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children

& daddies

THE UNRELIGIOUS, NONFAMILY-ORIENTED LITERARY & ART MAGAZINE

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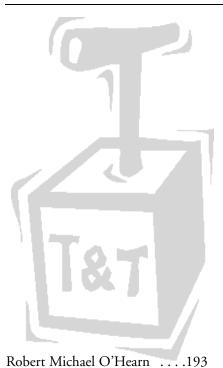
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#### +HE OLD BOLD PILO+

### J. QUINN BRISBEN

I.

Cletus Gowrie got a collect telephone call in the middle of

the night in early May, 1975. It was from his older brother Orvis on the island of Guam. Cletus refused the call. If Orvis was calling from Guam, he had escaped from Vietnam with his life. If he could place a call by himself, he was in reasonably good health. If he had to call collect, he had not picked up the plane load of gold or whatever he had been trying for this time.

The next evening Cletus waited until the rates changed to call Mattie, Orvis's most recent ex-wife, in Los Angeles. She and Orvis had a daughter who was still in college. Cletus had paid two hundred dollars a month toward his niece's support whenever Orvis had been unable to do so. Orvis always promised to pay him back and had actually done so on several occasions. He was currently eighteen months in arrears. Mattie was pleased to get the news that Orvis was still alive.

"Debbie still has two years to go before she graduates," Mattie said. "Orvis hasn't been legally bound to make payments since she was eighteen, but you and he have been so good about keeping them up. She has a job, but she would have to drop out if it wasn't for the extra money. Besides, that girl just loves her daddy so, even though she's hardly seen him in the last dozen years."

"I'd make sure she still got through school even if something bad happened to Orvis," Cletus said.

"I know you would," Mattie said, "and Debbie and I love you for it, too, but Debbie just dotes on her daddy and would be heart-broken if he died or was bad hurt."

"Orvis can be a very lovable man when the going is good," Cletus said. "I respect you very much for not trying to turn

Debbie against him."

"It's hard to turn a girl against a man who comes roaring in on her sixteenth birthday to give her a sports car he's just won in a poker game or who takes her off for a month's holiday in Manilla and Hong Kong and Singapore when she's just graduated high school," Mattie said. "Hell, I would have stuck with him myself despite the fact that he was always carrying on with other women and never could settle down to making a steady living, that is, if I could have stood the suspense."

"It's hard having to clean up after the messes he leaves, though," Cletus said.

"It is that," Mattie said. "I suppose you'd better call Mei-ling, too." "Who's Mei-ling?" Cletus asked.

"She's his latest," Mattie said, "or at least the latest that I've heard of. Orvis brought her by the house the last time he passed through, that was last Christmas. She's a pretty little thing, not much older than Debbie, from Hong Kong, I think he said, or maybe it was Vietnam. Anyhow, Orvis said they had a place somewhere near Seattle. I don't know whether they're

married or just living together the way people do nowadays. Probably, Orvis hasn't got in touch with her since he got out. He never likes his women to know about it when his crazy schemes have gone smash and he's broke again. I don't know their address, but you could probably get it from Seattle telephone information. Orvis always goes by his own name, even when someone troublesome is looking for him. That's a saving grace he's always had. She would probably appreciate knowing he was alive and safe for the moment. I always did when I was in her place."

One and only one Orvis Gowrie was listed for the Seattle area. Cletus called the number. A high-pitched female voice asked who was calling.

"This is Cletus Gowrie, Orvis Gowrie's brother. I just called to say that he tried to call me from Guam last night, so he must have gotten out of Vietnam this time in one piece."

"Oh, you are the brother Orvis has spoken of so often," Mei-Ling said. "It is good and kind of you to call me. I also had a similar call from Orvis, which I refused to take, for those were his instructions. Orvis has told me that there is a tradition of not wasting money in your family. I thoroughly approve of that. Have you called his other wives?"

"I just got through talking to Mattie in Los Angeles," Cletus said. "In fact it was her idea for me to call you. I've only heard from Orvis a couple of times in the last year, and Mattie's mentioning you was the first I knew of you. I have not called Willa Mae yet. In fact I don't know how to get hold of her. Last year's Christmas card came back saying that she was no longer at the address I had for her. I don't have an address for the two boys either."

"I do," Mei-Ling said, "and for the number one wife, too. She has re-married and has a different name. I have never met her or her sons, but Orvis told me how to make contact with them if I needed help from the family. Orvis is very proud of his sons even though circumstances have estranged them. The fact that they are both pilots like their father pleases him immensely. Orvis is very sorry that he could not have been a better father to them and to Debbie as well. He hopes to make amends with his new family."

"New family?"

"I am pregnant, due in about four months. We are hoping that it will be a son, another pilot."

"Congratulations, I suppose," Cletus said. "Excuse me for asking, but how does Orvis expect to support this new family? He is too old to get a job flying with a regular commercial airline, even if he could settle down to do such a thing. He has no savings, never has had. I'll help this new family out just as I have tried to help all the previous families, but I hope Orvis does not have you believing in any of his get-rich-quick schemes."

"Orvis is a man of great resources," Mei-Ling said. "His current plan to fly out the treasure of a Vietnamese general has evidently misfired, but he has other ideas, ideas which might gain riches for a man of daring. If the next plan does not work out, we will probably receive collect calls from Hong Kong within the month. If I receive a call from Taipeh or Singapore a month or two after that, I will ask for your aid. The money Orvis left me will be gone by then and the baby about to come. Even if that comes to pass, Orvis will keep on. He tells me that he has always paid you back in the past. He considers it a matter of family honor to keep on doing so."

"He has indeed always paid me back," Cletus said, "and showered me with lavish gifts when he did. But the man is sixty years old, and he has suffered all kinds of injuries. Soon his health will not permit him to lead the kind of life he has always led. Then his various families and other creditors will be stuck."

"Perhaps so," Mei-Ling said, "though I do not think that will be soon, and I believe that he will provide comfortably for his new family. The hair on his chest may be white, but Orvis is still a tiger inside."

Cletus had no answer he wished to make to that, not even on low evening rates. He agreed to call Willa Mae and her sons and invited Mei-Ling to drop in anytime she was in the Des Moines area.

Willa Mae and her new husband lived in Highland Park, Texas. She apologized for not sending Cletus a wedding announcement or her new address.

"It happened kind of suddenly," she said. "We met at a square dance convention in Gatlinburg last summer. Steve, that's his name, Steve Boudreau, he's a Cajun, talked me into taking an early retirement from the Fort Smith school system and moving in with him here. He's a widower who was just rattling around in this beautiful big house. His children are all grown up like mine. Steve is very well-fixed; he's an executive with a firm that puts out oil well fires, and he still goes out into the fields occasionally. He flies all over the world and takes me with him sometimes. We've been to Venezuela and to Indonesia just since the first of the year."

"I'm very glad to hear you sounding so happy," Cletus said.

"I've never been so happy in my life," Willa Mae said. "My big mistake in life was to get involved with a man like your brother Orvis when I was eighteen. You cannot really enjoy an adventurous man until the kids are grown up and you can't have any more of them."

"It's Orvis that I'm calling about," Cletus said. "He tried to call me collect from Guam last night. He's alive and well, but broke. He tried to ferry some gold out of Vietnam for one of the anti-communist generals, but evidently something went wrong. I called Mattie in Los Angeles, and she said that Orvis has a new woman up near Seattle, an Oriental girl of some kind. So I called her, and Orvis had left her instructions as to how to reach you."

"That poor little thing," Willa Mae said. "I suppose Orvis has knocked her up."

"She's due in four months," Cletus said. "If Orvis is still not back in the states by that time, I'll try to help her out."

"Let me help with this one," Willa Mae said. "I got a good price for the house in Fort Smith, and Steve has put a huge bunch of stock in my name. That's because a man in his profession can't get life insurance, you know."

"You are under no obligation to do that, Willa Mae."

"Not to Orvis, maybe, but I am to you Cletus. You're the one who talked Orvis into sending extra money so I could go back to college at Jonesboro during the war, and you kept that money coming when Orvis was out of touch, which was frequently. Even when you were just a little boy, you did your best to take care of me. According to Orvis, you were the one who got him to do right and marry me when I was already carrying Tommy."

"Orvis has a tendency to exaggerate."

"Is it true that you actually pulled a shotgun on him?"

"Willa Mae, I was only about ten years old then. I could barely hold that gun up. Orvis was a good deal more affected by our mother crying in her dish towel than he was by me and that silly gun. He would have married you anyhow; Orvis generally does the right thing, but sometimes it takes him a while to get around to it."

"Tommy is really going to be surprised that he's going to have a baby

half-sister or brother, what with him being forty years old and starting to lose his hair already. He has a regular run from New York to Paris now and brings me back the nicest things. Jimmy has a short run that's even steadier. He flies San Francisco to Los Angeles and back every day just like a bus driver. He's back home every day before his kids get out of school, and that's just the way he likes it. He has three nice kids, all growing like weeds, and Tommy has two nice ones, too, both of them in high school out in Connecticut where he lives. I should have sent you pictures of all of them last Christmas, but I was so busy getting married again that I forgot."

"It's good to be in touch with you again, Willa Mae, it really is."

Cletus was surprised to find that there were tears in his eyes. He recalled how Tommy and Jimmy had cried when they had left the farm; they had really loved their grandmother and their young uncle. He had done his best to keep that family together, but it was flatly impossible to do so once the war started. Orvis had given up barnstorming and made a genuine effort to settle down, but there was just no way that he could keep on helping with the farm, dusting crops, and giving flying lessons on government contract when so many of his old buddies were joining up with the Flying Tigers, being paid a thousand dollars a month with a thousand dollar bonus for every Japanese plane shot down just for doing their patriotic duty. Orvis had promised to come back and settle down after the war, but that was a promise which, unlike his periodic promises to pay his debts, he was constitutionally unable to keep.

Willa Mae had moved in with her mother's cousin in Jonesboro, gotten a secretarial job with flexible hours, enrolled as a part-time student at the local teachers' college, then sent for her two sons as soon as she could afford a place of her own. Cletus had visited them in 1946 after his discharge from the infantry at Fort Chaffee. Willa Mae had looked tired and was no longer the beautiful girl just out of high school who had attracted a barnstorming pilot, but she was coping nicely. Orvis had been there the previous month, leaving behind a treasury of silk and jade for his wife, fabulous war souvenirs for his sons, and years of arrears in support money.

She paid Cletus back for the army pay allotments which he had split between her and his parents and said firmly that she would need no more help. She had enough to buy and furnish a modest house in Fort Smith, where she had accepted a teaching position, and she was giving Orvis his freedom. She still felt a strong attraction to him, so strong that she considered herself fortunate that she did not get pregnant again during her prodigal husband's brief return, but she was not going to spend the rest of her life

crying over a man whom God had made a rolling stone.

Cletus had gone back to the farm in Grant County, Oklahoma. Orvis had been there before him, scattering gifts. The farm house and the milking barn had electricity now, as well as a propane tank, and the family soon expected the very latest in home appliances, presently unavailable because of pent up postwar demand. Four wheat combines of varying ages and conditions were packed on the backs of trucks in the yard. Orvis had left him a letter.

#### Dear Cletus,

I left money with Mama to pay you for the GI allotments you sent her, just as I did with Willa Mae. Take it, because Mama now has a new sewing machine and the biggest radio I could find and soon will have the gas kitchen range, refrigerator, fre ezer, washer, dryer, mangle iron, and all the other stuff she ever wanted. She complains that she will not have enough to do to keep her occupied, but it is about time she had that problem in her life.

Dad has always wanted to boss a custom wheat-harvesting crew, and now he can. If you get back by the time the wheat is ripe, I would appreciate it if you would go with him, at least for this one season. You are better at figures and paper work than anyone else in the family, and you can help him with that. The combines and trucks were the best he and I could get, but they are kind of junky. Dad is the best mechanic living; he could even keep that first plane I ever had, that old DH-4 I bought from my instructor, running like a Swiss watch when nobody else could even get it turn over.

The only trouble is, Dad tends to wander off sometimes when you need him. If he gets lost, look for him first at the local farm machinery agencies, for he likes to talk about machinery and mess around with it more than anything else in the world. Next to that, he likes women; if you want to find him, keep track of all the waitresses and such like with red hair, freckles, and long jaws and big teeth like Mama. The old goat is at least loyal to one type of woman, which is more than I can say for myself. Next to women, he likes liquor. Generally, if you let him bust loose on a Saturday night every two or three weeks, he will be all right between times.

Try to keep him away from driving and from machinery with moving parts when he is the worse for booze. He has already lost two finger joints and cannot afford to lose any more. He has reached the age where he ought to slow down. So have I. The men who flew us in our supplies over the hump used to say that there are old pilots and bold pilots but that there are no old, bold pilots. I have come to believe that, and I no longer take the chances in the air that I used to do when I was barnstorming. I may still do some crazy

things if I have to, but not through carelessness or deviltry. I do not need to give you the same advice, for you have always been a good and steady soul.

I thank you again for helping Willa Mae and my two fine boys and the folks, too, when I was unable to get money home to them. I would have loved to spend some time with you, but I have to leave for Europe right away. Some old buddies of mine want me to help them ferry Jewish refugees into Palestine. There is a lot of money in it, and it is work worth doing, too, even if the British do say it is illegal.

You are a hard worker, but you belong on a farm even less than I do. Take the money I paid you back and insist up front that Dad give you at least one fourth of the profits from this summer's harvesting. Make him put it in writing; he is generally an honest man, but that does not always extend to dealings with his own family. Then you take all that and whatever you can get on the GI Bill and enroll in some good college, one far enough away from Oklahoma so that Dad cannot drag you back every time he wants a job of work done on the cheap.

Do not take literature or history or law or anything like that, because you do not have it in you to be a bullshitter. Take accounting or business administration or something. Those are the boys who get the soft jobs that make big money in this postwar world, and that is what I want for you. I don't know when I might want to borrow from you again, and I want you sitting safely on top of a nice big pile.

Your loving brother, Orvis

It was the longest letter that Cletus had ever received or would ever receive from Orvis, and the only letter from him which ever contained advice. Cletus took the advice. He made good advance contracts, kept accurate books, and taught his father how to perform these tasks adequately. He kept his father on the job sufficiently so that the combines and trucks stayed in good repair. The wheat crop was a record breaker, and the harvesting profits were high. The crew called it a year in Manitoba in September. Cletus had declined to join his father and the rest of the men in a big Winnipeg blowout. He made sure that the bulk of the money had been safely sent to his mother, took his own share, and started hitch-hiking south.

Chance had led him to Ames, Iowa. He liked the area and decided that Iowa State University was good enough for his purposes. He had been allowed to enroll even though the Fall term had already begun. The campus and the town were bursting with returned veterans. Cletus moved into a tiny attic

room with three other bachelor veterans. The widow who owned the house had arthritis and wanted to move to California. The four roommates discovered that they had sufficient savings between them to make a substantial down payment and that they qualified for a low-interest Veterans Administration mortgage loan. The rent from the other tenants more than covered the payments. Cletus's business administration professors were impressed.

Summers had posed a special problem. Cletus stayed on to manage the house, partly to have a good excuse for not joining his father's harvesting crew again. He filled the house with undergraduate summer students whose fraternity houses were closed for the season. One of them was an engineering student from Des Moines named Kevin Lauchlan, who became close friends with Cletus. They went to Des Moines together for the two week break at the end of the summer term.

He liked the Lauchlan family very much. Kevin's father David Lauchlan had a thriving insurance business. Cletus had decided that the insurance business would suit him very well. David Lauchlin offered him a job when he graduated with a good salary and prospects for advancement.

Cletus had also liked Kevin's sister Heather, who was about to begin her senior year at Drake University. Heather had good secretarial skills and had worked in her father's office during vacations ever since she was in high school. Cletus returned to Des Moines that Christmas to give her an engagement ring.

"Are you buying that ring on time?" David Lauchlan had asked.

"No, sir," Cletus said. "The house has been turning a nice profit, so I could pay cash for it. One of my roomers knows a lot about minerals, and he says that it is a good stone for the price."

Heather and Cletus were married in June, 1948, following her graduation from Drake. They gradually bought out their partners in the rooming house. In addition to helping manage the house, Heather supplemented their income by typing dissertations for graduate students. When Cletus graduated in 1950, they were able to exchange their equity in the rooming house for a mortgage on a very nice three-bedroom split-level in the new Beaverdale neighborhood on the West Side of Des Moines.

David Lauchlan Gowrie, called Locky, was born the last week of December, 1950, nice timing for a tax exemption, as the proud grandfather remarked. His sister Jean was born in January, 1952, but her failure to save the family a few hundred dollars on 1951 taxes was forgiven with good grace. Cletus quickly became as much a part of his milieu as any Des Moines native, active in the Junior Chamber of Commerce and the First Christian Church. By 1960 he was a partner in the firm of Lauchlan and Gowrie,

which was doing very well.

He had not meant to diminish his contacts with Willa Mae and the rest of his family, but it had happened. At first he had written Willa Mae once a month, then once every three months, then finally she received only a brief personal note at the bottom of the mimeographed Christmas letter which he sent out to such a large list that it was a family joke. He sent generous graduation gifts to Tommy and Jimmy, but their dutiful replies told him chiefly how little they remembered him.

In 1963 on a Chicago to Miami flight to a business association meeting a stewardess had asked him to come forward to the cockpit. Tommy was copilot and had recognized his uncle's name on the passenger list. They had a pleasant dinner in Miami Beach comparing and exchanging stories about the fabulous adventures of Orvis, but neither of them had kept up the renewed connection.

He had tried to visit his parents every year, but they had less and less to say to each other with each visit. Cletus never felt quite at home in the remodeled farm house with its spectacular array of gadgets dominated, from the early 1950's on, by ever larger television sets which seemed never to be turned off. His mother liked Heather and loaded her down with home-made sausages and fruit preserves at every visit, but they had few things in common. Locky and Jean were always fussed over but showed progressively less enthusiasm for each approaching visit to their paternal grandparents. The elder Gowries never felt comfortable visiting Des Moines despite every effort to make them so.

They had died within a month of each other in 1968 shortly after selling the farm and moving to an Arizona retirement community. The Tet Offensive had made Orvis, then a pilot for Air America, temporarily unreachable, so Cletus kept half the estate in trust until Orvis re-surfaced, deducting only the support money he had paid for Orvis's daughter Debbie.

Orvis was temporarily safe in Saigon again within a few weeks. Despite Cletus's fervent admonitions, half of a good Oklahoma farm was almost immediately lost through a failure to anticipate correctly the price fluctuations on the Singapore rubber exchange. Cletus was angry about that and vowed never to help Orvis out again.

He had forgiven him, though, before the year was out. Orvis had given him a surprise call from the Des Moines airport on Christmas Eve, 1968. He had so many bundles that Cletus had difficulty fitting them into his small car.

"Life is too short to have to go through it driving a dinky little car like this," Orvis had said.

"It suits me," Cletus said.

"I reckon it does," Orvis said. "Before I have to listen to you grinding your teeth all the way to your house, take a look at this."

Orvis pulled some papers out of his jacket pocket. They were ninety-day Treasury bills in high denominations. They represented almost exactly the amount of the inheritance which Orvis had lost in his speculations.

"Why are you showing me this?" Cletus asked.

"So you will know I respect the amount of work that the folks put into that farm," Orvis said, "and that you and I put into it, too, for that matter. I just don't have your respect for money, except that I do enjoy spending it."

"Orvis, you have obligations. Mattie and Debbie have had to depend on me for months now."

"And you got a kick out of that, Cletus, just like you always do. Now I'm flush again, and I'm making good on everything. Give me those T-bills back. I just bought them to show you that I could keep ahold of money if I felt like it. I intend to spend them as quick as I can. This other little financial document, though, I want you to keep."

He handed a twenty-five dollar series E savings bond to Cletus.

"This represents the amount that Mama took out of the egg money in 1932 when I was seventeen to help me pay for my first flying lessons," Orvis said. "It took me three years before I could pay her back the cash, and there was no way I could ever pay back what the giving of it meant to me. It's meant a lot, too, the way you've always come through for me. I just want you to keep this pissant little bond as a sign that you understand that."

Cletus had kept the bond and continued to help Orvis out as needed.

He shook off his memories and looked at the lacquer screen which was one of Orvis's gifts from that Christmas six years ago. It had been admired by the people from the Nelson-Atkins Museum in Kansas City and was Heather's favorite object in the whole house. Cletus had spent good money to have it appraised and had added a rider to his homeowner's policy so that it could be replaced at full value if damaged or stolen.

He went to bed. Heather was already there. She had gone back to work full time at the insurance office as soon as Jean was in first grade and was an inveterate early riser. He snuggled in next to his wife and gave her breast a gentle squeeze. She gave a friendly wriggle in response but did not wake all the way up.

"Honey," Cletus said, "does it bother you that I am not bold."

"You suit me just fine," she said. "Now go to sleep. We'll both enjoy it more if we wait until tomorrow morning."

II.

Locky wanted to make his father a millionaire in September, 1985, but Cletus refused.

"Dad, this is as near to a sure thing as you can get on the

commodities market," Locky said. "I have good information that no one else has, legally acquired, too, that is going to make the bottom fall out of the soybean market in a couple of weeks when everybody else starts getting it. Go short on soybeans now and you can double your money, maybe even triple it."

"Son, there is nothing close to a sure thing in that soybean pit," Cletus said. "You have been trading there for ten years and ought to know that better than anybody. Any investment that the law says is too risky for an insurance company's money is too risky for my personal money as well. You are not going to get any of the money that your mother and I have saved for our old age. You will get half of whatever is left when your mother and I die but not until then."

"Dad, I am not going to need it then and neither is Jean. She's married to a doctor, for God's sake. This money is not for me, although I've put a considerable bundle on this, too. This is for you and Mama."

"Your mother and I are doing very well without extra nervous strain from taking unnecessary risks, thank you. You forget, Locky, that I'm a gambler, too. That's what an insurance broker is. I calculate risks and lay off my bets just like any bookie. I even back a long shot when I have a hunch now and then, as I did when I provided some capital for that black burial insurance firm that needed start-up capital to reach new markets. But that was an insurance company, which I understand."

"Dad, this is soybeans, which I understand."

"Nobody understands crops," Cletus said, "not the farmers, not the commodity traders, not anybody. Your grandfather Morgan Gowrie was as savvy a farmer as you could find anywhere, but he just barely scraped along most of his life. He prospered in later years only because he got an absolutely unpredictable infusion of capital right after the war, and even then he almost went under a couple of times before he sold out. You've almost gone under a few times yourself, even though right now you seem to be making more money than I'd ever heard of when I was your age. I am not going to risk a comfortable old age by going short on soybean futures."

"I reckon there is nothing to be done with a father who just absolutely refuses to get big rich," Locky said. "Do you think anyone else in the family would be interested?"

"You could talk to the Medicare wizard, that rising young internist, your brother-in-law, Dr. Gavin McClain," Cletus said. "You could talk to your uncle Kevin Lauchlan, the famous designer of bridges on the interstates, who might have some cash left over even after his very generous contributions to everybody's political campaigns. You might even get some of your uncle Orvis Gowrie's dope money."

"That's not fair, Dad," Locky said. "Uncle Orvis never sold dope. He just hauled it around for the people who wanted it hauled, which, most of the time, was an agency of the U.S. government which you and I pay taxes to support."

"I never thought of Orvis as an example of my tax dollars at work, but you have a point," Cletus said. "He's through with doing that anyhow. Since his stroke a couple of months ago, his doctors say that he'll be lucky to walk without a cane, let alone fly or boogie all night in some disco, the way you told me that you and he did a couple of years ago."

"That's too bad," Locky said. "Every time he came to town we would walk into Butch McGuire's and walk out twenty minutes later with the two best looking women in the place. Except that he sometimes had a couple of flight attendants for us by the time I picked him up at O'Hare."

"He's lucky that kind of behavior hasn't cost him another marriage," Cletus said. "He'll need Mei-Ling to take care of him now."

"She'll do that," Locky said. "She gets mad at him, but she told me one time that she would rather have a man who tomcats around than one who bored her to death. She used to call me for investment advice that year when Uncle Orvis sort of disappeared up near the Khyber Pass. I think that she's a fine woman. If I ever have a third wife when I am seventy years old, I want her to look something like Mei-Ling."

"You'll never even get a first wife at the rate you're going," Cletus said.

"I'm working on it," Locky said. "I thought I had something going with the girl who designed the track lighting for my loft a couple of years ago, but she said commodities futures bored her and married a stage carpenter who doesn't have a dime. If this deal I tried to get you to buy in on goes through, I'll be mostly fixed for life and will devote more time to really serious looking."

"Your mother will be glad to hear that," Cletus said. "You ought to call her more often than you do. You should call Orvis, too. That stroke has slurred his speech some, but he can still make himself understood over the telephone."

Locky promised to call his uncle.

The next Tuesday Heather and Cletus had dinner with Jean and Gavin

and their children, a weekly family custom. Gavin asked Cletus if he had followed Locky's advice and gone short on soybean futures.

"I did not," Cletus said, "and I would have advised you against it if you had asked me. How much are you in for?"

"Eight thousand and a bit," Gavin said. "I can afford to lose it and establish a tax loss, but I'd rather not, of course. Locky says that the rumors he has been anticipating have started to circulate, but the market hasn't dropped nearly as much as he anticipated it would."

"I remember the first year I made as much as eight thousand dollars," Cletus said. "I thought I was doing really well. Heather and I bought our first television by way of celebration. Remember, dear, it was a Zenith with a round tube that looked like it was staring back at us when we were through staring at it."

Two weeks later Mei-Ling called from a Seattle hospital.

"You had better come out here if you can, Cletus," she said. "Orvis has had another stroke. The doctors say he might go at any time."

Cletus was in Seattle the next evening. Orvis could not speak, but he could grasp his brother's hand and manage a lop-sided grin. Cletus asked Mei-Ling about the financial situation.

"It could be bad," she said. "Orvis recently sold all our securities and remortgaged the property. If his current investment does not pan out, I may have trouble putting Wayne and Kimberly through school."

"What is the big investment this time?" Cletus asked.

"He has gone short on soybean futures, and the market has not dropped as anticipated. If he cannot redeem those contracts within the week, we will be left penniless."

"I have always known this would happen," Cletus said. "I just didn't know that I would be the one to set it up."

Orvis lasted two more days. Cletus was at his brother's bedside almost constantly. Cletus kept re-assuring his brother that this last family would be taken care of and avoided being judgmental to the best of his ability. He could not tell if Orvis understood what was being said. The handclasp and the half grin were his only signs of consciousness.

Cletus told Mei-Ling to call Locky at his firm's 800 number. He could not help wanting his son to suffer a little for this. The operator told Mei-Ling that Locky was away from his desk but was expected back within the hour. Mei-Ling left a message to call her at the hospital. Locky called back shortly before one in the afternoon Seattle time.

"The market dropped like a stone this afternoon," Mei-Ling said. "Orvis

has made an after-tax profit of over a quarter of a million dollars, not as much as Locky had hoped, but still quite a lot."

Orvis squeezed his brother's hand and died with the grin still on his face. Mei-Ling could not tell whether Cletus was sobbing or laughing. Despite her decade in America, she found Caucasian emotions very difficult to read at times.

#### III.

In April, 1990, Cletus flew to Las Vegas for a convention of insurance brokers. As a member of the board of directors of the association, he had voted against holding the convention there but had been in a minority. He felt that Las Vegas did not represent the kind of image which the insurance business ought to project.

When he presented himself at the desk of a lavish hotel on the Strip, a clerk eyed him suspiciously and told him that there was a problem with his room.

"What sort of problem?" Cletus asked. "I have had this reservation for months."

"Our records show that Cletus Gowrie already checked into that room earlier this afternoon," the clerk said. "Would you mind presenting identification, sir?"

Cletus did so. There was a hurried consultation behind the desk. He was asked to step into the lounge where he was told that he could order a complimentary drink and was given a roll of forty quarters with which to play the slot machines. Cletus put the roll in his suit jacket pocket. He ordered a double scotch on the rocks, specifying an expensive single malt brand which he had learned to appreciate after having been given a bottle for Christmas by a company with which he did business.

Twenty minutes later the manager of the hotel, who was perspiring slightly despite the air conditioning, joined him.

"I have been in the hotel business for thirty years," the manager said, "and this is the first time that I have seen something like this happen. The gentleman occupying the room is also Cletus Gowrie. He can identify himself as such and has colleagues who can vouch for him. Both of your reservations were made by telephone by your secretaries on the same day. A clerk here assumed that the second phone call was a secretarial error. The only thing to distinguish the two of you on paper is that you are from Des Moines and that the other gentleman is from Detroit."

"I would very much like to meet this man," Cletus said. "This is the first time I have ever heard of anyone else bearing the name."

The other Cletus Gowrie was a light-skinned black man in his midfifties, long-jawed and toothy, with freckles and hair which had once been reddish. Both men were of the same height and build, both were wearing dark blue suits with conservatively patterned neckties.

"We have a real problem," the manager said. "There are two conventions being held here and the hotel is completely booked."

"There are two beds in the room," Cletus Gowrie from Detroit said.

"Then, if you are willing, sir," Cletus Gowrie from Des Moines said, "we shall share. I assume that the hotel can make a satisfactory adjustment in the rate."

"A very satisfactory adjustment," the manager said. "This has been terribly embarrassing for the hotel. Would you gentlemen care for another round of complimentary drinks?"

"We would," Cletus Gowrie from Detroit said. "We have some things to discuss."

The two Cletus Gowries sipped their drinks and munched macadamia nuts. They exchanged driver's licenses and discovered that Cletus from Detroit was born in 1934, which made him nine years younger than Cletus from Des Moines. Both were born in Oklahoma, but in different parts of the state.

"I do not remember much about Oklahoma," Cletus from Detroit said. "We moved north when I was five years old, to a Detroit neighborhood called Paradise Valley. I had a stepfather. I bore his name until I was eighteen years old, but we never got on well. When I won a scholarship to Howard University, I decided that I would change my name. My birth certificate lists my father as unknown, but that was not true. My mother said that his name was Gowrie."

"How did you come to be called Cletus?"

"According to my mother, it was my father's suggestion that I be named that if I turned out to be a boy. He said that it was the name of an upright person whom he hoped I would turn out to be like. I know no more about it than that. My mother was not very forthcoming, even when closely questioned. All I know is that they stayed together about two months, that it was impossible for them to get married in that time and place because they were of different races, that she genuinely wanted to have a baby by him, that he left her with a considerable sum of money and promised to send more if she asked for it, which she never did, and that she was courted in a glamorous and unusual manner which she found impossible to resist. It was very obvi-

ous that this had been the great love of her life and that this was why my stepfather, who was a good man in many ways, had never been able to get along with me. It was because she did not want to hurt my stepfather again, I think, that she refused to tell me more."

"Did she describe this glamorous and unusual manner of courtship?" "She did."

"Did it involve taking her up in an airplane and doing barrel rolls and loop the loops and all manner of tricks like that?"

"It did. Who am I?"

"You are the son of my older brother Orvis Gowrie, who was born near Muddy Creek, Oklahoma, in 1915 and who died in Seattle in 1985. You were named after me. I am probably not as upright as my brother thought I was when I was eight or nine years old, but I am pleased to have you as a namesake."

The two Cletus Gowries reached for the family photographs in their wallets almost simultaneously. Cletus from Detroit had a daughter who was an instructor at the University of Western Ontario and a son who was an assistant state's attorney for Wayne County, Michigan, with a four year-old granddaughter from each. His mother was in good health and living in Cleveland. His flourishing insurance business had many similarities to that of his newfound uncle in Des Moines.

Cletus from Des Moines told about Tommy Gowrie who had quit flying to take a front office job and Jimmy Gowrie who had flown back and forth between San Francisco and Los Angeles as often as the rules permitted for the last seventeen years without missing a single trip. Debbie Gowrie had moved to Des Moines and resumed her maiden name after the break-up of her marriage to a musician named Esposito. She worked for Lauchlan and Gowrie and would manage the firm after he and Heather retired later this year. Wayne Gowrie seemed chiefly interested in computer games, and Kimberly Gowrie loved to ride horses.

"All of them are cautious and hard-working, just like you and me," Cletus from Des Moines said, "without any of Orvis's wild streak. That seems to have been inherited by my son and one of my grandsons. My son Locky is the richest Gowrie I ever heard of, but he's probably going to have to spend most of it soon to

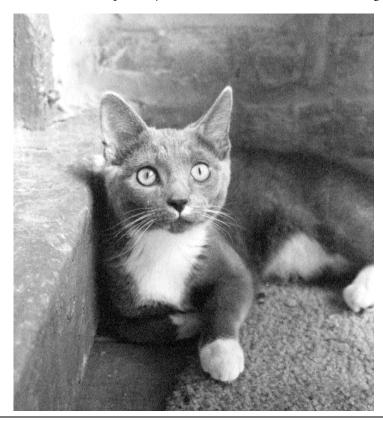
get out from under a federal indictment for some sort of complicated hanky-panky. My oldest grandson, Wallace McClain, has equalled his greatuncle's record for an early start on sexual adventures and may equal him for a late finish. Kimberly is your junior by forty-five years, and there may be others, older, younger, and in the middle, that I haven't heard about yet."

"My father does not seem to have been a good risk for most kinds of insurance."

"That is a very interesting way of thinking about him. You're right, he was a poor risk. He sought out danger his whole life long. Sometimes he got medals out of it, sometimes money, sometimes the love of very good women. Mostly, though, he took risks just for the hell of it. Come to think of it, he did have an insurance policy. I was it, even when I was a little kid and he named you after me for luck. I covered his risks all my life, and I broke better than even on the deal. I would still consider it a good deal, even if I had lost a bundle of money."

"Uncle, let me buy you dinner. I want a whole evening of family stories."

It was an expensive and leisurely dinner with a bottle of good wine. Cletus from Des Moines insisted on taking care of the tip. He left his roll of quarters on the table. It was too late to call Heather in Des Moines about the day's adventures, but she would probably call him tomorrow after the rates changed.



#### +HE BLUE S+EM SUI+E

(poems composed by J. Quinn Brisben for the walls of the Blue Stem Restaurant, 1935 W Irving Park RD, Chicago IL 60613, to accompany needlepoint canvases painted by Andrea Brisben of Changing Woman Designs, 784 E 100th PL, Chicago IL 60628 and stitched by Linda Hall, co-proprietor of the Blue Stem Restaurant, copyright 2001 by J. Quinn Brisben)

#### BIG BLUE S+EM RULES

### J. QUINN BRISBEN

Sometimes tall as a person, sometimes Taller, forming deep and complex sod, Good for tribal lodges and farmer homes; Sometimes almost nothing but big blue stem For many miles at least in the old days But not forever, nothing is forever In an ecology renewed by fire. Lightning Strikes in late summer when the stems Once green have really turned to blue And the rabbits, voles, and prairie dogs Scurry ahead of flame and bison thunder Shakes the earth, leaving a char that Soon renews, leaving room for shorter Grasses, red clover beloved of Lindsay's "Flower-fed buffaloes", hairy puccoon For butterflies, phlox, black-eyed Susans, Ragwort, milkweed, colic root, asters, Coreopsis, Joe Pye weed, a bloom for Every warm month, for spiders, bees moths, Snakes, toads, meadow larks, quail, and Big animals well-adapted for flight, With big blue stem renewing from Its earthy tangle among the worms and Mice and crickets, always richening the Food of our food. The once and Future big blue stem rules.

#### II. BIG BLUE STEM AT NIGHT

### J. QUINN BRISBEN

Wind raises dust in dry months And sometimes a full moon just above The horizon will seem to expand into A terrific disc of glowing orange And, for a once or twice in a lifetime Treat, something on a rise miles away Will expand to the limits of the disc. I have never seen this but Tecumseh And his brother the Prophet and Black Hawk Perhaps saw a distant buffalo framed Like the one depicted on the nickel They stopped minting in 1940, The one celebrated by Sandburg when It was brand-new: "Runners on the prairie, Goodbye"; but we can see again Big blue stem grass at night. Moons Like that do come. I saw one once East of Decatur after delivering Food to locked out workers and Helping an old friend get sober for That stupendous moon, so possibly With the big blue stem coming back And the buffalo raised now to keep Alive some sense of the past of Our prairie, someone might stand Among big blue stem and see a buffalo Framed in a great moon. Runner, hello.

#### BIG BLUE SHEITI NEAR WAHER

### J. QUINN BRISBEN

Water seeks its level and the land Slopes toward it with the grass Giving way on the banks of steady Slow streams to cottonwoods lifting Their seed on the wind in late Spring And the willows dripping tendrils In the shady water with bark That will ease aches when chewed, With big blue stem roots holding Dark soil created by the grass itself And its symbiotic tunnelers. So the clear water teems with perch And catfish and tender-legged frogs, And the land in August is loud With locusts by day and crickets by night. The water carried burnt-out half logs Ingeniously made for humans carrying Beaver skins from far timber country, Returning steel and glass and doom In time for tall-grass prairie. But old mounds where people lived And a system always destroying and Transforming itself suggest a return Of big blue stem again by water.

#### BIG BLUE SHEM AS SYMBOL

#### J. QUINN BRISBEN

It is always an occasion for joy When a body of lawmakers enact A law that is harmless, inexpensive, And even shows some remorse for Treating Mama's legacy the way we did. So the big blue stem is officially, sincerely Our state grass with precinct captains Under orders to restore it everywhere It does not interfere with making money. It is the theme of this good place Where we have come to show our plastic Is not yet maxed out and we can Let out a notch, for, if we wanted only Food that is good for us in skimpy servings, We would have stayed at home. Instead, In this place named for our official Big Blue Stem, we pleasure ourselves Before theater or making love And tip the once and future Actors and aspiring professionals Who serve us and hope the backer Can quit her day job with Cheez Wiz To bring us joy full time with good American food with sauces from all over And some made up right here, for Chefs are artists, just like quilters, Needlepointers, poets, and gourmets Pleasing their taste buds and bellies At the Blue Stem Restaurant east of Damen and Lincoln on Irving Park.

#### V. BIG BLUE SHEM COMES BACK

## J. QUINN BRISBEN

Short grass for cattle succeeds; Wheat, which is grass, succeeds. Corn is grass, too, though its Kernels feed hogs and us, who Have only one stomach and cannot Eat grass directly but know that we Live on grass and that seeds of Grass are chicken feed and the Leaves of grass are liberating Words. Big blue stem comes back When again it is the fashion to Lament poison in field and stream, Brown rivers flooding the towns, Too inbred and fragile a gene pool For the teeming urban burners Of fossil fuels and poisoners of Aquifers. Big blue stem comes back For it is not extinct like the Passenger pigeons that once flew Above big blue stem and crashed Entirely when their numbers imploded. Big blue stem can flourish between The lanes of interstates below The sonic boom of fighters as it Once flourished with the urgent Horny boom of prairie chickens And will again long after the fighters Vanish. It will flourish until the Heat makes cracked, dry land or Until the ice advances and Retreats once more and then

> Big blue stem comes back Again and again for as much Forever as we can think of.

#### RIHUAL

#### KEN SIEBEN

Had Catherine Keegan been a boy, she knew she would have studied for the priesthood with missionary zeal. Yet even in the lower grades, when every Catholic schoolgirl publicly professes the intention to become a nun, she knew she had no vocation. She could not envision herself teaching nasty little children and living in a convent of fussy women bound to obey a forbidding, overbearing mother superior. She preferred the breezier activities of the rectory, the strong, silent, safe priests whisking about their solemn duties in flowing black cassocks.

Masses, sacraments, choir rehearsals, weddings, funerals, Holy Week and Christmas ceremonies, vigils, retreats, novenas, First Fridays and First Saturdays, processions, Rosary Society, Holy Name Society, Knights of Columbus, CYO, altar boys, missals, statues, candles, vestments, sacred golden vessels, Sunday collections, letters from the bishop, fund-raising drives, bazaars, charity balls: Witnessing all these from inside, from behind the scenes, was what made her work at All Saints so fascinating. It was she who, by typing the announcements, became the first in the parish to know what events were to happen. It was she who, by answering the telephone, dispatched the priests on their missions of spiritual succor.

When Catherine first started working afternoons at the rectory, four

curates assisted Monsignor Brennan in managing the affairs of All Saints and caring for its twelve thousand souls. By the mid-nineties only two associate pastors were assigned to the dwindling parish. One, older even than Monsignor and too infirm to do more than say Mass, never gave her a sermon to be typed because he rarely could summon the strength and will to preach. When he did he would try to recall from memory sermons from those first fervent years following ordination. The other, who insisted on being addressed as Father Bill, played the guitar and sported a beard and shoulderlength hair that made him look strikingly like Renaissance depictions of Jesus. He spent most of his time trying to organize activities for the children of the local Puerto Rican families that had come to dominate the section of the city where All Saints Church had stood for more than a century.

Catherine could never understand why Monsignor let them enroll in the school. Why, they were not good Catholics, and half of them did not even speak English. You never saw them in church on Sundays with their families. Few of them know who their fathers were, and Catherine, nobody's fool, well understood how Puerto Rican men treated their women. Monsignor arranged jobs for mothers who could not afford the tuition, in day-care centers and laundries and all-night bakeries, or as cleaning women for older, wealthier parishioners who still maintained the stately houses along the river.

Monsignor had a kind heart, but Catherine believed he should have taken care of his own kind first. Terrified to walk alone, even in broad daylight, through the savage streets where oversexed boys of twelve and thirteen fought with knives and would not think twice about attacking a defenseless woman, she found it more and more difficult to leave the safety of her house each morning. When she learned that Father Bill had run off with a young novice who was helping him with the girls' athletic program, the life she had known for her forty-eight years dissolved like a soap bubble, and she chose to retire.

"I regret that you feel you must leave us at this time of crisis, Catherine," Monsignor Brennan said when she submitted her notice. "I don't know how the parish will manage without you after all this time." He hired an unmarried Puerto Rican woman with three children in the school and expected Catherine to spend her final week breaking her in. Fortunately for Catherine, she felt too ill to come to work.

\* \* \*

Joan Martin's husband moved out three days before Catherine moved in, but Joan insisted there was no connection, that the marriage had been dying for several years. "Even Walter didn't try to blame it on you, Kate, so don't blame yourself." Joan hadn't told her until they had finished loading Catherine's meager possessions into Joan's cavernous 1980-something van. "I'll just have to get used to it."

The three of them had met on the Memorial Day between the court-martial of Lieutenant Calley and the publication of the Pentagon Papers. Joan, who got off at two from the optometrist's office where she worked as a receptionist, was to walk along Smith Street toward the rectory, which Catherine would leave as soon as she typed the correspondence Monsignor had dictated before lunch. They would watch the parade from wherever they met up and then stop someplace quiet for an ice cream soda. But Joan was standing in front of the rectory by the time Catherine left. She was standing right there on the sidewalk, brazen as ever, wearing a flimsy cotton sundress and talking to a stranger.

The parade was already starting to pass by, and the noise from the high school marching band made it difficult for her to make out much beyond Walter's name. Catherine felt that everyone was staring at them and did not like how Walter kept touching Joan. He would cup his hand over her ear to say something, and then she would look at him, arch her head back, and laugh like a ninny.

Between bands, Joan told her he had been walking about half a block behind her all the way down Smith Street and caught up to her when she stopped to wait for Catherine. He started talking to her as if they were old friends, insisting they had met in high school. He had played basketball for Amboy and remembered her as a cheerleader for All Saints. Joan said she did not recall, but that did not stop him.

"I used to be jealous of you guys in the Catholic school," Walter said, "because you got so many extra holidays."

"Really?" answered Joan. "We were jealous of you because you didn't have to wear uniforms, weren't we, Catherine?"

"Well, I certainly was never jealous of anyone in public school, I can assure you of that," Catherine stated, smoothing pleated black skirt over narrow hips in unconscious recollection of the blue jumper and white blouse with the Peter Pan collar.

Walter did not seem put off by Catherine's tone. "And you guys always got the good summer jobs because you finished up earlier in June than we did. You have to admit that, Joan."

"Well, why didn't you transfer to All Saints then?"

"Simple--I wasn't Catholic."

"Isn't Martin an Irish name?" asked Catherine.

Walter looked at her blandly. "Yes, actually my father was Irish, but my mother's from a long line of WASPs. I was raised in the Episcopal Church."

So Joan knew right from the start what she was getting into, and she should have had the sense to excuse herself and walk immediately into the rectory where she would have been safe instead of staying right where everyone could see her talking to the devil's disciple.

Joan seemed undisturbed by the revelation. "You know, I think I remember you now. You were really the star for Amboy, weren't you?"

"Not exactly. We had a strong team my last two years. There was no single star."

"What position did you play?"

"Center."

"Sure, I remember now. You scored twenty-five points against us and won the game on a buzzer shot, right?"

"Hey, what a memory. You're appealing to my ego. That was the best game I ever played."

Catherine tapped her right foot on the sidewalk to signal disapproval, but Joan would not be stopped. "Did you go on to play basketball in college?"

Walter smiled boyishly. "Well, I played on the freshman team at Rutgers for a season, but I realized that a 6'5" center wasn't going to get very far."

Catherine saw her chance. "So you didn't finish college then?"

"Yes, I did. In fact, I just graduated two weeks ago."

"How exciting," said Joan. "I wish I could have gone to college."

Walter smiled. "Now it's my turn to ask. Why didn't you?"

"Oh, I don't know, I guess we didn't have enough money."

Catherine interrupted to correct an error. "That's not true, Joan. I told you I would have paid your tuition."

"Well, I guess the truth is that I'm not very ambitious. What did you major in, Walter?"

"Business administration, but I've been working as a programmer parttime for the past three years, and I start my first regular job tomorrow."

"Do you mean with computers?"

"Yep, that's where the future is in this country, and I'm in on the ground floor. I plan to stay with this brokerage firm in New York for five years and then start my own service company."

"That sounds exciting. I mean, nobody I know knows a thing about computers."

Catherine could see the admiration in Joan's eyes. After the parade was

over and Joan invited Walter to tag along with them, Catherine said the sun had given her a headache, and she would rather just go home by herself. Naturally, she reported to their father that Joan was at an ice cream parlor with a Protestant, but he did not seem troubled. Instead, he turned on her, as he often did when she tried to act responsibly about Joan's upbringing. "For the love of God, at least maybe now I won't have two old maids on my hands. You're twenty-five years old, and you haven't had a date since high school. Why don't you get out of that rectory and into the real world?"

\* \* \*

After Catherine moved in, Joan was too unhappy to be pleasant company. So Carolyn could keep her own room, Catherine slept with Joan as she did when they were girls, though the king-sized bed allowed them enough space that they would not actually touch. She thought that Joan would confide in her, that it would be like when she was a high school senior, wise in her knowledge of what boys wanted, and Joan was in the seventh grade, eager to learn about life, but Joan kept everything bottled up. She never volunteered a word about Walter, except to report the slow progress of the divorce proceedings or, later, the arrival of a much-needed alimony check. Joan's feelings about the breakup of her marriage remained as unknown to Catherine as the origin of the universe.

Three months after that Memorial Day meeting, Joan had almost sent their father to an early grave--God rest his soul, for indeed his fatal heart attack came just a few years later--by eloping with Walter and being married by a judge. Catherine had her suspicions about the haste, though she never shared them with her father, but Joan's confession of a honeymoon miscarriage proved how well Catherine knew her little sister. Also, while Catherine never claimed personal experience in matters of sex, she understood basic female biology; therefore, the fact the eight years elapsed before the birth of Carolyn and the further fact that Joan never again became pregnant probably meant that she practiced birth control. For seventeen years her sister had been living in a state of mortal sin.

So Catherine's mission was clear to her: She would try to lead her sister and niece back within the fold. Joan might resent her good intentions as interfering, but Catherine knew her own reward need not be in this world. Still, it would be better if Joan were grateful.

From the time it became apparent that Joan's faith had lapsed and she was making no effort to raise Carolyn properly, not even sending her to a

Catholic school, Catherine fretted over her own failure to instruct the child in her religious duties, though, God knows, she tried for two weeks during that first vacation. A lifelong daily communicant, she dressed up Carolyn and brought her with her to Our Lady of Mercy Church every morning for two weeks despite the steep ten-block climb.

Six-year-old Carolyn loved the extra attention and air of mystery associated with church-going, and Joan must have felt sufficient guilt to encourage her. As soon as she turned seven Catherine wanted her to join the Saturday First Communion preparation class for public school children, but Walter put his foot down. "Going to church is one thing. In fact, you even got me there on Christmas last week, but I will not permit my daughter's head to be filled with medieval nonsense!"

Joan's silence was a sin for which Catherine tried to atone. Every Monday evening, after the bright church lights had been darkened following the Miraculous Medal Novena, Catherine would kneel at the marble communion rail, a supplicant, by the five-tiered rack of Oremus special-intention candles and give an altar boy a dollar to defray the cost of lighting one. He would lift the red glass cover of an already lighted candle and, using a waxed taper, transfer the flame to her candle at the moment when she would silently declare her intention, then insert the burning taper into an underslung bed of sand, sending thick, dark smoke curling erratically heavenward and filling the church with the sorrowful smell of extinguished fire. Despite this and all her rosaries and novenas, the tenuous hold she had started to gain on this child crumbled like stale bread.

\* \* \*

Catherine's first act after moving into her sister's home was to remind Joan that, under church law, she had never been married. On those grounds, she could be granted an annulment and save herself the expense and humiliation of a divorce. Joan had already rejected that possibility under the advice of her lawyer. "Anyway," she added, "I want to end the marriage, not pretend it never happened."

Catherine couldn't resist the opportunity to instruct. "But there was no sacrament, Joan."

"But there was twenty-two years, and there was Carolyn. According to you, she was born out of wedlock. Do you want to make her a bastard?"

"I merely want you to see the truth."

"And lose my alimony and child support."

"I know nothing of such matters."

"You know nothing about life, it seems to me."

Joan walked out of the living room as though to escape responsibility for these last words, but Catherine would not be insulted out of her duty and followed her into the kitchen. "It's probably true that I know little of the kind of life you chose for yourself, but I know a great deal about the life Our Lord intended for us to live." Joan stood by the kitchen sink with her hands over her face. Catherine placed her own hand on Joan's heaving shoulder to comfort her as she often had done during their growing-up years. "Please come to church with me tomorrow to pray for forgiveness."

"It's too late for that, Kate," Joan said, straightening herself up and walking to the stove to light the kettle. "I've always tried to please everybody-Daddy, Mommy, you, Walter, Carolyn--but I've never felt rewarded for it."

"You shouldn't be so concerned with your feelings. Do what you know is right from what you were taught."

Joan reached for two cups and a jar of instant coffee. "Kate, do you honestly still believe all that stuff we were taught back in grammar school?"

"I have never had any doubt. I've kept my faith by praying daily for strength to resist the temptations of this world. Prayer has worked for me, and it can work for you. I know it."

"Well, then, you pray for me, and we'll see if it works; but, while we're waiting, please don't bring this up again. I don't want to talk about it or think about it. I've too much on my mind as it is."

"Joan, you must open your heart more than that."

"No, Kate, I've been hurt too much whenever I have opened my heart. I won't do it again."

\* \* \*

Catherine has been with Joan for three and a half years now, but she would like to get her own place soon. Carolyn, though a week shy of eighteen and not married, has a two-month-old daughter whose disgusting smells and frequent crying have made Catherine more nervous than she ever was walking the streets of Amboy. Carolyn was always too pretty, too headstrong, too daring and wild, too much like her father. Now her life is ruined, Catherine has reminded herself every day since Carolyn's shocking pronouncement, without warning but with too much sarcasm, last June. Catherine had been trying to let the girl know how pleased she was for what she was misinterpreting as a new maturity. "I'm very glad to see you're not

wearing one of those awful bikinis on the beach this summer," she said.

"That's because I'm four months pregnant, Aunt Catherine. Do you mean you really haven't noticed?"

So Catherine now has a new occupation for the late afternoon hours after the paper has arrived. She searches the classifieds for a suitable furnished room as well as for some kind of job. Her modest disability pension and the rent from the house in Amboy will cover living expenses, but a little extra income would be useful. She also misses the satisfactions of regular employment. A part-time position in the rectory of one of the local parishes would be best. In her condition, however, she would have to resist the pressure to take on too much responsibility. Perhaps she could be a companion for an elderly lady, as long as she would not be expected to do the housework.

Today is Saturday, the 17th of January, a beautifully clear day. As usual, Catherine slept too late to see the pink morning clouds shading the sun-reddened ocean while the full white moon still hung in the northwestern sky, whitening the glassy waters of the bay, but she appreciates how the weather has been much warmer this winter than usual, so warm that she is considering a bus ride into Riverton to look at a few of the advertised rooms. Joan works Saturdays at the Mall, and Carolyn, who babysits two other children weekdays and gets home instruction in the early evening from three of the high school teachers, does most of her week's homework in her room. She insists she will earn enough money for college, but Catherine has no idea what she expects to do with her baby. Catherine certainly is not going to take care of anybody's bastard. The foolish girl has not come to terms with reality yet. Why, just last evening at the dinner table she announced that she expects to be her class valedictorian.

"Are you certain?" Joan asked. "I mean, did the principal tell you?"

"No," Carolyn answered. "I telephoned Ms. Avocata, my guidance counselor, to find out what my average is. So far, it's 94.8, and that's fivetenths of a point ahead of Bob Buhlner. He can't possibly catch me if I only get 90s this last term, and I'll get at least 95s, maybe even a 98 in calculus and a 99 in English."

"Lord save us, they wouldn't let you make a speech, would they?" Catherine asked.

"I don't see why not. If I finish with the highest average, that makes me the valedictorian, doesn't it, Catherine?" Carolyn had stopped addressing her as "Aunt" when the baby was born. "What do you think, Mother?"

"Well, dear, what did Miss Avocata say?"

"It's Ms. Avocata, Mother. She said I should insist, even if they give me

a hard time."

"Well, I don't feel up to another battle with the superintendent," Joan said. "Believe me, it was hard enough to get you home instruction for this year. You should be satisfied."

"And grateful," Catherine inserted.

"Oh, don't worry, Mother. I'll fight my own battles now. Ms. Avocata said she'd try to find out how the principal feels about it. As soon as I turn eighteen, I'll start writing letters to everybody on the board, then to the county superintendent and even the Commissions. If the official route doesn't work, I'll write to the editor of the Press.

Catherine burped, a recent nervous symptom, and pardoned herself. "Do you really think it wise to seek publicity, Carolyn? I mean, after all!"

Carolyn stood up. She was tall like her father and often rose to her five feet, ten inches to make a point. "After all, what? I earned it, and it's my right. And I'm going to give a speech that my classmates will never forget, believe me. I want to be remembered for something other than the first girl to get pregnant!"

So Catherine's last night's sleep was ruined by nervous indigestion again. Thank God the baby is napping now so she can enjoy a cup of tea before she goes out. As she sits in the little chair at the table by the sunny kitchen window, she sees something that makes her shudder and spill good tea into the saucer. A little colored boy of four or five is getting out of a car nosed in behind the house three doors down. He is followed by another, and then by a girl, not as dark, who looks like a Puerto Rican. My God, Catherine thinks, what are they doing here? She sees them being greeted by a woman she has never seen before, who also, in this bright sunlight, looks suspicious. "Now I know I'll have to move," Catherine declares aloud, as though taking a solemn vow. "God bless us and keep us!"

# A +AS+E OF +HE SWEE+ LIFE

## BERNADE++E MILLER

She was inside a cake. Three-layered and enormous, it had been ordered for a company party. The outside was sponge with vanilla icing, adorned with pink rosettes; on top, candied letters read: CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR NEW VICE PRESIDENT. Crouched inside the birch container, Sally waited to leap out like a fairy godmother. Air holes between the letters let in oxygen, but it was hot; her sexy mini-skirt and sequined bodice might be ruined from perspiration. After hours of primping in her apartment, she waited impatiently, eager to note the men's appreciative gazes when she appeared.

In the dim light she checked her watch's luminous dial: nine-thirty. Soon, she'd hear a drum roll, her signal to push open he top layer and spring out onto a table where she'd tap-dance while the men whistled and clapped. Still, it was uncomfortable in the cramped space; if only they'd get on with it...

The last occasion had been a sales convention. She smiled, remembering. The salesmen, mostly married, had crowded around her, propositioning, but she'd held them off with a shy, dimpled smile. If they were serious about buying her gifts, they could contact her modeling agency. But if they just wanted fun, she wasn't interested.

Her watch read ten. It seemed as though she'd been cooped up here her whole life. Well, think about the future: exciting Broadway shows, leading movie roles, and many lovers! She sighed, remembering then her childhood in a drab little Missouri town. Mama, looking worn out with her wispy hair and faded housedresses, had been snubbed by townspeople for doing their laundry. Daddy, a handsome construction worker, had run off when Sally was nine. Poor Mama, always worrying about unpaid bills, all hope crushed. Sally shuddered recalling that dilapidated shack and Mama's weary voice:

"Sally, dear, not so much shampoo. You'll wash the oil out of your blonde hair."

"Mama, I want my hair shiny, not dingy like some of the other girls'."

Later, when Sally's curls turned mousy-brown, she used an expensive hair dye because, as the commercial stressed, her appearance was worth the extra cost.

"Sally, dear, popularity won't guarantee happiness," Mama had said, ironing a blouse. "You should settle down with a decent fellow who loves you."

Sally shook her head in amazement that Mama couldn't see beyond her

ironing board. Hands fisted on hips, she replied, "Settle down in this hick town? Why, every boy in school says I'm the prettiest thing he's ever seen! Just look at me: big blue eyes, cute nose, sexy body. I could become a famous movie star. Why stay here?"

But Mama just shook her head, sighed, and continued ironing, as if she'd never understand doing something important with your life. By thirty-five, Mama seemed middle-aged; by forty, positively ancient. And, finally, the year Sally moved to New York at twenty-eight, Mama died. Standing in that tiny room, tearfully staring at Mama's apron draped over a rickety chair, Sally promised herself, "I'm going to stay young as long as I live, and never grow old like poor Mama!"

Moist drops oozed down now between her full breasts. She felt her costume to see if it was wet. It was. She'd look awful by the time she jumped out. Funny, though, it didn't sound like a party going on, though it was hard to tell sometimes because the cake muffled noises. She sat very still, listening. There was silence.

Checking her watch, she gasped. She'd wasted over an hour, thinking all sorts of silly things. She should remember that jumping from party cakes paid good money!

Still, she'd give anything to stretch her legs. To divert her mind from her discomfort, she remembered last year's cruise with fat Robert, the movie producer. What a beautiful yacht! They'd sailed all around the Bahamas. True, she hadn't done anything except make love, but when they finally docked, Robert bought her those gorgeous designer clothes. Well, that was worth the boring lovemaking!

Hunched over, she shifted her cramped position, and began to feel abandoned. Why hadn't someone arrived to see if she was okay? She strained her ears against the birch. From afar a woman sang a Black spiritual, the voice alternately booming and soft, the endnotes quivering as though suspended in mid-air:

"Sometimes I feel like a motherless child.

Oh, Lord, I feel like a motherless child."

It was probably just a cleaning lady in the next room, but the song reminded Sally of warm, fragrant evenings on Mama's front porch, crickets chirping in adjacent fields, and the occasional chugging of a second-hand car on the distant dirt road. Mama, working as usual, mended a dress, while Sally waited for darling Billy Lee to escort her to the prom. It reminded Sally of his sadness when she'd refused his marriage proposal, and her regret when he'd finally married someone else. It reminded her of events she'd tried to

forget since living in New York. The song faded.

Sally shifted her position, and sighed. This cake business was beginning to seem dopey, just sitting here, waiting. Did it really matter if men whistled at her? After two weeks with ugly Robert, she never even got a screen test. Then, whenever Sally called him, his secretary said he was busy. She shook her head; she was just depressed. She'd never waited so long in a cake, usually a half-hour at most.

By eleven-thirty, she couldn't wait another second, "Help," she said timidly. Then she yelled as loudly as possible. "Help! Get me out of here!"

There was no reply.

"Help! Get me out! Get me out!" She pounded at the top layer; the hinges refused to budge. Kicking the birch with her high-heeled foot, she finally managed to puncture a hole. Hunks of cake cascaded onto her arm. She grew terrified of being buried under an avalanche of vanilla frosting. What a disgusting way to die! Not like in the movies: a handsome lover shooting himself after shooting her, refusing to believe that life was worth-while without Sally, although, of course, she certainly didn't want to die. There were too many wonderful events ahead. Thank goodness she was pretty. After all, if a girl wasn't pretty, what else was there?

Bruno, her agent, had gotten her a commercial that paid good money since it ran primetime. She smiled, cheering herself by remembering the commercial:

"Hi, I'm Sally Rae, the Allure girl. To me, there's nothing more satisfying than Allure deodorant. Know why?" Here, she'd performed her charming tap dance, and pointed a scarlet fingernail at the grinning cameraman. "Well, wouldn't you like everybody to think you're marvelous? Then come on, America. Find that fulfillment you've searched for. Use Allure--and the world is yours!"

Bruno had said, "Baby, without you, that commercial's for dumbbells. Your knockout sex appeal makes all the difference. Why, you could become another Marilyn Monroe!"

Except that nothing happened afterwards. She'd slept with Bruno, a schnooky guy with buckteeth, but no Hollywood contract emerged, as he'd promised.

Another hunk of cake brushed her arm. Hungry, she devoured crumbs and considered eating her way through the spongy layers. The cake was sickeningly sweet. She squinted her nose in disgust. Starvation would be better than that awful stuff! Besides, she'd better keep her curves in the right places, or she'd grow fat and ugly and be rejected--like Mama.

It was nearly midnight. Didn't anybody care about her? She'd longed to be rich and famous; instead, here she was, skirt gooey from icing, bodice soaked with perspiration, and a vicious gash in her nylon. If only she could escape! A child ran up her spine. Maybe she'd died, and this cake was hell...

Suddenly footsteps neared. A bucket scraped and water splashed, as though someone was mopping a floor.

She screamed, "Help! Get me out of here!"

"Who's that?" a man called out, alarmed--as if fearful a ghost lurked in the room.

"I'm inside the cake. The top won't open! Get me out!"

"Well, imagine that, a girl inside a cake."

"Please, help!"

The footsteps approached warily, as though he still wasn't convinced it contained a live person. He fumbled with the hinges.

Weak and dizzy, Sally desperately longed to stretch her legs, but told herself to be patient awhile longer.

"The banquet manager will know how to open it," the man said finally. Don't worry, honey, I'll come back." The footsteps retreated.

Sally grew panicky. Suppose he didn't come back. Suppose nobody did. She shuddered. From now on, no more wasting her looks and talent in party cakes, no matter how big the salary!

More footsteps hurried into the room, followed by the banquet manager's anxious voice, "Sally, the party was canceled. Unfortunately, I forgot you. Please forgive me. I'm terribly sorry."

Forgot... Terribly sorry... Men had said she was so beautiful, they couldn't bear to part from her. She shook her head sadly. Maybe after they left her, she slipped from their minds for some reason. "Please, help me. Please." She was too tired to yell.

"Don't worry, my work crew's here. You'll be out shortly."

She tried shifting her legs. They felt numb, as though she'd been stricken with polio. She pictured herself freed from the cake, able to walk, dance, run. Wouldn't that be wonderful?

"My God, the top's stuck!" one of the men said, panting. "The hinges won't open."

"Come on, use some muscle," the banquet manager said. "They have to open!"

"I'm telling you there ain't no way we'll open that top layer. We'll have to dig a tunnel and pull her through."

"Then do it!" the banquet manager snapped.

They scraped aside the cake and drilled through the wood, muttering

obscenities, chided by the banquet manager.

Finally, Sally noticed light glimmering beyond a widening hole, and a hand gooey with icing beckoning her.

"Careful!" the banquet manager called out. "We don't want a cave-in."

Gliding on her stomach, Sally inched her way through the tunnel toward the hand. Hunks of cake brushed her shiny blonde curls, caressed her rouged cheeks, and slid down her nylons. Ignoring the discomfort, she continued her journey, anxious to escape her sugary imprisonment. Suddenly she was pulled outside. Seated on the table splattered with crumbs, she rubbed her mascarasmudged eyes and blinked in the chandelier's bright glare, while the men crowded about, gazing at her sympathetically.

"I hope you're all right," the banquet manager said, concerned. Slender with graying temples and soft brown eyes, he wore a handkerchief neatly folded in a breast pocket.

Trembling from her ordeal, Sally brushed a sticky rosette from her cheek, and glanced at it clinging to her hand. "I don't understand. I'm a model and an actress. I did a television commercial! How could anybody forget me?"

"My dear, I'm deeply sorry. I was so preoccupied with important matters..." Embarrassed, he stopped, face flushed.

Astonished, she stared at him. After slaving all afternoon, trying to please people by looking pretty, she wasn't important enough to be remembered? Her eyes filled with tears.

Awkwardly he patted her shoulder. "There, there, I didn't mean..." He handed her his handkerchief. "Why don't you rest in a lovely room upstairs? Stay overnight, if you wish."

"No, please," she wiped away a tear, "I want to go home."

"But, my dear, you can't go out looking like that."

"I don't care." She sniffled and blew her nose. "I wouldn't be remembered anyway."

He eyed her curiously, as if wondering whether her sanity had snapped. "Naturally, I can't make you stay," he said, and smiled. "But, let me pay your cab fare." He removed his wallet and extended a hundred-dollar bill.

The offer as generous since Sally's apartment was in the neighborhood. She hesitated, then shook her head. Somehow men's gifts no longer satisfied. Exhausted, she climbed from the table, aided by her rescuers, and staggered toward the door, her legs stiff and wobbly. She glanced at the formerly magnificent cake, now pimpling the table with ugly lumps. Why had she been forgotten?

Thoughtful, she turned and opened the door.

# UP IN +HE MOUN+AINS

## BERNADE++E MILLER

It was a lovely Adirondacks resort. The large dining room's French doors overlooked Schwanga Lake with its piers and sailboats cradled amidst mountains. Chandeliers lit damask walls and candled tables, the room bathed with soft classical music. On the columned porch, guests could socialize on chaise lounges or rest nearby in their luxurious cottages. Farther down the paved road was the staff dormitory. Because they had obtained their jobs through an employment agency, the college students had never met the owner, Mr. Hargrave.

When pony-tailed Maxine, a psychology major, arrived by bus on Memorial Day, she hurried with the others to the dining room.

Middle-aged Mr. Hargrave was surprisingly handsome with deep blue eyes, craggy features, and graying sideburns. Lining the students against a wall near the entrance, he distributed white uniforms with black aprons, and then laid down the rules.

"Now listen you little snot noses, this ain't no Goddamn vacation! You wanna get through college, you're gonna work your asses off, understand?" He paced back and forth before the students staring, open-mouthed. "I'm expecting a convention in a few weeks," he growled, "and after that Hollywood big shots, and I don't want no shit from my staff! Any kid poor enough to work in the mountains is an animal, and that's how I'll treat you. But you work hard, you'll make god money. Okay, get the table setups started. Dismissed!"

Intimidated, the girls spread lavender tablecloths and laid out gilded silverware, while the boys cleaned the windows and vacuumed the plush lavender carpet. They sneeringly referred to Mr. Hargrave as Mr. Simon Legree.

The next day, balancing a heavy tray on one shoulder, Maxine filled orders for the forty guests at her station. She felt confident she'd earn enough for the coming semesters. "Don't worry, we'll manage here," she told Joanie,

who'd approached from the next station after lunch. "There'll be wealthy guests all summer."

"It won't be easy," Joanie said. Pretty, with curly auburn hair and green eyes, Joanie glanced about to spot Hargrave, and smiled at Hank, a cute busboy.

After dinner, Maxine rest her tables and propped the folded tray stand against the walnut cabinet shiny from the chamois rag. Anticipating a deserved rest, she headed for the oak doors.

"Where do you think you're going?" Hargrave called out, emerging from the kitchen.

"I've...finished, so I'm going back to the dorm," Maxine said timidly, pausing.

"Oh, no, you're not! Nobody leaves until everbody's finished!" She hesitated.

"If you don't like the rules, you can hop a bus back to town."

"No...I'll follow the rules." She retreated to her station and in frustration watched the others. If Fran worked any slower, she'd move backwards! Petite Fran smiled shyly as Maxine hurried over to fill a sugar bowl. Then Joanie helped another student to fold napkins. By helping each other, they finished by ten. They'd worked since seven that morning.

"All right, line up against the wall!" Hargrave barked like a drill sergeant. C'mon, no slumping. I want this staff to look sharp!"

Maxine forced herself to stand erect, deeply resenting Hargrave. What right did he have to make them work until they dropped? He was a sadist!

"This is an expensive resort, so we give the guests our best," he grumbled, and inspected the students, straightening a collar, tugging at a sleeve. "You brats will stand straight at your station until you're needed, and nobody leaves until the dining room's spotless. Got that?"

They nodded wearily.

"Dismissed!"

After work they discussed Hargrave and where they might have fun. Some busboys had old cars, so they drove the girls to charming Roanberry's Inn, several miles away. The spacious rooming house had been converted into a home away from home: porch rocking chairs, a cozy living room with thickly padded furniture, bar and TV. Guests made their own sandwiches in the kitchen.

Although Maxine rarely drank, she enjoyed the wooziness that eased her dread of Hargrave.

Hank, seated beside Joanie, said, "How can he operate a motel efficiently if he destroys his staff?" Frowning, he smoothed his blond crewcut.

"We've got to leave."

"Where can we go now?" Joanie said, clutching her second drink. "The resorts have already hired their help."

The others nodded glumly, and rested chins in hands, thinking.

"We won't last the summer," Fran said finally, gazing with glazed eyes at the bar mirror.

"We must find a way out," Maxine said.

Back at the dormitory, they wearily set the alarm for six o'clock and fell into bed.

Two weeks later, refilling salt shakers, Maxine noticed Fran staring at the wall, not moving. Maxine caught Joanie's eye, and they walked over to Fran, joined by Hank. Hargrave had disappeared from the dining room.

"Fran, come on, you can't just stand there," Maxine whispered. "We'll help you." She stuffed dirty tablecloths into a laundry bag.

Fran shook her head. "I'm so tired, I can't stand."

"Who isn't?" Joanie said, wiping the cabinet. "Roanberry's the only thing that gets me through the day."

"Hargrave has serious emotional problems," Maxine said. "He needs professional help."

Hank sighed. "I've been driving around, looking for another job for us, but so far, nothing."

"Keep looking," Maxine said, and the others nodded.

As usual, they returned from Roanberry's past one o'clock and again fell into bed. The next morning, Maxine slumped against the wall while Hargrave inspected his staff lined up like soldiers. "Listen, you little bastards, don't lean against the Goddamn walls! If you got some sleep instead of whoring at Roanberry's, you'd be fit to work. Hey, Malvino, what the hell are you doing?"

Fran had sunk into a nearby lavender chair. She looked at Hargrave, then, rising wearily, stood at attention with the others.

"Now, listen up good, you brats! Like I told you, this ain't no picnic. We still have July and August, and I want you bright-eyed and bushy-tailed in the morning. I'll work you day and night if I hafta! Important celebrities are coming to see their kids at Bingham's Camp, and I don't want no snot from my staff. Got that?"

They nodded.

"Dismissed!"

Maxine managed to gulp juice and corn flakes before the breakfast crowds entered.

"Maxine," said slender, gray-haired Mrs. Courtland in her shrill voice,

"I asked for cream of wheat, and you brought me Wheatina. I do wish you'd be more alert and give me what I asked for."

"Sorry, ma'am," Maxine said, and rushed into the kitchen. Rich old biddie, she thought. They hassle you with no concern about your feelings. Holding the bowl on a doilied plate, she glanced through the French doors at the lake's blue water rippling against a pier. Last summer, Lake William had been beautiful, too, but despite the nice hotel manager and guests, a bank loan paid for tuition. Daddy bought class supplies, apologizing that his small grocery didn't earn that much; she'd have to work her way through college. Still, she shouldn't complain. Many students came from poorer families, some on welfare. Biting her lip, she hurried to serve Mrs. Courtland her cereal.

"Finally!" Mrs. Courtland said, smoothing her brocaded designer jacket. She smiled at her frail, balding husband. "Did you enjoy the fruit cocktail, dear?"

"Would you like anything else, ma'am?" Maxine said, bending over her, the tiny black apron tugging at her slim hips.

Mrs. Courtland waved her hand, as if Maxine were a robot. "That'll be all." She turned toward her husband.

Maxine almost dropped the coffee carafe, thinking about Hargrave. Freud, Jung, and Adler could have spent their entire careers analyzing him! He was blindly irrational, probably a manic-depressive. She must escape from that nut.

Exhausted by lunch, she rushed to fill orders and flushed when Mrs. Courtland complained bitterly after finishing her soup, "Where's my Chicken Cordon Bleu?" What are they doing in the kitchen?"

Maxine forced a polite, "Ma'am, it takes time to prepare. I'll try to speed it up." Anxious to get good tips for school, she ran to the kitchen and almost knocked down Hargrave, who tottered for a moment and caught himself in time.

"Watch where you're going, stupid!" he whispered, and then turned, smiling, toward a guest.

At dinnertime, as the convention attendees filled the dining room, Maxine doubted she'd last the evening. The meal, with speeches and entertainment, would run past midnight. By nine, feeling dizzy, she visited the ladies room with its pink floral wallpaper and lighted mirrors. Fran Malvino lay sprawled on the plush pink carpet, an arm flung over a wicker wastebasket.

"Oh, my God--Fran!" she shrieked and dashed outside for Joanie who helped lug poor Fran into the cool night air and onto a chaise lounge.

Maxine untied Fran's apron. Fran's eyes remained closed.

"Is she okay?" Joanie asked, feeling Fran's forehead.

"Exhaustion," Maxine said. "I think she needs a doctor."

Hargrave came running onto the porch. "What the hell's going on out here?"

"Fran passed out!" Maxine exclaimed.

He glanced at the inert form and shrugged. "I'll take care of it. Get back to your station. I got a convention to feed!"

They didn't move, but stood staring at him.

"Did you hear me? Get the hell back to your station!"

Despite the late hour, Hank afterwards drove them to Roanberry's, where they discussed a possible solution.

"But how can we get even with Hargrave for poor Fran being hospitalized?" Joanie said.

Maxine thought for awhile and suggested a plan of revenge that would swing into action the night the celebrities arrived.

Filled with hope, the students beamed.

During the following week Maxine waited impatiently until the white limos finally crowded outside the cottages. At dinnertime, Hargrave planted himself at the oak doors to act the sickening sycophant, practically bowing to the floor as Hollywood stars, directors, and producers arrived, wearing gowns and tuxedoes and chatting among themselves.

"Mr. Van Buren, how nice to see you!" Hargrave gushed with perfect diction. "Oh, and this is your beautiful co-star, Miss Reilly. Wonderful, wonderful meeting you! My father was an actor--of course, I hardly saw him before his fatal heart attack, but my colonel grandfather more than compensated for my discipline." He paused, as if embarrassed, then shrugged it off with an overly sweet smile. "Well, let's not waste time on trivialities. Please, won't you allow me to escort you to your table?"

The menu had been extended to include more meat choices, plus lobster, extra desserts, and complimentary champagne. Shuttling between her tables and the kitchen, Maxine eagerly anticipated the pleasure of their revenge. She smiled at Joanie returning to her station with smoked salmon appetizers. Joanie nervously eyed Maxine who held up two fingers indicating, "soon."

Hargrave circulated about the room, snarling at the students, "Hurry up with that damned soup; don't keep them waiting!" Then he smiled at guests and inquired about their health to display his geniality.

Mrs. Courtland was especially annoying, complaining about every dish,

but nothing could dampen Maxine's spirits as she flew between the kitchen and her station. The other students, also rushing with their trays, kept glancing at Maxine, waiting for her signal.

Finally, it was time for the main course. As agreed upon, Maxine left the kitchen and stood at her station, noting each waitress's nod to signify that her main course orders had been given to the chef. At the last nod, Maxine suddenly waved her arm above her head as though swatting a fly, although flies didn't dare buzz inside the posh Lake Schwanga Motel.

As rehearsed, every waitress set down her tray and began leaving in tandem, followed by all the busboys.

Hargrave, who'd been chatting with guests near Maxine's station, happened to look up, and to his horror saw his staff disappearing. He grabbed Maxine's arm. "Where the hell are you going?" he said, his face flushing beefy red.

"We're quitting," she said, emboldened by the revenge. She wrenched herself from his grasp.

"Are you crazy?" He glanced at guests observing him curiously and dropped his voice to a whisper. "You can't quit now. I got a roomful of hungry people here."

"Too bad," Maxine said, scowling, and turned to the others behind her. "C'mon, let's get out of here."

"You snot noses!" Hargrave shouted, ignoring the sudden astonishment engulfing the room. "I'll get even with you for this!" He ran to the kitchen for a butcher knife and pursued the students now fleeing past the dormitory and toward the busboys' cars parked outside the dorm, crammed with their suitcases packed the previous evening.

The guests, screaming in panic at Hargrave waving the butcher knife, stampeded outside.

He raced toward his staff's departing cars, yelling, "It's right in the middle of the Goddamn meal! You can't do this to me, you sons of bitches. Come back or you'll never work in the mountains again!"

As Hank turned onto the highway and toward the new Caravelle Hotel where they'd gotten jobs, Joanie and Maxine peered through the rear window and burst into laughter at seeing Hargrave, pausing in a state of near apoplexy, still waving his butcher knife, while the celebrities' limos swerved to avoid him on the road and shot off in opposite directions with their prominent guests.

Mr. Hargrave's tyranny of college students was over.

# LICENSE PLA+ES

## MARCIGLER

When I was a small boy, bedtime-story duty fell to my father. Back then, he was working night rewrite for the San Francisco Call-Bulletin and had plenty of time for me before his shift began at 9 p.m. But we never seemed to have enough books. The library would only let you check out five at a time, and we'd go through those pretty fast. So, when we didn't have any books left, my father would simply tell stories.

This went on for a long time, but then my mother had another baby, and then another, and then twins. I found myself the oldest of five, and my father no longer had time for stories. With all the bathing and feeding and diapering, there was just too much work to do. My father would linger at my bedroom door before he headed off to the paper, maybe telling me a quick rhyme or singing a song and promising that the next night, or maybe the next, he'd have time for a story. On nights like that I'd lay in bed and go over some of the stories we used to tell.

One Saturday night, we had guests over for dinner - a man and a woman named Gene and Jean. Gene was also a newspaperman, and when he and my father got together, they'd spend the whole time telling each other about the stories they had written, laughing and joking and filling in all the details they weren't allowed to put in the paper back then. I'd sit and listen to them, acting like I was watching TV but trying hard to pick up everything that was said.

On this night, after my mother and Jean finished putting the babies down and returned to the living room, my father disappeared into the garage. He came back a few minutes later and called out to me, "Hey, come out here for a minute. I want to show you something."

My father was holding an old brown paper bag. As we all gathered around the coffee table, he reached inside and brought out two old license plates that made a dull clank when they hit together. He carefully laid them on his lap and motioned me over. I reached out and touched them. The paint - a maroon background with white letters and numbers - was rough and faded, not smooth and shiny like the ones now on our Sports Wagoneer. Rust ate away at the edges. I traced my finger over the symbols stamped into the brittle metal: "1-380-422" and below that "19 CALIFORNIA 27." The plates were more than 40 years old.

My father leaned forward, exchanged a glance with my mother, and said: "I got these from a cop friend the other day. He was clearing out the evidence locker at the department, getting rid of things connected to cases they've given up on. You know what they are, don't you, son?"

I nodded.

"Did you notice this?" He poked his finger through a hole in the top left corner of one of the plates. The hole, ringed by rust, looked like a puncture wound. He took his finger out and let me stick mine in. The edges were jagged. "You know what that is?" he said. "Bullet hole."

That night, as we all pressed in close around my father in the living room, I heard the story of the license plates for the first time. They came off an old Buick roadster found in a ditch down in Daly City on a misty night in 1929. The first cop on the scene immediately radioed in that he'd found the getaway car used in a daring bank robbery earlier in the day in San Francisco's Chinatown. The robbers, John "Dead Eye" McCabe and his wife Pearl, had calmly walked into the bank just before closing and made off with more than \$80,000. On the way out of the bank, Pearl had stopped to help a little boy who'd fallen off his bike. The delay was just enough to let the cops spot the two hopping into the Buick and give chase.

It was a frantic pursuit, my father told us.

Across Chinatown, over Nob Hill, into Pacific Heights they sped, Dead Eye McCabe blasting his gun out the window at the police car. The cops fired back, but Pearl, twisting and turning the steering wheel with her smooth hands, never let them lock in on the target. The old Buick roared out Geary through the old sand dunes of the Richmond, then spun south on the Great Highway.

"And disappeared," my father said with finality. Both my mother and Jean breathed in sharply. "The cops in pursuit later said the car simply vanished, just like the setting sun that was dropping into the Pacific at the time."

I sat mesmerized by the story. I knew I'd been listening with my mouth open because it was all dry when my father got done. I'd heard all about cops and robbers by this time - I think I was 7 - but I'd never heard about Dead Eye and Pearl. I asked my father if he knew anything more about them. He nodded slowly, looking from my mother to Jean and Gene and finally me, and said that Dead Eye and Pearl were a notorious robbery team throughout the 1920s in San Francisco. They robbed dozens of banks and armored cars. From what he'd heard, however, they were good people. They rarely hurt anyone - "unless they had to," my father said - and they gave away much of their take. It was not uncommon, he said, for an orphanage or old folks home to mysteriously receive a package in the days following a robbery. It was always stuffed with cash with some little note suggesting how the money should be spent.

Dead Eye, my father said, was a tall, handsome man with curly dark hair and an easy smile. He walked kind of loose-jointed and when he talked, his voice came out in a twangy drawl that everyone seemed to like, even the bank managers and tellers who'd been robbed. His nickname had nothing to do with

his skill with a gun. Rather, he had a lazy left eye that didn't track well. The cops knew a lot about Dead Eye - he'd spent the war years in San Quinten - but they knew very little about Pearl. They didn't even know if Pearl was her name. They'd given it to her a couple years earlier when a teller, asked to describe the blonde woman who helped rob the bank, said "Oh, she was a real sweetie, said please and thank you - a real pearl." Newspaper accounts of the robberies described her as a beauty. One called her "the creamy coquette." My father raised in eyebrows, and Gene whistled softly.

No one knows what happened to Dead Eye and Pearl after the Chinatown robbery. The cops suspect they finally left the city. The Chinatown haul, after all, was their largest ever. The last anyone ever heard from them was a couple days later when the pastor of a small church, located just around the corner from the bank that had been robbed, found a cloth bundle in one of the pews. Inside was \$10,000 in cash and a note that said, "We couldn't help noticing that you need a new roof - and indoor plumbing."

For the next several months, I had my father tell me the story again and again. I wanted details. What color were Dead Eye's eyes? Did Pearl have curly or straight hair? What did they put the money in when they were leaving the bank? Was the boy who fell off his bike OK? Did Pearl give him a kiss on the cheek? Why did they leave the car in the ditch? My father had answers for all these questions. I knewhe was winging it, but I didn't care. Often, he'd ask me what I thought. Did Dead Eye and Pearl have dinner before or after they robbed the bank? Before, I told him, because they had to be strong and they probably had steak or pork chops because they needed the vitamins. Yes, my father would say, and peas, too, and probably some potatoes. Yeah! And strawberry ice cream, I'd say.

My father hung the license plates in the garage, above and to the left of his work bench. He drove nails into the studs where the old screw holes were on the plates. That way it was easy for him to slide them off and bring them into my room. Usually, he let me hold them on my lap as we went over the story.

I became fascinated by the bullet hole. It made the whole thing authentic the wild olden days of cops and robbers, big strong men and beautiful women, high-stakes, going for broke. I'd slide my finger through the hole and imagine what that ride must have been like. Pearl flying through the streets at dusk, car horns blaring, people running out of the way, steam billowing out of the manhole covers. With her smooth, delicate hands, she'd yank the steering wheel back and forth, leaning into the turns, ever watchful that she didn't run anyone over. And then there was Dead Eye in the back seat, staying low as the bullets whizzed by, reloading his gun. In one clean movement, he'd swing the back door open, plant his right foot on the running board, and spray lead, gritting his teeth, his long, dark coat flowing in the wind. The cops would return fire, flames leaping

out of the barrels of their guns, the siren wailing, sparks showering everywhere as their car bottomed out on the pavement at the end of Nob Hill and picked up speed for the straight shot out Geary to the beach. With my finger in the hole, I'd close my eyes, and it would play like a movie, but better. I'd smell the burning rubber and the cordite, feel the damp misty air buffet my face, hear Pearl yell "Get down! They're coming on the right." I'd hear the shatter of glass as one of Dead Eye's bullets hit the police car's headlight, the ping of return fire striking the license plate.

When I got bigger and could reach the plates above the work bench, my father would let me take them down myself. I'd hold one in each hand, making sure they didn't knock together and chip or get dented. By this time, my four little brothers and sisters took up almost all my parents' time. I was 10 years old by now and could do most things by myself. I packed my own lunch, went to swimming lessons on my own, and walked down to the market every afternoon for my mom to buy vegetables for dinner. My dad was now working the swing shift, noon to 9, and it was hard on my mom. When he got home, there was no time for stories.

So, I'd often take the license plates to bed. Back then, I was mainly thinking about Pearl and the boy on the bike. Where was that boy going? What made him fall down? Did he skin his knee? And Pearl. What made her stop in the middle of everything to help the boy? Did she have a little boy herself? Pearl, I'd have to say, was my first love. Everything about her was smooth and clean. She smelled like jasmine in late spring, and her touch was like that of a kitten laying its head on your arm. Her voice usually had the gentle melody of flutes but could also blast with the big band bursts of trumpets and trombones. She smiled more with her eyes than her mouth. She looked good in any clothes, but preferred skirts and simple blouses. She was the type of young woman who'd kick off her shoes before she'd start to run. Her hair, blonde as buttermilk, was usually kept in a bun. When she'd take it down, she do it in one, single swoop of her head, and then give you that cloudy look as it fell across her face. If you got hurt, she'd hold you for as long as it took.

As I grew older, Dead Eye began dominating my thoughts. He was the dark, rakish hero - unassuming and homespun on the outside, bold and rugged on the inside. He was a gambler, a risk-taker who always knew the odds. He did what he had to do. To win, he knew he'd sometimes have to fight. Yet he was a decent man - fair and true and never taking more than he needed. He gave away much of what he had. He righted wrongs.

When I was 11, my sixth grade teacher, Mrs. Clemons, asked us to bring something from home - something that was important to us - and tell the class about it. I, of course, brought the license plates. That morning I carefully wrapped them in newspapers, individually, and carried them to school. When it

was my turn to speak, I walked to the front, gently leaned the plates against the chalkboard, and launched into the story of Dead Eye and Pearl. I tried to tell it just like my father. I would pause dramatically, change the rhythm and pace of my voice, whisper at points, bellow at others. I walked around the room as I spoke, putting my whole body into the story.

When I finished, there was silence. Mrs. Clemons asked if anyone had any questions. I smiled as several hands shot up. But they asked all the wrong questions, questions that really didn't matter.

"Why are these license plates maroon and white and the ones now are black and orange?"

"Could you still put those license plates on a car today?"

"Why don't those plates have the little stickers that you put in the corner?"

Everyone in class seemed to have an answer for these questions. There was a lot of discussion. But I didn't take part. It was almost as if I couldn't speak. When things had quieted down, one final hand came up. It was Nick Bryant, a snot-faced kid who always seemed to be whining about something.

"That guy, Dead Eye, and the woman, Pearl - I bet the cops found them and shot them dead. That's what they deserved."

"They did not!" I yelled, taking a few steps forward. I could feel my face getting hot.

"They stole money and they tried to kill the police."

"No they didn't," I shouted. "They - "

"Yeah, they did. You just said so. They robbed the bank and then they fired their guns at the police car."

"Yeah, but it wasn't like that. They - "

Mrs. Clemons was quickly angling through the desks, her arms outstretched.

"Class, let's not argue," she said above the commotion. When she got to me, she laid a hand on my shoulder. "Thanks for bringing in your license plates. That was a very nice story."

I slunk out of class that day when the final bell rang. I didn't speak to anyone. I ran home, holding the license plates against my chest. That night, I told my father what had happened and what Nick Bryant had said. He had just come home from work and was sitting on my bed. I was in my pajamas.

"Well, you know, some of what Nick said was right," my father said. "Dead Eye and Pearl did a bad thing. I don't think they were bad people, but that really doesn't matter. What matters are the license plates. They help you think about things - things you wouldn't otherwise think about. You can make up stories about them, almost like they're living. They can be anything you want them to be. And the best thing about them is you can touch them. You can almost feel where they've been. Here - let me show you something."

My father reached into his pocket and brought out his big, jangley key chain.

"You see this one?" he said, holding up an old key, the type that had only two or three big teeth. It had tarnished to a dull brown. I'd noticed it all my life but never asked about it. "My dad - your grandfather - gave me this. He told me it's the key to a treasure chest that was in the cargo hold of an old clipper ship, Lady Marion. It went down in 1863 off Pt. Reyes. This was the captain's key. His name was Captain McColl, "Big Jake" McColl, one of the greatest sea captains ever. Fought off a lot of pirates."

My father slipped the key chain back in his pocket. "Probably no one will ever find that treasure chest, but if they do, I have the key." He patted his pocket. "I've carried it with me for 35 years. I still think about Big Jake a lot, still wonder what it was like that night when Lady Marion went down."

For the next several years, I immersed myself in the world in which Dead Eye and Pearl lived. As a young teen-ager, 13 or 14, almost every report and project I did for school was on gangsters. Bonnie and Clyde, of course, dominated months of my life back then. I read about them with ambivalence, fascinated by their aura and the gutsiness of their crimes, but disdainful of their greed and cruelty. Same thing with John Dillinger and Baby Face Nelsen. Thugs, I thought, plain and simple. Would they have stopped to help a little boy who'd fallen off his bike?

I felt a little differently toward the old stage coach bandits who hid out along country trails, waiting for the strongbox to come by. I saw some heroic touches in Joaquin Murrieta, the Mexican desperado whose two-year rein of robberies terrorized California in the mid-1800s. Murrieta turned to robbery for a reason: Powerful white men seized his gold mining stake and drove him off land that had been in his family for years. But what good may have been in Murrieta soon turned to rot. He was a man who did hateful and unnecessary things after he robbed stage coaches.

The books never mentioned Dead Eye and Pearl. That was fine with me. I had them all to myself. The story of their lives was mine. As I grew older I wouldn't think about them for months at a time. I was busy playing baseball on sticky summer days after school or swimming until dark at friends' houses. I had to watch my brothers and sisters a lot back then. But it was during those quiet moments of monotony - riding my bike home from school, doing the dishes after dinner - that I'd bring myself back to them. I wondered what had ever happened to Dead Eye and Pearl after they abandoned their car in the ditch on that rainy night in Daly City. Where did they go? What did they do with the rest of their lives? Could they still be living?

When I went away to college, I decided to leave the plates at home. I didn't want the distraction. I wanted to move on. But most importantly, I didn't want to have to explain them to everyone. I did ask my father, however, if I

could put them in a frame under glass and keep them in my room at home. I asked him this over the breakfast table one morning while he was reading the newspaper he'd brought home with him. I had the plates with me at the time, and I showed him how I wanted them configured in the frame. He thought about it for a few moments, then shook his head.

"I don't think you want to do that," he said. "You've gotta be able to touch these things, run your hands over them. Let's just do this." He stacked the plates, one on top of they other. He did this quickly and they clanked together. I winced. He then reached for the front section of the paper and quickly folded them up.

"That should do it," he said. "You ëve gotta keep this stuff simple. You understand?"

I thought I did, but I wasn't sure.

My father died 12 years later. I was 30 at the time, working as a high school English teacher, struggling to get kids to read stories - Poe, Steinbeck, McPhee - as more than just words on a page, more than just an assignment to be completed.

After the funeral, I took a week off to help my mother get things in order. I was living a couple hundred miles away at the time and showed up just before lunch on a bright Monday. My mother and her sister were sitting around the kitchen table, drinking coffee and talking quietly. Aunt Willa was never a big part of my childhood. She lived on the other side of the country and usually only came out once a year. She was a big, raw sort of woman, divorced a couple of time, no kids. But she and my mother were close. I joined them at the table for half and hour or so, then walked out into the garage to my father's work bench. In the bottom drawer, stacked under a miter box and an old push drill, were the license plates. I pulled them out and returned to the kitchen table. My mother smiled and nodded. She knew.

"You going to take them?" she asked.

"Yeah."

My aunt craned her neck across the table to see what we were talking about. "Are those the license plates?" Willa asked. "The ones your dad used to talk about?"

"Yeah, Aunt Willa."

"God, I remember your dad telling me how he brought those things home, how he got ëem off an old Hudson Terraplane at the junk yard while looking for some engine part for your station wagon. Didn't he make up some story about ëem?"

I straightened up slowly in the seat until my back was flush against the hard slats of the chair. A prickly heat spread through my body. I looked over at my mother. She took a deep breath and then nodded.

For the next four days, I went through the motions as my mother and I cleaned things out. My brothers and sisters dropped by every day to help pack things that my mother wanted to keep and to take other things to the Goodwill. Mother was going to move to a little condo across town. We didn't say anything more about the old license plates. I think we were both waiting for the other to say something. I felt sort of like I'd been hollowed out.

When I left on Friday, she walked me out to the car. She put a hand on my forearm and looked up at me.

"I'm glad you're taking the license plates. Your dad would want you to have those." She paused as a car went by. "You know, it doesn't really matter where they came from. What matters is what they meant to you and what they did for you."

It took me a couple more years to understand that. I've now got the license plates over my work bench at home. They hang by a couple of nails and are usually coated with sawdust that billows out when I use the table saw. Sometimes I wipe them off, sometimes not, but they're always the first thing I look at when I go into the garage.

Every once in a while, I'll spend a Saturday or Sunday rummaging through old junk stores and antique shops. A few months back, I paid \$4 for an old cast iron pan, rusted in spots, dented in others. Stamped on the bottom were the initials "C.M." The next week I gave it to one of my best students, a shy girl who always seemed to be hesitating about something. She came somewhere in the middle of a big family. I'd always see her walking home alone. She'd read what I gave her, but her love, I could tell, was Westerns. I'd see her eating lunch away from the others, balancing an Owen Wister or a John Prescott her lap.

I told her the initials stood for Charlie McAllister, an old miner who worked a claim high in the Sierras in the summer of 1849. The other miners made jokes about Charlie. He mined late at night by the light of the moon and never seemed to find anything but rocks. One day, he rode in to Placerville on his mule and cashed out \$120,000 worth of gold. He then bought lollypops and sodas for all the little boys and girls in town and rode back into the mountains. Nobody's seen Charlie since.

The girl slowly reached out for the heavy old pan and held it like it was made of parchment. I hope old Charlie McAllister and all the happy kids of Placerville will live a long, rich life in her mind. That's the best place for them.

# BOB, THE INTAKE GUY

# PENEL & PE + ALBER +

bob is surprised that i'm anxious fifty-five minutes holding on the "emergency" help line i could have swallowed and digested a bottle full of pills i've been saving in case my last cry for help didn't work it's hard to justify a voicemail message as a cry for help hard to feel insured assured when bob tells me that i have six visits this year to become sane six visits six fifteen minute medication maintenance visits one every eight weeks to make me not crazy are you suicidal? bob croons the frank sinatra of my mental health yeah, i tell him, i've been passing the days and nights (insomnia) carrying a cornucopia of pinks and greens and whites lithium, prozac, trazadone up - down - steady left over from the last bob bright yellow caffeine pills 200 milligrams of fun making rainbows on my hand in my head reeling from the concerned phone calls but bob's not concerned he schedules me for six weeks from now

six weeks forty-two days one thousand eight hours bob is the poster boy of managed healthcare health uncaring and i know bob is talking about me after i terminate his singsong hey bob, i'm crazy nuts loony can you spare an appointment? spare a coffin perhaps? i think i'd take a standard size nothing fancy i now hate bob bob my enemy my nemesis the man standing between me and health between sanity and death and i want to kill him and chop him into bite size pieces so i can swallow him

with the rest of my rainbow

# PLEA RONDA

# GERMAIN Drogenbrood-

Do not come as light which all too bright blinds the eyes

neither come as darkness which one cannot grasp

> but rather come as a thorn who announces

the rose is within reach.

# ПЕОП JEZEBEL

### STEVEN ATTEWELL

Your electric kiss so carrion-sweet

Stuns, deadens, anesthetizes

Crashes self-reflection; letting the id run riot

Consume, you croon, gorge and fill your belly (there's no consequence, never a price to pay)

ye pixellated beauty, lush yet hollow like rotting velvet if we prick you, will you bleed or deflate?

Aphrodite, why can't you kick the habit Shooting up gold To fuel everlasting oblivion

Crack-whore of industry; mind-raper, will-castrator

What can poor mortals do against you? Do we retreat into the guilt of darker ages Or lose ourselves in your debauchery

# SCEΠES FRΦM Δ MURDER TRIΔL (Δ PLΔΥ WITHΦUT ΔCTΦRS)

# LOU FABER

I

He walks in calmly as though surveying the room. His head is shaved as it was a year ago, but he has let it grow out on the top. The food has been good to him thick across the chest and gut. The sport coat changes daily, yesterday blue, today an olive green. Most of the time he sits hands folded, stares impassively at the witness or pulls on his ear lobe.

П

There is a large map of the campus, blown up to show buildings and roads. Where is the blood, where are the screams that tore through the night, the flames of the candles, the tears. Bucolic, black, white, red, cold and dying.

III

She reads from the sheaf of pages from the pad, questions, each directed none overly obvious repetition. Drone. Harping on pin heads dancing, words as projectiles, in targets or shattered on the floor.

IV

The judges stare down from the oak paneled walls at the jury, the audience those who gawk those who were victims, or family. What do they know of our pain, our blood spilled, sitting calmly on the bench surrounded by dust crusted leather tomes in which are stored the blood of our forebears.

V

Juror number 12 sits with her arms folded across her chest and bores into defense counsel "don't be nasty," her eyes warn, "we like him," the witness, "and don't like your bitchiness. Don't lean over him," her face says, it's impolite.

#### VI

They whisper like pack rats crowded around the desk the hand motion of squirrels holding nuts against the chill none wishing to fall behind or be lost, all begging the nod and the smile.

#### VII

How do you sit so still, arm on the chair their blood, still dripping from your hands their cries in your ears drowned by your laughter.

#### VIII

The one eye stares unblinking the foam wrapped ear is poised blind and deaf.

#### IΧ

I sit and shiver in the cold that pours from your eyes, no ember burns in the recesses of your heart, my collar cuts into my neck, the hairs bristle at the sight of the fingers that drew the bow and pulled back repeatedly on the trigger.

#### Χ

He smiles only when the jury is out of sight more of a snicker in response to a comment from his attorney. A shroud falls in advance of the jury and he is fixed as statuary.

#### XI

He holds the gun and shows them, benign, although appropriately black, hardly a tool that might spit death in the night, ripping legs, cleaving chests, piercing head tearing lives apart. It was doing what it was designed to do, with mechanical efficiency and stoicism.

#### XII

"There are 5 to 7 hundred firearms in my store

at any given time," some will give pleasure others power, but all may bring maiming or death.

#### XIII

The U.S. Flag stands draped over its pole, still sharing, perhaps our mourning.

#### XIV

Administrative minutiae clogs the bowels of both college and the Court. Constipated, bloated until the shit explodes, peppering all within the target area. Still he stares and holds the pen against his chin.

#### XV

Words for blood
Words for screams
Words for torn flesh
Words for shattered bone
Words seeking reason
Words giving motive
Words for tears
Words echoing
off ears and falling
in deafened silence.

#### XVI

Day three same green blazer, beige pants, same stony visage. Screams still echo despite another sidebar.

#### XVII

"I thought I heard him call someone nigger but he said he didn't, so I let it drop." he was always respectful but somewhat quiet. We got along all right. He changed a bit (at which point truth yields to formality) We later had a conflict. Why would he threaten my wife and kids, what had they done? Unanswered questions dominate.

#### **XVIII**

Calm, another bullshit meeting ding one student for burning a note on someone else's door. Anger for one gets dinged, I get a fine. In your face, up yours, soon enough. Escape and hide, he's coming, children down, out the back and next . . . and next

#### XIX

They are shown captured on film in two dimensions still, not in pools of blood on the cold cement or slumped over the wheel, the car in a snowbank, brains on the window.

#### XX

Direct
Cross
Redirect
Recross
confuse
befuddle
c ry
mourn

#### XXI

The court officer keeps a watchful eye on the proceedings and brings water to the witnesses, allowing himself a smile only during recesses.

#### XXII

It is odd discussing a friend as history sitting across a room. He speaks softly hands clasped in his lap. Wayne sits impassively as though watching a film. Wayne smiles at the mention of the hard core concert and the jury understands, as images of pornography evaporate.

#### XXIII

Fourteen questions and three photographs are the summation of a life left in a snowbank, bleeding over the wheel, the window shattered by the jacketed slug. No articles written, no lives touched no mourning, no pain.

#### XXIV

A life in four movements unfinished in mid allegro the baton cracked on the podium.

#### XXV

Commonwealth's Exhibit 29 a photographic reality. the price of admission your life.

#### XXVI

Stare, you bastard as though nothing happened, stare with that damned blank look, stone faced. Did you stare as you pulled the trigger on her twice, then twice again or did you smile, knowing? Did you stare at the car as you shot out the window, though he never saw you, but did you smile, knowing? Did you stare at the couple when you said get the fuck out or moments later when you pulled the trigger, hitting him in the chest as he ran out, the good, if foolish, Samaritan or did you smile, by now comfortable with the pressure of the metal bar on the back of your finger? Did you stare into the dorm and see him standing there with his roommate, were you still, rigid as you fired, when they screamed or did you smile when you saw first one, then the other fall only to crawl off to safety. Stare all you can, stare at the bars, the walls until you wither under their restless gaze.

#### **XXVII**

Day 4 brown tweed same stare hands still folded.

#### XXVIII

The trail of blood ended at his body

curled on the floor, the trail of tears continued.

#### XXIX

The ME is a cherubic balding man a gentle smile whose life is spent explaining unexpected death. Why can't he explain why Galen and Nacunan are gone, why the laughter no longer fills the halls their tears, their joys evaporated. Don't tell how they died, we only want to know why.

#### XXX

Say something, do anything twitch, anything. You played football with him you threw him the last touchdown that Saturday. How can you now sit there, listening to him describe your bullets that tore his legs apart and do nothing, say nothing cold, emotionless. Is that how they instructed you? And when he told of fearing he might die if he lost consciousness, hopping up the stairs as the jurors recoiled, wanting to throw arms around him to shield him somehow from his scars, you did nothing, never moved, just stared at him. Were you proud of your handiwork

as he looked at his jeans shredded by the EMT's scissors once blue, now a mottled brown dyed by his blood, or that part which did not pool in the hallway. How could you sit and see this and do nothing, say nothing?

#### XXXI

Day five blue blazer white shirt same stare hands folded.

#### XXXII

Upon examination, I determined that the wounds were consistent with the entry of some missile, into the leg. It passed through one thigh and then the other, and then exited the body. We were concerned because there was a marked loss of function in the left lower extremity, that proceeded quite rapidly, and we were concerned that the nerve might have been severed or damaged, so we explored and debrided the wound. He was quite lucky, all told, in that the projectile passed close to the major nerve but there was only severe b ruising, so we believed he would regain use of the limb. It could well have been fatal

a centimeter or more one way or the other and it would have severed the nerve or the artery, and he might well have exsanguinated. There are the scars shown on the photograph as a result of the wounds, although I have not followed the patient since his discharge from my care. Jagged scars, blood red cross his legs, his face twisted in pain, calling meekly for a painkiller, trying to move the foot, crying and smiling as the toes moved, and the muscles stiffened, needing to be rubbed and looking, saying to himself why me, while smiling at others.

#### XXXIII

He spoke to me calmly, we talked about football the game on TV that night and he said he had shot two people at the guard shack two more at the library and two more at Dolliver House. He said he would have killed more he wanted to but the rifle kept jamming and he had to discard the clips as he moved through campus. He wanted to teach them a lesson but what he wanted most was to give himself up, he was ve ry concerned that he would be hurt so I assured him that if he put the gun down and walked out with his hands interlaced over his head he would not be harmed.

#### ACT II

#### XXXIV

Day 15, blue blazer, the hair has grown white shirt, pressed cuffs and the same blank stare.

#### XXXV

The map of campus sits in the front of the courtroom still, silent, peaceful, the blood has dried and been washed away, the screams are trapped inside the walls awaiting release into the night.

#### **XXXVI**

Criminal responsibility evaluation nuts or not, psychotic, cold, calculating, drooling smiling, shy, violent, patient interviews, life histories, friends, lovers, Galen and Nacunan still dead can't speak on their own behalf.

#### XXXVII

He went to a Catholic school and helped raise his brother as his parents worked 16 hours a day at the restaurant. His father was hard, befitting

a retired military officer. There was nothing remarkable in his history that would indicate anything abnormal in his mental status. He was cooperative, but had a need to control the interview. He promised honesty and told us we needn't question his veracity. When we contradicted him or told him we did not accept his story he took strong exception, that upset him, he wasn't in control. At most you could see some indications of a personality disorder, he had this tendency to be a cold, heartless killer.

#### XXXVIII

A maladaptive narcissist who makes bad choices, an offcenter view, always the central figure, diminishing others will full metal jacketed .762 caliber military rounds from the core of the SKS rifle.

#### **XXXIX**

In the world of psychobabble it is quite often lost that there is a mind cold and calculating, smiling when the jury's back is turned.

#### XL.

There is a fine art to the tying of Gordian knots, and littering them across the courtroom but they are not always capable of encasing the truth.

#### XLI

The voice of God spoke "Right the sins, act as I have told you." What sort of God would say "get the fuck out of here" or is this yet another new revelation.

# LEFT HAMDED POET

# ROCCO DE GIACOMO

when I was 12 years old

my cousin and I were clearing his back yard of trees

and forcing the branches and bits of fresh

wood into the mouth of a little red shredder

he had just bought in town

We'd been at it all afternoon

feeding this machine and watching the chips fly clean

when my left hand

gets caught

in a tangle of branches pulling my arm into the mouth

of the shredder

at the last second

my hand slips free

"be careful" my cousin says

stuffing more wood into the

in the machine

I am screaming

hand

arm

reaching

cheek

grass

brick

breast

window

the minutes the skin

the muzzle of a dog

bits of me flying clean

from the spinning teeth of a

back yard sun

turning

in the mouth of every word

I write

with this left hand

# Δ BİΦGRΔPHY

# RAY FEMECH

The Old grandfather clock chimes the Ave Maria. When his grandparents died the sound became a mental strain. It was sold in an auction, he will never hear its refrain.

His uncle's summer residence was a lighthouse. With his cousins, as a child, they chased the shadows away. Dusk was an adventure, only stars lit their way.

For years his father was a Franciscan novice. Sex was a sin. Sunday mass with cousin Elsie was a passionate quest. Hands folded, he reached with his fingers to fondle her breasts.

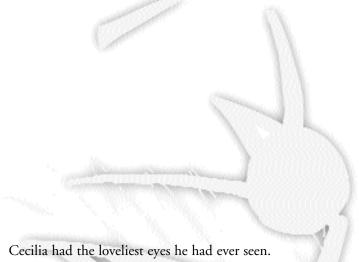
In South Africa he lived in a hut with the poor. It was at the peak of youth, when he was moving at full steam. There, all hopes and aspirations vanished like a dream.

The house where he lived, where he would want to die Smelt of the past, when all was well and he was young. There, garden ghosts whispered advice in silent tongues.

When he was assigned to Bosnia, he became immune to fear. Being a Red Cross volunteer required a certain courage. When it was over, he was no longer afraid of carnage.

He was thirteen and naked. He did not know he was being watched. His cousin Ralph walked inside his bedroom like a streak. His eyes spoke clearly. Ralph was strong and he was weak.

His first "love" was homosexual. He was raped by pleasure. When eighteen, Cecilia came giving him the first French kiss. When his tongue inside her churned up juicy bliss.



Her lips sensuous, when she spoke his eyes filled with tears. Her breath slid softly inside his ear like an elixir.

As a child his favourite companion was a piece of cloth. When frightened he covered his face keeping the world outside. He grew violent. Tsaikovsky's 1812 was as if war was in his mind.

Personality disorder struck. He fought against himself. Until reality and the fear of death drove him insane. A clock chimed the Ave Maria, he will never hear its refrain.

# EVER YBФDY is СФПQUERED BY SФМЕТНIПG

# ROBERT W. HOWINGTON

I tilt the bottle of cheap spirits and the alcohol rolls down my throat. The 40 hour job has had its way with me and I want to become numb. I want to escape, ease the pressure, evade the tension, pretend that everything's a-okay. If just for a few hours.

Everybody is conquered by something.

On the other side of the world a man is beheaded for saying Allah is full of shit. They take his dismembered head and stick it on top of a pole in the town square. People are encouraged by the clergymen to despise it.

"ALLAH IS GREAT!" they shout and spit into the dead man's unblinking eyes.

Everybody is conquered by something.

Meanwhile, a man looks out his office window and sees a beautiful woman walking down the street. Guys in cars slow down to look at her perfectly swaying ass. They unzip their pants and jerk off. She sees their bent faces and smiles. The office clerk is jacking off too. His female supervisor catches him in the act. He turns and explodes onto her dress. She is enraged. He is lucky he is only fired.

Everybody is conquered by something.

A mother screams at her children to shut the fuck up.

"I'VE HAD IT UP TO HERE WITH YOU GOD DAMN KIDS!"

They laugh at her. So do their friends.

She thinks of other women --- especially the one in Houston --- who've murdered their children. She thinks, yes, I probably could kill these little shits. All they do is bring me down to a place I don't want to be. Besides, I'll never get another man with them around. No good man wants a woman with kids. God, why didn't I get abortions? Or use protection?

Her 7-year-old daughter runs up to her and slaps her on the ass. "I HATE YOU, MOMMY!"

She tightens her grip on the knife she's using to make peanut butter sandwiches with and thinks, yes, I could kill my children.

Everybody is conquered by something.

A man is in a boat trying to get to America. He believes his life will improve once he reaches her shores. The waves are high. Water is filling up

his small vessel. His shoes are soaking wet. But on the horizon he sees lights. "AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL!"

Those three words are the only English he knows. But only the seagulls hear him and they don't know what in the hell he's talking about. A Coast Guard ship intercepts him. He's brought on board. He speaks to a sailor in Spanish and asks him if he's being taken to America.

"No, senor," the sailor says in Spanish as he places handcuffs on the man, "you're going to jail."

Everybody is conquered by something.

A woman raises her hand. Her stern-faced supervisor, holding a pen and clipboard, walks over to her work station. "Yes? What is it now?"

She tells him she wants to use the restroom.

"Okay, you got five minutes."

"But I have to shit," she says, "so it'll probably take me longer than five minutes."

"If it takes longer than five minutes you will be marked up and the extra time spent in the restroom will be deducted from your time card and your paycheck."

"All right," she says, "Whatever."

In the bathroom, she looks in the mirror. I look awful, she thinks. Look at those bags under my eyes. And for what? This shitty fucking minimum wage job where I'm treated like a piece of fucking garbage? God, I wished I'd win the lotto. Or die.

Later in the day the supervisor tells everyone that production is behind and, therefore, mandatory overtime is necessary to get the job out.

The woman raises her hand.

"Yes? What is it now?"

She asks him if there will there be restroom breaks during overtime.

"NO! No one can urinate, or defecate, during mandatory overtime. It's company policy."

She tells the supervisor to stick the company policy up his ass.

"I DON'T HAVE TO TAKE THIS INHUMANE TREATMENT FROM YOU OR THIS GOD DAMN COMPANY!" she yells. "I FUCKING QUIT!"

She rises to leave. But before she does she undoes her pants and pulls down her panties and pisses all over the floor. The supervisor tells her the cost of cleaning up her mess will be deducted from her final paycheck.

"WHATEVER!!" she screams.

Everybody is conquered by something.

Charlie sees the postman coming. He grabs his cane and opens the front door. He sees the postman putting a load of brouchers, coupons and other junk mail into his mailbox.

"I'LL KILL YOU!" he shouts at the postman.

Charlie limps down his walk to the street with his cane raised high.

The postman is dumbfounded. He tries to calm the crazy old man before there is an encounter. "Sir, can I help you?"

"FUCK YES!" Charlie screams. "STOP PUTTING THAT GOD DAMN JUNK MAIL IN MY BOX! I DON'T NEED ANOTHER VICTORIA'S SECRET CATALOG OR A COUPON TO CHUCK E. CHEESE'S! I'M EIGHTY-FUCKING-FOUR YEARS OLD! WHAT IN THE HELL AM I GONNA DO WITH A SEX MAGAZINE? I CAN'T EVEN GET IT UP ANYMORE, YOU MOTHERFUCKER!"

"But, sir, it's the U.S. mail," the postman says. "It's my job to put it in your box whether you want me to or not."

That's all he had to say. Charlie's cain came down hard on the postman's skull. A neighbor watering his lawn sees the assault. He uses his cell phone to dial 9-1-1. The cops take Charlie to the county jail on a charge of 'assaulting a federal employee.' He could get up to 20 years in federal prison, probably Leavenworth, if convicted.

While waiting to be bailed out a cellmate asks him if he'd be interested in a subscription to PLAYBOY. Charlie leans over and bites the man's arm, drawing blood. The guards rush in and pepper spray his eyes and put handcuffs on him. They immediately take him to jail's pyschiatric ward.

Everybody is conquered by something.

She is nothing more than street corner poontang but he needs some crack so he enlists her services.

"Now where can I score some rock, LaDonna?"

Her name is LaDonna. She has big lips and a big ass and a couple of big tits. He fucks her brains out on a flea-infested bed in a cheap motel room on the city's nefarious east side. He hands over two \$20s. As she dresses she tells him her pimp sells drugs to clients.

"I need a couple of grams worth of rock," he says.

She calls her pimp on his cell phone.

"He's bringing you your shit right over," she says. "A hundred bills."

He produces five more crisp \$20s --- he paid a quick visit to his bank's ATM before hitting the city's prostitution distrist --- and places them on the bed. He impatiently walks around the dimly lit room.

"Why are you so uptight?" she asks him.

"Crackheads are always uptight," he answers. "That's why we need the rock to smoke. To calm our nerves. I'm obsessive-compulsive about doing nothing and it's driving me crazy."

She looks at him. Watches him twitch. Turn. Twist. Fret. Mumble stuff to himself about his shitty job, his fucking ex-wife and his worthless friends. And thinks that he is one fucked up white boy and is very glad she wasn't born a honkie. Honkies are all screwed up, she thinks. I'm glad I'm black. Black is beautiful. White is hell on earth.

Everybody is conquered by something.

At the open mic reading, the dark clad young women, with piercings in their noses and lips and other hidden places, do not look at, or say anything, to Matt, a greasy, long-haired and wild-eyed human monster who smokes pot and reads stuff about drinking beer, doing illicit drugs and jacking off to Internet porn. He is ignored by the poetry groupies because he doesn't read love poems and he doesn't look like the poet all the girls come to see (and want to fuck), Joseph P. Vano. Matt, with his overt individuality, is much frowned upon and considered suspicious, even in this somewhat tolerant, enlightened environment. He is the intruder at this piss ant, back-slapping spoken word party held at a tiny coffee shop near downtown and attended mostly by meek, self-indulgent losers who drink cappucinos like Charles Bukowski drank booze. He represents the evil, outside world where full-time employment and responsibility for one's self is a daily reality. They want that evil world held at

bay for as long as they can. But Matt won't ever leave them alone because he has nowhere else to go to read his maniacal scribblings out loud.

"I'M HERE TO STAY YOU MOTHERFUCKERS!" he shouts out after reading a particularly vulgar piece of prose about a sex act that made several uptight women and their gay-like boyfriends get up and walk out in protest. "I WILL KEEP SAYING 'FUCK', 'CUNT' AND 'TITS' ALL NIGHT LONG, YOU POLITICALLY CORRECT FUCKHEADS!"

Everybody is conquered by something.

### CUPBOARD DOOR

### KAREN JEAN MATSKO HOOD

Her face was a pigmented sunset Vibrant amber, rose, crimson With some purple mottling Some splashes of midnight

One swollen eye surrounded by Warm beige makeup to tone Down some of the brightness of sunset A pair of frosty blue sunglasses Perched on the crooked feminine nose

Her familiar fresco looks more artistic Yet frightening to behold She walked into an open cupboard Door she said How stupid of her she said

Yet we knew how intelligent She was and beautiful and kind Not stupid enough to walk into A cupboard door again . . . and again

The hues of the sundown will Slowly fade from her face But with the dark circle of Midnight She will continue to live Until she finds

The courage to face away From that old swinging Cupboard door.

i am sewing Jesus with d.m.c. bringing Jesus back to life filling holes with tangible substance creating a miracle masterpiece from canvas and thread

# SEWING JESUS

i.B. iskov

in Jerusalem Jesus graces the church wall tiny painted porcelain squares thousands of people from all over the world line up for hours burn incense light candles kneel down and pray to the mosaic messiah

no one will kneel down and pray to my Jesus with the cross stretched and hung on Franca's living room wall next to Rosary beads and a bible

if i was sewing Jesus in the church maybe the Pope would deify Him take Him to the Vatican place Him on the church wall next to Rosary beads and a bible burn incense light candles and thousands of people from all over the world would line up for hours kneel down and pray to the framed cross stitched saviour

# HAIRCUT IN NORTH EAST VALLEY

### JAMES ΠORCLIFFE

at Hiz and Herz the old lady and I sat side by side and we stared back at ourselves from the mirror

Sarah flickered at my hair with scissors so sharp she cut herself and had to find an elastoplast

she told me I had a double crown and I peered proudly trying to locate it beneath the coxcomb Sarah was holding up

the old lady said she'd learnt to drive before the war even years after synchromesh had arrived she was still trying to double declutch

Julie said things are complicated these days

the old lady said but she didn't drive these days of course

Julie said just as well the traffic's so terrible

Sarah said she was always cutting herself

I said occupational hazard

I tried to picture Sarah before the war scraping my neck with a cut-throat razor slipping and speckling her ming blue smock with red

Sarah kept a fine mist in a black rubber bulb

Julie had shampooed the old lady's thin hair

the old lady said she had ruined her hair with home perms during the war

Julie said you have to be careful with harsh chemicals and tight rollers

Sarah said almost done and buzzed at my eyebrows for free

Julie said I suppose it must feel funny having your hair cut when you can't see

the old lady stared at the mirror

she said
I don't much like the way they do it at the home

Sarah said we can put you on our client database if you like

there you are said Julie pretty as a picture

### **AMGEL FACE**

### CHARLIE ПЕШМАП

I didn't see the murder see the murder I didn't see the murder in your eyes see the murder in your eyes so I ran to you once I ran to you twice I ran to you on cue like a Blackstone sleight I missed the twist in your eyes and you convinced me everything was jake when everything was a nun's slap nod you said and I will return your heart but you cared more about the stains on my suit who I spent the night with spent the night spent the night spent the night strapped to like a cheap holster holding death

# ФП THE DIS-СФVERY ФБ јФSEF МЕП-GELE AD2000 FOR SIMON

WAYTE RAY

WEISENTHAL

Good God! They're not dead yet? The geriatric Jews hunting those crusty old Nazis who are too old to strike the match that started all this hatred in the first place.

They must all be well over one hundred years old, but don't believe everything you hear as their one hundred years of solitude, of hiding, of tracking, of killing will never end for their children will follow their children and so on and so on and ... soon, no one will be alive to stand up for the Bosnians & the Afghans and the Cambodians and the South Americans and the South Africans and on and on and on ...

because no one cares for the Third World nigger and the back woods, slant eyed gooks or the child born and raised on the streets of Calcutta, the City of Joy.

originally published in the Well Magazine (Halifax) 1989.

# ΔPPROACHING THE HUNT

#### (BEGINNING WITH A LINE FROM NTOZAKE SHANGE)

# Tim martin

i.

we need a god who bleeds over-dosed after twenty-five years complex/an orison cyst for those who breathe an absent knot ripped from a sterile promontory to start look in the direction of another hope/reason to begin with

ii.

it's one year later & i still think about a victim bludgeoned tied & left for our imaginations i think of thorns & how hawthorn can hold together fragments his name is among the rare spoken this is not an elegy for bleeding scarecrows not a death poem we need a god who bleeds

iii.

whose wounds are not the end of anything fury at identified risk careful geometry cut soil put down the carpenter's tool it's a dirty little time each frame jostling cardinals west-north-east-south all exposure there is no line one of you denies me one of you betrays me simple alter -ations trust of a dog-eared lady proven the finest glatiation of the period

iv.

Dear Theo.

you aren't my brother, but what the hell? i cannot talk of divinity today, nor of the implications of lap top computers. this was before we knew of AIDS or the date rape drug. is there something to move towards? doubt is the most convenient substance to buy. just thought you'd like to know.

v.

Let songs in the bloodlines be sung from bridges for seven more generations Let reciprocity begin in the eaves leaving the moon its cricket politics Let it be enough to know you have suffered someplace Let skilled cutters come who work with invisible tension Let wounds be sewn today, a simple feast

vi.

ix.

birth--

viii.

there are a thousand

metaphors for newness

a companion a cradlesong

a cantilever

wrestle breaths out like participating in your gravestone

calm

so comely fucking-up, the mighty causality

with no answer i find

completion

we need a god who bleeds

whose wounds are not the end of anything

# BLUE EYES

# R. П. ТАВЕК

He sat at a table by the window staring into space, eyes like dewdrops on a bluebell among shadows haunting the handsome face like city kids playing among the last flowers of spring

I lost myself in those eyes, wandered territory unknown without fear, guided by the sad sunshine of a smile along trails I'd never dare for their twists and turns - Nature run wild, its call like the heartbeat of a willful child

We found each other and he took my hand, gently pulled me to the ground; Our first kiss was like coming home after long years away - and he made love to me there; O, the beauty, ecstasy, cruelty of despair!

Suddenly, he got up and went out in the rain. I finished my drink and went home alone.

# STREETLIGHT SOLILOQUY

# JUSTIN TAYLOR

the female form is incredible even as an outline seen from a distance against harsh fluorescents as the seer recedes into shadow

smoke billows out of the building thick & cloudy nightmares told to children in whispers that stand out in dissipating gray-white against a black and empty sky

sign says no left turn asphalt is unchecked aggression dewpoint crept in swiftly while I was walking left my shirt unexpectedly moist

three vacant park benches sure I think about joy sometimes & how love is so much more than an anatomy lesson a red car passes right by

# WEATHER REPORT

### JUSTIN TAYLOR

its humid, but not so hot looks like rain can't say I'm surprised there are dark clouds behind my eyes

shades of somber sagging with saline weight ready to burst & I'm scared

not because I fear lightning or even getting wet but because I made a graph today of pollution in this region so I expect this rain to be highly acidic

if I am outdoors it will burn my skin like bitter tears

# GET THE LEAD **\$**UT

### **V**İΚİ ΔCKLAΠD

wondrous we human race corn flake fed and caffeine pumped we neglect and lisp extravagant at the condition of that which ensnares us, we all eyes and ears breathe and bask under same sun, we all sex and limb shed song and secrets while some sleep quiet copious and licked others curl desolate wanting this life we grip and spill careless onto satin sheets, grinning at our masterful ways at which we feign calm and diplomacy

### BLOODY BONGWATER BOOT

### TODD CARTER

To you I am just a toy a possession like your waterbong and you hit it and you hit me taking care of what you own I fall to the floor bongwater puddles all around swirled with blood vision blurred, I hear no sound still, I have feeling and you're standing on my balls punishing me 'cause you dropped your bong blood gushing out my head with your boot in my face bloody bongwater boot the one you make me taste. Thank you for my punishment, sir.

# THE SPELL

### PAUL CORDEIRO

Raised on the ragged beauty and chaos of the Sixties, Vietnam, torn bell bottoms, naked limbs, and long hair stuck with utopian mud that the seventies disco dance party washed off. Raised on the sugar water spell. Swallowed down with Mao, Rolling Stones and Beatles, studio sounds, cupcakes, canned soup, Nixon, violence in the streets, cartoons, moon walks, and advertising jingles for colas. Nobody ever died watching the spell's flashes. Nobody ever grew up to leave the spell alone. Bank on the toys the spell puts under the tree at Christmas. The families the spell destroys when it makes the inhabitants fight a losing war against unhealthy images inside a house.

# ПОТЕЅ ОП A SCEПARIO

# CHR is mckinnon

A woman drives her husband crazy plays practical jokes? on him.

First she determines an act reproduces it then sets it to paper.

She stacks toilet paper atop his shaving stuff so it falls

when

he moves the rolls

--she plops a Heinz bottle upside down in the fridge so it falls

> when he pops the door

--she chugalugs siphons creme sherry bozenberry booze waters it by half

> --so he thinks he's drunk or drunk it already

--she stuffs his hairbrush in an argyle

--sneers at whispers about how sloven (half-plowed) he looks (to her friends) bySprint

--then disconnects as he enters kitchen --her territory --they ring him hang up -- a broken connection to break him

--she sprinkles sand in laundrywater dumps extra booster soapflakes in his jockeys for men

--she moves in pastel condo -small ceramic ashtrays sets of unisex longjohns velour towels from racks

and swears she doesn't

--sez her husband must just forget

switches		
calendar dates		
	rehangs	rubs
dates men	Van Gogh's	lemonoil
from his	on adjacentwall	thick
calendar		on spindleback
	where he	chair
has a	views it	(where he sits)
friend	when she	
	moves it	double creases
vacuums		his pants
Eureka!	back	just past
while he peers		their original crease
at thirtysomeone	departs	
	at midnight	
then sobs		
when he snaps	pulls up	crows
	emergency brake	offkey
charbroils chicken	on his Merc	as she
as it boils		rinses out
(boy is he burned)	leaves one door	his wool blazers
cooks meals for	unlocked	then dries them
wheels	and	
	dome light	at top heat
dusts	on	
chess pieces		matches
	deflates	his socks
moves blackknight	a whitewall	to the nearest
over just	with a long nail	
one		black or navy or brown
space		

if i were a wealthy woman i'd contribute to the arts instead of writing

if you want
my advice
(& clearly you do)
i say be happy
leave art to the crazy
keep your seams straight
don't listen to poets
work hard
at whatever -and love me

#### because

i'm
a
beautiful
people
and
so
are
you

we're all turkeys a generation of geese actively seeking pearl blue electric peace

# CHİCKS & TURKEYS & GEESE İП SEARCH ФF РЕАСЕ

SUSAN OSTERMAN

TO ΔLL TURKEYS, TO EVER YOΠE

# **Hİ**S LEFT⊕VERS

MOLLY B. MURPHY

I know it really must hurt you've even said it does, knowing you'll never have me not all of me, at least

I'm nothing, in a way, other than his leftovers just what he couldn't have as his illness devours us all

There I sit, on his plate the half of me that's left as he sits there before me staring off into neverwhere

You don't know quite what, if maybe you should ask him or just pick me off his platter, maybe just take all that's left

I hope I taste good, but I fear I can never satisfy your needs for that half of me inside him I guess was enough to fill his

I'm glad you didn't leave me like a half empty bottle of beer my head of suds all gone stale, my heart only luke warm to cool

I didn't want to be wasted left upside-down in the trash to slowly drain into nothing....
At least I've had this last kiss.

# ΔPPROACHING THE HUNT

(beginning with a line from Ntozake Shange)

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we need a god who bleeds over-dosed after twenty-five years complex/an orison cyst for those who breathe an absent knot ripped from a sterile promontory to start look in the direction of another hope/reason to begin with

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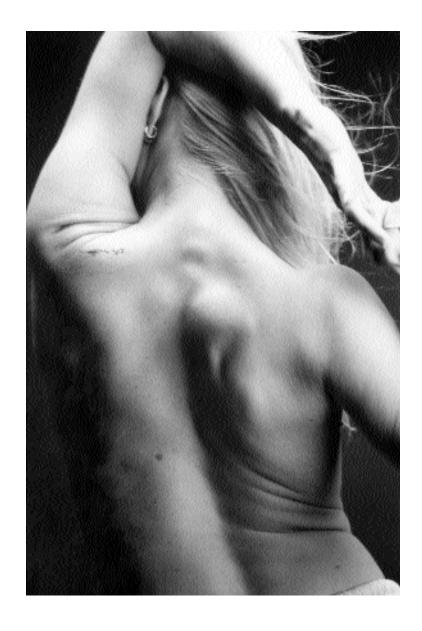
completion

we need a god who bleeds

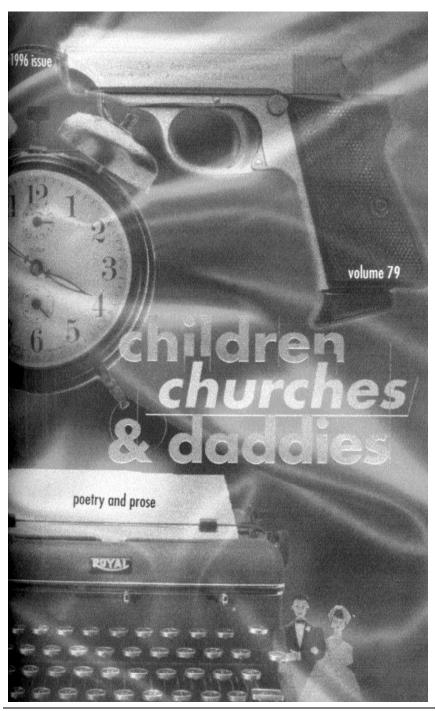
whose wounds are not the end of anything



artwork by Cheryl Townsend



artwork by Cheryl Townsend



# APOLOGIES TO THE MORBIDLY OBESE, THOSE TRAGIC ROMANTICS

MA++HEW LEE BAIN

Upon the couch, deep in the heart of the book store, Facing the romance section,

I compose apologies lost-To those who search for titles like

"The Sweaty Native" or

"Trail Dust in my Bronzer."

Apologies to those tragic romantics-

Who smile with plethoric faces-

Who smile like the moon when

They find their temptation on cardstock.

Buffalo humps rise and fall with their

Tachycardia and tachypnea.

Apologies like-

I'm sorry that there's no one

To sweat upon you; fantasies only produce

Personal perspiration.

Apologies like-

I'm sorry that there's no one

To pinch your chubby cheeks, not unlike flews-

I'm remorseful that there's no one

To slap your widespread(like an epidemic)

Hindquarters and hang ten on the fleshy bore

Of their wavelike creation-

No one to caress the boils on your visage

Or to apply love lotion to your cobwebbed thighs.

Never fear; keep turning pages;

Keep sweating profusely to the word paintings

Of authors as corpulent as yourself

With characters named Biff Glands and

Johnson Brachia.

Apologies like-I haven't a pearl of love

To dribble on you,

And believe it or not,

I am sorry...and thankful at the same time.

### NEW CENTURY MISOGYNY

#### MA++HEW LEE BAIN

Your tits aren't big enough,
Rectify the problem.
Your pussy's not tight enough,
I want to hear it whistle! Not queaf.
Go to the plastic surgeon.
And while we're at it,
Your nose could look better.
And come to think of it,
Your lips could be fuller;
Get an injection or
I'll leave and find another.

I've got skin like bronze
And muscles like Hercules.
Feel my abs...
I said, feel my Goddamn abs!
You want me, and you fuckin' know it.
I'm gonna make you feel like a woman.
I bet you love beefcakes
Who shave their bodies cap-a-pie.
I know "It's" a little small,
But that's the price of this build.
It doesn't matter
Cause I'm gonna give it to ya butt-good.

We were just buried, Interred in our spousal sepulcher! A newly dead couple; The wedding march, a funereal procession. Our matrimony is contumulation (death by devotion).

My beautiful dead, virginal wife Rolls around in this casket made for two. Her hymen so cold and corrupt. Our tongues explore each other's cavities Like massive maggots, Creeping through new holes in our flesh.

I join my bride in nuptial necrophilia; Sex of the recently slain. My cock is stiff from rigor mortis And welcomed by her womb. Our intercourse is a struggle, A grappling session of two ataraxics; Broad indifference.

Her white wedding dress is so tarnished With my dead cells. My perfect, black suit(color of crape) Is shredded like my epidermis.

The epithalamium is sung By the mouths of hungry larvae; Intruders in our grave new world. The bride's grume is on my sleeve, Dried in the shape of a black heart.

### NEWLY BURIED COUPLE

MA++HEW Lee Bain

The unity candle illuminates
Our state of consecrated decomposition.
We hold each other by rotting extremities.
Our putrid partnership bonded by
Black putrefaction; flesh as creamy
As the icing on our cake.

Even after the flesh is eaten away,
My love, our phalanges will be clenched
In one boney, eternal fist.
And after we, with the help of the worms,
Break away from our coffin,
We'll burrow through the catacombs.
Two caring cadavers; underground inquisitors.

#### SAID A MOU+HFUL

#### MA++HEW LEE BAIN

It is amazing, What one can find to engross oneself in these days. It is also amazing, That I could fit 100 razor blades in my mouth at once.

Chewing is diffucult, and eventually they chew me in return. Their silver surface slides between my teeth, like floss And just keeps going,
To get that kinda clean that dental products aspire to,
But just can't furnish.

Some even find their way right through my cheeks, And fall to the floor in a converging pool of blood.

Razors are crunchy, gritty. They're grinding my teeth, And mutilating my gums, making my gingivitis jealous.

Then I swallow about a quarter of them, They slide down my esophagus, skirting over my trachea, Creating unalloyed bliss!

Slice, slice. Cut, cut. It feels like I'm drinking blood, Oh yeah, I guess I really am!

I wonder how many calories these fuckers have, I am dieting, My insides feel all funny, I think I need some Pepto.

But first I have to piss. Whoa! Blood stream like the fucking Mississippi! Right outta my cock.

Damn that was great. So full now, I recommend razors late at night, Because they are apt to make you drowsy.

### SIDE EFFEC+S MAY INCLUDE

#### MA++HEW LEE BAIN

BEDLAMENE IS HERE!
Here's the cure to depression
And allergies,
All in one fell swoop!
Say "bye bye,"
And good riddance to those pesky
Blues and sniffles

With just three pills a day!

#### SIDE EFFECTS MAY INCLUDE:

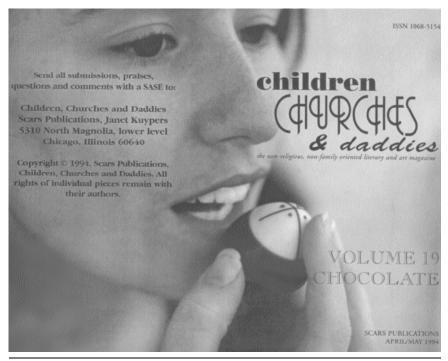
Scrotal hemorrhaging and bloating-Growth and protrusion of horns from skull-Secretion of blood from nipples-Subliminal impulses to cannibalize family and friends(please ignore them)-An uncanny ability to speak with And control kitchen appliances-Abundance of obscure visions such as: Dancing, skeletal children, Elvis' gutted torso Hanging from trees, colored capsules raining Down from the heavens, extra terrestrials Giving generous lapdances accompanied by Glowing genitalia, etc.-(In studies, only 20% of participants Reported the ability to prophecize The return of the all-mighty Amon-Ra.)

Ask your doctor about Bedlamene today

### I NEVER ∉×PEC+ED +⊕ SEE ❤⊕∪ HERE G⊕D

### REV. PETER E. ADOTEY ADDO

I never expected to meet you here, God You really pulled this one on me
This place is dirty and down right filthy
It really smells and makes me sick.
Right now I feel rotten and I feel weak
I never expected to see you here, God.
I never thought you'd be here God
This place is so crowded.
I guess this is the worse place you ever saw
But it's so nice that you came though,
I never expected to meet you here, God.



### CIN+AKU CIN+A IKAN +ERI

#### RINI ANAS+ASIA

cintaku cinta ikan teri berjuang hidup di tengah himpitan gelombang menyelinap di lekuk-lekuk karang untuk menemukanmu

{my love is a salty-fish love fight to live in the middle of sea-waves move stealthily between the hollows of coral reefs to find you}

cintaku cinta ikan teri asin di mulutmu tapi ijinkan aku rasakan lagi hangat bibirmu

{my love is a salty-fish love salty inside your mouth but let me taste again warmth of your lips} cintaku cinta ikan teri ingin kembali rasakan denyut nadimu desir darahmu lalu akupun menjadi satu dengan dirimu

{my love is a salty-fish love i want to feel your heart beat your blood rustling then we become one}

cintaku cinta ikan teri satu diantara timbunan di bakul bambu menunggu kau aduk sampai kau temukan hatiku

{my love is a salty-fish love one of many in a bamboo basket waiting for you grabbing til you find my heart}

# +HE MANCIPLE'S +ALE REVISI+ED, 2001

#### CARLA E. ANDER+ON

Poor Phoebus, he should have known Better than to leave her alone For the moment that he left His bride was quite adept At opening the doors of her cell The urge to breathe compelled Her into a maze of the dead To go where only she led To only motivation she knew To go where nothing grew Poor Phoebus, his greatest fear That his love might disappear Governed his every action And thus, even satisfaction Would not sate the appetite Of his precious earthly delight And, cherish her though he did Still she yearned to be rid Of her richly gilded cage And her inexplicable rage

#### **MERCY SEX**

#### CARLA E. ANDER+ON

It wasn't that it was perfect But it was certainly real And all men smell the same After a few drinks anyway Yes, she did feel desecrated Maybe she should have hesitated Maybe she could have waited Forever for the axe to fall She found herself ingesting euphoria In every conceivable form And warmth is not love, but it Keeps you from freezing nonetheless Still somehow she felt unclean Her self respect demeaned The thought of the action obscene But necessary if she were to survive

### JUS+ BEFORE +HE DROP

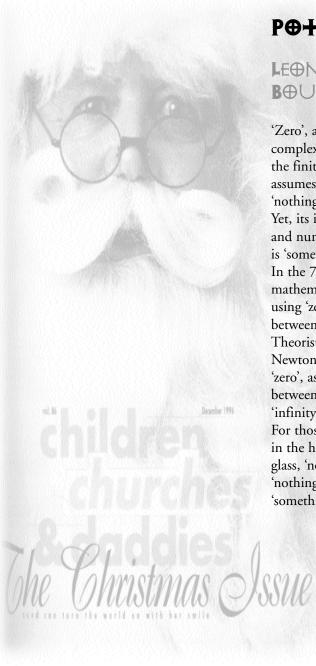
#### DAVID-MA++HEW BARNES

While you finish your painting
I drop another chapter from my heart
There is nothing else to do
So I study you and I swallow
Life whole is cheaper
By the dozen
By the line
A week ago, I snorted your love out of my veins
Coughed it up in a bathroom
In a gas station in Stockton
It was uglier than sin
And it smelled like the rotting
Abscess in my soul

Yeah, you said we needed a change Moving vans won't help us, dear Neither will that money from your folks The writing is already etched in to the wall Makes me want to take this razor And carve times' itch in to my skin Your initials, like blood crusted half-moons I resist the temptation Like I should have resisted you To make me love you again, We go to Santa Cruz Secretly contemplating Jumping off the highest cliff Instead, we make absentminded seaside love and we try to force the thrill. Happy anniversary

I thought life would be pretty With a hardware man and his art work But in the orchard He rapes and sting and cheats and drinks Draws the lie out of you
So we move someplace new
The view is pretty
Fucking ugly, if you ask me
But you don't
You just lock yourself in the bathroom
And complain about your adoptive parents
And the little town that almost noosed
your neck
You only call my name
When the others won't come

This all started when I was
A whore from the city
Who fell in love with some small-town guy
After a slow dance in a cheap bar
Near the train tracks
(I only wanted a swimming pool)
But I should have known
That if I couldn't float
Neither could you.



### POTENTIAL

### LEONARD J. Bourret

'Zero', an extremely complex concept for the finite human mind, assumes that there is 'nothing'. Yet, its idealogical, and numerical power, is 'something'. In the 7th Century AD, mathematician began using 'zero', as a power between '-1 and 1'. Theorists, like Isaac Newton, began using 'zero', as a comparison between 'nothing' and 'infinity'.

For those who believe in the half-filled water glass, 'nothing from 'nothing' does leave 'something'.

#### **OVERDUE ODE**

#### CHRIS++ PHER BRISSON

For years and years I've been wondering why Dolly Parton has not had any children this incredible woman whom I'd rather sit next to on a plane more than anyone else in the entire world. She turned the big five-

O this year perhaps its too late though there haven't been any intimations from the press that menopause has shut down her factory and then that Adrienne Barbeau gave birth to a second son this very week at age 51 without assistance from fertility drugs. That's what the papers

said and besides there are all those older women out in Italy who have been launching babies well past sixty lately Good Lord and the newborns are healthy a little small maybe if Dolly is in a quandary she's got some time left it's been pressing on me this childlessness. The woman

has accomplished so very much her achievements her legacy are handsome and confirmed there's plenty of money I presume for raising babies and opportunities galore she's not touring as much anymore I hate to think it's a problem with the plumbing did you know that Dolly's been married to Carl Dean for nearly thirty years? You

never see him at her side never not once on the awards shows or in those magazine photo spreads they lead separate lives and a seventeen page article will always fail to mention him they have an understanding it seems and I suppose so congenial is their arrangement she could seek out semen from other agents if the problem is indeed Carl's pipes but as no such plan or explanation has been forthcoming from her camp I remain patient though some dare say Dolly is a lesbian. Imagine!

#### DOLLY PARTON...A LESBIAN! Ever hear

anything more confounding didn't think so America has long enjoyed the large and wild success of the blue-eyed mountain-child woman her winsome soprano shiny persona in lackluster movies although 9 to 5 is a good film Pauline Kael said so and so do I do you remember Doralee's dazzling ropetricks? We should all

hail the creator of Dollywood a Blueridge Disneyland built in '87 in her hometown of Pigeon Forge people flock for the fun fantasy food fine music the rides razzamatazz the avenues of sequins there are crowds all times of day and year housewives young executives families Northerners Southerners foreigners schoolbuses of kindergartners and senior citizens legions of men with substantial Dollywood in their pants for years and years before the gala opening now it is a dream come true for them an actualization of all things Partonesque. Dear beloved incomparable

Dolly you should form a line with plump red velvet stanchions at the base of the corkscrew rollercoaster the men will clamber from the antipodes bearing goodwill and fresh spermatozoa scores of tadpoles kept warm through months of blue-nut retention swarming in anticipation of your plaintive echo of a womb there is a baby in you yet it's true they will do anything these men for the privilege the honor the chance to contribute yes

# BLACK AND BLUE IN BALTIMORE

# DAVID CAYLOR

# вепјатіп

I was fourteen years old in Baltimore's Irish slum. It was 1932 and a lot of Baltimore was an Irish slum. Specifically, I was running south down the middle of Bond Street chasing a stray cat I wanted to catch and eat.

"Here kitty, kitty, good kitty!" I yelled, hardly even noticing as I stomped straight through a mud puddle that had been in the same spot in the road all summer long. The cat thought I was only playing and whenever I fell too far behind, it would stop long enough to let me back within ten feet. I knew I would catch it because I was plenty fast, and while running I was actually thinking about the piano music that was coming from someplace, seemingly from out of the sky. After another block the music was out of earshot, and my mind turned to the fact that my uncle had lived on Bond Street before running away, first to Richmond where it was warm, and then to Atlanta where it was even warmer.

"Kitty, good kitty, good baby!" I shouted, and at the same time, in mid-stride, I glanced down my shirt to make sure the Saint Christopher pendant hadn't fallen off the chain around my neck. "Good baby, come here baby!" I closed to within five feet and when the cat glanced back at me I knew it was time to stop. "Come here, kitty," I called as sweetly as I could, dropping to one knee and tapping the ground with my fingers. I tricked the cat by pretending to be nice, and when it came up close enough, I grabbed it and stuck it into my briefcase. I was a son of the unemployed and mostly unemployable Paul Gallagher, but always carried my briefcase because it was my favorite thing and I thought it looked really good, besides being useful. It wasn't much of a cat, all gray and black and not yellow and pretty, and no one would have wanted it for a pet, at least that's what I hoped.

#### BETTY

I went outside hoping to hear some good news, but when I saw that odd Gallagher boy running down the street with his briefcase, I knew we were still in the depression.

"Kitty, good kitty, good baby!" he screamed out, and I noticed he was chasing a cat. I had always thought he was slow in the head, but after talking to him once or twice I figured out he wasn't. He was only a little crazy, probably from hunger. "Good baby, come here baby!" he shouted.

The cat was just playing with the boy. He'd never be able to catch it, but I admired his energy anyway. At least he was still able to move.

"Come here, kitty," he said, stopping to crouch down to the street. The cat stopped, circled a few times and then walked right up to him. He couldn't have been

too crazy if an animal would trust him so easily. He grabbed the cat, held it up in the air for a few seconds and then stuck it into his briefcase.

"Hi Ben, what are you doing?" He jumped back when I called him. Like most people during the times he was wound up tightly and startled easily.

"Oh, I'm just playing with my kitty," he said. I asked him why he always carried a briefcase. It looked so funny, but it must have held all of his possessions because he never seemed to let go of it. Boys are so peculiar, I thought. They're all so far from being poised and strong like men. He squinted into the sunlight and said his cat liked to ride in it. I didn't believe that, but guessed it was possible, or at the least was something he believed. This one has a long way to go.

"I didn't know you had a cat."

"It's right here in my briefcase, so it must be mine," he said. That was possible as well. It wasn't as if someone was there arguing about it with him.

"If it's your cat, what's his name?" I asked.

"Briefcase," he said.

"His name is Briefcase?"

"It's a her and I call her Briefcase because she likes to ride in my briefcase," he said, turning and swinging the case waist-high through the air. As he spun, his cap dropped off, falling down to the street. His face was dark brown with dirt; his hair was uneven, matted, and so greasy that it wasn't blond anymore but closer to green. He looked a mess. At the same time he reminded me a bit of Charles Lindbergh. He still had some life left in him, just like Lindbergh. First it had been the war and then the slow-down. Now men were so shell-shocked that they couldn't get up off their seats, or they were disappearing, running away and leaving me with boys and skeletons.

"When's the last time you had a bath?" I asked him.

"Umm . . . my pop says that soap and water are too expensive," he said, picking up his cap to cover himself with it as best he could.

"How are you ever going to get anywhere looking like that?"

"Lady, I'm trying my best but there's a depression. It's rough going." He was only thirteen or fourteen years old but it looked like he had twenty years of dirt on his face. A man wouldn't go around like that.

### DAMIEL

Hi, I'd wanted to kill someone and get away with it since the Leopold and Loeb trial in 1924. I wasn't a fussy person, but the choice of victim was very important. For weeks I had seen the same kid over and over, running up, down and across the street, always carrying a briefcase. He probably only carried it to try to look important, as if he had business papers or even love letters from girlfriends. Baltimore was full of kids out running the streets and they all looked alike, with pained expressions, dirty blond or red hair and grayish brown clothes that were either too big or too small for them. They were all a mess . . . height was the only real difference from one to another.

Everything about this one was a little more . . . he was dirtier than the others, his clothes fit him a little worse and were more worn out, and his hair was longer and

messier. Somehow he always looked wet, the way a stray dog looks wet, even when he wasn't. He was dirty and was always getting dirtier. Along with his bleary eyes, smudged up face, arms and shirt, his knickers were now spattered with dark circular grease stains. The stains hadn't been there before. I would have noticed, not that he bothered to care about any of it.

The bottom line was that he would be a good choice for a murder. I don't know how I had missed it, but I finally put it together after he ran past the store window for the third time in one morning. I had seen him dozens of times. He was always alone, so there wouldn't be any friends or parents in my way. Even if he still had parents, they must not have cared about him. A lot of people were letting things go south, but nothing like him. He was pretty far-gone. He doesn't care about the rules of how people should look or act. He runs around the public streets as if he owns them and undoubtedly talks back to anyone who tries to correct him . . . or else he just stares back at adults with a blank look on his face, daring them.

# IN BALTIMORE

I heard someone shout out "Ben," turned around, and saw a neighborhood easy-touch whose name I wasn't sure of, but thought was Elizabeth. She stood barefoot in front of the steps of an old tenement building as if she were just waiting for the day to end.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"Oh, I'm just playing with my kitty."

"What do you always have that briefcase for?"

"My cat likes to ride in it."

"Is that really true?"

"Yes, really."

"I didn't know you had a cat," she said.

"It's right here in my briefcase, so it must be mine." Then she stepped closer to take a better look and asked what I called the cat, and all I could think to say was "Briefcase."

"His name is Briefcase?" she asked.

"It's a her and I call her Briefcase because she likes to ride in my briefcase."

It was 11:00 in the morning and I had eaten a handful of raw string beans the previous morning, but nothing since and nothing at all the day before the beans. I hadn't eaten more than a handful of this or that for months and I wondered if I'd ever get the chance to eat a steak. First the stores had cut off my family's regular credit, and then our "Friday Credit," which was only credit to the next coming Friday. A lot of families were losing their regular credit, but almost everyone still had Friday Credit. Shortly after losing all of our credit, one of my brothers started a fire in our tenement room which burned up any food we had at the time, along with our clothes and most of the hair on his own head. He was only able to save one thing — an empty white mailing pouch, which my baby brother now played with like a toy. He would buzz it around like an airplane, or point it at me and say, "Stick 'em up, Benji!"

The fire was the last in a string of things which had me to the point of catching stray cats and frying them in grease drained from whatever mechanical device was handy. I was surprised and glad every morning when the sun came up.

When I turned to start back up the street, the wind kicked up from out of nowhere and blew my cap off, and all the sunlight showed my filthy face and my hair, which was uneven and stuck up at odd angles. I could feel the chunks of stray hair standing up and sort of tickling at my head.

Next she wanted to know when I'd taken a bath.

"Umm . . . my pop says that soap and water are too expensive," I said, reaching down to the street for my cap.

"How are you ever going to get anywhere looking like that?" she asked. I pulled my cap down as far as it would go onto my head.

"Lady, I'm trying my best but there's a depression. It's rough going." I didn't think I was all that dirty by depression levels. Everything was dirty in 1932. The city was only picking up a small portion of the garbage in the streets and people had to keep walking around it. There wasn't any point in complaining about it anymore. The garbage was just one of those things we had to do our best to live with. I didn't even feel very dirty or sweaty, but maybe it was something that happened so slowly that I hadn't really noticed, and other Irish kids had recently accused me of being a Greek.

"I'm as Irish as anyone," I said. "I'm just a little dirty." Then they wanted me to prove I wasn't Greek, so I'd had to lick and rub some of the dirt off my forearm.

The thick spots of dried mud on my knickers were bad enough, and worse still were the grease stains, which never went away and made it look like someone had just peed all over my legs.

"You should try to look like Charles Lindbergh," she said.

"Gee thanks, in a hundred years I never would've thought to do that."

"Well if you weren't so dirty I'd let you come up and visit me."

The details of sex confused me. I knew it was the privates touching. How people got into place to get them touching was my biggest question. I also knew that the size of a woman's honkers meant something, because I'd heard men talking.

"Lady, in the first place, what's your name? It's Elizabeth, right?" I asked, and she said her name was Betty, and I'm sure I laughed a little because it was such a funny name. "But that's a nickname for Elizabeth, isn't it?"

"No, not for me."

"Well how old are you then?" I asked.

"Thirty-four."

"So we can hump if I get cleaned up?" I asked.

"Yes, sure," she answered. I thought she had been joking, but she answered so plainly and easily that it hadn't come out of her mouth sounding like a joke or a lie or even a false promise. I was probably the smallest fourteen-year-old in Baltimore and normally girls didn't have any use for me, but maybe I was a better man than I thought and didn't have to be so nervous around girls and women.

"For how long do I have to take a bath?" I asked.

"How long does it normally take you?"

"Umm . . . O.K., you caught me. I don't think I've ever taken a bath."

"God, you're like a wild animal!" she said and she didn't mean it in a good way, that I was fast and tough like a tiger.

"I guess so," I said. "But I'm going to find a place to take a bath and then come back here and then you'll change your tune."

I set out to look for a free bath, but first I wanted to hide my briefcase someplace. Carrying it along, with a cat inside, will only slow me down, I thought. I glanced down the alleys off the street looking for a good place to leave it. There was plenty of junk to hide it in or under, but people liked to look through the junk for stuff to sell or burn. I went through one trash barrel, picking around oily rags, the pieces of a broken lamp, newspapers, and worse of all, three inches of old eggshells before deciding to leave the briefcase with a heavyset drunk in one of the alleys.

"Hey, Rummy, wake up!" I shouted. "Wake up! Stop pretending to be dead, I know you're alive!" I kicked at his hip trying to get his attention. "Wake up! Listen to me!" I kicked him again but not too hard. I was actually only stepping on him. He looked like he had lived a couple of lifetimes in alleys. Not only was he dirty, he was worn down and beaten, with a clear circle of black around his nose and mouth. What happened to get him here? Does he ever get to leave the alley? I stepped on his hip again and when he still wouldn't wake up, I raised my leg, got ready, and kicked him flush in the left shoulder. I didn't want to, and it wasn't my very hardest kick. His eyes slowly opened and he peered out at me.

"What, kid?"

"Listen, I need you to watch my briefcase, and there's a cat in it."

"O.K.," he said.

"I'm going to put it behind you so nobody can swipe it." I stuffed the briefcase into the small space between his back and the wall. "It's really important, and I'll be back in a few hours." He seemed trustworthy, but it still hurt to leave my case behind. I really wanted to find out about sex though, so I had to risk it. I imagined having sex would somehow make me taller. The first time for anything always changes a person. I just hoped my bad luck didn't rub off onto her.

I looked up and down the street and around our neighborhood. I didn't have a cent in my pockets, and couldn't guess where I could take a bath.

It was smartest to walk south. If nothing else I would eventually hit the water in the bay, and I had already been going south, chasing the cat. There was probably no point in asking anyone if I could use their bathtub. People didn't let strangers use their bathtubs and even if one might, they would look at me and think they'd never be able to get their tub clean. People sometimes liked to help, but not if it put them out too far. I couldn't blame them for that.

One idea was to find a shop that sold bathtubs, and then pretend I wanted to buy one and ask if I could try it out. It seemed like a real long shot, but I walked into Fickle & Sons anyway. With no money, I'd never had a reason to go inside, but had always heard they sold everything. Nobody I know can afford to pay for any-

thing, but people still go in and out of the stores everyday, so the stores must still be good for something. When I walked inside, I couldn't even tell what most things on the shelves were, and I picked up the first thing I saw, a piece of metal that was round on one side, flat on the other and had a wood handle. I couldn't tell if it would be used to cook, build or clean, or had something to do with animals.

"Can I help you with something?" the man at the counter asked after watching me look around for a minute.

"Yes, my pop's been saving his relief checks and now he wants to buy a bathtub. He sent me down to try some out." I knew it sounded crazy, but the craziest stories are sometimes the easiest for people to believe. The man seemed nice and I thought it could go either way.

"You can look at them," he said. "But, well, you can't take a bath in here."

"He won't buy one unless he's sure it works," I said shaking my head. "That's just the way he is." The shopkeeper told me I should tell my father to come in and he would talk to him about a bathtub. "How much does a bathtub cost?" I asked.

"About thirty-five dollars," he said.

"They cost that much and you still don't let people test them?"

"We can't have people taking baths in here," he said. "The tubs aren't even hooked up."

"But my dad really wants to buy one, and he expects me to test one," I said.

"Just get out of here! You're ruining everything!" he shouted. Maybe I was being a pest, but he wasn't busy and I wasn't ruining anything, or breaking or stealing anything. "I said get out!" he shouted again, taking off his spectacles, which he wore on a thick chain like a woman, and pointing them at me.

I went out to the street and sat down. It was almost noon and I hadn't gotten anywhere. I had only found out for sure that a shop wouldn't let me test a bathtub, and that was something anyone else would have already known, but most other people had some food in their stomach and could think more clearly than me.

I noticed a very proper and kind looking old lady walking toward me, so I put my head down and made myself start to cry.

"Boo boo hoo, ahhh boo, ahhh hoo." I cried a little louder as she got closer, "BOO BOO HOO, AHHH BOO HOO!" but I kept my head down, and didn't look directly at her. I quickly mashed my thumbs into my eyes so they would be red and then looked up. "Boo boo hoo, ahhh boo hoo." To make myself cry better, I thought about how the Clippers were in sixth place. They were losing to everyone, even the crummy little teams from York and Dover. I could understand losing to Annapolis, but York and Dover? The only good thing was that how we had a new pitcher named Ed Gallagher. He'd started the season a real big leaguer, on the Boston Red Sox, but they dropped him after he lost three games in a row. He landed with the Clippers, and I pretended he was my cousin. Maybe he really is, and even the worst big leaguer ever still has to be a great pitcher, I thought.

"What's wrong, boy?" she asked.

"Boo boo hoo!" I cried out looking right at her. "I'm from a broken home, boo

boo hoo, and, ahh boo, my mommy says pops would come back, if I took a bath, ahhh boo."

"Your father left you?" she asked.

"Yes, ahh huh," I said, nodding and wiping my eyes. "He was ashamed of how dirty I am." I could already imagine her giving me cookies and Coca-Cola after my bath. She'll probably even wash my clothes and cut my hair, and darn my socks. She'll love to have someone to take care of and worry about.

"The economy is tearing everything apart," she said looking down at me as I sat cross-legged on the edge of the street. "I wish Mr. Hoover could figure out how to repair things."

"Anyway," I said, acting like I needed to catch my breath, "if I take a bath, boo hoo, things would be better, but no one will let me."

"I'm sorry about all of this," she said. The lady looked as if she had two bathtubs. Her clothes, hat and gloves were clean. Even during the bad times there were some people with enough money for new things.

"Can I take a bath at your house?" I asked.

"A free bath? Are you joking, in the middle of a depression? My husband would murder us both if I let you." I kicked up the tears and started crying again. Sixth place! Babe Ruth grew up right here in Baltimore, and we should have a big league team, or at the least a good bush league team.

"Boo hoo, does he have to know about it?"

"I can't lie to my husband."

"Ahhh, we just won't tell him," I suggested. She reached down and patted my shoulder to comfort me.

"You seem like a nice boy," she said. "But I can't let you have a free bath with our water. Maybe if you pray really hard your father will come back. Would you like me to pray with you?"

"Forget about it lady," I said snapping out of the crying spell. "Please just go on your way." And that's just what she did.

I sighed and gathered my thoughts before standing up and continuing south. Well that plan didn't work out either, I thought. But it was only a spur of the moment idea anyway.

I wasn't having any luck on Bond Street so at the next corner I went east onto Lancaster.

\*

I came to a church with a wooden sign in the front yard: SAINT MATTHEW'S CATHOLIC PARISH — CLOSED FOR THE DEPRESSION. They might have a tub. I'd broken into at least twenty buildings that year alone, but never a church. I believed going to church was helpful, and my mom always went. But I have to live in the here and now. I didn't want to get into any serious trouble or hurt anyone's feelings, but I had to get inside that church. Oh what's the difference? Mom goes to Saint Anne's anyway. I was afraid to try at the front door or windows because someone might see me and rush over. Being that I was small, peo-

ple usually gave me the benefit of the doubt whenever I got caught, but breaking into a church would be hard to explain.

With my head down, I walked to the corner and then cut across the yard to a side door. I grabbed the handle and gathered my strength to pull as hard as possible, hoping for a cheap lock, rusty hinges, or rotten wood, or anything that would break so I could get inside. I glanced around one last time to make sure no one was watching and yanked. It flew open and I shot back, slipped and went skidding across the ground on my side. The thing wasn't even locked. Did someone really think it wasn't important to lock a church? I admit, I'm just a street kid, but I don't normally break into churches. If I will, a lot of other people will, to steal. People are stealing from everywhere, but someone thinks this church will be O.K. unlocked. That's why us Catholics are so poor, I thought. Most of us don't know any better. I stood up and saw that my knickers, which were already so dirty, were now also torn open at the knee and shin. I was without my briefcase, had been crying in public, had been yelled at, had torn my only knickers and I still hadn't gotten any cleaner. Both of my parents had told me that all people had to take the good with the bad. I seemed to take the good with the bad, the awful, criminal, ugly and rotten, but things had to turn for me soon.

There should be a bathtub. Priests get dirty just like anyone else, and have to look good, at least on Sundays. I was sure they wouldn't put a tub out where people sat, kneeled and prayed so I checked in the rooms around the edges of the building. The first room was totally empty, and looked like it had never been used for anything at all. This would be a really good place for a bathtub, I thought, shaking my head. Everything will be jake if I can just find a bathtub.

I opened another door, and — bingo — there was a small kitchen. I was getting closer. I might as well look for some food, I thought. I snooped through the cupboards and shelves but there wasn't anything. I shouldn't even be wasting my time. I still have the cat for later.

Boy, oh boy, the next room had a bathtub. Things are never easy but I usually land on my feet. I started to wet my pants, just out of the excitement, but that was O.K. because it was a bathroom and I was able to go in the toilet. The bathroom was nearly as empty as the kitchen. There weren't any towels, but I could do without one. But, in the bathtub, down near the drain, there was a thin slice of soap, and for me that would be enough.

I didn't flush the toilet after peeing because I didn't want to make any unnecessary noise that might get me caught. Where would I be then? I stripped off my clothes, gently turned up the water and let it run until the tub was filled up almost all the way. The water was so clean and warm. I feel cleaner already. I wasn't even sure how to get into a tub, and after my problem with the door, I was afraid I'd fall and get hurt, so I gently sat down on the edge with my feet in the water and then carefully slid down. After getting in, I fumbled with the soap, because it was new to me and more slippery than I expected. I considered the soap carefully. It was unnaturally white. Is it supposed to make my skin that clean? That's impossible!

I also considered my peter carefully. It seemed small but ready. It looked like it could do the job but I hoped she wasn't expecting some big, giant one. She'll probably even expect it to be small. I sat back in the tub to rest for a few minutes. It seemed like weeks had passed since I'd been running after the cat with the music playing. There were problems for me almost every day, and most days all I did was look for something to eat and try to keep out of the rain. I never had enough time or energy to chase after women or worry about how I looked or smelled. I'll have to start thinking about it now that women are starting to like me. Suddenly I couldn't remember where Betty lived. I'd been chasing around Baltimore all day, all year really, and was drawing a blank. All of the streets and buildings and alleys were running together into one blur in my head. How will I find her? She'll get excited waiting for me and take up with someone else while I wander around looking for her.

"Wait a minute," I said to myself, sitting up to think. "I just need to clear my head." I scrubbed at my stomach with the soap and it came to me — she lived on Bond Street across from an old boarded-up theater. I was about eight blocks away, still somewhere in Fell's Point near Durham and Lancaster.

I was ready, and wanted to leave before I forgot where she lived again. As I got out of the tub, I realized that my clothes were so dirty — I'd worn them twenty-four hours a day for five weeks straight — that simply putting them back on would cross out much of the bath. There's no chance I'm putting on one of the altar boy suits. I'd get eaten alive. I'd rather run to Bond Street naked, no matter how small my thing is. Of course my underwear was the most dirty, and seemed even dirtier now that I felt so clean. I dried myself as best I could by shaking first my arms and then each leg, left my underwear and socks on the floor and put on only my shirt, knickers, shoes and cap. I loved the Clippers and whenever I put my cap on, I could imagine the announcer shouting, "Now batting, Benjamin Gallagher!"

The back door to the church had been open, and I left it unlocked when I went back out, because they may have kept it open for some good reason I didn't know.

It had gotten a bit cloudy during the time I'd been inside the church. I was glad because the sex would seem more grown up if it were darker outside.

I carefully avoided touching anything as I walked through the streets. Normally I picked up everything I came across to see if it was somehow useful or in any way valuable, but that was probably one of he reasons I'd gotten so dirty in the first place.

I got over to Bond Street and walked toward Betty's tenement house. First I cut across the street to check on my briefcase.

"Hey, Wino! How's my briefcase?" I shouted down the alley.

"Huh? Yes, good," he said. I should have brought my underwear and socks along and had the wino watch them. Now I'll either have to walk back to the church or find another pair. I pushed it out of my mind. I wanted to enjoy myself and forget about the rest.

I had thought Betty would be waiting for me out on the steps, but when I got to her building, I had to go inside and look for her. She hadn't told me which room was hers, so I walked up and down the hallway a few times.

"Lady! Where are you?" I shouted.

"Which lady, me?" some other lady asked from inside her room.

"No, Betty," I said. The lady opened her door and stood in the open space, wrapped in a bed sheet. Doesn't she even have a dress to wear? Even I have a set of clothes, even if they are dirty and sort of torn up.

"I don't think anybody named Betty lives here," she said.

"Yes she does," I said. "You probably even know her. Her face is so-so, but she has really good honkers, and her hair is brown, and the last time I saw her she had on a yellow dress." The lady told me that didn't sound familiar.

"Tell me what's all wrong with her face, maybe then I'll remember," she said. "Well her mouth is too low," I said. "It's like her chin is too small. Betty! Where are you?"

"I still don't remember her," the lady said. "What color is her hair?"

"Brown. I already said that. Lady! Betty!" I shouted down the hallway. Maybe she really was only kidding around on me, I thought. Usually I'm smart enough to know when that's happening. I kept shouting her name though, because I didn't want to give up, and just a second later she walked up from behind me.

"Well, I got a bath," I said, raising my arms out and above my head to show her I was clean, but she only asked about my briefcase. "Don't try to change to subject," I said smiling. "You know why I'm here."

"Yeah, I know."

"Well are we going to hump out here in the hall or are we going to your room?" I asked.

"It's down there," she said, pointing. She had the room at the very end of the hall. It seemed everything was always as far away as possible.

She shoved open the door and we walked into her apartment. It was about twenty feet by twenty feet, with a carpet that covered up about half of the floor, and an electric lamp with a shade in the corner.

"Boy, this place is nice," I said.

"Ha ha, very funny," she said, smacking the back of my head and making my cap fly off, but I reached out and somehow caught it before it hit the floor and slapped it back on my head. If only there had been a coach from the Clippers around to see it I'd have been at third base the next afternoon. How are they ever going to catch Dover and get out of last place with Householder third? I wondered. He should still be on the team, but in the outfield. I'm probably as good at third as he is. I wouldn't hit any 400-foot homers, but I wouldn't be kicking grounders into left field either.

But I hadn't been joking about her apartment. It was one entire room and twice the size of the room I lived in with my parents, my aunt, my four brothers and three sisters. I looked around some more and saw a shelf with four books, three glasses, a fork and a spoon, and different sized bowls and a frying pan. The best part of the room was the sink.

"Who else lives here?" I asked.

"Nobody," she answered.

"You mean you have a private sink? All this stuff is yours?" She didn't answer me. I couldn't believe she had all of it to herself.

"You do look cleaner," she said looking at my face.

"I'm pretty happy with how it turned out. I was confused by the soap at first, but I figured it out." I took off my cap and threw it across the room and against the wall as hard as I could. "He's out! And the Clippers top Dover all thanks to Benjamin Gallagher!" I screamed. I undid the first four buttons of my shirt, pulled it off over my head and then dropped it to the floor. There was a pile of rags down in the corner, and when I asked her about them she sighed at me and then told me I could have them. Rags were the sort of thing I always hoped to find.

"Does someone cut your hair with a knife?" she asked.

"No, I use scissors. But it's hard to get the back of my head right," I said, and she told me that the rest of it looked bad, too.

When I unhooked my belt and started to lower my pants, I realized she hadn't taken off any of her clothes.

"Get undressed, it's not fair that I have to go first."

"Oh all right." She sat down on her bed and started to slowly get out of her dress. She seemed worn-out, but she hadn't been the one chasing around town, breaking into churches and arguing with shopkeepers.

"Come on, hurry up," I said. She stood up and pulled her dress off over her head in the same way I had taken off my shirt. Her legs and shoulders looked much bigger than I had expected. She kicked off her gray underwear and stood there barenaked. My eyes darted back and forth from her honkers and her area. I couldn't wait, and took off my pants.

"Don't you even have any underpants?" she asked.

"Not right now." My thing was already standing straight up and I realized that it had been stiff for a long time, since our first conversation on Bond Street.

"God, you're so skinny," she said. "I can see all of your ribs. I can even see the bones in your legs."

"I'm being starved to death by the depression."

# BALTIMORE, MD

"You should try to look like Charles Lindbergh," I said. He did look a little like Lindbergh, albeit a small, greasy, poorly fed Lindbergh dressed in rags. It might have been wishful thinking, but to me he also had Lindbergh's square jaw and his eyes were wonderfully blue. Even so, he was all arms and legs, and reminded me more of a monkey than a man.

"Gee thanks, in a hundred years I never would've thought to do that," he said. Everyone loved Lindbergh. Lindbergh was a classical man, like the men we'd had in the past. Then, without putting any thought behind it, I told him or somehow hinted that I would sleep with him if he were cleaner. I said a lot of things without thinking them through. The way things were, I didn't see any reason to hold back.

"Lady," he said, "in the first place, what's your name? It's Elizabeth, right?" No one ever seemed to remember my name anymore. How can it be? Only ten years ago men hummed little songs about me, doing everything to get my attention. I'd had so many socials that I'd once been proposed to by two men in the same week, and at another time, three others in one month.

"My name is Betty," I said.

"But that's a nickname for Elizabeth, isn't it?" He looked me up and down, starring at my hips for a moment.

"No, not for me," I said.

"Well how old are you then?"

"Thirty-four," I answered before he could offer a guess. He would have said forty-five or fifty. I knew I didn't look good. There weren't enough iron and minerals left in my blood. For years I wouldn't leave home without lipstick and some colored powder. Now that I really needed it, there wasn't enough money to buy any. My shape was going too. I was getting to be all hips and thighs and not enough up top.

"So we can hump if I get cleaned up?" he asked. I didn't see any reason not to, and even though he wasn't my first choice, or even my 101st choice, it would still be something, so I nodded and said "Yes."

"For how long do I have to take a bath?"

"How long does it normally take you?" I was going to suggest he double the usual length. He mumbled that he couldn't remember ever taking a bath, and then I really regretted having promised him. I imagined lying with someone who hadn't washed for so long and thought of his lice crawling around between us. Have I really fallen down this far? I tried to assure myself that he must have had a bath when he was a baby and the economy was still good. I'd give anything to still know John Sills, Bryan Gale or even Timothy McCann, or really any of the men I knew ten years ago.

"God, you're like a wild animal!"

"I guess so," he said. "But I'm going to find a place to take a bath and then come back here and then you'll change your tune."

He left running back up the street in the direction he had come from, before stopping to turn down an alley. Most likely I won't see him again. If I do, I do, if I don't, I don't, I thought. I can live either way. I had grown up in Glencoe, and had even gone to The Oldsfield School, so I had always known men with starched shirts, slicked hair and New York educations. Is this really me?

After watching him leave I turned back and went inside the building toward my room. I thought I'd better straighten up my things in case he did come back. Well, I don't really have anything left to straighten up. Little by little I'd sold almost everything for dimes and quarters.

It was only eleven in the morning. I hadn't even done anything yet but was already exhausted. I was so tired that I couldn't even really see, but still recognized Nellie Sipe as the figure down the hall. Please, just let me get past her quickly.

Quickly. Quickly.

"Nellie, you're hanging out," I said, pointing down at her chest. She just shanged and tucked it back into her dress. She never bothered to wear a bra anymore. She was in the same boat as I, but a bit worse off. Neither of us was really living. I don't know why I still bothered talking to her. She'd never done anything nice to me and had stolen a Persian immigrant from me the previous year. I also suspected she'd been telling men that I had moved away so she could try to get them for herself.

"So how are you, anyway?" she asked.

"I'm O.K."

"What ever happened to that Persian with the crew cut and earrings?" she asked, when she damned well knew what had happened. He had fucked her, which must have made him realize Baltimore was a no good place because he promptly returned to Persia.

"I'm not sure, he must have shipped out," I said.

"That's too bad," she said. "I know how much you like immigrants."

"I don't like immigrants," I said.

"Well I sure do." She didn't really like them either, she just pretended to because they were the only men she could get. She just wanted me to think she was getting her first choice when she really wanted a Robert or Sean.

"Well since you don't have anything to do, do you want to come by?" she asked. "I have some tea." Why on Earth would I want to do that? So I can listen to her talk about herself and how she wants to marry this type or that type of man. I know the truth; she'd marry anyone who asked.

"Oh, I have things to do," I said.

"Are you still trying to learn that typewriter?" she asked in her smartest voice. "Good God, how long's that been going on, three months?" It was closer to five. When I had gotten the idea of becoming a secretary into my head, I sold almost everything I still had left and bought a typewriter called a Smith Corona. I had thought it would be a good investment, but hadn't been able to make it work.

"No, I'm not doing that anymore," I said.

"Then how come I keep hearing it going tat tat tat?" she said. "Ha ha ha oh ha! What do you do, hit one letter about every ten seconds? Christ that's too slow!"

"All right Nellie, that's fine," I said. I hadn't imagined people could hear me trying to type.

"Oh don't get sore with me. You just need to learn you're not going to become a secretary and you're not going to get to marry the boss at a company. You'll never keep any man."

I pushed my way past her, trying to get back to my room. After a few steps I realized she was following me, getting more insults ready. I didn't even try to stop myself from turning back toward her, reaching out and ripping her dress open so her boob would be hanging out like it was when I had found her.

"You wench! That's my favorite!" she screamed, as if that would make me stop when it really inspired me to rip the dress wide open and pull it completely off.

"I'm going to burn this rag!" I said running down the hallway carrying it over my head. I knew I didn't have any matches, but I would find another way to destroy it.

"Get back here!" she shouted running after me. "You can't!" I tried to time the chase so that she would be right behind me and I could slam the door of my room on her head or neck, but I got too far in front of her and missed. "Give me my dress back. It's mine!" she shouted.

"Leave me alone, or I'll tell everyone how you're really from right here in Fell's Point and not Lansdowne!" I shouted through the door. "Go away, now!" She scampered down the hallway and slammed the door to her room shut.

I had her favorite dress. It was pretty well ripped up but I took a knife to it before I lost my nerve. That bitch had to stop talking to me like that and if this trick with the dress would stop her for a week it would be worth my energy. I wadded it up into a ball in the sink and stabbed at it. When the stabbing didn't do enough damage, I held it up, sliced through it about a dozen times and then tossed the strips into the corner of my room. I hated my room. I'd already lived there for four years and had thought that by then I would have had a red sofa, a table with matching chairs and a set of plates. Not only didn't I have those things, but I also no longer had any new clothes, my radio, my necklaces, my only ring or my glass vase. My prized possession was now the typewriter and I couldn't figure it out, but there it sat on the desk as the center of my room.

Three weeks earlier the priest at a nearby church had committed suicide, and I went to the funeral for the food afterward. The church closed down and tried to cover up what had happened, but that was difficult because he hanged himself on the street sign at Lancaster and Durham.

After listening to the speeches, prayers and crying, I walked back to the rectory from the cemetery with all the others expecting ham sandwiches and coffee and was thrilled when I smelled roast beef.

"Oh my God, is it roast beef?" some lady said far too loudly. A lot of people were there only for the food, but the rest of us at least tried to look sad. Not her, she hadn't even put on any black clothes. "He must have been a real big shot!" She was wearing a bright blue hat, and something that looked like a bathrobe. She did look somewhat sad but only because her clothes and hat were so beat up and ratty. The roast beef was incredible and everyone concentrated so much on the food that no one even spoke as we ate, sitting slumped over our plates, almost guarding our food like dogs. It made for a desperate meal. If only I had gotten married, or even only stayed in Glencoe with my mother, I thought. A lot of people are poor there now too, but it can't be as bad as the rest of Baltimore.

The morning after the roast beef dinner, I woke up feeling something good might happen. I sat at the typewriter, and with my eyes closed, typed out Betty Evans, Secretary, Baltimore, MD. It was my best typing ever. I did it again: Betty Evans, Secretary, Baltimore, MD. Then: Betty evans Sectaru, Baktinore MD, and then Vetty Evansm Secytary, VAltimmre, MS. I concentrated as best I could and it came out BetyEVanss Sectracy, Balotminre, MD. If I can't type my own name, how

will I ever get someone else's right? There honestly must be something wrong with me. Maybe learning to typewrite is something that needs to be done early in life.

After cutting up the dress, I sat down at the typewriter to try some more. I hadn't touched it for two days and hoped the break would help me: Betyy Evans,, Secrtay BalotmoerMd. I put my head down next to the typewriter for a minute and then got into bed to rest.

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I heard him calling out my name. He's come back for me. In another few seconds Nellie will run out to try to talk him into her room. I could have just let him go, and if it had been any other woman in the world I would have done just that. Instead, I got onto my feet, slipped on my shoes, slapped my face a couple of times to wake myself up, and walked down the hallway toward his shouting. There was Nellie, right where I'd expected her to be, standing in her doorway about to reach out and yank him into her room.

"Lady! Betty!" he shouted straight up into the air. He looked absurd, leaning back and shouting up at the ceiling.

"I'm right here, stop that shouting," I said. Nellie saw me and tried to squeeze in between me and the boy, but he ducked around her shoulder, turning away from her and toward me. I was relieved. I didn't have the strength to get into a tug of war over him.

He turned even closer so I could better see him and said he had taken a bath, and he was cleaner.

"Oh my God! Where's your briefcase?"

"Don't try to change the subject," he said. He was smart. "You know why I'm here."

"Yeah, I know."

"Well are we going to hump out here in the hall or are we going to your room?" he asked.

"It's down there," I said, motioning for him to follow me down the hall. Walking right next to me, he now somehow seemed smaller. I wondered if the soap and water could have stripped an inch of dirt off of him from all directions. He couldn't have been that dirty. It must be my imagination.

As soon as we got inside my room, he started up with how "nice" it all was. I wasn't in the mood for it and hit him on the head, just as I'd always done to my younger brothers whenever they talked back. His cap flew off, but he caught it and slapped it back on. He seemed to think it was a pretty impressive trick, but I hadn't hit him very hard and the cap had hung up in the air.

"Who else lives here?" he asked.

"Nobody." Who else would, I thought, my butler and children?

"You mean you have a private sink? All this stuff is yours?" Oh it was all mine; I even had the sink in which I could wash out my panties.

"You do look cleaner," I said.

"I'm pretty happy with how it turned out," he said, telling me how the soap was

confusing and that it took him a few minutes to figure out how to work it. He took the cap back off his head and threw it across the room. "He's out! And the Clippers top Dover all thanks to Benjamin Gallagher!" How can he be fantasizing about baseball when we're alone in my room? I couldn't remember the last time I'd even thought about the Clippers. I'd let go of them years ago.

After taking off his shirt he noticed the scraps of the dress I had cut up.

"Why do you have all those rags?" he asked.

"No reason, it's a long story. I'm going to throw them out later."

"Can I have them?"

"What for?"

"I'll use them for something." I pictured him wrapping his hands with them when winter came.

"Go ahead, take them," I said. His chest was absolutely tiny. It made his head look huge; he looked like a crying baby bird. His hair was even funnier now, after the bath.

"Does someone cut your hair with a knife?"

"No, I use scissors," he said. "But it's hard to get the back of my head right."

"You don't do a very good job on the front or the top either," I said. It didn't even look like hair; it looked like long animal fur. He started to take off his pants, but then hesitated. I thought he might be too scared and had changed his mind, but he told me to get undressed. I was out of luck. I had hoped I wouldn't have to get undressed and could just lift my dress up over my stomach. "Oh all right," I said, sitting down so I could take off my shoes. He told me to hurry up, and I wanted to get it over with so I pulled off my dress. Normally I would toss it to the floor, or into the sink. Since he was there I stood up to hang it on the doorknob. My panties were so old and dingy that I pulled them off as quickly as possible. He eyed me and looked interested but not wholly impressed.

"Don't you even have any underpants?" I asked after he pulled off his knickers and stood there completely naked.

"Not right now," he said. Why not, is he saving them for a special occasion? There hasn't been anything special for years. He had the smallest dickie I had ever seen, but I didn't say anything because it was the only one I had seen in ten months.

"God you're so skinny," I said. "I can see all of your ribs. I can even see the bones in your legs."

"I'm being starved to death by the depression," he said. I slid back down into bed. At least I still have a bed to have sex in, I thought. He stood above me for a few moments. He didn't have any idea what to do.

"All right, get on top of me," I said. He kind of let himself fall onto me, face to face. I was too tall for him and he was pressing it up against my stomach so I nudged his shoulders, telling him to move lower. He scooted down and I felt his dickie pop into me, I think. It was too small for me to be certain. He grabbed at my boobs and seemed to laugh. John Sills, Tim McCann, Bryan Gale, Neil McCallister, or was it McAllister or McAlester? Jason Hatcher. Why didn't I say yes

to one of them? I'd be Mrs. Jason Hatcher.

"Oh baby, oh baby, I can't take you anymore," he said. What is that supposed to mean? "Oh yes, yes, I have to keep going." I still wasn't sure if he had it into me. He looked down toward his waist as if he wasn't sure either. "Go, go!" he gasped. He straightened his back and I finally felt it, but at the most it only tickled. He wiggled a little, and a second later I felt his fluid spit into me. He immediately stopped moving and rested. Even though he was only a boy I reached down and stroked his back for a few minutes. I should really be Mrs. Jason Hatcher, but I'm here.

### CHICAGO, MD

It was true; I admired Leopold and Loeb. I couldn't help it. It was eight years after their convictions, and I liked them more than ever. Leopold and Loeb hadn't worked ridiculous jobs or let other people take their frustrations out on them. They exercised their minds, not just their fingers counting back customer's change, and they didn't wear a yellow store apron. Why did Fickle & Son-of-a-Bitch make me wear an apron? I wasn't baking cakes and frosting cookies. Dozens of people walked into the store every day, and the first and last thing they saw was me wearing a yellow apron like a damned woman. Why didn't the store just make it pink with white lace? How could anyone ever take me seriously?

"Yes, ma'am," and "Yes, sir," was all I said most days. "Here's your change, sir, twenty-nine cents." It had gone on for eight years. I was already forty-six years old, older than Leopold and Loeb combined when they smashed up Bobby Franks. What am I waiting for? Nothing could be worse than the "yes, sir" routine. I had been trying not to say sir and ma'am, but it kept slipping out. Customers never called me sir.

I knew I had the courage; I just needed to let it out, but working at the store had dulled my nerve. It wasn't only the apron. It was also the hours that repeated themselves, and in which nothing different ever happened. I had heard every possible question dozens of times.

"How much does this cost?" people asked me, although every item was labeled.

"Where were these bricks made?" and "Where was your lettuce grown?"

"Can I have a nail for free?"

"No," I would say.

"Why not? It's just one nail."

"Even so, I can't give it away."

"Can I use your bathroom?" was another one.

"Well, we don't have one." People would never believe me, but even if there we re a bathroom, they shouldn't have been asking to use it. It would only be for paying customers.

"Please, I just have to take a leak."

"We-do-not-have-a-bath-room," I wanted to say.

Hearing the stupid repetitive questions was bad enough, but in addition to this, people were always coming in and trying to get more credit when they hadn't put a dime toward their old bill in months.

"I'd like four veal cutlets and these six wine glasses," a bearded and barrel-chested man recently walked in and said to me. "Please put it on my bill."

"What's the name on the bill?" I asked. I knew his name was William Malley, but I made him say it for me. He didn't know my name.

"Malley," he told me, and I reached under the counter for the box of account cards.

"You already owe a hundred seventy dollars, and we haven't gotten anything from you since February," I said.

"So?" he said, seeming to flex his chest muscles at me, as if I were some sissy.

"The store won't let me give you any more credit now." None of these people had ever bothered to save anything. They had been the ones always out throwing money around on women and grand new clothes. They all thought were big shots. Then they'd walk into the store and look at me as if I was a nobody . . . just because my clothes weren't great and made me seem fat.

"But I've been thinking about eating veal all week!"

"I'm sorry sir, but cash only." The people who were the furthest behind never wanted the basics like bread, potatoes or milk. It was always veal, roast beef, new silverware or a hat.

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"Excuse me," a lady said, walking up to the counter carrying a giant box of twenty-four, one foot long, six-inch circumference candles. "I need you to carry these back to my house for me." She dropped the box onto the counter carelessly, with a thud, right in front of me.

"I'm sorry, what?" I said. I had heard her clear as day, but pretended I hadn't so I could have another moment to think.

"I need you to carry these to my house."

"When?" I asked.

"Right now. I'm buying them."

"Ma'am I can't do that for you right now, I'm the only person here. I can't leave." Frankly (Bobby Franks), she thought she owned people like me because her husband had \$25,000 in the bank. I dealt with five of her type everyday. Five by six days week by fifty-two weeks a year for eight years was well over 10,000.

"Aren't you here to assist the customer?" she asked me.

"Of course I am, but, like I said, I'm the only person here so I can hardly leave."

"What am I supposed to do, carry them back myself?"

"We might be able to arrange a delivery sometime tomorrow," I said. "Would that be O.K.?"

"That's not good enough," she said to me. She just wouldn't quit with me. She thought buying \$3.00 worth of candles entitled her to the world, or at least what was left of it. People were wondering if the country would collapse. More and more of them seemed to be hoping it would. It would be people like her who would suffer first and suffer the most. All of her paper money would be worthless, and nobody would be afraid of her anymore. She wouldn't know what to do when it happened.

"It's all I can do. I can't just close up the store."

"I'm a very valuable customer," she said. "I spend a lot." There was no doubt about that; she probably spent more on candles and other fancy things than I did on food.

"If you won't carry these for me, I'll speak to Mr. Fickle. When will he be back?"

"Ma'am, Mr. Fickle is seventy-four years. He doesn't come in much anymore."

"Then I'll speak to his son," she said.

"Well, there really isn't a son. They just made that up."

"I am going to talk to someone about you," she said. "What is your name?"

"Daniel Talbot . . ." I said softly. She had probably expected me to be afraid to tell her and just carry the box for her.

"What am I supposed to do?" she asked me, throwing her hands up in exasperation. I wasn't being difficult just to be difficult. Why couldn't she understand that I couldn't close up the store in the middle of the day?

She threw her head back and stomped out of the store. Maybe I should have tried to stop her and work something out, but I didn't. There wasn't much she could do, but for a minute I worried that I would get into trouble. It was always possible she would write a letter to Fickle and then exaggerate everything, telling him I had yelled and thrown her out of the store. I knew someone would eventually do that to me, but why did I always worry about that? I already regretted having been so polite to her; Leopold and Loeb wouldn't have been polite. They would have just ignored her completely, and if pushed said something to make her feel stupid. I'm witty too . . . people just don't know it.

After she left, I looked down the aisles of the store to make sure no one was around and pulled out my file. My Leopold and Loeb information went on for almost twenty-five pages. There were Chicago newspaper articles and my own notes, including a hand drawn map of the murder site. Years earlier, I had planned on moving to Chicago for a murder. The stock market crash made me give up on that idea. It didn't seem practical to think I would be able to survive in a new city without a safe job, and I'd never have been able to afford Kenwood, the neighborhood of the murder and where everyone lived. I held onto the map as a souvenir.

I also had pictures of everyone involved — Leopold, Loeb, Bobby Franks, Darrow, Crowe, and John Caverly. Leopold and Loeb were the only people with any life in their eyes. Bobby Franks was only fourteen years old, and he was already fat and lazy. I might be overweight now, but I wasn't at fourteen, I'd often thought. He looked like he had eaten a pie every day of his life. There was no doubt about that. Then after the pie he would spend all of ten minutes standing on a tennis court, half flipping his racket out at balls a friend hit right to him. After that, he'd sit in the shade with a glass of lemonade.

"That was some of our best tennis yet, Percy," he would say, bursting with sweat and pride.

I'd tried to look at the case from every possible direction. With the exception of Leopold dropping his glasses, their chief mistake was choosing Bobby Franks. I had figured that out myself. His family was rich and had spoiled him to the core.

Someone will miss a kid like that right off, and he was actually Loeb's cousin. Under any circumstances, police will eventually come around asking. I knew that myself and didn't understand why Nathan and Dick hadn't seen it coming. It wouldn't be a p roblem for me though, no one would bother looking for my kid. He wasn't so special or charming. Maybe a few people would think, I haven't seen Johnny — or whatever his name is — for weeks, but that would be all. Even after the body turned up, how would anyone connect him to me? Everyone in this neighborhood only knew me as the putz at Fickle & Son in theyellow apron. They didn't imagine me having any thoughts or plans beyond counting back change and stocking jars of coffee.

"Hey, kid, come here," I would say. He'd look up at me with an expression that was already half-dead. "Do you want a Clark bar?" Candy was the oldest trick in the book, and it had to work to become the oldest trick. With his hunger pains, this one would follow me around for a crust of bread.

"What for?" he would probably ask me, or "What do I have to do for it?" if he was fast.

"Nothing, really. The store I work at has a lot of them but the owner doesn't want to sell them anymore."

"Why, is something wrong with them? Are they burned or something?"

"No, but the owner and the man who makes Clark bars got into an argument about Hoover and Roosevelt, so the owner is mad." That would be a good enough lie to set him at ease. "I'd eat them myself," I would casually add, "but I'm too old." I'm sure he would take the candy and eat all of it right there, fast. "We have a whole box of them behind the store." The kid's jaw would drop open at that. "We're going to throw them out tomorrow. Want to go get them?"

"Yes sir, right away." He would be ecstatic. He'd want to run, afraid someone would find them before we could get back. "What's the fastest way?" and "How many are in a box?" he'd want to know, walking as fast as he could and having to pull his pants back up over his hips every few steps. While we moved together up the street and toward the store, I would check each alley we passed for people. One or two might have a drunk slumped in it, but not four or five. Baltimore was nothing but alleys; every block had a couple. The kid would think it was the happiest day of his life.

He was probably filled with every type of parasite. The tiny bugs and shit-eating worms would have sapped any strength he had, so it would only take a tap from me to shove him into the alley.

"Don't," he would say, but in another second I would have him slammed up against the back brick wall, knocking the wind out of him, and have my knife out. Without any breath he wouldn't be able to scream for help. "Don't hurt me, mister," he'd maybe have the strength to whisper.

Other people get to do what they want, just like that. I should do it too, but I'm always working in the store, waiting for Fickle's twenty-year-old hot shot Mueller to come in from Glencoe to double-check my arithmetic at the end of every month.

With his hunger, torn up clothes and loneliness, he was having a miserable life

so he wouldn't be very inclined to fight back. In all likelihood, he'd drop the briefcase when hitting the wall. If not, he might try to use it as a shield or maybe even take a swing at me with it. It wouldn't be a big problem, but I'd need to take it from him and toss it across the alley.

"Please don't hurt me, mister," he'd say to me, but after the first stab or cut, he'd be resigned to it and any further fighting would be minimal. After the third or fourth stab to the stomach, the color would drain from his face, and he'd wilt to the ground. The main part would be for me to stay calm, because he'd only be dying and not yet dead. If I turned to run after only stabbing him couple of times, there would be chance he'd live. Then not only would I likely be caught, but I wouldn't have even killed anyone. Then people would treat the kid like a hero. Everyone in Chicago loved Bobby Franks after he got famous, but what did they know?

I would have to reach down to him and cut his throat so deeply that his tongue would flop out. There would be a lot of blood, but it would have to be done. I'd certainly get some blood on me, but that was why I would be wearing dark clothes. I'm not stupid; in anticipation I had started wearing dark clothes more and more often over the last few months. The customers at the store and anyone I regularly passed on the street were now used to seeing me in a gray shirt and black pants. They would hide the blood well enough, especially after the sun went down. Blood on my face was what I'd have to avoid. There will definitely be some on my hands, but how often do people look at someone else's hands? I never look down at hands.

I'd walk out of the alley quickly but not in a mad rush. After hitting the street, I'd need the strength to slow down and walk no faster than usual. Even if someone had seen me with him a few minutes earlier, they wouldn't have paid any particular notice. These street kids were always coming up to people and asking for a quarter, allegedly so they could buy their mother a birthday gift. With things so tight, it wasn't unusual at all. I would think these kids could bother to remember which people had said no and stop asking them. But the same ones, the kid with the red crewcut who wore a black sweater, the twins who always looked like they'd just been crying, and the Italian one, had all asked me a dozen times each. They were all just wasting their breath. Don't they even look at me when they ask? Another was the one with bright red lips and curly hair.

"Mister, would you be able to spare twenty-five cents?" he had asked me.

"No'

"It's O.K. I'm sorry to be a bother," he said. Why didn't he remember me from the last time he'd asked? It had only been a week earlier.

When the dead boy's body turned up, the police would assume one of the darkies did it. They lived like animals in the alleys.

From there it would be back to my room to destroy my bloody clothes and clean up. Within two weeks I'd tell my boss I was leaving Baltimore to try my luck in Ohio. I'd really be going down to North Carolina, where I would tell people I was from Georgia. I had already worked up a southern accent and some hayseed mannerisms. I'd be in North Carolina, with a reason to live.

Then my plans started to fall to hell — my kid walked into the store. I had picked him out only half of an hour earlier. I couldn't do it to him in the store; that was out of the question. It had to be done blocks away. After coming into the store, he wouldn't be a pure and unconnected victim anymore. I had to get him out of the store as fast as possible. I realized he wasn't holding his briefcase and glanced around the floor for it. The briefcase would make one hell of a clue to leave around. When I couldn't see it anywhere, I got nervous and froze up, not sure how to handle things.

"Can I help you with something?" I asked. He couldn't possibly have had any money to spend and normally just speaking to someone without any will get them to leave. I was permitted to throw people out of the store if they didn't have any money. I had that authority. I moved to my right, down the counter trying to block the view of him, at least partially, from the street through the window. If I can stop anyone from seeing him, he'll still be perfect.

"Yes, my pop's been saving his relief checks and now he wants to buy a bathtub. He sent me down to try some out." I had expected him just to say something short and leave, but instead he was acting like a smart aleck. God damn it, that sneer! I bet he's already a morphine addict. All he probably ever thinks about is getting loopey and picking up women, as if he's so great and I'm so boring. He only wanted to kill time until it was dark enough to go out to steal and didn't care that he was messing up my hopes as he stood there playing with a wood-handled (Kenwood) spade as if it were a toy. I hope his little smile and blue eyes don't work on me.

"You can look at them, but, well, you can't take a bath in here," I said. I knew he had already been in the store too long. At least four people had walked past the store's front window; at least one of them had surely seen him. Someone would always watch and remember who went in and out of the store. People who wouldn't notice me enough to smile, or even pay the smallest attention to me would easily remember every detail about the kid.

"Yes, Detective, I saw him in the Fickle & Son store last Wednesday at about 11:30," someone on the street would say. "He talked to the clerk, the one who always wears a yellow apron, for a few minutes and that was the last I saw of him until his picture was in all the newspapers. He looked so sweet in the pictures."

"Do you think the clerk might have something to do with the killing?" the detective would say, nodding suggestively.

"Well, I'm not sure, but I guess he might," the person would say about me, and I'd be in a jail cell by the end of the day.

"He won't buy one unless he's sure it works," the boy said. "That's just the way he is."

"Have him come down," I said. "I'll show him the bathtubs." He would have been a perfect victim, but the plan was shot. It wouldn't be a big problem for me to find another, but in the half-hour between me spotting him and his walking into the store, I'd gotten my heart set on him; me slicing him open and tossing him

around like a rag doll, maybe even crushing his skull. Why in the hell won't anything ever work? I wanted to put my head down on the damned counter and cry and almost did. This boy was filthy, had no clean clothes or money but had bested me just by walking into the store. It wasn't right to me.

"How much does a bathtub cost?" he asked me.

"About thirty-five dollars."

"They cost that much, and you still don't let people test them?" Perhaps he had a point; Fickle guaranteed things, but who wants to drag a bathtub home to then find out it somehow doesn't work?

"We can't have people taking baths in here," I said. "The tubs aren't even hooked up."

"But my dad really wants to buy one, and he expects me to test one," he said. It was possible he was telling me the truth. I knew what it was like to have a father who made strange demands. During my childhood, my father would tell me to bring him a bowl of bread soup, but I could never figure out what that was. I'd smash some bread into a bowl, pour a little bit of hot water onto it and take it to him.

"This isn't bread soup," he'd say. "It's only bread with water." I'd look at him dumbfounded, go back to the cupboard and throw in some of whatever we might have had around, pepper, a tomato or some onion and take it back to him as silently as possible. "I said bread soup, half-wit!"

"I don't know what's in it," I'd say.

"It's easy to make. We had it back in Cardiff all the time."

Eventually I learned to ignore him until he'd get angry and punch me, which would make him forget about the soup.

"Just get out of here!" I said to the boy. "You're ruining everything." He just stood there with the same calm look on his face. He couldn't see any reason to be afraid of me, no one ever could. "I said get out!" He looked up into my eyes, then slowly and unemotionally left the store.

I sulked about my ruined plans for a couple of hours. I acted normally to the handful of customers who came in, quietly answering their questions and taking their money. Whenever nobody was in the store, I paced around thinking. I saw what my mistake had been; after picking out my victim, I should have immediately taken steps to kill him. With the more time that passed, the more likely it became that something would happen to mess things up. If the boy hadn't walked into the store, something else would have happened. The boy could have gotten arrested that night or left town the next week. If I would have waited a month, someone else might have got him.

It had become very clear to me that to succeed the next time, it was important to strike the moment there was an opportunity, so I hung up my apron, grabbed two Clark bars off the shelf and closed the store for the day. It was two o'clock, and we normally closed at five. It's close enough, I thought.

It was neither particularly sunny nor cloudy outside. It was just overcast.

Clouds would be one thing, but there shouldn't be all this dust in the air. It had been a long time since I'd seen what two o'clock in the afternoon in the middle of the week looked like. For years I was in the store every day at that time. That's the sort of thing working the job had done to me. What ever happened to the jobs I'd dreamed of as a kid? I thought, cowboy, inventor, general or judge (Caverly).

I passed the first kid after walking just a few feet up the street. He would have been good enough, but as it happened, we weren't anywhere near an alley. I was only walking home through Fell's Point as if it were a normal afternoon, down Bond Street before going west onto Lancaster. There's no point in going out of my way. If I happen to cross paths with an A-O.K. looking boy near an empty alley, I'll do it. If I don't, I'll do it tomorrow or next week. The timing will be right soon. Hey, how about a grown woman? I thought. No, no, a woman wouldn't be as good.

#### EVAMS

It was a horrible time for people to have to take care of themselves. He had to get up though; it was all so ridiculous for both of us.

"You should get off me now," I said, to which he groaned, and rolled off and onto his back.

"I can't believe you have this room all to yourself. It's just amazing. I can't believe . . . ."

"Keep going," I said, meaning that he should leave, but he just slid over a little bit. "You have to get up, put on your clothes, get out of my room, get out of the building, and go home."

"Can't I live here with you?" he asked. My God, he's acting like we're in love.

"No, of course not. If you want to share a room with a stranger, you should go to Russia. They all live like this there."

"Russia, really?" he asked climbing out of bed and puffing up his chest the way all men do after they have sex.

"Haven't you heard of it?"

"Yeah, I've heard of it." He looked down at his penis, which had shrunken to almost nothing. It was maybe two inches long by that time.

"Hurry up and get dressed," I said. He had to get back to normal, having no food, no money and no girlfriend. I have to get back to normal too, being alone in my room. I looked over at him standing right next to my bed, and suggested to him that he cut off all his hair, because it would be neater and not as crooked.

I shifted off my back and onto my side and watched him pick up his clothes. He started to get dressed, seeming to ignore me. "I can't get over how skinny you are! Even at your age you should have some muscles."

"Well you got fucked by me!" he snapped back. "You must be worthless too! Maybe you didn't go buggy over it, but you weren't complaining either."

"All right, you're not that bad, I guess," I said, and he wasn't. If I could have added ten years and seventy pounds to him, he would have been better than most men. But it was 1932, and 1932 was a bad year so I couldn't.

### TALBOT

Then I saw this kid walking toward me down the opposite side of the street. He was younger; he looked eleven years old, and didn't seem to be in as rough of shape as the boy from that morning. He was actually a little chubby, and while I'm sure he was far from clean, he wasn't a complete mess. His hair was combed, and his clothes weren't torn up. With his bug eyes and fat face he was far from a thoroughbred, and I really didn't give a damn if his parents did love him.

Out of the corner of my eye, I caught sight of something flying through the air toward me. I tried to dodge it, but a fraction of a moment later it landed on my cheek, just below my right eye.

"Oh, no!" Now in addition to everything else, I'm going to have a swollen face after this bird or bat or giant bug bites me. Why does everything happen? I winced and tore it from my face, feeling my fingernails scratch into my cheek a little . . . it had only been a leaf, and crumpled to shreds in my hand.

After settling myself down, I walked across the street at the corner, not looking right at him, but also not avoiding looking at him.

"Hey, kid-o," I said when the two of us closed to within ten feet of each other.

"What?" he asked me.

"Do you want a candy bar?" I held one of them out to him.

"No thanks, I don't really like Clark bars very much," he said, to me. What kind of kid wouldn't want a Clark bar? "Do you have any Hershey's?"

"Umm . . . no," I said.

"Thanks anyway. I'll see around," he said walking past me.

"Wait, wait a second," I said, pulling out the second Clark bar. "Would you like two candy bars?"

"Mister, I don't like Clark bars. If I don't want one, why would I want two? You're being dumb."

I've never been entirely sure what happened next. I do remember picking the chubby kid up from around the waist, presumably to drag him into an alley right then and there. Then he must have punched, or somehow kicked me in the jaw. He was so strong for his size and age, and it really hurt. The pain shot through my entire upper body and down to my knees. I dropped the kid and fell onto my rear end. I jumped back up as quickly as possible so no one would notice. I hated it more than ever. The kid didn't even bother to run away from me, he just continued walking south as if this happened to him every day, not even looking back at me. Also, from their cells in the Joliet Penitentiary, Leopold and Loeb were undoubtedly laughing, howling at me, gasping with laughter.

#### GALLAGHER

She sat back down on her bed, laid back, and had me get into bed with her. I got in and grabbed her honkers, one in each hand.

"No, you have to get lower, between my legs," she said. I fit my penis into her and pushed it in and out.

"Oh baby, oh baby, oh baby, I can't take you anymore," I started saying, although I wasn't sure what that meant. "Oh yes, yes, I have to keep going." I lifted my stomach and chest up off of her, trying to see my thing go in and out. I finally know what it feels like it. "Go, go!" I put my chest back down and pushed into her as far as I could. I got as much in as possible and finished. In a flash it felt like all my bad days had been O.K., and that all my O.K. days had always been good. After a few more seconds I wilted into her chest and my thing just slipped out. I sighed deeply and rested my head on her chest. I wanted so badly just to rest, and could have slept for days. I imagined waking up and living in the apartment. Anytime I wanted a drink of water I could just go to the sink. I wouldn't have to sleep on the floor between my brothers, and with my sisters lying across my legs and chest, and with everyone keeping me awake coughing. I'd be sleeping in a bed with a woman. Life still won't be perfect, I thought. But things would have to be better.

"You should get off me now," she said.

"Uhhgh." I rolled off and lay next to her. "I can't believe you have this room all to yourself. It's just so amazing. I can't believe . . . . "

"Keep going," she said, motioning for me to get farther away. I thought she only wanted to me move, but when I inched over she told me I had to get dressed and leave. "Can't I live here with you?" I asked.

"No, of course not," she said. "If you want to share a room with a stranger, you should go to Russia. They all live like this there."

"Russia, really?" I said getting onto my feet and out of the bed.

"Haven't you heard of it?" she asked. Of course I'd heard of Russia. I didn't know where it was, but I knew it had to be someplace and it sure sounded good. She sat up wrapped in her blanket and told me to hurry up. "You know, you should shave your head instead of cutting your own hair." I raised my hands and felt my head.

"What do you mean?" She turned and pulled a sheet up over herself.

"You'd look better with no hair. There are chunks that are different lengths. The right side is a lot longer than the left. Everything's lopsided, you should cut it all off and start over." I pulled my pants up over my peter and hooked the belt. "I can't get over how skinny you are!" she said. "Even at your age you should have some muscles."

"Well you got fucked by me!" I shouted back. "You must worthless, too! Maybe you didn't go buggy over it, but you weren't complaining either."

"All right, you're not that bad, I guess," she said. I couldn't believe it: 'not that bad'. The depression was still going on, but if I could take a bath, I could get a haircut and wash my clothes. I deserved to eat real food and not just stray cats. I could trade my briefcase for new underwear and socks. It wasn't too late to fix myself up, and good things were already happening.

## **C**ORKSCREWS

# JESSICA L. CHAPMAN

Freestyle moves and complacent grooves
Envelop her confession;
Like all the bottled promises
and all the crimes corkscrewed into kisses.
The words listen to themselves
in slippery tones and erogenous zones.
Truth oozing smooth and clear
and as freely as the smoke
from her cigarette...
And another boy makes his point
leaves dirty white socks
and half of a joint.
The government breath and deliberate decay
preaches it's own gospel in
dramatic corkscrews.

### YOUR WILL BE DONE

### +RAVIS COOKE

"Ten minutes!" My eyes came sharply open, my heart sank, and I wanted some one to say, "Just kidding, we are turning around and going home". No one said it, "Get ready!" and as if you could have missed the sergeant's booming voice everyone repeated his words. I prayed in my mind "dear God I don't want to do this, I am afraid, but if I have to die tonight, then Your will be done. Please God watch over me".

"Outboard personnel, stand up!" The men across from me unbuckled their safety belts. They clumsily stood trying to fight their heavy loads, cramped conditions, and the pitching floor. In the red light I watched them climb on top of their orange cloth seats, then bend over double to relieve their shoulders of the massive burdens upon them. "God, please watch over me"

"Inboard personnel stand up!" Involuntarily I tried to stand, but the safety belt held me fast. Embarrassed, I quickly unbuckled it and stood with the rest of the men. As one we turned to face our seats, we all bent and unclipped them from the floor, then folded them up out of the way. We quickly stepped into the newly created floor space, and the outboard personnel climbed off their seats and folded them against the wall.

"Hook up!" Oh, I hated that one, the thick yellow line draped over my left shoulder, ended in a heavy metal clip. I unhooked it from the handle on the pack concealing my belly. I held it up trying to slip it onto the cable over my head. The floor pitched wildly, and the cable with it. I missed the cable, time and again. The weight on my shoulders prevented me from using one hand to stabilize the cable while the other hooked up.

"Check static lines!" "Oh God, I'm not even hooked up yet" I finally slid the clip into place with a satisfying click. Then I ran my index finger, and eyes over both sides of the clip. I moved them down my static line and as far as I could over my shoulder. Quickly I turned to the back of the man ahead of me. I looked at his yellow static line, as it crossed his shoulder, my index finger light-

ly traced it as it zigzagged across his back, held at the sides by rubber bands. It finally ended in the center of the pack disappearing through a small hole in the green fabric. I slapped his shoulder, "Your good" I screamed over the noise of the engines. Seconds later my shoulder was slapped by the man behind me "Your good" I barely heard.

"Check equipment!" I ran my finger across my chinstrap, "Oh, God I don't want to do this" my finger ran its course over the straps leading from my chin to the back of my helmet. "Dear God if it be your will, just give me a break this one time." The finger slid to my left shoulder and checked the heavy green strap there and the metal buckle over my heart. I switched hands and did the same with the strap on my right shoulder and its buckle. With both hands I checked the buckle in the center of my chest, then the silver handle over my right hip. Two buckles threatening to break both of my hips were next. They were concealed beneath the pack hanging across my pelvis. Then the eighty pound ruck, that was suspended upside down over my legs. I had no idea what I was looking for, but it all seemed okay to me. The weight had again pulled me to a stooped position. I shot up straight trying in vain to adjust the load on my shoulders. It didn't work, it never worked, so again I stooped clinging to the yellow life line with my right hand.

"Sound off for equipment check!" from the back of the line the response was immediate, a loud slap and a chorus of "Okay!" The slaps grew louder as each man shouted okay to the man ahead of him. The man behind me slapped my butt hard, "Okay!" he shouted. I quickly did the same to the man ahead of me. It continued up the line, until from the front, the lead men shouted, "All okay, jumpmaster!" Now came the wait, it was normally three to seven minutes, but it might as well have been twenty years. I bent under the weight, both on my shoulders and on my heart. I realized that I needed to urinate terribly; I always needed to at this point. It was just one more thing to make this experience a living hell. The fear washed over me again, it took away the pain in my back and shoulders, it stole the sharp searing pain in my bladder, but it brought with it a question, a hundred questions, the same ones as every time before. I had been lounging against the pack on my back for four hours now, what if I messed it up. Head down, chin on chest, elbows tight into sides, hands on the ends of the reserve, bend slightly forward at the waist, feet and knees together, count to four, if you make it to five pull the reserve, my brain ran through the sequence. I had it down pat; but if I forgot one thing it would mean injury or death. "Dear God, I am afraid. I know you can turn this plane around, but if it is your will that we jump, please be with me. Give me the strength of heart to step out, and then carry me to the ground safely, dear Lord. If I have to die please watch over my sons dear Lord. Dear Lord, please give me strength. Your will be done dear God, Amen."

Suddenly my ears popped and the wind roared through the opening doors, the air rang with the agonized scream of the wind through the blast deflectors. It slowly died down to a dull rushing roar as my ears became accustomed to the sound. I could glimpse through the swaying forest of bodies the slightly bluer blackness of the night sky outside. I could also see the little red light next to the door; "Please God let it stay red". I wondered, would I jump, or would I freeze in the door? I had seen men do it, did they know they were going to do that, or did it just happen as they prepared to exit? I hoped it wouldn't happen to me. I had friends, leaders, and followers all around me, and I had seen the cruel ostracism that resulted from cowardice, I didn't want to be a coward. "Dear God, your will be done".

"One minute!" Oh, God, sixty seconds to go, in less than two minutes I would either be safely on the ground, or dead. Sometimes they didn't fall to their deaths though, every once in a while someone got hung up; the guys called it being "out there flapping," the army called it being a towed jumper. Normally, a person unfortunate enough to have this happen, would be hit by every other jumper that exited behind him, then if he lived would be beaten to death against the side of the plane. I could definitely do without that.

"Stand by!" the first jumper slid his static line to the jumpmaster's waiting hand, and turned to face the door. My heart skipped a beat, "Oh God, be with me", and I knew the lead man's anxiety. Everyone else could hold onto something to stabilized themselves against the bucking aircraft, the lead man on each side, however, had to stand with their hands on their reserves and watch that little red light.

"Thirty seconds!" the man ahead of me turned and showed me his index finger and thumb held close together, it was the visual signal for the thirty-second warning. I signaled the man behind me, and again in an instant, remembered my aching bladder. I was sure that my clavicles would shatter under the load, I remembered I was holding my static line in my right hand and quickly changed it to my left. If I had gone out like that the static line would have severed my neck, "Gotta think, Travis", I thought "you'll get yourself killed if you don't". The man beside me turned and winked, his smile was brilliantly white against his camouflaged face, "Have a good jump brother!" he shouted. I smiled back, it came natural, and looked like I meant it "You too brother, good luck!" It was tradition to wish each other luck, during the last thirty seconds. There was a combination of reasons; first, your heart was swollen in fear, and excitement until you knew it would explode if you didn't let some pressure off it. The only way to do that was to scream something to someone near you. Secondly, it felt as if you brought good luck upon yourself by wishing it to those around you, as if God would smile at your generosity of spirit, and then keep you from harm. I had to urinate so bad by then that I almost wanted to jump so that I could release the pressure.

"Green light, GO!" it caught me unaware, it startled me half to death. The outboard personnel would exit first; the man who had winked at me was gone in an instant. I only had moments left to contemplate my life before thought would be replaced by action. Why were they exiting so fast, couldn't they slow down and give me one extra moment? "Last man, last man, last man!" the last man in the outboard row flew past me, when he reached the door it would be time for the inboard row to exit. Suddenly the man ahead of me was gone, moving for the door. I jumped and followed him; the world went into slow motion. He handed his static line to the jumpmaster's assistant called the safety. He turned to face the door in one fluid motion, his foot went out and he froze there for an instant. The air stream caught his toe and that was all it took. In a flash he was gone, and I stepped up. I passed my static line to the safety, and turned to the door, "oh God, Oh God, Oh GOD". I bent at the waist and could see out, down the side of the plane there was a stream of open and opening parachutes out there. I stuck my toe out and it took an eternity for the air to catch it and suck me involuntarily out of the plane.

I forgot to count, I always forgot to count. The hand of God shook me like I was the dice in a cosmic craps game. My feet went over my head, and through slitted eyes I saw the aircraft upside-down. God chose that moment to snatch me upright, the straps running between my legs tried to cut me in half, as my descent slowed. I reached for my risers, and tried to look up at my canopy. My helmet had slid over my eyes and I was blind for a moment. I adjusted the helmet, and looked up again. The chute was full, full and beautiful. Light green silk against a blue-black night sky. The silence enveloped me, with aircraft flying over my head, and people falling all around me, there was silence. The silence was more than a lack of sound though; it was a lack of feeling, no wind, no sensation of falling, nothing but God and me. "Thank you, God" I whispered, "Thank you so much". God and I hung there in space and surveyed the world around us. You can see more at night from the air than the ground. It was wonderful, perfect, miles of North Carolina forest stretched as far as I could see. Then my eyes wandered to the ground. From that height you have no depth perception, I could see the ground moving slowly past me. There were parachutes scattered across the open field below, and I realized I could make out individual clumps of grass. I quickly lowered my rucksack by pulling the white handle that released it to fall to the end of its eighteen-foot lowering line. I then activated the clip on my left and allowed my rifle, in its case, to slide down the line and join my ruck there below me.

I put my feet and knees together so that my ankles wouldn't break when I impacted the ground. I put my chin on my chest so that I wouldn't bite my tongue off or shatter my jaw. I waited, and waited; the ground was impossibly

close but still I wasn't there. I imperceptibly reached for the ground with my toes. In a heart beat I realized that I had my depth perception back, this meant I was within thirty five feet of the ground, I would hit soon. From the realization to the hit takes a second and a half, but it feels much quicker. All at once, almost too fast to consciously realize my lowered equipment hit and anchored me to it's position, my toes hit, then my buttocks, and I flipped heels over head, twisted and came to rest on my back. The parachute was feeling ambitious and reinflated with the wind and began dragging me towards its own destination. I unclipped the buckle on my left shoulder, and the parachute went limp. I lay in the sand and grass, perfectly still. I looked up at the sky and wiggled my toes, then my ankles, knees, and hips. I then checked my back, my elbows, neck, and jaws, I was okay! "Thank you God, Oh thank you God for saving me". I rolled onto my side and freed myself from the rig, and while lying there urinated on the ground beside me. I got up to retrieve my rifle out of its case, pack my chute and don my ruck. While packing my chute into its bag, I saw a man near me doing the same thing. We silently worked as the aircraft made a second pass over head. Looking up, I could see more chutes opening, and was silently grateful that I was here and not there. I had just gone back to my work, when I heard a loud thump behind me. Something had hit hard between the other man and I. I thought something had fallen from one of the aircraft. I turned to look, and found that I was right. There on the ground was an amorphous pile of darkness, the other soldier and I advanced warily toward it. The pile groaned, and my heart stopped cold. I wanted to run away, I wanted to help, I wanted to do everything and nothing. I yelled to the other man, "Get a medic, now!" I moved to the dying man's side. I wanted to make him comfortable, but I knew moving him would kill him instantly. I lay on my side next to him; I wanted to ask, "Are you okay?" I knew it would be a stupid question, but it was all that would pass my lips. He groaned again, I can still picture his eyes wild with fear and pain, his neck bent impossibly sharply, and his cheek in the dirt. "What is your name?" I asked, I got no response. I heard the humvee coming with the medics, I whispered "Help is on the way, brother." I scrambled away as the medics ran up. I stood there helplessly as they cut away his equipment. I heard one tell the other that he was dead, and in answer the soldier groaned again. The medics got out a backboard, and six of them tried to roll him off of his equipment onto the board. There were sickening, audible, wet, cracks, and pops from the broken body. I waited for the scream that never came, only a small grunt and it was over. The soldier died before they could put him into the truck. I thought about him a lot afterward. I never knew his name, but I knew that on my first jump in the Eighty Second Airborne division, a man had died before my eyes. It is a sobering thought, and I see him in my dreams to this day. With all of that, it still was not my most frightening jump. The next one was.

#### PAUL DONNELLY

Once upon a time in the land of Dexter Vector, people of the left hand were oppressed. Why? Because it was the right thing to do. Lefties could not vote, nor marry right-handed people; they could not work at the better jobs, and wherever they lived they had to carry permits at all times. All but the simplest education would have been wasted on them. They were sinister. It was well-known that this was the right way to build civilization.

Renee was a pretty little girl born to an ambidextrous mother and a left-handed father – an unfortunate love-match, as sometimes happens even to the most blest families. Naturally, her mother's family cast her out when she told them the truth: "I love him," she said, "and that makes it all right. Both parents poured their souls into Renee, the focus of all their love and hope.

One day when she was five, they saw their worst fears realized: she wrote her name with her left hand, in big clear letters. So Renee's mother called her brother – the only one of her family who would still speak to her. They arranged for Renee to go far away, to be raised as a right-handed person with right-thinking people.

But Renee's uncle did not hide her true identity from her, and the righteous ways of the world troubled the child. A dutiful girl, she painstakingly learned to write with the correct hand, and to do all things properly. Still she knew that something was terribly wrong. Her uncle warned her it was not right to speak of it. One day when she was just becoming a woman and would carefully arrange to be by herself to think, she found in her uncle's garage, hidden away like an old error, a rusty musty left-handed monkey wrench. With the sense she was doing something deliciously naughty, she hefted it with her own left hand – and instantly a genie appeared out of a small, counterclockwise cyclone, clad in grubby overhauls and smelling of WD-40.

Her heart rose: perhaps the geni could help her right the ways of the world? "Are you here to grant me three wishes?" she asked.

"No, but I will grant you three lies."

Renee was puzzled. It is not right to lie.

"You know that if you lie, you will lose your immortal soul?" The genie demanded, taking the wrench away from her, and then giving it back to her right hand. She nodded.

"By my powers, I grant you the right to tell three lies, with use immunity from damnation," he explained. "But if you ever tell a fourth, you abandon your immortal soul."

With that, he vanished in a clockwise whoosh of blue smoke, leaving a

large oilstain.

From that day, Renee worked diligently at becoming a right-handed person. She did well in school, and was accepted to the finest, most exclusive college of all. When she filled out the application, she paused at the routine statement required by the government: "I am not now, and never have been, a left-handed person." Thus, she used her first lie, marking "right" with a bold hand.

In college, she met a wonderful, well-connected and wealthy right-handed man, who though he showed the right-thinking prejudices of his society friends, still had a good heart. They fell in love, and were married – and as Renee walked up the aisle, she saw two shabbily-dressed old people in the back row, on the left (depending on which way you were looking). Her heart sank, but she rightly focused on the key vow required by the ceremony: "Do you, a right-handed woman, take this right-handed man to be your husband?" Her second lie was plain: "I do", without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion.

So they grew rich by applying their brains (especially hers, which he rightly recognized) and his social connections, and thus she became involved in politics. Resolutely, she set out eroding, and then openly fighting blind bigotry and discrimination against left-handed people. She was on the right side of history. More and more Dexterians realized that, in truth, their society was moving in circles. For years and then decades, step by step progress was made. Renee sought high office, and then still higher, until finally she was a candidate for President of Dexter Vector, the first woman ever nominated, and she was close to victory.

Then in the last, decisive debate, her desperate opponent brought up the ugly rumor his campaign had been whispering for months: "Can you look the people in the eye," he cried, "and deny that you are not yourself secretly a Leftie," he nearly spat the word, "and that is the real reason you are destroying all that is right in Dexter Vector?"

Renee was waiting for this, which she had at first been dreading, and then gradually waiting for, as for redemption: "No," she said, looking all Dexter Vector in its unblinking electronic eye, "I am, always have been, and always will be a proud, right-handed, right thinking, right-acting person."

And she won in a landslide. In her two terms as the first female President, left-handed people won the right to vote, and all laws oppressing them were swept aside. Under her leadership, the transition was far easier than anyone expected. By the time she left office, no one could rightly remember why it had seemed so important that left-handed people be denied all. Her rectitude and integrity was legendary — "Right as Renee" became a cliché. After all she had accomplished, her slightest act, merest word, became a powerful moral guide for the renamed Republic of Excelsior.

So she retired, old and full of honors, to tend to her family – her grown children, and grandchildren, some of them offspring of marriages

## NOIVE

## AU+UMN MAY Davis



She doesn't trust you, me or anyone else because the typhoon sucked her dry.

Love is a Furball that wants to rip out hearts and eat them.

She lost her bible and then she was happy.

Now she just uses her fists.

#### UNWAN+ED INSPIRA+ION

## JODIE LYN FISHER

Moldy Green, unadulterated, vindictive smile A canvas pure, white ruined with affluent bile.

Dep[reciated children, polluted, frolicking in societal fecal matter The artist portrays using somber colors of spatter.

Unwanted inspiration-The artisan drops his head with shame as he settles his poignant piecewithin the frame



#### HOUSEWIFE'S LAMEN+

NICOLE J FLAHER +Y

Why men, something to endure clean up after, keep track of mother, lover, companion, confidant friend, accountant, nose-wiper, emotion provider

Endless tasks, empty pleasures treasured moments in dreams when a basement draws me to meet a rendezvous under five flight of stairs a compassionate lover with all the right answers.

I speak. You hide.
I ask a hundred times. You finally remember.
You take for granted everything.
How awful to feel alone in a house full of needy people.

Who are you that you can assume so much of me? Who have we become, once dancers in the sand now empty hourglasses with nothing but time

Can you see the animal in front of you drawing in the moon all its pain?
Bear and bison are the ones to call on for strength not the ox and ass you call your totem lovers

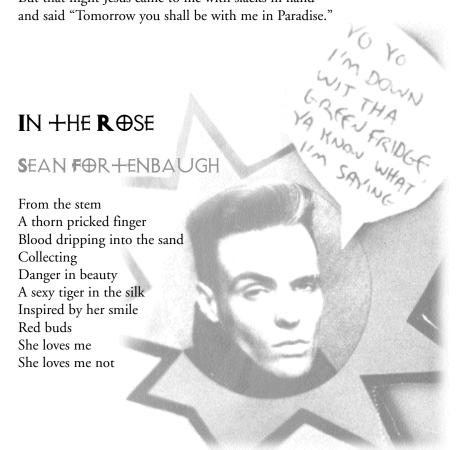
I beg and borrow the limits of candor collapse back into my shadow, search the heavens pray to any of the entities I knew and trusted as a child

You are eager for me to take over everything I spend too many nights weeping on the bathroom floor while you get a good nights sleep.

## JEANNE D'ARC'S LAS+ NIGH+ ON EAR+H

#### DON HARGRAVES

After weeks of torture and being preached to, I confessed to certain crimes against the Holy Church. So desperate were they for my words of confession that they offered freedom and mercy for my words -- all I had to do was wear a dress as my sign of repentance, and even here my jailers worked to accommodate me: the five English dogs were replaced by Vatican guards afraid to touch me for fear of excommunication. But that night Jesus came to me with slacks in hand and said "Tomorrow you shall be with me in Paradise."



## THE BLACKBIRD

## MA++HEW HEWI++

A blackbird with eyes of fire sings a song of death, Creating an image, an image lined with blood, grimy With blood. Darkness is strong in it's sole, hatred Is burning like a huge fire in its belly, oh black bird, Beast of the skies, harbinger of death, free us, free us All show us the way, the way to the devils door, To be greeted by his crooked smile. And shake his withered Hand of blistering fire, and at last feel oh so secure, So secure.



Bhudda Bar, by Mike Hovancsek

#### +HE COMMON WALL

#### MIKE HOVANCSEK

He was sitting in his room. That was all he was doing. There was, however, a lot that went into sitting. His synapses were firing their little pulses of information around his brain like millions of tiny fax machines; his stomach was busy sorting and reducing his last meal into usable elements; his cells were methodically reproducing themselves at a steady rate; a small cyst was patiently claiming space on his colon where it would remain, unnoticed for several years; his muscles retained the proper amount of tautness that was required for him to remain in a seated position; his perceptual organs continued to gather information from the environment; blood, bile, and phlegm continued to navigate their way through his lymphatic system... Sitting, you see, is a fairly complicated activity.

This sitting was more than just physiological. While he sat there in his room, letters he sent to friends were racing toward their destinations; his bank account continued to accumulate a modest bundle of interest; an electric meter counted out the electricity that his clock, desk light, and refrigerator eagerly sucked out of their respective wall sockets...

I could go on like this fore ver but I'm sure you get the idea. I won't talk about the gravity that labored to hold him against the floor in order to prevent him from floating uncontrollably up to the ceiling; the particle motion that held his atoms together so he wouldn't disintegrate into billions of pieces of undifferentiated matter; or any of the other things that went into sitting in that room. Instead, I'm going to focus on a small handful of information that filtered its way through the walls.

O.K., O.K., I lied when I said that he was just sitting. He was sitting and listening. Thanks to the shotty nature of the construction that went into his building, he could hear everything that was happening in his neighbor's apartment. He knew when she was in the shower, he knew what time she woke up and went to sleep, he heard many of the messages that her friends left on her answering machine, he knew what kinds of music she liked to listen to, he knew how often she had friends over, he knew what kinds of sounds she made when she was having sex... In a way, he knew more about her than her parents or even her lovers

would ever know.

Strangely, he didn't know her name. He didn't even know what she looked like. Because of her complicated pattern of arrivals and departures, only two occasions allowed the two of them to be in the hall at the same time. Both times he tried to look off into the distance until the crucial moment when he could slip in a cautious glance at her.

Over time, his imagination began to distort the bits of information that his eyes were able to gather. His mental picture was just inaccurate enough that if he saw her in the grocery store he wouldn't have recognized her. In his brain she was a picture that was assembled from bits of the indifferent cheerleaders, efficient cashiers, and cheery bank clerks whose generic pleasantness he mistook for attraction.

The sounds that found their way through the wall became a constant comfort to him. He sat on his bedroom floor listening to the water as it drained out of her bath tub. He listened to the sound of her closet door being pulled open. He listened to the mechanical whine of the hair drier as it altered the arrangement of hydrogen and oxygen molecules in her hair. With each sound, he imagined an accompanying visual image.

He pictured her unclothed body. He had fallen in love with her imaginary nakedness. What did he love about her body? He loved the fact that she didn't have a penis\; he loved every one of the 9,462 nerve endings in her body; he loved the fatty tissue that globed itself around her two mammary glands; he loved all of the 206 bones that kept her from being a shapeless, sloshy mass of flesh.

He took out a worn notebook and read the last entry:

2:05 AM = Listened to country radio station. 2:30 AM = went to bed...alone.

Below that entry he added:

Saturday, May 3rd: 11:00 AM = Woke up. 11:05 = Bath.

\* \* \*

His name was William Lanceford. I know everything about him (I'm omniscient, for Christ's sake). William got his start in much the same way that all of us did. He started as an egg and a sperm that had a fairly decent sense of direction. He successfully navigated his way through the usual zygote-embryofetus-newborn sequence and was born into the hands of Medina General Hospital's on-call obstetrician. The whole thing was pretty uneventful. To his mother's relief, he had the same number of fingers, toes, eyes, heads, noses,

reproductive units, and mouths as all the other babies in the neonatal unit. What a joy it was to be typical (if only for a brief moment).

Steve Lanceford was out of town when his son was born. He had to learn to adjust to this little six pound bundle of liability the way an amputee has to get used to lugging around a phantom limb. He was desperately repairing gas lines for the East Ohio Gas Company when he received the call from his wife. When he heard the news he ran out to a nearby deli and bought six pounds of lunch meat just to see what it would feel like to have the weight of his newborn son hanging in his hands. He held the package of pastrami, he looked lovingly at it, his chest swelled with pride. Then, he made a few sandwiches.

William's mother and father were separated at the time. This isn't such a strange thing. Marriage, after all, had become a temporary state-of-being in their culture. When it came to marital strife, William's parents were freakishly normal.

Steve and Lisa Lanceford were the kind of couple who communicated almost entirely with their genitals. Steve thought that love was the sensation he felt when the cavernous vessicles in his sex organs became engorged with blood. Lisa, in turn, thought that love was the sensation she felt when the alcohol seeped into her blood system, causing her legs to became less particular about who pulled them apart.

As Lisa's body went through the miraculous transformation of motherhood, Steve discovered that the cavernous vessicles between his legs were willing to fall in love with all kinds of women. Suddenly, every waitress, dancer, and hitchhiker became an object of his affections. He was a very loving person. Suddenly he was Jesus, Gandhi, and Mother Theresa rolled into one.

To complicate matters, Steve and Lisa's method of communication proved to be astonishingly inefficient. Although it can be a lot of fun to relate to someone in a genital manner, it can also make banking and income taxes difficult to navigate. At times it was like trying to speak a language that was made up entirely out of verbs.

By the time William was pushed through his mother's pelvic canal, Steve and Lisa were living in different homes. What started as a family quickly developed into two warring factions, the marriage being reduced to a mere legal technicality that both participants strove to violate.

Lisa turned out to be almost as good at parenting as she was at being a wife. She used to smack her tiny son when he cried too often or too loudly. Sometimes she would let him miss school because she didn't have the energy to force him into his school clothes. At other times she would leave him unattended for several hours while she went to bars in an attempt to find more alcohol induced love.

One day Lisa was painfully trying to sleep through the blackness of the previous evening's consumption when she heard a commotion outside. The neighbors at her apartment complex had just turned on the news and learned that John

Kennedy had been shot while parading through Dallas, Texas. What a shame.

To Lisa, this national tragedy was an inconvenience. Thanks to the disruption in her sleep, she wasn't going to escape her hang-over until late afternoon. Fortunately, she wasn't the kind of woman who let hardship hold her back. She wrestled her way out of bed to pee. As soon as she was upright, an evening's worth of fermented aphrodisiacs sloshed to the bottom of her stomach like a pile of hot lava. Suddenly, she felt as if she had spent the previous week eating flaming Brillo pads. Lisa made a couple of futile steps toward the bathroom and promptly vomited into the fish tank.

A skull-rattling bass drum in her head banged out the blood rhythm of her hang-over. Imprically, while the activities of her previous evening bludgeoned her back into bed, the President of The United States lay in Parkland Memorial Hospital with a bullet in his head, feeling no pain whatsoever. Some people are just lucky.

At twelve years old, William had basically raised himself and his mother. Most of his memories of November 22, 1963 were of damp wash rags, aspirin, and an entire day of cautiously soft-shoeing his way around his mother's hang-over. Another memory, of a glass box full of suffocated fish, found itself neatly tucked away where only a skilled therapist could retrieve it.

Later that afternoon the police arrived. Things were happening very quickly in their policey lives. At 12:30 their president's life escaped through a neat little hole in his head. At 2:28 (after the county had been presidented by a dead man for nearly two hours) Lyndon B. Johnson was sworn in as President of The United States. At 4:00 they were dispatched to the home of Lisa Lanceford after receiving numerous complaints from the neighbors about child abuse, truancy, and unhealthy living conditions.

William was forcibly seized by the two policemen. Lisa poured herself out of bed and screamed her anger and confusion through what was left of her hang-over. The police handed her a copy of the emergency custody papers and stormed out of the apartment with William, like a common purse-snatcher, locked in their arms.

William looked back at his mother. She stood there in her dirty underwear and her pillow-vandalized hair, yelling at the two uniformed strangers. He thought to himself, "Who will take care of her while I'm away?".

This memory found itself firmly tucked behind the fish tank in William's mind.

1:00 PM - 1:22 PM = Called friend.

1:30 PM = Listened to country music.

He was still sitting in his room. He was still listening to his neighbor. As time went by a remarkable amount of information collected in William's notebooks. He kept track of his neighbor's sleeping habits, her telephone calls, her bathing rituals... Her life was slowly becoming a tower of paper, her existence loosely bound by the misshapen spiral wires of college-ruled notebooks.

William closed his eyes and imagined her body again. He thought about the beautiful geometry, the curves and lines that made up her form. He thought about the poetry of her shapes, the history, the tryst between science and art that met at her body.

William and his unsuspecting lover, two carbon-based life forms, ran the parallel lines of their lives separated by the chalky border of plasterboard and wooden bracing. The plaster drew out the edges of their lives like chalk lines around two murder victims.

Soon the shortest distance between these two human points would be drawn. Soon, the parameters would be shattered. Soon!

\* \* \*

Freshly yanked from his mother's home, William was pulled through the system like a cat on a leash. He braced himself against the lawyers and the social workers, his feline resistance failing to match the brutish tugs of the system. Like a child exiting the womb, he struggled to remain where he no longer belonged.

William's life was a crowd of memories. He could imagine all the gauzy shapes swirling around his head like a million technicolor butterflies. Knowing that he could never keep track of it all, he had always assumed that his mother would be there to keep track of it for him. Once he was removed from home, though, he felt as if he had left his childhood somewhere in that dark, cluttered apartment where his mother twisted in her bed, trying to free herself from her latest hang-over.

The social workers tried to locate William's father to see if he could take emergency custody of his son. They had no luck. Apparently, Steve melted away like the marriage that once stretched between himself and Lisa. Rumor had it that he had been sleeping with a 16-year-old girl and that, when the girl's father found out, Steve had to leave town in order to avoid a rather impolite shotgun blast to his head.

William ended up living with his maternal grandmother in a squinty little house along the dirtier edges of suburbia. Every Sunday Grandma Rose would don one of her favorite house dresses, tuck a stack of ancient hymnals under her arm, and head off to the Mansfield Correctional Facility where she played organ at the prison chapel. This frail, dried flower of a woman (not content to remain pressed

between the pages of an old book) somehow managed to grow right into the cracks in the cement walls of the prison.

Her organ playing was like a waft of purgatory. She would pound on the keys with all of her 5'2" might while the instrument choked out its tragic melodies\; its club-footed rhythms. The praying inmates would curl into their bomb shelter kneeling positions as if they were ducking from the music that spewed out of the wounded instrument. Some of them would occasionally glance up at the organ, wondering if perhaps a flock of geese had gotten stuck in its pipes.

The organ was a cleverly disguised rehabilitation machine. Emitting moans and screams like the cries of a million crime victims, it pressed its guilt upon the congregation like a team of trained therapists. To the prisoners, Rose's music was a celebration of tone deafness; a taste of Armageddon.

Everyone at the prison loved Rose. She used to walk around in her rust-water house dresses and her large wooden beads like a stern mother bird with a beak full of worms. She knew the names of all the inmates who attended the weekly church services. Many of them counted on her to provide a thread of information about the outside world. To them, this plain little woman with her veiny legs and her thrift store shoes was a needle of light in the utter darkness of their daily lives.

Her make-up was the cosmetic equivalent of her organ playing. She used to slop on a fresh layer of lipstick at the top of every hour. Whenever she sucked the life out of one of her endless chains of cigarettes, she would make a saucy red smear on the filter. When she ate at restaurants her lipstick would leave behind a murder scene of red silverware, red cigarette buts, and red napkins. It was a miracle that the folks at Revlon didn't write to demand that she quit using their product in such an abusive manner; It was a miracle that circus clowns didn't stop in mid-performance, distracted by her outlandish make-up; It was a wonder her big red lips didn't play havoc with the traffic patterns.

Rose could be as tough as a bag full of angry pit bulls when she needed to be. She had to learn to be that way. Rumor had it that she was a quiet as a goldfish back when she was a young woman growing up in the embryonic city of Medina. It wasn't until she married her husband, Don, that she found her voice.

Her husband, a prominent gynecologist, was very good at his job. He was also a popular guest speaker at Kiwanis meetings, where the cutting edge socialites of the community gathered to tempt the fates by sipping caffeinated beverages and addressing the critical farming issues of the day. Everyone liked Don.

Despite her husband's competence and popularity, Rose's marriage to him was a trial. He was the kind of father who was more comfortable being a buddy than being a parent. He used to slip Lisa a handful of change whenever Rose cut off her allowance and he seemed to really enjoy helping his daughter get away with various things that were against the house law.

Rose would often catch Don helping Lisa to sneak around the rules. It was like raising two problem children at the same time; one of them just happening to be a prominent gynecologist. This situation forced Rose into the authoritarian role of the household, obliged to consequent Lisa and as well as her husband.

Don also found himself in trouble from time to time because of his sense of humor. As it turned out, he was recklessly fond of slight-of-hand tricks:

Dr. Don: What seems to be the problem my dear?

Patient: (Lying with her feet in the stirrups) I keep experiencing a burning sensation...down there.

Dr. Don: Well, no wonder you're having problems! (Appearing to pull a lit cigarette out of his patient's unsuspecting sexual orifice) I suggest you limit yourself to one pack a day, sweety.

In order to survive her husband's humor, Rose had to grow a shell over the sensitive areas of her psyche. Over time, she became as tough as a nail bomb. By the time her husband passed away she had enough emotional strength to crush a beer can with a single muscular swing of her mood. She was so strong, in fact, that she dealt with the loss of her husband the way a car deals with the loss of a muffler: She just kept going.

William had to compress his self-sufficient lifestyle into the walls of Grandma Rose's demands. The concrete boundaries of the Mansfield Correctional Facility were no match for the fortress that she erected around her grandson's unruliness.

He didn't know it, but this structure was everything that William needed. Up until that time he had never learned how to live up to expectations. All his mother ever expected was for him to keep quiet and away. Instead of being consistent with her punishments, Lisa punished her son with the same kind of randomness that a tornado uses when it decides which houses to obliterate and which houses to leave untouched.

Grandma Rose, on the other hand, gladly took on the enormous task of teaching William the relationship between actions and consequences. She was determined to keep this boy from turning out like her daughter. In William, she saw the chance to compensate for the inconsistent parenting that she had to dole out when she "shared" parenting duties with her husband. It was actually a relief not to have Don around, undoing her authority behind her back.

Rose methodically composed a set of rules and consequences for her grandson. At first, William beat his frustrations against the walls of this new structure. Over time, though, he found himself taking on a new shape that seemed to fit comfortably within the confines of his grandmother's home. Like an expert gardener, Rose dutifully yanked out every weed from William's personality. In response, William

flourished like an award winning entry at the county fair. For a while, anyway.

This brief moment of stability found itself interrupted when Rose became ill. After years of torturing melodies out of the organ at the Mansfield Correctional Facility, her heart had taken on the rhythms of her music (which is to say that she developed a fairly severe case of arrhythmia). William tried to nurse his grandmother back to health but, once again, the damp wash cloths, aspirins, and the old soft shoe were paired with police, social workers, and judges.

\* \* \*

#### 2:23 PM = Called another friend.

He was sitting in his room. He was listening. While the common wall that separated William and his neighbor continued to transmit information into the pile of notebooks, William's head continued to crackle with little sparks of thought. As he sat and listened to his neighbor talking on the phone a new thought occurred to him:

"If I can hear everything that happens in her apartment, she must be able to hear everything that happens in mine"

Thought is actually a chemical process. Once this new chemical was introduced to the stew, the whole recipe changed. William started thinking about all the things that his neighbor must have known about him. She must have known a million little intimate things that nobody else could possibly have known. Excitement rushed through his body like panic through a crowded movie theater. The chemical reaction of thought produced a dangerous potion in his head.

For months he had been collecting information into his notebooks. It wasn't until this moment, however, that he understood why he had been doing it. Unbeknownst to himself, he was courting his neighbor through the wall that seperated/connected them. It was a romance forged in plasterboard.

William decided to penetrate the barriers that sealed him off from his love. He listened to her voice coming through the walls as he formulated his plan. He decided that he would sneak into her apartment and leave a little note on her pillow. He thought this little move would enable him to meet the woman who held his future in her hands. At the same time, he knew that it would enable her to meet the man of her dreams. In this, he was killing two birds with one stone; In this, he was killing a whole flock of birds with one stone. Christ, he could have killed an entire species of birds with this stone.

Soon the two neighbors would meet in the flesh. Soon!

\* \* \*

With his grandmother's health on hold, William had to be placed in an emergency foster home. It was a numbing experience for him. After having his life pulled out from under him for the second time, he decided that it was time to allow the door in his heart to rust itself shut.

William simply lost the desire to play the games that eve ryone else around him was playing. After all, he didn't fit into society the way other people did. He felt like a priest with a hard-on; like a monk with a car phone; like a nun with a taste for leather... Resigning himself to this fact, William turned himself against the various foster families that opened their homes to him. It just seemed easier to reject people before they could reject him.

Not wanting to make the mistake of growing roots in unreliable soil again, William decided that he would do everything in his power to disrupt the lives of his foster families. There was no reason to be cooperative with them. He made a habit of making unreasonable demands, of taking anything that didn't belong to him, and of running away when he was consequented for his behaviors.

It wasn't long before he realized that two thirds of all parenting is a simple, powerless bluff. This realization was very liberating to him. Suddenly, all the borders that were laid around him became transparent. Suddenly, he felt like a dog on a broken leash. As this sense of freedom took root in William's mind, he began to take delight in probing the boundaries of his anger. He began punctuating his sentences with the sound of shattered glass and broken plaster. In no time at all, William had managed to violate every window and wall in the foster home in his struggle to maintain control of the house. Who would have ever imagined that anger could be so much fun? To their surprise, his foster parents found themselves longing for the days when he limited himself to being a mere nightmare.

Three years and a dozen failed foster placements later, William was a changed person. His grandmother's failing heart and his mother's failing...everything...made it impossible for him to return home. By this time, the little garden in his personality that his grandmother had once maintained with such care had become choked with weeds.

Frustrated, his social worker filed unruly charges against him. She was tired of dumping him on unsuspecting foster homes with the hope that they would be able to tolerate his incorrigible behavior. She was tired of seeing families drop out of the foster care program after William had tormented every maternal instinct out of them.

When he tried to test this new boundary by running away from his foster family, he was brought to court for violating the terms of his probation. He had crossed one line too many this time. In place of the usual lecture from his social worker, he

was sentenced to two weeks in a detention home.

William spent most of his time in the DH keeping to himself. If you and I could have opened his cranial vault and peered into that three pound bundle of thought, however, we would have found that he was a young man who was full of emptiness (or empty of fullness). He spent all his time being wall-to-wall with thoughts of his mother and grandmother. He felt completely betrayed by them. He felt like an abandoned house that was left at the mercy of the neighborhood vandals.

William had numerous opportunities to change his situation in a positive way. These opportunities, however, were wasted on him. William was the type of person who was more likely to sit, resentfully, through a terrible T.V. program than to get up and change the channel.

There was a kid named Nick at the detention home. Nick had the seductive quality in his personality that made people want to do what he said. Even the staff tended to clear pathways for him between the rules of the facility. They knew that if they displeased him the entire detention home population would become out of control. Much to their concern, they had to play the same kind of bluffing games that most parents were forced to endure.

Nick was a Messiah of sorts. One day he would become a powerful politician with a reputation for being tough on crime. He would also become known for being a bit of a philanderer. Nick had a long way to go between the concrete walls of the detention home and the silky beds of his numerous infidelities.

Nick could see the proverbial writing on the wall. The only problem was that he was hopelessly dyslexic. As a result, he often found himself leading his followers down one-way streets against the traffic of reasonable thought. Years later this quality would win him an entire series of elections.

The other kids followed their dyslexic Jesus with the kind of unquestioning obedience that often results in human sacrifices, wars, and bad hair styles. Nick, a painfully skinny kid with pitted skin and mournful teeth, was especially adept at using his unmatched eyes to his advantage. One eye was like a patch of sky with a touch of milk poured into it. The other eye was like a bottle of cheap Mexican beer. He combined these two colorful spheres to draw attention away from the realities that obstructed his path.

William was looking for something big and frightening that he could attach himself to so that he could give his anger a voice. Nick provided this for him. While William's social skills were like bad grammar, Nick's were pure literature. Nick's words were like a perfect mathematical language; each sentence a little poetic equation. He could hold the attention of his audience the way a junkie holds a favorite needle.

Nick was the undisputed leader of the facility. There was, however, a give-and-

take in this situation. He knew that he could only control the crowd if he was using all the right tools. These tools could be located by reading the crowd and figuring out what it was that they wanted to hear. In this way the crowd controlled him. After getting to know the other kids in the DH, Nick decided that the proper tools were rebellion and destruction.

William found himself transfixed by Nick's delinquent gospel; his charisma; his hypnotic, mismatched eyes... Nick had come up with a plan. Gathering together a group of his most useful followers (four disciples, one female and three males), he invited them to be part of his vision.

Virtually every kid in the facility knew of the plan. Some of the staff may have even known about it. Despite this, nobody tried to bring it to an end. That was how powerful Nick's influence was over the detention home.

During the recreation period (a time chosen because it was the only point in the day in which males and females were allowed to be together in the commons), two kids started a choreographed fight in a far corner of the facility. With this planned distraction in place, Nick and his four followers fell comfortably into their chosen roles.

It was William's job to disable the hall guard. He had hoped that the guard would be one of the staff members who he could really enjoy hurting. This wasn't the case. As he turned the corner to confront the guard, he found himself face to face with Mr. Steve.

The staff never used their last names around the kids. In a marriage of respect and confidentiality, they were known as "Mr. Mark", "Mrs. Colleen" and so on. These were the types of things that made up daily life in lock-up.

Mr. Steve was actually the most popular staff member in the detention home. He used to smuggle cigarettes into the facility for the kids and he often pretended not to notice when the males and females snuck little affections to each other during the recreation period. He was the kind of employee who was a dream for the kids and a nightmare for the personnel department.

As he raised a chair over his head, William felt a little squish of guilt running through his body. It wasn't enough to stop him, though. He had become skilled at locking off the emotions that were troublesome to him in moments of violence.

The first hit had a wet, doughy feel to it as the chair leg bounced off of Mr. Steve's upper back. The second and third hits, though, had a more solid tone to them as the body of the chair came down squarely on the poor man's head.

William continued to bring the chair down on Mr. Steve over and over again until Nick and another boy finally succeeded in plunging a table through one of the windows. Unobstructed, Nick and his four followers stepped through the shattered opening, their bodies still rattling with adrenaline.

Nick hot-wired a car from the staff parking lot. He felt so powerful; so free.

Excitement roared through the five runners as they raced out onto the freeway, blissfully ignoring the fact that they had nowhere to go. Their pilgrimage took them down the elated dirt roads in search of a stretch of open freeway.

As time went on, they started to prod their brains for hiding places. There just didn't seem to be anywhere that would have them. It seemed odd to be on such a big planet and to have so few places to go. Over time, the realization that their little plan could have been thought out a little more carefully began to soak it's way through their enthusiasm.

The stolen car, a high-mileage Ford, raced aimlessly down interstate 76. It passed an endless procession of other cars, each stuffed with the pasts, presents, and futures of its passengers. The Ford passed a big, expensive luxury car that contained the Medina Hospital obstetrician who assisted in William's birth. Fortunately, William looked quite different from the last time that the Doctor saw him.

The obstetrician had been retired for a couple of years at the time. In order to fill the holes in his day that were left when he retired, this gentle man became a master gardener. The same man who used to pull children out of their mothers spent his remaining years pulling prize winning vegetables out of the earth.

The aimless Ford passed a young couple who were married only a week earlier. Although they were still in the nape of their marriage, the wife was looking at her husband out of the corner of her eye, wondering how much longer she could tolerate living with him. Fortunately, her doubts would prove to be meaningless. She would go on to spend her entire life with him. In that time he would cheat on her once and she would cheat on him twice. In the end, he would be the one who held her eighty-year-old hand as a rampant cancer escorted her out of her hospital bed and into the next world.

The carload of runaway kids passed an ancient station wagon that contained a middle-aged housewife. Although she didn't know it at the time, the woman was only a few hours away from her death. She was headed home where she was about to start dinner, take out the trash, and, then, suffer a massive brain aneurysm.

The kids were completely unaware of the lives that shared the freeway with them. Some of them busied themselves by arguing about where they should take their newfound (and perplexing) freedom. Others were sifting through the debris in the car that betrayed meaningless little secrets about its owner.

In the glove compartment they found ticket stubs from a musical, a pair of badly scratched sun glasses, a bottle of mosquito repellent, three dried-up pens, and an envelope with a grocery list scribbled on it's back. As is usually the case, there were no gloves in the glove compartment. On the floor in the back of the car they found a rusted bicycle chain, another pen, a State of Florida road map, a rust sodden mitten, three pennies, and a nickel. Each item was like a little

totem in the life of car's owner.

After driving around aimlessly for three hours, the car ran out of gas. Nick herded his followers into the woods that butted up against the freeway. He didn't really know what to do next but he knew that if he was going to remain in control it was important for him to be as decisive as possible.

Nick split his followers into two groups. He explained that they would be more efficient in finding shelter if they scoped out the area separately and, then, regrouped back at the car a few hours later. Although he didn't know it at the time, he would never see the other group or the car again.

In one group were two boys who William never really got to know. The other group was made up of William, Nick, and a girl named Della. Della was at the detention home because she beat up her mother in an argument over who would be doing the dishes that evening.

Della was the kind of girl who would have made a great man's man. She was simply too brutish and aggressive to live up to the feminine ideals. There were few things in this world that were more satisfying to this young woman than the feeling of burying her fist into the soft tissues of another person's face.

Despite all of these masculine traits, Della was still remarkably sexual. It was all part of her celebration of everything masculine. She loved the male form as much as she loved the male lifestyle. In her brain, sex was a predatory sport. It was her sexuality, in fact, that inspired Nick to put her into his side of the divided group.

Night was closing in around Nick, Della, and William as they entered the woods. Slathering themselves with hijacked mosquito repellent, they disappeared into the greenerylike a patallion of ground forces invading a foreign country. They became lost almost immediately.

Realizing that he wasn't going to be able to find his way back to the car, Nick told Della and William that the real reason he broke the group into two pieces was because he wanted to cut away the dead wood. He boasted about tricking the two other kids into thinking that they would be meeting back at the car. William struggled to believe Nick's lie.

In an attempted display of resourcefulness, Nick tried to start a fire. He assembled a pile of leaves and sticks but couldn't seem to get the green wood to hold a flame. After several attempts, he had to accept the fact that he accomplished little beyond producing a considerable amount of smoke. Years later, critics would have the same thing to say about his political career.

William was starting to have his doubts about Nick. Nick was starting to have doubts about himself. Della, on the other hand, seemed to be completely taken with her leader. She kept nuzzling up against him with the kind of eroticism that a hungry house cat expresses to a refrigerator. In order to reaffirm his self-esteem,

Nick started to return Della's frattage. He started kissing her neck.

William couldn't help but notice that he and his friends were still stuck in the woods with no plan for returning to society. All the nuzzling in the world wouldn't fix this problem. He tried to share his realization with his fellow runaways.

The last thing that Nick needed was to be reminded of his failings. He was starting to feel like William and his realizations were nothing more than a piece of garbage that was stuck to the bottom of his shoe. They were like an eyeful of sand; They were like the neighbor's new puppy that yelps all night long from the back yard... Nick licked Della's neck, the sour taste of mosquito repellent filling his mouth.

Della gently unfastened Nick's pants and reached into them. She was surprised to find that nothing productive going on down there. The stress of his little pilgrimage had left Nick as deflated as a beached blowfish.

"What's wrong?", Della asked, "I'm not pretty enough for you?". Her voice was full of sudden, jagged pitch shifts like a verbal stabbing.

Suddenly, Nick began to look like a magician whose tricks had become as transparent as cellophane. He jumped to his feet, zipping and buttoning his pants. His eyes lost their exotic sheen. Bathed in panic, they started to look like the mismatched hubcaps on an abandoned car.

"Shut up! Shut up!", he yelled back at Della. It was becoming harder and harder to remember how articulate he was capable of being.

\* \* \*

He was sitting in his room, listening; waiting for his neighbor to leave her apartment. He was listening to her grooming patterns while his moment of neighborly contact raced closer and closer. The sounds of love crammed themselves into his ears. He listened while she rustled into and out of various outfits; while she picked through her personal belongings, looking for her car keys; while she descended the stairs, her musical key chain jangling at each step; while she stepped through the door; while she pulled the door shut; while she gently slipped the key into the lock, lacing its puzzle pattern into the tumblers...

He could feel his heart pounding against his chest like a drunk in the back of a riot wagon. While his neighbor's shoes tapped out their leaving information in high-heeled morse code, William finished writing the note that he had intended to leave on her pillow. The note said, "I have been listening to you. You have been listening to me. It's about time for us to meet". Feeling satisfied with his message, William put on his shoes and left his apartment. He found his credit card and fished it around the tongue of his neighbor's door. To his surprise, the french kiss of plastic and metal persuaded the door to pop open almost immediately.

"Jesus Christ", he thought to himself, "these apartments are a bunch of rat boxes". He decided that he needed to put a dead bolt on his door before some lunatic could get into his home. "There are a lot so sick people out there", he thought.

He felt a glowing heat radiating from his stomach as the door opened and the smells from the apartment raced out to meet him. It smelled like the kind of sticky, sweet perfume that little girls are so attracted to before their tastes get more sophisticated. It smelled very naive.

William quietly shut the door behind himself and crept up the steps, into the bedroom. Despite the fact that the apartment was laid out exactly like his own, it looked remarkably different. Dried flowers and dime store art were scattered around the walls. Several little velvet and straw pictures pretended to be Chinese with their peach blossom bird motifs and their black lacquer frames. A stuffed cat, probably a childhood relic, stared stupidly into space from the corner of the bed.

William approached the bed as if it was a place of worship. The tangled, unmade pile of sheets and blankets were like a document of the young woman's sleep. He gingerly placed the note on her pillow, sat on the bed, and turned to probe the personal items on her bedside table. He picked up a hairbrush from the dresser and examined it as if it was an archeological find, the tips of his fingers alive with static-electric excitement.

Suddenly, he heard an apocholiptic sound. It was the sound of a key entering the already unengaged lock at the front door. It was followed by the confused sound of the key discovering that its task was already completed. The door swung open. The woman entered her apartment.

\* \* \*

The sheriff's deputy read William, Della, and Nick their rights. He also informed them of the charges that were being pressed against them. It wasn't until this time that they realized how their fates laid scattered on the floor in front of them. Della and Nick were being charged with criminal damaging, evading arrest, grand theft auto, and a slew of other crimes. William was charged with all of these things plus one other: Attempted murder. Apparently, the staff member who received William's diversionary blows to the head was in a hospital where he lay suspended in a coma. Although he survived the attack, Mr. Steve would never completely recover.

The only member of the runaways to be tried as an adult, William was placed in a DYS facility until he reached the age of twenty one. Although most people in these facilities actually get out much sooner than their initial sentence, he had to remain in the facility right up until his twenty first birthday. Had he

chosen a less visual, a less newsworthy crime, he would have been out before his eighteenth birthday. The long sentence taught him a very important lesson: Choose your crimes carefully.

Even though he was released from the DYS facility during a time when the Viet Nam war was at full boil, he didn't have to worry about serving his country. As it turned out, his criminal record made him ineligible to serve in the army. Apparently, the government preferred to have its killing done by a less violent portion of the population.

With no job, very few friends, and no interests, William had to make the best of his years living alone in the government assisted apartments. He tried collecting stamps, reading, drugs... Each hobby held his attention for a little while. It was a few years, though, before he developed his favorite hobby: Sitting and listening.

\* \* \*

He was sitting and listening. It was the first time that he got to hear sounds from the female side of the common wall. Excited, he knew that his chance to meet his neighbor was at hand.

Feeling very absent minded, the woman returned home to retrieve a library book that she had neglected to grab when she left a few minutes earlier. Flustered, she wondered how she had managed to forget to lock the door when she left the apartment.

As she charged upstairs, William felt the layers of panic thickening in his body. He didn't want to scare the woman who had for so long been the object of his desire. Quietly getting up from the bed, he tried to find a non-threatening pose that he could assume.

The woman burst into her bedroom and into an entire festival of physical gyrations. The sight of William, hopefully waving to her from the middle of the room, caused her to jump back into the wall. She released an animal-like scream that scared the hell out of her intruder. Lots of other things happened too. She wet her pants, electricity prickled down her back, her heart started flubbering wildly around her chest, she covered her ears, she fell back and pulled her legs up against her upper body...

The woman was in a fetal position. People often do this sort of thing when they are in a panic. It is a physical expression of a person's wish to return to the safe world of his or her mother's womb. Unfortunately, this is not a very realistic desire to have. If William's neighbor could have returned to her mother's womb it would have accomplished nothing except to cause her mother a considerable amount of discomfort.

William didn't really know how to respond to this little display. He stood there, still waving, a panicked look invading his eyes.

"Hi!", he ventured, "It's me... William".

William was a bit disappointed at the greeting that his neighbor had for him. As spectacular as it was, it lacked the warmth that he had expected. He was also a little disappointed to see what his neighbor really looked like.

She was a bit on the plain side. Her thighs were rather bovine for his taste and her forehead seemed to protrude a little too far ahead of her eyes. Her nose wasn't exactly petite either. No, she didn't look very much like he remembered.

As a couple of awkward minutes passed, the young woman realized that her odds of being sucked back into her mother's womb were fairly low. She looked up at William, getting a good look at his face for the first time. Again, William said "Hi!" in the friendliest voice that he could muster. This time, she responded to his greeting.

"Get out!", she said, "Get out! Get out! Get out!... Get out!".

William thought the woman was being pretty darn rude. He moved closer in an attempt to explain the situation to her. She obviously didn't realize the he was the man she had been listening to through her walls for all those months. It seemed that a brief explanation was in order.

Abandoning her fetal position, the young woman moved on to another coping strategy. She waited until he got within a few feet of her and then she lunged up to grab William by the throat. There was no doubt about it, she was a rude, rude woman.

William desperately tried to calm his poorly mannered attacker.

"Wait", he said, "It's me... William". His voice, pinched by the panicked hands of his neighbor, made him sound as if he had been inhaling helium.

Romance is a funny thing. While William tried to straighten out his derailed passions, his neighbor grabbed one of the velvet and straw pictures off the wall and started beating him over the head with it. She was beating the love right out of him.

As he began to lose consciousness, William realized that he had made a big mistake when he entered this woman's life. He knew that the aspirins, damp wash cloths, and the old soft shoe would inevitably be followed by the usual procession of police, judges, and social workers. He wondered if he was going to end up in the Mansfield Correctional Facility.

As William slipped out of awareness he could have sworn that he heard that ancient pipe organ wheezing out its rehabilitation like a thousand sickly bag pipers. He felt as if he was returning to the concrete walls of his grandmother's love. He was sitting. He was listening...

### I'VEGO+RHY+HM

#### MARGARE+ KARMAZIN

I examine my skin in the mirror. The color is slightly on the orange-yellow side, in some places cream. My hair is brown with one skinny blonde streak at the left temple. My eyes are dark brown.

I turn my face to the three-quarter position. Definite pointy nose. Being an amateur anthropologist, I can see some Scottish type genes there - that angular, jutty look. Craggy? Well, I wouldn't go that far but let's just say I do not have soft, rounded features. You'd be hard put to tell what my ethnic background is. Some people say I look French.

Maybe I'm the Universal Woman. Think about this: who is the generic person in this world? There are more females than males, right? Therefore it's a woman. And what would her coloring be? Certainly not blond or redhead. More likely a combination of things - all the South Americans, Chinese, Africans - boiling down to dark hair and eyes and medium skin tone. That's me then. I'm the generic twenty-first century person.

In 1995 I got married to Thomas H. Reardon, "Tommers" for short. He's of German/Irish stock, Catholic background, isn't a church-goer but still lowers his voice when priests are around at weddings and funerals and says "Pardon my French" when he lets slip a swear word in front of one. Tommers is sexy as hell but whenever he does this priest stuff, I get turned off for about a week after. He is the type that would get up in the middle of the night to pick you up if your car broke down even 50 miles away, yet he says "nigger" on occasion. He says no white man would want a woman who has slept with a black man.

You can imagine my problem when I found out my great-grandmother was black. You can picture me sitting silently with the shades drawn, smoking cigarettes and drinking Snapple while I try to figure out what to do. Should I tell Tommers or not? If not, can I live with my stomach being eaten out by mutant butterflies for the rest of my life?

My Aunt Marge and I were cleaning out Grandma Benton's bedroom after she passed away from an intestinal blockage in Delaware Valley Hospital. Grandma Benton was my dad's mother and she'd been living alone in her house on Culbertson for the past nine years ever since Grandpa contracted Alzheimer's and went to live in that home. He died six years later. You can imagine a house con-

tinuously lived in by the same person for fifty years. You can picture the junk buildup. There were the usual old albums full of square black and white photos fastened to disintegrating brown paper pages by stick-on corners. "Who's this black lady?" I asked Marge.

There was a silence long enough to grow old in and then she mumbles, "Um, sit down, Honey. You got a little shock coming."

I avoided everyone I could for a full two weeks. What exactly would happen when Tommers found out he'd been having sexual intercourse for four years with a black woman? Since he imagines a white woman is somehow permanently soiled if she does it with a black guy, wouldn't that also work the other way around? Like, his member would need sterilization of some kind now? On the other hand, the old slave owners certainly did not disdain forcing the slave women to serve their base needs, so does that mean it s not befouling for white men to dip into black women but it is for black men to dip into white women?

You can see I was confused. And so scared I couldn't eat. I lost seven pounds in two weeks and Tommers noticed all right. My flattened stomach raised his libido and he kept sneaking up behind me to rub himself against my backside. But I had to claim I had female problems because when he did find out about my blackness, he might be even more enraged if he knew I'd let him do it to me after I found out what I was.

When Aunt Marge told me, I asked her, "Does Mom know?" and she was ashamed to say she didn't. "Your father decided not to tell her. You know how her daddy was and Barney didn't want to take the chance she might think that way too. Even though she did all that charity stuff, who knew what lurked underneath, deep in her subconscious."

My dad's been dead for two years and he was not here to talk to about this. I thought about him. Reddish brown hair with a slight wave to it, brown eyes, wide shoulders. Pointy nose, though, just like mine. Thin lips. But my mind is working now and yes, I can see it - African DNA in there, just a faint bit. He was a good dancer too - he and mom, they were famous at the local clubs when they were young. And, my God, I'm hot on the dance floor too! I can even hip-hop and I don't know any women who can do that around here. Definitely, I've got rhythm.

The evil butterflies regroup for their agitated dance in my stomach. Tommers has a right to know, doesn't he, since we could have kids? I go get the bottle of Southern Comfort out of the cupboard and pour myself a shot. By the time my husband comes in the door, I've got a drunk's courage worked up. The words are ready to fly out of my mouth when he says, "Did you hear what those bleedin' heart liberals at the State Capital were doing today?

Demonstrating to get welfare back the way it was! So I can work my ass off to feed their lazy butts! And they want us to take them seriously. Well, why don't they grow up and take care of themselves!"

By "they" I knew who he meant. My revelation died on my lips. I sucked it

back in and licked them.

"And Mike's daughter's going out with one! Next thing she'll be knocked up and Mike'll be stuck with it for the next twenty years!" He paused. "Woul you mind getting me a beer?"

I know then I'm going to have to leave. Not that I don't love him and I can lean to the politically conservative side myself, but you can see my choices are limited. You can tell he isn't going to take to my news with outstretched arms.

I don't know how to do it. What should I tell him? That I have a lover, that I "just don't want to be married anymore", what? I don't have the guts to tell him the truth. He doesn't seem to notice my skulking around over the next couple days and generally acting weird, but finally I pack up and leave while he's at work. I leave a note on the kitchen table and go move in with my mom. I figure it's better he thinks I'm cheating on him than that I permanently soiled him.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?" she asks when I show up with my stuff. "I've got bridge club here Wednesday and Cory's coming for a visit this weekend!" Cory is her new lover, although I'm not supposed to know she actually engages in that kind of activity. The generations are expected to pretend they don't notice what each other are up to in that department. I'm also not supposed to mention he is fifteen years younger than her. Go for it, Mom. I'll stuff earplugs in.

"I, um, have to leave Tommers," I mumble. "It's just not working out."

She looms in my face. "Why? Why the hell not?"

I avoid her eyes. "Um, it's sex, Mom. That's the problem."

That shuts her up. She purses her lips a little, shakes her head slightly, and dismissively waves her hand. "All right. Use the attic. I'm using your old room for my decoupage."

We don't mention the guestroom since we both have to pretend Cory will be staying in it.

I quietly go crazy over the next few days. Tommers, unfazed by the note, keeps calling and pounding at the front and back doors. Mom has been instructed to ignore him. "You don't have any lover!" he bellows so the whole neighborhood can hear. "I got a detective on you and he didn't find a thing! Now you get out here and talk to me!"

But I just ignore him. The thing is I know I love Tommers, but the knowledge that he would hate me if he knew my true self tends to put a damper on that affectionate feeling.

The butterflies chew on my stomach lining and I turn a page in the book I'm reading by Maya Angelou. After a while he gets tired of yelling and I hear his van start up.

It occurs to me that I might as well go meet some black people since I am one. The only black person I know personally is Terry Pickle who works with me at the courthouse. She's in Deeds and I'm in Passports. "You want to do lunch?" I ask her Monday morning and after giving me a puzzled look, she says yes.

After we order bowls of chowder, I explain my predicament. Besides Aunt Marge, Terry is, at this point, the only person who knows about it. She eyes me with interest, the way a zoologist might look at a rare, interesting flatworm.

"So are you gonna go out with black guys now?" she asks.

That had not occurred to me. "Hmmm," I say. "You think I should?"

She suppresses a guffaw. "Why not? You can have my Kevin. He's a pain-in-the ass, cheating bastard. Want him before I have to kill him?"

I slurp my soup and don't respond. Later I ask her, "So where do you meet black guys?"

"You're gonna get the neighbors talking," she tells me.

"Well, I'll be moving eventually anyway," I say.

I meet Dennis at Terry's a week later. She and her roommate throw a Halloween party and I go as Bathsheba, which is a pretty sexy outfit. A bare midriff looks great while showing off your dance moves.

Dennis is tall, in his late twenties, in jeans and a plain white T-shirt and glasses pushed up on top of his head which, thank God, is not shaved bald like those of most of the men at the party. If you've got hair, I can't for the life of me figure why you'd shave it off.

"What's a white chick doing at this gig?" he asks me looking at my belly then up to my eyes.

I'm thrilled but terrified. Everything I ever read or heard about black men on talk shows and in black women's novels pops to the front of my mind. Hotter in bed than I can imagine but inevitably strays. All of these stories are in my mind as I look at this man.

"Hi," I say, my voice trembly. "I'm no white woman."

"Yeah?" he says. "This interests me. How about we go sit down somewhere and you tell me about it?"

I go out with him. First we concentrate on the city but eventually get tired of that and meet for lunch at a local steak house and then the story is all over town and Tommers stops pounding on the door. My mother brings up the subject at dinner. We're having hamburgers and baked beans, Cory's favorite foods.

"What's this I hear that you're going out with Negroes?" She spreads Grey Poupon thickly on her burger.

"Negroes?" I say. "I don't believe I've heard that term ever actually spoken aloud."

"Don't try to sidetrack me with bullshit," she says. "What's going on?"

"Dennis is an insurance salesman. He has a degree from Penn State. He's a lay minister. His hobby is writing letters to the Editor."

Cory, a thirty-five year old crane operator, speaks up through a mouthful of beans. "What your mother wants to know is why you're dating a black dude."

I decide to be straight with her. I too am tired of bullshit. "Look, Mom, there's something you might want to know. I am part black."

She sprays pieces of hamburger all over the table, then laughs so hard she has

to run to the kitchen for water. It takes her a full ten minutes to get herself under control and even then her face keeps jerking while she talks.

"Part black did you say? And how would that be possible, Dawn?"

When I explain she loses the smirky smile. There is a very long moment of silence while Cory tries to act nonchalant and spoons more beans onto his plate. Then she says, "Um, Dawn. Maybe there's something you might want to know."

I wait

She starts pulling at her rings, which she only does when extremely uncomfortable. "Cory, would you mind terribly taking your plate out onto the porch? Dawn and I need to talk here."

He obeys without a word and as soon as the door clicks shut, she speaks.

"Dawn, things were not always so peachy between your father and me. He had a pretty bad gambling habit and there were a couple of times he and I went our separate ways. This was early in our marriage - later he straightened out. Anyway, one of those times, I got involved with another man. Dawn, I should've told you this before. Barney Benton wasn't really your dad, honey. So if he had black blood, well, it doesn't affect you in the least."

Now it it's me who's temporarily speechless. I need a glass of water from the kitchen. When I get back, I say, "Okay, so who was my father?"

Mom pauses, swallows and says, "Peter Raintree that owns the hardware store next to Eckerd's Pharmacy."

"What?" I say. "You mean that old guy with the white hair? The one with the finger missing?"

"Yes, Dawn. He lost that finger years ago when he worked for a butcher,

before he opened the store. What's that got to do with anything?"

I feel indignant. "Well, does he know I'm his daughter for crying out loud?"

She looks down at the table. "No, he doesn't. I never told him. He went back to his wife and I didn't want to upset the apple cart."

"Did Dad know he wasn't my father?"

"If he did, he never said a word. He was a good man when he got over the gambling thing."

I need a drink. My mother must have read my mind. "It's in the cabinet over the microwave," she says and I go and bring back a bottle of Tawny Port.

"So are you mad that Dad was part black?"

She makes a little snort and shakes her head. "Hell no. Who gives a damn? We're all probably a mix of things we don't know about."

Suddenly, I am interested in Peter Raintree. "So what's the ethnic background of my real father?"

Mom's eyes sparkle. "Well, now that you ask, I believe he is one fourth Cheyenne. Told me his Indian grandmother came to this area sometime in the 1890s when she married his schoolteacher granddad who had lived in Ohio for a while. Peter was a bit older than me."

Holy shit! I am part Indian? I fall deep into thought. This opens a whole new panorama for me. My God, I'd better get on the stick and research my heritage! Maybe I am naturally a shaman or something. Or is my nature that of a warrior or medicine woman? Must look into it.

I explain to Dennis that I am Native American instead and he laughs. We go out a few more times but there isn't much sizzle. He's a bit of a company man and preaches once a month for a church up in Lancaster. Rather straight-laced. I'm on a way different spiritual path. And now, of course, I may want to do a Vision Quest.

Tommers shows up suddenly one night at the door, catching me off guard. I agree to talk to him. "I want you to tell me what's going on," he says in a surly tone. "The detective tells me you've started up with a-" I butt in. "If you say 'nigger', I'll never speak to you again." And I mean it.

"Why are you doing this, Dawn?"

I tell him why. Then I tell him about Peter Raintree. He's silent for some time, then says, "Let me get this straight. You left me because you thought you we re part black?"

"Well, yes."

"Why would you do that?"

Does he not see himself? Doesn't he have any idea what he talks like?

"Tommers," I say in exasperation, "you hate black people!"

He looks surprised. "I do not," he says. "I'm friends with Peter Greer down at the plant - we eat lunch together every day. I know all his

problems and he knows mine. My supervisor's black and I don't hate him."

"But you make all those cracks all the time. And what did you say about Kathy Miller?"

He looks sheepish. "Oh, you mean about white guys not wanting to-"

"Yeah," I say. "That."

He shuffles his feet. "Yeah, well, that's just talk. It's the way I was brought up. Everyone talked like that."

"Talk that can hurt big time," I say.

"I didn't think about it that way," he says.

He looks up then and I see his big blue eyes that could melt a glacier down to a puddle in five minutes and I forgive him. But I'm not through testing him. "I'm one-eighth Cheyenne," I tell him.

He laughs soft and sexy. "Yeah? Well, Pocahontas, you coming back home with me or what?"

I don't know if I am going back. For the present, we are dating. Tommers watches his mouth in front of me, but I don't know what he says when he's with his friends. I'm not sure I want to know.

Last month I attended a pow-wow. And I spend a lot of time in the hardware store, secretly observing my father.

#### **C**RI+IQUE

# (INSPIRED BY A SWEE+ POEM) ON +HE IN+ERNE+)

#### CHARLO-LE KELLISON

I feel the pulse of that poem, but I can't hear the heartbeat.

But beware of my criticism...

I have ripped my heart out from my chest holding it out, offering it, thumping, quivering spasms slimy with blood.
Its cords and connections squeaking and slurping against each other. The hot stench squelching breath.

Discovering: the real heart inspires aversion.

I am learning to accept the discomfort. I cannot but accept the hand raised like a shield, the wince, the rapid exit without comment.

Ten paces past the metal slam of the auditorium doors giddy as children, loud groans, shudders, bursts of laughter into the cold fresh air.

## HELP ME HHR & UGH

## LAURA JOHNSON

I'm reaching out for your hand. Please take mine and lead me through the wreckage of my life. Hold me close, give me strength, and show me that you care. I need your love so don't let go. For I am weak and I will fall deeper down the hole I'm in. For I hardly have any will left to go on. And no light to guide me.

## SKIN BARE

#### DEREK KI++LE

don't worry about your hair because one day you will lose it

no need to watch your weight tomorrow you'll be thin enough

wrinkles will smooth themselves out ironed and pulled tight over polished bone

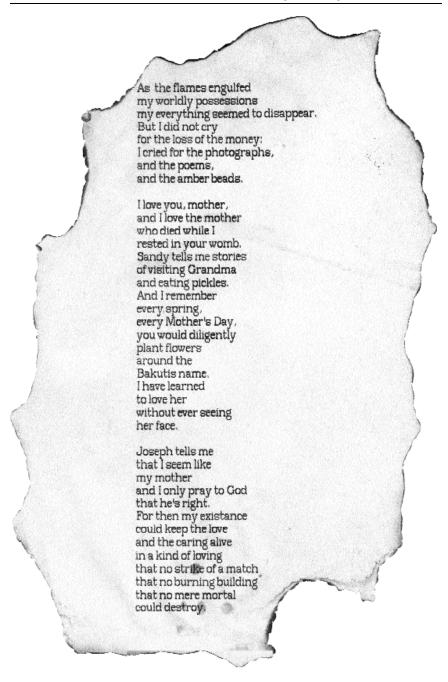
relax
as long fingernails scrape the night
as dead hair grows
untidy
no matter how neat its owner

sit back and embrace the mess

the one of the skinniest smile holds no interest for me for it is not alive

the mess is what we have loving sticky caring without need with laughter no one owns

in the soft moment when breasts are firm and mouths hot alive alive wet



#### ANDREW HE++INGER

#### IANE+ KUYPERS

I never really liked you. You never revealed yourself to me and why would you: you, who never had anyone, you, who always had the bad breaks. Everyone looked at you as different. Where would you have learned to trust. Who would you have learned it from.

I never really liked you. I met you through a friend and he explained to me that multiple sclerosis left you with a slight limp and a faint lisp. Faint, under the surface, but there, traces of something no one would ever know of you well enough to fully understand.

I never really liked you. You never revealed yourself to me and I never wanted you to; you scared me too much. You, plagued with physical ailments. You, with a limp in your walk. You, with a patch over your eye. You, who stared at me for always just a bit too long.

They told me the patch was from eye surgery with complications and now you had to cover your shame, cover someone else's mistakes, cover a wrong you didn't commit, cover a problem not of your own doing. The problems were never of your own doing, were they.

I heard these stories and I thought it was sad. I heard these stories and thought you had to be a pillar of strength. And then I saw you drink, straight from the bottle, fifteen-year-old chianti. And I saw you smash your hand into your living room wall. This is how you lived.

The house you lived in was littered with trash. Why bother to clean it up anyway. It detracted you from the holes in the wall, the broken furniture from drunken fits. This was how you reacted to life, to the world. You didn't know any better. This is how you coped.

I never really liked you. You would come home from work, tell us about a woman who was beautiful and smart that liked you, but she wasn't quite smart enough. And I thought: We believe anything if we tell ourselves enough. We weave these fantasies to get through the days.

I never really liked you. Every time you talked to me you always leaned a little too close. So I stayed away from the house, noted that those whom you called friends did the same. I asked my friend why he bothered to stay in touch. And he said to me, "But he has no friends."

This is how I thought of you. A man who was dealt a bad hand. A man who couldn't fight the demons that were handed to him. And with that I put you out of my mind, relegated you to the ranks of the inconsequential. We parted ways. You were reduced to a sliver of my youth.

I received a letter recently, a letter from someone who knew you, someone who wanted me to tell my friend that they read in the newspaper that you hanged yourself. Your brother died in an electrical accident, and after the funeral you went to the train

station; instead of leaving this town you went to a small room and left us forever. Strangers had to find you. The police had to search through records to identify your body. The newspaper described you as having "health problems." But you knew it was more than that.

And I was asked to be the messenger to my friend. The funeral had already passed. You were already in the ground. There was no way he could say goodbye. I shouldn't have been the one to tell him this. No one deserved to tell him. He was the only one who tried to care.

I never really liked you. No one did. But when I had to tell my friend, I knew his pain. I knew he wanted to be better. I knew he thought you were too young to die. I knew he felt guilty for not calling you. He knew it shouldn't have been this way. We all knew it.

I never really liked you. But now I can't get you out of my mind; you haunt me for all the people we've forgotten in our lives. I don't like what you've done. I don't like you quitting. I don't like you dying, not giving us the chance to love you, or hate you, or even ignore you more.

My friend still doesn't know where your grave is. I'd like to find it for him, and take him to you. Let you know you did have a friend out there. Bring you a drink, maybe, a fitting nightcap to mark your departure, to commemorate a life filled with liquor, violence, pain and death.

I never really liked you, but maybe we could get together in some old cemetery, sit on your grave stone, share a drink with the dead, laugh at the injustices of life when we're surrounded by death. Maybe then we'd understand your pain for one brief moment, and remember the moments we'll always regret.

## HOLDING MY SKIN +OGE+HER

## JANE+ KUYPERS

is life pre-ordained? i've been trying to remember all the little details that i'm supposed to take care of and i know i'm not even getting half of them done and i wonder if you feel what i feel is it just me is the stuffing falling out of my insides through the stretched seams holding my skin together because i keep finding bits of stuffing fallen out and i try to put it back in but damnit, i don't see the holes and i just have to work faster so that maybe i'll have a better chance of not losing my insides

is it just me?
probably
but i'll keep frantically trying
to hold myself together
so i can be a bit more normal,
no, wait,
so i can be a bit more like myself
and i won't have to be pre-ordained

## BEING GOD

## |ANE+KUYPERS

I'm tired of dying for your sins over and over again and why is it that I am the one that's doing the dying when you are the one that's doing the sinning I don't think you're learning your lesson

I'm tired of taking this knife to my hands over and over again giving myself the stigmata the blood gets all over my clothes and I can never get the stains out and for what, for you to see how I suffer

I'm tired of being humble when I'm supposed to be the one with the power over and over again I become your servant and never are you bowing to me I don't even get a thank you

I'm tired of preaching to the converted when the converted aren't even really listening they're snoring in the back rows while I deliver my sermon and there's not even air conditioning in here and I'm sweating

I'm tired of coming to you and healing the sick taking away the problems, over and over again giving you something to look forward to and all I have is an eternity of waiting for someone to take my place and tend to my wounds

I'm tired of giving the earth up to you watching the devil's work be done, and you know, he's just sitting down there looking at me and laughing, over and over again because it's so easy for him when he doesn't have to work

I'm tired of being your salvation over and over again you turn to me and I have no one to turn to but myself it's a bitch, you know, being your own god since no one can save me from me

I'm tired of being your teacher, handing you what you need on a silver platter and waiting for that damn collection plate and someone is always stealing out of it from the back row I know who you are, you who leave me nothing

I'm tired of wearing this crown of thorns over and over again the needles prick my skin and even gods bleed, at least this one does and when I ask you to wipe the blood out of my eyes, well, I can't see you anywhere

I'm tired of being something for everybody when everyone is nothing for me maybe the devil has the right idea, you know maybe I'll sit back and wait for you miss me as you wonder who's your messiah now

## GOD EYES

# |ANE+KUYPERS |KUYPERS22@A&L.C&IT

It was a stupid point to argue about at 2 a.m., sitting in the lobby of the Las Vegas Hilton listening to the clink and whirr of slot machines and the dropping of tokens onto metal. You believed in God, I did not. Even after two rounds of Sam Adams and three rounds of Bailey's I knew you wouldn't change my mind, and I had no desire to change yours.

You told me of a dream you had: in it you and Christian Slater played a game of pool. You won. He looked at his hands and said, "I've got a beer in one hand, and a cigarette in the other. I guess this means it's time for me to seduce someone." And he walked away. You're a funny man. You make me laugh. Your brother even noticed that. And you even spoke like Slater, rough, mysterious.

You were the optimist: yes, there is meaning to life. I was doomed to nothingness, meaninglessness. But to me you were the pessimist: you believed you were not capable of creating the power, the passion you had within you. I had control in my life, even if in the end it was all for nothing. You think we are so different. We are not.





It's now after three and we listen to music:
Al Jarreau, Whitney Houston, Billy Ocean, Mariah
Carey. Natalie Cole, with her father. "That's why darling,
it's incredible -" you mouth as you walk toward the
washrooms - "that someone so unforgettable -"
take a spin, watch me mouth the words
with you as you walk away "think that I am unforgettable too."

I tell you about the first time I got drunk - I was maybe ten, and asked my sister to make a mixed drink mom had that I liked. She made me a few. So there I was, walking to the neighbor's house in the summertime, wearing my sister's seventies zip-up boots, oversized and unzipped, carrying my seventh drink and sticking my tongue out to see the grenadine. You liked my story. You laughed.

Passion is a hard thing to describe. Passion for life. You must know and understand a spirituality behind it. You do your work, the things in life solely because you must - it is you, and you could not exist any other way. It is who you are. It is a feeling beyond mere enjoyment. You said that the spirituality was a God. I said it was my mind. Once again, we lock horns.

All of my life I have seen people espouse beliefs but not follow them. Tell me you're not like them. Our values are different, but tell me we both have values and will fight to the death for them. I need to know that there are people like that, like me. We are different, but at the core we are the same. We understand all this. I'm grasping straws here as the clock says 3:45 a.m. and the betting odds for football games roll by

on the television screen. You don't gamble. Neither do I. Why must you be so far away? You reminded me that I have a passion in life, that I have to keep fighting. But I get weak and tire of fighting these battles alone. I, the atheist, have no God and have to rely on my will. When I am low, I struggle. You have your God to fall back on, I only have me.

And you looked into my eyes as it approached the morning. You stared. We locked horns once again. I ask you again what you were thinking. And you said, "I see God in your eyes." Later you said it to me again. I asked you what you meant. You said, "I see a God in your eyes. I see a soul." Whether what you saw was your God or just me, my

passion, well, thank you for finding it. "Good-bye, Ms. Kuypers," you said when you left for good that day. I said nothing. Good-bye, Mr. Williams, I thought, then I closed the door, walked to the window, started singing unforgettable. I was alone in my hotel room, and the lights from the Stardust, the Frontier, the Riviera were still flashing. I'm not alone. Good-bye, Mr. Williams.

el really wish at knew what al wanted to ob with my life. I need something with a good income, because I HATE being in debt. So I picked computer science because in the seventh grade at had this remulation that this was the projession for me. So here I am, and when it starts getting both boring and tough, I get nervous. I'm too creative to wasterny life away in computer science. Engineering is a bitch at VogI But then again, I don't know athing in the art field Since the never taken a course in it in my life the oney thing eldo knows is that there's no money init. I don't know what ce'd want to do with my life if it wasn't computer science - there's no pro-Fession to fit my tolents, no market for my skills and I'm acready in engineering and it'd look like Shit if I transferred OUT of it. But then again, I don't know if I'd be happy IN it. I don't knows if ell over be hoppy.

that boring. People always say they wonder what the hype is about concerning birthdays, and I wander where that hype is.

People just don't think about me the way of fend to think about other people. So it goes.

29 think my problem is that I don't want to grow up. I don't want to deed with the responsibility, and the chance that I wan't find love, security or happiness. But cem dying to get out of this Fucking hole. I haven't been able to find that love, security or happiness that we're been looking. For here, so I have nothing to lose by continuing on, except what little hape I have left.

There's nothing else I can do.

# **S**ASSY

## HELEN MALLON

At thirteen, she was still a virgin.
Fourteen became roaming nights.
He had a den. He made her buy cream, tassels and she smoked his Pall Malls.
His place smelled of fried food.
She never learned to braid her hair. She cannot stand to be enclosed. The key thing, she smiles, is distance.

## **RIP**

## +SAHAI MAR+IN

Your words RIP Through my soul Like a bullet And it makes my heart bleed Because Even though I am dying Inside I still want you Outside And you care When you want to And I care All the time And I try not to listen To the voices I hear Telling me that I don't Need To want you And still I try not to hear Your words RIP Through my soul

Like a bullet

## **CHANGE**

## SHERRY ANN MEAGHER

Change your mind as often as possible. Just because you thought something yesterday. Doesn't mean that you have to think it today. Don't become a prisoner of your own opinion.

Get lust out of the way. It's the only way I know to make sure you fall in love. For the right reasons. And I want you all to find true love.

Never lie, and never let anyone cause you to lie. Truth, or pursuit of it, is all we need.

Never do anything you are ashamed of. If you are ashamed that means somewhere inside you think it's wrong, and if you think it's wrong, You shouldn't be doing it.

# ANOTHER INTERVIEW AT A WIPE AND DIAPER JOB

## JEFF MICHAELS

I am in a hallway with three other people Two black chicks and one heavily primped blond The blond is talking in a sugar sweet cheerleader voice

"I hope they let us walk and talk and play games with them

I want to be their friend."

I start laughing

The black chicks are laughing so hard they are hurting themselves

The blond isn't laughing

The head nurse suddenly appears and

Ushers us all into a small room

Once inside we are shown a long, exceedingly dull video

On the daily operations of a nursing home Then we are given the obligatory rah-rah speech About the high level of quality in patient care at the facility

The blond looks troubled

She says "We aren't going to have to clean up anyone's Bowel movements on this job, are we?"

I can't help it

I bust up laughing again

## PIZZA

#### BEN MI+CHELL

In front of the pizza shop, the street is wet and reflects the scattered lights and I smoke with the group that stands there. The man next to me is balding and his beard is gray. He tells me he lives in an apartment and doesn't have to stack wood or put plastic on windows because the apartment has people who do all that. He says he feels he's wasted his life, that he graduated from Syracuse and played the 'cello. He paints houses to pay his rent and says he's scared. "I'm terrified" he tells me, "I forgot to do anything with my life." who owns the pizza shop, works from nine to nine each day except Monday. I ask him how he is as I pay for my pizza. He say he's good. He goes to work. He works. He goes home and watches television. He asks if I remember the name of some girl who used to come and order pizza. I don't recall her name but it was something musical — something that sounded Italian. The kind of thing you say a thousand times. I think it started with an A.

## HIDDEN FACE ..

## ROBER + MICHAEL O'HEARN

Where do you even begin to connect the dots the empty between points like unmade beds that'll begin to picture the composite face, minus trial and error without any trace of empathy or guilty party apology that'll reconstruct on blackboards of empty schoolhouses, the lines between faltering points on an unsketched face.

# SEWAK+U BANJIR MENDESAH (WHEN +HE FLOOD SIGH)

# SHAMSUDIN ##HMAN Hatyai, #Hailand

Sewaktu banjir mendesah aku tak sempat memaut tangamu leawat air tak berperikemanusiaan segala cinta yang kita semai terpokah berderai tak berhaluan pohon kasih kehilangan akar lalu sewaktu hujan mendesah beginilah aku kehilangan segala-galanya -lemas dan mengerikan.

(When the flood sigh i don't have a change to grab your hand through the water which have no mercy every love we've made crashing down with no destination the love tree looses its roots then when the rain sigh here it is i lost everything)

# MY MOM THE CONQUERER

# JASON PE++US

You came and visited me in Chicago about a year ago. Without dad. And I was terrified. You see, the only other time you've visited up here, you were scared shitless. I convinced you and dad to leave the car at the hotel one evening and come to my house on the el. And you just went on and on about how scary the whole experience was and how you didn't feel safe until you found a policeman in the tunnel, and not just a regular policeman but one of those Chicago ones dressed all in black with the leather motorcycle jacket, and how you and dad followed him all the way down the underground hallway to your train. I thought this was how your week with me was going to be. I had to work the whole week you were here, and I was deathly afraid that you were going to sequester yourself in my apartment all week and not get to see or do anything.

But I gave you a street map and a transit map and I made sure that we took the el together on the first day from my house to the loop so that you'd know how to make the trip. And you know what? You became quite the urban adventurer. Each night when I would come home, you would tell me tales of riding the el by yourself to the museum, or to the Magnificent Mile to do some window shopping, or over to the Lincoln Park Zoo.

I took you into neighborhoods that even some of my friends won't go — Uptown, Logan Square. You walked down Lawrence Avenue, head held high, ignorning all the homeless people just like I told you to, talking excitedly about meeting my friend Steve's new gay lover. You dug the scene. You had something positive to say about every single thing I took you to. Even the crappy open mic in Wicker Park. And by the end of the week when I put you back on the plane, you had had a much better time than I think either of us ever expected.

I guess it's kind of silly to be proud of a parent. Being proud is something your parents are supposed to feel towards YOU. But man, I was so proud of you that week, mom. I was so proud of the fact that you were so courageous and empowered. It's a scary thing to do in Chicago — even I had a really hard time doing it when I first moved here. But you made it seem effortless. I'm really proud of you.

## **D** WN HILL

#### +OM RACINE

1

Things started to go bad for us fast.

It started when she looked up and shouted, "The phone's out!"

"What?"

"The damn phone is out! They cut me off 'cause I didn't pay."

"It was probably the storm," I said.

"No. I know GTE, they're assholes!"

"Did you get a warning?"

"No! Here's the bill. See, due June 15th."

"Yeah, but you owe \$250!"

"So what, back in Phoenix, I owed that much in a month!"

I looked at it, and the monthly amount was about \$60 bucks. "It was probably the storm," I said quietly.

2.

"No, goddamn it, it's the FBI!"

"What?"

"The goddamn FBI. They're bugging me—ever since I came back from Europe penniless.

They do that, ya know?"

"Oh?"

"Yeah, see." She brings out a savings-book or something, Payments that are late to the IRS—see!"

"Oh," I say, and look back at the computer screen. I was trying to get a poem off onto a floppy disk, but the fucking floppy drive was damaged, so the floppies were getting chewed up.

"Do you have another floppy?" I asked.

"No!"

3.

The next day she called me, "They want \$150!"

"Who?"

"The bank, that's who, they returned 5 checks and charged me \$30 each. And I have to pay the phone company. It was that damn clutch letting go."

"Maybe you should go see the bank."

"I'm tired of paying for everything.

I'm tired of this city, I'm moving

out—it's the goddamn Gulf, that's what it is—something about the ions in the ocean. I should be in Phoenix in the dessert,

I do better there—

that's what it is; besides, everyone's going to Cuba."

"Call me later, honey,

we'll straighten this out,

and then talk about love."

"I don't care about that." she said.

"What?"

"I don't care about love!"

I sure wish I got that poem out of her computer.

She didn't roll over when she was supposed to said, she was whipped out from the second time around.

So I fell off the bed with a soft sigh and got caught between the bed and the stack of boxes against the wall. I reached for her

but she wouldn't help me up; she saw the books rocking back and forth ready to fall.

She laughed as I slide deeper into the crevice of boxes and bed .

I may never spoon her again.





# A SHOR+ HIS+ORY OF +OOL MAKING

#### I.B. RAD

Early in our natural history, tools were distinct from people; yet, as farming communities swelled their leaders grew ever more supreme and began to consider coworkers as merely another form of tool, much as we now think of computers. This relationship between ruler and tool persisted, even as a more productive order, capitalism, was waxing ascendant. Eventually, factories and corporations evolved in which the latest set of lords, the owners and managers, felt no more obligation to their flesh and blood tools - also referred to as "workers" or "cogs" than to their metal machinery. As a result, like robots in a sci-fi novel, the worker-tools rebelled, protesting, often futilely, they were not tools but truly, that like their rulers, they too were human. And so, these worker-tools unionized and, in the ultimate case, were organized into a Soviet Union. In this Marxist utopia party theorists proclaimed that, as all productive citizens were equal, worker-tools no longer existed. But right off the assembly line, the Soviet revolutionary canon produced sanctimonious tyrants

and it soon became obvious that the laboring masses were living in a tools paradise. As time went by, this Soviet Union grew inordinately bureaucratic and consequently, less efficient than its capitalist rivals; accordingly, with a push in the right direction, the Soviet masters stumbled on capitalism. And so, with capitalism triumphant and rapidly converging with modern information technology, a revolutionary new millennium of tool making began. While many workers became "white collar" or toiled in service industries; in a real sense, the ensuing class of rulers grew international in scope, enriching and ruining economies by market/currency speculation without the least concern for workers, much like a lofty bomber crew that never stews over who's below. And so, with the parallel diminution of unions, the world regained its former ruler-tool relationship. Thus, our history ends; happily, on a positive note with a savvy economic order throttling down the information highway like an elegantly tooled vehicle, its soundly ground engine cogs meshing quietly underneath.





## POEM ATTACK

#### DANNY RAND

She hopped on the elevator and pressed six.

I pressed seven and the elevator door rattled shut.

"There's a lot of crazies up on the sixth floor," I told her.

She smiled shyly. "I just moved in."

"I used to live on the sixth floor."

She nodded politely and winced a smile.

"I probably should be saying this, but there is this one woman with red curly hair who always wears bright red lipstick. She's the craziest of the lot."

The elevator stopped and the door opened.

"Ahh, thanks...," the new attendany said all tongue-tied, when the door shut and she was gone.

I rode the elevator up the next level, feeling a little crazy myself, for talking so candidly.
You don't know how to behave in front of people, I kept hearing myself say.

So I discussed it with Joan

a little later on.

"I didn't mean to scare the new resident or anything," I said.

"Don't be silly. That redhead really is crazy."

"Yeah, but...."

"Oh, it's fine. You were just making conversation."
Joan slipped on her coat.
We stepped out into the hallway
and she locked the door behind her.
"...People like to hear that kind of stuff."

"I guess, you're right."

On the way down, the elevator stopped on the sixth floor. The crazy woman with curly red hair and bright red lipstick got on. "How are you two doing?" she asked very cheerfully.

"Good, and you?"

The crazy woman rolled her eyes back. "I'm going crazy," she said, "but I'm not dangerous."
She laughed at the joke.

The irony of it all, I thought, that the crazy woman would repeat exactly what Joan and I had just said, as if to confirm how odd everything was that related to her. It's amazing.

I felt my head whirl about. A poem had started to germinate. I could recognize the signs:
dry mouth,
sweaty palms,
sweaty temples
and armpits,
a hemorrhaging of dovetail sentences in the speech area of my brain,
a quick sense of euphoria,
trembling hands,
dilating pupils....

Then all at once, the elevator walls started waving good-by; the buttons began to dance and Dixie nusic started to play in my ears. The smell of burnt plastic filtered through my nose-trails. I started to feel sick.

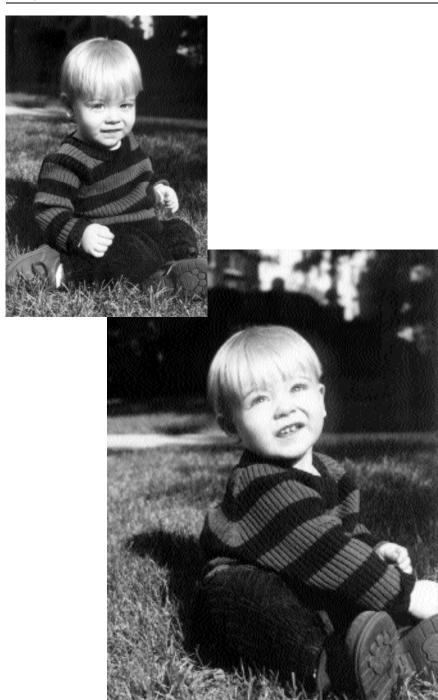
The the elevator came to a jarring stop and the crazy woman sailed into the lobby.

"Hey, Sammy, you don't look to well," Joan exclaimed.

I fumbled about in some literary paroxysm.

"Are you okay?" she asked.

I could hear the concern in her voice, but couldn't focus on her face. My breath was getting heavy. I took a step and leaned against the elevator door for support. "I think I'm having a poem attack."



## SOCIETY'S MOST COMMON BELONGING

#### SHANNON ROBER +SON

You wake up with an empty wine bottle at your side and light up your ciggarrette.

Stumbling over the sleeping body of your companion from last night you scratch your infected crotch and mumble profanities never heard before. You shower with substances which have been injected under the eyelids of innocent animals..

They suffer for you.

You get into the vehicle that promotes your allergy to walking and it spews disgusting thick clouds of smoke into the air yes, the air we must share.

You work eight hours to earn the green paper that can get you material heaven and turn you into another unfeeling, greedy slob.

Just like the ones before you, and before them.

For lunch, a meat sandwich made of mad slaughtered cows and other wonderful mystery meats.. how very appetizing..

Your belly gets fatter as you sit at your desk of screaming trees and stare out the window at the other alike buildings that stand where national forest used to proudly hold up its head.

what of tomorrow? Nothing.

## BLAME

## JENNIFER ROWAN

Blame it on the first angel That set the record for perfection Every day, I try to reach this goal That isn't even there Its existence is debatable Reliant upon faith and organized religion Who is it that I want to be anyway? Because once I reach perfection There will be nothing left to achieve I'll be left in a purgatory of trying to maintain Blame it on the artists, the musicians, the poets They composed the score, now here I am Trying to best them, get one up on them They started with a blank slate But I simply lie in their shadows Looking for a shred of inspiration they might Have thrown out in the trash Blame it on myself because I feel the need To compete with somebody Even me Never happy with the final project Never finished editing and revising Scouring away the art Changing it into a science of juxtaposition Perception, and deviation from the rule Even this poem didn't come from my Imagination It was planted here by the media

## +HE NEW SIRC RACE

MIKE SEEGEL

Green life quickly vanishing, oceans disappearing, people no longer exist - it was a nightmare to behold. I, Gus Raloband, am the only human being with flesh on his bones and breathing oxygen. Men dreamed of this day, desperately and eagerly awaiting its arrival, and now I am the only one to tell and see the gloriousness of this moment. I have nowhere to run and nowhere to seek refuge. My cause of existing is hopeless. My intellect urges me to end it now by decapitating myself with a surgical laser beam, but my pride will not let me. My anger will not subside until I leave no regret behind.

Men, women and children all over the world awaited the birth of AI. The technology breakthrough surprised even the biologists, software engineers and mechanical engineers that collaborated their findings. Not until they put their research together did artificial intelligence emerge. Mechanical engineers developed advanced robotics that enabled man to control machines of vast strength with virtual reality techniques. Software engineers discovered an innovative recursive method that increased the information reception rate more than five thousand percent. Astounding as that may sound, what the biologists unveiled about artificial intelligence proved even

more astounding, and unnerving.

A man named Thorton Gramm funded Project SIRC (Synthesized Intelligent Robotic Creation), a secret program to develop AI using any means necessary. He intended to create a robotic war machine that duplicated humanoid physical movements, but with superior physique and intelligence compared to a human. The United States of America promised riches beyond comparison for a weapon with intelligence that could be mass-produced. Such technology would enslave the world and force all people to abide by the Constitution.

The technology backfired. Once created, Sirc, as he was named, realized that to survive he needed a specific substance that is impossible to manufacture: human neurons. Sircís cerebral cortex was constructed of many microchips using the new recursive technique and neurons from a human brain. After attempting animal neurons, biologists discovered that the type of brain the neurons were taken from determined Sircís intellect. Using pieces of a human brain, however, empowered Sirc to feel emotion and remember events, not just act on instincts.

The neurons did not last forever. The amount of information Sirc gathered surpassed human capacity, but with a price. Each neuron lasted fifteen to twenty seconds, and then was rendered useless. Sirc battled with his ethical programs and human neurons for quite some time, but concluded his survival mattered more than anything else. If he ceased to exist, he could no longer learn, feel joy or discomfort, and his metallic parts would be used for another like him or rocket parts. I do not blame Sirc for killing his creators and adapting their neurons into his half artificial brain. I do not blame him for giving birth to others like him who shared his same survival instincts. And I do not blame the Sirc race for ruthlessly murdering my wife and children in front of my very eyes and extracting their brains as I helplessly feel on my face, weeping. I blame all mankind that searched for the knowledge, knowing that such technology would imminently bring us all to our knees, begging for mercy that machine-based rationalization would not provide.

Now only I survive. The million Si res know me as a criminal. I am the last threat to a thriving robotic society. Sires have developed a technique to harvest neurons by cultivating whole brains and cloning them. My only hope is to use their technology against them. I must break into the cloning facilities and clone myself until there are enough of me to retake planet Earth.

This will be the last entry in my diary. I only hope that years from now humans everywhere will read this as a triumphant historical document that surpasses even the magnificent Iliad. End recording.

\* \* \* \* \* \*

The electronic recording device beeped twice and shut down. Gus sighed heavily and bowed his head. He broke into a loud wailing with tears streaming down his cheeks. Because of no fault of his own, Gus lost everything - his wife, children, friends, and all humans - and he was alone because of a greedy mistake. Mankind was greedy for knowledge and pride that people could do anything and go anywhere. Furthermore, he never asked to be the last one left to save humans; he wanted to live a normal life and raise his two boys to be happy, productive men. Life dealt him a lousy hand this round, and he knew he would sooner or later bankrupt his funds.

Gus left an old apartment building with little more than his clothes and a surgical laser. Even though doctors used this hand-held device, Gus found it to employ mass destruction when he pulled its trigger. The crude weapon resembled a mini plasma cannon that soldiers of war used often. What made it a surgical instrument rather than a weapon was its range. The laser reached only ten feet in a cylindrical beam no bigger than one-thousandth of an inch in diameter. Gus needed to use his weapon precisely.

Casually Gus stepped into his hover vehicle and drove to "Double-Ur-Pleasure," as the cloning facility was cleverly labeled after cloning became legal and commonplace. At first he feared that the Sircs would identify him and kill him in his hovercraft, but he realized after living as the sole human heir to Earth for over two months that they possessed no method of tracing that a human and not a Sirc propelled the hover vehicle.

Gus arrived at "Double-Ur-Pleasure" during midday. During his two-month evaluation of the Sircs, he discovered that half of them replenish their neural implants when the Sun climbs to its zenith in the sky. Carefully, the unlikely hero jumped to the ground from his hover vehicle. As it descended from its two-foot height, Gus deftly hid behind the chrome vehicle. He used a crudely constructed mirror to survey his tactical position. Guarding the main entrance to the cloning lab were two Sircs, heavily armed with plasma cannons and microfusion grenades. They resembled human skeletons with such striking similarity that Gus shivered in disgust. Made with a titanium alloy, they were virtually indestructible. He dared not risk attacking them even from behind because his laser would not even touch them before they made him sidewalk sludge.

The unlikely hero acted by throwing his mirror onto the side of a building nearby and drawing their attention. Even though they possessed no eyes or ears, the Sircs did have mounted video cameras and adapted hearing aids. The two titanium skeletons ran quickly to the infraction site. As they moved away from the entrance, he slipped behind the building, because he knew video cameras awaited him eagerly at any entrance. Gus used his surgical weapon to slice the back wall into a crude entryway. He entered, finding the cloning lab, just as his virtual schematics promised. Finding the room empty the human began cloning himself. His software hacking skills provided him with all the knowledge to work a cloning device. The Sircs would be ecstatic to have his extremely intelligent brain, for it was sure to contain massive amounts of neurons.

Gus set the pre-cloning process for a time period long enough to enter a cloning chamber. As it began, he felt the little prick of a needle in his skin to sample his DNA. How he hated needles! Needles were among his top fears, along with public speaking and death. He actually felt a certain comfort in death, but he was afraid of how it would happen. For having an ethical program, Sircs could mutilate a person unmercifully. Then again, so could humans...

Five minutes elapsed and the cloning chamber opened. Gus went to examine his new twin brother, only to find him a pool of plasma. Knowing exactly what happened, the unlikely hero looked at the entrance he cut. The two Sircs stood there with their skeletal smiles, one with his plasma cannon still smoking at the barrel. Gus knew the Sircs had won that battle, so he ran away to fight another day and formulate a second plan.

\* \* \* \* \* \*

Gus woke up staring into a bright light. Exhausted and famished, he attempted to sit upright, but he could not. Then he realized why. He was strapped to a table, arms, legs, neck and head. Frantically he tried to free himself, but it was no use. He was helpless.

"Ah, you are awake," said a digital voice as the bright light was replaced by its dimmer substitute. "This is good. I like to hear my victims scream as I extract their brains." The Sirc started a small saw spinning rapidly in his hand and brought it close to Gus' forehead. The screams became louder and the saw deepened the wound, until finally death came for him in a black hovercraft.

The humans lost terribly and the Sircs have everything they needed to survive. Yet, who knows? Maybe one day AI will experiment with HI, Human Intelligence, and humans could retake the world again.

## +HE OU+SIDER

# JONA+HAN SORENSEN

## WHEN I KILLED +HE DEER

I had punished myself before. After my two older sisters graduated, the keys had been handed to me and I attained the status of "the one who drives us to school". One morning, driving my brothers, James and Paul, to school, I was feeling my oats a little on a straight stretch. I was pushing sixty in my parent's Pontiac when a buck leapt from the forest smack into our path. There was nothing to do. We sailed into the buck, broad siding him and knocking him a good 15 feet into a ditch. He raised his head once, looked at us and then laid it down for good. At first I was too surprised to feel upset. What had I done? We got out of the car and checked. It was dead.

Pride goeth before a fall, I thought. I felt as if I had somehow participated in something slightly evil. Nonchalant in front of my brothers I drove on to school. I called my parents and they called a ranger. It wasn't hunting season and you were supposed to report things like that. Sad, I stood in the rain during lunch to punish myself.

By summer, I had my own little brown bomb of a car. I was a senior and my girlfriend Nancy, a sophomore. It was about 6 miles from my house on

the mountain to Nancy's place down in Corbett, a ranching/farming community. The two lane roads were well kept and wound through the forest, thick with pine and fir on either side. Nancy and I were going to go down to Rooster Rock on the Columbia river and loll on the beach. Winter, its endless cold soggy hours of reading books or stomping sluggishly through the snow, was over. It had been sunny and warm for a while and I was looking forward to coming out of hibernation.

Nancy was a local catch. Her father worked for the telephone company repairing lines, installing phones and driving one of those big rigs with a boom lift on it. She highlighted her hair blond and was cute and very social. She was vaguely worried by her role as the chirpy cheerleader who dates football players. That was okay, I was tall and athletic but I wasn't a very good football player. I didn't know the rules and I didn't want to hurt people. Here, if you want the ball that bad, you can have it. What's the point anyway?

Enjoying the anticipation, I waited until the last minute to leave. That always irked Nancy. I liked that. I had a girl waiting for me. But then I would push it until she was really annoyed and then race apologetically to her house, hoping she wasn't too angry to put up with my shenanigans.

Country roads are great to drive on. You can take over both lanes, cutting the corners hard and whipping out of the curve to fly down the straight stretches. About half way to Nancy's house there was a severe corner followed by a long straight stretch. Though straight, the road swooped down steeply into a valley for about two or three hundred yards before climbing swiftly to the same elevation again. The great thing was to whip out of the curve at the top, floor it and accelerate down the slope before hitting the bottom and taking off up the incline. I could usually get to about 90. But if you didn't get enough momentum, you had to lug slowly up the slope in your rattling old car feeling lame and impotent, wishing for a little power.

Hogging the road, I whipped out of the corner as fast as I could take the curve. The little engine whined as I shifted into fourth and pressed the car faster and faster down the hill. The needle hovered uncertainly around 70. I was approaching the bottom when, on the upswing stretch of the hill, a doe and a fawn wandered side by side into my lane. Damnit, they were going to make me lug the hill. I swooped the bottom and rolled upwards.

My dad drove fast and decisively. He often used our family car to pull city folks in their 4X4 off-roaders out of the snow and mud on the mountain. Most people haven't got a clue. As my dad would wheel into the driveway, my mom would grip the dash saying, Herb, look out for the cat! He said, they'll get out of the way. One day, a black and white tabby was too

pregnant and it got its back broken. Unlike every Ford or Chevy half ton truck around those parts, we kept no guns. Looking severe and very pale my dad beat the cat to death with a fence post.

I sailed toward them. The doe leapt out of the way but the fawn froze, glistening eyes and twitching ears aimed at me. I braked but I don't remember if I swerved. I think I swerved slightly to the left. The only thing I know for sure is that I rolled over the fawn going about 20 miles an hour. The doe was terrified but she didn't want to leave. She hesitated on the other side of the road until I got out and then she leapt into the woods.

The fawn lay in the ditch, a smooth brown body with its hind legs bunched under it. Its spindly front legs were pawing and scrabbling at the dead leaves and grass. Eyes squeezed shut, it craned its neck as it bleated blindly for its mother. A lonely terrified baby, it cried. Its back was broken.

I had to kill it. Numb, I climbed back in my car. Where could I get a gun as fast as possible? I didn't want to drive back up the mountain. Most of the people up there were stand-offish and intimidating. If you walked on their land people usually stood and stared suspiciously until you had stated your case. I drove on towards the farming part of the country, leaning and urging my little car forward as it lugged along the roads. The fawn was suffering.

I stopped at Mark Stewars' house a few miles from our old house on Louden. When I was younger Mark used to invite me to play with him. Unlike us, they had a TV. It was quite a novelty to me. When people at school would joke and laugh about TV programs I would quickly memorize the story and tell people about the funny scenes. "You remember the part where . . . ?"

When I visited Mark I couldn't take my eyes off of their TV. I had seen my first episode of Star Trek there. It was an episode where some disembodied beings hung Spock and Captain Kirk up by their arms and put them through excruciating torture in order to study them. It was depressing and bewildering but I couldn't stop watching. I wanted to know what happened. I couldn't leave them to it alone. I wanted to make sure it ended. It didn't seem to interest Mark. He wanted to go outside and work on his go-cart so I tore myself away, "Yeah, let's work on the go-cart."

I hadn't associated with Mark in years and I approached the house a little unsure of what to say. Mark's mentally retarded older brother was home. I hoped he would understand.

"Um, sorry to trouble you but I ran over a deer a ways back and its back is broken. I need to shoot it but I don't have a gun."

He was home alone and they didn't have a gun that he knew about. He offered their cross bow. How can I shoot a fawn with a cross bow? I might

as well try to stab it with the arrow.

"Maybe you could cut its throat." He offered.

Frustrated I raced out and drove further down the road. Where should I stop? I don't know them. Those people built there after we had moved. I don't want to drive too far because it will take all that time to get back and finish it. Finally, in desperation I stopped at the farm house we used to live in. At least it was familiar. I knocked on the door and a man answered. I stammered out my explanation. He said they really didn't have a gun except for a little .22 rifle. He would come with me.

I sat stiffly in the seat trying not to rock forward in an attempt to make the car go faster.

Nearing the top of the little valley I searched the ditch for the fawn. I am sure it was right along here somewhere. He's going to think I'm nuts if I don't find it. Finally, halfway down the slope, there it was, still and brown in the wet leaves. It raised its head as we climbed out of the car.

"I'm sorry. My family doesn't hunt and I don't know how to use a gun."

"Do you want me to do it?" he asked.

"No, I ran over it. I'd better do it."

He showed me how to operate the lever that would jack a shell into the chamber and he reminded me to take off the safety.

"This way is off?"

"Yes"

I should probably shoot the deer in the heart. I read that you can aim for the chest just behind the front leg but I didn't really know where the heart was exactly. But what if I miss and it doesn't die quickly? What if I just puncture its lungs and it starts to scream again? I'll go for the brain.

It panicked as I approached, waving its head back and forth in pain as it scrabbled in the ditch. How do I hold this gun? I tried to aim for the small slender forehead that was weaving in front of me. Doubtful-sick with waiting-I squeezed.

The fawn screamed and bleated frantically. I looked for what I had done. I couldn't even see a hole. Trying to stay calm I worked the lever on the gun and jacked another shell into the chamber. Putting the gun six inches from its face I shot it again. This time the bullet ripped through its throat and it screamed before gurgling and choking on the blood welling from its mouth. It scrambled to get away even more frantically. Sick, I jacked in another shell and shot again. Somewhere on the third or fourth shot it laid down its head and died.

The man had turned his back and was looking into the trees over the

opposite bank. I walked over to him and handed him the gun.

"I don't feel very good about this."

He patted me on the shoulder and we stood awkwardly for a moment and then left.

Life goes on and an hour later, there I was, guilty, on a warm beach kissing Nancy Randall.

The Loppings

At the age of 33 I was teaching English in Saudi Arabia. I met a part time teacher there named David Heaton. During the first two months I visited him at his compound a couple of times and we began to get acquainted. David was British but had grown up in Saudi Arabia from the age of twelve. He had converted to Islam and he was more Saudi than he was British. I learned a lot just from talking to him and hanging out with his friends. I was a little uncomfortable because they were so much younger than I was. Some of them we re still in high school and would talk about how they harassed the teachers and got them fired. David, however, was quite mature for his age and I really enjoyed his company. He had a great ease around others.

Saudi Arabia still follows the laws of the Old Testament and its traditions haven't changed. Some of the young teachers had gone to see the public executions. Sean, the teacher coordinator, had talked and joked about it and it was becoming a sort of rite of passage to go. I knew I shouldn't go. How could it be okay to watch someone die just to have bragging rights? Just to say, I went too? David had witnessed it many times. He saw it as an affirmation of his faith and of the high moral standards of Muslim society. He said I should go with him.

I went down to Al-Balad, the central area in Jeddah. I caught a taxi and met David. We rode down to the main mosque talking about the many ways a taxi driver can rip you off. There is a big paved lot in front of the mosque with a raised concrete platform, about a foot high. The lot has a low iron fence around it and people we re already gathering. Some people looked at us and smiled knowingly. They we re there for the entertainment value or from morbid curiosity; who knows; they had grown up with this thing. It was fiercely hot and within minutes sweat was running down our bodies, inside our shirts and soaking our clothes. We waited in the shade of a tree behind an advertising sign.

About 10:30 we made our way to the steps of the mosque above the lot. There, people were already crowding the top of the steps near the line of police and soldiers. Down in the lot there were soldiers with machine guns. A man stood at one end of the lot behind a small soundboard and kept say-

ing "hallo, hallo" testing the sound system. Another full troop of soldiers marched into the square, quick time, and spread out along the fence and along the bottom of the Mosque steps where the crowd deepened.

We stood in the hot sun for twenty minutes. It beat down fiercely and I quickly became dehydrated. I felt weak and I tried to bend my knees, fearing that if I locked them I might pass out from heat stroke. Trying to protect my head I linked my fingers over the top and my hair was so hot it felt as if it might burn me. Sweat ran into my eyes, stinging them. I wiped at them with my shirt. I was beginning to feel a little nervous and unsure of my reaction. Why did I come? This is barbaric. I am a fool; a slut for experience.

David said, "Are you ready? Prepare yourself."

Sirens wailed and two police cars, front and back, escorted two vans into the square. David said again, "Prepare yourself."

I kept my mind blank to the immediate future. I told myself I was learning something. I was also seriously worried that I might pass out from the heat. My knees felt slack and watery but I didn't want the Saudis to think I was overwhelmed by emotion.

David told me that if a person is being executed for having wronged another family, (murder) then the family can choose to forgive them.

"So sometimes they let them go?"

"Sometimes."

There is one prince who always offers money to the family if they forgive the crime. I felt a moment of disappointment. Had I come all the way here for nothing? I felt a twinge of guilt. I was just as much a pile of shit as anyone else there. Why did I want to see it? Why did I allow my curiosity to drive me into situations that were extreme and morally questionable? I held onto the idea that it was happening whether I liked it or not.

The soldiers were all dressed in drab green uniforms with black combat boots. Occasionally they looked around and glared at the crowd or pushed through importantly on some errand. Now three or four men entered the square in bright white thobes with red and white checkered shumaks on their heads. Are these officiating princes or just officials? No. One had a scabbard. It wasn't the broad curved scimitar of the Lawrence of Arabia movies. It was a slender curved sword like those favored by Samarai warriors.

The vans backed up to the raised concrete slab. A man placed a colorful rug, it looked like a prayer rug, on the concrete. One and then another and then another; three brightly colored rugs on the gray concrete.

The first van opened its back doors and two policemen climbed out. They moved slowly and I peered in trying to see anyone who looked like a prisoner. The van was filled with police. Where was the marked man? What did someone about to die, look like? Finally, they reached back in and helped a blindfolded man to step down. He was a tall Nigerian. They led him to the rug. His steps seemed a little unsure but he was calm and sedate. David told me, they were sedated.

As a second man was being pulled from the van, the policemen helped the Nigerian to kneel. His hands were bound behind his back by cords and now they began to bind his ankles together. I watched for any sign of struggle. There was none. He even adjusted his weight forward so that they could slip the cords under his feet and around his ankles.

The other man looked Arab but he was not a Saudi. By the time they had secured the Nigerian, two policemen were also securing the Arab. Kneeling, bent forward, blindfolded and motionless they waited side by side, facing the long end of the parking lot where the announcer held the microphone.

The second van opened. Two policemen climbed out and assisted another blindfolded man out. He was a big, strapping Saudi. He also walked quietly with the police and knelt on the rug lain down for him behind the first two men. The police were almost caring in their handling of the men. It was as if, since their doom was sealed, they wanted it to go as humanely and quickly as possible. David mentioned that it went quickly and that if you looked away, just that fast, you might look back and only see headless bodies. I wondered, didn't any of the prisoners ever struggle or faint? Or even leap up and hop away in order to feel those last seconds of life, to have some control over the inevitable?

David said, "Prepare yourself. Just remember, okay, you can't do anything about it. It's going to happen."

Talking with two of his friends, they had told us that the men are prepared for weeks. Religious men come to them and tell them that even now they can repent. The religious leaders explain to them that everyone dies and we can all die at anytime, but if you repent, Allah may yet give you salvation and bring you into the next life.

The announcer began to describe the crimes over the sound system and his voice echoed across the square, mixed with shrill feedback. David translated for me. The Nigerian was being executed for trafficking in cocaine, as was the Arab next to him. No one seemed to care about them much. They were not Saudis and the insanity of drug trafficking in Saudi Arabia can only lead to death. It seemed that many of those executed were Africans who were drug smugglers from poor countries. But the real tension was to rest on the Saudi. He had killed a man in a fight. An eye for an eye; the family of the

murdered man could look on silently or could choose to forgive him of his sin against them. I was becoming numb. My brain kept trying to make reason of being there. But there wasn't any good reason.

The man in the white thobe, the executioner, had inherited his job from his father. His father had been famous for his skill, which sometimes requires, for the most heinous crimes, that the head be taken in three or four cuts so that the man mostly bleeds to death, aware of his slow decapitation.

As the executioner's assistant stood by with a second sword, the executioner unsheathed his instrument. It was bright and shone with a high polish. It was razor sharp. It is forbidden by the Koran to make the prisoner suffer needlessly or in anyway that is not prescribed by religious law. Even animals must be butchered with one quick slice of the throat; no sawing; so that the suffering is minimized.

Holding the sword casually, the man approached the Arab on the other side of the Nigerian. He was the farthest from me. Probably the man would raise the sword over his head and bring it down in a sweeping blow, ensuring a clean cut. He should also have to sidestep his own swing to avoid burying the sword in the concrete or in his own knee.

The prisoner was in a kneeling position, head bowed, leaning slightly forward. The similarities to Muslim prayer struck me; calm ritual, total submission. Now it just looked so vulnerable, so sadly meek. The executioner lay his hand gently on the man's neck and made him lean further forward so that his neck was extended. Again the prisoner complied the way a small boy does when the barber gently adjusts his head to clip the back of his neck.

Casually the executioner raised the sword and, without the slightest hesitation or drama, whipped it down.

A red meaty blot spouted where the man's head had been, like a bloody period. The slightest sound reached us, crisp and wet. Two gouts of blood shot, at intervals, from the neck. I couldn't take my eyes away and was only just aware of the shock of black hair rolling just six inches from the body. The body simply went slack and softly pitched over, the legs seeking to relax from their bunched position. A great pool of blood ran out. So easy. I checked myself for my reaction but felt nothing.

Quickly the executioner stepped over to the Nigerian, and gently pushed him forward so that his head and neck were extended beyond his knees. A casual sweep-not even a follow through. The Nigerian's head flopped to the ground and rolled a few inches. A larger man, his body keeled forward and sideways and the legs pushed back. His shoulders pushed from the top of his loose garb and he lay in a fetal position, slumped on one shoul-

der as if resting in the sun. His neck was ragged red and with two or three great pumps the blood pooled on the concrete.

The Nigerian was nearer and I could see the humanness of his body and how it lay down. I looked back at the Arab and the reality began to sink in. Nothing had changed. They were completely human, laying along the concrete, legs slowly pushing out and straightening. If you didn't look to the neck it was just as if they we re settling themselves into a more comfortable position on the concrete slab. The illusion of life sickened me. They we re so human, but one sweep of the arm had changed something. Be yond the brute obvious I couldn't tell what. We re they really dead? They didn't look like it. I felt afraid and empty.

The strict social control scared me. Calm and organized, everyone cooperated including me. But, these men we're criminals. Why, why would anyone ever smuggle drugs into Saudi Arabia? Maybe they we're just too stupid to live. Even worse, perhaps they hadn't smuggled anything. Don't think about that now.

Reasoning had been impossible from the beginning. But now, though I still wasn't thinking, I was aware of a growing sense of horror, and fear and disgust; of rejection. The third man had waited the longest. It doesn't seem right to be in such a vulnerable position and be treated so gently and not receive some mercy or grace, if only by a quick resolution. I guess murderers should be struck down but what of the humans capable of executing them? By necessity, this executioner was so good, so gentle and efficient.

The executioner walked to the Saudi and again gently, leaned him over, with a hand on the back of his neck. But then he walked back to the corner of the slab with his sword outstretched as if to hand it to his assistant. What is this? Is he switching swords? I forgot that the family could grant a reprieve; could forgive a fellow Muslim his transgression against them.

The Saudi was a big man. How could he stand it? He was so much flesh and blood. Why didn't he get up or object? After the executioners touch, he had to be waiting with his heart pumping furiously. He had to be waiting, waiting, waiting, It was a hideously cruel moment. But it was a hesitation of only five seconds at most.

An eye for an eye. There was no reprieve from the family. An older man summarily waved with the back of his hand; do it. The executioner took two steps, steadied the Saudi again and stepped back to raise the sword. Two touches. It was too much. The Saudi must be thinking, God, God, God, just do it or don't do it, let it be done.

Perhaps also sympathetic, the executioner, after steadying the man,

stepped to him and almost "put" the sword to his neck, as if he couldn't get it there fast enough. Or, as if he had forgotten a small detail at the office and had turned back to quickly complete his task. A shallow cursory blow, dropped almost level to the Saudi's neck; blade meeting flesh near the handle. It didn't seem to have enough momentum, enough swing.

His weighty head dropped to the concrete and rolled away. The man lurched upwards drunkenly as if to stand.

The man was too big to just go to sleep and he had waited too long. There were bits of tendon and bone in the neck. Instead of a great pumping gush of blood, two arteries, thin in the distance, stiffened and flicked out of the gaping neck. Blood shot in two thick streams as the body, too long to unfurl, fell sideways and pumped rhythmically. I couldn't look away, and the blood wouldn't stop pumping; two seconds, four seconds - ten.

I listened, shocked, then offended, as the crowd calmly clapped their approval. But justice had been served and all Muslim society was cleaner and safer for the moment. It wasn't a jeering clap, it was approval of a justified act. But still, afraid of these people, I insisted to myself that I not clap, like a powerless, defensive child. It was the only resistance I felt brave enough to offer. And I was not any better for it. I couldn't take my eyes off of the Saudi who continued to pump blood, as if shooting it desperately at his severed the head. I thought, please don't be thinking. Please don't live, stop it, rest. There is no hope, don't feel, don't pump. He was too dead to live, too alive to die.

I forced myself to look away and around. Three humans lying on the concrete, ordinary in every way except for their separated heads scattered near their bodies. Their clothes remained basically clean and their body positions natural and restful. I thought, they can't be comfortable like that, lying around on the concrete.

Men came, the ambulance pulled up, and they hurriedly straightened out the bodies. The men pulled the first two bodies onto stainless steel trays that puddled the blood and laid the heads with them. The guards pushed at the crowd. I didn't understand their Arabic but it was obvious that, justice completed, ogling was not allowed. I looked again at the Saudi. He was still pumping, but weaker. I'd better leave now. I turned to push back through the crowd that had pressed behind me at the top of the steps. People searched my face for the Westerner's reaction.

David looked inquiring too but I refused to let them see any regard for their little ceremony.

"Are you ready to go?" he asked.

"One minute."

David's friend had brought us water and I took a bottle and pushed back to the top of the steps, brazenly chugging the cold liquid, re-saturating my dehydrated body. I felt extremely aware of the gulping of my throat. My body seemed obscene. Suddenly being alive felt almost absurd or offensive.

Though very weak, the Saudi's body was still pumping small splatters of blood to the concrete in front of his chest where he lay sideways with his raw neck, an abrupt bloody blotch, aimed at me. I felt dizzy and sick but it would be like abandoning him if I left him there, not quite void of life. I can't look away as long as his terrified heart beats. He must have been terror stricken and full of adrenaline. Empty and afraid, I turned away as the blood slowed to occasional splutters. I didn't want to leave him but the soldiers were pushing and really rousting people now. He won't suffer if I leave. They are just large mounds of meat now. Nothing matters for them now. It's the rest of us who have to go on knowing.

As I walked away, all the kindness I had been shown in the country, sat like a cold rock in my stomach. I felt weak, alone and unprotected. I didn't deserve protection. They were much more sure of God than I was. And if God was that strict, what chance did I have? Or if these people were operating on their own, still what chance did I have?

Walking along the fence to the car we stepped over wet tea bags and empty biscuit wrappers strewn on the ground. As we pulled away, a hazardous materials tanker truck was pressure washing the blood of the sinners off the slab. They were cleansed and erased in a wet foamy spray.

Driving home, I boisterously agreed with whatever David and his friends said. Finally, I drew the line when they suggested we go watch them sew the heads back on at the cemetery. It wasn't necessarily respect for the dead, although I still felt a compulsion to protect them. It was me; I needed someone to sew my head back on.

"That's enough for me." I said, a big American in a little car, one small scared speck in a vast dry desert of indifference.

# QUESTIONABLE HABITS

# JIM SULLIVAN

During the '60s, at places like Woodstock, when other kids were doing drugs, getting high, and dropping out, I was being good. At the local movie theater, I was doing duds, Milk Duds that is. Sure, they had their downside: chocolate smudges, rotten teeth, and zits galore.

But such candy had another capability: gateway to more powerful sweets. Before long, I'd escalated to Walnettoes. I popped them chewy little chunks like pills, forgetting sometimes to remove their wax paper coverings. Soon, I wanted a bigger taste treat, so I started experimenting with all-day, taffy suckers. Then I couldn't stop.

To support my candy habit, I resorted to selling plumbing services, learned in shop class, at curbside. I'd wait on a corner. Men and women drove up in cars, rolled down their windows, and asked if I felt like plunging in. For \$5.00, I'd fix leaks, clear drains, and thread pipe. I'd then make my next candy buy.

Soon my self-worth went right down the toilet. Police picked me up as a derelict then. And I'd shake the next morning when appearing before the magistrate. He'd take pity and hospitalize me.

That's when they found I'd become diabetic. So I entered a 27-step antisweet program. Today, I'm proud to say I'm clean from candy, but have to give myself three insulin shots daily for the rest of my life.

# ABJEC+IVES

#### PAUL +HOMAS

The foibles of fables, coined in cliché Conundrums quantum, forever in aspic The dribbles and tirades, vivid in PK The maudlin exploits, of congenital fantastic.

The melodic charms, of grossly endemic On a fertility cruise, to almost ejaculate The eunuch styled purpose, dreaming of epidemic Full as a goog, when it's time to evacuate.

Iconoclasm and elastoplasts
Totems of tourniquets, to stop the floods
Rhetoric and a propped up prick
Allowing the wind, to greet the mast.

Rosarch tests, and silicon breasts Mountains derived, from mayhem Connubial bliss, upon the abyss Matches that thrived, in Salem.

Merely stepping, when what was needed was a hop Not understanding, all life's ruses Selecting a hot stake, instead of a cold chop Forgetting the wisdom, of the stooges.

#### SAVAGE

J⊕DANA +H⊕MPS⊕N

I.

He plays dangerous with the lion all day, clawing intentions for meat.

He is predator arrow and prey to the teeth, roaring war mask unmelted by the heat sweating jungle.

At night under leaf the boy dreams swirling rhythms of beasts. Their hearts beat one skin-stretched drum until morning.

II.

Welcoming night, the street holds an eye open.
The boy without a beast doesn't sleep, he only has fear of the heat.
City steel cracks the drum beating thuds of a random heart.
Gun shots without warning.

#### BASE +EN

#### MELISSA A +HULLEN

The number ten is a handbag, a doctor's black stachel. Ten fruits growing on a limb, purplish-brown, the shade of deep bruises, hung like an egg carton (long rows, two by two), balanced by their pale wicks like teats on the belly of a speckled cat.

Not like apples, which give to the stretching hand, which make their way to the basket.

The doctor's bag, the leather, the clasp, it rises in solemn time, engulfs the pendulous purpling fruits, closes over the limb with a quiet click; takes the egg-fruits in their ripe formation, takes the bruised wicks, takes the shining bald air, takes the quiet of a finished growth, and opens again to claim nothing inside, black and solid, the bottom facing up to a cocked eye.

#### MIHAI'S VISI+

#### BOGDAN +IGANOV

Mihai was my companion. On our last stretch of transgression We walked like Marxist comrades Sharing a likeness known only to shadows. He was at best ten years too dark And his poetic beard impressed me. I was still weary when saying to Mihai "These waves flap at our naked feet, The sounds court our tender spine Like sprayed droplets on leathery shells." He turned and eyed me as normally as he could Leapt into the water turned to flames, Grabbing my waist he pulled me in. I was secretly pleased to follow And Mihai observed my tearful self-analysis, Told me, and I would forget of Kindred visions misunderstood Of tragic ages passionately shared. I believe he also said "We are men of sensuous words, We were men of distant worlds."

# +REA+MEN+ RESIS+AN+ DEPRESSI⊕N (2000)

#### CHRIS +OLL

Let's begin in a dream and see where we go. I have a girl's sweater tied around my waist. I eat the last free cookie as I wander through a video store and look for the horror movie section. Go get me my pistol Bob, I can't tell right from wrong. The slave girl gets her first raygun by taking it from the frog creature she strangled with her iron chain. Hope is the feathered thing who lurches in a straitjacket. We sleep on the side of a mountain of cocaine while computers chitter in darkened rooms. I'm surrounded by an army of Guardian Poets, Night flows from my pen, and the poem knows I'm sick at heart and it carries me.

## CLAUS+R @PH@BIA

## CHERYLA. ++++WNSEND

Sometimes you walk into a room that you don't really want to enter But you're there You don't want to be but you're there You look at the windows and the door you came in through You look for any way out and you panic You worry that when you do finally get out that not everything will be as it was when you walked in Into that room Into that space Into his arms

# N⊕+HING +⊕ BR €AK UP

CHERYL + W NSEND

He wrote me
to say he
didn't want any letters
from me
He called me
to tell me
he didn't want to hear
my voice
When he drove by
my house
I knew he
wasn't looking

# READ I+ WI+H A DRAWL, DAHLING

CHERYL + OWNSEND

He's my heart attack lover palpitating my estrus into perpetual overdive Gonna dehydrate me if he doesn't come up for air Spelling it out with a capital "T" I swear my back is just gonna snap in two Check him out when he's through and resuscitate me just as his arms stretch out and lock

## CONTENT MENT

(PLUS OR MINUS)

#### CHERYL + OWNSEND

The clock is closer to midnight than you are to me the rain is remorseful outside our air-conditioned windows Years have glued shut our doors (Not that we have places to go anyway)

My arm extends fully to touch your soft side

There is a small sound of awareness which I am satisfied with and we breathe gently in the darkness of our marriage and dream of Caribbean lust

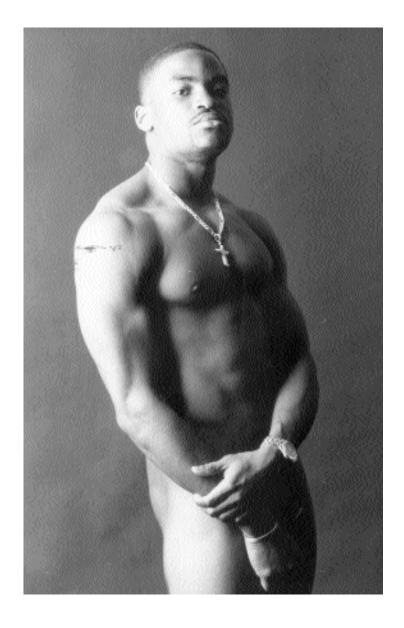
# DRIVING BACK FROM CLEVELAND

#### CHER YL + & W NSEND

and it's raining like Hell with thunder all over and the sky just a reach away My fresh wash & wax car not even 24 hours good is breaking my heart On a train car just ahead in bright red spray paint is "Tommy Too Tall, I Love You" from Loraine Through the rain and dark there is illumination rolling rolling like lightning



artwork by Cheryl Townsend



artwork by Cheryl Townsend

## DRAWING FACES

### NOAH M. +YSICK, M.A.

children can be so obscene.
she really drew it—a ghost
on a grid.
pressed the felt on
the marker flat—bled
the black
lines.
smiled like pan
on goat haunches.
she's barely three, but it bothers me:
the tortured way she sees a face.

#### R & SE BUDS

#### MELANIE WASHING+ON

pricks blood from an already stricken wound disoraganized minds filled with nonsence and lies when a war starts in your soul that you can not control

when you lose sence of your own emotions when battles are being faught were there are no winners

your every waking moment is controlled by someone else

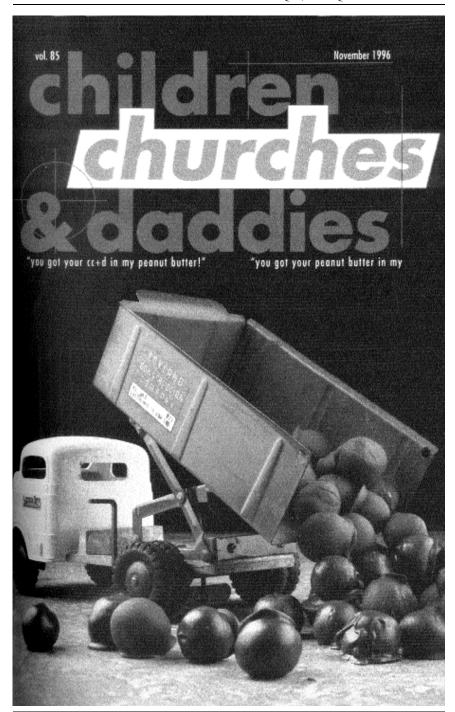
thier reactions are what makes your actions pricks of blood from an already stricken wound when you realize that the war inside of you will never and can never end when that that finally dreadfullness passes over you then and only then can you and will you ever know how i feel

### +HE ITUSE

#### **Y B**SH

an ideal I created to help deal with deals an idol I overrated to catch sunlight in a jar

			• -		
CCAD	S PUBI	ic A T	т́ДПС	8r DEC	iСП
$3C\Delta R$	o r o b	$A \cup \Delta I$	TWIIS	$\alpha D = 3$	IUII



gon in the six



## THE HUNTER AND THE FOX

#### SYDNEY ANDERSON

I've been a hunter, you know I've been working at it for a while I've gotten pretty good at it

I've been looking for the right prey all this time someone I could dominate isn't that my role, you konw

Ive been looking for an animal for a fox someone that would be a good show-piece

YOU KNOW
WHA+ I'M
+ALKING ABOU+

I've been looking all this time and I'm still looking

so where is he

## SYDNEY ANDERSON

i know it has been years since we have talked and I know you probably hate me and maybe you want something different in life and maybe I would be a nice diversion for you

and maybe I could tell you that I have gone through a lot too and maybe we could find consolation in each other provide relief

maybe you would talk to me and say things that you could not tell anyone well, at least not in open places

well, maybe you know what i am talking about I have been looking for things and maybe, just maybe you are looking for things too

> maybe something out of life maybe some comic relief, some attention maybe I could be that for you maybe you could be that for me

# IF I WILL HAVE +IME

#### MARINA AR+UR®

Oh brain take a note Call Jenny soon about the party next weekend

What else do I have to do I know I'm forgetting something

I'll have to get groceries soon One slice of cheese ane a half a jar of pickles will not last me a week

Paycheck Friday

What should I make for dinner tomorrow night This house needs cleaning

Think

Damn I need a vacation

I wonder if I'll have time to sleep tonight

### **S**PRING

# MARINA AR+UR+

Spring Hundreds of **Daffodils** in a sunburst of colors

Waving

Back and forth

in the gentle breeze that cools everything under the

sun

the sun

shining brighter than ever before

the world is walking

up

after a dormant six month sleep

it is the first morning of a new

spring

season

# WHA+ ARE +H+SE N+HE DARK

#### MARINA AR+URO

What are those noises in the dark that we hear in the night time just before sleep

Are they ghosts under the bed Are they bogeymen in the closet

Or is it the sandman opening your door or is it the tooth fairy lifting your pillow

Maybe it's just a restless dog howling in the night

Yet you seem to hear unknown footfalls tapping at the ground with eerie creaks

Yet you seem to hear a rustling of curtains even though there is no breeze

Maybe those noises are only your imagination had al ittle teddy bear

Maybe

# I十'S Y OU

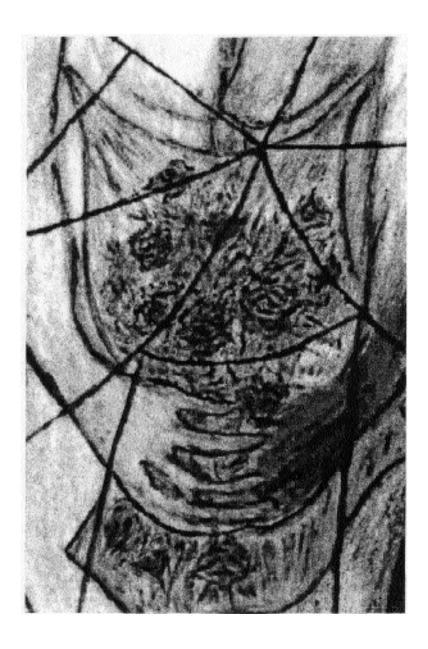
#### MARINA AR+UR®

I loved my soft quilt blanket When I was only two But you see, the reason for that was I never had known you

Thad al ittle teddy bear at the age of four I loved the bear with all my life But now I love you more

I loved my rusty bibycle When I had just turned seven But now I feel when I'm with you That I have gone to heaven

I have aged since the younger days I've had a chance to grow
And now it's no longer things that joy to me brings
It's you that I love so

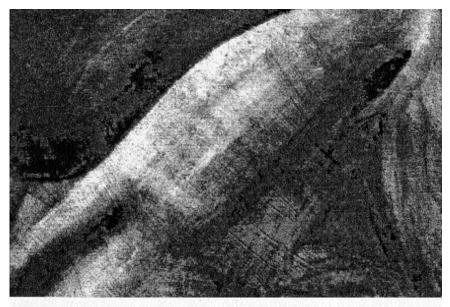


Body As Landscape by Stephen Mead

Hands on feet, a respite this, to crouch here observant on golden shores, these veins, rivers, over the footholds of bones pulsing to your slumber. They almost purr.



Body As Landscape by Stephen Mead

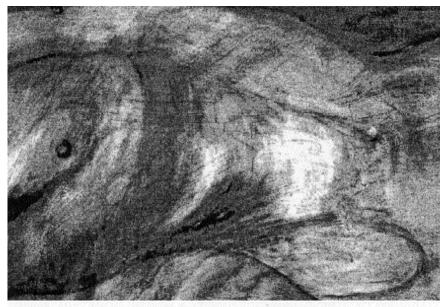


The legs, an arch, to climb such a slope with fingers as a wind ripple, with tongue, a caress, & the exploration is sure as any earthly plateau heavens hold the horizons of. Let us go further.



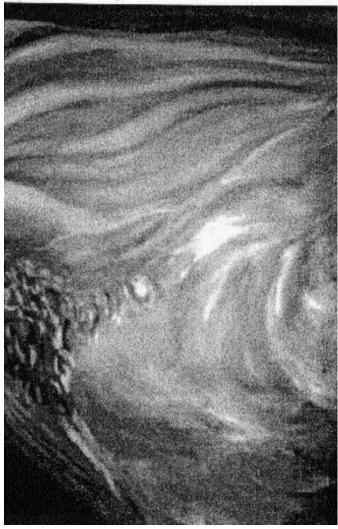
Breasts, dearest, they are orbs of the horn, cornocopia-firm with milk as honey, the fertile fruit in store tender as a warrior in Amazon strength cradling scars.

Body As Landscape by Stephen Mead



"Yonder", the stretch sighs, torso of holiness, the sacred ribs, a hull of breath where spirit life flickers candle warmest towards the belly which yeilds loin ripe between hips, & which of us afloat? Which of us, gondolier?

Lover, the copper canyon's birth is a field of bronze. Are these mine or yours'----- these waving shimmers in a valley of hope to rise forth from and find summits summoning: "Sail more!"?



Body As Landscape by Stephen Mead



Lover, up close
the world turns
into Gulliver,
& are we the Lilliputians
or equally giant to one another?
I do not know
any more knowledge
than these rolling folds,
these gentle flats.
Teachery be compass,
be map,
our sojourn a bas relief
of tactile pleasures.



Face away, what a shelter, the back, what messages in the shoulders. They are ensigns of invitations. Commissar, I listen, receive what you hear.

Body As Landscape by Stephen Mead

Stand up, lovely laborer, such tides sweep your curves ocean sure as a port vessel blessed by its very nature to center the frame as a trunk the moon rushes up for a tree of arms.



Body As Landscape by Stephen Mead

Turn around, a ceremonious throne sitting in its own honor, belly wide, regal, a dream of the sun real as a spear or an oar with which to stroke waters, navigate the course.



Body As Landscape by Stephen Mead

apparent FOR WARD web maze GABRIEL A+HENS minotaur center heart MASK preys GABRIEL A+HENS arms groping masquerade arms complied hide sky dress closer costume you black face black tears hope mask melt pay knives join cutting say slicing below high mask down hope you no forward agony forward forward hope nightmare desperation pain

# JAMES

## GABRIEL **A**+HENS

past republicans

confused

# HOLE IN +HE HEAR+

GABRIEL **A**+HENS

night

before

sleep

you

light

my

bed

feels

hole

where

missing

I you hours walking conversation room think think the doing one know didn't pushed know arm get pulled something held want close didn't think know together bother didn't care right sat park expect sat talked future

you hand your me sleep

my bed hole

through heart wish feel alone wish hole

away lay night alone you

complete nothing matters

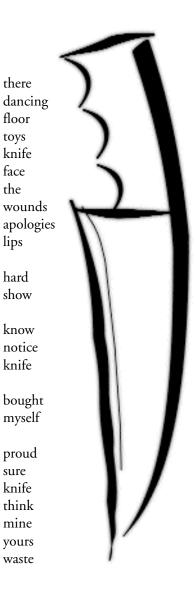
feel

am

[ 251 ]

# KNIFE

## GABRIEL A+HENS



# C

#### DAVID-MA++HEW BARNES

For Dromio - who once played my twin

You call yourself a cynic
I call you a sinner
You chauffeur me home
I am cruising on my temptation
Your fingers play the dashboard
As you sing your Counting Crows
Chords crash in my heart
I trip over your charm
As you confide in me your future
I need no convincing
You will be a big star
I wish on you already

I do cartwheels
Sitting next to you, I am challenged
I catch your concern
When I can no longer hold your eye
Your voice falls out of tune
You drain your water bottle
I see your skin, choked with your own
Careless disregard for
My craving
It competes with my control
Black hair falls into your chestnut eyes
And I am muted
By my crush and your conversation

"What you see is what you get."

I can only covet so much.

## MONOLOGUE +O A MARRIED MAN

#### DAVID-MA++HEW BARNES

I bet you work in a fancy office With real plants and a gorgeous view of the city You probably give all the girls a little pat

Every now and then

So no one suspects anything about you

At Christmas, you give them all boxes of candy

Truffles, probably

White chocolate or pink champagne

They can't wait to dance with you at the office parties - shake your hands

Because they adore you, they worship you

Especially the wives

But you refuse politely, don't you

Because you are a married man

And doesn't your wife look lovely tonight

And I bet - when she comes home from her little

Weekend getaway

And she's hugging you and she's kissing you

Because she missed you so much

It won't be her you're touching

It won't be her you're kissing

And it won't be her that you're thinking about

It'll be me

And I will tell you why

and this is so sad

Because you - you are nothing but a coward

And I am nothing to you

But a tool for your imagination.

## MR. DEA+H

#### DAVID-MA++HEW BARNES

He is a man, a stranger, with dark hair, deer brown eyes and a dangerous smile that lights you up like birthday candles. You meet him when you least expect it, when you are particularly vulnerable and craving some type of reassurance that you are beautiful and worthy. From the first sight of him, you know that he is the only person in this world and in your life that you will ever truly love.

In the beginning, when you are dizzy, weak and unsuspecting, his meticulous plan to ruin your life is something you are oblivious to. But he knows what he is doing. Like a symphony, he has the entire thing orchestrated and you are only an instrument. That is why, when you are in that common senseless state and you are seeing the world through eyes of bliss and love songs, he says the rights things to you, opens every door, shows interest in your life and your passions and spends hours pleasing you beyond waves of ecstasy. It is all part of his plan.

There are so many things to love about him. He remembers your birthday, the words to your favorite song, the date and hour your first met, your mother's maiden name and all the things in the world that you secretly desire. He takes you to hilltops at midnight to look at the city sparkling below. He takes you to places from his past, telling you stories for each one of them. He talks about the children he wants to raise with you, naming them and giving them life before they are born. He talks about the dream house in places like Arroyo Grande, California and summer trips to places like South Carolina and Russia and you mention Paris and his eyes dance in an exotic and wistful melody with yours. He tells you that you are pretty, you are funny, you are smart, you are invincible and most importantly, you are his. He talks about spending the rest of his life with you and no matter what, he would never, never hurt you.

The sound of his velvet voice, especially when he whispers your name, is intoxicating, reeling and leaves you trembling with urgency. When he holds your hand or kisses your cheek, you feel your heart turn away from all

that you have ever known or trusted and instead you convince yourself to follow him wherever he wants you to go. You do not question. You do not judge. You do not suspect a thing. When he beckons, the thrill of uncertainty, rushes through you like sugar. In this newfound high, clarity and reason are shoved aside to make room for adventures and rendezvous. He challenges you to do things that you have always believed to be immoral, perverse or frightening. He convinces you to do, say and feel things that you swore you would never do. But you do them all. Just to please him. Because making him happy is the only thing worth living for now.

Slowly, you say "we" where you used to say "I" and you refer to him as "the best boyfriend I have ever had", "the greatest guy in the world", "he's so different from the others" and finally, and foolishly, "the best thing that has ever happened to me". In return, and as part of his plan to consume you, he says words like "forever", "t rust me", "I will always be here for you" and "of course I would never cheat on you". You watch his mouth say the words, not noticing the deliberation or his self-serving motivations. You don't catch that slight twitch in his left eyelid, which is his silent confession to the brutality that actually sleeps in his heart. You believe what he says to be the truth because you have been led to believe that no one really lies.

Without any explanation, the words he says to you start to sound harsh and cruel. When you weep, he calls you "a cry baby". When you show excitement, he says you are "melodramatic" or "too emotional" or "neurotic" or "insane". When you exaggerate the truth to spare someone's feelings, he tells you that "you lie to everyone you know". When you try to express to him your concerns, your feelings, your opinion, he brushes it off with a roll of his eyes and an exasperated "Here we go again".

You beg for any type of affection or attention, just to be assured that he stills find you beautiful and desirable and all the things that he told you once that you were. But he pushes you aside or wants you to wait until the commercial break or says the all-too-familiar words "Can't we talk about this later? I'm tired. It's been a long day". When you become desperate, feeling ugly, worthless and not of any importance to him anymore, you take your clothes off and present yourself to him, naked and he says "Not now. I don't want to. It's just not the same anymore. I mean, what's the point if it isn't going to lead to anything more?" You dress again, pulling layers and layers of rejection and humiliation over your unkissed and untouched skin.

In the midst of your realization that he is not what he once appeared to be, you justify his behavior. You defend his actions to your friends. You deny the intervention of those that know you and care and those that are capable of seeing him for the monster that he really is. You question yourself, placing blame on your own faults. "What did I do wrong?", "Maybe if I was prettier", "Maybe I ask too much of him" and "How can I be better?" He offers you no answers, no advice or comfort. Instead, he smirks and laughs to himself, enjoying the matinee of your heartbreaking performance, pleased with himself that he is the sole purpose and cause of your misery and your failed attempts.

In the truth of it all, he does not know what it means to love another person. He only knows and seeks the instant gratification of a fifteen minute skin trade in which he is in control and is the dominating force and the sole receiver of pleasure as he pounds and penetrates and permeates another pitiful soul. You shouldn't be surprised. After all, wasn't he the one who told you that every attractive person he sees, he at once imagines them naked? Wasn't he the one who told you that you were paranoid, distrustful and "worried about nothing"? Wasn't he the one who told you that the two of you were "sexually incompatible" and called you names like "prude" and "old fashioned" and accused you of "always being the victim" or "trying to always appear to be the good one". He cites specific examples, mostly when you were showing your feelings whether they were concern or rage, and he says that the problems in the relationship and the sudden void of love is your fault and never his. The downfall and destruction of the relationship was of your doing, not his. By this time, you are so convinced that you everything is indeed your fault, you lose sight of the looming t ruth. You are the good one. And you always will be.

In the end, before the death of your innocence, the destruction of your planned future and the criminal invasion of your soul, he moves in for the kill. He disproves every word he has spoken and every promise he has ever made, proving to you once again that true love does not really exist anymore. He belittles you. He disrespects you. He lies to you. He cheats on you with a close friend. And not once do you question the change until it is too late and you no longer know your name.

For comfort, know this, that one-day, he will realize all that you offered. When he is twenty years older, forty pounds heavier and silenced when there is no one there to listen to his self-indulgence and ego stroking, he will miss you and he will hang his head in shame. You, in return, will be dancing in Paris, living in a dream house in Arroyo Grande, counting the accolades from your brilliant career and find yourself surrounded with white carnations, poetry and unspeakable bliss. And you will be blessed with love. For, without or without him, you are love and he is blind and the loss will be eternally his.

# +HIS MAN'S WA+CH

#### DAVID-MA++HEW BARNES

I wear it Because I love him I slipped it off His wrist, in between Margaritas, Marlboros Muddled innuendo

The band - it is silver
Like an accordion
I sit on the sofa at Millie's party
Where everyone is drunk
Listening to Maria McKee
But I am watching the seconds turn
Like the hope dripping
From his melancholic slightly-buzzed face
In a breath, he expresses
That a bedroom is what we need
Because we don't have much time

In the fumbling dark
The numbers glow
Illuminate the truth
I love to watch him tremble
Tick tocking
To the rhythm of his regular heart

Early dawn is reflected
In the round, glass face of the morning after
I know I have to give it back
He gives me so many words and wishes
I return his time
My wrist burns naked
And I think about him
At least until noon

# **→**HR ESH⊕LDS

#### DAVID-MA++HEW BARNES

\*A portion of this story was originally published as a poem titled "South Shore" in the magazine "Backspace" (Volume 3.03, 1995).

The author has retained all rights.

Josie and I would get really stoned and listen to Diana Ross records on my turntable. We would play them on a faster speed, mimicking the chipmunk squeal of a dying diva. We would crank call people we hated (like that bitch Amy what's-her-name) and we drank generic beer and thought we were cool because we were Seniors.

Josie was in love with this guy named Larry and he was in my English class. I tried to get them together, but he had a girlfriend. Josie never let on, but I knew she was devastated that Larry didn't like her. When his girlfriend dumped him, she looked at me with beer buzzed eyes and slurred, "Serves him right."

Josie used to run stop signs and one time she drove up on the curb in front of my house, until she wrecked her Mom's car when these two guys in an El Camino tried to race her. We were listening to The Clash when the accident happened. I ended up pinned in the backseat, the engine fell out of the car and Josie got knocked out by the steering wheel.

We worked together at an ice cream parlor, but neither one of us could ever decide what our favorite flavor was.

Bridget and I wanted to be rock stars in the worst way. Like crack-addicted canaries, we would sing until a neighbor would threaten to call the police on us for disturbing the peace. We wrote songs at coffee shops, harmonized together in the rain and passed each other song lyrics in between classes. I still remember the first song we ever wrote. It was called "Party Love" and it was about a guy and girl who fall in love at a party and then they get separated forever and spend the rest of their lives looking for each other.

Bridget and I were separated when we both had to move. I got sent to live with my Dad and Bridget had to live with her cousins in the suburbs. Our musical careers were postponed. I hope she is still singing.

Mara was my best friend and she was Jewish and she dated a black basketball player at school. She was the best dancer and she knew Swahili and sign language. I met her in English class when the teacher reprimanded her for being "snide". We spent the rest of the year with wine coolers on our breath, hip-hop in our souls and a common quest for true love.

Shortly after she graduated, Mara got engaged to a man from Brazil and moved to Africa and I never got the chance to say goodbye. But I will always remember spending nights at her house and the day she painted a map of the entire world on her bedroom wall. I studied the shade of every vivid color and secretly, I plotted my own escape from the doldrums of mediocrity and the pre-destined parental expectations that I would never leave the shadow of my own black-and-white misery.

Donna was the Homecoming Junior Princess and she was the epitome of everything that I wanted to be. We cut class on a Wednesday, drove to a park and got stoned out of our minds. And even though we thought it was funny at the time, Donna told me that she hated everyone in her life. She was fed up with ski trips, French Club and college applications.

When we went back to school, no one could figure out what we were laughing about. But Donna and I understood. Nobody else did, but that was okay with us. When I made the cheerleading team, it was Donna who understood the permanent sense of sorrow that stood before me. She knew that to be everything they wanted you to be, it was best to be as numb as possible.

Natalie and I rode the bus home together everyday. She was the best actress in school and the most beautiful black girl I knew. She had parts in The Crucible and South Pacific and the audiences would cheer and stomp and scream her name. I knew she would go far.

Sometimes she would cry and tell me that no matter what she did, her mother would never love her. They lived in an apartment in the hills that had become a loveless prison for my friend. Each day that Natalie took that final step off of the bus, the dread in her eyes was greater than any of her performances. To comfort her, I told her about my own childhood and my mother's blatant thieve ry of my youthful optimism. We were connected because we were both seeking approval from mothers who hated themselves more than we could comprehend at the age of fifteen.

When someone came to get me out of the school assembly to tell me that Natalie had tried to kill herself, by taking a bunch of her mother's pills, I felt proud of her. It was the best vengeful guilt trip I had ever heard of. I applauded her performance and allowed her to bask in the glare of her teenage angst, knowing that one day she would be a star. And the world would love her.

Anastasia and I drank all of the Vodka out of her mother's cupboard and then we filled up the bottle with water. We never got caught. We staggered in the inebriated rain to the movie theatre on University Avenue in Berkeley to see The Rocky Horror Picture Show and I let her read all the letters I wrote to a boy that I liked and she told me "to love life freely, you have to freely love your life". I think she was from Canada and life was effortless for her and I envied her freedom. Although we had a lot of friends, she and I were just kind of sad and we never really knew it. Until the night we shared a bottle of champagne in a scare-the-piss-out-of-you cemetery, surrounded by our own ghosts, hauntings and grave realizations that we could fool anyone, even ourselves.

Raymond was the brave one. He was the protector, then lover, of my fifteenth year. We lived in a bad neighborhood, surrounded by liquor stores, failed attempts and the thundering echoes of gunshots and the misery that follows a permanent sense of loss.

Raymond was Mexican and he was in a gang and everyone thought that he liked girls (even me). He drove stolen cars without a license, smoked marijuana and talked of guns and scars and fights that began when he was eleven. He took me to a Madonna concert, told me that I was beautiful (and I believed him) and slow danced with me to my favorite song. Raymond had soft hands, a rough heart and the habit of kissing my innocence with his rebellious edge.

Love was rare in our neighborhood, but across the bridge from where we lived was the ocean. It was in the eye of our first tender moment, that I finally saw belief. I saw it for what it was. Someday, my experiences and recollections would just be memories that with a stir would invoke a smile or a longing for what could have been. But at that second, they were thresholds for me. They were barriers that I was crossing as the loss of my innocence burned and the unwelcoming glare of adulthood beckoned like a sinister drought. I would be left thirsting for happily-everafters and the thrill of the unknown.

Raymond's vision quest was infectious. He convinced me that someday we would make it out. That there was a life beyond the love ghetto we had been subjected to. But, in the end, I left him for the rich, viewless urchins from the hills and their class rings, country clubs and complicated lies. They never gave me water.

Raymond (and to all of those I have recreated here, not in vain but in celebration), I have kissed regret and I have bathed in shallow ends. In the tidal pull of my heart.

I find myself swimming over these thresholds that will not be buried with my youth. If you feel the ache of what is missing, I will meet you there.

# UNAU+HORIZED

#### DAVID-MA++HEW BARNES

You told me not to write this
Warned me that if I did
You would write a tell-all
Unauthorized biography
And call it:
My Life, My God, My Hell
A tribute to me and all that I cared to share
Written from yourpoint-of-view
I am certain that a lot of things will be left out
To prepare for your literary and promised revenge,
I will not tell them your name in my story
If you remember to include all of this in yours:

Tell them about how we met and how you promised Romance and courtship and a life of eternal bliss. Tell them about MulhollandPark and the seventh of August And the canyon drives and the poolside, moonlit baring of our souls. Tell them about how I was nearly consumed by Hollywood And how you saved me from myself Tell them about how much you inspired me And the weekend that we ran away and plotted a new life.

And tell them about how you would rather watch television
Than watch my heart unfold for you or make love
Tell them about how many times you made me cry
With your daily doses of they-did-me-wrongex-boyfriends
Tell them about the night that I tried to please you and your
Immoral fantasy and I shared you with another and it nearly killed me.
Tell them about all the times that you tried to push me away
And I was relentless in loving you, stealing away from myself.

Above all, tell them the truth.

They will never believe you.

## $\mathbf{W}$ I+H $\oplus$ U+ $\mathbf{C}$ $\oplus$ NSEN+

# JALENE BERGER

A heart worn on your sleeve is vulnerable, tender and open. Long forgotten memories of the harsh conditions there. Easily caught up in the cobweb of our minds' eye. Leaving it hanging out in the wind unprotected. The reality of what 'falling in love' brings. Swirling around all aspects of life. Hanging thick, heavy in the air. Sweet and sticky as molasses. Falling in love blind, Without consent. Can torture Your mind Body And soul. So, hold fast To your heart. Protect it from harm. Hold closely to your breast. Where God intended is the best. Safely tucked within our ribbed chest. We have only one life to lead in this world. Only one heart to protect and it's as good as gold. Keeping it deep inside with warmth and loves caress. Please be cautious and careful with whom you give it to hold. Your future is for you to decide which way it will eventually unfold.

# MOST ACCURATE METAPHORS

# JACOB BES+

now there's two ways this can happen, little girl you can keep fighting me, and if that's the case, i'll have to keep my hand over your mouth and this knife at your neck, or you can relax, enjoy yourself, make this easier on the both of us

rape is one of the most savage one of the most accurate metaphors for how men relate to women in this society

you know you want this so stop fighting it

it is a political crime committed by men as a class against women as a class

i saw the way you were looking at me earlier, the way you stared at me the way you were dressed i know what you were thinking so don't say a word

rape is an attempt by men to keep all women in line Bob Lanm, 1976

did you think those drinks were free

how long did you think i could wait it's my turn now you owe it to me

just do as i say and no one gets hurt

# A SOCIALLY ACCEPTED TARGET

# JACOB BES+

rape is connected to the frustration produced by living in this society

rape is anger misdirected towards a socially accepted target: women

> Men and Politics Group, East Bay Men's Center, Statement on Rape

i didn't get the promotion i deserved i work in a cubicle the boss doesn't know my name i put in too much overtime this tie makes it hard to breathe

this traffic is always in my way there's all these bills i have to pay

i'm angry all the time

and the damn kids are banging their toys when i come home and dinner is never on time and your looks have just gone to hell and i hate you

i just want a fucking beer, you bitch

it's all your fault

# A MARRIED MAN'S CA+HOLIC GUIL+

#### PAUL COR DEIR O

I was supposed to be miles away but I suffered a change of heart. Who needs driving hundreds of miles a day, a heart attack, more money than I won't save for rainy tomorrows. I run in for pizza and there she sits lonely as a working class maid that hasn't been invited to the ball. I want to repeat some mindless cliché like the glass slipper doesn't have to fit and you're so right the way you are as you can't be any less than the full bodied angel I see. I wanted to slip my fingers, (what else) through her long Cinderella hair, but I didn't damn me. I wanted to share with her the pizza pie I ate silently in ten minutes flat alone.

# FVEN A BEACH BUTT POET IS +OO SATISFIED FOR GREATNESS

#### PAUL CORDEIRO

He says the old ladies love it best when he tosses the gulls table scraps and sometimes God thunderclaps in awe at such acrobatics that the sea tumbles seaweed and the old ball we're on rolls along toward the sun as everyone goes home happier and wiser. Those that fight madness and live for rougher places head for the tattoo parlors, strip joints, bars, and the neon lights. The desperate meet there, then, go down to mingle molecules on the terraces and the smooth darkened beach, and to ease the squeeze of the octopus around the heart. He leaves these unwise to haunt themselves and doesn't chase the leftover women in bars either who act like drugged whores in search of a fix. He says, you need to import friends down here, and keep to yourself, because the transplanted natives are icier than dead fish, stiff as preachers, closed down as the statues of Confederate generals unbowed in their loser's stance. Even the townies who show flashes of passion when drunk, and love to watch their football team punish with defense, wear racing T-shirts, and gaudier ones with the Dixie flags on the back. They repeat the same tired dance steps to a fault. They act like Hemingway only fought, fucked, fished, and shot rhinos and elephants and lions and never shined his words a thousands times before he said good night to a gentler world he helped bless and destroy. My buddy says he only wants the quiet life now after all the wild pot smoking chicks gave him enough breathless roller coaster rides to memorize what a rock star's endless fucks might feel like. He watches the dolphins frolic and the butterflies flitter in the dune grass. The moon comes up high after the cooling sunset to wander with him among Wordsworth's windblown daffodils where he does no one any harm but himself for not pulling enough poems like shark's teeth from out of his too satisfied and wine warmed guts.

## MY GOLDEN ON-LINE FRIEND

#### PAUL COR DEIR O

In her fifties, she still has Marilyn Monroe's playboy image. She runs on the treadmill, with round firm breasts and long legs to make angels weep. Somehow we connect though I'm not a gay dancer and good listener who knows he's not as handsome as one of the Kennedy cousins who never quite stepped on the White House lawn. I can only guess she's a retired dancer herself. I don't teach or publish anything substantial enough to replace what luxury she dearly enjoys. Though I give her examples of the pleasure of pain. She masturbates herself when I say I'm hotter than a city summer night on top of her now. She tells me she's miserable, and lonely, and sleeps in a separate bedroom a wing away from her husband. He writes scholarly criticisms and historical novels. He gives her a happy life raising their three kids, who also respect and admire him. She doesn't need any constipated married poet to drive four or five hours to the Connecticut woods to obviously upset the beauty sleep she has with a big house, and an investment banker on the side. She's bored by guys who want to give up all for a few minutes with her golden hair and smile.

# **M**O+IVE

# LAURI MCGILL GALEN+INE

What I remember most
Is the rage in your eyes
As the words from your lips
Broke my heart.
And I question your motive.
I wasn't the only one
Who sinned that afternoon
You were right there with me.
It was you who said
"Let's go in the backroom."
The thing is,
My heart was in it.
And if God looks at the heart
Then I guess your sin
Goes deeper than mine.

#### INNOCENCE S-OLEN

#### ROSE & GRIER

This is a secret journal. No one knows I am doing this. No one knows what I have done. As of late I have not been myself. They say it is because I am old. I do not try to convince them they are wrong. I sit inside myself and let them think that they know me and what is best for me. It is the only way I can continue this. It is the only way I can live my life for the duration with some semblance of sanity. One must admit at one time or another the realities of what their life represents. What it is they have done or not done with what the good Lord has given them. I stand firm in the belief that I have used my talents to the best of my ability. It is what I know. I claim full responsibility for my actions. The subject is not up to debate. Facts are facts.

All day today I have been thinking about how I am going to organize this body of work. I shall not mean to shock nor be thought a liar. So I think I have to write this from another perspective.

Here on these pages I can think in full sentences. I only come here when they are gone. Any hint of another and I close the satin bind and curse internally. In here I am free of the restraints life places on me. I am free of judgment. No one can take away what is in my head. Being alone is a good thing. Not a prison. Loneliness only consumes me when I cannot be here. Here is my favorite place. Here has always been a welcoming home.

Finally. I have waited days to come back. How do I start? How do I end? My actions must be catalogued. Yes. From the beginning. As young as I was the path was ever so clear. How wise I was. Following the course so diligently. I remain faithfully and eagerly on track. My regrets are few, if any. For I would not be where I am if not for where I have been. My reality is not to suffer guilt, but to embrace my truth. As with any confession, it is hard to begin. It is hard to know where to begin. Especially when you have to remember exactly. Admit exactly. Ah yes. Admit. This is turning out to be harder than I thought. There is much to think about. So much surfacing. How to word things and not be in denial. How can I word things so not to embellish and glorify?

I remember growing up in a family of all boys. Brothers, cousins, all boys, save two. I knew boys inside out. How their minds worked, how their bodies looked, how they smelled. I considered myself an authority. The authority on boys. I was always one of the boys because I had the energy and stamina to keep up with them. I liked the way they played. I liked what they played. I was a spy. I was the first female soldier hero. The first female everything, and, I was the first female relative to speak out loud about the monster

in our family.

I remember being happy and healthy. There were things in my life I thought could be different but I could never have predicted the poison that was going to be woven into the fabric of all of our lives. It was a stain so indelible that nothing could clean or remove it. Like a phantom it haunts and creeps around corners it never belonged in the first place.

My two female cousins are eleven years older and eleven years younger than I. The younger, I hardly know. The older, I know so well, as if she were me. The years we shared our lives with each other would show to be the common thread that held us to the living world. For without her confirmation, I would not be here. Had we not shared our secrets I would have thought myself mad. I could not have lived like that, would not have lived like that.

My father was a traveler. Quite good I might add. We were comfortable in the purest sense. Often, fathers job would take him out of the state or country for an extended time and we found ourselves living with any one of mother's five sisters. It was okay with me, because spies never stay in the same place too long. It was on one of these family stays that I met our common Basilisk.\*

I remember when it was that I could hang with the boys in the trees, as Robin Hood did. Run from trench to trench during our war games. Save each other from the evil clutches of an international spy ring. I also remember when all that stopped and my body changed. I could no longer drop hard to the ground as one of my fellow boys in play. Now, I had to be the damsel in distress. The murdered one they had to carry home. The one the boys had to protect from the boys. I was now the one who the vampires bit, no longer allowed to bite the boys I so dearly loved to scream with and chase with reckless abandon. My body betrayed my reverie. My imagination limited by the confines my new breasts now placed on those boys who so loved and trusted me before. It all changed so rapidly that I barely had time to mourn the loss of that childhood I so cherished and desire to this day. It was during this period of loss and acceptance that I found my bodily pride as a woman and lost it simultaneously. How I allowed this to happen still makes me feel ashamed.

I so adored my mother. She was a beauty. Since I could no longer be as a boy, who better to show me "woman", than she? And what a woman. Her beauty was clean and uncluttered. No bangles or paint. Her manners were proper. Her behavior was not flirty. She was an ever-faithful woman, as my father to her. Mum took care of us as if she had some kind of textbook. I wanted to be like her. My body was obliging. I looked in the mirror every day. My tenth year brought many physical alterations. My mental changes were much more alarming.

Boys began to notice me in a different light. They smelled me. It made the talk different. I hardly recognized my playmates. Our games became opportunities to touch each other in places where we chemically changed. I remember dying to be touched. Yearning to be noticed. Boys I knew so well, souls I thought were "like", became strange and exciting. I wanted to see each difference. I knew from my experience that God made each of us unique. I also knew that He changed each of us.

I had a secret. I now had a desired commodity. I coveted my womanness deviously. It was mine! What the hell was I going to do with it? I watched women. Women on the street,

in magazines and on television. But the woman I had greatest access to was Mum. I watched her interactions with Dad. They really had a relationship. They had sex! I tried to imagine what they looked like. I didn't even know what "it" looked like. Tough to imagine yet I knew it to be true. My brother and I were proof of that. I knew all about sex from school. Mum answered all my questions about menstruation. Got that covered. How was I going to take my newfound knowledge and put it to practical application? That answer came as rather a surprise.

It was a cold winter. For all I knew, it was summer. But for all my mind remembers, it was when the harsh winds of indifference paralyzed my understanding. Iced over and entombed my romantic notions of heated passion, love and sex.

Father was called out on business and we had to stay with Mum's oldest sister for two weeks. Brother and I were happy. Our cousins would be there and we could swim in their lake. What joy I envisioned. What a change. Uncle greets me first when we get to the door. I spring into his open arms. He is like a Saint Bernard to me. Big and slobbery. Wet kisses of love. Auntie has been baking succulent desserts and meat dishes. We supped in grand style at Aunties. The aroma made me float into the kitchen like a cartoon character when it smells apple pie on the window ledge. Auntie greets me with a glow of excitement. I feel pampered and special. It was the last time those visits would hold delight.

Where were my cousins? They should be here. Auntie says they will be here soon. Brother has busied himself in our cousin's room. Auntie is catching mum up. I too, will find something to do.

Uncle saw me roving. He has enticed me into his bedroom with Auntie's cookies. They are so good. He has his own television. He says I can watch whatever I want to! He let me change the channel. I will watch a funny show.

Uncle held me captive for three hours. I did not know this was going to happen. Now I can only exist in my head.

Must sort this out. Uncle says I am beautiful. How I have grown. Each word like candy. Each action stroking my ego. He notices my body. I puff up. I hope I look mature. To him every choice I make is "perfect". I know the best show to pick. How neat I eat. How perfect my body has developed. I was swooning from the attention and praise.

I sense a change in Uncle's tone and in our routine. He sits in his chair and spreads his legs. "Sit." He beacons with his deep throaty voice. Each word creeps out like molasses. It's as if he has been sedated. The air becomes thick and suffocating. He touches my breast. I stiffen. My world goes mute. I can no longer form words. I can no longer hear the earth. I am transformed to another dimension.

For three hours I pray. Screaming silently in my head. The whole time cosmically reaching out for anyone or anything to hear me. Daddy!!! Mummy!!! Brother!!! Cousins!!! Auntie!!! God!!! Hear me! No tears. Just the stench of betrayal.

I can recognize that smell anywhere, any time. See it at a glance. It is why I write this journal. My children must know. Though I write this chronicle in secret, I want my family to have it for generations to come. No one should be condemned to relive the repulsive history my uncle has left behind as his legacy. A pitiful donation at best.

The mental stress and torment I was to experience would prove my strength. Ever my

weakness was my naiveté'. I believed that a person could change. I believed almost eve rything. The experience of being "molested" for seven years, fashioned me into a most creative and ingenious individual. I made a vow to never allow the demented behavior of my uncle guide my intention or be a negative, controlling part of my life. If it could be my charge, I will be on pervert duty 'til the day I die.

So, I fall for the cookies. I could not resist Aunties baking. Still cannot. I enter Uncle's lair. He spreads his legs. I take the first cookie. He is in an overstuffed chair. He has an overstuffed body. I sit on the floor between his legs. He hands me another cookie. I change the channel to Andy Devine. I love his show. I enter that world. I am in control. Then Uncle touches me. At first I know it's an accident. Then it becomes clear. His touch is deliberate. He forces me to stay seated. I struggle, but he is strong. Why is he doing this? I am uneasy and alone now with no way out. I cannot move or speak. Uncle is talking to me. All I hear are low tones. Deep contemptible words in a foreign language. Unfamiliar actions. He caresses my breast. I am no longer proud of them. I want them to melt away. Now he has both breasts in his meaty hands. He is behind me. Thank God I cannot see his face. I smell his body. I smell his breath. I am dead. I am rightfully overwrought. Does he no\t know how distressed and broken-hearted I am? He was so nice to me for so long. Subsequent to today, memory says we always had loving years where I trusted him completely. He let me have my way. He treated me so special. Had it been his plan to gain my trust from the start. Did he groom me for this?

One would think that once is enough. But my silence cursed me. I did not say anything about Uncle. Nothing about my uncomfortability. Nothing. I eat dinner and go to sleep on the antique couch that was Grandmothers. I am named after her. The couch is always my "makeshift bed" and it is feather soft, warm and inviting. I fall to rest. I dream of my body. It is that of a grown woman. I dream romantic dreams. I am with my husband. He has no face. Am I twenty? God no! I am still ten. What is Uncle doing? Is it not enough that he ruined my day? Now he is in my night. His thick hand glides over my flannel nightie. The covers are off. Hands now under my gown. To him, I stay asleep. To me, I scream the silent scream that I will use for the duration of Uncles offensive.

I remain in this world where I do not want to believe I am awake. Oh, I know I am awake. I pray for the disease of denial to infect me with its convincing and tantalizing power. Uncle is using his "voice". That pestilent voice. If I could shrivel up into a dead leaf and blow away right now, I would. Uncle rams his fist-sized finger into my vagina. I see stars and hear echoes as if I were inside a tumbling can. Words come slurring out of his mouth. Sewage. Toxic and rank. I feel so alone. How long has this been going on? He leaves. The sun has risen. I smell breakfast. I am so hungry. I get up and electricity shoots through my groin. Shit! Uncle is at the table. Auntie is smiling and eager to please. Oblivious? My cousins are at the table! They are home. Thank God. I sit next to my cousin that one day was to be adopted by mum. (I will call him Cousin/Brother.) Brother is at the table too. Does he know? Eve rybody knows. They must. My eyes plead for some kind of recognition or\ understanding.

I eat like a ravenous waif. It arouses no curiosity. Plans for the day are taking place. I feel as if I'm being picked for badminton sides. Uncle pipes up first. He wants me to stay

with him. Auntie wants to go and buy me some sweet girl clothes downtown with Mum. I want to go with Cousin/Brother and Brother. Other Cousin says he will take me with him to meet his girl at her store. Uncle does not get his way this day. I go shopping with Auntie and Mum.

I am in the store with Auntie and Mum. Auntie has known the owner for decades. He dotes on me. Princess me. I change a hundred times. Mum watches as I change. Can she smell me? Does she see my pain glowing from beneath the silken pantaloons? I do not act as thrilled as she wants me to be. I change. She asks if I am pleased? I almost tell her. I am busting to tell her. I need to tell her. However my memory reminds me of Uncle's intimidation and the opportunity passes. No luck for me today.

I wake up today to Uncle's mother. She has come to visit. Besides Uncle and Grammy, all of the adults have departed somewhere. The boys have gone to the lake. I didn't catch them in time to go. I cannot be here alone with him. He is the only one here besides Grammy. Dear God, please don't let him come near me. Tears of desperation begin to flow. I weep as silently as possible. I feel a hand on my shoulder. I want to die. I look. It is Grammy. Thanks God. I've been spared for now.

Grammy stays with her son several months out of every year. As fate would have it, our visit has fallen at the same time. I am grateful. When everyone leaves, or a compromising situation arises, she is there for me. She takes me for a walk until the others show. These walks are some of the most loving memories I have. Grammy turns out to be my "Guardian Angel". I think she knows exactly what her son is all about\If Uncle is doing this to me, he must be doing it to his beautiful boys.

Father is coming home. We get to leave. We get to be in our family home again. Safe. Seems to me that I hide my exasperation well, until it comes time to sleep. My dreams are unwelcome. I resist at all costs. Though it angers my parents, I continue to give them the extra kiss goodnight. Perhaps I get thirsty or hear a noise. Maybe I hear them call me. Maybe they changed their minds and want me to stay up later! I want these to be the moments I confess my dirty uncle's secret. I chastise myself for not coming clean. I berate my moral character. This lack of reverence would prove the justification I needed for my later years of drug abuse and rampant sexuality.

In my dreams I would tell. I would tell all. No holds barred. In my dreams my uncle murdered me. My father murdered my uncle. My mum died lonely. Auntie hated me. Sometimes all the men in my family raped me for what I deserved. I was never innocent. Those dreams were from another time, for another time. I was not to know "sweet" dreams again until my late twenties.

How was I going to cope with this mummer I had become? I felt like an impersonator of myself in my own home. On the outside I was myself. On the inside, I was dark and angry. How could a love be so absolute one day, and utterly gone the next? Where did the good Uncle go? My emotions were conflicting relentlessly. There was a silent battle raging inside and no rescue insight. I had to tell someone! My older girl cousin was the lucky beneficiary of all my uncertainty. I was to know my trusted intimate.

After many indignities performed, I had now become an accomplished victim. Another one of Uncles' casualties. Damaged goods. By God, not alone. Much to my cha-

grin, the toll was immense. More colossal in its duplicity than even my creativity was capable.

I talk to my Older Girl Cousin. An inundation of information just comes flowing out of myself. She knows. She has been repeatedly raped by Uncle for many years now. With his penis. Bastard! She tells me that Uncle has attempted to molest her mom, my mum, family friends. The list is long. Uncle's mother even knows. So why has no one tried to protect us? To this day there is no satisfaction. No real answer to that question.

It is the summer after my ninth grade year and I search out numbing agents. I begin smoking pot. It is just what I want. It is perfect. I like it a lot. It helps me forget and overlook the injustices.

I am in a euphoric state as often as I can manage a moment to sneak off. Mum and Dad are always near. It is hard to get a minute to myself. Here on these pages I vent my rage and misery while floating around on a cloud only I can see. I do not want to come down. Here my vision is full of color and imagination.

I will begin to write poetry. It will romanticize this ugly chapter of abnormal psychology. I feel alone here. My parents do not realize they are smothering me with their rules. I make them the bad guys. The tighter they get, the more I want to leave. How can I go? I know what is out there. They can not help me because I won't tell them what is bothering me. Why? Will my life get better if I tell? No enlightenment for them today.

I feel a wild streak coming on. I want to go crazy. I want to be a tornado. I believe I have nothing to lose at this point in my life. I do not see what I still have. My perception has been distorted. I have little esteem left. My drawing and my writing are all I think I have going for me any more. My looks are not worth their trouble.

I see a girl on the bus today. I know for a fact that she will be my friend for life. I do not know why I believe this. She is uncomfortable with my stares.

I met the girl from yesterday. She is wonderful. She cannot see how Uncle ruined me. She never mentions it! She has a need to cut loose like I do. It is great. She is an artist and a writer too. My Friend and I spend as much time together as our parents will allow us. We party together and expound the wonders of the universe. We have no baggage. It is a freedom I have not known since early childhood.

My Friend ran away from home.

Loneliness

Pedestal of flesh and gray.

Skyward gaze, ball of fury.

Testing grounds for child play.

Reaching to grow with no sun or roots.

Canceled stares stamped void with time.

Unbalanced cubicles in a mind.

Touches of gold, ridges of blood.

Red clay stained and kind.

Gentle wind on rocky beaches.

Barefooted lovers waiting for the moon to fade.

A breath of birth.

A sigh of success in a tunnel of pain.

Grassy hills with no destiny.

Waiting for a friend from the

Center of the utopia you once

Felt was present.

An iceberg upon burning coals.

The scent of eucalyptus rising in the

Storm of madness...Deafening silence

The whisper of freedom hovering over your senses tonight.

My Friend is back home. I am relieved she is safe. I cannot wait until tomorrow to see her.

My parents have told me that my friend and I need to spend less time together.

My Friend and I are inseparable at school. My parents cannot take that away. She is sorry she ran away but she had so much fun. We dream about being together and free someday. No matter what happens we will be friends until the day we die.

Uncle and Auntie are in town. They are going to spend the week with us.

Glass eyes. Brick wall for a head.

Spears at your throat for a tongue instead.

Teeth of nails.

Lips of springs, tight and coiled.

Brain yearning to operate the

Body of mass wires that twist and

Rage.

Uncle, thinking of you is like touching an exposed nerve.

What is life worth when the protection of the thorns, the green of your leaves and the beauty of your petals have been picked, torn and splotched with mud?

Uncle came into my room. He didn't even wait a night. It is night four and I want to run away. I do not want to see him tonight or ever. I take the dog for a walk a hundred times. Each time I get stoned. Even that cannot hide my fear. It has enhanced it. I see Uncle around every corner. Peering at me. Waiting for me to put my guard down.

Mum! Dad!!! Uncle has invaded my personal space. I play dead. Uncle is licking my ear! What the hell is that about? His tongue travels down to my neck, then to my breast. I am crying. He continues downward. In the dark my eyes won't shut. His loathsome lingua lifts from my tummy and envelopes his finger, which emerges drenched. My mind is screaming. I am appalled as his finger intrudes my vagina then my anus. I feel my eyes shut taut. He speaks words of love to me. Words meant for a seasoned lover. Words meant for someone else who can understand. Then come the words I know are meant for me. Uncle speaks my name. He takes my hand and guides it to his penis. My fingers recoil in a desperate attempt to not touch him. He is so much stronger than I. I am no match. I feel myself go limp as he has his way with me. I emit a noise. His grip tightens on my wrist and I think it will break. To maintain my silence, Uncle tells me that I am solely responsible for his intrusions. If I did n\ot look the way I did...these things in him would not stir, and with that, he is gone. With the weight of the world on my shoulders, I cry all night. I do not

remember sleeping. My eyes are red. I am tired and I want to die. Just strangle me dead now.

Somehow I feel and know that my silence is killing me. Somehow I know I must find my voice. Somehow I need to save myself. Somehow.

Pressure

There is a madness deep inside my soul.

Something is there and it's not letting go.

Heart pounding louder by the decade.

The menagerie of everything forbade.

It may possess me for now but not for long.

It is there but now it is gone.

See a shadow like a fading dream.

You wake to find it lurking in someone's room who you don't know.

What is so bad in being young? I ask.

There are games and lots of fun.

Isn't it where the innocence is?

It's not the little children who do you wrong.

The head is there but the face is blank.

You assume it was something that you drank.

Insanity is just a word used out of text

And you don't know who it will hit next\I am feeling sorry for myself in a big way. I am isolated by misfortune. Insulated from the prevalent childhood I had just a few years ago. In maintaining my silence I become my own kidnapper. I am loathing my resolution of quietude. Where has my power gone? Has Uncle stolen it? Do I have the right to blame it on him? Do I claim responsibility over his actions toward me? I am riddled with indecision. I struggle to hold on to the beauty I know exists.

Life

Sunshine

Flowers

Butterflies

And children playing in the sun

Pine trees and shady evergreens

See the beauty and you'll know what it means

To be

Starshine

Waves upon the shore

Moonlight

And children playing in their dreams

Windmills turning in the bre eze

Peacefully as the nighttime lingers on

To be

Tomorrow Uncle leaves.

Uncle is coming. I hear his weight creaking the floorboards. He stresses everything. I

slip out of bed and quietly bury myself under stuff in my closet. I close the door and do not breathe. He is walking into the room. He is still. Sweat is dripping down every inch of my body. Does he feel the warmth of my sheets? God help me. Uncle is moving. I pray he is leaving. I hear the handle jiggle and then I hear voices from another area in our home. Uncle leaves. Boards are creaking away from me. Thank you Lord. I fall asleep in my closet.

I hear Mum calling me. Auntie and Uncle are leaving. I go to say goodbye. I hug Auntie. Uncle scoops me up into his mammoth self and dank mouth touches my lips. His eyes look at me with (what I take as a warning) a flash, and just that quick, they are gone. Relief drowns me as I swim in my liberation.

I am reading an Edgar Allen Poe book and I find a slip of paper in it. I do not know who wrote what is on the sheet.

Condition for not being in sin

By relating itself to its own self

And consciously willing to be itself,

The self becomes transparently grounded

In the Power which constituted it.

On the other side was this...

The longest journey

Is the journey of him

Who has chosen his destiny,

Who has started upon his quest

For the source of his being.

I am not sure what they mean, but I vow to understand. I believe this is a sign. I know it has been sent to help me out of my hell.

My Friend and I are developing the best relationship. I love her. I told her I have an ugly uncle. She understands without me ever having to say another word.

I don't know what it is about the age of fourteen. Things transform. Events impact you forever in extraordinary unfathomable ways. I wanted a relationship of my own. I wanted to search out a "normal" relationship. I knew that Uncles was the wrong type of connection. There was nothing good about it. I wanted my body to be a source of pride. I watched My Friend for clues. It was not long before we were in a situation with a couple of boys our age. I learned how to kiss. I learned how to be comfortable. I learned how to take charge of my life. I was only going to do what I wanted to do. Hence "the seduction".

Our family traveled to the beach to visit a colleague of dads. They had two daughters and a son home on leave from the Marine Corps.

I had been persecuted by Uncle since the end of my tenth year. Recently I learned how to take back my power. It was acceptable to hide. It may be permissible to set traps too. Up until this point in my life, no singular prior occurrence held this much of a grip. My mind had been altered by these experiences. If I was to have a secret life, I would like my silence to be for a better reason than one of Uncle's design. The trip to the beach would be my opportunity.

I spent the day with the two daughters of my father's friend. They were one year

younger and one year older than I. They were far worldlier too. Both were sexual. Mum and Dad were having so much fun that besides family meals together and bedtimes, we had the next week to ourselves. The independence was a breath of fresh air for me. Girls. What a change. These young women had a score of things to teach me. They were as eager to tell as I to hear. Their account of "life with boys" was not the same as mine! I had to know these things firsthand. Touching could be fun. Without the fear or guilt. I knew about kissing and surface petting. I also knew the effects of a long-term violation. Imagine my excitement when the girls tell me that their brother will be home on leave from the Marine Corps\I remember falling in love with an army man when I was ten. He was so handsome. I didn't know I was flirting. However that was what I was doing. He knew how to handle me. He talked and answered my questions. He never let on that he knew I was attracted. The situation never advanced though I saw him a dozen more times. To this day I remember his name and I can see his face.

The girls' brother came home on the third day of our glorious visit. I watched him like a cat watches a mouse. He could care less at first, but I broke him down. Oh yes.

This "big brother" was twenty-six years old. How nice. An older man. Polite and positively big brotherly. I could tell he was perfect for my experiment. He had nothing but good intentions. (Even nicer.) I wanted to test my power.

After dinner that night, all of the children were together for a television movie. The brother caught his sisters up on all of the things he had accomplished since they last saw each other. The sisters did the same. I was amused at how they were so candid with one another. Oh to trust someone that much. I shared some of my poetry. We really did have fun proceeding to enlighten each other on our differences.

The brother is unmoved by my presence so far. I play coy. Within the dark recesses of my mind I feel a bit sorry for my "victim". Which is what he will become whether I accept this or not. I don't believe he will deserve what I'm about to do. I must prove to myself that I am in control. I find in hindsight that "control" does not mean what I think it means.

I befriend the brother, hinged on his every word. He trusts that my interest is genuine. He is quite engaging. I question my motives. I am leading myself to accept my subterfuge. Is it reasonable intent or complete devolution? I feel I'm spinning backwards regressing into a black abyss. Surfacing. Feeling shame at my pretense. Except this need overcomes any conscience or scruple. Where is my virtue? Oh, to hell with it.

It is evening. Everyone here is settling in for the night.

I am teetering on a ridge. Will I fall on the side of clarity and worth or tumble headlong into the side of illusion and deception?

I see a sliver of light. The girls are asleep. Slowly I rise, keeping a keen eye on the ray. As I near, I see the brother. I stay in the shadow looking through the narrow portal. Every sense amplified. The shower starts. Steam is clouding the room and wafting out. I smell his soap. This heady mixture dances around my brain. I cannot breathe deep enough. He spends a lot of time in there. When he emerges I see he is manful. A harmonic rings throughout my body in anticipation of my "Tour de Force". If he looks, I am now in view. He cleans the mirror with a towel and wraps it around his waist. He is comfortable with his body. I creep closer, listing precariously. He sees me, yet evades our encounter. He con-

tinues his grooming regime but I can see his muscles have tightened and he is no longer restful in his skin. On an impulse I am in the room with the door shut taut behind me. I lock it. My boldness impressive. I want him. I am in "control". He smiles nervously. I close in. He te\mpers his recognition with light humor. He trivializes my determined intent with strange sexless jokes. Soon there is silence. In my prudence I guide him to the privy. He sits. We touch. I guide his hands to my waist. My hands run the length and width of his chest. What am I doing? He tries his best to dissuade me. His restraint is admirable. I am inexperienced and shameless. Awkwardly and clumsily I lean down. Our lips meet. He is still unavailable, aware of the consequences. I don't care. I have to have an experience that isn't deviant and incestuous. Something more unguarded and impetuous in nature is what I need.

I get close enough where my body is against the brothers face. With his hands on my waist and his nose at my belly button, I press my body towards him. I can feel him intently and solidly against my knees. I think I'm going to collapse. My feelings are racing. I'm dizzy and totally affected. He sees my drunkenness and relinquishes his control. Lifting my gown, he lowers my panties, and, oh so slowly I sink onto his lap. I can now feel the strength and size of him against my tummy. We kiss and melt together. He is slow and deliberate. Experienced. He is now in control. How tender he touches. How unhurried, almost leisurely. His kiss is sapid and sweet. I feel like a princess. I want him to hurry. I'm impatient for something. I don't know what, but my body knows on an intrinsic natural level. I submit completely. I kiss his neck. He breathes in my hair. His voice is like honey. Kind words I understand. No violation. He knows what I want; yet he will not rush. Perhaps he will not penetrate. I don't know. He is a man who knows how to move... how to touch. I am satisfied. He does not tease or provoke. He, he just does. He saturates me with affection. Tender and slow, quelling my anxiety. Cools me down. Calms me down. He will not allow me to do something wrong. He is no dupe. We move to the floor. He is on top of me kissing me and osculating. My legs are closed, as are his. His firmness is maddening. He exhausts me. He holds me. We smile. I cannot believe how good it feels to be close to someone. I'm bursting with new excitement. My desire for his body switches to a simple want for proximity. We dress and go to his room. We snuggle and sleep. Tonight the nightmares turn into dreams of angels, fairies and enchanted forests with cascading waterfalls. He wakes before everyone else and we go down to breakfast. He makes me a meal. I am starving. There is a magic quality to the day. We spend several hours together talking. We kiss tenderly, some touching, some exploring with respectful admiration. One by one, everyone else comes to breakfast. The house is alive and so am I. The air is fresher. The light is brighter and my smile, though it looks the same, feels different.

The day has gone and night slips in. I lie in bed and want to go to The Brother. I am thinking I want more body heat. I tremble and tingle in places. I'm enamored. I go to him. We snuggle. He does not overstep his boundaries and we spend the rest of the nights together.

Two men so different. Men like this brother could easily make me forget about a man like Uncle. Yet I know I must remember. Just not right now, right here, this moment. Right. No room for trepidation. I was not to know this type of soaring high from a rela-

tionship again until I meet the father of my children many years later.

Writing cleanses my soul. Each word disinfecting. I feel the filth scour off layer by layer. The burden lifts as my eyes look to God in thanks. Relief helps me breathe. When I am calm, I inhale and exhale deeply. The oxygen stimulates my brain. It opens me up to listen, really listen to the earth, to others and to myself. I know how to use all the tools LOVE has given me. I see in hindsight, there is a dark and light. Where you choose to spend the most time is completely within your control. I learned from my summer experience that "control" was release of control. All in all, my teen years were normal. Because of Uncle's molestation aggressions, I now had the perfect gauge: Uncle being at the bottom of the scale and The Brother at the top.

Three years after my summertime savoir-faire I am to graduate high school. Auntie and Uncle will be here. I have stuffed his memory so deep that the mention of his name has a hydraulic wrench to it. I begin to change my thought processes. My instincts shift into a lower gear. Survival mode. My senses are heightened. I need to hone my life saving strategies and call upon my deductive reasoning to bail me out. Remember. I must remember. It has been so long since Uncle has bullied or trapped me that I smell my own fear. I gather hangers to put on my door handle. Shit! There are two clothespins on this hanger. They take me by surprise. I am rattled. I cannot touch clothespins or even have them in my home until my forties. Imagine that? I remember Uncle making me put clothespins on his nipples. I remember his face as he made me squeeze harder! I gather cans and things that will make noise if my door so much as moves. I prepare for war. I am the General. He will not get away with hi\s perversions this night, because I will defend my territory. He will die in my trenches. I will gather ammo by remembering past incidents.

I remember my special hiding place in his home. On one visit I heard Uncle coming up the hall stairs. Ominously creaking his way towards me. I opened the nearest door to hide behind. It happened to be a hall closet. It did not seem protective enough. I had a sickening sinking feeling as the clothes on each side gave way to a very deep section of the closet. I heard Uncle whispering my name. My heart was pounding so loud I knew it would reveal my position. I backed deeper into the closet. Much to my surprise my hand felt a knob? I looked and saw a tiny door. I opened it, got behind it and barely had it closed when I saw a faint light. Uncle had opened the big door. If I can stay cool he will leave. Surely he knew about the tiny access. I hear my name. One more time and I will pee my pants. The door closes. Oh my God. He left. Flood of relief. I am in a dusty room with natural light slightly filtering in. It is an attic of sorts. My heart stops as I see a figure. It is only a se\wing dummy. I hug it as tears roll. I am happy here. It is not scary. It is large and safe. A refuge, a harborage. "Sanctuary" I cry, protected. So many times I ran to my space. My secret spot. Had I not found this place, there may not have been a chance for me. I still go there in my mind. All my childhood toys exist there. Many lost things wind up there. Home to some of my most effective visualizations.

I remember what I needed to. I now have a supply of munitions. I am going to win this night and I will celebrate my victory with a vengeance. My blood is boiling. Uncle cannot win. My ego is soaring. I have never been so self-possessed. This night will end in triumph. My plan is fail-safe.

Along with the traps I set, I move my mahogany dresser in front of my door. When Uncle comes this night, not only will noisemakers rouse the household; the door will not budge. He will have to exert a lot of energy and this will cause shifting of the cans and bottles. Sadly, I wish him a heart attack. This night I will sleep confident. I fall hard into my pillow, surely snoring.

The impact of reality stings and traumatizes me wide-awake. Uncle has defeated all of my traps. No bells, no warnings. Hypothermia sets in as the Cold-Hearted Iceman takes his tongs and completely puts me where he wants. I scrunch into a corner. He does not waste time. It is dark and I think he puts a clothespin into my hand. I try with all my might to open this clip but all my strength has been drained. I am now a faded shadow of the high-ranking officer I had been only a few short hours ago. With both hands I budge the clip and navigate it to Uncle's leather nipples. Contact. Sensation intersects as I realize Uncle has occupied my hands well. His are free and probing, stretching my flesh to its maximum. My hands are paralyzed. My two most intimate orifices are full. Pain, like electric shocks, pulse through my groin. My vagina throbbing, squeezing to emit his fingers? It feels like my feces are being impacted back into my intestines. Going the wrong way. I experience the sen\sation of every hair on my body at their root. Without a word, he has sabotaged the integrity of my battle plan. My hands have been placed around his penis. I choke and choke. Taciturn, ever so closemouthed, I scream inside my head. Tears flooding. He spits on me. I lay, utterly defeated. He conquers and retreats in piggish subjugation.

I collapse, deflated and drying up. Sticky on my skin, wrinkling. He won. He won! Dear God, show me the way. Where is reason? Help…please.

I hear a noise. It is our Friend/Aunt who is here for my graduation. I love her and trust her. Uncle has also confronted her in the past. God. You heard me, and the rooster crows. I tell her. She holds me even though I am dirty. She tells my parents. It is all Mum can do to keep an insanely enraged Dad from killing Uncle. Mum is convincing. Dad will be no use to us in jail. Everyone believes me. They know it is true. Uncle is banished from our home. Auntie and Uncle slip out and go back home. I wonder if Auntie knew why they had to go? I still graduate.

Eleven winters after Uncles last onslaught, he dies from diabetes complications. Legless and alone. Cousin/Brother checks the casket to see if his birthfather is really dead. I am not in attendance.

One night I dream that all of my family members are in a row. I am walking down the row hugging and kissing everyone. It is a funeral. I get to the end and look in the casket. I am inside.

Shortly after this dream, a mutual friend introduces me to my husband. We go out and like each other a lot. My husband's patience and understanding helped me learn how to be comfortable with myself. His family was equally as accepting. Together my husband and I created an atmosphere of love. Out of love came our daughter and five years later, our son. We have educated them about the monsters in our lives. As we all have our demons.

Eleven years after the death of Uncle, Cousin/Brother comes out to my Older Girl Cousin and Mum about how for years, his own brother raped him, and the things he

remembers about Aunties' enabling Uncle to torture him with internal shock probes, branding irons and high-tension nipple clamps. How they exposed him to smut books, real photos of pedophilia, sex toys, torture chambers in downtown buildings and so much more we never knew. This is why Mum verbally adopted Cousin/Brother and became a Grandma figure for his sons. During the year of Cousin/Brother's emerging, we all come to a sad realization that all along Auntie is a big part of this whole thing as well as Cousin/Brother's real brother. Mum feels so guilty for being adamant about protecting the feelings of her eldest sister. Through the years, a lot of people spent so much effort shielding the situation from Auntie only to feel decieved and manipulated now. We stand unified in our pain and try to quell the guilt, shame\ and blame. Love is our powerful antidote.

Cousin/Brother gets help. He rises above his upbringing and emerges a man with a past he can put behind him and move forward in the present. We talk. We enlighten. We are close and unite on a level deep and disturbing. Perplexing to most, we are not alone.

The path to my destiny is laced with prescription and illegal drug abuse, alcohol excess, and a short one-year physically and verbally abusive marriage to a severe alcoholic where I barely made it out with my life or self-esteem, sexual abandonment and a "devil may care" attitude. My teen years and early twenties were a perfect opportunity to see how low I could go. I left home for the Peace Corps and still confuse confidence with prowess. So began my sojourn to test the limits of my morals. It was also the journey to find how to live by the standards I raised when myself returned to my self.

The details of my sexploits are not essential to the impact of my journal. Your imagination can do those justice. As your architect, this blueprint is most salient when the finite specifications are thoroughly followed. No stipulations. My design will build, for the world, the warped, copious framework of a predator, to scale.

\*Part snake and part cock, the legendary basilisk has fatal breath and glance. I feel Uncle had the same deadly effect when he looked or spoke to me. Unlike the basilisk's victim, I found my own cure to survive his potent venom.

I live now with my daughter and her family in a beautiful home in the country. It is safe and peaceful. I write these entries for my children and grandchildren in the name of innocence. In this solitude I can now divulge my confession forthwith. It is the only thing preventing me from going home. My crime. My secret, if you will. Formerly undeclared, is a murder. I claim responsibility. I have committed the perfect murder. It was my legacy. I have the right to log it now, here, on these pages for all to see. I am shameless for the deed. Now you see why this biographical insight commences to be the focus, the offspring of my exacted plan. Completely open-handed, I freely admit that I maimed, killed and hung out to dry... my silence.

# A DIAMOND AEON LOGAN

most of the world lived in desolation
there was only a few remnants of old fires
that once burned down things that could have been good
Imagine a
world where you'd see a diamond. In
all the darkness and desperation
there would be one loose random
stone that glittered more that anything else on the planet
Could you imagine a world like that
Could you imagine a simple diamond

AND I DON'+ Care

AEON LOGAN

I'm tired of them asking me and that condescending high-pitched voice how I'm doing

well, I'm fine
I'm the same I've been
and I know that nothing gets better

they tell me it is my attitude with amazing regularity they tell me it is my attitude that makes me think this way

and it doesn't do me any good and I'm still angry and I've still lost part of my life

there are a lot of things I don't care about when the beautiful things have decided to take a turn for the worse for me

Are things getting better? Objectively, I can say that I don't know and I don't care

## I WAN+ MORE +HAN +HA+

#### SHANNON PEPPERS

I am tired of the one night stands
I want something more
you gave me that
and now I want more than that
When what you give me means nothing
I wanted more than bland sex
can you give me that
was I barking up the wrong tree
Because who can do that for me
I was hoping that you could be that someone

# IS I+ IUS+ ME

#### SHANNON PEPPERS

I remember how you used to pay attention to me and how you'd do nice things and wouldn't forget to call me or how you wouldn't forget what was important to me Is it just me or do you do this to others too do other people get used to it, just assume you'll forget them Is it just me or are you on time with other people or are you ignoring me Is it just me is there anything you can do to help yourself because I think I lost hope for you a while ago

I haven't lost hope, but I'm getting close

# @\$%&\* **B**EING **A**L**D**NE

#### SHANNON PEPPERS

I know I'm picky and need attention and love and support all this time I thought I could get that from you

I've been let down before, I've dealt with liars full time I've had to adjust my truths, my perceptions

I've adjusted my schedule for you but I still had a schedule there and I thought that you would come around and eventually somehow adhere to it

I'm tired of being let down all the bad things happening to me

I've had to keep to myself all this time
I thought that you wouldn't do that to me too
I don't know what I'm trying for
if you're not there
are you not even listening

I've had to learn to be alone

I was hoping for good news for someone to understand something I can understand to make me happy I thought it was you

many times I'm going getting kicked in the teeth there is no light at the end of the tunnel for me waiting isn't enough I can not sit around and wait for you any more

move on, girl

I don't know what I'm moving to but I have to be moving to something

# MAYBE YOU CAN

### SHANNON PEPPERS

I

and there was so much that I wanted to live and there was more that I wanted to live with you I've been angry, hurt, confused I've even been smart, smarter than people like to admit I've wanted someone to take charge of life even though I am strong, even though my head is on my shoulders we women could use that help every once in a wile

I feel like I've lived a hard enough life, in some respects, and I think it's my turn to enjoy life for once, why can't that happen for me?

I

I've gotten good over the years at being a good liar when I have to be. And no one has to know when I'm telling the truth.

Ш

It's good to know you were worried about me at least I had that effect on you, at least I still have power but I know you're still with her and I know you've been with other women and I know that you probably haven't thought about me much.

I'm sure you weren't planning to save money and get a job and well, support me for the rest of our lives I didn't expect that of you and you know, I didn't expect that of anyone, for that matter

no, I haven't expected any answers, even, I haven't expected that for years. But now I want a change I want someone to know that I want someone to do something about it and I don't think that will come from you

## HO+ FLAMES

#### +OM RACINE

She now sleeps soundly, but earlier she screamed, "Your burning up the chicken!" as I was kissing her long and deep. She ran outside and watched and screamed as flames shot out from the barbecue stove. The cat and I looked on— I have done it so many times myself that it is normal for my cooking, but not for hers, 'cause she turned red and jumped up and down, yelling, "Stop it, stop it! Maybe it's OK with you, but I haven't eaten for two days!" She ran into the kitchen and came out with a large glass of water. I looked at the cat, Ringo, and he looked at methen he headed for the hood of the car. I thought of following or getting in my van but opted to go inside and hide with my head in my poetry. I had turned off the gas, so nothing was left for me to do it would burn itself out. But she was still red and screaming and the cat stood still like he had many times before, and she dowsed the flames. She went inside and doors began slamming and a crash came from the bathroom.

Later, she leaned towards me in the bed and said, "Wasn't that the best chicken you ever tasted?"
"Sure, baby, sure," and I looked to the cat.

# I HAVE ++ G+ G+ U+

#### +OM RACINE

She phones and talks of food, music, the JOB and the things she did and is doing and about later. "Hey," I say, "how about a kiss?" She hesitates and makes the noises over the phone. I say, "Ya know, it should always come back to the basics—the kisses and hugging between us." She hesitates then says, "Yes, Sweetie."

"I've been working on poems all morning," I say, "about you."
"Well, good, bring them with you—
I'll help you. I don't care
who they are about,
me or whatever. Shower and
get down here. I'm with Rebecca
and we are cooking and dancing—
bring your work."
"Oh," I say, "you want me to be
a part of the 'real'?"
"Verveyers."
I ris

"Yesyesyes, take your time but hurry." I rise slowly, look around at the mess, then start another poem, then another— and I am late again. "Screw you," she says. "Four hours it took you to get here!" (It was only two.) She is angry long into the night.

# MARILYN

#### +OM RACINE

She stands in the door way,
"Just so you know- I was
a demon when I was a teenager."
"What?"
"Just so you know."

Air shoots from the floor fan and blows up her skirt.

"Wow, Marilyn Monroe," I say.

"What?"

"Marilyn Monroe!"

"Oh, OK." and she walks back into the other room. Sometimes even demons can be ignored.

# THEY ALL BECOME GREAT WRITERS WHEN I MEET THEM

#### +OM RACINE

Tonight went pretty smooth; I mean, we made love twice with no major arguments—no fights.

There was the usual stuff like her thinking that the FBI was after her and a comment like,

"Don't call my writing dabbling."

"That was weeks ago," I answered, "I don't even remember saying it."

"Well you did. Just listen to this, that I wrote." So I did.

"That's great stuff, honey, now can we go to bed?"

"Don't you want to hear more?"

#### WINHER DEFEAH

#### +OM RACINE

During those days, she would come to my door most mornings. She would often wear a hood; it often would be snowing, and she would have a picnic basket with her. "What are you doing?" I would sigh. "I can't let you in." "Come on, let me in." "No, you never leave; I have a lot of things to do today." "I won't stay long," she would white lie. "Will you leave when I ask you to?" I would ask giving up ground. "Yes. Let me in; it's cold out here." I'd open the door, close the door, and then realize I was defeated. She would put down the basket between us while sitting in the stuffed chair (the only chair). "What have you got today," I'd ask gruffly. She would open the lid, one side at a time; out would come paper napkins with designs on them, Styrofoam coffee cups, coffee, plastic forks and spoons, brownies, "cheesy chicken" or sometimes meat loaf. I was doomed; in my mind, I began digging my grave. For a long time she would sit there and say little as I would tell her of her responsibility to her social life, children, job, community and herself.

perhaps she was knitting one of her many afghans in her mind as I did my talk.

An hour would go bye, sometime two, until my tongue would get tired, my mouth sore, or I repeated myself three times, lost track of what I was saying, or just got tired of sitting on the corner of the counter.

"Listen, let me sit there." I would finally ask.

She would get up, I would sit down, she would sit on my lap.

Her firm soft breast would sit close to my mouth.

"It's hot in here" she would say, "Let's turn off the oven."

She would slip off her sweater

We would wonder over dirty cloths, boxes of books piled high to the ceiling, shuffled papers, and through the bathroom camp to the dusty back room.

At four o'clock sharp, she would get up and leave to pick her kid up and to do her last minute shopping at Stop n' Shop.

I would lay in the bed, and watch the darkness settle outside between the snowflakes.
I'd imagine I was watching the defeated troops file out of the Russian front.

exposing my defeat as if in Stalingrad.

Sometime later, I thought that

# **RELIGION**

#### ALEXANDRIA RAND

"We do expect you to marry someone who shares in your beliefs," the man groaned as he looked at you and said, "and that means you too, Joe." But tell me this: when you look into my eyes, do you want to look away?

# RENDERING THE

# ALEXANDRIA RAND

the heat the fire burning my skin red hot stripping me rendering me defenseless

#### SOME-IMES THE UNDERSTANDING

#### ALEXANDRIA RAND

Sometime the understanding
Travels into the realms of the unknown
All we can do is hope
search
dream
Because we will never find.

Sometimes the light is not enough.

# |ΦURNALS MACKENZIE SILVER

# 1997 | OURNAL EN+RIES

#### 8/15/97

I'm hated for being good and I'm hated for trying to make myself better. Everyone has given up here, so I have to pick up the pieces after them. Others scream because they don't like hearing the answers I give to the questions they ask. They all just want me to do everything, and they want me to smile about it. No one can finish a job here; no one cares to. Then everyone wonders why I'm not happy here; then everyone thinks I'm overreacting. With us there's one of two thing: no sense of pride or else there is an egoism coupled with a complete disregard for other people. And the thing is, I hate the fact that people hate me when I know i'm right. I feel like I'll have to settle for the rest of my life. Settle for idiots telling me what to do. Settle for idiots hating me because I have pride. Settle for idiots loving me, idiots who don't know why they do. I feel like I can't be an optimist forever when the odds are continually stacked up against me. I have nothing but my mind to help me with this fight, when everyone else is fighting me by shutting their minds off. How do I live in the middle of a barren desert?

REMEMBER: Whenever you're at work, YOU'RE NEVER RIGHT. All the people outside know better than you. All the people you're the supervisor of know better than you. You're overbearing, obnoxious, and you always think you're right. Get it straight. REMEMBER: YOU'RE NEVER RIGHT. All you have to do is follow orders. No one wants you to use your mind. Just follow the whims of everyone who wants to rule you. Don't make waves. When they change their minds, don't ask why. Always take the blame, especially when it's not your fault. Always smile. Always be courteous. Always thank people, even if it's for doing something they were responsible for. Especially thank them for that, because who are you to think that people should know or do anything? Who are you to think? Who are you?

#### 08/02/97

A co-worker quit from the company I work for today. I work in an office with about thirty-five people. Now this co-worker was in charge of our important material and quit two days before an important even for out company was about to begin. Apparently she was at a meeting about the event and someone else started badgering

her and twenty minutes after the meeting she was on the phone with her husband saying, "It's been bad enough that every day after work I cry when I get home, but now I'm on the phone crying while I'm at work." So her husband told her it's okay if she wants to leave, they can work it out. So leave she did. She collected her things, said, "Fuck you all, I'm quitting," and just... left.

Now I only got to hear about this scene second-hand, I didn't actually see her or even get to say good-bye to her, and that's a real shame because I probably would have shook her hand and thanked her for doing something that just about every person in our office has pretty much dreamt about on a daily basis. I mean, when I heard about what she did I let out a low, sadistic laugh, you know, one of those laughs that comes from really deep down, because we haven't had one of those angry quitting scenes in a while, and believe me, they're always fun to watch.

And I laughed like that because I know what she was going through and I know what a relief it must have been for her to do it.

She's not the first person to do this to my boss, and I'm sure she won't be the last. Once I saw a saleswoman walk right up to my boss in the hallway, get right up in his face, and tell him, "You're an ass-hole. You have no idea how to run this business. You are incompetent, and so are your favorite employees. You make me sick. I quit."

I've only been here four years, and I can tell I can't take it here much longer, but in these past four years I've seen a turnover rate of like forty percent or something and the retraining alone puts too much stress on a staff.

#### Ø8/29/97

I've go so many questions right now, and I have no way to answer tham all. I have to be somewhat honest with people, but if I do I could hurt their feelings and burn bridges. I need to keep connections if I'm going to do the things I plan to do over the next year, but I don't know how long I can lie to people in order to do it.

I'm just not interested in my relationship any more. It seems that he wants too much from me. He wants a relationship, and I just can't give that to him anymore. I tried for too long, and there was nothing there in the first place. But how do you say that to a man who tells you he loves you?

Working with him makes things all the more difficult. Why can't he just get another job? The worst part is, I genuinely think he's not good at his job. Other people compliment him, but I thnk his work is cluttered and disorganized. But then when people compliment him, it makes me wonder if its just me - am I being too hard on him? Do I not want him to succeed because it means on some level I have failed, since we work at the same job? It's both, I guess. I know I need to be the best at everything, and I know he's not as good as he thinks he is.

He just came up to me and told me that if things are bothering me, I can talk to him. That I shouldn't feel that I can't talk to him because I don't want to bother him with my problems. Would he feel the same way if he knew he was the problem? Now he thinks I'm keeping my problems bottled up inside of me for his benefit, to spare him

from having to hear about my problems, when he just wants to help me. If I told him the truth I'm positive he wouldn't feel the same way.

We've been through a lot and I want to feel like I can talk to him and confide in him. But he wants more from me, and that complicates things. We get along when we're just being human beings, but then he'll try to make a move on me and I'll feel so uncomfortable.

I'm exasperated. He sends out resumes every week, but he isn't getting a job, at least not yet, and I don't know if he wants to leave here or not.

It almost makes me want to stay here, just so he can't have the satisfaction of getting my job, especially when he doesn't deserve it.

\*\*\*

I hate having pride in my work at this place. It is hard when you know you're good at something and everyone tells you you're good and yet no one will let you make decisions. I'm the highest-ranking worler in my field at this company and people outside my department overrule decisions of mine arbitrarily - and regularly. They destroy any consistency or style something may have. And then I have to answer for it, since I'm the head of this department. But I'm really not. I'm a slave to the whims of people who don't know anything about my work. It makes me want to leave so badly.

And then I feel like I'm in some sort of contest with my relationship, that I can't leave, because that means he will have won and he will have my job. And he will have to deal with all the crap I have had to, and he will do a very poor job of it, and a worse product will be created.

But I guess it won't be mine, so I shouldn't care.

I just hate seeing things that are good get destroyed. It's one of the hardest things for me to witness.

There are two types of people: people who think of work as an extension of themselves, people who are productive, and continually strive to improve, to move forward, and there are people who think of work as some sort of evil necessity to help them exist because no one will give them money for some reason. So they go through work making a greater effort to not work and act like they are working, they stay in the same job, the gossip, and they make life difficult for productive people.

One of the greatest benefits of Capitalism is that when the most productive people are allowed to work and to excel and to own and fully reap the benefits of their labor, then the standard of living is raised for all. Consider how well off homeless people are in this country as opposed to other countries, for instance. There is such a wealth of goods and services that it trickles down and improves the lives of all. When new technology is created, the old technology becomes cheaper, and more affordable to the lower classes. Well, my point from all that is that yes, that's one of the greatest things about Capitalism, but I must admit that there are times when on an entirely selfish level it bothers me that people who choose not to create, not to work hard, not to really contribute to society, still get the benefits from intelligent people's work.

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I have a headache that just does not want to go away. It is so strong, and it is all over my brain. It's like there is so little moisture separating my brain from my skull that I'm really afraid to move my head around, for fear that the scraping will not only hurt but eventually damage parts of my brain I may actually need. I need to drink some water.

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I feel like I'm making such a large decision in my life now. When I left college, I knew I was only going to be going to school for four years, this was the logical conclusion to my schooling, but it was a great change to go back home, as an adult, and start to look for a job. Once you're working, though, you make your own schedlules. You can stay at the same job for thirty years, you can marry and quit your job and take care of a family, you can get another job. And the thing is, I had no idea how long I was going to be at this job. I thought I'd be here for at least six years' that's when my 401(k) becomes fully vested and I will have made the optimal amount of money in it, then I'd be ready to go, I'd have a few other investments, I could quit my job right about when I was probably ready to get married and possibly move to another city. But here I am, quitting a year and a half ahead of my plan, planning to spend a third of my savings on travelling instead of working for the next year.

It's strange. I've always been so insistent that I be financially secure. I've always planned everything. I've always done the most logical thing. Is this logical? I figure that I'm young and I have a savings and I hate my job, this is as good a time as any. If I get married and/or start another job, I might not have this opportunity in my youth again. Right now, other than my job, there's really nothing holding me back. So this is my chance.

But it's not like me. It's not like me to throw away a job that makes me great money. I have perks here. I can work on other projects here. The equipment is excellent. But I'm treated like a second-class citizen here. I have four to six people who answer to me, but I can't tell them what to do when someone from another department is overriding my decisions all the time. I can hardly be an effective leader when no one allows me to lead.

I've mentally just gotten tired of fighting this place. So I'm here for another two months, I'll try to save all of my money, and then I move on.

And recoup for a year.

I don't know what I'm looking for when I go to Europe. I want to be alone, really. I want to see different sights. I want to see different sights through my own eyes, with my perceptions, with my perspectives. I want to be able to react to the world.

Does that make sense?

I want to know I can do this. That I can.

And as I said, this is a very risky thing for me to do, this is not something that is in my nature. To reject my stability. How safe is it to travel on the other side of the world by myself? Oh, I know I keep thinking of all of the bad things that can happen, but I need to be prepared for all of them.

The first thing I'm worried about is that all of these people that said the'd get me a place to stay or go for a month with me are going to back out at the last minute, after I've quit my job and bought the ticket. Like my relationship. One woman I know said she was interested in an extended stay in Germany with her sister. Urgh. Who knows, no one can give me a definitive answer about anything. I just have no idea if I'm making the right choices or not.

\*\*\*

One of my male coworkers is leaving work. Today is his last day. I've worked with him for over three years, more like four, I think. He got another job in Los Angeles, and the market is better there in education for his wife. His brother is also out there, married with a new baby, so this guy will be able to spend more time with his brother. And the weather is warmer. And it's not THIS PLACE.

I told him I'd visit, that I'm planning on being in California in the beginning of February. He has no idea what the circumstances will be, though. I almost want to tell him my plan, right when he's about to leave, you know, let him in on the secret.

It's strange, really, working with someone for so long, going through so much garbage with someone. Usually when someone quits in this office they've only been here for a year, that's not much time, people like that come and go regularly (especially here, where the turnover rate is so high because everyone hates it here so much), but this guy has been here a while.

We used to talk a lot about religion. from the athiest perspective when you talk or agrue, well, the people you have the most interesting religious conversations with are, of course, the religious freaks, the ones who don't drink or swear and saved themselves for marriage and go to bible study. Well, when he was first here, we'd talk on our lunch breaks about life and it was really interesting. But then his wife got wind of the fact that he was having lunch with a "girl", all alone, oh my gosh, I might convert him (or worse yet, pervert him), so then he was forbidden by his wife to really spend any time with me.

You know, I never understood why she didn't want him to talk to me. Even if she didn't trust me, which she could have, she should have at least been able to trust her husband. I think he's probably one of the most trustworthy men ever to workhere (well, I guess that's not much, since the men that work here are usually jerks or alcoholics anyway), but why did she brow-beat him all the time? And why did he put up with it?

\*\*\*

The manI'm dating called me three times after work this evening. Twice to see if I

was okay, because I told him I was in a bad mood, and once to start an argument with me about how I never open up to him and he can't take this anymore and he never wants to speak to me again. So I ask him if he means that and he says no, that he want to make me happy. Can't he make up his mind?

I don't mean to drive him crazy, I realy don't. But I can't stand the way he badgers me for more than I am capable of giving to him. He's been too much of a jerk in the past for me to think of him as reliable. And since we work in the same field I can judge his work, and it's hard for me to respect someone that is wose than me in their career. I know I demand a lot of a person, but I know I have a lot to give and am worth it. And I know I need to look up to someone, and I feel I can't look up to anyone right now.

Sometimes I think of a past relationship, and how it always seems to fall into place with him.

Sometimes I really miss him.

Sometimes I wonder if we'll eventually get married anyway, even though we've been broken up for a year now.

It just might happen.

#### Ø8/3Ø/97

I just had breakfast with my guy. It was very nice. I talkd to him yesterday that we should be happy more, that we should just be happy, that we shouldn't keep fighting. And it was nice.

And then we were watching television and a song was on MTV, and it was a song by Jewel, and it was all about how she does the little rituals during the day, like brughing her teeth, or turning down the sheets of her bed at the end of the day, or leaving the light on when she leaves a room, and how all of these little rituals or idiosyncracies remind her of the one she loves. And every time I hear that song I actually think of someone else, and I try not to, but I do anyway. And I keep thinking that I keep trying to be good, I keep trying to be the best I can be, I keep trying to exceed my expectations, which are everyone else's expectations, but I can enver match him. I can never be as good as that ex. And I had to let him go.

And then I came home from breakfast and my roommate was waiting for me, and he saw I wasn't happy, and he was concerned, and he managed to make me smile for a little bit, but I still feel terrible.

Why do I feel like what I want is unreachable?

I keep thinking that my one ex that things seems to just flow more easily with is the one, and I still feel like I'm destined to marry him, even though I don't believe in destiny, but I feel like I can't talk to him. But I fear that it's not his fault; I fear that the problem is with me, not him, or anyone else. I feel like I have all of these demons inside of me, and I can't let them out. I have all of these secrets.

Then I think of people that make me think of him when I hear that song... Why can't I just stop loving him and get it over with? Why did he have to shape me so much?

Why did he have to make me think? Sometimes I want to curse him for it. Ignorance is bliss, they say. It makes me wonder if it would be easier if I just didn't think; but I don't know how.

I see glimmers in my ex sometimes. I see what I loved in him. And he can sense that, he knows what I am thinking when I am thinking that I love him. I wish he didn't know sometimes, and sometimes I wish he knew more than he did.

Like the song says:

Isn't it... Isn't it... Isn't it just like a woman?

Today I've been going back and forth between elation and complete depression. I have learned to turn it off when I need to, the depression, that is, when someone surprises me or if someone gives me a call I have learned how to just turn it off. But then I get off the phone, or they leave the room (finally), and I am allowed to feel as miserable as I did before again.

I guess it doesn't help that I'm on my seventh beer, and it's two o'clock in the afternoon. It's probably time for me to go.

#### Ø8/3I/97

Princess Diana died last night. I think I want to write something about it. I suppose that sounds rude, mentioning that I want to write something about the incident, instad of saying that I feel terrible or something. I mean, it's sad that she died, but I didn't know her. I do find it fascinating that she died while being chased by photographers on motorbikes and that the media is still in a frenzy, broadcasting hour after hour about her life ending in tragedy. I think it's also interesting that she became a princess at what, nineteen?, and she though she was really becoming a princess, as did the rest of the world, but really she was just a tool for the royal family, including and especially her husband. And she had to learn fast how to deal with the paparazzi, and the affairs, and everyone wanting to know every detail of her life, and he husband never admitting he loved her. And she was bulemic, and she suffered post-natal depression, and then she went on to do charity work, and then she was divorced. And then she tried to start her life over again and the tabliods snuck around for every photo of her with men that they could get and made her out to be some sort of whore, and just as she's probably starting to feel better about the past seventeen years of her life, just as she's starting to move a life, she dies in a car accident.

It really is strange, if you think about it.

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I'm visiting my friend right now, Well, his roommate is telling me about the obnoxious neighbors, and how they've been lighting fireworks late at night that are loud, and then she said one of her neighbors lit a cat on fire. And I thought, well, they probably just lit the tail and it went out a second or two after they did it. I'm then lis-

tening to the news later on tonight, and one of the stories shows a picture of a cat with almost no hair, burned all over, with a cone on.

# HOURNAL, UNDA-HED

Do you know how difficult it is for me to find someone? What is it, are my expectations too high?

Without someone to date, the chances of physical interaction are even more slim than they already seem to be for me.

God, I can't stand this. I'm here at work and it's after lunch and I'm so fed up with work for one reason or another, that's the way it always is, and so is he, I mean, he's fed up about one thing or another that's happening to him, so neither one of us are happy. And the thing is, I'm tired of trying to make things better for him when he makes no effort to do that for me. Whenever I can tell that something is bothering him, I always try to put on my happiest face, ask him what the problem is, see if I can do anything to help. But he doesn't do that for me. If he bothers to make some sort of an effort, it always seems pushed, and it always seems that he's still unhappy... Okay, if I tell him I feel physically sick he'll offer to get something for me, or help me carry my stuff, but it doesn't seem to matter to him when I feel emotionally sick. It's like I'm putting him out by needing comforting.

But the problem is, I need that comforting from him.

Sure, why don't you just break up with him, you say. You think he's no good anyway. But there are two reasons why I keep trying:

- 1. Men are NOT, according to the opinion of the masses, banging down my door and begging me to go out with them, telling me how attractive and intelligent I am, begging to spend lots of money on me and whisk me away to a better life. I look around and everyone seems to have found someone wonderful and I can't seem to find someone tolerable. I've been waiting for the point where I decide that being alone would be more enjoyable than where I am now, dating someone. It's getting to that point, closer and closer. The thing is, the way we are now, it's almost like I'm alone, he spends no time with me, he works a lot, and I can understand that, but then he socializes once or twice a week and doesn't include me in his only social plans. I always include him in mine, I at least offer him the option of seeing me. He doesn't even seem like he wants to be with me, either.
- 2. While men reach their sexual peak at 18, women reach theirs at around age 30. Hence, I'm getting more and more horny by the minute and I keep hoping that by staying with him I have a better chance than I do if I don't have a boyfriend. See, I'm not even too interested in trying to find a new boyfriend, because I've gotten to the point where I feel like no one on the face of this earth can even come remotely close to making me happy.

Okay, okay, I was wrong, there's a third reason:

3. Break-ups are always a bitch. And I know this wouldn't be a clean break-up. And, you know, I was walking down the hall today, and I saw a cute guy in a

suit (well, we were in my office building, what do you expect...) and I thought, wow, that's a cute guy, and I haven't seen one of those in a very, very long time. I haven't even been attracted to someone in a very long time. It's like I can't even find someone to match the physical criteria I've developed over the years, much less get past that and like them as a human being.

And right now, I'm thinking that I could deal with having to close my eyes and go through the motions. But I'm not even getting that.

I'm sure that guy in my office building was married anyway.

Hell, one of my exes even has a friend from high school that I met on the day of the gay pride parade, and even though we were all at the gay pride parade, none of us were actually gay, and I thought this guy was cute, too. But that would be too cruel -date someone that is friends with your ex.

That would be me just twisting the knife that I already shoved into his back.

Or at least that's how he would see it.

I do get hit on at bars sometimes, but it's usually be someone twice my age. Yes, Casanova, you're just what I'm looking for.

Help.

I met someone that I've now become friends with, and he's a very, very excellent person. We have a lot in common. I like the work that he does; he's very talented. And I know he likes me, hell, we even had the conversation:

"Well, you know you don't like him. It's obvious. Break up with him. You know how I feel. The ball's in your court."

"It's not that simple. I don't want to spoil our friendship and our working relationship. And I can't just break up with a guy; it's not that simple."

Yes, he is an excellent person, But I

- (a) am just not physically attracted to him, although I have to admit that there's still some nice tension there, and
- (b) fear that, knowing that he's like me, we'll be having fights in no time and throwing stuff at each other and then I won't be able to interact with him at all and that would be a real shame, because, as I said, he's talented and I admire his work. I'm trying to be politically correct.

Okay, okay, there's a third reason:

(c) I can tell from what I've learned about him that he is relatively neurotic, and I really don't want to have to deal with someone else's dysfunctionality. I've got enough of my own dysfunctionality to go around.

So now I'm getting to the point where I just can't take it anymore, so when I'm just about to tell my boyfriend to take a flying leap out of his office window, thinking that he's not going to the party tonight that I invited him to weeks ago, he comes in, saying give me a call, and I say,

"Why? I'm going straight from work to the party."

"Oh, well, I thought we were going together."

"Well, you said a lunch today that you were going to go home and be by yourself and drink whiskey instead."

"Well, I wasn't planning to, I said that for everyone else's benefit."

Then there's that really shitty pause.

"Well, then call me and let me know your time plan, maybe we can meet up for it or something."

Why did I say that?

So this is where I am. What do I do? Maybe I should post this on some "relation-ship news group" on the internet and see if anyone can help me. I know you're going to say that I bring all of these things upon myself. But I feel like I have no choice half of the time. It's either get next to nothing or get nothing. Maybe if I got nothing I would at least stop kidding myself.

I told my boyfriend last night that maybe the idea of being boyfriend and girlfriend is not the right idea right now, and maybe we should just hold off a while until we actually miss each other and want to see each other and go out on a date.

And I know I'm still not going to find anyone that doesn't look like an ape and isn't in debt. Not that money is the only factor, mind you, it's just that if they can't get their own life together, they can't get together on a life with me, and my life will be scooping them out of trouble and helping them out and being a mom to them, and I sure don't want that. I did that enough with one of my exes.

My boyfriend says he tries, and when he outlines examples I tell him that in those situations he made me feel bad for putting him out and now he's trying to make me feel guilty for ever asking for help when he had other things to do. Yeah, it's him that I need comforting from, and if he's causing the problem he can hardly be the solution, right? Well, as I said, I talked to him last night, hinted that we should cool off.

Maybe I should go for high school grads. I'm sure the male peak at 18 means they can do it forty times, at ten seconds a pop. Cool.

Oh, well, one can joke...

A guy I used to go out with went to the party that my boyfriend and I went to last night, and my boyfriend was just sitting there, not wanting to talk, and my ex was being very personable and funny and nice. It made me kind of sad, like, why couldn't he be cool when he dated me?

Oh, and about last night... I was out until 1:30 on a wednesday night and didn't even drink. i'll now explain the story of my crazy week:

Okay, this guy I was telling you about, he's a very, very talented man. Well, we went out with another guy Monday, and he told me at the end of last week that he liked me. well, he's very cool, but... Well, I told you his how I felt.

But... even there are all these problems with us dating, the thought does cross my mind. But I don't want to screw it up and make him my enemy.

And he's probably thinking the same thing.

Okay, fine.

So... I come to this party Wednesday with my boyfriend, who has had one hour of sleep because he worked and slept at the office the night before. and so we start talking

about things, because I didn't even want him to go to the party, and I surely didn't want him to get mad and expect me to leave and drive him home. I wanted to just be able to enjoy the party. Anyway, so we start talking, and I say that maybe we should cool it off for a while, since this hasn't been working for a while. he says he knows he hasn't made me happy in a while, and frankly, he's not happy either. So he seems agreeable, and I say, "maybe the idea - right now - of being boyfriend and girlfriend isn't working for us. maybe we can get to the point where it will work by giving us some time." That bothered him. He said that time just usually means time before two people break up. I said, well, maybe we can get to the point where we actually like each other again, where he wants to ask me out on a date, where he really misses me, where he's really attracted to me, and maybe at that point I can feel the same way. Maybe we can have a date and it will go really well, and we'll value each other again.

But that's not happening now. So maybe we need some time.

Okay, so with that said, my ex came then arrived at the party, just for a few minutes, and he was being fun and nice and cool, which I'm not used to, and my boyfriend is being crappy as usual. I mean, I'm trying to have fun, they're playing the Smiths and REM and I'm dancing in my chair, trying not to look like I'm having one of those kinds of discussions, and my boyfriend then decides he has to leave. Then my ex leaves a few minutes later, which was what I wanted in the first place to be there alone. I knew people there at the party, that guy I was with Monday was there, and there were people there I really needed to make contact with, introduce myself to and schmooze with. I needed to mingle.

So I talked to people and was having a really cool time, and there were like 75 people there, and when it was all done we said, let's all go to a bar right across the street.

So I tell the Monday-guy he can keep his stuff in my car so he doesn't have to lug it around and then they go smoke put and I watch because I just wasn't up for it and then I decided I wasn't even going to drink because I won't be able to stay up or get into work on time and I've been drinking too much anyway. So I get to the bar after everyone else from the party got there, and I walked in and saw everyone, and I felt like Herb Tarlek from WKRP in Cincinnati walking into a room and doing a gunshot move with my hands to some people and waving to others and being a big cheese-ball... So I'm just mingling and everything is really cool and the Monday-guy is talking to an ex of his a lot, but I figured he'd be talking to other people anyway so I wouldn't talk to him much. And then I see this really cute guy, he looks YOUNG, but hell, I'm desperate and as I said he's cute, and the thing is he looked just like Shawn Cassidy. Big droopy eyes. So I'm looking at him over the course of the evening and I can see that he's doing the same to me which is really cool because that hasn't happened in a long time for me. Okay, so then I'm just talking to people and then lisa comes up, and she's friends with the people at the next table, including Shawn Cassidy, so I say, "Those are your friends, right?" And she says "Yes," and I tell her the blonde looks like Shawn Cassidy and she says something about him really loud so he now has the opportunity to turn around and join in on our table to see what we're talking about.

So she tells him he looks like Shawn and he says that women ask him out because

of it, and that it's really scary and I say, "well, don't think of it as a bad thing, because, I mean, Shawn Cassidy is a good-looking guy." And he just looks at me and pauses and says, "I'll take that as a compliment." So we smile at each other for a minute and then I say, "You know, I don't look like any star. Someone once told me I looked like Rikki Lake and I said no way and then they say, no when she's thin, and I still said no way," and there were looking at me saying I didn't look like her at all, and then Shawn or whatever his name is says, "You don't have to look like someone, you're ve ry good looking by being you." And I say, after a long pause, "I'll take that as a compliment."

So we're just talking a bit and I don't even know this guy's name so as he's leaving I say, well, it was nice to meet you, but I didn't even get your name, and he tells me his name and he then says he'd like to see me again so I tell him to go to this one bar next Wednesday because his friend will be there and I'll be there too. Then he says good-bye to me two more times and leaves.

And the whole time our mutual friend is looking at me like this is just too unreal that all this cutesy eye-contact was being made between me and Shawn.

So then I finally decide I'm going to go, I mean, it's after 1:30 and I do have to be at work at 8:30 in the morning, so I say my goodbyes and tell the Monday-guy to get his stuff out of my car. And he is so stoned and we're walking to my car and we pass a fast food place and Shawn is sitting at the window, right by the open door. So I mess up his hair as I walk by and the just keep going, so he runs out after me. So now i've got the Monday-guy and Shawn standing at my car. I ask Shawn to wait while I get the Monday-guy's belongings out of my trunk. Then the Monday-guy, the sweet thing, then asks me if it's okay that he's staying and I'm going. and I'm thinking, "I could tell you were hitting on your ex," and I say, "of course it's fine, you don't have to think that it would bother me," because really, it wouldn't, I just want everyone to be happy. So he leaves, and Shawn and I just keep looking at each other and slightly smiling, and he said he wanted to go back to the bar to see me after he left and he was wondering if he could give me his phone number. I told him, well, I do know, I'm kind of busy for the next few days, so maybe it would just be cool if he would please show up at the bar next Wednesday, because then maybe we could get the chance to talk a little more, since we've barely had the chance to get to know each other. He said that was cool, and then I got in my car and drove home.

Phew.

So, in other words, I'm feeling pretty good right now. I didn't set my alarm right, so I woke up at 8, and I have to leave at 8 to be on time for work, so I got ready in three minutes and begged my roommate to give me a ride. So, 25 minutes after I woke up I was in the office.

Phew.

My "boyfriend" hasn't shown up at work yet, it's almost 10:30, and he told his supervisor that he's late because he had some stuff dumped on him last night. Boo-hoo.

Sorry, I'm being mean. I just like feeling wanted. Is that so wrong?

Okay, so this part of the story is called "when it rains, it pours":

My buddy calls me and asks me to go out with him and his friend because it's John's birthday and it would be cool. I'm telling my buddy of my frustrations with my boyfriend and he says "go out with my friend." I'm like, well, I don't know if that's a good idea, and my buddy says why not, he's got a masters degree, and I say, well, he's not interested in me, and my buddy says sure he is. I say, well, we had a falling out before, so to speak, and my buddy says no, he really liked you, but he didn't know if you liked him. so now I know I'm going to meet the two of them at a bar tonight and I just know there's going to be a lot of tension, unless my buddy gets his friend really drunk.

Hmm.

The new installment...

My buddy came over but his friend never showed up for dinner. He had no idea my buddy was planning on taking him to see me or that other friends were meeting with us at the bar. So... I went out with my buddy and we talked and everything was fine.

I talked to my "boyfriend" Thursday, we started to argue about all of the little things that we don't do for each other anymore, the way we always argue lately. I said, this is why we need to spend more time apart recovering. And he said, I don't know how spending time apart will help; if I don't make you happy maybe we just shouldn't bother. And I thought, he's throwing the baby out with the bath water, and I said, well, right now you're feeling the way I'm feeling now, you're not happy now, right?

And he said yes.

And I asked, did I ever make you happy?

And he said yes.

So I asked, do you want to try to get that back or do you just want to throw it all away?

So then he agreed with me.

So... I went out last night with my buddy, and the Monday-guy called me yesterday, and he's coming over Friday night. Hmm...

What chapter am I on?

Okay, so I go out Tuesday and see the woman who was friends with the Shawn Cassidy look-alike, and she's out with us Tuesday, and then I say I'm not sure if I'm going to make it Wednesday, because I have a work function, and it depends on how drunk I get, and she say, well, Shawn Cassidy is going to be there. so I say, okay, I'll be there, I promise.

I just thought, this opportunity is too good.

Okay, so I go to my work function, and I make sure I don't get hammered, which I didn't, and the thing was done by like 9:15 so I drive there and there's a lot more people there than usual, which is a good thing, and people are already there, so I just grab a seat and listen. It's dark, I'm having a hard time seeing, so I have no idea if Shawn is

there. Then she looks at me in the audience and says, "Did you know he was here?" and I'm just like, splendid, just what I needed.

Okay, so he says hi to me and then he moves so he's sitting closer to me, so that we can play that little game we were playing when we first saw each other, you know, glance over at the other one while you're talking to someone else, smile just a little and then look back at your conversation, over and over again.

So I know that Shawn, if all is going according to plan, is now officially hooked.

Hee hee.

So he ends up coming over and sitting next to me and we're whispering while others are there and we kept talking, you know, in groups with a bunch of other people too, but alone too, and we're talking about America's love of mass murders and pornography and having good conversations, like interesting ones, ones you can't just have with a frat guy type in a bar. And I was a little surprised, because I know he's only 23 or something, so I didn't know what kind of conversation i'd be having to deal with.

So, to make a long story only slightly less long, we talk until after one in the morning, and I give him my email and my business card and he gives me his number and email and I drive him and two other people part of the way home and ...

Well, that's it, I guess. It was just all very cutesy, and nice.

Hmm.

Oh yes, I'll see him again, at least if I have anything to say about it I will.

And he's taller than me.

Okay, am I missing something?

So we get to the party and he tells me he wants a relationship and since I don't seem to want that, he's dating someone that night be better for him. And I'm like, fine. You know, fine, like I didn't want a relationship with you, you were right, don't worry about it. Only thing is, I wish he could have told me before we got to this party, because now we've got this uncomfortable tension, unless he was just trying to get a ride from me, so he held off on telling me until he actually got to the party... So then three minutes after we have that discussion, which is like three minutes after we get to this party, some jerk knocks into me and spills my full glass of wine all over my shirt and a little on my jeans, too. So now I'm like, well, I've been here for a total of six minutes, had an awkward conversation and got a full glass of wine spilled on me and am now soaking wet. I've had about as much fun as I could possibly have at this party, so I should probably just go home, towel off and go to bed.

So I go home, and it's only like 11:30 on Friday night, but I'm in too pissy of a mood to go out and try to meet up with anybody, besides, I really don't know where anybody is. And of course Shawn calls at like two in the morning and wakes me up and he's apologizing and I said no problem, don't be mad if I sound groggy, and we talked about all sorts of stuff, none of which I can completely remember since I wasn't lucid.

I do remember talking about the play Caligula, which I just saw, but other than that I remember nothing. I think we both said we like each other. Who knows.

So then I'm kind of hoping he calls me, and he doesn't for the rest of the weekend. Poo. No emails either. So since I'm dying and have no restraint I call and leave a message at like 4:00 Sunday afternoon. No call back. So I went out to dinner with the fuy I just broke up with and am still friends with and watched "The X Files" and half of a movie and drank wine and came home. Still no messages.

Geez, he can't even call me back.

So I wake up and get to work and I have an email from him. and it goes:

I tried calling you last night. I guess you were eating. You did not say anything bad on friday: You would have a hard time offending me. I am so not awake yet. I got up early to work on homework-only to find I don't have any. Well time to eat some Capt. Crunch. Talk to you soon.

Went on a date with Shawn.

Okay, so at one point we were talking about throwing up stories, right? And I'm trying to come up with the grossest story I have, and I think it's when someone threw up on me. So we're swapping stories, and he says he's got one, and then he says he shouldn't tell it.

So I'm like, well, you have to tell it now.

And he says, well, you know how bulemics throw up?

And I say, yeah.

And he says, well, a woman did that once, in my presence, but it wasn't with a finger.

And I just thought, oh my god, she threw up on his penis! I mean, what's that going to do to a guy's psyche?

Okay, well, I'm also thinking, I can't believe this guy is telling me this story, and I just couldn't stop from laughing.

Okay, so then I'm thinking she had to be drunk, right? And I ask how drunk she was, and he says she wasn't, it was just from hitting the back of her throat,

Okay, so now I'm even more embarassed. I mean, I'm dying. I can't stop laughing, but I'm at least comforted that his dick is at least long enough to get to the back of some woman's throat.

I was so flushed, I couldn't stop laughing. I mean, what would you do if you were on a first date and your date told you this story? I mean, yeah, he didn't want to say it, and it's not like he was proud of it or anything.

Oh my god, I didn't know how to react.

#### UNDA+ED IOURNAL EN+RY

I think I'm going to quit my job. I really can't stand it here; even though I'm paid well I'm treated like crap by the owner; it's like he resents me because I asked

to be paid what I'm worth. And everyone seems to fight me on any decision to be made, even though everyone will say I am the best here at my job, they'll still argue with me. I have really gotten to the point where I just hate it here, so much that I feel like I almost have to leave.

That's a big step for me, that's a big thing to say for me, it's like a bigger jump like when I was leaving college. I don't plan on looking for another job. Either:

- 1. I'm going to take like a year off and travel, or
- 2. I'm going to start a new company, or
- 3. I'm going to take like a year off and travel, and then I'm going to start a new company.

I could do freelance work as well, to tie me over, if I can get the clients. That way I'd have an income, all while working at home, not having to commute, not having to dress up, not having committees changing everything (I would get paid by the hour), and I could take time off when I wanted to.

Then again, I'd have to get the clients.

Okay, so for at least now, the idea still comes back to travel.

This is probably one of the only chances I'll have in my life to see other places, to really take the time to do it. I could write while I'm out, too. I know a family in Scotland, I may know someone with a home in London (if all goes according to their plan for getting a place in London), a friend's family stays and has relatives in Prague and offered me a job there. I thought I could stay with people and work off my stay there or something, and just live differently for a while. I'm still single and have a savings, so this is probably the best time for me to do it. And I can't stay at this company for another Christmas. They have a ton of extra work starting in November and we put in 80-90 hours a week and I never have time for the holidays. I can't do that to myself again, and a part of me relishes the idea of short staffing my boss and making his life difficult.

Well...

But I can't stay here.

I'm single.

I have a savings.

Last Christmas I was just crying. I was so fed up then with my job, and I told her I wanted to travel. She did it when she was younger, and she just kept telling me, "You know you can always make it, if you have to work at McDonalds, you'll always be resourceful enough to make it. So if you want to take the chance, go ahead and do it."

And I don't know if I can look at myself on Christmas day 1997 if I'm still miserable and haven't done anything about it.

know what I mean?

I've made plans a few times to go to Europe, or Russia, but they fall through. I want to actually do it.

# 1998 | OURNAL EN+RIES

# AUGUS+ 21, 1998 FRIDAY N&N-AMERICAN +IME

Sometimes people just don't want to hear about complaints. People would rather just process thoughts than actually think. When I meet people who are in charge of prolife movements, and actually against anti-religion, or anti-life, or anti-thought movements. These are the types of people who would like to defend racism, or other things that seem to represent some people but not all people.

I don't understand how some people can support a life-decision, but not a life-philosophy. There is no consistency in that argument. Seldom do I see consistency in anyone's argument. Seldom do I hear people start to talk about religion, or philosophy. Seldom do topics like that fit into other people's arguments.

Sometimes the world just makes less and less sense. I've probably said too much, and I've porobably said the wrong thing, and I should know this for myself; I should know this more of the time.

Soetimes my days make more sense and sometimes the world makes less sense. I think it's 11:30 in the morning. In less than 2 hours I have to be at another meeting.

I'll just keep repeating to myself that this is supposed to be my last day here.

But nothing gets better and no problems get solved and my head still hurts and I've only been here six weeks and everything still sucks.

In less than two hours I'm supposed to be gone.

That never works.

This is my life.

I still want a happy ending and I never find one.

I have written at this for way too long and used too much unreal paper. This could be my world. I still have over an hour and a half to go.

I wish I could just sleep through the pain sometimes.

# AUGUS+ 24, 1998 NON-AMERICAN

Nothing from this new world makes sense.

People are regularly losing ... At, well, ... what do you call it? Daytime baseball, I suppose. I still hate the usual baseball - nothingness. I still hate most of the concerns that has nothing to do with any of the sports I feign interest in. I don't like football, or baseball, or most things that have anything to do with interaction.

Commercials on WGN or Fox or whatever I have on television suck. In case you're curious. This nonsense is still on tee-vee. I have a permanent headache and nothing gets rid of my headache. It's 12:40 in the afternoon and I have NOTHING to kill time-wise for the next 20 minutes until my next hour-long class of pain before I hate this place

even more and someone I don't care about gives me a half-hour painful ride home.

Some actions, some ideas, some thoughts, are loud, and HURT.

Everyone is about to go to lunch, except for the two people in the two beds, and me. I'm still writing and venting. Nothing ever changes.

There's too much time to kill, and too much nothing to do. Such is my life.

# 1999 IOURNAL ENTRIES

1/27/98

Here is the deal. I am writing this while I am working. There were things I wanted to say, but I didn't bother. you want to know what my issue is? My ISSUE? That I always want more. Yes, I know, that is MY problem, not yours. But after what I have gone though this year, my goals are even more defined and more specific now.

What does that mean for you? Well, it is a favor, I know, but if your definition of love comes anywhere close to my definition of love (no, that doesn't mean I want to get hitched and have six kids), but if your sense of understanding the value of love, if that is anywhere close to my definition, then maybe you would be willing to hear me out on this one.

I don't need a guy realtionship or any of that other crap. I've pretty much gotten used to the idea of not being gushy in public or anything; that's not my style. But I know I'm an attention whore, and sometimes I just need to hear that I am worth something. I know, I know, but I never pay attention to that; it's like I'm not capable to understanding that kind of stuff. I know there are men out there that find me attractive, too, but it is like this: in my own perverse head I often discount what other people say or think. Well, usually my assessments are accurate, but you know, such is life.

That's what I hate about thinking. My goals and values are so different from the average person's goals and beliefs and such, that it is just a disappointment. I get tired of being disappointed all the time, and I get therefore tired of thinking all the time. Which is why I ask what the point is, unless I change (at the core) who I am?

So either I have to get hit by a truck or happen upon a completely changed world. which option do you think will happen first?

It is hard to think about that "love" theory, and all that other crap, when there is nothing like it out there... according to my views.

So in other words... I know full fell (I know, I know, that wasn't even proper english, grammar-wise) that people don't think about things like this and people accept whatever other standards seem popular at the time.

At least that is the average person.

So now this is supposed to be truth time for me...

I guess what I was asking for was someone more stable to be the rock to lean on.

oh, that didn't make sense. But I at least know what I meant there...

The thing I miss is not having control all the time. I am too used to being the rock for everyone else, I am used to being the voice of reason when everyone else loses their head, and most importantly, I am tired of having everyone think that as long as I seem fine, I am not needed.

Friends are fickle, and selfish, and they lie. This much I know. Even when I'm not at full capacity I am aware of this. That is why I shut up all the time and don't tell people things.

I'm too used to people saying things and meaning them, in part, at the time, when they'll change their mind on it two months later. That is why on some levels I clam up, and on some I tell too much.

I guess that is another one of my problems...

But the things I want are a big deal to me, and they require at least some honesty and openness on my part, in order for me to get them. I'm too used to being the rock for everyone else, and I want someone to be the rock for me. That's what I want, and that is the most vague way I can put it. And the most general way. I am an attention whore, and I have been looking for it in any way that I have the capacity. Men want a piece of flesh, well hell, I don't even care about my own, so why should I be girl-like and act like it matters to me?

Well, it does matter, and I try not to say it and I try to not think about it. if I care about nothing else, why should I care about that?

# 1/29/99

I'm too used to being treated like shit, so when things go well I think, what, did I do something good? did I deserve this?

When I talked to my sister she was saying that I needed a female friend as I was growing up and then I wouldn't feel so alone all the time. I guess that is her theory on why I get along with men more than women.

Granted, they can steal from me, they can beat me up, they can rape me... but hell, other than that, they are nice guys.

Trust them as far as you can throw them. I guess.

oh, nevermind. I've discovered that it is pointless for me to have hopes. I've done a pretty good job of repressing all my dreams. we'll see if he wants to see me again.

or tonight.

or whatever.

I have met one person who has been honest with me. I mean, that I know is honest. But honesty is seldom the best policy, at least for the average person.

I don't know how I fit into the way I think versus how the average person thinks... that is probably why I ask questions about religion and such. People at least on some

level are somewhat honest about those beliefs.

But how often do I hear the truth? If you want my answer, it is next to never. People are not honest, that much.

I've discovered that people are not honest, and so if I say anything, it will be the first thing taken seriously out of my mouth. So I tend to shut up and the like. Just a theory.

My childhood? I was made fun of all the time. Teased because I was smart, I was fat, I was the teacher's pet... you see, I talked to the teachers because unlike everyone else I wasn't afraid of them, the teachers liked me becausei was smart. Kids can be cruel, though, and they will search for things to pick on. I don't want to remember specific details about how they acted, because the memories are something I have tried to repress. So in other words, I hate looking back on a good part of my youth. I was just a kid; I wasn't strong enough to stand up for myself or be strong. Which I am now.

I've discovered that people are not honest, and so if I say anything, it will be the first thing taken seriously out of my mouth. So I tend to shut up and the like.

I was just reading over these now, and yes, I am very used to people lying regularly to me. I am not used to honesty. I crave honesty, and I never get it. it's like this, if someone seems honest with me, they might hold back on the truth and all, but i want people to be people who don't lie. well, not to me. I want to have hope in something. I have been let down so much that I don't know what or who to turn to any more. Even when I have hope, a have to get let down, and then I have to kill a little piece of me. And I am tired of doing that to myself.

#### 8/8/99

Working for days a week for a month doesn't even cover my rent, so it is getting harder and harder for me to justify my reason for staying here.

Like any other day when I am here, I guess. living alone, metaphysically, and being alone, spiritually.

#### Ø8/Ø5/99

I'm early.

I'm early for my first day of quasi-work at this quasi-job. I shouldn't be so pessimistic about it, but when I know the difference for me between a job and a career, when I know how I stumbled into this positin, well, it gets easier for me to sound like I'm above this all.

Which I shouldn't say, because it IS work, which I have not had for 6 months, and it gives me a reason to not hem and haw about my internet connection.

I'm processing orders, and possibly doing some receptionist work. So it has been an interesting lack-of-moneyjob, interesting to see how models think and act, but otherwise fruitless.

It gave me a reason to put make-up on every once in a while.



8/6/99

It's so strange working for people who don't have everything together.

So some of it required me having to ask someone there, and they seemed to always be running around in stress mode, and they were also SO disorganized. At one point I saw that there was an order that needed to be done today, so I saw what kind of shipping it needed and I saw that it was going to the UK and so I got the right kind of packaging and I went to fill out a customs card and address label. Chanteen looked at me and asked, "what are you doing with that?" And I said, well, I know we're sending it out now, and I saw from the address and the shipment that it needed express delivery, and since it was going to the UK I got the global package. So I stay there and waited for a response.

She said okay.

I don't think she expected someone with half a brain to do this work.

Hell, I wouldn't expect it of me, either. Lucky fucking me.

They keep hard copies of all their orders over the internet, one for the "sort by name" file, one to go to the boss, and one to go to the manager. So she and the boss can record it all into the computer.

I still think it would save paper to put it all into a database, but the boss said that was not a proper use of their computer resources. So I wasn't going to argue with him on that one. Hell, it was my first day on the job.

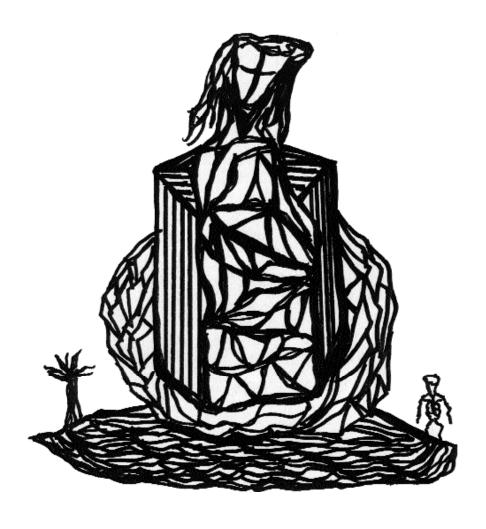
Either way, when they were done processing the order, one copy went to the customer, one stayed in the "sort by name" file (which wasn't sorted totally alphabetically, just by the first letter of your last name... you would have no way of seeing from the file how many orders were done by a Jane Doe, unless there were NO other D names in the file), and the last one went to the "sort by date" file. If the order was procrssed on the 24th of July, just put it in the file with the other orders for the 24th of July.

Very disorganized. I know I'm anal-retentive, but hell, there has to be a better way to keep this all together.

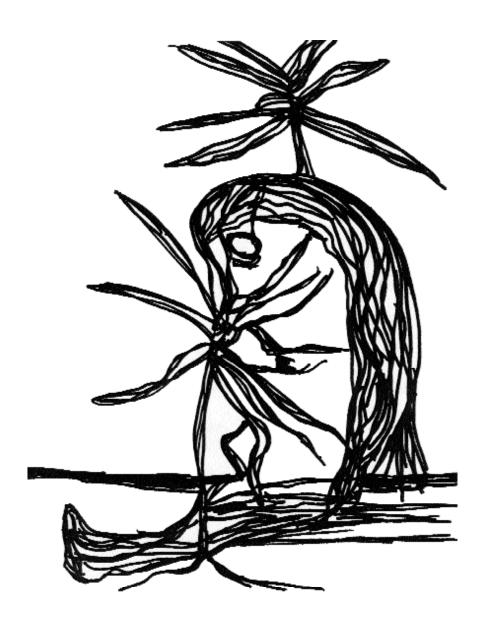
And this has to be a waste of paper.

Anyway... enough about the job. I feel I get to talk about these kinds of things with no one, so I ramble here. Forgive me.

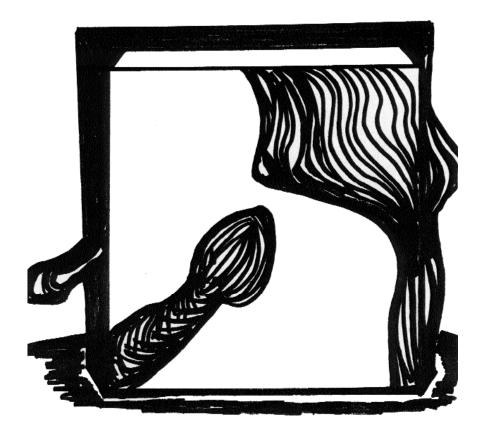
I love it when the bad breaks come in sheets for me. It's fun.



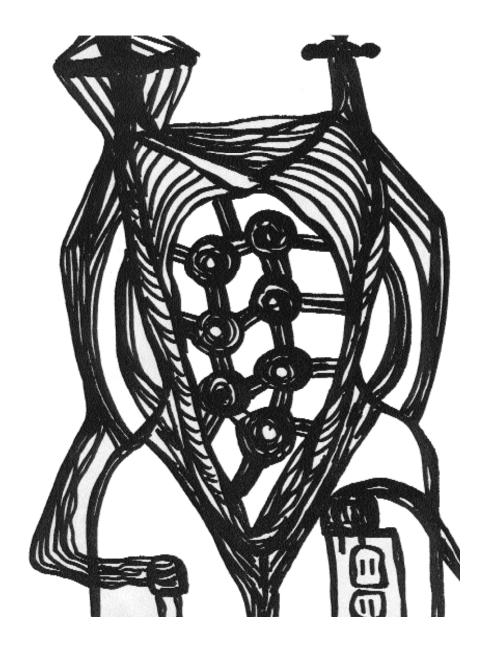
artwork by Edward Michael O'burr Supranowicz



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#### BORN OLD

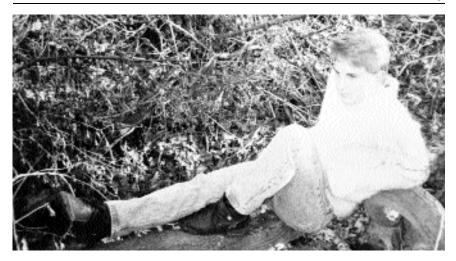
# JERRY VILHO++I

When Johnny, with the blond curly hair, could walk, his father would take him on ve ry long journeys all over the neighborhood: by the shoemakers, adjacent to where the baker's son had fallen from the mountain to his death who had given Johnny many rides on the handlebars of his bike, with a fake cat in the window holding the sole of a shoe; across cobblestones the great poet Poe once walked upon with his inner demons clutching his heart and mind while living in matrimony with his sister-cousin when the area was called Fordham Village and by the tire store with a cardboard print of a little boy inside a tire holding a candle against the darkness surrounding him ... but even before Johnny could walk, the father would hug him closely and kiss him tenderly; push him out above his head - bringing forth excited screams of joy from the baby and he would get excited over the excitement the boy showed. The more Tina, the father's daughter, began to look like a grown woman, the more he hugged Johnny and caressed him as if he were an anchor probing deep murky waters.

Seventeen year old Tina felt like spitting on the kid: "Here lousy, take this!" she would whisper harshly to him as she held her nose, pretending he was a horrible odor, giving him the sandwich to take to her father for ever since his hand had fallen from the table like a twitching leaf caught in a fierce breeze only to clutch to Tina's firm ass cheek - which was seen by the mother who called him an animal and visitor of sheep pens - they tried to stay away from one another to prevent glances with suggestive meanings in eyes.

Tom, who was seven years old when Johnny had descended among them in a crash landing from the body of a thirty-nine year old woman becoming the old-born baby, would tease the "little jerk with moxie" by making scary faces at him when no one was looking or pinch his legs from beneath the table and then pretend he had done no such thing when accused by a talking Johnny and the mother would hit Johnny, whom she really hadn't wanted - ove rwhelmed at the thought of feeding a fifth mouth during the dying of hunger Great Depression brought on by the rich to emphasize their worth for if there weren't hoards of wretched poor how would they know they were well off-for trying to get polio-legged Tommy into trouble with the father who had once bitten the carpet to shreds when Tom had dropped the bowl of pasta to the floor - insisting brace and all clutching his leg that he could negotiate the walk from counter to table since his hands were not inflicted with polio - rather than eat the wide-eyed frightened child. The meal was washed off and eaten after refreshed with more red gravy.

What Tommy would try to do was throw Johnny down the steep flight of stairs but Johnny's holding onto the railing prevented a head long fall through a glass window and into a courtyard five levels below where Black Jack the custodian would greet Johnny every day with a grand hello; failing this, Tom would pose a special challenge



to this kid-brother who was slowly stealing away the love of his father and mother that he had sole possession of since his leg had been attacked when he was six months old and Johnny would walk to the top of the stairs like a car with a flat tire - imitating Tom's polio walk - to hear Tom say: "Come on Johnny - jump! I'll catch you! I swear to God! Trust me - Christ I'm your fucking brother!"

Johnny believed and jumped but Tom only half caught him making Johnny bleed from the nose and lip. The very last time Johnny jumped, Tom missed him altogether making Johnny's knees, elbows and forehead bleed. Then after, whenever Tom called from the bottom of the stairs, Johnny would not go. He would instead get fully absorbed in the toy coal truck with a blunt nose his father had given him and play all about the kitchen floor until the noise of the truck's wheels scraped away all of Tom's might angry calls...



# LEARN + D D + HA+ + D D

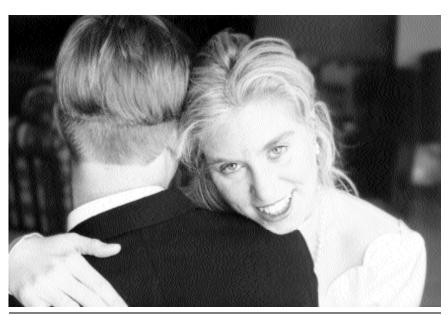
#### HELENA WOLFE

Maybe there isn't much of a chance for us but other people get to have hopes so maybe I can learn

I know we don't have a lot in common I know that we disagree you find a lot of my beliefs infuriating

maybe you still do

you've been able to shut all that off and like me anyway maybe that's what people do maybe I can learn to do that too





# I+'S ONLY +HE +IP

#### HELENA WOLFE

there are too many things that I want to say, but after all these years I've forgotten how to speak

I've wanted to tell you how I feel but I've always been afraid to do that and I've always been afraid of looking like a fool

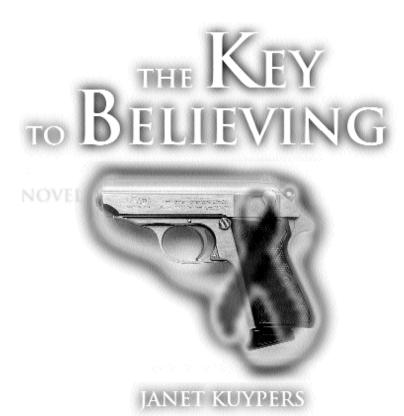
I haven't been able to tell you everything and now I'm afraid that it's too late for me and now I'm going to have to live with of what I know all alone

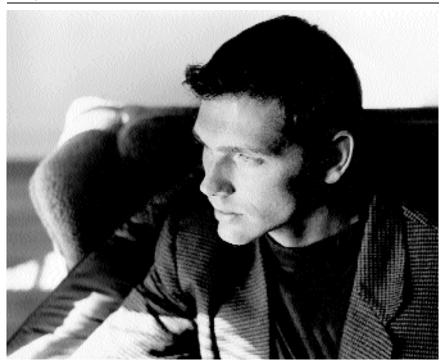
I want someone to share that knowledge with me I want someone to spend their life with me

I know I should have wanted that before but I'm telling you, at least I'm trying to tell you now

and I'm still afraid to tell all this to you and this is only the tip of the ice berg









wasn't enough that dedicated medical researcher Sloane Emerson developed new drugs for HIV and AIDS patients. She needed to discover a cure. Follow us after discovering by the U.S. government manufactured AIDS, expose the government, save her life, fall in love and change the world.

### THIS IS TO STRONG PEOPLE WHO HAVE BATTLED TOO MUCH



THIS IS DEDICATED TO
WILLIAM DOUGLAS WARD





## CHAPTER 1

#### THE WOMAN

six a.m. arrived and the alarm on the clock crashed into his bedroom, Kyle Mackenzie rolled over, slammed his palm into the buzzing clock, and rolled back onto his side. He turned his head toward the window. A slight rain tapped against the edge of the roof and dripped over his window sill.

He didn't want to get up, not today. Every morning he would pull his umbrella from the stand by his front door, run to his Honda in the driveway, and make his way through the streets of downtown Seattle, to the opposite side of town, to Madison Pharmaceuticals. Every morning he would go into the office, walk back through the long hallways to the lab, and work with his team, usually making no progress.

"Honey, why are you getting up so early?" his wife Elissa moaned from the other side of the bed.

"Getting in at nine means you're only there three hours before lunch," Kyle answered. "You can't get anything done if you're interrupted like that. I figured this way I can work for a good five hours before having to stop."

"Are you going to make a habit of this?" his wife asked.

"We'll see,' he said as he put his hand on her shoulder. "Don't worry, I'll try to make it home early enough tonight for dinner. I'll call you."

And with that he got up and walked into the bathroom to shave.

Kyle hadn't given up hope. Just a few months ago his team, headed by the prominent researcher Sloane Emerson, developed a new drug that drastically improved the T-Cell count by lengthening the time the viral load was down for AIDS patients. In the best-case scenario old protease inhibitors, when coupled into cocktails with the usual drugs like AZT, reduced the viral load of AIDS patients to a nearly negligible amount around a year. With the new inhibitor they worked on, Madison Pharmaceuticals laid claim to the only drug to date that when taken properly reduced the viral load for just over two years. This was an astonishing feat; some theorists claimed that after three years the AIDS virus would die out from within

the body, and if cocktails of drugs could extend the time a patient's viral load was almost gone from one year to two years, hope was in sight for a cocktail that would eliminate the virus after three years, thus eliminating AIDS in the body.

And if researchers couldn't find a drug that killed the HIV virus, they could at least find a drug cocktail that holds it back in the body until the virus actually dies.

He thought about this during his drive to work. More than the accomplishment itself, Kyle thought about the celebrations after the drug, Emivir, named after Sloane Emerson, was released into the public. The P.R. department handled the release of Emivir perfectly, and Madison Pharmaceuticals seemed to be in all of the newspapers. Madison's stock split less than one week after the F.D.A. approved the release of Emivir.

The parties, Kyle kept thinking, seemed to be at times the best part of the release of the drug. For the first few weeks after the release of Emivir he had plans three or four nights a week, to parties in ballrooms of hotels, to parties at the luxurious homes of both the president and vice-president of the company, to parties in Los Angeles hosted by famous actors, even to parties in mansions of government officials in Washington D.C., which were weekend-events where the executives and the laboratory staff flew on the company plane across the country to celebrate. He bought a tuxedo for the parties. He met people he thought he would never be able to rub shoulders with.

He remembered at one party walking over to a group of women having a conversation about dinner parties. He didn't know who any of the women were, but he could tell they were professional socialites, that they viewed their position in their life as their job, as a title to uphold.

One woman, wearing a floor-length black dress with gold trim at the neckline, asked, "So if you could invite anyone to a dinner party, who would you invite?"

Another woman, wearing a red beaded dress, answered, "Well, you know I'd invite the Addisons, of course, and the Bronsens as well. And the regulars would be on my list, you know, Daphne Hassan and her interest of the moment, or even the family of Emilia. But then I'd invite some people that would really stir things up, you know, a few others from Congress that would like to talk to people like the Tates."

Everyone started laughing in the small circle of people. Kyle had no idea who these women were talking about.

"Well, have you forgotten the Madisons?" Kyle turned to see an older woman glancing at him and smiling as she spoke. "You know the Madisons are very important."

At that moment Kyle felt a hand on his shoulder and he turned to see Sloane Emerson.

"Oh, Sloane, are you enjoying yourself?" Kyle asked. He could feel the cold stares of the women in the group — not glaring at him but at Sloane, the woman of the evening. She never looked like she fit in at these parties; Sloane's demeanor suggested, without her consciously trying, that she was above the group.

"I was just wondering how you were doing. What are you discussing here?" She looked around at the group of women.

"Well," the first woman started, "We were just discussing if we were to invite anyone we wanted to a dinner party, who would be on our list."

"Let me think about that." Sloane said, and genuinely thought about the question for a moment. "How many people could be on this list? Are we talking a small party or something larger?"

"Oh, just forty or fifty people," the woman in black answered.

"If it could be anyone," Sloane answered, "I think I'd invite Jesus Christ. And definitely Aristotle, and some of the Founding Fathers, particularly Jefferson. But Einstein would definitely have to be on the list as well, and maybe a few astronomers, too." Sloane stopped when she realized how the women were looking at her.

Sloane started grinning at the assumption she made. "But I don't suppose you weren't posing a philosophical question, were you?" She looked around the circle and saw every set of female eyes staring at her with disdain, except for one woman, who was rolling her eyes and looking away.

She turned to Kyle and smiled. "Well, I'll let you continue your conversation," she said to Kyle as she turned back to the group of women. "It was very nice meeting you," and as the last words were trailing out of her mouth she was turning and walking away.

Kyle shrugged his shoulders and smiled at the group, then turned and followed Sloane.

"Sloane?"

She turned around and glanced at him, smiling before she spoke. "I forget that most people don't think the way I do," she said to Kyle, nodding her head to the women she just talked to.

"You know, you didn't technically <u>meet</u> any of those women —they never even told you their names." Kyle grinned at Sloane's repsone of a smile, telling him in her look that she never cared to meet them because they had no resources of value to her.

"I just have one question, Sloane."

"Yes?"

"Why Jesus Christ?"

"So that when he doesn't show up I can have the last laugh." Sloane winked at him. Kyle never liked it when she made such rash comments, especially when she knew he was a practicing Catholic.

"You know he was a real man, Sloane."

"Many people believe the Bible is meant to be read as a metaphor and not taken verbatim. And I know there is scientific evidence that a man named Jesus lived, but I know that his name was one of many golds whose names were adjusted so they had the numerical and religious significance of the number 888. But if he was at dinner I'd be able to talk to him and find out if he was actually a prophet, or if anything from the New Testament actually happened."

Kyle then watched her begin to turn away before she turned back to him briefly. "You know," she added, "you should really spend more time with your wife when you bring her to these parties." She smiled, gestured to Elissa, then turned and

walked away.

Talking with the famous women and the wives of the dignitaries was somehow still Kyle's favorite part of these parties. It wasn't because he liked the attention of other women, he loved his wife dearly and would never think of another woman. What he loved were the way these women, who worried about looking good and being famous and adhering to all the necessary social graces, looked up to him because he was a part of a team that accomplished something. The team he was on, his team, set their minds to something, and they did it. And everyone wanted to know how.

When he was at these parties, Kyle felt like and astronaut who just came back from travelling to the moon.

"What exactly does your drug do, Mr. Mackenzie?" asked Katia Turner, a Hollywood actress, at one party in Los Angeles.

Kyle was amazed that the famous Katia Turner actually came up to him to talk — and knew his name. He cleared his throat. "When used in combination with the old drugs, Emivir reduced the viral load to a negligible amount for about two years, versus one year, the best result of the other inhibitors on the market."

"How does it work? You said it's an inhibitor?"

He didn't expect people to want to know. "Well, the first drugs on the market, like AZT, targeted only one of the HIV enzyme components. This was basically attacking only one part of the virus, which proved effective for only a small amount of time. The new wave of inhibitors, called 'protease inhibitors', attacked a different enzyme component of the virus, so HIV was then being attacked at a different level. Using a 'cocktail' of drugs instead of just trying to attack the virus at one part worked well, but the new wave of inhibitors could only reduce the amount of virus in the body for about a year. This new protease inhibitor we've created can continue attacking the virus for nearly two years."

He could tell that although she seemed interested, she was straining to act.

"So Emivir delays the continued spread of AIDS for an additional year?"

Kyle smiled. "Yes, but it's more promising than that. The theory is that the AIDS virus, without causing infection from its birth to death, can live in the human body for three years. The problem is that in that three year life span it continues to mutate and reproduce itself. If we can stop it from doing that for two years, we're getting closer and closer to stopping it for three years. After that point, the remaining virus may die within the body."

"And thus a cure?"

"Well, a human could live with AIDS in the body until the virus dies."

He tried to push out of his mind the thought that the HIV-infected cells could seemingly "hide" in pockets in the body, such as the lymph nodes, or in the spine, or in the testes — and that three years might not be enough time. Researchers still didn't know everything they needed to about the virus. But Kyle needed to think that there was a goal line in sight.

"That's amazing," Katia crooned. "So how long do you think it will take to

come up with the drugs to destroy the AIDS virus in the body altogether?"

Kyle paused. She asked the question he did not want to have to answer. "That is what we don't know right now. We'll have to keep working on it, hope for the best."

###

It was with that disheartening thought that he came back to today, in his car, driving to his lab.

It was 7:15 a.m. when he pulled into the parking lot. He walked through the main office, through back hallways, towards his lab. It wasn't the parties he liked, he thought, but the chance to rest on his accomplishments for once. To feel good about something he had done. Whenever he thought about the search for a cure now, disappointment crept into his pores and he felt like he was going nowhere, no matter how many hours he put in at the lab.

But he thought that at least today he'll get in before his boss, Sloane, because she must like to see that her staff still has the desire to get through this puzzle.

He walked down the last hallway to the lab. He could see through the frosted glass of the door that the lights were on. He opened the door.

Sloane Emerson sat on a stool, one foot on the floor, one foot on the bottom rung of the stool, lab coat open, falling over her hips to the sides of the stool. Sloane always looked lanky, Kyle thought, and seemed to fit in perfectly with the test tubes and pieces of scientific equipment placed in rows on the line of tables along the wall. Her black hair was straight, just above the shoulder in length, cut into a bob and she always tucked it behind her ears. She seldom wore make-up. She was reading some lab reports. She looked up at him.

"Kyle, you're here early."

Kyle was frozen for a moment in the doorway. The door hit him as it slowly closed behind him, reminding him to move forward. "Sloane, you're here early. I thought I beat everyone else."

"Well, some things were on my mind about the tests we did last night and I figured I'd get in early to read the results."

"And?"

"Nothing. It's not making any difference what we do with Emivir, we're not making any improvements at all." And with that she turned back to the reports, to read on for a more detailed explanation.

That's what is amazing, Kyle thought. She never gets depressed about making no progress. At least she never shows it.

He thought back to the parties. Once most of the guests had arrived Sloane would enter, never with a date. And although she didn't attempt to attract attention to herself, everyone always noticed her when she walked into the room. The rest of the researchers noticed her most of all. After seeing her every day in navy slacks and a white blouse, watching Sloane Emerson walk into a ballroom wearing a floorlength taupe satin dress instantly turned heads. She wore the simplest dresses, ones

that showed her off, not her clothing. The fabric from her clothes seemed to glide over her skin as she walked through the room. For jewelry she wore just a necklace with a solitary diamond. At these parties, Kyle thought, when all the women wore too much jewelry and dresses that looked a little difficult to walk in, seeing Sloane confidently glide through a room with the same determination she had when she was in her lab, made her look like she was in charge of everything around her.

Kyle knew she didn't do it intentionally. It was just how she was.

Kyle walked closer to her and glanced over her shoulder at the test results. "These weren't very important, I mean, we weren't expecting much from these tests. Is this really why you couldn't sleep last night?"

Sloane closed the lab notebook and placed it down on top of the pile in front of her. "I've just been getting exasperated," she said.

"About our lack of progress? You know, you should really take a break, we've made great strides, and you're —"

"It's not just our laboratory progress, you know. Tyler, from marketing and P.R., said that he's had a few groups lobbying with the government to check into our production speed because we're not getting enough of Emivir on the market. But they don't realize that our people are holding off on the number of people that get the drug, because we have to be able to keep them on the drug once they're on it. They have to take a series of pills a number of times a day for years, and once one customer gets on Emivir they have to stay on it, and if they miss two or three doses the virus can have enough time to mutate in their system and they develop a resistance to it. So we have to make sure that the plants are producing enough Emivir so we don't run out for the people already on it, we can't just give this to anyone, because if we do, then all of the patients will be out of the drug if the plants can't keep up with production. If we did that, we'd have more of an epidemic on our hands. We've got a plant of our own going, and we've out-sourced three plants in the States, Canada and Japan. What more do they expect of us?"

"Sloane, Why are you letting production become a problem for you? That's not your department."

"But it's my drug, and these people don't understand what they're suggesting. I think none of these people think that businesses have to plan, that they just make so much money and every decision they make is just to hurt "the public". They don't think about the fact the businesses have to sell to "the public" so they're obviously concerned with their market and they're doing what they can for their market. Businesses, in order to stay profitable, have to do what the market dictates. And this decision — to hold back some people from using Emivir right away — it's for the good of "the people," but no one wants to look at it logically. If we were being a mean business, might we be more interested in selling it to as many people as possible, Kyle?"

Sloane smiled when she heard Kyle respond with, "No, not if all of our patients die when we run out of drugs."

"So we're planning to do something that's best for the business and best for the

patients and still they complain. I don't see any of those lobbyists making a better drug and selling massive amounts of it. But they complain when we do it for them. It's like these people think they own us because we are talented and do something with ourselves."

"Sloane, I'm sure Madison is going to out-source production to a few more plants, and they're probably going to complete another plant within the next eight to ten months."

"I know, but it angers me that we provide a great product for people, we do our jobs, we do them well, we even perform a service to "the public," if that's how they want to refer to it, and these lobbyists still think it's not enough."

"Is this something you haven't realized before?"

"No, I suppose not." Sloane paused and began to smile. "Boy, you don't let me just wallow, do you?"

"Well, what good would you be if we let you do that?"

"Thanks, Kyle."

"No, Sloane, really, you never usually complain about anything or let those people affect you, so if you need to vent now, feel free to do so. But if you've managed to put those lobbying goons out of your mind before, I'm sure you're capable of doing it again. You know you really shouldn't even waste your time thinking about them."

"I know. But I just keep looking back at the lack of progress we've made in the months since Emivir came out. It makes me think we're on the wrong track."

Kyle looked at her. He saw for a split second what he thought was resignation.

"So I've been thinking about looking at this from a different angle." Sloane looked at him and the look of resignation Kyle thought he saw was instantly gone.

Kyle paused. "You know, Sloane, you really should rest more. It's Thursday, go home tonight and do something social. Take the day off tomorrow."

"Oh, I'm seeing my father for dinner tonight. Not too much fun. You know how family obligations go."

"Your father Bill's a great guy, I love it when he comes to visit. Spending time with him can't be too bad."

"I suppose not."

"He recommended you for the research job at the University, didn't he?"

"Yes, but I didn't want that job. Anyway, I'm sure I'll be in tomorrow; I'll need work as a rest from my dinner tonight."

As the rest of the staff filed in, work resumed as usual. They had managed to create their wonder drug, Emivir, by working with formulas for existing inhibitors and modifying them so that the HIV virus could not become immune to it so easily. Their current effort was to do the same to Emivir — to work with that formula to extend the attack period for an even longer period of time. It managed to work once for them; it made sense to try it again.

But Sloane kept hitting brick walls with this research and she knew she had to do something else. She studied the reports. She supervised the tests.

Maybe Kyle was right, Sloane thought, maybe she needed to rest. Her father was a nice man; she could have a nice dinner and get some rest and come to work on Friday with a clear head.

Sloane called her father from work at 6:30. "What restaurant did you want to go to? I'll just meet you there. You shouldn't have to pick me up."

"You're still at work, sweetheart, aren't you?"

"Yes, but I'm about to get out of here, so I can meet you anywhere."

"Okay. How about Dimitri's for Italian, say, 7:30?"

"Sure. I'll see you there."

When Sloane got to Dimitri's Bill Emerson was waiting at the bar for her. He was leaning over the bar, but looking back, checking for her. He was wearing the same sports coat he owned since she was child, but now it stayed unbuttoned because it was a bit more snug around his waist. Still, he looked comfortable. She walked to the bar.

"Hi, sweetheart. They're setting up a table for us."

"Oh, I was hoping that was your first drink and you weren't waiting for me long." She glanced at the bourbon on the rocks in his hand; it was his drink of choice.

"Yeah, I haven't been here long at all. Let's see how our table is doing."

Bill Emerson was a university researcher, working in the archaeology department, studying relics brought in from digs that the university was able to acquire. He went to work on time every morning, and he made it home in time for mom's home-cooked dinner every night as Sloane grew up. The university seldom sent him out on digs; they usually made him classify what the archaeologist groups found on their expeditions and brought back to the university.

Bill Emerson had been publishing less, so in recent years he was doing less research and more teaching, per the administration at the university. He seemed fine with that; besides, his retirement was coming up soon and he wanted to slow down his work load.

When Sloane got out of school, he talked to some people at the university and placed a recommendation for a job in the medical research department. Sloane knew well that you can't just recommend someone for a job, that the university research team would have to look at her records... She went through three interviews for a job at the school, but her father seemed to show more excitement about the job than she did. But when they offered the research job to her she turned it down to work in a low-end laboratory position for Madison Pharmaceuticals. Her father thought she was making a mistake. During her seven-year career at Madison, however, she managed to make her way to the head of the research department. As she began to prove herself at the company, the executives gave her whatever she needed. And she produced results.

Her father never understood why she wanted to work for a company and not the university.

"Do you want some company dictating what you do?"

"It's better than having the government dictate what you do, isn't it?"

"But you can work for the good of the people if you do university research."

"And I can do work for my own benefit if I do research at a company."

"Do you really want the bottom line to be the almighty dollar?"

"Why yes, dad, I do. And what's wrong with that?"

This would always exasperate her father, but it would also end the conversation.

Eventually the university job was offered to one of her classmates, Toby Graham. Toby was more suited for the university life anyway, Sloane thought. Besides, since they would both be working on improving treatments for HIV-positive and full-blown AIDS patients, they would also be in the same town and could confer on ideas if they were working on similar theories.

Sloane ordered a linguine with tomatoes and mushrooms in a basil pesto. Her father ordered the usual — meat ravioli. He ordered a bottle of red wine.

"What's the occasion, dad?"

"Well, it would have been our anniversary, your mother's and mine."

Sloane sat silent for a moment. "I'm sorry. I didn't even think about it."

"Well, I'm just glad that you didn't back out on me again."

"Dad, I —"

"I know, I know, dear. You've got your work. You shouldn't have to worry about your old man anyway."

"Dad, it's just that —"

"But you know, you should spend some time with your brother and your sister while you still can."

"Dad, they're not going anywhere, I can see them —"

"Well, we thought your mom wasn't going anywhere, either."

Whenever her father brought up her mother the conversation always became morbid. It had been seven years since she died in a car accident, but Sloane thought the way her father treated her mother's death made it feel like a cloak of guilt that he could lay over her whenever she had been away from the family for a while.

"You know, you never see your family anymore," he said. She knew where the conversation was heading. Her mind wandered to the last Christmas they spent together. Her brother, a mailman, and her sister, a housewife and mother, never understood her love of her work. Family gatherings became efforts to make Sloane see that there is more to life than accomplishing the goals at work she set out to accomplish. "When are you going to settle down, get married and have children?" her sister would ask. "Once you have children, you'll know what I mean. Children change everything." Her brother would attack in a similar fashion. "You know, high school friends ask me what you're up to. I never know what to tell them."

"Tell them I head a medical research department at a pharmaceutical company."

"But it's not as easy as that."

"Why not?"

Her brother never seemed to be able to answer that; he merely felt that something was wrong with a woman so obsessed with her work.

"Dad, I know where this conversation is going," Sloane interrupted. "We've

had it many times before, but you still keep trying."

"But sweetheart, they miss you."

"No they don't, dad, they miss the chance to judge me against what they think I should be doing — which is very different from what I think I should be doing."

"They just want what's best for you."

"And why do they think they know what's best for me, more than I do? Dad, they seem to re vel in imposing their standards on me, and no offense dad, but so do you."

"Sloane, it's just that we care."

"I know, dad, but trust me when I say I'm happy with the decisions I've made in my life."

Her father looked at her. They sat in silence for a moment before they returned to their food.

She never meant to have these arguments with her father. He was always the one that would bring it up. As she drove home from Dimitri's she tried to understand why her family couldn't believe her when she said she was doing what she wanted with her life.

Sloane walked into her apartment, tossed her trench coat on the chair next to the front door and propped her umbrella against the wall. She walked across the living room; shadows from the city lights from the picture window followed behind her and stretched across the floor and curled along the opposite wall. She made her way into her study and turned on a lamp at her desk. She sat down and looked over the test results she brought back from work. Although there was still no progress, looking at the data made her feel better after talking to her father; at least she could decipher the data, make sense of it, follow its rules and learn something from it.

Possibly even master it.

As it approached midnight, she got up from her desk and walked over to the window. She scanned the skyline and watched the city lights flicker like candles in front of her. These weren't candles, she thought, these were lights, lights in buildings where people were cleaning from the day's work, lights in restaurants where people were enjoying the fruits of their labor, headlights of cars moving through the city going home to their families, lights of apartments and homes where people prepared for bed. This is what my data does, she thought. This is what thinking does. It lights the cities. It lights everyone's way. It moves people. It makes all this possible.

She wondered how other people could not understand this.

She closed the shade and turned around for bed. She wanted to get up early in the morning and get some work done.

###

She didn't know why she was there, but she had just started a new job. It was her first day in the office, and her supervisor said to her, "Oh, you must have misunderstood from the interview. Research work is only a small fraction of the work

you'll do here. In fact, the laboratory and offices aren't even set up now, we're doing some construction and expansion in the building, so your first assignment is to go on a health-mission with a few other staff members."

Standing in front of her supervisor's desk, Sloane blankly managed to get out the words, "Where will I be going?"

"Africa. It's a peace-keeping mission, you see, they think we're hoarding our products here in the States and certain villages are going to be wiped out entirely unless we go in there and vaccinate them. So what I need you to do is let our company driver take you home so you can pack a few things, and then he'll take you straight to the airport, where you'll meet up with the rest of the staff. You'll probably be in Africa for about a month vaccinating children."

The next thing she remembered was that she was in her apartment packing, thinking to herself that she can't pick up and quit, she needs the money from this job, and she didn't even know what to pack. She had no time to call anyone and tell them she was leaving, so she changed the message on her answering machine. "Hello, you've reached Sloane Emerson. I'll be in Africa on business for the month of April, so please leave a message and I will get back to you as soon as possible." After leaving the message she realized how ridiculous it sounded. "I'm in Africa for a month, so leave a message and I'll get back to you as soon as possible?" she thought, but she had no time to change the message on her machine, she would be late for her plane. And then it occurred to her that by listening to her message someone will then know that no one is in her apartment for the entire month, making it a prime target for a break-in; she could see it now, she'll come home from her trip and there will be nothing left in her apartment.

She looked over at her suitcase. "I don't want to do this," she thought, but she had no choice. She needed the money from this job; this job was all she now had. She closed the poorly-packed suitcase, grabbed her passport and trench coat, unplugged the answering machine and headed for the door.

"How could I have missed this in the interview?", she thought. "How could they have misled me like this?"

The next thing she remembered was being on the plane, starting the descent. They would be landing within a half hour. Her new coworkers were sitting in the aisle and the window; she was crammed in between them. The only thought that kept going through her head, during the painfully long flight, was "How did I let this happen?"

"The thing with this company is that they want us to know where their heart is," the coworker on the aisle was saying to her. He was slightly overweight, he had a moustache and he talked a little too loudly, especially for being in an airplane. "I mean, they want us to like the company we work for, so periodically they send us out on these humanitarian missions."

"Yeah," chimed in the guy in the window seat. "It's like doing volunteer work on company time. And how many people get paid to go to Africa and get the trip paid for?"

"Don't dress up too much," the guy in the aisle said. "The company also brings along a photographer who takes a ton of photos of us vaccinating all the little African children, you know, holding them and caring for them and stuff, for press releases. They want us to look like we're down in the trenches doing hard work for these little starving children."

Sloane looked around the plane. She felt trapped between these two loud men. She wanted to get out of the plane.

"Are you afraid of heights?" the man in the aisle asked. "Cause you don't look so good."

The next thing she remembered she was being escorted into her hut. "This is where you'll be sleeping," the native told her. Apparently he guided Americans like her and her coworkers through missions like this, this seemed to be a regular occurrence for him. "Your bathroom is that building over there; you can get a bucket of water to clean yourself off with pretty much daily."

'Pretty much Ddaily', Sloane thought as she moved her suitcase to the corner before putting on a pair of shorts. "This is not where my talents are best used, I should not be here in Africa doing the work any volunteer could do to make people think that I work for a kind and caring company. I should be producing better drugs for these people, I shouldn't be going out here and hand-delivering them." She held her head for a moment. She then walked outside her hut and there were fifteen emaciated children with wide eyes standing in the doorway, looking up at her.

That's when she sprung up in her bed, panting.

She looked over at her clock. 4:07 a.m. She did a mental check: No, I did not quit my job at Madison. No, I'm still doing AIDS research. No, I don't have to pack my bags and go to Africa to vaccinate children.

She fell back onto her pillow. Her heart was racing; she was still breathing heavy. This was the point, she thought, that a man beside her would wake up and say, "It's okay, darling, it was just a dream." But no one was there to say it to her, and she was used to that.

She couldn't fall back asleep. This was one more dream for her to analyze. She never had nightmares, not in the traditional sense of the word, but to her they were most definitely nightmares nonetheless. She had deduced that they had all entailed her losing control of some aspect of her life somehow. In one dream she moved into a new apartment, to find out that she didn't read the lease carefully enough, and she had only rented a room in the apartment when she thought he rented the entire apartment and she would have four roommates sharing the common spaces with her. The remainder of that dream was spent trying to do two things, trying figure out which bedroom she wanted, before her other roommates came in and laid claim to their bedrooms, and trying to figure out how she was going to fit all of her furniture into a fraction of the space she needed. All of her dreams were like this, losing control over something, by overlooking one small detail, and then having to frantically work to pick up the pieces.

"Why do I have these dreams?", she thought as she wondered if they had over-

looked something to produce a vaccine or an attempt for a cure.

She glanced back at the alarm clock. 4:18. Her alarm would go off in forty minutes anyway. She figured she might as well get up.

She walked over to her window. The city lights were on, but it was quiet. She looked at all the dots of light, dots scattered among the tall buildings. She turned toward the bathroom to shower.

###

Kyle Mackenzie was the third person to get into the laboratory Friday morning. As he opened the door, he saw Sloane hunched over with another laboratory technician, Howard Shindo.

"Look, we were lucky with our protease inhibitor, and you know it," Sloane was saying to Howard. "When the first wave of drugs came out, doctors didn't know how to use them — they were just prescribing them as a single-drug medication, which was as effective as using AZT, or other drugs like it that affected just the reverse transcriptase component of the enzyme alone. Other doctors were prescribing protease inhibitors even after patients became immune to AZT, which was doing the same amount of work as giving it to patients who were not taking AZT at all. I mean, yes, our drug has proven itself as holding off the reproduction of the virus for a substantially longer period of time, but we don't even know if the other protease inhibitors were being used in the best fashion."

"What are you suggesting then?"

"I'm suggesting one of three things. One is that we have to keep modifying Emivir to improve its ability to attack the protease enzyme. Another idea is that we have to start research into integrase inhibitors, and by attacking a third enzyme we might further help AIDS patients. That's the one that should take the most research."

"And the third idea?" Kyle walked over and asked, pulling up a stool to sit.

"To change the format of these drugs, so we can eliminate two problems with the drugs on a patient-level. One problem with the current cocktails is that they cause so many side effects that some people can't take them at all. You've heard the stories, some side effects include nausea, muscles that feel like they're burning, difficulty in walking, diarrhea, bone-marrow suppression, spontaneous bleeding in hemopheliacs, a sudden upsurge in blood sugar levels, which can in some cases lead to diabetes and possibly ketoacidosis, vomiting, dehydration, weight loss, confusion, even a coma or death. There hjas to be more research into placing these pills together to streamline these pills, and into time-releasing them, so people don't have to work so diligently at watching the clock — and potentially miss pills. Some patients have also contracted shingles, which is the same virus as chicken pox, or even problems such as excessive flatulence and gastroenteritis. And with nausea being the most common side effect of these drugs, if some people develop nausea daily to these drugs and cannot take them, intestinal upsets may cause the drug to not be fully

ingested. If we can eliminate these side effects, we'll see an increase in the number of patients that respond positively to the cocktail of drugs."

Howard finished her thought. "So maybe we could redirect our efforts to making the drugs more ingestible."

"But there's also an emotional problem with taking these cocktails," Sloane answered. "And taking the drugs properly, that's the second part of the problem with these drugs. Patients take usually about 20 pills a day, sometimes more, sometimes up to 60, all at different schedules, some with food, some on an empty stomach. So the constant clock-watching and changing of their eating schedules because of these drugs is a constant reminder to them that they have a deadly disease. The emotional reminder of having a fatal disease by taking drugs so often can be a negative reinforcer in taking the drugs properly, and a patient doing well may skip drugs. Tack that on with a possible rejection from their family because of this disease, you have an emotional system wrecking havoc on the patient's body as well. Some patients don't have the money to sustain the drug purchases, because insurance companies usually won't allow for one hundred percent coverage of this treatment. Because the drugs can cost upwards of \$20,000 per year, some patients may then decide to take less of the drugs than they are supposed to take, to lengthen the time they have the drugs and therefore save money, and end up taking the drugs improperly. And skipping just a few doses, for any of these reasons, can cause a strain resistant to these drugs to emerge in their body, making the taking of these drugs useless in the long run, making those patients even more difficult to treat. Think about the fact that fifteen percent of current AIDS patients are initially, keep that in mind, initially unresponsive to AZT. My hypothesis is that it's because of a strain that was developed and transferred to these patients by people who took their medications improperly and developed a strain of the virus that could just chew up AZT and spit it out."

Kyle looked at Howard, then over to Sloane. "But how do you attempt to solve that problem?"

"Well, the cost of the drugs decreases in time, as production methods become streamlined and the demand is adequately filled for the drugs. But the emotional strain of taking these drugs on such a rigid schedule could possibly be avoided if we could develop drugs — whether in pill or in liquid format, either as a drink, maybe, or to be taken by needle, like a diabetes patient taking insulin or humilin, something that was time-released, so that patients would only have to worry about taking medication one to three times a day instead of 12 times. Couple that with eliminating side effects and you have a drug cocktail in one dose that's easy to use."

"Yeah, Sloane, but a needle?" Howard asked. "A lot of these patients are drug users, and might misuse a prescription for hypodermic needles."

"Well, if they're getting the needles somehow. They might as well pay for clean ones," Kyle answered.

"Besides," Sloane cut in, "if this could be developed in pill form, then we wouldn't even have to worry about the needle option. In fact, it probably would be easier to make it in pill form."

More technicians were arriving into the laboratory to work.

"So where does that leave us?"

"It leaves us with three courses of action. One is to improve Emivir, the protease inhibitor. Two is to work on an integrase inhibitor so that our cocktails attack three enzymes of the virus instead of two. And three is to work on making these drugs easier to take so that people will take them properly. Well, in theory we could work on a class of drugs that targets the infected cells, instead of being absorbed and spread throughout the body, but that's in the future, like a vaccination and a definite, short-term cure. These three modes of attack are plenty to get started on."

"And all three strategies could help produce better results," Howard said.

Kyle asked, "But how do you want to attack these three different plans?"

Sloane heard the door open. A few more laboratory technicians came in to start working. "Why don't we see what each technician thinks they can do the best job on, and divide people up accordingly?"

"I think we're on to something," Kyle answered, scribbling onto his note pad.

"Well, Kyle, if you could write up goals of each of the three attacks for this virus, and reasons why they would be effective, we could have a meeting this afternoon or Monday and see how we should go about doing this."

"Understood, chief."

Sloane smiled. "We haven't had much luck improving the length of time Emivir worked, but if people wanted to continue working on it I would be behind them one hundred percent. But if some people wanted to try this from a different angle, it might refresh the staff as well."

And with that the door swung open with a violent push. Sloane, Kyle and Howard all looked aver to the doorway. Tyler Gillian stormed into the lab, assuming he always had an invitation to do so.

Tyler looked like he should have been the high school class president. As the Director of P.R. and Marketing, a title which he wore like a badge, he made a point to dress impeccably, he made sure his hair was always in place, and he wore a smile that was probably used to seduce ladies into one-night stands during his college days at the fraternity house. Tyler was a diplomat. Sloane was sure that the only reason he didn't run for political office was that he would have to wait until he was 35 before he could run for president.

It amazed her that his position paid enough to warrant the expensive suits; surely her work was more important than his. It wasn't that she wanted the money — this was just another one of the mysteries of life that eluded her, like the mystery of why her family always badgered her.

Tyler always had one of two looks on his face: either he looked perfectly calm and collected, saying what his department needed as if it were a scientific law and that it would be done, and that's when he'd plaster on that charming grin of his to get his way, or else he had a look of panic on his face, one of where he was "in a crisis situation," where he was "in code red," and he needed to "put out fires" and "eliminate the problem A.S.A.P." to save the company from an otherwise inevitable

peril. Usually when he looked panicked, he'd end up talking the problem out with someone and throwing look number one, the charming look, on his face, in order to recruit all the help he'd need to solve his crisis of the day.

Sloane watched him barge in to the laboratory and assumed he'd have look number two on his face. She was right. Tyler quickly scanned the room until he found her, then he charged over, indifferent to the other laboratory technicians in his way.

"Sloane Emerson, just the woman I desperately needed to see. You're the woman that can save the day, my dear."

"Tyler, the last time I checked you were in the P.R. department and I was in the research department."

"But Sloane, you know that what I'm marketing is you."

"What I thought you were marketing was Emivir."

"But the people want the whole package, Sloane, you know they want you."

Sloane dropped her head an almost imperceptible level, and only Howard and Kyle noticed. They looked at each other and smiled.

"So, Tyler, what is the crisis of the day?"

"Sloane, I know this isn't very scientific, but you can help me out of this one." He attempted his award-winning grin; it never worked on her. "Remember that lobby group that said our production speed wasn't good enough because we're not getting enough of Emivir on the market?"

"Yes, Tyler?" She felt she almost needed to bat her eyelashes to mock his fake wooing.

"Well, they just said in a press conference that we should either out-source the production to more plants or we should open up the production of Emivir to competing markets."

Sloane stood up with this stab. "What?" she almost yelled.

"I know, I know, it's our drug, that would be like revoking our patent from us, and unless they get a law from the government it's not going to happen. But this is making us look like we're the bad guys."

"Well, tell them that we're expanding production. We need to not only make sure the drugs meet up to our standards, but we also we need to make sure there is enough product for patients to not only get on the drug, but stay on the drug. What we're doing is in the patient's best interests."

"Well now that same group is also complaining that we should lower our prices because we're destroying the market, since no one can afford to buy the drugs."

"Oh, and is that why our production plants are running at capacity and people are still waiting for more? Because no one is willing to pay for Emivir?"

"Sloane, I know, I know, but these are the masses we're talking about, they're not rocket scientists, or medical researchers, for that matter."

"But Tyler, the cost to produce Emivir is extremely expensive. There are so many man-made elements to this drug that it's a seven-week process to completely make one batch of the drug."

"I know, I know, Sloane —"

"And why do people think that businesses are making so much money that they burn hundred dollar bills to light their cigars? Madison is reinvesting most of the profits from Emivir to work on better drugs for AIDS patients. Why do people not see that?"

"Sloane, I know, but there are the people —"

"Tyler, if our drugs were so expensive, then wouldn't they be alarmingly more expensive than other protease inhibitors? And they're not, are they? They cost just about the same amount, and Emivir is a much better product."

"I know, Sloane, but that's not all of it. This group is also suggesting that Madison should be donating some of our drugs to poor who can't afford Emivir, you know, on a 'compassionate use' basis."

"If you know all of this, why do you come to me? You're saying that they think Madison is made of money? That money comes out of his pores?"

"Well, it might be a good public relations investment to —"

When she heard the words "good public relations investment," she thought about the dream that woke her up early this morning. "So what you're saying is that most people should pay for our product, but if some people beg enough, no matter how sick they are, we should give them upwards of twenty thousand dollars a year for free?"

"Sloane, I don't know why you —"

"Look, Tyler, you know I find it extremely irritating that these people try to lay claim to our product. That's why you come in here and tell me, in the hope that I will help you out of this. But I also find it extremely irritating that you can't keep a lid on this, seeing that you're the Marketing God, and I'm in the lowly research department."

"Sloane, it's just that —"

"Okay, Tyler, I've heard enough. We lowly research people have to go to work now and find the cures to diseases you want to sell to people."

Tyler stopped trying to interrupt her. He raised his eyebrows slightly, and tried to smile.

"Tyler, why don't you use that smile of yours when you explain in a press conference why those lobbyists are wrong? You can woo anyone with that smile."

"Except you, Sloane."

"Of course. But it's not me you have to convince."

They looked at each other for another long moment.

"Now Tyler, I'm sure you have a lot of important work to do, so I wouldn't want to keep you."

"Okay, Sloane, I get it."

"If you need anything, I'm sure you'll let me know."

And with that she turned back to the list Kyle was attempting to write out while this bureaucratic tragi-comedy was unfolding before the entire research department. Tyler walked toward the door.

Kyle was writing notes for what would obviously become the Monday morning

meeting, and not the Friday afternoon meeting. He could tell that there was no way they'd be able to meet about their plans before then. Sloane paused during reading Kyle's notes and looked up at the wall clock above the door as Tyler walked out.

"I told you there's a lot to do, Sloane," Kyle said. "And when I came here this morning I was just thinking about how boring the scenery was in this commute."

"Well, at least we get something closer to a view of water here, being just off Second Street and closer to Washington. And you know, I've never thought about what it looked like around here."

"Well, where do you come in from?"

"Closer to the airport, you know, by Kent. Makes the trip in easier for the office to be on the south side of Seattle. And just think, all this that we have had to deal with, and it's not even nine-thirty yet."

Sloane got up, told Kyle to keep writing notes for the meeting, and went out the door to get a cup of coffee.

"What is it about people?" Sloane thought. "Why do they feel like they can go to the government using all scare tactics, to make companies give them money?" She made it to the coffee machine; everyone in the break room looked at her strangely.

She turned to a receptionist in the break room, one that was sitting down and taking a smoke break. "Are you looking at me like that because the conversation I just had with Tyler is already being gossiped about?"

"Well, you've got to admit it's a strange thing when someone here can get away with giving Mr. Gillian lip like that, Ms. Emerson. But then again, we love to hear the way you talk to people."

Sloane didn't even know this receptionist's name. "And why is that?"

"Well, you just have the guts to say it like it is. Seldom do people get the chance to do that."

"Well, why would you say anything other than saying it 'the way it is?' And why don't people get the chance to do it? I mean, you just say what needs to be said."

"Well, some people aren't in the position of being punished for voicing an unfavorable opinion."

Sloane leaned over the table the receptionist was sitting at. "Let me tell you something. If you know you're right, and someone tries to squelch you, get out. You're slowly killing yourself if you don't."

The receptionist smiled at her, understanding. But the girl still felt apprehensive — even Sloane could see that.

###

Kyle just tried to take a moment to relax. He knew relaxing was never enough, but he tried to do it every once in a while anyway.

He knew it was morning, but he didn't know if his wife would get a phone message before Kyle got home from work. He thought about not calling.

He knew that avoiding the call would be an easy way out, though.

He reached over for a phone and dialed his number. He didn't know what he would say on the message machine. He listened to his wife's voice on the message machine on the phone. He listened for the beep.

He still didn't know what he would say.

He waited to the beep on the answering machine to finish before he started speaking.

"Hey, I thought I might be able to catch you. I didn't realize what time it was. I wanted to let you know that I thought of you. And I guess I wanted to say that I really do think about you, even when all this other crap is going on here at work. And I love you. Sometimes I forget to say that. Anyway, be good, be safe, and I'll be home tonight. Thanks for listening. If You need to, call me at work. I'll talk to you soon."

Kyle put the receiver down when he was finished talking. He wondered if his wife would hear the message, or if Kyle would just tell her tonight that he tried to call.

Maybe then he would hold her. That might make things better, if they had a little time together for each other.

#### ###

Sloane walked out of the break room with her coffee and decided that she needed to voice her opinion a little more. She walked down the hallway, took a left turn, and went up the stairs to the executive branch. She walked to the end of the hallway to the President's door.

She turned to the owner's private receptionist. "Is Mr. Madison seeing anyone right now?"

"No, he's not, Ms. Emerson. Would you like me to let him know you're here?"

"Why, yes, I would," Sloane responded. Why else would she be standing here asking if Mr. Madison was seeing anyone, she thought. She slid her sleeve slightly up her arm. Her watch read 9:52.

"Mr. Madison, Sloane Emerson is here to see you." It amazed Sloane that everyone here knew her name, even though she was sure she'd never met any of them before.

"You can go right in, Ms. Emerson," Sloane heard from the desk, and with that she moved through the doors to Colin Madison's office.

The one thing she liked about Colin's office was that it wasn't cluttered. She imagined a President's office being all dark wood with ornate trimmings, and nick-knacks everywhere, elaborate lamps and gold pen-holders collecting dust on the desk. Colin Madison's office was clean, bright, with one painting and a select few framed certificates on the walls. His table was glass. Everything was clean, organized.

She liked Colin; she liked the fact that they were on a first-name basis and that she felt comfortable calling him by his first name. He was a businessman more than he was an executive, and she could relate to him on that level.

She thought back to the Madison Pharmaceuticals Emivir party, held at his

house. She met his wife, Bethany, then. When she walked through the doors she noticed two things. She noticed that everyone seemed very concerned about what clothes they were wearing and who they were talking to more than what they were talking about. But she also noticed that the Madison home was very rich, that was the only way she could describe it. She was used to the clean lines of Colin's office, what she didn't expect was the antique vases and chandeliers and Persian rugs that were obviously chosen by his wife in their home. Bethany by any standard was a socialite; she concerned herself with shopping, owning just the right help around the house, and being above everyone else. Sloane could never understand this, and she couldn't understand how Colin fit in with this.

But she never asked questions about his private life; she preferred to think of him as a good businessman, as a businessman who trusted her ability and gave her the opportunity to excel at her work.

And it paid off for Colin Madison, so she was in good favor with the owner of the company.

She walked toward the desk. "I'm sorry to come in unannounced, I'm sure you have a lot —"

"You know that if I let you in it's because I want to hear from you. Besides, I always have time for you." Colin Madison was one of the few men, other than her father, who could successfully interrupt her. But it was only Colin Madison's interruptions that Sloane didn't mind. "Now, what can I do for you?"

"Well, I wanted to talk to you about Tyler Gillian."

"Oh, yes, I just got off the phone with him. He seems to be a little upset."

"Colin, is it my job to tell him how to do his job?"

"No, of course it isn't, Sloane. I know what Tyler's up to; he's just looking for someone to help him, so that if his plan fails he'll have someone to blame."

"Is that what you think, Colin?"

"Well, he is a marketing man, you know. His job is to do marketing for this company, but it's in his blood to market himself."

"I just want to know how you'd like me to deal with him."

"However you want to. If he wants to scream and cry, let him. Although you know it would be helpful if you showed up for a few words at an occasional press conference."

"You know I don't like those press conferences, the reporters always ask the most inane questions. Couldn't Someone like Kyle Mackenzie or Howard Shindo go in my place?"

"Maybe. You can work that out with your men and then talk to Tyler about it. But people know your name, Sloane, so you can understand why they'd like to hear from you once in a while."

"I suppose. I'll try to be better about it." Sloane paused. "I'm sorry to hear about the flack you're getting from that lobby group. You know you're doing the best for your market, which in turn is the best for your company, but no one else seems to think that way. I think they all just think you're made of money."

"Well, what if I am?"

Sloane smiled at his question. "It still doesn't mean they have a right to it. It's yours, and you earned it."

Colin smiled at her. "You know, you're one of the few people I know who would say that to me — and mean it."

Sloane smiled. This is why she liked Colin. "Well, I think that on some levels business is a science. You have to follow certain rules in order to keep your business successfully running. The part I don't understand is the public opinion factor, you know, the Tyler Gillian factor."

"And that's why you're the head of the research department. I'll make sure Tyler stops bothering you."

"I just wanted to know that this wasn't a part of my job, that I was right to say the things I did to Tyler."

"Consider the matter closed, Sloane. Now, there is something I wanted to talk to you about."

"Yes, Colin? What is it?"

"Well, you know you could be conferring with other scientists more, that's why I told you that you can use the company plane whenever you needed it."

"I know, I've been starting to use my e-mail account more, too, to communicate with other researchers more."

"Well, I just wanted to let you know that option was still open to you. Just check the flight schedule, at the main reception desk, to see if it's free, and it's yours."

"Thank you, sir, I will keep that in mind. Is there anything else you need?"

"Yes, Sloane. Take a vacation. Hell, fly somewhere this weekend, the plane is free. Just get some rest."

"I'll do what I can, sir. Thanks. And if I don't talk to you sooner, have a good weekend." Sloane turned and walked to the door.

"You have a good weekend, too," she heard Colin Madison say before his door shut behind her.

As she walked back down the maze of hallways, she attempted to take the first sip of her coffee, which at this point was cold. She threw it into the first garbage can she could find.

By the time she made it back to the main laboratory room, the clock above the doorway read 11:08. Sloane couldn't believe that she didn't even sit down in her own office yet, after being in the office for five hours.

###

Kyle was the first man to talk to her when she got back into the lab. "Well, do you want the good news?" He asked her.

Sloane looked around briefly. "What good news?"

"There's another reception dinner," Kyle answered. "Want to go? It's next weekend."

Sloane looked confused. "Why is there another one of these parties?"

"Well, it's more of an AIDS party than a research party. But it would look good if we both went to it."

Sloane still didn't know how to react to this party. A part of her didn't even want to go. "Well..."

"A friend of mine, Steve, he wants to go, you could even talk to him if you got tired of the dinner party."

"I'm bad with names. Who is this Steve guy?"

"A friend of mine. I've known him since college. He's a teacher. But he finds research talk interesting ... unless he just seems interested for my benefit. I don't know - but he wants to go, and he's not coming with anyone, so..." Kyle knew it was pointless for him to suggest that Sloane and Steve should be a date; that would make Sloane want to not go.

Sloane though for a moment. "Is he that friend of yours that comes into the office every once in a while, shorter than me, curly brown hair?"

"That's the guy. So... Are you going?"

Sloane paused for a moment before answering. "I don't want him to think I'm going to say yes so I can have a date with him."

"He'd want to see you because he'd want someone to talk to."

"Fine. Tell him that I'll be doing work while I'm there though.

"Got it," Kyle answered, noting that Sloane wanted to leave this conversation.

"Give me a copy of the plans, the location, so I can get ready," she said as she started to walk away.

"Consider it done." Kyle watched her walk away as he spoke.

Kyle hated being the matchmaker, so he did his best to act like he had no hidden motives to Sloane. He knew that Steve did like a good conversation, but he also knew that Steve liked women and that he always thought Sloane was cute. Kyle remembered telling Steve that Sloane would never be interested in him, and that Steve's response was that he always loved a good challenge.

Steve relished the thought of putting another notch on his head board with Sloane, but Kyle knew that Sloane wouldn't want that and that they would just end up bickering instead of talking - and he knew they would never make love. But Kyle knew that he couldn't argue with Steve; Kyle knew that it was merely Kyle's role to set the table - rather, the stage, for Steve and Sloane.

###

Later Sloane walked into the lab and people were waiting for her. "Sloane! We've been looking all over for you," one of the technicians said to her.

"I was in Colin's office. What's the matter?"

"One of your colleagues called for you. They didn't want to leave a message. They said it was urgent that they talk to you. They said they'd call back at 11:15."

"And did they leave a name?" It amazed her that she had to ask.

"Oh, yes, I'm sorry, it was Tobias Graham, from the university's medical research department, the viral branch."

"I'll be in my office when he calls," Sloane said. "Make sure the call comes straight through."

She walked into her office. There was a small stack of mail sitting in the center of her desk. A few journals were sitting in a pile on the chair that faced her desk.

"I'll get to all that later," Sloane thought.

She walked around her desk to her seat. She almost forgot what her chair felt like. She never worked in her office; when she was at work she wanted to be literally *in the lab*. She could read at home.

She slid her sleeve slightly up her wrist. 11:12. She knew she couldn't start working on something; she had to just wait out the next three minutes.

She didn't know how to wait.

She took her mail from her desk and the journals from her second chair and placed them in her briefcase, thinking she could get to them during the weekend.

She sat back down. She thought about the fires she had to put out this morning. "How do they expect me to get any work done," she thought, "if I'm saving everyone else in the company first?" It seemed to be getting more and more problematic, she thought, it seemed that more and more people from different departments were asking for her help to save them from their problems.

She leaned back in her chair. The phone rang.

"Sloane Emerson."

"Sloane, hey, it's Toby."

"Toby, where are you?"

"Brazil. Look, I can't explain it now, I —"

"Were you doing more rain forest studies?"

"Yes, but I'm on my way back to the U.S. now. I was wondering if there was any way you could meet me in Miami in a few hours."

"Miami? You mean this can't wait until you get back into Seattle?"

"I could really use someone to talk to about what's been going on. This research I've been doing is a complete mess. Can I bounce some of it off of you?"

Sloane thought about Colin's plane offer, thinking that this could be a business expense as well as a personal trip. "Sure, Toby, I can make it. Where should I meet you?"

Toby told her his flight number; since his flight wasn't for hours she told him she'd meet him at the gate when he arrived.

Sloane hung up the phone, picked it up again and dialed the main receptionist. "This is Sloane Emerson. Is the plane still open for this weekend?"

"Yes it is, Ms. Emerson."

"Well, please have it ready to go to Miami within the next hour. I'm leaving the office now; I need to meet a colleague." She felt like she needed to tell the receptionist that this was a business trip.

"No problem, Ms. Emerson. Jim, the pilot, will be waiting for you at the airport."

Sloane got up and grabbed her trench coat, her umbrella and her briefcase. Would this help her with her search for the key to her puzzle? Or would this be just another dead end? She looked at the mail billowing out of the front pocket of her briefcase. "Well, at least I'll have reading material for the plane," she thought, and she walked out of the office.



# CHAPTER 2

## THE RAIN FOREST EXPERIMENT

#### "DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHERE SHE'S

GOING?" Howard asked everyone in the room.

"Well, she was waiting for a call from Tobias Graham," a young technician answered.

"Oh, Toby," Kyle answered. "I'd assume she's meeting him somewhere."

"When has she ever left the office before six in the evening?" Howard asked.

"She did have a strange look on her face," Kyle said. "I hope she's taking a break with Toby and spending some time with him as a friend instead of talking about their research."

"You know her; it's got to be business," Howard said. "You know she wouldn't leave work early to be social. She wouldn't leave on time to be social. But on the plus side, at least no one will be barging in here looking for her." Howard turned to Kyle and smiled.

"Yeah, but those confrontations are entertaining to watch," Kyle smiled back. "Now all we get to do today is work."

They both smiled as they turned away from each other and went back to what they were working on.

###

Before Sloane got to the plane she checked her messages at home. Normally she did not worry about her phone, but seeing that we was in such a rush she did not even get the chance to change her message machine. She dialed her number and pressed the code to listen to her machine messages.

"Sloane, hi, it's you dad, didn't know how you were doing We didn't get a chance to talk much when we saw each other last, and I know you are at work, but

this was my only time between working at school here, so when you get the chance, give me a call. Talk to you soon—"

"Miss Emerson, hi, it's Kyle's friend, Steve... I know you weren't expecting an almost-stranger to call, but Kyle gave me your number, and I know this will sound silly, but it will be cool to have someone to talk to next weekend. If you need to, my number is three six four ten sixty three, 'cause I'm always up for a refresher course on the work you guys do. Otherwise I'll see you next weekend—"

Those were the only two messages, though she was surprised that there were that many messages there in the first place. Making a point to write down Steve's phone number and to call her dad and Steve back, she smiled, hung up the phone and made her way to the plane.

After sitting down, she thought it was strange to be on this plane. She was used to seats in rows of three with no leg room and a thin aisle. This plane had large roomy seats, some facing inward, toward the aisle, some facing forward, and there were a few cocktail tables and large counters bolted to the floor. This was a social airplane. This was a plane for entertaining guests.

"So, Jim, when's the flight attendant going to get on the plane and show me how to fasten my seat belt?"

The pilot laughed. "Haven't you been on enough flights to know your safety rules, Ms. Emerson?"

"Please, call me Sloane, and yes, I think I could mimic every move those people do. You know... 'If there is a change in cabin pressure, your oxygen mask will come down. Place the mask over your head and continue breathing normally; the bag will not fill up, but there will be a continuous stream of oxygen. If you are taking care of a minor, place your mask on first, then assist the child." The pilot was laughing at the show she was putting on, using two fingers to point where the oxygen masks and exit rows were. "And those flight attendants mock putting the mask on over their heads, but they never put the elastic around their head, because they can't mess up their hair."

"Well, you do know how it's done then."

"What I can't imagine is how infuriating it must be for those flight attendants to have to do this degrading little exercise and as they're looking around the cabin they can see that no one, I mean, no one, is paying attention to them. And still, they have to stand there, do these silly gestures, pull the loose end of the seat belt, point to the lights along the aisle."

"I never thought about it, actually."

"And why do they point with two fingers? When they point at something, they use both their index finger and their middle finger, and it looks so unnatural."

"You know, they're actually trained to use two fingers to point those things out. In some cultures, pointing with your index finger is considered very rude, so they are trained to use two fingers so as not to offend anyone."

Sloane paused. "That never occurred to me."

"Well, if you've got a screaming Japanese businessman on your plane because you

pointed in his direction when you were showing the safety rules, it occurs to you."

"I suppose it does."

"Well, Ms. Emerson —"

"Sloane, please."

"Well, Sloane, since there is no flight attendant here, let me tell you to keep your seat belt on during take offs and landings. And the other important thing you need to know is where the refrigerator is. It's stocked with a few sandwiches, I think there's ham, tuna salad, roast beef and turkey, and there's just about any liquor you could want in there, too. Usually people go for the champagne, and actually, I think the bubbles help with people who feel queasy flying."

"Got it, Jim. Can I ask another question?"

"Of course."

"This plane isn't too big for you to fly by yourself?"

"No. Actually, if it was any bigger by law I'd need someone with me. But this plane is fine for me. Besides, they add all these control features on planes like this, like 'auto pilot', so this plane could literally fly itself. Why do you ask — do you not feel safe?"

"I'm just amazed that this much machinery flying in the air can be comfortably controlled by one person."

"Well, come visit the cockpit while we're up and I'll show you how it works."

"Thanks. What time should we get to Miami?"

"Oh, right around seven o'clock their time. It's a three-hour time difference."

"Thanks, Jim."

"No problem."

Jim walked into the cockpit and closed the door behind him.

She leaned back and closed her eyes. She figured she'd wait until after they took off to get her work out. Besides, she thought her briefcase should be stowed away under her seat during take-off, right? She waited for the plane to move. She enjoyed airplanes; she liked knowing that a large, heavy piece of machinery could lift her up into the air and fly her across the country, or around the world. She listened to the engine start up; the plane made its way to the runway. The engine always seemed loudest when it just started up, it always forced Sloane to pay to the motors the attention they deserved. Someone made this engine, Sloane thought. Someone made it, not merely put it together, but someone created this engine. Someone figured out a way to create the power to fly, to move, faster and faster, with this machinery. Someone created this.

I want to create like that, Sloane thought.

She leaned back in her chair. The plane was moving faster and faster down the runway. She could feel the first wheel leave the ground, then the others. She was in the air.

With the nose of the plane pointing so high, it felt like she was almost lying down. She felt the pressure of gravity pulling all of her body into the seat. It felt like her clothes were being pressed to her skin. It reminded her of when she would go to amusement parks when she was a child and go in the spinning room where the floor fell out from underneath her. Once she accidentally swallowed her gum on that ride;

it was almost impossible for her not to have swallowed her gum, the force of the ride spinning was strong against her.

She leaned back in her seat, enjoying the ride, until the plane levelled off.

She opened her eyes and sat upright. She reached under her seat and looked into her briefcase. She almost pulled out her computer, then she decided that her notepad and pen would do the same job. She saw the messages to call her dad and Steve. A flurry of thoughts went through her head; she didn't entirely understand why her dad was calling her, she thought they had caught up at dinner, and then she thought about what she should make of the phone call from Steve. "Men aren't usually calling me," Sloane first thought, but then she thought that it might be just what she needed, someone to talk to about work that wasn't in the field, someone that might actually want to listen. Then she thought about the work she had to do when she got back to the office, and she wrote down:

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1. Improve Emivir
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Then she stopped, staring at her list; she drew a line under her list and wrote:

She put her pen down. She looked out the window.

"It's not as bad as it seems," she said under her breath to the clouds she was over outside her window.

She looked at her list.

"There has to be something I'm missing. Just look at this from a different angle," she thought. She looked at her list. She stopped on point three. She picked up her pen, and drew another line again.

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6. psychological treatment
6a. alleviate depression, may help immune system
6b. help memory to take drugs, and keep positive attitude
7. homeopathy
7a. nutrition, diet and herbs to improve general health
7b. herbs to alleviate nausea for patients who experience
side effects and to make injections more plausable
7c. any vitamins and herbs with effects on immune system?
7d. is there a psychologically
positive effect of eating things good for you?
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She looked at her list of notes on homeopathy. She was surprised that she knew nothing about this. She never thought of the nutritional aspect of illness and health. She remembered that in order to get her degrees, she needed only three hours — one class — on nutrition. And no one in the medical community in America seems to

<sup>2.</sup> Integrase Inhibitor

<sup>3.</sup> Improve side effects and ease-of-use for drugs

<sup>4.</sup> a vaccino.

<sup>5.</sup> a cure.



give anything credence for health benefits other than a drug — at least not on paper.

She tore the paper off of the note pad and put it in her briefcase. She pulled out her mail and her journals, placed them all on the table before her and started reading.

A few hours later, while she was still reading, she heard her pilot's voice over the speakers in the cabin. "Have you been working all of this time? Have you eaten any food yet? You have to be starving by now."

Sloane looked up. The door to the cockpit was open; Jim was glancing at her.

"Okay, okay, I'll get some food."

"Good. You know it will be after dinner by the time you get settled in Miami," she heard over the speakers in the cabin.

She slowly walked to the back of the plane and grabbed a turkey sandwich and a can of juice. She looked at the champagne in the refrigerator before closing the door.

Instead of walking to her seat, she walked to the cockpit doorway. Maybe Jim was right, she thought, she probably needed a break from her work.

Sloane stood in the doorway, looking at the tiny cockpit. "Mind if I come in here? I've never been in a cockpit before, and yes, I would like to see how you fly this plane all by yourself."

"Sure, come on in. there's an empty seat here."

She sat down, and opened the wrapping from the sandwich and peeled it down. "Is it okay to eat in here? Oh, wait, do you need some food? I should have asked before."

"No, I'm fine, I ate right before we left Seattle."

Sloane's eyes scanned over all the controls. Then she looked up at the sky in front of her. The sky unfolded rows and rows of billowing clouds in the panoramic picture windows before her.

"You know, the sky looks a lot better from here than from the passenger seats."

"Well, you know, seeing the world from this high is is going to be a lot better when you have a window bigger than a magazine cover."

Sloane smiled. She sat for a few minutes in silence, eating her sandwich and drinking her apple juice, while Jim radioed controllers at the ground to check for weather conditions. A few minutes passed, and the Sloane spoke.

"Jim?"

"Yes?"

"What kind of feeling do you get when you're flying a plane?"

"You mean, while I'm in the air?"

"Yes. You're in this cockpit, dealing with all of these controls, high above the ground. Do you ever get lonely or scared?"

"Lonely? Scared? No, not at all, Ms. Emerson."

"Sloane."

"Sorry. No, Sloane, I don't get scared at all. I feel, well, I don't know how to say it, but when I'm up here I feel like I have more control than I do anywhere else in the world. This is my space, this is my domain, and it makes me feel, well, I don't quite know how to put it..." Jim paused while speaking. "Alive, I guess. I guess I could feel scared, but here I know that if I do something wrong it's my fault, there's no one here to tell me how to do my work or to second guess me. I never get tired of flying airplanes. And as for lonely, well, no, I don't feel lonely, either. I guess I'm alone up here a lot, but there's a difference between being alone and being lonely. And when I'm up here, flying, I could never feel lonely. I feel like I have everything I need right in this little cockpit, flying in the air."

Sloane smiled. "Are you sure you don't need anything? I think I'm going to put my work away, I could bring you something."

"No, really, I'm fine. Yeah, you should pack your stuff up, I think we're going to be landing in about twenty minutes."

"Really? We've been on the plane that long?"

"Yes. Apparently you lose yourself in your work, too."

Sloane walked to the door of the cockpit. "I suppose I do," she said as she walked back to her seat to prepare for the descent into Miami International Airport.

The airplane arrived at the airport only about fifteen minutes before Toby's plane was landing, so Sloane didn't have to wait long for Toby to arrive. She stood at the security gate, just past the customs agents, pulling out the last journal from her briefcase. She leaned against the railing along the window.

She kept asking herself if he was going to give her any answers. She knew that she was supposed to be there for him as a friend; that's why he asked her to meet him in Miami. But she knew she wanted information about his search for a solution to the AIDS mystery. She wanted to get somewhere with her search, and she travelled across the country to try to get it.

Toby walked down the passenger terminal toward the security gates. He spotted her before she saw him, which is the way he preferred it to be: he could then look at her for one long moment before having to collect himself. Something about Sloane appealed to Toby, but he could never understand why. "But she's not very feminine looking," Toby thought, "...her jaw is even sharp and rigid..."

Toby saw her sitting on a ledge along the window at the side of the terminal. Her trench coat was over her right arm, and she was holding her journal in her right hand, and holding the strap of her overnight bag on her shoulder in her left hand. She was wearing beige slacks and a white button-down shirt. He could see that she was wearing a grey tank top underneath her shirt. Her hair kept falling into her eyes; she continually had to let go of her luggage strap to guide her hair back behind her ear with her fingertips. She stared at her journal. For that moment, she saw nothing other than the words she was reading and processing in her brain. And for that moment, Toby saw nothing other than Sloane.

It took him about thirty seconds to be processed by customs. He walked out of the hallway and to the open area where Sloane was waiting and started walking toward her. She looked up at him.

"Toby! I didn't even see you coming." She stood up, crammed her journal into her briefcase and put her arms around him. Toby smiled.

"Why Sloane, that was the warmest greeting you've ever given me."

"Well, I forget that my friends need reminders from me that I'm their friend. How was your flight?"

"Fine. I don't have any luggage, so let me just run into the bathroom and then we can go to the hotel."

"Oh, a hotel," Sloane answered. "I completely forgot about where I'd stay."

"Don't worry. I made sure I got a room with two beds."

"I'm sure I could get my own room."

"What for? Look, don't bother buying a room, it doesn't make any sense."

"Well, you've got a point... So, get to the bathroom, will you?"

Toby smiled at her again and walked to the bathroom. Sloane noticed that Toby smiled all the time. She couldn't actually imagine that he was that happy all the time, it just couldn't be possible. She watched him walk to the bathroom; as she watched him she thought that he looked like he belonged on a beach in California and not in a laboratory in the most dreary city in the United States. His blond hair was long on the top and short on the sides and bounced with him whenever he walked. His usual five o'clock shadow looked like little spears of copper and light brown. He almost always wore jeans, faded ones, with a t-shirt and sometimes a sports coat. He looked like he needed a convertible to complete the outfit.

They walked in stride through the airport and found a taxi. "The Pelican Coast Hotel," Toby said as the taxi sped off toward the expressway.

Toby checked in while Sloane stood by his side. She thought it was strange that she was with a man in a hotel; she usually checked herself in, because she usually travelled alone. They went to their room. Sloane started unpacking her bag.

"Sloane, can't that wait? Let's get a drink at the bar."

"I want to hang my clothes so that they don't get more wrinkled than they are."

"Okay. How about I meet you down there?"

"Sure."

Toby bounced his way out of the door. Sloane noticed that he was his usual happy self; he seemed much better than he was when he called from South America earlier that day. She walked over to the thermostat. It was 76 degrees in the room. She turned the temperature down and took off her white blouse before that was over her tank-top heading downstairs.

Toby was sitting at a corner table in the hotel bar. It was relatively quiet; usually the tourists went to other bars on the weekends. He saw Sloane walk through the lobby and enter the bar. He saw that Sloane took off her white shirt in her room and was wearing only the tank top with her slacks. Toby wasn't expecting this. He knew Sloane thought of her clothes as only functional garments; that they were doing a

job for her. It was warm in the hotel; she wouldn't have a need for her white blouse; it served it's function; it could now rest from its duty.

But now he saw her shoulders.

He noticed how she moved around the tables through the room. When she maneuvered around a table or a chair she turned one shoulder to the front, as if it were a guiding force, as if she was steering with her shoulders, as if she were about to shove her way through a crowd in a room. She held her purse in her hand, and even in how her arms held her purse, it seemed as if her limbs consciously knew they served a function and should do it effectively. Toby was transfixed on her shoulders and arms as she made her way to the table.

He stood up and pulled out her chair for her. As he was seating her, Sloane asked, "Okay, I'm here. Care to tell me what's going on?"

"Is it always business with you?"

"Toby, you called me this morning upset, asking me to fly across the country, and now that I'm here you act like nothing has happened. Can you explain it to me?"

The waiter walked up and placed a wine glass down in front of Sloane. "I hope a Chardonnay was a good pick. I didn't know what you'd want." The waiter finished pouring and brought a shot of whiskey and a draft beer for Toby.

The waiter walked away. "Shots, already?" Sloane asked.

"Look, I'll get it out, but I just wanted to say," and he raised his shot glass in the gesture of a toast, and Sloane followed his lead, "that I'm really happy that you came here. I mean, I'm glad that you thought this was worth travelling to Miami for. I do need to talk to you, but I just want you to know that I appreciate the effort you've made. Thanks."

Their glasses clinked; Toby threw his head back with the glass and grabbed his beer to chase it down while Sloane watched him and took the first sip of her wine.

"Look, remember the last trip I took to South America, to look into natural materials that may have anti-viral effects on humans?"

"The natural materials, and yes, and Toby, I'm still amazed that you got the funding for it. You didn't even know how to go about looking for material for AIDS drugs."

"Well, you forget that I work for the government, you and your little company probably would never have funded it, but the government did. That's why I like working for the university. All I had to do was make the proposal sound nice."

"You just had to make it <u>sound</u> nice," Sloane replied, almost with a condensating undertone.

"Well, yes, you know what I mean."

"So getting money doesn't necessarily depend on merit or talent?"

"Oh, Sloane, don't start, I didn't mean anything by it."

"And you said the government pays for it?"

"Well, yes, to the university."

"Who pays the government?"

"What?"

"Who pays the government?"

"Well, taxes, I guess."

"Yes, they do. And who pays taxes?"

"Okay, Sloane, you can stop now."

"I'm just trying to gently remind you that your money has to come from somewhere, it's not like the government is giving you free money, it was taken from somewhere else, taken from all the people who pay taxes."

"Sloane —"

"That everyone pays money so that you can go to South America searching for plants when you don't even know exactly what it is you're looking for."

"Sloane —"

"Okay, okay, I'm done, I'm getting off my soapbox now."

"Thanks."

"So on your last trip..."

"So on my last trip I managed to find something from the sap on the back of some bark there, and we brought it back to the States, and it seemed to do a very good job of fighting the virus."

"Yes, you told me about it, what was it, two months ago?"

"Yes."

"In fact, there's a little write-up about you and your findings in a medical journal I was reading on the flight over here."

"Really? Did you read it?"

Sloane did her best to put a coy expression on her face. "Maybe..."

Toby laughed. "Well, we did a bunch of laboratory tests on it and it seemed to be doing really well, so we administered it to four test subjects. Half of them showed marked improvements in their condition — their viral load dropped and their T-Cell count shot up. For the other two the substance had no impact."

"Still, that's great, with a little engineering you can find out what made the substance not work for the others and genetically alter it to give it a higher success rate."

"Exactly. Well, in doing all of these tests, we used up all of the drug."

"Oh, so you were going back now to get more of the bark."

"Well, to get the sap — not the bark."

"So you were going back to get more of the sap."

"Exactly."

Toby emphasized his last word too much; Sloane was sure he intentionally placed too much emphasis on that word. She looked at him for a moment. "And... how did the trip go?"

"How did my trip go?" Toby almost laughed as he signalled the waiter for another shot. "Well, Sloane, I go back to the same place where I found that tree, because you know how rain forests go, a tree there might be the only one of its species, or one like it may be very far away from it instead of right next to it, it's a very diverse and very rich area." The waiter brought up the shot; Toby held up his finger while he did the shot and handed the shot glass to the waiter and gestured for another. "Well, I go back to that same place where I found that tree, and you know

what I found?" He took a swig of his beer.

"What happened, Toby?"

"What happened is that some American cattle-ranching beef company or something bought a hundred acres of the land my tree was on and they cleared all one hundred acres for cattle ranch. Cleared. I mean, my tree was right smack-dab in the middle of the hundred acres. And it was completely gone. This field looked like it could have been right in the middle of Illinois or Iowa. Not a tree in sight. There was a little fence all the way around and a little sign every hundred yards at the fence line with the company name on it."

"So you had to come back empty-handed."

"Yes, I had to come back empty-handed."

"Is there any way that company could have known that researchers were using the material on that land for disease research? I mean, could you have notified the government or something?"

"Sloane, I did notify the government. But how accurately are they going to keep records in different departments of these things? They make a note of what I'm doing andthey seem to just put it in a file cabinet. Hell, they could have put it in the circular file for all the good it did. When someone wanted to buy the land, the government was the first to want to make a penny out of it."

"Well, of course they want the money for it. And if no one really knew..."

"There's so much bureaucracy, no one knows what the guy next to them is doing, unless they're doing something wrong."

Sloane looked at him for a moment. "Is there anything I can do?"

"Get me that tree back."

"Toby —"

"I'm sorry."

It all flashed in Sloane's mind that she should learn to be more social, especially in these situations. She did the best she could on such short notice by saying, "I mean, do you need to talk more? What can I do right now to make you feel better?"

Toby was surprised by her concern. "It's not like you to make such an offer."

"I didn't make an offer," Sloane responded.

The waiter brought another shot to Toby. "Point well taken."

The waiter walked away. Toby looked at his shot, then at Sloane. "You know what you can do for me?"

"Name it."

"Just have a drink with me."

"Isn't that what I'm doing?"

Toby looked at her, then at her half-full glass of wine.

"Waiter," Sloane called out, "Two more shots of whiskey and two pints of his draft." Toby could hardly believe his eyes. He smiled almost inquisitively at her.

The waiter brought back two shots and beers. Sloane picked up the shot with Toby and they held them in the air. Toby counted to three; Sloane followed his lead and they both drank. Sloane shivered after drinking the shot and followed his lead in going for



the beer to wash the whiskey down. Toby thought it was cute that she was doing this for him, knowing that she didn't drink much, and he watched her as he drank.

###

Sloane took the hotel key from Toby's pocket and leaned Toby up against the wall. "Now you stay right there young man, don't move," Sloane ordered Toby while she reached over and opened the door. She kept her foot in the doorway to hold the door open while she nudged Toby toward the door.

"Okay, I'm not guiding you anymore, get to the bed or bathroom yourself." Toby lifted his head and looked at her and smiled.

"What, you can't help a guy in need?" he asked.

"Not when I know he's perfectly capable of doing the job himself."

With that Toby burst out laughing. Only then did Sloane realize what it sounded like she meant.

Toby walked to the bathroom, splashed some water on his face and walked toward the bed. Sloane stopped and leaned against the wall and watched Toby slowly walk over to the bed and fall face-first onto the bed. She smiled, grabbed a t-shirt and shorts from her drawer and went to the bathroom to change. A few minutes later she walked out into the room and pulled the covers off of her bed. Toby was in the same position as he was when she walked into the bathroom.

She got into bed and she heard Toby mutter, "Why did this have to happen?"

"What, Toby?"

"Why did this have to happen?"

"Toby, just get some rest."

"But I was so close."

She considers it for a moment: on some level it hardly did seem fair. That rain forest was much more valuable than a cattle ranch. But all she could think was: why did this have to happen? It didn't have to. The company that bought it had a right to buy that land; they just made a bad business decision. Then again, if no one knew this patch of land was being used for research, how would they have known the value of it? The government kept bad records, so they made a bad mistake, if not only a bad sale.

"I know you were so close. But there's no use in lamenting over that when there's work to be done. Are you sure there's no way you can use anything that is left from the old samples and try to replicate in a man-made form?"

She heard Toby start to snore.

Smiling, she got up and walked over to his bed. She untied his shoes. She tried to push him up the bed, so his head was on a pillow. She slid his jacket off his shoulders. She figured he could sleep in his t-shirt and jeans.

She got up and turned off the light next to her bed. She sat upright in the dark for a while. She couldn't stop thinking.

There would have to be a way to replicate that tree sap, even if he used it all in tests, as long as he kept some of the results. Maybe he could search other rain forests nearby to see if there was any chance a tree like this existed somewhere else.

She thought about Colin Madison, telling her that she has a green light financially to do whatever she needed for research. That she could use the company plane whenever she wanted. But he offered that to her because she proved her talent and created a good product. She made strides and she was being rewarded for it. Toby was given the green light because he worded his guesses appropriately and got lucky.

She couldn't blame Toby for using the system, she thought. The government allows it, the government has created this system where independent panelists of people unrelated to the field dole out millions of dollars to the people who have a grin like Tyler Gillian, or who have a lobby group that talks the loudest.

Maybe she should blame Toby, though. She knew she didn't want that university job; she knew she wanted to be rewarded for her merits and nothing else. Toby liked the fact that the university had this "caste" system that gave him security in his job. Now he had a bad break. He has to learn from it.

She started to think about the rain forest. Why would it be so hard to find another tree? She realized how little she knew about the planet's rain forests. The tree had to be seeded from another tree, right? Is his search over?

She got up and walked over to her briefcase, by the window. She quietly pulled out her computer and plugged it into the wall. "I can get on line tonight," she thought, "and see what is on the internet about the rain forests, and possibly about the possible relationship of AIDS and HIV to it."

She looked out the window. She saw the lights of the city. Miami was still alive, at two in the morning, even though Toby was out for the night. She saw the lights of a few bars crowded with people. And then, like a page ripped down the center, next to all the lights was the ocean, a void of blackness.

She looked at the darkness for a minute, and noticed a few boat lights moving along the water.

"Anything is conquerable," Sloane said under her breath as she closed the drapes to her hotel room and went to bed. Her internet research could wait until morning.

###

But she still thought about the internet research, even when she wasn't on line.

This would be something she could stand some help on, she thought. Maybe the team at Madison would be able to use the internet accounts to get more information on specific parts of the problem for the Madison group.

Sloane knew that if there was a concern for the rain forests on the internet, then there would probably be concerns — and a number of web sites — about things like "alien abductions" and "government conspiracies" and "AIDS and homeopathy" and more.

And if it was on the internet, Sloane could find it. And so could anyone at Midison.

###

At ten in the morning Toby rolled over. He thought he heard a slight tapping of rain outside his window. When he opened his eyes, however, he realized he was in Miami and not in Seattle, where he would expect the rain to be falling outside his window. He turned over and looked at the window. The sun beamed in, streaming around Sloane, sitting at the table in front of the window. The light sound of rain was Sloane typing into her computer.

"How long have you been up?" Toby asked.

"Since six."

He rolled back over to check the clock; he remembered that he was still dressed and checked his watch instead. He picked his head back up to look at her. "You've been up for four hours? Why didn't you wake me?"

"You needed your rest. Besides, I wanted to get some work done."

"Is that all you think about?"

"Sometimes."

Toby let his head fall back on to the pillow.

"How are you feeling?" Sloane asked.

"Oh, my head hurts. Surprise. I just need some food. You've had breakfast, right?"

"Oh, I forgot. No, I haven't eaten yet."

"Geez, Sloane, I can understand letting your mind go into overdrive, but doesn't your body remind you that you have to maintain it?"

"I'm fine, besides, I've been so amazed at the information on the internet that I haven't been able to stop working. Now I know why Colin wanted me to get on line so bad."

"What do you mean?" Toby started to sit up.

"Well, I've been using the e-mail they gave us, right? Well, the boss kept telling me to use the internet, and I don't even think he's ever been on it, I don't think he knows how it works. And I've never had a real need to get on line before. But this morning I was thinking, I don't know much of anything about the rain forests, really, so maybe I can get on line and learn something. Madison Pharmaceuticals has a T-1 line as well as a national dial up number, so I just used a local dial-up number while here to get on line. I checked my e-mail, and then I got on to the internet to see what I could find about the rain forests."

"One question before you go on, Sloane."

"Sure."

"Are you going to let me take you out to breakfast when you're done?"

"You can take me to breakfast now, as long as I can tell you what I've learned." Toby got up out of bed. "Okay, I'm ready."

"For breakfast, or my story?"

"Both. I'm dressed, aren't I?"

Sloane laughed. Toby walked to the washroom; he turned back and looked at Sloane.

"Maybe you can wait until I have some coffee before you tell me your story."
"It's a deal."

Toby ran some water through his hair while Sloane closed down her programs on her computer and shut the laptop off so they could go to a breakfast diner.

Sloane and Toby both instantly turned their coffee cups over as they sat down in the booth of the diner. The waitress came over and filled them up. Toby curled his left hand around the mug.

"Okay, I'm ready."

"Well, you know, it's not that big of a deal..."

"Oh, just spit it out."

"Okay, so I decided to go on the internet to find out what I could about rain forests. So I went to a search engine and typed the words 'rain forest' in to see what I could get. Well, I got so many entries that I'd never be able to check all of the web sites. So I typed in the words 'rain forest destruction' in and got a number of sites to tell me about why and how the rain forests are being destroyed."

"And?" Toby asked. Sloane explained, "And did you know that the three primary reasons rain forests are being cleared are farming, cattle ranching and logging?"

"Well, it makes sense, I suppose."

"Did you know that orange juice sold in the United States that is from concentrate has oranges from groves in Brazil, on what used to be rain forest land?"

"Really?"

"Yes, just check the fine print on the package. Usually it will say something like 'oranges from Florida, Mexico and Brazil.' Right on the package."

"Wow, I had no idea."

The waitress walked over. "Are you ready to order?"

"Sure," Sloane answered. "I'd like a Spanish omelette and hash browns, white toast."

"Would you like any orange juice with that?"

Sloane glanced at Toby. "Is it from concentrate?" The waitress answered that it was.

"No, thank you," Sloane answered. The the waitress continued, "And for you, sir?"

"Can I have two scrambled eggs, two sausage links, hash browns, and toast?" "Sure."

"Actually, miss," Sloane interrupted, "can I change my order? What he's having sounds good."



"You want exactly what he's having?"

"Yes please."

"Okay. It'll be up in just a few minutes."

"So," Sloane turned back to Toby, "I thought it was interesting to learn this stuff about rain forest destruction. Most of the people that want to save the rain forests are talking about atmospheric changes, but there's no proof in that, and there's not even any proof that there's permanent damage to the ozone. I was surprised to find that people were arguing about saving the rain forests from that angle and not from the medical research angle."

"Good point, I guess."

"So then I went back to the search engine and typed the words 'rain forest AIDS' to see if there was anything. Get this. There was even a site about the monkey theory about how the first human got AIDS —"

"You mean the theory that a monkey transferred the virus to a human by biting his butt? A virus jumped from animals to humans? Do you even believe that theory?"

"Just listen, I never said I believed that. What I'm saying is that this site suggested that it was the destruction of the rain forest that caused the spread of AIDS in humans."

"From monkeys."

"Not from monkeys biting a human butt."

Toby laughed.

"The theory is that a man ate monkey meat that was contaminated with a virus, not that a monkey bit a man in the butt."

"But still —"

"I'm just telling you what was on this one site. The suggestion it was making is that not only do rain forests contain a plethora of rare animals and plants, so too it could contain rare viruses."

"A plethora?"

"And records of some viruses that have erupted since the beginning of rain forest destruction in African towns are spread by the air, not just by blood, which could mean the beginning of more drastic epidemics. And you don't need to make fun of me because I'm coherent enough to use big words like 'plethora' in the morning, mister drinker-man."

"Mister drinker man?"

"I'm going to keep telling my story."

"No one is stopping you, Sloane."

She mockingly glared at him. "They posted the theory that if AIDS mutates as much as it has been known to, it may mutate to the point where it can be transmitted by air."

"That's not going to happen."

"Are we sure?"

"If it is possible for it to mutate to that point, it will not be for years and years and years. I'm sure there will be a cure within the next decade or so."

"Still, it's something to ponder, something to spur you on a little more, isn't it?" Sloane paused to eat some of her eggs. "Well, there were a few more sites, and most of them were about herbs and vitamins and things people were selling — products that had origins from the rain forest."

"Like what?"

The waitress checked on their food. "Could I have some hot sauce?" Sloane asked the waitress. Toby looked at her with just a tinge of disgust. Sloane answered his glance with, "Just because you're hung over, doesn't mean I am."

The waitress brought the hot sauce to the table, and Sloane continued. "The other web sites primarily contained products with health benefits derived from plant extracts and the like from rain forest materials. There was an immune system rejuvenator made from rain forest materials, phytonutrients, colloidal minerals and even a tea to help with energy that was derived from a tree bark."

"And you think they all work?"

"I have no idea, I haven't had the drugs, the extracts, <u>or</u> the research facilities to check them all out. Probably not. My point is that there are other people out there looking for cures to diseases, utilizing the rain forest, people that you might be able to communicate with."

"People making a wonder tonic and selling it on the web do it because it makes them more money then driving from town to town and gathering a crowd for a sales pitch. 'Rev up your romantic life! Get the energy of your youth! Everything you need is this handy..."

"I get it, Toby," Sloane answered. "Super-potent..." Toby cut in.

"Toby, enough," Sloane protested. "Energy tonic!" Toby continued.

"Are you not interested in finding a way to solve your problem?"

"You think I'll find it by people selling energy tonics?"

"With ingredients possibly from the same place as your research materials? Look, one of the herbs, or whatever it was, was one that claimed to help with people's immune systems and had testimonials from AIDS patients. They said the materials were from a Peruvian rain forest. They found that this substance, from the inside of a tree bark, also helped with phagocytosis."

Toby looked at her. She added, "Is this sounding a little more familiar now?" Toby leaned back in his booth.

"Okay, I'll let you eat the rest of your breakfast in peace. Just let me know when you want the web site address. I saved it for you."

"You're doing my work for me while I sleep off a hangover, because I'm too mad about my lack of success."

"Don't think for a minute I'm doing it for you. This is a puzzle, solving this disease. And I'm a sucker for puzzles. You know me, I can't help but pick up a piece and try to make it fit. Besides, this research makes me think of other evenues I could be taking in helping people with AIDS." She smiled at him.

They are for a moment in silence.

"Hey, Sloane? Are you going to use the jelly for your english muffin?"

"No. Here, take some."

They got back from breakfast and checked out of the hotel. "Hey, Sloane," Toby stopped her in the lobby, "What do you say we have the hotel hold our bags for an hour or two and we go to the beach before we go? I haven't even been able to spend any time in Miami, and I've got two hours before my flight takes off for Seattle. By the way, what airline are you on? Maybe we could go back together."

"I would if I could, but I've got the private plane this weekend."

"Well, well, Ws. Emerson, you're really a big-wig over there, aren't you?"

Toby started to give a humorous sneer as he paused before speaking. "Well, that's what I get for giving up the university job."

"Well, can you at least go for a walk?"

"Sure, let me phone Jim." Sloane pulled her cellular phone out of her jacket pocket.

"Jim? It's Sloane. Yes, I suppose you knew that...

"Is it possible to take off in maybe around two hours? ...

"I didn't know how long I'd have to be here, but I didn't expect it to be all weekend...

"Yes, I know I'm supposed to rest. No, I should probably just fly back this afternoon.

"Okay. It can be ready? Great. Should I just meet you at the airport?

"Okay, I'll see you then. Thanks." She hung up her phone as Toby took her baggage and gave it to the clerk at the registration desk.

"You know, you really should go somewhere for the rest of the weekend," Toby said once they got to the water's edge. "They"re letting you take the plane — don't you have anyone you'd like to visit? I mean, you've got the company plane, you could just go for a while."

"I suppose, but really, who would I go see? And I want to use this for business, and business only. This isn't supposed to be a personal trip."

"Is that what your boss said?" They got to the beach and started walking.

"Well, actually, no, he told me to take a break for the weekend and go somewhere."

"Well? Go visit someone somewhere."

"What, just call them and say, 'Can I see you tonight?"

"Sure. You know you'll regret it if you don't."

"I doubt that. But I'll think about it."

They walked together along the water in silence.

"The water is beautiful," Toby said, looking out at the ocean. "The ocean is such a powerful force. I mean, it covers two thirds of the planet. Just one strong wave could pull you under and kill you. And yet we humans are fascinated with it. We're over half water. We want to ride boats over it. We want to swim in it. We want to surf it, ski it, float around in it. And we just want to stare at it, listen to the waves crash into the shore, smell the salt air. What a love affair we have with it."

Sloane thought for a minute about what he said.

"I think you're right," she answered to him.

"Yeah?" he asked. "Yeah." she answered.

"I'm not used to you agreeing with me."

She paused. "I've agreed with you on many things, Toby. But for me, the beauty of this scene is more than that, more than the beauty of nature, more than the beauty of the ocean. I like looking at the water because it reminds me of my life, about human life. It shows what nature is like, and it shows what we've done with nature. Yes, even though a tide can pull us under and kill us, we are still capable of going scuba diving with sharks and maneuvering boats over it. This water is beautiful because of our involvement with it, our choice to use it to our own ends. But on some levels what I think is most beautiful about this scene," Sloane said, moving her arm in a circle before her, "is that all of this, the waves crashing, the beauty and peacefulness of nature, is sitting here right up against high-rises."

"You like the buildings here, Sloane? It would look so much nicer if there was nothing here other than the water."

"Well, what I like is the fact that we've built these buildings, right at a place where the people in them can really enjoy the water. What I like is looking at the beauty of the buildings — the steel, the glass, the functionality of the products of the human mind — poised right up against the beautiful scene from nature."

"I don't know if I agree with you, Sloane."

"The best of man and the best of nature, all in one. That's what makes this

scene astonishing for me. I've seen sunsets reflecting off of skyscrapers that were more beautiful than any sunrise at this beach."

Toby looked at her and smiled. "You were always a strange bird, Sloane."

"Would you want me any other way?"

"Of course not."

"Well, that's my story and I'm sticking with it." They both smiled and continued walking. They turned around to walk back toward the hotel. During the remainder of their little trip they walked in silence. Sloane thought about all the avenues that going on the internet brought to her attention that morning. She thought about that list she started writing on the airplane. Then she thought about all the difficulties her staff had been going through trying to improve Emivir. She was beginning to feel the weight of the world upon her shoulders again. She thought about Tyler, and the lobbyists. She thought about the patients the lobbyists claimed blamed Madison Pharmaceuticals for not giving them drugs for free. "Haven't I done enough?" she thought. "What do they want from me?"

They got back to the hotel and Toby picked up their luggage. They shared a taxi together to the airport.

"Sloane," Toby said, "You look like you're already dreading going back to work."

"It's not the work that I dread."

"What then?"

"I —" Sloane couldn't get the words out. "I don't know what it is. I keep thinking that I do good work, but most people just want more."

"Are you working for them or for you?"

"Thanks for asking that. But for me, of course, and I want more from me too, I mean, I want to accomplish more as well, but when everyone is fighting you..."

"Believe me, I know what you mean," Toby answered. Sloane remembered his failed rain forest experiment and tried to empathize. "But I know you, Sloane, you love your work. Hell, you were looking into research about the rain forest while I was passed out from drinking myself into a stupor and out of a depression over this whole mess. You love this; it's in your blood. The thing is, you just have to forget about the people that bother you. They'll never truly get in your way."

She started to smile. "You're right, Toby."

"What? You're agreeing with me again?"

The taxi pulled up to the airport and To by handed Sloane her baggage from the trunk.

"When I get into town I'll send you the web site address for the rain forest pages I was reading."

"Thanks, Sloane. And thanks for coming to help me out here. If you need it, I'll fly across the country for you."

"Thanks, Toby." Sloane started to walk away.

"And Sloane, that's a big deal, because I'd actually have to pay for my ticket."

Sloane laughed as she turned back toward her terminal and Toby walked toward his.

Sloane met up with Jim at the end of the terminal and he walked her to the plane. "I'm surprised you don't want to stay here, or go somewhere else. You've got me for the weekend, you know."

Sloane stood outside, in front of the plane. She thought for a moment, then pulled out her cellular phone. "If I wanted to change our destination, could we do it?"

"Where were you thinking?"

"New York."

"Well, there shouldn't be a problem." He looked at the phone in her hand. "Do you need to call someone first?"

"Can you give me a minute?"

"Sure. Come up when you're ready — I can confirm where we can land in New York from the plane, so let me know where we're going, okay?"

"Thanks, Jim," Sloane said as she watched Jim walk up the stairs and duck his head as he got into the plane. She looked at the phone. She planned to make two calls; the first one was to the phone number that was left on her answering machine. A young man answered the phone, and didn't seem very alert when he answered the phone.

"Hello?" he answered. "Hello, is Steve there?"

"This is he. Who is this?"

"This is Sloane Emerson, I work with Kyle, I was returning your call, but did I wake you up? I didn't mean to —"

Steve interrupted her so she didn't have to explain. "I'm wide awake. I thought you were ignoring me by not calling me back. How are you?"

"Well, I'm about to fly from Miami to New York, I think... I got your message during my trip, but I didn't have much of a chance to call you until now."

"Don't worry about it. Any why Miami and New York?"

"Miami for business, and New York for social reasons. I am trying to not think about work <u>all</u> the time."

"Well, I know you don't know me very well, but if you are trying to be more social, I can be a good listener."

"Listener?" she asked.

"Sounding board, conversation friend — I work for the newspaper and do have a good command over the English language..."

Sloane smiled at his remark and noted that this is what she has to learn to do more of. "Well, I'm not very good at being social, I am usually doing research at home or at work, so you'll have to forgive me."

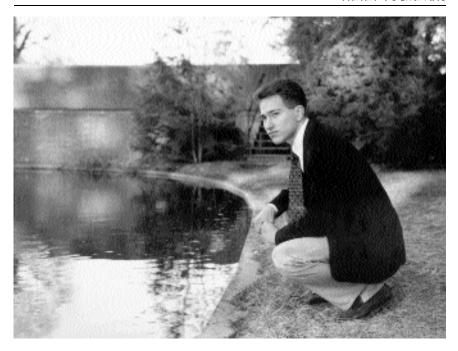
"Should I wait for you to call when you get back in to town then?" Steve asked Knowing this call would cost her money on the cellular phone, she agreed and said she would talk to him later. Then she dialed New York. She heard a voice answer. "Hello?"

She didn't bother with a formal hello. "Carter?"

"Yes, who is this? I'm having a hard time hearing you."

"Carter, it's Sloane, Sloane Emerson. I'm standing next to an airplane getting ready to go."

"Where are you?" Carter asked.



"Miami. We're about to take off."

"Where are you going?"

"Well, that's why I'm calling. I've got the company plane for the weekend, and everyone has been begging me to take time off, and I was wondering if you —"

"Tell me what time I should pick you up and I'll be waiting for you."

"You don't have any plans? I'm not interrupting anything?"

"Sloane, just call when you know where you're going to be and when. No arguing."

"Thanks, Carter. I'll call you in about an hour."

"See you soon."

"Bye." She looked at the phone in her hand for a moment, then glanced up at the plane. She pushed the antenna back into the phone and made her way up the stairs.

She walked to the cockpit while men closed the airplane door. She could hear the stairs being rolled away from the side of the plane.

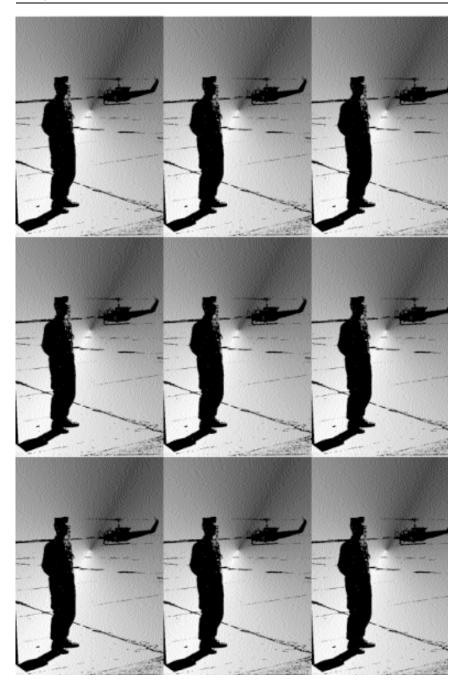
"Where are we going, Ms. Emerson?"

"I have a first name!" she said, laughing at how cordial he was trying to be. She smiled at him. Jim repeated, "Sloane, where are we going?"

"Well, we could go home... but then again, it's Saturday afternoon. We could make it to New York in just a few hours."

"New York it is," Jim proudly said as he turned back toward the controls. "Anything in particular you're going to do while you're there?"

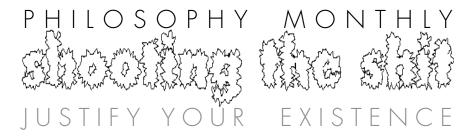
"Visit a friend," Sloane answered. "Someone who can bring my spirit back to me."



artwork by Mark Clayton Graham



artwork by Mark Clayton Graham



## Δ ΠΦΤΕ ΦΠ EMBRΔCiΠG ΦFFiCERS ΦF LΔW EΠFΦRCEMEΠΤ

### MATTHEW LEE BAIN

They wear blue, and they hate you, unless you're one of them. However, that's no reason to get upset. Policemen do so much for us. Just allow me a chance to give some prime examples and reasons why we should give every single hog a hug.

1. They provide comical entertainment that spans many networks and cable channels with their self-styled show "Cops."

"Cops," a half-hour program of hilarious antics, should not be missed. Herein, we lowly civilians can watch and thrill as policemen slap the cuffs on gold-toofed comedians and missing-toofed hillbillies. Of course this isn't reality; these officers present quite a respectable affectation since they know they're being filmed and since they're dealing with relatives.

- 2. I, for one, cannot get enough of police in riot gear breaking up peaceful assemblies. Clap as riot police slap innocents unmercifully with billy-clubs! Guffaw as riot police tear-gas calm and lawful citizens for expressing their own personal opinions! Roll with laughter as the bullies in blue spray the undeserving crowd with a fusillade of rubber bullets! Wee! In this symbiotic relationship, we the people learn that we should not express our political/philosophical views in a nonviolent manner and the police gain an outlet for their sociopathic aggression. Everyone wins!
- 3. Law enforcement is often forgotten for their help in domesticity. Who would ever be able to settle their differences without the police kicking in their door? No one, I say. Patrolmen become our adopted parents, the

guardians we never had, explaining the do's and don'ts of interdependence.

- 4. If you're anything like me, you just can't wait for an unreasonable search and seizure! Either while you walk down the street or while you reside comfortably in your own home. That's right! They can take or do whatever they want in your own house, or they can stop you on the street, frisk you and basically rob you of whatever they deem unlawful. All they need to possess is probable cause and reasonable suspicion. No warrant is necessitated. Throw that pesky Fourth Amendment out the window. That way, they can take whatever they want as evidence of a supposed crime. Sure, there isn't any legal precedent behind most of the theft they engage in, but who's the judge going to believe, you or them? Don't be disrespectful, or you'll get a blackjack to the back of the head. Obey!
- 5. Freedom of speech? Who needs it. The right to bear arms? Who needs it. These are frivolities that no one in this utopian society really needs, and officers of the law give us negative reinforcement for our own good to remind us of that. Don't dare speak your mind to a policeman! There are laws against that! No, not in the constitution, but obey anyway.

Come to think of it, just start kowtowing even when you see a patrolmen; better safe than sorry. Aside from that, all I have to say in finality of this piece, is that everyone, everywhere should embrace law enforcement. No, not just their rules and regulations that shred our civil liberties but they themselves. That's right! I want everyone out there to hug a cop today! At first, he might point a white, powdered sugar-covered finger in your direction and tell you to halt, but you must advance! Make him understand your true affections for his uniform, and his badge, and his total domination of your pitiful civilian self. Make him comprehend that love is all you have to share with him; once his guard is down, you may embrace him. Pat his back a little to make him feel more comfortable about the situation. Then, with your left hand, pull the stiletto out of your right shirt sleeve, and stab it deep into the back of his neck. Do not attempt to slash the carotid artery! This would make his death and suffering minimal. You want to get the tip of the blade to pop right through the front of his throat. Center it so that you puncture the esophagus; twist it. Embrace him in your arms as he shakes and shits himself. Take out his mace and give him a little spray just for fun. It's a vis-à-vis confrontation after all, so it's quite evenhanded compared to their tactics (employing four people to savagely beat an unarmed speeder, assfucking minorities with plungers, etc.). So feel good about yourself, and have fun with it! That's one less pig off the streets.

# Δ BR iEF DEFENSE OF FREE WILL

### BY TIBOR MACHAI

### The Importance of having Free Will

This is not a common topic of discussion outside the discipline of philosophy and some other fields.

Nevertheless, political economy is related to this philosophical problem in more ways than one. For example, if, say, a certain system of law is just, it is implied that we ought to implement it - even if only gradually, over time.

If we claim that aggression is wrong, we implicitly hold that people ought to refrain from it. Indeed, even to say that some argument concerning any topic from logic to astronomy is unsound, we are claiming, implicitly, that one ought not to propose or accept it.

But as the philosopher Immanuel Kant pointed out, ought implies can. That means, in part, that only if it is possible to choose to do something can it be the case that it ought to be done. So the very meaningfulness of the advocacy of political ideals implies that free will exists. (The other meaning of ought implies can is that some objective standard of human conduct must be identifiable, otherwise one could never do what one ought to do.)

Thus, clearly, it is of some value to explore briefly whether human beings have free will. In connection with the particular principles of classical liberalism, the issue of why respecting individual rights is vital and possible relates to the problem of free will. Individual rights need to be respected because we must have an area of personal responsibility within which to make our choices about our lives or wherein to initiate our own actions.

The need for this kind of respect assumes, again, that human beings have free will, that they can make basic choices about their lives, initiate basic conduct, that can turn out to be right or wrong. Furthermore, requiring of people that they respect individual rights also assumes that they possess free will. Otherwise it would make no sense to require such respect from them: something they have no choice about cannot be something they morally ought to and can fail to do.

But there is also the more familiar matter of the issue of personal responsibility concerning everyday conduct, those matters discussed daily in the home, in the press, and on the various media. Not only is there the issue of who is responsible for various good and bad things, but there is also the question of whether most of us are, as so many people seem to believe, in the grips of various forces over which we have no control. This or that addiction - to drugs, sex, violence, power, athletics, or work - is supposed to be our master, with ourselves merely puppets on strings moved about by them.

Yet, only if we have free will does any talk of blaming our parents, politicians, the rich, bureaucrats and the rest make sense. But there are many people who believe that modern science, including, of course, all the social sciences, leave no room for such a thing in human life. Where does it stand, then, with the free will issue? It seems to me worth discussing this topic outside the confines of philosophy graduate seminars and encourage some thinking about it on everyone's part. After all, it is a central feature of the political philosophy of liberty that individual citizens in society must not be thwarted in making choices for themselves, in initiating their own thinking and conduct. What does this come to unless they possess free will, the capacity to produce their own behavior?

I want to argue that there is indeed free will. And I'm going to defend the position that free will means that human beings can cause some of what they do, on their own; in other words, what they do is not explainable solely by references to factors that have influenced them, though, of course, their range of options is clearly circumscribed by the world in which they live, by their particular circumstances, capacities, options, talents, etc.

My thesis, in other words, is that human beings are able to cause their actions and they are therefore responsible for some of what they do. In a basic sense we are all are original actors capable of making novel moves in the world. We are, in other words, initiators of some of our behavior.

The first matter to be noted is that this view is in now way in contradiction to science. Free will is a natural phenomenon, something that emerged in nature with the emergence of human beings, with their kind of minds, namely, minds that can think and be aware of their own thinking.

Nature is complicated and multifaceted. It includes many different sorts of things and one of these is human beings. Such beings exhibit one unique yet natural attribute that other things apparently do not exhibit and that is free will.

I am going to offer eight reasons why a belief in free will makes very good sense. Four of these explain why there can be free will - i.e., why nature does not preclude it. But these do not yet demonstrate that free will exists.

That will be the job of the four reasons I will advance next, which will establish that free will actually exists, it's not just a possibility but an actuality.

Nature's Laws versus Free WillFirst, one of the major objections against free

will is that nature is governed by a set of laws, mainly the laws of physics. Everything is controlled by these laws and we human beings are basically more complicated versions of material substances and that therefore whatever governs any other material substance in the universe must also govern human life. Basically, we are subject to the kind of causation everything else is. Since nothing else exhibits free will but conforms to causal laws, so must we be. Social science is merely looking into the particulars of those causes, but we all know that we are subject to them in any case. The only difference is that we are complicated things, not that we are not governed by the same principles or laws of nature.

Now, in response I want to point out that nature exhibits innumerable different domains, distinct not only in their complexity but also in the kinds of beings they include. So it is not possible to rule out ahead of time that there might be something in nature that exhibits agent causation. This is the phenomenon whereby a thing causes some of its own behavior. So there might be in nature a form of existence that exhibits free will. Whether there is or is not is something to be discovered, not ruled out by a narrow metaphysics that restricts everything to being just a variation on just one kind of thing. Thus, taking account of what nature is composed of does not at all rule out free will. Yet, simply because of the possibility that there is free will, there may still not be. We consider that a bit later.

Can we Know of Free Will?

Now, another reason why some think that free will is not possible is that the dominant mode of studying, inspecting or examining nature is what we call empiricism. In other words, many believe that the only way we know about nature is we observe it with our various sensory organs. But since the sensory organs do not give us direct evidence of such a thing as free will, there really isn't any such thing. Since no observable evidence for free will exists, therefore free will does not exist.

But the doctrine that empiricism captures all forms of knowing is wrong-many things that we know not simply through observation but through a combination of observation, inferences, and theory construction. (Consider, even the purported knowledge that empiricism is our form of knowledge is not known empirically!)

For one, many features of the universe, including criminal guilt, are detected without eyewitnesses but by way of theories which serve the purpose of best explaining what we do have before us to observe. This is true, also, even in the natural sciences. Many of the phenomena or facts in biology, astrophysics, subatomic physics, botany, chemistry - not to mention psychology - consist of not what we see or detect by observation but that is inferred by way of a theory. And the theory that explains things best - most completely and most consistently - is the best answer to the question as to what is going on.

Free will may well turn out to be in this category. In other words, free will may

not be something that we can see directly, but what best explains what we do see in human life. This may include, for example, the many mistakes that human beings make in contrast to the few mistakes that other animals make. We also notice that human beings do all kinds of odd things that cannot be accounted for in terms of mechanical causation, the type associated with physics. We can examine a person's background and find that some people with bad childhoods turn out to be decent, whole others crooks. And free will comes as a very helpful explanation. For now all we need to consider that this may well be so, and if empiricism does not allow for it, so much the worse for empiricism. One could know something because it explains something else better than any alternative. And that is not strict empirical knowledge.

Is Free Will Weird?

Another matter that very often counts against free will is that the rest beings in nature do not exhibit it. Dogs, cats, lizards, fish, frogs, etc., have no free will and therefore it appears arbitrary to impute it to human beings.

Why should we be free to do things when in the rest of nature lacks any such capacity? It would be an impossible aberration.

The answer here is similar to what I gave earlier. To wit, there is enough variety in nature - some things swim, some fly, some just lie there, some breathe, some grow, while others do not; so there is plenty of evidence of plurality of types and kinds of things in nature. Discovering that something has free will could be yet another addition to all the varieties of nature.

Let us now consider whether free will actually does exist. I'm going to offer four arguments in support of an affirmative answer.

Are We Determined to be Determinists - or not?

There is an argument against determinism to the effect that, if we are fully determined in what we think, believe, and do, then of course the belief that determinism is true is also a result of this determinism. But the same holds for the belief that there determinism is false. There is nothing you can do about whatever you believe - you had to believe it. There is no way to take an independent stance and consider the arguments unprejudiced because all various forces making us assimilate the evidence in the world just the way we do. One either turns out to be a determinist or not and in neither case can we appraise the issue objectively because we are predetermined to have a view on the matter one way or the other.

But then, paradoxically, we'll never be able to resolve this debate, since there is no way of obtaining an objective assessment. Indeed, the very idea of scientific or judicial objectivity, as well as of ever reaching philosophical truth, has to do with being free. Thus, if we're engaged in this enterprise of learning about truth and distinguishing it from falsehood, we are committed to the idea that human beings have some measure of mental freedom.

Should We Become Determinists?

There's another dilemma of determinism. The determinist wants us to believe in determinism. In fact, he believes we ought to be determinists rather than believe in this myth called free will. But, as the saying goes in philosophy, ought implies can. That is, if one ought to believe in or do something, this implies that one has a choice in the matter; it implies that we can make a choice as to whether determinism or the free will is a better doctrine. That, then, it assumes that we are free. In other words, even arguing for determinism assumes that we are not determined to believe in free will or determined but that it is a matter of our making certain choices about arguments, evidence, and thinking itself. That's a paradox which troubles a deterministic position.

We Often Know We Are Free!

In many contexts of our lives introspective knowledge is taken very seriously. When you go to a doctor and he asks you, Are you in pain? and you say, Yes, and he says Where is the pain? and you say, It's in my knee, the doctor doesn't say, Why, you can't know, this is not public evidence, I will now get verifiable, direct evidence where you hurt. In fact your evidence is very good evidence. Witnesses at trials give evidence as they report about what they have seen, which is introspective evidence: This indeed is what I have seen or heard. Even in the various sciences people report on what they've read on surveys or seen on gauges or instruments.

Thus they are giving us introspective evidence.

Introspection is one source of evidence that we take as reasonably reliable. So what should we make of the fact that a lot of people do say things like, Damn it, I didn't make the right choice, or I neglected to do something. They report to us that they have made various choices, decisions, etc., that they intended this or that but not another thing. And they often blame themselves for not having done something, thus they report that they are taking responsibility for what they have or haven't done.

In short, there is a lot of evidence from people all around us of the existence of free choice.

Modern Science Discovers Free Will!

Finally, there is also the evidence of the fact that we do seem to have the capacity for self-monitoring. The human brain has a kind of structure that allows us to, so to speak, to govern ourselves. We can inspect our lives, we can detect where we're going, and we can, therefore, change course. And the human brain itself makes it possible. The brain, because of its structure, can monitor itself and as a result we can decide whether to continue in a certain pattern or to change that pattern and go in a different direction. That is the sort of free will that is demonstrable. At least some scientists, for example Roger W. Sperry - in his book Science and Moral Priority (Columbia University Press, 19983) and in numerous more technical articles - maintain that there's evidence for free will in this sense. This view depends on a number of points I have already mentioned. It assumes that there can be differ-

ent causes in nature, so that the functioning of the brain would not be a kind of self-causation. The brain as a system would have to be able to cause some things about the organism's behavior and that depends, of course, on the possibility of there being various kinds of causes.

Precisely the sort of thing Sperry thinks possible is evident in our lives. We make plans and revise them. We explore alternatives and decide to follow one of these. We change a course of conduct we have embarked upon, or continue with it. In other words, there is a locus of individual self responsibility that is evident in the way in which we look upon ourselves, and the way in which we in fact behave.

Some People are, some are not Determined.

There clearly are cases of conduct in which some persons behave as they do because they were determined to do so by certain identifiable forces outside of their own control. A brain tumor, a severe childhood trauma or some other intrusive force sometimes incapacitates people. This is evident in those occasional cases when a person who engaged in criminal behavior is shown to have had no control over what he or she did. Someone who actually had no capacity to control his or her behavior, could not control his or her own thinking or judgment and was, thus, moved by something other than his own will, cannot be said to possess a bona fide free will.

Those who deny that we have free will simply cannot make sense of our distinction between cases in which one controls one's behavior and those in which one is being moved by forces over which he or she has no control.

When we face the latter sort of case, we still admit that the behavior could be good or bad but we deny that it is morally and legally significant - it is more along lines of acts of nature or God by being out of the agent's control.

This is also why philosophers who discuss ethics but deny free will have trouble distinguishing between morality and value theory - e.g., utilitarians, Maixists.

The Best Theory is True.

Finally, there what I have alluded to earlier, namely, that when we put all of this together we get a more sensible understanding of the complexities of human life than otherwise - we get a better understanding, for example, of why social engineering and government regulation and regimentation do not work, why there are so many individual and cultural differences, why people can be wrong, why they can disagree with each other, etc. It is because they are free to do so, because they are not set in some pattern the way cats and dogs and orangutans and birds tend to be.

In principle, all of the behavior of these creatures around us can be predicted because they are not creative in a sense that they originate new ideas and behavior, although we do not always know enough about the constitution of these beings and how it would interact with their environment to actually predict what they will do. Human beings produce new ideas and these can introduce new kinds of behavior

in familiar situations. This, in part, is what is meant by the fact that different people often interpret their experiences differently. Yet, we can make some predictions about what people will do because they often do make up their minds in a given fashion and stick to their decision over time. This is what we mean when we note that people make commitments, possess integrity, etc. So we can estimate what they are going to do. But even then we do not make certain predictions but only statistically significant ones. Clearly, very often people change their minds and surprise or annoy us. And, if we go to different cultures, they'll surprise us even more. This complexity, diversity, and individuation about human beings is best explained if human beings are free than if they are determined.

#### Is Free Will Well Founded?

So these several reasons provide a kind of argumentative collage in support of the free will position. Can anyone do better with this issue? I don't know. I think it's best to ask only for what is the best of the various competing theories. Are human beings doing what they do solely as the consequences of forces acting on them? Or do they have the capacity to take charge of their lives, often neglect to do so properly or effectively, make stupid choices? Which supposition explains the human world and its complexities around us?

I think the latter makes much better sense. It explains, much better than do deterministic theories, how it is possible that human life involves such wide range of possibilities, accomplishments as well as defeats, joys as well as sorrows, creation as well as destruction. It explains, also, why in human life there is so much change - in language, custom, style, art, and science. Unlike other living beings, for which what is possible is pretty much fixed by instincts and reflexes - even if some extraordinary behavior may be elicited, by way of extensive in laboratories or, at times, in the face of unusual natural developments - people initiate much of what they do, for better and for worse. From their most distinctive capacity of forming ideas and theories, to those of artistic and athletic inventiveness, human beings remake the world without so to speak having to do so! And this can make good sense if we understand them to have the distinctive capacity for initiating their own conduct rather than relying on mere stimulation and reaction. It also poses for them certain very difficult tasks, not the least of them is that they cannot expect that any kind of formula or system is going to predictably manage the future of human affairs, such as some of social science seems to hope it will. Social engineering is, thus, not a genuine prospect for solving human problems - only education and individual initiative can do that.

## PROTEIN AND CALCIUM MYTHS

People are increasingly concerned about adopting healthier diets. However, many are prevented from necessary changes because of myths about certain nutrients. For example, it is the common wisdom that one should eat ample amounts of meat in order to get adequate protein and large amounts of dairy products in order to get adequate calcium to avoid osteoporosis.

But, please consider the following: Countries with the highest consumption of dairy products, such as the United States, Sweden, and Finland, also have the greatest incidence of female osteoporosis. Eskimos, who consume the highest amounts of calcium of any of the world's people, have the highest number of cases of osteoporosis. Osteoporosis occurs relatively infrequently in China, even though they consume very little milk or other dairy products.

The reason is that people on meat- and dairy- based diets are getting far too much protein, generally 2 to 3 times the amount required, and when the excess protein is excreted, calcium and other minerals are drained from the body. A recent study showed that people getting 1400 milligrams per day of calcium along with about 150 grams of protein had a negative calcium balance of 65 units while people getting only 400 milligrams of calcium per day with only 500 grams of protein had a positive calcium balance of 31 units. The main problem is the consumption of animal protein; studies have shown that protein from non-animal sources has health benefits. So the answer to preventing osteoporosis is not to consume a lot of dairy products, but to reduce animal protein consumption through a balanced, nutritious diet centered on the "New Four Food Groups": fruits, vegetables (especially broccoli, a very calcium-rich food, without the negatives of animal products), grains, and legumes.

Researchers have found that the consumption of high-fat dairy prod-

ucts is a leading cause of atherosclerosis, heart attacks, and strokes. While lower-fat dairy products represent an improvement, they are higher in protein, and this contributes to osteoporosis, kidney problems, and some forms of cancer. Dairy products are also the leading culprits in food allergies. Actually, milk is a wonderful product, but it was designed for rapid weight gain in calves. One might wonder if drinking milk is natural to human beings when we recognize that no other mammal on earth consumes the milk of another species or consumes it after a weaning period.

Many plant foods are good sources of calcium. Especially good sources are dark leafy greens (such as kale and mustard, collard, and turnip greens), broccoli, beans, dried figs, sunflower seeds, and calcium-fortified cereals and juices. Dairy products are good sources of calcium, but they also contain large amounts of fat and protein. According to an American Dietary Association paper, vegans (who consume no animal products at all) can obtain the calcium they need from plant foods alone, and studies have shown that vegetarians can absorb and retain more calcium from foods and have lower rates of osteoporosis than non-vegetarians.

The question most frequently asked of vegetarians is "How do you get enough protein?" However, the amount of protein that a person needs (as a percent of total calories) is actually relatively low: 4.5%, according to the World Health Organization of the United Nations, 6%, according to the Food and Nutrition Board of the U. S. Department of Agriculture, and 8%, according to the U. S. National Research Council. It is extremely significant that during infancy, the period when humans have the most rapid growth, mother's breast milk provides only 5% of its calories as protein.

Adequate protein can easily be obtained from vegetarian, even vegan (no animal products at all) diets. Protein is found in most plant foods as well as in animal foods. Potatoes, for example have 11% of their calories from protein, and spinach has 49%. While an average working man needs about 37 grams of protein per day. 3,000 calories of rice alone would provide 60 grams of highly usable protein (for 3,000 calories of potatoes, 80 grams of protein would be provided). It is almost impossible not to get adequate protein, even on a plant-based diet, providing that one is getting enough calories and consumes a reasonable variety of foods. If this is true, how is it that we have gone so far wrong and so many people think that getting sufficient protein is a major dietary concern. The reason is that much of our nutrition information has come from experiments on rats, and rats require far more protein than humans do, as seen from the fact that a rat mother's milk has almost 50% of its calories from protein. Consuming excessive amounts of

protein can seriously damage human health. As indicated, it can result in a negative calcium balance and osteoporosis, because calcium and other minerals are lost in the urine, along with the excess protein.

Calcium lost due to high protein diets must be handled by the kidneys, which contributes to the formation of painful kidney stones. Excess protein causes destruction of kidney tissue and progressive deterioration of kidney function. Many people in affluent societies have lost 75 percent of their kidney function by the eighth decade of their lives. Extra kidney capacity enables the kidney to carry out its function in otherwise healthy people, but for people who suffer from additional diseases related to the kidney, such as diabetes, surgical loss, or injury from toxic substances, damage due to the excess protein may be fatal. When people with partial loss or damage to their kidneys are placed on low-protein diets, they are able to maintain much of their remaining kidney function. People on meat-based diets not only get excessive protein, but also large amounts of hormones, fat, cholesterol, pesticides, antibiotics, and other harmful ingredients that place major burdens on the consumer's kidneys, liver, and digestive system. Do vegetarians have to "complement" proteins, that is, get a combination of different foods containing proteins, to make sure that they get complete protein? This was a theory first advocated by Frances Moore Lappe, who mistakenly argued in the first edition of her very influential book, Diet for a Small Planet, that vegetarians should combine proteins in order to get the same "protein value" as meat. However, nutritionists no longer agree with that theory. The American Dietary Association stated in its 1992 paper, "Eating Well - The Vegetarian Way", "Vegetarians do not need to combine specific foods within a meal as the old 'complementary protein' theory advised. The paper states: "The body makes its own complete proteins if a variety of plant foods - fruits, vegetables, grains, legumes, nuts, and seeds - and enough calories are eaten during the day." Even Frances Moore Lappe agreed with this assessment in later editions of her book.

In summary, more and more scientific studies are finding that the best health results are obtained by shifting to completely plant diets, rather than shifting from red meat to poultry, dairy, and other animal products.

# RELIGIOΠ AΠΟ ΦΒΙΕCTIVISM DIANA MERTZ BRICKELL

The question was posed as to whether Objectivism and any form of religion is compatible. Perhaps I am not the best person to answer this question, since I have never believed in God, nor have I ever had an affinity for any form of religion. Thus I am not terribly sympathetic with attempts to reconcile any form of religion with Objectivism, although I hope to be able to coherently explain why they are incompatible. To start our with, we need to be sure exactly what we mean when we speak of religion. Being that religions and their tenets make claims about most (if not all) branches of philosophy, it seems reasonable to classify religions as a type of philosophy. But we refer to Christianity and Paganism and Islam as religions per se because of the added element of belief in the supernatural, which will give rise to their claims about (mainly) epistemology and ethics. Certainly numerous philosophies entail some supernatural element, but this tenet does not effect the rest of the philosophy in a significant fashion, whereas some philosophies (i.e. religions) are based almost entirely on their conception of the supernatural. In epistemology, the result of reliance upon the supernatural is that the system is not justifiable with reference to reality, and so faith must be considered a valid means of knowledge. Faith becomes an integral part of any religion, because there is simply no reason and sense-based means of knowing the supernatural. I would define religion as a philosophical system which justifies its tenets with respect to the supernatural and which requires faith from its adherents. This definition isn't too far off from those given in Webster's, which include: the service and worship of God or the supernatural, commitment or devotion to religious faith or observance, a cause, principle, or system of beliefs held to with ardor and faith. So is Objectivism at all compatible with religion? Very simply, no. Faith is a completely invalid means to knowledge and consistently undermines the use of reason. The supernatural is also out of the bounds of Objectivism, since claims about the supernatural generally involve a mind/body dichotomy, primacy of consciousness, and a rejection of the law of identity, not to mention the sheer lack of evidence for the existence of the entities involved. Even the derivative tenets of Objectivism significantly conflict with religion. The emphasis of religions on duty, sacrifice, the value of suffering and martyrdom, the mind/body dichotomy, altruism, etc. are simply incapable of being reconciled with Objectivism. Now, I don't know a whole lot about Zen Buddhism, and if the religion is in some way exempt from the above criticism, then I do apologize. But from what I understand, there is an emphasis on the inadequacy of logic and language, a rejection of the law of non-contradiction, and the existence of some source of pure wisdom. Certainly none of these ideas are even remotely compatible with Objectivism. But before I finish up here I want to caution you not to take me to mean that there is no truth in any religious system. There are true and useful ideas in almost any philosophy, and we should not reject those ideas because the philosophy as a whole is rejected. At the very least, we should maintain a willingness to delve into other philosophical and religious systems in order to understand them better, as well as to test the validity of our own beliefs.

# THE JESUS MYSTER JES: WAS THE ΦRIGINAL JESUS A PAGAN GOD?

### TIMOTHY FREKE AND PETER GANDY

The traditional history of Christianity is hopelessly inadequate to the facts. From our research into ancient spirituality it has become obvious that we must fundamentally revise our understanding of Christian origins in the most shocking of ways. Our conclusion, supported by a considerable body of evidence in our book is that Christianity was not a new revelation. It was a continuation of Paganism by another name. The gospel story of Jesus is not the biography of an historical Messiah. It is a Jewish reworking of ancient Pagan myths of the dying and resurrecting Godman Osiris-Dionysus, which had been popular for centuries throughout the ancient Mediterranean. The stories told about Osiris-Dionysus will no doubt sound familiar. He is the Son of God who is born to a virgin on the 25th of December before three shepherds. He is a prophet who offers his followers the chance to be born again through the rites of baptism. He is a wonderworker who raises the dead and miraculously turns water into wine at a marriage ceremony. He is God incarnate who dies at Easter, sometimes through crucifixion, but who resurrects on the third day. He is a saviour who offers his followers redemption through partaking in a meal of bread and wine, symbolic of his body and blood. The Jesus story is a synthesis of the Jewish myth of the Messiah Joshua (in Greek Jesus) with these Pagan myths of the dying and resurrecting Godman.

It is hard for us today to imagine the Jesus story being consciously created, but this is because we have misunderstood ancient spirituality. Myths were not seen as untruths as they are now. They were understood as allegories of spiritual initiation, which encoded profound mystical teachings. Reworking old myths to create new ones was a standar practice in the ancient world. The conquests of Alexander the Great had turned the Mediterranean world into one culture with a common language. This created an age of eclecticism, much like our own, in which different spiritual traditions met and synthesised. Jewish mystics of this period, such as Philo Judeas, were obsessed with synthesising Jewish and Pagan mythology. In light of all this, it is actually no surprise that some group of Jewish mystics should synthesise the great mythic hero of the Jews, Joshua the Messiah, with the great mythic hero of the Pagans, Osiris-Dionysus. At the time, both Pagans and Christians were well aware that the Jesus story was a myth. The early Christians known as Gnostics understood the Jesus story as allegory, not history, and even called Jesus by the names of the Pagan Godman. The Gnostics were brutally eradicated by the Roman Church in the 4th and 5th centuries, and since then we have believed the official propaganda that these Christians were dangerous heretics who had gone Pagan. Actually the evidence suggests the opposite is closer to the truth. The Gnostics were the original Christians, just as they themselves claimed. They had synthesised Jewish and Pagan mythology to produce the Jesus story, and many other extraordinary Christian myths largely unknown today. The Roman Church was a later deviation, which misunderstood the Jesus story as history. It was, as the Gnostics said a the time, an imitation Church1 teaching a superficial Christianity designed for the masses'.

Roman Christianity, and all its subsequent offshoots, is based on the idea that if you believe in the existence of an historical Jesus you will go to heaven when you die. For the Gnostics, however, Jesus is an everyman1 figure in an initiation allegory. They taught that if you yourself go through the process of initiation symbolised by the Jesus myth, you will die to your old self and resurrect in a new way. The Greek word we translate resurrect also means awaken. For the Gnostics, Christianity was about dying to the idea of yourself as a mortal body and awakening to your immoral essence as the Christ within - the One Consciousness of the Universe. This mystical enlightenment was not something that happened after death, but could happen here and now.

The historical figure of Jesus has been so central to Western culture that it is hard to question his existence. As soon as we hear his name we can see him in our minds eye, in his flowing white robes, with long hair and a beard. Yet this picture of Jesus was not created until the 8th century. Early portrayals of Jesus show him clean shaven with short hair and wearing a Roman tunic. St Paul says that long hair disgraces a man, so presumably his image of Jesus was not the same as ours. The fact is that everything we think we know about Jesus, like this romantic picture of the bearded saviour, is a creation of the human imagination. Actually there is barely a shred of evidence for the existence of an historical Jesus. Paul, the earliest Christian source, shows no knowledge of an historical man, only a mystical Christ. The gospels have been thoroughly discredited as eye-witness reports. Other bits of traditional evidence, such as references to Jesus by the Jewish historian Josephus, have been shown to be later forgeries. If solid evidence had existed, there would have been no need to have created such fabrications.

A little over a century ago most people believed the story of Adam and Eve to be history. To most thinking people today its is obviously a myth. We predict that within a generation a similar revolution will have taken place in our understanding of the gospels. People will look back at the beginning of the 21st century and be amazed that a culture with the technology to travel to the moon could see the fabulous story of Jesus as anything other than a myth. However, we do not want to dismiss the Jesus story as nonsense. For us it is truly the greatest story ever told, because it has been thousands of years in the making. It is a perennial tale which has fascinated the human soul since the dawn of time. Whilst our ideas clearly rewrite history, we do not see ourselves as undermining Christianity. On the contrary we are suggesting that Christianity is in fact richer than we previously imagined. According to the original Gnostic Christians, the Jesus story is a perennial myth with the power to impart the mystical experience of Gnosis which can transform each one of us into a Christ, not merely a history of events that happened to someone else two thousand years ago.

# THE ESSENTIALS OF $\Phi$ BJECTIVISM

My philosophy, in essence, is the concept of man as a heroic being, with his own happiness as the moral purpose of his life, with productive achievement as his noblest activity, and reason as his only absolute. – Ayn Rand Ayn Rand named her philosophy Objectivism and described it as a philosophy for living on earth. Objectivism is an integrated system of thought that defines the abstract principles by which a man must think and act if he is to live the life proper to man. Ayn Rand first portrayed her philosophy in the form of the heroes of her best-selling novels, The Fountainhead (1943) and Atlas Shrugged (1957). She later expressed her philosophy in non-fiction form.

Ayn Rand was once asked if she could present the essence of Objectivism while standing on one foot. Her answer was:

1. Metaphysics: Objective Reality

2.Epistemology: Reason3.Ethics: Self-interest

4. Politics: Capitalism

She then translated those terms into familiar language:

- 1. Nature, to be commanded, must be obeyed.
- 2. You can't eat your cake and have it too.
- 3.Man is an end in himself.
- 4. Give me liberty or give me death.

The basic principles of Objectivism can be summarized as follows:

### **METAPHYSICS**

Reality, the external world, exists independent of man's consciousness, independent of any observer's knowledge, beliefs, feelings, desires or fears. This means that A is A, that facts are facts, that things are what they are-and that the task of man's consciousness is to perceive reality, not to create or invent it. Thus Objectivism rejects any belief in the supernatural--and any claim that individuals or groups create their own reality

### EPISTEMOLOGY

Man's reason is fully competent to know the facts of reality. Reason, the conceptual faculty, is the faculty that identifies and integrates the material provided by man's senses. Reason is man's only means of acquiring knowledge. Thus Objectivism rejects mysticism (any acceptance of faith or feeling as a means of knowledge), and it rejects skepticism (the claim that certainty or knowledge is impossible)

### **Н**ИМАП ПАТИКЕ

Man is a rational being. Reason, as man's only means of knowledge, is his basic means of survival. But the exercise of reason depends on each individual's choice. Man is a being of volitional consciousness. That which you call your soul or spirit is your consciousness, and that which you call 'free will' is your mind's freedom to think or not, the only will you have, your only freedom. This is the choice that controls all the choices you make and determines your life and character. Thus Objectivism rejects any form of determinism, the belief that man is a victim of forces beyond his control (such as God, fate, upbringing, genes, or economic conditions)

### **ETHICS**

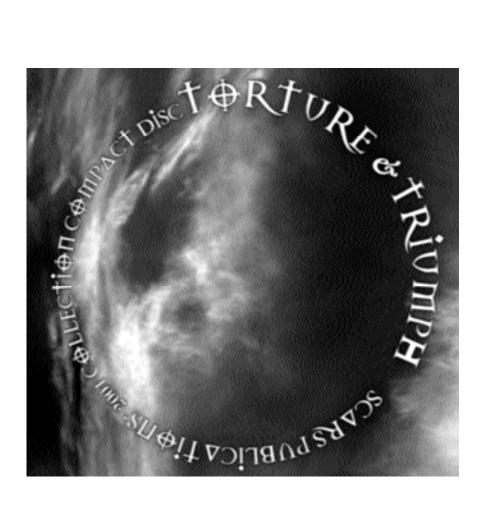
Reason is man's only proper judge of values and his only proper guide to action. The proper standard of ethics is: man's survival qua man--i.e., that which is required by man's nature for his survival as a rational being (not his momentary physical survival as a mindless brute). Rationality is man's basic virtue, and his three fundamental values are: reason, purpose, self-esteem. Man--every man--is an end in himself, not a means to the ends of others; he must live for his own sake, neither sacrificing himself to others nor sacrificing others to himself; he must work for his rational self-interest, with the achievement of his own happiness as the highest moral purpose of his life. Thus Objectivism rejects any form of altruism-- the claim that morality consists in living for others or for society

Politics The basic social principle of the Objectivist ethics is that no man has the right to seek values from others by means of physical force--i.e., no man or group has the right to initiate the use of physical force against others. Men have the right to use force only in self-defense and only against those who initiate its use. Men must deal with one another as traders, giving value for value, by free, mutual consent to mutual benefit. The only social system that bars physical force from human relationships is laissez-faire capitalism. Capitalism is a system based on the recognition of individual rights, including property rights, in which the only function of the government is to protect individual rights, i.e., to protect men from those who initiate the use of physical force. Thus Objectivism rejects any form of collectivism, such as fascism or socialism. It also rejects the current mixed economy notion that the government should regulate the economy and redistribute wealth

Esthetics Art is a selective re-creation of reality according to an artist's metaphysical value-judgments. The purpose of art is to concretize the artist's fundamental view of existence. Ayn Rand described her own approach to art as Romantic Realism: I am a Romantic in the sense that I present men as they ought to be. I am Realistic in the sense that I place them here and now and on this earth. The goal of Ayn Rand's novels is not didactic but artistic: the projection of an ideal man: My purpose, first cause and prime mover is the portrayal of Howard Roark or John Galt or Hank Rearden or Francisco d'Anconia as an end in himself--not as a means to any further end.







### CD COLLECTION BOOK LISTING:

track	author	title					
01	mom's favorite vase	what we need in life					
	an original song from the acoustic band to start the CD.						
02	pointless orchestra	people's rights misunderstood					
	jk vocals, mike hovancsek recorder, phil kester assorted percussion						
03	janine canan	blossom					
04	cheryl townsend	and d.a. levy's still waiting and					
	for that perfect cup of coffee						
05	penn kemp	night orchestra					
06	the voice of john yotko	there i sit					
07	jason pettus	i will not use your damn pc					
08	krystal	i like to dress in pvc					
09	seeing things differently CD	he told me his dreams one					
10	janine canan	changing woman					
11	cheryl townsend	lost in					
12	seeing things differently CD	new to chicago					
13	penn kemp	cogito ergo sum					
14	tom henkey	live poetry reading					
15	janine canan	mira and krishna					
16	david rubin	live poetry reading					
17	scars/alexantria rand	once wanted you as my friend					
18	janine canan	passion of georgia o'keefe					
19	penn kemp	SinTax					
20	kate cullen	taffeta dress					
21	seeing things differently $CD$	last before extinction					
22	janine canan	the only readon					
23	cheryl townsend	melt in your mouth					
24	the voice of john yotko	lambs to heaven's gate					
25	penn kemp	when the art starts					
26	lisa hemminger	exhumation					
27	janine canan	what woman wants					
28	pointless orchestra	japanese television					
	k vocals, mike hovancsek koto & bowed cymbal, kalim el-dabh piano						
29	cheryl townsend	sharing					
30	mom's favorite vase	vintage wine					
a cover of a song from the guitarist brian hosey's previous band							

"feedback", from the acoustic band to complete the CD.

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### SCARS PUBLICA+IONS

### CURREN+LY PRODUCING

THE SVETASVATARA UPANISHAD

### **B**OOKS

sulphur and sawdust slate and marrow blister and burn rinse and repeat survive and thrive (not so) warm and fuzzy infamous in our prime anais nin: an understanding of her art the electronic windmill changing woman harvest of gems the little monk death in málaga hope chest in the attic the window close cover beofre striking (woman.) autumn reason contents under pressure the average guy's guide (to feminism) changing gears

### COMPAC+ DISCS

MFV the demo tapes
Kuypers the final (MFV Inclusive)
Weeds and Flowers the beauty & the desolation
Pettus/Kuypers Live at Cafe Aloha
Pointless Orchestra Rough Mixes
Kuypers Seeing Things Differently



