

# KENNEBEC:

A PORTFOLIO OF MAINE WRITING  
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*Play Ball! Ceramic by Josh Nadel  
Underglazed Earthenware, 18" high*

## *Jumbo Shrimp*

(From the novel, *The Fly Must Die*)

Fred Fudpucker, a college professor and unpublished closet poet, lives with his parents after his wife and daughter walk out on him. His father, a dwarf with the nickname "Shrimp," insulates crawlspaces for A-Pollen-Aire, a heating and air-conditioning firm, and plays midget league baseball. At one of his baseball games, he's recruited by Mick McDiddle, CEO of a giant fast food chain, to become the company's mascot and good will ambassador, a clown named "Little McDiddle," Shrimp, eager for riches and status, jumps on the offer. But soon the job starts to wear on him. He has been in the role five years when this section begins.

My father had aged ten years in five. His face was lined, his shoulders

sagged, the spring had gone out of his step. He consulted physicians, who plied him with vitamins, diets, drugs, advice on lifestyle change—relax, slow down, don't take your job home with you—but nothing worked. His decline continued; his drinking increased; he was now just a shadow of that feisty center fielder I had known.

On one of the many nights that I couldn't sleep (and there wasn't any buzzing in my head back then!), I was tearing apart the poem that *SLOW* magazine had rejected, when I heard a soft rap on my study door.

It was Dad. He entered, bags under his eyes, sank into the overstuffed chair near the window, and let out a sigh. His appearance was shocking. I could hardly believe that this was the man who had led the midget league in homers for twelve straight years. When he spoke, his voice was exhausted.

"I'm famous," he said. (He'd been drinking again.) "They know me all over the world. But am 'I' really known? Is Shrimp Fudpucker known? Of

course not, they don't know *me*, all they know is the image, the clown."

My heart went out to him, this sad little man who had taught me so much, including how to turn the double play. "Dad," I said, "that's the way life is. Suppose I were a beloved, lionized writer" (here my heart contracted slightly). "No one would know who I was, all they'd know is my work. No one would praise me for what I *am*, they'd praise me for what I *write*. That's the nature of fame. When you were a center fielder, did the fans ever know the real you? All they knew was your speed on the basepaths, your skill at the bunt."

Shrimp looked lost in the overstuffed chair. "But I still was *myself* back then!" he said with blurred eyes. "I was Shrimp Fudpucker and nobody else, the best midget in organized ball! That was *me* those people saw, not some falsefaced clown, some act. And I *loved* playing center field. I didn't mind insulating crawlspaces, either, if you want the truth. It was hell in July and August, but it was *honest*. This Little McDiddle bit, that nose, those phony tricks . . . " He sighed again and said, "My god do I hate kids!"

He was such a pathetic sight that I almost wept. "Dad, it's time to get out," I said. "Hang it up, you don't need it now. You have plenty of money" (he chuckled bitterly, softly at this) "you've had your taste of fame, so quit."

He shrugged, looking smaller than ever in his crimson robe. "Ah, Freddy," he said, "if I only could."

"But you must," I said. "You've been at it for over five years and your life's not your own anymore. You used to laugh and joke around, and now that you make a living by laughing and joking, you're always depressed."

He stared at me. He was silent awhile, then said, "You're right. I'll notify Mick tomorrow. What do I need this clown gig for? I can always go back to the crawlspaces, right? I'm not too old."

"Dad," I said, "with the money you've made at McDiddle's—"

"You're right!" he said, and he slammed his midget hand on the arm of the chair. The act brought with it a flash of the old Amphipod sliding into third base head first in a cloud of dust. He tightened the belt on his robe, stood up, threw his shoulders back and declared, "I'll do it! Freddy, you've saved me. To think of it, the Kid, the professor, getting his old man back on the track. I'll tell him tomorrow! I will!" At that moment he looked a meter tall. He smiled—and passed out cold.

Amazingly, he was gone the next morning before I was even awake. He didn't return until after eleven that night.

When he did, defeat was etched in the lines that scored his aging brow. His Nixon chair swallowed him up. Turning his red-rimmed eyes toward mine he said, "He's got me, Freddy."

He'd requested a meeting with Mick McDiddle himself, but had been turned down. He spoke to Mick's lawyers then, and they told him the contract he'd signed at our house five years ago—while dazzled by visions of riches and fame—was totally airtight. He had to continue the Little McDiddle act until he was sixty-five, or pay unheard of damages. He was now fifty-eight, and would be "the clown without a frown" for seven more years, or lose every kryptchick he'd worked for.

As he slouched in his chair, so haggard, so gray, I fumed. All the hours that Mick had spent in our house with his flunkies; the cutting remarks he'd subjected me to as he clouded the living room air with his vile cigars; all the promises he'd made to Dad, who'd done so much to create his success, and now he wouldn't give him the time of day.

I looked back at silent Shrimp—and was startled to see that a spark of fire was lighting his wrinkled eyes. Then he smiled a little and said, "He *thinks* he's got me. But he doesn't know Shrimp Fudpucker, does he, Kid? What if a part's not big enough for you? What if you outgrow the role?"

I should have found encouragement in this defiant stance. Instead, I was terrified. And, as it shortly turned out, with good cause.

In the five years my father had worked for McDiddle's, Mick's empire had mushroomed beyond belief. His labs had come up with more and more "treats": McMush (babyburger), McCandy, McCake, and a shaved beef sandwich, the Big McSteak. They'd honed their quality control, perfected staff speedup, concocted a frying fat that would last an entire year, and developed an ice cream cone that was 80.2 percent air. The profits poured in. Every day, a new restaurant went up. The McDiddle Foundation burgeoned, spewing tons of well-publicized money to colleges, hospitals, airports and army bases. Comfort University was founded. Mick went into seclusion.

McGrow was a hormone derived from sheep pituitary glands (it takes one hell of a lot of sheep to make all that Leg McMutton, so Mick had an endless supply of glands); a drop of this stuff in an animal's feed would make the beast put on flesh at a fabulous rate. Thus the time from birth to slaughter was drastically shortened, and profits dramatically multiplied.

My father knew about McGrow. He was often taken on tours of the labs to hype up his pride in the organization, and on one of these tours he siphoned off some of the hormone. —An entire vial of it.

As he rose from his Nixon chair, the fire was still in his eyes. He came over, reached up, touched my elbow, said nothing, and went to the third floor room.

It was less than ten minutes later that I heard his powerful, dwarfish voice cry out: "No more Little McDiddle! I will never be Little McDiddle again! They can't touch me now! Ha-ha-ha! I am *me*!"

A short moment of silence. Then a cracking, creaking, popping noise, a loud rumble and then a groan—so piteous, so forlorn!—and a whopping crash that shook the whole house. I took the stairs two at a time to the third floor room and threw open the door.

Above my head were the moon and stars. At my feet was Shrimp—or rather his feet and legs. His head and shoulders were seven meters away, resting on the roof of our neighbor's garage.

Suicide? Absurd! It was tragic miscalculation. The McGrow was more potent than Shrimp had imagined; he'd drunk too much. His plan, I'm sure, was to reach normal height or a little more, thus making it out of the question to ever again play the clown. He would never commit suicide. He had guts. He would never give up, no matter how dire his situation.

Poor Dad! A "freak" in the eyes of the world, trying his best to emulate those who put him in that category, fighting his fate every inch of the way, "succeeding" (in their terms: fame, money), only to see his very success bring him down.

—Bring him down like a tree on our neighbor's garage! Is it any wonder, then, that they stole our pink flamingo and crystal ball?

Christopher Fahy  
Thomaston

*is a novelist and works with the blind*

## Virgin Words

Words never used by me  
were lined up inside my mind.  
They'd been there ever since  
I learned them, waiting for  
the right woman with whom  
to share intimacies of utterance,  
words turgid with anticipation,  
tensing my throat with expectancy,  
words tying my tongue with fears  
of premature articulation.  
Proudly I confess to the world  
how glad I am I saved those words  
till Elise entered my vocabulary  
as the proper noun for love.

Glenn McKee  
Waterville  
*walks, writes, cogitates*

## Words Don't Wipe Off

The father's words pour out, like soot  
from an exploded furnace.  
She rubs against them with eraser,  
tries scrubbing face from hair to chin,  
showers (clothes and all),  
opens the kitchen window  
to let words air out,  
turns the fan to exhaust,  
takes herself to the dry cleaners.  
Nothing avails.

The next day she goes to school  
and writes an essay, rubbing face  
across lined paper, punctuating  
with elbow thrusts.

The teacher asks where she got  
such mighty words so young, assigns  
a large A for anger. The daughter floats home  
on a thundercloud.

Edward J. Rielly  
Westbrook  
*teaches at St. Joseph's College*

## Common Senses

It was low tide today when I walked a stretch of beach. There are some shorelines that are better walked after the sea has receded, and drawn itself back. It shows a different view, an unwatered perspective; things get exposed, uncovered. One begins to grasp what is going on underneath it all. For it is what happens beneath the surface of things which unravels great mysteries.

It is a hot summer day. The heat prickles like the points of a sea urchin held in the palm, but soon that fades and is no longer noticed. I look at a sandbar, and call it female. The strands of dark green kelp are male. Some of the senses shut themselves off while others open wide, and become mesmerized by a two inch star-fish. Nothing else matters but to get closer. The ears no longer hear the voices of children or the sound of water against rock. The mind does not notice the deafness. It just happens. It is only later, when I will leave the starfish, that I will become aware of sound again, aware that it had left me. But now the visual becomes exaggerated, as if my eyes are great telescopes, and I am unsatisfied with how far away the starfish appears. Automatically legs move quickly toward the sea animal. Knees drop to the bottom of a tidal pool. The water is warm and very clear, like a John Klemmer saxophone.

I am in the water, up to my waist in a kneeling position before I sense the wetness, and wonder where it came from. I know the surprise of a tadpole as it grows tail and tongue and webbed feet, the touch of dry ground for the first time; outside its original element. Which comes first, the act? or the realization of the act?

I do not pick up the starfish. I want to meet it on its own terms. I immerse myself in the three feet of water, and release air from my lungs. Slowly my body is flat against the bottom of the pool. The sand is soft and cool on bare skin, like rain from an open window. The five-fingered creature is inches away. At first glance he blends well, the identical color of the fine sand he presses against. But as my eyes adjust to water and lose their filminess, I see he is pink, the pale pink of a wine blush. I touch his skin, it is neither smooth nor rough. It reminds me of a quilt with many stitches.

For as far as my eyes can see in any direction, the starfish is alone. A child left unattended to face the busy traffic of the sea. Right now he is enjoying the slow hour. Lucky to have found himself left behind in a pool large enough to prevent dehydration. The sea gulls are too busy with crabs, and clams, and unyielding things to bother with him. Gulls seem to prefer hard-shelled things, things they can swoop up, hover at low altitude, and release from their beak-grip, sending the catch smattering against rock. The starfish would not offer the gull his pleasure of cracking things open. There is no spine to break. Nature is like that, filled with contradiction, and pity.

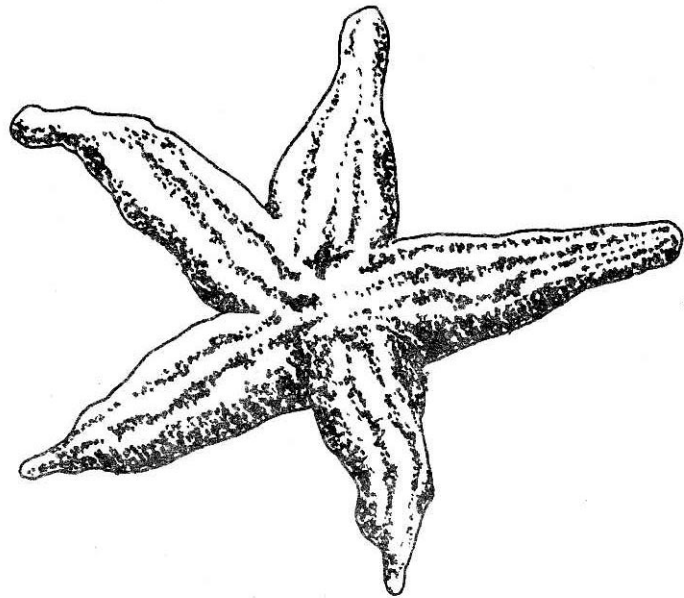
I have no idea how long I have been underwater. Great natural divers can hold their breath for fifteen, twenty, thirty minutes? There was no one with a stop watch above waiting for me to surface. Perhaps a world record was broken that day. Perhaps the starfish charmed me, and cast a spell my way. Or perhaps in water I am no longer human, I return to the womb in a fish-like state. There is fleshy webbing between my fingers, gills where my cheeks should be. I could live forever beneath low tide.

We look at things and attempt to place ourselves inside the thing. We give eyes, and ears, a thumb, an intellect to things which may not have them. We give them anyway, so that we might find a common ground to communicate, to understand. The skin of the starfish is not so very much unlike mine. His underbelly feels the beach sand in much the same way my inner arm and thighs do. Does he look at me and think at first I too blend well with the sand, until his eyes define the difference in tone between sand and skin? As I touch him, he touches me. Does he think me cold or warmblooded? Do I remind him of kelp or granite or of some other species of fish? Am I plant, mineral, or animal? Does he wonder if I am prey for the gull? if I have a spine that will snap if dropped against the rocks?

A shadow is cast over us. At first I pay it no attention. But unlike a cloud which moves from east to west or north to south, casting a shadowy mass, and moving on, this shadow sprouts arms and legs, and human intrusion. There is a tap on my shoulder.

I am half out of the water. My eyes are adjusting from liquid to dry air. The salt stings like a hundred bees injecting their venom. Lungs gasp for oxygen which seconds ago breathed freely underwater, or did not need to breath at all. A train seems to be heading in my direction, the noise hurts my ears, and I wildly look about to see which direction I should run to avoid getting caught under the wheels. But there is no train. There are no bees. It is the return of sound, the return to another world so different from the one just left.

A monolith stands above me with a radiant source of light coming from where one would put a head on it, it is very bright, like car lights on high beam. It takes awhile to focus some meaning out of this two-headed monster. It takes the shape of two young girls. I watch their mouths move but do not catch all their gibberish, their words are like a foreign language. The mind adapts rather slowly to this new world. A sharp scent of the sea reminds me of a place from childhood, the smell of beet greens simmering in my mother's kitchen. I like this return to a familiar place, and would like to sit and visit for



Silvia Rike

awhile. Instead, I am faced with two strangers who want to know what I am doing.

I am still kneeling in the water up to my waist, I feel rooted there, my toes dig deeper into the sand as I point to the starfish. I scoop my treasure up in a broken mussel shell. The starfish goes limp out of water, as if he is trying to retract himself into a small ball, offended by air and sound and giant things which glow in unrefracted light. Outside his element he is as helpless as a bird without wings, a rabbit missing hind legs, a starfish out of water. I am so caught up with my find in the sea, and sharing it with the young girls, that I have missed something. Something very important. I have been talking to their eyes. They appear interested, friendly, eager to look at the starfish. And then I see the whole picture. They are holding something in their hands. It is such a mass of things that at first I do not know just what it is. A glob of tan, green, pink stuff. Occasionally a part of it moves as if to unwrap itself from the lump.

They each are carrying handfuls of starfish. But why? Where did they get so many? Where are they going with them? They get caught up in their story with the same tone of enthusiasm I spoke mine. They pulled the sea animals off an island of rock at the south end of the sandbar. They insist they only took the bigger ones, and left the babies clinging to the granite. They are taking them home to dry out on the porch railing, and then they will make Christmas tree ornaments out of them.

I place the starfish gently back in the water, he is still clinging to the mussel shell. As the shell touches the bottom of the pool the starfish seems to relax, spreading itself out, stretching its fingers in a wide yawn.

I try to talk the young girls into letting their sea creatures go. Reluctantly, they reach what they think is a good compromise. They empty their hands and count out their catches, twenty-eight. Fourteen get put back in the water where they huddle around my starfish like friendly handshakes.

I watch the two young girls walk away, and wait until they are no bigger than pencils walking stiffly down the stretch of beach, before I think about moving on. And then I decide to wait longer, wait for the high tide to return. Someone must guard the remaining starfish, keep them safe until another day when low tide will leave them vulnerable, unarmored against young girls looking for tree ornaments.

**Donna L. Popadak  
Brunswick**

*is a listener, an observer, a slow dancer  
through life.*

## In Maine

Ever notice how Summer and Fall  
come out of nowhere;  
Like old age or puberty?  
But April and November wait for  
Spring and Winter, in anticipation;  
Like parents when children leave home  
Not wanting to let go of past seasons,  
but wishing for what lies ahead.

**Peggy Contreras  
E. Winthrop**  
*is a UMA English major*



## Lucie de Graaff

Rotterdam, 1943

The sirens woke us again. I grabbed my son and baby daughter, stumbled down the stairs to the cellar. Seventeen people here, everyone silent, listening: who knows when or where they'll strike this time? We're all half-dressed, uncombed, shivering with anxiety and cold. Thousands now have died or lost their homes, so we're the lucky ones. My four year old whimpers, wants his father. I don't know if he still has one; Wim's last letter came to me from Leiden several weeks ago. "Planes flying over!" "Whose?" Hell, it's the same sound, the same terror, the same agony of death whether it's allies or enemy.

\*

Another raid. I think it has been five days since the last bombs hit us; time has few relevant measurements anymore. We're alive, breathe in, breathe out. Today there are thirty-two of us in the cellar. The center of town is all dead rubble now, a heap of smoldering stones, but for one miracle: the city hall survives, stands tall and dignified, a lone reminder of man's humanity to man. What can I say of war?—I am a mother, not a philosopher. My only plan is staying alive from one day to another. Tomorrow I'll inquire about Wim again; two months, and still no word from him.

\*

Pipes burst yesterday; the filthy water sloshes to our knees. I gave my share of the bread to little Jan and now my daughter cries. My milk is gone. Mevrouw van Leer moans over her New Testament, insists this is all judgment for our sins. I'd like to slap her one, curd-faced old Calvinist. There's talk the Germans will destroy the dikes. Death by drowning, death by slow starvation, death by incineration—it's all death in the end. I've never had a lick of patience with heroics, but while I still draw breath, I will stay civilized as I can. I'll keep us clean, comfort the kids, and try to sleep.

\*

Four missing faces. Piet van Leer was shot. The Germans learned he was a courier for the underground. His mother, I think, is not in her right mind. I once spoke ill of her, regret that now. The Schuytlers, said to be one-quarter Jewish, left for "relocation," as some call it. Every day I see Jews huddled on platforms at the railway station. This afternoon I lost my temper, cursed a guard right to his face. (I wish I'd spit.) A woman whose baby died said she will nurse my daughter; that makes one less worry. It does not get any easier, but at least something still separates humans from the beasts.

\*

Last night I dreamed I was in Groningen again, a child. The tulips were in bloom and I was eating ginger cookies. Then the screaming of the sirens shook my room and brought me back. Wim, I've learned, is dead, his body in a grave somewhere near Delft. No food for two days now; even stale bread's become a luxury. I tell myself I must keep going for the children's sake, so I mend clothes, sing lullabies. But I'm not sure how much more horror I can take. Whose planes are racing through the sky this time, and to what purpose now? They sound so near, almost right over us.

Oh God.  
Not here.

**Katherine McAlpine  
Robbinston**  
*is a free lance writer*



## MIA—VIETNAM—'69

First,  
the earth took your blood,  
redder than the Kool-Aide  
we drank together  
underneath the catalpa tree.  
We toasted Aunt Lottie's fat ass,  
Davy Crockett and  
long life.

In  
the quiet heat  
your flesh  
melted into  
the earth.

In some jungle  
vines have taken root  
in your bones,  
filling them out  
once again.  
I can smile at that,  
remembering the Halloween you were  
the Jolly Green Giant  
and I was a kernel of corn.

Finally, bones are dust.  
But that small metal  
that tore life and soul apart  
remains, whole,  
only slightly tarnished,  
somewhere.

I guess  
brass,  
like grief,  
endures.

**J. T. Fairbanks  
Augusta**  
*is a teacher & writer*

## Short breath suddenly cold

November house fragrant with soup  
and wood fire  
three big young dogs nuzzling on the rug

Son growing quickly now  
first thickening past stringy  
voice not breaking, broken  
cheek kissable nose denser

Son fifteen drinking cider  
staying at the table when the meal is over  
says yes fervent yes  
when asked if the U.S. should invade Iraq  
as the 8 grown-ups who all said no  
stop in a short breath suddenly cold  
slapped by the reminder  
that children grow beyond  
what we want for them  
and worse,  
that wars are fought by beautiful children

**Pam Smith  
Bath**  
*is a painter & writer*



## Moffett's Last Flight

(October, 1943)

Soldiers in a silent flicker, the armorers,  
brass biting over shoulder, fill the cavities  
of his six fifty-calibers. He sniffs the oil that ripples  
from the topped-off gull-wings, stretching from their stain of smoke,  
and shouts "Prop Clear!" as a crewman yanks the chocks.

He feels the Corsair rattle its flaps,  
as 1800 horses try to shake loose from the cowl  
and charge into the spin of the blades.  
He watches the prop reverse the stroboscopic pain  
of a sun melting this crushed coral of Munda.

Pressing right rudder against the torque  
that hopes to twist him into the green  
and shark-strewn ocean, he joins up on the way to Bouganville,  
where they watch the waking of dust behind the Zeros  
taking off below. They dive and stroke red circles

of oil over the canvas water, thinning towards  
the wash of other islands, white on a gold horizon's rim.  
Their vapor etches hoops in the sky,  
widening out to clouds lurking  
under battle stations of the southern cross.

His engine cuts into the heart of heat,  
and red-lines against the echo of the firewall.  
"I need a hand," he says. "Engine gone. Zero on my tail.  
Hurry!" "I'm on my way," Pappy says. "Hang on!"  
"Oh, skip it," he says, ashamed of his panic. "I'm going in."

Based on Col. Gregory Boyington's Baa Baa Black Sheep  
(NY: Bantam, 1977, 179-81)

**Herb Coursen**  
**Brunswick**  
teaches at Bowdoin

## Hiroshima: 8-5-85

(For Marina Tanaka Horsting)

(1)  
It's noon in Maine. The sardine factory  
whistles the lunch break. If our time were like  
theirs, it'd be twenty hours and sixteen  
minutes until the blast. The sun's discrepancy  
delays the flame, the surge that will plaster  
the shadow of a clock's hands to its lens,  
the pattern in a blouse to the skin beneath.

(2)  
Kaz Tanaka, whose name's common  
as Miller or Smith, plays in the yard,  
hears the plane, six miles up, and waves.  
"It's my angel again," she says. Her  
mother dies in a storm of glass shards,  
her father under the garden gate, and she  
survives.

(3)  
Only in art can we now indulge our  
urge to witness what, close up, was nothing  
but light, afar a cloud of steam we call  
a mushroom; for once, the repetitions  
of poetry may be our only grace;  
life won't tolerate another occasion  
for a poem like this.

(4)  
In Maine, the night passes. In Hiroshima,  
nothing happens but another silent  
protest. In Washington, the dark spot  
she was born with has melted into my  
daughter's lower back, and the Pentagon  
gleams in the early sun like a future  
we must imagine.

**Eric Horsting**  
**Yellow Springs, OH**  
summers at Machiasport  
& teaches at Antioch



God is my co-pilot, but who filed this flight plan?  
Underglazed Earthenware, Josh Nadel

## American History

This humongous racehorse,  
frothing at the mouth  
from running hell bent,  
like a bastard  
with a headless rider,  
for two hundred + years,  
always faster, faster,  
eating Indians, blacks,  
whole cultures,  
in god who trusted  
some crucified image,  
idolized gold, gas & plutonium,  
traded simple pastures  
for highway pleasures,  
until this racehorse,  
amalgam of man and beast, America,  
emitted one large chemical fart

then the horse froze up  
where it stands now,  
similar to the Trojan horse,  
filled to capacity  
with quiet orientals,  
who are waiting  
to flip the animal  
inside out  
and flail the skin  
into neat seat covers  
for many hot little cars

but the gates to the city  
crumbled years ago.

**Louis Sinclair**  
**Waterville**  
is a poet/musician

War

## Narcissus Again

Flakes of white phosphorous\*  
fall fast oh fast  
upon the shoulders  
of William Westmoreland  
standing in a meadow  
beside a pool  
of jellied flesh

He drops to his knees  
drawn to his own reflection  
deep within:  
He becomes two million Vietnamese  
He becomes the skeletal remains  
of a Huey\* of an APC\*

He struggles to rise  
but his arms  
can only flail away  
at the orange sky  
His fingers  
ripple off  
into filaments  
of yellow smoke

His ears grow huge  
His nose droops to his chin  
William Westmoreland  
has become  
LBJ  
Richard Nixon

His mouth opens  
into a tunnel  
with no light  
at either end

For eternity

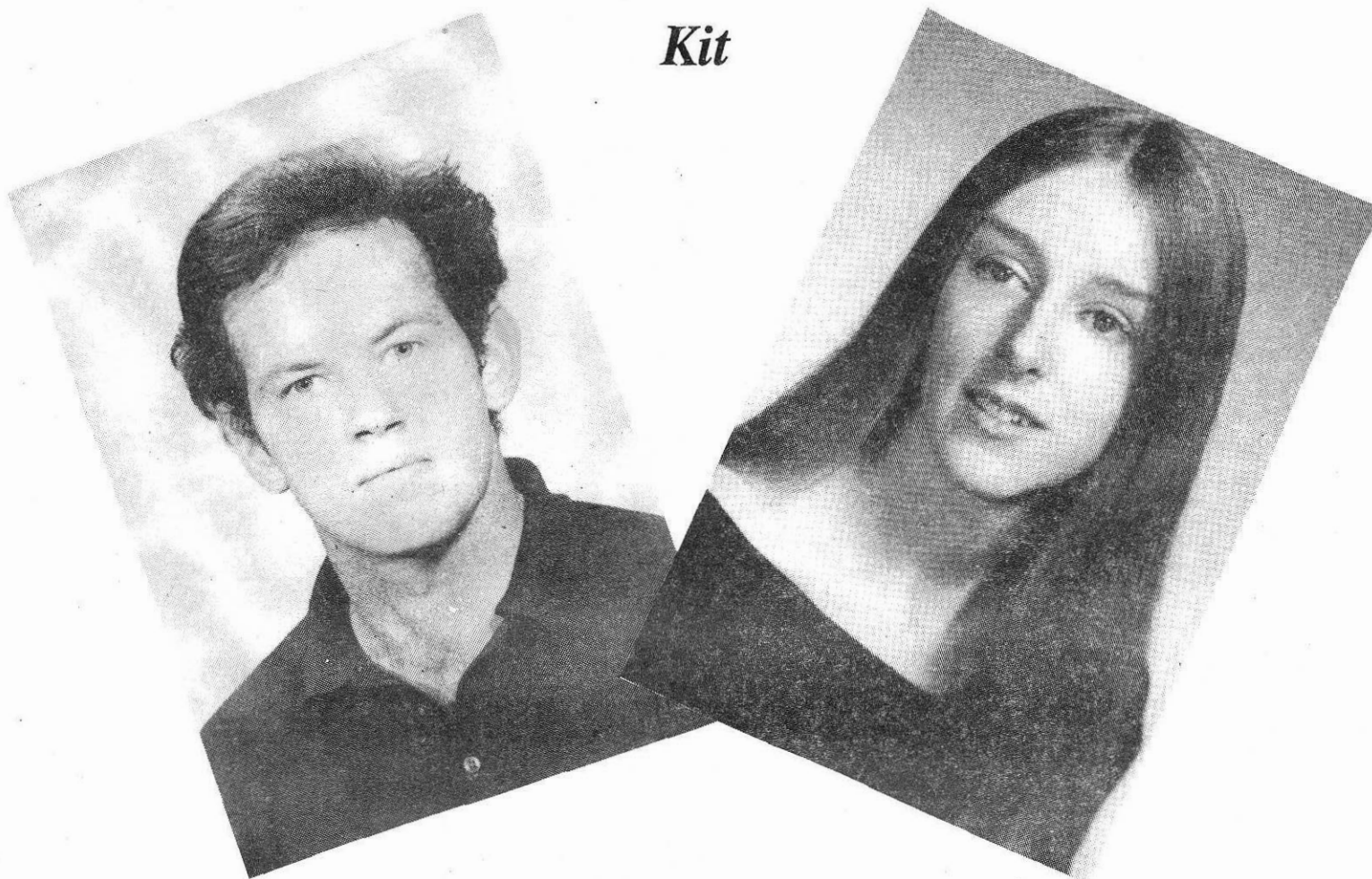
White phosphorous was used in  
Vietnam: if it lands on human flesh, it will  
burn through to the bone.

\* A Huey is a helicopter.

\* An APC is an armored personnel  
carrier.

**Doug Rawlings**  
**Mt. Vernon**  
is a member of  
Veterans for Peace

## Kit



She came to me with an outlaw in her hand. I was sixteen; she was two years older. I don't recall exactly how old he was; Gary was in his twenties, I guess. He was in trouble with the police for setting an abandoned car on fire. It was mischief. When the cruisers came after him, he fled into the Michigan pines. She trusted me because I had once helped her clean up after her tray of highball glasses crystalized to the floor in the restaurant where we worked. Now her lover was inconsolable with the law, on the run, and he wanted two things: a loaf of bread, because he was hungry, and a pair of scissors, so she could cut his hair before his capture, so he might at least escape being sodomized in jail. As she reached for the scissors, I noted the long pale scar on her left wrist.

Gary was caught, by and by, and he was issued a nine-month jail sentence. I meant to visit him but I never did. She didn't mention him again, ever, and I thought it was just as well. It was 1966.

\*\*\*

I returned to Culver, Indiana, for my final year of military school. The prospects were good: Honors Geometry, Honors French, Honors English, editor of both campus literary magazines, captain of the company football team. There was an interview scheduled with a representative from Dartmouth College. Things were set. I might become a psychiatrist. I was interested in all that, way back then.

Something happened. I don't know. I fell sick, and stayed nearly two months in the campus infirmary. It wasn't really physical, and it wasn't mental at all. It was a sort of existential illness that some of the best minds thereabouts, as well as some of the worst, could not quite figure. Eventually I was released, though to this day I haven't been cured.

I spent my nights smoking Camel cigarettes on the shore of the military lake. I thought about Vietnam and became anti-war. I thought about God and became a non-believer. I thought about life and became an artist. I was still feverish; I was sick in love with Kit, but I didn't know that.

My interview with the Dartmouth recruiter, in some room swirling with mahogany and pipe, went swell until he asked me what was the first thing I would do upon my arrival in New Hampshire. Perhaps he wished I'd say I would try to forge meaningful friendships. "Start a revolution," I replied quietly.

That's all.

With the one-fingered salute of a self-made private, I strolled through the Iron Gate. The hat I threw into the air, upon so long ago leaving Culver Military, has not yet touched ground.

\*\*\*

My more personal commencement was held evenings later, on the shore of another lake, in northern Michigan. I began spending my nights there, that June, thinking star thoughts, listening in the wind to the narcotic waves, letting darkness be my sweet fix. At times I felt utterly contained, and my solitude left me silvery inside. I was a poet born to die writing poetry, and all that goddamn goddamn stuff, which is still true now, after all these years, although life has lost its charm.

At other times, however, the surge and withdraw of those waves left me indistinctly anguished, derelict inside, inarticulate. The anarchy of the junkie waters would threaten things I couldn't quite comprehend. At such times I was an artist without an art.

The Fourth of July found me with Kit. It was a mistake, how we got together, broken dates left and right. We were good friends on a busted holiday night, drinking whiskey out of a brown pint by the lake; we talked books, we talked of Van Gogh and Vietnam.

The spirit is willing but the flesh sometimes was waylaid. Kit was naked on the sand, I more or less on top of her, somehow still wearing my shoes but nothing else, my pants parting forever on a long-fingered wave, she softly whispering the final love-monologue from some obscure novel, myself fumbling lost in a rattlesnake nectary, in a crazy race against time, loony miserable jubilant full of renaissance finally assured I was no longer virgin, though I felt no such large transition.

Three nights later we were in an abandoned shed by the lake. I was smoking and we were talking light years a minute—books, music, art, religion, politics; I had found the person I was going to spend the rest of my life with and I felt terribly lucky at seventeen.

The tight shack had lost all of its warmth, so I rose from the floor and closed the only window. No sooner had I sat down, Kit went over and opened it.

"Too much smoke?" I asked.

"No, smoke doesn't bother me," she replied. "It's just that I like to have an open window, in case I need it. I have to have an open window, that's all."

I thought that odd, but let it pass.

We stretched out on the floor for a while, in each other's arms, making our own warmth, which was better. Shirtless, I felt something pressing me through the pocket of her laced blouse and I asked.

"I can't explain, but I'll show you," she said, and I lit a match to find her revealing a carefully folded tissue. Inside was a razor blade.

"For protection?" I smiled.

"In a way," she replied. And then, after hesitation: "Protection from myself. It's another type of window. Someday you'll learn what I mean. That is, I think you will."

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Through the silence that followed, she rose from the floor and went to the window. I lit another cigarette, and looking up she was gone.

\*\*\*

I began my road years: Haight Ashbury, Monte Rio, Boston, Salem, Detroit, Lansing, Chicago, Cleveland, Washington D.C. I passed through all hundred and fifty states, burning.

Oh, down on the Haight it was the Summer of Love. It was so loud christ you couldn't hear a bomb drop. Hipsters, geezers, glue sniffers, juiceheads, body snatchers, low rollers, elderly sensualists, free-lance dictators, bounty hunters, rent-a-freaks, marriage brokers, Balkan spies, missionaries, narcs, riverboat pirates, altar boys, string collectors, Pinkerton detectives, game-show hosts, runaways, their parents, rapists, their parents too, and a lot of people beyond classification because they came to the District to find themselves, to become classified. Everybody was talking at the same time and it was so loud you couldn't hear a bomb drop and I'm not kidding.

I learned starvation. I knew what it was to break into places simply to find shelter. I hustled for a few dollars here and there, poker, pool. I never had a good memory, and I've always been nervous, but I picked my targets with steady wisdom. One of my early surprises was to find how easy it was to be methodical when hungry. I never sold my body, which was lean back then, although once I was offered a hundred dollars when I had only change in my pocket. I never dealt drugs, though old friends of mine claim I was known to have been on the receiving end.

\*\*\*

I tried college briefly, Northwestern University. It didn't work. Those were the Vietnam years, and I couldn't accept a student deferment, putting to use black kids as my shield against the yellow. My counselor connected me to the SDS, a nouveau radical group, but I felt like a left outlaw even with them. Kit sent a suicide letter and I bluffed a check and flew to her.

*"My darling by the time this reaches you I'll be dead. I've found a way: no blood, no guts, no pain. Remember how we used to laugh about it? I think I'm pregnant, by someone I'm not even speaking to anymore, but that's not the reason. I hate college and everybody here. I don't even know where I'm going—to hate that like you hate your own future. But it's myself most of all. I'm tired of being Kit, so tired of conversation, being intelligent. Right now I'm so nervous I couldn't tie a shoe. If only you could be here, hold me in your arms and tell me in your eyes I'm pretty once more and say "wait Kit, not now" and let me cry and cry. Kind of strange I should be writing you, of all people. But I love you more than anyone else in the world. Funny how that looks on paper. I never thought I'd be telling you that, but it doesn't really matter now, does it? Someday you'll find the right love I'm sure, to share your beautiful mind and body. I envy her already. She'll be a real princess, bluejeans and all. I wish now there's some sort of afterlife, because babe I couldn't bear not to see you again."*

\*\*\*

She made it through that time, and nearly all of the times after; I don't know how she did it but she did it and I was pleased. I held her close to me when I could. I was young and I was still learning about bodies (learning about minds would come later).

She seared me. I remember clearly how she was the first naked woman I ever saw in daylight. This was around 1968, and I had had two ricochet lovers in between. Sometimes I forget their names. But it was a glorious morning and Kit stood shining in a Chicago doorway her ass her fine back her pale brown triangle the scar on her wrist her long brilliant hair everything so immaculate but unresolved. I loved her then.

\*\*\*

A move to get close to her failed miserably. I was with my three good friends in life, other than Kit: Duane and Dot, who were married, and Jack. I used to kiss with Dot, in the back seat of Duane's car, back when I was seventeen. I kissed her breasts, too, oh and we talked of escaping to South America. Then I suddenly quit that act (she had golden hair) because her husband was my friend and I believed in loyalty.

We traveled to East Lansing, with a car full of amphetamine hope, rented a spacious place, but things untwined. Jack fast became Dot's lover, while Duane was out at work, and I got uncomfortable. Kit was a student at Michigan State but she was screwy and doing acid and no longer caring for me. I hit the road

again; one morning I simply put my thumb out and I wasn't certain if I was heading east or west but I knew I was going toward survival.

\*\*\*

Always I wrote her letters, as she thumbed her own way through the classics, and all her colleges—Michigan State and Catholic University and George Washington—finally surfacing in law school. I wrote her from the tiny and immense cities of my life:

*Kit I want to go with you to a place where there are no required formations  
Kit love is a word which neither of us can safely define  
Kit like a painting I've hung you on my heart  
Kit I reach for fireflies instead of stars  
Kit the war will get along without me  
Kit we would probably be unhappy even in heaven  
Kit those hippies honest to god they don't exactly have a Swiss sense of time  
Kit tell me you love me tonight because our addresses will be no good after a while  
My girl in Boston came to me all weepy  
The war is our wilderness now  
Kathleen I'm high and I keep track of time by your letters  
Kit sweet Kathleen I want to get into the thick of your life and convince you that any  
terrain you take without me will be wrong for both of us  
Kit I'm searching for the perfect place to bring you to  
Kit Kit a girl asked me to marry her the other night  
Darling please don't ever tell the bastards that I loved you  
Kit you are my window*

\*\*\*

I was never good enough for her; I was unsure and uneducated, by American standards. Poets had no future in the United States, never have. But there was always the possibility of old age to comfort us: if I made it to sixty, with a small amount of silver in my pocket and fresh crumbs to float up through the sky to the birds, to the birds, then maybe I had perhaps decided the right choices all along and she would come to believe in me.

I remember one night when we were standing naked in a lake, beneath an August moon and the waves whitecapping our thighs. She quoted purely from a book she'd been reading: *Less than a promise have I given, and yet more generous have you been to me. If in the twilight of memory we should meet once more, we shall speak again together and you shall sing to me a deeper song.* She was not embarrassed after she said this; she kissed me, then played with a wave.

Because Kit would not love, not exactly, not in the way I wanted her to, I allowed another woman into my life. Kit tried to come back but our door was already closing:

*"I think Carol is the only girl I'll ever find who can give me a relationship that approaches what I imagine life with you would be like. It's a shame that you and I never gave it a chance. When we talk about Someday, aren't we banking on the same set of variables that has proved miserable in the past? And each day they become more oppressive. Sometimes I think I may be too provincial for you. You say in your letter you want to spend a year or two traveling in Europe and you say you want to live with me someday. Well, I am 22. I won't be able to go to Europe with you, not now; I refuse to leave America unless I've something to come back to, if I'm to return at all. I'll be moving in with Carol in the fall, late September or October. You and I must decide how much we are willing to gamble on the chance of having a better relationship together than we could individually have with anybody else. We are dealing too with other people, you know. We should spend some more time together before autumn, ideally. But I must stay here and write; I realize, also, that you have commitments of your own. Once I decided to wait for you, and now I'm astonished by your words. Carol loves me, she does she does. I'm locked in. I feel like some RipVanWinkle man who's been waiting patiently in the corner for you over the years—and now he finds that what he thought were simple cobwebs were chains after all. Carol loves me: can you understand how safe I feel in her arms? Oh Kit can you understand? I have a shot at existence with her. Kit what can I do?"*

\*\*\*

Time later, after Carol and I broke up, my brother committed suicide. He had lived just a half mile away from me, and I guess his death left me pretty crazy inside. I couldn't sleep; I couldn't eat; I could hardly speak. I called Carol but she was too busy to allow my sorrow into her life, even though we had spent all those

*cont'd next page*



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years together. That's how it is sometimes. So I called Kit.

Kit immediately instructed me to pull the telephone out to my porch, and we talked for three hours beneath the Michigan stars. I was so whiskey blue and she let me cry myself to sleep flat out on a concrete slab in the smack of winter. She *knew*. Yes I should have gone to her then, made things right, but I was crippled inside.

\* \* \*

My friends are pretty much dead now, now that I've moved to Maine. Duane hanged himself; Jack died in a chase. Carol could be alive, but I don't really know.

Frank Johnson  
Tenants Harbor  
*writes on a tidal cove*

## Forty Weeks Term

She awakes naked. The room is dark. The sheets are under her husband. She has only a corner of the bedspread curled tightly in her hands. Her husband pulls at the corner. The dream she just left hung and covered her mind. She lets herself think about her dream and smiles at her silliness and fears and rubs her still swollen stomach. She had the baby in her dream and it didn't hurt. All her friends, all her family, and her doctor told her that childbirth is the most painful experience any woman ever has. But they were all wrong. She did not feel any pain.

The baby was just there. The baby was not red or discolored with the usual closed eyes and clenched fists. It looked like an eighth month old infant with large eyes and a playful grin. The books were wrong. The childbirth pictures were wrong. And she had been smug. She took her baby to everyone who told her that childbirth was going to hurt and she said laughing, holding her adorable and grinning baby against her now suddenly flat stomach, that childbirth did not hurt *her*.

There was no hospital stay, no memory of any hospital at all. She had the baby in her sleep. She awoke to a twenty pound baby dressed in a mickey mouse nighty. Her whole family was there in her bedroom surrounding her bed. This did not surprise her. They were so impressed and so astonished with how she and her baby looked. They kissed her and her mother and father told her they were so proud of her, that the other girls had such miserable and long labors. Her husband stood near her head with his hand on her and the baby and said that his wife always seemed to do everything differently than other people.

She let them hold her delightful baby and act silly over it. They admired her baby's ability to smile so soon after birth. They told her she was fortunate the baby already had teeth as teething is such a difficult time for both the child and the parents. But, then, her baby suddenly turned into a Boston Terrier. A small, homely, fierce Boston Terrier. It snarled and bit anyone who held out a hand. No one wanted to hold it. They looked at her with sympathy and disgust. They asked her if she was going to change the baby's name. They said the name Matthew no longer fit, and that breast feeding was now impossible. She gave birth to a dog, and not a sad eyed Cocker Spaniel, but an ugly snapping flat faced Boston Terrier. The mickey mouse nighty vanished. There were no more hugs and caresses for her, but the truth of her husband's words remained unchanged.

The dog officer pushed abruptly through her family group and told her the dog had to be euthanized. She didn't know why there was a dog officer in her bedroom. She told him that he had no right to take her dog unless he found it loose on the street. He said there was a new law, that all dogs that bit people had to be found and put to sleep. But the dog didn't bite her. It looked adoringly into her face. She knew the dog was unattractive, a fault she blamed on her poor diet during pregnancy, but the dog was hers. The dog officer tried to pull the dog away from her like the witch from the *Wizard of Oz*. She clutched the dog tightly and yelled. Then she woke up. She appreciated that there was no one in her bedroom.

She now pulls hard on the bedspread. Her husband also wakes up and asks her why she is taking all the covers. She doesn't reply as he will deny the answer. She thinks about telling him her dream. Then they could laugh over

I'll never find Dot again, her sunshine hair and taut breasts in an old Chevrolet. I know the meaning of memories, and they do not make me particularly sad. I can adjust to all that.

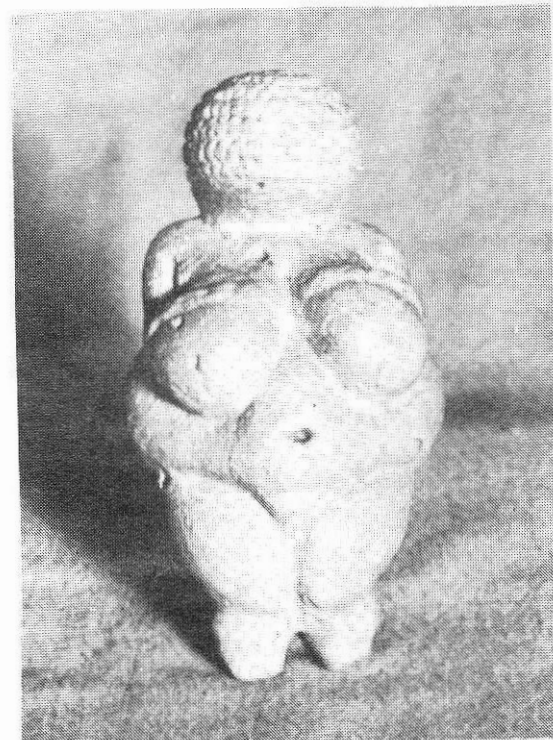
My heart was broken in two a while back (how else can I explain it?), and I sought out Kit, for wisdom and consolation, but no luck she was gone. She had killed herself with pills in a room full of flowers, down in Washington. Her father returned our correspondence, six hundred letters bound by a yellow ribbon. I could have come to her, as she often came to me. I would have held her in my arms and told her in my eyes she was pretty, and I would have let her weep between my hands. What a blow her death was: not just the moon, not just the stars, but the sky fell from my sky.

it together. But her friend told her dream during pregnancy to her husband and he teased her about it later.

Her friend dreamed that she gave birth to a tropical plant. She remembers that her friend was angry because the plant was tropical and not indigenous to Maine. Her friend wasn't able to put the tropical plant outdoors and had to build a special greenhouse for it. Her friend, however, gave birth to the plant in the hospital. Her family and friends went to the hospital nursery to see it. They all went to her room and told her how sorry they were, but she could make the best of it. Her friend was angry with their remarks and eager to see her baby again. Her friend didn't remember any cause for concern or why she needed to make the best of it. But her friend's husband carried the dream into reality by bringing her a tropical plant as a gift in the hospital.

She, however, does not want a Boston Terrier as a gift after the baby is born. She looks at her husband who once again has taken all the covers and gone back to sleep. She had told him her friend's dream and he would remember the conclusion to the story. She could, however, lie and say that the baby turned into a Dalmatian puppy or a black sports car with air conditioning. She smiles as she thinks of the possibilities of what she could tell her husband in the morning. She will have to think about what she wants that would still sound believable. She gets up and goes to the bathroom, then goes back to bed and yanks the covers around her. As she rolls on her side and closes her eyes, she tries to picture what she wants, but all she can really picture is a grinning baby in a mickey mouse nighty.

Helen Peppe  
Gray  
*is a free-lance writer & new mother*



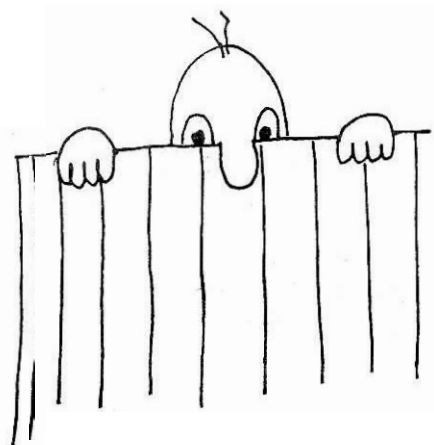
Venus of Willendorf, c. 15,000 B.C.,  
stone. One of oldest known fertility figures.

Light Verse

### State of the Union

See the president.  
His name is Dick.  
See his wife.  
Her name is Jane.  
They put their dog to sleep  
Because it sniffed cocaine.

**Douglas Woodsum**  
**Cape Elizabeth**  
works at Middlebury



### Where is Kilroy Today?

Gone from Walls  
Halls and Urin-  
Als,

Seldom seen in  
10c Stalls  
Or Johns in any  
Classy Halls.

Healthy in the Forties  
He returned from  
Assorted Sorties  
And remained a Sporty  
Figure  
In the Nifty Fifties.

But a Peace Sign in  
the Sixties  
Fixed him—Quickly

Home Kilroy boy  
Your Cheery Lear is needed  
Here  
To reassure us—in our  
Ruts—that we're OK

It's them that's Nuts.

**Rodney Cole**  
**Belgrade**  
teaches at UMA

### Fly Fishing for Lizards In the Desert

Only Kings or Queens  
would have other people  
kneel before them and kiss their hand  
(oh, and the Pope too)

Only Evangelists or Charlatans  
would have their visions  
paid for by their believers  
(oh, and the Pope too)

Only Politicians or Corporate Moguls  
would have their laws  
made into something flexible  
(oh, and the Pope too)

Me?  
I want only to fly fish for  
lizards in the desert and have  
my pizza delivered in an ambulance.

**Wayne Atherton**  
**Sanford**  
works for a food broker

### Butter Mountain

(from The Butter Poems sequence)

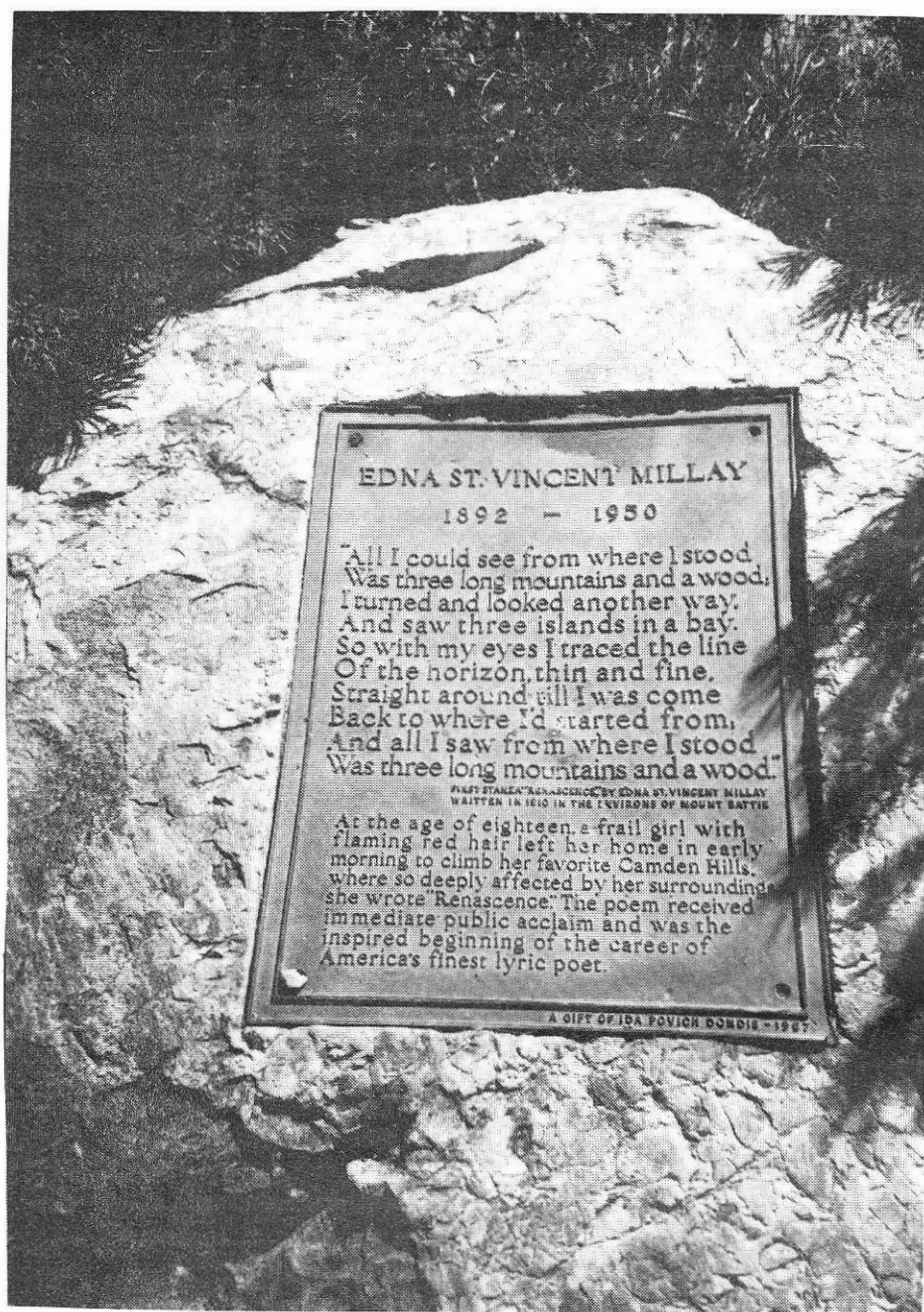
In a country below the waterline,  
no great hills block the view.  
But there is a mountain, made of cows,  
or rather made of what they make.  
In the Netherlands the ground is soggy  
but firming up with sheep and cow dung.  
And every day the cows give milk  
and the Dutch churn it into butter.  
An every day they eat some, met brood,  
and send some throughout Europe, the world.  
The fertilizer doesn't pile up  
because the Dutch, done churning,  
spread it filling in tulip fields and meren.  
It makes more for cows to eat,  
making more cows, and more butter.  
And the mountain grows of butter stored.  
Its spread is thick yet stopped  
by import ceilings and cows in other countries.  
So in a land a little short on hills  
the Dutch keep churning and spreading,  
proud at the height and sight of the butter mountain.

**Duff Plunkett**  
**Washington D.C.**  
is a UMO graduate



Formerly, the man pictured above was a macho cowboy type, deeply enamored of the Hemingway ethic. His wife, Josie, found enrichment in the arms of another woman. The man pictured above soon became a woman and his wife, finding her lover with a man, became herself, and needed no one.

**Wayne Atherton**  
**Sanford**  
is a poet & visual artist



Millay plaque, Mt. Battie

My candle burns at both ends;  
It will not last the night;  
But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends—  
It gives a lovely light!

What lips my lips have kissed, and where, and why,  
I have forgotten, and what arms have lain  
Under my head till morning; but the rain  
Is full of ghosts tonight, that tap and sigh  
Upon the glass and listen for reply,  
And in my heart there stirs a quiet pain  
For unremembered lads that not again  
Will turn to me at midnight with a cry.  
Thus in the winter stands the lonely tree,  
Nor knows what birds have vanished one by one,  
Yet knows its boughs more silent than before:  
I cannot say what loves have come and gone,  
I only know that summer sang in me  
A little while, that in me sings no more.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

## Don't Bring Me Any Lobsters

The Letters of Edna St. Vincent Millay

At the rise of her career in 1913 with the publication of "Renaissance" to the height of her fame with the 1931 collection of love sonnets in *Fatal Interview*, until her death in 1950, Edna St. Vincent Millay was an inveterate letter writer. After she moved from Camden, Maine to New York City, she wrote a stream of letters home to her mother and two sisters, Kathleen and Norma, gossiping about her exciting new world at Vassar College and the artists' circle into which she was making her debut. At times Millay's letters ached for the coast of Maine and the intimate family life she left behind. At other times the letters reveal her rockbottom fears and insecurities, which she deliberately kept hidden behind the public *persona* of her poems.

The account of her life which emerges from her letters often contradicts the public view of her as the symbolic "free woman of the age." All through the 1920's and 1930's, she personified for her readers, and for those who knew her, the spirit of the time: its restless exuberance and defiance of convention. Comparable to the status of Stephen King's bestselling fiction today, Millay's poetry in the early 1920's had probably been more read and promoted than that of any other living American poet. Just in her own lifetime, she sold over three-quarters of a million copies of her books. Many still remember her as she was known in the 1920's: "The Poet Laureate of the 1920's," "The Spokesman for the New Woman," and "The Voice of Rebellious Youth."

It was really the candor of her love poems during the early 1920's that led to her reputation as the symbolic figure—the "free woman" of the age. She did, in fact, have numerous love affairs during this period with such literary figures as Edmund Wilson. Along with the uninhibited love poems, her bohemian life style contributed to her reputation as a free spirit that still endures today.

However, the same flippant poet who published "My candle burns at both ends," one of the most famous lines in American poetry, also wrote at about the

same time to her friend and mentor Arthur Davison Ficke:

Arthur, dear,—

Please don't think me negligent or rude. I am both, in effect, of course, but please don't think me either.—My mind is full of pounding steam, like a radiator. And I am sodden with melancholy. However, I should not be saying such things to you, who have arrived quite honestly & even meritoriously at your wits' end: my own progress, while by no means vicarious, is rather piffling.

[1920]

In a letter to her mother from this same period, she refers to her work in *Second April* as "not so good as it should have been, actually. I think, personally, they are giving it more than it deserves." And in another letter to her mother, she writes from England that "I have a curious feeling that someday I shall marry, and have a son; and that my husband will die; and that you and I and my little boy will all live together on a farm." In this same letter of September 23, 1921, Millay reveals to her mother "a desire to write not only the things that I do but also the things that I think."

While so many of her poems only skirt the surface of her emotional life in New York's Greenwich Village, her letters to Ficke and occasionally those to her mother and sisters reveal another side of Millay's personality. What she exposes of her mistrust of conventional marriage in the 1921 letter to her mother is not so much the fear of having a family as of marital security itself. All her life, Millay craved the approval and emotional support of influential men, while she accepted the mutual reliance and interdependence of her female family members and friends as "givens." Dark, fragile, and fearful of success in love and life, it is a melancholy self which is often at odds with the poet's tougher, more audacious *persona*.



How much she was scarred by the divorce of her parents when she was eight is uncertain. She was the first daughter of three girls, and she may have been called Vincent because Mrs. Millay had expected a boy. Whether or not the boyish name was the reason, Vincent did have more freedom growing up than most girls of that time. Certainly, she took on the role of surrogate mother/father to her younger sisters when Mrs. Millay was called out of town for nursing jobs. In a letter to her mother on July 7, 1911 from Camden, Millay boasts about the two good-sized cod she caught out on Penobscot Bay with two hooks and a line. In the same letter, she also brags about the delicious bread she baked, as well as the baked beans she "had awfully good luck with..." Millay reports, "I have made pies, cakes and doughnuts and we are living almost wholly from home cooking." She also tells her mother about financial matters she is handling in her absence. Like her mother, she approached the dual role of father/mother as both a challenge and a survival tactic.

Information about her father is regrettably scarce. With the exception of references to Henry Millay in a few letters published in the authoritative *Letters of Edna St. Vincent Millay* edited by Allan Ross Macdougall in 1952, Millay rarely mentions her father after her Camden years. A high school teacher and school superintendent in Union, Maine, Mr. Millay did not contribute regularly to the family's support after the divorce. However, he did keep in touch with them and in March, 1912 when he became ill, Vincent went to stay with him.

In a letter to her mother dated March 4, 1912 from Kingman, Maine, Millay attributes her knowledge of deer hunting and bobcats to her father. She shows concern for his health and recovery from pneumonia and a bad heart and is impressed that "so many people inquire for one man. All festivities here are postponed until he recovers. An M.D. and an L.L.D. from somewhere around here came in on the train today just to see him a minute—great friends of his." Even though she speaks of him at times with distanced awe and respect, the poet offers that "I see Papa twice a day. We can't talk very much but he loves to have me with him." At the age of 20 there is already a mixed tone of yearning and skepticism about the permanence of love, which the reader of the Kingman Letter senses between the lines in Millay's doubt about her father's condition, her reluctance to state her feelings more openly about him, and the way in which she writes about him as an outsider would judge a prominent acquaintance.

Millay's upbringing in a "broken" home and the absence of a father may have contributed to her later feelings about men and doubts of the staying power of love and marriage, which was a recurrent theme in her poetry. The inability to hide her need for attention and caretaking by such father figures as her mentor Arthur Davison Ficke, Edmund Wilson, and, later, her husband Eugen Boissevain was reflected in her love poems which insist that love is transient and cannot last: underlying the context of the poems is the whisper of the poet's begging to be contradicted and saved from her uncertainty and disillusion.

In her letters to these men, Millay often speaks in the language and posture of a coy, often girlish, coquettish tease. On December 15, 1912, she writes Ficke "I'll slap your face" in response to a remark about the possibility of her copying a line in one of her poems from a book. In a letter of January 12, 1913, she teasingly implores Flick not to lose faith in her, and she continues to write to him throughout her years at Vassar College, treating him alternately as a father to whom she reports what she is reading and studying and as a suitor whom she scolds for not sending her his photograph or visiting her when he's in New York City.

In a pivotal letter to Ficke dated October 29, 1920 from New York City, she affirms an undying friendship and love for her friend and former mentor. Millay writes, "It doesn't matter at all that we never see each other, & that we write so seldom. We shall never escape from each other." She continues:

*It is very dear to me to know that you love me, Arthur,—just as I love you, quietly, quietly, yet with all your strength, & with a strength greater than your own that drives you towards me like a wind. It is a thing that exists, simply, like a sapphire, like anything roundly beautiful; there is nothing to be done about it, —& nothing one would wish to do.—There are moments, of course, when I am with you, that it is different. One's body, too, is so lonely . . .*

*You will never grow old to me, or die, or be lost in any way.*

—Vincent.

The coyness and coquettishness have given way to mature feelings about the strength of desire between them. However, there is also a note of urgent fatalism here, a strong undertone of intuitive knowledge that perfection in love can only be achieved through separation and distance. Earlier in the letter, Millay says that she longs "for you in an anguish of sweet memory, & send all my spirit out to you in passion." Curiously, these qualities expressed for and about Ficke are hard to read without feeling they may be the force of displaced love for a father she was unable to address with these words.



Millay

Vassar College Library

In her letters to Ficke and to Witter Bynner in 1922, Millay moves between them, creating a web of inevitability of her own making. She makes Bynner's own case for a marriage proposition based on their mutual love for Ficke. On January 23, 1922, she writes Bynner from Vienna:

*It is true that I love Arthur. But we have all known that for some time,—haven't we?—I shall love him always. He is something to me that nobody else is. But why should that trouble you, Hal? Don't you love him, too? Don't you love several people?—If you loved me, I should not want you to love only me. I should think less highly of you if you did . . .*

*Besides, I should not wish to marry Arthur, even if it were possible,—so it is not because you are free and he is not, Hal, as may have come into your mind.*

Whatever had come into Hal's mind, Millay's is truly vacillating. On January 24, 1922 she asks Ficke if she were to marry Bynner, "Would you be sorry or glad if I did? . . . Of course, there is every geometrical reason why I should. We should make such a beautiful design, don't you see,—Hal and you and I." And later on March 1, 1922, she writes to her sister from Budapest, "As for my getting married, I may and I may not. Because it very likely will never happen. But it may." Finally on December 17, 1922, upon hearing about Ficke's liaison with Gladys Brown, Millay notifies Ficke from Bouches du Rhone, France:

*Is this a snippy letter, dear?—No, it isn't. I shall love you till the day I die.—Though I shan't always be thinking about it, thank God.—Yet I shall be thinking about it every time I think about you, that's sure.*

*As for Hal, there's not the slightest danger that I shall marry him: he has jilted me!*

The man who did not jilt Millay was Eugen Boissevain. They were married at Croton-on-Hudson on July 18, 1923, and the rest is history. Boissevain became a guardian of the poet's time, health, and writing energy. He gave up his business as an importer to assume responsibility for the care of Millay's talent, body, and social demands. When she became an invalid in her middle years, Boissevain was there to assist during nervous breakdowns and other health problems. When her husband died suddenly of a lung condition in the fall of 1949, Millay lived alone in their Steepletop home in upstate New York. She lasted little over a year and was found dead on the stairs of Steepletop in October, 1950. Whether she lived that year of widowhood in a state of feeling once more abandoned by a male she

loved is unclear, but her letters reveal a return to an attitude of bravado and cheerful "stiff upper lip." Millay's letters taper off during her period of bereavement and she takes on a distancing posture once again in order to deal with her loss.

On December 10, 1949, she writes Manuel Maria Mischoulon from Steepletop: "You feared that I might be ill. I am far worse than ill. My husband has died." She bravely attempts to conceal her feelings:

*I cannot write about it, nor about anything else. And I cannot answer questions. But I wanted to get some word to you, you were so distressed by my silence.*

By April 20, 1950 she is able to write Mrs. Mary V. Herron that "My own sweet wonderful darling died of cancer. As did, a few years ago, our good friend, that fine poet, Arthur Davison Ficke." She wonders how she is going to stand the spring, and she admits "I'm plenty scared. Not scared that I shan't muddle through in some way or other. Just scared. Shrinking from being hurt too much."

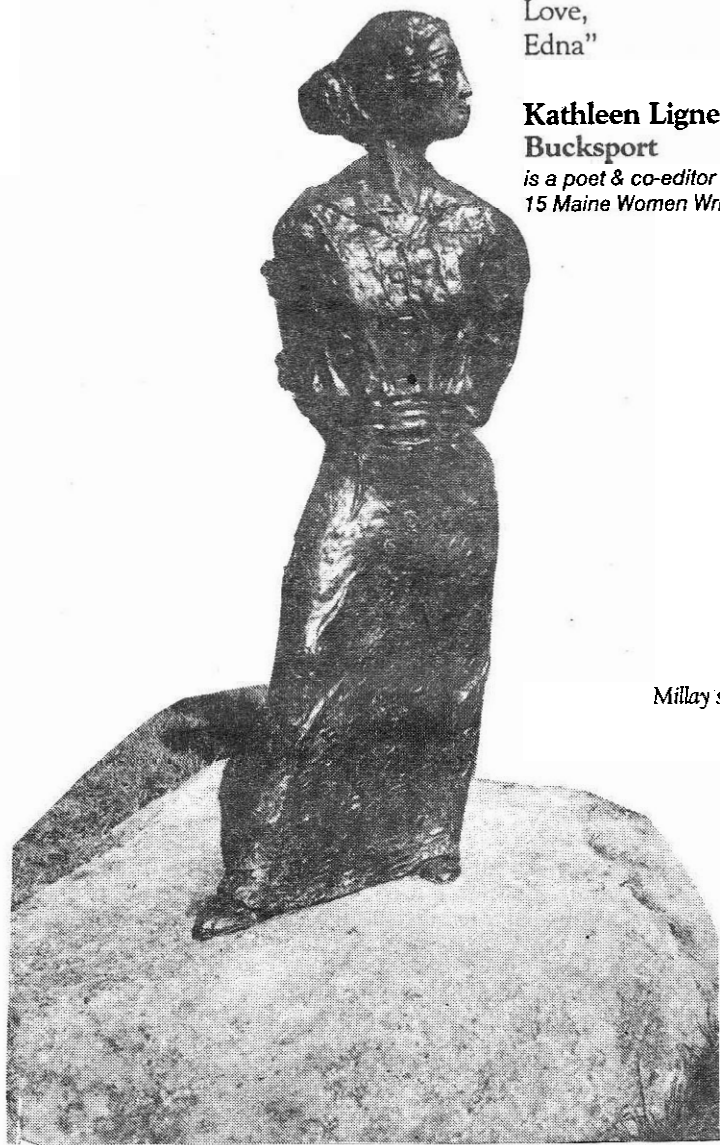
During July, 1950, Millay was busy writing a Thanksgiving poem commissioned by *Saturday Evening Post*, and the letters pick up with her spirits. Although the public persona of her poems never regained its full voice, on October 9, 1950, shortly before her death, Millay gave it the old rebellious ring in a letter to Mrs. Esther Root Adams. "Dear Tess," she wrote, "No, my dear. Don't bring me any lobsters. And don't bring me any sea-weed.

Love,  
Edna"

**Kathleen Lignell**

**Bucksport**

is a poet & co-editor of *The Eloquent Edge*:  
15 Maine Women Writers



Millay sculpture, Camden

Women have loved before as I love now;  
At least, in lively chronicles of the past—  
Of Irish waters by a Cornish prow  
Or Trojan waters by a Spartan mast  
Much to their cost invaded—here and there,  
Hunting the amorous line, skimming the rest,  
I find some woman bearing as I bear  
Love like a burning city in the breast.  
I think however that of all alive  
I only in such utter, ancient way  
Do suffer love; in me alone survive  
The unregenerate passions of a day  
When treacherous queens, with death upon the tread,  
Heedless and willful, took their knights to bed.

E.St.V.M.

## Millay's first sonnet was named "Letters"

—I was about fifteen, I think, when I wrote it,—not very young to be trying my hand at my first sonnet. (Somewhat young, perhaps, to be burning in my lonely grate packets of letters yellow with age!) Here it is:

### Old Letters

*I know not why I am so loath to lay  
Your yellowed leaves along the glowing log,  
Unburied dead, that cling about and clog—  
With indisputable, insistent say  
Of the stout past's all inefficient fray—  
The striving present, rising like a fog  
To rust the active me, that am a cog  
In the great wheel of industry today.  
Yet, somehow, in this visible farewell  
To the crude symbols of a simpler creed,  
I find a pain that had not parallel  
When passed the faith itself,—we give small heed  
To incorporeal truth, let slack or swell;  
But truth made tangible, is truth indeed.*

The word "indisputable," as used in line four of the above, is not, I fear, an elegant attempt to stress my syllables after the manner of Shelley, but, rather, a sturdy, whole-hearted mispronunciation.

The word "cog" at the end of line seven is not brought in just for the rhyme. This is the only part of my first sonnet which may be said to be "real," as distinct from "fanciful." That year for the first time, during the months of my summer vacation from high school (where I had taken a course in typewriting and stenography) I had a job: I was a typist in a lawyer's office in Camden, Maine.

The phrase "let slack or swell," in the next to the last line, is not so strained and far-fetched a metaphor as it sounds; it refers to the gradual ebbing and the gradual flooding of the tide,—an expression natural enough to a girl who had lived all her life at the very tide-line of the sea.

E.St.V.M.

Steepletop  
August, 1941

Oh, think not I am faithful to a vow!  
Faithless am I save to love's self alone.  
Were you not lovely I would leave you now:  
After the feet of beauty fly my own.  
Were you not still my hunger's rarest food,  
And water ever to my wildest thirst,  
I would desert you—think not but I would!—  
And seek another as I sought you first.  
But you are mobile as the veering air,  
And all your charms more changeful than the tide,  
Wherefore to be inconstant is no care:  
I have but to continue at your side.  
So wanton, light and false, my love, are you,  
I am most faithless when I most am true.

E.St.V.M.

- 1892 Born February 22, Rockland, to Henry Tolman Millay and Cora Buzzelle Millay. Soon moved to Union, where father became h.s. teacher and superintendent.
- 1893 Norma born, December.
- 1896 Kathleen born, May.
- 1900 Parents divorce. Father moves to Kingman, Maine, becomes school superintendent and selectman.
- 1901 Cora moves with three girls to Rockport (briefly), then to Ring's Island, MA, then Newburyport (where Cora grew up), then to Camden.
- 1902 Edna nearly drowns in Atlantic; will later recount incident in "Renaissance."
- 1905-09 Skips 8th grade; begins h.s. in Camden. Reads, walks, writes poetry, plays piano. Meets Abbie Huston Evans.
- 1912 Norma works as summer waitress at Whitehall Inn. At party for workers, Edna reads "Renaissance," which will soon be published. A NYC visitor, Caroline B. Dow, hears poem and arranges funding for college.
- 1913 Arrives NYC, attends Barnard for winter semester to "prep" for Vassar. Lived at YWCA, meets Sara Teasdale, sees Sarah Bernhardt, is accompanied everywhere by a young Nicaraguan poet. Summers back in Camden, studying mathematics, history and Latin for Vassar. From Camden, NYC seems "just across the yard, you know, in everything but distance." In September, enrolls in Vassar.
- 1917 Graduates with A.B., after much rebellion and eccentric behavior. Went AWOL to hear Caruso; wrote dramas and acted in them. Vassar President accommodates her, saying "I know all about poets at college, and I don't want a banished Shelley on my doorstep." Helps Kathleen enroll at Vassar. Hears and admires feminist Inez Mulholland (soon to be Eugen Boissevain's first wife).
- 1917-21 Lives in Greenwich Village, her famous "bohemian" years. Acts with Provincetown Players. Publ. *Renaissance and Other Poems*. Publishes unserious stories under pseudonym "Nancy Boyd." Writes for *Vanity Fair*. Norma and Edna share a flat; with Kathleen and Cora, family takes NYC by storm.
- 1921-22 Travels in Europe, by horseback to Albania, then lives in Vienna and Hungary. Poor health. Cora joins her in Paris for a long visit. Writes to one lover, "We shall never escape from each other," while planning to marry his best friend.
- 1923 Returns to NYC. Meets widower Eugen Boissevain, and is married in Croton-on-Hudson in July. Serious intestinal surgery. Publ. *The Harp-Weaver*. At National Women's Party in Washington, D.C., reads sonnet "The Pioneer," dedicated to the late Inez Mulholland.
- 1924 Moves with Eugen to the "dollhouse" at 75½ Bedford, near famous Chumley's Bar. American reading tours; with Eugen, tours Orient.
- 1925 Village days end. Edna and Eugen buy a huge farm and old homestead in remote Berkshires, near Austerlitz, N.Y. "Steepletop" will be their permanent home.
- 1927 An opera of Edna's performed at the Met. Jailed briefly in protest of execution of Sacco and Vanzetti.
- 1928-39 Health declines. Translates Baudelaire. Volume of poetry follows volume, but literary tastes shift and her reputation fades.
- 1940 Obsession with WW II results in propaganda poetry, which further damages her reputation as a poet.
- 1941-48 Lives reclusive life with Eugen at Steepletop, and on Ragged Island in Casco Bay, which they bought in 1933. One of several nervous breakdowns in 1944; cannot write for two years.
- 1949 Eugen dies of stroke, age 69. Edna hospitalized for nerves & alcohol.
- 1950 Edna dies of heart attack fourteen months later, alone at Steepletop.

from *Renaissance*

(opening stanza)

All I could see from where I stood  
Was three long mountains and a wood;  
I turned and looked another way,  
And saw three islands in a bay.  
So with my eyes I traced the line  
Of the horizon, thin and fine,  
Straight around till I was come  
Back to where I'd started from;  
And all I saw from where I stood  
Was three long mountains and a wood.

\* \* \*

(concluding stanza)

The world stands out on either side  
No wider than the heart is wide;  
Above the world is stretched the sky,—  
No higher than the soul is high.  
The heart can push the sea and land  
Farther away on either hand;  
The soul can split the sky in two,  
And let the face of God shine through.  
But East and West will pinch the heart  
That can not keep them pushed apart;  
And he whose soul is flat—the sky  
Will cave in on him by and by.

E.St.V.M.

## *Below Mount Battie*

None of us boys liked her  
and she had few friends  
among the girls  
such superior airs  
when she wasn't even born here  
acted as if she lived at the heights  
instead of downtown  
and she was too intense  
too mad for love—  
the gush we called her  
the mad drool, Miss Passionate.

And her mother wasn't even a nurse  
she went to homes  
and cared for the elderly, the bedridden—  
she washed their feet!  
And that gambler of a father  
ran off and left them.

She wanted to be class poet  
but we wouldn't have it  
we elected Billy  
he wrote well enough for us.

I mean  
who could have known?

Arnold Perrin  
Union  
edits the New England Sampler





Millay at Steepletop

Love is not all: it is not meat nor drink  
Nor slumber nor a roof against the rain;  
Nor yet a floating spar to men that sink  
And rise and sink and rise and sink again;  
Love can not fill the thickened lung with breath,  
Nor clean the blood, nor set the fractured bone;  
Yet many a man is making friends with death  
Even as I speak, for lack of love alone.  
It well may be that in a difficult hour,  
Pinned down by pain and moaning for release,  
Or nagged by want past resolution's power,  
I might be driven to sell your love for peace,  
Or trade the memory of this night for food.  
It well may be. I do not think I would.

E.St.V.M.

## Vincent: Her Poetry and Pose

Cora Buzzell Millay's brother was seriously injured in an accident at sea, and received wonderful care at NYC's St. Vincent's hospital. In gratitude, Cora gave her first-born "St. Vincent" as a middle name. In one of the many ironies that were to mark the poet's life, the hospital was in Greenwich Village, where she herself was to live for seven hectic years and whose free-thinking bohemian spirit she was to epitomize. Her friends called her "Edna" and her Dutch husband "Aid-na," but she herself seemed to use "Vincent" both as a mask and a complicated symbol to suggest that a brash little girl from Hicksville, Maine had as much right as any male to live the free-wheeling, sexually liberated, heavy-drinking life of the 1920s in New York. She typically signed her name with all of her initials, "E.St.V.M." The use of two names suggests some of the tensions in her personality—the surface toughness so many in the 1920s tried to project, vs. her emotional vulnerability; her willingness to live hard and fast and to take chances, vs. her quite desperate desire for security, seclusion and sustenance (a hospital's function, and later, the role of her wonderfully protective husband, Eugen, at their remote retreat in the Berkshires). At a time in American life when people seemed to have more fun, or at least appreciated a sense of humor and were less rigidly ism-matical, her friends and lovers (would-be or otherwise) sensed Millay's duality, and wrote playful limericks about it. Kenneth Burke, the literary critic: "There was a young woman named Saint/ Who was named for something she ain't." Her first lover in the Village, Floyd Dell, found her "a scared little girl from Maine," yet her shocked and lapping public knew only the emancipated ingenue reinventing the love poem by tossing off first lines like "What lips these lips have kissed," or "What arms have lain/ Under my head till morning." But Burke and others knew: "I've told you the story today," he wrote, "Of Edna St. Vincent Millay/ While omitting the parts/ That would shatter men's hearts,/ Not befitting a bachelor to say." They knew.

Millay herself knew. As early as 1917, she could write, "After all's said and done,/ What should I be but a harlot and a nun?" She knew how hard she had to try to live up to the image of the 20s "IT"-girl of the magazines. It took real effort, and it was scary. She knew she had neither the hide nor the heart for it. After seven years in the Village—and that in early 1925 before the decade was really Roaring—she and Eugen packed it in and headed for the hermitage three miles outside Austerlitz, N.Y., where they would live out their decades, with occasional spells on equally remote Ragged Island in Casco Bay, to be broken by

her reading tours (which she hated) and by trips to Asia and Florida. The literary lioness had ceased to roar, in all but her poems—a fact she kept carefully hidden from her adoring public. In other words, the nun won over the harlot, the blasé flirt who could lightly write "And if I love you Wednesday,/ Well, what is that to you?/ I do not love you Thursday—/ So much is true" had to work to maintain her pose. In her deliberately-chosen isolation, she sank into herself and came to rest on her own thorny personality—by turns moody and engaging, utterly devoted to fulfilling the strictures of her own High Art, yet more than willing to write trashy poetical propaganda for WWII. In many ways, seclusion served her. She became a better poet. True, she never again turned to the Emersonian transcendentalism that inspired her teenage masterpiece, "Renascence," where she yokes earth and sky, and experiences mystical, almost evangelical, transformations. Yet that is not to be regretted because—great poem that it is—to a 1990s eye there is something hoked-up about it, staged, and there is also what even one of her admiring critics (Edward Davison) calls "girlish pretty-pretty-ness," for example, in the coy flavor of this line about the sky—"I 'most could touch it with my hand." What Millay did was to settle down to developing and refining her truly serious themes—man's precarious relation to Beauty ("I am waylaid by Beauty," she wrote), the transience of all love, and the outrage at the fact of Death's existence. These were her serious business, and her true contributions to our literature. She may have written "World, world, I cannot get thee close enough," but in fact, with both lovers and literature Millay was most comfortable—and creative—when distancing herself.

This refusal to engage deeply with another human (except Eugen) lies at the heart of her hit-and-run, love-'em-and-leave-'em flings of her Village days. She was hiding behind the pose of Liberation when she wrote her "Dear Floyd" letter to Dell: "I'm not the right girl to cook your meals and wash and iron your shirts, as a good wife should. It just wouldn't work out." True, Millay was messy, a poor (non-existent?) housekeeper, and later Eugen cheerfully took over such tasks. But she is lying to Dell. More recent biographers have a picnic accounting for her affairs in this period; one actually makes a count (18). One of the infatuated, the literary critic Edmund Wilson, quipped, "Edna's had so many lovers we should start an alumni association." Some biographers speculate that her inability to trust, or commit, followed by the utter opposite, her collapse forevermore into the protective, benevolent, arms of the genial, bear-like Boissevain, resulted from

psychic scarring from her father's departure from the family when she was eight years old. In my opinion, there is little evidence to support such speculation. But behind the bravado, the poet quivered: "I may be shattered/ Like a vessel too thin/ For certain vibrations," she once wrote, betraying brittleness. As early as 1920 she was writing Wilson of "another small nervous breakdown," one of many to disrupt her life. Wilson noticed her distancing: "What interests her is seldom the people themselves, but her own emotions about them . . ." It goes too far to identify her with her character Pierrot in *Aria Da Capo* who says, "I am become a socialist. I love humanity, but I hate people." After all, Millay got herself arrested for protesting the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti, and her WW II efforts were truly heroic and humane. Yet there is in her some bit of Pierrot's suspicion of individuals.

As the years wore on, her inner desperation surfaced again and again. When both of her sisters, now also living in NYC, married, she noted, "I'm just about three months from being an old maid." To Wilson she wrote, "I'll be thirty in a minute." True, some of her suitors were homosexual, or at least bi-sexual, and true, it is her own Received Wisdom in the early volumes that she could love two or more men at the same time. But one biographer comes close to the mark, I think, in saying that it was separation from lovers, not engagement with them, that provided the creative tension necessary for her to make art. This seems especially true of her life-long non-relationship with Arthur Ficke, nine years her elder, a promising poet, and a lawyer who hated law. She loved him deeply, that is to say, at a delicious distance. Too, Wilson noted in *Shores of Light*, "There was something of awful drama about everything one did with Edna." She was a self-dramatizer, as should be clear now from the histrionics in "Renascence," her early work in the theatre, and her sassy stance in the early love poems. She "created" emotion, and therefore was able to control it. Despite the fact that this group was so liberated and upfront with each other that Gladys and Arthur Ficke got married in the home of Edna and Eugen, Gladys would say years later that Millay was "no female Jesus . . . she could be a bitch on occasion." Oddly, for a person whose letters make such compelling reading, she like Emily Dickenson, kept the world at bay by not answering—sometimes not opening—her mail. "Epistolophobia," she called it.

Eugen Boissevain is crucial to the Millay story. By every single account, he was a jovial, liberal, well-educated person, fully sensitive to originality and the arts, yet owner of no artistic talent himself. One of his grandfathers was provost of Trinity College in Dublin, another the publisher of the major newspaper in The Hague. A widowed Dutch importer living in NYC, he had been analyzed by Jung, and despite his bluff and hearty cheerfulness, he was blessed by what his roomie Max Eastman called "a strain of something feminine that most men except the creative geniuses lack." He supported his famous first wife, Inez Mulholland, a Vassar graduate, in her suffragist activities. (Millay, a few years later at Vassar, was to idolize her, and went on to write an elegy to her, concluding "Take up the song, forget the epitaph.") Eugen soon saw that his role was to protect—some say shield—Millay from the distractions of *le monde* so that she could devote herself fully to writing, to excavating the genius that Eugen and half the world (including Edna) knew was there. He did exactly this for 26 years. In their Village apartment, he rigged up red blinking lights to substitute for the disturbing doorbell. And Millay, sitting under her ever-present bust of Sappho, did write. In the Berkshires, they lived without a telephone, rarely saw newspapers, and domestic Eugen screened all her visitors. Theirs may have been the perfect match, his nurturing streak exactly what Millay's temperament—and vocation—needed. Over her study she posted a large sign: "Silence." Sappho and Silence, it appeared to work. Over decades, she claimed territory for the American female previously off-limits, and she spoke in a new, frank female voice previously *verboten*. She wrote better sonnets (about half Petrarchan in form) than any American of her generation (except Frost). On the other hand, some speculate that Eugen "protected" her too much, that her instinct for withdrawal was not entirely wholesome and that their arrangement kept her (albeit willingly) from engaging with a world she ought to have needed more. Who can tell? It did throw her back upon the place she most desired as a writer to be—herself. For better (the poems) or worse (the breakdowns).

The "old-fashioned" feeling of formality in her poems is another distancing device. True, it partly reflects her lifelong commitment to a 19th c. notion of the "poetic voice" (Housman and Tennyson she claimed as masters). One critic (James Gray) gets the control idea right; he speaks of her "orderly surrender to ecstasy," and adds that "quiet reverence for vitality under discipline is the distinguishing quality of her poetry." Even as she can tell a lover, "Oh I shall love you still, and all of that/," the next line reads: "I never again shall tell you what I think." She builds her verse with long complicated constructions, an amazing number of involved parenthetical expressions, word inversions, and the usual Keatsian O-s, Ah-s, hast-s, art-s, and 'tis-s—in short, modern message, "formal-

wear" medium. She creates a poetic packaging for extremely strong emotion that might threaten to burst out of control. Gray calls it "fastidiousness of style in which the spontaneity is captured." There is surely the "ecstasy," but Millay's is an "orderly surrender" to it—this is the crucial point where her craft and her consciousness meet, and reflect each other.

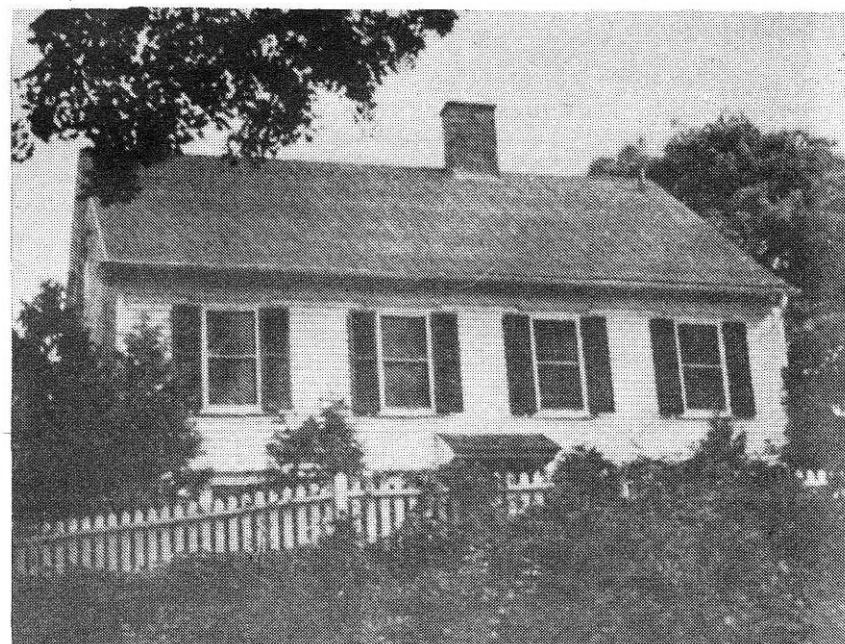
As early as 1916 Millay was exposed to the teasing, playful spirit in *Things Literary*—a quality noted in her as early as her Camden years. Ficke and his friend Witter Bynner (both of whom almost married Millay) amused themselves by founding a magazine called *Spectra* in order to poke fun at the free versers, which they disliked, and at Amy Lowell, Pound and Eliot, etc. Ficke took the name "Anne Knish," after the Jewish pancake; Knish, much like Millay, hated domesticity and made no bones about it in his tongue-in-cheek parodies. Bynner's *nom de plume* was Emanuel Morgan (in German, *morgen* means morning, thus roughly, "morning song," or the form called an aubade. Oh, bad). Their hoaxes actually worked—Knish and Morgan received praise as "serious" poets from Monroe, Williams, Masters and Lowell. Millay herself, pulling back and watching herself as a phenomenon, could describe a recent breakdown as "very handsome . . . all but life-size." Her wonderful wit, Eugen's *bonhomie*, and the general brio of the time, must have eased her enormously. Her fast humor has not been sufficiently recognized. Like her contemporaries Frost and E.A. Robinson, she remained unaffected by the "new" poetry of Pound, Eliot, et. al. "Ezra's such a short-weight Pound," she quipped. Once, at a party, she complained of a recurring headache. A young psychoanalyst (she had no time for analysts) took her aside and brazenly suggested Millay may be gay. "Oh," she is reported to have responded, "You mean I'm homosexual! Of course I am, and heterosexual too, but what's that got to do with my headache?" Later in life her publisher, Harper's, hounded her about an anthology project she wanted no part of; to them, she wrote, "I reject your proposals, but welcome your advances." About a fourth of her oeuvre, the lighter unserious portion, was written under the pseudonym, Nancy Boyd—stories and poems. After Millay had lived in Dorset a while, Nancy Boyd comments on the English, especially appropriate now after the recent resignation of Margaret Thatcher:

*The English are an amusing people.  
They are a tribe of shepherds inhabiting a  
small island off the coast of France.  
They are a simple and genial folk.  
But they have one idiosyncrasy.  
They persist in referring to their island as  
if it were the mainland.*

Surely Millay—highminded though she was about her work—must have been amused by the many parodies it inspired. One, by Samuel Hoffenstein, a writer of light verse, sends up her famous candle quatrain:

*I burned my candle at both ends,  
And now have neither foes nor friends;  
For all the lovely light begotten,  
I'm paying now in feeling rotten.*

cont'd next page



"Steepletop," near Austerlitz, NY,  
named after an indigenous flower

Vassar College Library



She and Eugen definitely drank too much, especially Edna. Wilson worried. Max Eastman, editor of *The Masses* and Eugen's apartment-mate before the marriage, said they would "stimulate their hearts and dull their cerebral cortices with alcohol." The muckraker, Upton Sinclair, clearly implicates her in his book about boozing, *Cup of Fury*. He witnessed Edna, backstage at a reading tour, drain an entire flask provided by Eugen, as if nothing were out of the ordinary. At first, alcohol was a light enough matter, as it was for many of her generation. In "Feast," she could write, "I drank at every vine,/ The last was like the first./ I came upon no wine/ So wonderful as thirst." This she likely learned from Eugen, as there is a Dutch folk saying I once copied from the wall of a cafe in Amsterdam: "They all talk of my drinking, but they never ask about my thirst." For Edna, the problem deepened. Whether drink was a cause or an effect of the emotional breakdowns, or even related at all, is unclear. It does not seem to have affected her work. But something, drink or emotion or the recurrent bad health that was to beset her, was taking its toll. Edmund Wilson, visiting her after many years, was stunned at her condition. In 1945, the Boissevains spent a weekend with friends at Bailey's Island before sailing on out to Ragged Island. Vincent Sheean, in his memoir of Millay, *Indigo Bunting*, says she "was, to put it bluntly, a frightening apparition to many of us. Her temperament was so variable that it was impossible to tell what mood might overwhelm her next; and she was obviously so painfully sensitive that any untoward phrase or sudden noise could thrust her into a private hell from which she might not emerge for days."

Nine years earlier, in 1936, she fell from a stationwagon and tumbled down an embankment, causing spinal and nerve injuries that would not go away, and that would hospitalize her frequently. Eugen would inject her with prescribed morphine. However, a year before the accident, she would write this odd letter to Bynner: "I am at present under the influence of hashish, gin, bad poetry, love, morphine and hunger,—otherwise I could not be writing you even this." (Unpublished letter, quoted by Ann Cheney, *Millay in the Village*, 124). Clearly, fifteen years before her death, she was being overwhelmed. A serious breakdown in 1944, plus the severe criticism of her propaganda poetry, plus changing fashions in poetry which left her feeling unappreciated, stilled her pen for two years.

When Eugen died suddenly of a stroke in 1949, Millay simply fell apart. She spent months in Doctor's Hospital in NYC, drying out, healing her scared and broken heart. For the next year, her 58th, she carried on bravely at Steepletop. She had distanced herself from her old friends. Cora was dead, as was sister Kathleen, the tight family of women from Camden no more. She was virtually alone, except for a caretaker who stopped by daily. One biographer (Cheney) tries to perpetuate the romantic image up to the end: "She died with a glass of wine in one hand and a page of poetry in the other." The truth of her passing is a quieter one, and more dignified. She had stayed up all night reading proof—of another writer's work. Around 8 a.m. she poured a glass of wine to help her sleep, and headed up the steps. Halfway up, she stopped. The great heart that had broken so many others', was breaking itself. Surely she thought of Eugen. Perhaps she thought of her own youthful lines, "Time does not bring relief; you all have lied/ Who told me time would ease me of my pain!" She sat down, carefully placed the wine and the manuscript on the step above her, and expired. She was half-way up. But the candle had finally burned in from both ends, the flames which gave such "lovely light" met at death in the middle, consuming all. After 58 years, she had come a lot more than half-way. She did "last the night."

**Terry Plunkett  
Hallowell**  
teaches at UMA

#### Thursday

And if I loved you Wednesday,  
Well, what is that to you?  
I do not love you Thursday—  
So much is true.

And why you come complaining  
Is more than I can see.  
I loved you Wednesday,—yes—but what  
Is that to me?

E.St.V.M.



Millay at Steepletop

In 1921, Millay visited Dorothy Thompson (1894-1961) in Vienna. Thompson was an internationally-known journalist, who later was married for 14 years to Sinclair Lewis. Years later, Thompson visited Millay at Steepletop. Her biographer writes:

A particularly painful episode occurred when Edna . . . unexpectedly appeared in Vienna. Dorothy adored her sonnets, knew many by heart, and imitated them in her own attempts at poetry. She was delighted when Edna agreed to rework, in verse form, Josef's translations of Hungary's leading poet, Andrew Ady. The collaboration, however, turned out to be more than literary. The three had gone together to Budapest where the hotels were crowded and Dorothy and Edna were forced to share a room. Dorothy recalled the incident years later in her diary

"She was a little bitch, a genius, a cross between a gamin and an angel. In Budapest she had two lovers . . . both from the embassy. Keeping them apart was a kunst [an art]. And we sharing a room . . . She sat before the glass and combed her lovely hair, over and over. Narcissan. She really never loved anyone except herself. Very beautiful with her little white body and her green-gold eyes. 'Dotry, do you think I am a nymphomaniac?' she had asked. Then she comes in a Grecian robe and reads aloud to the Ladies Club, 'Such lips my lips have kissed . . .' And what a sonnet that one was.

"I had to go back to Vienna and I left her the toast of half the town . . . Handed her all I had because she was an angel. A bright angel. She might have left Josef alone, but not that, either. When she came back to Vienna, she twisted a little green ring on her finger. 'Josef gave it to me,' she said absolutely brutally. 'But he really cares for you.' 'It's all right Edna,' I said, 'I know he does.' And I was full of furious tears."

from Marion K. Sanders, *Dorothy Thompson: A Legend in Her Time* (1973), NY: Avon Books, 96-97.

(Ed. Note: Each year KENNEBEC reviews a Maine writer from an earlier generation. Previous subjects include Robert P. Tristram Coffin, Wilbert Snow, E.A. Robinson, and Longfellow.)



The night of the day my house burned with my life's worth of writing in it I lay in a sleeping bag on the cold floor of the house of friends. It was twenty below; north wind buffeted the old and permeable house with a continuous howling. My journal lay open before me. I was in the heightened state that often follows disaster; one means of describing it is to resort to metaphors of fire: my brain was a firestorm, I was burning with an unsustainable energy that consumes what- or who-ever feeds it. But in that state I could recall at will every poem I had ever written. I began to write poems down, at first as they announced themselves, then—in an act of psychic triage—in the order of their importance to me. I wrote for hours; I knew that when I slept this state of grace would slip away; I knew I could not sleep until I'd made substantial a measurable part of what the fire had turned to heat and light.

So I think I understand what it must have been like for Edna St. Vincent Millay to have turned around on the beach at Sanibel Island in May of 1936 to see her hotel in flames and realize that the only copy of the manuscript of her verse play *Conversation at Midnight* was going up in that fire, to have made the endless drive in a car with a bad bearing home to New York State with only the "once-white linen suit" on her back, to have counseled herself with Catullus' maxim to "Cease this folly . . . and what you see is lost set down as lost," nonetheless to have set about reconstructing the manuscript. Millay wrote in a letter to a friend that the loss of "My cherished little seventeenth century copy of Catullus, Propertius, and Tibullus," a book her husband had given her before their marriage, "was the only thing that touched me emotionally . . . the only thing I mourn for." When I read in another of her letters, however, that "It seems to me sometimes that I lost about everything I had in that fire," I suspect that her hurt may have been more widespread, that Millay may have been putting a good face on things before her friends, and perhaps even before herself, attempting to live up to what she thought should be her attitude. A freak accident a few weeks later, in which she fell out the passenger door of the family station wagon, "hurtled into the pitch darkness" and down a rocky gully, injuring her arm so that she could not type, certainly provided her a physical analog of dislocation.

Nevertheless, Millay set about rewriting the manuscript poems. She was able to "recall all those that were completed," but described herself as having "an exhausting and nervewracking time" with those she was still working on. "I might have been able to recall the whole book," she comments in the foreword to the reconstructed version of *Conversation at Midnight*, "if, for instance, a copy of it had been in existence somewhere, though at the moment unavailable, or if I had been required to recall it, not knowing that the only copy had been burnt"; but a problem more fundamental than pressure may have been that she extinguished the new work when she slept. Recuperation may have required it.

What corresponds most closely in my life to my state of consciousness on the night of my house fire is the mental state I sometimes enter when a poem is moving through me: phrases speak in my head that leave me physically shaking, wired—another fire image. It's as if I'm witness to my own transubstantiation, what the chassids of my ancestry called the revelation of the divine spark that resides in each of us. They flocked to their zaddik-guru because living and praying in his presence induced this vision. I and my fellow poets wait out the words that feel as if they dematerialize us then return us to earth newly grounded; we may envy the believers their road map.

When I walked up to the burning wreckage of my house, a charred piece of paper blew past me—a poem I'd printed several years before on Pearl, my platen press. In red ink on golden paper it read, "abundant compost generates heat / leaves mold smoldering pyre / man in the fire / afire afire." I clutched it in my mittened hand. It seemed terrible and fitting that the fire should have released the sign for fire to one who had invited fire into herself.

**Lee Sharkey**  
Farmington  
teaches at UMF



Photo Melody Lee York



Photo Melody Lee York

## Items of loss

After the fire burned my past  
I began again to count.  
One two three the jade tree trunk  
now as thick as my forearm.  
Anything that doesn't disappear is precious.  
What can equal the power of destruction?  
Pottery smashed on the side of the house,  
cartons of dishes fragmented because  
the sender neglected to mark FRAGILE.

And now the dog is dying.  
Her heart valve leaks, she can't breathe  
(systole, diastole).  
My hands read chaos  
within her rib cage.  
The tail bobs, but can I comfort?

I need a golem,  
of sand, clay, water  
and the secret name for God,  
which I'll push in, pull out.  
It will be my personal materialization;  
I'll seat it at the table,  
teach it first to count,  
next the alphabet  
then the good schmooze.  
It will love the eep of hummingbird,  
thrum of Milky Way.  
It will light the candles,  
save my home from dark.

**Lee Sharkey**  
Farmington  
teaches at UMF

## Two Female Writers, Two Islands

Ragged Island, originally Rugged Island, sits three miles out in Casco Bay and was settled in 1844 by Elijah Kellogg, a minister and writer. In his boy's stories, he called it "Elm Island." Some 50 acres, with high rock ledges and one tiny "harbor," it was purchased by Eugen Boissevain in 1933 because Millay was enchanted. Although they renovated Kellogg's house, there was no electricity or plumbing, and no means of communication with the mainland except by sailing to Bailey's Island. They loved it, and Millay wrote much of her later work there.

Similarly, Millay's contemporary Willa Cather, the author of *My Antonia* and *Death Comes to the Archbishop*, in 1921 settled for summers on the Canadian island of Grand Manan, seven miles off the Maine coast. In 1925, she and her friend Edith had a cottage under construction. "Before Breakfast" is Cather's only story set on Grand Manan, available in a posthumous volume called *The Best Years*. Cather and her friends named parts of the island for places in *Alice in Wonderland*. In the WW II years, 1939-1945, visiting the island became impractical, perhaps dangerous. Cather instead went to a cottage attached to the Asticou Inn on Mt. Desert Island.

Although they never became particular friends, in 1933 Millay presented Willa Cather with a literary prize, the Prix Femina.

T.P.

### *Ragged Island*

THERE, THERE where those black spruces crowd  
To the edge of the precipitous cliff,  
Above your boat, under the eastern wall of the island;  
And no wave breaks; as if  
All had been done, and long ago, that needed  
Doing; and the cold tide, unimpeded  
By shoal or shelving ledge, moves up and down,  
Instead of in and out;  
And there is no driftwood there, because there is no beach;  
Clean cliff going down as deep as clear water can reach;

No driftwood, such as abounds on the roaring shingle,  
To be hefted home, for fires in the kitchen stove;  
Barrels, banged ashore about the boiling outer harbor;  
Lobster-buoys, on the eel-grass of the sheltered cove:

There, thought unbraid itself, and the mind becomes single  
There you row with tranquil oars, and the ocean  
Shows no scar from the cutting of your placid keel;  
Care becomes senseless there; pride and promotion  
Remote; you only look; you scarcely feel.

Even adventure, with its vital uses,  
Is aimless ardor now; and thrift is waste.

Oh, to be there, under the silent spruces,  
Where the wide, quiet evening darkens without haste  
Over a sea with death acquainted, yet forever chaste.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

### From Mourning

3/11/79    now i must write to john and tell him his manuscripts burned  
                 this is of all fire related tasks the hardest    no way  
to begin no gentling it and him abroad unbraced for shock

john    i have no easy way to do this    theres  
been a fire our little house is gone and though  
the new house was saved all our belongings are  
lost    this means as well your two manuscripts  
i left that morning by the unabridged on the piano  
         i sit in fear as i write this that you have no  
other copies fear complicated by my guilt at not  
communicating with you in the stretch before you  
left for italy    i simply took on more than i  
could carry and this winters brought it crashing  
down on me

the dogs are dead    physically we're uninjured  
step by step ginger our lives together  
working on the house to make it livable    a  
friend has loaned us his cabin    people have  
given whatever they can    the poets respond from  
their privacy and some words touch and heal  
i hope youre well    and grace    i pray your poems  
survive unscattered    please let me know if this  
is so

with all respect and love

\* \* \*

then fire destroys a personal history  
dreaming of death i surface  
over the crest of the hill to find it gone  
         poems like charred birds  
         disembody  
on the slow walk up the drive  
acceptance rehearses  
houses my small self in its cocoon  
i see i float dart below  
fire    afire!    going in circles awed round a blazing woodshed

how fierce the cold  
are you all right  
mother the house burned  
         everything  
lucky you weren't  
lucky it wasn't  
         the dogs dead  
swift  
         borrowed  
         skeletal curve of a charred piano

Lee Sharkey

Farmington

first published in Puckerbrush Review, Spring, 1979

## Boyfriends

Jacqueline and I needed some different clothes if we were going to have boyfriends. She was forty three and a complete virgin. I was almost sure of it. Well, mores the pity, as your mother might say.

She didn't like walking by black men. "There's somethings it's best not to make a mistake about in this town. Ignorance can make a lot of trouble," she'd proclaim. As if she knew something.

"Jacqueline you've got to fix that." It was the voice of her mind speaking, but I could hear it too. She was not talking to herself or anything like that. I knew her so well I could just hear the internal dialogue of her mind clearly speak. She was looking behind the rose striped curtain and referring to the awful, awful mess of wardrobe in the two foot deep closet.

We decided to take the bus to Petronia Street where the second hand and antiques shops were located. In the Dress for Less Clothing Shop silverfish waited comfortably under limp shirt collars for the intruding customers.

It had come over us suddenly one day to get these boyfriends. We hadn't much talked about the possibilities before last Tuesday. On that morning we were at White's Beach starting an exercise and fitness program for the flaps that hung beneath our arms and the flaps that slackly touched each other between our thighs. Jacqueline and I walked vigorously on the small strip of damp sand. Four arms swung in generous, rhythmic arcs. It was a periodic thought we had about saving our bodies before it was too late and had nothing to do with getting boyfriends.

We had walked a full hundred or so yards when without our noticing and alarmingly close, a brown-skinned white man, unshaven for a while, rose out of an army sleeping bag in front of us. He could have been a drifter, but seemed more like a college boy who was having a good adventure. His arms reached over his head as he took that first morning stretch pulling the body into great elongation.

His gray sweat shorts dipped deeply down his torso and the trail of belly hair grew thicker as they slipped. The brown of his hair and face and body made him look like a sand man children pat together when they tire of building castles. Nice bodies on young men are not rare at any beach around here. It must have simply been the first moment of real awakesness and the kick of full lungs at daybreak imprinting this masculine image on my aging ovaries. The next day Jacqueline and I had one cup of coffee and declared, "We got to have some boyfriends."

I am like a virgin as they say today. It's been too long to remember if I have experienced full intimacy with a man. It may not have actually happened. It is possible not to be completely sure. If I did, I no longer can recall the feel of it. But last Tuesday night laying in the matching maple twin bed next to Jacqueline, every cell in my body, every organelle in my cells, every thumping little mitochondria ached so much with wanting to be touched. Touched.

Jacqueline's clothes and mine too, are dreadful. We have outgrown most of our pants, our hips pull them tight across the belly. Our sweaters are pilled and the color is never right. We have jewelry and scarves that different nieces and nephews have given on holidays.

After we shop at the Dress for Less we are going to buy Exactly Right Perms for hard to hold hair at McKnight's Pharmacy and have new dos by tomorrow.

This shop has the best bargains in Big or Little Torch. We could get a whole new look for not a lot of money. The clothes have to be washed before I will wear them, they have the odor of previous owners' mothballs. Crisp, new-smelling folded clothing is a great pleasure to sacrifice. Jacqueline doesn't care, she will put her outfits right on.

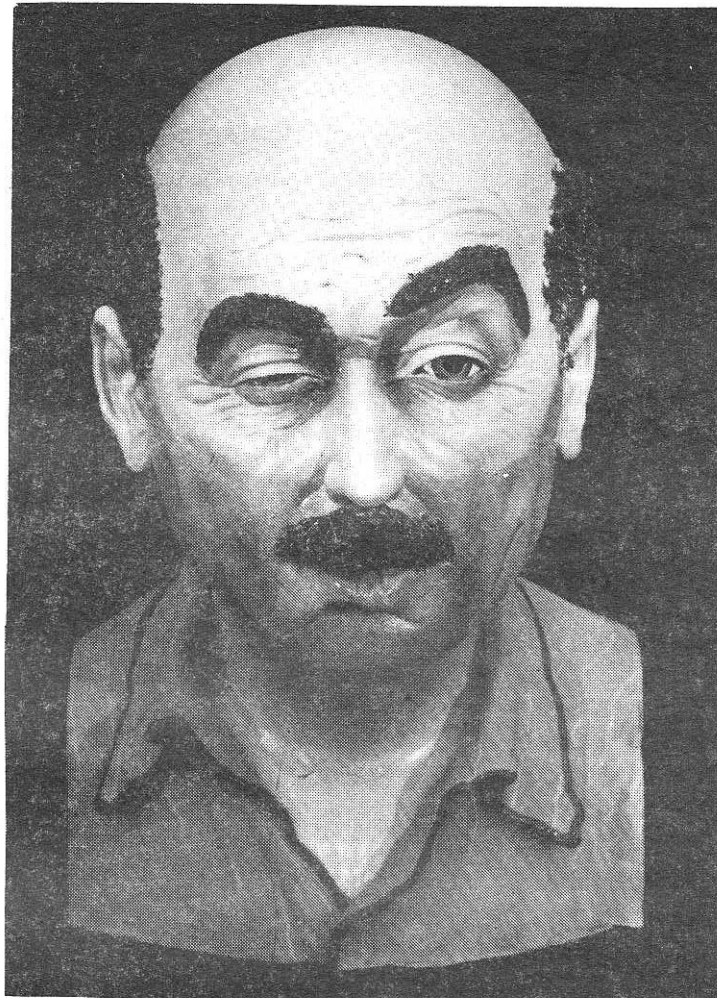
Most of these clothes are too small, but I find a lime sundress with a feminine ruffle that dips quite away down in the back. It is just the dress for boyfriends. I love to think about the color lime, it is different from the other colors I own. Jacqueline selects a short sleeved mango-colored blouse and gauzy white skirt that swirls. She also finds some earrings with little pink shells stuck on them.

Three black men are leaning on a car in the parking lot we must cross to get to the pharmacy. They look right through Jacqueline as she clutches her bag of used clothes and shudders.

By Saturday afternoon the perms have lost their tightness and ammonia stench. We have been experimenting with makeup and have painted our nails. The lime and mango and white are appealing together in the mirror. The softest wind floats in the window over the sink and lifts the hair from our necks.

"You are a very pretty woman Eva," says Jacqueline and I feel about nineteen years old.

Where to go to get boyfriends. I am determined that Jacqueline's effort will be worth it. She is lovely like I have never seen her before. This was a lot my idea in the beginning, but it is important to her now. She is raising her eyebrows to hold the skin like a facelift.



Ceramic: Josh Nadel

"I never trusted anyone over the age of 13 who jumped out of bed wide awake" Earthenware, Underglaze, 1988, 18" high

The bar charges three dollars for ginger ale but the jazz is good. The jazz is hot. And so are we. Two hot women out on the town on a Saturday night. The boyfriends will be showing up anytime. We sip slowly and crunch the ice. I work my shoulders back and forth with the beat. I can feel the lime ruffle shimmy on my back.

A man pays for his drink and drops some change that rolls under our table. He ducks beneath the tablecloth and says, "Excuse me ladies." Jacqueline and I smirk and bat our eyes at each other expecting anything to happen next. He pulls back out, "Easy come, easy go. Sorry about that."

We should have asked him to join us before he left entirely empty handed. Words come slowly after a long wait like ours. After a while we wander into the street and enjoy our pretty clothes and hairstyles on a Saturday night. There are not many men like the sandman from the beach, that we can see. I know Jacqueline is tired but she is still trying to sway her hips like a forty-three year old virgin.

She has a little blister on her heel from her sandals.

"Do you want to go in somewhere else, or we can come out another time," I ask.

"I'm not sure I really want a boyfriend Eva. We haven't given this enough thought."

We were reflected in the window of the Island Crafts store. A melon ball and a withered lime. Two men were crossing the street to where we were standing. My body language felt silly and I let my breasts and shoulders slump as the men stepped over the curb. Their arms casually reached out to drape across the others' waists and they paused for a moment to look at the glazed blue pots in the next window.

Our apartment was ten and a half blocks away and Jacqueline had started to limp. There were fine clouds at a great height in the sky. When we got home we would have a half glass of whiskey and ice. It made us nervous to drink in town, we had to keep our wits about us.

I hung my lime sundress on a hook in the closet. Jacqueline's things were on a chair. The whiskey filled my head with familiar fuzzy warmth and I shut off the lights to drink in the dark. I could remember my past intimacies now. The fullness and excitement of my body. The hands, the breath, the raw and shocking actions in the nude. Dampening skin holding each other. I dipped my head into the glass of whiskey and then filled it again.

In the twin maple bed against the wall I held Jacqueline for the first time. There was everything I'd been missing for twenty years. I was happy and she seemed happy too. Without boyfriends.

**Mary Lawrence**  
**Bangor**

works in a social service agency



## Other Deaths

The sunlight's too bright, blinding. I'll pull the studio shades. Black shades. No natural light for this photo. Natural light is flattering. I'll use flash. Harsh, straight-on flash that washes out features and makes the face look ghostlike. Unrealistic. This portrait needs that.

My most important "Leila Blakely Photo" must be just right. I'll get out the old Yashica twin reflex camera that's in the back of the studio cupboard. Swore I'd never touch it again after I took the portraits of the others—the ones whose negatives I put in a special box when their obituaries appeared in the newspaper.

Lined up here on the light box they look like jurors in the courtroom. My peers. Twelve of them frozen in frames of 2¼ inch negatives. Iva Richardson, the poet, was the first. I took her photo when the councilmen gave her the Boston Post cane that goes to the oldest person in town. She'd just turned 98 and she died three weeks later.

Ellsworth McPhee was next. He kept lobstering till he was 84. His family couldn't convince him to take it easy. There's Fitzpatrick, the retired Portland Fire Chief. Gone too. And Marty MacDonald, the policeman who died in a car chase. Left two little kids. Here's Walter Morrow, that gentle soul who walked into the ocean . . . off a cliff . . . in January. They found his keys, wallet and rings in a neat pile on a rock.

Who's this? Matty? Yes, Matty Larson the organist. Sometimes it's hard to tell from a negative. Black is white. White black. What isn't. Black teeth, white eyes. Twelve pair of eyes staring blankly. Staring into nothing.

Tom's here too. My Tom. Gone like these others. White dots where those lively dark eyes should be. Those eyes that were enhanced by his camera lens so he could see, and show, the world stripped of illusion. His "Life and Death in Vietnam" showed the war's ugliness as only Tom's eyes could. Those photos influenced a lot of people. Made them think differently. Tom could do that to you. I wish I had an ounce of his talent.

"I wish." Face it, Leila, Tom's talent didn't just happen. He made it happen. He photographed with the same enthusiasm he brought to living and lovemaking. Tom sparked everything around him. I felt so alive when I was with him. From that first moment when he looked at my portfolio and let one hand wander on my thigh while the other held my portrait of Paula Thompson on the verge of tears. "You're gifted, really gifted," he told me.

Then there were all those months working side by side, in the darkroom, on shoots . . . even helping out at his wife's dinner parties. Loving him more and more. We made love everywhere. His studio, mine. Outdoors near Tom's summer cottage. Even by the red glow of the safelight in his home darkroom. Leaning against the sink while the running water washed the prints and silenced our sounds of passion.

Tom's obituary said, "Noted photographer Thomas Crowley died Friday of a heart attack while playing tennis. He was 59 years old." Fred was there. He said it happened fast. Tom froze, then folded and fell to the floor . . . in slow stages like movie film frames clicking off one by one.

Tom's wife asked me to send the newspaper a photo for his obituary. She remembered I had taken one for the photo workshop brochure so she thought it was a simple request. She didn't know about Tom and me. Didn't realize how it would torture me to stand in the darkroom watching Tom's face emerge on the white paper as my tears made circles on the surface of the chemicals in the tray. The developer . . . with its sweet acid smell . . . like embalming fluid.

I'm not crying now. First time since Tom died that I've thought about him and remained calm . . . very calm, almost peaceful. But my hands are trembling. I've got to control them or I'll never get this camera screwed onto the tripod. Maybe another tranquilizer, or two, will help. I left the bottle on the shelf next to the vitamins. Almost empty.

I'll play the Vivaldi tape while getting ready for this portrait. The one Tom and I used to listen to. "The Four Seasons." He liked "Summer" best. The hot-blooded sounds of bright sun. "Winter" is my favorite. Silent white snowflakes falling slowly in the black night sky.

Isabelle told me to throw away the tape after Tom died. "Get out of the past. Start a new life," she said. As if it were that easy.

Isabelle never did understand me. We've been friends for twenty years, best friends, but too different to really see into each other's soul. Isabelle so light-hearted. Me so serious. I don't know why we get along so well. We do though. Maybe it's because Isabelle never judges me.

If she ever stopped long enough to listen to music, she'd probably like Vivaldi's "Spring." It's so full of hope, upbeat . . . like her. I'll start the tape there. Do all the seasons. There'll be enough time.

Isabelle never liked Tom. Thought he was too self-centered to ever be good to me. When I got pregnant she blamed Tom. But she was on my side when I told her that I wanted to have the baby. She knew too, that at 39, it might be my last chance.

Tom couldn't see it. He had grown kids. He was afraid a baby would mess things up between us. He kept telling me we were both too old and he offered to pay for an abortion.

I was too happy to care and too stupid to worry about what might happen with Tom or to my life in general. But that was before the sonogram. That blurry picture on the monitor of the baby in my womb. I knew something was wrong immediately. The head. The baby's head . . . Lumps in the wrong places and big . . . much too big. I didn't need the amniocentesis to tell me the bad news. They did it anyway. When they tried to tell me the truth, I wouldn't listen. So they told Isabelle. She was there, not Tom.

I'll never get that picture out of my mind. The picture of my baby with the deformed head. It's more vivid than any of these negatives of the others. I could destroy these, but it's harder to destroy the image of the baby. My baby.

Isabelle understood then. Understood that I didn't want the baby to die. I had no choice. It couldn't live with that head. The baby would have been born in the spring, but I let them take it. Then I was empty.

I'm still empty. Void. A negative of a person. Black where white should be. When I make prints in the darkroom, I can put the world back the right way. Recreate reality. Creating it. Controlling it. I always liked that. Now things have gotten out of hand. I have no control. No control over the baby's life. Over these other deaths. Over this camera that took the death portraits.

Tom laughed when I told him I thought my Yashica robbed souls, took lives. "C'mon now Leila baby. Cameras don't kill," he said. I explained that seven people had died in two years . . . all of them captured on the Yashica's negatives. My



first inkling was when I noticed that the Portland paper reprinted a freelance photo of mine with the obituary of the Fire Chief. I had taken it when he retired. At first I felt sorry that he died so soon after retiring. Then I had the thought that the paper should pay me the regular \$24 fee for reprint rights. I billed them and a couple of days later, another picture that I took showed up in the obituaries. Before I could bill them for that one a third photo was published.

I thought it was a little spooky but I figured it was all a coincidence because the people were old. I had been doing a series on the elderly and had lots of photos of people over 75. Then others showed up, younger people. The cop with the little kids. The young mother shot by a hunter.

Tom still thought it was a coincidence, but with each new death, I knew he was wrong. The worst was when I tried to prove it. It was so frightening, I couldn't even tell Tom. After putting the Yashica away for months, I took it out to experiment on Matty Larson. Granted she was very old, but she did die six weeks later. I did it. We did it. The camera and I were accomplices.

Here's Matty's negative on the light box. Next to Tom. Both with big, black-toothed smiles. Tom smiling his happy, roguish smile. He didn't know the photo would end up in his obituary. He was thinking about life, not death. Tom had asked me to take his portrait for the photo workshop brochure. I didn't want him to teach that "Photographing Nudes" course, but I didn't say anything. I was afraid the young female students would only too eagerly pose for the class and Tom would compare their 19-year old bodies to my 40-year old flesh.

I was afraid of losing him but I didn't want him dead. He insisted that I take his portrait with the Yashica. Said I had taken my most successful photos with it because it allows eye contact, not like 35mm cameras that block the face of the photographer.

Tom knew about the other people who died after I took their photos with the Yashica, but he just laughed and said, "Honey, do as I say and take my portrait . . . and try to make me look young and dashing." He made it sound like a joke, but I knew he meant it. Knew he wanted a picture that would entice the girls to sign up for his course.

So I did it. I shot his photo. The Yashica and I took Tom's photo. We took Tom. He's gone. Black teeth, white pupils left . . . looking at me from the lightbox. All their eyes looking at me. White eyes. Not blaming, just staring. Dead stares.

The baby too. Staring at me . . . from inside my head. The baby that I wanted to be somebody, to do something worthwhile. It turned out to be a monster . . . and I killed it. It would have died anyway . . . if it was born. They told me that.

Vivaldi's "Summer" is ending. Now the whirling leaves of autumn. I can feel the chill in the air. I'm shivering, but I'm not going to put on a sweater. This black silk shirt will do. Isabelle gave me this shirt. She knew I would love it, love the feel of it on my braless body. Isabelle has an instinct about my tastes, but so little insight into my thoughts. She wouldn't understand why I have to take this portrait, just like she couldn't understand why I read obituaries.

"What's a 42-year old woman reading the obits for? Only old people like my mom read them . . . you know, to see if anymore of her friends died," Isabelle said when I tried to tell her about the woman who made buttonholes.

I had seen this obituary headline that said, "Elva Farrin, buttonhole maker" and it bothered me that that was all the editor could say about the poor woman. I read the rest to find out more about her. It said she made buttonholes at Whitney Clothing for 25 years. She was a member of the Grange and the Congregational Church. She had four children and ten grandchildren. Period. Seventy-two years of living and all she did was make buttonholes and kids. What a waste.

"So what? Who cares?" Isabelle said. "Besides, it's weird to read obituaries."

I tried to explain that I got into the obituaries accidentally because of the photos that showed up. I had started to check the page everyday and then I became curious and began reading about the people who died. I wanted to learn more about them. Thought I could find out more about life.

Isabelle was appalled. "You read about dead people to find out about life? Don't you have a better source? Those people's lives are over, finished," she said.

She couldn't see that that's the only time you can really tally up someone's achievements . . . figure what their life was worth.

"But it's too late to do anything about it then," Isabelle said.

"That's why I'm thinking about my own obituary now," I told her. "And it's bleak. The headline will say 'Leila Blakely, photographer' and so what. There are millions of photographers in the world, more photographers than dental assistants. At least a buttonhole maker is more unique than a photographer."

Damn. Thinking about this has me crying. It's difficult to focus with tears in my eyes and I want this portrait to be sharp and clear . . . not blurry like the image of the baby. I've got to get control. Perhaps another pill . . .

Control. If I had the ability to control this camera maybe those people on the

lightbox would still be alive. If I could control my own life . . . maybe I could have had an "other death."

"Other deaths," Isabelle really flipped when I told her that I wanted my obituary to make the "Other Deaths" column that the papers print to fill out the obituary page. Of course she never read that column. She didn't study the page like I did.

"Other Deaths" were about people who didn't live in the area. People who did important things. Not famous people, like Greta Garbo, who go on the front page when they die. But people who made real contributions to the world. People who wrote Pulitzer novels or invented Teflon.

I told Isabelle that I wanted my life to qualify for that column. That I wanted to do something worthwhile. She didn't get it.

"Photography is worthwhile and you're darn good at it," she said.

But I knew that shooting weddings, portraits and news photos in Portland, Maine, was not going to land me in the "Other Deaths" column.

"Hell, if you want world recognition . . . go for it," Isabelle said. "Go to Gaza and take photos of bloody Palestinian kids and if you're lucky, get shot in the head. Then the Portland papers will say 'Maine photographer downed by Israeli bullet.'"

She didn't understand that that was a headline, not a qualification for the "Other Deaths" column. I wanted an 'other death' and I knew that I didn't have what it takes to get it. I still don't and I know I never will. Too tired. Too empty. Just enough energy to take this last portrait. I'll use the black backdrop. Not the white. I want the long dark hair to disappear into the space around it, to frame the face with darkness.

Tom loved long hair. It was a turn on for him. I'd catch him eying girls with long hair as we walked along the city streets. When he did portraits, he would carefully arrange a woman's long hair in curves over her breasts, then take longer than he needed looking at her through his lens.

Whenever we were alone he would take the pins out of my hair, drape it over my breast. Black hair on white skin. His hands caressing both at the same time. I could never cut this hair that meant so much to Tom.

Isabelle loves it too. After Tom died, she brushed my hair for hours and stroked my skin until I stopped sobbing. Her touch was soothing and somehow I wasn't surprised when she slipped her strokes to my silk shirt, warming me softly like the early spring sun. Her mouth opening slowly in silence.

I'll let my hair down now. On a negative it will be white, snow white like an old lady's hair. White hair, Black teeth. No, I won't smile. I can't smile. No dark smile like the others.

Ah, Vivaldi's "Winter" . . . my favorite part. The music filled with snow. Swirling storms quiet down to silent flakes softly covering the dark world in white. Falling one, by one. Each flake separate while falling, then joining billions of others to make a blanket of white. No longer alone. A part of the whole. At peace. One.

It's time. The flash is in place. Bench adjusted. Backdrop perfect. I'll take one last look through the lens to make sure everything's the way I want it. All I see is black, but I can imagine the portrait. My years behind the camera have given me that much. I can see a photograph in my mind's eye. I can envision this very important one.

There'll be no interruption. Isabelle is away for the week-end. And Tom is waiting . . . waiting on the lightbox with the others. Twelve of them waiting for one more.

I feel tired and strange. I'll rest here on the model's bench, and look at the camera. So rigid on its tripod. Unyielding. It's odd to be on this side of the lens. Uncomfortable being watched by the camera's single cold eye. The lens thick and black, like a solid whirlpool.

The timer will go off soon. Then it'll be my turn to be taken out of the three-dimensional world. Frozen forever on the flat plane of film. A negative of myself. Like the others.

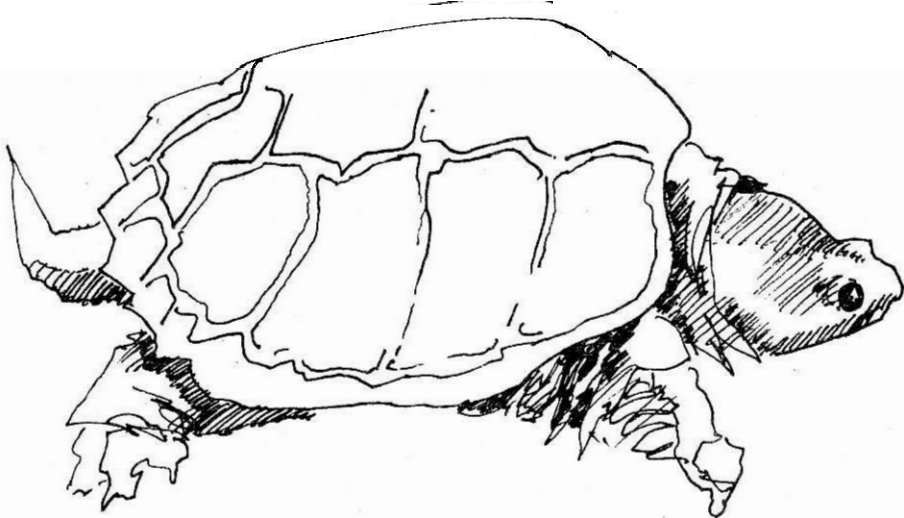
The Vivaldi's ended. The timer's ticking's stopped too. The iris of the lens is opening. A huge eye. Wide mouth. Sucking me into its dark depths. I'm too sleepy to resist.

The flash. Bright light washing away the studio, the street outside. Blocking all sound. Blinding white fading to gray. All anger leaving, all hate, love, self-pity . . . all caring gone. Gray to black. Floating peace, emptiness. Nothing.

**Joan Grant  
Round Pond**

*Writer/Photographer*

*is currently editor of the Coastal Journal, Bath*



Silvia Rike

## Snapper

A tite-sized snapper  
draws herself from the dark mystery  
that is Beaver Pond,  
furrows a trail through the woods,  
and up the long drive beyond the house  
to the pile of half-rotted manure  
where she scrapes and gouges  
with her flat-taloned stubs of feet  
until she has moved enough aside  
to plant her eggs  
securely within the mound  
which still bears the warmth of the horses  
it passed through,  
of the grass it was, before it was horse,  
of the seed it was, before it was grass,  
and of the sun it was, before it was anything—  
of the very light it was that gave it life.

A mud-encrusted snapper,  
a swimmer of light,  
lays a nest of future light  
in a mound of old light  
which, if you look with a turtle's eyes,  
still shimmers  
like the memory of a dawn-lit sea.

Look with a turtle's slow eyes.  
Look. LOOK! with the eyes of a turtle  
Everything is passing, but  
Everything is light!

**Raymond Wirth**  
**North Haven**  
*teaches English on the island*

## Young Yachts

The triangles twitter amid the chop,  
Sunfishes, Knockabouts  
Turnabouts  
and a slightly older boy  
scuds by in a skiff  
carrying the island's noon mail.

Two yachts cowed by  
an oil tanker  
can see the water marks  
and olive-berry rust scars  
running across  
the rhino-plowing bow.

At night  
the yachts chatter together  
with wooden spars  
and await tomorrow's  
moon driven tide.

**Jason Brown**  
**Portland**  
*is a Bowdoin student*

## Two Approaches to the Lake

At sunrise  
the last snow withdraws its fog  
into the fissures  
and braces among the rocks.

In the lake below,  
mountains  
poise.

\*

River falls from sky  
and boils in the pool.  
Brown sinews slip through rocks  
and foam.

Beyond,  
sunflames shudder  
on deep water.  
A skiff sets out  
along the shore.

**Michael Smetzer**  
**Unity**  
*teaches part-time at UMO*

## Just Ten

A princess at the dressing table  
I rolled Mother's golden hairbrush  
into my long, uncombed  
straight hair.

I twirled it tight as a scroll  
to hold court there  
on the right side of my head.

I hairsprayed it as much as I could  
until the ozone in the room broke down  
and I was sick in the nostrils  
wearing this full-blown crown  
in my hair. Hours later

we still couldn't get it out.  
Bristles had sewn into my scalp  
like a toenail that keeps growing  
after death.

My eyes teared as Mother held her breath  
and pried that stubborn laureate,  
the slats of hair like frozen fur,  
a matted animal in a trap.

Mother cut the hairbrush out,  
my hair shorn to a poor boy's cut,  
the severed ends tied in the brush  
like some polluted clump we fished  
from the pond at Girl Scout Camp.

I was just ten  
in my new feminine regret  
that vanity would coax me  
into what I didn't want.

It was not the strange fright  
the mirror shot back.  
It was not the failed scheme  
of becoming beautiful  
in one graceful sweep of easy curl.

It was the providence  
of too much sudden knowledge  
that the world was unkind—

and no matter how a woman tried  
to style beauty  
she would be pulled  
into the mirror's depths,  
pressing against the silver  
to be lured into humility,  
forgiveness and kindness.

**Deborah DeNicola**  
**So. Portland**  
*is a poet and teacher*



## Etta Pushard

*A woman was at the police court this afternoon requesting a warrant for the arrest of her husband, who had given her a little love pat in the mouth with his fist.*

*Gardiner Daily Reporter-Journal, Nov. 21, 1896.*

"I want him arrested," I said.

"Who?" the sergeant said.

"Who d'ya think?" I said.

"My husband, of course, that's who."

"Well, now, woman, what's this about?

Why would any wife want her own husband arrested?

It don't make sense," he said.

I could see his eyes smiling.

He thought it was a joke.

"He hit me," I said, "hit me on the mouth."

"You mean it was a hard kiss, maybe.

We husbands do that sometimes

when the feeling gets strong."

The other policemen in the station

who had been listening, smiling,  
started to laugh.

I don't know why I came.

It was hopeless, I knew it would be.

I thought about it a long time

and started more than once

and then gave it up.

At last I couldn't give it up again

and went to the station

to stop the coming despair.

And so I was there, into it,

and being there, I had to carry on.

"No," I said, "He don't kiss that way.

He hits."

"Oh, you mean he gives you love taps."

"No," I said, "he don't love

and he don't tap.

He hits, hits with his fist

or the back of his hand

if he's in a good mood.

If not, he hits and then kicks me

after he knocks me down."

"That's too bad, Mrs.,

but it ain't against the law

for a husband to control his wife.

For all I know, maybe he had reasons.

You go on back and try to be a good wife.

I'm sure if you do right by him,

if you know what I mean,

he'll give you the kind a taps you'll like,

you know, love taps."

He patted me on the shoulder,

grinned at the others,

and pushed me toward the door.

I suppose it's the same everywhere

as it is here in Gardiner.

There's no escape.

I meant to tell them what brought me down

in hopes the election left them all  
feeling triumphant or sympathetic,  
but I didn't get to.

Last night the town had a parade  
in celebration of McKinley's election.

I wanted to put a candle in the window  
like everyone else in town.

He said no, it was no celebration

as far as he was concerned.

He'd voted for Bryan.

"Well," I said, "I can't vote at all.

I just want to be part of something  
the town is doing."

"You're just a part of what I do,  
and I'm not celebrating," he said,  
and gave me what the sergeant, grinning,  
called a love tap,

I guess, because it only bled a little.

It was little and much at once,

the final straw

that itched all night,

and I took off this morning.

Well, I knew it was hopeless,

but I tried.

I overcame my weakness

and I tried.

And now I'm collapsed inward,

lost all my spunk

and allowed myself to be pushed out,

but I haven't allowed my loss to shape

my body or my face

as I put a dead-heavy foot

in front of a dead-heavy foot

and made my way back up this hill,

up this steep hill of Church Street

with its structures to cold Christ,

had to stop to rest here on the Common

with its stone monument

to the Great Rebellion,

its stiff erection to the boys

who did not live to beat their wives.

I must wheeze on then

beyond the cemetery

to the cottage I'm forced to inhabit

with the man I was given to,

this man like my father

who gave me away,

this man who beats me,

especially when he's drunk

and he's drunk mostly when he's awake.

Well, what did I expect after all

from those policemen?

They're all males, all men,

like all the rest of them,

like all the men I ever came across,

like God, a male for sure,

like the minister at that orphanage

praying for the girls there

with his hands

and with the same smirk

on his twitching face they all have.

I'd rather there was no God.

Better this world's an accident

than that it was made on purpose.

Well, there's been talk,

in this Nineteenth Century at last,

that it *was* an accident.

Maybe there's hope.



All my life I been walking up hill,  
up one male hill after another  
with my feet hurting  
and my hands dry and cracked,  
and always some man at the top  
ready to knock me down again.  
It was desperation made me go,  
go down to the police station,  
knowing no other way,  
knowing that was no way either.  
Now I'm in for more of the same  
or worse when he finds out,  
and he'll find out.

Someone will be sure to tell him,  
may even tell him before I get there.  
Maybe he'll kill me this time.  
Maybe that will be my way out.

My life's a house of empty rooms  
with no door out,  
rooms of dust and ragged wall paper  
and some man blaming me for it.  
In the first gray days of marriage  
I hoped for children.

In my innocent neutrality  
I wanted to care for babies  
because I wanted to care,  
even to love another.

A child, I thought, would be lovable.  
But the babies never came.

As the slapping came instead  
and the cruel tongue lashings,  
I came too to thank the fate  
that kept me barren.

I see now that there is more  
than one kind of emptiness in life.

How could I have stood to watch  
a daughter grow into slaps  
and maulings from her father,  
to be traded at last in silence  
and exchange one pain for another,  
father to husband the same  
and all with the blessing of the world,  
even her weeping mother's?

Or how could I watch a son  
repeat the pattern of his father  
on somebody else's daughter,  
all in the name of love?

Well, barrenness is frightful,  
a house of cold and empty rooms  
in a house of almost guilt,  
saved only from despair  
because there are no children  
to carry on or suffer the despair.

Richard Lyons  
Gardiner

*is a professor emeritus, No. Dakota State U.*

# Dilly's Breakdown

(From *Cream Line*, a closet novel)

(1)

When he was finally alone with Number 40, Dilly Church pulled himself inside the old milk truck and sat high on the torn leather seat. Too high—his feet came off the floor. He slid off and lowered the seat, then adjusted the sideview mirror; swung open the refrigerator doors and changed around the cases of creamline and lowfat so they were the way he remembered them. Oh, the wonderful sour chill of that box. He sat back down and took the steering wheel with a smile. By God, it felt wonderful. He smelled his hands. He pressed the brake, pushed the clutch, pumped the accelerator, thrilled to the racing of the engine. He spat on his handkerchief, rubbed the windshield clean, and drove to the first stop whistling stoutly.

Back in the Heights again—Pete Corey's old territory—Clyde Bourassa's old territory. And didn't old Clydie used to make out at Christmas time. Back in the fifties, before the jug stores—back when everyone had a milkman. Ten dairies in the area back then. Cowmore alone ran 30 trucks on the road, employed 50 men and paid them a good wage to boot. People *valued* their milkman. Christmastimes old Clydie'd bring back sweaters, leather gloves, fifths of VO, toys for the grandchildren, records, money—'course, he'd never let on how much. Pete Corey made out, too, when he took over, but never as good as Clyde—jug stores were all over town by then—Morning Farms, Cumberland Farms, Seven Eleven. And every time a new one would go up, Dilly would get a hundred stop notices or more. And he'd have to combine the remnants of one route with the remnants of another and always end up laying a man off. Or what hurt just as much was when he'd have to stop a customer out in some farm town—it just didn't pay to drive ten miles into the boonies for a half gallon sale.

Another year, another jug store, another five would go: route men, secretaries, mechanics, utility men, until there were only seven men left at Cowmore Dairy. Nowadays Dilly watched the mail every morning with dread anticipation of finding the note from Aunt Arlene that they were closing the barn doors for good.

Heading down Hillside Drive, his thoughts were shattered by the sight of the MORNING FARMS sign glaring at him, green letters on blue, from atop the red-shingled roof—the jug store. A sign facing the road read: ANOTHER MORNING FARMS—GRAND OPENING MAY 25—3 DAYS. MILK \$1.89 GAL. Brick masons were there already this morning, finishing a two-foot wall along the left side of the parking lot. The electrician's van was parked in front, two cars and a blue pickup truck around the side. Approaching the stop sign, Dilly pumped his brakes, but considered the courage of the Japanese kamikazes. He imagined himself highballing straight across River Road, smashing through the gas tanks in one enormous Godfearing roar, then steering the fireball right on through the front window of the jug store, and the whole kit and kaboodle blowing sky-high over the Passacook. He shivered and made a left turn.

Headlights flashed in his sideview mirror—a black pickup truck trying to pass around a long leftward curve. Dilly eased the milktruck to the right and, seeing the road clear ahead, reached his hand out the door. "Go around," he muttered. But the pickup stayed on his tail, still flashing. When the road straightened, he slowed down, but the pickup still wouldn't pass. He snugged closer to the guardrail. "Come on, come on," he said, waving. His right wheels drifted to the edge of the asphalt and he jerked back into the road just as the guardrail ended. "Pass!" he hollered, bouncing on his seat. "Pass!" He stood and threw his arm out the door. "Go! Go by me!"

At last the vehicle moved out to overtake him.

"We'll see about this," Dilly croaked, and stepped on the gas. But the pickup gained just the same—its grill crept close to his door. Too close. Dilly looked over, tried to see into the truck's mirrored windows, and shouted: "You get that—" when his right wheels jumped the shoulder, swerved through the sand, and the milktruck lurched over the bank, buckjumping over rock and stumpage, then started a horrible slow roll over.

His arm caught in the steering wheel. His hip hit the stickshift then slammed the freezer. His heels kicked the ceiling, all in a ghastly jangle of steel and glass. Breakage, he thought helplessly, hugging the wheel. A sapling came into his door, gouged his ribs, and was gone. The black notebook struck his throat. He gagged. He hung. He flopped. Half gallons of ice cream and pounds of frozen butter lifted out of the freezer and pummeled his body. He

lost consciousness. He regained consciousness. The refrigerator door slid open, slid closed, open, closed, while cold milk splashed over his back. Oh, the breakage. A steel case jumped onto his shoulders, then disappeared and Everything stopped.

Dizzying light and shape jelled into focus. He was hanging by his elbow, watching a brown sodden limb—hair blowing like Medusa—rising, falling away . . . He was becoming aware of a flood of icy water churning around his hips, and he scrambled up with a violent shudder. The Passacook was inside old number 40, white as chalk, and rising. And Dilly Church couldn't swim.

He jumped back into his seat and took the wheel in his hands, expecting desperately to drive away, but the cold teeth of reality quickly savaged those hopes. He called, "Help," in a little voice pinched by shivering and completely engulfed by the roar of the river. He hugged the wheel and watched milkwater throb through the open refrigerator in slow gushes, encircle his legs, then go swirling out both doors. The truck turned a teasing circle. "Little help here!" he chirped, watching the bank stroll away before him. He was drifting backwards. He pressed the horn, but it made no sound. Suddenly the truck barged to a stop, throwing him back against his seat. Its nose lifted and swung a slow arc as if surveying the opposite bank, while the Passacook impassively roared through the truck. Dilly lifted his legs. The truck tipped. *Oh Jesus save me*, he prayed. *Right now*. But the river paid no heed. It muscled the back wheels off the rocks and pulled the milktruck, bobbing, into the heart of the current, where it began barreling headlong down the whitewater, in long spongy leaps off the rocky bottom. Dilly pumped the brakes.

Ahead, a glistening, craggy boulder sprayed dead-center out of the current, coming fast. Beyond the boulder, the river widened into an open, grassy pool, bubbled along its banks with milkfat. He envisioned the truck breaking apart against the rock like a coaster on a reef, spewing vessel, cargo, and humanity alike in hundreds of splintered pieces, to sink miserably to the dreary bottom. He envisioned cold, suffocating darkness. He stomped on the starter; he stamped on the clutch; he steered both ways. The truck took a hard bounce off the bottom then bounced again, and veered right. Dilly closed his eyes and waited for the crash. But instead, the truck came to a crunching, skreaking stop.

He opened his eyes. The boulder was pushed into his side door, the river surging over it, flooding around his legs. On his right, a long, barkless deadfall blinked in and out of the deafening torrent, squeezing the milktruck against the rock. The timber stretched back twenty feet to a mossy root complex in the shallows under the bank. The river thundered against the truck, inching it, groaning, through the squeeze, until it suddenly jumped and caught the deadfall in its front wheel well.

Dilly looked at the timber. He stared at the timber, and forced a clear thought: It was his lifeline, his only chance. If he could step out onto it, if he could keep his balance for twenty feet . . .

He slid off his seat, clutching the freezer handle, and pulled himself toward the door. He felt for the outside handle, but found the sideview mirror had been crushed against it. Grasping the mirror's top, he gingerly reached a toe out to the timber. The truck lurched, and Dilly's foot slid; he fell forward, twisting the mirror out, and as his reflection turned up in a shard, he gasped. It was the rising pasty face of a dead man. He looked again, crouching with one foot on the timber, the other in the truck, the mighty Passacook surging through his legs . . . and his mouth opened in astonishment—a glasses lens was shattered, his hair and face were matted with milkwash—he had the most profound feeling that he was witnessing his own death. And yet the notion of death seemed somehow not at all fearful to him, but rather quite tantalizing. No, more than death, he realized, it was *disappearance* that charmed him. He had the fondest desire to simply disappear. The deadfall cracked. The truck creaked. "Oh shut up," he said, and left the mirror like a wire walker, balancing along the oozing trunk to the shore, this strange and wonderful excitement coursing through him. As he climbed down into the shallows and hoisted himself onto the bank, the top of the deadfall snapped loudly and the truck crawled free past the boulder. Its back sucked into a vortex, then bobbed out and swung into the current, then finally plunged into the creamy pool, where old number forty dipped out of sight.

The bank was a steep slide of pine needles and dead leaves. Dilly's trousers sagged so heavily, he had to stop climbing every few steps to pull them up and catch his breath. It was halfway up the hill in this struggle, while fighting to maintain his balance, and while still pondering the possibilities of his death, that he turned back and found himself eye to eye with a great blue heron standing bolt upright in the shallows. Dilly, clutching the knee-high crotch of his trousers, was thoroughly entranced. He had never seen such a bird, never dreamed such a creature existed. It was as if the prehistoric thing were

a sign. When it spread its wide wings, lifted up over the river and sailed away, Dilly tingled with significance, and thus enlightened, turned to see a gray squirrel standing not twenty feet from him, chattering excitedly. It seemed to be calling to him, so he made his way along the bankside to it. But as he neared, the squirrel jumped onto a black birch and scurried up. On the ground, precisely where it had been, something peeked up at Dilly out of the leaf bed. He knelt and picked it out of the pine needles. A mason's trowel. Turning it slowly in his hands, Dilly nodded with innate new understanding, then looked up at the squirrel. "Ah, yes," he said. "Yes, yes, yes."

It was at this moment that Dilly Church became imbued with a most powerful sense that animals—not only the heron and squirrel, but all animals—knew much more than they let on.

\*

*(A week passes, Dilly is missing, and presumed drowned. Actually, he is masquerading as his rich, deaf, reclusive Aunt, and is referred to as "she." In the next section, "she" steals into the Cowmore Dairy and takes the Cowmore sedan, a white station wagon with a plastic Jersey cow rising five feet above its roof. Although the sedan takes gas in the normal place, Dilly has put the nozzle into the cow's neck and is filling it up.)*

\*

(2)

The gas pump was so full of a clatter, it seemed at any minute it would seize up. It had sounded that way for years; and it would likely sound that way for a good long time to come. But what on earth did it matter? Nothing.

In the full darkness of night, she stood in the open doorway of the Cowmore sedan, holding the plastic cow's foot for support while directing the flow of gasoline into the neck opening. Surprisingly, the cow's integrity was good, just a trickle from an open seam on a back leg. She checked the gas pump in the stray illumination from the car's interior light: forty gallons and still pumping.

She stopped at fifty. Even though the cow could have held more, she was sure fifty gallons would do the job. She stepped down, hung the hose back on its holder and debated for a moment whether or not to shut the pump off. *What would it matter?* she thought, and with that notion, had to consider what anything mattered. For heaven's sake, in light of her situation, nothing—not a blessed thing. The world was about to disappear. Just the same, she threw the lever, silencing the pump. Propriety, she said to herself.

She reached an arm into the neck opening, but her fingers never touched gasoline. She was surprised to think that all that fuel could have filled only the legs, udder, and belly.

Still, when she pulled away from the pump and stopped at Portland Ave., the thin liquid sloshed out of the neck opening and spread over her windshield. She pulled on the wipers, pushed a spray of cleaner, and wished the animal has been molded with its head raised rather than grazing. Another cog in the idiot wheel.

She drove the River Road to the west end, the cow's steady hooting drowned out by a radio talk show—insomniac listeners mewling on about capitol punishment, national defense, the use of instant replays to officiate baseball games, freedom fighters, terrorists, car bombs... "Cow bombs," she said, and laughed. None of it meant a thing.

She slowed at the vacant jug store, illuminated pink by harsh arc-phosphorus lamps on high aluminum poles. ANOTHER MORNING FARMS, the sign on wheels read. GRAND OPENING 2 DAYS—MILK 1.89 GAL. She turned up Hillside Drive and watched the sign and gas pumps fall away through a rippling stream down her back window.

Near the top of the hill, when the River Road was just a hint of light in the rearview, she pulled into a driveway, then backed out onto the hill. She straightened the car, faced it down. Now the trickle of gas flowed down the windshield, and the fumes began to finger into the car—she felt its sweetness in her mouth as she heaved a terribly resolute sigh. She turned off the radio. She peeled off her wig. Dilly Church again. Gordon M. "Dilly" Church IV, which of course is what the paper would call him. General manager of Cowmore Dairy. Whatever they would say about him... didn't matter. Died in a cobalt blue dress. Dilly shook his head.

He took off Arlene's bifocals, replaced them with his own single-lensed specs, then turned on the interior light and looked into the mirror. He ran his fingers through his white hair, then lapped his fingers and rubbed the rouge off his cheeks; with the dry side of his hand, he wiped the lipstick off his mouth; wiped the lipstick from his hand onto his dress. He briefly regretted not bringing a proper suit of clothes, but *what did it matter?* He

opened the glove compartment, took the two photos—the gang at Cowmore, the Cowmore building—and laid them on the seat beside him.

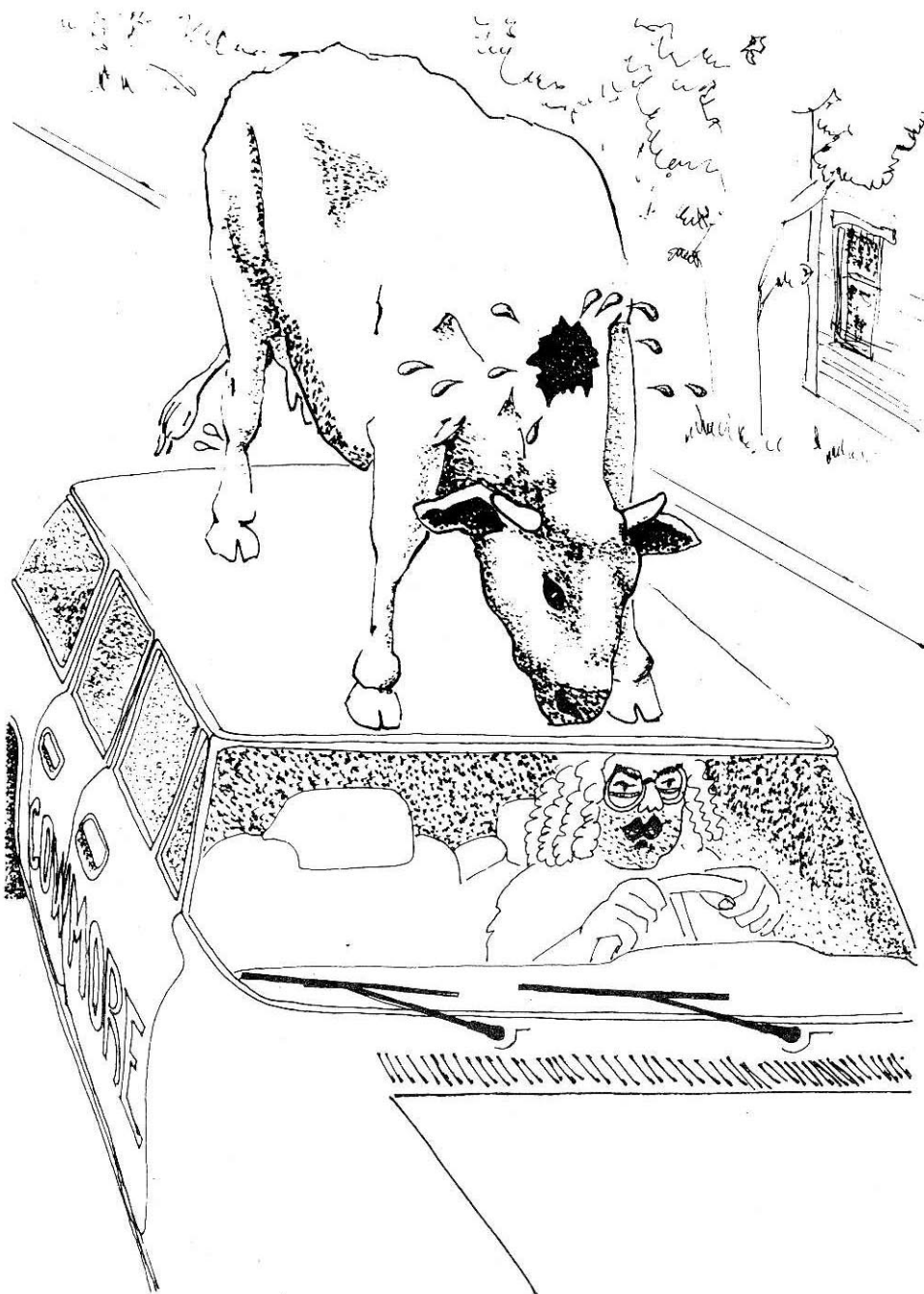
Shivers of goosebumps climbed his body. His right knee vibrated. A long sigh came, riding an embarrassing, quavering moan. So what? At once his heart surged; adrenaline floodgates opened. He lifted his foot off the brake and the car started downhill, gaining speed as it fell, the plastic cow fluting against the wind higher and louder than ever before. He cranked open his window, let the last cool wind caress his face. Houses passed. Parked cars hushed by. Now he pressed the accelerator steadily, until it was hard to the floor. *Yeowwww* roared the engine. *Wheeeeeee* sang the cow: THE FIREBALL EXPRESS. Ahead the pink lights flared, gas pumps turned up like soldiers, the crackpot jug store just beyond, stop sign flying past, cow and Dilly wailing:

"No! Noooooo!"

He stomped the brakes with both feet, brakes screaming, cow gushing gasoline over the hood, back end angling, shattering the sign on wheels, hopping the island, crunching the end pump, careening on helplessly, helplessly!, slamming into the corner of the jug store in a steely ringing of plate glass and crunch of metals, the headless cow vomiting gasoline into the suddenly wide-open store, Dilly in the same instant bailing out his door, catching his blue dress on the handle, tearing free, racing for cover behind the dumpster, where he fell onto his hands and knees and was caressed—caressed—by sounds: his own charged breathing... the quiet papery flutter of the Morning Farms banner in the opened front window... the peaceful whisper of the Passacook down below. Together, so quietly, they were the most beautiful sounds Dilly Church had ever, ever heard.

#### Michael Kimball Coopers Mills

*is the son of a milkman (1948-63) & a milkman himself for a dying dairy in 1971. He wrote Firewater Pond.*





# Long Suffering

"Sure and I hope you're proud of yourself now," she says to him, "letting them see you three seas over. Your own son and granddaughter. You're a fine sight. And I'm after emptying every bottle I could find down the drain which is where you're headed if you're not already as low as water can sink." "I even found a bottle in his shoes, his shoes, mind you," she says to us, rolling her martyr's eyes heavenward before fixing them again on my grandfather. "It's sweet you are with your dirty clothes smelling of whisky sweat. And that's what you are too, don't you know, just a heap of dirty clothes. Ach, the stink of you."

"The Holy Mother knows I've tried. I've been searching out your bottles like the devil himself for forty-three years to banish'em from the house, but, no, you'll sneak more in, wily as you are, wily as the devil's disciple. I even found a flask in the chrysanthemums like it was growing out of God's good earth. And that fifth found its way right to the sewer where it's trying to drag himself. But does he thank me for sparing his puling little existence for one more day? Oh no, he's too grand for that. Instead he skulks around and hides my rosary, my sacred heart, the tintype of my own Mum. Well sir, you'll have your reckoning with St. Peter, now you will, and with my mother too. And I for one will shed no salt tears for you in heaven."

The wire whisk goes around and around, scraping the sides of the saucepan with angry, little metallic rasps. The room smells of steam, years of steam, of brisket and potatoes, pot roast, the warm, close smell of chocolate, dark as mortal sin, woven into the cabbage roses of the carpets and drapes. Steam condenses on her rimless glasses.

"And himself just sits there," she says to the staccato accompaniment of the whisk. The chocolate bubbles and roils in hot little pops. "Himself just sits there and not a word to say for himself. Well, I hope you're saving it for St. Peter, because sure and you'll have a lot of explaining to do remembering Sundays and the Holy Days by drinking your poison instead of the blood of Christ."

My father barely, barely shifts his weight, leaning slowly against the white, cool metal of the refrigerator. His forehead tilts forward as if his head's grown heavy—the blossom of a chrysanthemum nodding under an early snow.

I strain against my yearning to lean beside my father against the white steel of the Frigidaire. The air itself sags, heavy and slick with fudgy steam. My sweet tooth thuds, dull in my mouth, as if it's already rotten with sugar.

"You'll have your sweets soon," she says to my father. "A sit-down for a taste of dessert if himself can make it to the table. Not that he deserves a nice bit. He's no better than the family of drunks who bred him, no better. Worse maybe, worse even than that shiftless brother of his who drank up his own family's mortgage money, drank the whole lot of them out on the street. But at least he could sing, Daniel could, and tell a story. Did I ever tell you about Daniel? He was a witty drunk, that one, a talented man, and tuneful when he was in his cups. He could sing like an angel from heaven. All the girls loved him. He'd look them right in the eyes and sing some sad ballad and bring tears into their eyes. Many a girl fell from grace falling for him and his song. But not me. I saw right through him and his charm. He asked me to marry him. But I told him, "You can't eat charm, Daniel Culligan. And fine words butter no bread. I see right through you, Daniel," I said. "And see nothing at all," is what he said back to me. Oh, he was quick with a phrase. And he must have had one ready for Mary T. because didn't she marry him nearly within the month. And I had to go for the silent one here."

"And do you have a song or a clever word? Oh no, not you. You're too busy floating in your whisky, drowning in it, your lungs so full you can't come up for a mouthful of air or conversation. Not a word or a laugh to brighten the world you blight."

The whisk clicks round and round, and she pours the chocolate in a thick stream over the sponge cake.

"Well, sit yourself down in shame with your family then and have a bit of cake if your bottle-rotted old carcass has the stomach for it."

And he stubs tobacco into the bowl of his pipe with his thumb, raises his eyes, pale blue and shiny as mirrors, and smiles.

"Oh sure," she says, "go ahead and smile. You'll be crying soon enough. There will be no whisky in heaven; I can tell you."

And still he smiles as if to say, "Then I'd rather be in the other place." But he doesn't say it. He hides behind his screen of pipe smoke. He's a quiet drunk.

Joan C. Connor  
Chebeague Island  
*is an autumn fellow at Vermont Studio Colony*

Happy families are all alike;  
every unhappy family is unhappy  
in its own way.

Anna Karenina  
Tolstoy

on friday my daddy hit my mamma  
hit her face  
so that it bled  
bleed red blood  
all down her dress

on saturday he apologized  
sent her roses  
cooed her  
and told her that  
he loved her

on sunday we went to church  
my brother cried  
i picked my nose  
and daddy played with mamma  
beneath her new printed dress

on monday mamma and i went shopping  
and there was a man who looked at mamma  
and mamma looked at the man  
and a woman looked at mamma looking at the man  
and told my daddy

on tuesday daddy beat mamma  
beat her like an animal  
'till she couldn't move  
'till her swollen lips kissed our dry floor  
and her barren eyes stared at my black shoes

on wednesday i nursed mamma  
nursed her brittle bones  
her broken heart  
and daddy cried  
and prayed she would get better

on thursday mamma died  
i cleaned her body  
brushed her hair  
kissed her lips  
then scrubbed the blood stains  
from our kitchen floor

on friday daddy told me not to tell  
he pinched my cheek  
then slapped my rear  
and i looked at him  
then looked away

mourners send their flowers  
to the grave  
that is now her home

and daddy dates the voice  
that revealed  
the innocence  
of one womans dream

Stephanie Saunders  
Bar Harbor



Photo Melody Lee York

## Family Portrait

You cannot say,  
"I love you"  
anymore.  
Yet compassion shows  
in secret gifts.

Cheap romances  
stashed beside your bed  
where love is but  
a sterile dream  
experienced with open eyes.

Downstairs  
the great glass pictures  
flicker and roll.  
You sit and sniff  
the little clouds of sentiment.

We try to maintain  
the balance that is family,  
while your rancor shifts  
from one to another  
as you generate  
a screen of artificial hate.

Panic grows  
when they strike out  
on their own.

You clasp the youngest,  
your final chance at love—  
though for you the grand emotion  
is not love  
but pity.

I am tired of forbearing,  
sick  
with thoughts I cannot share,  
sick  
of your distortions,  
sick of you.

**Miles Robinson**  
**Thomaston**  
*is a retired electronics engineer*

## Requiem

The beginning's  
infinite possibilities  
all exhausted now.  
No sudden death of love  
but a malignancy so subtle  
it took us by surprise.

Days of wine and roses  
given way to kids and careers  
and revolving charge accounts.  
Circling each other like wary beasts,  
we move in separate spheres,  
speaking separate languages,  
untranslatable.

In my memory, occasional flashes  
of our yesterdays:  
Like Polaroid snapshots,  
their brittle shine eroded  
by time and distance,  
caricatures of what we once were,  
they mock what we've become.

**Laurie Breton**  
**Augusta**  
*is working on a B.A. in English*

## Dead Air Space

When someone dies, Hindus stack firewood,  
place the body at the top of the pyre  
and watch mortal smoke coil into the sky.  
Greeks seized highest ground for graves.  
Americans like cemeteries on hills.  
The idea is to get a corpse close to God  
and to give the dead a view.  
The idea is to avoid the earth  
as if it already had claimed too much.  
The Parsees find a hill  
and build a Tower of Silence  
on top of which rotting bodies  
are picked clean by vultures  
who fly even higher  
with pieces of flesh in their beaks.  
But this new scheme from California  
goes too far.

A Cremators' Group will soon launch  
a satellite into permanent orbit  
containing thousands of urns.  
It will be covered with mirrors  
and will circle the earth forever.  
We will live with our dead  
flying through the air,  
around and around us.  
On clear nights, Californians  
will step into their backyards  
and with the naked eye  
see grandfather speeding by.  
If you look close enough at the mirrors  
you can see yourself.

**Terry Plunkett**  
**Hallowell**  
*teaches at UMA*

## Ghouls

Sitting in my living room, knees tucked under,  
leaning to the left,  
reading light giving off a comforting circle,  
book on my lap,  
opened.  
You appear,  
stand in the doorway,  
I look directly into brown eyes,  
you into blue.  
No words spoken.  
Closing the book, setting it aside,  
I stand and follow you  
to the shed for the shovels.  
Silently we walk down the path,  
open the iron gate, glide under the stone arch,  
knowing how many steps it will take  
to the granite, the name  
washed long ago.

We lift the shovels and begin,  
not stopping  
til metal hits wood.  
The dampness of the earth reaches into our cells.  
Lifting the lid, we peek in,  
is it too late, is there anything left.

The earless, noseless, eyeless face returns  
our thoughts. Gray flesh hangs from bones,  
skeletal fingers rest across the chest,  
the white gown,  
yellowed.

Shredded. Ignoring peacefulness, you  
reach under the arms, I take the feet.  
Gently we lift it out.  
We carry it back to the house,  
sit it in a chair,  
I return to my book, you  
take up residency in front of the t.v.

With us at the dining room table, between us  
in bed, to the grocery store, to the movies,  
out to dinner with friends,  
to church. The decay moves rapidly,  
the dripping becomes deafening,  
slime prevents us from holding it up,  
it slides onto the floor  
oozing. Sprawled in its own puddle,  
it returns our thoughts into brown,  
into blue, no words.

Retrace the steps, set it back  
in the box, replace the lid.  
Heap the dirt into the hole,  
a dirge of thumps  
marking the last time

again.

**Bonnie Enes**  
**Southport**  
*works with Front Porch t.v. show*



## In Proper Form and Sequence

Blue sky, bright sky, vibrant with early morning sun and the ceaseless ocean breeze of October. From her bed, Lucy sees the cube of sky framed by the dusty glass and breathes raw salt air through the half-opened window. Half open, half closed, neither summer nor winter, the sash marking the boundary of the seasons. At some point when she was younger, Lucy decided that fresh air while sleeping was good and consequently had lived in a succession of cool rooms. The blankets on the bed are heavy, keeping her limbs still within the concavity of the mattress. But her mind moves, spins in its own sphere. *What time is it? is it time? what day? how much time do I have?* Lucy rolls to her side, reaches for her watch on the night table, then feels a flutter, tentative like a sandpiper feeding, below her stomach. She sees her hand tremble over the watch. Quickly she lies flat on her back and waits for the tremors to pass, waits for quiet to reenter her mind.

The cube of sky grows darker as the brilliance of dawn changes to the royal blue of midmorning. She would rise, place her feet on the cold floor and propel herself into loose clothes, then into the kitchen and to the telephone. But Lucy lies still, watching the sunlight tap the bedroom walls. The wallpaper of her converted attic room peels slightly away from the wall, curls of grey testifying to years of salt air and neglect. The bedroom floor was done in linoleum, a black and white speckled pattern that had never claimed to be anything but serviceable and now had lost that distinction. When she moved in, Lucy threw some second-hand rugs over the floor, serving only to add to the gentle decay of the room. But to Lucy it had seemed romantic—an attic room, overlooking the ocean, the sharp hint of iodine in her clothes, a desk by the crooked window.

From her bed she sees the book on the shelf which Mark had given her when they'd first slept together. *The Book of Merlin*, a book about age and regret and loss, written by a man who wrote for children. She'd been happy for the unwrapped gift, not knowing the story or that it was the only gift. At the end the old king asked Merlin to let him die, for he had lost, through death and betrayal, all he had loved. Lucy had marveled then at the sadness of it, for she was so happy, and she had tucked its clear yellow binding among her paperbacks. She raises her head from the pillow, gazing at the book so bright against the other tattered spines. *But what happened then?*, she wonders.

They'd been a couple, at least in the evenings. Lucy and Mark would walk at night, around tiny rental homes perched on the hill overlooking the shore, trying out porch swings of empty homes, cutting through backyards, wandering down to the beach or up toward the local bar. Mark liked to walk. Mark also liked to talk, about God and the law of nature and the poor caliber of the people he knew and most of those he thought he'd meet. Lucy dated other men before Mark, tidy men who talked in circumscribed sentences about their work, or their car, or their last girlfriend. She would respond in kind, pay for her own beer or movie ticket, and the men faded away, without anything sharp to remind her that they'd been present.

But Mark's words were different, unfettered, warm torrents of beautiful words which washed over her, head to toe, constantly and completely. She could remember Mark talking, she nodding or murmuring in the dark, and the almost physical pleasure his verbal abandon gave her. Then the words would wind down and evaporate and she'd be left with Mark's smile, some indefinable twist to his mouth which told her that very soon he'd touch her and move closer. Mark desired her very simply, almost as the pacifier necessary before sleep, Lucy recalled.

One night in July they went swimming among the rocks at the beach. At home Lucy left a light on in the hall when she slept alone. But in the open

ocean she enjoyed the thrill of the dark, sensing but not seeing the unknown wave moving toward her. The key was not to fight it, to let it catch her limbs, move her up in a swift arc, and then fling her, happy and uncaring, onto the sand. She had brought champagne to the beach that night to celebrate Mark's new job, an odd gesture from a silent griever. Mark was happy, as buoyant as a child's raft, anticipating his new life as a reporter in New York. They'd drunk the sweet wine and lay together on the blankets in the dunes, close and sticky with salt but separated by a letter and a plane ticket.

During the rest of the summer they talked sporadically on the phone. Lucy felt her words come through the line as if from underwater, in proper form and sequence but without any sound. Mark said he would come up for Labor Day but cancelled the visit, because of work he'd said. There had been no invitation for Lucy to leave her attic room for the city. They spoke less and less after that. Then Columbus Day passed without a word. By then she had lost the energy to dial the phone, to search for words so sharp and true that he'd have to hear and respond. It was a lethargy, as smooth and silent as talc sand, that stilled her thoughts and actions. Then her pants began to fit too closely. She stopped eating breakfast with relief, but still her stomach seemed larger, firmer to her touch. Her period had never been regular but three months turned to four. One day she found herself in the small Planned Parenthood clinic, gazing steadily at the murky water of a fish tank stationed in the waiting room. Flickers of fish catapulted against the glass, time and again returning to their own reflections with mouths open and hungry.

*It is late. I should get up, I need to call the hospital and the doctor and the insurance company. I must move,* Lucy tells herself. What made you wait? the doctor had asked, it will make it harder. Why didn't you come in earlier? She couldn't explain to him that she hadn't brought herself in, not really, it was just a wave, a swell of happenstance that had deposited her before him.

Lucy follows the line of the ceiling where it meets the walls. This box is warped, she thinks. Those lines aren't straight, they wobble along the wall. It's just a crooked room and tiny. She wishes she could draw Mark's book from the shelf without moving and keep it under the blankets. *It's getting late* . . . Time to be still is what the old king wanted, Lucy remembers. I'm done with doing, he said to Merlin. Whispers of movement stir her stomach and Lucy catches her breath. Then the king says that it was time and events that led him to his end, sweeping him into actions that he had no heart for. The air against Lucy's cheek feels cold, and cool tears slip from her eyes into her ears. She hears sobbing, harsh sounds that gradually grow softer and subside into whimpers, leaving just the ticking of the watch in the still room. Lucy rolls to her side and stretches her arm out toward the night stand again. She squeezes the watch tight within her fist, and sees her knuckles stand out white. Then she opens her hand. The watch cracks against the floor and rolls beneath the bed.

The sky outside the window is white with noon sun. The ocean swells and falls, the ceaseless breeze of October skipping over its surface, brushing over the empty seaside houses and slipping through the half-opened attic window. Lucy wakes again and lies flat, hands over her stomach. There will be company in the spring. In the cool early mornings she will hold the child close beneath the blankets. She imagines the face of the child, sucking like the quick fish in the tank, and dreams of it swimming in the great dark waves of summer.

Melissa Waterman  
Bath

works as planner for the Gulf of Maine Project



## Siege Leaves One Man Wounded

Headline from local paper.

The question that motivated this poem was: Which man?

The old man broods in his shack,  
dark air greasy with kerosene fumes and  
smudges on the windowpane thirty years thick,  
a curve in the threshold from his mud-caked step.  
The porch floor sags where he stands to smoke  
watching the world go by one truck at a time  
down his narrow dirt road,  
watching the trees leaf out, again.  
He mildews in the damp spring, like  
laundry forgotten on the slack line out back,  
flapped to shreds by wind and sun.  
Grass and goldenrod'll grow thick enough  
to strangle a man, come summer.

He tosses his butts as far as he can spit,  
a game he plays with himself,  
or shoots at bottles, or bald tires stacked  
like rubber hotcakes.  
He pitches glass, plastic, paper out the door,  
fills his yard with one man's debris.  
Anything wood he burns.

No one cares about him except one man,  
his younger neighbor Paul  
who picks his way through the glass-strewn yard  
to find him hunched in the dark  
eating cold beef stew from a can.

"C'mon Ken," Paul says, "let's g'down  
to the stream and git us some trout."  
But some fear moves in him  
same as the spring stirs grass to grow.  
"Na," he says, "ain't goin."  
Some fear of capture though he's already  
trapped, some fear of loss,  
this man with nothing. He hears  
a tractor rumbling its way  
to the fields with manure.  
In a life so stagnant, anything that moves  
can leave him behind, abandoned, forgotten.  
Even a tractor can betray him,  
someone else's work and pride  
can rob him blind, keep him a  
powerless man pathetic in his one-room  
shack without even a dog for company.  
Only a target-tree riddled with holes  
can prove his skill. Only his trash  
can vouch for him, glass in the grass,  
old calendars with crossed-off days.

Where had he heard that rumble before?  
That fear rising in him like sap?  
Was the trenches, Europe, a long  
way from home fightin  
someone's war, I forgit who,  
leavin Pa behind to harvest  
the corn without us boys. There,  
was nothin but a man with a gun,  
a hunted man hidin in trenches,  
for what? They said I had ta go,  
they said Pa would have ta  
harvest the corn alone, there was

a war on, didn't I know?  
But Pa died, the corn got  
et by crows, the field got  
sold to old Müller down the road.  
Family's nothin now.  
Oh, there's a war on, don't ya know?

Paul turns to go down fishing alone.

The rumbling coming nearer,  
Ken grabs his loaded gun,  
tests his aim, one eye squeezed shut,  
gotta be ready for the enemy tank  
ready ta shoot the son of a bitch that  
farms the old fields up yonder.  
And warn't that some good, that corn,  
yeller as the sun, and sweet as my  
Molly who didn't wait?  
He dreams himself into a toothless  
smile and raises the gun to his tattered  
shoulder, squints and fires at the  
passing tractor, fighting his war  
to end all wars. The farmer scared  
but safe inside the tractor cab  
goes home and calls the troopers,  
That crazy coot tried to shoot me.

State troopers come in three quiet cruisers  
and find no sign of him except his  
trash in the yard where grass will  
overtake the shack, come summer,  
mulching over one man's past.

"Come out, Ken, we want to talk  
to you," he hears, huddled in the  
dark of his shabby room, oiling his gun.  
"Come out," they plead like  
no one ever has, 'cept that lady  
from down t' Augusta, and those  
wartime recruiters lookin for farmhands.  
Yeh, they want me like they want old  
trash, ta clean me up, I'm an  
eyesore, me and my yard, I'm a  
minefield, watch where ya step.  
They come closer, creeping past  
the lilac hedge into open range.  
"Ken," say the men, "we want to  
talk to you," they coax the old  
man who hasn't said a word in years  
except to Paul.

He huddles behind the woodstove, smoking.

Their footsteps come closer,  
crunching over glass. Now  
Paul's voice says "C'mon,  
Ken, let's g'down fishin."  
Stay away, stay away, Paul,  
don't feed me ta these dogs.  
Don't lure me like bait.  
You think I'm stupid?  
A movin target is fair game.  
Stay, stay on yer side a the

road, stay away, don't  
cross my grass, don't  
holler in at my door, No.

"C'mon, Ken, get yer pole."

His old hand shakes as he  
takes aim at the door,  
what keeps him safe, the old door that  
never kept anything out  
but daylight, never kept out  
cold wind or mosquitoes,  
only keeps him in  
darkness, only keeps him in  
hiding, only keeps him a  
prisoner in his shack.

Takes aim and shoots ten holes in the door.  
And one in Paul.

Through a dusty window he watches them  
scatter and duck behind the silver cruisers,  
watches a blinking ambulance take  
Paul away.  
Watches them crouch, for hours,  
staying close to the lilacs and  
calling his name through a bullhorn,  
"Ken, come out, we want  
to help you." Ta take me  
away, ta send me ta war, ta kill me.

At dusk  
teargas comes crashing through the  
one good pane,  
another,  
another.  
He huddles behind the woodbox,  
shivering, weeping, too weak  
to shoot, too weak to hold  
the gun, come and git me,  
Paul, Paul, they're gonna  
take me, they're gonna kill me.

A dog leaps through the broken glass,  
two troopers break down what's left  
of the door. They got me now,  
Pa, good-bye. Prisoner a war. Gone for good.

News cameras shoot his desolate face  
as troopers put him behind  
a cage in the  
backseat of the cruiser.  
Shaken neighbors come out to fetch  
their laundry off the line.  
The stake-out is over.  
The rural night returns to  
its silence as a powerless man is  
swallowed by power, a bewildered man  
swept up like trash.

**Linda Tatelbaum  
Burkettville**  
is a poet & medieval scholar

## A Free Meter Haiku Cycle

When the rain stops  
the peepers hoot it up  
louder than ever.

Under a branch  
a row of raindrops  
and a fly.

Mopping his brow,  
the farmer stops to chat  
with a scarecrow.

A jogger puffs past  
sowing  
New Age music.

Beaver lodge.  
In the ripples  
frog necks.

All night long  
flitting this way and that  
the last firefly.

Below the footbridge  
to the fair  
the rush of water.

Splitting the apple  
a worm  
and a dark star.

Southbound geese  
moving over the mountain  
the whole sky.

Hunter's moon.  
A stick match lights up  
a hound's eye.

Autumn bonfire  
warming  
the upturned faces.

Halloween!  
Hurrying past the graveyard  
a couple of ghouls.

First snow;  
shaking off the flakes again  
a sparrow.

Christmas Eve.  
Reading yesterday's news  
at the laundromat.

Hand in hand  
dashing over the icy bricks  
to the movies.

Whiteout!  
Deserted  
Icehouse.

Here a lantern, there a face  
waiting  
for the smelt to run.

Daybreak;  
one by one  
the peepers stop.

**Arizona Zipper  
Fryeburg**  
is a painter/poet

## Editor's Note:

On these pages many Maine writers have a try at haiku, a tiny Japanese form over 400 years old. Some catch the traditional delicacy of lightly brushing two images together, in the way a calligrapher's brush feathers ink across a scroll. Some keep close to haiku's traditional subjects, nature and the seasons (18th and 19th c. Japanese insisted on the presence of a *kigo*, a season-word, called a *ki*, in every poem). Many of our haiku-ists observe the 17-syllable limitation, and carefully construct their lines in the 5-7-5 syllabic pattern. It should be fun for readers to make the count, to see which do and which don't, keeping in mind that sometimes a printed syllable is not in fact pronounced. However, others go off in different directions: the range is remarkable. Some deliberately club their images together, resoundingly. Some follow their current Japanese fellows in using brash contemporary subjects, such as the conflict over Kuwait. Some "cheat" on the 5-7-5 grid, usually on the shorter side, offering fewer syllables than a line calls for. You'll find vertical verse, and some in a new pattern. One writer even parodies the form itself. Given the expansive American temperament, and our epic inclination in the heritage of Whitman and generations of talk of "The Great American Novel," it is not surprising that our writers sometimes show the strain of compression, of the burly Maine temperament being packed into a little fishing-shack of a form. Maybe the urge to expand accounts for the many "sequences" our writers offer, as if to stop too soon is a sin. But that is part of the interest in all of this, one culture expressing itself in another's mode, forthright Americans commenting—for a change—in limited compass.

Haiku history is important. Bashō (1644-94) is the undisputed deity, looking down from haiku heaven on centuries of writers. No one bashes Bashō. A bourgeois, with samurai bloodlines, he broke with his background, a bit like Francis of Assisi, "renounced the world" and became a Zen meditator and gentle spirit. For a time he lived in a monastery, but by 30 was out and about and started a school; his students would become life-long disciples. However, Matsuo Bashō spent most of his life on journeys, or more correctly, wandering around. He composed and recited haikus that to this day set the standard. In his last ten years, he composed 800 of them, brief, elliptical, epigram-like, flashes. "Old pond:/" he writes, "frog jump-in/water-sound." Regarding this most famous haiku in the Japanese language, readers are advised to distrust both those claiming mysterious meaning and those seeing nothing at all. MacLeish's dictum is better: "a poem must not mean, but be." Bashō tried, as with the Vedas, "not to put words between the truth and ourselves." The best haiku have *renso*, the quick association of two ideas. These usually contain a "cutting word" to link the two images; as one historian puts it, the effect resembles "two electric poles between which the spark will leap . . . otherwise it is no more than

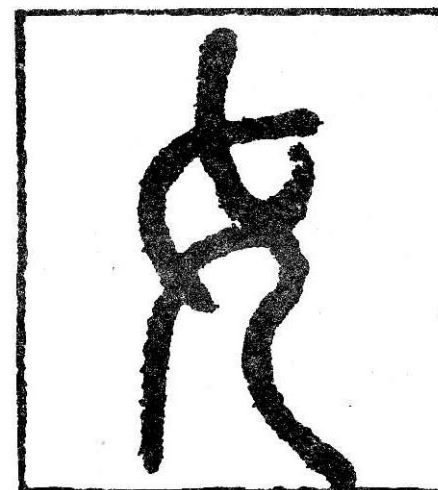
## Basho's Journey: sonnet

From the 17th c. Japanese poet's account of his travels.

My body was escaping me. My arm  
Ached with its easy burden; on my back,  
Which had for weeks obediently borne its pack,  
Pain settled like a stone. In my alarm  
I dreaded a defeat along the way  
To the extreme north, where my pilgrimage  
Was, I thought, destined. How could I engage  
Such fear? At last I brought myself to say  
That all was providence, and, even lame,  
I might go on a little. When I trod  
As firmly as I could, my strength renewed  
And miles were put behind me; so I came  
At last into the north, and could lie down—  
A body that I knew to be my own.

Thomas Carper  
Cornish  
teaches at USM

## Lune Mood



Seal text character for "woman," *nīwo*  
(ca. 3rd Century B.C.)

Calligraphy, David Gordon

Smile absolute, eyes  
flashed from dark, jambreuteuse, dance  
doe in my heart's park.

"jambreuteuse," an old French-Canadian word from Acadia, from  
*gimberter* = "sautiller, être en gaîte."

**David Gordon**  
**Sheepscot**  
is a poet & Chinese scholar

a brief statement" (Donald Keene). I think this is akin to the "sudden illumination" of his Zen, *satori*. But Bashō even took liberties: he often exceeded 17 syllables, sometimes omitted the "season-word," and sometimes wrote in the "lengthy" *tanka* form (meaning "short poem," lines in a pattern of 5-7-5-7-7 syllables, totalling 31, now enjoying a revival). In that freeing spirit, Thomas Carper's *sonnet* (printed here) about Bashō is appropriate and intriguing because its content talks about a haiku master while its form comes from the Western European Renaissance. Bashō, playful as ever in paradise, is delighted.

Because the effect depends so much on the intuitive, because haiku is an oeuvre of overtones, reading them "is an art in itself" (Harold Henderson) in which the reader must become both meditator and co-creator, qualities 20th c. Americans are not noted for. Much of it comes down to a spirit of play, *homo ludens*. (A haiku a day, keeps the heart at play.) Listen to Moritake, a predecessor of Bashō's: "Fallen petals rise/ back to the branch—I watch:/ Oh . . . butterflies!" Can you feel the joy in the cinematic reversal? Or this, from Sokan: "If to the moon/one puts a handle—what/a splendid fan." In fact, haiku began as play, an aristocrat's game, in which three and often more "poets" would sit around amusing themselves by composing—in turn—"linked verse," or *renga*, often of 100 stanzas. (Similar to poetic parlor games played by our Victorians.) A non-standard and less serious version, with "lower" language, was called *haikai* and would run to 3, 50, or 100 lines. The first, or base, stanza in the sequence in the 5-7-5 pattern was crucial, and assigned to the best poet. It was called *hokku*. (Don't you love the names?) Others would build upon it, using different patterns. Naturally enough, the first three lines were often the best—or at least the most memorable, so they were often detached from the whole and let to stand on their own. A late 19th c. "reformer," Shiki (1889-1902), proposed the also-common word "haiku" to distinguish it from the old *hokku*. Thus we get a name for the independent poems Bashō had been composing centuries earlier: "I'd like enough drinks/ to put me to sleep—on stones/ covered with pinks," he wrote.

Can we Americans slow down enough to grasp this kind of thing? I think so. Real interest began in the 1950s when the catapulting Beat Generation writers, perhaps seeking an antidote to their pell-mell frenzy, took up Zen. Kerouac would name a book *Dharma Bums*, and try his hand at haiku: "In my medicine cabinet/ the winter flies/ died of old age" (an imperfect 8-4-4). More Kerouac: "O ant/ crawl up Mount Fujiyama,/ but slowly, slowly" (2-7-5). The meditation movement of the 60s and 70s helped. And the simple fact that so many Maine writers have worked in the form in so many ways suggests that we understand how small can be beautiful. All we need is less starch in our shirts, a good dose of delicacy, a feel for fun, and an eagerness for the unexpected, even if unexplained.

—T.P.

## Hearing No Splash

Bashō's frog  
in farm pond  
is nearly netted—

11 year old girl  
loses  
her balance, falling

in eleven feet  
of water—  
drowns.

No poet dares make  
a poem of such loss  
even if mind could

imagine the place  
and hear  
the terrible silence

following  
the unheard  
splash.

(In memory of Jean Gallagher, Age 11  
Bowdoinham, Maine, 25 June '88 Press Herald)

W. F. Halpin  
Old Orchard Beach  
is a consultant in care & learning

in the warm attic  
a child's unopened present  
still rattles

\*

cloud of de-icer  
enveloping our plane:  
my seat belt tight

\*

spring thaw—  
our Christmas tree reappears  
beside the shed

Edward J. Rielly  
Westbrook  
teaches at St. Joseph's College

## Who-Ku

Meeting his stripper  
Prince Andrew, embarrassed,  
says starkly, "Hi Koo."

\*\*\*

She's late for a date  
with an Asian emirate.  
Andrew states, "Koo, wait!"

(inspired by tabloid accounts of one of the  
Royal Family sowing oats wildly with a  
showgirl named Koo Stark)

T.P.

## Haiku



Buddhist patriarch tearing up the Sutras,  
or prayers. C. 12th c., ink.

(1)

Ozymandias  
and the Desert Shield  
in the shifting sands

(2)

mesmerize	
the	said
moment	the
	buzz
	to
	the
	bee

(3)

Haiku  
like a cricket  
how much space  
and song you contain

(4)

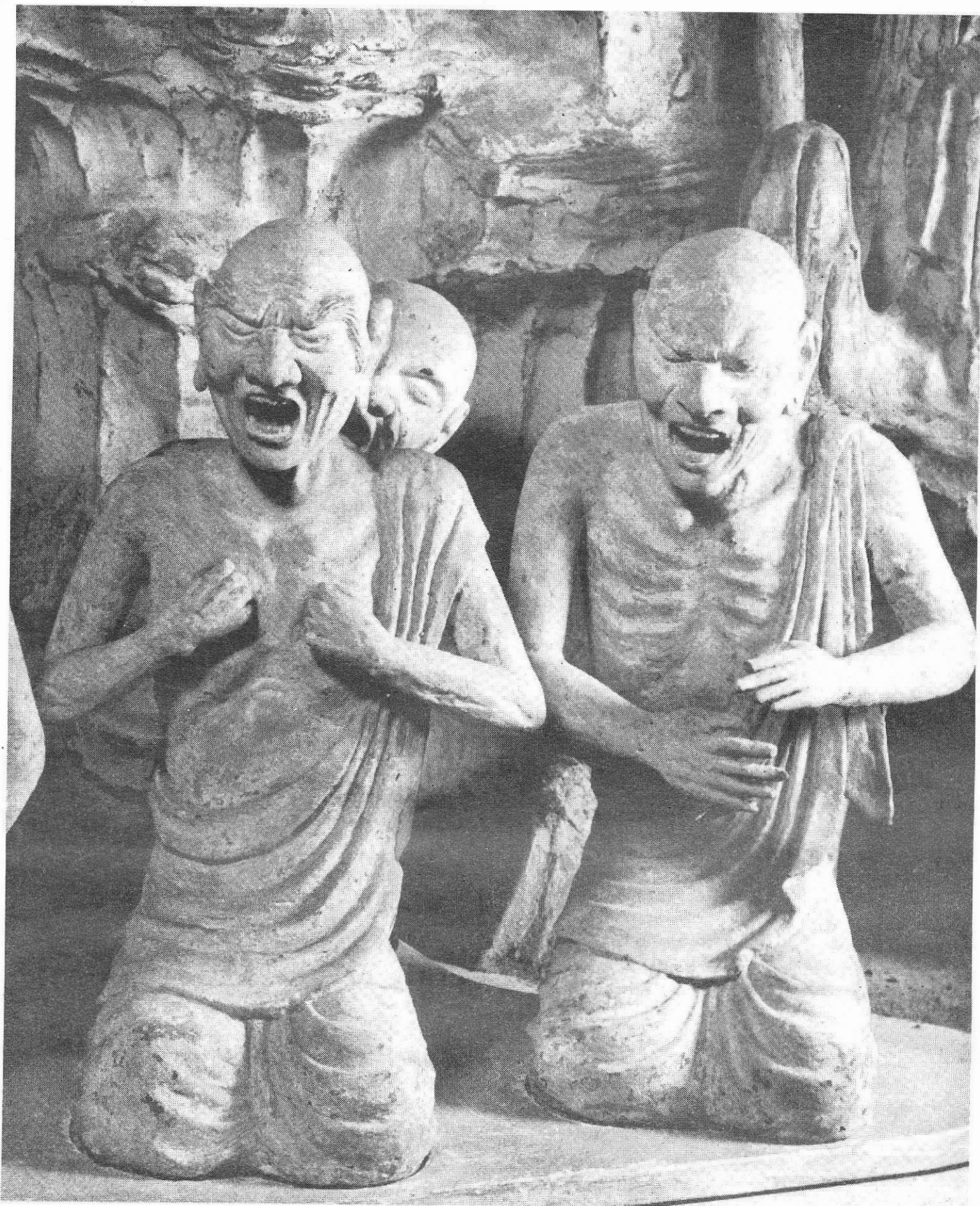
To find a haiku  
in a haystack  
sleep a while!

(5)

In  
the  
privacy  
of  
a  
pearl  
the  
musician  
makes  
a  
Note

John Tagliabue  
Lewiston  
is a retired professor from Bates





### **Clock Without Hands**

*When the Moon visits  
the Sun on a clear blue day,  
Time is out of place.*

**Pat Murphy**  
**So. Portland**  
*operates Yes Books*

### **The valley of the Autumn Stream: Early Morning and Mid Afternoon**

*Mist over the stream.  
Where there was a barn,  
The mist bellows.*

*Though they are still,  
Fields tell themselves  
"Grow. Grow."*

*All the white butterflies  
Are flying northward.  
Or am I mistaken?*

*A pigeon has finished eating  
Elderberries,  
And departs with a great flapping.*

*The chestnut tree  
Has jagged leaves.  
The breeze helps them touch me.*

*My neighbor's geese  
Are disagreeing. A noise  
Like the shaking of keys.*

*Work is being done  
I hear the engines  
In another valley.*

**Thomas Carper**  
**Cornish**  
*teaches at USM*

### **Triptych**

*Above red buds, below  
thunder, a wild duck, yearning  
for water, rows*

*through last light, over  
salty Perseus (smelling rain,  
thinking of sun*

*warming the skin of  
Andromeda, asleep  
in the sand, dreaming this).*

**Robert Meyer**  
**Augusta**  
*is an artist*



## The Seasons

### Summer

Strapped to the car roof  
a crate of weathered oak slats  
no use now, but proof

### Fall

Rolling hills in mist  
under blue tarp for frost, peaks  
of tomato plants

### Winter

Close to the woodstove  
hardwood ridge, not Paris, yet  
chickadee berets

### Spring

The woods still hold snow  
but things move so friggin' fast  
find your harbor charts

**Sylvester Pollet**  
**East Holden**  
teaches & edits at UMO



Detail, Buddha's nirvana, disciples weeping,  
clay, 711 A.D., Nara

## Speaking to Darkness

black willow leaning  
to the blacker river while  
swallows rise in tongues.

## An Apple in November

spent light finds one leaf,  
stem, a fruit once of itself  
now its face shines forth.

**David Adams**  
**Trumansburg, NY**  
taught at UMO & UMF

## Down By The River

. . . stones along the bank—  
something big must have crumbled  
then wet itself

**Pat Murphy**  
**So. Portland**  
operates Yes Books

## Blizzard

the pear tree stands alone:  
a character in a corner  
of some Zen scroll.

**Doug Rawlings**  
**Mt. Vernon**  
teaches at UMF

Goldenrod swaying  
In a Japanese garden  
Is not goldenrod.

**Douglas Woodsum**  
**Cape Elizabeth**  
works at Middlebury

# Being a Better Beggar

(A Q. & A. column by S. Duane Hampstead)

**Q:** My buddy Paul, a former architect, and I have a running argument about proper begging attire. Paul maintains that form follows function, therefore the beggar's work clothes should be durable first and presentable second. As a former public relations manager for a former American business leader in the rent-to-own industry, I contend that appearance and presentation are the primary considerations for today's successful beggar. Please answer this letter so that Paul will quit begging in that suit he made of surplus heating duct. I have a spare tux that's just his size!

**A:** I hate to say this because it's the kind of two-faced statement that probably drove you and Paul from traditional working environments, but here it is: you're both right—to a degree. Yes, a beggar's clothes must be durable. In today's tough begging climate you may be called on to beg in all kinds of conditions. In the South you must endure humidity and a stultifying, monoxide-saturated atmosphere. In other parts of the country it's not uncommon for fast-track beggars to work straight through hailstorms serious enough to send Volvo sedans to the body shop. So the beggar's wardrobe, like the beggar himself, must outperform depreciation to be of value.

But your begging uniform must also be presentable. Stained polyester plaid, as we know, went out in the late 70's. And while most beggars understand that the blue jean is the accepted standard for durability, many have difficulty dealing with the messages sent by wearing the newer blue jean line extensions. You're safe, though, with any jean honestly worn and faded. So let's cut out this begging in stone- and acid-washed jeans. Only people with money pay to have their blue jeans worn out for them. Beggars must wear them out naturally. As for the tux, that's a no-no for all beggars with the exception of diplomats. Your clothing should always be unpretentious. It attracts your target audience as a novelty.

A final tip: in hailstorms, find a doorway. In humidity try not to overexert. And good begging!

**Q:** I've been holding up an "I will work for fud" sign at the corner of a major intersection for three days now, with little success, unless you count this one loopy guy with a speech impediment who stopped and offered me five bucks if I could tell him where "that wascelly wabbit" went. I mean, I know times are tough, but c'mon! I'd be willing to babysit at one of those two-career family households for a variety pack of peanut butter crackers. What am I doing wrong?

Bubba S.—GA

**A:** Excuse me, Bubba, but your schooling is showing! I get so many letters from beggars in the deep South, and most of the time, misspelling is the culprit. Just change your sign to "I will work for food" and I'll bet you see results. You should know that I offer a virtually non-profit service called BegEdit available to beggars everywhere for a small fee. Just send me your begging message, and I'll run it through the spelling check option on my home computer before sending the corrected version back *postagepaid*. That address is:

S. Duane Hampstead  
12 1/2B  
Volare Apartments  
Hackensack, NJ 20895

And the spelling is guaranteed for life!

**Q:** Two questions: who is the world's most successful beggar, and is it true that superstar Eric Estrada once begged?

G. Harold Gribble  
Milwaukee, WI

**A:** Well, G., identifying the world's most successful beggar depends on how you define success. By "successful" do you mean financial growth, frequency of begging, soundness of begging strategy, what? You must learn to define your terms. If your gauge is financial, I would say that Lee Lococca gets begging honors for his performance during the Chrysler bailout. Harold Stassen gets my vote in the frequency category. As for soundness of begging strategy, I give Jimmy Swaggart the nod. But these are only examples of celebrity beggars. Every day, from coast to coast, anonymous begging miracles go unreported in the media, stories of courage, genius, and determination. And they are stories every bit as enlightening as those of Lee Lococca, Harold Stassen, and Jimmy Swaggart. I

bring profiles of the world's unsung beggars to the begging public in my monthly publication "Beg to Differ," available by subscription (cash or barter) from:

S. Duane Hampstead Publications  
12 1/2B  
Volare Apartments  
Hackensack NJ 20895

For your own good, I urge you, G., *please* subscribe today!

As for your second question, yes, Eric Estrada once begged for food and spendable income before landing a starring role in the police series C.H.I.P.s. As a result of his performance in that series, Eric is begging again today, though this time his venue is the offices of agents and producers. Since negotiations are still in progress, we can't make any promises, but we hope to feature Eric in a future column in "Beg to Differ." Don't miss it!

**Q:** Just three years ago I was a vice-president of a major global dredging consortium. I travelled the world, stayed in the finest places, ate in the finest restaurants, cheated on my wife with some of the finest young, nubile... well, the point is, today I am a beggar, and despite the fraternity and encouragement of my fellow beggars, I can't help but feel a little ashamed. Sometimes I feel I'm begging for the self-confidence and self-esteem I used to know, but I don't know whom to beg to. I am thinking of becoming a Shiite or whoever it is that worships by flogging themselves. Any suggestions?

Paul H. Briggs  
Bethesda, MD

**A:** It's clear from your letter that you are already flogging yourself; you blame your high-living as a corporate vice-president for your current condition as a beggar. When you wore your suit and tabulated frequent flyer points, you probably felt like one of the rich, and though you knew that for every one person who gets richer, 1,000 get poorer, you weren't concerned. In hindsight you now see that your wealth was all in company "perks" and not in any form of real financial, emotional or family security. You know that your former bosses, who don't return your calls, are richer while you beg for food, shelter, and answers to the aching questions in your soul. But Paul, don't become a Shiite without a good medical plan. Instead, accept the beggar's identity. We are a minority on the way to becoming a majority. Our second union is organizing now in your area. I urge you to join local #2 immediately (before they raise dues for their upcoming HMO plan). At the meetings you'll find camaraderie, unity of purpose, support, and a free one-year trial membership to our union newsletter, "Begging the Question." It's filled with nurturing and healing begging-advocacy-strategies to take us through the 90's. Our members are begging for you to join them! And don't forget... your free one-year trial membership entitles you to one of these three guaranteed prizes:

- 1) a warm, inviting 3-bedroom brick ranch near pretty good schools.
- 2) a low-paying but invulnerable job in the Civil Service.
- 3) a solar-powered clock-radio with snooze-button, 1 1/2-inch speaker, analog tuning, genuine simulated woodgrain cabinetry, and non-slip "footies." (For odds of winning each prize, call S. Duane Hampstead at 1-900-BEG-GARS. \$1.95 first minute. \$9.95 each additional minute.)

(S. Duane Hampstead's column appears weekly in Parade. He is recognized worldwide as a begging authority, author, advocate, lobbyist, and part-time house-painter. His latest book, "Beg Your Pardon, Ahem, Excuse Me..." was reviewed in the 6/23/96 issue of the New Yorker.)

Fred Leo  
Brunswick  
*writes advertising copy*

## History

At the base of telephone pole 643  
on the road to Old Orchard Beach, Me.  
lies a rusty Narragansett beer can  
thrown out of the window of a speeding car  
during the summer of 1964

Pat Murphy  
So. Portland  
*operates Yes Books*



## Who has heard of Harriet Quimby?

(HQ, first woman in U.S. to obtain a flying license [2nd in world], and first woman to fly the English Channel, was killed in a fall from her plane the following year: 1912.)



Born too soon, too glamorous,  
too chi-chi to be  
a straw-haired lady Lucky Lindy  
like Amelia. Harriet, your purple  
satin pantaloons assumed  
too much. Harriet, you forgot  
the golden Grecian Rule  
for tragic death, the bright  
inevitable end for those  
who dare the Gods, to fly.  
Even for those death should come  
off stage. A scream. A messenger arrives.  
On cue the chorus cries. But you,  
Harriet, falling a thousand feet  
in plain view into the mud  
of Dorchester Bay, your stick and string  
Belerot spinning, gliding in  
without you and you in your  
hood, scarf, purple satin pantaloons,  
falling, turning, ragdoll falling, you were  
sensation overnight. But no mystery.  
A limp thing carried up  
like a wet sac on a man's back.  
Harriet: recorded, mourned,  
forgotten in the morning.

**Robert Chute**  
**Poland Springs**  
teaches biology at Bates



Harriet Quimby (1875-1912)

## Acquainted with the Night

I have been one acquainted with the night.  
I have walked out in rain—and back in rain.  
I have outwalked the furthest city light.

I have looked down the saddest city lane.  
I have passed by the watchman on his beat  
And dropped my eyes, unwilling to explain.

I have stood still and stopped the sound of feet  
When far away an interrupted cry  
Came over houses from another street,

But not to call me back or say good-bye;  
And further still at an unearthly height  
One luminary clock against the sky

Proclaimed the time was neither wrong nor right.  
I have been one acquainted with the night.

**Robert Frost**  
(1874-1963)

## Experienced Teacher

Of "Acquainted with the Night"  
my Sophomores said:  
"He's a druggie."  
"He looks for trouble in alleys."  
"No, he's looking for a dealer."  
"He's a gay cruising."  
"He's a coward. Won't help someone in trouble."  
The clock, what about the luminary clock?  
"It's the moon." "It's Big Ben."  
Why does he mention it?  
"Time for a hit." "He's tripping."  
Why is the time neither wrong nor right?  
"He's burnt." "He'll take what he can get, anytime."  
So there I had it,  
the 1990s, the eternal denial,  
loneliness as genesis.

**JoAnne Zywna**  
**Weld**  
teaches at Mt. Blue H.S.

## Mowing the Cat

She called as I went out to mow  
And said to watch for Silver.  
I mumbled something in reply  
About the heavy crop of hay  
And how slow I'd have to go.  
I would be careful, but mowing  
Has a way of putting you to sleep  
With chattering satisfaction.  
Green swaths are gently rolled  
And laid flat behind in parallels  
Like ocean waves on a calm day.  
Not one little and one big as  
In to shore they crash,  
But more like waves far out to sea  
Where, keeping their distance  
One from another, they lie  
Like bands around a braided rug,  
Peacefully screening undercurrents.  
And so the mower's steady, shuttling teeth  
Like some flashing hypnotist  
Lulls the mind and concentration.  
When the field is raked, you'll see  
The four foot rifts of grass  
Where last year's mouse nest  
Caught the pointed guides  
And pushed the grass below the bar.  
Those four feet measuring  
The time it took to see and act.  
So her concern was not an idle one,  
But based upon the three-pawed cats  
At Uncle Ray's cow barn.  
Old Silvertoes was always  
Making treks down through the fields  
To visit her and view the garden.  
And with self-assuredness, he'd  
Lie down before a hoe or rake,  
Squinting at her with trusting eyes.  
I thought I'd got him yesterday  
When something dark appeared  
All tangled in the mass along the cutting bar.  
It started me you may be sure  
To seem as if to verify  
Her trust or rather lack of it  
So soon. The timothy was parted  
And there the victim lay in armored silence.  
Nature's army tank! A turtle,  
Bigger than a frying pan.  
Relief, as usual, was the forerunner of generosity  
So transportation was arranged  
By shovel and manure barrow  
To a more turtillion habitat  
Where it can rest and mend its tail,  
While I returned again to mow the cat!

**Ian B. Ormon**  
**Leeds**  
teaches at Edward Little H.S.

## The Winds of March

We wrapped on Saturday, I was out of the bungalow at the Chateau in an hour, Dusty picked me up at ten, we got to LAX in half an hour, he caught his plane to London and I grabbed the Red Eye to New York via Dallas-Ft. Worth at a little after midnight. The best sleep I'd had in a month. And still there was JFK and Logan to come and then the long drive up from Boston to Port Clyde, always an amazing time warp for me, like rolling back my soul to the Middle Ages, or the Celtic Twilight, I suppose, in my case. Fishing boats, lobster traps, shacks—what are these? Do we light them with fresnels or lekos? Can they cheat this way a little, counter to the left for that medium shot? Pan the whole coast of Maine, will you? Now, give me a tight shot on a clam, will you? I like that little smile. Pan to that chorus line of oysters on the right. Voiceover: "And answer came there none." Music up. Helicopter shot: church steeple on a verdant island. Funeral procession.

I thought about her all the way. How long ago? Almost two months ago, just as we had begun shooting. Luckily, the director rescheduled my scenes. Renee was a help, playing the understanding angel. "Yeah, it's not like we all don't got mothers," Renee said to me, in her mock tough New York way. What an agent! The Heart of old Hollywood, I'd say. If even genuine feeling can be pitched, Renee will do it. But that's the bounty tag of the industry. Well, she got me in with Ovitz at C.A.A., and who's in that new flick with Costner, but Yours Truly; maybe it will work, maybe not, but "The Natural" didn't hurt and the part's bigger this time.

Why do I feel so guilty, then? Why do I feel as if I am betraying the whole family? Maybe because I couldn't make it to Boston on time. I tried. She knew I was coming, but, when I arrived, she was gone. Just like that. Eighty-five years old and evaporated in an afternoon, such a gallant old lady, the mixture of Scottish and Irish blood in her fighting, raging all the way to the end. And now, only Jenny and I left to settle the estate, no Harpo, our little brother, no mother, no father, just Jenny in Connecticut, and I in the air, "making my entrance again with my usual flair," a second-rate film player in his thirties hanging on to his youthful athleticism and his arguable charm. Not a director yet, not a leading actor, nothing to write home about, a Maine Yankee who should have known better. I can just hear the Spanish Islanders yapping about it. "Why'd anybody want to go out to California? Everybody knows Fred Allen said the only thing that thrives there is an orange." Even I know that Gloria Swanson said, when she moved back to New York from California, that "all that sun can't possibly be good for the brain." Addled, that's what I've become. Too much 72 Market Street, Spago, Polo Lounge, and Malibu. Put me on your menu and call me Avocado Delight. AVOCADO DELIGHT starring in FARCE: MY FORTE, I FEAR.

"Spanish Island, here I come. Right back where I started from." Reverse shot. Roll it. Show me backing up to Logan Airport in a 747 and getting on! "And now, folks, here comes Mr. Patrick Curtis, Avocado Delight, arriving in his Cutlass Ciera, courtesy of Hertz, at luxurious, swanky Port Clyde, Maine. Let's put him on the ferry and send him over to exotic, exciting Spanish Island. Mr. Curtis, I know it's foggy out today, but you have such a great tan. Could we ask you a few questions about your humble origins on our fair isle? Do you really think it will become another playground for The Rich and Famous? Is it true that Ally Sheedy, Liza Minelli, Debra Winger, and Mary Stuart Masterson are all flying in to meet you here?"

Cold, damp, mouldy wood, creosote, gull shit, gull cries, dull clang of unseen bell buoys, bass voice of foghorn. No one on deck except me, Captain California becoming Patrick Curtis, a young kid with a future. "Sail on through the fog, sail on, sail on, and you'll never sail alone." Wouldn't you know? They did film *Carousel* in Maine!

\*\*\*

We pulled into the slip right on time. The boat chugged against the side, the ancient wood shrieked a couple of times and then surrendered.

"Jesus, Mary, and Ralph," said Ben, catching me roughly by the arm as I stepped off the boat. "What are you doing here this time of the year?"

"Thought I'd come out to check on the place."

"Seen you in that picture with Meryl Streep. How do you like being one of them men that paint their faces up like women and prance around on the screen?"

"Did you like the film?"

"Nope. Couldn't figure out what in the hell was going on. Why was she fooling around in Africa with that aviator? Does she really talk like that?"

"No, she's an actress."

"So I heard tell. Heard she went to Vassar, also. Mrs. Boody went to Vassar, too. She don't talk like that. Your mother went to Vassar, didn't she?"

"That's right."

"She didn't talk like that. Sorry to hear about her, by the way."

"Yeah."

"She'll be missed this summer. Services down in Boston, were they?"

"Cambridge. Mt. Auburn."

"Your sister show up?"

"Yes, of course."

"Haven't seen her in three, maybe five years."

"No. She lives in Connecticut, you know."

"I know that. Haven't seen her here summers."

"Her husband's from Long Island. They go there."

"Don't say! I suppose that's bigger than us."

"Ben, the whole world is bigger than Spanish Island."

"Well, we got Deer Isle and Mt. Desert up here in Maine. Is Long Island bigger than those?"

"I guess so. Is the store open?"

"Maybe yes, maybe no. Can't tell. Depends on Sim's whims, we say around here. Well, I see a light on there. Let's go on up."

"No. I'll go round to the house first. I'll meet you there later."

"Suit yourself. You got till four o'clock. You don't mean to spend the night, do you?"

"I have to get back. I'll take the four o'clock boat."

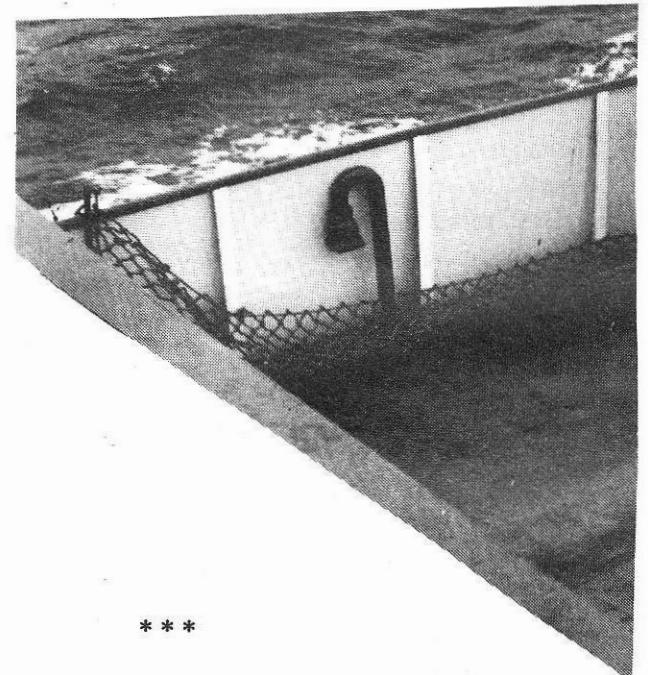
"Suit yourself. Mrs. Hamilton could put you up, you know."

"Thanks. I have just this one afternoon. I have to get back to Boston and then back to the Coast. I'm starting this baseball movie with Kevin Costner."

"Never heard of him. The Coast, is it? Thought you were on the coast right here."

"Touché. This is the real coast."

"You bet your ass it is."



\*\*\*

The mud season. Nothing romantic about this place. Cold, grey, moody sky. Gulls screaming, bell buoys straining and clanging in the water. Wooden boards like little gangplanks, over the pools of water and mud, leading you up to the front doors of houses. Unpleasant little splashes lapping at one's ankles. The smell of cracked clams on the rocks stinking up the air. Only the ferryboat tied up at the wharf. I was the sole passenger over from the mainland to this island, the one thing in my life that seemed immutable up to now.

You don't tell your troubles to anyone on this island. You don't tell anything to anyone on this island. Everything is kept locked in. Humor is rare; confidences rarer. We are in the hands of a cold, cynical god here. Nothing is given easily, and everything can be taken away swiftly. There is no such thing as mercy, only a relentless push toward something, an urge to hang on, to turn oneself into a creature that develops a hard shell that cannot be scraped off, something very much like a barnacle, like Ben Whitefield, who must be in his sixties now and has been ferrying people and cars over from the mainland since he was a young kid. I worked with him one summer when I was sixteen. I think he had to be born out of the sea somewhere, a human crustacean—huge brown hands with capable tentacles that become ropes, knots, cables, lifelines at will.

I grew up on this island. I spent summers here, and then, after my parent's divorce, whole years of my life. I went to school here. I learned to sail here, to swim, to envy the jaunty summer visitors who came every July and August and

opened their houses, decked them out in petunias and geraniums, and had slews of friends in for laughter and parties. And I watched them depart and helped them onto the ferryboat with martinis in their hands and waved goodbye to them when the summer sun went down and the season was over. And finally I joined them. I just didn't want to stay put.

My mother loved this house. It's a lot weather-beaten, silver-grey, just like her. When the winds of March whip around it, as they are doing today, the old house creaks and groans, protesting against the agonies of nature. You can hear it if you listen. That's just the way my mother went, according to Jenny's account, dying there in the hospital in Boston. Jenny said that in her final hour she had her head turned toward the window with her arm stretched out. What was she reaching for, I wonder? This house? This creaking wooden house of security which she inherited from her father and now has passed on to me?

What will I do with it? How does it fit into my life now? My life as an actor seems all wrong, purposeless, ill-suited to the person I was when I was here. That young man is gone now. What I know of sunshine and camellias and fashionable Beverly Hills villas with sunken pools would strike me down dead in my tracks among these people on this island. I was always a summer person to them, anyway. I never really belonged. You can see this in Ben's eyes. He sees me as a soft, spoiled rich kid who sold out and does nothing decent for a living. And he's right, from the Spanish Island point of view.

Well, the house has memories, but they no longer are my memories. I cast a cold eye on the old house now, like a ruthless real estate appraiser. That front door needs repair. Two screws have pulled out in that top hinge. That's dangerous. That white trim on the dining room window didn't winter well. Has to be painted. Someone left that screen on by mistake in my old bedroom upstairs. That pine's grown way too big down by the dock. Needs drastic pruning, I'd say.

My place and not my place. I can't get here summers. Jenny can't get here summers. She prefers East Hampton. My legacy, my inheritance, my problem now. Something wants me here, though. There's a hint of a crocus or two around the back door where my mother planted them long ago.

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The store smells good. There's a fire in the woodburning stove. Old Sims says, "How do?" That's as effusive as he gets. He must be eighty-nine now, still pink-cheeked, pipe smoking, lumpish body moving like some impudent bear.

"How do, sir," I reply respectfully.

"Sorry she croaked," he says, offering me some coffee.

"Thank you, no," I say politely.

"How's tricks in Hollywood?" says Ben, laughing more than it deserves at the sub-text he puts into the remark.

"Hooray," I reply, making a ding-a-ling gesture in the air.

"Can't believe a Vassar girl'd talk like that," says Ben.

"Who's that?" asks Sims.

"Name's Meryl Streep," Ben says. Sims looks puzzled. "Don't matter, Sims. You wouldn't know. You don't never go the movies, do you?"

"Can't say as I do," says Sims.

"She's just an actress," I explain to Sims.

"Oh, I seen actresses all right," says Sims. "I went to Boston once. They had a place called the Old Howard." He and Ben laugh until Ben breaks out of it with a hacking cough.

"I'm catching the four o'clock boat back," I say to Sims.

"You bet you are," he says.

I pick up a package of gum. "I'll take some of this," I say.

"There you go," says Sims, ringing it up and giving me change. "Will you be coming this summer?"

"I'd like to," I say. "But I don't know."

"This man's in pictures," says Ben, putting his arm around my shoulder. This man's gonna be on the Johnny Carson show one day."

Sims whistles. He's impressed, but he doesn't watch television either.

"If you get on Monday night, you might get Jay Leno," Ben says. "Did you know he's from Boston? If you see him, tell him to lay off those Dan Quayle jokes. Makes it appear as though Leno's a God-damned liberal."

"Is Dan Quayle that young pup who's the Vice President?" asks Sims.

"That's right," says Ben.

"Don't think much of him," says Sims. "I didn't vote for him."

"You voted for Bush, didn't you?" Ben asks, surprised.

"Can't say as I did," says Sims, pushing up his glasses and smiling.

"You mean you voted for Dukakis?" says Ben.

"We need a New Englander," says Sims. "Haven't had a good one since Kennedy. I don't like those damn foreigners."

"Bush has got a big place down in Kennebunkport," I tell Sims.

"Summer resident," says Sims. "That man can't fish." He looks at me. "Sorry, Patrick. Didn't mean to offend."

"Come on," says Ben to me. "I'll walk you over to the ferry."

We walk pretty much in silence. We make a big thing out of watching the boat pull in. Ben wants to know if I ever met Dolly Parton. I board the ferry. Again, I am the only passenger going back.

"Real nice to see you, Pat. I'll keep my eye on the house for you."

"Thanks."

"Write if you get work." He roars with laughter and splutters into a cough again.

The boat pulls out. Ben gets smaller and smaller. I see him wave. A tiny voice calls out, "Say hello to Meryl Streep for me. Tell her to learn how to speak English."

I watch until all I can see is the island. Then it becomes a blue line in the distance. I turn my back and go inside the cabin. I think of a line I once had to say when I played Prince Hamlet at Dartmouth, "But break my heart, for I must hold my tongue." I know now that I will have to rent out the house to a succession of anonymous summer people until one day somebody will want to buy it and perhaps it will come alive again.

**Roger Kervin**  
Arlington, VA  
*graduated from Bowdoin*



*Jewett house, S. Berwick*

## ***Memoir for Sarah***

*(after visiting the home of Sarah Orne Jewett)*

If a biographer were writing of my life  
How would she know of this moment  
How could he know what this poem is like  
That's longing for birth, but won't give me words  
How would she know what the green fields were like  
How much I longed to ride on that horse  
To jump over those hills  
How would he know that I reached out to take  
This second, this moment, to not let it pass  
How would she know of the curve in the road  
And my ideas of what new sights I might see  
How would he know of my gasp when I discover new oceans  
Or estuaries, but oceans to me?  
If a biographer were writing of my life  
How would she know of today  
A day too perfect for anything by being  
A day unrecorded in any memoirs or charts  
A day insignificant in every significant way  
But a day that can make me wake up  
Even on dark significant days  
Longing for this one to be.

**Liz Wright**  
W. Buxton  
*teaches at St. Joseph's College*



*Sarah Orne Jewett*



# The Cat

The child knew the way to the bus stop. She had walked there every day for a month. She put on her sweater, pushed back the sliding paper screens and put on her shoes. "Kikosan!" she called. "Hurry up!" She squatted outside on the rocks, tossing them and catching them impatiently. The maid came to the steps, slipped on her wooden sandals and took the child's hand. "No hurry," she said. The maid's walk was relaxed and large. The child felt her hand warm and safe inside the maid's.

The child loved this walk. There were so many things to see, always changing. The little alley of neat bamboo fences turned into a larger row of shops. The florist had taken in the zinnias. The chrysanthemums were out. Lush yellows, burnt golds and oranges were displayed in banks outside and singly in the window. The child's delicate touch on the flowers was allowed and she delighted in this privilege. Some people came out of a noodle shop. The child watched the maid bow and exchange greetings. She herself was not expected to know the proper forms, but the child enjoyed surprising people with her Japanese. Their faces changed, their eyebrows went up as they smiled and laughed, sometimes clapping their hands.

They turned from the side street onto a large thoroughfare. Traffic moved quickly in row after row. The child had been warned several times never to cross this street, but she had no intention of trying. The child and the maid walked together to the bus stop. The school bus picked the child up there every morning to take her to the American school which was miles away. Today the child stopped to gaze into the window of the toy shop. The maid walked on and when the child noticed she was alone, she ran to catch up. The maid caught her with her soft warm arms and whirled her around.

At first the child didn't see the cat. She was soaking up the joy of the spin. But as she found her place by the curb, she stepped back. The cat was in the gutter at her feet. She looked with open eyes before she realized what she saw: The cat had been hit by a car. Its body was twisted, joints going backwards. An eye was on its cheek and the mouth was flung open, a raw bloody hole. Pink tubes snaked across the lower body. Lumpy grey liquid and blood streaked the chest. The tail lay further down the gutter.

"Kikosan!" The child ran back to the maid, grabbing at her hand and arm. Never before had the child seen such a thing. Never before had the child felt such

shock. Fear punched her body, her breath almost gone. The ringing in her ears drowned out the noise of the traffic. "Kikosan!"

The maid smiled gently at the child and picked her up. The child hid her face in the rounded shoulder until the bus came. It rolled over the piece of tail and the child felt sick as she boarded the bus.

In the afternoon the child could see Kikosan from her window, waiting at the curb. She felt the shock again as she got off the bus and saw the cat, now covered with shiny blue-green flies. She was drawn to look at it again. The mouth and eye socket were a thick mass of slowly moving insects. The fur had dried into stiff peaks on the chest. Rising and falling clouds of flies covered the rest of the body. The intensity of their noise frightened the child. She ran past the toy shop before her heart slowed down and she could breathe.

In the morning, Kikosan did not find the child waiting eagerly for the walk to the bus stop. She found the child in her room and had to carry her out, crying.

"Kikosan, please take it away!"

"No. You come see." The maid said more in Japanese and the child understood it was something about chrysanthemums and the changing seasons. The child didn't see the flowers, the shops or the people. Kikosan gently led her to the bus stop, to the cat, and told her to look. To look, and to see. The child looked at the cat and allowed herself to see it.

Every day the child and her maid visited the cat. Solemnly they approached it and stood, hand in hand, looking and seeing. The flies left and the maggots hatched. Patches of white burrowed in and out of the wounds. The eyeball shrivelled. The snakey tubes were picked into chunks. Pink flesh turned brown, then grey. Day after day the gruesome process continued until tatters of bones and fur, an disheveled pile, were left in the gutter.

Light snow covered the cat and the child and her maid did not pay it any more attention. They lingered now at the toy shop where holiday decorations of mechanical dancing bears and jumping monkeys attracted crowds. At the florist's shop the chrysanthemums were gone. In the window now was a graceful bare branch, sprigs of dry grass placed sparingly at its base. The child could not touch it, but she looked and she saw.

**Marianne Marple  
N. Whitefield**

## On Considering Edouard Manet

("Le Dejeuner sur l'herbe," 1863)



Manet, *Le Dejeuner sur l'herbe*  
(Luncheon on the Grass), oil, 1863

(1)

One can't help  
wonder who that woman is  
and why she came  
to the picnic undressed.  
Even more curious are  
the men who, in the  
midst of this erotic  
luxury, can sit  
and argue  
politics or religion.

(2)

We are like the people  
in that private landscape:  
you raise your hand, fingers  
crooked, while  
I gaze steadily  
toward the imagined  
watcher, holding my chin.  
As always, I am the  
naked woman.

(3)

"Evocative" is the only  
word that fits, that echoes  
an inscription in the depths  
of my brain:  
refracted light from etched  
windows dancing on  
a spiral staircase and  
your skin glistening white  
as you muse  
on art history.

**Anne Britting Oleson  
Dixmont**

writes from the side of a mountain  
and teaches high school

## Fee Fi Fo Fum

He infests the city,  
the poet who tracks you, woman  
with tired eyes, woman  
with open toes in the park  
on Sunday alone.  
He hunts you with a straw  
and a cold soda. Here, he says,  
drink this. Trust me.  
Give me your past to make  
my art.

**Wendy Kindred**  
**Ft. Kent**  
teaches at UMFK

## The Breaking Place

We feed ourselves on our breaking place.  
We cannot feel the wholeness  
for our fingers find the cracks.

When insanity speaks, he whispers:  
"I am the fissure  
where life breaks."

But life is so smooth, so smooth,  
she slides, you sleep.  
It is nothing—  
love, but deep habit.

You know no other way  
and she rocks you,  
summer spring winter fall,  
she rolls you.

**Lesley Palmer**  
**Old Town**  
is a writer who lives with her  
husband in Colorado

## Movie Kisses

They make no provision for sad endings  
or tired lips. Embrace is soundless,  
1940s arms in place until the fade  
and existing in the one  
long last kiss  
going nowhere.

**Deborah Stiles**  
**Enfield**  
is a graduate student at UMO

## The Japanese Maple

(excerpt from novel)

Martha thought at first it was the flu, because it was March, and everybody was talking about how bad the flu was that year. She couldn't put anything on her stomach, and she felt faint as she stood at the stove scrambling Warren's eggs, and she had to sit on the toilet with the cover down and put her head down between her legs, the terrible smell of the half-cooked eggs seeping around the bathroom door.

Warren asked what was the matter with her—she looked like death warmed over, he said—and she told him she thought she must be coming down with something. The flu. Her boss had had it, and the woman Martha talked to sometimes in the laundromat, and she'd overheard somebody in the post office say it had killed her mother in the nursing home. "Well, for Crissake don't give it to me," Warren said, and that night she slept on the old fold-away sofa bed in the living room.

But she never came down with the other symptoms—sore throat and fever and cough—and gradually she realized she wasn't going to get the flu. She was having to go to the bathroom all the time to pee and her nipples were sore. In the late afternoons, sitting at the typewriter in the office, she felt so fatigued she thought she'd be able to sleep with her cheek resting on the keys. She doesn't remember anymore when she put it all together. Maybe there never was a moment of revelation; maybe she came to understand it the way you realize you're growing old, inch by inch.

She does remember a time of almost complete happiness. By now it was April, and one day, with the knowledge of that tiny clump of life in her belly, Martha got in the car and drove way out into the country, somewhere north and west of Bangor. If she looked at a map she'd never be able to trace the route and couldn't have done at the time; it was almost as if she invented the countryside as she drove along and it disappeared after she passed through it. She left the car by the side of an unpaved road and walked through a field. It wasn't soggy like the open land near their place in Holden, and in the field some kind of tiny white wildflower was blooming everywhere. She stood there, surrounded by those flowers, and felt total joy. Before she left she picked some, but by the time she found her way home they were nothing but a small heap of withered stems and leaves on the dashboard.

It couldn't last, she knew that. There was no place for a baby in her life, or in Warren's. She had to go to work to keep them going and he had his dogs to breed,

more every year. She couldn't even imagine what his reaction would be if she told him, that's how far they'd grown apart by then. Or had they ever been together, really? He was so much older, and he had his experience of the war—that rough snake of stitches she felt winding across his back every time he made love to her. No, he didn't make love to her. He left what he needed to get rid of in her. It wasn't at all about love or about making a child.

So she would have to get rid of it, too. And she'd better do it matter-of-factly, without weighing it or anguishing over it. She'd be practical—as she always was, as Warren expected and depended on her to be.

In May Martha worked up courage to ask her friend in the laundromat if she knew a doctor who'd be sympathetic to a woman's problems, and the friend understood what she meant and wrote a name on the back of a Snickers wrapper she found on the laundromat floor. The next day at the office Martha looked up the name in the phonebook and called and made an appointment.

She didn't think about it, she just shut that part of her mind down. But before the day of the appointment arrived, she began to bleed. Some clots came out, one of which was the baby. So she didn't have to keep the appointment or go through with the procedure, and that relieved her because of the cost involved. How would she have concealed the expense—hundreds of dollars? thousands?—from Warren? But she felt as guilty as though she had gone through with it. She had flushed that baby out of her body by her need to be free of it.

Soon afterward she was delivering some legal papers to a client in Eddington, and on impulse Martha stopped at a garden center on Route 9. She saw a small ornamental tree whose leaves were just opening: reddish and membranelike, tiny drooping hands. She used some of the money she would have spent on the operation to buy it, and she planted it in the back yard in Holden, where she'd always be able to see it when doing the dishes or preparing vegetables for supper.

But now she's left Warren and lives in Bangor, in a second-floor apartment. And Warren has made another woman pregnant, it seems, and therefore wants a divorce. On the phone he asks if there's anything she'd like from the house; what's there is half hers, he implies. "The tree," Martha says. "That little Japanese maple." She has to describe to him exactly where it's planted and what it looks like before he has any idea which tree she's talking about. He sounds relieved she didn't ask for furniture.

**Elaine Ford**  
**Milbridge**  
teaches at UMO

## Semi-Precious Stones



(Lake Michigan, 1902)

Photo Melody Lee York

Fifteen years old, a month and a hundred miles from home, Willie Leander was kneeling on a sandy beach near the great dunes. "Ever heard how those islands got the name 'Bear Cubs'?" he asked, pointing offshore.

A knot of children, four brothers, one sister, gazed out across the water. No, they didn't know, although they lived in a beech grove back over the dunes and patrolled the lakeshore daily, collecting stones. For three days Willie had camped alone on the beach, wearing a baseball uniform. Five sets of eyes had watched him shoot birds, draw pictures in the sand, pitch rocks at the waves until they'd trusted him enough to show themselves.

"If those're bear cubs how come they ain't movin'," challenged the oldest. He was eleven and runty yet. His pockets bulged with stones.

"Drowned," said Willie. The younger ones shivered happily.

The next in line, a little girl with blond braids and eyes glinty as fool's gold, shaded her face to see the islands more clearly. "You a real baseball player?"

"Those real braids?" Willie yanked one, the way he used to with his sister Ivy's. The girl giggled behind a bony hand. "Yup, I play baseball," he said. "My last game I pitched for the Rosebush RedWings—" he expanded his chest to advertise the name. "Men's team—we won." Not telling that this game, this glory had caused a final argument with his father, who had ordered him to harvest corn instead of pitch, and he had run away.

"How come they don't stink?—the islands, being dead bears," the oldest persisted. The others nodded, as if the same question were plaguing them.

"Magic," Willie said. "Indian magic."

The oldest, hungry for the inside story, accepted this explanation. With a jerk of his chin, he silently ordered the others to drop cross-legged in the sand, leaving space in the circle for Willie. A late September wind splashed suns on the water; sand blew into their hair and, like gold dust, stuck on the eyelids of the youngest. "Come sit here," Willie said and plopped the little boy on his knee.

"A long time ago, lightning struck a pine tree over on the Wisconsin shore." He gestured across the lake, beyond the horizon. "The lightning traveled from one tree root to another, and fire hid underground, a big fire, waiting to burn the world down. The animals could smell it, though, and those that burrowed started sweating in their tunnels. But there were twin bear cubs in that forest and they didn't notice anything and course they didn't worry. They were too busy rolling and biting and scratching each other, swiping their paws in the lake to catch fish the way they'd seen their ma do. Except they never snagged anything. Your ma catch fish with her paw?"

Willie poked the little girl with braids. She looked like Ivy. Her eyes adored him.

"I catch the fish," said the eleven year-old.

Willie nodded his approval. "So after those bear twins tried fishing, they ducked their noses under some pine needles, looking for ants and beetles and what-not. They were pretty hungry. All of a sudden one of em claps his paw on his nose and yowls. He's burned himself and the skin turns all blistery and painful. When his ma pushes his muzzle underwater, a blast of steam shoots up. By this time the whole forest is burning. Pockets of gold and silver and copper bubble up like springs. It's so hot, sand on the shore turns to glass, and the deer and coons

and wolverines get stuck in it. If you look hard, you can still find glass fossils over there in Wisconsin." Again he gestured out and away, over the lip of the horizon.

The youngest drew his feet up on Willie's lap so they wouldn't burn or turn to glass. The oldest stared. His hand thunked rocks in his pocket. The others sat still with fingers in their mouths or noses.

"Mother Bear, she slaps those cubs into the water so fast they don't get stuck, and she makes them swim for their lives. They can smell their friends burning—hair and fur. They hear the cries of animals dying, the crackle of trees. The whole sky lights up, red as a mitten. You can still see it when the sun goes down, that Wisconsin fire."

The children nodded, wide-eyed, at this new truth behind the sunset sky.

"On they swam, hours and hours. Ash rained down, they could hardly breathe. When the cubs got too exhausted to move, Mother Bear let them climb on her back. All night she swam, and those cubs slept peaceful, even with all that water and fire and death. Sometime the next afternoon she could just make out the shore—right where we're sitting—the dunes all purple and shaky in the sun. She was losing her strength so she shook herself and the cubs splashed off, and after a few sputters they began to swim again. She swam on ahead, faster this time, knowing that if she lingered she'd never make it, and without her, the cubs would surely perish."

He paused in the telling to draw a deep breath, as if he too were winded. "But the cubs lagged further and further behind. Finally, Mother Bear beached herself on shore. She was bone-tired but instead of resting she climbed a high bluff to watch for her cubs. She watched for them and waited day after day, never stopping to eat or rest. She loved those cubs, but they never came."

Willie stopped. The wind had quieted. Only one sun, hushed and blinding, shone upon the water. "She just pined away and died," he added softly.

The children sighed, stirring on the sand. They had lost a brother and a sister, barely old enough to have open eyes, or names.

Willie stretched his legs into the circle. Pins and needles distracted him momentarily from drowned bear cubs, and from a mother, inconsolable. The little girl's ravaged face pleased him—that simply the telling could be that real—but he felt contrite. Reaching across the circle, he flicked her braids before he took up the story again.

"Manitou, the Great Spirit, He felt so bad for Mother Bear that He stuck two islands where her cubs drowned, then He made a dune out of Mother Bear herself. He blew sand over her body and asked bushes and trees to grow there. They look just like her shaggy coat, don't they?"

In the late afternoon sun, shadowed by a cloud, the lone dune did rise wild, dark. "Sleeping Bear," said the girl, satisfied, as if she'd eaten something meaty and warm.

"Got any other stories?" the oldest asked.

Willie shrugged. "Few."

"Wouldn't mind hearing another one."

"Wouldn't mind telling it but you might better take care of your tribe. It's getting late and somebody's worrying about you, right?"

The little girl stood up, shook her braids the way Ivy used to. She was younger than Ivy, entirely different, with those fool's gold eyes, but longing made the resemblance painful, and he didn't want to let her go. "You got a Mama Bear, right Goldilocks?"

Her eyes lit up, but she was tongue-tied. The boy gave Willie a string of lake perch, limp on a string. As an after-thought, he stuck his hand into his pocket and produced a round smooth stone, the size of a chestnut. "You won't go pitchin any more of these in, will ya?"

"What's so special about em?" asked Willie.

"Petoskey stones," the boy said, as if they were something precious. He took his sister and brothers away over the dunes without saying goodbye.

Willie scratched his name in the sand, then laid a fire of driftwood, waiting to light it until the one burning Wisconsin had snuffed itself out and a lonely moon rose over Sleeping Bear.

The children returned at sunrise. "Ma said bring you home for breakfast," said the oldest.

"Your pa around?" Willie asked as they approached the beech forest. The wind was cool, the sun bright, but rusty through the burnished leaves. He was starving.

They shook their heads. "Trapping up on Manitou Island, ain't seen him since Omar was born." The oldest cocked his head toward the youngest, riding the girl's hip.

Beech trees grew right up to the cabin door; one tripped on roots inside. Except by the fireplace, a small fieldstone cave, the single room was cool, and damp always. Opposite the fire, toe to toe, lay two double beds. Four chairs, a



rough pine table and a three-legged stool filled most of the remaining space. A rocker sat on a rug braided out of grain sacks, and next to it was a wooden barrel, on its side, attached to a metal crank. The only natural light—melancholy, the color of copper that time of year—entered through the open door.

Willie stood, paralyzed, at the doorstep, yearning for home. But he was fifteen, too much a man to tolerate paralysis. Homesickness gave way to hunger pangs. He smelled oatmeal boiling, and when the mother, Mrs. Holzhaus, turned to welcome him, the rusty cabin brightened.

She had a round pink face, everything about her round and pink, except her eyes. They were mottled brown, with six white starfish rays streaking out from the pupil. Strange, overexcited eyes, thirsty and kind. Mrs. Holzhaus dished oatmeal into seven bowls. "Eat your fill," she said. He sat down at the table, accepted the bowl she offered, ate while all five children watched. A rib lean dog sniffed him, a scrawny cat rubbed his leg.

"Don't feed em, they're beggars. Kids been tellin me you got stories," said Mrs. Holzhaus after she and the children finished their oatmeal and the cat and dog had licked the bowls clean. "You Indian?"

"No, Ma'am," he answered with some regret. She seemed relieved.

"I learned stories from my mother," he added.

"That one about the bears sounds Indian," Mrs. Holzhaus persisted, unconvinced.

"Chippewa, far as I know. Had some Chippewa living near us down state. Nice folks."

"Where you heading?" she asked.

"West. I been to California coupla times already."

This information dazzled the children. The youngest climbed into Willie's lap and curled up there like a cat.

"Kick him off he bothers you," said Mrs. Holzhaus.

The girl wrapped a braid around her finger. "Tell us," she whispered, "—about California." He looked toward the mother for approval, unsure what was expected. The other children begged and tugged until she nodded permission.

Willie hardly knew where to begin. Mrs. Holzhaus made him nervous. She stared with such expectancy that he felt bound to disappoint. In a moment, however, he relaxed. From the noisy way she drank down his words, it was clear she had seen even less of the world than the three year-old, regularly dragged along the dunes.

"My mother had an uncle that ran off to the Gold Rush—the California Gold Rush," he added, "and he came back with nuggets he hammered into coins for her to play with. She was born in '48, the year gold fever started."

"They didn't buy anything with it?" asked Mrs. Holzhaus. How strange to make little girls' toys out of pure gold. Strange, perverse, and wonderful. She looked over at her only daughter, who had made do with socks for dolls. "My, my . . ." she marveled as she rocked herself by the fire.

"So all my life I heard about California and I played with some of those coins myself. Two years ago we went out there—my parents and my two sisters and me. The farm was blowing away, it felt like, when we set off for the train station—everything white around us. Horses practically lost their way in the snow, then when the wind dropped, the sky so blue you felt like your heart was gonna freeze."

He stopped, shy suddenly at his lyric flight. But he needn't have worried. Mrs. Holzhaus sat spellbound. "Did she bring the gold coins—your mother?"

"Just a couple. She'd already given most of em to my sister Livie. The oranges—you wouldn't believe it—so juicy you needed a soup bowl to eat em and the mountains had snow on em while we were down splashing in the Pacific, bobbing around like corks cause of the salt. We did everything. Visited my aunt up in one of the canyons. She lives with her goats, all alone. And we saw the alligator farm. They got live alligators that slide down slides. And we rode the gondolas in the canals—they got their own Venice even. My God, we took the trolley up Mt. Lowe and saw everything . . ."

He looked around him, marking the contrast between this cabin and Paradise. Then, afraid he'd insulted Mrs. Holzhaus, he added, "You just can't quite imagine how it is, unless you've seen it."

Mrs. Holzhaus loosened her apron, then her collar. "You just took off in winter? What about school? My kids never miss a day and they gotta walk six miles."

"My mother schooled us while we were traveling."

Mrs. Holzhaus was breathless. "How come you didn't stay?"

"We were just visiting," answered Willie, who had often wondered the same

thing.

Soon Mrs. Holzhaus shooed out all the children, including Willie, and they drifted over to the lake with fishing poles and some stale cornbread tied in a bandana. They were to hunt for raw Petoskey stones and be home before sunset, she told them.

After a supper of watery beans, lake perch and more cornbread, Mrs. Holzhaus lined her children up, washed their faces, scrubbed behind their ears, examined their teeth for rot. The oldest squirmed until she cuffed him. "Ain't Saturday," he grumbled.

"We got company," she said.

When all five were clean, she herded them into one bed and told them to tell God good night silently, in their heads. Willie she ordered to sit on the three-legged stool by the fire. She sat across the fire in the rocking chair, turning the metal crank. Round the barrel spun, sand and water splashing, and the familiar thunk of stones.

"What do you do with those rocks?" he asked.

"Once we get em polished we sell at Glen Haven. Tourists at the dunes. Puts oatmeal on the table. He don't care how I feed em," she said bitterly. Then she stopped cranking, reached into the foamy water, and pulled out a stone, the same size as the one the boy had showed him. She rubbed it on the bodice of her dress, making the flesh sway. The stone was shiny when she gave it to him, and warm from her breasts. Instinctively he closed his fist over it, then opened it and held the stone to the firelight. It was a honeycomb, whorled like a turtle's back.

"May I keep it? I mean, I could pay you for it," he stammered. He had no money.

"Course keep it. Souvenir. It's coral, you know—those branchy things. Right where we're sittin today used to be the bottom of the ocean."

This was a marvelous thing. "How'd it happen?" he asked.

"God musta told the sea to roll back. If you can do that, it's easy turning coral into stone." She smiled. Her teeth gleamed, small and white. "Pretty things, ain't they? But not as pretty as your gold coins."

A musing silence fell between them. Mrs. Holzhaus resumed rocking and cranking. Willie held the stone. "Nice family," he said finally, by way of conversation. "How old are the kids?"

Her teeth glittered, widely spaced in a pink mouth. "Odds this year. Count by two's starting at three."

She burned with many questions, what they ate in California and if tourists slept in fancy hotels, and what kinds of bathing costumes the ladies wore. The little girl lay in bed, listening, crowded by sweaty brothers. She dared not move for fear her mother would notice her and scold. But the fire was so warm, fed with unaccustomed lavishness because of the guest, that the girl herself soon fell asleep. Willie longed for the empty bed, though he would count himself a king to have a place on the packed dirt hearth with the dog and cat. He had not slept indoors since he ran away from the farm. But Mrs. Holzhaus showed no signs of letting him sleep. She rocked, she cranked, she drank his stories down.

In the midst of her questions—she was asking about the caliber of tourists one met out there, and if a lady traveling alone with children would feel at home—she slowly began unbuttoning her dress. Willie averted his eyes, but when she continued her task, inviting him to look, he did. Nothing but bare flesh lay under the thin cotton. Her breasts were pillows, pink clouds veined in blue. She dipped a rag in the tea kettle, and, without interrupting her questions, unbuttoned his baseball shirt, parting Red from Wings, slipped it off him, washed his arms and chest with smooth maternal strokes. It tickled, it licked him with fire, but he did not move. Shame and desire choked him. He could not speak. Then she unfastened his pants and let them drop to the floor. Matter-of-factly she continued washing his groin and buttocks, as if he were her little boy. Her face grew pinker, her breasts yearned for him. As she bent to wash his behind, he blushed the long golden length of him, wanted her to stop, and never stop.

At last she rinsed out the rag and washed his face, slow strokes, caressing his cheeks and nose with her cloth, while her eyes feasted on his sweet boy's mouth.

"Your ma know you're here?" she whispered, leading him toward the empty bed.

He blushed again, shamefaced, and shook his head.

"She must miss you powerful."

**Kate Kennedy**

**Portland**

*teaches half time at Portland H.S.*

## Under the Bed

In the morning, the Thing under the bed slid out from underneath the mattress and made its way across the rug and out the doorway. Invisible in daylight, it had no worry of being spied by prying eyes, and today it did not matter for there was no one in the house. There had been no one in the house for several days now, and it was clear to the Thing that it needed to move on.

It was very hungry. It did not remember when it had eaten last, but it had been a long, long time.

The Thing was not required to eat often, but when overtaken by hunger it would be racked by pain so acute its huge, ovate body would curl up upon itself in writhing spasm. It was almost to that stage now, and it knew that if it did not find Prey soon, it would surely die.

It inched its way down the hall and across the living room rug, then braced itself, slowly flattened out, and slid underneath the front door.

It was hard for it to see in daytime, for it was a creature of the night. The already bright sun of morning burned deep into the unprotected gelatinous body, causing painful, repetitive pulsations to ripple throughout its being.

Angry now, the Thing inched its way across the lawn and down the street, searching.

There were few of its kind left, but it was in no danger of extinction since it could divide and create its duplicate at will. The decimation of its population was due more to boredom and sadness than anything else. Prey was only succulent when it was full of dread and fear, and these days little terror was reserved for fabled beasts. Some Prey had no belief in Things at all, which made them unpalatable and difficult to digest.

The small Prey were the best. They were fat and juicy and screamed and wriggled horrifically when seized unsuspecting. They gabbled and drooled when clutched by the suckers at the end of the Thing's long tentacles, then shrieked aloud once more as they were dragged under the bed and thrust into its ravenous maw. Any Thing would agree that in the case of Prey, smaller was unquestionably better.

Occasionally the Thing found adult Prey to be tasty as well, but they were difficult to find. Once, many years ago, it had slithered into a small white house where it had found a grown female Prey that not only believed in Things but became terrified at merely the thought of them. It remembered the night it had attached its suckers to her leg and pulled her into its lair under the mattress. She had been unusually delicious, and since she was quite large, she had given the Thing a feast fit for a king.

The Thing remembered her with some fondness.

Several blocks down the street now, the Thing heard small chirping noises coming from across the road. It blinked in the sunlight and peered ahead, and beheld playing in a yard two of the prized small Prey, one so young it could do no more than crawl.

The Thing twitched with joy.

The small Prey tumbled about in the yard, squealing and chattering to each other. One pushed about a strange metal thing with wheels; the littler one held something soft and stuffed and furry and attempted to chew its ear.

Mustering all its resolution, the Thing made its way across the blistering tar and inched onto the yard where the Prey cavorted. It slithered up close to them and took their scent, then stretched one suckered tentacle towards the larger one. The Prey immediately screamed and began to cry, the small one promptly joining in.

Soon the door to the house opened, and a grown Prey hurried outside. It looked around and appeared puzzled, then scooped up its wildly wailing young and carried them back inside the house.

The Thing's stomach spasmed.

When the pain passed, it followed its Prey, sliding up the stairs, through the open doorway, and into the house. Toys and picture books were scattered all over the rug, and the clean Prey garb was stacked in high rows on the couch. Prey voices murmured from another room, and the Thing moved towards the sound. Down the hall and past several more doorways, it found the Prey, and quickly slid under the plain wooden bed in the far corner of the room.

Despite its hunger, the Thing knew it would not feast tonight. The Prey needed careful seasoning and tenderizing first. It was hard, but the Thing knew how to wait.

It burrowed silently beneath the mattress, nesting. In a night, or two, or three, it would stretch a tentacle out beyond the borders of the bed and tug on the sheets until the Prey awakened, then it would, for just a moment, fasten a sucker to an arm or leg and hold it fast until the Prey screamed. It would do this on several occasions, *perhaps* even letting the Prey see it for the one quick moment when the lights switched on before it became invisible. And on the night it heard the Prey beg to sleep with a light, beg to sleep in another room, beg to be protected from the Thing under the bed, on that night it would feed.

The suckers on its tentacles pulsed, and its body trembled happily. It was home!

Janet Beaulieu

Bangor

works at Bangor Theological Seminary  
and reviews for the BDN



Drawing: Phil Paratore

## Hunters Dream

We sit here on this prairie, stirring our fires, waiting for the return of the panther. We imagine that passenger pigeons darken the sky. We will soon tire and sleep and dream of eagles soaring into view. And owl and bear. Elk and bobcat and bison. Wild turkey and luna moth. You can *all* come back now. The cities and farms are long gone, the property markers turned to rust, the houses rotted away. Rows and rows of basement-ponds are standing in the moonlight. Frogs sing where the voice of Pavarotti once echoed, where copies of Vincent's starry night hung. Otters slide where factories stood. Bluebells can be smelled now where concrete once hurt the feet of children. Small birds nest where 747s and F18s landed every minute and took off every minute until the sky was dark, almost as dark as it is tonight!

But now the air is clear again. Our prairie is quiet and clean. You can see the stars. Look! There is Orion, a fourth star in his belt. Look up swans! Look up puma! Tonight we wait for you. Our arrows are sharpened and straight. We are hungry. We will kill and eat you lucky ones. You will be reborn again in our breath. And in the breath of our children. And the breath of the prairie, breathing again after a long sleep.

We dream deeply into this quiet starry night, our backs against the prairie, waiting.

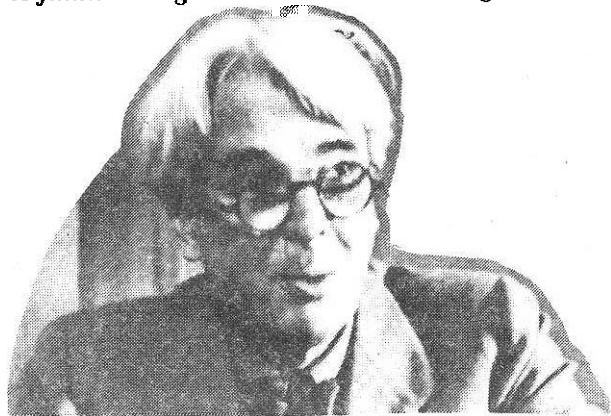
Robert Meyer

Augusta

is an artist

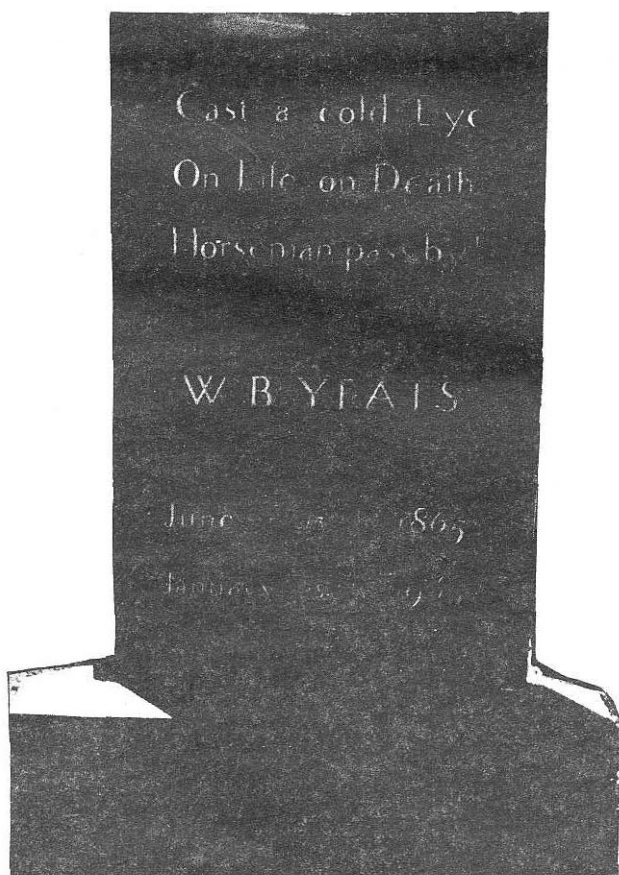
## The Poet Is Sent For

*W. B. Yeats did not live to write an essay where he intended to fulminate against all institutional religions.*



God was disgusted. Here, in ripe old age,  
In admirable health, and spared decrepitude,  
The Irish bard was working up a rage  
Against Him and his churches. It was rude,  
Considering all He consciously had done  
To furnish words and worlds for metaphors  
(Like wars, swans, towers—even a girl, Maud Gonne).  
“And now he plans what everyone deplores,”  
God said. “Besides, the blessed will complain  
About declining standards for admission  
To realms of light should Willy not refrain  
From writing on. He’ll be in no condition  
For holiness after that sort of sin.  
I’ll hurry an angel down to bring him in.”

**Thomas Carper**  
**Cornish**  
teaches at USM



William Butler Yeats' grave, Co. Sligo, Eire

## Sunday River, Bethel Maine

In winter, it is grim business.  
The pines are thick and dark,  
strict and stiff as sentinels  
along Sunday River Road,  
and the blue black river  
turns the birches upside down  
to dangle by their white branches  
from the snowy banks.  
The birds line up along the telephone wires  
likes notes on a staff,  
but the song is a hymnal here in Bethel,  
House of God, and you must mind  
you don't laugh out loud.  
Seal your lips, and don't keep company  
with any words that might be playful things,  
or else the wind will pluck your tongue  
like an errant leaf,  
and let it fly.

In this world, all is black and white  
and stern stuff,  
and love is just something coming  
on and off the radio  
beneath a stained glass sky.  
If I am about to drown here  
in this snow, in this congregation of trees,  
their wiry branches gone awry,  
in a tangle of exposed nerves,  
I could never let on I'm a Jew,  
wandering as usual,  
with no roots to speak of  
and no thought of being saved.

**Roberta Chester**  
**Bar Harbor**  
works for the Holocaust  
& Human Rights Center

## Rosh Hashanah melody

Sometimes the quiet and I get on very well.  
The flat smooth surface that edges the cabinet  
is fine to run my eyes up,  
and to run them over  
palest rose, clay white, and ochre  
to the lines where walls  
and roof pitch meet takes me back  
to deep veiled comfort in the tent of childhood.  
Light filters through a copse of maple.  
Root meets soil in pots by every window.  
When I'm cold there is heat, when I'm thirsty there is water,  
when I'm hungry there are soup and fresh tomatoes.  
In this house no one starves, no one gorges, no one screams.

Still, the church bell chimes Jew, Jew, Jew,  
you are never safe, ever, ever.

**Lee Sharkey**  
**Farmington**  
teaches at UMF

## A Lover Departs

The sapphire  
dimmed and

The emeralds  
faded from  
green to grey

As the  
sun from  
her window

Withdrew its  
hand

**Kenny Brechner**  
**North New Portland**  
is a graduate student in history at UMO

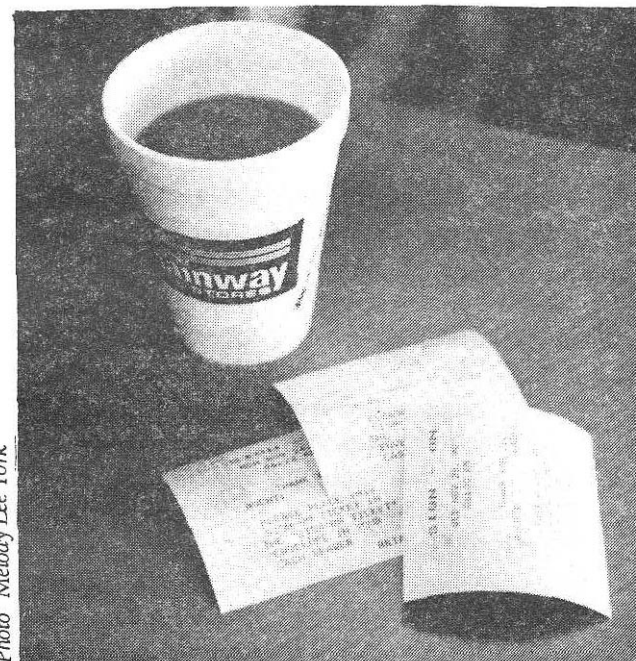


Photo: Melody Lee York

## The Lottery

He waits each week  
but cannot bear  
the tumbling cubes  
that reveal the marks—  
the digits.

Seeking signs  
he plays  
his lucky numbers  
the series number on the back  
of last week's ticket  
his birthday  
his wife's birthday  
their anniversary

his mistress's measurements  
the numbers of his first love

the numbers whispered by a dying wino

the numbers of the Battle of Hastings  
when his ancestors came  
the numbers of Lincoln's death  
of Christ's

the numbers that came to him  
in a dream.

**Arnold Perrin**  
**Union**  
edits the New England Sampler



## Some Kind of a Record

Seven-year-old Larkwood Pease was measuring the hole in the crown of a lower molar with the tip of his tongue. For weeks he said nothing to his parents about a sore jaw. Maybe the soreness would go away. His Aunt Ida, who was a Christian Scientist and who attended meetings, often spoke of the miracles of her faith. "If you tell yourself it don't hurt, it don't." But his jaw got worse instead of better. By bedtime he had given up saying Aunt Ida's magic words to himself. Larkwood knew that his mother was watching him as he lingered in the doorway of the living room. His jaw really hurt him now.

"Larkwood, have you daubed your pants?"

His mother always asked him this when he was coming down with a cold or had the beginnings of a temperature.

Larkwood shook his head. Another burst of pain shattered up and down his jaw.

"I think you need a laxative," said his father, looking worriedly over his newspaper. "I don't know why we're plagued with that all the time."

The pain in his jaw and the sound of his father's voice reacted in Larkwood. He could no longer keep the secret. It was a relief to let his sobs loose, finally, while his parents studied the decayed tooth with a flashlight and felt his neck and jaw for swelling.

"I don't like this at all, Leonard," said his mother.

"He's got a Pease mouth," replied his father. "Rub some checkerberry on his gums and press a cold water bottle to his cheek. It's going to be a long night."

"What's going to happen to me, Papa?" cried Larkwood.

"I know our big boy is going to be brave," said his mother, stroking the back of his head and neck.

"Papa?"

But instead of getting sympathy from his father, he got a flash of anger.

"I told you to brush your teeth, and so did your mother!"

"He meant to every night," said his mother as she continued stroking him. "Didn't you, Precious?"

"Now you've got to go have that tooth out," declared his father. "First thing in the morning."

Larkwood spent most of the night pacing the living room floor while his parents took turns staying up with him. It was nearly daylight before the pain subsided enough for him to stretch out on the sofa. He slept restlessly and woke whimpering from a bad dream. His jaw felt heavier now, and the pain had given way to a soreness that made it difficult for him to speak.

He sat at the table watching his parents have their breakfast. The hot cocoa his mother had given him hurt his mouth. His parents said little, but when they did speak their voices sounded far away, as if they were talking from a bottle. The ticking grandfather clock in the hallway could be heard measuring the passing seconds slowly and separately. Larkwood watched his father finish his coffee. His father usually gulped it in a hurry, but this morning he sipped it carefully. Then Larkwood saw his father's hand disappear under the table and take out the gold pocket watch. "It's getting about that time, Laura," he said. "Us menfolks better get going." Larkwood saw his mother nod solemnly as she rose to wash the dishes.

There were no patients in the waiting room of Doctor Miles Peterson's dental office. Doctor Peterson was nowhere in sight.

"Papa, let's go home," said Larkwood. "My tooth feels better already."

"Perhaps we better have the doctor look at it," said his father, "since we're here."

Maybe he wasn't in the office, thought Larkwood as he slumped in a chair next to his father; maybe the doctor had gone away and would never be back. Then Larkwood would go home and the tooth would stop aching and everything would be the way it was before.

But there was the sound of water running somewhere in the building. "If I say I don't hear it, I don't." Larkwood almost whispered the words as he formed them painfully in his mouth. Then the scrape of a chair being pushed back and the sound of footsteps approaching. "Go away," the boy shouted inside himself as an empty feeling swept through his stomach and the back of his neck stiffened. The distant voodoo beat of pulses grew louder in his head as he tried to make everything disappear.

"What do we have here?" he heard someone ask with a squeaky laugh.

He was a tall man dressed in the cleanest of white clothes. The dentist's thin white hair was parted in the middle and combed carefully to the sides. He smelled

strongly of cloves, and his watery eyes were magnified by thick glasses. The dentist had a way of looking up at the ceiling whenever he spoke.

"So this is our young lark fresh from the woods," chuckled the old man as his trembling hand found Larkwood's limp wrist.

He followed the dentist into the office and his father helped Larkwood into the biggest chair the boy had ever seen. His legs felt weak, and both arms were getting prickly as he tightened his grip on the ends of the armrests.

"Open."

A tool disappeared into Larkwood's mouth, and the dentist rummaged along the painful gums and into the decayed crown of the molar. A searing throb of hateful force jolted Larkwood as the point of the instrument found raw nerve endings. He cried out in surprise, but the chair, the bright light above him, the mysterious instruments on trays, and the machinery around him were too imposing to struggle against.

"A tiny bit tender," declared Doctor Peterson as he turned to his instrument tray and looked up. "You should have come sooner."

"Is it bad?" his father asked.

"It must be extracted," replied the dentist. "A tooth this badly decayed is usually ulcerated."

Doctor Peterson now had a serious look on his face, and Larkwood remembered what he had read about gangrene. A leg could be cut off—didn't a lot of pirates have peg legs? But what would happen to him if the gangrene spread through his jaw and into his head?

Larkwood began to cry.

"Papa, I want to go home!"

Larkwood felt his father's hand on his shoulder as his eyes smarted with tears and the glaring light above him was moved closer.

The dentist's voice was no longer squeaky.

"You hold him, Mr. Pease."

Larkwood tried to lift himself from the chair, but the sight of a big machine close by restrained him more than his father's grip.

Doctor Peterson was now holding an instrument that had a long needle attached to it.

"Open."

The needle rested on the surface of Larkwood's sore gum, pricked through, went deeper, as if in layers, and then with a slow and blunt pressure behind it, it blundered all the way; lowered itself by tearing through tissues into the center where the dull ache had been hiding from the beginning. Larkwood pressed his head back into the headrest as hard as he could, but there was no escape. The violation had to be met head-on.

A spray of cold water struck the raw nerve endings with force, and Larkwood rolled his head on the headrest to shake the pain.

"Spit."

A drop of saliva stitched with threads of blood clung to the porcelain bowl for a long moment before the spittle was washed away with a gush of swirling water.

Doctor Peterson looked at the tiled ceiling and spoke to his father.

"It's like hoeing your garden," he explained. "If you don't get between the plants, they're soon choked with weeds. Teeth are like that when not brushed."

"I never heard it said quite that way," said his father with interest. "You garden much, Doc?"

"Five days a week. Been weeding and pruning in this very office for nearly fifty years!"

"You been practicing fifty years?"

"Your father, Tom Pease, was one of my first patients."

"And he had bad teeth like all the Peases," said Larkwood's father. "Didn't he, Doc?"

"Terrible," replied the dentist, "just terrible."

"I think all those rotten teeth he had caused him to die of kidney trouble fairly early in life. Don't you think so, Doc?"

"Probably," said Doctor Peterson. "Bad teeth can trigger a multitude of ills."

The dentist turned to the instrument tray and back to Larkwood. There was a shiny metal object concealed in his hand.

"Open."

The force behind the instrument shocked the boy. There was a relentlessness of pressure which kept building. Larkwood felt the wash of blood over his gums as he tried to escape the forceps. But the man held his head firmly. Then the

*cont'd next page*

cont'd

searing, biting scald of pain and the popping sound of bone being wrenched from a socket.

"Spit."

His blood was brighter than he thought it would be. He watched it swirl away in the bowl, away from him.

"Open."

A wad of gauze nearly choked him as it was fumbled into place where a piece of himself was now missing.

"Bite down."

He felt a rawness at the back of his throat, as if he had been screaming for a long time and no one had come to help him. For the first time he realized that there was no one who could comfort him. No one could make the soreness go away. Not Aunt Ida with her magic, not the warmth of his mother's breast and her arms around him, not the manly squeeze of his father's hand on his shoulder. The ache must have its way. In him.

"That Doctor Peterson is a nice old man," said his father as they came out of the office into the sunshine. "And what he said about weeding between teeth sure makes sense."

"Yes, Papa."

"And you're the third generation of the Pease family to have him pull a tooth. That's some kind of record!"

"Yes, Papa," said Larkwood Pease as he shifted the bloody wad of gauze in his sore mouth and followed his father up the street.

**C. J. Stevens  
Phillips**

*is a gold prospector on Maine rivers*

## North Haven and No Children

*I wake to breathing this houseless air:  
In the wrinkled wake of sheets, the yawning light  
To this life we both are heir.*

*Our children left to our neighbors. For repair  
we bicycle the island end to end, dawn to night,  
and wake to breathing the houseless air.*

*We pump up to Pulpit Point. I stare  
as your flank and rump dismount the bike.  
Is it to this life we both are heir?*

*The cormorants flap seaward in pair.  
The sheep graze among the lupine at twilight.  
We wake to breathing this houseless air.*

*You uncork the Sauvignon Blanc to air.  
My fingers touch your chilled lips. You bite.  
We wake to breathing this houseless air.  
It is to this life we both are heir.*

**Bruce Spang  
Readfield**

*is pupil services director  
in the Gardiner School system*

## Deaf Beethoven?

*Choral Symphony No. 9 in D Minor, Op. 125, 1824*

*Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard  
Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;  
Not to the sensual ear, but more endear'd,  
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:  
Keats*

Sudden as winter night,  
a conductor lifts his baton.  
The composer in the front row  
has never heard his piece performed,  
and will not, but follows it  
reliving the melody. He sits  
amid tones as if among stars,  
fitting them into proper orbits.

Notes like words  
blend and flow into phrases,  
bringing waves of approaching tumult  
shaking the universe utterly.  
But just at the crisis, dawn breaks.  
Tones retreat until they hover  
like whispers. He feels the universe  
breathe freely again and finds,  
within himself, songs  
of morning stars.

The orchestra stops when notes  
return to their reservoir  
of silence. Performers bow  
to the ebb and flow  
of applause and leave  
the chamber.

This performance will fade  
into its place in memory  
as this night will merge  
into the next dawn,  
as the sea into the land,  
the land into the sky.

The composer who hears  
no instrument, goes out  
arranging sound in endless  
combinations as he walks.  
This he hears  
as starlight is heard.

**Bonny Barry Sanders  
Scarborough**



*Beethoven deathbed drawing, 1827  
by Joseph Danhauser*

*My bad hearing  
Does not trouble me here.  
In the country  
Every tree  
Seems to talk to me,  
Saying: "Holy! Holy!"  
In the forest  
Is enchantment  
Which expresses all things—  
Sweet peace of the forest!*

*Almighty, I am happy  
In the woods,  
Blessed  
In the woods,  
Every tree has a voice  
Through Thee.*

*O God, what glory  
In such a woodland place!  
On the heights is peace—  
Peace to serve Thee—*

*How glad am I  
Once again  
To be able to wander  
In forest and thicket  
Among the trees,  
The green things and the rocks  
No mortal can love  
The country as I do;  
For woods and trees and rocks  
Return the echo  
A man desires.*

**Ludwig von Beethoven  
(1770-1827)**

# American Folk Forms

For Charles Mingus

(1)

everythin's okay, momma  
here in the USA

we got plenty  
a money  
from sellin coke n horse,  
crack to them high school dropouts &  
niggers

on street corners, helpin knocked up sisters  
shoot up  
yeah, we havin  
a time smokin  
crack—  
would you beleev it!—smokin

crack  
with the mayor a DC capitol ov  
the great USA, we havin  
ourselves  
a time momma

the streets are paved with gold!

(2)

the red white & blue flyin on the flagpole out front a school  
& the guy dressd in army fatigues come in our sixth grade kids class & he pointd a big  
gun  
at us kids & the teacher & wow he tole us we wuz gonna die, tole us Satan orderd  
human sacrifice  
& the guy from Satan he startd shootin & us kids runnin & blood flyin all ovr the  
blackboards wow all over me  
us screamin kids runnin & cryin & screamin & the Satan guy shootin & shootin &  
shootin & laughin  
then quiet, no more shootin, the red white & blue flag still flyin out front a school &  
wow kids dyin right in sixth grade class  
& us cryin kids & moanin kids & the guy from Satan still laughin loud & he put the  
big gun in his mouth  
& bam  
jimminy crickets, you shoulda seen his brains all over the blackboard, wow!  
the red white & blue flag still flyin  
out front a school  
wow! you shoulda seen the mess on tv news durm our supper that nite, jimminy crickets!  
bam  
the guy from Satan's brains all ova the blackboard of my sixth grade class, wow!  
American histry



Pen and ink: Conor Plunkett

(3)

Dear Diary

Everybody was gone after mass,  
after the sermon,  
after holy communion

& Father Joe offered me  
a sip

of the wine in the sacristy &  
Father Joe took a big sip

& then he took off his vestments  
& then he took aff his pants too, we

were alone in the sacristy, he showed me  
his underpants &

his big thing & he made me swear  
by the Holy Mother not to tell &

then Father Joe took a big sip of wine  
& we played a game.

(4)

the baby  
wouldn't stop cryin  
at night

wouldn't stop cryin  
at night  
so he could hear  
his music  
watch tv

so he hit the kid  
& the kid cried  
louder  
so

he stuck the kid's  
face in the toilet bowl  
& flushed the water  
& the kid

cried louder & louder  
so he stuck the kids's face  
in the toilet bowl &  
flushed the water  
& flushed the water  
& flushed the water  
& flushed the water  
& the kid

drowned

**Tom Fallon  
Rumford**  
is a human being



## "Feeling Good"

I have an important job. On Saturday mornings I go with Daddy when he picks up his paychecks. If I don't go with him he loses his money and won't come home until Monday after work. He'll be drunk. He's embarrassed he lost it. So he acts mad. He gets everyone scared so no one says anything about it. Mom says Daddy's feeling good when he's drunk. It doesn't look like feeling good. We need money so my job is important.

Daddy drives a truck. We pick up his money at the loading docks on Saturday morning. It's quiet and empty except for trucks. Then we go to the barroom. It's close by. Not many people are there. I know them though. They give me money. One lady always sits on the stools. Dad and I sit in a booth. Sometimes she's still sleeping. She wears a funny looking hat. She gives me money when she's awake.

I don't do my job the best. I'll be doing better if Dad and I went home. We never do. Mom doesn't get mad because we don't lose the money.

Anyway I get a Coke and Dad gets a beer. Then he gets a beer and a shot. Then he gets more beer and more shots. He puts beer in my glass when the Coke is gone. I like the foam better. Dad's proud of me when I drink it. He brags. He says, "You're a real Irishman." I like being a real Irishman. It's a good thing to be.

A fat man named Joe sits with us. He always sings to me, "Daddy's little girl." He's a good singer. Sometimes his voice is deep. When he sings "little girl" his voice gets high and his face shakes. The song is about how much daddies love their little girls. Dad pours me more beer. Joe likes it too. Dad says, "Just like the ol' man." He tells Bill (the man who makes the drinks) he'll be getting another customer.

I take tap-dancing lessons. If I dance in the bar I get more quarters. I get dizzy drinking beer. I don't like it. Daddy does. He says "he's feeling good."

Everything spins in the car on the way home. Daddy's mad at how the people are driving. He calls them "Ginny bastards" aloud out the window.

Mom gives Dad a mad look 'cause he's feeling good. She doesn't notice I'm not.

### Queenie

Sometimes Daddy sleeps in my bed. He sleeps in my bed when he's mad at Mom. He was mad tonight. Now he's in my bed. I'll lie still and silent. I don't like him when he wakes up. Everyone is safe when Daddy sleeps in my bed. He's mad at Mom. Tonight he hit her face when she screamed. She wanted him not to beat my brother Butchie anymore. He held Butchie down on the floor between his knees. That way Butchie can't move while Daddy punches his face. Daddy punches my other brothers too but he always punches Butchie harder and longer. Butch is the oldest, and I'm the youngest. I love Butch and he loves me. I lie on top of Butch to cover his face so he won't bleed. I protect him. I don't get punched. Daddy calls me his "Queenie." Daddy won't punch me. Daddy sleeps in my bed.

### St. Mary's

It's morning. I awake with a startle, my stomach jumps. Something's different today. I remember. Quick short breaths follow my heart pounding. I go to school today for the first time. Dreaded day. Oh, how I've been dreading this day. I have new shoes. I'll think about my shoes. I can see them on the floor shiny and stiff. I love my new shoes. Hanging on a hook behind my door is my dark blue jumper with a starched white shirt. I wear them together with dark blue knee socks and new shoes. Dread. I've never been to school. I don't know what the nun who will be my teacher looks like, what sound her voice makes. I don't want her to have a mean voice, loud and low, croaking like an unhappy frog. I hope not. I close my eyes and try to imagine an angel's face sweetly speaking with her soft eyes.

I know what nuns look like. My brothers go to the same school I'm going to. (I have three brothers. The twins are in the fourth grade and John, my favorite brother, my friend, is in the sixth. I'm four and ready for kindergarten.) I've seen the nuns walking. It looks like they walk without legs. They wear so many black skirts that brush the ground when they walk, but they don't get dirty. You can't see their feet either. They wear long black aprons that cover up the skirts that reach the ground. When they move it all glides at once in a circle. Some place in there is a white stiff bib, like cardboard. Over their heads are also many long black veils, almost, but not quite reaching the ground. Covering their foreheads is a match for the cardboard bib, a cardboard cover for the forehead. The only part that shows is the face, because most of the time their hands are tucked in their long black sleeves.

I saw a movie about nuns and priests and a school named St. Mary's, same as mine. The nun had a robin's voice and an angel's face. She could really sing, so



could the priest. I hope they're at my school. I think they will be. My brother John came home from school one day with swollen stripes on his back. His nun put them there with a stick because he writes with his left hand. He was crying hard and had to sleep on his stomach with wet towels on his back. My mother was mad and she said the nun promised not to do it again. I don't think I write with my left hand. I'll have to ask my mother to make sure.

Dread again. I'll think about my new shoes. I'm going to be very careful to pick up my feet and not scuff the toes. I wish I didn't have to scuff up the bottoms. Anyway, I think when the nun hurt my brother was before the singing nun and priest came to St. Mary's School. I'm pretty sure of that.

My mother is calling. I'm sitting, deciding what to do first. I don't think I need to wash. I had a bath last night. What do I put on first? Bloomers. That's what my mother calls underpants. Me too, sometimes. That's easy. What's next? My mother comes in the room, and all those decisions are made for me. I just put my arms and legs in the right places, my shoes are last. I slide into them myself, both feet together. I look different in this uniform, like someone else. I prefer dungarees, but I'm looking pretty good in blue and white, as shiny as my shoes. There's cereal and juice waiting for me. I'm not in the mood to eat. I'm too excited. My mother started lifting the spoon filled with Wheaties to my mouth. One more, she says. As soon as I swallow one more, she'll say "one more" again. She can go on and on, until I can't swallow anymore. Mom gives up.

Finally, I'm out the door and down the stairs. I'm excited. We hold hands walking on the brick sidewalks crossing streets I hardly ever cross. We are getting farther from home, my room where I like to play, my mother's room where I can make tents with sheets on her bed posts. I don't think I want to go to school today anymore. We walk farther. I'm slowing down just a little, so my mother doesn't notice and think I'm scared. She'll say I shouldn't be because because because because. I'll think about my new shoes. There's a scuff on them and now I'm so mad. I lick my fingers and wipe the scuff. It disappears. That's better. We've gotten to the church. I think about crying, begging, screaming, lying stiff on the ground. I'm frozen. I don't want to go one more step. I realize my mother's not going to stay with me at the school. I'll be alone. My mother tugs at my hand and says, "Hurry up! We'll be late." I still can't move. I have a funny feeling in my heart. "Mum, my heart's crying," I say. My mother laughs. She thinks it's cute. "Susie, hearts don't cry." "But mine is, my heart is really crying." She laughs, we walk on.

When we reach the school, I stop outside the gate. I check my shoes. The scuff is back again. I bend down, lick my fingers, and when I wipe it the scuff disappears again. How many times will I be licking my shoes today? There are so many buildings, all brick. They are pretty but not friendly. There are many giant wooden doors I couldn't open myself. My mother knows what door to go in and she can open it. Who will open it to let me out? The kindergarten is in the basement. It's a dark, long hall with rooms on both sides. The children are already sitting at desks. We're late. There is a nun standing at the door. Behind her is a cage. Next to all the rooms are cages. My mother and the nun greet at a distance. The floor squeaks as we walk toward her. The nun says, "You must be Susan McLaughlin." Nobody ever calls me Susan. I want to tell her that. Her name is Sister Mary Joseph. My mother kisses me goodbye. I scream, I cry, I beg, but before I can get stiff on the floor, the nun has me surrounded in her black dress. I see her hands. The door swings behind my mother, and she's gone. With my last struggle to escape, black shoes appear from under the black skirts. Feet. "That's enough of this nonsense." Not an angel's voice. She's upset, I think, because her foot got out.

### "Sister Said"

Sister Theresa Bernadette is my first grade teacher. She puts me out in the hall

I have to sit on the floor. Then she is going to put me in Hell. I have to wait until she has time. This means I'll be dead. I can call my mother to say good-bye. Sister said. I'll say good-bye mom, I'm going to Hell. Mom will say good-bye. She'll miss me. There's nothing she can do. Sister said. I'm going to Hell. I don't not talk in school. Sister tells me not to. I forget. I listen to the devil. He's on my left shoulder. My guarding angel is on my right. I forget where my right is. The devil's in me. Sister said. I will go to burn in Hell. That's where the bad people are. I'm scared of the bad people. There's a furnace in the basement. It leads to Hell. That's where I'm going. I'm sitting on the floor. Waiting. It's a long time. I'm scared. Hell hurts. You burn there. You don't burn up. You keep burning forever and ever. Sister said. If anyone is my friend they'll go to Hell too. I'm the devil. I forget not to talk all the time. I don't know I'm talking until Sister hits me. Then I know. Then I forget again. I forget my left and my right too. I don't want to go to Hell. That's where the bad people go. I'm bad. Sister said.

### Buzzards Bay

It is a clear, shining summer afternoon, colored blue, yellow and white, full of possibilities for an 8-year-old. This summer, this particular afternoon, I choose digging holes in the hot sand, always amazed at finding the cooler sand below. The tingling of the sun's heat on my back feels like an amusing dance of sensation.

This is my third summer spent in this tiny village named "Hideaway Village." The beach is on Buzzards Bay, and the bay in Cape Cod. I'm thinking, "Lucky, lucky, I know how lucky I am. There is this beach, this bay, this village together with me—a perfect combination."

Naming the village Hideaway is clear to me because once inside the village there is no reason to leave. A small general store takes care of all my basic necessities: Tootsie Rolls or fireballs for refreshment, comic books and even a pinball machine for rainy day entertainment.

Naming the bay Buzzards confuses me. I don't know what a Buzzard is and I feel I should, being eight, though I do like the sound of the word Buzzard. I play with the variations: Buzzurd... Buzzed... Boozard. Trying to hide my ignorance as I search for a clue with a matter-of-fact style of voice, I asked my summertime best friend Joanne if she had spotted any buzzards lately. She said no in a dreamlike voice that suggested she had looked. I guessed by her gaze and her quick subject change that she didn't know either.

I am safe in this village. There are no strangers or roads to cross. The only fear I have at this moment is that this, the upteenth hole I'm digging, still won't be big enough, deep enough, or the perfect distance from the ocean to hold the water I'm planning to fill it with.

I'm so intense in my calculations that the sounds of the commotion around me are muffled. A scream startles me, a limp woman being carried from the water grabs my vision. I can see nothing else. She is laid on her stomach. Someone begins pushing on the middle of her back, then lifting her bent elbows. Someone else rubs her legs. She is a different color than they are. My heart is pounding. I am afraid of that color.

Two small children are straining to see behind them as they are towed away. Their faces are distorted as they disappear into the trees. I know they're her children, her scared children.

I'm watching the pushing, the pulling, the rubbing. "Enough! Enough you lazy pig! It's time to get up. Get up, change color, go to your children and comfort them."

Instinctively I get on my knees. I need to help, to pray. I'm praying that the pushing-pulling is the right thing to do. It looks so stupid. My field of view widens. I'm aware that there are people behind also watching. One, two, then four. Soon the crowd is kneeling. "Our Father," I'm saying, "who art in heaven." We are all praying. I begin to feel some hope.

Two men dressed in white from head to toe are beside her. (The prayer isn't finished.) They look so out of place on the beach, so many clothes and a stretcher. One of the white men feels her arm, her neck, turns her over. The push-pull person closes her eyes. (Why?) I can see her curly hair covered with sand. She is on the stretcher now. (I didn't see how she got there.) The men who don't belong at any beach cover her with a sheet.

The ambulance is gone, the men in white with it. The woman carried from the water. Gone. The crowd vanished. Me, I don't know what a buzzard looks like, but I'm eight and I know the color of death.

### Toast

Going out to lunch is so different from eating lunch at home. A sandwich isn't just there waiting. A sandwich you may not be crazy about or the same-kind-of-sandwich-you-had-yesterday-and-may-have-tomorrow sandwich, the you-should-be-grateful-that-you-have-a-sandwich-at-all sandwich but a sandwich you decide

you want.

A waitress with an apron gives me a menu with lots of sandwiches listed on two pages. More sandwiches than I have ever eaten. I'm going to spend a long time reading this menu because the waitress embarrassed me. She asked Mrs. Poloski if I could read before she gave it to me. I'm embarrassed that she thinks I look like I can't read and more embarrassed that she asked Mrs. Poloski if I could read instead of asking me. As if I wouldn't even know if I could read the menu or not. Does she think I can't talk or that I can talk but wouldn't know if I can read or not? Anyway, I'm getting a hamburger with mustard, relish, ketchup, and I'll say it with dignity.

Soon I'm comfortable sitting in the back seat of Joanna's car. I pretend this is my car. I'm wondering what it would feel like if Mr. and Mrs. Poloski were my parents and Joanna was my sister. I study the back of Joanna's parents' heads. They are discussing afternoon plans. Mr. Poloski won't get drunk. He won't hit Mrs. Poloski or Joanna today. I don't think he ever has.

They sound a little like Leave it to Beaver's Mom and Dad (my favorite show). I look at Joanna. She would be my big sister. We would share a room with two single beds. Dad would come to our room every night to talk to us about our day.

A hard wind blows through the window. Joanna's long black hair is swept up and twirls in the air around her face and head like a tornado. My hair has short curls tight to my head, and with the same breeze shakes only a little, like dried seaweed. I will always want hair that blows in the wind. We're not a family. My skin is white and freckled. The Poloskis have brown skin all one color. The waitress in the restaurant noticed. She said with a big smile, "You can't belong to them with your green eyes." "No, I'm not Portuguese." The waitress' smile widens. Joanna's parents are smiling too. I'm embarrassed again. Maybe I pronounced Portuguese wrong. I used to say Portageeze. Joanna's mother taught me Portuguese, but it has been such a habit I may have slipped. I don't know.

"Well then, what nationality are you?" The waitress waits for an answer, still smiling. I think a minute, hoping to get the answer that will stop the questions and smiles, and bring lunch.

"I'm not sure. My father's Irish and my mother's Protestant." The smiles turn to laughter. My ears are hot and burning. I told a joke everyone understands but me.

I put my head out the window so my curls blow better. The car stops so fast my head bangs on the door. Joanna's dad is running toward a smoky house across the street. We get out of the car. Joanna's mom holds her. I press myself to the car door. My head hurts.

I look out to see the smoke escape through closed windows, closed doors, a lot of smoke, black smoke, gray smoke, white smoke. It squeezes out of every crack and rises to the sky. Mr. Poloski is banging on the house door. I don't think anyone will answer. He runs back and forth, slamming the door with his shoulder. The door won't open. The distant sound of sirens quickens. My cue. "St. Francis save us." (I'm supposed to say that when I hear sirens. It helps.)

The firemen are here and they rush to the door. They run with axes, hoses, masks. Two blows of the ax and the door opens. The smoke is free and explodes out the door faster than a train. The smoke at first holds the shape of a door, in an instant loses form and covers the front of the house. Two of the firemen disappear inside.

I press myself to the car door. I don't move. Figures emerge from the smoke carrying a burnt black chair. The other men rush to help carry the black chair. It must be an important chair.

When they are clear of the smoke they put the chair down and step back. The chair faces me. I stare at it and black eyes stare back. The eyes are in a black head on a black crisp body. Black fingers tightly clutch the arms of the chair. Two black legs are held together. Black feet rest on the green wet lawn. A black dress is melted on the black body that melted on the chair. I saw her whole body and my eyes never stopped staring into her eyes and she never stopped staring at me.

Back in the car my lunch is making me sick. I'm afraid of throwing up in Joanna's car. I can hear myself talking. "Anyone for toasted marshmallows?" No one moves. I told a joke no one understands, not even me.

### Tricked

No one is around. There is nothing to do. Then Billy yells to me from the doorway of my apartment house. "Come here." "What for?" Billy's a big kid. There must be a trick. "I want to show you something." "What?" I'm not believing him so easily. "A surprise. You'll like it." I think a minute. "Come on now or just forget it." "Okay, I'm coming." Billy probably wouldn't be showing me if there was anyone else around. I am kind of happy no one is. I feel like one of the big kids.

Billy holds the door open only a little, wide enough for me to squeeze through.

He is hiding what is behind the door with his body. My face scrapes the buttons on his shirt. I'm still thinking he could be tricking me when my face gets covered up with hands. I can't breathe and that's scary. My hands fight with the hands on my face. More hands help the other hands fight my hands. My pants are coming off. "Where's Billy?" I thought. He's Patti's big brother and she's my friend. The tiles are cold on my back. My pants are off. I'm in trouble. I can't move but some way some of me goes over to the wall. The wall part of me is okay. No one else knows I'm on the wall. I'm tired and take a nap. I wake up back on the floor. I look at my bare stomach and my bare you know what.

Without standing I put on my pants. Without thinking I open the inside door. Three, four, five big kids are sitting in the hall looking at me. I need my feet to know the way up the stairs to my room. I can hear them warn me not to tell. Three, four, five good reasons not to tell.

I'd never tell and I don't need a reason.

### "How's Your Cousin?"

I can walk as slow as I want to and I'll still be early. It's Saturday morning. I only need to wear a T-shirt and shorts. I want to skip. If I skip I'll get there too soon. I'm already walking by the hedge of City Hall. I'm swinging my bag. After every two swings, I'll take a step.

I'm on my way to the pool. I swim with the team every Saturday. I'm not on the team. I'm not twelve. The coach lets me race with them. I need help with my dives. My dives are too deep and slow me down. The coach is helping me with the shallow dives. The coach wants me on his team. I'm good. He has been trying to get an exception made to the rule that you need to be twelve. Today he'll know if there is an exception for very close to eleven year olds on the city team. It's funny, since I've been thinking about the exception, I'm walking fast. I'm already to the donut shop.

The donuts smell good. The coffee too. Good thing I don't have any money. I swim better hungry. "How's your cunt?" A big man with red hair and lots of freckles leaning on a car outside the donut shop says that. He's smiling. I have cousins big, with red hair. "How's my cousin?" "No, how's your cunt?" He's teasing me. I think he's probably my cousin and he's teasing me because I don't recognize him. "You mean, how's my cousin?" "No, how's your cunt?" His voice is getting lower. I step closer to hear better. "My cousin." He talks slowly, deeply, moving his face closer to mine. "I said how's your cunt?" I don't think this is my cousin and I don't think he's asking about how they are. He's scaring me now. "I've got to go. I don't know what you're talking about, mister." I don't want to walk up the street where he can see me. I think he's a bad man. Next to the donut shop there is an alley. I cut through this alley a lot. He wouldn't see me down there. The alley's empty. I'm safe. "I'll show you what your cunt is." His hand on my arm is strong. I can't move. I don't know what to say. He's unzipping his fly and taking out his dinky. That's what a cunt is: a dinky. It's so ugly. It makes me cry. "Okay, mister. I know what it is. I need to go."

He let's go of his cunt. The hand that was touching it grabs my other arm. (I wished I didn't have on a T-shirt.) "Hey!" a man yells from the warehouse door. My arms drop. The man with the red hair runs away. The man from the warehouse is coming toward me. He has a strange look on his face. I run too. "Hey kid!" I run faster. The air dries my arms. They hurt. I'm late to the pool. Everyone is already swimming. The coach is waiting for me. He's smiling and swinging a team shirt in his hand. It's mine.

I'm embarrassed in my team suit. I keep changing the way I stand. Nothing helps. We get into position. I dive. A shallow dive. I get it. I turn to come back to finish and there's no one ahead of me. I have a chance to win, but I'm not sure if I want to. Thinking slows me down. I can see someone under my right arm. Stop thinking. I reach the edge of the pool. The coach's feet are there. I won. He pulls me out. Everyone is excited. I would be, but I can't pay attention. The suit is sticking to me. I'm scared walking home even though I'm taking different streets.

I'm thinking about the word cunt and why I never heard it before. I'm thinking about telling my father and mother that I swim on the city team. I'll tell them about the man with the red hair and that I'm a good swimmer. I want my dad to walk me to swimming. He would kill that guy.

My father is drinking his beer at the kitchen table. My mother's at the sink behind him. I tell my dad what the man with the red hair did. I start out, "Guess what this guy did..." I tell him everything. He's listening, staring at me. He looks angry. I talk really fast. Dad's just looking at me, his eyes changing. "What did you do to make him do that?" I didn't know, so I couldn't answer. "What were you doing?" he says again. I could answer that. "I was going swimming." "No. I want to know what you did to this guy." What did I do? What did I do? I thought about what I did. I did know I did something. My father was mad I didn't answer. He told

me to get in the other room. I might as well not say anything about the swimming or the team. I don't want to do it anyway. It's a stupid team, and the bathing suits are ugly.

### Ya But

I'm walking through the fog looking for my goddess. Today I need to talk to her. I've got to ask her a question because I have a big problem. I kind of forget what the problem is. That's a problem in itself, but even if I could remember I wouldn't tell you. One thing I know is it's a big problem... I mean large. Anyway, I'll remember by the time I find my goddess. I always have to walk through the fog a long time to find her. She's somewhere in this thick fog which I hate because it makes my hair curly and when I come out I need to wear one of my mother's nylon stockings over my head until my hair flattens.

If I ever got caught with that stocking on my head I'd have to leave town on an early bus. I'm eleven and definitely not ready for bus rides. This means I have to hide in the basement for hours. I hate that too, but when my mother puts on her stockings tomorrow and has one big wrinkled leg it's all kind of worthwhile. I'm not mean or anything but she hardly ever is a laugh. Her big joke is she calls me a little shirt instead of a little shit. It's amazing after 10 years she still laughs at that one.

I'm still in this fog, not a clearing in sight. Oh brother, I'm not going to find her. If she was always the same I might know what to look for. But no, she's got to be different ever time. I think that's on purpose. She probably figures I'd be out here every day asking things like where I left my blue T-Shirt, and when will my chest make bumps in my blue T-shirt. I could be a bother. It's got to be big and I've already said it is B-I-G. Okay, I didn't forget my question. I wasn't ready to say. You might leave, and not keep me company in this dreary fog. You might laugh but I've already told you about the stocking on my head. Well here goes. I want to ask, what do I do? Sometimes I have problems that scare me. Sometimes I'm confused, things get too hard for me. My best friend becomes someone else's best friend and tells all my secrets. In gym class I have to wear balloon shorts (not a pretty sight when your legs look like the balloon strings). My grandfather died today and I have a mother who says shirt and laughs. I could go on.

Hey, there's a clearing. Beyond it a pond. Maybe today she'll be a mermaid. There's a duck swimming in this pond. I'll wait for the mermaid. I'm waiting. Oh, no, could this be her? A duck. Shirt.

"Hey duck, are you my goddess?"

"Yes." (Holy moly, the duck's talking.)

"But you're a duck, an ugly duck, probably the ugly duckling."

The duck answers, "This is what you get." I'll give the duck a try. I've come so far and I might not find my real goddess.

"Hey duck. I need some advice. Could you tell me what's the best way to live life? I'm confused about the whole thing."

"Well," the duck answers, "Do what I do. Get in the water and swim."

"Ya, but, I'm not a duck. I get tired when I swim."

"Well, do what I do when I get tired. I float."

"Ya, but, I get cold if I stay in the water too long."

"Well, do what I do. I lay in the sand and the sun warms me."

"Ya, but it rains."

"Well, do what I do. I find shelter and tuck my head under my wing."

"Ya, but, I'd get bored."

"Well," the duck replies again. "Do what I do. I fly."

"Ya, but, you keep forgetting I'm not the duck. You are. I can't fly."

"Well, do what I did. Learn."

The duck swims to where I'm standing on the side of the pond. I climb on her back. I fit snugly between her wings.

Her feathers are so soft and silky. I have never been so comfortable. This duck is definitely my goddess. She takes off so smoothly. We sail around and around. Each circle we complete we climb higher. I look down. The pond is small. I can see tops of trees and the fog on the other side. I wonder why I'm not scared. This time when I look the pond is the size of a nickel, a dime. This is glorious. I'm soaring, really flying. Just when I think I never want this to end we begin to glide down back to the pond.

Standing back on the edge of the pond and the duck swimming, I say, "Thank you, duck." No answer. She said all she had to say. Sometimes I'll float. Sometimes I'll need shelter, get bored. Sometimes I'll soar. For right now, I'll be going home to put a stocking on my head.

**Susan Cramer**  
**Rockport**  
*works in graphic design*



## *the cairnbuilder of mt. desert*

there are rules  
the guidebook tells us  
for constructing  
a serviceable cairn  
one that will be useful  
"when the weary traveler  
must find his way  
in the poor visibility  
of an alpine storm"

he however would have none of these  
a park ranger struck silent  
by the spectacle  
of mountains dipping to the sea  
knowing joys so deep  
he could only speak in stone

he taught himself  
how rocks could be trained  
to seem to float in air  
stand awry like clowns  
or stride toward you  
on two stone legs  
when fog swirls  
high upon the blueberry barrens  
how the ochre of the lichens  
would glow like sunpatches  
in the pinewoods  
where he placed them

his imagination  
bubbled like a mountain spring  
issuing unexpectedly  
among boulders on the trail  
with a logic of its own  
and like a spring  
one summer it was gone

the mountains  
are not supposed to change  
the system  
redresses its imbalances  
park headquarters  
said he was transferred  
it is difficult to believe  
a single winter  
could have levelled  
all that rockwork  
to the squat nonentities of stone  
cairns that like a thin gray line  
of infantry  
move up the ridge  
and with a sense  
of having lost the trail  
we fall in step  
up a mountain  
grown strange  
beneath our feet

**Philip Dane Levin**  
**Gloucester, MA**

*edited Appalachian Mt. Club journal for 15 years*

## *Mt. St. Helena*

If I look at the mountain long enough,  
I become the mountain.  
I scale its knees and elbows,  
even though it is miles away  
from where I sit, watching  
it crouch on its haunches.

And there's no doubt about it,  
the mountain is making eye contact,  
and asking me to speak,  
I don't know about what.  
That may be why I remain alone,  
embracing the solitude  
that calls my name,  
why I want to enter the shadow  
of the mountain,  
to fill the space  
between the living and the dead.

**Kathleen Lignell**  
**Bucksport**  
*is a poet/translator*

## *Before the Rock Lets Go Again*

He climbs  
and the mountain  
grows smaller  
until no larger  
than a small hill.

From near the top  
he sees he has overlooked  
something: before it can  
slope into the sky  
and shape connections,

a mountain must have  
a large beginning;  
before he places his rock  
at the top, the mountain  
has to be larger.

He must run down  
and climb again.

**Robert De Young**  
**South Freeport**  
*is a retired professor of English,  
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Photo: Clara Schröder

## Persimmons in Portland

**If a man in flames knocks at your door you must answer.**

At the bus stop everybody's smoking. The guy downwind is smoking. The guy upwind is smoking. A fuzzy-haired dwarf encased in a grimy lemon-colored stretch chenille tube dress struggles by with a rocking gait and she's smoking. A pre-teen in a denim mini-skirt stops to pull a cig from her tiny red suede shoulder bag. There's a young guy in a wheelchair—Leather hightops on the dead feet he keeps readjusting by picking up a thigh in both hands and then letting go. He's wearing black openwork fingerless gloves, listening to his walkman turned up high so his neighbors can hear it too. He's got a pack of Winstons riding above his left bicep, rolled up in the sleeve of his black t-shirt. He smokes one and snaps the butt away, but his aim is off and it rebounds, still smoking, off a signpost instead of landing in the gutter.

**Be prompt in embracing the stranger in flames.**

The bus is a new type called a "kneeling bus." As the door opens the entire front end sinks with a sound like exhaled steam. A queue of gray-haired women toting groceries in plastic bags mounts the lowered step to settle themselves on the hard red seats in the darkened interior. "It's wonderful," one of them turns to comment, "what these new buses have done for the elderly."

A stooped woman in an ill-fitting snakeskin-print pantsuit has a beef about getting overcharged by the driver on the previous run. She's arguing in a high breathless voice and pointing at the medicare card displayed in her open wallet. Her tongue keeps flicking her narrow liver-colored lips. This driver just shakes his head and drones each time she pauses, "I wasn't there ma'am; it wasn't me."

**If red tears flow from your fingers, milk them.**

A white Saab Turbo makes a sudden right and smashes into a blaze orange fire hydrant, putting a large indentation into the middle of the front bumper. Nobody turns to look. Nobody gets out of the car. Instead it backs out and pulls away.

**Kiss each drop quickly, a glowing coal.**

Two shrivelled women, one in harlequin glasses encrusted with rhinestones, the other in a hairnet spangled with tiny gold beads suddenly cease their conversation. They are gazing at the burnt-out building at the next intersection. A big black V oozes down the front where the vinyl siding has melted away. One woman is clucking and the other is saying "It must have happened over the weekend because I go by here every morning and it wasn't there last week."

It happened last winter. Black water froze in sheets on the five streets that intersect there. For days the smell of damp charred wood entered the ventilation systems of downtown offices. A young mother threw her two small children from a second story window in order to save them from the fire. One of the children was caught by a spectator from the bar next door. The other's fall was broken enough to prevent serious injury.

The two sparkling ladies go on chatting.

"You know the hospital on the island?"

"There's no hospital on the island."

"I mean the Catholic place."

"The Mercy? Here in town?"

"No, St. Vincent's."

"The church?"

"Yes, the one on the island. Well, I ran into Lilah Swanson the other day—she goes to that church, you know. She's the one who's hard of hearing. She got one of those eye-seeing dogs."

"You must mean hard of seeing, like . . . blind."

"Well, you should see her with that dog!"

**Persimmons might roll from your head and you'd eat them.**

There's an abandoned Hallmark store on the other side of the street. It has pastel eggs and chicks and bunnies in the windows even though it's August. They've been there since March. There are no "closed" signs posted, no announcements for a going-out-of-business sale; the staff has just disappeared, leaving the merchandise undisturbed.



"You kids say Frisky did all this"  
Earthenware, Underglaze, 1988, 20" high

Josh Nadel

**On a dark street alone you could burst into flame.**

A woman with long, stringy hair ambles toward the bus stop pushing a grungy powder-blue stroller. She's wearing gray jeans and a gray sweatshirt with a red arrow printed on the chest pointing down at her belly. Above the arrow is a picture of a yellow road sign that says "Under Construction." A man in droopy rust-colored corduroys with the cords worn off walks beside her drinking a Coke from a fat plastic bottle. He has stubble on his face and homemade tattoos on both forearms.

There's a chubby blonde toddler in the stroller. Something greenish-brown and crusty smears in a cascade down the toddler's face and t-shirt front. The couple stops and huddles over the stroller. The man pours Coke into the child's open mouth until it runs out the sides and splashes on the crusty t-shirt. The woman giggles.

**You might flee reason, screaming your need.**

There's a woman at the bus stop holding a small book with a marbled cover. The cover swirls with the colors of embers, Easter chicks, snakes' tongues, lemons, persimmons. The woman writes in the book with a sleek black pen. As she bends to write, her red-gold hair swings forward like a curtain closed across her face. What does she look like? What is she writing?

**If the skin of a child stung your hands, would you drop her?**

**If I reached for you, would ash run through my fingers?**

Jennifer Lyons  
Portland

searches in a special Library

# *Of the Life and Death and the Life and Death of Finn Underhill, Illustrious Citizen of Fells Point, Baltimore*

(as told to Michael Boccia by Jorge Amado)

## A TRUE TALE

This story that I tell you about the life and death, and the life and death, of Finn Underhill is absolutely true. I, myself, witnessed the events and do hereby swear and affirm that everything contained herein is the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help me God!

Or as close as anyone may come.

My name is Jorge Amado Basura, but everyone calls me George. Openly I admit it: I am a red wine drunkard since the age of four. I do not remember my first drink of wine. Whenever I cried as a baby my parents gave me a sip of red wine to quiet me. Now, a day without wine is like a day without the sun. I would cry without my wine. Red wine is my blood. I am the bastard son of a bastard father of a bastard race. I am an American born, mix-raced Sicilian, 37 years of age. I have lived in Fells Point all my life and know everyone who lives here. I knew the illustrious Finn Underhill well.

I saw Finn Underhill rise from the dead and die again.

Although he usually smelled like a dead fish, Finn Underhill was the most beloved resident of Fells Point. In the rowhouses and alleyways where the prostitutes worked, on the corners where the dope smokers and tramps and muggers slouched, and in the bars where drunks and vagrants and sailors found a home, tears were shed when they heard of the death of Finn. They wept as for a lost son or father or brother. No one else could tell such funny jokes and marvelous fish stories. No one else could calm the rough seas between two angry lovers as well as Finn Underhill.

Finn's fish stink made him irresistible to the ladies.

It must have been his stink that made the ladies love him so, because he was a pot bellied, pug ugly dog-faced man with curly black hair that was never combed. He hated water and refused to bathe in it or drink it. He said, "God wouldn't have made the sea salty, if we were meant to drink water!"

But men loved him too. No one over-tipped bartenders and waiters more than Finn. No beggar's plea went unanswered by Finn, who knew them all by name. He'd give them money or buy them a meal, and worse, he was always good for a drink. Or as many drinks as they wanted.

"Whiskey is the water of life!" The gentle Welshman would often exclaim when drunk. "Barkeeper! A round for my friends!" Finn's rich Welsh accent was heard over many mahogany bars in Fells Point as he made his nightly drunken rounds of the local taverns. He was afflicted with a restless spirit and couldn't stand to drink in one bar for too long. This spirit forced Finn to wander from bar to bar, drinking as he travelled the side streets, and telling the same jokes and fish stories over and over. Finn was able to drink amazing amounts of alcohol without losing his temper, the test of a true man.

Even though he never had his shoes shined, he always gave the shoeshine boy a buck. "Don't give the kid no money!" I told him a hundred times. But he always winked and grinned and said, "I give it for me, not for him." His crooked yellow teeth cracked into a zany drunken grin as he laughed at me!

Winter and summer, fall and spring, he always wore the same woven wool vest that his gypsy sister had made from colored scraps. Finn could sleep anywhere in this vest (in his bed, on the floor, in a bar, or on the cobblestone streets). And he often did. The vest smelled like dead codfish. Wearing underwear was his idea of dressing up. He only washed when it rained.

Rumor has it that he was wearing the vest when he died in the rain in the gutters of Fells Point.

## THE FISH EYE

According to the clock behind the bar at the Fish Eye Pub, it was 6:03 PM, when Michael Bates started being a pain in the ass again. Michael could be a royal pain in the ass. When he got drunk, he recited stupid poems. He wore one of those 1920's broad-rimmed gangster hats. Silly wire eyeglasses sat on his bulbous nose, and a puny mustache adorned his lip. My Aunt Mary has a better mustache.

And it was Michael Bates who started all the trouble.

"Maybe Finn isn't completely dead," said a drunken Michael to me and Wheelchair Willie as we sat in the back of the Fish Eye Pub after dinner. This was Michael's way of being a pain in the ass. He thought he was funny. This was the kind of shit we had to put up with, if we wanted to hang around him. Michael was the cook, and he let his pals drink and eat free in the kitchen. On the night of

Finn's funeral, business was slow, and we sat at a rear table in the bar. The owner wasn't around, so no one would catch us.

"Dumb mothafugger's dead," grunted Wheelchair Willie.

Wheelchair Willie was the only true philosopher we had in Fells Point in those days, although I have noticed that we have a great many today. He had a fully developed philosophy about women, society, life, and everything. He held them in low esteem. When questioned on matters of philosophy, he boiled down his ideas on the vast ocean of life to a tiny tear drop with these words: "Fug it."

As a professional beggar, Willie had a lot of contact with the public and knew humanity well. He had refined the art of begging to three simple stages. First he smiled a crooked smile and silently held out his hat. If this elicited no money, he pled in a salty voice, "Any spare change?" And once people had passed Willie without giving any coins, Willie growled after them: "Fuggers!"

"Some dead people come back from the dead," said Michael Bates as he took another swig of beer. "People famous in story and song."

"Like who?"

"Osiris, Attis, Adonis, Lazarus, Jesus, and Sam McGee, to name only a few."

"Sam McGee?" I eyed Michael curiously because I knew something smelled fishy, but before I saw what was coming, he took another drink and began reciting:

*"The Cremation of Sam McGee" by Robert Service*

*There are strange things done in the midnight sun  
by the men who toil for gold;  
The Arctic trails have their secret tales  
That would make your blood run cold;  
The Northern Lights have seen queer sights,  
But the queerest they ever did see  
Was the night on the marge of Lake Lebarge  
When I cremated Sam McGee.  
He turned to me and "Cap," says he,  
"I'll cash in this trip I guess;  
And if I do, I'm asking that you,  
Wont refuse my last request."  
Well he seemed so low that I couldn't say no;  
Then he says with his dying moan:  
"It aint being dead; it's my awful dread  
Of the icy grave that pains.  
So I want you to swear that, foul weather or fair,  
You'll cremate my last remains."  
Now a promise made is a debt unpaid,  
And the trail has its own stern code.  
So some planks I tore from the cabin floor,  
And I lit the boiler fire.  
The flames just soared as the furnace roared  
—Such a flame you seldom see;  
Then I burrowed a hole in the glowing coals,  
And I stuffed in Sam McGee.  
I do not know how long in the snow  
I wrestled with my grisly fear;  
But the stars came out and they danced about  
Ere again I ventured near;  
I was sick with dread, but I bravely said,  
"I'll just take a look inside.  
I guess he's cooked, and it's time I looked."  
Then the door I opened wide.  
And there sat Sam, looking cool and calm,  
In the heart of the furnace roar;  
And he wore a smile you could see a mile,  
As he said, "Please close the door.  
It's warm in here, but I greatly fear,  
You'll let in the cold and storm.  
Since I left Plumtree, down in Tennessee,  
It's the first time I've ever been warm."*

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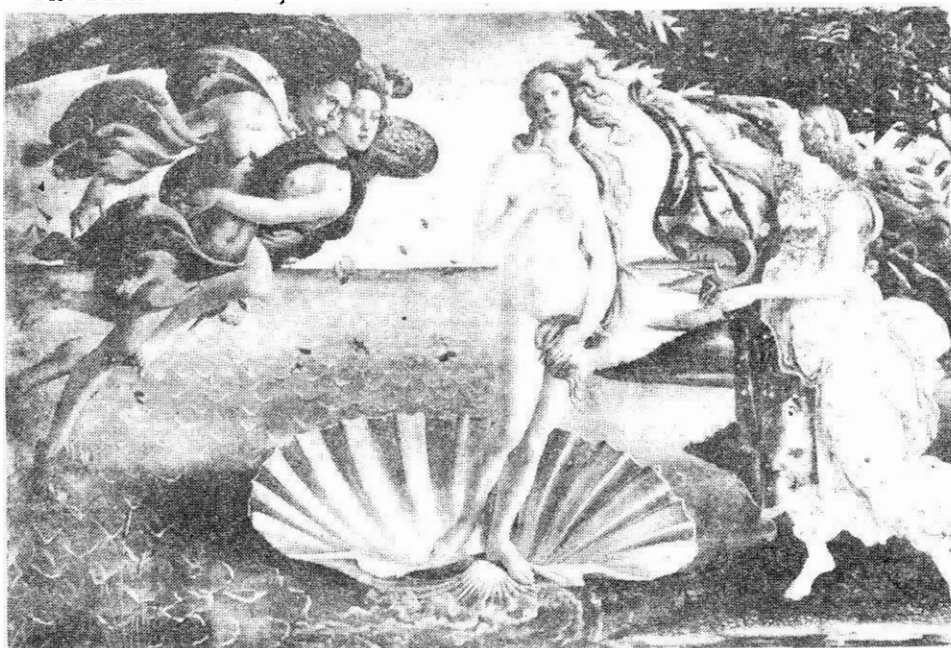


The only response to the poem came from Wheelchair Willie: "Let's get the fug out of here before the owner shows up and kicks us the fug out." He was a real cynic.

### BERTHA'S MUSCLES

We entered Bertha's Bar, which is only a half block from the Fish Eye, and found our place at the long bar at 7:34 PM, according to the clock in the stomach of a stuffed blue swordfish that was jumping over whiskey bottles.

Behind the bar, above the clock and the bottles of liquor, was a dirty painting of a naked lady, the kind you see in all the bars. Above the painting, someone had written in block letters: VENUS ON THE HALFSHELL. But that ain't the title of the painting. The title was on a little oval brass plate on the frame which read, "The Birth of Venus by Sandra Botticelli."



Sandro Botticelli, Birth of Venus, c. 1484, tempera

I don't know who this lady, Sandra, is, but this painting is strange. In the center of the picture a naked lady is surfing on a giant seashell. She is blond and curved and has the sad face of a Lady of the Evening. Only the fortunate falling of a whisp of her reddish blond hair in front of her privates prevents her from total embarrassment.

The other figures in the picture seem to be fighting over whether or not the surfing lady should be naked.

On her left, a dressed woman on the beach is trying to cover the naked surfer lady with a pink blanket. On the other side a guy is trying to blow the blanket off the naked lady! But this ain't the weird part. The weird part is that the man is flying through the air with another naked girl on his hip! This woman has her arms and legs wrapped around the thighs of the man. From the expression on her face, I think she's jealous and just is trying to get him away from the naked surfer lady, who's got a better body.

The air is full of flowers.

In the middle of this chaos, the naked surfer is serene, as though she doesn't even know what all the fuss is about. It's a very confusing painting. I've looked at it a thousand times and I still don't understand it.

A bumper sticker was plastered on the wall below the obscene painting. In large red letters on a yellow background the sticker reads: EAT BERTHA'S MUSCLES.

Willie had a simple explanation of the painting: "Fuggin' whore!" This was Willie's universal opinion of women. "All women are fuggin' whores! Just like these girls here." He referred to the ladies in the bar.

But Michael Bates had to be a pain in the ass again. "They are not hookers, but bartenders. They work a few hours a week behind the bar. And if they want to sleep with a guy, and he wants to give them a little present, it's nobody's business. If you know what I mean."

The ladies being discussed were sitting at the bar.

Demian was all in black. Her pale skin contrasted with her black make-up, black highheels, black net stockings, and black cotton dress that barely covered her tits and sizable ass. She sat next to her best friend, Tangela.

Tangela was black. As a prostitute, she made a bundle because she was so sweet to every john. She wore a red lace bra and hotpants. Her long legs were crisscrossed with red leather thongs that ended at her sandals.

The women wept profusely at the announcement of Finn's death. Soon the crying spread up and down the red mahogany bar. They cried for a lost loved one, suddenly they felt alone and unprotected. They praised Saint Finn, and forgot

the old Devil Finn. In death Finn could do no wrong. The women cried heart-breakingly and found some consolation in drinking tequila with beer chasers. In honor of Finn, no one drank water. Black-eyed Demian, her mascara running down her cheeks, gave out the loudest wail. It bounced across the brick plaza on Broadway and echoed back against the bar. Between sobs and gulps of tequila, Tangela bewailed the loss of Finn, the world's greatest lover, the sweetest boy, the wisest sage, the happiest man that ever lived!

Others who were present joined in. The ladies of the evening recalled details that proved Finn was no ordinary man. It was Finn, who had taken in Kimberly's baby when she spent two days in jail for hooking. He had done everything for that baby himself, even if he had to carry the baby from bar to bar. He had changed its diaper, fed it, bathed it. The only thing he hadn't done was given the baby his tit to suck.

"He did the best he could with tools God gave him," I said.

His skill as a guitarist was recalled with a sigh by Jasmine. His art as a poet was praised by Rose, who had her head turned by Finn's verse. A fight almost broke out among the ladies as to whether he was a better musician or poet, and blows were only averted when Michael Bates cried out: "A toast to dead artists everywhere!" A round of tequila, quaffed to honor art, silenced the barroom.

If this is to be a completely true tale, it must be stated here that some of the participants were still sober. But no one can remember who. Everyone had a few drinks after hearing the bad news and then consoled themselves with a few more. The alcohol produced sea salt tears of infinite sorrow. How could anyone be expected to remain sober after losing a friend like Finn?

The reverie was interrupted when Wheelchair Willie scoffed, "Fuggin' Bates says fuggin' Finn ain't dead."

"Like Jesus reborn?" asked Zelda, one of the ladies who had been reborn recently at the City Lights Mission.

"No, like Tim Finnegan," Michael drunkenly replied.

"Who's that?" asked Demian before I could stop her.

Michael took and drink and began half singing, half reciting:

*Tim Finnegan lived on Walker Street,  
An Irish gentleman, very odd;  
He'd a bit of the brogue, so neat and sweet,  
And to rise in the world, Tim carried a hod.  
But Tim had a sort of tipling way:  
With a love of liquor Tim was born,  
And to help him through his work each day,  
Took a drop of the creature every morn.  
One morning Tim was rather full,  
His head felt heavy and it made him shake.  
He fell from the ladder and broke his skull,  
His friends assembled at his wake.  
Miss Biddy Moriarity began to cry;  
"Such a purty corpse did yez ever see?  
Arrah, Tim mavourneen, an' why did ye die?"  
"Hold yer gob?" sez Judy MaGee.  
Then Peggy O'Connor took up the job.  
"Arrah Biddy," sez she, "You're wrong I'm sure."  
But Biddy gave her a blet in the gob,  
And laid her sprawling on the floor.  
Each side in war did soon engage;  
Twas woman to woman and man to man;  
Shillelah law was all the rage,  
And a bloody ruckus soon began.  
Micky Malone ducked his head,  
When a gallon of whiskey flew at him.  
It missed, and falling on the bed,  
The liquor splattered over Tim.  
And Timothy calls, jumping from the bed,  
"Souls to the Devil! Did you think I was dead?"*

But no noticed Michael's performance.

No one noticed because a hue and cry had arisen in the bar that drowned out all else: "Let's go to the funeral and pay respects." It matters little now who first said those fateful words, but it was me.

### CITY MISSION

At sundown, when the light and dark are intermingled on the edge of the horizon to form the mysterious hour, the drunken troupe staggered into the City

*cont a next page*

Mission overlooking the garbage filled harbor waters at the foot of Broadway.

A sage once wrote that to know a community, we must observe its funerals. Finn Underhill's funeral was in the City Mission, the last refuge for the homeless. Finn's family had flown in from Wales for the service. They were going to take his body back with them for burial in the ancestral graveyard.

The Underhill family left early. They had left as soon as they could. Finn's family were Baptists, or "Bloody Baptists" as he called them. They could never forgive him for the terrible shame he imposed on them. He was a bum by choice, and this was a terrible, terrible thing, according to the minister who let us latecomers into the empty chapel and ushered us up to the pine coffin.

As we surrounded the open casket, the reverend discretely withdrew. As to the bottle that someone smuggled in, I fully admit that someone brought a bottle of Chartreuse. I saw it, I touched it, I drank it.

Finn lay in the open casket in suit and tie. His eyes shone and he smiled at his friends. We all smiled back. No one would have recognized him, except for that smile.

"Who's that?" asked Demian.

"It's Finn, you jackass."

"Can't be. Finn never wears a coat and tie."

"It's Finn. Look at his eyes."

Why did Finn's eyes stare right at you? I don't know. I took another drink and looked again. His eyes looked to the right. Then to the left. He was making me dizzy.

"We better give him a drink. He looks thirsty."

Tangela poured tequila from a bottle into the dead man's mouth. "Glug, glug, glug," said the bottle. All else was silence.

These were the friends Finn Underhill had been waiting for. There was that dopey smile and familiar glint in his eyes. He listened in silence to them for a moment, enjoying their company.

"He's gonna ruin his clothes. Look how much he spills when he drinks lying down." Michael's slurred voice suggested, "We better sit him up." As they pulled Finn forward and sat him upright, his grin revealed his satisfaction with his friends.

"He ain't wearing no pants," Demian sweetly noticed.

"You don't have to wear pants to your own funeral," I informed her and then asked Finn, "Do you want another drink?"

Finn replied yes by nodding his head once. But then he clumsily grabbed for the bottle. He fell over in the coffin and knocked the bottle from Michael's hand.

"Give the man a drink. Can't you see he wants the bottle?" Demian interjected as she hauled up Finn and stuck the bottle in his mouth. "Here, sweetheart."

"And I was trying so hard to stay sober!" gurgled Finn.

"He's wasting the booze!" someone objected.

"It's his fugging party. Let him drink the way he wants to." Wheelchair Willie noted the time. "It's almost nine o'clock. Time to go to the Wharf Rat."

Everyone understood Willie's announcement. At precisely nine o'clock, Oliver, the bartender at the Wharf Rat Bar, gave everyone in the room a draught of rum on the house. Willie never missed a free drink.

Now that everyone was in good spirits and drinking tequila, they decided that it was time to move the party from the gloomy City Mission. "We can't leave Finn alone tonight," Tangela stated emphatically, "this is his party."

"Who's gonna leave him?" demanded Willie.

They consulted Finn.

"Of course I'll go to a party! What do you think? I'm dead?!" said Finn as he winked at Willie. But Finn had trouble standing up and his friends had to help him to his feet.

"He's too drunk to walk," announced Demian. "We can carry him." By which she meant the men could carry him.

"Fugger can ride with me on my wheelchair," growled Willie.

## WHARF RATS

Night had pushed day from the sky and darkness took sole possession of the street. Old street lights shown on embracing couples in doorways, cats cried on the rooftops, and jukebox music echoed down streets and alleyways.

In no time Finn was stiffly balanced on Willie's lap and rolling down Thames Street and then up Wolfe to the door of the Wharf Rat Bar. It wasn't easy. Finn was dead drunk and would not cooperate. He fell off Willie's lap twice. Once when we lost control of the wheelchair, and only the curb prevented Finn and Willie from going for a swim in the harbor. Then again when the wheelchair fell sideways as we pushed it onto the sidewalk. Although Finn remained silent during this ordeal, Willie yelled "Fuggers" at us every few seconds. The bar door was the most difficult part to navigate. The door slammed on Finn's hairy bare legs, and the wheelchair kept getting stuck on the threshold.

In the end Finn had to be dragged in for his free rum.

The Wharf Rat Bar was decorated with stuffed rats dressed in little sailor costumes and standing in cute little nautical poses. All around the room, little sailor rats rowed little boats or danced little jigs or played little hornpipes. There must have been a hundred of the little grinning figures. This was how the bar got its name. It was disgusting.

Once inside, Finn returned to his jovial self and soon his mood infected the entire barroom. Many of his friends had not heard of his death and were glad to see him for one more good time before his departure. His death could hardly be celebrated with only one rum, or even two, or three.

Even without his pants, Finn was enjoying himself completely by playing the buffoon. He tried to dance with Helena, but he fell flat on his face. What a clown! Even when we made him sit down and ordered him to behave himself, he still pulled pranks. He stuck out his hairy skinny leg and tripped the waiter, who crashed a dozen bottles on the floor. We laughed so hard that we only encouraged him, so he laid on his back and tried to look up the ladies' dresses!

But this was too much, and Oliver, the bartender, announced that it was closing time. "It's one o'clock folks. You all have to get out of the bar."

I looked around the bar. Everywhere the sailor rats had begun dancing little sailor jigs and playing their little instruments. The moose head over the door grinned and winked at me.

## THE SEA

Finn had drunk too much and fell asleep in the alleyway among the drunks and marijuana smokers. He lay with his head on Willie's breast and his legs sprawled out.

"He needs a drink to revive him." Demian had smuggled a bottle of Chartreuse from the bar in her blouse. Oliver let her steal a bottle now and then, and in return he got to search her for stolen bottles whenever he wanted.

Into Finn's mouth, Tangela poured some tequila from a bottle she had stolen. This seemed to revive him, because I heard Finn speak as clear as a bell:

"Let's go for a sail." He loved the sea.

The sea was in his blood. Finn had never learned to sail, he had been born knowing the sea and the wind! He, himself, had told us so a hundred times. "I am a fish in the sea," he would boast. No one knew the ocean waters like Finn, and no one loved the sweet sea like him. One drunken night, he had sworn a most solemn oath in front of the entire bar: The sea would be his final resting place! No earthly bed for him! He would swim forever!

How could we resist his last request?

It was a misty night with a full mystical moon peeking from behind clouds, but we all agreed at once. No one wanted to disagree with Finn, nor to insult him. Or else we would have mentioned how sloppily he was drinking and how much liquor he dribbled down his coat.

We stumbled blindly through the wet fog. Finn lead us to a wharf where dozens of white sailboats were moored. Finn knew which sailboats had stocked bars and which didn't. He knew which bottles we could steal unnoticed, and which bottles we could sip, if we refilled them with water and returned them to their homes on the shelves. We know the rules of the sea. We are honorable men.

And despite what rumors went around town, we did not steal the sailboat!

We climbed aboard a white sailboat named "JOYCES WAKE," which I saw painted on the hull as we rolled and staggered down the wooden deck that was now covered with drizzle.

Finn was absolutely no help when we tried to pull the wheelchair onto the boat. And after I had graciously helped him aboard and given him the best seat, all he did was lay back grinning his stupid grin and dangle his feet in the water.

If it were not for the efforts of Demian and Tangela, we would never have gotten Willie and his chair over the boat's rail. Finn with one finger and a wink pointed below deck, where he knew the bar to be, and I soon took Finn's hint and sought out a fine bottle of scotch. When I returned from below deck, the ladies had pulled Willie's chair on deck and loosened the ropes connecting us to the dock. I had a sickening feeling as the ship drifted from the pier, but I didn't say anything. I didn't want to spoil the party. I joined Finn, who had wandered to the front of the sailboat while I was below. He was slumped forward against some lines, looking lovingly at the waves in the harbor.

The ladies were trying to raise the sail, but were having no luck. It's just as well, because the storm would probably have killed us all if we'd gotten under sail. A thick fog rolled in and the Man in the Moon was now only a white shadow behind some mysterious black clouds. A heavy rain began to fall as we drifted from the dock. The sea and sky seemed all one.

Finn and I stood on the prow, peering into the dense fog. Finn was very drunk

*cont'd next page*

and leaned heavily on me as we clung to the aluminum handrail and stood on the slippery water covered deck. He was unusually silent. The waves got higher and higher as the storm got rougher and rougher. The two women were laughing as they slid and slipped on the watery deck, fell on their asses and spilled good alcohol everywhere.

Chaos ruled.

"A gift to the gods," was all I could say when Demian dropped her bottle overboard as her butt smacked the deck with a thud. "Fug," was all Willie said, who by now clung to the railing for dear life. "Wheeeeeee!" screamed Tangela

from the sea filled floor of the deckwell, her skirt over her head.

I turned to show Finn what fools we had for friends, when a wave washed over the deck and I almost fell overboard. Finn was unperturbed. He stood up to the wave. He embraced the wave. He joined the wave. He raised his arms above his head and the seawater fell back. Finn did a perfect swan dive into the water.

Some folks say Finn Underhill went for his final swim that night. But, I don't believe it. I swear I saw Finn walking down the street the other night with a bottle of liquor in his hand, but I was too drunk and couldn't catch up with him as he disappeared down Shakespeare Street.

**Michael Boccia**  
**Eliot**

*teaches at New Hampshire College*

## Ray Charles and the NYC Ballet

*(Live at Lincoln Center)*

When it makes you want to make love you know  
you've been moved—like Ray Charles moaning the blues,  
Raelettes with their dark adoring eyes  
and sassy hips. Even honkies are moving like everybody  
in these States wants to move in their blackest  
bluest

reddest  
dreams.

Moving like skinny white women in slippers,  
like Raelettes' red lips.

Moving like women caged in black net  
stockings and high, high heels; like calves  
tied with velvet ribbon.

Moving in gingham dresses and hand-tooled boots,  
like boys in baggy trousers turning handsprings  
over milkcrates,  
parking meters,  
trash cans,  
knee-flapping, moon-walking.

And Ray at the keyboard, cobra-necking,  
grinning,

taking out his  
handkerchief  
to wipe his face.

**Terrell Hunter**  
**Dexter**  
*is an editor of Chants*



*Conor Phurlitt '90*



## Joy Ride

Drinking beer, they lean against Shep's battered Chevy on an old woods road five miles from town. The rays of the September sun slice the crystal air and sting their eyes.

"Damn me, Duck. Gotta get us some *poontang*, heah?" Shep heaves the empty bottle into the woods with a curdling Rebel yell and settles back against the fender, arms folded.

*Sonbitch gon' bring Ryan out here yet; swoop down on us like a 'vengin spirit*, thinks Duck. "Why 'n't we take a spin through town," he says. "School be out 'fore long." He rubs the back of his hand across the bristles under his chin, tugging his visor down to shield his face from the noontime glare. Of course going after pretty high school broads with Shep is not what he'd most in the world like to do. His problem is, he guesses, that he cannot clearly enough define what he *would* most like to do . . . . Anyway, far's he's concerned Shep can haul his ass back to Tennessee and ol' Duck can go back to the fair or go to college, *somethin'*!—but just get out from under this smotherin' blanket of boredom he's endured rantin' around with a worthless ex-con out on a lark.

"Heah, man? Tell ya. This pickin' ol' Maine's jus' too damn dull. C'mon, le's take us a little joy ride."

They get into Shep's car, Duck in back to stretch his long grasshopper limbs over the seat, Shep snarling and clutching at his greasy cap behind the wheel, smokin' away, rat's eyes darting from the road to the rearview. "Gimme 'nother." He rests his arm on the seatback. Glancing right to grasp the beer, he leers at Duck. "Christly hick town," he says.

"Get the sheriff on us and it'll get a lot duller," Duck observes. "Even Farm'ton's big enough to have a jail."

They park in front of the post office on Main Street. It's two o'clock, time for kids from the high school to begin wandering about. Shep slouches against the door, bottle wedged between his thighs, cap pulled low in a lone rider pose.

In the middle of the back seat, frozen in limbo, Duck sits erect. Why doesn't he open the door and get out, leave the bastard to his misery? Just tell him to fuck off. Why does he feel like some kind of whimpering errand boy in the company of this scrawny creep?

Shep had appeared in the spring like a phantom. Something about an older sister who lived in Waterville. Duck knew only: Shep was twenty-five; he'd done time somewhere around Memphis; he'd pulled a knife from his boot in a brawl over in Augusta two weeks earlier. Maybe it was the knife, the grisly vision of it still in his mind. Nothing appealed about the wizened degenerate; yet he found it impossible to break loose from him, to set himself free and honorable. And while he drifted—drinking, ridin' around the logging roads, watched always (he knew) by Ryan—his life had come to a standstill. One day he would chuck all this asinine horseshit and get on with amounting to something. Now he was nineteen though, he thought with a sigh, forever horny, and stuck with a kid's nickname he knew could affect his image and thus his destiny. Well, it wouldn't be long. Shep'd either leave or get thrown in jail or get himself killed, and then he could pursue his positive qualities . . . .

"Looky there!" Shep sits up quickly, ramming his hat back with his hand. The car's windows are all open. Shep speaks in a hushed tone, 's if he'd discovered the source of the Nile.

Two young girls. Schoolbooks pressed to their chests, talking down the street a ways from the post office. Long silky hair floats above them like golden clouds in a playful breeze.

"Oh my, sweethearts!" Shep hisses, no love, only tension in his voice. He sits up, seizing the wheel with both hands and shaking it while ogling the girls.

"See you gawkin' like that they'll run an' hide for a week."

"Yeah." His eyes are wide, bugged out, insane. He looks like a loony peering through bars at unattainable treasure.

"Frig 'em," says Duck, hopeful of deterring the madman. "Young stuff. Jail bait, an' not for us." He leans into the corner and closes his eyes.

"An'thing I set my mind to 's for me. An'thing."

Duck clenches his eyelids, wishing he could expunge Shep, this whole life. The guy's stark tone is crazy if he knows craziness, if he's ever heard anyone makes you shiver with off-the-wall talk. Shep is crazy. It's chilly, Duck thinks, but he knows it's his nerves. Shit, must be eighty-five. He snuffles and grunts, moving, opens his eyes. "Come on, Shep," he says. It is too weak. "Let's get goin' . . ."

The girls are drifting apart. The shorter one jiggles up the post office steps, waving to the other, the prettier of the two who is already on her way down Main Street beneath a canopy of maples and elms. She carries a small satchel as well as her books. It's a fine afternoon of sun and shadows; something seems wistful

and romantic about the blonde in that setting.

For fifteen minutes he sits in restive agony, praying they will let her slip by but expecting Shep's thoughts brutal beyond his knowing. Shep drinks, makes no effort to conceal his gluttony for the stuff. Duck gets it: Shep wants to convey his misery to others, to flaunt it, to say to the world "Look, I'm fucked up and I'm proud of it and this life ain't worth crap anyway." That's it, Shep, Duck thinks, but the knowing doesn't make him feel exultant. Hardly. Shep revs the engine suddenly and starts off on a brazen tour of the lazy sidestreets. Screw the quiet decorum of the innocent town—is that what he feels?

Duck looks out the window, side to side. Most people must be at the races, somewhere. Shep ki-yis over and over, and guzzles away; he bullies for the attention of scowling walkers and comfortable old guys and grandmas in white t-shirts lounging on porches.

"Won't get any *poontang* you wind up in the Crossbar Hotel." You had to approach very obliquely if you meant to calm Shep. "Look out!" Whizzes through a stop sign, swerves to avoid a truck. "Kee-ris!" Duck takes his cap off and begins to twist it in his hands. "Hey, that was *too* close!"

"I'll do the drivin', shithead. Just enjoy the ride."

He leans his chin on the seatback. Oughtta mutiny. Grins sort of as he thinks of that movie where the men take over the ship from the captain during a storm. Too unreal. Gotta be real. Jesus, this guy's nothin' to fuck with! "We'll have the state cops after us, I'm telling you." Sing-songy, as if he were subservient.

"Well . . . good. Then we'll just hafta blow this friggin' state. Best thing. Nothin' here worth stayin' for."

Don't hang 'round on my account, he thinks. Just let me off at the next corner.

They pass a number of high school girls coming into town in tight little knots; Shep's insolence brings only icy stares, frosting him, sometimes sarcastic cracks or bold fingers.

Duck grins. Take that, shithead, he thinks. He tries little furtive finger-waves when he can to show the girls he's nice.

The car goes toward the low, flat area away from town. It cruises up the hill behind the ballpark and chugs along a tree-lined stretch of dark and remote country lane. The blonde with the satchel, hearing them approach, walks off the shoulder into the tall grass.

Shep says "I'll be god damned! Would ya believe this? There's m' baby!"

Sure enough. He sees her too. Even in the gloom of the shady road her yellow hair shines. He feels himself start to shrivel inside. "Hey, Shep. Don't, man. I mean . . . don't."

"We gon' have some fun, ol' Duck, heah." He's slowed down; the car knocks and vibrates.

The girl's head tilts forward as she walks, he sees; probably she's making a point of focusing on the ground, at her feet, about ready to pee herself, hoping the steel beast creeping behind her has other prey in mind. She brushes her hair back with her hand as if to give the idea she has no greater concern than to combat the mischievous breeze. He feels himself sympathetic toward her, but he grins.

Westward they edge into the sun, alongside her. The only sounds are the irregular rumble of the car and her feet crunching gravel.

"I'll do the talkin'," Shep says. "When I give the word, snatch her in here."

All at once she stops and turns to them. Low on the soft shoulder where the car had forced her, her eyes level with theirs. Shep idles the engine; the car lulls. Duck watches Shep. He looks at the girl. She sweeps with her hand at the lovely silky hair.

Why are we doing this? How beautiful she is, how fresh! Not much younger than him; oh, if he could only have met her in a different place, Shep only bitter memory . . . !

Opening a beer, the driver places his arm along the window frame. A man of leisure, he looks like, Duck thinks, gazing across the seat at her while popping the mouth of the bottle with his thumb in a gesture somehow obscene.

She pivots to her right and dares a step forward.

A startled fox, Shep leaps over the seat. "Hey ya! Don' go runnin' off now, heah?"

She dares only the single step.

"Don' let ol' Duck here scare y'off, honey. Ugly's hell, sure—the ugly duck—but ain't no reason to be scared of him. What's ya name?"

Her eyes are wide. Her books and satchel remain hugged to her front. "Gena," she says in a whisper.

"Where ya off to?"

She nods to the west. "My aunt's. I have to babysit."

"Well, ain't that fittin'. What say me 'n' Duck give ya a lift?"

Weakly: "Please . . . I'd rather walk." A slight pause. He thinks she wants to be respectful, even to them. "Thanks anyway." She is staring at something on the

roof of the car, again touching her hair.

Shep turns to him. "Not very eager, is she?" He looks at her. "Duck here's got a way with women, know what I mean? Bet he c'n make ya friendly's hell."

Why does he go along with this? Girl's humiliated, about to sag in a faint. It's time he asserted himself, God damn it! . . . "Hey, Shep," he says, "take it easy, huh. Come on. Let's go . . ."

"Go? Okay then, le's go!"

Shep scrambles behind the wheel, gases the engine hard once, surges about two yards ahead and jams on the brakes. "Now!" he yells.

Mindlessly, he finds himself throwing open the door. He grabs her bare wrist and tugs her toward him and the car. "C'mon," he pleads, almost in a whimper. Her satchel falls. With her right hand she leans down to retrieve it, holds it as he pulls her onto the seat. She flails without screaming and she is strong. He drags her by the upper arms—damp and smooth and sensual they are, but slithery—and reaches around behind her to lock the door. He groans, panting, and says "there" as her eyes sparkle at him in fury.

With a defiant roar the car spins away in the direction of the bridge.

For a couple of hours they ride around country roads west and south of town. He's sure they'll let her out in time to allow her to reach her aunt's without causing alarm. Shep sips away from one bottle after another. Duck and the girl nurse single beers only to appease the driver. He has become enchanted by her, by the picture of her life she has revealed, not eagerly but probably as a means of building a case for herself so they will release her soon.

When she got up that morning she didn't know whether to go to Aunt Sally's after school or to run away to Portland.

At first it seemed Shep softened when he heard her own life was screwed up like his. "Why would ya run off?" he asks. "Lots a kids get fed up, but they don't run away. Girl like you, life should be a ball."

"Ha," she says. "Boring. Things I want to do, big things, but I can't do anything. My father's sick in bed. Ma has to work all the time. I only go to school 'bout every other day 'cause I have to tend the kids. Gotta have a life of my own, 'f I have to go somewhere else to get it." The way she pampers her hair with her palm as though brushing it excites him.

"Well," says Shep, "you c'n come along with us. We'll see some things."

Duck looks at him. The unattainable dream. For a moment it is quiet and sad. Duck's arm drapes around the seat above him and behind her; it makes him feel he is protecting her, a big omniscient brother. He'd like to touch her, just tick her with his finger; the vision of it captivates him, but he is too much in awe of her and to touch her would be too great a risk that she might reject him and forestall a better opportunity to make progress later. Sometimes he gapes. He feels it. He can't believe she has opened up to them as though they were guardian angels. Or is she putting them off, playing it smart?

"Besides," he hears her say, "all they think about is Jesus. Puttin' up with everything and bein' saved. 'Life on earth is hell,' they say, 'but we can stand it, for we'll be in the arms of the Lord.' Bein' saved, that's all they think about, findin' the way to Glory." She takes out a handkerchief from her sweater and blows her nose.

The driver chortles. "Yeah, well, I know what ya mean," he says. "Where I come from seems 'bout everyone's that way, reg'lar Jesus freaks. 'He's a comin'!' they holler. 'Run to th' arms o' Jesus! He's a comin' right down the road!'" He takes another swallow of beer. "Seems to me everyone who don't have a pot to piss in looks for th' arms of Jesus."

They bounce up a rutted mountain road until the car finds its way to a weatherbeaten shack. Gena looks at Duck and raises her eyebrows to ask "What now?"

He nods toward the door behind her and places his hand on her arm. "Git," he says.

"You don't have to shove," she says though he didn't shove and he realizes in elation she is communicating with him in a kind of code that says she knows he has been communicating with her. For good measure she adds "I'm not trying to run away."

Outside the car, they pause a moment to breathe. The bright September afternoon exhilarates him, or something does; watching her, so lustily appealing, he wonders if he'd feel the same spark if she were ugly.

For all his foul talk and drunken swagger in the car, once in contact with the earth Shep appears bewildered and listless. Or maybe drunk. He opens another and sags down against the building, lifting the bottle in a long swallow.

"Well," says the girl, "what now?" She teeters like a dancer from foot to foot. Her spirit, he thinks, like his has been recharged.

"Dunno," Shep murmurs. He looks up at her, seemingly perplexed by his own

inertia, dangling the car keys in his fingers. His grin fades into a leer. "Ain't you scairt?"

She shrugs and sniffs with a haughty air. He wonders where she finds the courage and he falls even more in love. "You guys look nice enough," she says.

Shep can't keep his eyes open; the sharp, slanting sun strikes his face and highlights the mean lines. "Don' get no bright ideas," he says, jingling the keys. "Minute 'n' we'll go t' the pond for a skinnydip." His eyes close and his head droops against his right shoulder.

Duck with his hand gently on her waist nudges her around to the woods side of the shack.

"OhGodohGodohGod," she says, her hands clutching her forehead, "what am I going to do? That weirdo."

He wishes he could help her keep from panicking, from going berserk, though he doesn't blame her, but he only stands there and feels foolish with his arms dangling.

Finally they sit in the shade on rickety steps.

"OhGodohGodohGod . . . oh Jesus!" She is hoarse; she looks up at him with a question written over her face.

Can she really see that he feels for her?

"Thought I'd pass out," she tells him, "but then I got wonderin' about my poor parents. Thought . . . maybe I can get through this after all." When she starts to bite her nails he has an urge to pull her hands away from her mouth. She pauses, studies him again with that same question, only this time she asks it, saying "Can I? I mean, get through this?"

Not knowing anything else, he grins at her. Then he steels himself and wills himself and reaches over as though reaching for a boiling pan and touches her wrist. "Be tough," he says. "Step by step. He's an animal."

"Yeah. I know a mean guy when I see one." This time she touches him, gently on the shoulder, electric, sending an impulse all through him. "Look, why can't we just break away while he's passed out?"

"He's got a knife, prob'ly a gun. Gotta keep cool, girl. Oh, I been wanting to get away so bad myself!" Now he cradles his head. "Didn't even realize it myself so long there. Just bummin' around like a lowlife, that's all I been doin', bummin' around. Now you come along—well, go' damn 'f I'll let him hurt you!"

Looking between her knees at the splintered step, she says "I knew in the car. Knew you were different, the way you looked at me that time. You helped me find the guts."

"We gotta be smart though. He ain't 's dopey as he seems though he's always in a fog, half drunk . . . one vile son of a bitch."

"Mm." She nods. "Can't let him know you're on my side."

Rising, he stretches his pale, wiry arms toward the sun. "Gonna get away from the bastard an' start to do something. Got a chance to go to vocational school in Portland."

*cont'd next page*



"Oh that's nice! Sure you could. Don't get dragged down by a jerk like him."  
"Yeah, what I been thinkin'. Always felt kinda worthless, ya know, kinda ugly. Kids said I looked like a duck, so that's where I got my name. Real name's David James."

She laughs. He can see deep into her pink mouth and her teeth are all covered with a veneer of sparkling moisture. "Sure it's not James David?" she asks him. "Well, I'm Gena. Imogene Moore." She holds out her hand formally and laughs again.

If she is self-conscious, he thinks, she must care about me or she'd just clam up and be shy, and it makes him swagger inwardly. He takes her hand and laughs with her. "How old are you, seventeen?"

"'Fraid not. I'm only a baby freshman, fifteen. Stayed back a year I missed so much school taking care of my father." She peers at him as if gauging the extent to which she can confide in him. "I'm running away," she says. "Portland. Love my family, all of 'em, but I just can't take it any more."

For a moment, it occurs to him they are sitting there talking like normal people probably talk in normal times and he wishes it could go on.

But she rises from the steps to break the mood, standing before him so he can see all the gleaming golden threads of her hair between him and the sun. She looks up at him with a brave smile. He admires the way she has adjusted to her predicament; and he realizes he's made a kind of rock-solid commitment to himself about her.

"You have faith in yourself," she tells him. "Nothin' ugly 'bout you at all. And you're kind—that's a big thing. Ma would say you're seein' your way to Jesus, 'cause you've had a change of heart and want to do better." Takes his hands and squeezes his fingers, then pulls back with a giggle.

"Humor 'im some. Go along as far as you can an we'll come up with somethin'.

"Lord'll provide, Ma says."

"Maybe I can get him to take you back into town."

"No way, man," says Shep, standing there against the corner of the shack. "What the hell's goin' on here? Hey now, ain't we gonna take us a dip? Come on, heah, come on." He makes a motion with his hand for Duck and Gena to proceed. Walking down the hill, they see the blue pond through the trees. "Been hot 's hell today. Bet our friend here'd like to wash off the sweat 'n' grime."

How can he regain the man's trust? he thinks, flustered. "Don't wanta cool her off too much," he says to play along, but wishes he hadn't said that.

"Thought we might splash around in the raw for awhile." Shep grabs her by the wrist and hurries her along. She stumbles once or twice, but resists with no zest.

He knows she recognizes she must watch him, ol' Duck, for her cues.

Pushing through thick growth they arrive at a placid little pond overgrown with lily pads.

"All right, sweets, let's see what ya got. Get 'em off."

"No!" The cry is instinctive, involuntary. She draws back toward the thicket. "No I will not . . . !"

"Come on, man," Shep yells, "let's cool the little bitch off!"

He flies at her like a flapping, evil bird, clutching and tearing at her clothes. He shoves her into the pond, her startled cry ending in a gurgle as water fills her mouth, forcing her into a spasm of choked coughs. She sinks under once or twice, flailing and gasping; on the bank Shep cavorts with twitchy legs at her misery. Finally she manages to keep her face free, breathing as if her lungs will rip apart.

Nothin' but a man turned to stone, Duck thinks, that's all I am. Cheering her on silently, like rooting for a good guy in a movie, he remains powerless. Oh his soul, his soul! he thinks, for he stands appalled that the courage only minutes before mustered has blown away in the wind.

But she sputters "Huh, neat!" and he catches on she's playing the role of pacifying the beast. "Water's great! Come on in!" she says.

"Bet your ass!" With frantic movements Shep strips off his boots (after removing the knife), his shirt and pants, and with a howl plunges into the pond.

What the Christ? The knife! He scrambles around the rocky shore toward the far side, watching her paddle away, away, and visualizes Shep's arm crashing down on her, his pretty girl, over and over, churning the water into a scarlet caldron . . .

In the moments Shep is submerged she struggles for the far side. He hears her screech and sees her dragged under, thrashing to avoid Shep's windmilling arms whaling at her, the knife sparkling in the sun.

Duck reaches out to her as far as he can stretch and seizes her wrists, pulls her onto the sand and rocks, her clothes shredded and her hair plastered to her head. She has not been cut. They begin a furious ascent toward the shack.

"Bastards" they hear pursuing them.

They fumble open the door and get into the front seat of the car but are unable

to find the keys. "Damn!" he says. "Prob'ly at the bottom of the pond."

"Oh, this has gone far enough!" she says through chattering teeth.

He feels another surge of resolve. "Wait." He goes back down the hill as stealthily as he can, but when he reaches the spot where Shep leans against a tree, he is greeted by an idiot grin as Shep rubs his thumb along the blade.

"'Fraid you two'd eloped. Sons . . . a bitches." Finding it hard to catch his breath. "Now I'm goin' over to get my clothes. Might 's well get some rest. Don't you two waste your time thinkin' about goin' anywheres 'cause I'll be watchin'."

He goes back to the car.

They each open a beer. She finds an open box of stale Wheat Thins.

"You freezing?" he asks.

She nods, quivering, lips purple. He removes his flannel shirt and places it across her shoulders. Stepping outside, she uses the shirt to dry her arms and legs. "Well?" she says.

"He's passin' out . . . but he's holding on to the knife."

"Can we rush at him, get the keys maybe?" She's holding the shirt to her mouth, still shaking, her elbows tight to her sides.

"Maybe he'll sober up some, get a little sense, so in the morning we can get you home."

The sun drops below the treeline, leaving an orange-red glow on the lower horizon.

"Oh darn." She gets into the back seat. She sprawls out over the seat, opens the satchel, and removes a pair of silky blue pajamas. With a wistful sigh, grinning at him in spite of herself, she stuffs the pajamas back into the satchel. Leaning her head into the corner, she stares up at him as he watches her from his knees on the front seat. Darkness enters the car like a tangible invader. "So we wait," she says.

"We're too deep into the woods to take off walking."

"I couldn't move another foot. I've had it, even if I die here."

"You won't die. Just go ahead and sleep. The mornin'll be better."

She reaches up and touches the side of his grubby face. "David," she says. "Not Duck, David. We gotta have a little faith, that's all. Right?"

"Right."

"You can be something. You're smart enough. Don't run around with criminals." She is drifting sleepily, but she laughs. "Course I'm a good one to give advice," she says.

He holds her hand. "I'm goin' to school," he tells her with an air of determination. "Learn to be a decent carpenter. I been a jerk an' a bum." He opens the door and gets out, leaning down even with her window. "See if you can sleep. I'll keep watch."

He walks away from the car toward the pond wondering about the source of the inner warmth he feels. David. Yes, much nicer, much more dignified. She's a smart one for a kid, he thinks, but he guesses fifteen's old enough to know what's what if life's been hard.

By the pond, he approaches Shep, says his name tentatively to see if he's awake. The bastard stirs, mumbles, but has no life nor reason. He'll freeze his ass, the wetness drying to chill. Trying to find the knife, he urges Shep to roll onto his other side, but he starts when he finds himself staring into the man's open eye.

He jumps away into the brush. For long minutes he gazes at the writhing form until at last he gathers courage to return up the hill.

"God a'mighty," he says to the night, closing the car door quietly behind him. He looks into the back but she is okay, huddled in the corner asleep, her breathing loud and fitful. A trace of moonlight the width of her face reveals her white features. He twists his shoulders between the wheel and the seat to take up his vigil.

And awakes with a twitch, lurched from a dream, disoriented, needing moments to bring things to mind. Lifting his head, he checks in back.

"Hi," she says. She has not moved, but her eyes are wide.

"You awake?"

She giggles. "No, I always sleep talkin' and with my eyes open. I had a dream."

"Yeah? Me too."

"Same dream every night. I'm in a palace, a great golden palace, and white stallions graze outside the windows."

"Weird."

"Mhm. Feels nice though. No matter what awful thing's goin' on, I always have my palace and my white horses. Know what I mean?" When he doesn't reply, she says "Look outside."

It's that thought, Duck supposes, that returns the nastiness to Shep's manner.

"Please," she says, not really pleading, "I have to go. They'll all worry. Is it four yet? Please—"

"Shut the Christ up! You just shut the hell up or we'll give 'em a damned good reason to worry. Got me?"

She nods, zombielike. Backing into the corner, she closes her eyes.



"Giver her 'nother beer." Shep uses the rearview to catch Duck's eye.

He opens a bottle and holds its moistness against her burrowed cheek. The cool, damp glass causes her to moan softly as though she were agitated in the midst of an intense dream. She reaches up and takes the beer while keeping a watchful eye on the front seat; she only rests the bottle against her tan knee.

"What do you want with me?" she asks.

Shep gapes at Duck in the mirror and then lets out a derisive howl. "You go on an' tell her, Duck ol' boy! Oh yeah! Tell the bitch what we gon' do. Mm hm!"

So this is where he draws the line. With no thought beforehand he says "Stop the car!"

"Huh?" Shep glares at him in the mirror, his eyes only slits.

"I said stop the car so we can let her out."

"Don't think you understand, fella. I said we was gon' have some fun, an' this here fine-lookin' lady's gon' be part of it."

He thinks of the freakiness of the driver, of what he recognizes now as raw, head-knockin' craziness. He thinks of the knife, remembers the glinting blade. Looking at her rumped hair, her forehead grazing his bicep, he feels a longing for her and realizes they are in it together, victims, hostages of a crazy coot. He must use good sense, not rash bravado, and be sure he can save both her and himself. You never know which button to press with Shep; there's the knife wedged inside the boot. A gun somewhere probably, and sure as hell a readiness to kill.

They ride around, tires squealing and gravel spewing. Maybe Ryan or one of the fat deputies will come after them. He doesn't want any part of the "joy ride," or of Shep or even the girl, he guesses, but here he is; oh if he had the guts to stop the son of a bitch now, before something rotten happens. He's seen Shep in a rage, the time over in Waterville a month ago when the asshole splattered two guys over the hood of their car because he thought they'd mocked his accent.

She cringes in the corner. He can see her tremble. Does she sense any difference between the two of them, him and Shep? Probably thinks they're gonna rape her, cut her into little pieces, dump her fragmented body in a muddy ditch. Not if he can help it, God damn it. He'll draw a line. He begins to feel an onrush of recklessness, even of knightly valor. If it gets right down to it he'll challenge the bastard, whatever becomes of him.

"That place of your uncle's where we went last month, out there on Bear Pond," he hears Shep say. "We'll all take us a l'il dip, huh. What say, sweets? That sound nice?" He reaches back with his right arm and squeezes the juicy flesh of her thigh.

"Don't know," Duck says. "Maybe we oughtta just let her go . . ."

"Hell, no harm." He squeezes the softness again, pinching her 'til her eyes bulge. "Is there, sweets? L'il fun for the boys, huh?"

She begins to cry, seeming more humiliated than afraid, the pretty features of her face turning red and coarse.

How can he talk to her? he wonders. Boost her spirits somehow, help her tough it out. If she knows he's on her side, can they work together . . . ?

Suddenly she lurches forward and begins to hammer at Shep's shoulders with her fists. "You let me out, God damn you!" she cries. "Let me go to Aunt Sally's! Don't make her worry!"

He draws away from the onslaught, hunching over the wheel. "Come on, man! Get the bitch off me!"

Duck tries to communicate with her by pushing her back into the seat with even pressure from his hands, without pinching. "Hey-hey, easy, kid." He leans his chin into the smoothness of her face and whispers "Okay, Gena. It's okay. Don't be foolish."

She looks into his eyes curiously, frowning. When she starts to speak, he covers her mouth with his palm. "Just wait," he tells her.

"Listen, Duck, no games back there! Talk so's everybody can hear." Shep glances quickly over his shoulder, his face grimaced, then twists back around and hurls a bottle out the window. Settled, he says "Must be 'bout four, four-thirty." He has become affected, finally, by his incessant guzzling. "Don't matter to you, sweets. Got all the time we need." He cackles like a wicked witch and swipes his sleeve over his nose.

Streaks of light expand even as he watches. "Same as last night, only in the east. Gonna be hot again."

A sound comes from his left; Shep has both hands braced against the frame. Hacking and retching, his quaking shoulders indicate his anguish.

"Need any help?"

"Naw. Oh God. Musta drank two cases yesterday." Shep paces around between the car and the shack, breathing deeply. Coming to the driver's side, he motions Duck over. "Okay, sweets, let's get your ass home."

Duck thinks thank God! If I can just keep him sane and sober a little while

longer!

Duck crawls in back and sits across from Gena. She straightens herself in the seat, opens the satchel to remove a brush, and begins to groom her snarled hair.

"Want you to know this is against my better judgement, heah. Don't expect you to sic the cops on us soon's ya hit your doorstep." He starts the motor; it barks angrily.

Same decrepit mold, driver and machine, thinks Duck.

"As for you, ol' buddy," Shep goes on, eyeing him fiercely through the mirror, "far's I'm concerned you can take a flyin' fuck."

Well, that's okay! If he can get her home all safe and be rid of an asshole at the same time, so much the better.

He edges his hand across the seat and clutches her fingers with what he imagines a sunny grin. She throws her shoulders back, breasts out in response, squeezing his middle fingers.

So, it's going to be all right. Somehow they've missed what could have been a nasty scene. He knows she'll never cause him any grief; she sees they've each been victims. Images of hitherto alien days blink through his mind: vocational school, becoming a proud tradesman, maybe even an ongoing acquaintance with her, with Gena, the four years' difference in age growing less and less significant as time goes by. Who can say? Just the fact she exists shows the world ain't so ugly after all . . .

"Fuck!" The driver squirms, prompted by some sour thought.

He feels her stiffen beside him and he glances at her. She pushes her face to his ear and cups her mouth with her hands. "Uh-oh," she whispers. "Look at him. Is it a fit?"

Suddenly the car swerves off the road into a clump of alders. Through the open windows branches and leaves whip across their arms. They grind to a halt; Shep turns off the engine. Tiny scratchings of limbs twisting over the roof. She leans forward with her mouth open. The driver places his right arm over the back of the seat, grinning like a devil, knuckles pressing up against the roof. In his left hand, the knife. "Okay, sweets," he says, "joy ride's over."

Duck slides against her and shoves her into the door, his eyes fixed on the blade. "No . . . no man." His tone is even. "You're not gonna do this. I'm not lettin' you touch her." Flipping open the door latch with his left hand, he pushes her onto the ground and tumbles out over her. Then he scrambles to his feet. Yes, he will die for her.

And, later, he realizes it was not his fault he failed to save her, that from the start so long long back fate had meant to thwart him, to make him a duck egg, a nothing. That he slipped when he lunged at Shep proved unfortunate. That the flung-open door caught him over the right eye and knocked him senseless brought an end to his rally. That he lay stunned while Shep pounded and slashed . . .

Through the haze he perceives a surreal world. No sound. Except for Shep sitting there breathing hard like a man resting from chopping wood, on a log with a cigarette. He stares at the girl. Her legs and arms sprawl at unnatural angles, half in and half out of the car. They twitch revoltingly.

He hulks there, hands hanging uselessly at his sides. Fling himself at Shep's throat or go to her? He falls to his knees and his upper body unfolds so his forehead comes to rest on her stomach. He lifts his head and looks into her eyes.

She touches his shoulder. "Tell Ma," she croaks, dying on him, "tell Ma I'm headin' for Glory . . ."

"No! Son of a bitch . . . !" He sobs.

"Bye . . . David." A bit of grin seems to tease along her face, and her head jerks to the left.

Rising, he looks at Shep. What's to say? Rage drains from him, leaks out, as quickly as it had been poured in.

"Well," Shep says, "guess I better do somethin' 'bout her." He gestures at her body; Duck follows the pointing with his eyes as if he hadn't realized she was there. "Find someplace no kid nor animal will root up for awhile," Shep goes on. "Saw an ol' pile a sawdust in town." Teetering, he gets up. "Sorry now, heah? You were gettin' kinda close, you two. I have these, uh, spells, ya know." He holds his hand out like a groping blind man. "Be headin' on outta this friggin' state . . ."

Turning, stumbling through the broken alder branches toward the road, Duck thinks "What the hell . . . oh Jesus, what the hell."

(This story was inspired by a 1971 Farmington murder, still unsolved.)

Stewart Goodwin  
Farmington  
is writing a novel

# Here, There, and Away

*A baby asleep but about to be waked by hunger sometimes makes little sucking motions: he is dreaming that he is being fed, and manages by virtue of the dream to stay asleep. He may even smile a little in satisfaction. But the smile cannot last for long—the dream fails, and he wakes. This is, in a sense, the first story; the child in his 'impotent omnipotence' is like us readers, us writers, in ours.*

Randall Jarrell, from "Stories"

In the basement of this funeral home there is a room whose walls are lined with school pictures. Children gazing hopefully, or slightly goofy, from the fading gray and chalk of paper printed for the generation leaving now. Sometimes it is easy to imagine that world had no color until granted it by film.

Outside the rain we hoped would wait is falling, enveloping Cleveland, bleaching the October leaves, bending them with a sting of northern air. The day unfolding, its sky so darkly mortal, swamps the cheer of modern liturgy in the Mass of Christian Burial. Six soaked pallbearers struggle with their oak burden on slick grass, to a white tent sagged above an envelope of earth. *Put your rose upon the casket as you leave.* And emerge into the rain, part of a blur of mourners, to realize that I am home once more. Cleveland.

Driving from the neighborhood where I was born to the one where I grew up carries me along the lake, across the heart of this city. Less freighted than it used to be with the smoke and fires of mills and factories—industry as climate. The river thinned of the long ships that emptied out the hills of taconite. The old granite, the glass and steel of renewal, the lake—especially the lake—are gray as any Cleveland joke. But it's all right. More than that, amazing. Amazing to see something for, could it be, the thousandth time and know that it is different. The angle of light changed so slightly upon a wave that spends its energy a second earlier. The lake gulls riding a different wind. Far out on the breakwall a fisherman has climbed a block above his usual perch, and pulled his collar tighter. Than when? Than ever before, or perhaps, again. It doesn't matter, for the place is in the moment, and that is where the artist lives. In the place in the moment. It's all right, this Cleveland.

Martin Luther King Drive was once called Liberty Boulevard. It winds through the gardens of the nationalities, as fixed in another era as those pale photographs, to the Cleveland Museum of Art. To Winslow Homer. To Maine.

Have you ever stumbled into something that exploded with surprise? When every receptor in your heart and mind and soul and circumstance was set only to receive the very thing, just out of sight, you never figured on? So it has been, for this flatlander, with Maine. With Ohio. With Cleveland, with some few humans. Rooms with doors to other rooms. And so with *Reckoning with Winslow Homer*.

The first time I stood upon the coast of Maine it was as I imagined it, which was not at all what I expected. A poet's early lesson in surprise.

I had feared that my imagination would be wrong, that the place could not match the mythic image it held for me—a mix of photographic seeds, Great Lakes reckonings, wistful rumors, undergraduate permutations of "Dover Beach."

It must have been somewhere near Camden Hills. I remember the mix of salt air and pine (Now I'm glad my first visit was not to a mud flat at low tide). The shore as rough as an aftermath of battle, the rocks that seemed so permanent in contrast to the sandy beaches of my childhood. The sheer, almost boundless power of the sea as even small waves broke with stunning violence. But most of all, and still, the chill sense of the northern ocean, the very cusp of the end of the world, fish as sudden as razors.

Turning a back on the land to gauge the thunder of the waves. In Ohio I would watch my father stand outside and stare into the wildness of a Midwest thunderstorm sweeping off the lake. I stood six feet less brave, my face pressing the storm door's screen, my eyes as frozen to the danger as to that heart's yearning that each of us casts out, trying to net some fragment of a life beyond us. Slivers of a mirror in some moment the lightning found. The pure force of particulars in the moment, in the place where someone stands alone, wishing not to be.

Imagine a necklace of lightnings, strung together bolt by bolt. A necklace of

the froths of waves, their curve, the color of their lights. To make these someone stands both in and out of the moment, anchored with a soft ferocity. For the maker, it is exactly that original apprehension only once. Then it is a gift that others see from where they stand in moments further out. The fragments of the story are brushed into a sadness fixed and final. The painting, as does the poem, becomes the thing we never snare entirely. And that fact we learn to love. Waiting, watching, summoning the sums of our particular lives like lenses. A story.

Beyond his primal vision, or as part of it, I see that Winslow Homer paints a story in everything he does. And the stories accumulate their moments to the moment that he tells, and point away beyond the canvas.

*Moonlight on the Water*, where the night wave, as it reaches land, has cast upon it the bursting waters of the light. And looking down we see the two who watch are small and dark, a cloth of midnight as surely formed as any granite. To watch someone watching is a story. And *this* story, enlarged, becomes the different story of *A Summer Night*. Sometimes it is possible to imagine each of us as a study for another's canvas. And then the two for yet another . . .

I think I went to the Museum that day because to do so felt just like the story I was living in. To my disgrace, I had thought of Winslow-Homer as a dim figure who painted postcard scenes. In the cavern of the gallery the viewers drifted in random paths, clustering before a work, then passing through each other.

At the first canvas I was gone. The storms stark and powerful; each drew me. I couldn't even read the titles. Here I was a half a century before my birth in a moment that I knew. I stayed until the angles of the land and wave and sky, their colors, had metamorphosed into their separate works. Until I truly told the difference.

A mortal day of loss forms such a conscious day. To make art is, in part, to understand the difference between the things from which we go and those we can't leave anywhere. Someone reading souls could find our true hieroglyphics in the moment of that knowledge. Maine, Ohio, Homer, Cleveland, the stories carried in my veins, the images of a sad hopefulness, are all illuminated here.

There is a story, apocryphal perhaps, about Winslow Homer waiting six weeks for a wave to break the way he needed it to break. The talent to select is such a cruel discriminator. And yet, one feels that the first creature climbing from the sea turned back and noticed something, as if awakening.

When I finally leave, the gray has turned to urban darkness slit with lights. It is still raining. And there is no room left in me even for rain. *Once upon a time there was a man who stepped from a gallery into a stormy dusk. And there was not room enough in him even for the rain.* It starts that way.

The last thing I recall about my uncle was the day he brought some old movies he had put on video cassettes. Movies strung together from the years around the War. In black and white with awful light traipsed his sisters, cousins, people from the neighborhood. Shadowy figures playing at a picnic, nearly hidden by the darker leaves. A frosted cake just on the edge of someone's table. Briefly my father and mother, he in uniform. Others I did not know. I listened to the quibbling over history: . . . *who died in the Pacific. Did his sister marry . . . No, she drowned after the War, somewhere near Huron.* A future corpse still smiled uncertainly, leaning in his dark uniform on the darker trunk of an Olds, all the light gathered in his spectacles.

I can imagine my uncle, who was no artist, alone in his basement running the film back over and over, bathed in the spare light of the screen, quibbling with himself in a murmur like a quiet, halting melody, trying to get it all right. Which is, perhaps, why art can speak to anyone.

David J. Adams  
Trumansburg, NY  
*is a poet who teaches technical writing at  
Cornell & taught at UMF, UMO & Unity*

## Review



Northeaster, oil, 1895

## Reckoning with Winslow Homer: His Late Paintings and Their Influence./ Bruce Robertson.

1990. Cleveland Museum of Art/ Indiana University Press. 196pp.

This book catalogs a stunning display of late oils by Winslow Homer, and of those by 14 artists whose work he influenced. The premise of the show and this catalog is that these late works of Homer (after 1890) deeply influenced a group of artists, ranging from Robert Henri and his students to Marsden Hartley.

As one views the show, the thread of influence seems inescapable, particularly the ways in which all of these artists rendered their experience of the Maine coast. In his book, Robertson traces first the nature and then the paths of that influence. He begins by examining the changes in Homer's work after he abandoned the art scene of New York City for the semi-reclusive years at Prout's Neck.

Robertson offers interesting speculation on the reasons for the evolving power and intensity of these later works, many drawn from watercolor studies, but finished exclusively and painstakingly in oil. Homer even recalled some of them for further refinement. At any rate, both the paintings in the show and their reproductions in the book register an astonishing contrast to earlier more familiar works. No picnic scenes or placid beaches here. Instead we find the wild clash of sea and rock, the figures (when they appear at all) reduced and vulnerable. Especially fine are reproductions of *Winter Coast*, *Northeaster*, *Early Morning after a Storm at Sea* (which also frames the cover), and a haunting study in oil, *Moonlight on Water*.

Robertson approaches his task with sympathy and an obvious respect for Homer's stature as an artist. The text is lucid, thoughtful and unpretentious. Some of the critical responses to Winslow Homer he records make a fine object lesson in the frozen-in-time and facile character of much criticism.

But there is useful background: on the turmoil in the art world at the time, and on the growing migration of artists to Maine. The key in the trail of influence appears to be Robert Henri, who admired Homer's work and spread that admiration to his now famous students, many of whom came to Maine in their quest for an art both modern and American. Their own. The book doubles the 60 or so paintings in the exhibit, resulting in a wonderful set of explorations of the Maine coast, including work by Bellows, Hopper, Rockwell, Kent, Luks, Sloan, Marin, and Hartley.

As art books go, this one is a deal for \$21.00 in paper (\$34.00 in cloth). I especially like the title. Reckoning with instead of something like *Placing*. Artists still come to Maine, and when they arrive must find Homer still in the moment of his place. Still to be reckoned with.

David J. Adams

### Reckoning With Winslow Homer: His Late Paintings and Their Influence.

Cleveland Museum of Art  
Cleveland, Ohio  
Sept. 19-Nov. 18, '90

Columbus Museum of Art  
Columbus, Ohio  
Dec. 16, '90-Feb. 10, '91

The Corcoran Gallery of Art  
Washington, D.C.  
Mar. 16-May 12, '91



Drawing,  
by J.E. Baker, 1857





Ezra Pound's funeral gondola  
on the Grand Canal, Venice, 1972

## A Letter to Ezra Pound

6/7/88

Dear Ezra: I know it's presumptuous of me to be writing you, now that you're a classic, although some people still wonder why so much fuss over a Jew-baiter, almost a Nazi? And I? Still, I'm afraid, just a boy from Patterson,

California (pop 3800), looking for that cafe where the artists sit after sundown, their fingers stained with paint and ink, aphorisms dripping from their lips, the image, the death of God, the rise of the masses, and here I am, the mass-man,

the barbarian at the gates, the man who would, you were sure, destroy all that order, all that grace, sitting in a sidewalk cafe, not Paris, but the most classic city of them all, Venezia, Campo Sa' Stephano, though I

don't think there are many artists here (one man with a beard, who's been carrying a painting around town all day, I saw him at noon in Sa' Marco, at dinner in the Trattoria ai Cugnai, Disodura, and now he's found a round-faced

American girl, to drink with him, four kids in T-shirts, smoking cigarettes, two black women with London accents, two middle-aged men, Americans, talking about Joyce in French to a grad student, female, from New Zealand,

a woman with three shopping bags, alone, and of course the lovers—he caresses her arm, she sips her espresso and pretends not to notice). The chairs are yellow plastic, the beer is Tuborg, but the label is in English.

Still the streetlights come on at dusk, the facades of the palazzi look down on us, imperturbable (or are these just plain houses?), the eaves, the eyebrows over the windows are as classical as ever,

and the waiter hasn't even coughed, although I've been sitting here an hour now, over one bottle of beer. Venezia. And two hours ago I walked out to the Dogana, to think about you, and to watch the sun go down

behind the construction cranes, though I couldn't find the steps where you sat in (when was it?) 1907 I think, because the gondolas cost too much that year, only some wood steps, not a gondola in sight, the doors of the Dogana

rotting, padlocks rusted brown, weeds sprouting from chinks in the wall, even the graffiti are in English: Betta love ♡ Chi, Reagan eats. But on the roof, the golden ball still turns, Hermes points the way, shows where the wind blows

to anyone who passes. Two winos, Italian style, share a pint of brandy. Two honeymooners, from, I think, Australia—they asked the winos to take their picture, with the harbor behind them. Joggers, a pair, then one man in a Nike sweatshirt.

And me, thinking of a poet from Idaho, who sat here when the tourists were mostly British dons, who fell in love with girls that were really boys, or Germans, who thought of love as a kind of death, and came here to die.

But you, looking down the arc of the Grand Canal to where it twists out of sight beyond the Accademia, or out across the harbor, the Doge's Moorish palace, Castello, the Lido fading in the haze and across the way, two pompous Palladio churches,

front steps going down to the sea, for a people who rowed to church, saw what it takes to make a culture, a sense of line, the third tier of windows balancing the first, the cornice defining the whole, one facade leading the eye on

to the next, no master plan filed in triplicate with the zoning board, only a common sense of what makes order, what makes grace—the craft in the eye and the hand, to make the line come true, the way Bellini (Giovanni) etched

those perfect tiny toes of the infant Jesu, the way those anonymous stone-carvers shaped lintel and cornice. And you put this city into a poem, unfinished and crooked and, sometimes, luminous as the first light in Sa' Stephano

(my square, after three days in this city), a poem to tell us that life should be as beautiful as the lips of that Bellini madonna. And it's your poem, I wanted to tell you, that brought me to this square tonight (full darkness

now, the lovers have gone to a place where they can touch lips, breasts, thighs, the woman with the shopping bags has gone to her lonely bed), en l'an cinquante et deux de mon age, thirty years too late to the great feast of life, Hemingway

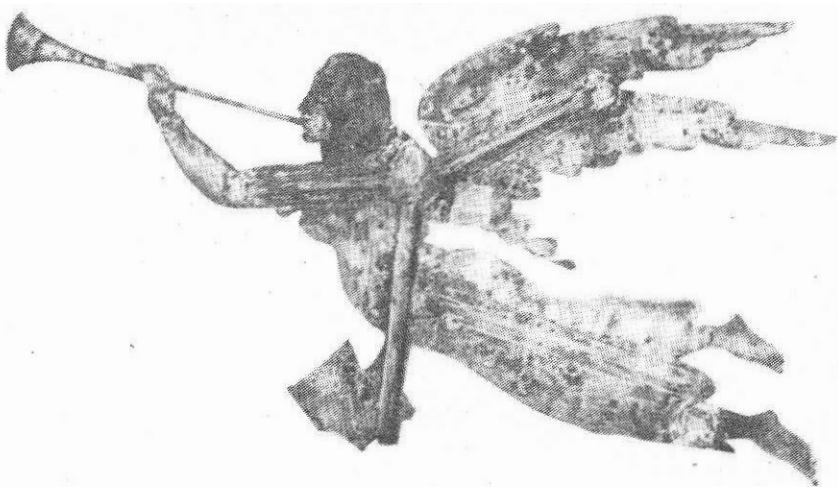
won't be back to that table in the Cafe Florian, but I haven't stopped hoping. And how many of us are left, who would consider the day well spent, because I was able to spend two hours studying how the line goes soft after the Bellinis?

(Although the grilled sole at the Trattoria ai Cugnai—over the Accademia bridge, bear left, then the first street to the left—was as perfect as Carpaccio's dog.) And isn't it queer and sad that the only ones left who care about what you cared about are the people

you thought were going to ruin it all? Like Zukofsky, the Jew? Or like this Norwegian immigrant's son, who followed your ghost through the crooked streets of the Disodura, down to the Dogana, where in the sunset he decided to write you a poem?

Burton Hatlen  
Orono  
teaches at UMO

## Review



### *Pilgrimage*/Stuart Kestenbaum

(Coyote Love Press, Portland, ME, 1990, \$8.95)

When we were teenagers and dancing real close together, a chaperone would appear and say, "leave some room for your guardian angel." It made no sense. We were too young and corroded by lust to believe in angels, the way Stuart Kestenbaum appears to. Angels abound in his first collection of 23 witty poems. A Chagall angel floats on the cover. They peer out from four of the 39 pages swirling in gelatin monoprints supplied by his wife, Susan B. Webster. They appear to the author as he commutes up I-95 in "Angels on the Interstate," their wings "stained with diesel smoke." In a later dream sequence, angels "shove" him off a train, "out into the fields of light." In one encounter, reminiscent of Emily Dickinson's, Kestenbaum is picked up by a convertible; it is "driven by Death," and two angels sit in the back seat—"I feel the sinew of their wings," he writes, "the delicate unbreakable power." In another poem, at an auto salvage yard, the poet discovers what has to be an allegorical river Styx, and meets a dirty unshaven ferryman: "I notice the tip of a wing," he writes, "spreading out from under his garment/and know it is my angel."

Imagine an angel anywhere, he seems to be saying. Centuries of religious painters did, their imaginations inflamed in ways few other subjects stirred—after all, no one has ever seen a seraph, so anything goes in angel-art: androgynous angels, arching wings of all description, arcane angels with laser beams directed to the Virgin's belly or brain, fliers, floaters, a few with fiery swords. Medieval theology even distinguished nine types, or "orders," arrayed in increasing degrees of immateriality, thus spirituality: Angels, Archangels, Principalities, Powers, Virtues, Dominions, Thrones, Cherubim, and purest of all, the Seraphim. Kestenbaum has no need to make these distinctions. He doesn't get into Gabriel nor mess around with Michael, the two mentioned in *The Bible*. (The other five of the holy seven appear in the *apocrypha*: Raphael, Uriel, Chamuel, Jophiel and Zadkiel.) For the poet, their sudden, startling appearances are enough to suggest the spiritual dimensions of man in his journey (pilgrimage?) through life, the "out there" part of us, the immaterial aspect, sensed rather than known, that hovers just beyond our flesh and the daily round. In "Rebirth," Kestenbaum speaks a little sadly of "the journey: body through time, / life, my life, contained in a body, / body through the world." But he brightens, sensing the presence of other: "Behind me," he says, "I know someone watches in these moments." By contrast, recalling his father dressing for work, still half-asleep, the poet observes that "his belt/ was like a tether holding him here." In virtually all of the poems, either angels or Kestenbaum himself seek to sever that tether.

Perhaps because the poet commuted for years between Portland and his job with the Maine Arts Commission in Augusta, the bulk of this writing deals with movement—in planes, trains, cars. He is firmly in an American tradition of auto-literature, Steinbeck's *Travels with Charley*, for example, Kerouac's fiction, Gregory Corso's "Gasoline," and a glovebox full of Maine writers who have gotten more literary mileage out of autos than ever would have been thought possible. His eye for homely detail is sharp; in his Subaru he finds "the record of commuting: apple cores, a bag from McDonald's, crushed Dunkin' Donuts cups, a flashlight that doesn't work and one that does, gas receipts blurred beyond recognition." He listens to the Beatles on the radio. In the title (and also the best) poem, he finds himself on a diner stool, "helping to wear down a counter in Northern Maine"; he notices everything, down to the "mint flavored toothpicks." It is precisely this love for the quotidian, the *stuff* of our lives, that allows the angel material to work, that tethers the transcendent to the trashy. It's the flavor of certain Latin American writers, of Marquez, Amado, Cortazar perhaps, in the

transformations of the daily into the divine, a Maine "magical realism." But a hint of the Hebrew helps here too—folk tales, some of Isaac Bashevis Singer, a bit of Bernard Malamud.

In a way, Kestenbaum's challenge is like our teenage chaperone's—to get us to *believe*. Ignorant of angelology as teenagers, we were all angel-atheists. True, we wormed closer to each other while dancing to "Earth Angel" or "Teen Angel" but heard no hint of the immaterial in all that fleshly materiality. True, one of us was named Angelo, there were a couple of Angelas, an Angelica, and an Hispanic kid down the street was actually named Angel. And there was that city in California. We probably knew that Jacob wrestled one, and maybe knew that one visited Abraham and Sara, and one drove Adam and Eve from the garden. But believe? In the here-and-now? Kestenbaum's *persona*—humble, open-eyed, accepting such things as if literally possible—pulls it off. We *like* our guide on this pilgrimage. As a result, we believe our way into and through these delicate, often humorous adventures, through the unembarrassed talk about God everywhere in this book (one is titled, "God Visits the Maine Coast"). Because of his diffidence, Kestenbaum's assessment of himself at mid-point in life's "commute" is charming and disarming. Here, the shabby angel-ferryman pulls out the poet's life-file; it reads:

Kestenbaum, Stuart J.  
Human. Male. White. American. Jew.  
Knows the world is full of suffering,  
does little about it.  
Has minor worries, mostly self-inflicted . .  
Little change in condition.  
Treatment: continue journey, induce  
weeping, destroy TV. Prognosis: fair.

I would add one note to the file:

Wrote religious book—full of grace.

**Terry Plunkett  
Hallowell**  
teaches at UMA



## Pets

I wanted the impossible: the seamless  
existence in the natural world  
I saw in the lives of Saint Francis, Audubon, Sacajawea;  
a fairy-tale absence of barriers between  
the animals and us.

Dogs and cats weren't enough. Neither  
were canaries, parakeets, hamsters, white mice  
and tropical fish. Creatures in the wild I coveted  
and joyfully captured and proudly brought home  
to my greedy friendship,  
which killed them, as often as not.

At this late date I apologize, to  
the fireflies who spent their last week in my grass-filled jar,  
the small frog devoured by the large one in my bathtub,  
the three tender newts meant to become red efts  
I plucked from an April pond—  
each of whom swiftly fled its new quarters to die shrivelled  
in some dim nook of the house;  
and to the canary whose dish I'd forget to water  
but who had no one song for thirst,  
and to Pat, the family retriever, the old dog I taught new tricks,  
though plainly she longed to be left alone.

So great was my wish for possession, which I took for love,  
that only reluctantly would I release  
the frantic sparrow trapped once on the screen porch  
whose heart, as I held the bird safe in my grip,  
head poking out between my middle and index fingers,  
beat so my whole hand throbbed.

And years passed before I knew  
that in spite of my pain at each small loss  
the errors were on my side,  
and before I'd feel grateful for  
the appearance, say, of a goshawk one Thanksgiving morning  
in the apple tree right outside the dining room window,  
who stayed just long enough to be seen  
and correctly identified.

**Deborah Pierce**  
**Falmouth**

## Jill Corbin

I worked the front desk of Hank's Laundry.  
Nineteen, pretty, in a soft, flowing gown.  
I took in men's clothing from all over town.

I'd pile shirts, pants so high  
That Hank's seemed a giant home to tend  
and me the mother to a variety of men.

**James McKenna**  
**Augusta**  
is working on Rivertown series

## Winter

The simplest thing can cut you loose.  
You are there one minute, sitting  
on the couch with your feet up,  
arms folded in contentment, and  
I don't even know what I say,  
but suddenly you're off, drifting up  
through the ceiling, through  
the attic and roof, leaving behind  
a cold shell for us to prod.  
We pick up your shell, shake it,  
plead with it, offer it food and drink,  
place it in front of the TV,  
present it with music, a good book,  
stacks of magazines and clothing catalogs.  
The kids can shrug their shoulders  
and run off to bed, used to this by now.  
But after I tuck them in, after  
I puzzle over what you have left,  
after I make tea and sit before you  
on the floor in the darkened room,  
I begin again telling your  
shell everything I know,  
especially the dark secrets  
I've never told anyone but you.  
And when the tea is gone, you come back,  
shuddering and rubbing your thin arms,  
ignoring the sadness I've rung up  
in my own heart. You yawn, look past me  
at the frosted window and say,  
"Oh, these winter nights," as if  
winter had anything to do with it.

**Michael Brosnan**  
**Lincolnton**  
is Asst. Editor of Down East

## Summer Corn

She grew like corn,  
She was as seductive  
As the wind in the cornsilk

Summer, when dry was on the wind  
Like hot breath, and wet  
Left salt on the skin,  
And water quenched, was

A quiet affair. She'd walk  
Between rows of corn, shorts and barefeet,  
She'd feel the cool shade brush her limbs,  
She'd squeeze the moist earth between her toes.

Even now, I hear the cornsilk whisper in her ears.

**Mike Walsh**  
**Brunswick**  
is a graduate student

## the pregnant technician

(from *Sweet Dreams*, Robyn!)

briefs us  
for tomorrow's first  
round of radiation  
nine purple x's will be scattered  
around Robyn's head  
of thinning hair  
to mark the radiation's entry

alone in a large gray room  
on a slab of steel  
she will lie  
for a fifteen second shot of radiation  
custom made styrofoam blocks  
protect her eyes  
a lead apron screens her body

Robyn begins the dress rehearsal  
willingly  
she lies stone still  
we leave her there and step outside  
peering through a small window  
from behind the lead lined wall

is she scared  
I think not  
I think she thinks  
this is what happens  
to all four year olds  
they play on swingsets  
color pictures  
watch Sesame Street  
have radiation for leukemia

this will help you feel better honey  
is all it takes

she doesn't even blink

**Dan Rothermel**  
**York Maine**  
teaches at Frisbee Middle School in Kittery

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