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Orpheus

81

Orpheus

Volume IX 1981

Cal State Bakersfield



Orpheus 81 is respectfully dedicated to Anne Passel, the teacher who keeps alive the creative and the noble spirit.

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Preface

"My story is not a pleasant one: it is neither sweet nor harmonious, as invented stories are; it has the taste of nonsense and chaos, of madness and dreams — like the lives of all men who stop deceiving themselves."

Hermann Hesse

This is the ninth issue of *Orpheus*, and more than any other previous issue, it represents the diverse feelings of a growing number of student artists at Cal State Bakersfield. Significantly, this issue represents more creative works of students who have not been published in *Orpheus* before. We welcome the new creative blood and are pleased to see a few familiar names again. Some thirty-five students are represented here.

This year, *Orpheus* includes a number of short stories. A word or two about them seems in order. "The Nemesis," by Charles Morrison, is one of the funniest tall-tales I've ever read. The open ending to Diana Lumley's "A Closed Door" is both ironic and extremely appropriate in our society of the 1980's. Greg Goodsell's "Apocalypse No" offers an intriguing notion about the end of the world, and how subjective that ending just might be. Jame Lokie's "Sunshine" tells the story of passing time, and is painfully accurate in its telling.

Some forty poems are collected in this issue, a number of which originated in one of the creative writing classes here at the college. The diversity of thought in these poems exhibits the range of human emotion and captures something of all of our lives. "Evening Prayer" stands out as an angry lamentation of the human condition in a hostile, almost hopeless, universe. It speaks clearly of a collective experience rather than a subjective one. Leo Tolstoy wrote that "the artist should be impelled by an inner need

to express his feeling." I should like to add to Tolstoy's statement by saying that the artist *must* be impelled by an inner need to express his feeling. According to legend, Orpheus was the first of mortal singers, and he was impelled by his circumstances to sing the best, the most moving, of songs. His art was so excellent, that he even made the lord of the underworld, Hades, cry. But then, Orpheus' end was intensely sorrowful.

Orpheus stepped out into the light and turned to see Eurydice. A hot wind blew from the cavern as he reached his left hand towards her.

As his finger touched her hand, Eurydice cried, "Farewell," and slowly faded into the darkness of Hades' kingdom. Her beauty disappeared like dust in the hot wind.

The eyes of Orpheus filled with tears; his fingers found the strings of his lute. A sad song he played, and wailed throughout the woodland.

Perhaps this is why so many songs, so many poems, express sadness and lamentation. At least this is how the Greeks explained creativity. But then, according to the Greeks, Love was born from the castration of Time.

M. Jerome Evans

Advisor: Solomon Ogbede Iyasere

Editors: M. Jerome Evans
Janine Strange

Hannah Hu

Your Mood

I think I know your mood,
when the red evening vanishes on the garden roses.

I think I know your mood,
when the snows and the frosts are dropping down.
I sense, I feel, and I touch the warmth underneath their seven-inch fathom-
there had once been a volcano.

Charles Morrison

A Winter Harvest

I was up on the roof today,
    Eyeing the troughs along the eaves
    For leaves and other wind-blown chaff;
Last Summer's splendor --
        Last Spring's tender young;
    Those buds that did not fruit,
But turned to green leaves --
        Nature's manufactories.

Now I sweep them out,
    Those dead,
        Condemned;
            Destroyed by life.

They
    Have one mission yet,
        To rot,
            Decay --
        And spring to green again.

The Nemesis

"Look, feller. Put some money on the bar."

"Gimmya drink."

"Yer broke, buddy. Go somewheres else fer free drinks."

Well, it weren't good thinkin, but that there big ole wino, settin aweavin aroun on the stool, he lifs one han offa the bar an grabs Ferdie by his vest. Off pops a button. Ferdie, he's a real sight proud of that there fancy vest. Wears it all the time.

"I shed gimmya drink!"

Ferdie, he hits him just oncet, right where the cork goes. The big ole boy, he kinda pours hisself like a bucket a cole gravy down atween the bar an his stool, an lays there. Real peaceful.

Well, Ferdie, he oozed aroun the bar alickerna water snake after a tadpole an drug the stoopid one out on the street. Then he came back, lookin fer his button.

Ole man Crane, he says "Ferdie, you needs a woman to set them buttons. Then they wouldn come off so easy." Ferdie jus sticks his chin out an stares him shut. The oney womenfolk Ferdie admits of is his sis an her dotters, an they lives back East somewheres.

We hears the big ole boy scratchin aroun on the street out there; Ferdie looks at the door an shakes his head like he's sayin that feller won't be back, which he won't. An that's the way Ferdie does things. He's fat an ole an tall, but he done got experience. Like with that guy, he genally got ever las four bits outa them troublemakers, jus afore they'd start a ruckus. Then he'd talk em off, run em off, or help em out the same way he done this one. Like this-un here, if they wasn't ready to leave, that

didn't bother him none. He's done more smart bouncin than them Harlem Globe Trotters.

An you know, women wasn't no problem fer Ferdie, neither. If they was trouble they got what was comin. But mostly women was oney aroun on Satiddy nights, when the batchlures was flush. It's mostly a men's joint, Ferdie's is, an it souns like it; not that them boozy women was ever caught short of nasty talk. No sir. No sirree. That were one reason Ferdie never hitched up, I reckon.

Well, the other evenin, it were Toosdy, if'n I members rightly, we seen sumpin happen in Ferdie's that's agonna keep this here town aclackin fer some time; in fac fer some considdable time. I can tell you fer sure, cause I seen it all.

An it weren't atall late, fer mos of the fellers, they hadn yet come in from work. Ferdie was aloafin aroun, moppin down the bar, an apolishin that there great, big backbar mirror, with its ole fashion taper off edges. He's mighty proud of that there backbar an mirror, cause it done come over on Noah's Ark or sumpin. Years back, somebody'd throwed a beer bottle an busted a little chip outa one cottom corner, but nary one'd notice it.

"You was always ateasin me about seven years a bad luck," Ferdie says to me, "but the time's near up now." That's right, I reckons to myself. The oney guy who got bad luck outa that was the feller who done the bustin. Ferdie jus hollered "Hey, you is in big, bad trouble, feller," an he sure as shit were.

Well, like I done said, twernt atall late when the door come open an in waltzes them three gals.

Gals! Man o man, they was sure gals alright, but it were the cloes, too. There weren't never no cloes like them seen in this here town afore, an there likewise wasn't that much woman skin seen all at one time afore, neither. They has on sof, tight leather boots that come to the knee, which was about all the leg coverin they had, cause their skirts looked like they was all three made outa one bad shrunk flour sack. But to keep a feller from starin at the legs, was a considdable further shrinkin a the stuff that made their tops, which musta been soaked in mucelage afore they was put on. Why, a milkin machine'd cover more n them tops.

It happened so that I was asettin right in front a Ferdie, awatchin all this in the mirror, which acks to me like it might melt, when I looks at Ferdie's face. I ain't never seen him eyeball no customers like that afore, but I'd bet a wagon load a whisky to a hogshead a hogwash that I were the oney one in there awatchin Ferdie.

Except fer them gals. They is lookin straight at im, smilin like three part-plucked chickens aloose in the corn crib, an one speaks right out— clear— "Are you Mr. Ferdinand Barley?" in a voice that were kinda tingly, an 'd melt the sugar offen a Eskimo's dogsled.

Ferdie, why he jus stood there with his Adam's apple goin down an up like the church toilet seat at the strawberry festival. He ain't blinked oncet since the door's opened. Then he takes a extra good dulp, an kinda gurgles "I reckon so. Yup."

Then, this here gal, she leans on the bar, an I figgers Ferdie coulda seen right down to her bellybutton, iffen his eyes wasn't so glazed over.

"Uncle Ferdinand! It's so wonderful to see you, and for the first time, too! I'm Colleen, and this is Tammi, and this is Charlette — all the way from Florida. Oh! It's so lovely to finally see our Uncle Ferdinand!"

Ferdie, he didn't never like to be called Ferdinand, but I didn notice him complainin none. He was still kinda gulpin fer air, but he shoves his han out across the bar, sorta like he knows he's gotta do sumpin, an each one a them gals takes it in both hans an squeezes it.

Now at las he swirls his eyes aroun the bar to see who noticed he was caught with his longy's trapdoor open, I reckon, an to maybe kinda cut off any a them that mighta been asmirkin. He knowed he'd tole us all about his sis an them triplets, cause she were always awritin him about how smart an healthy they was. I thunk about that, an after a good, long look, I reckons none of us ever figgered they was *that* healthy.

"It sure was good fer you to come by," he says. "Lemme buy you a drink?" Well, this were news, too. It were the firs time any sout alivin in Punkin Center — r maybe Kern County — done heered a Ferdie perdoocin a free drink.

"Why, thank you, Uncle Ferdinand," says the one what called herself Colleen. "Tammi doesn't drink, but I'll have a Daiquiri, please. What do you want, Charlette?" Charlette, she's thinkin, an then says "Oh, I'd like a Tijuana Sunrise, please."

God spin me over. I wouldn never a believed it coulda happened, but them three knoked ole Ferdie looped-legged agin. Twicet in a row. Now, I didn know what they was a-talkin about, but I was willin to grab a hot horseshoe ifn Ferdie did either. I remembered that Ferdie, he never done married, an he allus said that he couldn a stood some woman roun, pesterin him constant. Well, I thunk jus then that he still hadn had nothin happen lately that were like to change his mind. But anyway, Ferdie, he covers up real good, considerin.

"Girls, I'm sorry," he says, "but the guy who brings me all them fancy mixes, he hain't showed up here fer a month. I'm down to 7-Up, Coke, sody, an termater juice. An water."

"Oh, that's a shame, Uncle Ferdinand. That sort of a problem must really hurt your business. Well — I'll have a Scotch and soda."

"I will too, Uncle," says Charlette, so Ferdie, he turns aroun n dusts off a bottle a Scotch what looked like it come on the same boat as the backbar. Then them gals kinder angles their butts up on the stools.

Oh boy! *Oh Boy*! That sure didn make them little short skirts any longer, an I could hear ole man Crane at t'other end of the bar kinda wheezin, while Ferdie, well, he was atryin to kinda get a grip on things again. He were probly tryin to figger out in advance what might be the nex surprise outa them three, so's he'd be kinda braced fer it. Mebbe he tried, but he missed, cause jus then that there Tammi, she speaks up

"Could I have a glass of milk, please, Uncle Ferdinand?"

Boy, it were lucky fer Ferdie that he weren't swallerin nothin but air jus then, cause he chokes all up, an his face gets red, an he starts a-coughin-boy, he really whoops it up. I don't spose there was ary a ounce a milk set on that there bar, unless it were laid there in some ole gal's dugs. Milk? Ferdie? In his joint?

Anyways, someone is kinda snickerin somewheres, an ole Crane, his breathin seems to take on worse, an Ferdie hans him a nasty look calkerlated to mush up an frazzle his gray stuff, ifn he ever had any.

MMI'm turble sorry, Tammi, but I jus finished the las when I et. How about Coke?"

"Thank you Uncle Ferdinand. Coke will be just fine."

That milk fer dinner bit sure stopped that snickern fas. Nobody was gonna dare say milk or anythin about milk in that joint, fer Ferdie had jus give the word to the smart asses. Notch one out fer him.

Ferdie, he serves the gals, an then drags up his behine to the bar stool, an sets down to talk at them three. He asts about their Ma, who's O.K., an then they tell him about how they got the trip from her fer a grajuation present, seein as how they'd come firs at the college they's been at.

They goes on an on about their trip so fer, an how they wanted to see Disney Land, an Knock's Bury Farm, an then go up north to San Ferncisco an see the hippies an all them strange an weird ones what's up there, like them men what as dresses like women. They allowed as how they couldn stay aroun jus yet, an I could see Ferdie kinda relax, but how they planned to stay awhile on their way back. Then — open comes the door an in comes the guys from Minyard's Feed Mill. Ferdie's face, it tightens considdable.

There's about five a them young rascals what as runs aroun together, an they'd worked up a name fer theirselves by goin over to Weedpatch an Arvin fer the Satiddy night dances, an then beatin up on fellers an stealin their gals. Them Arvin an Weedpatch boys, they ain't no pansies, neither.

It don't take them five young bucks no time atall to move in on these lookers. They swirls aroun them gals like dirty water circlin a bathtub drain, an grabs the stools to both sides. Them nieces is covered by five pair a eyes like three pullets in a henhouse

with five roosters. It takes a quick look at Ferdie, but his face looks like that there Egyshen Spinks.

"What'll it be, boys?" he says to the five pair a eyes what isn't lookin at im. The Oliver kid, he's the savvy one, he scrapes his eyes offa the scen'ry an looks hard at Ferdie, cause Ferdie, he knows what kinda beer they drink; he don't never ast em what they want; he allus has it on the bar by the time they get to set. This time, though, he sticks his big ole han on the bar in fronta ever one of em, an then asts him what he wants. Ferdie's face, it don't twitch a lid. Then Charlette, she pipes up —

"Uncle Ferdinand, when are you going to visit us? Don't you think it's time you had a vacation?" Ferdie is puttin the guys' bottles a beer on the bar; they don't never use glasses.

"Well, I guess I hadn't never thought about it," he says.

"You *should* think about it. We'd just love to have you. We'll expect you to tell us when we come back to stay awhile."

Boy, ten ears is tuned in like they was a-listening to the caller at the grand prize bingo game. The one fer the key a cider.

"You know, Charlette, I'll consider it real serious when thins starts to gettin slow again."

"Well, don't you forget."

Ferdie, he's ringin up the beer money. He knows that with them pretty, near nekkid girls aroun, them boys is agonna set there an get all beered up. An by then, them five boys is trouble. An he knows that everybody in there knows it likewise. I kin tell how's he's a-thinkin; hard.

Them boys, they done that beer over in about one breath, like it weren't nothin but fumes, an plunks down more money.

Ferdie, he sets em up again. His eyes is movin from the boys to the gals, an then he looks behin him, an I knows some more what he's thinkin: mirror — bottles — mirror — bottles —

"Can I fix you gals another drink," he asts.

"Well — maybe one more, please, Uncle Ferdinand."

"I'm a-fixin to sell this here place, one a these days, an then I'm a-gonna travel. I'll visit you-all first, I promise."

"Why, that will be lovely," says Charlette. "We'll give you a really nice time."

The boys is already past half with them second beers. Ferdie, he walks over to the Oliver kid.

"Moose, he says, "can you come here a minute?" an he walks down to the end of the bar. The kid picks up his beer an follers. Ferdie starts talking real low, an I hears the kid say "No shit?" Ferdie nods his head an looks real serious. "Don't you worry none, I'll look after em," says Moose, an he walks back to his stool, puts his beer down, an ankles along, whisperin sumpin to his buddies. They gets funny looks on their faces, an looks over at Ferdie, who's a-noddin his head, real sad-like. The boys, they finishes up, say "See you, Ferdie," an take off. I looks at Ferdie, but that face ain't sayin, so I drinks up an shoves fer home.

The boys is makin good night t' each other outside, an when I goes past Moose, I asts im ifn he wants a ride.

"Sure," he says, "lookin unhappy like the rest of em.

"Clime in," says I.

We're mos to his place afore he lets it out:

"Boy, I sure feels sorry fer Ferdie, an his sis."

"Why?" I asts.

"Well, it mus be turble embarrassin. You'd think they'd leave im alone."

"Who, his nieces?"

"Yeah. An I spose it's worse fer their ma, them bein so pretty, an triplets, an all —"

"Why, what's wrong with em? They's sposed to be total healthy, an they sure looks all there to me."

"It's up here," he says, tappin his head.

I pulls up at his place, but he don't get out. He's starin at las night's moon or sumpin. I prods him.

"Now Moose. Them gals ain't loony, they ain't. Not by a long-legged frog jump."

His face is longer n that. It's longer n Parson Goodwind's prayin.

"It's worser n that. It's a awful theng, but Ferdie hisself tole me. All three a them triplets is — why, they is *Lezbeens*! They oughta be drownded."

I reckons my jaw done dropped a foot.

Janeen Smith

Mother's House

In evening
I went to her house.
She wasn't there.
I walked from room to room
Turned on every light
Sat at her oaken desk
Looked through her scattered mail
Peeked into the refrigerator.

A new house with old things
Familiar items never seen before
In different spaces.
In her closet
Her fragrance was everywhere
Subtly over-powering
I longed to seal it away
Drawing it out
Whenever I needed to remember her
After.

Virginia Wilson

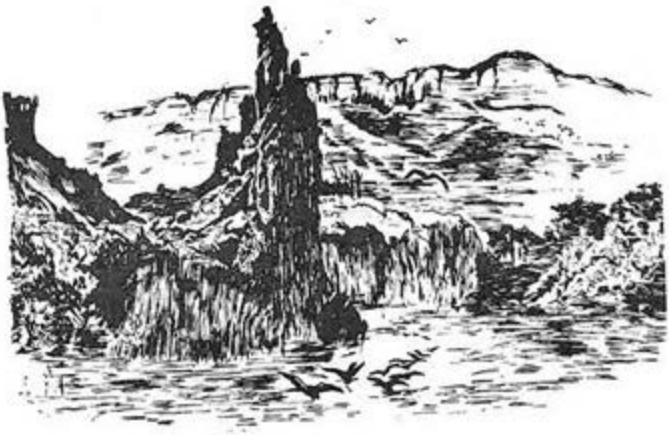
Fog Memory

Winter is fog
Everywhere gray
Shapes stark, rigid, cold
My spirit concurs: dull, flat, chilled through

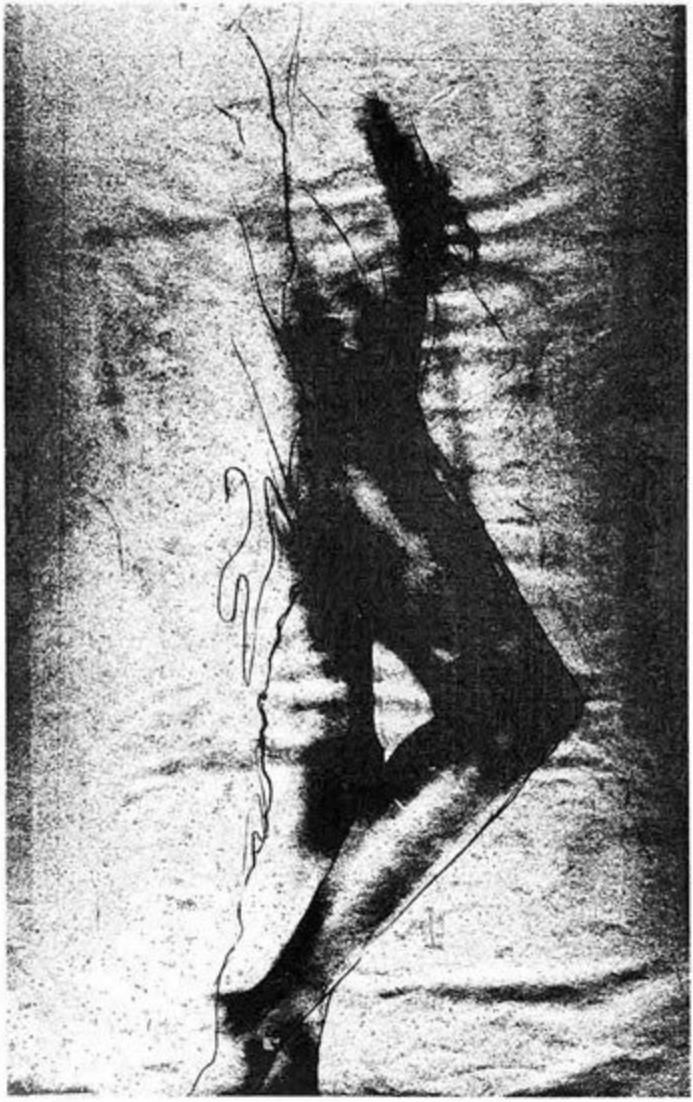
But there's feeling in fog
Repeating through years
Recalling nostalgia
For things felt before

Fog is mist; things suggested
Suspended and softened
I'm floating in time, apart from the now
Expanding beyond this body and place
Rejoining a time of warmth in the gray

When I return
I see with new eyes
Once stark, shapes now free with essence exposed
A pine Japanese, a voice ringing pure
No longer imprisoned; freed by the fog.



Joyce Mayweather



Patricia Sanderson

The years spread before me
as a beckoning bed of scent.
They whisper in veiled voices
that brightness lies ahead.
They teasingly invite me,
turn here, turn there.
And I, heeding the deception,
move with a slender smile.

Jealousy

Through windows recently
splattered by rain, I watch
you digging, your shovel
turning the heaps of soil.
In time you pause to pull
your fingers with patient
care through the dampened soil;
Once, you caressed my hair
with the same gentle touch.

Perry McBride

The Decayed Decision

My Brain so Wise
seeking the Answers: The Remedy
with pools of Nerves flowing
emotions sinking deeper, plunging, purging toward
The inevitable bottom, To no escape.

Why strain, no surprise
For Constant pain spells it out.
Narrow Anticipation, Staggering pain in doubt.
only to enter through the door
Finding no way out

He's smiling, Inside I'm crying
Tears and Fears of my Decayed Decision
Relax, He's mad I'm trying to
Remain sane. But for the
Decayed decision I had
No one to blame

Sandy Lumkey

Reality

"How long ya been yere, Lady?"

Gertrude shrank back from the unshaven, bleary-eyed face so close to her own and tightened the grip on her purse.

"About three hours – no, nearly four."

"Mebbe ya gotcha a hung jury. Then they gotta let ya go – that is, if the D.A. figures they can't make it stick the second time around. Sometimes the bastard holds ya though, and the whole goddam circus starts all over."

"I'm sure I'll be found not guilty. I didn't do anything." Gertrude's protest addressed everyone in the holding room – the deputy sheriff in the corner reading a girlie magazine, the clerk shuffling papers at a desk by the door – but only her fellow prisoner paid any attention.

"Yeah, Lady, they pulled me in on a bum rap, too. But that don't make no difference. Ya wanta beat the system, ya gotta getcha a good lawyer. Me, I got Willis Pemberthy, Esquire. Ya heard of him?"

"No," Gertrude wished she could end the conversation; "no, I really haven't."

"Well, he's one smart son of a bitch. He'll have me outta here any time now."

To Gertrude's relief, the man fell silent. Left alone once more, she tried not to think about the series of events that had led up to this moment. The arrest, the terrible ride downtown in handcuffs in a police car, the booking, the all-too-temporary release on bail, the trial – the trial with all those eyes upon her. She never could tell what the jury was thinking.

"Ms. Schroeder."

She looked up. The black policewoman who had taken her to and from the courtroom all week stood in the doorway.

"Yes?"

"The jury has reached its verdict and is returning to court."

Gertrude rose and joined the guard. As they left the room, ignored by the deputy sheriff and the clerk, the old man on the bench said "Good luck, Lady" in a tone that suggested she'd need it. In silence she and the guard walked down the corridor and up the short flight of stairs to the courtroom. Entering, she flinched – as always – feeling the gaze of all those eyes. She moved toward the table where her attorney waited and then sat beside him. He smiled reassuringly at her.

The judge, tall and solemn in black robes, entered almost immediately.

"Please rise," intoned his clerk.

Today the usual ritual ended differently.

"Ladies and Gentlemen of the jury, have you reached a verdict?" The judge's question hung on the quiet air.

The foreman of the jury stood up and said, "Yes we have, your honor." He extended his right arm, his hand holding tightly to a small piece of paper. He peered at the paper intently with a farsighted squint. With his left hand he then extracted a pair of bifocals from his breast pocket and slipped them on, his eyes never leaving the paper. He cleared his throat and shifted his gaze to Gertrude.

Gertrude put her hand to her heart as if that might somehow stop the pounding. She felt slightly dizzy and shook her head to clear it. The foreman continued to stare at her and she tried to shrink into herself, away from the accusing eyes.

The foreman cleared his throat a second time, obviously enjoying the drama of his part, and swung his eyes to the judge.

"Your honor, we, the members of the jury, find the defendant, Gertrude Schroeder, guilty of murder in the first degree." His face flushed with triumph as he sat down with a plop. He shot a quick, smug smile at Gertrude before composing his face in a serious half-frown.

Gertrude felt herself beginning to sink.

The judge looked imperiously over the bench at her, saying, "Gertrude Schroeder, approach the bench."

Gertrude tried to move forward, but her legs were helplessly paralyzed and she continued to sink.

The judge ignored her feeble attempts to move toward the bench and intoned, "Gertrude Frances Schroeder, you have been found guilty as charged in the willful and intentional murder of your husband, Elwood P. Schroeder." The judge leaned forward over the bench and glared at her, "Before I pass sentence, do you have anything to say for yourself?"

Gertrude opened her mouth, but no sound came out. She watched as the judge grew larger and larger, his long, ruddy face looming now over the entire courtroom. The floor under her began to give away and she felt herself falling. She held out her arms to her attorney, but he stepped back, smiling and waggling a finger at her. "Tsk, tsk," he said.

Gertrude grabbed at a chair, but it slipped away and she fell completely through the floor. She tried to call for help, but her voice was still mute as she fell deeper and deeper into darkness. At last a small, strangled sound came from her throat and Gertrude woke up.

She sat up in bed, but lay back down at once. She was dizzy and disoriented, but she knew she had had the dream again. That made twice tonight already. Her eyes were circled with smudges of fatigue. This had to stop or she was going to break down from lack of sleep. She turned her head and watched Elwood sleeping peacefully beside her, his balding head on the edge of his pillow.

Nothing kept Elwood awake, and now he slept, like every other night of their thirty-four year marriage, with the covers pulled tightly up under his chin. Gertrude knew without checking that his pillowcase was slightly damp where he drooled. Every Thursday when she washed the sheets, she made sure his pillow got back on his side, and she never had any trouble telling them apart because his was spotted with yellow stains from his night-time drooling.

She sighed and smoothed the covers around Elwood. Once again she puzzled over the strange dream. Why would she dream that she had been convicted of Elwood's murder, or, for that matter, why would anyone murder Elwood? He was so quiet and unassuming, so eternally pleasant. No, she thought, staring at Elwood for a second before turning away from him, no one could ever murder steady, dependable Elwood. Too bad, she thought, as she drifted back off to sleep.

She woke up the next morning before sunrise. As she fought her way out of sleep, she felt disoriented, unsure that she was in her own home in her own bed. She rubbed the sleep from her eyes, then reached to touch Elwood, to assure herself that she had been dreaming last night. A slow chill started up her spine and a knot began to form in her stomach. Elwood was not beside her. Waves of panic began to wash over Gertrude. She took several deep breaths in an attempt to slow her heartbeat.

Where was Elwood? He never rose from bed before 7:00 a.m. She sat up, frantically looking for the alarm clock — only 6:14! Gertrude threw back the blankets and swung her legs out of bed, then felt for her slippers with her feet. They weren't by the bed. She was certain she had left them there last night. She hurried to the closet, then to the bathroom, still no slippers — and no Elwood.

With increasing panic, Gertrude began to search through the house. The living room, kitchen, dining room. As she raced down the hall to the back bedroom, she heard a noise. Just as she reached for the doorknob, she heard Elwood's voice, then a scream and a dull thud, as if something had fallen to the floor.

Gertrude slowly opened the door, conscious of a breeze coming through the room, increasing in intensity as the door swung back against the wall. The window was open, the curtains brushing softly against the window screen. As Gertrude started across the room, she tripped, slipped and fell, landing across Elwood's arm.

"I'm free," she thought in the numbness before the horror. Her mind ceased to function. "Thank goodness I've found my slippers." The thought penetrated, "What am I doing here?" She stood in her nightgown, staring down at Elwood. Her hair was a mess. In one hand she clutched a slipper. Someone touched her arm. Startled, she jumped back with a cry.

"I'm sorry, Ma'am, but I'm afraid you'll have to come with me."

She nodded dumbly. Her mind still wouldn't work properly. All she could think of were nursery rhymes. "London Bridge is falling down, falling down, falling down . . ."

"I really didn't do anything." She could barely believe the voice was her own. It seemed such a long time since she'd heard it.

"Yes, Ma'am. I'm sure you didn't. But that doesn't make any difference. You'll have to come downtown anyway." The officer seemed nice enough, but she didn't want to go downtown. "Do you have a lawyer, Ma'am?"

Lawyer? No. No, she didn't. What would she need a lawyer for? She shook her head.

"I thought if you knew one, you might want to call him."

Maybe he was right. "Would you call him for me?"

"Who?"

"The lawyer."

"I thought you didn't have a lawyer."

"You won't call him?"

"Of course. What's his name?"

"Willis Pemberthy, Esquire. He's one smart cookie. He'll know what to do."

She sat in the holding room, waiting to be questioned. It seemed she'd been there for hours. Her throat was dry and she wished she had the nerve to ask for a drink. She tried to speak, but her throat was so dry that only a gasp came out. The deputy sheriff in the corner glared at her over the top of his girlie magazine.

In the opposite corner sat a bum. His ragged clothes and the smell of his unwashed body repelled her. He noticed her gaze on him and started to speak. But she already knew what he would say.

"How long ya been here, Lady?"

Olivia Tustison

Arrow of the Evening

Arrow of the evening
Makes its way over the turquoise tarp,
Shooting safely through the air
Till it hits the asphalt.

Where did you come from?
And to where do you go?
Did Cupid thrust you in a flurry,
Or straight as William's bow?

Plotting your course with such care
That all the night you fly
To some distant destination
Arrow of the morning.

Winter Rain

Winter rain
Clatters on my window pane
Chattering the same refrain
"Sprinkle, sprinkle, splat!"
"Pitter, patter, plop!"
Will it ever stop?
Trickling down the gutters,
Tapping screens and shutters.
This is rain's sweet song.

Olivia Tustison

Darkness

Darkness like a silhouette
Creeps its pattern over silent sky.
Lurking, slithering, lying in wait,
To catch the sunset unaware.

Pale pink and silver-gray clouds
Give off a faint hue.
Praying that the menace
Will wander out of view.
Too late, the night is new.

Skater

Sea of ice
Wistful white
Shimmering in the shadow.
Through the forest's hollow,
I hear, "Follow." Follow me."

Silver blade
Like a spade
Cuts the very closest edge.
Weaving now its tiny wedge
Mars your great beauty.

Without a warning, I am turning,
Spinning, swirling, cutting, curling.
Jump!
With pain, my heart's still yearning.
Suddenly, I fall.

I try again.
Getting up, I start to glide.
Sensing victory at my side, I leap,
I land.
Success.

Thank you, thank you, my icy friend.
On you now I can depend.
I will not dream nor will pretend.
To float, to flit, to flee.
To feel such an ecstasy.

Nancy J. Williams

Sweet Swamp

A somber ghost arrives at daybreak
Suffocating dawn's bright birth.
It licks the hills and skims the wasteland,
Dripping chills, exhuming tears.
    Dreary daytime walks the marshlands,
    Earth's sweet mud between her toes.

A gallant heron guards the inlet
Where the sea's salt is dissolved
To sink into a brackish peatbog,
Earth and ocean's excrement.
    Weary daytime stalks the marshlands,
    Earthsweat streaming from her hair.

Dayfog weds my disenchantment
With its peeling pearls of dreams.
Pearls and dreams once crushed are snowflakes
Melting on swamp's compost pile.
    Bleary daytime mocks the marshlands,
    Earth's cry smothered at her breast.

Nora Gosser

Winter

The hills are white, that just last night,
    Lay wrapped in Autumn's gray.
Across the lake, huge breakers break,
    And keep the icy fringe at bay.

Fog

Low-anchored cloud,
Ethereal shroud,
    Dew-cloth.
Drifting meadow air,
    Dream-drapery.
Spirit of oceans,
Billowing, rolling,
    Silent motion.

D. Holmes

The Wall Street Journal

The Brown Industries Railroad Company was going bankrupt. That was nothing new; the company had been going bankrupt for all of the five years Shelldon had been employed there. Shelldon had got the job to appease his father who dreamed that Shelldon would fight his way up through the ranks and finally become an infamous railroad tycoon. Railroad tycoons didn't exist anymore. Shelldon's father was senile. Shelldon had this job to make his very old and very senile father very happy because his father was also very rich.

While Shelldon had no faith in the railroad industry's reincarnation; he liked his job. It required him to sit at his desk and do nothing for five days a week. Actually, every day or every other day someone would ship something over the railways and Shelldon would have to fill out a form. Sometimes, the boss would try to get him to fill out other forms and sometimes he would do it.

Today, like any other day, Shelldon sat at his desk daydreaming. He dreamed of quitting his ridiculous job and becoming an artist. Not just an artist, he wanted to be famous — an international artist. His work would be a household necessity for the status-conscious. However, it would not just be an art form for the very rich, but for the middle class as well. The upper class would hang an original in every room, the middle class would hang prints, and the lower middle class would, of course, hang bad copies of prints. In this way his art would join the classes of all levels and the people in all classes. He would have a great reputation not only as an artist but as a person as well. His face would be as common to the covers of magazines as his art was to the walls of people's homes. That was Shelldon's dream. It was the only thing that got him through work and school. Maybe it was the only thing that got him through a lot else. Shelldon couldn't draw.

Looking up from his daydreams he noticed the "boss" heading his way. Bad news. The "boss" was a rather short plump man whose masculinity Shelldon was never quite sure of. He was amused by the "boss" in general, and was even more amused by the "boss's" concepts of fashion. The man was constantly a good ten years behind the

times. As of late the "boss" had taken to psychedelic bow ties and those hoop glasses that were so popular with the Beatles. He swore that they were the latest fad in Paris and that he knew this Parisian designer that kept him up on such things. The designer sent him samples of the most popular styles, his creations, of course. Shelldon, for himself, wondered just what the "samples" cost.

The "boss," now leaning heavily on the corner of Shelldon's desk, cleared his throat as if to give Shelldon — his busy employee — notice of his presence and said, "Well Shelldon, the railways are doing better this year. Keeping up on the old 'Journal'?" (Keeping on top of the *Wall Street Journal* was the other part of Shelldon's job.'

"Sure am."

"Care to brief me on it? I've got just a snap of paper work here. One day we'll need more management personnel around here . . ."

Shelldon bit his lip to keep from snickering as the "boss" demurely placed the papers on the corner of his desk, right beside the name plate which read "Shelton Smithas" without pausing in his never ending stream of prattle.

"I think I'll get someone who's moved up through the ranks; that way I can be sure of his loyalty to the company. Can't trust many these days . . . Like that new secretary, Miss . . . What's her name?"

"Oh, you mean Miss-"

"Exactly, now she's a pretty little thing, don't get me wrong. But she's into this new "a thigh will get you anywhere" ethic. I tell you! Women these days! And me, a married man, too!"

About then, Shelldon spied the "boss's" coffee cup in the man's left hand, straight across from the dreaded busy work and empty.

"Anyway, I told her off good. Set her straight on some stuff. Didn't fire her though. Bad for the image . . . the company's of course . . ."

"More coffee boss?"

"And then I had to consider that modern education of hers . . . that's hard to replace! How's school going these days? I remember when I had to quit high school, never did me a bit of good anyway. All they taught up there was reading and writing, no thinking . . . Now if I were in charge of those schools . . . Now that you mention it, some coffee would be nice. I would change a lot of stuff. I'd teach them kids how to work . . . send them girls out and get them jobs as secretaries. Save on the secretarial staff, eh? Then teach them how to think; then in college let them learn . . . "

Shelldon, now playing the role of the hurried, efficient and fascinated servant, started to stand up and took the coffee cup from the "boss's" hand; thus knocking the "Shelton Smithas" name plate and the dreaded busy work to the floor.

"Whoops."

"To read and write in college, give that place a use! I'll get them papers. You go on and get the coffee . . . "

"Yes, sir."

"That's what I like; respect for one's employers. I say, Shelldon'll go far!"

Shelldon sped over to the coffee machine, got the coffee and sped back over to deliver the coffee before the "boss" had time to put the papers back on his desk.

"Boss, you know this coffee machine certainly was a good investment."

"Yeah, I know what you mean . . . that coffee certainly keeps the morale sky high around here, and you know I just love that coffee, I don't feel quite like doing anything without it. And you know what they say . . . a little coffee pays for a lot of happy and busy employees. You don't drink coffee, do you? Not to insinuate that you aren't happy and busy. It's just as well, saves us money . . . the company I mean . . . "

"Excuse me boss, but I think you should take a look at the Dow-Jones."

"Uhh, is it really bad?" The "boss" thought of news from the *Journal* with the same worried anxiety as most people think of a relative suffering from a terminal ailment.

"Maybe, we should discuss it in your office."

"Uhh, that would probably be the best idea . . . don't want the others to get worried . . . it might not be too bad . . . first, though, let me look over it for myself."

The "boss" then scurried nervously back to his office, full cup of coffee in one hand and the busy work in the other. The "boss" couldn't understand the Dow-Jones and could only barely understand Shelldon's explanations of it. Shelldon leaned back in his chair and thought, "after I live in Africa for a few years and establish my fame, I think I'll move to Vancouver, British Columbia . . . "

Susanne Icardo

It was one of those perfect days that people would remember and talk about for months to come. The air felt like silk, and the gentle breeze that blew from the ocean carried the salty, fresh fragrance of the sea. The sun was so bright that it turned the water into one giant glittering surface, enhanced by the turquoise reflection of the sky, blinding the spectator's gaze.

It was the beginning of the season, with the long lush summer still ahead. The sleepy village was just beginning to awaken from its winter rest, using the glorious day to prepare itself, for those few faithful guests who couldn't resist its charm and returned year after year.

The village lay hidden between two coves, clustered against the cliffs like a well protected bird's nest. Its only hotel was located directly on the beach, with the rooms over-looking the ocean. The hotel had its own pier that stretched a good distance across the water, beckoning its guests to languidly relax in the sun. . . .

The pier's wooden planks were freshly painted and their white glow seemed to blend with the hotel's blue and white awnings which were playfully fluttering in the breeze.

The woman who was stretched out on the pier's sun deck looked up at those awnings shading her eyes with her hands. Her body was absorbing the sun's warm caress and she wanted to melt into the wooden floor, the water, and the sky above her.

The ocean had an invigorating effect on her, calming and exciting at the same time. . . . The rocking motion caused by the waves splashing against the pier's foundation made her feel at one with the water.

They belonged together, this woman and the ocean, with their inevitable fates linked for eternity. . . .

They were so much alike: unpredictable, as their moods could change without a warning from peacefully innocent to stormingly destructive. . . . Their deceiving appearance attracted people and fooled them into believing that they were safe among the ocean's playful waves, safe in this woman's inviting arms. . . .; but like the ocean which drowned its victims mercilessly the woman had drowned the dreams and hopes of those innocent lovers who had entered the treacherous waters of her soul. . . .

Just like the ocean, the woman was used to having her way; once her mind was set on a certain goal she wouldn't give up until she achieved it. Her powers were as persisitent as the waves which pounded against the land that tried to hold them back, until the land became eroded and brittle, giving away to the sea's endless attacks.

"What are you thinking, darling?" The man's voice came from far away . . . intruding the privacy of her thoughts, interrupting the flow of her silent communication with the sea.

"I was thinking about us . . ." the woman lied in her clear, crisp voice, as she turned her head and rolled over on her stomach, avoiding the man's questioning glance. He looked at her lovingly, then a touch of doubt was clouding his eyes as he sighed and turned around to watch the fishing boats as they struggled against the waves in their attempt to bring in the daily catch.

The woman lay motionlessly as the sun kept climbing, changing the sky's color from a light turquoise to a rich blue. Her mind kept playing with what she felt was her fate and how closely it was linked to the ocean.

She had picked the sleepy village for its seclusion and its closeness to the beach. The people who ran the hotel knew who she was by now, but their lips were sealed and they guarded her secret like the waves which faithfully washed away the footprints her lovers had left in the sand . . .

As the sky turned from solid gold to liquid fire and white crowns enhanced the dancing waves, the woman's voice echoed from within the pounding surf:

"No force is strong enough to ever break the ocean's heart . . . "

Maria B. Gray

Recycled Happenings

Starving
child
of life
running
down
the
alley
In
search
of self
Exploring
all
the
cans
Some
of
them
trash
Some of
them
treasures
That
feed
the
inventive
mind

For what else is left for our children
But
used
and
recycled
happenings
Giving
advice
on
how to
use
best
Oh,
how
I
long
to rummage
through
the alley
Just
one
more
time
before
I
rest.

Maria B. Gray

I Live Two Lives

I live two lives
Then and now
My heart bleeds for then
But my mouth slavers like a mad dog for now.
In then, in them,
My mother, my brother
Reflections of my guts, my deep down
insides
Afraid of the revulsion I might cause
I cover myself with bright light
And smile an extra mile
For I know if I look like and smell like
And talk like I even might
Fool myself
No, I don't live two lives,
I really live one long in between
Somewhere in between loyalty and desire
Loyalty knaws at me
Desire teases
And neither one really pleases

John Dixon

Constant Restless Sleep

Obedient, eyes closed, I lie awake
waiting impatiently for sleep to arrive — it's late.
Curious now, I wonder who it is that lies here.
Someone I'm tied to, to be sure, not I.

Watching all too emotionlessly, I
read the epitaphs of the multitudes
compiled over years of common living,
ease-writted by the blind-light of an intermittant faith
preserved and past on.
They rest now in well deserved gray.

Yet aware am I of the Albatross.
Silent am I on the comments
of Good Young Death.
Ah, but for the unfulfilled dreams
of this dubiously chosen few,
wherein lies the difference?

Inomniscient, eyes open, I stand asleep.
I see the nebulous faces timeless — they're late.
Curious still, I wonder who it is that stands here.
I, to be sure, not I.

Helen Dixon

Lamentations of a Bakersfield Transplant

Tie-dyed sky.
Dusty brown earth.
Water color world,
With too much water,
Not enough rain.
Sizzling hot sun.
Yet, everywhere — snow.
Big, black towers belching at Heaven.
Shopping center pumps dredging up Hell.

Well, I'm beyond that corn-fed Kansas naivete
That prompted younger heroines.
When the tornado takes me to the
Emerald City,
I'm staying!

Lulu Stewart

The Everlasting Song

Spitfire's fury
of heated sands,
and angered winds
the crackling song
that stings and bleeds
that magically ignite
and magically concede

Rapture's chase
of fiery surges
and billowing sweeps
the quaking song
that tides and waves
and spontaneously erupts
then melts to a fade

Purity's promise
of bare remains
at the darkened door
the quickening song
of thickened cream
and purest honey
moisturizing dreams

Carmen Escobedo

Sky Pilot

With one shaky hand, Mr. Ruettgers pulled out the mirror from the bedside table and studied his reflection. There were dark circles under the eyes and tiny red veins on the skin surface. Most of his hair was on the sides now, fuzzy white, with a little bit on top of his head. Frown lines around the mouth had become deeper. He made faces in the mirror — frowning ones, angry scowls, smiling faces — and he liked what he saw. He was an old man, toothless, wrinkled and almost hairless. "But," he talked into the mirror, "I'm still a pilot." He nodded and made a smug face before he put away the mirror. In the recesses of his mind he saw himself flying his small airplane then landing smoothly on the runway. But as fast as the fantasy began, it quickly stopped. He was too tired.

The night had been a sleepless one. Daylight crept into the corner room through a small window. They were noisily moving beds, then they brought in a moaning man next door. On the other side of the unit, somebody was vacuuming noisily and it was only 6:30.

Mr. Ruettgers tried to adjust his position in bed, but it was almost impossible. One arm was taped to a board to keep it straight so that his IV would run better. His other arm was sore and bruised from past IV's and from blood draws. His back ached and his face felt taught and dry. Again, as he had through the night, he wished he could get some sound sleep.

He could hear the moaning from the new man next door and could see machines being brought in, then taken out. Doctors and nurses were coming and going. Someone pulled the curtain in the man's room but before that, a face had peered curiously at Mr. Ruettgers through the glass wall, and Mr. Ruettgers had stared back, unblinking.

Even though he couldn't see inside the room, he could hear; he knew what was going on. He heard the man thrashing about in his bed, sensed his restlessness, but Mr. Ruettgers tried not to think too much about him. This man was keeping them

busy. He saw everybody pitching in to help in the busy room. As sick as he was that first night, he remembered seeing many different faces. It had been like this with him.

For about the hundredth time, he looked about him again. There were two IV bags hanging from a suspended IV pole to his right. To his left, hung one large yellow bag whose tubing was fed into a machine before it infused into the left side of his chest. Absentmindedly, he scratched, then adjusted his gown. His heart monitor's alarm went off with a sharp bang-bang-bang. Two nurses walked in rapidly to see what was wrong.

"It's just me scratching," he told them. One of them he had seen before, but not the young one. The familiar one checked his wires while the young one stood by. After that, they both left. "Stupid machine," he thought. Slowly, he closed his eyes but they burned and watered from lack of sleep. The tiredness seeped down into his muscles then deeper into his bones. "I wouldn't wish this on my enemy," he said softly.

Talking to himself was one of his annoying habits. Not that it annoyed him, it didn't, but he was bothered that it annoyed others. He had been caught mumbling to himself lots of times in grocery stores, banks, and on the street. He would pretend he wasn't paying attention to the stares, but it embarrassed him that people might think he was crazy. After he got over the embarrassment he would say to himself that he didn't care – that's just the way he was.

Breakfast, when it finally came, was a big disappointment. He managed a few bites, and forgot about it. He sighed. "Well now, what do I do? Now what?" he mused. His eyes scanned the pale blue walls to the right and straight ahead of him, then the partial glass wall on the left and the ceiling above. "I'll be glad to get out of here – so glad," he thought and he was serious. He was in a tiny room in the small intensive care unit in the hospital. A box within a box inside a box.

The unfamiliar nurse walked in. She was a plain young thing with large dark eyes and long dark hair that was pulled back from her face and up under her cap. Neither spoke but they studied each other. He could tell she could not see his big eyes because of the glare from his glasses, so when she carefully stepped closer, he was pleased.

"Are you here today?" he asked her. He didn't like asking "Are you my nurse today?" That sounded like he owned her and he didn't like the thought of that just because he was sick and restricted to his bed. He had taken care of himself for years, and he still tried even if he was in a hospital.

She was observing him too hard, he thought. "What's your name?" she asked him. She watched him with big eyes, probably to see if he was alert, he figured.

"Ruettgers," he said. He was testing her. I bet they think I'm confused, he thought. "Thomas Ruettgers," he added quickly so there would be no doubt in her mind that he was not confused.

"Are you hurting anywhere?" she continued.

"Not now, I'm just tired." he said.

"Listen," she motioned with a wave of her hand, "You sleep all you want. But I'll check you and watch your IV's every time I come in here." Those darn IV's. Once he had asked why he needed them. "Just in case anything happens," he had heard one nurse say, and that made him think for a long time. Maybe, he thought, if something bad was going to happen, the pain would warn him.

"And what's your name?" he asked her.

"Givett," she said without taking her eyes off him.

"What?"

"Mrs. Givett," she said.

"And what is it that you give out" he almost asked her. He tried hard not to laugh. Givett? He saw that she was waiting for some comment about her name and she was ready to defend herself.

"What's your first name?" he asked.

"Lieselette," she replied.

Slowly he said her name, "Lieselette. That sounds French. I like that better. Lieselette. I've never seen you before."

"I work in the other intensive care. But your floor was short of nurses so I'm here," she said. She walked out to help in the room with the moaning man, leaving him absorbed in his thoughts.

He thought too much. Lately, his hospital stays were more frequent which he didn't like and during these times he thought and fantasized more. Ellie had warned him that too much fantasizing was bad but he didn't care. He would go on and on about his daydreams to Ellie and she listened. She was the only one that had listened to the tales of his adventures in the sky. He had loved Ellie dearly.

He wished he was home in his garden or visiting with neighbors or just sitting in his comfortable chair. Maybe it was time for a little ride, just a quick one and back, to keep his mind off this place.

He'd had these fantasies of being a pilot since he was a boy. He closed his eyes and they were burning again. There . . . taking off from the runway, was the King of the Skies, singing at the top of his voice. He wore a brown aviator cap, the same color as his brown leather jacket, and a long white scarf tied around his neck. Yes indeed, he looked good. Of course, he had flown in different outfits but he wore this

one most of the time and always the same scarf. He could change the color of his plane at will, but it was always an open cockpit so he could wave at the crowds that waited for him when he landed. All this time he was smiling. He couldn't help it. The enthusiasm of the crowd was too great for him. They had watched his figure eights, the flips and loops of the aerial acrobatics he performed. Always, there was a throng of people before he took off and the same crowd applauding when he got back to earth. People would reach out to touch him and pat him on the back, and they said, "You were great up there." He was a famous pilot. He had gone everywhere and done everything: fought crime in the city, nabbed bank robbers, rescued kids. He was a hero.

He wondered what the nurses would say if they saw him sitting in the open cockpit of his plane in his hospital gown, his goggles and his scarf. Maybe the gown would flap a little in the wind. Nothing was underneath. He sat there grinning and he was delighted that all the nurses were scolding him. They gasped in surprise, then they frowned.

"You naughty man!" one of the old ones said as she shook her finger at him.

"Shame on you!" said another one.

He teased them, "You're jealous! Jealous!"

He even took his IV's with him on the ride, but he made sure they were all right. He was at the controls and the movement of his arm had pulled on the tubing which caused the IV pole to sway. The nurse came in to see.

"And what are you doing with your IV's?" she asked him smiling.

"That? Oh, I just went for a ride in my plane, that's all." He tried to keep a straight face and wondered what she would do. "I'm a pilot, you know."

"A pilot?" she asked him.

"Yeah." He kept his gaze down and held his laughter back. Her eyes were calculating machines deciphering his remarks. She looked at him for a long time.

Finally she asked, "How high up in the sky can you go?" She was serious.

He would have fallen flat on his face if he had been standing up talking to this girl. Rarely did anyone continue this kind of conversation. They usually said things like "Are you all right?" or "What have you been drinking?" But this one was asking how far up could he fly!

"I can fly anywhere and as high as I want," he told her. "I can do anything."

She was looking down, thinking. "Well . . . can I go?" she asked.

"Can you fly?" he asked her.

She waited then said "No, but I can pack a picnic basket for us. That'll hold us for a long trip."

Mr. Ruettgers liked this girl. "Where do you want to go?" he asked her.

She paused. "I've never been to France. Let's go there," she said quickly.

"You can sit in the back seat of my plane."

She nodded her approval. "With my basket," she added.

"We'll look for another Lieselette," he said, his eyes big.

"Let's bring her here for a visit, then we can take her back."

"Yeah," he said. He was smiling. Today was full of surprises. Next time he went up, he was going to write "Lieselette" across the sky.

Lunch came but he refused it — he just wasn't hungry. The afternoon was long and drawn out just like the looks on the nurses' faces. They had stopped working on the man next door. After all the commotion was over, they brought the man's family in to see him. Mr. Ruettgers saw them when they walked in huddled together in two's and three's as if they couldn't stand up by themselves. The curtain had been kept drawn all this time. The wail of grieving voices rose to a pitch and blended together in muffled tones as they comforted each other.

A long time later, his nurse walked in the room, silent with big eyes and still trying, he was sure, to read his mind.

"We lost him, didn't we, Lieselette?"

She nodded and softly said, "Yes."

He turned his gaze away from her and kept it down. He didn't feel like talking just then; he wanted to go home. Lieselette left the room.

He also wanted to be up in his plane again, though this time he had to be helped into his seat and made comfortable. There he was, a grinning old man sitting in his pilot's seat with the same scarf, brown leather jacket with matching aviator cap, and goggles. He flew off into a turquoise sky that turned to gray as he met it. Nervously, he checked the controls. Everything was spinning and he was helpless in the whirling blue haze.

And then suddenly the pain was devastating. He tried to fight it, but the darkness overpowered him. Numbness paralyzed him so that he couldn't manage the controls anymore. Swirling, deeper and deeper, it took him to a blissful dark, and only the IV pole was swinging back and forth when Lieselette entered the room.

Sandra Nicholson

Nocturnal Crossing

You were a demigod and
I Persephone
Before we traversed a dense
And novel darkness
To painful light beyond

I drew your outline and
Filled the empty spaces with
Multi-hued celestial dreams

Your Plutonian allure
Tempted me
But I tasted your bitter-sweet fruit
And found it of this earth

The lines in your face shatter
Lightening scatters sharp-etched
Cracks of knowledge
Rock ruptures your precipice

Call to me--Proserpina
Before you fall

Andy Benson

The Ragman

He's litter on the roadside, a heap
of flesh, wrapped in rags.
He has no shoes, and a silly grin
        like a bear chewing prickly pears.
One foot from the gats, the other
a step from highballs at the Hilton,
a brea at the Dew Drop Inn, and a
        drunk tank hangover.

Crumpled up like a paper bag
in the rain.

He's litter on the roadside, a soulless
dream of Tequilla sunrises over Stinger Seas.
Ladies and gentlemen . . . For your displeasure . . .
        direct from Bunkhole, Arkansas . . .
joe slug the ragman.
Who was Mr. Somebody the English Teacher,
8:15 A.M., prompt, from Ferndale Junior High?
        a skidrow limelighter . . .

Crumpled up like a paper bag
in the rain.

He's litter on the roadside, a statue
of satire; monument of irony.
Lost his way, hope, reason, love and mind,
        out of everything . . .
Hear the gutter slurs,
"I'm only drunk, goddamnit!"
"I'm only DRUNK, God, damn it . . . please."

Anonymous

Sidewalk

She wanted to walk back to the hotel so she would be tired enough to sleep. The hotel bulbs were too weak to read by, but that was not so much the problem as the dimness of her own mind. Every night she found herself listening to Clach's regular breathing, found herself unable to concentrate on any book other than Trimm's *Bullfight Guide*, "veronica" being a safer word for her than any "the" in a novel that might send her off into that cemetery of the mind where one buried passion that had no object to give it focus. Even the bullfighting manual was not completely safe. It pointed out that focus was not an attempt to define or even to see but was always an attempt to control.

She did not want to unearth her rotted passions, the sight of which could lead to pain, the pain of some once-life that even dead flesh must feel. The pain closed the eyes into darkness and in that darkness one lost his way back to that level where 30 watt bulbs and the time chosen for dinner could be the sole irritations of the summer.

Clach was sleepy over his chocolate ice cream, taken at a different restaurant than their dinner, so that the evening could stretch itself out, so that the flesh of their arms could move from enclosure to stark air and then into that half-state of a canopied sidewalk. The warm breathing of people encircled them and mixed with the cool softness of the coastal night which had moved from the harbor into the city itself through the uncluttered sky.

The waiter eyed her nervously, wanting her to leave, to stop spoiling the image of luxury every restaurant here busied itself toward after the seven o'clock traffic had stopped its writhing on the sidewalks and in the streets. The whole city underwent an epileptic seizure that released its daytime passions.

Clach and she had sat in the midst of it that afternoon, watching office workers going home. Women in cotton dresses and shiny scarves, riding on the backs of men-driven scooters, their high heels and braceleted arms maintaining a certain dignity

in the exhaust fumes of the cars at traffic lights. The women seemed to promise things: the absence of dust and the light smell of flowered skin that only men and marbled rooms somewhere off in the shadows of greenery could know. Lou had manifested such qualities herself at times but they were never things she could have *promised* anyone. In general, she was a dusty type. The women's skins looked as if they held back those promises of life, waited for appropriate destinations before the skins disengaged themselves from the passivity of being cloaks and became flesh once more. Lou admired the tension she saw in all that.

Now, the night was those promises come true. With only Clach and her left as remnants of the tongue bitten too hard, Lou obstinately ignored the hovering waiter, promised herself to tip him little, and watched an American woman, middle-aged, appropriate, but as strained as herself, study an obnoxiously large menu.

The woman had no book with her, no child, and would confront the vacant seat across from herself with all the composure of a powdered American woman who had brought all the right clothes, the right money, who was undoubtedly staying at the right hotel, and who was even independent enough to eat somewhere other than the hotel dining room. She is insufferable, Lou thought. If she orders the most expensive thing on the menu the waiter will forgive *her*. Any waiter could tell Lou would never order the most expensive thing on the menu. She watched the lady adjust her glasses, cocking her head and folding her hands in an unnervous way before she reached up to adjust them again. When the waiter came toward her, she gave him her widest smile, the one she saved for door-to-door salesmen and store clerks. Her very American smile.

Lou realized she was blatantly staring at the woman and so gave it up. She couldn't have endured to watch the woman anymore, anyway. It was too painful.

"How is your ice cream?" she asked Clach.

"It's melted," he said, stirring his spoon around in it.

"You like it that way." She sipped her coffee. "We'll go soon," she promised.

A well-dressed man at one of the more secluded tables stood up. Lou watched him go toward a woman who was moving fluidly through the tables, even before the door of her Mercedes had closed with that same silent aplomb with which it had been opened. The woman was no longer young but elegant. Her grandeur came from her age and the power of that age lay in its tragic ability to give daily evidence of its destruction. Once the man reached the woman, she moved only under the guidance of his arm. At the shadowed table, two men stood with the grace of antlered heads who are forever moving into and out of some still life of beauty. Alert to every approach.

The woman reminded Lou of the twelve-foot mahogany doors of her hotel room. The rich, unobtrusive carvings on the heavy, arched doors. The luxury of which must permeate to the bones' marrow, make it richer in color, make it less scrupulous in its means of nourishment.

Anonymous

Lou signaled the waiter. He was there before her table immediately, overly polite, elated with her leaving his table free for those who wanted elaborate detail in movement so that it could be taken and enjoyed in the same moment it was ignored. In short, men and women. Even just men would do.

"Can you walk, baby?" she asked.

"How far is it?" Clach asked in a voice that expressed fear of his never being able to please her.

She took him up in her arms, once they were out of the light from the restaurant, and he nuzzled his head into the cool knit of her sweater and the strained tendon of her neck. She let the rest of his weight fall into the palms of her hands that hammocked the taut cloth of his cotton pants. He was always warm and moist, his skin still retaining the sweet, clear smell of the baby's body that had been washed twice daily and left without powder, without rubber, without stain or food or urine to contaminate that lush smell of human life which has had no time to go awry. She felt his arms heavy across her shoulders and down her back. That meant he was asleep although his weight had not shifted but was still equal between her shoulders and hands.

She kissed his hair and remembered a time when he was a baby. There had been some need for her to hurry in an airport. He had been asleep in her arms, then, too. She had propped him against the back of a lounge chair so as not to disturb his upright sleep. His hands had clutched the back rim of the chair in sleep as if he always slept dangling from the safety of tree limbs whenever taken from his mother's chest.

He still did not know his mother was a transient, but thought her some migratory bird who knew by instinct which way they were to go. He never questioned, never disliked the places of desperation to which they went. Not yet, you don't, she told him in his sleep. But soon. Soon you'll recognize the flight north in winter and the flight south in summer. And what will you do if you survive the unweaned time? A robin is red-breasted because he murders his father. But you, you'll beg crumbs like your mother. Strike a match by accident and burn your own feathers, the wind to meet your flamed body as if that were the only reason either of you had ever been made.

The wide boulevard was quiet, palm-studded. Her arms were hurting. The hotel two blocks yet. A car stopped in the empty, one-way street beside her. Its driver got out and walked up onto the sidewalk. He inclined his head toward her more as a way of stopping her than as a token of politeness.

"Where are you going?" he asked in English. He was no distinct age there in the dimness of the street but he had the authority of husband, father, brother, and patriarchal religion in his voice.

She was not frightened but somewhat amazed. "To my hotel. It's not far."

"The child is too heavy fo;you. You must not carry him. I'll take you."

"No, thank you. It's not far."

"Then wake the child. He is too heavy for you."

"No, it's not far."

The man checked his angry tone, drew himself into a statuesque politeness. "Please permit me." He indicated his car. "You must not walk late at night."

She turned her head to stare over her shoulder and the child's arm at the beautiful lines of the black car. She saw it bespoke the same authority as the man who could be driven to break decorum by rage, rage at the sight of sloping shoulders, seen defeated above the thin ribs and the defenseless skirt that had lost its shape in the tepid washings of night sinks. She felt serene and could even give up wanting in the car – to be part of it, its security and intimacy.

She smiled gratefully at the man's anger concealed in that vast formality that had eased its way through an aquiline-nosed government and had stared down the sight of poverty, commanding it to hide behind walls, to conceal itself from those eyes that denied it any right to exist.

"You must now," he said again. She realized then that he spoke English no better than she spoke his language. That he no more understood her than she would have him in Spanish because one could look up pronunciations and questions in a dictionary but one could never prepare for the answers because no one could ever be sure what the answers would be.

"No, thank you." This final refusal seemed to throw the man off-balance, to push him back into that anger he might direct against some stupid servant or obstinate son. The intimacy of his anger taken away, she was left more alone on the street. The man had slammed the door of his car and driven off, not slowly nor fast but with the same natural precision with which the man had driven all his life. The car, the possession, never confused with any thought or emotion or action even, but left as a machine to function under his hands, hands that never thought of flesh except when flesh was in them, hands that never thought of the texture of an orange except when the peel came off soft in his hand and was there to enjoy. His hands had never confused any of those things they touched, were hands that became different for each different thing they touched.

She hurried in spite of the child's weight to the iron gate that was still unlocked and gave access to the safety of her room before she could anger any more of them.

II

They boarded the overnight boat for Mallorca at ten. When buying tickets, Lou had met an English couple. They had a son one year younger than Clach whom they called Marco Polo. He was much louder and more demanding than Clach so Lou felt comfortable in their company. The couple had lived in Hong Kong five years and were

returning to England, visiting friends enroute. In cabin class -- four to a room -- the men were separated from women so the English woman and Lou bought tickets for the same room, so the children would not bother anyone. Moreover, the Clants had a gibbon in a knapsack that they did not want discovered. They had brought the family pet all the way with them. Lou thought it was rather Marco they should have hidden in the knapsack. The gibbon she didn't mind.

That night in the lower berth she could not sleep. She could hear the others breathing loudly and there did not seem to be room enough for her breath, too. She rolled clumsily out of the berth and stepped onto the edge of her bed to hoist herself up to look at Clach. She needed to look at him, to hear his breathing as something familiar and apart from the others. There was moonlight coming in the small porthole. On the starched pillowcase was a black spot; she started to brush its imperfection out of the moonlight but it started moving, crawling. She jerked the pillow from underneath Clach's head, beating it, whispering "Goddamnit, goddamnit, goddamnit." She then raised the pillow out of the small sink between the berths, hoping the spider would be there in the bowl, so she could go to sleep. Her heart was pounding and she could barely mover her hands. I need to sleep, she thought. The procelain was blank. *Now* I have a reason to be hysterical, she thought. She wanted to scream at herself as she did at Clach when he did something mindless. She wasn't ever going to find it.

She searched Clach's covers, then turned on the light and searched her own bed and the floor. She started to wake the English woman, but she would think Lou silly. The English woman had lived in Hong Kong.

Turning off the light, Lou lay in her berth. It wouldn't bite Clach when she had been the one who had tried to kill it. But then, one could not count on spiders to reason things out. She could feel things crawling on her. She cancelled every one of them out except that one in her hair. She threw her hair over the side of the bed and shook it with her square fingers. She stood up and turned on the light again. There was nothing crawling on the floor. She checked Clach's bedding, the walls, her own bedding. She finally settled on being furious about the ignorance involved. Why had she believed that fifty dollars worth of travel books could cure her of it? If she only knew that there were no poisonous spiders here. Or knew even that there *were*. That would enable her to stay awake.

In despair for herself, she put on her clothes and went above for coffee. She intended to ask about the spider, but, out of the cabin, the long corridor became enough to cope with. It was empty and kept turning until it became directionless. Safe in the yellow glare of the main lounge, with the hall having not betrayed her, the spider seemed unlikely. Besides, she could find no one who looked as if he were approachable on any subject, much less that of spiders. They might throw her overboard like Jonah if she said ugly things like spiders about the ship. With her paper cup of coffee, she escaped the dingy brightness of the lounge onto deck. The sea, the foam, the full moon all looked like a postcard one would find in the racks at a summer resort. A cheap, stereotyped picture of beauty that failed to capture the essence of any thing. A couple from Sweden introduced themselves to her for some reason. To talk. No, to chat. She thought about asking them about spiders in Spain but she decided they would disapprove

of her drinking coffee there on deck if she told them about in the cabin. If she just hadn't bought the coffee. But she had bought the coffee so she could stay awake the rest of the night. She couldn't keep it straight.

The couple were dressed in pants and knapsacks. They had just been married and were going to visit the man's son and ex-wife. He considered the information a part of the amenities for new acquaintances. The man was doing most of the talking, so Lou stood examining him. He was Lou's age, maybe older, but his wife was eighteen. *Very Young* was written all over her. He was tall and lean, fit but weary around the edges. Had been for some time. And then Lou saw past the girl's long blonde hair and her bust-bulged blouse. There were the hips and the too-big thighs that would turn the girl into a matron soon. While the man would still be lean and fit and just weary around the edges. Lou smiled broadly at the man then. He was becoming expansive; the girl was making a few tentative yawns. The girl alternated between craning her neck so that her face was tilted fully in the man's direction and looking off as if there were something to be found close by in the shadows. Finally, the girl rubbed her crimped neck and complained of being sleepy. The man ignored her, talking on, his face intimate in its proximity to Lou's. The girl was not going to leave him there alone with Lou, and she was beginning to look pouty. She was ready to break decorum if necessary and the man knew it unconsciously. Lou admired and felt contempt for the girl's tenacity. Pouting will get you your way for exactly three months *if* the woman is always someone like me.

Lou's mind slid back then to that point where she saw the spider crawling. It was too late to ask about the spider. She had left her son and two other people down there with a poisonous spider. One couldn't do that sort of thing. People could marry and use one another to create monstrous patterns called "relationships" in psychology books but one could not leave her child unprotected and let moonlight spill on her hair. The spider, Lou decided, would have bitten Clach by that time if it were going to. If Clach were dead, then her last grievance against the world would flinch her free of all pain. Lou excused herself and went back to the cabin.

The hallway was not as treacherous returning, mainly because even the panic inside her could not *believe* in the possibility of what she feared. This final, last-minute panic was all she had to offer as protection again for Clach and herself.

She turned on the light to be sure they were all breathing. She cleaned the make-up off her face, what had seemed too much trouble before. As soon as she turned off the light and was in bed, she could feel things crawling on her. She stood up, stepped on her bunk, and kissed Clach's soft forehead. "Poor Clach."

For the last time, she pulled the covers over her body. "I am too tired to be afraid for you, Clach. Too tired. Even for myself." She was glad to find it was true. Then her regular breathing, too, filled the room.

III

The restaurant was cool in contrast to the glaring street outside. Large ceiling fans with wooden blades circled slowly, high above the center aisle. She shoved Clach along until they reached the staircase at the back. Upstairs, most of the tables were empty. Lou put Clach in a chair at one of the small wooden tables against the wall and pushed his chair toward the table until his chest touched its edge.

"Now, behave yourself, or I shall really get mad at you." She had had all she could stand of disapproving waiters.

There was a small section of the floor missing and railed off. The small, floorless indenture looked down upon the entrance. Clach wiggled and asked to go over by the railing.

"Okay, if you promise not to get in anyone's way and not to lean against the rail."

Clach stood watching below and looked at her to see if she noticed he was behaving. She smiled at him. When she looked again, he was hanging his arms over the rail, but his body's weight was balanced away from the banister. Clach looked through the spindles at the people below, intent upon them. She knew there was no danger of his falling and that it was too much to expect him to sit quietly for thirty minutes between each course. The waiter brought her sangria, the ice clinking inside the already beaded pitcher. He looked at Clach's empty chair and then toward the front windows. He was at the rail then, lifting the unsuspecting child. He pulled out the chair for Clach; the child pulled at the seat of his pants, rearranging his shorts underneath, before looking up into the waiter's face to see if everything were as serious as it seemed. After Clach was placed properly, the waiter turned to Lou, making a rigid bow.

"You must watch your son," he said to her in his stilted English. Anger was in his voice. She was about to get him fired.

She turned red in the face but said nothing to him. She scolded Clach and he began to whine. Damn, she thought. Damn them. They think children are idiots undoubtedly. That waiter is more likely to fall over that rail than Clach. Because I may well push him over it. Damn him, damn him.

Neither Clach nor she liked the cold lobster. Lou ate some of it. She drank all the sangria in large gulps, giving Clach one of the ice cubes out of the pitcher for his orange pop. He sucked on the half-melted cube when he had finished his drink.

After lunch they walked to a nearby plaza. They stood watching the swirl of bright clothes and beautiful faces around the buses that were picking up passengers for the beaches. Lou's head was buzzing from the heat and more from the cognac. The people-filled sidewalks matched the swirl that was going on in her head, that had always been there but that she had never listened to before. Because she already knew what it was about: the disguised pain of being alive.

She didn't know why she had to be neurotic, even on their vacation, but there was no man, no woman in that stream of people, in any stream of people anywhere, other than her child, who could care – who had ever loved her enough to hate her death, her pain. She hated Clach as she stood paralyzed by her caring for his death, his pain, his pain in her death, her pain woven into his death though she would be dead long before. She hated him for his vast security in that fleeting image that she was. Clach even refused to let her hysterics dissuade him from trusting her to abide forever. She thought about him, as he pulled her toward the window filled with beach toys. He found me to be his only lot, his stronghold against danger, pain and death and never questioned my validity. No one questions my validity. How dare no one question it. There is this child who depends on me for everything and I'm capable of nothing. His bloody father should be hanged.

She was talking under her breath then, but Clach was glued to the shop window and did not notice. "Damn you. Damn you, kid. I can divine spiders on your pillow but I cannot kill them, do you understand? Do you understand that you cannot count on me? That I'll lie and cheat you all your life because I am afraid. Even of waiters."

Clach was through with the window and had backed away. She bent down and kissed his hair. His face turned upwards, filled with all the intellignece of a child's assessment of a parent's mood. She, in order to keep from being overwhelmed by his eyes, kissed his mouth. It was faintly sticky with orange pop.

"May we go to the beach, Mama? May we, please?" He was sure she was going to say no.

"Yes," she said.

"Does that mean we can go?"

"Yes."

"Right now, not later?"

"Yes."

He pulled her hand and arm in the direction of the crowd of people draped with hats and canvas chairs that stood near some buses.

"Suits," she said. "We have to get our suits."

"You'll make me take a nap," he said.

"No."

"You promise?"

"I promise," she said and turned them in the direction of the hotel.

"May we hurry?" he asked. "The buses will leave us."

"There are other buses," she said.

"No," he said. "I'm *almost* sure," he added, the spoken doubt not meant except as his appeasement for her.

She saw, for perhaps the first time, how hard he had to work to keep her going. She almost cried but she did not.

IV

At first, the man did not seem to understand her question and turned half away. But she insisted, in a friendly, open-faced way, as if to say, you see, you really must be nice and help me. Then the man finally acknowledged her, started to explain in Spanish. When he saw her bewildered look, he smiled and shrugged his shoulders. He took the lead and began to walk them to the right platform. When the boy complained, she picked him up. By this time, the man had decided to allow this interruption of his life and thus devoted himself to it. He insisted upon taking the boy from her. Clach seemed delighted by the transfer into male arms. He hunched up tightly around the man's shoulders to ride high in display, his head bobbing, blocking the man's view of where he was going. Lou started to protest to Clach, but the man shook his head no and smiled.

At the platform, she thanked the man profusely, but he would not relinquish the boy and boarded the subway train with them. Then, she demanded that Clach stand; her demand was urgent enough that the man complied. She did not like the man going with them. She was sorry she had taken the tired way out and asked him instead of finding a station map.

The man did not try to talk but smiled whenever her eyes met his and then he would smile down at Clach. At the fifth stop, he picked up Clach again and let her go out the door before him. They walked the stairs. She thanked the man again, apologized for having imposed on his time. She started to offer him some money but was afraid that might insult him.

He spoke in English. "Will you have something to drink with me, please?"

"I'm very sorry," Lou said, "but we must go to our hotel."

She put her hands around Clach's waist but Clach held to the man's neck. The man closed his eyes, shrugged his shoulders and then looked skyward. She imagined that he meant she should not try to go against fate. In the strong sunshine, she now noticed the man was not as clean as he had first looked. She was ashamed of noticing, but she wanted Clach out of his arms. The neck of the man's shirt was dirty. The man smiled triumphantly at her as Clach kissed his cheek.

Yet, there was humility in the man's face – genuine or feigned, it did not matter. It hurt her. He took a roll of peseta notes out of his pocket and showed them to her.

"We will go to any restaurant you like," he said.

After having seen the roll of bills, Lou could no longer look at the man's face. All the panic ever felt during her life was there in her chest pushing into her throat. She could feel it. Not able to say anything, she tried to take Clach from the man's arms, almost knocking the bills out of the man's hand, but Clach clasped the man's neck, the man the boy's waist. Lou realized the three of them looked ridiculous and she almost laughed.

"I want something to drink!" Clach pleaded with her and then turned his bright smile to the man's face and rubbed his fragile skin against the man's stubbled cheek.

She wondered that Clach did not feel any distrust as she felt. That he did not feel them both threatened. The man's yellow collar brought the same revulsion in her that she had felt when Clach, as they had walked through that part of Soller where the inhabitants lived, had petted every cat and dog along the way. There had been large, running sores on some of the animals. She had wanted to tell him not to pet those animals but he would have asked her why. And she could not, in front of those women who had looked at her coldly and whose faces had not softened even at the sight of Clach, have told him those animals were dirty. She had never told him anything was dirty, not even restrooms that smelled so bad they took one's breath away. How could she now tell him when to touch and when not to? It was too late; he would not listen.

She had taught Clach fervently that all animals and humans were made to be touched and loved. Clach's father had left him to her world that existed without scrutiny. She had touched and loved with as much blindness of running sores as Clach. It was only now, with fear for his hands that moved so eagerly to everything, that were hungry for the feel of everything, she began to see she would have to live through the terrible chances again.

She crumpled. It wasn't a loud thing. It wasn't even noticeable for awhile to anyone. She held her arms across her chest, kneeling, rocking her body over the sidewalk, crying wetly but silently onto the chalk-white cement. The boy struggled down from the man's now unresisting arms. Clach stood over his mother's bent head, bewildered. She did not want them to have a good time, to laugh with cold-iced glasses in their hands under a bright, scalloped tent that would shadow their table.

"Don't cry," he said to her, but she kept on. He remembered those as her words given to him many times. Then he made up comfort out of his own mind. "It's okay, Mama. I don't want anything to drink." He patted her shoulder.

People were beginning to look at the man, to frown at him as if he had been the one who had knocked her down. He looked frightened. He started to speak to her, but he did not know what to say. Even in Spanish. He extended his hands to lift her up, but the child frowned at his advance. The woman kept rocking and saying softly to the spattered drops on the sidewalk, "Please don't take my baby. Please don't take him."

Then the man was gone, a part of the dark portal of the subway entrance. The avenue where the woman and boy were was only a half block from their hotel. It was one of the extravagances of Barcelona, named after Franco. The boulevard cut across the city at a diagonal with the same careless precision of a check mark made in some box on a questionnaire. Some check mark that carried the absoluteness of a choice, that slashed upward in its rush to spring away from the bottom line of some boxed decision. But she could not see that. She could only see the sidewalk.

She had finally come to that cemetery, only to find the stones bereft of any date or name. There was only some mysterious code of darkened spots, written out in tears or rain or whatever wet could fall.



Stephen Thomas Swarts

Song of the Soon Free (1)

(a song for Nancy)

The red and the black
    colors in a dream
hot coals through the grill
    of an iron stove
a picture window of a still
    a photo from an album page
grey mist of yesterday's forgotten rage
    count backward through
a thousand days and nights
    in the arms of the
not unlovable yet unloved
    asking is it you
    or me
    or us

The black and the red
    paints splash in our hair
the changes the energy
    to make it go somewhere
except returning to the arms
    of the not unlovable
yet unloved goes nowhere
    like the slowly closing
iron door that once sealed
    my glowing embers

Rage on the red and the black dies
    too
The picture window's familiar view
    another grey dawn
and huddling round the stove
    warms the hands
but doesn't heal the heart

Release what you cannot hold
    and the red and the black
become an emerald green and gold
    remember you knew this
before you were ever told
    and whoever I am I'm
    waiting

Anonymous

Evening Prayer

Oh sun, here we meet again.
now you're not so fierce;
now you're not so proud.
I gaze freely at crimson features
Orange hues that mix with red.
Boiling vapors, that paint the horizons glow.
Half hidden, hanging low,
You're larger now but not so bold.

You bastard, you bloated obelisk,
taking your leave.
off to your lair.
tell me then before you go,
of all you've seen, and all you know.

Ancient one,
how many eons have you watched us now?
did you once too open eyes
wondering at the solemn void?
did you only arrive?
or were you the product conjured by
some vast eternal guide.

did he let you see his face?
or just abandon you,
an orphan in some hostile silent space.

how long did you sit,
pondering, wondering?
if there is purpose behind awareness.

until you belched in your disgust
watching the pellets of flaming spittle
floating about like bubbles in a glass

did you smirk, leering
pleased with your creation.
some little amusement
though not much company.

what thought you when you first saw man.
did you peer curious, with haughty scorn.
watched him dig, crawl, kill and die forlorn.

Anonymous

How many times have you toyed with him?
surely you could not resist.
Yes, on this I must insist,
what better sport could tempt you?

sucked the moisture from his lands, torched his crops.
watched him cry, curse and bleed.
or withheld your favor,
good sport indeed;
let glacial winds descend
and ice upon the water breed.

sat back gloating
while he shivered, stomped and froze.
what glee did mischief bring?

to watch the naked dolt, gape torpidly
with dirty face through tangled locks,
watched him in his aching langor,
while all his dreams returned to frozen dust.

understand, I do not mean to chide.
I merely jest.
perhaps by universal axiom it is your right,
for so it seems the strong
do always prey upon the weak.

neither do I imply when I speak,
that men deserve your sympathy.
for truly they use their own powers
just as wickedly.

Is it not their constant blight
to carry on without respite,
every abuse upon which fettered imagination
lets them dwell.

no rather do I envy you your private hell.
your distant detached promontory.
wish that I in your stead
could look at them with insolent dred.

yes, I should like to spurn them as well
with honest loathing.
holding myself in arrogant superbidity.
and yet, I lack the ability.

Anonymous

not that I seek some austere magnanomous nobility
though quite an absurdity
a little clemency remains within

why I cannot abolish it.
of that I am quite ignorant.
it seems to be part of heart and soul,
were I sagacious should I pluck it out,
crushing it beneath heel and toe.

envision world and understand
how ruined the fate of mortal man.
in him few virtues can reside.
in vain he struggles with unmalleable pride.

bereft of cover, nude it stands.
the guttling, lusting, core of the human.
small, -- narrow, -- blind;
his tortured mind, stumbles at every turn.

in impotent rage we watch his children
trampled, starved; Their ruthless brothers,
the cruelest most selfish lot
well fed, bored, frolic and care not.

in embarrassed silence watch the regulators
courted by corporate colicitators
spew with foul and poisoned breath
hissing mouthfuls of hipocracy.

yet I cannot condemn
nor separate myself from them.
ignoble as man may be,
all his failings, his licentious cravings
are echoed inside of me.

alas justice by compassion is not swayed.
neither can the few,
those too infrequent few,
whose qualities and consciences rise
above those of the common fool,
stay the hand of our collective fate.

history does not judge us each individually.
its course is bent by force of flood.
the trickle however valorous and deserving
however needed, flows by unheeded.

Anonymous

measure then upon the balance pan,
all the excellence versus all our vice.
the needle does not hesitate,
the scale tips to our discredit.

the thirsty desert will yet drink,
spilled blood from the sure wounds of hate.
the plumeless genus of bipeds,
of flesh and bone will build their pyre,
to be consumed by heat of nuclear blaze.

a monument for all who pass.
a blackened burned out shell;
the remnant, home of man.
testimony to the final resolution
the last solution;
that life upon this planet
were better had it never begun.

in all mankind's age,
four million years,
ten billion tears,
o christ, has love once ever vanquished insanity.

although mind's eye encompasses the truth,
my unbelieving heart retains utopian visions.
the dogged breath of hope
refuses to lay entombed in its bitter sepulcher.
resurrected, all my idiot's illusions do persist
but from such fool's thoughts, would I could desist.

one last word to you pompous one,
that you might not rest so smug,
though his battle is far from won
indeed he looks to be undone,
be wary you o sun, should he prevail.

he'll throw a yoke around your neck
and to his twisted purposes will you yeild.
weilding your might at his bidding
like some dullard ox toiling and sweating.

your pale cousin, the emperor of night
waits his turn in envious impatience
fly then, be gone.
farewell, my spirit flees with thee.

Greg Goodsell

Apocalypse No

The clock in the air studio read ten minutes to twelve. Ten minutes to purgatory.

Ed Gein scratched his salt-and-pepper beard and took one more sip of coffee that was one degree cooler than steam. Running the late night talk show on KTLK-AM Fresno was just one of the many facets of his private purgatory to which he had been sentenced after his divorce. He had a car that would rarely run; he had no social life whatsoever. He had an ever-growing bald spot that could not be disguised by comb-overs. He had a bad stomach; and he ran the late night talk show.

From twelve to three in the morning, he would field comments from listeners over the phone into a talk show format. Monday through Saturday.

"How's it goin', Joe?" Ed said to the runty little man who was the station engineer. He sat in the engineering room and took all the incoming calls.

"Oh, fine." That was Joe's standard reply. He was never interesting company. A partition of glass separated them, necessitating a phone intercom. The broadcast booth in which Ed sat was a stark white-on-white cubbyhole with only a chair, a microphone, the phone intercom, and headphones, in contrast to the engineering room which was a tangle of sophisticated equipment.

"Hey, Joe, do me a favor," said Ed. "Be choosy which calls ya take tonight. All the drunks are coming out of the bars about now, and they all need a shoulder to cry on."

"I'll try, I'll try . . . "

"If that man calls up, the one who says the President is the Antichrist, hang up! For God's sake, he quit being amusing a lo-ong time ago."

"I'll try," said Joe. "He's pretty clever. Sometimes he disguises his voice to get on. Sometimes he has friends who call in and then he gets on the line . . . "

"Be choosy, be choosy," said Ed. At that point, "Eating Right Will Keep You Well," a syndicated health program, sputtered off the reel-to-reel. Joe slammed on some local commercials. It was almost time.

The talk show theme blared into life: "FEEDBACK . . . the radio show that listens to YOU . . . this is FEEDBACK . . . with your host, Ed Gein. The number is 577-7777. Let us hear from YOU . . ." The tape faded out, and Ed came on directly on cue. "Hello. This is Ed Gein. I want to talk to you. Talk to you about what's on your mind. Please do not attack specific individuals, but share with me the concerns you feel about yourself and your community. The number is 577-7777."

The board lit up. Joe screened the first caller and connected it to Ed's head phones.

"Hello, this is Ed Gein and you're on the air."

A pause. A low-pitched hum.

"Please turn down your radio."

A cautious female voice spoke. "Is this FEEDBACK?"

"Yes ma'am. You're on the air."

"I want to talk about all the filth they have on television." It was a very old woman. The type that took in stray cats in her one-bedroom apartment.

"What do you mean by that, ma'am?"

"All the sex they have on television!" she replied.

"They're getting a bit daring on cuss words, ma'am, but I don't know about actual sex they have on--"

"You're not looking hard enough!" Now that was an astute observation. You're probably the one those crackpot church groups hire out to count nipple bumps on game shows, thought Ed to himself. Moral Majority, where is thy subtlety? "They never do it on television!" cried the reedy voice in defense.

"Ma'am, I don't understand. One moment you're saying there's too much sex on television, and then the next you don't see any. What do you--"

"NO, NO, NO!" screamed the voice. "They never do it out on television. They do it inside closets and behind bushes when the characters are saying their lines! Like on 'Happy Days' once--"

Ed made a rapid "cut" signal but Joe had beaten him to it. The phone went dead, leaving the drone of air space. "This is Ed Gein, and the program is FEEDBACK. Give me a call at . . ." his automatic retort at the end of a sudden call severing. He took another call.

This one was fairly intelligent. It was from a well-informed male listener who discussed the President's foreign policies. They talked a solid ten minutes.

In the meantime, the board had gone dead. The nuts, night owls, and bored teenagers had gone elsewhere to harangue somebody near. Ed was frightened by the prospect of talking to thin air through most of the night. Thankfully, a commercial break was upcoming.

"Hey, Joe," said Ed through the phone intercom, "let the loonies have a field day. Let 'em on the air."

"Are you sure about that?" said Joe.

"Yeah. Anything's better than talking into space about the weather. Don't worry. I'll keep things under control."

"Okay. It's your funeral . . ."

The commercial break ended. Ed began his automatic spiel which included the FEEDBACK logo, phone number, and pledge to community service when Joe received a call. He connected the call and mouthed "it's her again" through the glass partition.

"Hello, you're on the air," said Ed.

"Hello."

"Hello."

"I want to talk about the end of the world."

OH, NO. Please! When people have nothing else to talk about, they talk about religion, most specifically the end of the world. Another rehash of these are the last days cash in those United States Savings Bonds now. "What about the end of the world, Ma'am?" sighed Ed.

"How do you think the world will end?" It was a serious question.

"Oh . . . an atomic war, I guess. Or if you're religious, a great war spearheaded by the Antichrist, and--

"Well you're WRONG! WRONG! WRONG!" she bellowed on the line to the point of distortion.

"Ma'am, that's not my opinion," said Ed in an effort to appease the harridan. "I really don't think that–"

"They're all wrong!" she squealed. "It won't be that way at all! It won't be with loud noises and fire and commotion! It won't be that way at all . . ." Her voice trailed off.

How will it end then? With a whimper? Surely this old biddy isn't that literate, Ed thought. "How do you think the world will end, ma'am? How?"

"The stars. The stars, one by one . . . will go out. Like millions of little lights. One by one . . ."

Dead silence.

"I don't see how that will–"

"It will be like a great hand erasing a blackboard in broad strokes! The sky will be dark as pitch! And the world will be plunged in darkness . . ." she hissed.

"Still ma'am, I don't see how this would cause the world to end, we–"

"AND THEN," she said in great, cracked Shakespearean tones, "the world shall be erased! The lights shall dim, the water dry, the dust will settle–"

Ed made a broad "cut" sign to Joe. The line went dead. Perhaps talking into thin air about the weather wasn't all that bad, after all.

"My name is Ed Gein, this is FEEDBACK," blah blah blah . . . "give me a call at–" the board went crazy! Hundreds of lights glittered on the switchboard. Had this crazy old woman stirred up all this public response? He took the first call.

"Hello?" It was a young black male. "Motherfucker, why'd you cut off that lady fo'? Huh? She had a right to her opinion, you motherfucker! Whassa matter with the way her world ended? Grow up with fire and brimstone, man? Can't take a different opinion? Huh? Huh? HUH?"

"No, no, no!" Ed pleaded, "We cut her off because she was getting out of hand. She had a right to her opi–"

"Well you motherfuckin' motherfucker you can take your motherfuckin'–"

He was cut off immediately. How embarrassing! Ed thought. Of all the nights they went without a ten-second tape delay! He hoped no children were listening. He took another call.

"Hello." It was from a young lady. "Y'know, that old lady. Y'know, I'm not religious or anything, but I sort of like the world being erased an' all . . . like, I get

this picture of soft chalk on a blackboard being brushed away, real soft. Nothing violent. Silent, soft, and fluttering like so many granules of chalk into oblivion . . . "

"That's a point worth considering," said Ed. "Like I said, she had a right to her opinion . . ."

The rest of the calls that night continued in that vein. People were intrigued, nay, fascinated with the old woman's view of doomsday.

Religious listeners disagreed with her, citing specific Biblical scripture as their argument. Most, however, found her "blackboard" analogy quite charming, with its implications of a benevolent God going over his mistakes.

The callers talked exclusively on this subject for the rest of the night. They discussed all aspects of the Apocalypse: Biblical, pre-Biblical, pagan, fire, flood, ice age, atomic, everything.

It was five minutes to three. At three, Joe would play Muzak until 6 a.m. when KTLK would resume normal broadcasting. Time for one more call. Joe jumped in surprise in the engineering room; it was her again! Ed took the call.

"Hello," said the voice on the line, "I called earlier. I just wanted to say that the world will end tonight!"

"How do you know, ma'am?" replied Ed with cool sarcasm. "Did God tell you?"

"GOD HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH IT. I JUST KNOW.

The line went dead. She had hung up.

It was ominous. Even for a crazed little old lady. It could have been funny, letting her fall on her face in sheer absurdity. But nobody was laughing.

"Uh . . . a point well worth considering . . . " said Ed, desperately trying to add a drop of cheer in a doom-laden atmosphere. "This is Ed Gein. This has been FEEDBACK. Catch you tomorrow night. G'night!"

Ed put on his coat to leave. "G'night Joe, don't take any wooden nickels!"

"Yeah, good night . . . it was nice knowin' ya," said Joe.

"Now what in the hell is that supposed to mean?" said Ed.

"Oh . . . nothing." It was the first time Joe had shown a shred of creativity in his entire life. Now that was frightening, Ed thought.

As Ed walked to his battered old '67 Volkswagon, he pictured whole groups of families sitting out on their lawns waiting one by one for the stars to go out. He wondered if he would see them on his drive home to his apartment.

He got in. He turned the ignition . . . damn! The thing would not start again! Well, sh–

"The world shall be erased. The water shall dry. The dust shall settle. The lights . . ." came a voice from the back seat. A voice that was owned by an old lady who had fifteen stray cats in her one-bedroom apartment, an old lady who counted nipple bumps on game shows . . .

"The world shall be erased. Erased. Erased."

He felt withered hands clutching his shoulders.

He did not look into the sky to see the stars go out.

Bertha Crow

Ancient Things

Bright sunshine glints the late oranges
And yellow grapefruit hanging against the low backdrop
of dark green trees
Cerelian skies, void of opaque, cradle the world
against Naples and Payne's Grey clouds
Until the sun sets in crimson floresence behind a
massive bank of blue-black hills rimming the world
Pleasant, yes, this warmth after the cold
This multicolor accent of each new spring
The hum of bees in early blosoms braving the aftermath
Speaking renewal to all things
Yet, the sound of weeping is heard in the laughter
of the little brown brook trickling over
stones and fallen leaves
And the deep undertones of the river recently released
from its winter solidity
Remembers the death of many friends that lay long
on its bosom
Even the wind melody in the slim, spinet trees
Answers some dim, distant nostalgia
For underneath are the scars of a world waxed old
Of wounds too near the surface to be forgotten
As each revival is left with the haunting memory
When the silver crystal is gone.

Christine McMillin

The Leaf and the Secretary

Twirling autumn wind
carries the leaf in circles
and the secretary dizzily scurries to please:
    be professional on the phone
    keep the customers happy
    type this top priority project
    forget the rest
Stop.
A pause when the wind
drops the leaf
and the secretary collapses
until
once again
subjected to the breezy whims
of more powerful forces
they lose control.

W. Ann Momot

O Dog

The Society for Prevention of Cruelty
to animals
arrested my dog
for scattering garbage
on the neighbors' lawn.

Gleefully gamboling among the garbage
this dog
was merely having fun
as she tore into tatters
a week's worth
of the neighbors' waste matter
and indiscriminately spread the stuff
all over their turf.

Two young men who
like loud music and
drive pick-up trucks
one large and blue
the other
white and small
General Motors and Toyota.

Two young men who
have not an iota
of comprehension of
or compassion for
what it takes
to make
a dog.

Beach

Monochrome of air and ocean
watered silk green
with a shade of cream
Wishing I could stay and watch
and hear the sun sizzle as it slips
into a quenching sea
while seagulls cry for help
and thoughts of dry brown city vanish
in the day mist on a stony beach

Diana Lumley

A Closed Door

Two in the morning and lights were still burning in the Magorian house. Harry lit another cigarette with the glowing butt of one he was just finishing. Nervously, he paced the floor, seemingly unaware of the dirty cups and napkins and half empty trays of hors d' oeuvres scattered about the room. His face was etched with lines of anger and disgust.

When did I lose control? he wondered. For ten years Ruth had been willing to let him make all the major decisions concerning finances, residence, and employment. He had given her two beautiful children to care for and she had been a good mother. He worked hard, he didn't play around, and all he expected of her was a well-kept house, well-kept children, and a responsive bed partner.

Harry knew he hadn't changed. He demanded no more and no less of Ruth than before. But he had seen a change in her. It was just little things he hadn't noticed before that kept creeping in and becoming the focus of endless petty arguments.

"Ruth, you left all kinds of hair in the sink. Why don't you clean it up?"

"Can't you clean it up, Harry? I'm busy."

"What about all this make-up crap. I'll throw it out if you don't keep it out of my way. It's all over the place."

"Don't threaten me, Harry. I have it out there for a reason. You just leave it there, please."

"Ruth, where is my leather jacket?"

"Oh, sorry, I didn't have time to pick it up at the cleaners. Don't you have another one you can wear?"

"I wanted to wear that one. See if you can't manage to pick it up today . . . if you're not too busy."

Harry walked to the front window and looked out. She always had an excuse. There was never any peace around the house any more, and people were beginning to notice the strain and tension between them.

"Harry, is there something bothering Ruth? She seems very edgy and so do you. Are you two having problems?"

"Oh God, Dad, I just can't handle her any more. She's constantly picking and bickering. I don't know what her problem is."

"Well, what does she bicker about? I mean, does she have a legitimate gripe?"

"She probably thinks she does. It's not so much that she says anything. It's more what she does. I swear, she sits around that house all day dreaming up ways to bug me."

"What do you mean? What does she do?"

"It's more what she doesn't do. She doesn't keep the house up like she used to. She's too busy to pick the kids up from school so they have to ride the bus home. And . . . and just last week she didn't have dinner ready for me when I came home. She had all day, I don't know what the hell her problem is."

"Have you tried asking her? Maybe there's something she really wants or needs and she just doesn't know how to ask you."

"Hell, Dad, the only thing she could possibly need is less time on her hands. She's driving me crazy with all this shit. Maybe what she needs is another kid. That would keep her busy enough."

Walking back to the bar, Harry shook his head. He had been confident that plan would work, but she had even managed to ruin it.

"Harry, please, not tonight. I really don't feel like it."

"What? You never minded before. In fact, you used to enjoy it."

"I know, but I'm really not up to it tonight. Couldn't we just go to sleep? Please?"

"Come on, Ruth, be reasonable. It's not like I ask two or three times every night or even every week. It won't take that long."

"I'm really just too tired, Harry. Maybe some other night, ok?"

Harry's frown deeped to a scowl. Gripping the drink in his hand, he nearly crushed the plastic party cup. Just thinking about her and her goddamned headaches made him want to . . . strangle her. His own rage surprised him.

Harry gazed about the room, seeming to see the paraphernalia of the party for the first time. This is the last straw, he thought savagely. I'm going to have to do something before that bitch ruins me completely.

The party tonight had been an important one; the top executives from three major accounts held by Harry's firm were the guests of honor. At first Ruth was the perfect hostess, smiling, chatting, mixing with practiced ease.

The Magorian parties were famous and Harry used any excuse to give one. He concentrated on making his guests feel at ease. The spacious living room easily accommodated the twenty guests; the large stone fireplace kept the room cheery and warm. The bar at the back of the room was well stocked. Tables scattered about the room held trays filled with carefully prepared hors d' oeuvres. A reel-to-reel set up behind the bar and speakers placed inconspicuously around the room provided music for dancing or just listening.

The evening was going well. Everyone was enjoying himself and Harry began to unwind, forgetting the troubles he was having at work and with Ruth. The air was full of talk and laughter and smoke; the guests were swaying easily to the steady beat of Steely Dan.

Deeply involved in a discussion of the Ram's game played just that Sunday afternoon, Harry didn't notice the gentle nudge of a woman's hips against his. The nudges became more obvious and persistent as he ignored the woman, preferring to continue his discussion. Finally, he felt a tug on his sleeve he could no longer ignore and he turned reluctantly to find Ruth wiggling her hips in a provocative dance.

"Come on, Lover, let's dance." She began to shake her shoulders, then turned to wiggle her shapely fanny at him. Whirling back to Harry, she beckoned with her hands.

"Come on, Sweetheart, don't be shy; let's dance." Her voice was thick with alcohol. "Let's all dance!" Giggling, Ruth bumped and whirled her way among all the guests. The men smiled enjoying her display of drunken sensuality. All eyes focused on Ruth as she wheeled and cavorted about the room. The women guests gasped in surprise as she grabbed each of their husbands in turn, coyly admonishing them for being dull if they refused to join her in a dance.

Harry was rigid with rage. Rooted to his spot on the floor, he watched as Ruth began to slow her antics and quietly turn to survey her silent audience. Catching Harry's eye, she tossed her head defiantly.

"I think I'll step outside for some fresh air," she stated haughtily. "It seems a bit stuffy in here." She turned and began to weave her way unsteadily to the door.

She seemed oblivious of her surroundings, bumping tables and chairs and people as she went. Livid, Harry rushed after her. Ruth had the door open when he reached her; they stepped onto the porch together. Grabbing her arm just as she was descending the first step, Harry kept his voice low, "Ruth, get back in here. You're making a fool of yourself . . . and of me."

"Let go, Harry, You're hurting me." She raised her voice with each word, "A wife should be able to go outside alone if she wishes. Do I need your permission?"

"All right, then go!" Harry hissed at her, throwing her arm away from him. "See if I care if you freeze your ass!"

Scowling, he turned and went back inside, resisting an impulse to slam the door.

It wasn't long afterward that guests began collecting coats and purses. Quietly they bade Harry good night.

Once more, Harry strode to the windows and looked out. The looks of pity on the faces of the departing guests burned in his mind.

As Harry watched, a black car pulled up in front of the house. Letting the drapes fall back in place, he walked to the front door. Stepping outside, he waited, arms folded across his chest.

Two policemen were helping Ruth out of the back of the car. Harry could hear her from where he stood, "Leave me alone! I can do it myself!"

Her dress hiked up around her hips as she slid across the seat. Giving each of the officers a dirty look, she stood unsteadily and yanked her dress down.

Slowly she staggered up the walk to the porch, a man on either side, catching her when she missed the walk. "I said I can do it myself!" she admonished them each time they tried to help her.

"Hello, Harry," she slurred when she finally reached the porch. "You're not mad at me are you?" Harry grimaced. She continued in her drunken speech, "These guys brought me home. Maybe we should invite them in to our party." She giggled, covering her mouth.

"Goddamn it, Ruth, will you straighten up!" Harry scowled.

Ruth's face fell. "You're still mad at me," she whined, bursting into tears.

"Oh for Christ's sake." Harry muttered. Turning to one of the officers, he asked, "Where'd you find her?"

"She was crawling around a neighbor's house . . ." the officer checked his notebook, "A Mrs. Adams called us. She thought it was a prowler."

"So why didn't you haul her in?" Harry asked, disgusted.

The officer cleared his throat, "Well, sir, Mrs. Adams identified her and told us where she lived. She wasn't going to press charges so we saw no reason to take her in."

"I don't feel very good." They all turned back to Ruth who was swaying visibly on her feet. "Can I go to bed now?" She turned her red, swollen eyes to Harry.

Shoving his hands in his pockets, Harry turned back to the police. "Well, I guess I'll take it from here. Thanks for your help."

As the police turned to go, Harry unceremoniously picked Ruth up and carried her into the house and up the stairs. She was unconscious before he got the door closed.

It seemed Harry had been asleep only moments when he sat up suddenly in bed. It took a few minutes for him to recognize the surroundings of the guest bedroom. He sat a moment wondering what had wakened him when he heard a moan.

Running across the hall, he burst into the bathroom where Ruth lay face down on the floor. Beside her was a bottle of Valium prescribed for him by his doctor.

"Oh, my God," he muttered as he stooped to pick the bottle up. He couldn't tell how many were missing and he checked for a pulse. Slow and weak, almost imperceptible.

The next hour passed as a nightmare. Numb, Harry called an ambulance and had Ruth taken to St. John's Hospital, the best private hospital in town. Shaken and exhausted he fell back into bed for a couple hours' sleep before he had to get up for work.

* * * * *

Harry didn't have time to get his breakfast next morning. When he got to the office, he had Ellen go out for some doughnuts. He sat munching on a maple bar as he talked to his mother on the phone.

"Hi, Mom. I just wanted to call and thank you for keeping the kids last night."

"Oh, no problem, Harry. How did the party go?"

"Just fine, Mom. Are the kids ok?"

"Yes, they're fine. Is Ruth coming by to get them later?"

"Well, Mom, that's another reason I was calling. Ruth had to go stay with an aunt of hers up north. Seems she got sick suddenly. Uh . . . Ruth figured she could help."

"Oh, will she be gone long?"

"It's kind of hard to say for sure." Harry hesitated. "She plans on being gone a few days. But you never can tell about these things."

"Well, it's nice Ruth could go up and help. She's such a nice girl."

"Yeah, Mom. Uh . . . Mom, since Ruth is going to be gone, could you possibly keep the kids a few more days? I'm really busy here, I'll probably have to work late."

"Sure, Harry. But I do think you should call every day. It's important the kids hear from you." Harry listened with half an ear as his mother ran through the activities of the kids the previous day. Finally she hung up, leaving him to his work.

Harry stayed late that evening at the office. Riding down on the elevator, he was reminded by his growling stomach that he'd need to eat before going home.

The bar at McGuffey's was still crowded with Monday Night Football fans, but Harry preferred the noise and smoke to the deathly quiet of the dining room. He seated himself at the first vacant table he found and waited for the waitress to find him. When his meal was finally served, Harry ate quickly and left before the roast beef and gravy dinner had had a chance to settle. He went home tired and out of sorts.

By Thursday morning, Harry knew he could rely on Ellen to have fresh doughnuts waiting for him when he arrived at the office. As he made his ritual call to his mother, he munched on a jelly-filled doughnut.

"Hello, Mom. How are you this morning?"

"I'm fine, Harry. You sound tired. Are you ok? Do you want me to come by and do anything for you? You know, tidy up? Cook?"

"No, no, Mom, you've done enough already. Kathy was in on Monday and cleaned up. The house doesn't get that messy with just me there. How are the kids?"

"Oh, well, they're fine, I guess. They are beginning to wonder if they'll ever see Mommy and Daddy again. When are you coming by to get them?"

"I'm really sorry, Mom. Things have got me so bogged down here. But I'll try to come by this weekend. Please, Mom, can you keep them just a few more days?"

"Well, ok. Have you heard from Ruth? The kids are wondering when she'll be coming home."

"Oh . . . uh . . . I guess she's keeping pretty busy. Maybe she'll call tonight. I'm sure I'll hear from her soon."

"Have you tried calling up there, Harry?"

"Well, no. As I said, Mom, I'm really busy here and I get home so late . . . I hate to call and get the whole house up."

"Yes, well, I hope you hear from her soon, for the kids' sakes."

Relieved when he had finally satisfied his daily obligation, Harry buried himself in his work.

That evening at 7:30 Harry sat back in his chair and stretched. God, I'm going to kill myself if I keep this up. Maybe I should just go home tonight and try to get a decent night's sleep. I wonder if there's anything at home to eat. Probably not. I guess I can stop by the store on the way home. There's bound to be a frozen dinner or something even I can fix. Grabbing his coat, Harry shut off the lights and headed for the elevator.

* * * * *

The garage door swung open, responding reliably to the remote control Harry kept clipped to the visor of his car. Wearily he slipped the Porsche into the garage next to Ruth's powder blue, convertible V.W. Shutting the car off he grabbed his package, A Swanson's Hungry Man Dinner with an unappetizing picture of a cardboard Swiss steak on the front, and slid out of the car. In three quick strides he was through the back door and in the house.

Quietly shutting the door, Harry stood stock still, his hand poised over the light switch. Staring up the hallway into the dining room, he noticed the soft amber light cast by the chandelier. The table was lit with sparkling stars as the light from overhead was reflected off the crystal goblets and the fine bone china. The heavy, hand-hammered stainless was set out on Irish linen napkins beside two plates.

Harry walked quietly down the corridor. The aroma of a roast prime rib cooking filled the house, making his mouth water and his stomach growl. He could hear the clink of cooking utensils on cookware and the lyrical voice of Boz Scaggs floating in from the living room. Nearer the dining room, he could just catch the soft voice of a woman singing along with Skagg's "Harbor Lights," a particular favorite of his.

The carpet of the dining room muffled his steps as Harry made his way around the corner and into the kitchen. Feigning nonchalance, he lounged in the doorway.

With her back to him, Ruth was busy removing the roast from the roasting pan to the china serving platter. Meticulously she placed a carving knife and a serving fork on either side of the roast. She turned to take the roast into the dining room, a smile of satisfaction on her face.

Dropping his coat and package, Harry rushed across the kitchen and grabbed the edge of the platter, righting it just before the roast slid to the floor. He took the platter easily from Ruth's limp hands, returning it to the counter.

"Oh! H . . . Harry, you startled me!" Ruth stammered. Her eyes were wide and her mouth gaped open. Harry noticed she had done her hair? it was neatly pulled back into a French braid. She was wearing his favorite dress, the silky blue one that clung in all the right places. The simple strand of pearls around her neck seemed to emphasize the cleavage revelaed by the low neckline of the dress.

Patting her hair and dress, Ruth tried to compose herself. "But I was glad when I finally heard you drive up. Are . . . are you glad to see me?"

Harry frowned, angry to find himself responding to the heaving of her breasts. Shrugging, he turned back to the doorway to retrieve his coat and package.

"Well, I guess I'm more surprised than anything. I wasn't expecting you."

Walking to the refrigerator, he removed a bottle of 7-Up and put the Hungry Man Dinner in the freezer. Taking the Seagrams Seven from the cupboard, Harry poured a short tumbler half full, added 7-Up and some ice. "You want a drink?" he asked Ruth as he stirred his own. She shook her head, "No, thanks, Harry."

"Well, then why don't you clue me in on how you arranged this little surprise."

Picking the platter up, Ruth motioned toward the dining room. "Can we talk about it over dinner? Please?" Harry nodded. Picking up his drink he followed her to the table.

Harry sat down, waiting for Ruth to return from the kitchen with the potatoes and buttered vegetables. He drank in the savory aroma of the meat and vegetables. With Ruth seated at his right, he stood and began carving the roast; he placed some meat on Ruth's plate, then served himself. Potatoes and vegetables were passed, then Harry sat back, ready to enjoy a feast.

Not wishing to spoil his meal, Harry was content to eat in silence. Neither was willing to disturb the surface calm. Harry reached to refill his plate several times, but Ruth ate little, playing with the food on her plate. Finally, the roast half gone, Harry sat back in his chair satisfied.

Lazily he reached into his pocket for his cigarettes. Lighting up, he puffed contentedly while Ruth removed the plates. He listened as the dishes clinked in the sink and remained still as she returned, placing a cup of coffee before him. She seated herself once more. Absently Harry flicked his ashes into the clean ashtray kept on the table at his side.

Reluctant to spoil the meal and the moment, Harry tried to smile at Ruth. "That was delicious, Ruth." Shyly she returned the smile, sipping at her coffee.

Harry leaned forward and folded his hands on the table. "Maybe we should discuss this little surprise now."

Ruth nodded hesitatingly. More firmly, Harry continued, "Why don't we start at the beginning. Just how did you arrange a release?"

"Well, Harry," Ruth began as she carefully smoothed and folded her napkin, "the hospital could only hold me for three days, under emergency care."

"You mean, they had you for three days and they didn't find anything wrong with you? I find that hard to believe."

Ruth looked at Harry, her eyes pleading. "Please, Harry, don't be so loud. The kids, they have to go to school tomorrow and they need their sleep."

"What? What are the kids doing here?" Harry spluttered. "I left them with Mom. I was probably going to get them on Sunday. You went and got them?"

Ruth frowned, a hurt look in her eyes. "Those are my kids, too, Harry. They belong here, at home with their mother. I missed my kids, Harry. I had to see them."

"Ok, Ok, Ruth. I'm sorry. It's just that I wasn't expecting the kids; I wasn't counting on them home right now. But they're home, so let's not fight about it, Ok?"

Ruth's expression softened, she nodded.

Harry went on. "Ok, now just how did you get home? I mean, how did you manage a release from the hospital without me knowing? Who brought you and when did you get home?"

"Well . . ." Ruth shifted nervously in her seat, "the doctor told me that either I could stay . . . for treatment, you know, or I could go home after the three days. He said he would contact a family member or close friend for me." Ruth paused a moment before stumbling on. "Well, I figured you'd be real busy at work, and I didn't want to bother you, so I had him call Elaine." Ruth stopped, taking a deep breath. "Anyway, she picked me up around noon. I had time to get home and get cleaned up. I called your mom and I picked the kids up after school."

Grinding out his cigarette, Harry exploded, "You mean, you've been home all day and you didn't call me? You didn't want me to know you were home? Why not, Ruth?"

Groping for the right words, Ruth stumbled through her response. "I didn't know how you would react, Harry. I thought it might be better if . . . if I surprised you."

His fist clenched, Harry hissed at Ruth, "Surprise me! You thought you would surprise me?" His breathing was fast and labored. "You fix this big dinner, and you play my favorite music and you wear that dress, you didn't want to surprise me, Ruth . . . you set a trap for me! You figured that I couldn't resist a good meal, and good music, and . . . and such a nice piece of ass. Right? And now I forgive you

and things are just like before. Right? Isn't that how you planned it, Ruth?" Harry clenched his teeth, his red face betraying no sympathy as Ruth fidgeted under his relentless gaze.

Haltingly, she persisted in her defense. "Harry I didn't plan all this just to get you in my bed. I just wanted to see my kids and to see my husband. But I can see it won't do any good to argue with you over my motives. I'm going to bed . . . Good night, Harry." Ruth pushed her chair away from the table and hurried from the room.

The house was quiet now, her retreating steps muffled by the carpet on the stairs. Harry sat for a moment growling over his coffee. Savagely he pushed his chair away from the table and grabbed his drink glass. Frowning, he strode back to the bar.

* * * * *

"Mommy, why is Daddy asleep on the couch?"

"Daddy's very tired, Honey. Come on in here and eat your breakfast."

Harry forced his eyes open. Why do kids always get up so damn early on Saturdays? His mouth felt full of cotton. Slowly memories of the night before filtered through the haze in his head. Damn that woman! Why'd I let her get to me like that?

In the kitchen, he could hear Ruth fixing breakfast for the kids. He let his eyes slide shut, trying not to smell the coffee perking and the bacon frying.

"Ok, David," he heard Ruth say, "Get your coat. Nancy, come here, let me help you."

"Mommy, are you taking us to school today?"

Harry's eyes flew open. Oh my God! Today's only Friday. Shit! I'm going to be late. Harry struggled up off the couch and stumbled to the stairs. He could hear Ruth telling the kids good-bye at the front door. The firm thud of the closing door reverberated through the house.

Ignoring the pain in his head, Harry tried to hurry up the stairs. A good, hot shower will wake me up, he thought.

Harry was freshly shaved and dressed for work when he came down to the kitchen a half hour later. He found Ruth sitting at the breakfast table sipping her coffee and reading the morning paper.

"Good morning, Harry." She was wearing a smart gray wool skirt and a champagne colored blouse. Her jacket was draped over the back of the chair.

"Uh . . . Good morning. You're all dressed up. What's the occasion?"

Getting out of her chair, Ruth walked to the coffee brewer, the click of her high-heeled boots a bass drum in his ears.

"You want a cup of coffee?"

"Yeah," Harry replied, rubbing his temples.

"How about some breakfast?"

"No, no, I don't have time. I'm already late."

Ruth returned and placed the coffee in front of him. "I have an appointment this morning," she began, "with Dr. Culberson."

"Culberson . . . Culberson . . ." Harry couldn't make his brain work, the cobwebs still hanging heavy in his head. "Where've I heard that name?"

Ruth shrugged. "I don't know. He's a psychotherapist. He has an office downtown."

Harry choked on his coffee. "You're going to see a shrink? You wouldn't even stay at that hospital long enough for them to help you. What's this guy going to do for you?"

Frowning, Ruth fixed him with an icy stare. "Yes, I'm going to see him and yes, I think he can help me. Dr. Werner, at that hospital, recommended him to me. In fact, he said there wasn't a thing wrong with me that . . . that a boost to my self-esteem wouldn't help."

"And this guy, this Culberson, is going to do all this for you?" Harry spluttered. "Does he do this for all of his patients?"

"Patients? Oh, Harry." Ruth laughed, her smile amused. "Harry, I'm not going to be a patient of his. I was hoping he'd give me a job." Getting out of her chair, Ruth slipped into her jacket. "I'm supposed to be there at nine."

Harry sat stunned. "Why, Ruth? We don't need the money. And . . . and what about the kids?"

Ruth smiled at him. It was a smile she'd never tried on him before, usually being reserved for a very confused child. "It's for me, Harry. It will be ok, really. I'll only work part-time and I'll be home by the time the kids get out of school."

Walking over to him, she gently kissed his cheek. Without a word she turned and headed for the garage. Harry sat staring into space until he heard the back door click shut.

Janice L. Rank

Dateline Express to Yesterday

Following wild game they came
from Siberia to Bolivia
icefields to jungles
time in eons

Chasing wary deer on foot
Montana to Missouri
mountains and plains
many moons

Moving with the company
Denver to San Diego
deserts and freeway
a few hours

Silver sided jetliner
New York to Boston
cloudtops
minutes

Laser missile
lightstreak
Moscow
to
Washington
m
i
c
r
o
s
e
c
o
n
d
s

Lucinda Ware Austin

Shelter

taught, ridgeless
unaccepting

sheer-veined
transparency (you perceive)

Your words murmur, caress,
exacting response
to quiver with slightly expanded breath

Then words demand,
are darts of questioning
reaching center and puncture

ego swells and loosens hold
into filaments of ruptured weave

leaving the network
of life's veins,

Rebirth Questions

Shall I remain apart
accept this dissolution
reason away past
leave this life bound, footnoted,
shelved in place?

Will I quiver within tyger,
of sureness and precise rhythmn
deadly-on the stalk
with eye of topaz lust?

Do I allow movements
of passion upturned
escape the dust?
be unfiled in reality's grave?

Lucinda Ware Austin

bruises laid upon
    our torched limbs
    during wind-crazed encounters
    when razed desire
    smoked all senses
    and no sense gleaned harm.
in daily absolution
    warmed memorary rinses
    over molten scars and embers,
the ruptured patterns
    branded within our skin
    as we lay
    charred together.

Moments Apart

Waves separated
    with languid-lipped finale
    the breath of soul's warmth.
No questions poised
    to falter
No plan careened
    to uselessness.

Lucinda Ware Austin

Self-Sketch

Minute sketchings
of an active mind
denied me now.

Visionary chances
intuitive responses
parcelled by meaning
ingrained upon survival
sense.

Confusion now rampant
victimized by rememberings,
cravings,
just-past my fulfillment,
just lines on the sheet?

Battle of Mind vs. Heart

exhausted from introspection
and sleuthed for meaning
words are spoken
without decipher
The soul sleeps.
The heart aches
in trepidation
forced with rage
against bloodied muscled wall.

Linda Huffman

Dry

Earthbound oblivion
Wasteland's vassal
Thundering: fossilized
Cataract ghost

Judith Allen

Night

in the sunshine
there's a soothing softness
it's the hard black lines of night that make me shiver
childhood phantoms and atomic bombs
an end-of-the-world nothingness
in the shadows my mind raced for new fears

glowing digits tell me the best hours to wonder
how someone can touch without being touched
why you wouldn't let me squeeze you
mold you
fold you into what I thought you were

why you wouldn't let me hold you in the night

Sunshine

Something was wrong. I tried to pull my mind out of the fog, but I couldn't separate fantasy from reality. There it was again. Fire trucks? Church bells? Door bell? Door bell! I don't have a door bell! The fog began to clear. The phone! Who in the hell would call me at this time of night? I stumbled across the room, banged my shin on a chair, and groped for the phone.

"Hello?"

"Hello, Bob?"

"Yeah."

"This is Mark Hudson."

"Who?"

"Mark Hudson." Mark Hudson? I should have known the name but . . . Mark Hudson?

"Sunshine." Sunshine! Of course. Damn! I hadn't heard from him in years. How long had it been? Three, four years? I tried to pin it down but my mind was still too foggy.

"How've you been?"

"O.K., I guess."

"Still living in West Marin?"

"Naw. I've moved to San Diego."

"Moved?" He couldn't have moved. Marin County could not exist in my mind without Sunshine. "What the hell are you doing in San Diego?"

"Oh, nothin'. Workin' and hangin' out, mostly. You know, same old shit."

"Oh yeah? How's Bobby?"

"Hell, I don't know. Haven't seen her in about a year. She went back to her folks 'cause her dad said he'd send her to school if she did. But I heard she's been livin' with some guy up on the Russian River."

"That's too bad. She was a nice lady."

"Yeah. Well, I don't need her ass. There's more than enough tail in the world. No sense chasin' after one broad."

"Yeah. I guess. So, what's up?"

"Well, I'm in a little trouble. I thought you could help me out. I tried everyone else."

"What is this shit? You call your partner last? What't wrong with you?"

"Yeah, well shit, I didn't want to bother you unless it was real important. Anyway I got in trouble with the cops. Me and some other guys were screwin' around. We weren't going to steal anything but the cops won't believe that. Anyhow, we got fucked up and started puchin' each other. You know, friendly hasslin'. And this one guy got pissed. Then we started to get serious. Turned into a regular brawl. I was doin' all right until some asshole threw me up against a store window. Damn thing busted and everyone split. 'Cept me. I was too fucked up to run. Besides, my head was cracked open. So I got busted. They thought I was drunk and trying to break in. Shit. I couldn't even see. Dumb bastards."

"So what do you need?"

"Well, I got out on bail. But the cops don't believe me. And my lawyer said it'd look better if I paid for the damages. I might even get off. Otherwise, I'll have to spend time in the joint."

"How much?"

"About a year with my record."

"No. I mean money. How much do you need?"

"Oh. It's going to cost about a grand. But I've got most of it. I only need about four hundred more."

"Four hundred dollars? Jesus Christ, Sunshine." I started to put him off with excuses. But I knew it wouldn't work. He always knew when I did that and used it to his advantage. I'd have to handle this my way, not his. Look, if it was fifty or sixty dollars I'd probably do it just 'cause we were partners, even though I think you owe me a better explanation. But four hundred? Hell, that's more than two months rent. For that kind of money, I think I deserve to know what's really going on. Want to tell me about it?"

"Hey, man. It's just what I told you. I got busted. I need the money to keep from going to jail. Come on, man. I wouldn't bullshit you."

"You sure?"

"Sure I'm sure. It's the truth. I ain't fuckin' around."

"Well, I'll have to think about it. Can I call you tomorrow?"

"Naw. I don't have a phone. Write me. If you don't want to send the money, at least write and tell me so I'll know."

"O.K." I took down the address, said good-bye, and went back to bed. But I couldn't sleep. What the fuck was wrong with him? Did he think that after all those years I hadn't learned anything? We'd been partners, for Christ's sake. Tight partners. Didn't he remember? We'd been busted together. Been burned together. Hustled pool together. And had a damn good time. "God damn you, Sunshine. Did you forget? Or don't you care?" I hadn't forgotten. It had been one of the best times of my life.

I'd met him about six or seven years ago, when my brother had been living in West Marin. At that time western Marin County, or West Marin to the locals, was just being discovered by the San Francisco hippies. They had left Haight-Ashbury for Sausalito, left Sausalito for San Rafael, and were leaving San Rafael for the coast: Stinson Beach, Bolinas, Olema, Pt. Reyes Station, Marshal – all small towns yet to be invaded by the San Francisco commuter. Rents were low, people scarce, and jobs almost nonexistent. To Sunshine it must have seemed like a paradise.

I first met Sunshine at my brother's house in Pt. Reyes. He was small and wiry, like a cat. But he was loud. He naturally dominated any crowd, either telling a story himself or putting down a story that had just been told. In fact, his tongue was probably his most distinctive feature: it got him into and out of more places than most people can imagine. When I first met him, he was trying to weld up a crack in a gas tank. It was a custom tank off his motorcycle, but it couldn't have been worth more than twenty dollars. I couldn't believe it.

"Jesus Christ, Sunshine! You can't do that."

"Do what?"

"Weld that gas tank."

"Why not?"

"It'll blow up!"

"Aw, bullshit. That's what all them red-neck welders in town told me. But I've done it before. You just have to know what you're doin'. Besides, I don't have the money for a new tank.

I shrugged. "It's your ass. But I ain't gonna sit here and get blown up just 'cause you're an idiot. I'll be back after you finish. Want anything from the store?"

When I got back from the store, Sunshine had the tank off the bike and was just getting ready to weld it. He looked like something that should be hiding under a bridge waiting for innocent young ladies. His dark hair was pulled back in a pony tail that reached almost to his waist. Above his full beard, which was being threatened by the torch's flame, the welding goggles looked like two bug eyes, first deep green and then flat and silver as the sun reflected off them. The flame from the torch was a beautiful smokey orange that wouldn't heat a cup of coffee. The tank was propped precariously against the tire of his pick-up. And the rod he had was about the size of a sewer pipe.

"Sunshine," I said. "What the hell are you doing?"

"I'm going to weld this tank."

"What you're going to do is blow up the tank and ruin a tire. I thought you knew what you were doing. Jesus. Turn off that damn torch. O.K. Now, you got any two-by-four blocks? And maybe some slightly smaller rod?"

"Yeah. I think so."

"Good. See what you can find while I look at this tank." I wasn't much of a welder, but at least I could get the torch lit properly. And I'd seen guys weld tanks by filling them with water. The water coming out of the crack made it hard work, and the weld wouldn't look too pretty, but it could be done. While he looked for more blacks, I checked out the tank. The crack was O.K. Not too big and easy to get to. I filled the tank and we blocked it so I could get to the crack. He reached for the torch.

"Give me that stupid thing. And take off those goggles."

"I thought it was too dangerous."

"Yeah. Well, it is. But if you do it, there won't be anything left when you get through."

It took me about an hour and about a ton of rod. While Sunshine went through a six-pack. But the leak finally stopped.

"If you grind that off, we'll check it with water again before you put it back on. Then you can touch it up with some spray paint and it won't look so bad."

He handed me a beer. "Looks O.K. to me. Thanks."

"Well, O.K. It's your tank. But I hate to see you put that abortion on your motorcycle." I sat sipping my beer while he put the tank back on. He was almost done before I remembered. "I thought you knew what you were doing."

"I did."

"You sure didn't look like it when you had that torch in your hand."

He smiled. "I got the tank welded, didn't I?"

In the following weeks I began to spend more time with Sunshine. I was never really sure why he let me hang around. I wasn't much help to him. I hardly knew anything about dope. And I was usually extra baggage — someone he had to look out for in addition to dealing. And I always felt like everyone understood what was going on except me. Sunshine would say:

"Hey, you guys. I got a good deal on some whiff. Want in?"

"Sure." Even Rick understood. "How much?"

"Grams for half a bill."

"Is it good toot?"

"Fair. Probably been cut once or twice. But not too heavy."

"That sounds good. Here. Get me a quarter.

"How 'bout you, Bob?"

"Uhh . . . I don't know. What is it we're buying?" And Sunshine would have to stop and explain. But he always did. And he never seemed to get angry about it.

And then I fell in love. It wasn't the first time, but it was one of the worst. Lori was the foxiest lady I had ever been out with, and I was determined not to take any chances with her. I went out with her for a month before I took her out to Pt. Reyes. And then it was only because she insisted that she wanted to meet Sunshine. So I took her out there one Saturday afternoon. Sunshine acted like a bantam rooster trying to impress a hen. I tried to stay with Lori, but eventually Sunshine manuevered me outside while Rick entertained Lori inside. By that time there were about twelve or fifteen people there and a party was beginning. We were standing in a group drinking beer and passing a joint.

"Lori sure is a fox," Sunshine said.

"Yeah." I was getting nervous.

"Where'd you find her?"

"We work for the same company."

"Listen, Bob, you're my partner. I never hit on a partner's lady without asking him. But I can't let her pass. Do you mind if I try to score?" Everyone in the group was watching. I had to be cool. After all, only red-necks and straights tried to possess women anymore. Besides, I wasn't ready for the question. I could be out front about dope and cars, but women still had to be handled carefully.

"I un . . . I . . . well, sure. I mean no. I mean it's O.K. You should ask her, not me." That night I went home by myself.

I stayed away from Pt. Reyes for three or four weeks after that. Every time I thought about going out there, I felt like I had just been kicked in the stomach. Finally Rick called and asked me to come out because they had a deal going that I should get in on. I still didn't want to, but I couldn't think of any way out.

Sunshine and Rick were sitting in the kitchen when I got there, drinking beer and adding up figures on scraps of paper that covered the kitchen table. "Hey, Bob. Where you been?" Sunshine asked.

"Oh, around." I still didn't feel too friendly.

"Something wrong?"

"No, not really."

"Rick said you were ticked off about that girl that was out here."

I shot Rick a dirty look. He wasn't supposed to tell Sunshine that. "Yeah. A little." Shit. I'd been in love and he couldn't even remember her name.

"Well, you dumb shit, why didn't you say so? Hell, if I'd have known you'd be pissed, I would have let her alone. Why d'ja think I asked you first?"

"I dunno." I was feeling kind of sheepish. He had asked me first.

"Look, shithead. Some women you don't mind sharing, others you do. You're my partner, so I asked you how you felt about that one. If you ain't got the balls to say how you feel, don't blame me for not knowing. Besides, I did you a favor. Girl like that is only trouble. If she'd go with me, she'd have gone with someone else sooner or later. You're better off without her. Now quit acting like a jerk and sit down here. We've got a deal going and we need your help."

I had never been let in on one of Sunshine's dope deals. But he needed more money than usual for this one, and since I was one of the only people he could trust who had any money, I was invited in. I was still a little bent about Lori, but this sounded interesting. I don't know how he made the connection, and I really didn't want to, but the deal involved a large amount of cocaine. Since I had most of the money involved and Sunshine had made the connection, we were the ones who had to be involved directly in the deal. I tried to back out, but Sunshine insisted. It was my money, I had to be there. I told him I'd trust his judgment, but he continued to insist. So for the next week, I was subjected to a rigorous schooling in cocaine. How to act. How to taste it. What it could be cut with. How to act. How it would taste if it was cut. How much it could be cut and still be acceptable. And how to act. In Sunshine's words, "These guys don't fuck around. You act like a jerk and we'll wind up in the bottom of the bay." I half hoped that the deal would fall through, but my luck never was that good.

A week later, I was in the back seat of a rented car, crossing the Richmond Bridge. Sunshine sat next to me. Rick was driving. The driver was the most important back-up man in a deal like this. If things went wrong, he could easily save his skin by leaving. But if we came out in a hurry with people chasing us and there was no car there, we would be dead. I knew Rick wouldn't leave without me unless there was absolutely no other way. It was a comforting feeling. Next to Rick was a guy named Eskimo. He was huge, about 6'8" and at least 250 pounds, mean, and not too smart. But for some reason Sunshine had complete faith in him.

Sunshine gave directions and we stopped in front of an old, rundown apartment house in a seedy part of Oakland. Sunshine and I got out. We would take the money, go into the apartment, and if everything went smoothly, be back within ten minutes. If we weren't back in ten minutes, Eskimo would come after us. Rick had to wait another ten minutes before he was on his own. From there on it was each man for himself.

We walked into the building and up to a second floor apartment. Sunshine knocked. I felt just like I used to before a test in school. I had studied the best I could in the time available, and now I had to take the test. But there could still be something that I hadn't prepared for. The door opened and we walked into a dingy apartment. Facing us against the opposite wall were three of the biggest, blackest dudes I have ever seen. Between us and them there was a table with a small case on it. The guy in the center nodded at Sunshine.

"You got the money?"

Sunshine nodded.

"Where?"

Sunshine nodded at me.

"Let's see it."

Slowly I unbuttoned my coat to reveal the money belt around my waist.

"What's wrong with your friend? He nervous?" The black dude was looking at me. I tried to make my voice as level as possible.

"Hell yes."

He almost smiled. "Good. Just don't get too nervous and we'll all be O.K. Now drop the coat." I did as I was told. "Now put the money on the table." I unfastened the belt, stepped forward and put the money on the table.

"Let's see the stuff," Sunshine said.

I didn't see the signal, but two of the three stepped up. Each one had a key that he put into a lock. The locks sprung open and they lifted the lid, turned the case toward us, and stepped back, leaving the keys in the latches. The man in charge nodded and Sunshine walked up to the table. Inside the case were twenty clear plastic bags filled with white powder. Sunshine searched through them, picking some up, weighing them in his hands. Finally he opened one and tasted it. He stepped back and nodded at me. I went up to the table. The package Sunshine had opened was on the table. I went through the bags in the case just as Sunshine had. A couple of them felt different for some reason — almost sticky. I picked one package that was sticky and opened it. I stuck my finger in the white powder and rubbed it on my gums. Lactose! At least fifty percent! I tried to keep my face straight. I didn't want them to know that I knew. Carefully I picked up the bag that Sunshine had opened, rubbed my finger down the inside of the bag and put it on the tip of my tongue. Lactose in this one, too. Now I could even see the difference. I searched carefully through the bags. About three of them looked bad. I checked a good one. It was cut, too, but it was O.K. What the hell was going on? These guys couldn't have thought that we wouldn't check. Shit. How could we be so stupid? I looked at the three people across the table.

"You got a scale?" With any luck it would be in the other room.

"Sure." One of them reached down for a scale. Damn. I waited until he had the scale in both hands.

"We're not buying," I said. "Too much lactose." The room froze. In the silence, I heard the muffled click of a blade. One of them had it under his coat. We were in trouble.

"Hold on. Everyone stay cool." Sunshine's voice was congenial. "Man's got a right not to buy if he don't like the deal. We'll just take our money and split. No hard feelings. We never saw you. You never saw us." I started to reach for the money.

"Anyone touches that money is dead." One of them was still holding the scale. The other two had long, cold blades. My hands were on the table. I calculated the odds. I could hit one with the case and we could probably get out the door. After

that — well, we'd be lucky to make it down the stairs. They probably had people all over the place. Shit.

"Now wait a minute. Let's not get hasty." Sunshine's voice was behind me. I could feel him moving gently toward the door. "You guys still got your dope. All we want is our money. You can find another buyer for that stuff. You kill us now, you'll hang. Just give us the money and we'll be even. No trouble."

"We'll make you white boys a deal." The three of them were smiling. "You leave the money on the table and back your white asses out the door, and we won't kill you. Now get the fuck out of here."

I took one last look at the money. Everything I'd saved was there. I'd worked on this stash since before high school. But it wasn't worth my life. I heard the latch on the door and moved back toward it. Outside, Sunshine grabbed my arm and hustled me down the stairs. I caught a glimpse of Eskimo on the landing above us as we started down the stairs. Sunshine pushed me through the doors and onto the street. "Come on. Hurry." We crossed the street at a brisk walk and got in the car. I looked back in time to see Eskimo jump from the fire escape to the ground. Rick had the car rolling as Eskimo got in.

"Easy, Rick," Sunshine said. "Just drive normal. Left at the next corner. Right here. Through that alley. Right there. O.K. Good. Know where you are now? Good." We were in San Rafael before anyone spoke.

"Jesus Christ, Sunshine. They got it all." I could hardly believe it.

Sunshine smiled. "You were great. Just perfect."

What happened in there, anyway?" Rick wanted to know. "We were beginning to get worried."

"Lactose. The bastards wanted to sell us lactose!" My fright was beginning to turn to anger. "When we called them on it, they pulled knives and took the money. It was a set-up."

"Relax, Bob. The money's O.K. I've got it right here."

"What the hell do you mean? That money was in that belt. I saw it there."

"Yeah, I know. But something didn't feel right about this deal. So I switched belts on you. If the deal had been clean, I would have given them my belt." He pulled his coat away and I saw the belt he was wearing.

"God damn you! I almost went after that other belt. Why didn't you tell me?"

"Hey, calm down. Your money's right here. I didn't tell you 'cause they had to believe the money was in that belt. If you didn't believe it, they probably wouldn't.

And I knew you wouldn't risk your life for a few thousand. And you were perfect. For a minute even I thought you were going to go for it. They were so sure they had the money, they didn't even chase us."

I didn't know whether to hit him or hug him. All I could say was, "You son-of-a-bitch. You God damn son-of-a-bitch."

After that, we were really partners – each of us knew that he could count on the other. We never shared any more women, but we did a few more dope deals, got busted once, and raised a lot of hell. He could use my motorcycle and I could use his house (I didn't trust his motorcycle). And then came Bobby. I didn't really love her, I just wanted her. I couldn't take my eyes off her. I'll never forget the day I first found her at Sunshine's house. Instead of going to work that day, I had gone over to the coast and got drunk. I felt I needed an extra holiday. By late afternoon I was smashed. There was no way that I could drive home, so I headed for Sunshine's. I stayed at his place a lot. I didn't even see her when I stumbled in and flopped on the couch. But the next thing I knew, someone was trying to pull off my shoes.

"Who're you?"

"Bobby."

"Sheee-it. You don't sound like no Bobby."

"Says you. You must be Bob."

"How'd you know?"

"Mark told me to expect you."

"Mark? Who's Mark?"

"The guy that lives here."

"Oh. That's Sunshine." And I fell asleep.

The next morning she was still there and Sunshine was still not there. My head felt like an exploded cannonball. She handed me a cup of coffee.

"Where's Sunshine?"

"If you mean Mark, he's not here."

"Mark, shmark. His name's Sunshine."

She shrugged. "He's still not here."

"Where'd he go?"

"I dunno. But he said he might be gone a couple of days."

That didn't surprise me. Sunshine was always going somewhere. In fact, you never knew where he was unless you were looking at him. And then sometimes you weren't sure. So I just hung around and watched her. And she was fun to watch. She was short (Sunshine always liked women shorter than he was), blonde and slender. She wasn't really built, she was almost flat chested, but she was sleek — slender. And she could sure fill out a pair of Levis. My head was even beginning to feel better.

"More coffee?"

"Sure . . . Thanks." I watched her backside disappear into the kitchen.

"You feel like breakfast?"

"Yeah. You buying?"

"No. You are."

"I am?"

"Sure. I put you to bed and have coffee ready when you wake up. You buy me breakfast."

I shrugged. "Sounds logical. You trade for everything?"

She laughed. "Dream on, hot shot."

I liked her. She had a good style. Hard-assed enough to get by but not more than necessary. I began going to Sunshine's when I thought she might be there by herself. At first I didn't admit it to myself, but when I did realize it, it made it harder because then I had to hide it from Sunshine. When he was there, I had to hang around with him even though I wanted to be inside talking to Bobby. I wanted to ask Sunshine about it, but I couldn't find the courage. Sunshine finally had to bring it up himself.

"What do you think of Bobby?"

"Oh, she's all right."

"All right, shit. You been following her around like a dog in heat."

"Yeah. I know. But damnit, I can't keep my eyes off her."

"Well, why don't you quit mooning around and do something about it."

"She's your lady."

"Aw, bullshit. She's her own lady. Hey, Bobby. Come out here for a minute, will ya?"

"What is it?" Bobby came out of the house.

"Your beautiful bod has hooked another fish. Bob would like to get it on with you."

I was embarrassed. That was what I wanted, all right, but I wasn't ready to put it that way.

"Well, if Bob would like to get it on, why doesn't Bob ask me himself."

"I . . . uhh . . . I mean . . . uh, I 'd like to ask you. But I don't mess with partners' ladies." I felt like crawling in a hole. Why couldn't I handle ladies like Sunshine?

"Bullshit, man. I don't own ladies."

She looked at me. "You heard the man."

I didn't know what to do. I couldn't ask her if she wanted to go to bed. But dates were for straight chicks. "Well, umm . . . would you like to go out with me?" The words came in a rush and sounded like something from a manual on how to act on your first date.

"When?" She almost laughed.

"How 'bout tonight?"

"Give me an hour to get ready."

I couldn't believe it. We had a fantastic night. I didn't know what else to do with a girl on a first date, so we had dinner and went to a show. Neither one was great, but the company was out of sight. And she suggested we stop at my house. It was a long stop. I felt great the next day. We walked downtown for breakfast. It was foggy, but I felt sunny anyway. Then I had to take her back. Sunshine was sitting in a chair, smashed.

"Hey, look who's here. The Bobbsey twins, Bob and Bobby. I haven't heard anything so cute since Paul and Paula. Well, don't just stand there, come on in."

I looked at Bobby. She shook her head. "Christ, Sunshine. You been up all night?"

"All mother-fuckin' night. Where the hell you been, mother fuckin'?" He laughed drunkenly. "Or is it mother-fucker?"

"Knock it off, Sunshine," Bobby said. "Come on. Let's get you to bed."

"Yeah. Let's get me to bed. You guys already been to bed. Now it's my turn. Say, you're real cute. Must be the mother-fucker."

We got him into bed and he was asleep almost instantly. Bobby followed me to the door. "You gonna stay here?" I asked.

"Yeah. He wants me to."

"You sure?" She nodded. "O.K. Tell Sunshine I'll see him later."

"Sure. And Bob."

"Yeah."

"Thanks for a great time."

"Yeah. It was fun. See you."

"Bye."

I went out a few days later. Sunshine was just leaving and I didn't try to get him to stay. A week later I was offered a job in the company's new branch in Fresno. It was a good opportunity and I took it. Sunshine lent me his truck so I could move my stuff. When I brought it back, he wasn't there, so I left him a note with my address and phone number. That was the last I had heard from him until now. A lot had happened since then — to me anyhow.

I lay staring up at the ceiling. It was after two o'clock and I still couldn't sleep. I didn't really mind the four hundred. It was a lot of money and it really wouldn't be fair to my wife to give it to Sunshine, but I could find it and Carol wouldn't mind once she understood. But I didn't buy that phony jail story. Shit, if Sunshine had all but four hundred and the lawyer couldn't get it settled, the jerk ought to be fired. No. Either Sunshine had a deal going that he needed more money for, or he had done some dope that he couldn't pay for. But should I bail him out? I couldn't make up my mind. Finally, I dozed off.

When I woke up, the sun was just coming up over the Sierras. I love bedrooms that face east. The best time of day is sunrise. Things always seem to come together. I lay staring out the window at the new day. Sunshine and I had had a lot of good times together. But that had been yesterday. If Sunshine wanted to be treated like a partner today, he would have to act like one. "Sunshine," I thought, "You're on your own. I'd give my last nickel to a partner. But you don't bullshit your partners."

Carol Wickwire

The Motion of Quiet

Too old
    much too old
    for thoughts
of things which leave
and pass forever
    into some small place
with room for only fragments

And time once
    to hold the pieces
in a cup
    and drink what then
was tasteless
    has been scorched
on memory's husk
    and wasted

In hours of motionless
    appraisal.

M. Jerome Evans

Images of the Recent Plague

The plow lies there, broken
On land scorched to the caul:
There are no posies for the poor
Lord, have mercy on us all

The baby died last Winter.
We huddled by our icewall
With stone-cold breasts
Lord, have mercy on us all

Blood never washes clean.
Mind stained and hands stained,
In that crimson Spring,
Death ruled; plagues reigned

Summer was black
Yet scorched all to be seen.
Trees withered in darkness,
The grass sickly green

And the hot days of Madness
Came late in the Fall;
I killed a man in the wind
Lord, have mercy on us all

My house lies in ruin
Burned, frozen, red-black gall:
There are no posies for the poor
Lord, have mercy on us all

M. Jerome Evans

The Lesson

(To my mythology students)

Hector brave, Tamer of Horses,
Broke', mutilated, defiled,
Dragged 'round the walls of Troy
    in the frenzied madness
    of the Greek death-dealer,
    silver-footed warrior,
    brave in arms, cold of heart, hot-livered,
Lies as cold ash scattered
To the dust and wind
Blown from Troy to the ruin of Achaea.

Pity him no less
Than these who struggle
    to read his passion,
    his bravery in the field,
    his wholeness in arms.
Pity him no less than these busted statues
Of forgotten men, lost ever in a maze of words
And senses and images too old to fathom.
Pity him no less than the grave of time
That conquers even his brave foe,
For Hades lets none leave his dark land
Where memory also goes.

M. Jerome Evans

Autumn's Promise

We'll soon be raking leaves together
you and I
Summer's noise is all but gone
as our sycamores lose their leaves
quietly,
goldenly,
brownly falling
to the placid still-green earth

Flannel shirts and dungarees are the
best clothing now it's time for
long walks in the crisp air

leaves in piles look to the afternoon sun
reminded of warmer days they will know
again

I won't mind the cold at all this year –
you've come to enjoy the evening's tea
and I'll take you skating soon,
I promise

