Tyrannosaurus

Yesterday was hell.
We climbed trees.
You came near, nearer.
Up close, your loose skin,
hanging heavy as history,
smelled like reptile.
You licked us from limbs
like sprouts from a stalk.
You got Adam and Abel.
Cain you missed.

James Fehlhaber
Bucksport

A PORTFOLIO OF MAINE WRITING
Vol XI — 1987

Published by
University of Maine-Augusta
Leaving

Finally it begins to sink into Linnea’s head that Bert could just possibly be shackled up with someone in Augusta. But, then, what can she do about it? Or, should she do anything about it at all?

She knows she should leave him. That is the most logical course; except for the baby that’s born in a month and their daughter Alice. Always a baby saving him, she thinks, staring out into the damp, Maine, November afternoon and seeing the dying fields and gnarled, leafless woods. She watches a truckload of blue-orange-capped coppers roll down the dirt road past her house. Wanting your time today boys, she laughs at herself, all that’s posted now, every last bit of it, do your killing elsewhere.

She does not wait to sneer at their return, but walks over to the only other window in the house, one that peers out on the dormant summer garden and their own hills and woods stretching north and beyond. Ah, Bert, she shakes her head, I was truly going to leave you seven years ago, but you got me pregnant there, too! Is that your method? Is that the way he’s ever had and she’s as well, really it’s not too bad. They need every penny, particularly with the new baby and the new siding he was supposed to put on the house during the summer but never got around to doing, saying it was too expensive, and maybe those dinners and lunches are why.

None of Linnea’s close friends go to Augusta or anywhere for that matter. Acquaintances are whom she gets these bits from, and then it’s more from the tone of their voice than what they actually say. Like the postmaster this summer, he knew the town gossip center; hang around with the other women and one in particular. And Linnea has tried to dismiss it all. She has not dared question him about those places with women and one in particular. Perhaps he knows something, she wonders, but she does not question him about it. And Linnea has tried to dismiss it all of their voice than what they actually say. Like the postmaster this summer, he knew the town gossip center; hang around with the other women and one in particular. And Linnea has tried to dismiss it all.

Although fairly certain that her neighbor assumes Bert does business at these places, Linnea knows better. He just graduated from law school and works for the state. Writing articles. His salary is not much, but considering it’s the first job he’s ever had and she’s as well, really it’s not too bad. They need every penny, particularly with the new baby and the new siding he was supposed to put on the house during the summer but never got around to doing, saying it was too expensive, and maybe those dinners and lunches are why.

Of course, she always supposed that could be enough to settle things. She was after all, pregnant and was not going to leave him. She was never even sure whether there was one woman or two or three. He has been seen any number of times by a variety of people such as her neighbor down the road who is really not a friend but just a neighbor and has periodic business in Augusta. They usually talk casually when Linnea waits on the corner during the spring and fall for the school bus to drop off Alice in the afternoon. The neighbor is often out in her yard then, and they chat easily about gardens and the weather. This past fall she mentioned that she ran into Bert after they do the mail then. She knew if he hadn’t left things would have been different. That’s how they bought the horses, her mother remarried a wealthy, retired businessman and moved to Connecticut. Only six hours away. She knows, has told herself many times that it is the only answer; if indeed, that is the answer she wants. Not like sugar, not like beans and franks or tuna casserole. Better far better. He does complain about everything she’s fixed lately. Oh, well, so what, and she heads back into the living room and sits in the old rocking chair to wait for Alice to come home from school and to consider seriously going to Connecticut, like this weekend.

Maybe if most of their friends hadn’t left things would have been different. But almost all of them couldn’t stand the winters and discovered the land didn’t provide as good or as easy a living as they’d thought. That’s when Bert decided to go to law school. He’d received an undergraduate degree at UMO, but figured that wasn’t enough and maybe it was time to stop taking money from his folks. Besides, he didn’t have anyone to hang around with anymore, so no time to smoke pot with. The locals didn’t like him, especially after he’d had that run-in with the warden and threatened to shoot anyone who came near their property. She’d never been able to understand why he did things like that. Law school did seem to have calmed him down.

Bert had complained a lot about having to go to Portland for law school. But the city had been fun for her. Had been in school most of the day, so she’d taken Alice and gone into all the shops, walked in the parks and down by the waterfront. She’d been surprised at how much she’d enjoyed the city hustle, all these people together at once. And Linnea had decided that it wasn’t good for her and Alice and had rented a farm out near Gorham. He never lets her do anything, doesn’t want her to know anybody.

Love never enters Linnea’s mind anymore; the word, that is, much less the feeling. Except for Alice. And Bert sorts her. Perhaps, she is jealous of his affection for her daughter. But that would make it even better if she left him. Up and gone, tonight. She has the good car; he took the truck to work. She could call her mother; there should be enough gas for the trip she’d be there by then.

Bert Love begins to feel better than she has in weeks. She is planning, doing something. She goes into the kitchen to make a cup of tea. It would be nice not to cook this evening, even a pizza from the general store would be better or a grannce hall supper if you can stand four or five different kinds of beans plus boiled franks. Bert loves beans and franks, so she has them once a week. They’re all right, but she longs for the days when she might never have to eat them again. There is a chicken in the freezer, but it’s too late for that now. He goes mad if supper isn’t ready when he walks in the door.

The kettle begins to boil, and Linnea makes a small pot of comfrey tea. The herb grows wild halfway up the hill out back, and she finds its steaming flavor very soothing, almost reassuring. She carries a full mug over to the living room window with her and watches for Alice to come down the road from the schoolhouse. The baby that’s due next month and their daughter Alice. Always a baby saving him, she thinks, staring out into the damp, Maine, November afternoon and seeing the dying fields and gnarled, leafless woods. She watches a truckload of blue-orange-capped coppers roll down the dirt road past her house. Wanting your time today boys, she laughs at herself, all that’s posted now, every last bit of it, do your killing elsewhere.

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in hand: the bus is always on time; well, usually. She returns to the now darkening window, oblivious to the scant light in the room save for the glow from the fire in the wood stove. Maybe she went home with Sam and Jim; but, no, she would have had to pass by there. Besides, that wasn’t like her.

By 4:30 Linnea, still standing by the window, clutching her now empty tea mug, challenges herself to call someone. The school, the school district office, the post office, a neighbor. But she seems frozen to her spot by the window. Then finally — finally her phone rings. She places her tea mug on the window sill and moves calmly toward the ringing.

"Hello."

"Linnea?" asks a familiar and anxious voice that she cannot place immediately. "This is Sally, over at the school district office. There’s been an accident; the bus."

"There’s a pause on the line as if the caller is waiting for Linnea to go hysterical or allowing herself time to summon the courage to tell the tale. But Linnea waits; her mind is blank with terror, her mouth dry and unworkable.

"Linnea, Linnea. Alice is all right. Her arm is broken, and there are cuts on her face, but she’s all right. All the children are alive, some hurt worse than others."

"Will they let me see her?"

"Yes, of course, go now."

"What about Bert?"


Then, as if she is a mechanical woman, someone has just wound up her spring, Linnea scratches a note to Bert and sticks it on the tea kettle’s spout in the kitchen. She pulls on her boots, throws on her coat, shoves a blaze-orange watch cap on her head and, for a moment stands in the living room shifting from one foot to another.

Suddenly, she runs into the bedroom and yanks open a dresser drawer where she knows Bert keeps wood money hidden in a sock. She stuffs it in her pocket, makes sure she has her driver’s license, and then just in case, just supposing she might not get home tonight or the next or even the next, she jams several changes of clothes, both hers and Alice’s, into an old beach satchel and charges out the front door without locking it behind her.

A Domestic Scene

...a woman reflects on her long marriage to a husband who is dead

Moonlight climbs above our headboard to the wall, filtered through the lace your mother gave. I lift my hands in the speech we call our whisper. The words flutter like black doves across the faded patterns of swans and reeds.

Some asked me, “How do you talk to him in the dark?” I wanted to say your hands are like drunken geese that learned to dance, and slowly, slowly got tired and settled their way to words instead. But for that we need the moon.

But for that I need to tell the truth and never do even when I try. I speak so quickly in the dark.

For your thick hands, with whom my doves lie down these years upon your thigh, have swallowed everything I say. It’s all right.

After twenty years, the shape of my heart with you, what to shop for, and where to go in August are nearly the same shape.

It’s as if each thought is held a moment and then placed into the air.

It’s all right even when, in the kitchen, I must put down my cup and walk around in front of you and still remember the list of things I need to ask and swallow those for which I have no signs.

Here in our darkness, my hands are so free they don’t know anything. They just live. It’s strange, as I roll across your chest and press your hands apart, to think, “You talk too much!”

C. Walker Mattson
Troy
former writer, editor and photographer in D.C.

Making Bread

Clipping wings on the milkroom window moths madden the light break my night retreat out here in a cold baker’s hut.

A jungle mantra to mix into meditation. Why not just flour and warm milk to make this bread rise? It is midnight and I keep kneading.

Lisa Beth Hammer
Bar Harbor
studied at CODA

David Adams
So. Euclid, Ohio
is a technical writer
The Positive Mental Attitude
Path to Success

from Growing Pains, a novel

When he got back home, June's car was in the driveway.

Kim was at the kitchen table, eating cookies and drinking milk. She looked at him with nervous eyes. He wanted to hug and squeeze her, but checked himself and said coolly, "Hi. Did you have a good time at Grandma's?"

Before she could answer, June came in looking exhausted. "Hello, Ted."

"June... I'm really glad you're back."

She sighed. "The kids and I had a talk. We agreed to try to make the best of a bad situation."

With gratitude so great he could have kissed her feet he said, "We'll work it out. I'm sure we will."

She looked at him. The space between them seemed to crystallize. "My father had found you a job," she said.

Kim got up from the table; went into the family room. Ted said, "He did? What kind of a job?"

"There's an agency in Sellertown called Helping Hands. It's for families in crisis. They need an assistant director. You'd do publicity, write brochures and press releases, interview people to determine their income levels, that kind of stuff."

Ted held out his helpless hands, palms up, thinking: families in crisis? "But June, I don't know anything about that kind of work."

She sniffed. "You can talk, can't you? And you teach kids to write, so one would assume you can write."

"But a social service agency... I've never had anything to do with a social service agency. I'm not even sure I like them."

"This is hardly the time to be choosy, Ted."

"But we'd have to move. I don't want to move."

She rolled her eyes. "Oh Ted, for Christ's sake, be realistic. I guess you didn't see the paint that's splattered all over our door."

"Right. In how many years? Think of Brad and Kim. Do you realize how embarrassed—?"

"I know, I know."

"Do you also know you'll never get another job around here?"

"Not in teaching, I guess."

"Not in anything, Ted."

She was probably right. But he would be damned if he'd take her father's job. He would not be indebted to him for anything—ever! He told June he'd think about Helping Hands, but he had a few other leads—which of course was a baldfaced lie, but he did have a plan. It'd apply to every junior college in the country, College— that's where he should have been teaching all along. A brief fling with a student? In a college setting that was nothing at all.

In his silent study, head fuzzy, he worked on his resume. He tapped the blotter with his pen and stared at the cemetery. The sky— a scalloped gray—pressed into his brain. Jesus, what could be say? —except English and psychology teacher, Walt Whitman High School, Somerside, New Jersey. Part-time automobile dent inspector? Not very impressive — and neither were part-time supermarket clerk and part-time bartender, other jobs he had held in past lean (always lean) summers. Seventeen years at the same damn job! It looked awful! People didn't expect that these days. They thought if you didn't jump around there was something wrong with you: you lacked initiative, were nuts, incompetent! He changed "dent inspector" to "automotive assessor," changed "supermarket clerk" to "retail sales." What else, what else? Was that it?

He put two hundred resumes in the mail — and kept searching the COURIER-NEWS, the Philadelphia papers, the NEW YORK TIMES.

The social agency jobs — developmental psychologist, psychiatric social worker, etc. — required credentials he didn't possess. In the course of three weeks he found a grand total of two English teaching positions — one at a school for the deaf in upstate New York (sign language required), the other for a debate coach-English teacher in Newark. He called about the latter job the day the ad appeared. It was already filled.

As he read the ads, he suddenly realized that time had passed him by. While he was seemingly expounding on Poe, Thoreau and Frost in his classroom capsule, the world had turned upside down. "Data capture shift manager." What the devil was that? Did people actually go to college to study such things these days? "Fluid dynamicist" — another mystery. "Flavorist" sounded like a bit more understandable, but where were the jobs for him? Not "flavorist" but "wine-taster" — that sort of thing. (How did one ever get a job like that, anyway?) "Export traffic specialist." Ruh? "Does your fluency in English and German look like your experience in export traffic?" His fluency in German did. Seventeen years ago schools had been begging for teachers, and now he couldn't give his skills away.

He signed up with a placement agency. They were not optimistic. English teacher at the top of the scale? The man at the desk gave a shrug of thick shoulders, a shake of bald head. FeelingIll, Ted stopped into the ground floor bar (the placement agency's real business?) and ordered a double shot.

Jesus, he was totally expendable! All the courses he'd taken (that Master's plus plus), all the kids he had taught, all he'd learned and had done meant nothing! He drank. There had to be something he could do — besides ringing up groceries or mixing drinks or checking cars for dents. He thought of his work as yearbook advisor, Editor? The magazine or newspaper field, some area like that?

There was another possibility, one he didn't like to contemplate: but during the rush hour drive across the dark Walt Whitman Bridge (the murky river fused to the graybrown sky), he decided to give it a shot. All he really wanted to do was teach, and he knew that now: he already missed it like mad. He'd never missed those lousy summers, had actually dreaded Labor Day, but now with all this time on his hands oh god did it appeal! He'd get back to it soon, he swore he would, but right now he needed a job, any job — some temporary thing to tide him over until—

"Hello, is this Joe Bishop?"

"This is Joe Bishop, who's this?"

"Joe, this is Ted Wharton."

A pause at the other end of the line. A long pause, then: "Ted! What's up, your Electra-queen giving you trouble?"

"No, Joe, it's not that, it's... well, I'm looking for work."

"For work?"

"I was thinking about that offer you made when you sold us our vacuum. You know — the salesman job."

"A long, long pause. "Well, that was a while ago."

The hum of the line. "You mean there aren't any openings?"

Joe's voice took on a confidential tone. "Ted, look, let's face it. After your troubles at Whitman... selling door-to-door around here after that... no way."

Ted wet his lips. "Well Jesus. Joe, I'm not a goddamn roapist, I mean what do you think will happen?"

"It's not what I think will happen, Ted. It's your image. A male is always a negative image in the minds of work. He can often overcome it with effort, but in your case...it's just not possible."

"Joe, listen. I'll take another neighborhood. — Some place where they've never heard of Whitman High."

Another pause. "Sorry, Ted, but we can't take the chance. Electra-queen has to protect its image."

Ted gritted his teeth. "Hey Joe, let's not be hypocritical, Did you show me a magazine in the men's room at school?"
Once: A Collaboration

in the mid 1930s, André Breton and other surrealists living in Paris practiced a method of group composition in which, until the end, each participant saw only the word or phrase written immediately before his own. They called it le cahier ou le cahier érotique after a phrase that appeared in surrealistic attempts. Sometimes, as in this example produced by Louise Plotner's creative writing workshop, the results can be extraordinary.

No words have been changed. The author's name is simply a listing of the participants' first initials.

Once I thought about the world as a child might, and years later these thoughts revealed the simple truth that poetry evolves from everyday experiences — changed in some ways, but still the same. We changed as we grew old, but if I'm along with you the best is yet to be, because we live for the future, and you make every day better and brighter than the one before. Today is only a drop in the bucket of forever — forever is too far away to imagine — yet I dream about what I will be doing in 10 years, and I see a dirty mop and the world crumbled around their feet.

Kibij Jpljs
Orono
is a writing class

Assault

I was attacked last night skidding down my road in the moonless illumination of fresh snow, by I don't know what — a pack of mongrels from the junkyard gone over the brink... a shuddering porcupine with one red eye...? three quenly coyotes sick of strews...? a sneaking chilly sting, or so it seemed, or did I step into my own shadow struggling like a spider coughed off a bridge?

I was attacked last night skidding homeward in a wet November snowstorm after the newest damn car I ever owned couldn't make Rocky's Hill. Down, down the dark homeward in a wet November snowstorm after the newest damn car I ever owned couldn't make Rocky's Hill.

I was attacked last night plowing through a surprise car I ever owned couldn't make Rocky's Hill. Down, down the dark homeward in a wet November snowstorm after the newest damn car I ever owned couldn't make Rocky's Hill.

On Rocky's Hill I burned and burned

One Body, All Bodies

If we would listen to the body and nothing else we might never break from silence. We might learn no skin is exclusively ours, that the clean and unclean drink of the same sky, that breath never ends and is just beginning.

For the thing about the body is this: tracing it forward and back to the origins we get lost, finding ourselves unable to distinguish between molecule and sun, mouth and womb, blood and sea.

Christopher Faby
Thomaston
from his study window admires the prison's pink glow

Mark Melnicove
So. Harpswell
runs The DogEar Press

The DogEar Press
Gradsution

A senior sees his words and face pressed on the pages of his yearbook.
He stands at the door.
Teachers have gone home.
He turns as if he could return to being bright and young.

James Dean leaps just in time before his car careens off the cliff.
He never dies. He makes of desire and the sun what he finds in his reach.
He rages in his heart and leaps out of doomed cars watching the best part of himself disintegrate in the gorge.

There is no return. Only the art of leaping out just in time.

Bruce Spang
Readfield
educates adolescents about substance abuse
This isn't a love story because she wasn't that pretty, and I'm not granite-jawed or steely-eyed or that kind of thing. She didn't have one of those faces where you look at her, and you're talking, and you're thinking "If I can just keep this conversation going." And you get excited because you've been funny, and she's laughing and saying oh my god, while you're just thinking — not that kind of thing. I don't remember any strong feelings about her, until she was wearing something — and then she turned to look over at something else — I remember that. And, if I think back, I can see her again lying back on my bed after everybody else had left, saying, "Don't you ever try and get on the bed, too!"

But this is also about leaving home for college, expecting it to be better, and finding out it was different, but not any better. When I left for college I was thinking about adventure, maybe even danger. The way I was thinking, I should have run away to sea, or hopped a train headed West. But somewhere along the line I had bought the idea that college was a big adventure. But for me it was just a way for my parents to treat me like I still wasn't old enough to feed myself or come in out of the rain.

I wanted to get into some kind of predicament — something life-threatening — and then not be saved by my parents. My parents were saving me all the time: mostly from the things that frightened them.

I got there in the afternoon, still dressed the way my parents liked to see me — banson shirt and pressed slacks — but I was feeling very patient. They'd have to leave me now. This was college. They weren't allowed to stay. My roommate had been there first and done a few things. Nothing obvious, but it looked like his.

It was like we were both dogs and he'd already run around the room, peeing on all the best bashes. My mother had found the dorm counselor: some-one in purple corduroy cut-offs. I could see her setting up the scene so it would be a funny story to tell the bridge group — "crazy kids...ivy league...his parents pay all that tuition and these pants!..." I thought. I was being taught how to swim. At the time, it looked a lot like the beach where I was being taught how to swim. And then there would be Diver Dan, in his big metal globe helmet, with sort of a sewer grate across where his face was, so you couldn't see his face at all. He'd stamp around on the ocean floor, bubbles boiling around his helmet. He had this big rubber air hose that apparently connected to the surface of the water where there was a boat. Show after show there were bad fish who lured him into dangerous caves, or killer clams who gouged holes in his legs. Everyone tried to look back with his air hose. The fish were stuffed, I think. They were sort of dangled near Diver Dan while they talked out their plans to do him in. The leader was a long thin fish named Barry Barracuda, who smoked a cigarette. His henchman was a hammerhead shark. They were always trying to get Diver Dan in pretty obvious ways, like "Hey, Dan, why don't you put your foot in this giant clam? See what happens." The scarist part was when Dan realized he was in trouble. Then he'd do this slow motion lurch — this and that — bubbles everywhere. They always used to end the show with what he was in deep shit — or maybe not — but I can't remember how he ever got out of anything — just this death lurch — and maybe a shot of the people on board the boat saying "Pull him up — he's in trouble." They were always idiots and understood nothing about the problem. The other thing they said a lot was "he's only got a few minutes of air left." And I was walking among all these people at college like everything was underwater and I had to worry about my air hose all the time. But the worst part was that there was no one on board my boat. If I somehow ended up I would die a slow death, and no one would notice, except maybe the evil fish that lured me into a trap.

The other counselor had blond hair and a full blond beard. His name was Skip, which was a bit much. The place was too much like summer camp already. He was earthy, intelligent, I guess, and friendly, but I'd just dropping into his room. I would put on one of his records, usually The White Album (I liked "The Birthday Song"); I liked the ferocity of the song which im- plied that if you didn't have a happy birthday, you would be killed. Then I would talk about things I had seen that day. I had a nasty, irrefutable sort of humor which I always employed when the subjects of my humor were no longer around. To Skip, however, I implied that I was as tough at the time as I was in the retelling. Responses that had only echoed in my head were repeated to him as if they had been spoken aloud, and his appreciation gave me great comfort. I told him I was a Golden Gloves boxer in high school. In this way I lived my life like it was a second broadcast delay; I never stood directly behind my words. To me, that was like hugging a tree during an electrical storm. But we became good friends, I guess, and he's an important part of this thing with the girl that I'm going to tell you about.

At the end of my first day at college, my roommate Jack invited people back to our room for some pizza and Amaretto. I sipped the stuff. Almond liqueur, and it gave me this scary portentous feeling: now I could taste all these funny drinks, even have a Manhattan if I wanted one. It made me think vaguely about my future — big drinks in plush restaurants with darksessions on paintings on the wall — of course that wasn't what I wanted at all. Afterwards I went over to the bookstore, which was open until midnight the first week. I went over the section where they have all the things with the college insignias and mascots and all that. I just liked to browse through — soft glasses, cushions, mugs, toothbrushes, toilet seats, mirrors, all kinds of clothing — part of me was very scornful and part of me wanted to buy all of it. I had never wanted to make a show of being an alumus, say twenty years down the line; while my friends guffawed and tittered out in my living room, I would prepare drinks with my college shot glass and everyone would have a good laugh about my toilet seat. Finally I just bought a car decal. My parents had seen them (they beat it over to the bookstore, too), and had hinted around about how nice they were. For some reason it was my place to buy them. I bought a small one that just said "Brown University." It had a little bear, wearing a sailor's cap, leaning against the "B." I don't know if I thought that was me, or what.

I headed back to my room wondering what to do next. I wanted to meet one...
more person, or maybe I should write some letters. I had this idea that writing letters would be a big, enriching thing in my life, and I was able to keep that feeling as long as I didn’t actually write any. Once I put down the date and “dear somebody,” I felt stupid and uninteresting. I opened the door of my room and only my desk lamp was on. I sensed there were people in the room, but with the place so dim, I didn’t even want to look.

“Hey, Lawrence,” Jack said.

“Hey,” I said, sounding cool and off-hand, no idea what was going on. I kept my back to them, there had to be someone with him, and I started going through all the catalogues and coupons on my desk as if it was something I really had to do, making myself look relaxed.

“You have met Elizabeth?” he said.

I figured that was my cue. Elizabeth looked confused and rumpled. The anarretto bottle was about empty.

“Oh, sure, Jim Elizabeth,” I made my voice deep and understanding, like I was young once and had done like her, and I had come out of it all right. Really it was my father’s voice, echoing out of me. Think about it. Whenever you’re startled, that’s when you realize that your parents live inside your head. Elizabeth was looking at me like I had slapped her out of a deep sleep. Jack looked slick, a little pleased with himself. I guessed this was his way of conquering a new place. Jack steered her outside, and I could hear this low hum of conversation. In the weeks that followed, she came down to the room a lot, but after awhile Jack stopped being there. He had hooked up with a senior who had an off-campus apartment. Later that semester she joined the feminist group on campus. I’ve met a lot of girls who think all men are users, they usually have good reasons, but I’ve also noticed that the only men they seem to view seriously are those slick movers who manipulate them with suave flattery. That was but I’ve also noticed that the only men

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But it’s not fun—it can be a

She was telling us about his reel

My door was open, so she offered me some. My mother made it clear

I was going to make herself talk to someone. Steve was the easiest. Now I was there, and I could sense that she was going to hang on a few more minutes before she considered her patience complete. Even as she was sitting there, looking for a chance to go, she was running Springsteen lyrics through her head, like some kind of chant that would keep her safe. In a little while she would be alone with the song and that would completely free her strangely certain sense that at some point she would become something powerful, admirable. She might flare, tarch-bright, up into the air, some hot dangerous night, powerful feelings and thoughts snapping through her like voltage through a high power line. Then all her potential would be shining in her face, but before she could triumph over the odds, someone would discover they loved her in return: a brilliant flame of being constant and visible to all. I knew her scenario because it was a lot like mine, and that of all the people around me, like college was the incubator and we would astonish the world with our idiocy like us.

But she was noticing me, at least a little. Steve was telling us about his reel and Dolby sound reduction. Somehow I eased the conversation towards Springsteen—automobiles, hot roads, t-shirts damp with sweat, couples in backseats opening and closing around each other like a fast clenching and unclenching. Steve switched his topic to anti-static functions, but he knew he’d taken the wrong turn somewhere and wasn’t even really in the room.

Of course I had never heard a Springsteen album. My Dad’s big thing was 101 Strings. This was some orchestra that took popular show tunes, or whatever, and made them all sound the same. Muzak, really. After my parents installed a radio intercom system in the house, they just stayed tuned to WEZEN all day. It was on every minute of the day, with creepo announcers telling you, in their valley voices, that you were listening to beautiful music. I would listen to it for awhile, and then I’d want to go do something crude in a public place—spit on the floor in a restaurant—anything to counteract the feeling that my brain was being turned into a baggie. Stuff like that.

There was a poster in my room—Steve had a boyfriend named McDonald and Mr. Rogers—sometimes it gives me the feeling that everyone else in the world has already had a lobotomy and now they’re looking for me.

Later that evening, Beth came walking down the hall with a box of Ritz crackers. My door was open, so she offered me some. I don’t know how I got started, but I used my hands to make her “let’s get stoned” gesture—my background. I grew up in a Connecticut suburb, but that’s not what I told her.

“Where did you grow up?”

“New York City.”

“Really? What part?”

“Not a well known part, I mean, not Fifth Avenue, or anything. Sort of a poor area.”

I was inventing this story. Why? I wanted to seem pathetic and valid. Someone who had triumphed over tremendous odds.

“I know where Grand Central Station is. Do you live near there?”

“Closer to 125th Street,” I said meaningfully. She didn’t get it. “Near Harlem,” I said, trying to sound like I didn’t mean anything by it. I liked the tension of acting reluctant to tell my heroic story: Also, it gave me time to make it up as I went along.

“Have you ever seen about Brown?”

“I didn’t really, I was in some trouble, and I heard about it through this program.” While I was laying all this down, I had only the dimmest idea of what I expected to get out of it. Mostly I wanted her to take me to her bed for a languorous naked end to the afternoon. I had planned the rest of the time. But it’s not fun—it can be a sad lonely thing. Most of the time people keep hidden what they know other people would not enjoy seeing. The secret itself is not as horrifying to us as the idea of watching someone else discover it. Anyway, lonely trapped people really set me off, and this film strip of their life starts clicking in my head. Like they’d probably spent the last week trying to breathe some life into her room. All her favorite books were put on a prominent shelf, maybe one or two she didn’t really understand and hadn’t finished reading, like Ulysses or Paradise Lost, but she had read the introductions. She had planned the rest of the time. She would talk to people that if they asked about them, so it was not a pretentious thing to do. Her blanket from home went on the bed—some sort of up-boot stuffed animal; Stooppy or a Kaliban Cat. Beth’s calendar might be Sierra Club, but she was never really into it, but because she was a horror of spooky-clear mystic rock formations—the visual equivalent of a coyote’s howl. Those black and white windows into the grandeur of solitude lent dignity to silence and boredom. After the room was set, the next impulse would be to buy something with the money given by some uncle or other. I had bought Eddy on Main Street. I didn’t have any albums at home, nor a stereo. My father had built a Heathkit stereo which was in the livingroom. I stole the Hot Rocks album from a place where I’d lawn work, and when my parents went out I would put on “Sympathy for the Devil” as loud as it would go, and sing along.

But for Beth, it had been Born to Run. And now she was headed back to her room to listen to it alone. But before she could do that, she was going to make herself talk to someone. Steve was the easiest. Now I was there, and I could sense that she was going to hang on a few more minutes before she considered her patience complete. Even as she was sitting there, looking for a chance to go, she was running Springsteen lyrics through her head, like some kind of chant that would keep her safe. In a little while she would be alone with the song and that would completely free her strangely certain sense that at some point she would become something powerful, admirable. She might flare, tarch-bright, up into the air, some hot dangerous night, powerful feelings and thoughts snapping through her like voltage through a high power line. Then all her potential would be shining in her face, but before she could triumph over the odds, someone would discover they loved her in return: a brilliant flame of being constant and visible to all. I knew her scenario because it was a lot like mine, and that of all the people around me, like college was the incubator and we would astonish the world with our idiocy like us.

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It gave me an image, disgusting and exciting, of students tirelessly experimenting with each other's bodies. And then there was intellectual graffiti. I made up a few and scribbled them:

God is dead.

Nietzsche

You're in big trouble.

---

During the day Beth and I fell in with each other again, never forgetting, like a couple too old, to think anything that important.

But this isn't the girl I first started talking about. About that time, there was a shock to the Brown Daily. A child was raped at a fraternity house. The details floating around were that she had done the seclusive shots of whiskey, chewed on by whomsoever, and after she was incompetent, three students had her in succession. Another story was that she daren't do it. She was found drunk in the lounge, drunk and gagged. That sort of thing. It seemed like rape to me, whether she gave them permission at some point or not. The idea of placing her in the lounge afterwards made me feel a little queasy. But I was also fascinated with the story, and I didn't want to know why.

After that, Skip came around to talk. We had taken to dropping in on each other just like before. After a while he mentioned that he knew this girl — the one who had been raped. She lived on the fourth floor. They had talked about it and now she would come by from time to time to say hello. But it wasn't so that.

He had told her about himself — that he was a virgin — Beth's unsnapped jeans had kept him intact — Louise, this girl, had started hinting lately that some night she was going to bring his contact lens case to her room. I didn't get it. Was he shocked that her vision had been corrected? But it was a pretty clear code if you knew that you couldn't wear contacts to bed at night; you had to soak them in some fluid. Skip had read her a passage from his journal, but before he knew her, about how he saw the incident. She took him to his bed, more like a favor than anything else.

We went over how it wasn't really a bad thing. He was a counselor and she was a freshman, but she didn't live on his floor. She had coaxed him into it. He had written that passage before he even knew who she was, and she had wanted him to read it.

She had visited on the floor a lot, and I knew her just by seeing. There was no big meeting. I can't remember when we met, like I said. I don't know why we started talking. I think Skip told her about me, that I was articulate and a chicken, that sort of thing. I don't know if that sums me up. I also ran on the cross country team, but I could tell this didn't intrigue her at all. From the start she treated that side of me like a mistake I was making. Remember her tapping my running shoes, while I was wearing them, and then tapping me on the forehead. "How do you reconcile these two?" she asked. At the time the question seemed profound, and I had no answer. The question invited me to feel mysterious and therefore desirable. She was inventing a scenario within which she would be willing to make love with me. I did not mention being a virgin because that was too physical a word. It was an eager, sweaty-palmed word that did not accord with the abstract, intellectual world in which I dwelled, as if I could make out. So I implied that I was experienced, even jaded. I see myself leaning back in my desk chair, one foot in an open drawer, my hands on my hips. She did not feel it was a suicide attempt, nor did I. Now I see that she was trying to make her mystery worthy of the genius she thought she saw in me.

She, for her part, began to hunt him at right side to her nature — one that only a great mind could understand. She was the Ancient Mariner and I was the wedding guest, fated to hear her story and be forever changed by it. One day, after we spoke for awhile, she showed me where she had cut herself on the wrist and dispensed a disposable razor. She presented me with a razor blade, saying, "I wish you were a virgin so that I could feel my way out." Of course I didn't, and I made a joke about it. She looked at me, and I could tell this didn't intrigue her at all. She was not a virgin, either.

Skip of our growing intimacy. He had stopped sleeping with her after the first couple of nights. They had decided they were best suited to each other as friends. I didn't have any sense that he dumped her. It was more like the play was over and he had to exit left and she had to exit right. She ran on me the fact that I had to go talk to the Dean of Somebody or other, because he had conveyed the information about how I was using the situation to do things to her that were uncomfortable. I was pubescent. Sometimes I would still be up when it was quite late at night. The hallways of the dormitory were always brightly lit, so you wouldn't feel like you were creeping around at night if you chose to walk around. I'd get a candy bar out of the machine in the lobby, just because I felt good to get something to eat in the middle of the night when everyone else was asleep. Then I would walk the hallways on different floors and read all the notes on the memo boards. Almost everyone had a memo board. Some were in the shape of a light bulb, others were a spring landscape that invited you to write your thoughts on it. On the still, dawn hours, the messages were so energetically written that they seemed to shout: "Sally — hand practice at two?" They made the coming daytime seem like an exhausting dream.

The love messages were cryptic:

"Hey, joannabell! How did you like them spuds?"

"Yo! Boys! Lay off the sheep and let me come blow your horn!"

"If I'm a french fry, why don't you be my ketchup?"

I guess this is what we needed to hear because she became a loyal companion. If I were late getting back to dinner she would wait for me. She would write notes when she was in her own room, bring me ice cream. Her solitude was meant to keep my demands to a minimum. And it felt to me like it was central to her life, and I did not analyze possible contradictions to this feeling, such as the fact that we had never touched each other, even in the most casual way.

"You want to come in one night or four or five of us sat around Skip's room drinking slope gin. It was a drink he liked and that he wanted his friends to try. I was telling some funny story, my gaze sweeping the room to gauge its effect. And I saw that Skip and Beth were sitting on the bed holding hands. I kicked off my story, not missing a beat, but I felt that something inside me was peeling itself away from my ribs and congealing into a hard ball. I had recoiled myself to Steven, her Virginia boyfriend, as some sort of evil emperor in a faraway land. Some force that might just consume itself and leave me the boy-prince of vast lands I had never dared to explore. Instead, sitting in a stuffy dormitory, drinking some purple shit, I was barren, without a shot being fired."

"One night Skip caught me in the hall and asked if I minded what was going on. He said he just took her hand and let her go. He was very intense about the question — counselor to counselor — like if I was sick about this 'teard' be happy to write me a note to the infirmary, I told him I didn't mind. Was I sure? Sure I was sure. We were just friends. What did you both do after I left? He said not everything.

Just a lot of kissing and dry humping. I asked him about dry humping and he said it was going all the way, but both people leave their pants on. I thought about how civilization had really brought us a long way. Then they both dropped out of my sight. Skip's face was shut, day and night. I did other stuff, I guess. Schoolwork, that sort of thing. Mostly I made out like Diver Dan — keeping a sharp eye on my air hose, trying to make sense of everything through all the bubbles. Somewhere in there I called my parents. I wanted to retreat, but that's not how I called. I called to remind myself that I still had nowhere to go.

It was my first call home from college, so it had all the trappings of a television sitcom:

"So, you remembered you had a mother?"

"I guess she was half-faking and half in pain. "Of course I remembered!""Talking to them always seemed to force me to be jovial and hearty. Their conversation was so alive with immaculate and comments constructed as verbal land mines. The clue changer was enormous, and I could only proceed by sounding enormous myself.

"Honey, it's Lawrence!" he yelled to her yest to my father. Her tone for this seemed genuinely excited and touched, but usually when she spoke directly to me the voice was flat. I remember when I was six years old and of course the endings, which were always the same: "Don't forget.

This was shorthand for "don't forget I love you." My parents seemed to think all of their feelings for me might very easily be left behind, like a pair of gloves in a box.

One night Beth knocked on my open door, just like old times. She had in her hand a copy of Catcher in the Rye. I had told her before it was my favorite novel, but she had not read it. She had bought it and read it — peace offering, penance, I don't know. I should have shut the door in her face. That might have done me some good. Even now I have a clear image of standing up and slamming the door shut. That image is more clear than what I did, which was to act delighted. People who put themselves in vulnerable positions around me, bare themselves so to speak, can really cut me off from what I should do. I was so sorry for her, so nervous her feelings would be hurt, that I felt that something inside me was peeling itself away from my ribs and congealing into a hard ball."

"..."
between Louise and me, I did not have this picture of her at all. Continue her
studies? We never talked about classes. The interview with the Dean was more
of a briefing session. He informed me how they viewed the situation and I
listened.

Things went on this way. Beth dropped by occasionally, but I was increasingly
different to her. My sudden lapse of energy resulted in tired exchanges about
campus events. I no longer felt any hopeful intensity and felt just untuned in her
presence. But with Louise I felt alert. The fact that the same feeling was so centrally
transposed from one woman to another should have warned me that I was run-
ning some film in my mind and women were the blank screen. Of course with
Louise, she was sort of directing the film, editing it as we went along, shaping it
into narrative form so that it seemed right and inevitable.

One night a lot of people were drifting in and out of my room. It might have
been a hall party. Louise had just come back from Boston where she had seen
David Bowie in concert. She seemed on a more energetic plane. Maybe she was
just stoned. She floated around the party telling everyone what Bowie wore, 
what he sang, I teased her about her passion for him. "I'll bet if he were here
right now, you'd be too silly to speak." "That's what you think," she said. The
group started thinning out a bit, and I had this sense that she was thinking about
spending the night. I chartered on, making it easy for her to remain behind.
When were alone it seemed very important to me to keep talking. I sat in
my desk chair and she lay down on the bed. We chatted some more. Finally she
patted the bed and said "Don't you think it's time you got on the bed, too?" I
said no. I said I didn't think it was a good idea. There were things—certain
things that she didn't know, reasons I couldn't go into with her, or anyone. So
we got interested in my dark past. What was wrong? Oh, just something that
happened. And while I talked, I tried to think what it might be. Maybe I was
actually her brother, or I had been castrated in a freak accident in kindergarten.
Then I settled on the idea that I had been accused of rape in the past, that I was
on probation of some kind, and getting on the bed with her was bound to viola-
te it. After a bit she asked me if I had raped someone. No, that's not it. I said. It was
like a bizarre game show. Well, could she just lie on the bed with me for a little
while? Her roommate was away for the weekend and she didn't feel like sleeping
alone. She was just being clever? I thought so then, now I'm sure she was telling
the simple truth, although she thought she was being clever too.

I got on the bed and just lay beside her, and she was quiet. For a long time I
felt good about the situation. I could hear myself telling Skip in the morning how
I had comforted her, no more, despite her clear offer. How, unlike the other
boys, unlike him, had given her new insight into men, new respect for their
sensibilities.

Then I got more and more aware of her lying there. I felt that if she moved
even a little I would jump as if something had brushed against me when I was in the
dark. She had not said anything for an hour, but I sensed she was awake. A
little bit after that, I began to absent her shoulder. I willed my hand to
move across her chest. All the while a voice asked me "What do you think you're
doing? What do you mean by this?" Still she was absolutely silent, as though she
were the proctor in some exam who knew the answer, but the whole point was
for me to discover it unaided. I grasped the zipper tab at the nape of her neck
between thumb and index finger. She shifted, almost imperceptibly, so that the
dress material was slack around the zipper, so that it could be pulled down with-
out making any noise. Her breathing was very careful, very measured, like
soldiers in those war movies just before they break from cover. Slowly every-
thing became more frantic and hard-edged. We did not speak a word, as if we
were lovers in each other's dream, and knew that any sound would cause us to
awaken. Everything seemed blind and thirsty; each of us feeling for somewhere
to be, somewhere to nestle and hide. My delight was in her sharp intake of
breath, her fingers tightening.

I figured that was the beginning of something. We'd be good for each other.
Early in the morning she said she had to get back to her room. When I saw her
again, later in the afternoon, she was in the lounge with a bunch of other people.
She gave me a careful greeting, and just like that I saw that the night before had
been sealed off, a secret. She would not come down to the room even to talk.
There was no longer any point.

Later I told Skip something about that evening, how she had patted the bed,
what she had said. And then I told him how we talked about it for a while, I
explained why I would not sleep with her, and then I sent her back up to her room.
He congratulated me, and was very warm in his praise, for doing what he felt
he should have done.

That night I went to bed quite late, but before I did I walked around the dorm
reading memo boards. Of course when I got to hers I wanted to write some-
things, but the more I tried to think of something to write, the more I realized
that I really didn't want to write anything. The episode was over; my air hose
intact. I kept on down the hall, walking the bottom of some unheard of ocean,
everyone around me drowning.

Garry M. Leonard
Waterville
Teaches English at Colby

Before you love,
learn to run through snow
leaving no footprint.

Turkish Proverb

What could love be wanting here
in Maine, midwinter?
Ludicrous, the whole idea—
this is no time for love,
we wear too many layers
and even, after effort,
getting to our skins,
we find them gray and pasty.

And yet a friend comes to announce
he has been struck with love
for, it gradually emerges,
another friend, and both of them
married of course, to other friends
and their kids, naturally, friends too.

You want to shout at them
"It's not even March!"
You want to shake them,
show them the footprints,
the dwelling woodpiles,
the ice dams on the roof,
the squash in the back room going soft.

Like a dream car made of glass
rust can't reach them—
impervious to roadsalt
or the hot salt wash of tears
they're months ahead of us
somewhere in summer,
radiating in flowers.

There's nothing you can tell them, though you know
at moments Maine will set them back—
force them, for discretion in fresh snow,
to learn to ski in one another's track.

Sylvestor Pullet

E. Holden
is a teacher and editor at UMO
"Hey Bernadette, get me another beer, willya?"

Bernadette sighed heavily, rolled her yellowed eyeballs heavenward, and headed for the kitchen. She'd probably miss the exciting part of "Another World." But no matter. What happened when Lance discovered that he was not the father of Delia's child would be small stuff compared to what would happen here if Ralph didn't get his goddam beer the minute he asked for it.

Ralph patted her ass as she walked by.

"Christ," he thought, "what a kisser."

He could remember when she had such a cute, tight little rear that he could get hard just thinking about it. No more. Twenty years, twenty pounds. All in the rear it looked like.

"Get the lead out, Bernadette. I'm thirsty."

"Keep your shirt on, Ralph. I'm moving as fast as I can."

She was pleased at her own boldness. She walked back into the living room. The theme music from "Another World" leaked from the TV. Oh, well. She could always call Wanda and find out what happened. Wanda never missed an episode. Wanda didn't have a fat slob drunken bum husband hanging around the house all day driving her nuts. She proffered the sweating can to Ralph.

"Alotch'a gonna pop it? God, Bernadette, you get lazier by the minute. You got nothin' better to do than lay around watchin' soaps and getting fat. OPEN THE CAN!"

She opened the can, willing her hands to be steady. She was scared. She was always scared when he yelled like that. She never knew which way it would go. Sometimes he just made noise. Some times he hurt her. If she could tough it out she'd be better off. He was like a hound dog — he could smell fear on her.

He took the can from her roughly, spilling some beer on the couch. She ran to the kitchen and returned with a cold wet rag. She started to cry a little as she scrubbed at the spreading stain.

"Bernadette, baby, I'm sorry I ruined the couch. Sweetie, honey, it'll be o.k."

She didn't speak. How could he know that she was crying with relief? She was grateful that he had not slapped her with his free hand when he'd taken the beer.

"Really, baby, don't cry, o.k.?"

Christ, she really made a federal project out of everything!

She struggled to control her voice, to get the tone just right. Tone was very important. Her mother had always said so.

"Oh, Ralph." Smiling tremulously. "Of course I'm not mad. You know I'm always a little over-emotional right before I get my period."

He knew alright. Christ, did he know! She was like a crazy woman sometimes!

He was a good guy, an understanding husband, and he tried to be patient, but sometimes, man, she was too much. Sometimes she needed a few slaps to keep her straight. He heard her back in the kitchen, heard the sounds of pots and the refrigerator door opening and closing.

"Ralph."

She stood framed in the doorway. God, he hated that polyester crap that she always wore. Did she really think that stretch pants made her look slimmer? And those print over blouses. Ugh!

"Yeah, What?"

"What would you like for supper, chili or meatballs and spaghetti?"

"Make it chili. And a salad. You got any of that homemade bread left?"

"About half a loaf."
"Good." She was a good cook. You had to give her that much. Too good maybe. That’s how come she’d picked up all that land around the rear. He drained the can.

"Hey, Bernadette, another brew. And pop it this time, huh? Bring me some chips or somethin’, too. I’m starvin’.

He headed down the hallways towards the john. She watched him and thought bitterly.

"Unzip your fly for you? Hold your dick while you pee?"

She wished she were brave enough to say it out loud. Someday. Someday. He lumbered into the kitchen and sat down on the red plastic covered chair.

"Go relax in the living room, honey. I’ll bring your beer and chips."

"Nah, I’ll sit here and keep you company."

She smiled brightly and turned to the refrigerator. Shit, she thought, shit, shit, shit. She would give a lot to have a minute to herself. She served the beer, being careful to open it, and then she filled a bowl with corn chips. She placed a paper napkin next to the beer and went back to the stove to prepare the chili. Her hands trembled slightly.

"Ralph tipped the chair back and put his feet on the table. The bottoms of his white socks were stained yellow-brown from his work boots. He unbuttoned his wide leather belt and opened the button on the watchband of his dungarees. He let out a loud, satisfying belch. Ahh! That was better. Bernadette turned and watched her.

"Good." She matched him. He lumbered into the kitchen and sat down on the red covered chair. He took the beer, drained half of it immediately, and placed the can on the gray formica table. He watched her put the salad together. Suddenly he felt sad, regretful. He loved her. Swear to God he did. He remembered the young Bernadette. Slim, lovely, sweet, so sweet. Long auburn hair. Freckles. A body he loved to love.

He took another pull on the can. Some beer trickled out the side of his mouth and down his chin. He leaned his chin abnormally into his shoulder to wipe it clean. He could swell his own sweet: strong, senza. He reached up and rubbed his chin. Two days worth of stubble. He had been shaving short of his life. Now he took his time and shaved off what he had left. He had been a beer belly. Sometimes he was a little sick of himself. Couldn’t find a job, couldn’t turn his wife on, couldn’t control his rage. He didn’t mean to hit her. He hated it but he couldn’t stop it. It made him feel strong, powerful, on top of things. The young Bernadette was happy through his tears of joy. She was the violence, the smell of her fear that aroused him. He’d get her when he came to. Hard. Fast. Painful. Right. Get him just drunk enough but not too drunk.

He was the violence, the smell of her fear that aroused him. She’d get him that way. He reached up, brushed his hands across her nipple. He brushed his thumb lightly across her nipple. He ran his fingers up and down her stomach. Again, the fight for control.

"Willya? I’m done~ile.

He sat down. He sat down, he thought, he thought, he thought, he sat down. He sat down.

"Yeah, Bernadette, sure."

He headed down the hallway towards the john. She gave him his beer. He’d let her slide for now. Let her worry a bit. Keep her on edge.

"Bernadette. A beer."

He wasn’t going to turn into some older biker. He was the violence, the smell of her fear that aroused him. It was the violence, the smell of her fear that aroused him. She’d had her triumphs though, small but significant. She did not have orgasms.

"It was the violence, the smell of her fear that aroused him. She’d had her triumphs though, small but significant. She did not have orgasms.

She didn’t do it for the thrill, for the sport, for the kicks. She did it for the kicks, for the kicks, for the kicks. She had to be careful. Do things right. Get him just drunk enough but not too drunk. She used to try to get him to pass out but he didn’t drink. He had to be careful. Do things right. She didn’t do it for the thrill, for the sport, for the kicks. She did it for the kicks, for the kicks, for the kicks.

"Keep her on edge."

Bernadette gave him his beer. He’d let her slide for now. Let her worry a bit. Keep her on edge. He took the beer, drained half of it immediately, and placed the can on the gray formica table. He watched her put the salad together. Suddenly he felt sad, regretful. He loved her. Swear to God he did. He remembered the young Bernadette. Slim, lovely, sweet, so sweet. Long auburn hair. Freckles. A body he loved to love.

"Good.

She smiled - too quickly, too brightly.

"You’re my wife, he said. "I own you. You’re worth no more to me than like some of those goddamn women’s libbers. Nothing worse than an uppity woman."

She didn’t do it for the thrill, for the sport, for the kicks. She did it for the kicks, for the kicks, for the kicks. She had to be careful. Do things right. Get him just drunk enough but not too drunk. She used to try to get him to pass out but he didn’t drink. She had to be careful. Do things right. She didn’t do it for the thrill, for the sport, for the kicks. She did it for the kicks, for the kicks, for the kicks.
And then he'd done the unspeakable thing. No babies for her. Never. Never. She stifled an urge to scream and forced her mind away from it. She turned to face him, smile back in place. She took another beer from the fridge.

"May I have one, Ralph?"

He considered for a minute. One would probably be o.k. He liked her sober. He liked to know that she was feeling the full impact of his fist and of his sex.

"Sure, go ahead. But hurry up. I wanna eat."

She sat down with the beers. She'd have liked hers in a glass but was afraid to go to the kitchen. She lied. She was putting on airs. Say she thought she was too good for him. Puny, she didn't think she was good enough for anyone, even him. They ate in silence. She grateful for the peace but wary, watchful. She waited. He had her off balance tonight. He almost always complained about the meal or some part of it. It upset her equilibrium. threw her off balance for him to eat without comment. She felt like a wounded mouse when the cat plays with it. It came to her all at once that Ralph was closing in for the kill. He'd been toying with her for nearly twenty years. It was almost over. She was sure of it. The thought made her happy. It would be over. She could rest in peace. Was there peace? Was there life after death? There was no life before death, she was sure.

Why hadn't she left him? Where would she have gone? What would she have done? Who would want her now, a fat, lonely, barren woman?

And it hadn't all been bad. When they were newlyweds and he'd been in the Navy, he hadn't beat her so often. Anyway, she'd thought things would change, that it would stop. After a while she'd decided, she knew, that it was her fault. Shied tried to change, be a better wife. She kept the house cleaner, cooked tastier meals, tried to be more passionate in the bedroom. She'd failed. It was inevitable. Ralph told her she was stupid, ugly, incompetent. A slut besides. In time she knew it was true.

"Are you finished, Ralph? I'll take your plate."

She reached towards his plate. Her hand stopped in mid-air. A feeling of dread pounded in her chest. He was quite drunk now and his eyes had a demented gleam.

"Take it."

"Don't bother Bernadette, don't strain yourself."

He stood and sent the dishes crashing to the floor with one quick movement of his arm.

"Now get me a beer. Safely spoken. And then — CLEAR IT UP!"

She was shaking. She began to go through her ritual prayers. Please let him stop. Please don't let me be hurt again. Please don't let him cut me.

She prayed to no one, she prayed to everyone. She prayed on the outside chance that there might be someone out there who would hear her. She got the beer, opened it and handed it to him. When the beatings had first begun she had tried reasoning with him, pleading with him, asking questions.

"Is something wrong, Ralph? Did I do something wrong? Why are you angry with me? Please, Ralph, talk to me.

"You know what you did, bitch! Don't get cute with me!"

She'd stopped talking when she realized that it only made things worse, only drove him to greater fury.

"CLEAN UP THAT MESS, I SAID. YOU FIGG YO FUTY SLUT CLEAN IT UP!"

She went to the closet to get the broom. She'd learned not to bend over to pick up the debris. She'd been kicked face first into it too many times. She began to sweep. In her head she chanted her prayers again. This time she added something new. "Be a good girl for Daddy."

She did not know how much time had elapsed when she was able to rise painfully from the bed. She pulled on a robe to cover her shame, her body. She hobbled to the kitchen holding the wall for support. It took a very long time to travel that nine feet. She poured herself a drink from the bottle of vodka she kept hidden in the closet with the cleaning supplies. Once more her cup had broken down and Ralph couldn't take her food shopping; she'd gone with Wanda. What fun it had been, almost like a vacation. On the way home she'd asked Wanda to stop at the liquor store. Said she wanted a little something in the house for "special occasions." Well, her special occasion had arrived.

She tossed it back, choked a little at the burning sensation in her throat and poured another. Ab, screw this, she thought, and took a drink from the mouth of the bottle. The pain was beyond words. She deserved it, though. Yes sir. Ask Ralph. Half a bottle began to take the edge off.

She opened the junk drawer and picked past the bits of string, the rubber bands, the twist ties and other assorted crap until she found the small bottle. She sighed in relief. She'd been afraid that Ralph might find it. She took another drink. She emptied the pills onto the blue formica counter. A veritable rainbow, she thought. Forty six pills. Uppers, downers, and everything in between, she'd been saving for a long time, begging pills from Wanda, one at a time, "for her nerves". Wanda's doctor prescribed these things like they were M&M's, for God's sake. And Wanda was a junkie. She just didn't know it.

One by one, she propped the pills into her mouth and washed them down with vodka. She was SO weak and she wasn't used to drinking so much. She'd have to be careful not to pass out before she'd completed her task. She had to swallow ALL her little friends. She started to take three, four pills at a time. At last she was done. She felt happy.

She staggered to the couch and lay face up. She closed her eyes and let herself drift. She smiled, and wondered what Lance would do when he found out that he wasn't the father of Deila's baby.

"Ralph, please." Her headached from sobbing, she could not stop the tremors in her body.

"Please, Ralph. Please."

"Please what, Bernadette? What are you asking me please for? Please do it to me? Please give it to me now? Don't worry, baby, you'll get it. It's just not time yet."

He stood up.

"Come here.

She stood mute.

"COME HERE!

She walked towards him. He reached forward, placed two fingers under the band of her bra and ripped it from her. She kept her eyes downcast as he encircled her, speaking once again the unspeakable things in his slick, oily voice. She stood frozen. He began to touch her, he began to hurt her. She screamed. He doubled his fist and smashed it into the soft expanse of her belly. She sprawled into the broken crockery, turned to her side and inductively pulled her knees to her chest. He began to kick at her back, already bleeding from the broken dishes. He kicked at her sides, her legs, her head. As he delivered the kicks he chanted:

"Where."

"Bitch."

"Shut."

And more. And worse. Over and over until his chanting was drowned out by her screams. He stopped. Foreplay was over.

"Oh, baby. Just tell me the truth. Tell me who you're doing it with? I promise to forgive you. Just tell me, tell me."

She could not speak or scream. She could not even cry anymore. She fought to stay conscious, afraid of what he might do to her if she passed out. Ralph was crying now, lifting her from the floor, carrying her to the bedroom. Her pain was exquisite, breathtaking, beyond expression, beyond screaming.

"I'm sorry honey. You know I love you. Swear to God I do."

He laid her on the bed, chanting again, crooning. "Daddy loves his baby girl. Daddy doesn't like to hurt baby but baby has to be a good girl for Daddy."

She felt her gorge rising and fought it back down. He'd be furious if she vomited. She didn't want him to kill her. She didn't want him.

She stiffened her underside and began to undress. Let it be fast, she prayed, let it be fast. She looked at him, a fat white slug in the moonlight. In a moment he was on her, chanting, pummeling, chanting his obscene litany. Then it was over. She lay still until he slept. She did not touch herself tonight. She was in too much pain. Lying there, she knew the truth again. Ralph's truth. He was right, always had been. She was stupid, disgusting, a filthy whore. She was bad alright. So bad that not even God could love her.

If she did not know how much time had elapsed when she was able to rise painfully from the bed. She pulled on a robe to cover her shame, her body. She hobbled to the kitchen holding the wall for support. It took a very long time to travel that nine feet. She poured herself a drink from the bottle of vodka she kept hidden in the closet with the cleaning supplies. Once more her cup had broken down and Ralph couldn't take her food shopping; she'd gone with Wanda. What fun it had been, almost like a vacation. On the way home she'd asked Wanda to stop at the liquor store. Said she wanted a little something in the house for "special occasions." Well, her special occasion had arrived.

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Ride a White Horse

The doctor stood calmly leaning over the patient. "Try to relax. You must get some sleep. I'll give you something for that right now."

"Oh, God, no!" screamed the patient trying to rise from the bed. "Please...I don't want to sleep. You know what will happen if I fall asleep."

The doctor frowned. "You know you can die from lack of sleep. The lack of REM sleep can be very dangerous."

"I'd rather die," said the patient. "I don't want to see the white horse again."

"Perhaps, when you see the white horse again you could get on its back. Wouldn't that change the picture? Wouldn't that make you feel better?" soothed the doctor.

"The horse is too big. I've tried to get on. Then there is laughing. All that horrible laughter that grows louder and louder. I can't stand the laughing," the patient began to weep.

"You must control yourself," said the doctor not unkindly, "Dreams are our own creation. You can control them if you try. I'm ordering sedation. This has gone on too long." The doctor turned and opened the gray door. A nurse entered quietly.

There was muffled talk between the doctor and the nurse. The nurse slipped out into the hallway with her orders. The doctor pulled a chair to the patient's bedside and waited.

"Why don't you wear a white coat?" asked the patient.

"Certain colors are soothing," said the doctor.

"White. White is not soothing. Yes, you're right. A white coat would be a reminder. You get inside a coat, but you have to get on top of the horse. There's the difference," mumbled the patient.

"You must think of something else now. Something pleasant. It's not good for you to keep going over your failures."

"A prince. I saw a prince. Did I tell you about the prince? When I got up close he didn't have a face. He held out the reins from the gaping mouth of the white horse. I could see all the horse's teeth and they fell out at my feet." The patient was talking to the ceiling now. "Look at me when you talk," said the doctor lightly. "I told you before that dreams cannot hurt you. You must gain control before you fall asleep."

"I can't!" the patient said staring hard at the doctor.

"You can if you will," the doctor reaffirmed.

"When I was a child they taught me..."

"You must forget your childhood teachings now. That's why you are here." The doctor noted on a yellow pad to resume the shock treatment the following morning. The patient must forget, to recover. And the doctor's reputation was at stake. This patient was taking far too long. Resisting too much. What power of destruction those ancient fairy tales had. With great relief the doctor remembered that this was the last patient with the "white horse syndrome," and took the syringe from the nurse's tray.

"Stop! I tell you I can't go to sleep. Get away," a slight scuffling noise. The nurse held the patient firmly by the shoulders while the doctor administered the injection. The nurse left with the tray and the doctor sat down to wait again.

"You're killing me, you know that," said the patient with half-closed eyes. "You want me to die."

"No. You've killed the prince. His face is gone. But the horse: My God, the horse still lives. It won't let go. It always rises again from a pile of teeth and bone. It will rise upon your head. Mark my word, doctor, you aren't safe either."

"It's only a dream, my dear. Try to relax so the medication can help you. Think of realistic things. Do not drift. Stay on course. I'm here to help you."

"I'll fight it. I'll fight you..." But the patient was losing consciousness now and couldn't fight. Down. Down and down to the green meadow, the blue sky, the violet mountains that exist in the minds of youths. The white horse steps high. Front and center beside the stream. The breeze is cool. The doctor jots "goosebumps" and the time on the yellow pad.

It seemed like hours to the doctor but mere moments to the patient. The patient was sweating and moaning. The doctor kept writing on the yellow pad. The words were coming more clearly so the doctor rang for the nurse to bring a recorder.

The tape ran silently into the night. The doctor's shadow was falling across the patient and seemed to change shape as the patient tossed under the pastel flowered sheet. The doctor repeated, "You are in control. Make the horse leave. You have the power to make the horse disappear."

"No," mumbled the patient, "I must get on."

"No. Do not get on the horse. I know now that harm will come to you if you get on the horse. Go away from the horse."

"The doctor had to save this patient. The others had died. There would be a board hearing, loss of practice, and shame if the last patient died. The others. The others had finally mounted the white stallion...and died.

"The laughing is so loud. I can't stand it," screamed the patient. "The women. The women are laughing. More and more women in the trees."

"Don't look. Don't listen. Get away from there. Your mind has the power to bring you to the real world. Come to me in the real world. Now!"

The patient lay very still. The sweating had stopped and the sheet moved only slightly and irregularly.

"Nurse! Stat!" the doctor croaked. But it was too late.

The nurse finally covered the man with the pastel flowered sheet. The last one, she thought, thank God. The doctor was in the hall talking to the physician who signed the death certificate. It was too quiet for a mental hospital at midnight. It was too quiet for any hospital. It was unreal. A sound began in the air ducts. No one noticed. They had their own real worries to contend with.

The desk nurse noticed the noise first. She'd heard it before and paid it no mind. Things only troubled you when you thought on them, paid them mind, constructed a reality in your mind. She was young. She'd been taught to know better. The drumming increased its volume. The nurse opened a chart and kept on working in the dim light. The doctor was slipping coffee in the lounge alone. She fought off the stories in her mind. The ones the man had told her in his dreams. Princes, white horses, and maidens. Unreal. Foolishness.

The doctor went to the front desk to sign out. The nurse was somewhere checking on a patient. The drumming beat in the doctor's ears.

She called it suicide. They said the pressure got to her. They said the strain of losing another patient was too much. They said she couldn't handle reality. They said a career woman was just asking for it trying to combine everything. Trying to have it all.

They said all these things as the doctor lay flat on a gurney in the hall. The nurse covered her face with the pastel flowered sheet and wondered to herself how the doctor had inflicted such wounds. But the reality was, she had. The nurse went back to her station hardly noticing the receding drumming of the hoof beats that would never come to her. She sat down to transcribe the tapes. It would surely take her till midnight to finish. Wrapped in the reality of her work she never noticed the tiny mouse in a red jacket run under her desk. The mouse who waits for midnight to become a white horse.

Linda J. Bardlett

is a columnist for the Rockland newspaper
American in Bombay

I rise at five to watch the truck come
to clear bodies from the street
before store fronts, lying like rolled rugs.
The driver races the engine,
some wake up, turn over,
and the barefoot boy kicks at others
to tell if they are asleep or dead.
A blond boy is turned like a log.
I met this westerner yesterday
when he begged me for money
and saw him the day before
picking up melon rinds.
His hair had not been cut in years.
His unmoving eyes stared but did not see,
milky eyes vanishing in oceans of red.
I bought him biriyani he did not want
and would not eat.
He had not spoken to a white man
he knew in years.
Nothing was left in Weston
or Hartford, just scars from Scarsdale,
where ideas were thin as air he breathed,
so he shipped himself out
to find out how far cargo can go
when no one cares.
He dropped into India a decade ago
with no shots, a nylon backpack
with Velcro flaps with a label “Down East”
and a pouch of traveller’s checks on his chest.
His head was empty except for yearning
but the world was wide with his wonder.
He came for the ideas of India
which soon felt thin as air too.
Reincarnation seemed a horror
because he could not bear to think of living again.
Karma meant he deserved the life he had,
a vicious thought. He could not discover
Dharma’s duties, nor any way at all.
So, he spent the checks on ganga, or poppies,

Then swapped his backpack with Velcro flaps for more.
Then he sold his jeans and belt
and began on bathtub gin and Bombay bhang,
breathing in at last on air his mind could feel.
One night he came out of a coma,
his boots gone, his eyesight almost,
and he began to wear rags
and sleep on a grain bag,
his head emptier than ever
and no wonder left anywhere.
He put down at the place
where people do whatever they want
because no one cares.
And after everything he wanted to do was done
and he had gone all the way to the end
and found no end
his terror got worse.
He sank and sank in his hole
that seemed to have no bottom,
believing and hoping there was one,
until he found the depth he sank for
and the hole went away,
Scarsdale and Hartford and Weston went away,
even India itself went away
and last night in Bombay a bottom really appeared.
The worker rolls him over with his foot.
I watch as he lifts him into the truck,
hair dripping, and the driver drives
to the long trench in the country
where the worker’s foot will roll him off
among melon rinds into air in the hole
where there is a bottom
filling up.

Terry Plunkett
Hallowell
TEACHING AT UMA

At The Top
Of The Mountain

Trees scraping rain
off the sky
I standing below
outside the matter

Amplexus

When I can touch nothing
I am not alone
for it is that empty space
that is familiar to all that is.

Second Divorce

Once more around the block
to the bloodbank.

Pat Murphy
Portland
operates OUT-OF-PRINT Bookstore
In Umbria

a swallow has a chance
to be the most important thing
in the land.
The oil is the clearest
and the basil the sweetest
you will ever taste.
Young men still learn to play the lute.
Blood is the color of the red wine.
To the olive growers
each sunrise is the Creation.
The old women know dreams
and yell them
through the winding cobbled streets.
A man named Tommaso brushes his thick hair
in the reflecting eye of a lizard.
The priests can sometimes
say the secret silences that lie
in the folded hills
and full hearts of the people.
Square chapel towers glow
in the smooth light of sunset
that seeps up through the soil.
When you first stir in the morning
to a warm touch
you wonder
if it is the skin of your love
or the breeze.

Lyle Dennett
Rockport
builds houses and writes

Photo by Michael Howland
The Codfish Relay Race

Seems to me every town in America ought to hold a codfish relay race the way it's done each year in Milbridge, Maine. My bet is The New England Journal of Medicine would report out improved mental health.

Consider. We Americans are gripers and we've perfected the art. Griping goes along with competition and free speech, wanting to do it (pitcher or slower), in a bigger way (or smaller), different, my way. Think the library closes too early? Complain to the librarian. Want a speed limit sign posted? Complain to the road commissioner. Think we're too far out or in Nicaragua? Hector our congressman, visit his local office (if he's not around, sit in and wait). Or if our rich neighbor buys yet a third car and new redwood lawn furniture, complain that his cars eat gas and he doesn't need new lawn furniture; he's never in the yard anyway — too busy working. Admit it, we're gripers we can pump up our blood pressure and reshape our mouths into a permanent sneer over a ref's bad call.

But imagine, for a moment, a gripe-free neighborhood, town, a gripe-free America. The waitress embraces the coffee-drinking-pitcher. We ask for a pothole repair and shall receive it. Our successful neighbor takes US for a ride in his luxurious new car and shares a beer at his fine redwood table. (The congressman still isn't in his office, but life's not perfect.) All of this can be ours, if we do as the Milbridgians do — run a codfish relay race once a year. Here's what happens.

In a neighborhood park, or on the square or common, rope off a rectangle about thirty yards by ten. Roll a sixty-gallon drum into a corner. Borrow the new pump truck from the fire department and set it up halfway down field, the hose aimed at the course. Persuade a local fishery to donate four cod. Have to use cod because they're American. (Did you know that once a gold codfish hung in the Boston statehouse?) Also, a gutted cod, about fifteen pounds, is an ugly, bug-eyed, grey-green, soft and slippery double-armful. Just perfect for this race.

Round up four-person teams of gripers. They're easy to find. Tease the waitresses and the cheapskates; challenge the foremen and assembly-liners; call down the Knights of Columbus and the B'nai B'rith. Likely, more than needed will volunteer. Then plan the race for about 4:30 on a summer Saturday, but don't start until 5:15 or so. Gives the gathering neighbors something to gripe about.

When the kids are nagging and the oldtimers' handkerchiefs are soaked with sweat, send the librarian onto the field dragging a wagon-load of gallon-size Mazola oil bottles (any brand will do). Watch as one by one they emplishe the oil into the sixty-gallon drum then returns with another wagonload — this time, four warming cod. Into the drum they go. Finally, pile the official codfish relay racing gear at each end of the course: firemen's rain slickers, firemen's boots, firemen's hats and firemen's gloves. One size — extra large — fits all. Now call the contestants.

When the first three teams enter the field and take their places, two runners at each end, the mayor, beneath stovepipe hat and behind a bullhorn, signals the start. Into the boots, hat, gloves, and slicker (must be buttoned last) the contestants stumble. Now they stumble to the drum, haul out an oil-slick cod and, cradling it the way they would their dearest child, run the thirty yards to their partners. Halfway down the field they're blasted by the fire hose. Hats may fly, knees buckle, but a real combatant never drops the cod (or he's out). Into the waiting arms of the second relay man the floppy cod is heaved while the first undresses, then grabs the cod until the second is dressed and ready to run back down the field, cod in arms. Four trips. The fastest time wins.

Undignified you say? No argument there. The drenched racers smell like the back end of some ludicrous sea creature. And the spectators, after screaming thirty minutes for members of their own species who dressed in rubber and ran through a fire hose spray, clutching a slicked-down cod, are red-laced, hoarse, and spent.

But listen. No griping. No kids whining. No petty jealousies. Lots of laughs. Lots of good-natured kidding. Gripes drift away like milk-weed seeds on the gentle afternoon breeze. No thought of the world beyond, the racing field. Even the racers feel a peculiar euphoria born of uncertainty since the losers seem to be winners and the winners, losers. After all, who wants to be remembered all winter as the winner of the annual codfish derby?

Seems to me every town in America ought to run a codfish relay race. Why, it's something like holding a funny-mirror up to ourselves, and that's always been good for a gripe-freeing laugh.

Joe Sterberg
St. Charles, Ill.
Teaches in a community college
Clara: A Triptych

Drawing by Nick Snow
Do I sound upset? How would you feel if the best friend you ever had in this world was uprooted and sent away. Uh huh. A bunch of grown men acting, as they said, the responsible officers of the town caught on me only one good for. An allowance. And she has lived in this town for fifty years. They're pushing her out of the house that's been her home for the last forty years. Worse, they're going to force her to live in one of the worst of neighourhoods, State-supported nursing homes this side of Augusta.

But why pick on Clara and not one of the other regulars listed under "taxes in arrears" in the annual Blue Book? It causes no trouble for that and also how it was the only person who spoke up for her. First, let me tell you about this friend of mine.

Clara has been more family to me than my own folks, closer than my own mother. Hardly a week's time when you read and she got me to understand how mean she was about the Board's action in disposing of Clara's home. As Second Selectman, not much goes on around here in the nature of winning and complaining that I don't hear about it. They won't hear about it, eventually, don't they? That house of Clara's. If you can use the expression, wasn't fit to live in. I went up there myself with the assessor last time he made his round of course, no, didn't come at us with her stick. Could feel her peering at us out the window, though. Would you believe, that thing she calls a septic system was flowing down over the slope like a little brook. Of course, I didn't use that, we drove up but, I tell you, the stuff that stuff bubbling up and the smell of it was more than I could stand. She had no complaints only because her husband George, he; of Patitis and other diseases out of her sewer had in five years ago was about as sanitary as if you had her empty her chamber pots out the window. True... there are people in this town who have no better a setup than she has. In fact, a backhouse would do better assuming it got shoved out and dumped properly now and then.

Anyway, it's her own land it was running on. Oor, we, will know that that land, so close to the woods, and all, has got to be developed someday, and that kind of open sewer wouldn't be allowed to go on. The house isn't worth anything but that piece of land.

Listen, even if the taxes had been paid for the last couple of years, something would have had to be done. As I reported to the board, the sewer system she had operating put in by her husband thirty-five years ago was about as sanitary as if you had her empty her chamber pots out the window. True... there are people in this town who have no better a setup than she has. In fact, a backhouse would do better assuming it got shoved out and dumped properly now and then.

Well, this system of hers was never dumped. It just spread her gurly into the veins of water courseing down the hill and into the village wells. You may think I'm stretching things a bit, but it's entirely possible we could have had a serious health problem in this town. Grandfather clause. Sure. Up to a certain extent that might apply in her case. She wasn't on storm property. But sure as hell you had her the system. You knew yourself you would have won that one. No. Being where she was, we probably couldn't have done anything about her on that score even if the whole village... kids, babies, expectant mothers and all was eating and drinking hepatitis and other diseases out of her sewer whether it liked us or not.

Of course, mother. She must have just flushed as we were, scaring young people off her land and things like that. She never turned me away from her gate. When my father died this boat drifted up on Burnt Island ledge with him in it who do you think thought to come over to the school and get me, hug me, walk me out of doors and break the news to me to before some principal or teacher call me into the office? Clara. That big black dress was safe harbor to me all the time I was growing up. When my Henry was so wild in one of his jealous moods he thought to come over to the school and get me, hug me, walk me out of doors and break the news to me... make me feel safe. As you can see, Henry didn't kill me. Clara judged him rightly for a wimp ... and a liar.

I remember complaining to her that my folks didn't hand me some money I asked for. An allowance. And still we most likely couldn't have done anything. But the taxes was something else. You know that the town can hold liens on back taxes just so long because the entire town was getting a certain property that was called attention to our traditional ways of handling what should be and, if it can help it, will be our own damn business. Well, do you want the State on our backs and peer... into every little thing we do... and I had every... among other sorrows. And pretty soon I felt like a fool... crying over a petty money grievance.

Oh, she can be judgmental. There are times when even I think she's gone over board... particularly when she makes out all young people are dangerous drunks. The kids who drove her daughter, Matilda, off the road were dead at the time. And she did push the law until those kids had everything and maybe extra coming for the mistakes they made on. She's a dreamer... and smel1ing of fresh cut wood then. She's going to take care of the cat for me, and a nice can of catfood every now and then and should help him accommodate himself to a new house and Clara's dogs. But, he'll get used to the new order of things... the same as I will.

The sun's out. No point in standing inside when we can be outside. Or sitting in the doorway anyway. Whatever I have I'll put aside for me. Clara's the one who dug up the money she got for the lot to put toward Nicky's upkeep. She was there to calm me down... make me feel safe. As you can see, Henry didn't kill me. Clara judged him rightly for a wimp... and a liar.
You. The fact is... I think I've been touched by the devil's... than the things she and I talked about.

Commenced chattering about something... so there wasn't even a trace of what you'd call graveyard clay... coming from the strongest human being in the world.

When Clara said, "We ended our brawl in the usual way..." I didn't know... the town took the action it did. I do know it was right after Henry and I had that knock down... that knocked down, dragged argument about Clara and the devil... the town that it did. The best and maybe only thing I could do for my old friend was get her back up there... and then I must have added that we went to meet the devil.

I didn't know... I recognized the symptoms: the yellow, bloodless jaw and the precise diction... his holding his knees together... not letting his breath all the way out.

"You're up. Finally. What time did you go in?"

Well, we chewed that one over for about an hour with me being the unbeliever... up to the point that I saw that Clara was getting angrier with me by the minute.

"What was he getting at? Clara and I had stopped off at her place for some talk and some warming up after our vigil on the hill. After all, I had to satisfy myself that I'd gotten my friend calmed down. So I'd be goddamned if I was going to sit there and be questioned like a naughty school girl... so I just dawdled. Drank my coffee, savored it... and, all the while, I could see him getting steamiest. The next moment, he was complaining that I had left no dinner for him when he got home from the lobsterman's meeting and no note saying where I was going. Well, I had left some dinner in the toaster oven: he just hadn't looked very hard. And if I thought that now, after all these years, I was going to account to him all my comings and goings, he should have known better.

Well, I got tired of his bating and told him, "I went for a walk with Clara."

And then, just to rile him a little more, "We went to meet somebody." I knew that would cut it... and it did. It didn't matter that Clara was with me the whole time.

When that fool has an attack of jealousy sickness, nothing answers. It was then I must have added that we went to meet the devil. I was going to bear about that lot... and regret it. Even my dear old mother took it on herself to tell me I should maybe stay away from Clara, that there was evil up on the hill. No, I shouldn't have said it. But the sight of that pleased white face staring at me wide eyed and hateful just opened me up so.

Before that breakfast spat was done, Henry threw at me the fact that Fred Otis had arrived late at the lobsterman's meeting and couldn't resist telling him about seeing me up in the birch grove with somebody. He couldn't tell who. I couldn't care. I knew how come Henry was laying for me... on what score I didn't know. I recognized the symptoms: the yellow, bloodless jaw and the precise diction... his holding his knees together... not letting his breath all the way out.

Then it all poured out... how she'd been out for a walk up by the cemetery the right before... right about sunset. And for no reason she can figure yet, she had wandered off the road down into the picketbrush on the side of the road opposite the graveyard... had followed some old deer path down amongst a stand of birches. She was peering in the shadows where the spruces take over further down the slope and the birches give way to something else. At that very minute, the hair rose on her head and she felt something like a hand stroking the back of her neck. Gently. Up and down. She was paralyzed. Couldn't move and sweats she might be there still except that Helen Walmuth, driving by, picked her up in her headlights and stopped to see what was going on. Clara figured that's what broke the spell. She rode home with Helen but didn't say a word about what had happened. She waited all the rest of that night and the next morning till I come by to tell somebody.

Well, we chatted that over for about an hour with me being the unbeliever... up to the point that I saw that Clara was getting angrier with me by the minute. As I said, I grew up with a lot of this kind of talk... but as a believer? Not me, not really. Still, this experience had shaken her to the very foundations and no way was I going to get away with passing it off lightly. Then, it occurred to me that the best and maybe only thing I could do for my old friend was get her back up there... and then I must have added that we went to meet the devil...

"I'll miss her. I'll miss the smell of her woodstove, her..."

The old timers... I'll miss the smell of her. The smell of her woodstove, her...
She'd been taken aback. "Why sure, what's it to you?"

"Well, I think it's time for you to color it again 'cause in this light I can see your dark roots showing."

She remembers her embarrassment, and her anger. And after that held the gall to try to attack her in the back seat of the car. She'd turned him down and off real fast. The funny thing is that he still graces her nerves. He might be a fine person, but whenever she sees him, she's the nerd who made all the wrong moves.

An elderly man leaves the doctor's office. White legs and shoes, a fake fur coat, frayed brown hair crowning a round face. "Can't be her.

The woman unlocks the door of a red station wagon nearby, the back loaded with miscellaneous ball gear. "Must have been. She gets in, puts her head back against the headrest and closes her eyes. "A long day."

The engine starts; she drives away, the left side a little lower than the right.

Neither woman nor car fit the image she has of the nurse. Her eyes examine the cars in the lot. There are still a dozen or so. Near the last fortunates — are there three apartments upstairs? Near the doctor's. And what's in the building next door?

A dozen cars, half of them junk, a few small economy cars, two older sports cars and a Turbo SAAB. Which would be the nurse's? Either the SAAB or the MG. With him in the SAAB, she'd turned all the doors to the comfort. In the MG she'd stretch around to let down the convertible top. Her mini-skirt and his eyes high on her thighs.

She sits, searching for the new car smell. He likes this car. They picked it out together. It was the best deal in their price range. Practical, with a touch of class, they'd joked. He'd asked for the sunroof and the sound system. The dealer insisted air conditioning was an investment. And she chose the color. Metallic gray. Softie. Not flashy sports car yellow nor sleek SAAB black. Muted. Like Monet's water. He likes this car.

She fingers a moment in the car, her space. She knows that she must leave, gets out of the car, checks the lot once more and locks the door. That pale green door awaits her. The one from which the fake fur nurse and the old lady emerged, the one the husband entered an hour and a half ago. Her feet feel heavy. Like walking on fine beach sand. It is nearly 6 p.m. She trudges forward. She wonders what she looks like to an observer. She hopes her husband will appear. "Her husband" not the nurse's lover.

The pale green office door. Solid steel, standard chrome knob. She turns the handle and pulls back the door. Soft music. Antiques smell. A small empty window, its shades of orange and brown with blonde furniture. An empty reception window. She sees her husband lean toward that window. Beyond the two vacant desks and file cabinets, a door partially open. She hears a woman's low laugh, a flattened woman's laugh. A male voice murmurs a reply. Is that him?

She tries to peak around that door fifteen feet away. She tells it open. No lock. She taps her fingers on the check writer's ledge in front of the window. She strains to hear the words.

The voices move toward her. She stops tapping. She casually leans an elbow on the ledge and admires a bright autumn abstract on the wall above the waiting room chairs. Not as severe as Monet.

"Mr. Parker. I've come to pick up my husband."

"Oh, Mrs. Parker. The doctor just went in to see him. He should only be a few more minutes."

"Thanks. Is it okay for me to wait here?"

"Of course. The nurse turns away."

"Nurse?" She has to ask.

"Yes."

The nurse's head turns back.

"Have you worked here long?" Her eyes feel glued to that pretty face.

The young woman blanches. She shakes her head away from her face. "It's only been a year or so."

The knot in her throat that had grown tight enough to choke her releases. "I didn't think I'd see you before. Pause. 'I won't keep you.' She crosses to the first chair.

Minutes pass. The waiting room door opens. He's in front of her, one hand unwinding his red-checkered fly. "Hi, hon, sorry to keep you waiting. The doc had an emergency call this morning that screwed up his whole day. What time is it anyway?"

He leans over and kisses her left cheek. Old Spic on his skin.

She smiles and lifts her watch to examine it. "It's okay. Let's go. I'm starved."

"Sounds good to me. He takes her hand and helps her up and out. He opens her car door. She watches his eyes take in her legs. He gets in.

The doctor and nurse leave the office together. He puts her shoulder and helps her into her MG, then he heads on over to his SAAB. She follows him out the driveway.

"Is Dr. Lambert married?" She already senses the answer.

"Oh, sure. His wife is the painter, Gabrielle Lambert. Their son goes to Harvard Medical School."

"I thought so. 'She hesitates. 'Did you get the test results?"

He grins. "They're swimming fast and there's plenty of the little buggers."

She gives him a quick hug. He starts the engine, then the radio. Michael Jackson. She reaches over and shuts it off.

"Let's stop at home so we can dress for dinner. What do you say?"

He gives her a quizzical look. "I feel like wearing my gray high heels and my best stockings." She looks straight ahead.

He glances at her and smiles. "Home it is. They drive off in the direction opposite the doctor's.

She back and breaks in the new car smell. Shallmar. Old Spic. No smoke. No greasy burgers or fries.

Lisa Grunsum-Whitney
Virginia Beach, VA recently moved from Maine

A Man Remembers His Wife

(from a novel in progress)

The room disappeared. Did it matter where he was? He loved her. He took one look at her face and he loved her all over again like the way it was the first time, for the last time. It was the last time he would look at her face, though he hadn't known this was the way it would be. He had thought he would not get the chance to be seeing her now; he hadn't the courage to make it happen on his own and now in her presence, or in the presence of her physical presence, he saw again her beauty and felt the love and the loss as they burned up tight in his throat. The longing was no longer a burning, but a dry powder on the blackboard of his soul that no amount of water or alcohol could erase.

It was true that he drank, but she flirted. Which one was the chicken before the egg? The cart before the eggs? Oh, he was all scrambled up as had been for a long time now, but for a moment the reasons were clearer than they had been in years. Yes, she was beautiful and he loved her beauty, but it was not that that would stay with him. It was the wiz, the sharp wit of one who was a survivor, loved the thrill of the chase, and walked the fine lines that separate humor from armour. Oh Christ, how cold she could be then and how cold she was now.

His feet had brought him here, his feet and three of her shinnings. They were standing next to her casket, huddled together, the outcasts from out of state who had chosen to leave and/or were thrown out of town — the ugly ducklings who wanted more or less than what was expected of them. The death of their mother was the final wedge in the split of that family tree weakened by jealousy.

It had been going on for years and it was going on now, the three of them huddled together near their sister's casket as he stood in his long black shoes near the body of his Jeannie, the beautiful, the comedian, the flirt, his wife. It was his shoes that brought him here in this room full of her relatives and the wide-eyed and tear-swollen faces of his own five motherless children. His shoes had walked him here as they had carried him out onto the dance floor the first night he had held her in his arms, as they had walked him into so many meetings, so many bars, so far away from the kids who stood there needing him. His shoes had carried him beyond being needed; he could not, would not retrace those steps, re-face those family ties that strapped him for money and took his dancing shoes away.

When his feet hit the icy pavement outside Cambres' Funeral Parlor, he shrugged his shoulders, walked in the path that presented itself to his dress-shod feet, and did not try to hide his face from the sharp April wind.

Ann A bor
Beloit, Wisc.

teaches in the public schools
old fashioned enough to think a man has a right to know where his wife has
gone off to ... especially at night. Fred told me she was up there in the
bushes at sunset ... and then, in the morning, she gave me a cock-and-bull story
about being up there with Clara to meet somebody. The devil, she said it was and
that Clara had already met him before. The devil.
Well, I don't know how you'd take something like that. As for me, I figured
either my wife had really lost it or Clara was into some very strange doings up
there on the hill. I can't say I ever believed in the devil ... but what in hell was
she leading my wife into? Alicia was always going to her friend Clara for advice.
What kind of advice was she getting up there behind the locked gates? Locked
 gates. What was to hide? I'll tell you that she got from Clara all her notions about
that big outside world. I think our ways are better.
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that big outside world. I think our ways are better.

A Final Scene

Midnight caller hears buzz-unanswered buzz-unanswered buzz-unanswered, leaves
at last for an uncertain future. The phone swings on its black cord.
The call comes too late. Ringing echoes through the hollow house, each ring
building on the last to fill empty rooms where all have died or fled into the night.
The roadside phone booth, alone beneath a tame, pinkish moon, marks time. The phone
on its cord, the pendulum, slows, stops.
In the cold house the bell shrieks in circles through hallways, stairwells,
spills out gaping windows, sprawls in weedy gardens, crawls down the hill.
A passing vagrant checks the slot for coins, hangs the phone up, wearily walks on.
Credit rolls across the dawn.

Clara, cont'd.
cemetery ... never mind the things she said that other morning when I told her
about the first experience ... let me think I would be dealing with a scoffing.
And much as I appreciate the attention she gives me and the things she's doing
for me, I just haven't the time or the patience to set her straight.
In the end, Alicia probably thought that taking me up there had cleared my
head ... and indeed, it had, but not the way she thought. She's a touchy and
means well. I'll leave it at that. I do wonder sometimes how long the two of them,
Henry and Clara can go on the way they do. Forever, no doubt, and with no
help from me. Game players. And, though I find myself feeling sorry for little
Henry sometimes. I guess they're pretty evenly matched, her energy, his cunning.
George, you were never a game player. Everything you did was for keeps. So,
think ... I hear Alicia's car coming up the road ... so we've just got a second.
What will we have left behind? Maybe, maybe the shadows here will be just a
little deeper? The blacks a little blacker?

Nicholas Snow
Spruce Head
Is a painter

Photo by Michael Howland
Ourself Behind Ourself

for Emily Dickinson, on the Centenary of her death, 1830-1886

When I was growing up, there were always two women in my life: myself and the self behind myself. There was the girl with a face, whom I hardly knew; this one I presented to the world like a paperdoll — she wore clothes and a body I didn’t recognize. The other one thought and had feelings and she kept to herself, standing off a little to one side and speaking to no one. This second self was a wallflower, plain and unpretentious.

There were also two other women who informed my life: very real, uncommon women. Already dead, but at the same time hauntingly alive. They were part of everything I thought and did. Mary Baker Eddy and Emily Dickinson, both New Englanders, straight-laced, both in a sense out-of-the-body, spiritual transcendentalists, vulnerable to strange fits of depression, and visionary. One, the image of the mother — the founder of the Christian Science religion and the Mother Church in Boston; the other, the image of the spinster — a red-haired woman with hazel eyes and a contrauto voice writing in a white-curtained, high-ceilinged room about volcanoes, deserts, eternity, suicide, physical passion, rape, power, madness, separation, the demon, and the grave.

Mary Baker Eddy spent my whole childhood and adolescence with me, trying to convince me that I had no physical body, could experience no pain, sickness, or disease. Dickinson, however, reminded me that there was great pain, grief, unrelenting sadness, and that they must all be experienced. The one with the smaller mind tried to avoid the body altogether, and the one with the greater sensitivity tried to remain a girl — kept that persona all her life in order to define the world and the personal anguish of a speaker whose gender is the determining factor in her existence. Mary Baker Eddy tried to forget that she was female, to disregard sex as unfortunate; Emily Dickinson was self-consciously female in poetic voice, and more boldly so than is often recognized. She was hopelessly ignorant of the male American literary tradition, most of which was right there in her own backyard, but she did read avidly the female authors of the day.

Her contemporary, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, meant the most to Dickinson, in her confident use of female experience and female accouterments — the clothes, the discorments, the domestic chores of a woman. Dickinson was coming directly out of a female tradition and she took it a step further, compressing metaphorical linkings between girlish intimacies and spiritual abstractions. I believe that every serious woman poet writing in America today must eventually come to terms with and encounter her progenitor in Emily Dickinson. She has allowed us to enter the chambers of self in which

Ourself behind ourself, concealed—
should startle first—

This split between a publicly acceptable persona and a part of yourself that you perceive as the essential, creative, and powerful self is an extremely difficult and painful way to live. The difficulty and danger is in possibly not being able to accept that immense energy and harnessing it into an outlet that is also acceptable to those you love and the greater society as well.

Many contemporary women poets have carried on the tradition of writing through the persona in order to be able to say what they may have been unable to write about otherwise. For myself, I chose to write through the persona of Calamity Jane — a tough, energetic, strong-willed woman of the frontier West — in order to gain the strength to write out of my own inner voice, also Western.

We think also of H.D.’s Helen in Egypt, Adrienne Rich’s laudatory but exasperated salute to Marie Curie who died from the power she discovered and released in radium, and more recently of Carol Oles’ work about Maria Mitchell, the astronomer.

Until we can understand the assumptions beneath which we have been socialized we cannot know ourselves as women, much less as poets. We are just beginning to be able to express an unmistakably female voice in our work. We have a great deal to learn from Dickinson, whose poems were self-confirming and had begun to explore states of psychic extremity. Unlike the “dreamy, half-educated recluse in an out-of-the-way New England village” relegated to oblivion by Thomas Bailey Aldrich in the Atlantic Monthly in 1892, Dickinson herself had the courage to enter, through language, states of mind and feeling which men and woman have long denied or veiled with silence. She opened up new possibilities in poetry, both for men and women.

Dickinson represents a significant character in her poems — the whole work builds to an experience of restricted space and augmented emotional intensity bursting at the seams.

Writing about Dickinson in her seminal work of creative scholarship (My Emily Dickinson, Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books, 1985), Susan Howe tells us that the powerful essence of her poetry is the vital distinction between concealment and revelation. Her brilliant technique of masking and unveling is the poet’s device for releasing creative energy and at the same time protecting herself against the power of that energy.

Dickinson recognized the unstable condition of power, whether it be the power of love, of time, or of nature. In her fiercely insightful poem about the necessity of power for the powerful, “My Life had stood — a Loaded Gun,” Dickinson is both the owner of the gun and also the one “carried away” by the power of the weapon. Dwelling in possibility, which Dickinson learned early on to do in life and in her work, she deciphers the idea of herself in code, in the emblematical Gun, and she moves through the poem as on the edge of a real frontier, becoming the source of her own creative power. In the end, like all those who create, Dickinson has “but the power to kill. Without — the power to die.”

Kathleen Ugnell Orenso

is a writer/editor at QMO
Thoughts While Waiting on Death Row

I went to bed early because it had been a long day and both my body and my head were weary, but the minute my head hit the pillow I found myself wide awake, sleep the furthest thing from my mind.

What was on my mind was Ted Bundy. Theodore Robert Bundy, prisoner on death row, scheduled to be executed in Florida’s Old Sparky at 7 a.m. July 3. I kept wondering how he must feel, this self-assured, arrogant, amoral man with the handsome face and crooked smile: what must it be like for him now, at 10:30 p.m. Tuesday, July 1, 1986, contemplating the prospect of his quick but excruciatingly painful death looming just 2½ hours ahead.

What is it like to know precisely when you will die, that you must die, that there is no hope of reprieve, and barely a hope of postponement?

Foolish questions. I may not know what Ted Bundy is thinking at this moment, but I share his feelings of denial and terror for I, too, am under sentence of death.

I have been sentenced not by my peers but by my body, the very thing that allows me life. When the doctor first said the word “malignant” my head-in-the-sand mechanism kicked in. “They’ll fix it.” I assured myself. Even after my skin had burned and peed from radiation treatments, after great, huge handfuls of hair had fallen from my scalp and my stomach developed a permanent intolerance for nourishment, my time, but nothing remotely approaching Bundy’s long list of sins. It’s something altogether different and must make serious decisions.

Yet it is both legal and moral for society to choose when and how Ted Bundy is to die, whether he wants to or not. The process is called justice.

I don’t know what they call the decisions they presume to make for me, but they will not prevail. I will die, and sooner and, and break whatever laws I must to ensure that the nature of my last days will be of my own choosing.

11:45 p.m. I still wonder what Bundy is thinking right now. I know what I am thinking.

Ted Bundy is one lucky son of a bitch.

Janet Beaulieu
Bangor
a free-lance writer
(1) skylarking
you still hear
your old navy chief growling
at yourself & some other green seamen
to stop your sk'larling & turn to —
himself half skipping the first syllable,
always preceded by a well-plucked adjective,
& bellowing the second.
struck anew by the lack of wisdom to it
your eyes spark with a blue more electric
than stars.

(2) the last aspect
i recall of my cousin molly at eighty
is her skeptical yankee nose thumbing
up out of her coffin at life
as if distrustful as ever of doctors
(& finally with reason),
of men, although they were burying her,
& most especially of those
who would have had her as wife.

(3) her brother john
had left the little hill farm
bitter as early turnips,
& getting no beef
had abandoned my grandfather's brother solon-the-butcher
to live down in town with my grandfather
who had not much more himself than
a handsome moustache & a sky sort of love.
weil, john became a baker after
suking as a second wife a small dumpling
of a baking lady, they are now apparitions
on the wooden walkway to the water district,
figures faint as dust motes doing out
gingerbread men & sugar-starred cookies
to children standing outside their summer kitchen
& dying inside all the time from sugar diabetes,
justifying molly's sprained nose.

(4) starcrossed,
the island cat
saturated with time
measures winter more softly
than snow shadows:
small boulders, tan grasses clumped on white
she grows with the sunset
into regal purple, paled blues
& gold in the twilight,
camouflaged in the back field,
only she knows who she is.

(5) the big man
with the plastic ear is permitted to carry
his white parrot into ames
& i see my childhood friend charlie step out
through the look-momma-that-man-has-a-parrot-that-sits-on-his-shoulder-&-talks & we are stepping down into
old mr. peterson's cellar full of finches
& listening to butch the cockatoo who could whistle
behind a screen of jiggles & front porch wisteria at ladies passing
before being eaten by charlie's pet cat.
charlie killed the cat but turned out to be a doctor.
as the white parrot stated archly, "pretty boy, pretty boy."

(6) every time
that the pigeons from the beehive house land on our roof
i remember your story about your uncle frank
(a frequent & uninvited guest in your childhood)
trying to persuade you to climb out on the porch roof
to catch some lunch on the move.
"them squab are mighty good eating, boy."
one clatter of cat-startled wings is enough.

(7) hannah,
when we watched the young eagles scream down from the catskills
on our way to your show in new york
i knew we'd find their presence in your paintings
though no birds or people are visible in your landscapes:
the trees move — no, dance really, with life.

grete goodwin
thomaston
is trying to find a match, and a
campfire and a few good ghosts

Seven Palimpsests

Palimpsests are parchments from which writing has been erased
to make way for new text. Here some traces of time remain, and
the parchments include surfaces other than paper.
Introduction

Assafa slides his butt along the ground, keeping an eye out for large stones or droppings in the gravel. He drags two rollable appendages of shrunk bone and skin where legs should be. At least he is mobile. His arms, shoulders, hands carry him. In the dry season his white jacket, one of two he owns, catches its share of the dust raised by donkeys and cows on their way to market or back. It is washed every night. The rainy seasons, when they come, are another matter; the mud is thick, clothes dry slowly, his jacket is often damp and yellowed. But the small rains have ended and there are months to go before the big ones begin. He does not worry ahead of time. No need to store up trouble; each day brings its share. And if it doesn’t, so much the better. Assafa slides his butt along the ground, one eye out for large stones or turds in the gravel, the other for a friendly face, reason to pause. Assafa is not a beggar, although among the beggar population of Addis Ababa there are many with his peculiar deformity. Some say it is the result of venereal disease and malnutrition; others say it is bad luck or God’s will. it’s all the same to Assafa: he has always walked on his hands.

If a person sitting on the ground comes up to your waist, how tall would he be standing? Simon had been toying with the question for two weeks, since he had started walking to school, declining a ride with his mother and sister. Each morning he passed Assafa.

He had never given much thought to height until he grew taller than his mother and, in a very short time, taller than his father as well. His father showed no concern about it. He seemed to think Simon was doing what sons did. But Simon was not accustomed to the adult status his height conferred on him. He kept count. In the fifth form at the English School. He had always been an articulate child, glib with comments on any subject that presented itself. Parents, teachers, his younger sister Wilma let him talk. But within months he had grown from 5’6” to 6’2” and all of a sudden these same people began listening to him, turning his opinions over in their minds, weighing them, matching them up with this or that other idea, questioning him as if he had some sort of insight, or should. He didn’t. He had always launched opinions like trial balloons: some caught the wind, some fizzled. Nobody kept count. They had begun keeping count. “Sh·it,” Simon muttered to himself and kicked a stone in his path. Damn stone rolled off at an angle and stopped in the path of this guy coming towards him, swinging himself along on his hands.

Oh God, thought Simon as he watched the stone roll away from his foot and stop in front of the one creature in all the motley traffic on the Dessie Road that morning who could not step over it. “I’m sorry,” he said, and, bending over to pick up the stone, came eye to eye with Assafa.

The fact that Simon’s was a revelation: confident, amused, the last thing on earth Simon expected from this fellow who scooted along the ground like a wormy dog scraping its bottom. They’d discussed it at the dinner table a few nights back, “Have you seen him?” Wilma asked. “He always looks like he’s going somewhere, I wonder where he’s going.”

“Poor soul,” Jenny, the mother, sighed. “How can you look at him? I wonder if there’s any treatment available for that sort of thing. Maybe if we got him out of Ethiopia... Mayo Clinic... physical therapy...”

“Cut it out, Jenny!” That was David, husband and father, speaking. “You can’t go around saving the world. You’re not a Rockefeller... they can’t even do it.”

“But it’s so painful to see people like that. How can you sit around and talk about it and not want to help?”

Simon had said nothing during the whole exchange. But equivocality, even humor, was the last thing he expected to see in Assafa’s face. He let go of the stone, squatted down, and stared at him in silence. Assafa stared back at the pale childish face of this foreigner who, most days, walked past him as if on stilts. It was, as a matter of record, the first time that either of them had looked directly into the other’s face. He let Simon’s was. Simon’s was. Simon’s was. Simon’s was.

It was, as a matter of record, the first time that either of them had looked directly into the face of a stranger, the sort of face that most people, steering a safely charted course through life, are careful to avoid. It took a bit of time, a few seconds in real life, before they remembered the formalities. “Good day, praise God, etc.,” as they say in Amharic. But before he stood up, Simon put out his hand and said. “My name is Simon.” and Assafa let go of one of the blocks he used as shoes for his hands, took Simon’s hand and said. “I am Assafa.”

Then Simon went on to school. He watched his feet as he walked, fascinated by how, at every step. they touched the ground. Assafa moved in his own direction, at his own pace.

Wendy Kindred
Pl. Kent
Raches art at UMB/EA

Sonnnet: Crude

if we under absolute untrammelled
by what or which or trick or treated sky
under just a metaphor unscrambled
of fiddle strung for sun’s bow blue and high

over needles that pines to live bleed down
over chewed up and spit out for beach sand rocks
over trails of weren’t and roads of were to towns
of might be and could be and will be walk

if we write silly acorn books too real
to read too long for depth too deep for length
on topics like cobwebs and how they feel
when some big foot decides to test their strength

Then we will know them we can conclude
that love like all else is best when it’s crude

Peter Miller
Vienna
Rises Chuck Berry’s poetry
The Jibaro

"Ed. Note: In Puerto Rico a jibaro is a kind of mountain man, herb-gatherer, shaman.

He was living in the cave when she moved in. From the window of her bedroom, as she unpacked in the soupy air of the second floor apartment, she watched him waddle out. He squeezed from an opening half-hidden in jungle growth, a place where water seeped and gathered. She watched as the goats she had seen stripping the bougainvillea near the driveway, when he straightened, and the kinky hair floated past the bald spot on his head, she saw a wookie face.

She frisked the sportswear for the Nikons. She had let it in the lingerie. She needed the big pullman across the floor and grabbed at the keys in her pocket. The old man hopped from the wall bordering the driveway and walked into the room. "Great," Carlos smiled warmly at the drawstring shorts. "He's an old Jibaro—a hillbilly. Mentally, he's a fool."

"I'm sure you will like our beautiful neighborhood. Rising above the slums of the city, its Moorish curves were a haven for the middle-class."

"They go out on the street like this," Carlos winked. He said. "Don't do that before they start to ponder. Like a large cockroach darted beneath the chair of a woman at the next table. A large cockroach darted beneath the chair of a woman at the next table."

"Look at him. He's a fool." Carlos shrugged, fingered an ear. "And he won't leave," he said. "Even though his legs are stiff and, I swear to Christ, fur grows under his fingernails."

"I'm sure you will like our beautiful neighborhood. Rising above the slums of the city, its Moorish curves were a haven for the middle-class."

"Why do you want?" Annie asked about the old man. "Frail."

"Don't worry."

"Hi," she said. "I like his style."

"You can see he's been here a long time."

"I didn't know you spoke Spanish." Annie said. "I don't," said Annie. "I like his style."

"Well. What do you think?"

"Good breeze could take him away. His clothes hung from his frail skeleton."

"They say he's the precise time that the old man emerged from the cave. Spectral in the morning fog, he snaked from the cave in a slow unwind, wrenching each limb in its turn until he was straight and the homes of his shoulders pricked the thin cotton of his shirt. He would tug at his belt, rock his packered hat from side to side until it squaused his brow, and buzz intimately at the dogs who had gathered. And the mangle-crusty dogs would bow their heads and follow like broken children.

Nobody knew how the old man spent his days. Carlos thought he went into the hills to gather the ingredients for an ancient phil yer said to awaken a dangerously non-specific lust. Just last week he saw two men leave the cave fondling small packages bound in banana leaves. Once Annie saw the old man laughing at the men who played dominos outside the rum shack, cracking his rum in a tiny paper cup. From inside the shack, someone threw scraps to his dogs.

"Look at him."

The old man smiled at the Black Eagle where she went to have her imported steak. He sat himself at her table without introduction and began Carnival of Venice on a plastic recorder. She wanted to leave. But she had her steak and people were grinning, so she stabbed at the bread and sucked at the other end.

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"Well, What do you think?" His gaze moved down the front of her blouse and found the steak. She felt suddenly exposed.

"Nice," she said. "What do you want?"

"Boy, relax, I'm just being friendly." Raven called over the waitress and ordered a beer. He then began the unedited story of his life up to now, an outpouring so generous and rich that Annie could only pick out a word here and there to ponder. "Like "surfing," or "Terre Haute." A large cockroach darted beneath the chair of a woman at the next table. It grabbed a crumb and dropped it under a bush. Annie pushed her steak across the table to Raven, who only paused long enough in his narrative to slip a large chunk past his epiglottis.

When Annie agreed to give Raven a ride home, she hadn't realized it would be twenty miles out of her way. For the last ten miles she turned up the volume of the radio to the sobs of an evangelist who spoke a florid Spanish. When they arrived at the beach house, they sat in the car until the program ended. Raven pulled the elastic from his bleached hair. "I didn't know you spoke Spanish."

"I don't," said Annie. "I like his style."

"I'm sure you will like our beautiful neighborhood. Rising above the slums of the city, its Moorish curves were a haven for the middle-class."

"I don't leaving you alone with my husband," She half-smiled at Annie. "They say they feared the needles with black iron and screened by the lichen hedges, they drank dark rum from coffee mugs and watched couples parade beneath the streetlight."

"This is a Liberian country." The astrologer motioned to a woman in a ruffled skirt and elaborate makeup. "They have a face fascinated.

A man was at the gate. Two dogs wedged their muzzles between the bars of the door and growled. The man from the cave. The astrologer booted to his feet, spoke roughly to him in Spanish. Rummaged the glass of the table, knocked down the leg into a crack in the floor. Annie moved to where he stood. She ran a hand over the sketchy fuzz of his face before she could stop herself. She followed his eyes over the vinyl bamboo on the wall, past the hanging beads of the doorway, and deep into the apartment. An Asian face. Something about the high cheek of the clan, the angle of the eye, Indian blood."

"Look at those eyes," Annie said. "If I could solve those eyes. He's wise, you know. He wants to tell me something."

"All you're gonna see in those eyes is your own reflection," the astrologer said.

She pulled Annie away from the door. "Look at him. He's a fool."

The old man smiled at one of the astrologer's children who had run into the porch at the sudden change in her mother's voice. He stuck a fast between the...
bars and dropped something on the floor. The child ran for it. Her mother caught a fold of her dress and jerked her back. The little girl screamed and crumpled to the floor.

Annie hunkered down beside it. "He's carved a bird."

"It's a crucifix," said the astrologer. She stepped up the limp child.

Annie looked up but the old man was gone.

The astrologer kicked the carving through the bars of the door and took the child inside.

... ... ...

Annie sat at the window with a cup of thick, boiled coffee. The sediment settled in a new, bitter layer with each swallow. She'd missed him. She glanced over at Raven who was wrapped completely in the dump sheet. He yawned and sat at her.

"What are you doing up already? Come back to bed." He rolled to the other end of the mattress and pecked off the sheet. Annie looked back into the mist.

"I've got things to do."

A pillow caught her in the back of the head. Anger congealed into words that crowded for expression. With one voracious act of will she said, "Go home."

Raven studied himself from the pile of pillows where he propped his head. He clutched a t-shirt to his waist and heaved himself upright. At the door he stopped intently over the line of ants whose route took them through the middle of the room to the opposite wall where they lined snugly into the light socket below the window.

The mahogany door banged in its frame. Paint stiffened gracefully from the ceiling.

A small lizard bobbed in the corner. In the driveway, Carlos and Hector unloaded building tools. They climbed the wall and in unison sliced the jungle growth outside the cave until it was low and spikey. By the time Annie returned that afternoon, they were tacking a cramped metal roof to a rough shack which stood 20 feet from the tree.

She was awakened the next morning by a scream which rose from the earth and filtered through the foundation of the house, a scratchy vibrato at the suspended part of her brain.

Dogs barked in abandoned stanzas. Men shouted in Spanish. Annie stumbled to the window and saw the old man stiffen, dig his heels in the clay. Carlos and Hector dropped him for his ankles. They pulled him from the cave like a startled fetus, red-faced, fists punching the air. In three minutes they had him bound to the trunk of a skinny breadfruit tree. After Carlos finished his patio beer and went inside, Hector would unlock the door to the roof with his father's key.

But the dulling of her senses only sharpened her intuition. She picked up sights everywhere. She saw pattern in trivial events. They asked her to forget their programmed roles and use them instead as sacred nouns in a dialogue of cosmic significance. She typed as fast as she could their urgent, inner dictation. Despite the general sluggishness of her synapses, she never forgot to shoot her work far into the bowls of her private account at the end of the working day.

She slept on the roof most nights now. After Carlos finished his patio beer and went inside, Hector would unlock the door to the roof to catch the dubbed version of Merv Griffin at eight. He brought copies of last year's People magazine, family size bags of nacho-flavored Tostitos chips, and a six-pack and a half of Rico Cola.

Only when the breeze blew the wrong way and the dogs whimpered like devils in their rut would she ask him to come up and rub her back. And when she was half-asleep, he would unbind his chinos and slide into place behind her. Unassuming, even in the greed of passion, the pitch of his lovemaking was so profoundly soothing that Annie would sink at once into grateful sleep.

On the night Annie heard a drone in her ears that even her Don Barroallo Three-Star could not erase, she picked a lime from the tree that held her clothesline and went with her bottle to the roof. Ducking the web of antennae wire, she leaned past the edge. Below, the dogs barked and rolled like a swollen river, churning and mounting, spilling beyond the driveway and into the street. A bat circled above her head, dipped and disappeared. The old man poked his head from the shack and piped at the dogs. Then he raised his chin and delicately sniffed the air.

A dog spotted her and let out a howl that lifted him off his forelegs and sent him sprawling against the ribs of a taillight rival. The old man saw her. He snapped his arms over his head and began to move. He moved slowly at first, hopping lightly from foot to foot, then shifting, finally stumping to each side. He crouched and sprang, sprinting perfectly in mid-air and landing on the ball of one foot. With a burst of speed he sailed off the wall, spreading his legs into an accomplished split before losing himself in the knot of dogs. He surfaced and plunged in again, landing on several, rolling along the ridges of their spines and hoisting.

Annie watched until she too was up, tripping along the ledge, balancing the bottle in one hand, the lime in the other.

"Hey," she screamed. "Hey, old man, look at me. Que pasa, old man. Hey, catch me Jibaro, I'm gonna jump into your arms."

Giddy, she pitched the lime at him. It landed soundlessly in the street. A dog rooted it back into the air. Throaty laughter caught and churned in her throat. She coughed it up and gulped for air. A string of thin hicups popped in her mouth. When she looked down again the old man was standing still among the dogs whose ears were cupped at the street. Carlos stood at the far curb, shaking a baseball bat. He spoke and the old man cringed, hobbled into his shack, and closed the door. The dogs broke like a wave around Carlos. They bayed a single, rumbling note that rolled up the side of the building and curled around her like a mushroom cloud.

Carlos looked up at Annie wobbling on the ledge, Chelsea robe flying at the moon.

"You," she shouted above the cracking lift. "Get the hell off the roof. You're point that out."

"Yeah," Nilda sniffed. "Talking to him is like talking to the moon. Anyway, I don't trust him." Her eyes narrowed. She leaned into Annie. "I know for a fact he's got powers."

"Powers?" Annie watched the red vein throb in the corner of her eye.

"You know. El mal del ojo. The evil eye." She lifted her right arm and rattled a silver bracelet strung with a single jet black bead.

Carlos came into the room with a record album under his arm. "Leave the old guy alone."

He sat on the stool beside Annie and old Thelonious Monk beneath her right breast.

"You can't get this down here," he said. Hector had a low and penetrant voice that wound down each sentence with a soul-wrenching sigh. "I'm going back to the States this summer, did I tell you? I've got to get out of here." He reached over and drummed on Annie's neck with icy fingers.

When Annie got back to her apartment, she undressed immediately and dropped into bed. But she couldn't sleep. The sheets chung and burned her flesh wherever they touched. The light from the street leaked beneath her lids. She found complex logic in the dog noise outside her window.

Her work was beginning to suffer. Annie was not surprised that she was called in to see her supervisor or that her co-workers talked about her in little tight groups. There were too many dogs. They cried and eupalutated all night long and it was impossible to sleep.

But the dulling of her senses only sharpened her intuition. She picked up sights everywhere. She saw pattern in trivial events. She was trying to tell her something necessary to her being. She would be alert.

She stared at the screen. At her terminal, commands glowed. They asked her to forget their programmed roles and use them instead as sacred nouns in a dialogue of cosmic significance. She typed as fast as she could their urgent, inner dictation. Despite the general sluggishness of her synapses, she never forgot to shoot her work far into the bowls of her private account at the end of the working day.
They worked part time as diving teachers or techs for the phone company or you get out of here for awhile.' He crushed several ants beneath the heel of his sandal and scattered many more.

"I know he's poisoning them," Annie said. "Do you think I don't know that?"

"Something had to be done," said Raven. "You have to fight for your life to get in or out of here."

Raven had come out of his meditation but was still sitting, legs entwined, on the rug. Out of his shirt pocket he pulled a small bottle containing a single white beads tied to her right ankle. One bead was black. She stepped into the tub with Annie.

"It's too bad what happened, but you got to get on with your life. Why don't you go home and stay with your folks until you get on your feet again?" Nilda looked hard at Annie who held a paper bag over her eyes. The child stood around in the space between her legs.

"Pull yourself together," Nilda said. "Have a little faith in yourself."

From her purse she took a red vinyl book with the word "Datebook" in black letters across the front. She opened the book and turned a page.

"I got organized since I bought one of these. I get a lot done now. I have a six-month plan and a five-year plan. You could use one of these too."

She looked at Annie again. "Why the hell don't you say something?" Annie blinked up at her.

"Turn off that light, would you?" Annie said. She looked sideways at the child over the fingers of her right hand. The little girl sat at the edge, whacked at the water with her feet. It churned and foamed around Annie's face.

Nilda rose and grabbed the child by the waist. The water that clung to her legs sprayed the room as she bucked against Nilda.

"Carlos wants to rent this place," Nilda said. "He wants you out."

She stopped for the sandals and left.

Annie considered Nilda's advice. She tried to get up but the heaviness in her legs held her to the water. So she stayed in the tub for the rest of the day and into that night. It was only because of the old man that she got up. It was because he rolled up her spine and broke in her mind and she could not stop the breaking. Because when she thought of him, he was already dead and the flies hopped from his mouth and ran into the corners of his eyes. Or he rocked on his knees crying mutely, and the yellow clay took his big tears where they fell. For him it didn't move.

"They're probably lost your job," Raven said after the second week.

"In the hell don't you say something?"

Carlos was nodding over a copy of El Mundo when she knocked. When he saw her face in the yellow periphery he nearly shut his door. Something in the expression of her eyes or in the red and white of her face compelled him to change his mind.

"I'm worried about the old man," Annie said. "Is he OK?"

"Carlos looked down at her abbreviated feet.

"I don't know where he is. I haven't seen him."

"He could be sick," Annie said. "He could be dying or he could be dead. You killed his dogs."

"Carlos looked at her sadly. He dropped a hand on her shoulder."

"He's ok. What are you so worried about him for? You got your own problems."

"Annie swept the big hand from her shoulder. "Rooster says she's killed her man. She poisoned him."

"Carlos looked around the room. "Annie said."

"Mostly Annie slept. In the little room she shared with Raven she slept day and night. When Raven tried to wake her for work she would squeeze her pillow and say she was ill. She continued to sleep until she was uncertain of the day."

"You've probably lost your job," Raven said after the second week. "Don't you even want to find out?"

Raven was becoming impatient, growing distant. He could not appreciate the depth of her exhaustion. Annie stayed on for a week and three days after Raven moved into another cottage with a woman who rubbed Spanish olive oil on her skin. Then she took her car and went home.

The first thing she noticed was that all the dogs were gone. The next was that her TV was missing and so was all the cash she kept in the third drawer drawer inside the box of unscented panty-shafts.

""I'll try to find out," she thought."

Carlos went out of a drawer. He cursed her with Spanish words that directlyinvolved her character and that of her mother's. He left the apartment. Annie chased after him on the balls of her feet.

In the moonlight, the shack had a hunched grace. Underlined by tremors and
The Kindling Queen

The kindling queen does not ask the big professor. He almost always says no, and besides in the three years she's carried box after box of scrap wood from there, she only saw him once. So she talked to Bobby Darin instead because as far as she can see he runs the place. “Sure you can have it,” he says with a smile, delighted to see her again. “No one picks it up anymore,” he tells her grimly, and sometimes he even has to throw it out — sending a great shock through the kindling queen. It is all right now, she thinks. At last she is at the kindling again.

The kindling queen is low on boxes. Once she had the poor boy stack them tall by the produce, and wheeled out without them. And one window shut now that the alligator won't budge. She can only load them in by the side door and fill the boxes so high. If she really wants the nice, thin, oversized ones she'll have to make two trips. On the lunch hour or at the end of the day, she can only afford one.

She used to wear gloves. There were a few nails but the wood was tossed so light you could always spot them. She used to wear big gloves and try not to dust her fine pants which were ordinary enough but better than the ones she wore on weekends. She'd come in with a fine trace of sawdust or a few smudges. She loved to pick up kindling.

A few times she saw her in the barrels out back where the duck man renovated the duck pens. There were old nails and dust and dried duck do, and a few traces of feathers floating lazily as she rummaged through the old wood. She knew the smell and was not afraid of it, having cleaned her own chicken pens countless times. She was always so pleased to finish the job, giving her birds a clean, dry place. Thinking one day she'd hose the house down. One hot steamy day she'd take a hose to that house and then she'd be happy.

Most of the scraps she gets from the shop don't need to be split. But she does more work than most would. Most people wouldn't think twice about a scrap that big. They'd howl to see the sticks she takes to an ax. But she doesn't mind. She'd rather make a blazing fire than a steaming mess on those stiff frozen mornings.

Sometimes she feels kind of cheap rummaging through the wood-box like some ancient lady picking clothes from the back door trash. So she keeps her head down and moves swiftly, keeping the noise to a sigh. She leaves the plywood which scatters in awkward blocks throughout the scrap box. On the radio she heard not to burn it because of the glue. She could almost feel the invisible gas going out the stove door and into her house. So she leaves them behind and hopes they don't notice the vegetables she left on her plate. She hopes nobody bothers to notice the kindling queen and the plywood plugging up the deep box.

Looking back, she never had it this good. It took years to find it: the perfect kindling. Along the way, there were others: slabs at the sawmill, take a year to split. Dry oak, too big to burn so quickly, smoldering from the start. Scraps from her own workbench, never catching up with demand. Or old boards with nails, a hundred rusty nails she doesn't have time to pull.

Then there's the kindling she saved for years because it was too pretty to burn. Always meaning to make something. Or the branches knocked down by the worst storms. Trick kindling, she called it. Where you get 10 boxes in no time and watch it burn like paper. So in the middle of winter you're out there breaking boughs from frozen trees, cursing. Kind of like a match at your rear end when you're low on kindling.

But this kindling here is the best. So when the time comes for her to collect it, a wave of anxiety breaks over her: you can't keep a good secret too long. You wouldn't think there'd be much difference from one kind to the next. But then there aren't too many kindling queens out there broadcasting it. When you find 'Grade A' kindling, you kind of keep it to yourself.
Silver Blue

I would rock them gently home: Duane, Paul, B.J., Jack. They were all around 30, except Jack, who was a few years older. He played the piano in shabby bars across the north country, and drank wine highballs like they were nothing at all. He was huge, always happy. never said anything unkind. I remember the night he showed at my door eighteen.

Dylan Thomas for an hour or so while Jack and his sweetheart embraced on the other side of a thin wall. I was embarrassed and nervous but I did so and it worked fine. Life kept saying, don't hand it over—just leave the bill on the seat. I remember him on one of his more loquacious nights, teaching me was a man of few words, and they were usually pretty generic. I understand” or “that’s wonderful” now and then. But not Duane; he braced on the other side of a thin wall. I was embarrassed and nervous but I did so and it worked fine. Life was simple then.

When Duane hanged himself one March morning, I was crushed. I sat by the shore of Lake Michigan for the longest time, and the waves seemed to say, over and over, there you go.

Paul's favorite saying was “there you go.” He used it all the time, no matter what did, healing. Most people say “thank you” or “I understand” or “that's wonderful” now and then. But not Duane; he was a man of few words, and they were usually pretty generic. I remember him on one of his more loquacious nights, teaching me quickly how to pay off a Chicago cop. Leave the bill on the seat, he kept saying, don't hand it over—just leave the bill on the seat. I was nervous but I did so and it worked fine. Life was simple then.

When Duane hanged himself one March morning I was crushed. I sat by the shore of Lake Michigan for the longest time, and the waves seemed to say, over and over, there you go.

Paul's favorite saying was: "It's not the fall that hurts, it's the sudden stop." He was a gigolo of sorts; he lived mouth to mouth. All the women adored him, and they supported him in gracious little ways. It made me jealous, and I left him. I read to him the following passage from a novel by Lawrence Darrell, something I nevertheless would have liked to have spoken also to Jack and Duane and Paul:

It's a terrible thing to feel that one has come to the end of one's life experience—that there is nothing fundamentally new to look forward to; one must expect more and more combinations of the same sort of thing—the thing which has proved one a sort of failure. So then you start on the declining path, living a kind of posthumous life, your blood cool, your pulse steady. And yet it is just the fruitful point at which some big new understanding might jump out on you from behind the bushes and devour you like a lion.

My brother shook his head slowly, carefully I think, although to this day I don't imagine he really heard my words. As he turned to leave, I played for him a John David song I'd recently discovered:

Silver blue... said goodbye to no one. Thought it through, and left me standing in the road.

On Penobscot Bay

If the widow commit incontinency, she forfeits her estate.
If she comes into court riding backwards upon a black ram and uttering a rhymed plea, she may regain her inheritance.

The Newgate Calendar

Sleek hulled sloop
Circ's you said
Closed-celled, healing
Pumping Sou'east across the bay

On the granite brow of Spruce Island
Above the bucking hull
You sit crosslegged, shake loose your hair
Then carefully cast the delicate bones
Force: bump and stench
The agony of tensed thighs and brittle knees
The whelming need to urinate
As, teeth chattering, you ride backwards the black ram
Up from Stone Harbor to reclaim my few books, letters
A faded blue flannel shirt, the map, and the two amphorae.

Just two white lamps
"Jug, jug," you said and held them against your breasts
And the sun far out on the water catches copper
As I repeat the translated cave scratchings
"Long ships of Phoenicia
Cargo lots landing quay."

We lie drying on the granite
Cigarettes in puckered fingers
Talk of Columbus-come-lately, Popham, Weymouth
Of men, women drowned before Calvary.
The bay pulsaets, water lapping, lapping
Salt for your psoriasis.
The sun teeters on the hills
Ringing the West Bay
And twenty yards offshore, watching
A harbor seal rides the waves.

Frank Johnson
Tentants Harbor
writes in the woods
on a fisher canoe

Roland Burns
Fort Kent
teaches at UMFK
Fifty Year Anniversary

**Kennebec: Cradle of Americans** / Robert Peter Tristram Coffin


Coffin's is a book to curl up with, a book for anyone who enjoys language, the tall tale, the playful Maine imagination rather than gospel truth. This Maine classic should not be allowed to gather dust. One of twenty-four volumes of literary history about the Rivers of America, this 1937 folk saga is fifty years old. It is for the general reader, not the historian. In it, "people are supreme and events secondary." The novelist and poets commissioned to write the series were told to catch America in "the rhythm of moving water." Coffin (1892-1952), perhaps the best-known Maine poet of the previous generation, does just that. His river flows in the rhythm of his words. Born in Brunswick, and for years a professor at Bowdoin, he revels in the real river and his imagined one.

He begins with pre-history, native Americans, and quickly introduces the red clay and oystershell people. The latter left the largest monuments to human hunger in the world, he says: the mounds of shells found along the river are temples to the God Gastronomy, our oldest deity. Soon he is writing about the Abenakis, the Dawn people and their god Katahdin, and how in a "century of agony and fire" two ideas of land control clashed so that "hate flashed up and down the Kennebec valley like summer lightning." After the last Indian War the nation "bowed from sight as the pines that had brushed the stars bowed for the sawmills that ate the forest from the Kennebec's bank." He warns us that "the greatest error of history is the impression it constantly leaves of one race's complete supplanting another... as though our Maine ancestors could have lived next-door to the Abenakis for two centuries and still have remained European. It is like expecting a book to lie open in Maine's sunlight and not change color." Coffin concludes that "there is a lot of American psychology you can explain only by the fact that we went Indian for a while."

Regarding European settlement, he speculates about the first person to "sail into the lower end of a rainbow, or into a river like crushed diamond.

St. Brendan the navigator? a Viking warrior? or a simple fisherman? The last, probably. Coffin takes high ground: it was "God and not Columbus Who opened the door to a new world." Coffin tells of David Ingrum, America's most famous walker, who in 1558 was marooned on the Gulf of Mexico and walked his way to the Penobscot where he met French fishermen whom he told about the riches of a town called Norembega (Old Town). His story inspired Europeans to explore our coast. Weymouth, for example, came looking for riches but found something better, "something close to paradise — Maine in full bloom." The French temporarily settled Mount Desert. Fernando Gorges, "proprietor of Maine" for the English, found "winters as hard as diamonds, but the people tough and stayer." Later, during the six battles for the continent between the French and English in which Indians were pawns, the "habit" of trying to capture Quebec was formed — Benedict Arnold and all of that followed. Coffin relates the legend of Jacataqua, the Indian queen who fell in love with one of Arnold's marchers — Aaron Burr. Coffin's prose is playful. After the revelation, "America stood up as a nation and something tremendous happened to the Kennebec. It started rising and kept rising until its waters covered the Atlantic, poured down the Horn, out across the Pacific, and met themselves coming around Good Hope." To Coffin, Maine's wooden ships, built by farmers, were "seasonal symphonies. The keel was laid when the grass showed its first green around it. Their planking was finished when the golden-red blossomed. And they usually went into the river to meet the rising of the harvest moon." However, with the Civil War, wooden ships and the Kennebec in general declined.

"The pulp era" polluted the river; the acids of August and Gardiner mills ate the water; Fish disappeared, as did birds which hunted them. Thousands left the valley; houses emptied and decayed. It was 1937. Coffin dedicated his book to his son Robert, and as such to all young Mainers of the time. "Greed fouled the Kennebec," he tells them; he pleads for its renewal, and for kids to stay home and take pride in their patrimony. Today, more seem to stay home, as did Robert who teaches at USM. The river is clean enough to surprise Coffin. Salmon swim it to spawn. People swim in it for... for what? Coffin might say "...to meet the rising of the harvest moon." Around here, we have a new word for our clean river, and an official Day and a bizarre boat race to celebrate it: "Whatever," we say. "Whatever Day." I can just see the post floating down his river amid the hundreds of others, saying it: "Whatever... Whatever." And he smiles.

Clara Schroder

Hallowell

studies history at USM

**Review**

**Kennebec Weather**

"On the 18 of January they had in seven hours space thunder, lightning, rains, frost, snow, all in abundance, the last continuing."

This is, so far as I know, the earliest weather report in the Kennebec valley. It was for the year 1608, and the place was the Popham Plantation. It reads mighty natural. It could be for the year 1937 just as well. The weather has not changed.

The Indians weren't the only things that tempered the steel of the Kennebec men. The weather did too. Purchas's description is that of a good average day, the run-of-the-mill weather you can expect in seven Maine hours.

The weather vane always put on the top of the tallest pine tree is a necessary adjunct of a Kennebec farm. This is not for looks. It is to tell a man if there will be rain or hail, a thunderstorm or a fog, by the time he has the horses hitched. A farmer who begins his haying with that arrow pointing the wrong way may have to finish up his haying three farms away. A Maine farmer had always better take his winter coat along with him. A July westerly winds up with three blankets and a comforter on the bed at night. Many Kennebec men wear their long ones right through the summer. Woolen socks never go out of season with the lobstering men.

A Kennebec breeze can grow into a man-sized gale quicker than any other breeze going. It can get strong enough to lean on in an hour's time, and it can rattle the teeth in your head and make your eyeballs jingle. No wonder the Kennebec people took to sail early, with all that power flying around loose. The winds get into people's minds; they get through the clapboards of the stoutest houses; they get into people's sleep. My father once had a farmhouse that he had to keep tied down with chains over the roof, and he had to change the chains when the wind veered. That's the kind of wind we raise in Maine. The spruces grow close together so that all hands of them can lean on each other and still be there in the morning. The Kennebec men
women have learned to fit their lives into the winds. Maybe their not of any aquarium. Cold as slow molasses running uphill. There is the making of Maine's wit, undeniably worthless, contemptible, and degenerate, "evolved from generations of mutant Giffords" mired in "the murky life." Chester quickly becomes the hypnotic focus of empathy. His a clown with feline delusions of grandeur. Biding on his white horse, driving the noble Packard to freedom, seducing the most unlikely of damsels, he is the romantic hero, obscenely exaggerated to absurdity. Chester is the ridiculous reflection of romantic aspiration for whom you can't help but identify: "Or very dead."

If you read the book jacket synopsis you would undoubtedly wonder what book the blurb writer read. If you reflect further, you may wonder why the second part of the book is so much better than the first. You may ultimately wonder whether anyone at MacMillan bothered to read the entire book. My guess is that some ambitious editor smelled another literary Grandma Moses. Consequently, very little editorial attention was paid to this promising first work and the author was left to struggle with her subliminal editor. When she finds her voice and focus, the book offers some fine reading.

Cathy Pelletier does persevere: regrettably, many of her readers won't.
REVIEWS

The New Year's Owl / Susan Shetterly
(Yankee Books, 1986)

Some nature writers, like Annie Dillard or Joseph Wood Krutch, were already well along as literary people when they found nature as a subject. Others, like Aldo Leopold or John Muir, were naturalists whose passionate concern for the outdoors boiled over into words. When you read Susan Shetterly's work, though, you get the sense that her writing and her natural history co-evolved as aspects of the same personal development. Information, observation and expression are so skillfully integrated that before you know it your eyes have been opened to parts of the world you had never seen, and you've learned something without the painful formality of instruction.

The New Year's Owl is arranged by seasons, but there is a deeper story beneath, the story of a family "homesteading" in downeast Maine, with all that the term implies, making a home, making or discovering true human dignity and civilization in the border territory of man and wilderness. There is an elegance of language and of living in this book, a very fertile tension between acute,City-tuned highly sensitive observation and the simple, deliberate expeditions into nature that dominate the book. It speaks for all of us who put the city away and moved to Maine back in the seventies.

Both Shetterly's essays and her husband Robert's etchings commemorate this successful cultural synthesis. You can see it from the very first piece. They are dressed up to the hilt, heading down the road for a costume party with the gorilla spits at her once. She holds her ground, then again. She is marked from the outset as one who will not just passively observe, but have to co-suffer with the natural suffering of things. She is a child in a zoo watching a gorilla who starts spitting at people through the bars. Everyone else backs away. The gorilla spits at her once and she holds her ground, then again. A tremendous stamina and courage comes through in these essays, whether she's near-drowning in a swamp or facing down a hunter who threatens to violate their property. It manages to articulate the responsibility we all accepted in choosing Maine, a responsibility for life that we all keep guessing at, feeling unconsciously, but here it is in plain print.

This is exactly what it means to be a steward of the land and a neighbor to other humans. The book cuts open the skin of theory and habit that separates us from the world and shows the living tissue of ecological relation underneath. The endlessly-debated matter of poisoning herring gulls to save terns is put in a new light by a visit to the local dump where the gulls feed. She teaches us that to see is an active, not a passive verb, that attentiveness involves risk and commitment, and we share through language the privilege of her attention. We are reminded of the shamas in their dark, northern climates, putting on bird-costumes to fly between our place and the forgotten place of the animals to bring us news.

The New Year's Owl is full of information about birds and animals. You learn how sweet copulate and where monarch butterflies spend the winter. You learn the history of the landscape and the occupations of its people. You end up with a lot of knowledge about the natural world and you have been taught so well that you forget that you learned it and feel that you knew it all along. You have become through these essays part of the author's life and of her family. But there's also an uncanny aspect to this writing. The author is a poet who uses metaphor to expand her vision, and ours, beyond the present time and space. Snell fishermen gather in the moonlight in Steuben. All you see of them is the glowing points of their cigarettes. "It is as if they had gathered here to row, with long-stemmed oars, a heavy black-timbered boat out into the bay." Such evocations of dream-like ritual and deep history make it a good book to read on a winter's night before going to bed, when the real and the unreal begin to transform into each other.

Robert Shetterly's illustrations develop the uncanny, shape-changing multiple faces of nature that are hinted at in the prose. These etchings, by now familiar to anyone in Maine, show with tremendous humor and compassion that seeing is also an act of transformation. We turn these drawings over one after the other and finally must say yes, of course, the same healing, rehabilitative creative force that pushes natural things through their changes is also in our own minds. It is our mind creating itself while it looks on. Human and natural creation become the same, and in these frog eyes and heron eyes and chicken visages we find our own reflections starting back, asking the question we hadn't thought of yet.

Sociobiology tells us that all human emotions and ideas ultimately evolved for their survival value, the survival of the individual and his gene. Whenever I encounter a sociobiologist on the street I ask him the same question. What is it in our genetic structure that would make people campaign to save another species? They can never answer. But here is the evidence of human compassion reaching across the species barrier that has nothing at all to do with human survival. Or does it? You read these essays over and realize that these dramas of midnight bird-rescue and bird-rehabilitation, these moments of unselfishness in the sardine factory, offer a glimpse of possibility for another kind of survival that is not yet in the lexicon of neo-Darwinism. The book is about freedom and survival, a family surviving on the edge of the country; and the acts of healing and rehabilitation they perform are absolutely inseparable from their ability to endure. The sociobiologists are both right and wrong. We are programmed to survive, but somewhere in the instructions is also a message to help out. Humans in Maine and elsewhere have so much to be ashamed of in their long history of predation on themselves and others. This wonderful book may help force us to see that maybe in spite of our story we're somewhat better than we had thought.

William Carpenter
Stockton Springs
teaches at COA

Picking Up / Lucy Honig
(The Dog Ear Press, 1986 — Winner of the 1986 Maine Novel Award)

In Picking Up, readers catch a glimpse of April Deove, a commonplace, lonely woman whose existence in downeast Maine is defined by her hard, back-breaking work in the potato fields and her equally difficult struggles in a family marked by poverty, infidelity and abuse. The drudgery of her life matches the bleakness of the landscape. Surrounded by acres of unpicked potatoes, she describes her life as a "great big field of potatoes that's got to get picked up, and I can never finish and no one ever helps." April Deove is tired, tired of the struggle, tired of the unending work, tired of her dishaveled family life. She wants to make all of it better, but her attempts seem futile.

But as desperate as her situation appears, April Deove dreams. She imagines a life of endless choices, like the world of the homesteaders "from away" who form the coop and live in dome houses. She pictures a household where a family relaxes in each other's company without conflict, without hate. She fantasizes about romantic love and the attention of a caring, sensitive man. She dreams of work that is fair and satisfying. "One day of good minutes. That was what she longed for. That was the whole thing." April Deove is handicapped by the circumstances of her birth. She fears the unknown, and her relationships seem all wrong. Gradually, Lucy Honig discloses April's plight through her expectations of the people around her and her inevitable frustrations when they fall short. Especially convincing are the raw dialogue between April and her mother Sally MacQuarrie, the strained interaction between April and her near-do-well husband John, the battles with her three unruly sons, the daily confrontations with her co-workers in the fields. However, it is April's Resilience that moves the story along — and her resilience that saves her.

Undoubtedly, this first novel will receive attention. Readers will be tempted to compare Picking Up to Chute's THE BEANS OF EGYPT, MAINE. Critics may include this novel in their debate about the Maine novel. April Deove leads an ordinary life that is uncommonly difficult, a quiet life of despair transformed into hope.

Carol Komos
Windham
teaches at UMA
Review

Relations: Selected Poems
1950-1985 / Philip Booth
(Viking Penguin, 1986)

The cover photo of Philip Booth's latest volume, Relations: Selected Poems 1950-1985, is pointedly absent of people. A gull stands on a wharf post in a direct line across from an empty fold-up chair. Both are framed by Castine Bay, I suspect, and the water is also empty of boats and people. And yet the word Relations in the title smacks us hard in the face: the letters are bold and black, they beg our attention. And the poems in this volume, gathering together work from his six earlier books and including new selected poems, are very much concerned with relations and relationships the poet has experienced and is still moving toward.

"Crouched hard on granite, facing a weathed sea, I breathe as slow as rock," Booth informs us in "Voyages" from his third book, Weathers and Edges. And even though the poem is titled "Voyages," the poet is still back in the harbor, poised like the gull, rooted on the ledge, "bound! as I am to the very edge." The poet journeys inward, not outward, hugging the tideline like the staid and finding his own horizon like the hulls of the poem. The tension between inward and outward possibilities for change and experience are reflected in the makeup of the poem's structure itself. Booth's two sestets, also divided into halves of three-line stanzas, move from the external landscape of granite and his own human butt in the first sestet inward as sea and eye, where the voyages are taken into the human imagination rather than on the Penobscot Bay. Of course, Booth being a sailor himself, knows the external experience of sailing and owning a boat, but the poem tugs inward, reflecting on the transcendent sense of place.

In the second sestet, the end words of the first and sixth lines, ledge and edge, again rhyme and are employed in the same way as the first sestet. Here he is poised like the gull and empty chair of the cover, alert and responsive to the relationship between inner and outer landscape.

Place is no superficial "home, sweet, home" for Booth. It is a deep-rooted, historic, hard-earned location. It is a spot his own ancestors, going back three generations, have nurtured and handed down to him for safekeeping. It is a place to dream from, the collective unconscious so well endowed and overflowing from the family heirlooms, "my mother's grandfather's clock," the magnificent old woodstove which link the poet to his relatives, his village, at the edge of this northern New England tide, where his "feet feel into the hillside" and he is "relative to every last house." ("Before Sleepy")

What saves Booth's work from sentimentality is his voracious concern for language that challenges and probes his experience, these relations. Booth never lets himself off easy: he crouches hard on granite, he reflects that 'Granite takes nothing for granted,' he goes out to fell oak and think woodlots, not knowing what is really true, realizing the one constant in life is change.

One of Booth's most frequently anthologized poems, "Eaton's Boatyard," insists on making a cut of what's here: what has to be made to make do. As in the cover photo of Relations and in many of Booth's poems, we are faced with a location or landscape without human beings, but the human spirit and possibility of all things human is suffused in the poet's reflection on that place. Eaton's Boatyard is obviously a place frequented by the poet. He has used these tools and materials, in his continual search for the requisite tool. The poem is a probing search for a way to make a living, one's life, the piece that already may fit to make do.

Eaton's Boatyard

To make do, making a living,
practically nothing, nothing that may
come in handy;
within an inertia of caked paintcans,
nothing that may fit
for whatever it's worth;
the requisite tool
in this cutch there's no end to:
what has to be there:
the piece that already may fit
the idea it begins
to shape up:
to be put off by split rudders,
to forget for good
not to be put off by split rudders,
stripped outboards, half
what needs be retrieved:
the idea it begins
a life given to
how today feels:
to make of what's here
what has to be made
to make do.

Philip Booth
Castine
mothers of Syracuse

Kathleen Lignell Orono
is a poet and editor at UMO
Fifth Grade, Second Period
Social Studies

The girl who sits in the fourth row, sixth seat, Fifth Grade has a body that skipped ahead of her as if it wanted to be in the seventh or eighth with breasts and hair and blood. The girl in the fourth row, sixth seat feels it is unfair her body has a mind of its own that has twisted her out of shape and makes demands and she cries to please wait and let the others catch up in fractions and science and spelling and when she writes her name and numbers the page and puts her crayons away. The girl in the fourth row, sixth seat feels it is unfair her body has a mind of its own that has twisted her out of shape and makes demands and she cries to please wait and let the others catch up in fractions and science and spelling and when she writes her name and numbers the page and puts her crayons away. The girl who sits in the fourth row, sixth seat, Fifth Grade has a body that skipped ahead of her as if it wanted to be in the seventh or eighth with breasts and hair and blood.

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The boy in the red shirt next to her has been chosen to spy down her shirt and through her button holes and report at recess on the playground if they are scoops of ice cream, jelly rolls, marshmallows, whether they are play dough or putty or cool and moist as the Pueblo clay in the picture on the classroom wall or hot as chocolate pudding thickening and everyday they want more and more beside the seesaw and the jungle gym as if he carried tales from the land of milk and honey. The boy in the red shirt, fifth seat Fifth Grade has two left feet and hands that can't catch anything, that make him wish that he was dead. The boy in the red shirt overhears the teacher whisper he is slow, so he knows those small creamy hills and valleys, those shadows moving over her paper as she writes between the afternoon bells are all he has.

Roberta Chester
Orono
teaches at UMO

Hot Air Balloon Ride

In the beginning
fear shrouds the field in loose colors,
sulks in its basket.
Strangers gather,
The wind drops
as the bright folds build
in the monumental dusk.
And then it's over.
We are risen,
distilled into our own distance,
windless
(for we are members of the wind),
fearless
(for we have become the fear of others).
Here at last —
O, vacant, soft cathedral! —
trust works,
principles hold,
while in some other world
deer cross clearings,
horses make for barns,
tractors blacken fields,
and only the nesting bird thinks of looking up.

Daniel C. Bryant
Portland

practices medicine

KENNEBEC: A Portfolio of Maine Writing, Vol. XI
Published by the University of Maine-Augusta
For eleven years we have been printing the best Maine writing we can find. Typically, about half of the forty-one writers have not appeared in these pages before. 5,000 copies are distributed free throughout the state as a service to the community in an effort to bring Maine writers to the attention of a wide public. In this effort, we are supported by the UNIVERSITY OF MAINE AT AUGUSTA. Back issues, 1981-1986, are available upon request. Deadline for submissions for next year: 9/13/87 - 12/1/87. Send SASE. Copyright held by writers.

Editors: Carol Kontos
Terry Plunkett

Typesetting: The Comp Shop

Cover: Phil Paratore, from The Dinosaur Series