the walls and floor a world.

Her red hair is spread against the pillow.
One foot curls above a calf.

Untouched, his book lies open.
He does not look at the floor's
rectangle of light.
Shoulders and arms
merely connect
to the laxity of hands.

His shirt is open.
His trousers neat.
His hair unruffled.
His shoes tight laced.

On the wall another rectangle
is bred from the windowed sky
where trees are showing.

The woman's body
is a contracted blaze
or impenetrable ice.

He waits for something else.
Some opening
not flesh or sky.

Lee Messineo

History of Land Travel

"The distance between our cities," my dissertation proposal starts out, "is a direct consequence of the changing technologies of land travel."

I'm in the note-gathering stage. I hope to do a refractory study on distance and intimacy, the American experience of the automobile—for my doctorate.

This, the 1974/75 school year at Saint Louis University, the Social History Department, the year of the energy crises, long lines at the pumps. Iacocco is President of Ford Motors and Nixon of the country. Honda is known chiefly for its motor bikes and "Made in Japan" for bargain basement chintz, the kind you find in the Woolworth's Five & Dime.

I'm seated across from Dr. Bennington, sunlight spilling across his large mahogany desk from the ceiling-high window, his dark plush office in DeBerg Hall.

He reads: "'To discover how inexorably the automobile is woven into the fabric of contemporary life, it only needs to be noted, were we to weigh the merits of this technology before the fact, holding in mind the 50,000 deaths, the 190,000 maimings a year, the pooling of toxic clouds. . . .'"

"Of course, Mr. Bertolli, it all depends on your point of view," he says fixing his eyes on me, the same cool pewter color as the new Audi 5000 he rides in to work each day from his ranchero home in Florissant, in air-conditioned, sound-proofed comfort, surrounded by quadraphonic sound.

Cory and I are robbed again, our apartment on Pine Street—our stereo, her camera, my flute. We live three blocks from St. Louis U., a white Catholic island in the middle of the slums.

"They want in , they get in," the officer says, not at all impressed with the double-bolt locks I've put on the doors, the 18-gauge wire fencing around the windows.

Cory is crying. "If we had a car," she says, "we could live in Florissant where it is safe."

Days after the robbery, doubts, uncertainties surround our relationship and I'm not so sure Cory won't go back to California, to Derek Wander her former lover, to her friends on Venice Beach.

How Cory's changed from the time we met a few years back. I was finishing my Masters; Cory had just left the convent: the soulful talks, the

long walks in Forest Park, the sweet summer days of hand-holding, trading kisses still sticky with ice-cream.

Then Cory went off to California, fell for a musician, Derek Wander, lead singer of Frau Amoeba, thrumming, acid rock.

Just back this past summer, her relationship with Derek on the skids, she'd called me. She's looking for an apartment. Coincidentally, I'm looking for an apartment. We decide to get one together. Two bedrooms.

We never use the second room.

"Hey you guys," I ask my kids, "who stole my girlfriend's camera? My flute?"

I'm a teacher at Providence School in the heart of St. Louis' Pruit Igo, a fallen-down hovel that could well be Golan Heights after the Six-Day War. A program run by the Christian Brothers on an LEAA-funded grant, we pretend to rehabilitate felons, minors assigned to us by the city courts.

I point out to my principal how cities are built with the automobile in mind, how unnecessary the detention house across the street, the inner-belt itself a lock-up, stockade fence and concertina wire, patrolled by that first armored division, the American car.

When Derek Wander's album *The Properties of Jane* was at the top of the Billboard charts, Cory tells me, Frau Amoeba used to drive around in one of those stretch-limos: sound-proofed, bullet-proofed, dark-tinted windows, the sumo wrestler chauffeur, tetanus boosters in the glove compartment against trophy-hunting adolescents, their Woolworth's red flesh-rending talons honed razor sharp.

On a trip to California a few years back, I had met Derek. Cory and he were living together at the time on Venice Beach. He was doing demo tapes with Frau Amoeba at some third-rate recording studio on Ventura Boulevard, I think. Late at night—he'd already used up his fifteen minutes of fame.

He confessed to me in the sound booth, thick with marijuana smoke, in his boastful gravel voice, his spatulated fingers gripping at Cory's shoulder like a sponsor, that it took him about 300 tabs of acid to straighten Cory out, so screwed up was she by the convent.

I told him I liked Cory better when she was screwed up.

"How do you mean 'distance and intimacy'?" Cory asks.

"The automobile is both an extension and an amputation of the legs, a prosthetic limb by which we extend ourselves into physical space—while feeling it less."

We are at Izzy's, a dimly lit little coffee shop under the Broadview Hotel where we sometimes stop for coffee and Danish on our short walk to work, Cory to the university public affairs office, me to Providence School.

"Nicanor Parra, the anti-poet, has a line. 'The automobile is a wheelchair.' You experience more walking cross town, than driving to L.A."

"You can also get raped," Cory says.

A very canny photographer (Cory did the photo-cover for Wander's *Properties of Jane*), I suggest to Cory we do a photo-essay on *Alleys of America.* Main Street USA belongs to the automobile, a soft-focus facade just made for cruising speed. But alleys, with their broken-windowed garages, paint peeled off, unmorticed brick, the abandoned washing machines, rusted-out cars sitting up on blocks, whiskey bottles buried in the thistle, the human detritus . . .

Before her camera was stolen, we were biking the alleys of St. Louis, Cory in her cut-offs, her Hasselblad over her shoulder, her gadget vest bulging with lenses; me, my Campagnola cap, beak up, the sepia-tinted aviator glasses, the black tee shirt. "Cars Kill, Not People," it says.

In my class at Providence School, I promise my kids, convicted of everything from auto theft to murder-one, "Get your lesson down pat; we'll take the van out to Florissant this afternoon and pillage and rape."

I read the article from the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* while Cory mashes pinto beans in the skillet, her famous Tex-Mex Tacos. "'Increasingly, the evidence suggests that learning problems and asocial behavior in the inner city are caused by air pollution, the high concentration of lead in the air . . .'"

"The automobile!" I say gleefully.

"Why can't you be happy?" she says, impatient with me.

I'll tell you why I can't be happy.

Because at Providence, where I am the only white teacher, and for reasons mysterious to me, I talk this starchy English. At Saint Louis U., to the chagrin of my professors, I talk jive.

Because, sometimes, in the middle of the throes of passion, you call me "Derek."

Because I keep getting these calls from my father early in the morning—the reduced long-distance rates—asking me when I'm going to settle down and get a job.

Because I cannot shake this unassailable feeling that at twenty-nine, I'm an utter failure. . . .

Of course, I don't actually *tell* Cory these things. I think them while I'm soaking in the tub. And then for the rest of the evening I sulk.

"The internal combustion engine—the automobile, the bus—creates the very distance it promises to overcome."

Forced bussing, I explain to Cory, does not remedy segregation at all. It erodes communal ties, pride of neighborhood, tears at the fabric of familial bonds. "The internal combustion engine—the automobile, the bus—creates the very distance it promises to overcome."

My father works for Delco Corporation, a subsidiary of GM, a highly respected, class "A" tool-and-die man in their machine shop. Though he's saved Delco hundreds of thousands of dollars with his innovative designs, the credit goes all to his bosses and the profits to the company store; how he resents now having had to quit school to support his immigrant family.

When my parents argued, often, he'd go out to the garage. By week's end he'd emerge with another one of his dream machines, something he'd built from the ground up from the old clunkers that littered our backyard.

"The future belongs to the automobile," he used to say. "Become an engineer."

Cory tells her sister on the phone I have a fixation on cars. No. It is more than a fixation. It's like "sibling rivalry."

Denuda, our History of Technology specialist, boasts his father was also a class A tool-and-die man.

Denuda, a large man with a pockmarked face twisted in a perpetual sneer, with badminton racquet-sized hands, lug nuts for joints, is almost immoderately brilliant; that is, when he's not slavering over Dr. Sonia Tidegate who he strangely, quixotically, fell in love with recently at the Popular Culture Conference at Bowling Green.

We are at Friday's, the '60s memorabilia-filled watering hole adjoining St. Louis U. We are seated at the bar, having a beer in the late afternoon.

"I wanted to become a tool-and-die man myself," Denuda explains. "'Get your head out of the clouds,' my father said. 'Maybe if you're lucky, you can become a doctor, or a judge.'"

I tell our department chairman that I had hoped that Dr. Denuda would head my dissertation committee.

"I see rich possibilities here," Bennington says. "Inferences, theories, great leaps. Something using C. G. Jung. Mythic symbology, archetypal patterns. . . . Try Sonia Tidegate. Denuda's too nuts and bolts."

"What do you know, Bertolli?" Denuda asks the day after my meeting with Bennington when we bump into each other on our way to class.

"Practically nothing," I say.

"That's the spirit," he says.

When I tell him Sonia Tidegate is to be my dissertation advisor, he tells me he wants reports, "the more salacious the better."

I've taken several courses from Dr. Sonia Tidegate, our Intellectual History specialist. A Rhodes Scholar, youngest Ph.D. at Stanford ever, Sonia Tidegate has a Victorian dourness about her, a quiet brilliance, a daunting reserve; except when she's drunk and is given, I understand, to caviling endlessly about the liability of being a henna-haired bitch with big honkers and a high IQ.

Pipe-smoking Earl Paulus Brady, my office mate and a former member of Army Intelligence ("I was an oxymoron stationed in Turkey," is the way he puts it), calls Denuda and Tidegate, "The Prurient One, and the Prude."

When Sonia Tidegate's office door is open, when she has office hours, she's not there. When she doesn't, the office door is close. You can almost hear the scratching sound, the quill pens she favors, the file drawer (where she keeps her bottle) opening and closing.

We communicate through interoffice mail, my notes produced on onion paper, our office's old Underwood; hers on dark avocado stationery, sepia-tinted ink.

I propose. . . . She objects. . . . I feint towards. . . . She cautions. . . . I wonder if it's advisable. . . . She rather leans more in the direction of. . . .

The deadline for approval of my dissertation topic comes and goes.

Somewhere, it is decided I will do my dissertation on the exponential growth of feminism with affluence and the increasing preponderance of the second car. "Let's get together and talk method," Tidegate's sepia-inked avocado stationery reads.

"What do you know, Bertolli?" Denuda says.

"Feminism is on the rise," I say.

"Long as we keep it chained to the stove," he says.

Since Sonia Tidegate has become my dissertation advisor, I see Denuda practically every day; if not in the halls, he comes to our office looking for me. Earl Paulus Brady points out to me that Denuda hits his head on the transom on his way out, that he's six inches taller for just hearing Sonia's name.

Denuda and I are over at Friday's having a brew.

Denuda reads her stationery. He smells it. “This is wonderful,” he says.

“The topic. Read the topic!”

“When she mentions the ‘method,’ Bertolli, what do you think she means?” He raises an eyebrow.

“I had intended to critique the automobile. Our nature violated. An alienating technology. Using Max Weber, Marx—”

“Which Marx? Zeppo? Harpo? Me?” He flicks at an imaginary cigar. “I didn’t touch your car. Don’t even know what your car looks like. Even if I did, I wouldn’t be caught dead with your old blue ‘53 Pontiac with its vinyl-covered seats.”

Cory’s and my bikes are stolen, the shear-proof cable cut clean through—at the International Day Festival in Forest Park.

We’re heartbroken. Though Cory says nothing, I know how much she longs to be back in California, with Derek Wander, her friends on Venice Beach.

Cory wants us to go in on a car together.

I tell her I’ve never had a car before.

“You mean you’re a twenty-nine-year-old cherry?” she says.

For reasons obscure to me, Cory finds this thought immensely entertaining.

Bennington drives a pewter-colored Audi. Sonia Tidegate drives a lipstick-red Mustang. Earl Paulus Brady drives his father-in-law’s Austin Healy of England. Denuda drives a soot-colored Pinto with a hatchback that keeps popping open, that is always getting flat tires, that is always in the shop.

Later that evening, Derek calls from California. He’s coming through in his old mail van, with his bass guitar player, his drummer, the old Hammond he synthesized himself out of surplus NASA boards. He’s playing the Ramada Inn circuit, from L.A. to Bangor, Maine, a gig in Mount Vernon, an hour’s drive from us. Around the time of his birthday. Do we want to come? Cory invites him to stay with us.

Cory and I argue. She reminds me of his genius; she waves her hand towards the bust of Derek an artist-admirer friend did of him. It sits on our mantle, the towering forehead, the accusingly righteous scowl, reminding us we do not extol genius enough, do not even acknowledge its presence, the dark pall it casts over the illusion of equality we want so desperately to uphold.

Distance and intimacy: “Biking is *intimate,*” I tell Cory. “Bussing—to achieve racial balance is *distancing*—it destroys communal ties. *Streaking,* running through public places naked, is *very intimate.*”

"Hey, Bertolli, what do you say we do some streaking. Faculty senate meeting this afternoon. We can make it if we run," Denuda says.

"I'd love to," I say, "but do you think I'm properly dressed?"

We go to Friday's for a beer. I explain my growing disconsolation over my dissertation topic.

"I had something more practical in mind," Denuda says, "something more nuts and bolts. Something like, 'The Passion Pit: Changing Courtship Patterns—From Chaperoned Dating to Mating in the Back Seat.'"

"Whatever happened to academic freedom, intellectual discourse, the free exchange of ideas—"

"Here, here," Denuda says, raising a brow. "You got to be more like Earl Paulus Brady, Bertolli. Brilliant. A complete sham. He'd sooner sell his own dear sweet mother into penury than venture forth an idea of his own."

"Everyone's a genius these days," I complain to Cory.

We're in our bathroom. I'm shaving. Cory's taking a bubble-bath, a knee pulled up, clipping her toe nails.

"Earl Paulus Brady's a genius. Derek's a genius. Denuda's a genius. Tidegate, Bennington. . . . We have more genius than the Mississippi has algae. I'm probably the only one left who's in the normal range."

"You have other gifts," Cory says, missing the irony.

Cory is distracted these days. She's aware of the approaching date of Derek's arrival. She's making herself ready, going through certain rituals, ablutions, as old as mankind.

I explain to Bennington, I'm at an impasse with my committee. He offers to referee.

The four of us meet in his office, the only light the afternoon sun spilling through his ceiling-high window.

"I think I see a way out," Bennington says. In his big swivel chair, no less autocratic, he looks small, churlish, immature. He reads from note cards in front of him, "Sonia, you see 'the exponential growth of feminism with the increasing preponderance of the car.'"

"Yes, the second car—"

"And, Denuda, 'The . . . Passion Pit: Changing Courtship Patterns—From Chaperoned Dating to Mating in the Back Seat.'"

"That's it." Denuda looks at me, winks; then over at Sonia, fetchingly.

She studiously ignores him.

"What is the one factor both your topics, very astute ones I might say, have in common?" Bennington asks, swiveling towards the window, putting his wing-tipped shoes up on the sill, leaning way back.

Neither represents *my* interests, I'm thinking bitterly, when I see Sonia Tidegate screws up her face at Bennington's back, sticking out her tongue.

Just as suddenly her face relaxes into that almost sedated reserve. Denuda, meanwhile, who I see in profile and somewhat from behind, is rolling his tongue around his lips like a strangling dog. His eyes, heavily lidded, seem about to roll back into his head. He's having an epileptic seizure, I'm thinking. No, he's slipping down in his seat, a penny-loafered shoe sliding towards Sonia, who looks like she'd as soon dive out the window and end it all.

"Pegasus!" Bennington says, swiveling back.

He reads our distraction as ignorance.

"Great Zeus, has no one here heard of Pegasus?"

"The horse?" Sonia says incredulously.

"A stud," Denuda says joyfully.

"More than a horse," Bennington says. "A potency symbol, symbol of transformation. The symbology of C. G. Jung. Whosoever is able to tame Pegasus soars above the pedestrian, the commonplace. For the woman, the ability to rise above the procreative function, being assumed bodily into heaven, that sort of thing; for the man, the engorged phallus, the war chariot by which the sons kill the fathers, wrest the daughters from their domain."

"Well?" Bennington says, smiling, immensely pleased with himself.

Bennington's classes: C. G. Jung. The symbology of, the archetypal patterns in, the transformational aspects of. Pleromas and syzygies and the gnosis and the mysterium coniunctionis and the sacral quaternity. C. G. Jung, and more C. G. Jung.

Earl Paulus Brady has it that we ought to adopt the Sinatra tune for our class song:

Look at all you derive
out of being alive,
when you're Jung at heart

Brady gives me a copy of the approved draft of his dissertation: *Lawn Ornaments in 1950s America: The Renewal of the Arcadian Dream.*

"When I deal with my committee," he says, "I project that helter-skelter look. 'I'm Charlie Manson,' it says, 'and I know where you live!' I learned long ago that genius is just a form of rape."

"So what do you think, Bertolli?" Denuda asks as we walk out of DeBerg Hall.

"Less and less with each passing day!" I answer dejectedly.

We go to Friday's for a beer.

Denuda, in a confessional mood, divulges that Tidegate and he went to bed at the Popular Culture Conference at Bowling Green. "She was drunk at the time, practically attacked me. Now, not only can't I convince her it

happened, she's threatening to call the campus police I so much as cast a shadow across her door."

Both of us, our moods sullied, stare into our beers.

"What the hell am I going to do for a dissertation topic?"

"Cheer up, Bertolli," Denuda says. "Bennington made it easy. All you have to do is prove the car is a horse!"

Cory gets her camera back. They catch a parole violator with it in his paper bag, trace the serial number back to us.

We're asked to testify at the hearing.

I do not recover my flute.

We bus back to our apartment where Cory calls her sister. I get my notes and go off to the library, promising to be back before dark.

In my study carrel, I stack up the multi-volumed Bollingen series on C. G. Jung. I plow through *Aion, Mysterium Coniunctionis, Alchemical Studies.* . . . Nowhere do I find evidence that the car is a phallus. I am being too literal minded, perhaps. Bleary eyed, I put my head down for a moment, nod off. I am awakened by a voice behind me. "Nahum, 2:4," it says. I jolt awake, disoriented. The library is closed, dark; except for the hiss of the radiators, quiet as a tomb.

I make my way to the card catalog, taking the "Na" drawer under a security light. An Old Testament prophet, I go to the biblical literature section in the stacks. This, the New World translation: "In the streets the war chariots keep driving madly. They keep rushing up and down in the public squares. Their appearances are like torches, they shall run like lightning."

I break out of the rear fire exit exciting the alarm, run down the dark untrafficked streets.

My heart still racing, I slip silently between the sheets beside Cory. She stirs. She is angry with me, for not calling. She rolls over, falls back to sleep. I cannot. I feel like a felon on the loose, the siren still ringing in my ear.

The next morning, I decide to push on with my original proposal: "The definition of man as 'the thinking biped with prehensile hands' no longer obtains. Man is the product of his technology, man himself man-made, a crustacean, an exo-skeletal creature that circumambulates on anywhere from four to sixteen wheels."

"Do it!" Earl Paulus Brady says, his pipe bowl aflame. "Bash their brains out with it. Make them eat smoke."

"The jakes is about to back up on you, Bertolli," Denuda warns, looking over his glasses at me.

"Sounds like a psychosexual problem, Bertolli," Sonia Tidegate's sepia-inked note on dark avocado reads. She's clipped a card to her note, a psychologist at St. Louis University's Medical Center I know for a fact she's seeing three times a week.

I feel exhilarated, the first time in months. I've taken to explaining my dissertation to just anyone: my dentist, the grocer around the corner, the elderly lady next door from whom I buy the rattan chair. "The car makes us bionic," I tell them. "It makes us go through the ether, like a Fleet enema through the colon."

To my fellow grad students most capable of understanding, I say, almost mystically, "Man and His Car."

Earl Paulus Brady goads me on: "Why 'Man and His Car'? Don't you think that rather lackluster? How about something more derring-do? 'Man and His Sopwith Camel.' Or bawdy? 'Man and His Inflatable Ewe.'"

"I intend to go much further than that," I tell Brady. "I intend to exclude 'man' from the equation altogether, to write the history of the car. From the car's point of view!"

"Atta boy!"

My thirtieth birthday. See enclosed picture: me sitting in my rattan chair, my Campagnola biking cap on, beak up, shorts and tank-top shirt, playing with the match-box car Cory gives me as a joke.

Cory takes me out for dinner.

She wants to know what's wrong. I'm seething with resentment. I don't talk to her anymore. It's a miracle if we make love more than once a week.

Nothing, I tell her. I've never been happier in my life.

The next day, Cory and I go out and buy a VW convertible Bug. I swell with the pride of ownership. I tell practically anyone—my dentist, the grocer around the corner, the gentleman at the garage sale where we buy Cory's enlarger—that in Plato's Cave, the VW Bug is the paragon, all other makes of cars the shadow it casts on the wall.

We drive our VW into the city for the court hearing. I see some of my former Providence School students (our recidivist rate is around 90%). We identify the camera, the developed pictures as Cory's, confirm our address. They set a trial date.

Outside the courtroom, a brother sidles up to us. He's going to "pickle our white-ass faces in battery acid" we ever come downtown again.

When we get outside, the VW convertible top is slashed, the radio, the license plate gone.

I call my principal at Providence School, resign from my post.

It was always a presumption I could make their problems, anyone's problems, my own.

I practically live at the library.

Someone in the department starts the rumor that I'm doing *auto*-biography for my dissertation.

Cory and I drive to Mount Vernon to hear Derek play, the Bug's top patched with duct tape.

At the Wagon Wheel Pub of the Ramada Inn, Derek plays requests, his NASA synthesized Hammond. What starts as "Rocky Mountain High" turns into Stockhausen as it might be played by a steel-drum marching band out on the Asteroid Belt of Canis Minor. Thirty minutes into the first set, moon-eyed travelers, furtive-looking couples, are pulling out their car and motel keys, calling the waitress for their checks.

We are out back by the Ramada Inn pool—Cory and I, Derek's bass player—celebrating Derek's birthday. Derek has the champagne Cory gave him between his legs. He waves a spatulated hand in the air, "I want my music to take them for a drive down a lonely road on a moonless night, the windows rolled up, the radio playing at stellar volume. I want panic and pandemonium, their eyes on fire, blood and pus pouring from their ears—"

The champagne bottle explodes, the warm terra cotta tiles, the cork grazing Derek's forehead.

We're all laughing. Cory is taking his picture.

"This could be the start of something new," Derek sings in his gravel voice, giving Cory one of those sweet conspiratorial looks.

Like a bracing slap, this effectively destroys the rest of my night.

They follow us back to St. Louis in Derek's old mail van, park out back of the apartment. It's already near to three. Cory says she is not tired. Do I mind if Derek and she talk?

She goes down to the van.

I can't sleep. I read Brady's *Lawn Ornamentation.* Concerned with suburbia, chintz heaven, it's about as exciting as reading a refrigerator warranty under a bug light. Denuda's right. It is perfect for saying nothing at all, the paragon in Plato's cave.

It's getting light out, Cory still not back.

I drive over to Izzy's just about the time the fresh Danish arrive. Then I drive out of the city, aimlessly, deeply into Missouri, my thoughts racing ahead of me. I wend my way into the Ozarks, along secondary and tertiary roads.

I begin to sense the truth of McLuhan's suggestion that it is the car and not the home to which Americans retreat to be alone.

It is dark when I get back. Derek embraces me at the door. “We were worried about you, old man,” he says.

This sudden feeling of having been displaced: It is Derek who lives here now, and I am the guest.

Spending more and more time at the library, living out of a study room on the fourth floor. I have my Hermes portable typewriter with me, my sleeping bag, work feverishly, gathering, compiling notes, subsisting on a diet of Ladyfingers and Peanut Crunch from the lounge vending machine, catnapping, heedless as to whether it is day or night.

> . . . it is the car and not the home to which Americans retreat to be alone

The library’s security lights are on and the library closed when I slip off. I have a feverish dream: I am crawling along a catwalk, a flimsy affair of 12 × 2’s laid over metal girders high up above St. Louis U.’s theater. Far below me is an empty lit stage. I am inching my way back to the trap door out of which Cory has just come. She wants to help me. “Go back, Cory,” I shout. As she crawls towards me, the planking sags to the breaking point. Beneath me I hear a breathless silence, and in the distance a drum roll. Derek, silhouetted in the light of the trap door, taking in the situation, pleads with Cory to come back. . . .” I struggle awake, I am clammy with sweat. I rub my face, bristly with several days growth.

I get a note in my grad office mailbox from Dr. Bennington, to see him at my convenience.

“A spirited essay,” he says, “. . . not a dissertation proposal in the true sense . . . demonstrates an intellect teeming with good ideas, creative flare, sparkling moments of genius . . . sadly idiosyncratic . . . none of the scholarly habits of mind pursuant to the doctoral degree . . . wouldn’t dream of stopping you from pursuing your studies, but. . . .”

It is Cory, finally, who seeks me out in the library. We go to Izzy’s, sit silently for a long time looking at our coffee.

“You never once told me you loved me,” she says.

I don’t tell Cory that I never felt she rightfully belonged with me, that I always felt she was Derek’s and I just had her on loan.

“What do you want to do?” I ask her finally.

She doesn’t know. Derek has asked her if she wants to finish the tour with him, go on up to Bangor, Maine.

“What do you want to do?” she asks.

I buy back Cory's share of the VW Bug.

When I leave St. Louis, my dissertation research is a shambles, a thing of surmises, conjectures, random notes. I carry it away in a Hammermill box.

I drive nonstop through Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York . . . the sound of human happiness, the humming of wheels.

Several months later, I've still not thought of going back. I live near the State University College at Geneseo, the southern tier in New York. An old farmhouse overlooking Conesus Lake. Couched in pine trees, sycamore, and birch; cornfields out back, and a pond. Deer run through my front yard, mallards fly overhead. At night I listen to the crickets cross and uncross their legs.

It is during this period, I have that strange dream. I'm aboard an aircraft carrier. Though it is late at night, I can see the distant outline of land lit by an immense fire, vermillion, and overhead dark plumes of smoke. The air is sooted and stinging to breathe. I go down into the bowels of the ship. In the briefing room I am reading to airmen in flight gear from *The Tibetan Book of the Dead.*

The next day, President Nixon resigns.

I get a call from Denuda. He and Tidegate are getting married. Got her pregnant. The Popular Culture Conference. She finally came around, owned it wasn't an immaculate conception, that it was his.

They want me to come back. Bennington is on a sabbatical for the next year—Jungian Institute at Insbruck. They'll see to it I get my degree.

I get a note from Cory. Things just didn't work out between Derek and her. He's back in California. She's back at our apartment on Pine Street. She misses me. She wonders if I might consider coming back.

A presidential pardon for Nixon. "I'm a Ford, not a Lincoln," the president proclaims.

I think about Denuda's offer, Cory's request. Shall I travel to that distant place which holds so few fond memories for me? Which already, though less than a year has past, seems not to exist?

I write a letter. "Cory," it begins, "the distance between our cities has been carefully thought out."

Rebecca Baggett

Mid-Thirties

Your skin, abruptly
unforgiving, punishes
past neglect by tightening
across the backs of hands,
cracking at nails and
knuckles. Two hours at your
desk, and back and neck snarl
rebellion, driving you from
the half-finished page. Even
your stomach turns traitor,
won't relent to the Szechuan
and Mexican you've devoured
without regret
since your late teens.

Tweaks and twinges hint
at dissolution, send chills
up your spine. All these years,
you've thought you were pure
mind, while your body, donkey-like,
plugged away without complaint.
Now suddenly the beast assumes
command, begins to guide
this journey toward an end
you never quite believed.

Edmund Pennant

The Spring

At the bottom of a basin of sand
the clean silt dances
roiled gently by waters rising
from the heart rock beneath.

Maple leaves, mirrored,
and my face, waver a silver level
deeper, where I stare into eyes
at the spring bottom

that speak to me through clarities
that will not come to rest. Gifts
of wet mint and catnip spice my inhaling,
touched waters raised to the lips

wake palate and tongue to savors
of slate and clay and cold limestone,
gift enough for one who counts
a transfigured hour infinitely dear,

who backed off from the still pool
of a geyser once, moments after
the sulphur mouth bade him drink
and the will of scalding steam
burst upward, flowering.

Elizabeth Blair

Five-poem sequence from Divided Light, *a collection about the Lewis and Clark expedition of 1804–1806*

Meat and Myth

(Village of the Mandans,
Winter of 1804, Nathaniel Pryor)

What kind of men are these, these
men not of our kind
who find value in a skull
who claim a stone can leach signs
of favor or famine from the sun
explanations
the action of heat on minerals
illusion
grace

They thank the buffalo
as if he thinks
as if he chooses to become meat
offering kinnikinik
as if he smokes
as if he values human things

These men are childish, believing
in meat and myth
as if the two were linked

They slash their arms
when someone dies
propitiate the sun with
hunks of their own flesh

These men are childish, heathen
I can't approve

But sometimes, sitting full-behind
around their fires smelling of
sweetgrass and sage

I think we are not so far apart

Worse, sometimes I doubt
my own belief, see
communion in the drinking
of bear blood after the hunt,
crucifixion in the sun dance

What kind of men are we?
What kind of man am I?

This life breeds doubt

If a man's not careful, it could
burn memory clean out of the brain

Source

(Hugh McNeal)

All day we followed the Missouri
as it wound up land's back
where it would break to the sea,
where we would taste on our tongues,
salt bracken of the visible river.
We had not eaten all day, had
left the parchmeal back at camp,
but we pushed up the Indian road
where the Missouri slowed to
the velocity of a man's pee.
Beyond, we knew Columbia flowed
west, carrying cedar stain and
pine scent down past the
dumb, dead-fish mud of
return to the sea.

Straddling the headwaters,
I cried: Praise God! We
outran the Missouri.
And Captain Lewis himself put
his lips to the river and drank.

It was for this that we hollowed out
in the shadows of lily rot.
For this we lay in stone-cold
and breathed dung smoke.

Soon we'll eat salmon and
oranges, sail south to go east,
return to fireworks,
whiskey,
breasts the color of salt.

Red Moon

(John Shields, Fort Mandan)

The deer come for salt, not
affection—Gary Snyder

in the still hour
before dawn
when even the red moon
refuses blessing,
thoughts of your kisses
burn
on my skin

here there
in the hollow places

molasses on the tongue

not for me
quick caresses
musky with sweetgrass
and sage,
kisses tasting
of calamus
and smoked meat

I lie alone
under a fur robe

Melinda Melinda

as day's bright fire
consumes night, so
your heat
rises within me,
memory more needful
than salt.

Border of the Known World

(George Shannon)

In the vast plain, broken only by
the sinuous loops of the river that
knows no bounds, he lost his sense
of which way they had gone
or why they had come.

After twelve days of searching
for tracks, smoke, warm ash,
eating bark and sour grapes,
smelling the air for gunpowder and
roast quail, and shooting at
shadows of deer with an empty gun,
he built a willow brush snare
and, lacking a fire, ate
steaming rabbit entrails fresh.

Thoughts of food consumed
his days. He was only seventeen
and his mother's batter cakes
lingered in the tongue's memory.
He imagined fire, spit of buffalo
warm whiskey deep in his gut but
tasted only stomach salt
and sweat.

Bloody moon gone down and solitude,
he strained for the now-welcome
sound of coyotes, almost human
the cry of his own throat.

Dancing the Bear

(for Clark's Body Servant, York)

Say that he minded when
the Nez Perce called him
Tse-mook Tse-mook To To kean,
the black indian, then asked
what burned him up

when the Mandans called him
big medisin, spit on his skin
and rubbed, thinking to
scrub the charcoal off

when the Nez Perce at winter fires
called him "The Raven's Son"
and "he who makes big eyes
much white and looks fierce
at chief"

when Pierre Tabbeau wrote:
"A large, fine man, black
as a bear, who spoke
and acted as one"

when his master Clark wrote
in the daily log: "Ordered
my servant to dance
which amused the crowd much"

Say that he minded all this
but still, say that he danced,

danced to the tabborets
to the calfgut thrapples
in the ring of painted men
with red skin, pale men
with red beards

Say that he danced
light on his feet by
the fire's flow

whirled, licked the honey
from his paws, shook his
great dark head from
side to side

Rough bear, you dance light
no one can touch you

Here at the center
of the circle you roar
even now, under the cover
of starlight, even now
claws are growing
into those dark palms

Even now you are moving
into the dark beyond the camp
in a new century, growing
a new body under
your skin

no one can touch you now

Kathleen Lignell

Northern Lights

Some news is good news, like an old friend
who tells me she won the Tri-State Megabucks,

which is true and $3 million and a shaft
of light in an otherwise dark landscape.

I stand in the field in August. Goldenrod
yellows the night air. You point to the north.

The sky pulsates, beam to beam, a curtain
of light. It speaks to the inner eye.

It's unnerving to hear you say, "These are
electrical discharges in the ionized air."

I stand in disbelief at the difference between
us, mute behind my mammalian eyes.

All's luminous. All things have their spectacular
moments. The lights, at any rate, are real.

I practice the posture of indifference
and scan the midnight sky for creatures

whose lives are like shooting stars,
streamers of light, efficacy of the dark.

christien gholson

two poems

In the Night Sea

"For everything that lives is holy"—William Blake

It was when I saw the clams screaming open in the frying pan
while a drunk Swede squeezed a stewardess next to the stove
in my father's kitchen, that I knew.

The Swede fondled the woman and she giggled, drunk, but I could
see neither of them were able to dig a penny of happiness
out of the beach sand still clinging to their shorts.

I thought of the Roman Empire, of a blind philosopher found on
some beach, on the Caspian Sea maybe, and led by some laughing
centurions towards their remote, forgotten outpost, where the
son of a great senator had been drinking for nine days straight
with this entourage and needed a little entertainment.

The clams screamed open, simmering in their own frightened juice
dribbling over their shells. The blind philosopher was led
into the middle of the room where the entourage lay about naked,
plump and wealthy.

"Why is there something instead of nothing?" the senator's son
asked the blind old man and winked, because he'd read all the
Greeks and knew all the answers the Greeks gave. (How could
anyone have possibly read the Greeks in such a primitive place?)

The blind philosopher said, "Sand particles chase each other back
into the sea, stars follow one another's thoughts across the sky,
everything is shaped by its desires, its hunger . . ."

"Yes, but why is there something instead of nothing?" the senator's
son persisted, waiting to be amused by the old man's crude logic.

The blind philosopher said, "Cormorants black as night fold their wings
and dive from one world into another, air to sea, blood to bile,
beak to fish, swallowing whole. The fish is the seed from which
his mind is born."

"Yes, yes, didn't you hear me, old man? Answer the questions, why is there something instead of nothing?"

"Sticky pollen is the flesh of the bee's mind."

"Goddamnit, old man, answer the question!" the senator's son shouted.

"The spark of light is the seed of grass mind.
Grass is the seed of deer mind.
Deer is the seed of tiger mind.
Inside the tiger's night eyes is the grass-mind's
spark of light . . .
seeds within seeds within seeds
like a lacquered red Chinese box . . ."

"Answer the question, or you will be killed!" the senator's son screamed.

"There is something because nothing desired it," the blind philosopher said.

In this empire of drunk kitchens, half-eaten chickens, clams in red sauce, and the vermilion flanks of brown-eyed cattle piling up in tiny mounds over greasy paper plates on formica counters, the blind philosopher clam opened his mouth and gave his answer before he died. The same answer, over and over . . .

I walked out onto the back porch and stared across the weedlot towards the dunes. The sun flashed in waves along the ridge of bowing dune-grass.

The spark of light on the grassblade is the spark that ignites this mind, both of us made from the same sun that desired us. What separates us is how we choose to interpret that light. (Oh, but what desired the sun into being?)

The clam interprets the night of the moving sea:
The voluptuous shifting nightsand of the ocean floor,
the cool dark waking off the fins above . . .

Each mind is fashioned on the anvil of what it eats. We all come from the sex-charged sea of night.

All the Beautiful Dead Along the Side of the Road

Foxtail headdress
Pheasant necklace
Raccoon tailring
A gown of bone

He kneels over
the seven blue shades
of a blue bird's stiff body

A car appears

He is a heron
opening his wings
out over the corn

Robyn Supraner

two Poems

Abstract Expressionists in Connecticut

The father is slicing shitakes
for the stir-fry. The child, blueberry
applesauce all over his undershirt,
grabs for his mother's hair and opens
wide for the narrow spoon.
Peanut Butter Ritz Bits blend
on the clay-caked floor with
dripped wax, Biter Biscuit flecks,
fresh gratings of ginger. A sacred
disorder permeates the room, lights it
with delirium. The linoleum
holds it together: chance
and accident, the dropped garlic, oil
splattering in the wok, the child, the
bright line of his laughter, the mother,
her whole being straining, focusing
on the mouth.

Uneasy in Taos

1.
Four and twenty
would not make one
good pie. They come
humming, divebombing
the feeder, purring
violence. Zap.
They stutter
like tiny electric
killing machines.
Behind the curtains
I watch
the intravenous feeding
the gemmy throats
glittering, swelling
subsiding.

Somewhere: a tin skeleton
sucked dry by the Taoseño sun,
its jewels flown.

2.
No rattlesnake. No.
Not one scorpion
has come
calling
high-tailing it
in my direction.
Hummingbirds
plunge their needles, draw
from the inverted bag
nectar, not blood.
I am afraid
(held by the mountain)
I will forget
the sound, the chattering
of castanets.
I keep a heavy stick
to guard me
against this peace.

Daniel Pearlman

Cinderella of the Psychotron

I

Moe Unglick looked around at his board of directors, then stared gloomily down through the window at the Twin Towers far below. When it occurred to him how much rent he shelled out for office space up here, he began to picture how each of these directors would look sailing through the air if he tossed them one by one out the window. First he would toss out that hollow-cheeked, thin-lipped obstructionist at the opposite end of the table—Randolph Quern, Director of Technology and inventor of the gadget to which they all owed their very presence here. The unsmiling Quern would plummet to the street as if dropped through a vacuum and gouge a well-shaft through Fifth Avenue down to the bedrock. Next he would heave out the lumpy carcass of Herman Utica, Director of Advertising and Marketing, who would veer from left to right and make excuses to pedestrians as wind currents wafted him to the sidewalk. As to the new Director of Promotion and Product Development, Pete Petrovsky, the athletic young redbeard seated to his right, maybe he was really Superman and would surprise them all, as everybody was hoping. As to the descent of his Administrative Assistant, Angela Corpino—who should have been here already and was holding everybody up—she would just suck in her breath, and her chest would inflate, and back she would float through the window like a dirigible to deny him the pleasure of being miserable all by himself.

The silence among the directors was growing unbearable. At last came the click of Angela's heels in an urgent arpeggio—uncharacteristically urgent, Moe sensed—from the end of the corridor. The door slid back and in she strode, arms akimbo, green eyes aflame under mounds of blond ringlets, violet bosom heaving under hotly glowing cheeks.

"So you'd shove me outta the window and blow up my balloons, would you? Don't deny it, Moe. That was *your* ugly mind I just caught on the screen." She slapped a note pad on the table and sank into a chair to his left, between him and the Director of Advertising. "It was easy to tell it was you. You were the only one that didn't get kicked outta the window."

"You were *spying* on me back there?" said Moe. He felt personally insulted and publicly embarrassed. The other board members coughed politely and straightened their ties.

"Me? Spy? Never!" She wagged a painted nail in his face. "But you've been snapping at my tail all day long, and my choice was either to quit before you chewed my head off, or aim the psychotron down this way and

hope to get a handle on what's eating you—and you sure gave off revealing images!"

"That is unauthorized use of company equipment," said Randolph Quern sitting ramrod-straight with arms crossed pugnaciously over his chest.

"He sure gave off revealing images," Angela repeated, ignoring the dour inventor. "I thought it was just me he can't stand. I'm wrong. It's all of us."

"Any fool could have figured that out," muttered Quern, "with or without the psychotron."

Moe was sick and tired of Quern's arrogant and condescending poses. He was sick and tired, also, of his Administrative Assistant's treating him like some fleabag husband when in fact they did not even have an affair to regret. And he was sick and tired of Herman Utica's impressive charts and diagrams which conclusively demonstrated, in complementary colors, that the best marketing strategies resulted in declining revenues.

"Listen," said Moe, slamming the table with his fist, "I'm going to be absolutely calm and rational. As president and financial wizard of Psychotronics, Incorporated, I am responsible to 137 stockholders besides myself, and I find it hard to explain even to myself what you now see on the screen in front of you. He flicked a panel near his elbow and lit up a videocube in the center of the table. Each of its four large faces displayed a colorful line-graph comparing a sinking curve of audience ratings with a flattening trajectory of advertising revenues and an erratically drooping line for leasing income.

"The linkage between ratings and revenues is obvious. But my big questions are these: Why are both TV and 3V ratings for the Dazzling Daydreamer declining? And what can we do about it? . . . Now, to help us find the answers, I need hardly introduce to you Pete Petrovsky, Director of Promotion and Product Development and newly appointed to the board in recognition of the importance we all attach to *creativity* in this organization." Moe shot a sharp, meaningful glance around the table in response to a volley of coughing. "I hope that Pete comes out of his first board meeting with a modicum of respect for the way we conduct business."

Angela yawned loudly.

"In my humble opinion as a market analyst," said Herman Utica, squeezing together his pudgy hands as if secretly making a tortilla, "we are fast approaching the point of audience saturation. We must diversify our operations by identifying and penetrating new markets with the psychotron."

"Do you mean to tell me," said Moe, "that after I spend a whole year just *discovering* our wonder boy, and after exposing him to the national media for not even one year, that we should give up on the Dazzling Daydreamer, just cut him loose—Ira Simon the Third—the young man who is the source

of our corporate wealth, the mainstay of our public image, and the cornucopia from whence has been dripping the oil and honey of your fat private salaries?"

"Speak for your own salary," said Angela.

"Herman," said Moe, raising his voice, "are you seriously suggesting that we have exhausted the most profitable imaginable market for the psychotron?"

"Herman," said Angela, "you should have seen yourself gliding down to the pavement after he threw you out of this window. If only I'd pushed the 'Record' button."

"Herman has a point," Quern testily spoke up. "I've already suggested to this group the potential application of the psychotron to the psychiatric study of daydreaming for the early detection of schizophrenia and related mental disorders."

"Damn it, Randy," said Moe with a downsweep of his hand, "you're a scientific genius of the highest order, and without you we would not be here today feeling lousy about the statistics, but you are a total imbecile when it comes to the practical application of your great mind to this petty world we live in. Do you realize the *image* that the psychotron would have if it were put to such a use? Do you want the public to think of daydreams as the hunting grounds for the guys in the white coats to search for kooks, nuts, the mentally diseased and the criminally insane?"

"I should have pressed 'Record,'" muttered Angela.

"The advances in medicine that could accrue from—"

"Advances, romances!" Moe snapped. "Maybe ten years down the line we'll all be so rich we can afford to be altruists. Right now we have to reinforce the *positive* image of daydreaming as a creative process of the highest order, the source of art, poetry, wisdom, the appreciation of beauty, the magic carpet to high adventure, the world of fun and play—all the upbeat, creative things that Ira Simon the Third is associated with."

"It is also true," said Quern, "that the psi-waves that rather vulgarly translate into 'daydreams,' when in fact it is only the *non-verbal* component of daydreams we are dealing with, originate in the hypothalamus and rhinencephalon, rather *primitive* portions of the brain, so that—"

"Primitive? Are you putting down the word 'primitive'? The primitive is the source of the creative!" Moe insisted. "We've made that point on TV, 3V, a million times. And we've made millions of people aware of their daydreams as a source of creative self-renewal. The psychotron has an *image,* Randy. Will you keep that in mind?"

"We were doing pretty well in the education market," said Herman. "Some of the biggest school systems have a psychotron or two on lease for closed-circuit monitoring of kids' daydreams. Other kids watch and turn them into poems, stories, pantomimes. One of Pete's ideas right now is to

sell schools the idea of devoting a few hours a week to promoting daydreaming among the kids. How's that moving, Pete?"

Running his hand through his neat red beard, Petrovsky answered reflectively, "Your more progressive teachers seem to like it. They're trying it out in a few of the fancier *private* schools, but the big problem is getting it through to the ordinary teacher of ordinary kids, like in the public-school systems of big cities, where we run into a lot of dumb resistance like, 'Are you kidding? That's all they do is daydream, and half the time they're orbiting out on drugs.' Of course, Ira Simon the Third has helped break the stereotype . . . but Ira, you know . . ."

"But Ira?" prodded Herman Utica.

"But Ira what?" Moe demanded.

"But Ira," Petrovsky began judiciously, "with all due respect to what he has done for Psychotronics . . . Ira may be giving us somewhat of an image problem."

"Ira *is* our image," Moe gasped. "Youth, adventure, imagination, creativity— and a middle-class teenager not on drugs. We advertised everywhere— 'Daydreamers, make your dreams come true!'—and we tested thousands of subjects all over the country before we found performance of such high quality, and a performer who could consistently deliver, too. Not just a flash in the pan. And how many people do you think there are in the whole country who can, number one, daydream just visually, without depending on a verbal component—which is, I need hardly mention, exactly suitable to the limitations of the psychotron—"

"I object to your referring to the *limitations* of the psychotron," Randolph Quern broke in. "That's like talking about the limitations of a frog because it can't fly. The psychotron is, and was designed to be, no more than an elegant device for the visual imaging of psi-wave patterns, which have no connection with the speech centers of the brain. If a frog could fly, it would no longer be a—"

"Don't lecture me, Randy. I don't want to hear about any goddam frogs. I was saying, not many people can daydream just visually, and number two, hardly anyone can weave together a self-contained and sustained visual narrative that can entertain millions—and do it over and over again," Moe said, rapidly snapping his fingers in illustration.

"What I'm trying to say," Pete Petrovsky resumed after politely waiting for a pause, "is that the rate at which our Dazzling Daydreamer is producing performance-quality sequences is noticeably diminishing."

"So what!" Moe fired back. "What artist keeps going at the same pace all the time?"

"Well," said Petrovsky, "let me just tell you the production facts. We've got to get Ira to daydream a lot more often now—just to get the three acceptable takes per week that we've committed ourselves to. That wouldn't

be so bad, except that, in my own artistic judgment, the dramatic quality and tonal intensity of the best Ira can do is consistently slipping."

"But why should that be?" pleaded Moe. "The kid's barely fourteen. He's just at the beginning of a great career."

"If you'll all allow me," said Randolph Quern, pressing monitor buttons on the table in front of him. "I've made some precise calculations of what's been happening over the past few months. Excuse me if I replace Herman's colorful graphics with my own, but the line-graph you now see, resembling Herman's in that it also contains a descending curve—not at all uncorrelated with Herman's, I might add—shows, over three months, a regular curve of decrement in the intensity of eidetic imagery produced by Ira during D.D. sessions, including *all* taped sessions, whether selected or not for media presentation. These psi-wave measurements are the physical explanation behind Petrovsky's tale of production difficulties. Notice, too, the incremental curve in blue that's angling up to the decremental red curve of psi-wave degradation."

"What's with all this increment, excrement? Something's getting *better*, right?" Moe offered, looking around him for takers.

"Not at all," Quern coolly replied. "The points on the blue curve represent average levels of testosterone in the bloodstream during D.D. sessions. If this regular upward curve did not exist, one could explain Ira's performance decrement as a temporary slump, but, unfortunately, there is an almost perfect inverse correlation between these two curves that strongly suggests their causal interrelation."

"Listen," said Moe, shaking his finger at Quern, "I'm in a perfectly calm and reasonable mood, but I'll be damned if I'm gonna sit here and permit myself to be snowed by all this polysyllabic bullshit. Just what the hell are you talking about in plain English?"

"What he is saying," said Petrovsky, "is that the kid has sex on his mind, and that this is messing up his psi-wave productivity. That's why you hardly ever can find an adult daydreamer who records above average on the psychotron."

"Sex?" said Moe, astounded.

"Don't worry, it's not catching," said Angela.

"We've got millions riding on this kid," said Moe, "and the punk has *sex* on his mind when he should be *working?*"

"I warned you that this might eventually happen, but you paid no heed," Quern snorted.

"All right, all right, so the kid has sex on his mind." Moe made patting gestures toward the table with his palms. "So can't he find a girl friend, ten girl friends, a kid as famous as him? . . . Maybe an older, more experienced woman?" he murmured, glancing inquisitively at his Administrative Assistant.

Angela turned beet-red. "Are you suggesting, you son of a—"

"It won't help," said Petrovsky. "Members of my staff have already, uh, looked into that possibility."

"So what does he like? Virgins? Contortionists? There's something for every taste," Moe declared.

"Child corrupters!" Angela snapped. "I'm not putting this crap in the minutes. You're a regular bunch of pervs. You ought to be hung like Socrates."

"The fact is," said Petrovsky, "he's in love with the girl who sits next to him in class, and she won't have anything to do with him. And the less attention she pays to him the more infatuated he becomes."

"So the little bitch is a snob," Moe grunted. "I'll bet if we talked to her mother . . ." He stole a side-glance at Angela, then fell silent.

"The point is," Randolph Quern intoned, "that the satisfaction or frustration of our young Mr. Simon's sexual appetites is entirely secondary to the fact that he indubitably has them. He has been smitten with a biologically ordained increment in testosterone level. *That* is the factor at issue here."

"And what the hell is she so snobby about?" Moe demanded. "Name one thing she doesn't like about Ira."

"She's a very bright girl. She thinks Ira's dull," said Petrovsky.

"Dull!"

"Dull, yes. . . . And that is, I believe, the more immediate problem that Ira is presenting us with. As I told you before, I think we are developing something of an image problem."

"Do I hear you saying, Petrovsky, that because some smart-ass little twit of a girl thinks Ira's dull, that *we* have an image problem?"

"No. What I'm saying is," Petrovsky sighed nervously, "that Ira *is* . . . dull."

"Not too bright," sighed Herman Utica, wringing his sausage-like hands.

"Stupid," said Quern.

"Ira . . . dull, stupid?" Moe gaped incredulously.

"Not in the quality of his daydreams so much as in his *person,*" Petrovsky explained.

"So? So Ira doesn't have a great brain! Since when does it take brains to be successful in business?"

"Nobody's attacking you personally," said Angela.

"It's not even brains," said Petrovsky. "It's more like lack of a lively, engaging personality. My staff and I have been reviewing the increasing number of media appearances we've had to trot him through. The kid is looking more and more distracted and spacey."

"Bleary-eyed and heavy-lidded," said Herman Utica.

"Comatose and stupid," said Quern.

"But everybody can see he's a well-dressed kid from an upper middle-class background," Moe insisted, plaintively. "His hair is medium-long, and his nails are clean. Why else do you think the school systems have been getting into psychotronics? We're selling the *image*."

"Mr. Unglick," said Petrovsky, "if we could keep Ira personally off the screen, we'd be in a little better shape. The problem is, the people demand the personality behind the product. What'll happen when educators find out he's flunking virtually everything in school?"

"That can't be!" said Moe. "Talk to his teachers! If not for understanding, sympathetic teachers, how many great basketball stars would there be? Football stars? Teachers are at the basis of the whole entertainment industry!"

"Listen," said Petrovsky, "we've been stressing his clothes and his looks, coaching him to smile, and feeding interviewers questions that he can usually answer well in ten words or less. It's simply not working. When the public rejects the personality, they're going to reject the product."

"But he *entertains* them!"

"Yes," conceded Petrovsky, "but that depends a lot more than ever before on careful editing, doubling up on the number of his D.D. sessions to be sure of enough usable footage, and a lot of computerized image-enhancing to cut out the static and stiffen up a lot of flabby psi-waves."

"I have never thought," muttered Quern, "that the permanent value of my invention would derive from its application to the entertainment industry."

"Are you people going nuts?" Moe stood up and leaned knuckles-down on the table. "Think of the volume and diversity of advertising that Ira Simon the Third, the Dazzling Daydreamer, has been able to attract. Junk foods, airlines, Disneyworld, moon excursions, tranquilizers, clothing, toys, motorcycles!"

"You left out rectal suppositories and sanitary napkins," Angela reminded.

"Health!" Moe exclaimed. "A youthful appearance and mental health are what we are selling. Ira stands for that healthy, well-rounded American attitude that says We the people can change the whole crap-filled world into anything we want—through the magic of the mind!"

"Enough rhetoric!" said Quern. "We have zeroed in on the cause of our problems. Now what are we going to do about it?"

"Testosterone!" shouted Moe. "Reduce the level of testosterone!"

Petrovsky returned a blank stare. Patiently, he explained, "The idea did, in fact, occur to us, but apart from the objections that might be raised by the boy's parents and Ira himself—he is not exactly a guinea pig, you know—such hormonal tampering would change his secondary sex characteristics, and if he gives us image problems *now*—"

"All right, all right," said Moe. "Let's say you've convinced me. I don't hear anybody suggesting a *solution* to this mess."

After clearing his throat several times and looking anxiously around the table, Herman Utica said, "I think I may have an idea. Why don't we try coupling Ira's daydream fantasies with sound—you know, speech, music?"

"I object," said Quern. "The psychotron is a non-sonic synthesizer. Psiwave patterns are generated in total independence of the auditory centers of the brain and are not perceived by the public as pictures lacking sound. Would you suggest that pantomime could be improved if sound were added?"

"They made movies into talkies in the 1920s. The idea caught on," mumbled Herman, oozing back redfaced into the depths of his seat.

"Forget it," said Moe, adjudicating. "Sound won't help if the pictures are going bad. . . . Petrovsky?"

"I know exactly what we should do."

"Yeah?"

"Yes. We've got a good thing going, and the question is, How do we revitalize it?—with or without Ira Simon III? And the answer is, we have to find a new psychotronic superstar."

"A new one?" said Moe. "That could take us six months just to locate—*if* anyone can be found—and then another six months in promotion and production. According to the figures we've been seeing, the Dazzling Daydreamer could completely fizzle out in six months."

"No," said Petrovsky, "not if the talent-search is itself used to generate a new wave of national excitement about psi-wave technology. The new search won't *be* like the old search. To find Ira you advertised in the performing-arts journals, the school systems, and all those off-the-wall fantasy magazines. This time, not only will Ira himself be announcing our search in all the big media, but the search itself will be done differently and much more thoroughly. We won't depend on stage mothers like Ira's to push kids forward. We won't waste time auditioning ego-trippers of all shapes and sizes. This time nobody will even *know* they're being screened. We'll catch the true daydreamers off guard, in the state of nature. We'll go out in the streets—in unidentified vehicles—at different times of the day and evening. We'll aim whole banks of receivers at houses, apartment buildings, schools, offices. As soon as we pick up a promising signal, and that won't be often, we'll pinpoint the location and return to investigate."

"Sounds like one hell of an expensive operation," said Moe.

"On the contrary, advertising volume will double while the search is under way. Even better, the *people* will decide who gets to be the next superstar."

"The people?"

"Yes, because we'll play all the promising talent on the media, and we'll invite the public to respond, to push their rating buttons, whatever. The next superstar of the psychotron will be democratically selected, the people's overwhelming choice."

"That sounds dangerous," Moe grumbled.

"But a big part of our problem," Petrovsky countered, "is that the upper middle-class private-school image that Ira Simon the Third has given Psychotronics is working against us. The people out there are not *identifying* with Ira. Ira does not represent the reality of the vast majority of the public."

"So what are we gonna find? Some drunken creep, some college professor, some crook doing time in the state pen?"

"We want a democratic image," declared Petrovsky, his wide blue eyes gazing off into the Manhattan haze. "We'll scour neighborhoods. Neighborhoods! That's where the people live. It's the middle and lower-middle classes that spend three fourths of their leisure time hooked into the media. We'll hit the run-down apartment buildings, the slums, the schools that average under 400 on the S.A.T.'s. . . . Look at the lottery. Have you ever heard of a big winner who wasn't a mechanic or a store-keeper or some miserable low-paid secretary? Go to the neighborhoods! That's where you'll find most of the real people who daydream their lives away."

"You've got a point," Moe mumbled, dazzled at the wealth of possibilities—the whole population of media-struck, lottery-fixated America engaged in a vast contest, every one both judge and potential contestant, picking out their own winner and new Superstar of Daydream—and the money flowing in while the contest rages on. "He's got a point!"

"I believe he does have a point," echoed Herman Utica.

"I see nothing undemocratic," muttered Quern, "about a college professor becoming the next Sinbad of the psychotron. If we are concerned about dullness and stupidity . . ."

"Let's not try to predict who'll be the next Ira Simon," said Petrovsky. "Whoever it is will be the darling of the public, the poet of the silent masses, the mouthpiece of the laryngitic multitudes!"

✳

Never had Moe been so delighted at the outcome of a board meeting. He congratulated himself over and over for having discovered Petrovsky—hiring him, grooming him, and engineering his election to the board. Not only was he a hotshot idea-man, but also, like a great general, he proved to be a tactical genius who carried out an intricate campaign that attracted a great deal of free publicity and set fire to the national imagination. Moe could hardly believe it when *Time* plastered his own picture—one burly arm resting on top of a psychotron—on its front page and quoted him as saying, "Smile, you're on Candid Chimaera." (Petrovsky

assured him that readers of *Time* would understand.) Ira Simon, too—his bowtie gone, replaced with a casual open collar—peered sleepily from the covers of innumerable slicks, vaguely pointing a finger at the reader and saying, "I want you!"

People began to sit by their windows, or on doorsteps, heads cupped meditatively in hand with one eye peeled on the street for slow-moving vehicles driven by strangers. School principals instituted daydream periods and sent weekly schedules to Psychotronics, Inc., by registered mail. People watched TV and 3V more than ever and achieved states of semiconsciousness conducive to the generation of idle fantasies. Daydream classes mushroomed overnight in Y's and nursing homes, vacant lots and pool parlors everywhere, putting to work hordes of unemployed English teachers, primal therapists, and Asian refugees. Numerous conmen were arrested with fake psychotrons in their hands and spurious media contracts bundled in their cars. Late-night comedians mocked the campaign but were soon brought up sharp when their sponsors threatened a pullout.

The technical problems of scanning the targeted neighborhoods were minor. Special dish-antennas and beefed-up wave amplifiers made the remotest apartment along any street accessible to the probing eye of the psychotron. If a wave emission was strong enough to be worth monitoring, then it would not be lost, would not be drowned in static. To the voices of skeptical critics, Moe Unglick had only one reply: "This is the most democratic talent search in the history of the media." The fact that certain socioeconomic classes were generally neglected in the search remained a closely guarded corporate secret. Moe's presidential conscience did not disturb him one whit on this delicate point. Show business was show business, and this particular business was nobody's business but his own. Besides, genius was skulking down in there somewhere among the masses, like a rat hiding in the weeds, and how could you flush it out if you included everybody in?

A whirlwind of activity sucked Moe into its center and rendered such scruples irrelevant. Reports flowed in to him from Pete Petrovsky's lieutenants around the country. As might have been expected, there were problems. Some scouts found it impossible to remain incognito. One group parked a new Caddyvan on a street in Haight-Ashbury, left for a ten-minute coffee-break, and returned to an empty parking space. Two female scouts were raped in Chicago when they stopped to ask for directions, and a lovely pair of psychotrons were beaten beyond recognition. In Boston, agents in a Volksvan banged up to blend in with the neighborhood were followed by hundreds of kids who had never seen that car on their turf before. Too many such incidents were occurring. But even these things made new headlines. Such events made Moe Unglick dizzy. Even when he lost, he won.

Then "hits" were reported in L.A. Hits came in from Chicago. Another hit in Miami. Two in Long Island.

"What do you mean, a hit?" Moe asked.

"A true, high-intensity, sustained psi-emission translating into entertaining visual sequences possessing sharp resolution—and a follow-up identification of the originating subject," Petrovsky answered excitedly.

"So where do we go from here?"

"We play these one-shots on prime-time and gauge audience response."

"And then?"

"If response is positive, we go back to the subject and try to get a *series* of quality D.D. sessions recorded. The aim is now to see if this is a shot in the dark or can the subject perform in a sustained manner at a high level of quality."

Promising hits began to be made on an average of every few days. The public loved sitting in judgment, and they put pressure on the media to feed their voracious appetite with a steady flow of these one-shot amateur performances. The rules of the game were that viewers were to rate, on a 1-to-10 scale, the quality of each screening, without being told a thing about the identity of the daydreamer. It was important at this stage of the contest to keep the personality behind the performance from contaminating audience response.

Moe Unglick acted in concert with his dynamic Director of Promotion to scour the country for the undiscovered precortical genius of the Man or Woman in the Street. The search acquired a frantic momentum and neither time nor money was spared in the effort to turn up potential finalists. Moe, of course, was one of the first to review the tapes selected for media presentation. Watching each one on TV or enveloped by it on 3V, he would bite his nails till his fingers bled because in his heart of hearts he judged each one he saw as far inferior to the standard set by Ira Simon the Third. Aware that he tended to be too harsh, since others might praise what he could barely tolerate, he developed a technique that saved him from looking like a grouse. It turned out that what Angela thought highly entertaining would bore the vast majority of the public, and vice-versa, so that he would simply utter the inverse of her opinion with the result that his staff began to think of him as prophetic.

With the passage of time, however, a real problem began showing its horns. If a tape got high ratings, it would invariably follow that the daydreamer— whether unable to cope with being "discovered" or simply a lucky no-talent—would be unable to produce anything of quality on a consistent basis thereafter. Shots in the dark and flashes in the pan. And the public was getting hungry for *personalities;* Narcissus demanded the face behind the reflection.

A perfect subject, the image of upward-striving ordinary folks everywhere—a Miami manicurist who fantasized traveling around the world in the company of royalty and riverboat gamblers—fizzled out after an initial hot hit. A cross-country trucker who daydreamed of combat with cars that turned into carnivores was undone in subsequent trials by imagery tainted with testosterone. A young construction worker, whose psi-waves had pictured an acrobatic dance among the girders high above him, was the tragic victim of a falling tile some days later. These disappointments were bad enough, but sadder yet was the fact that good hits were harder and harder to come by so that the quality of what reached the media, whose appetite was insatiable, was inevitably diluted.

"The people have two sides to them. They're like—a garbage heap with flowers sprouting out from the top. We are all . . . dungheaps aspiring to be flowers, animals aspiring to be angels."

And added to all this was the progressively heightened sensitivity of the public to suspicious-looking vehicles in their neighborhoods. How idiotic! thought Moe. The people took delight in "exposing" the very vehicles of their own potential fame and fortune! Wouldn't they be better off to play dumb and go along with the game? Like thoughtless animals, they preferred the moment's gratification of sniffing out psychotrons.

But Moe Unglick came up with an answer to this increasing threat.

"Those people out there," Moe growled one day, "tracking us down like bloodhounds, ripping off our scouts, raping our vehicles—they're no better than garbage."

"From such garbage we make a living," reminded Angela.

"No! The people who have stuck with the Dazzling Daydreamer are sensitive, imaginative, take showers and pay up on their credit-card purchases."

"There are many more of the former than the latter," muttered Quern.

"I disagree with both of you," said Petrovsky. "The people have two sides to them. They're like—a garbage heap with flowers sprouting from the top. We are all . . . dungheaps aspiring to be flowers, animals aspiring to be angels."

"Garbage is what they are and garbage is what—*Garbage*!" shouted Moe. "That's it!"

"That's what?"

"Garbage trucks! Camouflage! Protection! Blend in with the people in a way they'll *never notice*!"

"Nonsense," snorted Quern. "The presence of the observer must always contaminate the results of the experiment. It is a fact known in physics, psychology, education—"

"Specially modified garbage trucks," Moe insisted, his finger jamming the conference table as his vision possessed him. "Garbage pick-up is so irregular throughout the country, especially in the bigger cities like the ones we've been targeting, that nobody'll think twice about our presence in their neighborhood. Garbage trucks go slow. They even stop and dawdle around for no reason at all because of the strong unions. It's perfect cover for our psychotron crews."

"But won't people become suspicious when they don't see them picking up garbage?" asked Petrovsky.

"They *will* pick up garbage! Not all of it. A little here, a little there. It'll look perfectly normal."

"A garbageman sitting at the wheel of his truck," smiled Quern, "would look rather obvious if he happens to be holding a psychotron in his hands, don't you think? And then, what does he do with it when he gets out to pick up garbage?"

"The men in the front of the truck," Moe retorted, "do nothing but drive and pick up the garbage. All our talent scouts and their equipment are in the *body* of the truck."

"The psychotron," Quern shuddered, "is designed to accommodate only one kind of incoming garbage. Where, may I ask, do you intend the other kind to be deposited? On the heads of our crew members?"

"In a special compartment, of course," Moe replied with contempt.

"It'll stink in there. It'll be too hot," Angela objected.

"Lights, air-conditioning," Moe answered, brushing at the air as if waving away flies.

"And how will they see out?" asked Quern. "Are these garbage trucks to be fitted out with windows?"

"Periscope!" Moe snapped.

Quern groaned and covered his face with one writhing hand.

"I think it's brilliant!" said Petrovsky. "I think it'll work!"

Herman Utica, Director of Advertising and Marketing, had been sitting silently all this while wringing his sweating hands. "You all realize," he coughed, "that this may be very expensive. I'll have to cost it out."

"I'll be personally responsible. Just hand me the tab," Moe concluded, waving away the last of the objections.

II

Almost six months had gone by since the search had been publicly announced. There were signs that the people's interest in the contest was leveling out, had already perhaps passed its peak. An occasional

bright flare of talent would arise, fill media heaven for a day, for a week, with a burst of pyrotechnical splendor, and then fade away without sequel to the wails and groans of increasing corporate despair. Psychotronics, Inc., would announce the redoubling of its efforts, would assure the public that they hadn't seen anything yet, and Moe personally rushed to the scene of any follow-up after an initial hit had been made. He feared that if Petrovsky did not soon pull a rabbit out of his hat, the whole bubble of free national promotion, increased advertising revenues and stepped-up leasing of psychotrons, largely by educational institutions, would soon burst—leaving them with a highly anticlimactic Ira Simon III. Certain commentators, in fact, were already suggesting that a secret corporate elitism was operating deliberately against the democratic facade of the whole campaign. Moe swallowed his wrath at such pronouncements and continued to work all the harder, as he could tell by the increasing frequency with which Angela Corpino would offer her resignation and plead in vain for him to accept it.

One day he was sitting in the cozy dome of the 3V enviromat with Angela, about to review a new hit that came highly recommended by the scouts in the field. He made it a practice not to know a single thing about the person behind the performance before any such review. Not only did he want to maintain an unbiased attitude toward the material, a condition to which he subjected the whole viewing public, but he did not want to suffer the double disappointment of building up in his mind the glowing image of some Great People's Poet to which the actual performance could not measure up. With a skeptical grunt, then, he leaned far back in his flexiseat and, trembling as always with new hope, signaled for Angela to start projection.

From the very beginning he sensed something extraordinary about this tape. It had a kaleidoscopic vividness and exuberance of color that far surpassed in intensity and variety anything he had seen before—even of Ira Simon III's. It possessed an electrifying dynamism, a wild, plunging grace of movement more fabulous than the high-rise acrobatics of the tragic young hod-carrier who had raised his hopes months earlier. Moe was swept off his seat and aswirl on a magic-carpet adventure that lunged from horizon to horizon, from nadir to zenith, a soundless song that celebrated the union of the soaring Spirit with the grandeur of Nature. The plastic surfaces of our stifling technological environment were scanted in favor of grass, trees, butterflies, birds and clouds. Image upon image elaborated a cosmic hymn of love that far surpassed in spiritual reach and sensuous delight anything ever done by Ira himself. The logic of the juxtaposition of images reigned supreme over any mere logic of narrative or "plot" development, as in the greatest poetry of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. There was sadness, too—the dimming of color, violent lurchings

of hands and feet—in artistic contrast to the superseding panorama of light, dazzle, grace, and beauty.

It would not be accurate to say that Moe Unglick was *impressed*. He was overwhelmed. He felt reborn—the old skeptic replaced by the new lover of the common cosmic heritage. He promised himself to reread the currently despised, critically rejected, and passionately pooh-poohed *Leaves of Grass* by that ancient democratic eccentric, Walt Whitman. He had witnessed the creative romp of a mind free of plastic wrapping that had hitched its wagon to a star. Trying not to reveal his excitement to Angela, whose eyes looked strangely glazed, he waited with trepidation for her reaction and hoped that she would say how much she *hated* it.

"I loved it!" she squealed. "Absolutely stupendous! I don't care if everyone else hates it—including you. *I love* it."

Her reaction confronted him with a dilemma. She was supposed to say she hated it so that he could say he loved it. What was he to do now—lose face? Sacrifice a successful consistency for a risky sincerity? Well, what if he *did* elicit her scorn? . . .

"It's great!" he blurted, pounding his fist against the 3V console. "And I don't care *what* you say!"

The subject was determined to be a Mrs. Désirée Squamitch, age 38, residing in a run-down, multi-dwelling, low-income housing experiment of a bygone social era erected along the perimeter of the Great Bedsty Landfill and Bird Sanctuary of Brooklyn, New York. She was right here—in Moe Unglick's own city! She was the last of a diminishing number of hits and was made by a team of scouts cruising in the belly of a garbage truck. If not for his inventiveness she might never have been discovered. The kids in that neighborhood came down on strangers like piranhas. Roaming bands of mongrels intimidated dogcatchers and vied with street urchins in sowing terror along sidewalks lined with blasted lampposts. There, in the very bowels of the people, lay this glimmer of hope for the transcendent democratic message of the psychotron. It was the end of summer, and a new media season was approaching. The critics were already laughing at the failure of his quest. Even worse, some of the scoffers now totally ignored him—a fate much worse than headline-grabbing contempt. Moe hated to admit it, but his stunted, blistered hopes all seemed to rest on the enigmatic Mrs. Squamitch. Burdened with anxiety, he ran the tape in the media—and public response was an avalanche of lO's! No other tape had even remotely met with such a reception. The commentators were once more abuzz. His office was swamped with inquiries. Who was this mental meteor? Stop teasing the public. Produce him/her immediately! Vidiphones bristled with calls from school administrators demanding to lease psychotrons for the coming academic year.

Pete Petrovsky came in with a puzzled look on his face.

"The studio tests!" Moe demanded, his heart thumping wildly. "How'd they come out?"

"We've been dealing with her for three straight days. The studio tests themselves came out . . . negative."

"What!"

"Wait!" said Petrovsky. "It's not all clear. She claimed she didn't feel 'at home' in the studio. It gives her stagefright. I don't know, two days in a row and she can't forget her 'stagefright' just to unselfconsciously daydream for a lousy fifteen minutes? Sure, we picked up *some* signals from her —weak, blah, jejune, ordinary. All the real stuff is bottled up or else . . ."

"Else what? Spill it," said Moe.

"Well, I don't want to say she doesn't *have* it, because we did what she asked today, tested her at home—from the truck parked outside, like before —and she produced in flying technicolor! At least as good as the first time. You know, this makes it tough on our technicians."

"The hell with our technicians! I don't care if they have to shoot her from inside a manhole, so long as we know she's got it."

"We certainly hope she's got it."

"Hope? What do you mean, hope?"

"Look, Moe," Petrovsky shrugged, "she's outside waiting to see you. I told her that we normally wait for the end of the testing procedure, but she insists on seeing you personally, now."

"But . . . what can I tell her?" Moe hesitated, himself suddenly stagestruck.

"Feel her out. See if you think she's real."

"I pay you to find that out, dammit!"

For a second time Petrovsky shrugged his shoulders. "Do you want me to send her away?"

"Send her in," said Moe, biting at an already ravaged fingernail.

"Mr. Unglick, Mrs. Désirée Squamitch," Angela announced, rolling her eyes to the ceiling as she quickly retired from the office.

Tinsel! thought Moe. Okay on a Christmas tree, but not on a person. The woman's ample body was sheathed in a dress of oblong silver spangles, and her platinum hair, done up in the latest "pointed" fashion like a bleached porcupine, was dusted with sparkles. After showing her to a seat and engaging her in small talk, Moe discovered to his abhorrence that she was chewing doodlegum like any vulgar teenager. On top of that, she insisted on the galling familiarity of addressing him by his first name.

"So like I say, Moe, why waste time with Indians when you can pow-wow with the chief, right?"

"But Mrs. Squamitch," Moe countered, blinking at her overpainted face and pearl-glazed, sensual lips, "we can't announce you to the public until we're sure you can produce for us on a consistent basis. According to the studio tests . . ." As he spoke, she blew a doodle shaped like pouting female lips that suggestively parted and upset his train of thought.

"You'll never be more sure than you are now, Moe, dear," she winked, leaning back in such a way as to ripple all the sequins along her bosom.

"We have strict procedures," Moe insisted, "and while I have no reason to doubt that you may have the biggest talent I've ever seen . . ." Again, in a most disconcerting manner, she blew a doodle that expanded to form a large pair of rosy-nippled breasts. They popped as she proceeded to wheedle:

"My old man, you see, he don't make us much of a living, that's me and the two kids, so an opportunity like this to get outta that stinking neighborhood don't come along too many times in a lifetime, you know, so since, I mean, you're *pretty* sure you're on the right track, I just wanted to do anything I could to sort of speed things up a bit." She paused, fluttered her eyelids, and slowly crossed her legs in a shower of spangles. Hope caved in to despair as Moe thought of the *image* that a Désirée Squamitch would present to the people of America. If this was the personality behind the performance . . . As he thought of a polite way to end the interview, he watched another doodle snake out of her lips, something long and pink and tapered followed by another, exactly the same, both turning into a nude pair of legs that commenced an obscene and repeated gesture. Moe felt his ears turn red. And then things suddenly became clear to him. Testosterone! he thought—or whatever the female equivalent was. There was no way that this woman could have been the source of that great performance! The thing to do right now was to hold out a bit of a carrot, keep her busy for the entire evening, have Angela whirl her around Manhattan while he, Petrovsky, and a company crew staked out the house *without her in it* for as long as possible. Someone else in their apartment was the source of that incredible psiwork.

"Mrs. Squamitch," said Moe, standing up, "let me think things through a little more."

"Really? You see, I knew you were a soft—I knew there was a soft heart behind that hard-boiled face, Moe, dearie."

"Meanwhile, I have to leave right now, but why don't we try to get together later this evening . . . to talk more. My administrative assistant has instructions to take you to dinner and show you around town."

"But I'm not dressed—"

"You're dressed perfectly! Just wait here a moment while I go out and . . . remind Miss Corpino."

Moe sat opposite Petrovsky in the body of the garbage truck. His only relief from fits of claustrophobia was to peer occasionally through the periscope that was trained on the ground-floor Squamitch apartment of the multiplex across the street. A technician sat grimly to his right, eyes glued to the screen of a psychotron. Outside, the men in the driver's cabin were to tell the curious that the truck was stalled and that they were waiting for help. Moe knew that the new Dazzling Daydreamer had to be one of the two kids the mother had mentioned. It couldn't be the father because he had been at work on previous occasions when the high-intensity signals had been received. If Mrs. Squamitch was lying, as he was sure she was, then this would be the quickest way to get her to admit it and step aside. And right now time was everything. Time pressed in on him just like those bony dogs that were prowling, growling, and sniffing around outside the truck at that very moment.

Suddenly the technician's hand was jabbing at his shoulder. Both he and Petrovsky crowded in to view the monitor. The frightening image of slavering, charging dogs crackled onto the screen. Hundreds of children, cats and birds fled from them in all directions, climbing trees, scaling walls, and lying still in the grass to escape pursuit. Colors now brightened and images of harmony prevailed—a giant picnic grounds dotted with baskets and platters of food, men, women, and children and all sorts of friendly animals eating and dancing, running, playing, hugging—a paradise free from want and fear. Now objects began to change form in surprising, amusing ways, rocks changing into rabbits, rabbits into bushes, bushes into boots. Moe grinned and tried to keep from laughing. They could not afford to blow their own cover. Especially not now, when they knew that at last they were closing in. . . .

At first Mrs. Squamitch was bitter at being exposed. But then, practical woman that she was, she felt happy that the treasure was at least within the family. She invited Moe and Pete to meet her twelve-year-old, Joey, who was the true daydreamer of the family. "That's all he does all day. That boy has cost us endless grief. And to think that *my Joey* , of all the poor little slobs in the world . . ." A twelve-year-old named Joey! thought Moe. With such strong signals, could be testosterone won't bother him for years. And Pete is right, Joey is a name that the public can relate to. A hell of a lot more Joeys than Iras in this country!

As they entered the dim hallway to the rear of which was the door to the Squamitch apartment, they were confronted by a pretty little freckle-faced girl of nine or ten who looked at them suspiciously. She had one arm hooked around a cat in a way that obviously distressed the cat because its neck was in a chokehold and the rest of it dangled toward the floor.

"If you're inviting anyone for supper, Ma, forget it," she scowled, squeezing the squirming cat which was trying to slip out of her grip. "Dad's too drunk to cook up dinner tonight."

"Shut your fat face, Stacey, and drop that cat," Mrs. Squamitch replied.

"Derrick just shuts up and takes orders," Stacey sneered. "We call him Derrick because we took him in after a derrick hit him in the head so he lost an eye. He's no good for anything, and he knows it, so he takes . . ." Unable to breathe, the cat started flailing, catching the girl's arm with one of its claws. "Damn you!" Stacey shrieked, catching the cat by the tail and swinging it upside down over the floor while it desperately sliced at the air and yowled in pain. She then flung it away from her and the cat—bright orange and white but skinned in spots—caromed off the corridor wall and scrambled limply for the stairwell leading to the basement. "Next time you scratch you'll be dogmeat!" Stacey shouted after him. "Don't worry," she grinned up at Moe. "He'll crawl back to me in a few minutes 'cause I'm his only friend."

"Get lost, Stacey. Go see that Joey's looking human. These gen'lemen are here to see Joey."

"More people for Joey? I thought we gave up on that a long time ago."

"Get *moving*."

Stacey retreated, after sticking out her tongue.

"She's my ten-year-old. She's very bright in school."

"I'll bet," Moe mumbled, filing into the apartment behind Petrovsky. It was furnished in Contemporary Gaudy, with metallic colors screaming out at the visitor from every gewgaw-cluttered corner. They passed through the living room, where a heavy-set man was snoozing in pajamas in front of a screen that was watching itself, and entered a brightly lit den where Stacey was doing a fast scrub with a washcloth over her brother's face.

"This is Joey," said Mrs. Squamitch. "Joey, these are nice people. They've come to see you."

Scrawny for a twelve-year-old, Joey smiled pleasantly and had handsome features and a satin skin—and his head bobbed incessantly on his skinny neck.

Moe's heart sunk, and he avoided looking at Petrovsky. "Mrs. Squamitch," he wheezed, "Joey is . . . retarded?"

"So what of it?" she retorted. "Do you know what goes through the heads of kids like that? They don't say nothing, but they're powerful *dreamers*."

"We'll have to observe Joey under studio conditions, Mrs. Squamitch. Mind if we borrow him for two days?" Petrovsky said unenthusiastically.

"Only if I come along. Joey needs me near him, you know. And I'm just dying to meet that wonderful sweet Angela of yours again."

"I'll tell her that," said Moe, his ears still smarting from Angela's reaction to her evening out on the town with Mrs. Squamitch. This cannot be! Moe muttered inwardly. The national daydream champion—a gork? On the other hand, he was very photogenic. And if a hidden brace could be attached to the back of his head, maybe it wouldn't bob around so much on that spindly little stalk of his. And if his appearances were edited just right, with fake dialogue laid over shots of his smiling face . . .

Joey did not check out. He appeared perfectly placid, totally unperturbed by the studio environment, but after two days of testing—mother present, mother absent, toys present, toys absent—he showed far duller and more muddy patterns of psi-wave activity than did most people who would never even register a hit. Randolph Quern was intrigued by the differences between Joey's patterns and normal ones in frequency, color-range, and image quality, and he again reminded Moe of the potential value of the psychotron in the diagnosis of mental disorders. Moe had nothing but contempt for such blithering scientific idiocies. After many fruitless hours spent checking tapes and observing Joey through the one-way window, Moe Unglick and Pete Petrovsky looked at each other and blurted, almost simultaneously, "Stacey!"

"She's the lead character in parts of those tapes!" Moe exclaimed.

"And her cat is in them too!" cried Petrovsky. "A lot more handsome-looking than the scruffy original, but she has the good artistic sense to spruce Derrick up for public consumption."

"She's very cute," Moe added. "The freckles, the turned-up nose . . . the perfect American *image*!"

"And she's smart in school—in *public* school," Petrovsky emphasized. "Every school system in the country'll be knocking at our door."

Moe frowned and fell silent for several seconds.

"What's the matter?"

"She's got a vicious little trap on her," Moe groaned. "She's a bitch and a shrew."

"Think positive," countered Petrovsky. "She's a perky, sassy little lassie with true, individualistic American gumption."

"She's crude and vulgar," Moe sighed.

"She's got good old-fashioned energy and down-to-earth sincerity."

"Most kids wouldn't treat a rag doll the way she treated that miserable-looking cat," said Moe, shaking his head.

"She scrubs her little brother's face!"

"Big brother," Moe corrected.

"Only *we* know that."

"The kid's a goddam sadist," Moe grunted. "She whacked that animal's head right into the wall."

"Discipline! Training!" Petrovsky replied. "Besides, the cat loves her. Ten minutes later it was in her hands again dangling by the scruff of the neck."

"It's just plain un-American to wipe up the wall with an animal," Moe snorted.

"Don't you understand?" said Petrovsky. "The poor kid has a love-hate relationship towards her sleazy mother, and she takes out her ambivalence on the cat. It's a textbook case, as American as you can get!"

The problem now was dealing with Stacey's mother. They encountered unreasonable resistance.

"That little bitch?" spat Mrs. Squamitch. "She's the creative genius you've been sniffing around the whole damn country for?" She blew a doodle of a hand with finger pointing upward. "She's a selfish, rotten liar, and she'll con you into anything."

"Selfish? Rotten? From a family like yours?" said Moe. "I don't believe it. Besides, we cannot be conned. And anyway, Mrs. Squamitch, *you* still get to control all the financial arrangements."

"Well," she conceded, "I s'pose you're the experts. But if that brat starts lording it over everybody around her . . ."

Stacey refused to come to the studio without bringing Derrick along. She yanked him by the neck up from the dark basement stairwell, where he was allowed to live as not quite part of the family but safe, at least, from certain death outside. He whined in terror throughout the whole long drive to Manhattan, and whenever Stacey bashed him in the nose, shutting him up at least for a while, Unglick clenched the steering wheel until his knuckles turned white.

"Will I make a lot of money?" asked Stacey.

"If things turn out right, yes," said Moe.

"Great! 'Cause then I can buy me a real show cat, like one of those fancy long-haired ones from Tibet."

"And what will you do with Derrick?"

"Kick him out. My mother'll be delighted."

They fitted out the studio with anything Stacey asked for—two female store manikins and fifteen flashy outfits to change them into, a stack of magazines with holographs of romantic, faraway places, bowls of candy in every corner of the room, and a bowl of catfood, of course, for Derrick—anything that might relax her and serve also to stimulate her psi-waves. Moe observed her for a while through the one-way glass. The psychotron was set to take in the width of the room so that wherever she moved she would be within range.

Stacey was, if anything, totally unselfconscious. She appeared to enjoy this opportunity to be away from her depressing family. When not engrossed in magazine or mannikin, she would reach in under a chair or

couch and pull out a limp but yowling Derrick by the ear or tail, toss him into the air, then roll him around the carpeted floor until he sprang out of reach again.

Moe alternated with Petrovsky and Quern in watching the monitor. The seriousness of the moment weighed on all of them. They hardly exchanged a word. Except for visits to the bathroom, they all remained constantly in the observation room. In the midst of eating an algaburger, Moe saw the first blaze of multicolored light explode on the large screen mounted on the wall to the left of the one-way window. The display was being recorded under the best possible conditions. Soundlessly, breathlessly, the three of them watched the unfolding drama of image and color, the lost girl chasing through the trees, Derrick tramping lovingly beside her, the transformation of both into beautiful soaring birds, the lunging of the birds to earth, the flight of the scared rabbit . . . the logic of the emotions, of a grand search for love and security in a world full of protean dangers, the logic of the heart and spirit replacing the usual logic of the mind and weaving the whole sequence into a unified ensemble. Utterly absorbed, all three continued to watch and paid no attention to the light click of the door behind them.

Moe was subliminally aware of a fourth person watching, with equal fascination, from close behind him.

"That's great!" Stacey whispered in his ear.

"Shh!" hissed Moe.

"I'm sorry," Stacey said. "I went to the bathroom and got lost coming back. I came through this door by mistake."

"Stacey! Dammit, what the hell are you doing—" Moe's spine tingled with an uncanny sensation somewhere between the eerie and the horrific. He swiveled around to face her as if looking at a ghost. The other two men also stared at her, speechless. Moe pointed back at the screen, at the ongoing drama of color and image, as though demanding an explanation.

"I didn't mean to interrupt," she addressed all three of them aloud.

Moe slapped his hand to his head. "My God!" he said, and the three of them seemed to say it at once: "It's the cat!" Derrick was under the couch against the opposite wall of the studio, his scarred orange head slightly in view, resting on his paws. His one good eye was half closed, and he appeared to be purring, lost in a world of his own.

"Lost, everything lost," moaned Petrovsky, his head sunk in his hands.

Randolph Quern gazed sternly at the two of them and then began quietly laughing.

"What the hell is *that* for?" said Moe, the tears beginning to come to his eyes.

"*Parturiunt montes, nascitur mus ridiculus*," Quern replied. "Horace said that, old man. 'Mountains go into labor, and out pops a silly-looking mouse.'"

"If this gets out," Petrovsky warned, "we'll never survive it. None of us. The psychotron either," he added pointedly, staring at its inventor.

"What's wrong with what's playing," asked Stacey. "I think it's great."

"Wait," said Moe. "Wait!" Closing his eyes, he held his hand over his throbbing temples. "Okay, so we lose the airlines, Disneyworld, the motorcycles, the clothing manufacturers. . . . The hell with them! We've got pet foods, cat collars, environmentalists. . . . Pet foods is big advertising," he insisted, rapping his fist into the arm of his chair. "Dammit, don't look at me like I'm an idiot!"

R. T. Smith

three poems

Renaissance

When I stray into the yard
after dark and lie down
on the lawn

beside the rowed sunflowers
already drooping
with dew

to discover the moon
waning amid a maze
of apple boughs,

I almost know
how flowers and light
overlap, how the black

seeds our finches adore
offer more than an amber shining,

how they hinge
on the barn owl rising
as a curious

night rose. They
depend on the fireflies'
amorous darting and

on Orion, as well,
who needs the blossoms
to guide him.

Supine at eye
level with crickets
and the blackberry's white

spirals, I can just
remember how the Pawnee
lived by bract

and bristle, ray
and disc: they salvaged
oil and silage,

the fruit ground to flour,
moist soil at rootclaw
sworn to cure fever. And

though I watch
the stalks like so many
green bones bowing,

I will use nothing
and only savor the silence
of each eyeless visage,

till dream is lifting
me like the gold crowns
of flame, and the first

birds sing their rapt
passage across the starless
threshold of dawn.

Shells

At eighty, Aunt Katherine
claims strangers inhabit
her house, always talking

about her—slanderous, rancor,
a concoction of lies. She
walks the beach, keening

across the Atlantic,
polishes her hand against
the fossil in her pocket

and tries to remember
the face of her mother,
the spring house, the bellwether

that fell to his death
on Dingle stones.
As a child she wandered

the shore, picking shells
from the surf, or listened
for ghosts in the ruined abbey

where she gathered gentian
and thrift. Now she sees
clouds almost claiming

the shapes of kin, hears Irish
voices in the salt wind
off the coast of Maine.

Her mind, the neighbors say,
is gone. This morning
she remembers a girlhood

relic in her palm's hollow
and collects the husk
of a mussel that once clung

to black rock but now lies
hinged open, bruise-blue
in the sand. Is there an

angel watching over her
with azure-winged symmetry,
the whisper of a Munster air

or just the solace of forgetting,
a mild dusk in the mind?
Eavesdroppng on gull gossip,

she keeps vigil against
intruders near the surf's
sobbing gospel and hopes

this hard work is followed
by the succor of another shore.

Chore

Clockwork woke me
at the drover's hour. Stirred
embers and a slosh of tea.

The basket's handle
of woodbine twisted
as a linnet's song fit

my palm exactly. Dew
glittered the madder grass
and meadow chirr stilled

to my step. When the coop's
saddlehide hinge swung,
I stooped under the low

lintel and caught cobwebs
on my lips. No
russet-combed cock

stirred as purring hens
let me ease my hand amid
twilled straw and down.

With each egg nesting
in basket moss, a warm
moon kept its secret

dawn, though I walked
out under snowclouds
feathering the north

and sang my song
of plunder to a world
on the edge of freshness,

red ivy dying
against the autumn wall.

Linda Andrews

five poems

Late Sky

at Bend, Oregon

Sunset, and the high desert sky breaks
into bands: black, midnight blue,
sea green and yellow. Colors of the desert
thrown into the sky like a scarf.

Black predominates:
the color of recent violence.
Tubes of lava run for miles
below the crust and, inside,
the most a lantern will show
is the cloud of a child's breath
or small patch of cave wall.
All that can be done
is trust the dark floor shaped in waves,
ridges of tide from a solid sea.

Midnight blue well before midnight,
the bank of sky just dark enough for stars:
pool of ink, or a lover's eyes
steadfast and deep.
The stars begin here,
faint jagged shapes
left behind for us to navigate.

Sea green. Before mountains,
the sea rolled through here.
For proof, tiny skeletons
embedded in sandstone
or this too-earthly green in the night sky
and in the noble fir,
needles whirled on the stems.
Each year's growth goes
seamlessly into the next.

Yellow, the last color
to outline the mountains,

palest layer of the sky, aretes
backlit as if by a last candle.
Silhouettes glow and seem to close in,
collapsed craters and cinder cones
in a chain scattered like black sleeping hearts.

Io, One Summer

> *"You need not be afraid to enter the dim forest where beasts crouch in the dusky ravines, for am I not here to protect you?"*
> *—Zeus to Io*

If she has a failing, it is this: her belief
in words. One beautiful sentence can last her
a year. His mouth on her, his tongue trails the beginnings
of stories, stories that will spring up out of her while
he is gone. He holds her tighter than most mortals
could tolerate and says the truth, "You would let me
break you." And she counters with the truth,
"You already have."

In the careful rhythms of love, she will learn
his body and they will tell each other where
all the scars have come from. He tells her such stories:
of a farm, the drive lined with poplars; of a small city
where hawthorns grow to sixty feet and droop heavy
from hot pink bouquets pinned to their branches;
of another land between their two homes, a place
of headwaters and hotsprings, vast enough
to shelter them from a jealous wife.

What remains is their time to travel. She spends
seven days with him going from Garnet to Wraith Hill
and the circle they make is made of every rise and fall:
the taste of his summer skin, the frantic give and take
of love, and every morning she settles herself over him.
On this mountaintop is where they should stay, the man and woman
that they are, skins gleaming. The air will thinly cushion them
and the bears can come and take what they want, walk away
with parts of them trailing red from their mouths.

All the Calliopes in Montana

As if they were children, all the calliopes in Montana
have been carried to one old room. Inside a glass
and cherrywood cabinet rests a violin that, for fifty cents,
will play.

For fifty cents
a melody will coil out
into the museum. And part of the chorus, one minor
progression of notes, pulls them up to the curved
glass. And they're sure they know the tune or
his grandmother sang it to him or they need to hold on
to it to stay in love.

Resined wheels sing the wires of the violin, a hill
of powder collecting below the neck. And the instrument
is lit from below, lit with pleasure and past, paid as it is
to remember missing melodies. How hard it would be—all this
remembering of sound, as difficult as resurrecting a mother's laugh,
grandfather's salute down a long table, or the voice
of someone who once loved you.

And the man and woman can't pretend they didn't start this
with their pooling of quarters. But then the whirring
took over, the eerie progression of notes that had them staring
through the glass as into a crystal ball,

had them wanting their arms around each other
and they did. Had them wanting to dance
and they didn't. Even though the floorboards would
have groaned with them and the dust would
have parted for them, they didn't dance
but kept their balance, so the melody retreats
and won't be recollected, taking the brittle invitation
deep into the machine fallen dark.

Plains at Belle Fourche

South Dakota

Ahead, the sky is spilling itself
upon the plains, from a blue-gray
theatre curtain, hung with rips of lightning.

I'm too far away for the pronouncement
of thunder. Here, it's all wheat ruffling
in the first wind, crickets filling

the ditches with falsetto voice. The decision—
whether to drive into the chaos or let it
come to me. The first rondels of rain hit

and the crickets mostly fall quiet. Starlings
thick on the barbed wire of the cattle pen
lift off. Even the crows begin to notice

and start their useless noise. The curtain
is sweeping this way. In the dreams
of Midwestern girls, such storms can narrow

quickly down to funnels, like an angry
father surging up the driveway, come
to terrorize the ones he fascinates.

Rain harder now and more wind. Growing up
with thunder and lightning
gets you ready for anything. It trains you

to see ditches, underpasses, or a deep crease
in the earth as shelter. For anyone new
to tornados, I would tell them this:

They are beautiful.
When your storm comes close
find a low place in the earth. Then set

your back to the funnel and let it sweep
your house away.
Watch it as long as you can.

The Bathers

Come together in a city neither of them knows,
they are not lost. They could find each other by scent
if they had to. Free of self-consciousness, they become
bodies dressed in their primitive down. What they shed
is misgiving, and in that moment deserve to be called
beautiful. A simple cleansing, the ritual way
they bathe each other to prepare for love.

She soaps him long past clean. He rinses her
with cupped hands and licks the pearls
of water at her throat. In abundance,
water slides over the rim of the tub
and they are rich for having nothing between them.

The hot sinking takes them to a place so free of longing
they could believe there was never a need
for art or music. They are surrounded by the ripple
of spaces closing, but could as well be immersed
in headwaters, framed by soft rushes,
a mud floor and the rim of the horizon.

Lee Passarella

two poems

Winter as Sibyl

A month ago the terrapins and sliders clumped
like galls on half-sunk limbs; they've had
enough of summer now, taking the sun only
when coming up for air, nosing the surface
like breathless fish in a slow ground
to the dragonflies' scat-sung counterpoint.

You accept the lake for what it is now:
an inland ocean choked with shoals of algae.
They shear and trail in spongy clots,
tear trees limb from limb that in another
season could fall whole, weightless as shades
into an underworld of mirrored light.

Stuck in the green continuum that's August,
it's hard to see winter come again, sponge
fishing, unraveling each billowed thread.
Working its slow work at the bottom:

riffling the stacks and reams of leavings,
writing chapters, whole novels,
on the latticed skeletons.

The Leap

Hickory Nut Falls, August 1991

The stream dropped down
in quick rappel from the ledge,
the white rope falling in tatters,
in shattered tones against the rocky
side. Water—swift, uncertain
as thought—seemed torn
between noise and music,
between the clear path it chose
among the rocks
and that desperate escape
it took beyond
the edge, to the rope's
sheared end.

We had our picture taken
with the ribbon of the falls
behind, shared cold wet kisses
after Cokes in the shadow
of the rock, flung all we had
in us of music into space,
into the void, to hear
the echo of its fall.

S. Ramnath

Mangoes

The smell of ripe mangoes is unmistakable, inviting, and it rises above the signature of all other fruits. As soon as I walked into the supermarket I knew the king of all fruits was there, and sure enough, a big mound of mangoes sat in the middle of the floor, an icon of supremacy, surrounded by a gallery of other lesser vegetables and fruits. These were delectable mangoes. Most of the fruit's skin had turned a flamingo pink, and the skin gave slightly to a thumb's pressure, and as you lifted it up to the nostrils, the smell was full of the promise of yellow-orange flesh. I bought six mangoes for two dollars.

Mangoes take me back a long ways. I can remember a mango tree every place I lived in India. In Ernakulam, when we were living with my grandparents, there was one in the back of the house. It was planted the day I was born, a sapling; I think it was my great-grandmother's doing, to commemorate my birth. I am not sure the tree exists today, or for that matter the house. To the left of the house was a Toddy Shop, and behind it a Saw Mill, and I am sure one of these businesses acquired the property when my grandfather sold the house and moved with his wife to Guruvayoor to live in a modest one-room home near the temple. When they sold the house, I was living in Calcutta and getting ready to leave the country.

I remember the tree fondly. It produced a lot of fruit. I remember climbing a ladder my grandfather had made to get the fruits that hung from the lower branches. The ladder was made of bamboo poles, two long ones for the sides with the steps made from sectional cuttings. To get the fruits way on high we used two long, full bamboo poles tied together, with a sickle-like blade attached to the end. The trick was to raise the pole through the foliage to the fruit, hook the stem with the blade and give it a good, sharp yank. My grandfather and I would take turns at the pole. The other person would catch the falling fruit in a wicker basket. These mangoes were not of the sweet variety and they were sliced, marinated, spiced to make hot pickles. My grandfather made mango pickles every season, and these concoctions spiced all our evening meals.

Where the tree once stood there is probably drunken banter or the loud whir of saw blades and a suffocating cloud of saw dust.

$$$

Train stations in India are as busy as a Miró painting with hawkers peddling all sorts of goods. And always in the mêlée, one can spot the woman selling mangoes, a pyramid of fruit arranged in a wicker basket

sitting on her head, which moves like some anti-gravity device over a sea of heads. Anywhere one travels in India one goes by train; it is the cheapest mode of transportation. I had made many trips by train, and the mangoes I tasted in Salem, Bangalore, Malgudi, to name just a few of the places where the train stopped, form a unique and unforgettable experience.

There was also in Calcutta a mango tree, which stood in a yard adjacent to my friend's house, and in my 5th, 6th, and 7th grade years, intoxicated with the adventures of Fatty and the gang, the Secret Seven, as given to us in the books by Enid Blyton, I formed many secret societies, belonged to many of them, and did a lot of surveillance and dangerous spy work while perched on roofs and tree tops and while crouched behind walls and shrubbery. Most of it was training: practicing signals, shadowing unsuspecting people, trying to eavesdrop on conversation, and our prey was always a dangerous criminal, a kidnapper, or an agent working against the government. For a weapon I carried a slingshot tucked into the waistline of my trousers. One day I had climbed this mango tree, and I cannot recall now if it was for the fruit or doing detective work, when I espied from my angle above, looking into the window of the house beneath me, a woman in the shower. The light was on, and the glass window was open. The curtain which covered half the window's height was drawn and it provided all the privacy from the ground level, but it didn't block anything for the tree-perched voyeur. I remember being thrilled by the vision of the young woman in the shower. The way she bent to scoop the water from the large tin drum and pour it over her body and her long hair held me in a trance; I wanted to stop breathing so I could stop the pounding of my crazy heart. Later I kept a vigil outside the house to catch sight of this woman. I never saw her likeness come out of the house. For many days following this, at exactly the same hour, I climbed the mango tree, with nervous anticipation. But nothing happened; she never appeared. Then one day I was spotted in the tree by the owner, and in my attempt to escape I came a cropper. I had to climb over a wall as high as myself to escape the brute of a man who came after me. This put an end to my early voyeurism.

$$$

The tree trunk chained down to the flatbed (you can see it on the highways of Montana, Oregon, Washington)—the horizontal, fallen giant on his way to the lumberyard—carries with him a child's story, the one-way language of growing up and growing through pain.

$$$

I have mango on a plate. A plum and a peach also. Fruits for breakfast.

Suzanne M. Swanson

The Crow Reaches the Middle of her Life

Long ago, when she was a young crow, and lonely,
she spread her wings, she opened her beak. He left with her prize.

She forgot her name, lost her body.

In time, tiny hills formed a new landscape
around her shoulder blades. Buds of wings broke through
slowly, and with a pain that was gradual, impossible

to locate. Every night the wings grew in her dreams.
Now, with the proper mirror, she can see
the feathers shine, rough as coal. She was afraid

she was turning into an angel until she heard herself
competing with the jays, felt the sting of blackbirds' beaks
on her back. Her own beak materialized then, such a relief

to exist without teeth, the poking and prodding
accomplished handily from the outside.

She is growing back into her crow body.

With her fixed eyes, she can see how there will come a day
when she will not easily be fooled, will learn to love
her own raw voice.

Don Schofield

three poems

Dead Shepherd's Hut

Sure, I can fix the broken door, clear the brush
out front, find a rope and bucket for the well,
a mattress for the iron bed, but what about
his coat and crook still hanging by the mirror,
the photo of bare breasted women
in white shorts and red boxing gloves
squared-off and wailing at each other?
I've come here, a tangle of desires,
more like the brambles I open the shutters to, the random
twisted olives up this valley kilometers from the road,
come to lose myself in the deep lull
of summer, to be less than smoke
curling from a lamp, nothing and nowhere. I like to think
he woke early, herded the huddled goats
up the ridge, that he knew each one by its bell,
that he's still sitting where pine cones
crack in late morning heat, the place
he slipped through to death. He's buried on the opposite slope,
in the one bare patch among briars and burned grass.
I like to think he's the absence of yearning. But when I stand
at his rusty basin, see these women he gazed at every morning,
the smell of leather and sweat implied
by their gleaming shoulders and gloves, the ripple across their breasts
when a punch lands, the spectators cheering
from the darkness surrounding the ring, even the referee
smiling and pointing—I wonder
what he thinks of pleasure now
that he's gone to the source. Dead shepherd
are you still hovering near your body, or here with me,
still wanting this primal destruction, resenting even your own
birth, the wound that bore you?
Or have you come back with some other knowledge—
taking down your coat and crook
then winking at me with the eyes of a goat, behind the bright slits,
some truth I just can't see.

Comp I

I'm tired of writing,
of making subject and verb agree, of finding just the right
declension for pain. You want pain? I give you
Georgette, my Palestinian student who wrote how Phalangists
broke into her family's home and shot them all,
each of the killers with a picture of the Virgin
on the butt of his Kalashnikov. Two sisters, her mother
and father. Dead. And I had to correct her prose,
tell her that a sentence is a single unit of meaning,
that certain conjunctions can balance ideas
and colons throw our attention forward: My father,
in my first memory, is throwing a lamp across the room
at my mother. I, a boy of two, stare numb from the couch.
I didn't tell this to Georgette, my pain seemed paltry
next to hers. I didn't scream it out
as I stood in front of my old house in Sacramento,
saw the pine I hid in dying, someone else's version
of a garden by the front door. I simply
dropped it into the conversation last night, my story
no better or worse than the other being told
as we faced each other in the hot tub
and sipped champagne, our last night at Squaw.
At dinner a woman's hair caught fire
"and no one seemed to notice," Mark said, "It seemed so
abstract." Mike described his father's
way of beating his mother, recited a poem
in which he performs an autopsy on them both. He didn't
cry. Nor did I when my father left me once again
at the depot, bound for this home or that, gave me change
for the Tractor Scoop and drove off. I could make
that tractor pull plastic rocks out of synthetic earth,
pile two or three at a time into the dumptruck,
lights flashing, bells racking up
the points; how skillful
to a child, this occupation that can kill a man or make him
an angry father. In Greece, on a beach, I watched a man
play catch with his son, then sit down and unscrew
the bottom part of his left leg. He had the boy
hold it as he rolled into the sea,
his strong arms pumping, a single kick in his wake.
If it were me, would I hold that wooden stub,

quiet and patient, a good son to a good dad,
or toss it away, let him live his own
damn life, take care of his own rotting parts?
When he died, would I keep it to remember
how he used a paddle with holes
drilled in it to make it sting
on my brother and me? For sure I'd hold it up
like an exclamation point and say, to Georgette
or Mike, or anyone else who cared to listen:
This is a unit of meaning.

Volcano

Left Athens,
    Patty glaring, me yelling
        inside: can't speak, can't make the

right gesture—
    to this island that blew
        millennia ago, wedge

once whole. Gulls circle
    dry landscape. Flowering nettles
        on the path. Drystone walls

angling to expanse of sky
    or sea. You can't tell
        rising and falling

when some emotion will flood you—whose anger
    carved these terraced slopes?
        Whose love planted lemons? Whose grief

pulled up good water
    through his broken reflection?
        Some days you see the mouth

steaming in the bay, bargain a boat
    and lean over the rim:
        gust of sulphur

from hell: cracked
    core of lost wholeness
        seething, compelling

you to seek these whitewashed houses,
    blue-domed sky, peace
        at the center of storm.

You know that guise
    but not this other
        rule of love: anger

at the center of peace.

Paula Milligan

Truing

Ancient one, you did not spring fully armed
from your father's cloven pate, did not flow
from the sea in a white froth of skin and
sensuality, yet strength and sense are yours.

Born full and tall in a muddy field just sown,
you drink light and rain; you are that oak
tree there, your roots dig deep—earth
is your temple. Your limbs reach high:

Sun is your father, he gives you green, gives
you breath, and you breathe on me; summer
winds lick my face, whisper secrets, tell
me of other times: I know the people

long ago, those who honored earth and sky,
who so revered creation, they called them
mysteries; touch became blessing, man and woman
joined beneath the budding oak to celebrate

spring, recreate creation, reunite earth
and sky. Dangerous prayers for good harvest.
They knew you could smite the unpure in bright,
jagging power, swallow in your gaping loam.

But you are not cruel.

I have cherished you, baptized you
in soft rain. In the Falls, the cold waters
I gather, I pricked your skin until
you were pink and tight. You have laid

your full woman's buttocks in my dark
crumbled soil, I have held you, awaited
your wakening, cradled you as sky took you,
and I took only a bruise. You were born

of grain and wheat, cleaving earth. Now
you are tall: reach high, too. Dive into

the fire. I will hold you, then I will bathe
you in clean water where the falls pool up.

Yesterday, I saw your messenger,
golden eagle on a light standard,
heavy-chested and watchful, owl-brown
breast and white throat. I knew her

because no one else could see her.
The solstice has passed, she reminded
me. True, it is winter now: the cold
is heavy, pressing, darkens my vision;

but already, light is longer. Soon, acorns
you have held since fall, the children
in your womb, will dig young roots
in muddy, musky soil, send shoots to reach

for the light, for without the light,
there is no leaf; without the earth, no root:
Look: I begin to glitter, dance in sky's light.
Hold me high, mother, I am your Eagle.

Donna Spector

three poems

In Grandmother's House

That was the strange house, beige stucco and gabled,
its sloping roof like the house of the seven dwarves,
hiding under pine trees in the Altadena hills.
When I entered, Sunday afternoons,
I was surrounded by damp carpet smells,
sweet scent of potato kugel, my mother silent
in the soft bustle of Miriam and Leah, my plump aunts
baking in the dim, flour-dusted kitchen.

When I entered, I had to leave everything behind me.
Especially my picture of Jesus, his Sunday School
innocence offensive, because here
they ate latkes and lit candles.
My father wore a silky shawl. Sometimes he sang
words too sad and ancient for Mother's new house
where we sang the money song.
If I was good in my white church dress,
and didn't tell anyone where I had been,
I could eat on special plates food Mother never cooked.

If I was good, I could listen to Jack Benny later
while Grandmother brushed her long white hair.
I might be able to play with her silver dresser set,
the comb and heavy mirror, and the little scrolly pot
with the powder puff inside. That was the one that played
Talk to Me with Flowers when I opened it
in the sugary darkness of Grandmother's bedroom.

That was the bedroom I could only enter
if someone said yes, and after I played a while
I could climb up on the big blue satin bed
and listen to the wolves outside. After Jack Benny
I could hear Grandmother's fuzzy voice
talking to her son, my father. I could hear
his smoky laugh. And if I floated very carefully
on the edge of sleep, I could hear, sometimes,
my mother's silence as the wolves crept closer.

Going Down into the Dark

I'm bringing you with me, Fanny and Laura,
my grandmothers.

I'm taking musty scents and mutterings
from the Kiev ghetto, Fanny.
Rabbi whispering, flee, faster than blood
rushing down narrow streets.
Carry your babies in bags like groceries
to Chicago, wear a new name, a fancy hat.
Have a child who will be a poet,
who will find a woman from Kentucky.
A woman who wouldn't know a Jew
if she married one.

Laura, I'm taking Paradise
that was stripped,
ploughed under, leaving nothing
but a graveyard, an empty church, a gas pump
rusting long after you left
the clutter of falling leaves and children,
so many you'd forget their names.
And the women frying chicken for breakfast,
gathering wildflowers for freight cars
they lived in after the railroad
gave up on their men who broke down in the mines.
I'm taking your oldest child, Overa,
who said goodbye to Paradise,
crossed the Green River with wide eyes
and white dress.

I'm going down into the dark, my mother,
and I'm bringing you with me.

You, the first woman to go to college,
who married the first man who wrote poems.
Overa, I'm taking Dolly, the name
you wore with your Los Angeles glitz
that blinded me. Your movie star
beauty I starved myself to have,
stretching my eyes and pressing my long nose
against the mirror. I'm taking

what you called love, indifferent
as the mink stole you wore
in our hot, breathless house
where Jews couldn't live, where Paradise
was someone else's story.

I'm taking myself, who was
my father's secret, bright boy.
Myself, your doll, so pretty and empty
with the effort of it we couldn't tell
ourselves apart.

Grandmothers, Mother,
we must go down here now as one woman.
Christened, bat mitzvahed,
heavy with honest pain,
we must deliver ourselves
so we can find the boy I gave birth to,
and let him go.

My Son Calls Me from Los Angeles

Tonight my son tells me he wants
to peddle blue jeans in Japan for one thousand
dollars a pair. Wants to work for Club Med.
Wants to buy a Greek island, to sell real
estate, to start his own band, to study
philosophy, to give bank loans to the poor.
Just twenty-five, he holds life in his hands
like a bowl of rainbow marbles.

His girlfriend is twenty-eight. A flamenco dancer
whose biological clock ticks louder
than her clicking castanets, she wants walls,
windows outlined in bougainvillea,
a back yard lush with roses and brussel sprouts.
She wants afternoon sun gilding the powdered
sleep of babies, the bubbles that poof up
from their dreaming mouths. She wants Aaron,
my son, caressing her heart in firelight,
on their sheepskin rug.

Don't leave her, I say. You can build
a house like a love, patterns shifting in shadowed
mornings that drift into evening wine
crimson in blue-stemmed glasses,
babies crawling through damp summer grass.
You can learn the music, the mystery of one
changing person, the language that seems
familiar, like words you almost know
because they smell like grape leaves, garlic
and lemons. Don't leave her, the moments
are small, but someone is adding them up
like rosewood beads on an abacus.

Don't leave, I say. But he is standing
in the surf at the San Diego shore, his eyes
looking out toward Japan.

Louis Gallo

Still Life with Heating Pad

Truth is, all day I've hankered to test our new heating pad, even to the point of hazy, distracting reveries at work. So imagine how perturbed I am to come home and find Faye posed granite-like on the sofa, ready to pounce. She's had a rotten day, true, but so have I. We compare horrors as usual to see whose day was indeed worse. I come up with about twenty-three points on our distress scale and she ekes past me with twenty-five.

"Ok," I concede, "your day was worse but only by two points, which hardly counts."

She insists her bout with a Mr. Cannazaro at the office should merit about ten points, which would raise her score to thirty-five, but I won't agree. "Rules are rules," I say. "We set it up so each problem is worth only one point, no matter how bad. It's too bad spilling coffee on my new Reeboks rates the same lowly point as this Cannazaro guy, but then your paper cut and my inflamed disc shouldn't rank the same either. Be fair, Faye."

I nod judiciously and she simply huffs and sinks further into the sofa, looking meek and frail, like a tiny ostrich driven out of nest. I almost grant her the extra ten points for Cannazaro, but decide against it since this sort of thing would surely happen again and we'd have to bend the rules once more. "Quality of distress is a relative thing we've succeeded in quantifying," I proclaim. "We don't want to tamper with mathematics."

What's really eating Faye, I know, is the setback yesterday, not Cannazaro. She could not contain herself when the postcard came announcing we'd won a prize in the National Consumer Sweepstakes Competition. "We didn't really win," I'd said, "since we have to send $5.95 for handling charges. The prize is probably a two-dollar industrial diamond."

My assessment had plunged Faye into an instant funk and she'd marched zombie-like into the bedroom and thrown herself across the mattress. Following, I tried to console. "Faye, Faye, you're fretting over nothing at all. Everybody wins an industrial diamond or two. No big deal."

"I've never won anything," she whimpered into the comforter.

"Of course not," I said. "You're only twenty-five. You don't start winning industrial diamonds until you're past thirty, maybe thirty-five. It was a fluke that you won this time. Somebody got you on the wrong mailing list."

I knew I'd tampered with Faye's hope and regretted it, though I firmly believe people should abandon hope. She wanted to think there was a real possibility she'd won that million but would settle for the diamond just to

have an upbeat winner feeling for once in her life. But, I would argue if I had to argue, it would be a bogus winner feeling, an illusion.

"I don't feel good," she now whines.

"New symptoms?" We're always on the prowl for new symptoms.

"It's not just symptoms," she says, "it's the world. I heard on the news about this man who worked in a styrofoam pellet factory—you know, those squashy little mailing things? Something went wrong with the machine and he just happened to be under it. Fifty tons of styrofoam came down and crushed him to death. Is this fair? Crushed by styrofoam?"

"Ah, well," I say, "maybe he's lucky. At least he won't have to linger in a hospital and watch himself waste away . . ."

"Like me!" Faye wails.

"Actually, " I go on, "it's one of the best deaths I've ever heard. It proves what Einstein said: God doesn't play dice, he bowls!"

I want to note that styrofoam packing pellets take the shape of the sign for infinity, which must signify something, but it's a mistake for either of us to take the other's misery for granted. Who can tell when the tables will turn? Commiseration, back pats and soothing awwwws here will in turn be reciprocated there. My problem is I've got my mind on the blasted heating pad and my inflamed disc. I'm obsessed, you could say. A fine kettle of fish. Faye may be dying and I'm off on a puny tangent. We're out of synch. Would that fifty tons of styrofoam pellets crush us both here and now. To wind up as packing material even seems a little sexy, if you ask me.

Luckily, Faye needs a nap, so I figure I can squeeze in some tinkering with the heating pad during the forty or so minutes she's out. No sleazy rubber sheath of old encased in floral cloth, not this beauty. You don't even have to move furniture and station yourself beside an AC receptacle because it doesn't require AC. With the old models there's no getting around the fact that somebody's fluids or germs have definitely lingered. Nasty equipment to be sure but no option—until now. This thing I discovered at Revco amounts to nothing less than a new concept in heating pads. It works by chemical reactions of salt crystals in the bag. All you do is jiggle to set off the reaction. The salt hardens and gives off heat. And they're so cheap every member of the household can afford their own. No more sharing.

Obviously, I had to try it.

Faye staggers in, not quite awake. She's in that fuzzy, green, limp state. "Hi," she says blankly.

Oh, I yearn to complain, but she's not ready. It would go in one ear. It's important she be ready. So I offer to get her a Coke. Coke adds life, right? "Ok," she says, sitting precariously on the chair that needs to be recaned. I get the Coke, she sips at it—why do women always sip or use straws?—and slowly revives.

She bends over to gaze at something on the floorboards. "What's that slime?"

"What?" I ask.

"That white stuff."

I see it then. "Shit! I missed a patch. Damn it, I've been through the entire house."

"What is it?"

"That, Faye," I seize my opportunity, "is a remnant of our new heating pad!"

"*What* is it?"

"Salt deposit."

"Why is it there?"

"You won't believe what happened during your nap," I let it gush out. "All hell broke loose during your nap. You missed hell."

One difference between Faye and me is that she goes out of her way to avoid all hell breaking loose whereas I like staying on top of things. If there's wailing and gnashing of teeth, I'll be there. Call it a quirk.

"That wretched new heating pad is a fraud!" I'm up now, pacing, anxious to dash off letters to Ralph Nader and *Consumer Reports.*

"First you have to jiggle it so it hardens, no big deal. To unharden you boil it in a pot of water. All ok until I took it out of the pot with the long-nosed pliers. The plastic bag had sprung about fifty leaks. There were geysers spraying out in every direction. Boiling hot water. Some got on my clothes, even my skin! I was running all around the house with this spurting thing dangling from the pliers, looking for rags."

"You didn't."

"I had to," I confess, lowering my eyes. "It was right there hanging on the bathroom hook."

"My nightgown."

"The only thing made of cloth. I'm sorry, Faye, but it was a disaster. I've spent your entire nap wiping up steaming salt deposits."

"My nightgown."

More problems. The IRS seems determined to sink my and Faye's relationship. We make too much money. On the other hand, we shouldn't complain since many Americans make no money at all. Good God, you'd think someone somewhere had it easy. Say Faye and I had only a platonic relationship, even a plutonic relationship grounded in paranoia over demise, rather than the hormone-sizzling union we enjoy routinely (except for the last few nights, what with this proliferation of symptoms)—maybe less fluidy entanglement would spare us both a goodly portion of grief. I say this because sex complicates not only life but death as well. One of the major reasons I don't want to die is that no one has yet reported any diddling

beyond the grave. The Reaper makes eunuchs of us all. And I'll be damned if I want my skeleton to wind up in some high school biology lab. The little buggers won't hesitate to carve their initials into my pelvis. Worst mistake I ever made, donating my body to science. Yet you can't undo it once you've signed the dotted line.

And why am I having to shave so often? In my twenties I could shave once a day and get by; now, if I shave in the morning, by six I'm a regular Richard Nixon of the 1950s. They say hair grows pretty fast on corpses. A sign? Down with signs.

Faye too is succumbing. The other day she called from her office to inform me in her weakest, most fragile voice that she'd been sucked into a flow chart. The flow chart she meant had nothing to do with the charts she and her colleagues use in their work. She meant one of the many such charts beautifully illustrated in our massive *Family Guide to Symptoms.* First you identify the symptom, usually contained at the top of the page within a pale blue rectangle; then you follow ominous arrows until you spot your affliction and learn what recommended steps to take. Almost cruelly, the authors use bold red crimson for those rectangles which contain the most dreaded diseases and announce "See a doctor immediately."

Fortunately for me, I gave up on flow charts long ago, having been, as Faye puts it, sucked up into every crimson swatch in the book. If the myriad flow charts of my past mean anything, I've had every fatal disease (with major complications) it is possible to have. I am therefore theoretically dead, riddled with defects pronounced "terminal" by *Family Guide.* So today I neither consult medical dictionaries nor go to doctors. My interest in symptoms remains keen, however, as a sort of hobby. Just spare me the ordeal of consulting doctors—they've *got* to find something, right?—especially those whose services we require immediately. Thus I have passed from the ghastly terror-stricken sieges of my twenties and thirties to the much more serene levity of my Indian summer. Faye in her late youth cannot possibly grasp my defiance of the inevitable. I say too many little loosed ends for inevitability at the moment. Tomorrow maybe.

It occurs to me that signs themselves may be the problem. Most often what we take as a sign is something imposed by others, not ourselves. If, for instance, I cringe when a black cat shoots across my path, it's because someone along the line set up the pattern. A black cat by itself means diddly-squat. Let them shoot across my path like arrows. The cringe is someone else's cringe I've taken on. I'd like to get my hands on the original son-of-a-bitch who cringed. He has singlehandedly destroyed peace of mind in the world for centuries, made cringing Christs of us all.

Faye says some signs are personal. When we were buying the house and inspected the crawl space, she spotted a dead poodle next to the furnace. I remember it, too, just a dusty heap of organic debris by that point. Faye

says now, two years later, she knew the dead poodle meant something, signified a bad deal. I think that's nonsense, of course, but don't belabor the point. It makes Faye feel better to have signs. So let there be signs. Could be everything just happens with no connections at all. Indeed, I'm inclined to believe it. But it's so cold, dreary and desolate a belief, I *choose* not to believe it. Thus I find myself in the ludicrous position of choosing not to believe what I actually believe in order to, in effect, have more fun. Because that's what it amounts to.

. . . I find myself in the ludicrous position of choosing not to believe what I actually believe in order to, in effect, have more fun.

I have no doubt Faye takes the heating pad leaks as a sign of something dire about to occur. Maybe one of us will spring leaks next. Best to just wipe up the mess, I say, and move on to the next calamity. I've been accused of pessimism when I so speak, but I regard myself as an optimist because I know in my bones things will work out. Faye is the real pessimist; nothing works out in her bones. Her bones say the world is all that is the case. I actually believe what Faye's bones say, despite my own bones telling me different. Again, the conflict would boggle my mind if I let it. It's far easier to take care of Faye, cheer her up, squeeze the back of her neck, do what I can do. Nothing worse than being moored in your own psyche for very long unless, say, you're Barry Manilow, who writes the songs the whole world sings.

Faye finally shakes off her grogginess and we're back to the serious assessment of symptoms and bad days. She says Cannazaro merits more than one point and won't let it go. What did Cannazaro do? He occupies the desk next to Faye's and lets coffee cups accumulate. Coffee cups that accumulate for a week or so tend to spawn entire cultures of fungi. Well, Faye finally complained because she could smell the murky spores from the fungi. Cannazaro protested that you can't smell spores. At that moment Faye sneezed and her eyes began to water. Cannazaro was already on edge because he'd had a car wreck on the way to work that morning. "Look at my eyes!" Faye cried as he tried to ignore her and get back to his filing.

Then, as such things happen, the man proceeded to go berserk.

"Too much!" he cried, "too much!" He sprang from his swivel chair, clutching his cup of fungi and stormed over to Faye's desk. "You want spores, honey?" he screamed. "I'll give you spores!"

He turned the cup over and let the mildewed coffee drip all over Faye's desk. "It was this big disgusting slop," she said. "And I had to clean it up."

I could agree that Cannazaro, given what he'd done, displayed far graver symptoms than Faye has ever reported, that he'd been on the brink and her

comment about spores demolished him completely, that he probably feels much worse than Faye about the incident. But I don't say a word. I just focus upon the hardened salt deposit on our floor.

Then Faye looks at it too. "Some sight that must have been, you running amuck with the geysers."

Soon we're both howling, gasping for breath. It's one of those great moments we live for, when the laughs come. We're about to have heart attacks we're laughing so hard. But at such moments you don't care about heart attacks. And once the laugh is in your system, in your bones, it stays for a while, everything becomes hilarious, you go quiet for a while, recover, then you're howling again. Yeah.

It takes a while to calm down, but we do; the world shrinks a bit and we get back to dreary business at hand. "The point is," I maintain, clearing my throat, "whatever you may think or say it gets down to we're big hulking animals that die."

Faye says we're only medium-sized animals.

I grant this point. We're medium-sized animals that die. Everything else follows.

Faye wants to turn over a new leaf, abandon distress scales and bad times and despair. She wants to move on to another happier and simpler path. I agree. But what path? For nearly five years we've hunted options as we'd hunt rodents invading the house. We're medium-sized animals that die. Who can refute bottom lines, axioms? Faye says you refute axioms by ignoring them. This bothers me, for although I detest logic and reason with a passion, I am the first to grant their necessity, even triumph. Never underestimate the enemy, I say. How can you simply ignore an axiom? All Euclid would collapse, and we know Euclid was a most intelligent fellow. I t won't do to ignore axioms.

But Faye insists we rotate the bottom line on its axis; if indeed we're medium-sized animals that die, she says, we should begin to act the part rather than that of rational beings who huddle in dimly lighted rooms smarting over symptoms and spores and salt deposits.

"What do medium-sized animals who abandon axioms do?" I inquire meekly, sensing she's on to something.

"Graze?" Faye suggests.

"You want to go out and graze? You mean in a pasture?"

"Well," she says, "not like cows, but some sort of human equivalent."

I am, alas, unable to come up with anything remotely akin to the human equivalent of grazing like cows in a pasture. "Besides, I go on, the Buddha tried it all, remember? Wealth, sensual pleasure, knowledge, humility, defiling himself with excrement—let's not count that one, ok?—family life, power. No path led to happiness until he just sat under the Bo tree and gave up. Then it happened. He was enlightened."

"That's it!" Faye cries. "Give up. We can give up!"

I survey our room, spread my arms as if to encompass it. "Give all this up?" I think of IRS returns, life insurance premiums, career incentives, pension plans, priorities, endless forms, letters to answer, credit limits, calendar appointment books replete with duties, social security, repairs to be made on house and car, compacting garbage and scrubbing the tub. "Give it all up? We can't give it all up. We're embedded."

Faye is sinking. I've got to think fast. It's the same routine—I've again burst a promising bubble. "We c-c-can," I stammer, "act *as if* we've given it all up, then secretly take care of things on the side, you know, maybe swipe at the tub when the other isn't looking or kick the garbage out rather than carry it. We can hang around on the lawn more, burn the damned symptoms book."

"Maybe we won more than the industrial diamond?"

Faye glues her eyes upon mine. Time, I realize, to lie low. "Yes! There's a good chance we won the million—or at least the Corvette, eh?"

Hope is not quite giving up, true, but if hope is spurious anyway, then in effect you've given up. Besides, who said anything about giving up permanently? Maybe you can give up in little segments, a bit here, a bit there, the way you take naps or cuddle your dog. Maybe you can give up every few seconds, lift, say, your eyes from Forms 2106 and 3868 and have visions. It's not what Faye has in mind. She wants the great, sweeping surrender, a plunge into the Grand Canyon, chucking it all and heading for Baja California where you fiddle on the sand all day, stroll beside the ocean, fondle clams you find on the beach, gaze at the stars after sunset. "But," I'm about to say . . .

And there it is, the egregious, sabotaging, absolute BUT, always at our backs, always hurrying near. It takes all I've got—I feel like a man trying to hold back an avalanche with his palm—but I manage to suppress BUT.

"Yeah, we could just check out of this life the way you check out of a motel and move on to another—no credit cards, mortgages, coverage . . . like parasites . . ."

"Parasites?"

"Hey, don't knock parasites. They've had a bum rap for millennia. At least they've survived."

My defense of parasites does not enchant Faye, who suddenly decides she wants to take a ride somewhere.

"Where to?" I inquire, adverse as always to surprises.

"We'll just drive," she says. "I'll drive."

"It's nearly midnight."

"So?"

"There's work tomorrow."

"So?"

"We're low on gas."

"So?"

SO may be more lethal in its way than BUT. No arguing against it. Besides, Faye already has her coat on. With her knit cap she looks like one of the rosy urchins in children's books.

"Ok," I say, "let me get my stuff." I rise to procure wallet, keys, spare change, comb, bank cards, pen, whatever I deem essential when stranded, whatever stuffs my pockets.

"No," Faye insists, "we go as we are, the clothes on our backs. Nothing official about this."

I'm in pain. How can I function without the very accessories that make me me? "Faye, is this reasonable?" I grumbled.

"No," she says.

"Ah, I see . . . a minor giving up?"

She nods. Yes, Mexico. Unlikely but who knows? Anything can happen. One thing is certain: when you're hooked to a heating pad life goes nowhere. Down with heating pads. Up with rides on empty tanks at midnight. We'll cut through the thick, potent darkness with our puny headlights and maybe even stop for coffee at some golden arch towering above the dreamy interstate. Mexico is not the agenda. What counts is stumbling that inch or so toward. Viva Bo Tree. Yeah.

Pearl Karrer

Some People Can Tell Time by Looking at the Sun But I Have Never Been Able To Make Out the Numbers

Note: science observations,
fifth and sixth graders

When perfume disappears,
it evaporates. Evaporation gets
blamed for a lot of things people
forget to put the top on.

To most people solutions
mean finding the answers.
But to chemists, solutions
are things that are all still
mixed up. When people

run around in circles,
we say they are crazy.
When planets do it,
we say they are orbiting.

The law of gravity tells us
no fair jumping up
without coming back down.

Vibrations are motions that cannot
make up their minds
which way they want to go.

Vacuums are nothings.
We only mention them
to let them know
we know they're there.

Genetics explain why you look
like your father and if you don't
why you should.

In some rocks you can find
fossil footprints of fishes.
Many dead animals changed
into fossils while others
preferred to be oil.

There are twenty-six
vitamins but some of the letters
haven't been discovered yet;
finding them means living forever.

Anne C. Bromley

Warm Water

Will you look at that face. It's Sunrise, the one Dr. White played midwife to. Not much to look at. He's got no ears, just real deep eyes and whiskered lips. His body's like a bloated sausage that slims down to a paddle-like tail. Christopher Columbus thought the manatees were mermaids. Dick says they look like over-stuffed seagoing sofas with moveable manhole covers for tails. He would. Dick thinks he's so bright. He never paid much mind to plants, fish, or animals till he came down here. Now he takes his buddies from Cleveland out on river rides, and he's naming everything he sees around every bush and under any water lily. They think he's an expert. Hell, Dr. White's the only expert worth anything around here. Naming is no big deal. It's what you do with what you don't know. Like with Sunrise. Between the dredging, the pollution, and filling up swamp and marsh for the retirement houses like ours, and the damn boats, the manatees are going to die out. Not to mention those powerboats. I remember when the propeller of a barge-towing tug cut a manatee in half. I was on one of the piers here at Homosassa Springs, working on a watercolor of a pelican roosting on a sign: BOATS TURN BACK. THIS IS A SANCTUARY, when this little kid skipping stones says, "Look at the water!" The green water had turned a deep copper color. From manatee blood.

That's when I started writing letters to Dr. White. Janet, George, and Dick thought I was crazy. Peter, well, he was too far away to know, but he did give me a SAVE THE MANATEE bumper sticker the last time he was visiting down here.

I wonder when it'll hit Dick that his engine is wrecked? He's out on the Crystal River fishing with his two golf buddies, Mike and Al. Showing off his new Wellcraft. I heard him bragging on the phone last night: "Yeah, it's a 250 V–8, fully carpeted with 4 stereo speakers, a full instrument panel, wood-grain dash, vinyl upholstery, and get this: a swivel Captain's chair. And she goes 45 miles per hour . . . on the average." Shoot, he can't go any faster than 45 on the Crystal River anyway. They got speed limits to protect the manatee. But nobody pays any attention. These old retired buzzards get out on the river and think they're Richard Petty on waves. They forget everything else, like it's just them and that engine and that water. You'd think they were looking for a shortcut to heaven.

But I did it. And I'm not sorry. And Dick will never know how it happened, either. Unless he notices a five-pound bag of sugar missing from the cupboards. That's not likely. He barely notices what I put on his plate.

It wasn't always like that. I got to give him credit. When we were first married, living in Brecksville, him commuting to the Ohio Bell office in downtown Cleveland, he noticed everything. The love notes I put in his lunchbag. He'd send flowers once a week. But when babies come along, things change. Dick couldn't handle the diapers and the baby smells. He loved his kids. But he loved them when they were clean.

Ariel's nursing Sunrise from a thumb-size teat under her flipper. He's got a radio transmitter on his tail so Dr. White can follow him everywhere. There are only 1,000 manatee left. And Dr. White started the captive-breeding program to try to save them.

There was this big article in the Tampa–St. Pete newspaper that got me interested. It told how he rescued Amanda and Ariel. Amanda was badly cut up in a shipping port at Lake Worth. She had six large propeller slashes and was weak from losing all that blood. Her baby, Ariel, was swimming by her side. If she died, so would Ariel. Dr. White's four-man team trapped Amanda in a large net and caught the baby by hand. They hoisted Amanda onto a stretcher and lifted her into their trunk. I saw the picture—she really was sort of like what Dick said: like an over-stuffed sofa getting lifted into a moving van. Anyway, Dr. White cleaned up her wounds, and she was healed in six months. It's been eight years since. Ariel's had her first baby. People come from all over to see him. He's part of the local tourist attraction here. They come to see the birds, the fish, and the manatees. The locals don't come much. Too busy with their boats. That's all they talk about on the golf course. Everybody's got to be near water. Warm water.

It's why Dick and I and Dick's golf buddies, Mike and Al, are here in Florida. We hated the winters in Cleveland. Mike was the first to retire from Ohio Bell. Then Al. And finally, Dick. Finally. I thought I'd never live through another winter in that old brick house in Brecksville. Sure, I loved it in 1948 when we first moved in and I was pregnant with Peter, my oldest, but chriminy, my left leg couldn't take much more of those stairs.

I spent more time on those damn stairs: up and down to feed my plants, up and down to do the laundry, up and down to my sewing room, up and down to make the beds. I had to stop on the landing to have a cigarette just to relax between chores. I never got into the right kind of pattern to save trips. I was 20 when I fell down and couldn't get up. Polio, they said. And wouldn't you know. Once they took out that muscle in my leg, they discovered the vaccine. My kids, Peter and Janet, took sugar pills at the public school to keep from getting it.

It's why I hate to walk. But I love to swim. I made sure Dick put in a glass porch for my garden and the pool over at our home in Sugar Mill Woods. When he's out golfing or fishing in Crystal River, I'm in that warm water all by myself. Now that Dick is home more often than not, I look

forward to my quiet time in the water. Even when my kids were growing up, I'd send them out to play when I couldn't stand their noise. I know my limits. My own mother was a solitary woman most of her life—after my father got killed by seventeen logs that rolled off a truck in Canada. I was about four when that happened. She taught me to like sitting alone by the woodstove with plenty of yarn to make long-sleeved sweaters.

I'm making a sweater for my grandson, Adam. He's four years old. Spoiled rotten. He's going to be a real brat if Janet and George don't stop getting him so many toys. His bedroom looks like it could have kids in my old Elyria neighborhood happy for years. And he's pretty full of himself. His father is a DJ for WFLA, an easy-listening station in Tampa. He's always taking home movies with his video camera, and Adam gets so he really likes it. He says, "Daddy, can I see myself on TV?" He'll just grow out of the sweater I'm making. And he won't need it much. Not growing up in Florida.

I guess I'm just like all the other northerners who come here to Homosassa Springs in December. They all want to see those birds we've seen in *National Geographic*—Great Blue Heron, Anhinga, Pelican, Egret, Osprey, and of course, the Flamingo. They come here to get away from those sharp winds crawling through their houses in Boston, New York, and Cleveland.

I wonder if the Thompsons have done anything about those drafts. I warned them. I think the drafts made my leg worse in the winter. When I sent the kids out to play in the snow, I'd go soak in a hot tub and let my bad leg have a real treat. They say water is where we come from, and I want to get back to it every chance I get. I limp anyway, but in winters up in Cleveland, I looked like a real cripple. Even thought about getting one of those handicapped license plates so I wouldn't have to walk so far from the parking lot to the Brecksville A&P.

Down here I limp, but so does everybody else. As long as I can get into that warm pool every day, I'm fine. No more eternal gray sky and winds snaking out of Lake Erie.

I don't miss that house either. I don't even miss the trees and the ravine where Janet and Peter would hide when they wanted to get away from Dick. He has such a short fuse, though nowadays the only thing he really has to get mad about is his golf game and the snowbirds who can't drive on Rt. 19 between Homosassa and St. Pete.

I think the kids spent half their childhoods trying to figure out ways to keep Dick from finding out what they'd been up to. Peter sprayed the bathroom with Lysol to hide pot smoke. Janet sprayed her mouth with practically a whole bottle of Listerine to hide beer breath. Dick never asked them any questions, because he figured life was going on without any complications. So he was pretty shocked when Peter announced he was

applying for a C.O. to beat the draft and when Janet announced she was getting married because she was one month pregnant with Adam. He just kept bringing home those big, black Ohio Bell looseleaf binders every night and stayed up till 2:00 a.m. figuring out ways to save them money. He'd fall asleep on the couch, and I'd have to wake him so's I didn't have to carry him.

He always forgot about my leg, like polio never happened to me. He thought I could do anything. He's still a pain in the ass, but as long as he golfs and fishes and gives me two hours a day to be in the pool, I can live with him. It's been 37 years this February we've been married. Janet tells me she would have left Dick years ago if she'd been married to him. That's funny, I told her, because she married a man just like her father.

And Peter. Well, he's 36 and still growing up. A late bloomer who writes poetry and teaches writing at a technical college in Virginia. He sends me copies of the magazines that publish his poems. I read them and read them again. But I don't have enough brain cells when it comes to poetry. His words are pretty, and he writes a lot about water. That's about all I can say.

He married once, then divorced five years later. He was in jail serving an 8-day sentence for drunken driving when he proposed. I told him that was no place to figure out you needed to marry someone. Now he's involved with some woman who's a painter and a sculptor. Does funny looking things with junk: railroad ties, old dentist chairs, tin cans, wire, yarn, you name it. Peter says he loves her, but I doubt if he'll marry her. He's a scared boy, my son.

Probably something Dick and I did somewhere along the line. He's a good uncle to Adam, though, and I sure wish he'd kidnap that child for a summer to get him away from all those toys. His toys and George's. I warned Janet about that man, but Dick said, "They're going to have a kid, so they better marry." George is ambitious, a good provider, but he loves to spend more money than he's got. I told Janet she'd better keep the reins on the checkbook. Janet had to drop out of college when she married George so they could move to Cedar Rapids, Iowa, where George got a DJ job for a country-western station. She did odd jobs here and there at fast-food restaurants to bring in a little extra cash. But now that she's got Adam and another one on the way, Janet won't be going back to work for a while.

I had a job once. I was a supervisor in a munitions plant in Elyria from 1942 to 1945. I was in charge of ball bearings until they let me go so some veteran could have a job. I was furious. Still am. They also said I couldn't walk around the plant fast enough because of my "handicap." I said, "Well, you ignored it for three years." I knew my leg was getting worse. Some days it would turn purple from my ankles to my shin. I'd come home after a ten-hour shift, have a long drag off a Lucky Strike, then take a bubble bath in my mother's big tub. The old timey kind that has lion's paws. I'd sit in that

tub for at least a half hour and read Dick's letters. He was stationed in the Pacific, and I wanted to make the best ammo in the country so he would come back safe. Still, he came back with a scar on his left cheek from getting in the way of some shrapnel.

I loved that job. Still five gold ball bearings in my jewelry box to remind me.

Janet reminds me of myself. Scary. She tends her plants the way I do, she cooks like I do, she folds laundry the way I do. Maybe we're just too close for comfort. I don't want her to make my mistakes all over again. That's what I hate to watch.

I'm glad I did it. I called Peter to ask what would mess up an engine real fast. He laughed and said, "Sugar, Mom. Why?" I told him to never mind, that I'd get back to him later. Wonder why I didn't think of it before. All it took was that sugar I'd been waiting to use for cakes and cookies to keep just one more boat out of the Crystal River.

Just look at those fish. And I'm down here with them in this nifty bathysphere, surrounded by 10,000 fish and two manatees. Amazing how all those fish just rise and fall, circle and glide—without touching one another. No accidents here. Perfect traffic control. Dr. White says fish have special sensors on their gills to keep them from bumping into one another. Those crazy folks down at the Outlet malls in St. Pete sure could use sensors. This time of year it's awful. Twenty-five people wanting a special deal on microwave ovens. I admit I have one. Came with the house. Peter tells me it's stupid. Janet wants one just like it. And Adam, well, he's got his cars, robots, and spaceships to worry about. The baby on the way is probably dreaming of exotic toys, floating in that warm water. Why would anyone want to be born and leave that warm water?

Why would anyone want to be born and leave that warm water?

There goes Sunrise and his Mona Lisa smile. Wonder what he thinks of this crazy looking bathysphere. Probably figures it's just another big fish. To think that 1300 pounds swimming around out there with hydrangea hanging out of his mouth is a baby. Believe me, he was a long time coming into this wet world.

I'd wanted so bad for Ariel's time to come. Dr. White wrote she was due, even invited me to witness the birth. We spent 18 hours in the tank: him in his wetsuit and me in the bathysphere. The other animals ignored us while we kept sight of Ariel. Then all of a sudden, there was an explosive contraction and this elastic, grayish bubble about a foot in diameter appeared. Each time Ariel contracted, the bubble got bigger. then the amniotic sac burst and Ariel made her last contraction. The baby was born, tail first. He swam to the surface, making loud, high-pitched cries just as

dawn was breaking. Dr. White swam by, grabbed his flippers, and brought him out. Even from down in the bathysphere, I heard him squeaking like a frightened rabbit.

As long as Sunrise stays in these waters, he's safe from the dredging, the pollution, and the powerboats. He's putting his muzzle up to the window of the bathysphere, wondering what kind of animal I am.

By now Dick knows his engine is shot. I'm safe as long as I'm down here. He'll never connect me with his Wellcraft. He'll never notice the missing sugar. As long as he never notices, I'm safe too.

Scott Ruescher

two poems

Waiting for the Light to Change

My mother doesn't really care to remember if he had that much to see,
Whoever that man by his black sedan was, and the details in her memory
By now are pretty blurry, like the images in a snapshot left in a car
In a parking lot in the afternoon sun, on a shopping day like this one.

Only now does she look back, staring ahead courageously as we cruise past a tract
Of modest box houses built in the 50's, but even then she's determined
To pace her blushing delivery, halting between her fragmentary phrases
Like the car between stretches of tack commercial strip when the light turns red.

"Maybe it happened here," she says, but for all the tar and quilted sod, she can't be sure
If this is the land she can't remember in all the detail I'd ask her for,
Or if that ravaged land's been salvaged in all those grainy black and white pictures
She stores in sacks at the bottom of the closet where faded housedresses hang.

She doesn't address the past anymore, and doesn't wear the housedresses either,
Garments of a past she'd lose if no one held it for her, as I like to think
I hold it for her, clutching it so that it doesn't sink like some black camera
Dropped into the brown waters of whatever that river we crossed back there is called.

Maybe she can picture white picket fences, red brick farmhouses, and streams that her senses
Perceived to be the colors of the stones they caressed, flowing

their way to forgetfulness,
But she has always settled for phrases as flat as photographs,
for images as sketchy
As undeveloped negatives, for anecdotes snapped in the blink of
a shutter.

She knows I long to hear of the land where there weren't any
lights to run so red,
Where tame farms were settings for germinating relationships, on
roads gone wild now
With shopping malls and dealerships, but she has blessed me with
the willingness to guess,
Particularly in regard to the man beside his car, and that's
where the guessing gets hard.

Waiting for the light to change, I want to ask my mother if she
thinks she selects
Her memories for a purpose, like a photographer cropping one good
image
To put another in focus, or if she thinks of her past as some
big elephant
Strayed from a circus in a one-horse town where no one owns a
sedative gun.

She lets me infer what the man seemed to want, it not enough to
tell exactly
How justified she was to pedal away in panic in the gravel with
her friend.
"Strange men tended to keep to their shadows," she says, "and
girls in trouble could always scream
Till help from sheds at farms came running, when people in
general were not so mean."

But why dwell on the past? Shouldn't we all keep moving? Don't
I get the picture yet?
Why should she attempt to recall the twisted look on a sick man's
face, the cast
Of sky that day, the things they must have talked about pedaling
back to town
In the gravel on their bikes? Why describe these things she's
seen if the light has turned green?

Grampa

When my grandmother Ruth was two years gone
And he moved, at 71, with his newlywed Helen
From neighborhood Columbus to the jungle near Orlando,
I think he must have tested his ties to the past.

I think he must have seen, in vines mistaken for snakes
And rattlers he killed in the road, a natural extension
Of the boyhood days he spent to the knees
In the waist-deep, farm-dividing creeks near Columbus.

Hearing the tangled chorus of birds more colorful
And cacophonous than jays, he must have parted the foliage
At the edge of Buckeye Acres—the name they gave
The trailer park—in hopes of seeing a parakeet

On a branch of a cottonwood draped with Spanish moss.
Once, maybe, he did—a squawking pet-store bird escaped
From the tame Columbus zoo?—and then for once
His past did not come back to him. He wasn't trapping

Turtles in burlap bags for soup with a distant cousin,
Skipping down the surface of the slow-moving stream
Jagged trapezoids of gray shale, or hanging a bucket
Of pouting small-mouth bass by string from the limb

Of a willow weeping for the beauty of spring.
He wasn't trying to link these wet, remembered things
Like segments of hemp to tie to the cherry tree
In the fenced back yard of the house on 21st,

Or planning to unravel it, next time north,
Back down the median strip of Interstate 75,
In a trance walking backwards a thousand miles south,
His trouser pockets bulging with back yard relics—

Purple-stemmed rhubarb leaves, molasses-colored locust shells,
And gravel from the alley behind the garage.
Fishing pole, tackle box, and can of worms in hand,
He'd finish his trip to the neck-deep lake

In the dip below the trailer park, bend to load and board
His blistered rowboat, drop into the stern
The nylon mooring rope, then stick his paddle in the hot mud
And shove off backwards gasping from the shore.

Notes on Contributors

Linda Andrews (Kirkland, WA) is a native of the Midwest now writing from Washington, where she lives with her two teenagers. Her work has appeared in *Cutbank, Nimrod, Poetry Northwest, Seattle Review, Iris, Cream City Review,* and many others. She has won an Academy of American Poets prize, the Richard Blessing Award, and a residency at Ucross. She holds degrees from Michigan State University and the University of Washington and, for breadwinning purposes, is a speech writer and editor for a major health-care organization.

Rebecca Baggett (Athens, GA), a native of North Carolina, has moved five times in the past eight years. While not packing, she has published poetry, fiction, and essays, most recently in *Ms., Mid-American Review, Calyx, Fiction, Utne Reader,* and *Americas Review.* She now lives with her family in Georgia and hopes never to load another U-Haul.

Elizabeth Blair (Chicago, IL) won the 1993 Charles Goodnow Award for Poetry with poems from *Divided Light.* She has read from this manuscript in Michigan, Kansas, Kentucky, and Wyoming, as well as at numerous venues in Illinois. She has also published poems from *Divided Light* in a variety of literary periodicals. The book will be her creative dissertation for the Ph.D. in English at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Anne C. Bromley (Radford, VA) has poems, stories, and reviews in numerous magazines, including *The Georgia Review, The Literary Review, Prairie Schooner, Massachusetts Review,* and others. She is Assistant Professor of English at Radford University.

christien gholson (Des Moines, IA) reports: "I've been seaweed marrying crabs under blue moonlight, I've been the constant wash of waves on monoliths of rock, I've been the smoke of moss giving shape to the wind, I've been a swollen river, a toothless woman on a bus bench, the eerie fluorescent glow of an all-night city jail. I've been a word in a book. At the moment, I am the mask behind the mask of BEgiNNer's MIND press, which publishes chapbooks of poetry, sending them out free-for-postage. Send me a stamp (52¢) (2615 Kingman Blvd., #6, Des Moines 50311) and I'll send you one."

Louis Gallo (Radford, VA) was born in New Orleans. He has taught at the University of New Orleans, the University of Missouri, Columbia College (SC), and now at Radford University (VA). His recent stories have appeared in *American Literary Review, Glimmer Train, Habersham Review, Louisiana Literature, Black River Review,* and others. Aside from teaching and writing, he is intensely active in fathers' and children's rights movements.

Pearl Karrer (Palo Alto, CA), from a log cabin in a Montana mining camp to her present home in California, explores the world around her, traveling extensively. After a degree in microbiology from Cornell University, leading to cancer research, she currently teaches piano and Japanese brush painting, exhibits prints and pastels in juried shows, and writes poetry. Her poems appear in the *Bird Watcher's Digest, Bottomfish,*

California State Poetry Quarterly, The Devil's Millhopper, New Voices in Poetry and Prose, Poets On, Visions–International, among others.

Kathleen Lignell (Bucksport, ME) grew up in the San Francisco Bay area and is the author of two collections of poetry, *Red Horses* (1991) and *The Calamity Jane Poems* (1981), and co-editor of *The Eloquent Edge: 15 Maine Women Writers* (1989). Her poems have been published in such places as the *Antioch Review, Beloit Poetry Journal, Columbia, New York Quarterly, Kansas Quarterly, North American Review,* and *Woman Poet: The East.* She has received a 1984 National Endowment for the Arts poetry fellowship, 1989 Yaddo residence fellowship, 1986 Pablo Neruda Poetry Prize from *Nimrod,* and the 1983 Stover Poetry Prize from *Southwest Review.* She lives on the midcoast of Maine and teaches literature and creative writing at the University of Maine in Orono, where she also directs the annual Downeast Poetry Workshop in July.

Mordecai Marcus (Lincoln, NE), Professor of English at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, recently began a partial retirement but plans to go on teaching as long as possible. In 1991 G. K. Hall published his critical book, *The Poems of Robert Frost: An Explication,* which is now in its third printing. In 1993, Whole Notes Press at Las Cruces, NM, published his sixth poetry chapbook, *Pursuing the Lost.* The editors of *Gaia* published his fifth chapbook, *Restorations,* under an earlier imprint and also included several of his poems in their former journal, *Lodestar.*

Paula Milligan (Seattle, WA)

Maia (Isla Vista, CA) grew up in Southern California, tried her hand at stories as soon as she could hold a pen, and poetry at twelve. In 1985, she began public readings of her work and has read regularly in Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, and Ventura counties. In 1987, she started a women's writing group in Santa Barbara. In 1990, she was awarded a stay at Hedgebrook Writers-in-Residence program, and several of the poems written there appear in her first chapbook, *A Woman Green as the Sea* (Pieces of the Moon Press, 1991). Many of her poems and short stories have been published in magazines and anthologies.

Lee Messineo (Erie, PA) has served as the editor of *The Unburnished Mirror: A Folklore Study* and *The Word Foundry: A Spoken Arts Magazine.* He lectures at Gannon University and has had pieces in *Kansas Stories, Midwest Quarterly, Negative Capability, Thema,* and various other magazines.

Lee Passarella (Lawrenceville, GA) has a Ph.D. in English from the University of Pennsylvania and works as a technical writer, editor, and illustrator. His poetry has appeared in *The New Mexico Humanities Review, Lullwater Review, The Sun, Poem, Midland Review,* and others. His chapbook, *Working from Memory,* appeared in 1992.

Edmund Pennant (Bayside, NY) has published five books of poetry, the most recent of which is *Askance and Strangely, New and Selected Poems* (Orchises Press). His work has appeared widely in literary journals and in many anthologies, such as the recent *Blood to Remember* (Texas University Press), holocaust poems by American poets. In addition to fellowships at Yaddo and the MacDowell Colony, he served last fall as

Resident Fellow with Honors Cadets at the West Point Military Academy. He teaches part time at Adelphi University.

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).

Scott Ruescher has lived in the Boston area for nearly as long as he lived in the central part of Ohio where he grew up. He is a graduate of the Iowa Writer's Workshop, an ex-Freshman Composition teacher at a prison and an art school, and now a secretary and recycling coordinator at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. A contributing editor of *The Agni Review,* he has published poems in *Poetry Northwest, Ploughshares, The Nation, The New England Review/Bread Loaf Quarterly, The Boston Phoenix Literary Supplement,* and in the *Antioch, Iowa, Ohio,* and *Seneca* reviews.

Don Schofield (Athens, Greece) was a runner-up in the 1992 Paumanok Poetry Award competition. Born in Nevada and raised in California, he has been living in Greece since 1980. Mr. Schofield has received a Roberts Writing Award and the Cynthia Cahn Memorial Poetry Award and is the author of a chapbook, *Of Dust.* He currently teaches at the University of La Verne in Athens.

R. T. Smith (Auburn, AL) is Alumni Writer-in-Residence at Auburn University, where he edits *Southern Humanities Review.* His most recent book is *The Cardinal Heart,* and he has poems forthcoming in *Poetry, Shenandoah, Southern Review,* and *Georgia Review.*

Donna Spector (Warwick, NY) has published poems and stories in *The Greensboro Review, Poet & Critic, Sycamore Review, The Paterson Literary Review, The Bellingham Review, The Hiram Poetry Review, Poet Lore,* and other journals and anthologies. Her plays have been produced Off Broadway, Off Off Broadway, regionally, and in Canada.

Robyn Supraner (Roslyn Harbor, NY) has written many books for children, several of which have won awards. Her latest book, a mystery, will be published by Viking Press. A recipient of the Pen & Brush Club Poetry Prize, her poems have appeared in *Prairie Schooner, Beloit, Ploughshares, The Massachusetts Review,* and numerous others.

Suzanne M. Swanson (St. Paul, MN) is a poet, psychologist, and mother who lives and works in Minnesota but longs for the Pacific Northwest. Her work has been published in *Verve, Encodings,* and *Minnesota Monthly.*