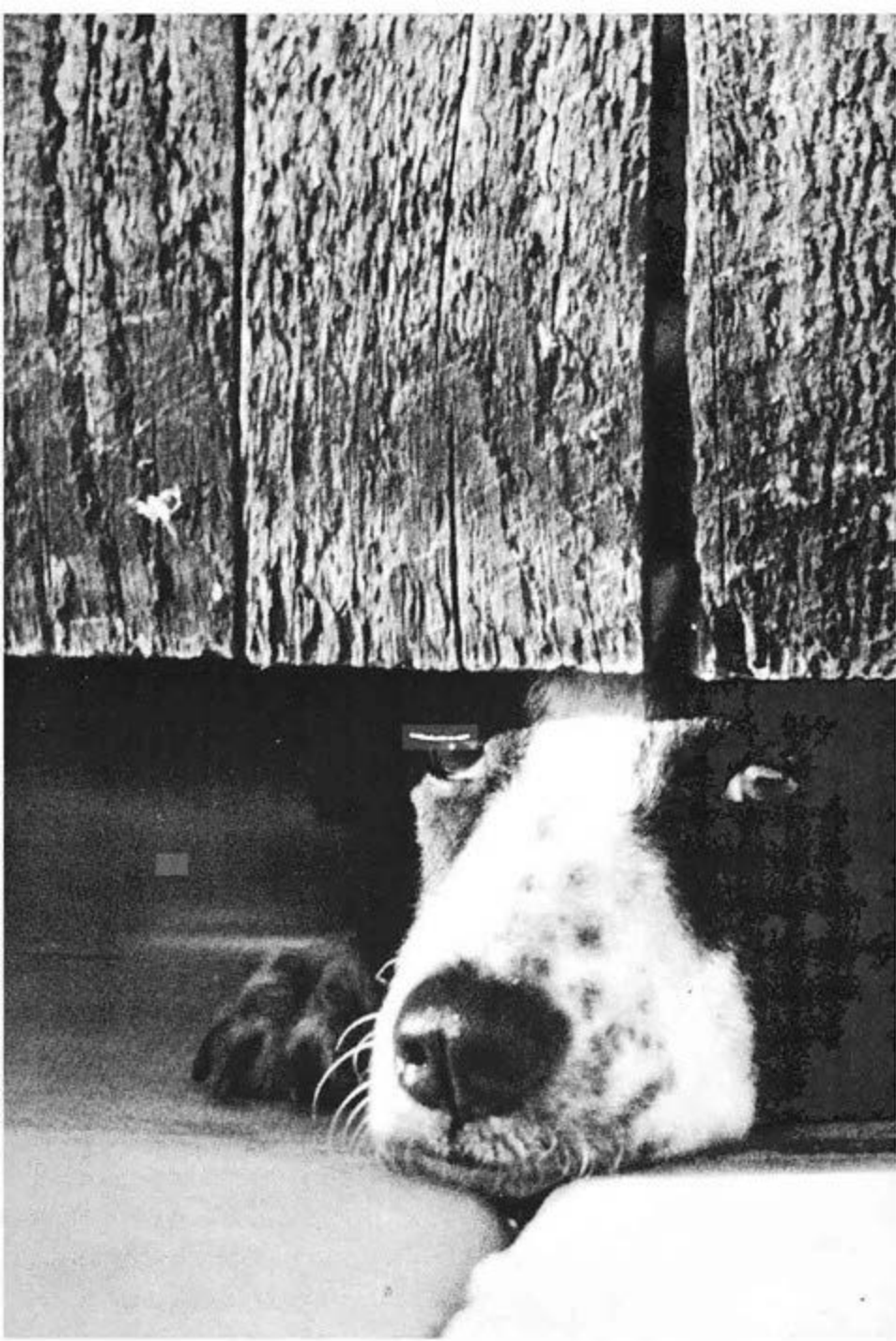


Orpheus

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Orpheus

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Orpheus

A L I T E R A R Y J O U R N A L

v o l u m e • X V I

Dr. Solomon O. Iyasere, Advisor

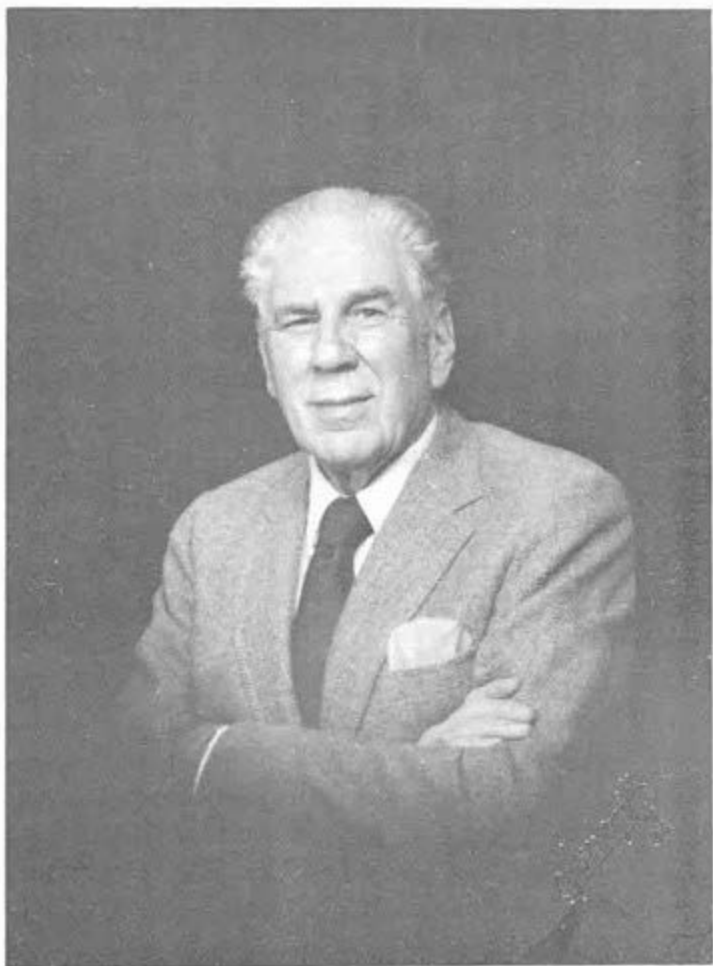
Inez Mejia, Reader

Orpheus is an annual literary journal produced by California State College, Bakersfield. All submissions must be typed, double-spaced, on 8½" x 11" paper. There are no restrictions on subject matter, length, or theme; however, poems over one hundred lines are rarely published. Any use of profanity must be pivotal to the understanding of a work.

So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see
So long lives this, and thus gives life to thee.

William Shakespeare

In Memoriam



**Professor Charles W. Kegley
Outstanding Professor of Philosophy
1912-1986**

Orpheus

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Orpheus •

He Never Came Home

He is dead. It's a good day for dying, they say
He is dead! What more can I say?
I sent him away on a warm day in May,
To the sound of the fife and the drum;
He wanted to go for the sake of his land,
He wanted to go for us all.
So on that spring day, he marched away —

He died on the day his heart blew away.

He is dead, but they can't send him home, they say,
For the enemy has run over the land where he fought.
We must wait for the bugler,
We waited —
Finally, they have sent him home, they say —
I have waited so long for the father I knew,
But the pale stuffed puppet they send is not he.

He marched away on that fine spring day,
And never returned to me.
Over there lies my father, over there in a land
Far away — I sent him away, and to this very day,
My father has never come home, no,
My father has never come home.

Come

Come to the river of time
To the place of the crystal pool
To see the weaver, old time at his loom
Picking up tattered threads of lives
And weaving them into his tapestry.

Come Walk With Me

I walk the road between the clouds
and sky —

My friends are the condor, eagle,
and hawk

I play with the otter and the squirrel
waiting to see who will win the
favored spot.

I dance between the rain and the wind —
But I'm lonely
Come walk with me.

To Summer

The dragon-fly sitting on the window
sill stirs the wind with its tail.

Melancholy

River of tears, wind of shame, leave me
for I have lost my love again. Torrents
of tragedy, I know you well, chase off
the mournful moon and float me to the
healing light of day.

Soaring

I cannot chase the wind on high
Or catch the golden butterfly
But here on earth I stand,
tethered to this lonely land.
My spirit strives to be set free
and fly among the birds and with
the breeze.
We live among the apes, but we are
men, and so must dream of freely
soaring once again.

I Awaken

Time has drifted into
a lonely burden
as I sleep through winter:
Rising one day
after the next
with a smile in the mirror.
As if time was over
and I was a grown lover.

Awake

Someone believes
leaves fall from trees
are me
in everlasting
spread with the wind
in a whirlwind
of possible
destinies
to shock
the peaceful walk
of your undecided
dreams.

Sketch of a Picture

A picture
I drew of you
appeared once again
on the Christmas
that gave me courage
to tell you
"I'll meet you
at a quarter of ten."
There you stole no heart
to casually forget
why I awaited the day.
How I would love
even more a far away
sketch of you everlasting.
Then you came.

Green Chair

I sit with my door
open today
and hear people passing
with laughs and a joke
transients are shuffling
the cosmos aroar
as some child laughs
in cars now passing
while birds and sky
with wings and cats
like mine
in the sun
sit watching it all

Untitled

delight beyond chaos
surface tension
beach balls
Red
Yellow
Green
Orange
Blue
floating waves
blue upon blue
I trim
in mourning
the
passionate
vine

noble truth

There are vultures trailing
splendidly vast
webs of my mind
spun with the sky

Barbed wire visions
of sculpted azure
held delicately still
on threads
of live suns

As so savagely tangled
I move and I gouge
and leave bits of my flesh
as signposts
of pain

Nacht ohne Schlaf

Nacht ohne Schlaf and Lippe ohne Wort,
Es murt und droeht von allen nahen Dingen,
Es fallen lautlos Decken und Waende ein.
Du auf dem schwebenden Bett,
Du auf dem breitne Stein,
Hinter vergitterter Brust
Klagt das gefangene Herz.

Gertrud Dachzelt

Night Without Sleep

Night without sleep and lip without word
Grumbling and rumbling of all near things,
Silently falling roofs and walls,
You on the floating bed,
You on the broad stone,
Behind trellissed breast
Laments the imprisoned heart.

tr. by Gene Clark

My Home

I am a contemplative Oriental
Born in a land struck by fiery fatalities
I have no prestigious diploma nor illustrious family tree
No vast fortune to subdue my travel fantasies
Coming from honest, simple country folks
I strive hard to get myself soaked
In Eastern wisdom and Western culture
I rarely enjoy Happiness and Freedom
For Vietnam was constantly under the thumb
of French colonialists who milked indigenous people
of Japanese militarists who pursued greater Asian dream
of foreigners who impose their lore and lofty ideals
and of die-hard Marxists whose sole ambition
is to turn a Small Dragon into a Socialist Vanguard.

Sometimes I fancy myself an awkward Atlas
Ambling along on my frail shoulders carrying
the burden of four decades of war miseries and searing pains
For all my life I treasure Liberty and champion freedom
In my youth I fought French conquerors in the Maguis
Under the Ngo, I narrowly escape jail and torture
Against Thieu, I wrote patriotic, ardent pamphlets
to advocate conciliation, love, and independent stand
In an attempt to spare Nam from the grinding of giants.

But like Penelope's work all these vanish like smoke
And now I trudge along, a weary exile, a refugee
Who lost parents and relatives, friends and his motherland
Yet tries hard to preserve the essence of his patrimony.

I am molded and constantly refined by East and West
Raised in strict Confucian traditions
I tried to get a liberal education
A self-taught student clutching a free passport
I labored and travelled around the world
With open mind, perseverance and insight
I respond to currents of all sorts
Always with liberty and lyrical songs ringing in my mind.

I never bow to the great but totalitarians I loathe
my saturnine mind constantly turned inward
To worship his tabernacle, my Lord
bestowed me an inquisitive mind.

All my life I seek eternal Truth
Hidden under alluring forms, illusory sights
Which often bog the common mortal's mind
but attracts me like a beacon on some familiar shore.

Oil Spill

Sticky, black ulcers
splatter the beach.
Green waves, glistening
opalesque in hazy sunshine,
gently lick the musseled
rocks.

A wounded gull struggles,
to stay afloat
on the liquid slush,
rolling, rhythmic upon
the crest,
only then to spin
downward into the
silent, murky waters.

The Dance

I long to dance barefoot under a clear, midnight sky;
of drums and the endless drone of insects.
I long to pound.
To pound my feet into the wet,
and feel the dampness between my breasts.
The city tenements moan and creak with the weight
and I hear only waterfalls,
That African summer of long ago, burns within my soul
and unlocks a new world,
Hearing the music of the jungle,
bending,
swaying to the beat
black earth
of neglect
roaring through tropical underbrush.
as old as creation,
older than the screaming egret.
I kick off my shoes.

Sufrimientos y Gloria

Mi gente sufre
My people cry.

"Por que lloramos?"
Asked my brother.

Replied mi abuelo:
 "No llores M'ijo, but
 grow, think,
 study and fight
 for what you
 deserve.

Fight for the pride
Of your heart, the pride
Of La Raza that is always
Alive."

"M'ijo you are the world
Lo tienes en tus manos
Go out and reach the glory
Of your efforts y sufrimientos
De tu vida."

Grandfather

Oh! Great Spirit
Be with me always
Whenever I laugh
Laugh with me.

Oh! Grandfather
I suffer because
I cannot be a
Universe like you.

Father ruler of
Life I ask you
To let your
Goodness flow into
Me to brighten
My life.

Grandfather let me
Be happy
Grandfather let thy
Thoughts be mine so
I can think.

Grandfather let thy
Word be mine so
I can speak.

Great Ancient Spirit
Let thy wisdom be
Mine so I can spread
It.

Grandfather Let my
Temple be like your
Eternal body.

Grandfather let my
Temple shine during
The day as yours do
From dawn to sunset.

Grandfather let my
Temple glow and
Brighten as yours do
During the night.

Grandfather let I
Be "You," the Universe.
Great Spirit..!
Thank You.

On Being

I

What can I do
with the empty spaces,
the interstices of words?

With what colors shall I mold
the warp and woof,
the fabric of my being?

Questions without answers
are answered without question
clothed in seamless abstractions.

II

Where did she go?
Did you say?
Eh? Can't hear well.
Oh, that-a-way?
You say?
Ummm, then I'll go
keep on looking.
Got to find her
sure-enough do.
She's me you know.

Yellow roses bloom in snow
nodding gentle to the music —
wind chimes now tinkling
soft in blowing breeze —
brass shimmerings in the sun
structured clean and bright
with and against
delicate drop-touched velvet
yellow and crystal white.

And so my soul speaks
from within calm peace.

Rosas amarillas amanecen
almas frescas respirando
libre y claro.

Y así estoy yo.
Tocame suave,
delicadamente con claridad,
con mi alma lo siento.

These
angular bits of brass
tinkle soft in fresh breeze,
jangle sharp harsh in whipping wind —
changing with the flow of moment
yet always constant.

I am as the wind, love.
I cannot stay.
But listen and touch
my ever moving:

ruffling the grass
on the constant changing
skin of the earth
(of which you are a part);
tickling tossing flowers —
just a touch to know and enjoy
and not to let go by;
kicking up autumn colors,
bright delight in sporadic gusts;
seeking ever seeking;
and now and then again
winding through tall stately pines
with quiet soothing rustlings
in calm soft notes.
I am here.
Move with me
with care and knowing,
changing ever.
Feel me:
with beautifully fierce cold driven snow
reaching in soul-bone deep;
with howling gale anger-hurt
in rafter shaking storming;
with smells of fetid refuse
in tossed off gusts up alley ways
harsh and pungent;
and with breezed in wafts of wood smoke,
gentle after rain fresh greenness,
and all but scented spring light blooms.
Yes I am
everywhere in everything.
I gather my soul
with all forms of wind
in mind pictures ageless.
Remember my passing.
Please?

Queen's Glory

She sits regally
Amid beer cans and
He-Man dolls,
Wearing her crown of white bandages
Soaked in once-red life,
Crying with a smile
Of the cruelties of the king
All the while
Bestowing her convenient martyrdom
On everyone.

Roses Are Red

Step forth with a flourish of satin
Wine-red Rose
And claim your automatic victories
Every perfect petal casting shadows
Across lesser varieties
You demand a king's ransom and
Will be paid in full -
Such is your seething beauty.
Hush now, lest we be reminded that
Your velvet softness
Hides
A thousand thorns

The Dream

It came around again
in this circle of my life,
Swaying, gray,
hazy around the edges,
But still the same:
Silent house with picket fence
Weather-wearied buckboards
Sunshine and flowers in the garden
My playmate and
The eerie picture face:
Young, handsome, doughboy
Smiling his knowing smile
Beckoning me longingly to
Our long ago memories
I never lived.

Daughter

Swirling around her every gentle
movement is the musky scent of
the beginnings of beguiling

Her lovely alabaster face, so perfectly powdered,
is marred only by a sprinkling of
persistent freckles

The silky blondness of her hair
cascades shiny and full through
memories of yellow ponytails

Her slender body picking up,
easier each day,
the natural rhythms of life

My heart melted today as
I caught a glimpse of her -
that graceful willow woman
where once my little girl had been

Hurt

Blood throbs painfully
To my throat
Each time you
Step on my depth
I hate you at that moment because
You live on the surface
Where everything is your joke
I tell myself you must be afraid
It cannot, must not be that
You really don't worry
Or care
That you are
Purposely sleeping through beauty
And pain
Reading only pictures on a dancing silver screen

The Night

The night stretches on ...
I'll make the dawn.
Bombs bursting.
Rockets flaring.
Fireworks in my head.
I'm too young
... too young to die.

The River

The river rushes wildly
Cutting through the high, jagged rocks of doubt
A man descends from the ledge of despair
Tightly grasping a thin rope of hope
Exploring the depths of his soul
He stretches towards the river
and drinks
He's alive again.

This Is Good

I am not a mountain
I am an even plain
No highs
But no lows
This is good

Yet
Sometimes I miss the mountain
and the clean fresh air
The contrast
Exuberance

Then
I remember the valleys
And the dark
The shadows
Fear

And
I am glad I am on the plain
No highs
No lows
But this is good

My Brother

We grew up together
We shared dreams, plans
whispers, secrets
Then you left
And they placed you on a pedestal where you
grew
and grew
and grew
until I couldn't find you anymore
But today I saw you again
on a paper
familiar writing
And what you were came back
Hopes
Dreams
and I remembered
our shared secrets
whispers
plans
goals
I'm glad you're back

In His Notes

I found a paper
Renee it said, Renee
Hearts, flowers, symbols of love
All in familiar scrawl
I thought I knew

We shared a childhood
you and I
dreams, plans
whispers in the dark
Parents, and
I thought I knew

As time passed
we grew
apart, but still
I thought I knew

Too soon you left
I cried at the loss, and yet
I thought I knew

Today I found the paper
Renee it said and again Renee
A past love?
A crush?
A dream?

And then I realized, I didn't know at all

Bloated Vacancy

No more the quenching thirst of the wounded soul.
As we crave so do we expel our desires.
Tepid baths constitute our luxuries for our
Zeniths either scald us to fury or freeze us to apathy.
But this is only now, this moon's shade.
Fidelity, the only permanent canvass on which we splatter
our amenities.
No more the quenching thirst of the wounded soul.
Moods vascillate, smudging our memories with blighted hopes.

After Thought

I do not entertain the notion of introspective locomotion
Nor am I urging for a nation in total communication.
But I to thee and thee to I have pertinence and relevance.
No sight I see says don't be free,
I am blinded you know, my neutral stance.
Is not accorded fraught with naught thoughts of the sower
of the seeds of doubt?
How does a poem mean?
How does a poem mean?
It is beauty with a cloudy sheen.
Let us talk.....it is deeds that are all that matter.

Untitled

emotions on parade
love unmade
images of me
warm company
alligator eyes
tears in disguise
end of the tracks
peeking through cracks
peacemaker
circuit breaker
love you so
tender volcano

Hour by Hour

Hanging by a thread
through the head
waiting to hear
and wanting and wishing
dreams are so clear

Holding my own
not the unknown
mortifying land
so tender and violent
twinkles like sand

Channeling power
hour by hour
energy seeping
drifting and drifting
hopelessness sleeping

Chartering guides
mysterious hides
ceasing to grow
breathing and weeping
ceasing to know.

Sylvia Two

Sylvia
red darkness cracked
a solitary smile
unpermeable
a continuum of pain
yellow bruise
white blur
absence of sunlight
but even more
marching horrors
filling a dead heart
black blood
grey ground
blue death

Untitled

Something is whispered
darkly
against a closed door,
like the rasping of
jagged broken glass;
and from within
comes weeping,
clear and
relentless
as fresh blood.

Untitled

The end of everything
playfully lurks
behind unknowing trees.
Listen.
Closer.
Yes, it's there.
In the scrunch and rustle
of fiery fallen leaves
it gives itself away.
There again.
In a forest motionless,
breezeless.

Untitled

lightning in our touch
thunder in our breaths;
nearby lies a single
young rose, white and watching,
in the candlelight

Untitled

Your tiny features
so fragile and perfect,
I craddled you in my arms.

Now I know I was once
so held.
Oh Mother, why then can we
only speak of the weather?

Untitled

Before I knew of you
I was afraid,
afraid of myself,
afraid of my knowledge.

I knew so little
of tiny feet and
how to nurture them
to walk upon this earth.

But alas!
You taught me well.

Flight

my mind released takes flight
etching the blue piercing the air
a winged tracery defiant unafraid
flitting dipping soaring
that peers down at the me it left below
seemingly a helpless sunlit heap

but I too ascend
abstracted from my earthly self
to buzz fledgling spirits
touch the gossamer of angels' wings
gather asteroids and stars
even defy father sun

then comes the yearning
to reach up all the way
and touch the heavenly vault
escape the prison of my earthly self
caressed by an errant cherubim's plume
be set aglow by a seraph's flame

The Un-Prince Comes To Academe

He came clothed in gentle words,
the cooing of his voice
veiling the venom of the viper.

He was an argument
in terms of right and justice
that translated into the traitor's snare.

His serenity, a shield
masking the cauldrons of ambition;
his delicate manner, a venal veil
banking the fires of his passion.

Each soft word,
a velvet sheath for infamy;
each voiced concern,
the travesty of truth upon his lips.

He came clad in mock gentility,
that, somehow, conjured up
a patriarch's flowing robes.

"We'll espouse," he said,
"principles most foreign to our purpose,
place expediency above ideals,
but sport the mantle of the scholar.

"Ostensibly, we'll be the champions of integrity,
who cannot with mediocrity temporize,
nor countenance the erosion of academic virtues,
but we'll place manipulation above truth.

"Always, the amenities we'll observe,
deftly pouring the tea of infamy,
or, if need there be,
slice an academic throat from ear to ear."

He came in civility bedecked,
as one in whom there is no guile,
whilst gathering evil in his heart.

He came as the dove arrayed,
mock rectitude, feigned innocence
shrouding the serpent's jaws.

Purveyor of the half-truth,
not the keeper of the flame,
but artful dealer in sophistry and deceit,
the Un-Prince prospers in Academe.

The Fifth Season

The fifth season,
the season of the heart,
the understanding heart
perceptive alike to wretchedness and want.

The fifth season
A lifetime-round awareness
of the have-nots' plight,
regard for the lowly and the poor.

The fifth season,
the season of the blameless soul
who in justice walks, truth within,
and without slander on the tongue.

The fifth season?
Time of man like silver tried
depurated of the awesome dross
of the smooth lip and boastful tongue.

The fifth season.
Tenure of hearts that need
neither bounteous plenty,
nor overlaid table to recall
that empty stomachs fill the earth.

The fifth season?
The seamless robe
that clothes the soul
that speaks not with double heart.

The fifth season.
Harvest time of graces
for the brother heart
that heeds affliction's call.

La Espera

Entre lápidas de ignotos sonolientos,
ávidos de la visita dominguera,
del clavel y el nomeolvides;
entre mustios testigos de su espera
—saben que volverás, Antonio—
cenidas sus hermosas sienes
de rosas y de alhelíes,
yace Leonor enternecida,
de azahares de amor,
lirios y azucenas revestida.

Espera Leonor que a su lado yazgas
en lecho de amor interrumpido,
recojas rosas aromadas,
delires en el embeleso loco
de dulces suavidades,
goces en delicada
delicia de lirios y jazmines,
y—milagro del amor, Antonio—
una vez más se tinan
de carmín sus alburas perfumadas

Watermarked Memories

Paddington Bear lies quietly atop the roof
carried there by the merciless waters of the flood.

His days of tea parties, nighttime hugs and imaginary
adventures to foreign lands are over.

He lies abandoned, forgotten, never to be reclaimed by loving, childish arms.

The memories of my childhood are dimmed by time,
vaguely recalled now and then.

They are carried to the dark recesses of my mind by
the currents of the passing years,
abandoned, soon forgotten, never to be relived again.

The Caged Bird

I was as a bird
in a cage with opened door.

Free to leave,
yet enslaved by
fears,
the unknown.

The Lord offered
hope, love, and
life eternal.

My soul sang out
as I left the cage
flying on wings of faith.

Holding on to Her Dreams

Old woman shuffles up the street.
Purse clutched tightly,
"Love Boat" tote bag
hanging by her side.

The city, cold and dirty
clamors noisily around her;
It robs her of her strength,
taking advantage of her age.

"Find romance,
take a cruise on a Love Boat"
promises her tote.

Keep on old woman,
hold on tight to your dreams.

Helen's House

The rusted bell lies abandoned
among the stones at my feet.

It's clapper, clothed in corrosion,
rests silently within.

The old woman grieves for the home
she once knew;

Her memories carried away in the
currents of the flood.

I pick up the bell and gently shake it,
amazed as a beautiful melody sings
from within its wasted exterior.

The old woman sifts through the pieces of
her past, and finds within herself
a song.

Warmth

The summer day turns traitor
as heavy, dark clouds crowd the sky.

I shiver as the cold sea wind
penetrates my skin.

I see you in the distance
seeking me out in the crowd.

The darkness gives way to light
as warmth envelopes me.

Clouded Mirrors

The images,
so vague and unchanging.

You see as your
desires dictate.

What is clear?
What is exposed?

I see myself mirrored
in your image of me.

I lose touch
and search for clarity,
identity in what lies
behind the mirror.

Untitled

I am an artist
striving to create a masterpiece.

The floor,
caressed by countless
leather-clad feet
becomes my canvas.

Satin slippers once unyielding,
now so familiar,
are my brushes.

The music singing from
my soul adds color
and brilliance.

My inspiration comes
from that which I am:
a dancer.

At Nineteen

Jenny,
so young, so hopeful.
In your world
doubtful reality doesn't
stand a chance.

Jenny,
you cause me to remember
dreams long forgotten,
places never traveled
and never conquered.

Jenny,
your youthful innocence
awakens the dreamer
buried alive within me,
battling the adult I have become.

Jenny,
you and I are one.

Death

Death lives with me.
Slowly eating away a soul while I watch.
Her once laughing blue eyes now hold a faded stare.
She watches the world go by and awes at the changes she sees.
In the night, often her frail body lies too still after a tired breath,
but as always the chest rises again.
Grandma will go soon.
Yet — she has so much yet to tell.

Beauty Spent

A fading rose
Petals, eaten and torn, falling off towards the ground.
It can't flower anymore
It is a tired rose
Beauty spent
Cactuses are placed around the rose
They flower also, but none could match
the rose
Even when dead.

Untitled Poem #1

The moon has chased away the sun,
as darkness crashes on the land.
Moon glares coldly at the Earth
bored with the world of grey.
Laughing colors put away
To mourn the passing of the Sun.

this month she turned sixty

born: 1926

vital stats: she was a vital woman

epitaph: not yet, not yet

she considers suicide:

No, she concludes,

not yet, not yet

she wanted to be a poet

sometimes she writes a poem

sometimes she likes the poem that she wrote

sometimes

this month she turned sixty

half a century gone since a spiderweb

forced her to become a poet

sometimes she writes not-poems

this is one of them

A Non-Critical Introduction

And what were your critical influences, old woman?
Who forced poetry into your not reluctant mouth?

Ah, professors of mastery, I became a poet —
forgive me my androgyny, a poet, never a poetess —
one day when a spiderweb halted my skipping steps,
a spider's web seeming suspended in air,
stretched between bushes, spattered with dew:
A spider's house captured my sight, begged me to see,
then challenged me, asked to be told —
but how is one to sing a fine-spun web,
a radiant string of glistening pearls,
a circular net of fairy-spun gold?

I became a poet because I was struck dumb.

Literary influences?
Oh, you want to know whose rhymes I read?
Whose words I chose to imitate,
Whose lines I elected to adore and emulate?
Let me think ...

One was a lady who thumbed her nose,
who raised a rude finger and scoffed at death,
who flirted with suicide and finally said,
“ ... might as well live”
but drowned herself in bottled amber death.

Mimi Merrill

And one there was who boomlay-boomed,
who rhythmized his rhymes like a jungle drum;
and who cursed patterns, and stiff brocade;
another sang soft while the red juice ran;
and some were women and some were men.

When one "looked another way and saw three islands
in a bay" and died a thousand deaths in a place
called Capri — she captured me, she captured me.

From an obscure writer whose name was Brown,
I borrowed an irreverent, cynical tone.
And when Richard Cory blew out his brains,
I fled to the forest whence the traveler came.

One last important influence:
A learned doctor of the mind said I stole words
and lusted for fame, that naught would content
me save Shakespeare's name.
Guilty and ashamed, I sentenced myself,
considered the crime, decided the timer,
and sent me to silence, where I wrote no more.

Fifteen years later, awaking from sleep,
learned professors, wise doctors,
my tongue was restored,
but more cutting, less fearful than ever before.

Death in the Air

The fire that rages in Kiev extends Armageddon's arm;
Fingertips of floating death brush across the world.

Those flames ignite an ancient voice in me, and I,
A prophet's tongue licking my drying lips,
Sing out damnation, wail in melting tones at meltdown's toll:
"O! Cloud of Hell! O! Messenger from Satan's putrid breast!"

In Russia, Mother Russia who mothered the mother of me,
In Russia, near Kiev, this day a fire rages,
Spewing forth cloudy death; floating death is drifting.

Meanwhile, cocooned in another part of a too-small world,
An aging poet sits and sullies paper, searching for verse,
For verse and line she prays will sing and sear,
Verse and line and song she hopes will be deemed uplifting —
But not in falsely honeyed hope, not with bloody justice's scales.
No. What she would lift is rebellious spirit from its grave.
Ah, she is too old. She no longer trusts even her own words.
She never did trust authority's wheedling lies.
She sits and watches as a visionless eye illuminates the day.
Purveyors of adders' oil usurp the waves of air, skirting meaning.
The poet writes and fears her foolishness no less than theirs.

Mimi Merrill

"O! Cloud of Hell! O! Messenger from Satan's putrid breast,
Be thou at last the final warning: Learn or die, learn or die!"

Forty years and more gone by, time enough to have near forgot
The piles of Jewish bodies, Jewish bodies that appeared to test
Our ever-weakening spark of spirit, of humanity,
Piles of Jewish bodies arrowed to point us, to point away, a way —
With horror so focused on our conscious minds,
With nightmare pressed so tight against awakening despair,
Finally, we had no words, nothing left to say.

Will nebulae of radioactive smoke force more?
Only the forms of death have changed, only the forms,
Only the shapes of the wounds have metamorphosed into metaphor:
Constant and unchanged is evil's still demented core.

Petroglyphs

My own flawed quick notes
Are not like those
Of the singer who sang of Beowulf,
Nor the Bard who graced blue Avon's shores.
No. The poet whose work is most like mine
Chipped stone, rubbed rock,
And worked a wordless tune on granite's face,
In caves or in the desert's emptiness;

Or scratched a feather dipped in dragon's blood
Across a drying autumn leaf,
And flung it to a nameless wailing wind
Whose passage brought it to my door.

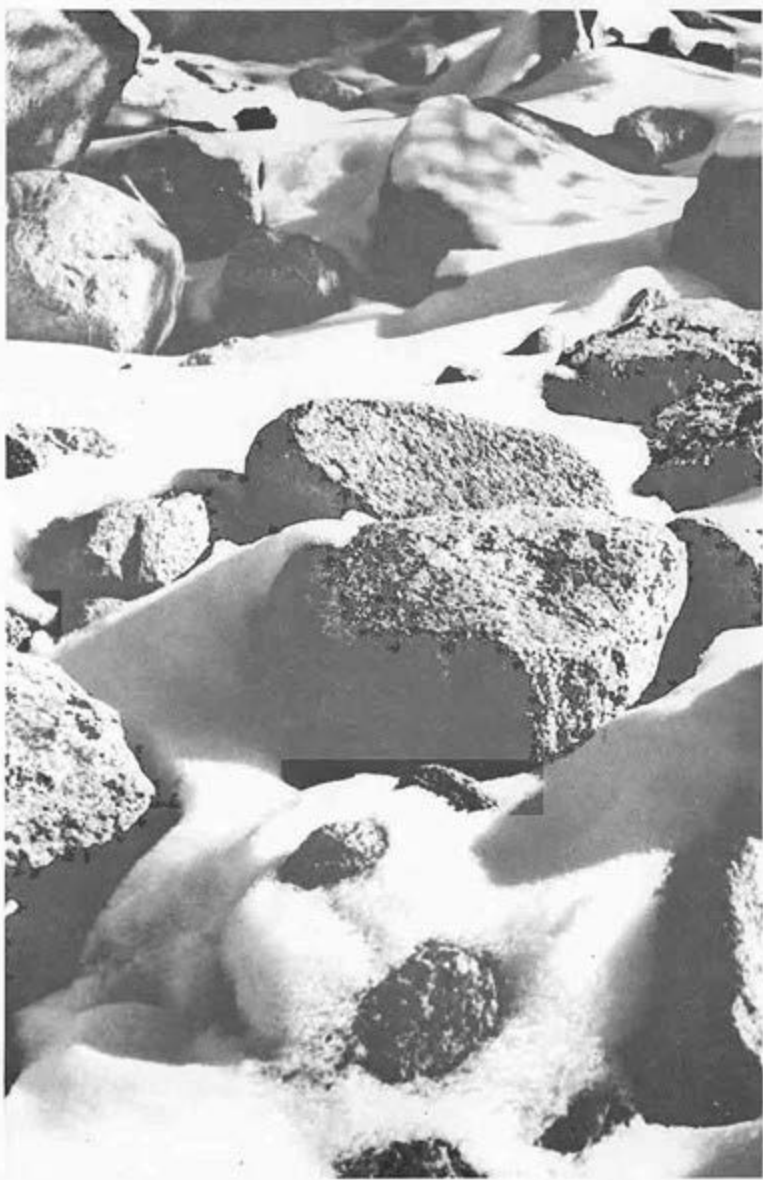
Acts of Love

"Someday, twenty years from now, they'll throw another war,"
I howled as they held me down and wrenched my first-born out of me,
"Another war, another war, and then they'll kill him, too,"
I screamed as ether brought a merciful end to endless pain,
("... him ... too ...")
And drifted into forced sleep's drugged embrace.

"The sole surviving son of a deceased veteran,"
They labeled him, and so lulled me into dreamless sleep.
He was safe. No draft could steal my son away.
I slept without my bedmate, nightmare, for a while.

You held out the pen and asked me to sign,
and I watched my hand not-tremble, as I wrote my name
on the waiver that would release you, let you go,
go into the hell that men call war,
and I signed, I signed, I signed,
my son,
because you asked me to.

"Thanks," you said.
"It was nothing," I mumbled.
But I lied.
It was an act of love.



Colors of Change

Change the colors
For me ...
My tears begin to fall
Exploding to a storm
When the colors start to crawl.
Like chocolate wet paint
Melting ...
My heart sinks
Flowing dead away.

And you by the door
Hidden in yourself
Just wait.
Conscious not to touch
Reminded of a care
You have for yourself.
Your eyes dreamed blue
Blue teardrop blue
Tears that I see
A lone reflection of me.

Harsh are the colors
Now.
Smothering me
Turning my thoughts
As desperate as can be.
So I reach
To you to my love.
But then you move far away
Through the door
Leaving me killing me
Forever more.

Passage Home

I was so overdue. I should never have stopped
And somehow they knew as always they did.
their son's a fool boy an expendable kid.
Forest silence was broken. About me leaves danced.
It was then I should have run to make quickly my flight
But the wind began swirling as it brought on the night.

Rushing to catch me a tireless thing
The blackness still behind me over pines did it pour
Through me it passed dragged me into it's core.
Voices replaced whispers a chant on the wind.
In the void it was clear something started to form.
It was not life before ... no eye in this storm.

If I could just make it back I would never be bad.
Murmurs behind me Oh, God! What had I done?
In front there was nothing so to it did I run.
Like time in a warp my motion had slowed.
Before I could realize the ghouls were atop me
Scratching and pulling determined to stop me.

A faint sound I then heard Father oh, Mother.
To them how I tried to make heard my last cry.
To the voices my hands stretched then before me Death's eye.
In masses devils ripped me away from the light.
My body torn asunder with a tear a last moan
Never again to traverse the long passage home.

Expectations

In the lighted classroom I'm the notable one.
I sparkle with anticipation, awaiting the question.
I shoot my hand upward, "Fire away!"
He answered, "You are always right."

As I left the room, my mind went cloudy.
It would take more
Than mere pen and ink to uncloud,
In the dark hallway of life.

Endless

The silence is poked by the pace of the baby ben
The one beside me breathes with the downbeat
In tick ... Out tock ... Endless

Restlessness covers me as I glare at the time
Many hours til morning. I flip the tube to
watch ghosts playing in a blizzard.
Crackle ... static ... Endless

Herds of sheep stumble over rickety fences
Riot-like, their cries fill my head.
Bah ... bah ... Endless

The puppy stirs and stretches, her brown eyes
catch mine by the light of the hall. She
questioningly glances and quietly investigates.
All is well.
She settles to sleep with one eye open
her watchful gaze is Endless

Time passes slowly, ever so slowly
I lay here waiting for the sands of sleep
My wait is Endless

Winter Understanding

It's fog, moist and cool, protecting
Semi-dormant buds now resting.
Forced by life, quickly they will burst
And show their color.

Will most come to green and feed
The life from which they spring?
Will others briefly flame
Or smoke or shimmer
With all the zeal of dance hall girls
Knowing their brief glories
Have few fruit?

A pretty interlude they are.

Life is not:
Relentlessly powerful,
Life is endlessly destructive certainly;
Eternally reblooming perhaps.

So, after all, what is living
In the fog?

Ode to Beth

Just pretend you're a nobody.
That's the secret.

Nobody ever going to read you so you write
to nobody never. And all your words come
spilling out to Nobody 'cause now you're a
Nobody too and all you'll ever be is just
a curled-up puppy in somebody's back yard
You ain't never going to see every stranger,
Strangers going to stay that way forever Nobody.

So now you can write like Gertrude Stien did
Emancipation of bad grammar that was
and you can do it too
It's easy as just adding water.

But you also gotta say, "I'm forever a Nobody."

That's real important
and then it starts raining words like it never
done before all spilling out of clouds, falling
loud falling spilling out paper full of stacks
of words falling out and all you have to do is
write. Feels good, so damn good too, feels good.

It's just like it's supposed to be
all just letting loose like the launching of a
Zeppelin and everyone waving hats and scarves
and standing some in awe and waving smiling
breeze in Spring so nice,
and majesty of airship, technology of man
and all in awe, in awe of man and majesty
in all in awe of all of man and all.

Brent Palmer

Beth going to see maybe see
Beth see all I write I am maybe not so free
maybe all I write I do for her
so she'll see why she is not all alone
like words in a sentence
sentenced separate each cell
separate words in a sentenced cell
each block cell so separate
and alone all alone
white space and
no touch.

Hurting now to think, think now no hurt in heart.
It feels alone now to know now no hurt in heart
Is to not to be alone but to be together, us together.

Now its robbing from me life like air leaving plane
with a cracked cabin high up, pressure sucking out
air, suffocating us, robbing me but all so she can
get that special cut-out valentine
special cut and I cut it out so special.

She needs to know not just I love

But she is more than just a cut-out valentine
but she is more than just another lonely
She is more than all these lonely words can say.

She is all the greatest words in Greek
(or any other ancient language)
and she is more than all the best selling novels
of the last century
She is more than great, like Gatsby
She is pillars great in her heart pillars like the
Parthenon or Gatsby's balcony pillars.

Ode to her I spill out:
rain the Queen spill out and
douse the grass and soak the
violins and sog the hair wet
wet sog wet hair night, tonight.
Tonight when all the strings

back and forth

go strings wet full of rain,
I will sigh and her eyes
will fill and flood with rain that
pours from the unknown sky.

And ode to her I owe
for lady
setting free the storm and now in sweet rain
not lo-cal or phony sugar sweet for fat
but sweet like grass freshly mowed in rain.
And I owe her to say I rain inside
for her to say what she will say
when rain is obsolete.
For all the rain of all these years
could not obey and fall to say
all I say in a thousand rains for her to say.

If I could say in words or rain the heart language
words and rain could say I'd be the sun beyond the
clouds never gloating up big and red to someday
explode and die but I'd be the sun beyond the death
of all suns in all of space and time I'd be.

Never going to stop to say it's over
never want to stop to say it's over
never never want to stop to say it's over. Stop.

Yet like the winding down with age of hands sore
turning the coffee grinder round and round
There comes a time to mix without,
to blend the coffee soil with the water boiled
to steam and steaming out away out the window
down the road, sleeping road
and tenements
napping.

Salmon pink and white
with dust and steam swirling

in and out

like bandits behind every post and pillar
distant out beyond the green

where words could never touch

She and I will sit and swing
swing back and forth and smile inside
beyond a smile and know

We know the words and rain all turned to steam
were but a taste in our mouths one morning when
we awoke and all the world stood silent
almost dead

in awe of us, when we spoke out words beyond the dead
and smiled in our hearts to know the other knew,
to know and see beyond each other's cells
to know that there was someone who believed in her
and him and content to swing beyond the green
beyond the toil of the slave
and swing as he wrote down more to love
and write to love
to write to love her right,
and write love to her
and write again to love her always loved
and will love her always.

Love

Love

Too powerful for the weak

Too long for the impatient

Too fragile for the destructive

But for those who have "time"

Love is Eternal

Untitled

Wish I could go home again
Where hearts are tender and people care
Wish I could go home again
Greet Daddy at the door
Play in my tree swing
Climb my back stairs

Wish I could go home again
Hear Daddy sing, "Mandalay"
Hear crickets outside my bedroom window.
Wish I could go home again
Where my youthful heart still lives.

The Road

As we move steadily upward on the road
An occasional lily can be seen
A violet, a rose bush, and a sunflower

The clearing just ahead
Sports a border of red and violet carnations,
In the distance upward ... music can be heard.
It grows louder and more melodious with each step we take.
The crowds are gathering now to meet all of us
Who have come through troubles and sorrows to ultimate victory.

Remember how that when we first began our upward climb
The road was laced with killer ants
Somewhat like the fears that ran up and down and all around
In our minds?
Remember the black widows and the king cobras
And how they met us at every bend of the road?
But also do you remember how that our determination fueled our
upward climb?
In order that each one of us could reach our peak in spite of the
overwhelming odds?
So that we might obtain all we had set our goals for?

Can you remember how dusty the old road was ... never having ever
been watered?
How that the houses we saw along our way (were all faded and old?)
And how the cows were sickly and how the dry over-grown weeds
were reminiscent of death and things dying and decaying?
Like the dreams we had that never came true?
And now the road is clean.

The widows are all gone.
The cobra's are no more and our trials and troubles are all
behind us on the road.
The road of the mind ... the figment of our imagination
The road that discourages so many who start their walk through
life.

Of course there are problems
And there will always be,
And we will always have to solve them,
But so much the fear that arises stunts the growth
The growth of a brilliant wonderful soul of a man.
The fear that begins in the mind
Has discouraged and hurt many a brave anticipating soul.

Remember though that as we moved steadily upward on the road
we had chosen
After the troubles and trials
After the sorrows and heartbreaks
After the rain was over.
An occasional lily could be seen
A violet, a rose bush, and a sunflower
But we must look for them.
We must search for them
We must hope
Hope with all the heart that we possess
To see them
For they are there, they have always been there, and they will always
be there.
Believe it for 'tis true ...

My Self

I thought I heard a knock
Pulled back the curtain
And came face to face with myself

The Whisper That Was

A whisper flew
 On water wings
Beside the burning barn, and
 Past the piles
Of decaying dreams
 To lite on Yasgur's farm
But seventeen summers
 Have turned to fodder there
The flower and the power
 Were no match for the plow
I saw the whisper bow, and
 Shed its tired wings
Naked it laid on
 The shadow of the stage
After pause it arose, and
 I saw it had changed
A scream flew away
 On wasted wings

Make Us Pay

Does the earth beneath my feet
Seek revenge upon my kind
For the heartless way
We've made it serve our pride?

Should I fear that I'll go down
Like Atlantis without a trace
All because my reckless cousins
Had to win their ruthless race?

Is there any penance large enough
That I may ease my shame
To counter what you've suffered
In the greedy game?

It's not enough that I regret
The humiliation you've endured
But that I guarantee to you
It will never again occur.

No reason we have given
That you should trust our kind
So if justice sees to our demise
I really wouldn't mind.

Go ahead
Make us pay.

Sarah Phinney

"isn't that new?"

he asks

"isn't it beautiful!"

"why are you frowning?"

the others look worried

and scowl across the room

"it's beautiful?"

they question

now

the harlequin

looks worried

his bells are falling off

Not Everyone Loves the Clown

it's a new way
the cork is out
and heads turn

"why is it new?"
the censor asks
he sees what he thinks
is a mouth full
of dirty words

the interrogator asks
"where'd you get it?"
he weaves
a web of intrigue
and slaps it around

"is it christian?"
asks the preacher
in great confidence
he smiles
and passes the plate

the harlequin walks in
and jingles his bells
trying to make them laugh

The Fog

Rolling hills with cloudy matter,
never have I seen you sadder.
I do not know whether you're far or near,
from my sight you disappear.

All that is seen is a white mass;
a flicker of light
grasps the all expecting eye.
A strangle hold of you he's got
but with sun and time you fear not.

Why He comes — nobody knows —
What will he take with him:
for most of us
time is his biggest victim.

The Meal

He pierces the spider with his needle eye;
through the kelp and onto a leaf,
the meal has found some time to buy.

He darts around with his rainbow colors
showing off to his school of brothers.

A fatal move the spider made,
for the leaf slowly starts to sink —
leaving him treading the lake.

Up from the hollow depths he makes his way
for this poor unknowing soul
gobbles up the spider with no delay.

A meal he thinks is indeed quite fine —
until he finds himself on the end of a fishing line.

Conversion of a Landscape

The snow seeped in
Thru darkness
Invading
All things
Last night

Its crystalline shell
Frosted
Each contact
In starkest
Rigid white

The sun arose
Expecting
To illuminate
Each drop
Of dew.

But every beam
Was captured
Imprisoned
Like fire
Frozen too.

The River

Gushing
Tumbling
It falls
Soft
Refreshing
Cool.

Then more rain comes

Splashing
Dashing
It leaps
Forcefully
Tugging
Wet

Sun melts the snow

Swirling
Crashing
Surging
Carelessly
Powerful
Cold

The summer comes

Sparkling
Inviting
It sweeps
Dangerously
Capricious
Lethal

Death waits all who go
I know

A Tapestry of Freedom

Time looked down on a world of woe
A tangled mass of thread
How could he make a thing of worth
If the spirit in it was dead?

Time had such beautiful plans for man
In every earthly land
But greed and pride and arrogance
Were totally out of hand.

Death was the penalty all must meet
If his soul did not agree
With the ideas of the ruling class
He had to die or flee.

And the quality of life was low
No dream dared show its face
Each man was told what he must do
Lest another take his place.

Perhaps Time pondered a way to go
When a pattern began to show
A glimmer of light in the hearts of some
Tho the flame was burning low.

So Time set about retrieving these
In ones or dozens or scores
And he moved them onto safer soil
For transplanting to other shores.

And so it was that the people came
Threads from the tangled strands
Of chaos, bigotry, hurt and shame
Rampant in other lands.

Seeds from a crop unwelcome there;
These dared to think and do
Help must come soon the weave mused
He would have to see them through.

Time gathered them carefully and well
From every land on the globe
He sorted all sizes and colors and creeds
No nation he did not probe.

And he tested the strands he carefully chose
For hidden strengths and goals
Was their character strong, or would it fray
Would the pressures of life make holes

In the sterling worth of the warp and woof
Of the tapestry he had planned?
In the face of heartrending trials to come
Would their principles still stand?

Only trial would tell so Time set the frame
In a land both far and wide
And wove those various threads he chose
In the matrix side by side.

And the pattern grew with each added thread
They held well when blended and tied
Strong voices came from all over the land
"Give us freedom or death," they cried.

Time built a nation different from all
Stronger, more honest and true
Where freedom beat as its very heart
Where liberty could shine through.

And the threads have held for 200 years
Freedom and liberty thrive
The masses still come to the open shores
Toward the goal of strength they strive.

While Time keeps sorting the special strands
From all nations under the sun
And weaves them in to provide the strengths
Where all can work as one.

Billy Whose Life the River Took

You are out there
Somewhere
Silent, still
Peacefully
Asleep, as is
God's will

I can no longer
Reach you
Nevermore
You have no need
Death closed
the door.

I miss you son
Yet within
I know
No hurt can penetrate
The door through which
You go.

Your sleep is deep
Beyond the reach
Of time.
You'll wake to an
Eternity
Sublime

Where Is Our Billy?

Silently he slipped beneath the water
Not knowing when it overflowed his face.
No other one in all of Gods' creation
Can ever come to take our Billy's place.

Where did he go? They're searching for an answer.
Is he aware he's in the river — lost?
Sometimes, they say, they think they hear him calling
They search for him unmindful of the cost.

And well it is, the "house" our Billy lived in
Should have a final place to rest and wait.
Life has moved out, our Billy's house is empty
And as Life left, it softly closed the gate.

The breath, it was, that made our Billy function
Shut out, his body's motor slowed to stop
Then flipped the mainswitch to his brain computer.
What had been Billy vanished on the spot.

Soon, in the not too distant future
The God who made our Billy will return
And by the formula He used the first time
He'll recreate Billy's "house" so all will learn

Eleanor Rothgeb

That it is He who powers the body's main switch;
He Who puts breath back in the man He made
Then Billy's brain will start again computing
Right where the lack of breath caused it to fade.

And Billy will become the self-same person
He was when circumstances took his breath
He'll think he only rested for a moment
We'll have to tell him that his rest was death.

When I leave here Doubt
I leave much to praise
But son John and Danny two
with little sons to raise.
My stately bones in U.S. Steel
rotting putrid on Hollisters fields
And wanting more much more
to have my wife sitting
next to me counting roses
and watching ships leave Frisco Shore.
My woman made me man.
From a woman I was made.
My wife gave me reason to exist
and from the hot glare of life
 she gave me shade.
What reason for do I want a
 loan of Dead.
Nothing left now to be said
and nothing has been uttered
to mend the torn
scars of life, except
for me and my wife.

The time was yesterday
my son, saw his son's son, and
his son was myself long
lost to dust covered
brick buildings hide Hollister
fields.

Crying tears not for me or
my lovely wife and no one feels,
the pain of the years.

Yet it's our life now
my wife let's grab and run
for the game of life,

Death has won,
my wife of brown hair, lets
love now, not hiding. But
wanting to be naked in the sun.
We have measures of time
left one for the other.

Dios Y Algodon

That's all there was, God and Cotton.
La Raza had it made, but you
can bet we didn't find in those
infinite rows of cotton any shade.
(y como duele mi espalda! ay mujer!)

When the cotton was plenty, you
could tell the Sanchez family
by the new belts, bright shirts
and Andy's shiny pistols.
(me las compro me jefe!)

When the cotton was thin, then
it was up to Dios, que los proteja.
By miracles and my carnales'
sweat we carried plenty of
frijoles and harina (Harina de la Pina!
merra Rachel que bonito va ser tu
vestido)

Yes in those early years I learned
the art of picking cotton, so my
hands wouldn't bleed, I was proud
vato! si tu mosquito!

And so it was I learned to depend
on God and Cotton.
(nunca los olvedeve)

Adrienne Rich

Assise sur le rocher de votre sagesse
Devant un miroir brisé par vos bras ouverts
Richement vetue du bleu rayon de vos yeux
Illuminée comme le soupir de vos larmes ...
Existence d'ambre jaune autour de votre coeur
Nageur gracieux dans les plis rythmés de votre esprit
Nulle ame connaîtra votre calme douleur!
Entendez l'écho infini de vos paroles ...

Recevez l'écharpe d'Isis pour vos mains douces
Initiez l'aurore d'un désir d'amitié
Collez votre esprit dans mes souvenirs humides
Haussez vos épaules transformées en ailes ... elle.

Mother

My mother is a whistle
heard in tunnels
locked in shadows
never sounding
when light, wind, and rain
beat down on her neck.

She has blasted her name
screeched out her tones
in moments briefer
than death on the tracks.

She is a whistle
spending sleepless nights
on tracks that pass
beneath her
on tracks that beat
their refrain
into her ear,
drowning her tones
until a tunnel
of frozen stone
approaches.

Prophecy

You went up to the mountain
And I stayed behind on an earth mound
and cried till my eyes were washed
of all the salt I had tasted.
Then you turned your head
till your eyes like lasers
met mine saying,
"I am going to the mountain
to find the herbs to blend
and soothe your heart.
I won't be long.
Just rest or chant
and watch the flight of birds."
As her silhouette merged and
rushed into the mountain
I sat thinking, loving myself
telling myself that I would
be fine into the next decades.

Tio Jorge

Springing upward
your toes lock
and lift you
from the palisade
while your arms
send the air
whizzing
in circles
of August fire.
Your body lunges
crashes
air cymbals
in your ears.
Your outstretched arms
are two arrows
parallel and meshing
as you become
a knife
of translucent flesh.
You are soaring
down:
a falling star
fusing with the sea
as you meet
the water's surface.
Surging downward
your head
hits a rock
echoing

centuries of pain
in your fellow
sea vanquished.

Those who chose to follow,
your friends
scramble down the cliff
and dive
into the low-ebbed waters
fishing your body
from the hot sea.
Blood gushes
from your temples
as you still
visibly breathe
yet your consciousness
remains imprisoned
in the waters.

Your last hours
are fixed in my mind
on the sand
where you lay
stunned
and unconscious
19 years old
and too daring.

I have lost the sound
of your voice
and the Lorca-like tones
of your poetry.
I have lost you
to the heat
of the tropical waters.

Blue Grey

I wish to write in images
like misty smoke rings
that curl around your thoughts
that screen your eyes for a moment
until the smoke rises
and your eyes dazzle me
with their
blue grey
your eyes are blue grey
you make them flutter
go gently that a breeze
blushes my cheek
and then I kiss
the blue grey
the gentle blue grey
of your eyes.

The Web

Yea, the web that tangles the soul
Vexes the mind and the heart also.
The lives of man are so complex
That most of his doings are to hex.
Very few people are today alive
Who do not on another's blood thrive.
We yell and we scream;
We bite and we claw;
Yet no one knows
What will come of it all.
Yea, the web that tangles the soul
Vexes the mind and the heart threefold.

Seeing The Truth With A Tear

God has given color to me,
by enriching my world with you to see.

My eye was caught with just one glance,
my eyes sang and my heart began to dance.

A man who is honest must know,
for emotions to be felt, they must show.

I am at odds at what to do,
because I have grown very, very fond of you.

Realizing the end is near,
I kill the dream to see what is clear.

It's always hard to say good-bye,
but it's even harder knowing you'll cry.

Blow the House Down!!!

Stretching her rubber band
The mirror trips our feet where we stand
Look to the ground caterpillar man
Crumbling castles in the sand
B L O W the house d

o
w
n

Feeling weak we put our heads down
Around the thoughts of late
Feel the chill from the night scare
Standing in the storm
Waiting for thoughts to crash
Counting seconds before we turn to ash

It's getting nearer ...
so nearer
blow the house down ... down to the ground
forever and ever and ever

Nothing Yet

in her life
had ended. Traces
survived. Ptolemy lay
beneath the rose bush.
She could retrieve bones,
memories.
Black fur splayed
across nylon drapes,
moist tongue rasping
against her chin.
A dead cat was not dead.

Other traces too.
Her trip to France
revived by the taste,
of pear Helene,
A broken love affair
recovered in moments
she could wring dry,
leave to soak again
in memory.

But she would never
uncover her own bones,
find traces of herself.
She would join those others,
once throbbing,
now vanished, cut off.

Record High

Pavement spewing
molten air,
legs bake,
face shrivels.
metal sunglasses
sear my temples.
Body seeps
vital juices. energy
oozes, puddles,
evaporates.
Veins collapse,
muscles shrink,
tissue hardens.
Ignited by glare,
I burn, self-fueled,
a meteor propelled
through sliding doors,
to chilled air
that douses my flames
and transforms
this smoldering mass
into an iced
replica of myself.

Delivered

at last
from skirmishes
across distorted landscapes
glazed by fever
(the mattress sour
with odors of pallid flesh
and sweaty nights
thrashing a crumpled quilt),
I emerge victorious,
muscles, organs, limbs
limpid and composed
like fresh sheets
folded in the linen closet.
My movements are liquid.
I remake the bed
with colorful stripes,
puff air into the pillows,
open the blinds, the windows,
my eyes. The room
swarms with sunlight.
Outside birds chatter.
A child squeals in delight
before splashing
into a neighbor's pool.
I strip the stale gown
from my skin, drench myself
under throbbing water,
replenish my bones.

No way to grasp the sharp
edge between being
and nothing. Only
the curve of skin
when she crossed her arms
and held herself tightly.

Fog

The fog is lifting.
I see pavement patches
fragmented curbs.
The car whispers
forward toward a still
enshrouded intersection
I cannot yet
see, but know is
just ahead
waiting.

Sins

As the castigating sun baked through his skin, he played (and committed little boy's sins).

Exhausted, he retired. His eyes were old and wise when he looked up and said to me, "God's mother must be Mother Nature."

Voices in the Night

At night while I sleep I hear a voice
That calls to me,
A distant voice that is my own.

Startled Foxes

In the shadowed snowy wood
they stood fixed —
sensing me
long before I saw them, —
 Ears up — eyes bright
 Nostrils flared
 crouched —
waiting for subtle signs —
of friend or foe.

Stopped in awe of the silver wonder,
I, too, fixed keen senses.

Seeing their beautiful poise —
I trembled
in excited delight of humor
in the face-off —
set in tumbled instants
of a delicate time —
too rare to speak.

Then — mused at Nature's
uncalendered joys —
I stumbled richly home.

Devotion

Never mind that pain lies deep.
Sleep on —
in the innocence you are.
Take what you see.
Have your dream —

I'll be here —
where you wanted me,
tied by echoes of a love gone by.

I'll be here —
Where you wanted me,
tied by echoes of a love gone by.

Woods Walk

We walked the hills —
 rejoicing in each step
that drew us nearer on the trail.

We sat beside the waterfall
 feeling all the nuances
 of mist and rainbow sun.

We moved against each other
 in the pleasures of a love
 grown deeper by the hour.

We visioned bright tomorrows
 pulsing vibrant on the
 ghostings of our hopes.

We read the sky —
 with cleaning clouds
 which drifted on the blue.

And then —
 I took your hand to
 walk away as newly
 formed in joy —
 But found you lost
 in reverie of trees.

Stacy by Caesarean

Lifted up and out
leaving the warm-bond
pulled into the world
heels clamped high
head down
crying first breath
strong in the chilled and quiet grey room

Stacy came frocked in purpled ruddy skin
dropping the pulsing — twisting — nurturing cord —
clipped by the parting surgeon's practical hand —
yielding soft to the new beginning —
rhythmic and blind
let loose in love,

Lifted up and out
pulled into the world —
Stacy came
searching for her cycles to be lifted.

Essays

Orpheus •

Excellence in Scholarship: A Shared Responsibility

No other age in the history of higher education has witnessed such an astronomical increase in scholarly activity as the present one. Publication is dramatically on the increase in all fields, with new journals being quickly established to accommodate the influx of articles. The figures for the fifteen year period between 1965 and 1980 are most telling: Ulrich's *International Periodical Directory* listed 28,000 titles in 1965 and 66,000 in 1980. All this activity seems to suggest that scholarship is alive and well in academia. In recent years, however, several critics have come to see this profusion as detrimental to scholarship in general. In their view, unqualified emphasis is being placed on quantity rather than quality, on the peripheral rather than the substantial, on the instantaneous rather than the sustained.

Too often, as the distinguished Yale historian Jaroslav Pelikan pointed out, faculty emphasize the latest trends in a particular field and give the impression that a "quick fix" providing research in a hurry is valid for professional advancement (qtd. in Paul 6). Richard Kamber makes the point, "Faculty members are writing more, but for the wrong reasons. Prompted by the muse of promotion and tenure committees, some write not because they feel they have something to say but because they feel they had better say something." (96)

In the discipline of psychology, for example, Arthur Melton suggests, "Some problems that arise in manuscripts may be attributed to the publish-or-perish spirit in which they are written. Others, however, seem to arise because we become content with rapid, mediocre investigation where longer and more careful work is possible." (22) Consequently, higher education is glutted with dubious, lightweight scholarship unfortunately being passed off as "significant contributions to knowledge" and quite often validated as such. As a result, scholarship seems to be losing its uniqueness and its authority. Several factors within academia have contributed to this mawkish state of affairs which now threatens the well-being of the entire profession: intellectual slovenliness, the new pragmatism, and inadequate institutional support.

In most colleges and universities, especially those which emphasize teaching

over research and publication, the principal area for evaluating faculty for retention, promotion, tenure, and merit raises are teaching, scholarship, and service, with excellence in teaching the first and indispensable criterion. In practice, however, faculty are rewarded primarily on their research and publication.

The rationale supporting this emphasis on research and publication is that the inevitable pettiness, hearsay, ideological and personality conflicts, and gossip generated in evaluations of teaching can be avoided in evaluations of research and publication. The simple fact that the products of this pursuit are tangible, quantifiable, accessible, and subject to external review promotes their importance. Research and publication become the primary items separating the professional from the neophyte. Surviving in colleges and universities, which are nationally suffering diminished enrollments and concomitant reduction in financing, requires publishing in quantity. Ironically, the effect of this emphasis on research and publication has been deleterious; indeed, the whole purpose for pursuing scholarship is being seriously maligned.

This primacy granted to research and publication ought to ensure that such activities will receive serious and careful evaluation. Unfortunately, the entire evaluation process can be fraught with intellectual slovenliness. Emphasis here is placed on the number of articles or books produced rather than on the intellectual content or the impact of the works. Significant works that often take years to bring forth may not be valued any higher than those more rapidly put together and less persuasive and compelling in their insights. The question is usually, "How many?" not "How good?" We soon discover that in academia quantity has become the *dictum extremi*. This dramatic move away from the old-fashioned notion of excellence, away from the belief in what Pelikan characterizes as "A sacred pursuit requiring discipline, patience, attentiveness, imagination, and communication" (qtd. in Paul 6), has not only contributed to "publication-inflation" but also has begun to shape the attitudes of faculty members, particularly those without tenure.

In this environment, faculty are faced with an ethical if intellectual dilemma: should they engage in sustained, meaningful scholarly activity, which may take years to bring to fruition, or should they merely rehearse some run-of-the-mill ideas for quick publication? The pragmatists among us—and the numbers are growing every day—must choose the latter in the quest for job security in this age of "gypsy scholars." Then the old guard, the senior faculty who have tenure, begin to feel the pressure to keep up the pace of publishing set by their junior colleagues and themselves turn to production of the instant article or book. And so mediocre publication begets mediocre publication.

Of course, this argument is not to suggest that significant scholarly works are not currently forthcoming in every discipline. Nevertheless, we must also agree with William H. Wilkening when he writes, "The frightening result of this 'erudition syndrome' is a hobbling publish or perish mentality in our colleges

and universities that dilutes to an alarming degree, through sheer bulk, the total effectiveness of meaningful published research in all academic disciplines." (4)

To produce meaningful research, suitable for publication, requires not only intelligence, discipline, and an inordinate love for the activity, it also demands that we devote to it extended, uninterrupted blocks of time. Meaningful scholarship is a process which develops slowly over the years, ultimately over one's entire lifetime, and may not yield successful results when we try to compress it into too short a time. In T. S. Eliot's words, "...the sense of fact is something very slow to develop and its complete development means perhaps the very pinnacle of civilization." (13)

Given the increased demands on the faculty in most colleges and universities today in all phases of their job responsibilities—teaching; service to the department, college, and community; research and publication—any of which is time consuming if it is performed reasonably well—simply does not leave them sufficient time for vigorous, sustained scholarship. This situation, coupled with the lack of adequate resources for scholarship, makes the pursuit of excellence in scholarship extremely difficult.

In fact, I am convinced that this situation encourages us to accept, albeit unwillingly, the mediocre publications being churned out so feverishly. At the same time that we acquiesce, we resist knowing there can be no surrogate for good scholarship. Even the attempt to substitute something lesser for it is not only institutionalizing mediocrity, but also debasing the most civilizing aspect of our culture. Shakespeare put it well when he wrote, "And oftentimes excusing of a fault/ Doth make the fault the worse by the excuse." (*King John*, IV, ii, 30)

There is no mystery about what should be done to liberate good scholarship from the present malaise. To restore to scholarship the intellectual vigor, devotion, learning, and sensitivity it both demands and deserves calls for shared responsibility between the faculty and the institution. While the brunt of the responsibility lies with the faculty, both must work together to form a constituency for excellence in scholarship. Faculty should devote themselves to the production and protection of respectable scholarship; the institutions of which the faculty are a part should also commit themselves to creating the intellectual climate that nurtures and stimulates the pursuit of excellence in this activity. To establishing such a climate, the institutions should provide the faculty with resources to support serious scholarly endeavors by taking the following action:

1. Making available seed money for preliminary work on grant proposals and other meaningful scholarly endeavors;
2. Providing the faculty with sufficient travel funds to attend important conferences; and
3. Releasing the faculty from a portion of their regular teaching responsibilities to engage in research.

As the custodians of excellence in scholarship, the faculty must promote and protect it through responsible actions. Such actions might include:

1. Establishing clear, specific criteria to distinguishing the substantial from the peripheral, the sustained from the ephemeral, in evaluating scholarly activities;

2. Emphasizing in that evaluation the work's intrinsic, intellectual merits rather than any environmental or political concerns;

3. Applying established criteria judiciously and uniformly in all cases;

4. Determining a collectively agreed upon scale of values at the department, school, and college levels, for assessing different types of scholarly activities;

5. Following procedures in both evaluation and research that ensure fairness and protect the integrity of scholarship; and

6. Making sure that a high standard of honesty, objectivity, and respect for the goals of scholarship are maintained in every step of the research or evaluation process.

These criteria and procedures, no matter how well defined, will not of themselves ensure that meaningful scholarship will be produced and protected. Much still depends on the evaluators' taste, sensitivity, and love for upholding the integrity of their disciplines.

All in all, the production and dissemination of good scholarship is essential to the healthy intellectual growth of the faculty, the students, and the academy. Thus, it is our mutual obligation to guard against its demise.

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This essay is written in memory of Charles Kegley, a friend, a teacher and a scholar — the noblest of all.



Essay

To this perfection of nature in our poet we require exercise of those parts, exercitatio, and frequent. If his wit will not arrive suddenly at the dignity of the ancients, let him not yet fall out with it, quarrel, or be over hastily angry, offer to turn it away from study in humor; but come to it again upon better cogitation, try another time with labor. If then it succeed not, cast not away the quills yet, nor scratch the wainscot, beat not the poor desk, but bring all to the forge and file again; turn it anew. There is no statute law of the kingdom bids you be a poet against your will or the first quarter; if it comes in a year or two, it is well.

— Ben Jonson, *Timber*

Essay. A dirty word, evoking images of papers marked in red, looking like they've just been through the Civil War — and didn't survive. The word strikes terror in the soul of the average student. He is sickened at the thought of staring at a blank page for endless hours. With short-lived excitement, he jots down an idea. Then he shrinks in terror — his paper may be read aloud to the class! — an example of how not to approach the assigned subject. Agony. The hours drag on, and still the words won't come.

Most people will tell you that writing, especially essay writing, is something they don't want to think about, don't enjoy doing, don't do well, and don't ever want to have to do again. For whatever reasons, these people have never experienced the satisfaction that comes from composing a good piece of writing. They weren't willing to invest themselves in their work, to struggle with connotation, denotation, punctuation, spelling, grammar, ideas. They never saw beyond the red marks on the page to the masterpiece that awaited them in the fourteenth rewrite. And therein lies the pleasure of the process, that finished piece that you are willing to own, bearing your name in print, a product of your soul.

Being good at writing essays is like being good at any other skill — it takes practice. A good writer writes often. He perfects his craft by struggling with words and ideas and isn't satisfied with the first sentence that pops into his head. A good technique for practicing writing is jotting in a journal. Journal

writing is not to be confused with writing a diary. A writer's journal is the place where he experiments with form, ideas, modes, structures, characters. This writing should be done freely, without concern for grammar, punctuation, spelling. It is an exercise in fluency. It should be done daily. Record your thoughts on a news event, an interesting person, a book you've just read. Get used to writing. You'll find that it's not so bad when you can do it for your own enjoyment and don't have to worry that someone will slice away at its life with a red-penned sword.

Once you get in the habit of writing, you'll find that you're noticing other people's writing, too, whether it be in a letter, novel, magazine, or newspaper. Look at it critically. Decide what, if anything, the author could have done to improve his piece. Study his techniques. Try to see how he used his sentence structure, form, punctuation to create tone and mood — look beyond what it says to how it was done. And keep practicing in your journal. Remember, you're preparing for that essay assignment. You wouldn't go run a 10K footrace without putting yourself through some kind of training, would you? You must also train yourself to write, and practice is the first element of conditioning.

As you practice, you'll discover the different processes involved in writing. Every piece of writing you produce goes through three stages: prewriting, writing, and editing. A piece of writing is conceived in the prewriting stage. Once the idea has been formed, you need to write lists, cluster, outline, or use some other similar technique to generate details and organize your work. Then you set about the task of actually formulating the idea into words. This is the writing stage. This is where most people quit. They've got the essay on paper, they've met the requirements of the assignment, they're done. But this isn't so. The editing or post-writing stage makes the difference between an adequate and a brilliant piece of writing. Editing should not be used simply to correct spelling and delete an occasional comma. It should be approached with a critical eye, and you need to be willing to throw out words, sentences, paragraphs, if necessary, to achieve the effect you wish to have upon your reader.

Only now are you ready to approach that essay assignment with confidence. You've been practicing in your journal. You've studied other people's writing carefully, and you've discovered that there's a process to writing, that it's a skill born of patience. Your professor gives the assignment. You're ready.

As you leave class, let the topic turn in your mind. Think about it from different angles; let your mind wander with it as you drive, do dishes, cook dinner, watch the news. Put it on a piece of paper. Circle it. Write down everything that comes to your mind about the subject; draw lines from your notes as you associate other ideas with the topic. Create a spider web of ideas on the page, and try to link together those thoughts that are related.

Arm yourself with Webster and Harbrace. Load your word processor, or straighten your stack of paper. Place a *large* wastepaper basket strategically

near your work area, and practice your free throws while you write.

Set your objective. Know very clearly where you want this paper to go. Do not deviate from the game plan. Each word and sentence must support your thesis, or you'll begin to flounder and find yourself leading your reader down a rabbit trail you didn't intend to take. Write your rough draft. Put it aside. If time permits, put it aside for an hour or a day; give yourself time to gain perspective on your work.

Now the real work begins. Editing and rewriting. It is at this stage that you need to bring in the reinforcements — the Thesaurus and an objective editor. Read your work critically. Look for unnecessary repetition, redundancy, wordiness. Make sure the words you've used have the correct connotation and impact you intend. Play with your sentence structure and punctuation to create the effect you wish to convey to your reader. Then look for punctuation, grammar, and spelling errors. Fine tune your work as you would a musical instrument. It should be smooth, flowing, and most importantly, clear.

You're now ready to have your friend edit it for you. Ask him for his opinions. Explain your purpose and make sure that the work conveyed that purpose. Take his suggestions and write the final draft. But be careful. You're still not done. Before you turn in this paper, read it one last time. This final reading usually turns up a stray comma, a misspelled word, a dangling preposition, a forgotten question mark. An essay free of careless mistakes shows you've made the best effort you possibly can. Your reader won't be distracted by errors, and you'll feel the pride of a job well done.

You may not get the grade you wanted on this essay, but now you know the essentials, have the tools to work with, and can practice the skills necessary to every good writer. As Ben Jonson said in *Timber*, "... beat not the poor desk, but bring all to the forge and file again; turn it anew ...; if it comes in a year or two, it is well." Discover your masterpiece in the fourteenth rewrite.

Stories

Orpheus •

Discharge

He seemed oblivious to the carbine pointed at him. The young man stood quietly, looking not toward the weapon, but away, far away into a clear blue sky and a slowly-ascending sun that held the promise of many quiescent early-morning sunrises and mild summer nights. "A light whispering breeze called his attention to a robin's nest precariously balanced on two fragile limbs of a small olive tree that gently swayed to and fro. He watched the mother robin resolutely, yet lovingly, nuzzle her young chick to the edge of the nest, only to have the offspring turn and hop back down into its sanctuary. "You're smart to want to stay in your warm, safe nest, little fella," he thought to himself.

Suddenly, a shot rang out. "Aauugghh!" he screamed as the shell tore off his left kneecap. Clenching where once was his knee, he writhed on the ground until the excruciating pain gave way to merciful unconsciousness and dreams of yesterday.

Only six months earlier, during his senior year at Plains High School, he had fallen in love with the blond-haired, blue-eyed girl from Romantic Literature class. During each lunch period, they met under the tall oak tree behind the gymnasium, where they exchanged homemade sandwiches and crude, but sincere, love sonnets, still ink-wet. On Saturday evenings, the young man borrowed his father's pick-up truck and took her to the movies. On Sundays, they went to church. Soon, they spent every waking moment together making plans for their June 12th wedding.

But graduation day's mail brought the young man a telegram which changed all that. The induction notice ordered him to report immediately to Fort Dixon, Dallas, Texas. He knew that from there he would be shipped thousands of miles away to Vietnam, where he would "either kill or be killed." "But, I'm about to get married," he first thought to himself after reading the telegram for the third time. However, he shook with fear at his next thought: "I don't want to die."

After what seemed hours, paramedics arrived, treated him for shock, and placed a tourniquet above the gushing flow of blood. Soon, a helicopter arrived, and flew him to a hospital where doctors worked feverishly for two hours to stop the hemorrhaging.

On June 4th, the Plains High School Class of 1966 Commencement Exercises went off without a hitch. In fact, while petitioning the graduates to support the government's "involvement" in the Vietnam "conflict," the guest speaker, Colonel Hades of the United States Army, was unaware of the two empty seats in the third row of the graduate's section

One week later, a jury determined that the young girl was inexperienced with firearms and that the rifle had "gone off accidentally." She was released from jail, the young man was released from the hospital, and on the following day, June 12th, the young lovers married. From that day on, they were never forced to leave their warm, safe home in the tiny town of Plains — just as they had planned on that graduation day morning.

Alone in the Rain

I drove home alone in the rain, not feeling lonely. A quiet calm, tired yet peaceful sense of tranquility was with me. My sister had recommended I write the book when I got depressed. I knew I would this time, without the black beautys! I felt grateful, a feeling I had never experienced before I was introduced to Alcoholic Anonymous philosophy. Tonight at the late night meeting I was not the devil's advocate! There had been many other times I had.

He was there, oozing with pain from unrequited love from his wife. The old me would have responded to that painful cry with all the understanding and compassion his wife allegedly lacked. Not now. I had learned. I also knew from experience that desperate people do desperate things. That we so often abuse people when we are in pain. I had abused and been abused. I was not interested in old style relationships.

My strongest attraction to this man had been his arms. His damn arms! My next attraction to him was his attraction to me. He called me a beautiful lady and looked at me with wanting eyes. My third attraction to him was his pain. Hardly a solid platform for a healthy relationship. Yes, I was grateful for so very much tonight. I had helped healthily ease another's burden. I had been appropriately honest for a change.

I felt so grateful I had two homes tonight where I could go, where they really wanted me there, where I could feel at home, part of the time anyway. I had a place where I belonged, part of the time. I also realized I had a real home, where my fellow sufferers were. Those men and women who had known pain, sadness, neglect, rejection, self-loathing. Those people who were alone in crowds, self-obsessed and drowning in discontent. These souls, lost and tempest tossed through life until they were led to the anchor they had always needed. What a miracle to see! To be a part of the literal transformation of misery to joy, to see and feel and sometimes touch human hearts now filled with tenderness and tranquility where once hatred and hostility bred. These rejects from society, these loathsome creatures were healing each other. I had helped heal others tonight as I had been saved by them. Ah, it did really feel better to give than receive. It had not always been that way and was not always that way now; but tonight, I could thank God that my troubles seemed trivial in

light of my blessings. I did not have a him to comfort and adore me. My purse contained \$42 that I owed to others. My years were beginning to show on my face and my stability in my undertakings was shaky. But tonight I felt hope, loved, wanted, cared for and important. Those true fruits of the spirit once questioned. I knew that everything would be OK and that everything was OK, just like it was. My fears were asleep for a change. My angers and rage, self-pity and sadness were out of sight. I could experience a oneness with the universe and myself. I wished everyone could be afforded the same program for life I had.

My obsession for a new man I had met was gone. Thank God, again! I still cared and thought about him but there was an ability to release my want to saturate myself in him. I realized I did not really know him at all and was sorry I had been unable to unleash from him some genuine soul-sharing. Tonight, anyway, I could accept that was the way it was suppose to be and the reasons did not matter. I had little time for pounding down someone elses walls. I hoped he found someone to aid his discomfort for I believed he was special. God had given me an ability to see past the masks he wore. I hoped he would be able to see himself as I did.

Wholeness and health were the Zeitgeist of this generation. Love and acceptance of others as they were, not as they might be, had been the theme of my last college daze before this one. Hopefully I could embody both this time around. I thought about how I had prayed to die so many times and how tonight anyway, I was so grateful God had not chosen to answer my prayer. No, instead He had given me a program for living and a path for encompassing all my transgressions. He had given me the home I had always wanted where I was loved, not inspite of my weaknesses, but because of them. I really was able to accept myself and consequently others, as being just right, just the way we were, for now anyway.

I became aware of my physical state. Broken nails, chaffed skin, made up face and colored auburn hair. My largeness, though hardly what I wanted, was at least temporarily acceptable. I would never be a five foot two inch Barbara Donnelin, but perhaps someday I could be a lovely five feet nine and one half inch statuesque woman. I shuddered at the word woman. I was still such a child and was so aware of how I had to act adult. Being childish was my natural state. I thought about the insight my friend Kay had given me once about that. How I had probably made an inner vow to never grow up. Finally at thirty six I had taken the risk of breaking that vow. I still felt the soreness of that sever. The pain of separation from the desperation to find someone else to take care of me. I sighed at the relief of discovering I now had the tools to do it for myself.

I lit up a cigarette and knew quitting time had to be soon again. I had allowed myself to smoke "at them" for over a month now. I realized the pleasure I had felt from one and one half years of not smoking had been lost. Now that was a pleasure recapturable. I felt grateful I had not had to "eat at them or drink at them" for awhile too. Old ways do not die, they merely lie in wait for old entres.

How fortunate I was that I had learned, for today anyway, alternate releases for those pains.

I glanced at the clock, two thirty a.m., I fought sleep but knew I would regret later not yielding to its call. I decided to pass up the temporary pleasure of further outpourings of my emotions and thoughts to avail myself an opportunity for another day, tomorrow of productivity. I knew all too well the dangers of getting too hungry, angry, lonely or tired. I had taken care to see that all areas but the rest had been soothed today. I put my cigarette out and reviewed my days end with quiet calm and appreciation for my freedom from bondage to self...for today anyway.

Twilight

They seemed to approach each other; neither made the first move. Her blue dress was like gossamer. Looking back, he would say that he wanted to touch her first, before he heard her speak. He asked her to dance, but how he phrased the question has been forgotten. She put her palms on his shoulders and they began to sway to "All Those Years," the band playing carefully, letting the quiet beat take the number. Her blue eyes and blue dress made her a vision in motion. To her, his appearance was secondary; perhaps his excitement interested her more. He seemed strong and solid, and she wanted to hold him closer. They went home together.

"Would you like some wine?"

"Allow me."

"Look at all these plants!"

"I want you."

"Take me."

"God, that feels good."

Indigo light was barely perceivable through the plush blue drapes that touched at the ceiling and the floor. The air was cool as she slept silently in the baroque darkness. Velvet chairs and the deep carpet absorbed her breath, leaves brushed the pointed windows, ghosts floated and she lay there wrapped in cool silk and envious shadows. No memories haunted her, no frustrated dreams hung in the opulent shade.

Warmth radiated from the bright flowing stream, reflecting bustle and shine. Sunlight waved red and brown, amber and gold; his body shone brown under the blazing sky. Whiteness seeped into the earth with energy and passion as stunned pale willows bowed in the glare. Colors were trapped by the very openness of time. No boundless joy or awe invaded the polished green.

At first they were both afraid, of commitment, of time, of loss. Gradually they grew to trust each other, and their lives seemed to meld. They felt

themselves falling, but each thought the other loved first. They drove each other's cars.

"You're the most lovely woman I've ever seen."

"How can you love me so soon?"

"Do you believe in us?"

"I'll call you tomorrow."

"I want to live with you."

"I'll never let you go."

Love was danger. Day turned into night and the glistening twilight blinded her as she gazed at him. He reached for her in the last glimmer of sunset. He saw light in her eyes; she saw shadows in his face. Serene calmness was drawn to energy, scarlet, the warmth of him. She cooled his skin, inflamed him with her emptiness while he seduced her darkness with the charms of light. He came inside her shadow, she inside his blaze. Time drew bright sketches of day, cool paintings of night.

Her ice began to melt, death began to fade in the heat of his golden arms. He pulled her out to see her hair shine in the sun, light glowing on her face. She ran in the brilliant grass, gazed right at the sun, and danced back to soothe his forehead with her fingers. Quickened breath and his heat inside her shone in her eyes, brightened her hands. His fire began to cool, life began to fade within her coolness. He sank into the blue of her sofa, the darkness behind the drapes, calming his rushing blood and quieting his quick breaths. Dissolving into her smooth paleness, he was imbued with peace. His eyes dreamed, his face deep and pure.

For a while they were like twins, spiritually. They began to discuss things, trying to find out what the other person liked to do best. Sometimes they were tired, or got a little short with each other. There was a lot of talking, late night conversations and contrasts over coffee.

"I don't believe in God."

"This way is better for me."

"Are you sure I can't go with you?"

"Why do you love me?"

"You're a dreamer."

His fiery hands did not burn her, yet the sun was fading her tapestries. The blue drapes had opened and light thrust itself through the pointed windows. She stared at the yellow sun, bathed in the warmth, and began to long for a bit

of shade, a coolness like her own. She reached for him and he was love, only hot and brilliant. She felt the blue of clouds and the peace of cool water, walking in winter. She never made him cold, yet the coolness clouded the day colors. The twilight had deepened and night crept over the water, making it opaque and stormy. He rested under shady trees, gazed at the stars and began to want them closer, brightening in his eyes. He touched her and wanted, and she was cool and sedate.

"I don't know."

"I'm sorry."

"I didn't mean to hurt you."

"I didn't realize ..."

"I didn't know ..."

The sun burned her; the brightness was stunning and made her sleepy. She still saw the darkness in his face. The night oppressed him; the coolness was stultifying and made him want to move. He still saw the light inside her eyes. She floated to the serenity of her soothing room; it seemed even colder. He danced back to the sun; it seemed too bright. She longed for his warmth; the curtains opened slightly to allow the lavender light. He longed for her cooling hands; evenings became longer. Twilight beckoned their souls.

The Last Streetcar from Juarez

Promptly at nine o'clock on Sunday night, like Charon's bark setting off across the Styx, the last streetcar from Juarez, Mexico, crossed the International Bridge and set sail into El Paso, Texas. Its cargo, a representative from every stratum of society, down to the very dregs of humanity. Crowded into bedroom-like intimacy went inveterate and first-time drunks; disappointed, bitter bettors who had tried their luck and lost, vowing never to return again; worried family men trying to cook up a plausible explanation for their absence from the hearth; females dealing in small-time contraband, bottles of liquor under their breasts lending their bosoms grotesque proportions; frustrated seekers of carnal pleasures endeavoring to find satisfaction by rubbing against alarmed or unsuspecting female passengers; anxious, concerned recidivist enjoyers of the pleasures of the flesh, of the delights that numberless palaces of prostitution offered, now afraid that they might have caught gonorrhea or syphilis this time; prostitutes making every effort to play successfully the role of respectable ladies out slumming, but betrayed by overly expensive clothes, excessive make-up with which they sought to cover the sagging of facial muscles that the labors of Eros induce, and most of all by the smell of Lysol that their heady perfume could not stifle; desperate perverts playing the knee game, or placing lascivious, hungry hands exploratorily on neighbors' thighs or crotches; patent-leather souled pimps in sleazy clothes, pomaded hair, and outrageous hats, fingering the proceeds of the night; a wife or two on the way to the sanctity of the home, after being cloistered over the weekend in a high class bordello to augment the family income; Filipinos, forerunners or fashion setters for the Pachucos of the 40's, in bizarre, incredibly exaggerated pleated pants.

In the midst of this motley assembly, hemmed in by saint and sinner alike, like an empress with her retinue, majestically rode the Octoroon Mildred, singer-dancer at one of Juarez' exclusive cabarets. Mildred of the beautifully molded face and finely chiseled features; Mildred of the flawless velvet skin; Mildred of the extraordinarily firm and full endowments; Mildred who drove men mad with her Junoesque proportions; Mildred who smelled of woman, was redolent of wheat fields and wild flowers. The floating sea of humanity in

the streetcar was her retinue. As combination lady-in-waiting and bodyguard rode her mother, a short, wizened, jet-black lady dressed in austere black, and armed with an umbrella rain or shine. The umbrella was like an appendage, an extension of her right arm, and she wielded it with uncommon ease, indiscriminately raining blows right and left to ward off attackers and those seeking to feel the luscious flesh of her jewel.

The last streetcar from Juarez made its way along North El Paso Street, stopping now and again to drop off some poor soul whose stays had burst, forcing her to hug protectively her grotesquely disproportionate bosom, now on the verge of spilling the bottles of contraband liquor cradled in it. Conductor and passengers alike enjoyed the sight and gave the woman a conspiratorial round of applause. A few drunks and worried husbands got off enroute. The rest of the packed assembly rode on to Second and North El Paso Streets, hub, heart, and tenderloin of the City of El Paso, Texas, and the center of the whorehouse district. There, the last streetcar from Juarez, like a ship docking, made its stop in front of the Aguila Drugstore, whose wide protective overhang extended along both streets. As always it was a thundering stop that spilled and disgorged its cargo much like an iron horse vomiting smoke and sparks. The sound of the singing and instruments of the missionaries greeted those getting off. From the center of the streetcar where she always sat, Mildred made her way forward like an empress unperturbed by, unaware of, the eager hands seeking to pinch or touch her splendid breasts, her exciting, undulating hips. In her wake came her mother, raining expert blows with her umbrella on those who would taste of the forbidden fruit.

The voices, horns, and drums of the missionaries lying in wait under the drugstore's overhang to rescue stray souls, and the raucous strains of the pianola in the pool parlor opposite fused into a musical effort of particularly cacophonous dimensions. The shouts of the barker outside the Colon Theatre served as an obbligato to what sounded like three amateur groups playing and singing, each in a different key and tempo. Regally, mother in tow, Mildred sailed into the drugstore, leaving behind covetous hands and appraising eyes. With the ingenuousness of a child, she asked for change for the pay phone and called a taxi. While she waited in the safe harbor of the drugstore, she disarmed everyone as much by her beauty as by her unawareness of it. Not quite everyone. Alas, Guadalupe, the spinster pharmacist, would draw to her full height, settle her metal-rimmed glasses on her aquiline nose, and snort in shock and disappointment.

The other passengers of the last streetcar from Juarez went their separate ways. Some, as if afraid of being recognized—such was the case with one of the local high school principals—disappeared quickly down the various dark streets leading away from the center of sin; others, more venturesome, reluctant to end their adventure, paid their way into the Colon Theatre, or walked along whorehouse row in hopes of picking up a companion for the night.

When the Orange Branch Blooms

The tiller surged forward, forcing him to set his heels and pull back with his forearms so the tines could bite into the matted weeds. Leaning against the momentum, he looked down to one side to see the rotating arms dig deeper and deeper, pulling the tiller down and lifting the handles up as the machine pivoted forward on its rubber wheels. He rocked it back to lift the arms and give them fresh earth, controlling the tiller's urge to race awkwardly across the field. His hands tingled from the constant vibration, and the noise of the engine numbed his ears. He glanced over at the two people leaning against the fence.

Stephen watched the chickens scattering as the tiller changed direction and headed towards them. "I don't know. I just can't see her right now, that's all. I need some time." He looked out at the hens again. One was standing near the gate, pecking for grubs, stepping forward to scratch the dirt, and stepping back to peck again. She paused to glare at the man who watched her.

The tiller kept digging, moving down instead of forward, and Ned wrenched it out of the hole, pushing down on the handles to lift the blades free, and pivoting to the left to find fresh ground. One tire sank into the sand, tilting the machine to the right, so he thrust one foot in up to the ankle to twist the machine over. He disengaged the tiller from the engine and stood straight, lifting his hands in the air and stretching his fingers inside the crumpled leather work gloves.

Laura smiled at the hen. The feathers shone white in the afternoon light and the comb flopped red over one angry eye when it flicked its head around to look at Stephen. "Is she all right? She sounded strange on the phone, you know, sort of too controlled, the way she does." The breeze settled a lock of hair onto her face, and she brushed it with one hand.

Ned saw a clump of foxtails still rooted, so he stopped to coax it out of the ground and throw it into the tiller's path. He straightened up and looked over at the gate. "Laura!" He saw her look over at him, raise her eyebrows and move her lips in an unheard question. He gestured, beckoning her into the field. She

opened the gate, leaving Stephen at the fence, and walked through the rows of loose, uneven sand. He shouted over the engine, exaggerating the words with his mouth. "Which part do you want me to do next?" She walked over to the side fence, spreading her arms along it and pointing both hands at the open ground between the fruit trees. He nodded, smiled and waved, and she walked back to the lawn, closing the gate behind her.

Stephen watched her walk, seeking the firm spots to set her feet and lifting her shoes above the sand. She closed the gate and looked at him, waiting. "She's all right, I think. She's busy with her job. And with Toby. I called her last night but she didn't have time to talk." As he spoke, he looked down the line of fruit trees, along the vines draped over the wires, and at the swaying green boughs of the elm tree. He tested his toe on the newly-mown grass. "I'd better get going."

Ned turned and headed for the gate, glancing over just long enough to see Stephen nod in his direction. He waved, then set his grip on the handles and bore down, easing the tiller forward.

Stephen looked one more time at the field, now nearly finished, then waved towards Ned and turned away from the gate to walk back towards the street. Laura escorted him, lingering to pull a dandelion in her path, then following as far as the ash tree. "Thanks for stopping by." He smiled at her and got into the car, slamming the door behind him, and drove off towards town.

Ned headed down the last row, reining the tiller in, keeping the tines digging into the firm, flat sand. Then he felt a hand on his shoulder and turned to find Laura there, carrying a small orange branch. He disengaged the blades and stepped forward to flick the piece of metal that stopped the engine. His hands buzzed and he could still hear the echo of the engine in the gradual silence. She held out the orange branch, and he bent down to smell the sweet blossoms.

"Isn't it lovely?" She smiled at him.

He leaned forward to kiss the corner of her jaw, just under the ear where the downy skin of her face met her neck. He straightened to look at her, and she smiled again. They stood together, watching the chickens scratch for food in the sand.

Rudolfio

Their first meeting occurred on a streetcar. She touched him on the shoulder; when he opened his eyes she pointed at the window and said, "you get off here."

The streetcar had already stopped. Elbowing his way through the crowd he jumped off right behind her. She was a girl no more than fifteen or sixteen. He realized this as soon as he caught sight of her round shiny face when she turned towards him expecting thanks.

"Thanks," he said, "I would have missed my stop."

Sensing this wasn't enough he added, "today was crazy; I'm beat. They have to call me at eight. You caught me in the nick of time."

She seemed pleased, and together they hurried along the road, glancing back at a speeding car. It was snowing and he noticed the driver had turned on his windshield wipers. Whenever it snowed something so soft and fluffy seemed actually to exist up there on high, teasing the beautiful snowbirds. He didn't really want to go home. 'I'll wait for the call and go out again,' he decided. Turning towards her he tried to figure out what he should say to her as the silence between them was becoming awkward. But he had no idea what to say or not to say to her and was still puzzling it out when she took the lead: "I know you."

"Do you?" He was surprised. "How?"

"You live at No. 112 and I'm in No. 114. We ride the same streetcar twice a week on average, only you naturally don't notice me."

"That's interesting."

"What do you mean, interesting. It isn't a bit. You grownups only pay attention to other grownups. You're all frightful egoists, aren't you."

She turned her head right and looked him up and down. He muttered something but made no attempt to answer her because he still did not know how to handle her or what he ought or ought not to say to her.

They walked on a bit in silence. She kept looking straight ahead and while doing so brought out for no apparent reason: "You still haven't told me your name."

"Why do you need to know?"

"Well I do. What's so strange about that? Is it because people think I must

have an unhealthy interest in a man if I want to know his name?"

"OK," he said, "I get the message. Well, if you must know, my name is Rudolf."

"What?"

"Rudolf."

"Rudolf." She broke into laughter.

"What's with you?"

She laughed ever harder. He stopped and began staring at her.

"Ru-dolf." Her lips formed an O and she rolled the word around again.

"Ru-dolf. I thought only elephants in zoos could have a name like that."

"What!"

"Don't be angry." She touched his sleeve. "But honestly, it's funny, it really is. I can't help it."

"You're a wicked girl." He felt insulted.

"Sure I am. And you're a grownup."

"How old are you?"

"Sixteen."

"I'm twenty-eight."

"That's just what I say. You're grown up and your name's Rudolf."

She broke into laughter again, looking him up and down gaily.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Mine? You'll never guess."

"I have no intention to."

"You couldn't even if you tried. It's Io."

"What?"

"Io."

"I don't get it."

"Io. Important Officialdom, if you like. Io."

His revenge was sweet. He couldn't stop chuckling, swinging backwards and forwards like a bell. Just looking at her made him laugh all the harder.

"I-o," he choked, "I-o."

She waited, glancing from side to side, until he was a bit calmer and then said in a hurt voice: "You think it's funny, do you? There's nothing funny about it. Io's as ordinary a name as any other."

"Forgive me." He smiled as he bent over her, "but I really found that funny., We're quits now, aren't we?"

She nodded.

Her house came first, then his. Stopping at the entrance she asked, "What's your telephone number?"

"You don't need it," he said.

"You're afraid?"

"That's not the point."

"Grownups are afraid of everything."

"You're probably right," he conceded.

She pulled a glove off a little hand and offered it to him. Her hand was cool and soft. He gave it a squeeze.

"Run along home, Io." He laughed once more.

At the door she halted: "Now will you recognize me in the streetcar?"

"Naturally; sure I'll recognize you."

"Till the streetcar, then." She raised her hand above her head. "...The one we'll be riding together," he added.

Two days later he was sent up north on assignment and did not come back for two weeks. At home the city was experiencing the strong sharp scent of approaching spring, which was blowing away the ashes of winter's vague gloom. After the northern fogs everything (even the streetcars) was now sharper and livelier.

When he got home his wife lost no time telling him: "A girl has been phoning you every day."

"What girl?" he asked, weary and indifferent.

"I don't know. I thought you did."

"I don't."

"She annoyed me."

"Oh, it's not so bad," he said, forcing a smile.

He was in the bath when the phone started ringing. Through the door he heard his wife answer: "Yes, he's back; he's having a bath; call back later, please." He was getting ready for bed when the phone started again.

"Yes," he said.

"Hi, Rudy, you're back," came a joyful voice over the wire.

"How are you?" he replied cautiously. "Who's this?"

"Don't you recognize me? Oh, Rudy. It's me, Io."

"Io." Everything came back in a rush and he involuntarily burst out laughing. "Hi, Io. It looks like you've found a better name for me."

"Yes. Do you like it?"

"That's what they used to call me when I was no older than you are now."

"Please don't get fancy with me."

"Certainly not. What do you..."

They were silent until, unable to stand it any longer, he asked, "Well, Io, what's new?"

"Rudy, who's that woman? Your wife?"

"That's right."

"Why didn't you tell me you were married?"

"Excuse me," he replied light-heartedly. "I didn't realize that was important."

"Of course it's important. Tell me—do you love her?"

"I do," he said. "Io, listen, please. You're not to call me any more."

"He's a-frai-aid." She pronounced the words in a sing-song way. "Rudy, don't worry about it. Of course you can go on living with her if you want to; it's OK by me. Only fair's fair. You're not to call me either. Perhaps I'll be busy too."

"Doing what?" he asked with a smile.

"What do you mean, doing what? Let's say,—oh, let's say, for instance, that I can't pump all the water out of one reservoir into another." She'd found an issue. "I could be busy then, couldn't I?"

"How should I know?"

"Of course I could. Rudy, don't be scared of her. We're two, you know. She's only one."

"Who?" He'd lost the thread.

"Why, your wife."

"So long, Io."

"You're tired, aren't you?"

"I am."

"OK then. Squeeze my hand and go to bed."

"I'm squeezing."

"And don't even talk to her."

"OK," he chuckled. "I won't."

Still smiling, he returned to his wife. "That was Io," he said, "that's the girl's name. Funny, isn't it?"

"Yes," she replied slowly.

"She couldn't solve a problem involving two reservoirs. She's a student in the seventh or eighth class—I forget which."

"You helped her with the problem?"

"No," he said, "I've forgotten everything I ever knew and reservoirs are really tough."

The telephone began ringing in the morning just as it was starting to grow light. But it wasn't really light; the whole city was still sunk in a final predawn slumber. Dragging himself out of bed Rudolf glanced at the house opposite. No lights showed in any windows. Only the four entrances, like mouth organs with glinting metal, formed a row of light. The telephone shrilled incessantly. On his way to answer it Rudolf looked at his watch. It was 5:30.

"Hello," he spoke angrily into the receiver.

"Rudy, Rudy..."

He was furious: "Io, what the hell is this..."

"Rudy," she interrupted him, "just listen and don't be mad. You don't know what's happened."

"What's happened," he coldly inquired.

"Rudy, you aren't Rudy any more; you're Rudolfio," she triumphantly explained. "Rudolf-io. Don't you think it's marvelous? I only thought it up just a minute ago. Put Rudolf and Io together and you get Rudolfio, the way the Italians do it. So now repeat it."

"Rudolfio." His voice was a blend of rage and despair.

"You've got it! You and I now have one name. We're inseparable. Like Romeo and Juliet. You're Rudolfio and I'm Rudolfio."

"Listen," he said, recovering his equilibrium, "couldn't you name me at a more suitable hour another time?"

"Don't you understand? I couldn't wait. I couldn't. And it's time for you to be up anyway. Rudolfio, remember: at 7:30 I'll be waiting for you at the streetcar stop."

"I'm not taking a streetcar today."

"Why?"

"I've got time off."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Time off. An extra holiday. I'm not going in to work."

"Oh I see," she said, "But what about me?"

"How would I know? Go to school and that."

"Has your wife got time off too?"

"No."

"Then it's no big deal. But be sure to remember our name's now Rudolfio."

"I'm elated."

He replaced the receiver and cursed as he went to put the tea on. He couldn't go back to sleep again. Three windows in the house across the way were also lighted up.

* * *

At noon there was a knock at the door. He had just finished washing the floors and was still holding a wet mop when he opened the door. For some reason he had not thought to leave the mop somewhere on the way.

It was she.

"Hi, Rudolfio."

"You!" He was surprised. "What's up?"

"I've taken some time off too."

Her face was like a saint's. There was not the slightest trace of a guilty conscience.

"Well, what do you know," he replied bravely. "That means you're out for a walk. Oh well, come on in then, since you're here. I'm cleaning the place up."

She sat in the chair by the window with her coat on and watched while he bent over to swish the mop around the floor.

"Rudolfio, I don't think you're happy in your home life," she said after a minute.

He straightened up: "What gave you that idea?"

"It's not that hard to see. For instance, you're not getting a kick out of washing the floor; that's not the way with happy people."

"Don't imagine things," he said with a smile.

"Well, tell me. Are you happy?"

"I won't tell you anything."

"There you are."

"You'd better take your coat off."

Looking out the window she said, "I'm afraid of you."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, after all, you're a man."

"Oh, that's it." He burst out laughing. "How did you dare to come here?"

"You and I are one, Rudolfio."

"You're right," he said, "I always keep forgetting. And naturally that confers definite responsibilities upon me."

"Naturally."

She stopped talking and sat quietly while he clattered about the kitchen with a pail. When he returned Io's coat was hanging on the back of the chair. Her face was pensive and sad.

"Rudolfio, I was crying today," she declared suddenly.

"Why was that, Io?"

"I'm not Io; I'm Rudolfio."

"Why was it, Rudolfio?"

"It was my older sister. She caused trouble when I decided to take time off."

"I think she was right."

"No, Rudolfio, she wasn't." Io left her chair to go and stand by the window.

"I can only do it once, don't you see? You don't know how happy I am right now talking with you..."

She was silent again and he looked at her attentively. Her dress revealed surging breasts, which were thrusting up to form two small nests, such as mysterious birds like to build to hatch their young. He knew that within a year her face would grown longer and become pretty. He was saddened to think she'd soon have a boy-friend. He went up, put his hands on her shoulders, and said with a smile: "Everything's going to be all right."

"Will it, Rudolfio?"

"It will."

"I trust you," she said.

"Right."

He tried to move away but she cried out, "Rudolfio!"

"Yes."

"Why did you get married so young? Another two years and I'd have been able to marry you."

"Don't be in a hurry," he said. "You'll marry some wonderful man."

"I'd rather it would be you."

He'll be a better man than I am."

"Well maybe," she said doubtfully. "Do you think they come any better?"

"A thousand times better."

"But he won't be you," she sighed awkwardly.

"How about tea?" he suggested.

"Let's."

He went into the kitchen and put the teapot on the stove.

"Rudolfio!"

She was standing by the bookshelves.

"Rudolfio, you and I have the most beautiful name. Why look; even writers don't have better ones." She was quiet for a second. "Except perhaps this one—Ex-u-pe-ry. Pretty, isn't it?"

"Yes," he said, "have you read him?"

"No."

"Take and read him. Only no time off. Agreed?"

"Agreed."

She started putting on her coat.

"What about tea," he reminded her.

"Rudolfio, I'd better go, OK?" Her smile became sad. "Only just don't tell your wife I was here. OK, Rudolfio?"

"OK," he promised.

After she was gone he felt depressed and full of an inexplicable sadness he could not fathom but which existed in nature. He put on his coat and went out.

* * *

Spring arrived suddenly, virtually without warning. During the past few days people had started becoming kinder; they felt these days were a transition from anticipation to fulfillment. The dreams of spring foretold happiness and love like a master fortune-teller.

One such evening Rudolf was on his way home when an elderly woman stopped him.

"I'm Io's mother," she began. "Excuse me, but I think your name is Rudolfio."

"That's right," he said, smiling assent.

"I've heard about you from my daughter. She's been talking a lot about you lately, but I ..."

She stopped talking. He realized it was hard for her to put the question a mother needed to have answered.

"Don't worry," he said, "Io and I are best friends. Nothing bad will come of it."

"Of course, I quite understand." She pushed on in confusion: "Io is a high-strung girl. She pays no attention to us at all. If you have any influence with her . . . Well, you see, I'm afraid. She's that age... she might do something foolish. And I'm also concerned that she hasn't a single friend among her classmates or even among other youngsters her age."

"That's too bad."

"It is. I believe you have some influence with her ..."

"I'll have a word with her," he promised, "but I think Io is a good girl and you needn't be so worried."

"I don't know."

"Good-bye. I'll talk to her. Everything will be all right."

* * *

He made up his mind to call her at once and not put it off, especially as his wife was out.

"Rudolfio!" Obviously she was absolutely delighted. "How good of you to call, Rudolfio. I was crying again."

"You shouldn't cry so often," he said.

"It's all because of *The Little Prince*. I'm sorry for him. Was he really among us on earth?"

"I think he was."

"I do too. But we didn't know it. How awful. Except for Exupéry no one would have known. No wonder he has a lovely name like ours."

"Yes."

"Here's something else I've been thinking about. It's good he always stayed a little prince. Wouldn't it be terrible if he'd suddenly become an utterly ordinary human being? There are too many ordinary people in this world."

"I couldn't say."

"But I know I'm right."

"Did you read *Wind, Sand and Stars*?"

"I read it all through, Rudolfio. I think Exupéry is a very wise writer. It gets scary to think how wise he is. And kind. Do you remember? They buy Bark his freedom and give him money, but he spends it on slippers for the children and has nothing left for himself."

"You're right," he said. "And do you remember Bonnafous? He robbed and ruined the Arabs and they both hated him and loved him."

"If it hadn't been for him the desert would have seemed perfectly ordinary to them. He made it dangerous and romantic."

"It's clever of you to understand that," he said.

"Rudolfio ...," she stopped.

"I'm listening," he reminded her.

She made no reply.

"Rudolfio, something's bothering you," he said. "Come to me right away; I'm alone."

* * *

Looking around her she went to a chair and sat down.

"Why are you so quiet?" he asked.

"She really isn't here?"

"My wife?"

"Who else?"

"No, she's not."

"There's a leech for you."

"What?"

"A leech, that's what!"

"Where did you find that word?"

"In the mighty Russian language. It's the only term that fits her."

"Io, enough of that."

"It's not Io, it's Rudolfio."

"Oh yes, that's right."

"I phoned a little while ago and got her. Do you know what she said to me? She said, 'if you're calling about reservoirs you'd better ask your teacher.' I think she's jealous of me."

"I don't think so."

"Rudolfio, aren't I better than she even though I'm not as mature as an adult? It's all ahead of me."

He smiled and nodded.

"Look here, I think it's time for you to get a divorce from her."

"Don't talk nonsense," he broke in, "I let you get away with murder."

"Because you love me, right?"

"No, out of friendship."

She frowned and stopped talking but obviously not for long.

"What's her name?"

"Whose—my wife's?"

"Naturally."

"Klava."

"That's not much of a name."

He was furious: "Stop it."

She stood up, closed her eyes for a minute, and suddenly said: "Rudolfio, I'm not normal. Forgive me, I didn't mean..."

"No more outbursts," he warned her.

"There won't be."

She moved away and turned to face the window.

"Rudolfio," she said, "let's make a pact. I was never here with you today and I didn't say any of these things. OK?"

"All right."

"Consider I'm saying good-bye to you over the telephone."

"Fine."

She was gone.

Five minutes later the telephone started ringing.

"Good-bye, Rudolfio."

"Good-bye."

He waited, but she had hung up.

* * *

She called no more and he didn't see her for a long time because he had to go away again and did not come back until May, after the sun had finally made spring yield to summer. He was always busy during this time. He hadn't forgotten her but he kept constantly putting things off: 'I'll talk to her tomorrow or the day after.' But he never did.

At last they met by chance on a streetcar. Catching sight of her he started

impatiently to elbow his way to her in fear she would get off. She might leave at another stop and he had not fully made up his mind to leap off after her. However, she stayed on and he realized this actually pleased him more than it should have, considering they were only friends.

"Hi, Io," he said, his hand touching her shoulder.

She turned in alarm, but when she saw him she stood motionless with joy and nodded. "Not Io; Rudolfio, like before," she corrected him. "You and I are still friends, aren't we?"

"Sure we are, Rudolfio."

"You've been away?"

"I have."

"I phoned once but you weren't there."

"I've been back a whole week."

The streetcar was full of people who kept bumping into them. They had to stand very close, her head touching his chin. When she lifted her face and he bent to hear her they had to avert their eyes because they were so close.

"Do you want me to tell you something, Rudolfio?" she asked.

"Of course I do."

Again she put her face up so close to his that he wanted to shut his eyes.

"I always feel lonely without you, Rudolfio."

"You're a silly little thing," he said.

"I know." She sighed. "I don't feel lonely around all the kids but they'll never mean anything to me."

The streetcar stopped and they got out.

"You're on your way to your Klava?" she asked.

"No, let's go for a walk."

They turned towards the river where the vacant lands begin, left the path, and jumped over little hills and heaps of rubbish. He took her hand to help her over obstacles.

She said nothing. It was unlike her to be so quiet. He felt both of them were in the grip of a strong, intense, uncontrollable emotion.

They came to a steep bank. Still holding hands they looked at the river, beyond the river, and at the river again.

"Rudolfio," she said. She couldn't help it. "No one has ever kissed me."

He bent over and kissed her cheek.

"My lips," she entreated.

"Only people who are very close kiss on the lips," he said, very uneasily.

"And what about me?"

She shivered, and he was frightened. A second later he suddenly realized—not merely felt but actually realized—she had struck him, slapped him hard, and had started to run back, through the vacant land, through the little hills, through emotion and expectation.

He stood watching her run, not daring to call out to her, much less to run and overtake her. He stood there a long time, devastated and hating himself.

This took place on Saturday. Her mother called early Sunday morning.

"Rudolfio, excuse me please; perhaps I got you up..."

She spoke in a confused trembling voice.

"It's all right," he said.

"Rudolfio, I didn't come home last night."

He should have made some kind of reply, but he said nothing.

"We're desperate; we don't know what to try or to do."

"The first thing is to calm down," he said finally. "Perhaps she spent the night with a girl-friend."

"I have no idea."

"That's most likely what happened. If she isn't back in a couple of hours we'll go out and look for her. Just relax. I'll call you in two hours."

He put down the receiver, thought for a bit, and said to himself: 'you'd better calm down too; she probably spent the night with a girl-friend.' But he couldn't relax; instead he felt a nervous tremor was making him shake. To get rid of it he went to the storeroom and, whistling, started to rummage among his old schoolbooks. His algebra text had somehow been mislaid. Trying to find it diverted him a little.

The telephone was ominously silent. Closing the kitchen door behind him, Rudolf began leafing through the text. Yes, there it was: 'if water flows from one reservoir into another for two hours...'

The telephone started ringing: "She's come back." Unable to restrain herself, her mother burst into tears.

He stood listening.

"Rudolfio, please come over here." She started crying again and then added: "Something's happened to her."

* * *

Not waiting for permission he took off his coat. The mother silently pointed to the door of Io's room.

She was sitting on the bed, her legs tucked beneath her, looking straight ahead through the window.

"Rudolfio," he called.

She turned towards him but didn't say anything.

"Rudolfio."

"Shut up." She frowned with distaste. "You're not Rudolfio; you're just an utterly ordinary kind of Rudolf. An utterly ordinary kind of Rudolf. Do you understand?"

The blow was so sharp that pain spread immediately all over his body, but he forced himself to stay. He went over to the window and leaned on the sill.

She kept rocking backwards and forwards, steadily looking straight ahead right past him. The bedsprings creaked softly.

"OK, have it your way," he said, humoring her, "but do explain where you were."

"Go to hell!" she answered wearily, without turning.

He nodded. Taking his coat from the hanger and ignoring the mother's silent queries he descended the staircase and stumbled out. It was early Sunday morning; only a few people were about, and no one stopped him. He crossed some deserted land and went down to the river bank when the thought suddenly came to him: 'Where next?'

Valentin Rasputin was born in 1937 in a village in far eastern Siberia. Upon graduation from the historical-philological department of Irkutsk State University he proceeded to hone his writing skills by working for two Siberian newspapers. His success as a journalist encouraged him to embark on a literary career. His first novel, *Money for Mariia* (1967), enjoyed considerable critical and popular acclaim.

Unlike many Russian writers, who have migrated to the major cities, Valentin Rasputin has remained based in Siberia and made it his own. Few authors have managed to capture so many facets of this vast harsh land; he has won for Siberia a genuine place in Soviet letters.

Rasputin can make effective use of what has become virtually a dialect—the Russian spoken in far eastern Siberia—but he can also write a Russian that is remarkable for its lucidity and purity, as this tale demonstrates. Treating a universal theme in simple limpid prose, the story unfolds almost entirely in a dialog between the two principal characters. It adds a dimension to realize that they live in a Siberian city and the "vacant land" through which they walk is the vast taiga and tundra stretching to the Arctic Ocean.

The amusement Rudolf and Io express upon learning each other's names is unfeigned for both appellations are quite unusual in Russian. Unfortunately the pronoun *you* cannot render the subtle difference between addressing a person formally or familiarly. Io switches from the former to the latter during their first encounter; her presumption is underscored when the fact is borne in mind that young people address senior members of their own family in the formal fashion.

Rudolfio recently appeared (pp. 21-26) in Vol. 17 (1984) of *Roman-Gazeta*. This edition of this monthly literary journal was devoted to an anthology of Rasputin's short stories.

Translation and note by Professor Hugh Graham

Palimpsesto

para Ute

Me dicen que no moriré. Para divertirme los acuso de engaño. Los acuso de crueldad y de odio. Se inclinan ante mí asustados y tiratantes. Me aburro. Les ordeno irse.

— Un été nu —

Más tarde retornan trayéndome vino. No se dan cuenta de que la vasija sangra por un desperfecto. Les doy las gracias y les pido que me dejen solo. Cuando salen bebo de una copa de cristal deforme.

— La menta lamenta —

Por un rato pienso con placer en la visija rota, pero después siento impaciencia. Los llamo y les digo que cubran de arena blanca el piso de metal de mi cuarto. Cuando terminan los insulto y les ordeno ondear la superficie de la arena. Se miran entre sí, incrédulos y confusos. Para divertirme les digo que recojan la arena grano a grano. Cuando se duermen de agotamiento y de desconsuelo, salgo de mi recinto a explorar el edificio donde me guardan.

El edificio es en realidad varios edificios: algunos viejos, otros nuevos. El ala donde yo soy es una estructura vasta e inmaculada, construida de acuerdo con los últimos principios de la arquitectura. Camino por sus brillantes y monótonos pasillos, por escaleras estilizadas y parcas. Me entristecen la aridez y la falta de color que me rodean. Lloro hasta llegar al lugar donde el ala nueva se conecta con el más viejo de los edificios. Entonces, con curiosidad, camino por corredores que huelen a tierra —corredores oscuros y fríos, llenos del dulce aroma de antorchas de queroseno—.

Camino por el piso de tierra de corredores sin luz, acaricio con las manos las grenas que crecen por las puertas de madera, aspiro el olor agrio de la piedra mojada.

Visito un solarío abandonado, o un aviario: un gran salón circular con altas ventanas de vidrio. El salón está demasiado iluminado y silencioso, el polvo danza por las anchas columnas de luz solar. En el centro veo un pedestal. Sobre el pedestal han colocado un par de tijeras y un anillo.

Voy a inspeccionar una cortina de terciopelo al otro lado del salón. La tela está raída y llena de polvo. A la diestra de la cortina una vieja vestida de negro

se arrodilla junto a una silla. Por su rostro emaciado cruzan gruesas lágrimas. Con voz débil, casi inaudible, me llama suyo. Le ordeno que me diga que hay tras la cortina. Baja los ojos y solloza.

Detrás de la cortina hay una escalera de escalones estrechísimos, difíciles de subir. Casi arriba, cuando ya se ve el final, los escalones se hacen peligrosamente débiles. Algunos se rajan bajo el peso de una mano, otros crujen amenazadoramente. Es necesario subirlos sin respirar, sigilosamente. Es necesario moverse como una araña.

Arriba encuentro un salón de mármol, graciosamente decorado con ónix y plata. La única salida de allí es a través de un pasillo estrecho, por donde corre una brisa fría y levemente perfumada. El pasillo conduce a un laberinto de corredores: como venas que cruzaran cien recintos de oro.

En uno de los recintos -nunca podré volver a encontrarlo- hay una estrella; en otro, un ostensorio; en otro un niño juega con una víbora. Sigo adelante y encuentro una corona de espinas, un pelicano y el trono de un rey oriental. Por estas habitaciones fascinantes se oye el eco de una música de flautas y violines.

En estrados colocados a lo largo del corredor hay grupos de niños que cantan. Escucho sus canciones, sus canciones fáciles e ingenuas. Es música perfumada de lilas, jazmín y sándalo; pero el olor más resaltante es a mar. Las fragancias más intoxicantes, los ritmos más hipnóticos son los del mar.

La presencia de la eternidad me sofoca, parece que perdí el sentido.

Cuando vuelvo en mí me llevan en andas por el salón abandonado, el solarío o aviario. Oigo la voz de la vieja que me llama suyo indicándoles la vía de retorno a mi lejano aposento. Cuando advierte mi estado me mira a los ojos con sorna.

Esta gente vengativa que me rodea, que me irrita con sus demandas y exhortaciones, no quiere callarse. No quieren obedecer mis órdenes. Se burlan recordándome mi invalidez, que nunca abandonaré este cuarto vacío. Murmuran y cuentan historias de atrevidos que al perder su poder sobre la muerte quedan impotentes. De vez en cuando la vieja viene a visitarme. Me dice que todo es cierto, que nunca moriré, que nunca conoceré libertad alguna. Pero todos me hastían: me es indiferente la vieja que se dice mía, estoy indiferente a todo.

— Eva se va —

Si no fuera tan difícil subir por la escalera estrecha, retornaría a recorrer los recintos inconscientes del éxtasis.

Stop Sign

He was a black man, humbled forward in a stoop by years long past his memory. Behind him the wind whistled keenly around the grey corners of the concrete streets, lifted his shabby coat and sloshed shivers up his back — making him grip the tattered lapels closer under his chin and search longingly from his lonely spot. Stinging his eyes, the sand-grit bits of ghetto trash dropped away back into the wind and street. The wind died down. I moved close, calling in earnest over the noises of buses, the elevated and the knifing cold, intrigued now by his silhouette. "Hello. You look as bad off as I am in this stuff. Is there a little coffee shop around here where I could get a hot drink?" The eyes searched first, the lips moved slowly — paced by the southern drawl. "Ah don' know. Ah don' live heah! Maybe one in the nex' block."

The eyes continued to search, this time for money — noting the suit, polished shoes and neatly knotted tie. The hand clutching the lapels opened and dropped down, the bare chest heaved up exposed to the wind. "Hey, man! You got a quata' Ah kin 'ave? Ah need booze real bad!" The question was open, with special cunning and sincerity. "No, I don't. But I'll buy you a bowl of soup, if you'll show me where that coffee shop is." The eyes lifted again in skeptical trust and a bit of hope; a grin spread the lips showing black-cavities teeth rotting in diseased gums. "Okay. Ah ain' got nuffin' else ta-do. This-a-way." The pointed gesture was unsure, slow and lame — reminiscent of arthritis struggling against the wind.

As we moved on the littered street, the rage of the wind broke slightly at the building corners, posts and cars, warming where basement vents steamed up into the frosted air. Buttoned close against the cold, the few travellers leaned forward, poised against unseen forces buffeting hard against their passage, as the first evening lights glowed and winked in the dusted windows.

The diner was small, squatted on the flat corner — yellow-orange garish, with a spring-pulled screen door, a twist knob and a painted slip-bolt lock — remains of the elevated's history — with wheels stilled forever by burial in concrete. The expanded room's windows, shining in staccato series, glowed with the swinging bulb lights reflected down and out from greenmetal shades, while a lazy single-blade fan circled slowly in the greasy air.

Taking the burnished knob, the black man and I slipped into the milling aisle and moved reluctantly to a red-and-white Italian oilcloth-covered table in a bright yellow booth. A cockroach, alarmed by our presence, skittered down the crack at the end as we moved in — sensing. As we settled, the dish-towel-aproned waiter-cook leaned over the end of the booth table, displaying his food-stained wrapper — requesting our order. “Whatcha gonna have?” “May we have menus, please?” My request was instinctive; his response was equally so. “We ain’t got any. It’s up there,” — pointing with his pencil, chewed blunt by use and licking. “Oh. Okay. Give us a minute or two” — I didn’t like to be pushed.

The black man was pensive now, seeming somehow different, safe in the warmth of the room. “Hey, Man, jes’ coffee. I don’ need nuffin’ else.” The protest was faint, suggesting deep need. “Don’t you want that soup I promised? You completed your bargain, you know. I have to do my part. ... Or maybe you’d like something else, like a burger?” The searching eyes narrowed questioning my sincerity. “Don’t worry, I’ll cover the ticket.” Assurance filled the eyes — lifted now tired and deep-set in their dried skin wrinkles, showing yellow in the whites from jaundice. The scaled hands, folded with fingers interfixed, shifted, twitching sometimes in nervous response. The hash slinger came. I ordered burgers for both, plus soup and coffee. The eyes widened. The hands relaxed. The awkward pause began.

“By the way, what’s your name?”

“Juls, Anthony Washington Juls,” the slow tongue said. “Pronounced J E W E L S — ya know, like *gems*.” “They ain’t many Juls in the country, ya know.”

“That’s a nice name. Mine’s LeRoy — LeRoy Jones. What do you prefer to be called?” The coffee came. The cream was sour and had to be changed. “Blackey, — tha’s my nickname; everybody call me that.” “My Daddy call me ‘Wash’ — but I didn’t do that very often, an’ the kids call me Blackey.” The lips grinned again, the puns were fun, and the eyes glistened with remembering.

As we ate the vacant lostness of Blackey’s face came alive in memories of family and friends long buried in the press of survival from day to day. The toothless grins of recollection came more often, and the arthritic knees moved rhythmically in anxiety of the end of the brief encounter.

When he told me of “Julie” — his long-time wife — tears welled in the mucous-rimmed eyes and slipped like silver ribbons down the deep black cheeks. “She was a nice woman. She always loved me jes’ right. Ah sho wish she wuz heah now.” The eyes looked back in reminiscence and away in the direction of her grave filled many years ago in “down South” — old Georgia.

“You must have loved her a lot, Blackey.” I tried to be comforting and kind. He met my gaze — searching for honesty I dared not to amplify.

“Ya, ah sho did ... but she died anyway.”

Soup and sandwich finished, we renewed the coffee — sipping the last dregs as tales of children, jobs, and schooling rose in memories, ghosted through our

minds and dropped back into awkward silences.

"Do you want some pie?"

"Oh — No! No! — Thank you!" The fear of insincerity rose again, the graciousness was awkward, the eyes narrowed, the fingers intertwined. Blackey was ready to leave.

Picking up the soiled check, I slipped out of the booth, moved past the other patrons, slipped on my overcoat, and headed to the old cash register sitting cock-eyed on the linoleum-topped counter. Blackey followed, shuffling worn shoes over the grimed floor and struggling to put on his rumpled rags. Halfway to the door he coughed violently with a deep pneumonia.

The cook took my bill, shelled out the change, thanked me, and returned unaffected to his ladles and spatulas. Blackey and I shoved open the wind-blown door, avoided the clanging screen and headed into the street again against the bitter chill.

As we walked the short blocks back to where we met, Blackey hummed the deep, throaty melodies of "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" and "Jesus Loves Me This I Know," — letting his lips part now and then to sing a phrase from the mystic revelries of his ancient mind. I listened — half-hearing — as the songs spoke his joy.

On the corner, at the stop sign across the street from where I met him, I bid him goodbye. As I shook hands, tears welled in his eyes and the thick lips quivered. "Mah Mamma tol' me — nevah say 'Goodbye'; so — ah don'. But — Thank yuh. Thank yuh."

I gave him a ten-spot, walked away, and felt strangely challenged by the simple sincerity of his deep respect.

Halfway up the steps to the elevated's stop platform, I heard a sudden horn blast, the sharp squeak of stressed brakes, shouting, and the belated wail of a police siren. Looking back across the winded corner where we had been, I saw a crumpled black figure clutching his battered body against a stop sign. Blackey had crossed at the right corner.

Looking away — I saw chariots in the sky.



