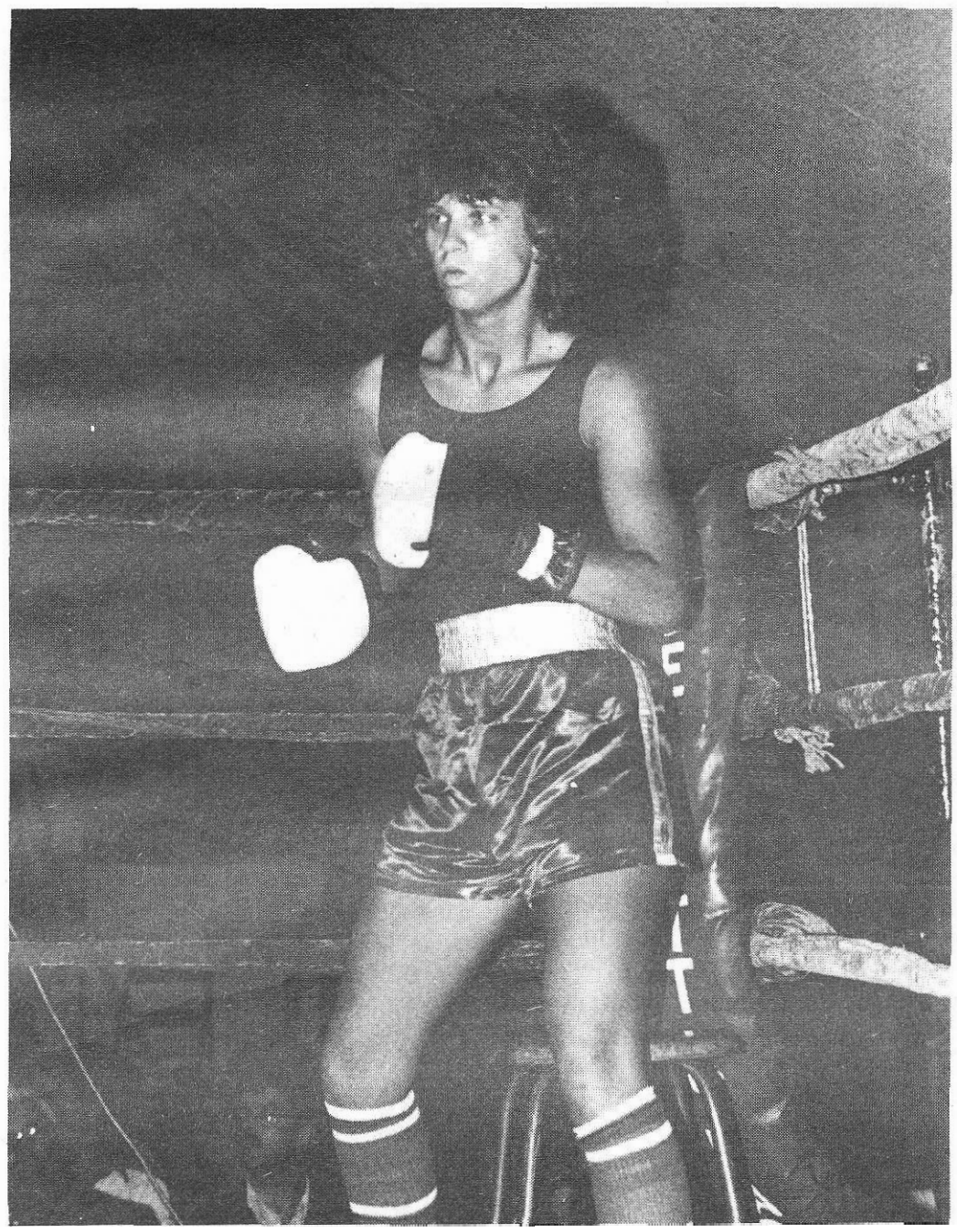
KENNEBEC:
A PORTFOLIO OF MAINE WRITING

Vol VII - 1983



Decision

My trainer is a tough old woman with one eye, a cauliflower ear, and brown skin wrinkled like hide, but her short nose still turns up at the end and she has never lost a tooth. She cut them all on the ropes and they are still long and sharp. She is mean, horrible to me for my own good — drives her beatup Cadillac right up my tail when I'm doing roadwork, actually accelerates enough to almost hit me in the butt because I'm not going fast enough. I'm terrified every step of the way, and this goes on for miles. Every day she gets up before I do and slaps me awake, blowing cigar smoke in my face and handing me a huge tumblerful of training breakfast, a blenderized swill of raw eggs, raw liver, brewers yeast and Worcestershire sauce that I never fail to puke, toughens the gut. Well you could bounce bricks off mine, so she's probably right about that too.

My sparring partners are all convicted rapists and sadistic foreigners who really hate me — she picks them for that. She knows all the wardens and parole officers in the county and on occasion has pulled strings and pleabargained through the D.A.'s office in order to get me a particularly mean one. I am terrified of them too, though many of them are a lot smaller than I. A lot of times they don't even realize they're fighting a woman but she makes that work for her too, by pretending to spoil and pamper me like a pet boy so they'll hate me either way. In practice I wear headgear with a nose protector, and she tapes my breasts tight against my ribcage so that nothing shakes under my sweatshirt. I have pretty small hips anyway, and of course she butches my hair right off so I give out no visual clues. She puts pebbles in my shoes, and sand in my gloves, and chili oil on my

Evening, Anchoring where Pines Grow, at the Ferry Harbor

Water rush over shingle-stones,
glossy shags move on wing-beat,

and inside, where reeds hold the wind
a whipoorwill mourns.

The mirror doesn't care
for my drab convalescent face

as I moor my hull
to the lovely sun-fall.

Life is a fading ghost,
but you tarry for the wine

The traveller's road melt in green haze;
and I hum a tune.

Now, none ever asks
the way to the Big Town,

but craggy slopes and lonely inn,
here is where pines thrive.

Lu Yu, Sung Dynasty
(Lu Chi 15)
translated by David Gordon
Alna

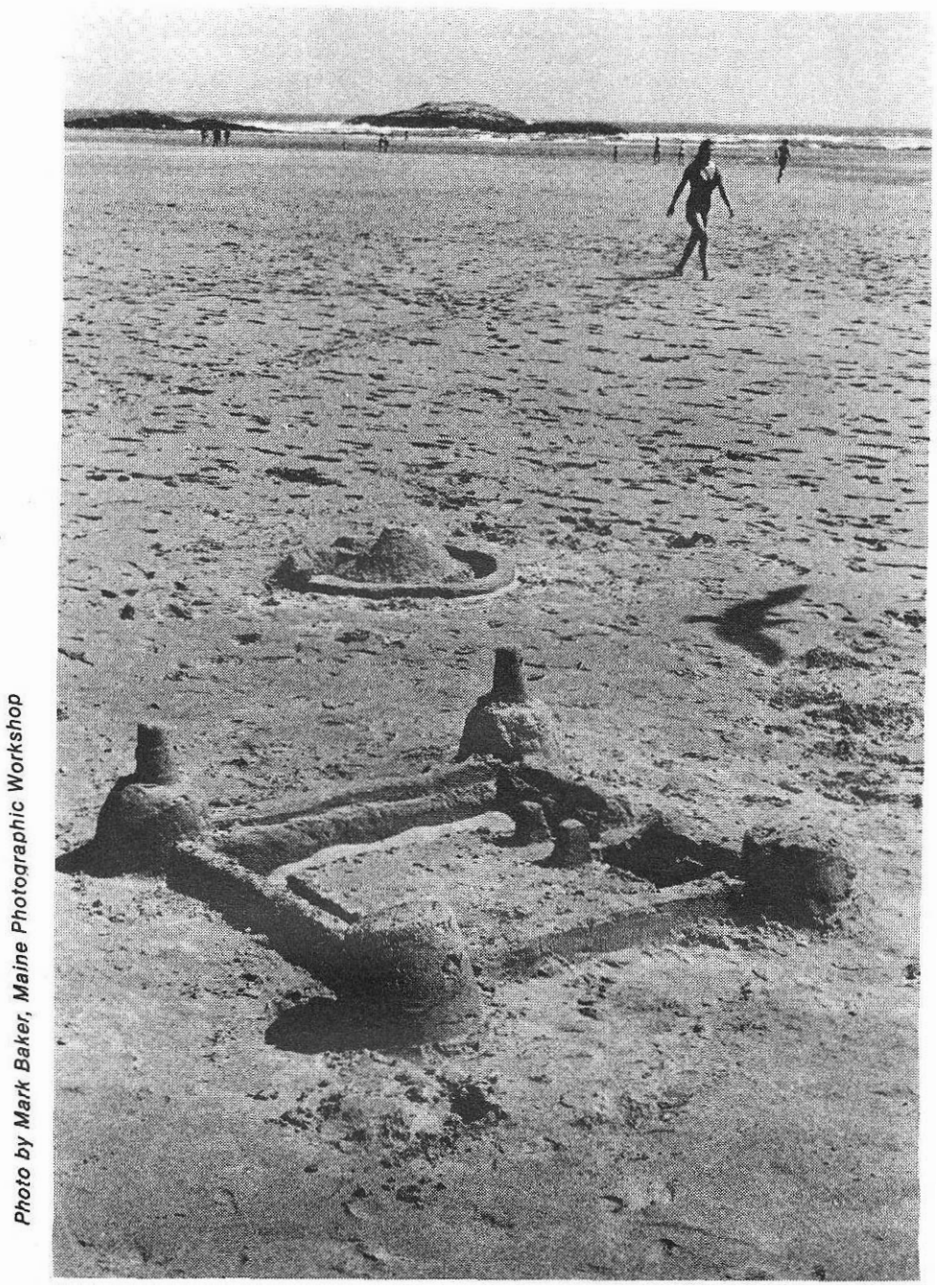


Photo by Mark Baker, Maine Photographic Workshop

mouthpiece so I'm in agony during the whole session which lasts four hours or more, but she's trying to teach me not to react to things with tears, which she says ruin your vision in a contest. Naturally I'm allowed no love life; there isn't a man around who would look at me, and though there are plenty of dykes hanging around the gym who do, they turn me off, make me feel like a piece of meat; and most of the time I'm too exhausted and my hands are too sore to take care of myself, though nature in its way provides for that by giving me dreams about making love on the brightly-lit canvas of a ring in a deserted coliseum with a beautiful unknown fighter who's even bigger than I am, and he's very gentle with me and touches me tenderly all over, and I come and come and come and then she's slapping my face and I'm waking up and it's starting all over.

My parents intended for me to go on the stage like they did, but I have a weak toneless voice that I never could project so I spent my childhood hanging out backstage with the set crews and janitors, playing cards and getting in trouble for feeding people's lunches to the alley cats behind the theater. When my parents died in a hotel fire when I was eleven and my grandmother didn't know what to do with me — I was already five foot ten, one seventy — this one came around and collected me; I don't know why, probably Dad owed her money; I've been in training ever since. I'm now twenty-three years old and have yet to fight a real match for money, but she says any day now, as soon as she can arrange it with the commissioner who's against mixed matches. There aren't any other women in my class. There used to be one, Sophie McCluskey from Chicago; six-three, one ninety, but she couldn't get any work either so she put on another fifty pounds and dyed her hair orange and went into wrestling, and that was a good fifteen or twenty years ago. I heard about her from the gym owner who used to date her when he was on leave from the Navy in San Diego.

So I'm ready to go any day now, but the truth is, I'm not sure she's up for it. Lately I've noticed little things like during ropeskipping she looks like she's daydreaming instead of watching my timing, and she no longer pays attention to the mugs she keeps for my sparring, who stand around in their shorts smoking butts and drinking beer right in the gym and saying nasty things about her loud enough for me to hear. But she notices when I start to go after one of them, and calls me back and says it doesn't matter. And then the other night after I did my five hundred situps and got into bed, she came over and smoothed my hair back, which startled me so that I flinched, but she just smiled and said, Good night dear, and turned out the light, and she's never done anything like that before. She's losing it, getting soft. Well all I know is if I'm ever free of her, I'm going to get in that old Cadillac and drive right out to California, get a place on the beach and find a job as a waitress or mail carrier or bus driver, and work with regular people. And take up something nice like softball or rugby, with a regular women's team, just to keep in shape. And let my hair grow long enough to wear those little tortoiseshell barrettes, and buy clothes that show I have breasts, and go places at night. And have lots of pets and a garden, and maybe get married. I'd even go to church. And when I get rich and have a lot of money I don't know what to do with, I'll buy a place with some real good equipment and open a Fighting School for Girls. And name it after her.

Hafiza Hagili
Orono

The Picture of Alice

Mr. Adams' pith helmet
had already fallen off
when the python began
to swallow him. The snake
waited until he was still
to push its jaws, spread
in a dislocated grin, over
the top of his balding head.

So Mr. Adams could no longer see
the beauties of Nature around him.
He couldn't see the orchid
that blushed pale and bled spots
of red in the crotch of the tree,
nor the great, golden bee
nuzzeling the fringed flower.
The bee buzzed and quivered to be.

Mr. Adams' glasses fell off,
but the black leather belt would be
digested, except for the buckle
and the Swiss army knife that hung
by a braided cord. The stiff gray
jodhpurs his wife thought so ugly
would go, and the calfskin wallet
with the picture of Alice.

So, when his wife came,
gun bearers preceeding, parting
the jungle with tentative guns,
they found his hat — and only that
because his glasses lay glittering
in a patch of ominous sun.
The snake, swollen, mottled
with shadow, ignored them.

Mary's smooth calves neatly filled
her knee-length hose. Her shorts
were just enough shorter
than they might have been
and her hips would have given
even a python pause (Mr. Adams
had been quite thin).
But the snake ignored her.

The searchers pass. The snake,
deep in mahogany shade,
sampled the air with its tongue.
Mary was much younger
than Mr. Adams (who'd been quite thin).
Her skin was excited with sweat.
Her hair curled excessively
on the curve of her neck.

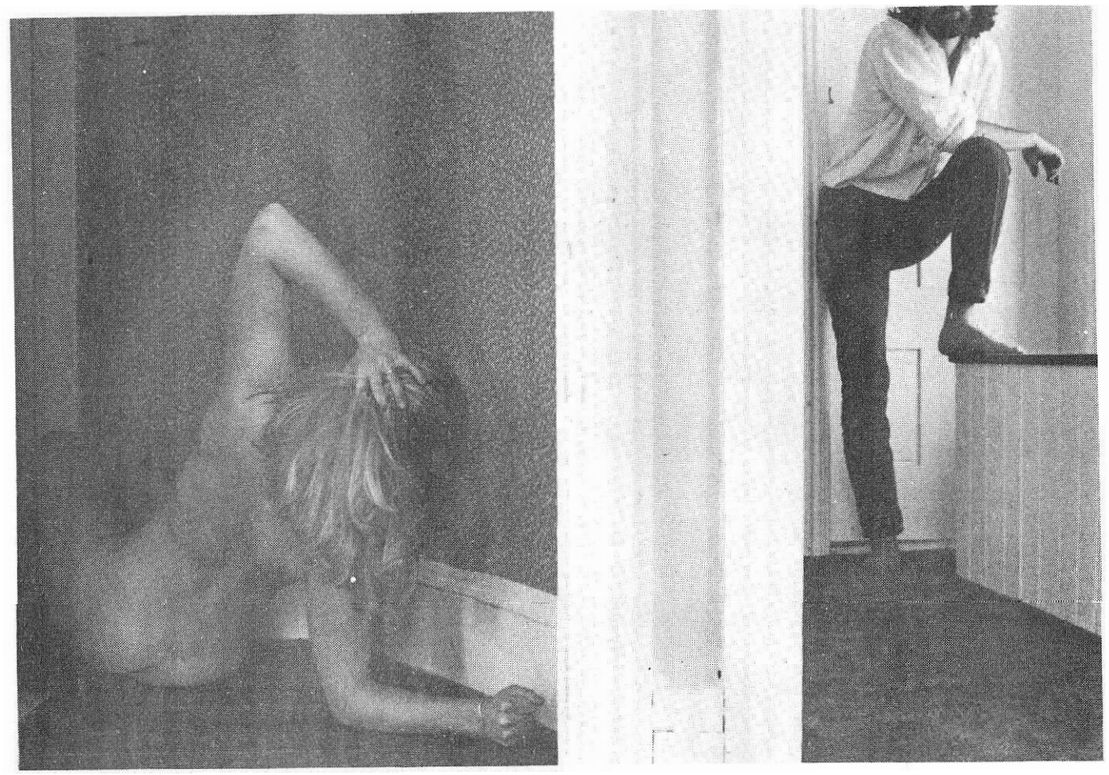


Photo by Sarah Bowman, Maine Photographic Workshop

"My plump little mouse", Mr. Adams
had called her — she didn't look
like any mouse now. The sweat
outlined her breasts as they strained
at her blouse. The buttons
held fast, and gleamed
like a gun bearer's eyes. The snake
was replete. It would be weeks...

Swollen, full, the snake
aches with it. It will
take weeks for release to come,
to pass, as anticlimactic,
buttons, belt buckle, army knife,
bootlace tips, and, at last,
the picture of Alice, thoughtfully
laminated in Plastic,

A dried spot on the jungle floor,
a clot of undigestible things
(including, of course,
the picture of Alice). That
is all Mary will find
when she returns to the jungle
for one last look
after weeks and weeks of waiting

Robert M. Chute
Freeport

Therapy

And they asked him: Who are you?
And if he told them who
Their conversation would end
He said riding the crests
Of glaciers is steady work
That he who enters heaven
Must be a spool of thread
And they asked him: What does that mean?
He said translators are needed
To interpret the wind
That meaning is like a woman best
When loose and thin
And to see his lawyer for they had sinned
They looked at each other
And beat the living
Shit out of him

#15079-179
Thomaston

The Room Without a Piano

There is no longer a piano in the house. Once there were daily arpeggio studies, the right hand cascading up and down the keyboard in broken figurations, the left hand motionless in her lap, although at times Laura would bring it up to supply octaves for a harmonic base. Then the right hand would rush skittishly across the black keys alone again. Her life was a polished, worn stool and an old upright piano with remarkable figure in the wood. Under her touch the piano had awakened and begun to take on a life of its own.

Consider her background. At first it was all hunt and peck like an inexperienced typist. But eventually the keys, responding under her eager fingers, began to tell her things she could never have discovered alone. In short, she matured quickly beyond her mental years with the insistence of the major and minor chords hammering against a soundboard of her own. In time, she knew the keyboard better than she knew herself.

Laura preferred amusing pieces. Often the more difficult ones were the most humorous, and she would come to the piano each day in search of that gaiety which was missing in her own life outside the room. She enjoyed conquering the technical problems these pieces offered, disliked the slow, languishing movements which were, however, simpler to learn. She craved the language of counterpoint, difficult harmonies, allegro and presto passages. She thought the music should always be slightly out of reach. In that challenge was her joy.

Laura went to visit her grandmother as often as possible, because she was the only one who did not rebuke her for her exclusive attention to music. She would sit in her grandmother's parlor, the heat rising up her legs from the metal floor grate under the stool, and play the simple hymns the old lady liked to hear. Soon her grandmother would be asleep, smiling and slumped against one arm of the overstuffed mohair couch. Then Laura would close the hymnal and begin to compose at the keyboard, embellishing, improvising, fashioning the music into an intricate Rococo structure, yet creating a delicate effect.

When the piano was badly out of tune, beyond playing, Laura would mope about the house in morbid desperation. She had a path she followed on days like this. In and out of the piano room she wandered every fifteen minutes, hoping, expecting a change in circumstances. Had the piano tuner come without her having noticed him? Had the piano, anthropomorphic as she secretly believed it was, repaired itself? She could hear the invisible music — the key hidden inside her fist anxious to be free — and bouncing across the walls, the black and white notes she had been amassing inside the room, demanding release.

There were other days, when she was ill, when she was out, when the room was occupied by her mother's bridge club, when the long hours climbed to their zenith for nothing. Days, when the energy of her body, festering like a wound about to burst, turned in on itself.

Laura often played fourteen hours a day. This was before the piano was taken away, before the long illness, before the atonal silence fell over the house. The marks remain on the floor where the piano once stood — permanent, surfacing when the verithane over the hardwood floor begins to wear away. And from the threshold of the doorway the dents in the white wall, that once supported the upright case, show dark against the relentless, morning light.

Her mother never could hear the improvement in Laura's playing. She was moreover convinced that she performed those long hours each day for her ego's sake, as if there were no connection between quantity and quality. And perhaps, in Laura's case, she was right. Yet she should have sensed more here than endurance. More than the will power of a young girl bent on labor.

Laura never wondered why her father did not have a say in family matters or never joined them for meals. She had always known him one step removed from the common interest, had always remembered him different. That he might have chosen to live apart in his own room never occurred to her to be out of character.

Her grandmother, on the other hand, was the anchor in her life. But during the last years, instead of doting on her grandchildren, as one might expect of a woman who had been the ideal mother once herself, she became distant and strange. She used to hear things no one else did, and rock endlessly in her creaking wicker chair with that peculiar smile spread across her face. Everyone said it was senility.

The piano now sat like a guest in her grandmother's parlor. No one played it but Laura, who would tiptoe in past the smiling, old woman who heard the music but did not know who gave her this secret like a gift. Some days she heard nothing at all.

As a young person, Laura was naturally expected to want to leave home one day. It was even suggested that leaving would be the best thing, considering the history of proverbial skeletons in the family closet. Not to mention Laura's abnormal preference for the piano over friends her own age.

In the end she did go away, not for long, and only to a private music school thirty-five miles from home. She had not wanted to leave from the start, and was glad to be in her mother's house again. Laura had been back for just a few weeks when her grandmother died.

After the funeral, she rarely left the house except for an infrequent trip into town to pick up music paper, fine-point Osmoroid pen tips for composing, and an occasional recording by Bach or Chopin. Her general interests in music tended toward the Baroque, but she was also inordinately fond of Chopin Etudes and Sonatas. Laura's interests never grew into the twentieth century; in fact, they never really went beyond the late-eighteenth.

No one had ever known what to make of Chopin's B-flat minor Sonata. Laura had been carefully studying this turbulent piece now for nearly a year. The first thing that struck her was that he had written it with dissonances. Chopin, a composer who was never considered for his dissonant music — it baffled her. Now everyday was absorbed by this sonata that both fascinated and startled her imagination, that took her further toward the discovery of the mystery behind man's ironic smile.

The Sonata's finale has no parallel in piano music. Laura played the chilling, flash ending with a heavy hand, unlike the technique she would use in any other sonata. When you thought about it, the wild and often disentangled chords from the earlier part of the work had no other possible resolution. But somehow this joyless, unmelodious last movement seemed more like a joke than a piece of music.

On and on she would play those arbitrary chords, performing as though she had lost all sense of order. At night the notes came back to her, offering insights which seemed irrational in the light of day. Some nights she heard the notes like someone's funeral march. She heard it particularly in the third movement, a parody of itself and certainly out of the sonata scheme of things.

When her mother mentioned that she was tired of hearing the Chopin, Laura laughed. "I am not through with it yet," she protested — her mother sighed. "It is time you moved on to something else" was all she said. After a while her mother forgot all about the piece as it gradually wove itself into the house like the pattern on the wallpaper.

Laura eventually turned away from her mother. With the usual lack of warning, suddenly mother and daughter were no longer one; the relationship had simply wandered off when no one was looking. Now the only conversation in the house was the Sonata's. Its enigmatic sentences filled the room with words no one but Laura could comprehend.

She was prouder than ever of her long hours — her mother was right about the pride in labor — but something else also kept her at this extraordinary task. The dream of hearing what no one else could was now her overriding desire. Laura had become too thin, too drawn, wearing a too-healthy pink glow. These days not even her mother could listen to her without wanting to hold her back from where she was going.

It was true, Laura was making progress with the piece, although she was the only one who knew it. She had moved her bed into the room and was playing nearly eighteen hours a day. Nobody had tried to stop her. She was on her own.

Everyone seemed to be watching her progress. The family was busier than ever discussing her habits, or lack of them, you might say. The practice had taken on epic proportions and her mother even brought her bridge club friends around to watch. They did not stay to listen, but they saw what they came to see, before retreating, one by one, into the living room for their game.

Laura was always getting up in the middle of the night, as often as two or three times, and her mother began to tell her friends that she was a sick woman and that her father drank now because he was disturbed by the noises in the night. Nobody else in the family believed that. They didn't think he could be bothered by anything. Laura was her father's own image of himself. She was an inescapable part of him; he couldn't be disturbed by her. His secret life sought her out and clung to her, filled her, and sometimes they were one.

Of those who watched her playing, her mother was the only one to voice doubts about the success of her work. The music itself, filled with Laura's scrawlings, had long ago fallen on the floor under the piano stool. She had never bothered to pick it up, having committed the piece to memory months ago. Her mother wanted to retrieve it for her, brush off the dust, and replace the Sonata on the stand where it belonged. She wanted to be of some use. But she knew it was too late for that now.

There were problems. Laura was having trouble with the finale, with the irony of it. The sphinx she sought was nowhere in sight. Each time she sat down to play she searched for the most articulate expression with which to end the performance. But she wanted to make changes everytime she heard it, tear it away from its original structure. She was not content with Chopin's terrible mind breathing out in the end; she would have liked to put more of herself in the Sonata, she who had already given it her entire life.

On one rare occasion when Laura had spent the morning with her father — she had not felt well enough to play — her mother entered the room with the intention of cleaning it. She tugged the vacuum behind her, poking into the corners with the machine and sucking up dust from around the piano and under the stool. When she was almost done, the vacuum began to make horrible, choking sounds as if it had swallowed something it shouldn't. Quickly she turned off the machine and pulled out the dust bag. There in front of her, in a hundred tattered shreds, were the remains of the Chopin Sonata. The music was brown, lifeless, illegible notes.

Her mother never knew whether Laura noticed the music missing from the floor. But she checked on her more frequently now, took pains to make her com-

Planes

A faint rumble plows the damp spring night,
The echo of a distant silver ship.
Tiny insects sunning in the sleepy blue,
Crawling placidly across the mottled gradations
Have consoled me with their mechanical indifference
I keep watch for the sparkled sky.

The prophetic growl summons me to the window.
Why don't you call? I ask the papery clouds;
Don't you know my nerves are dancing?
Your old girlfriends were so pretty
They must have swallowed pastel ribbons, got drunk on light.
Suicide, the smudge, would keep us innocent, nirvanic.
There would never be anything else.

At dream speed they pass,
Blind silver fish smoothly feeling paths,
Suspended, eternally seeking invisible harbors.
Rapt, I would disappear in such flight,
A frozen bird always mumbling to
You, an indistinguishable dot that stares.

Anne Wadleigh
Augusta

"Vincent"

He haunts me, your Van Gogh!
He forces my Western eyes
To read from right to left!
To read the bandage on his newly severed ear
As the only real lines;
The first white amidst the sharp and scattered
Straws of southern France.
His eyes hold no lines at all,
But are areas of intensity,
The right one so deep that you must slip belief
To see its point.
The lips and flaring nose are full and resolute
As if they — despite the wild and whirl — understood
A pipe, clamped, seems also to speak of roots,
And yet, the play its smoke makes,
Seals,
Ariel's kiss to this whole frame.

J. James Daly
Springfield

Matthew Levey Leaves Augusta

1973. Before college, before
law school: 97 on the
FSE. Offer: north border
guard. Goodbye Jenny, backseat fun.
Her dress! Did not know she owned one

Training. Uniform fitting. Apartment
North and Main. John Herd ordered:
"Search the hippies if they look away."
I woke each morning and smelled Canada.
Not once did I weaken, call smiling Ma.

Slim, hair curly, jeans pale, pack
stuffed. She smiled at me. Duty blushed.
But John stared until her eyes dropped.
So into E Room. I grin. First interview.
Serious, she watched with eye softest blue.

Jane Ritt. Teacher. Bangor. I searched
her pack. First: book, early English
poets. Then lace bras, panties. Are
Jen's like these? I blush again. She saw.
When her lose gowne from her shoulders did fall.

Also: a cloth bag with perhaps a
large jar. "This?" Eyes steady:
"Diaphragm." Her voice might be Jenny's
Open the bag? Fear even I can see.
Against all training, I say to leave.

Pay for my uniform, quit, and
hitch the bare Airline to Bangor.
Sleeping in Paul's room at Seminary,
read poems, walk streets, watch faces
Search for Jane Ritt in likely places.

Lamplighter waitress: Ritt? A dancer.
She's gone to Boston." Now, lies seemed
then only fears or custom. But I went home.
Therewithall sweetly did my kysse.
And softly saide, dere heart, howe like you this?

James McKenna
Augusta

Completion

Long before you knew me
I caressed you
in a Maillol by the Tuileries
Your surface
was warmed by sun
and dampened by
an unexpected storm
Those who fled that garden
failed to see my brazen fondle
of your hip hollowed form
Now I feel your real breathing
warm beneath my hand
and understand the sculptor
granted me completion
of the circle he began

Ken Kuenster
Lincolnville

Oil Manifesto

Of course we said we were well-meaning
And never given to self-scheming.
Especially were we not demeaning
Of the natives. Not at all.

Thus the news that came out later,
Seemed a sort of clever caper
From an unrelated paper,
On the politics of oil.

Said we'd been only sitting there,
Drinking in the desert air,
In a place that brought despair
To all, except the natives.

It only chanced we made a group,
A petrol-knowledgeable troup
Of riggers, drillers, all enroute,
To help our friendly natives.

So really it was awfully nice
To know no touch of avarice
Could taint our plan to sacrifice
Full one percent, for natives.

As every derrick, mounted high,
Brought gushing oil toward the sky,
We thought that nought could go awry.
We thought without the natives.

It was their oil, they screamed and said
Their country, it was being bled
Of all its wealth. Thus was I led
To bargain with those natives.

I thought perhaps that five percent
Might prove a happy increment.
Maddened, they threatened banishment!
Those ill-bred uncouth natives.

They changed all rules, to destroy
All perquisites that we enjoy.
And we ended up in their employ!
Those g. d. bloody natives!

Evans B. Reid
Waterville

fortable, brought her pillows and her favorite desserts — while a wide distance spread between them, her mother rearranging furniture, and Laura, the finale. The family came in and out on their ritual visits — uniformly polite, moving together with eyes that did not see.

Nor was anyone there to see when Laura made the final change in the Sonata. In the end, she realized that calling it a Sonata had been a caprice on Chopin's part. When she recognized it for the jest it was, it became hers. Now she played with fervor, the enigma opening and closing like a flower. The scherzo fairly leaped from the confines of the piano. There was music everywhere. The finale, a tiny, swirling, despairing presto, an evanescent outpouring, entered and left the circle of light.

Laura's music is no longer heard by anyone. The piano was donated to the music college she once attended, and now the room stands empty in the afternoon sun. The bravest of the bridge club members still make their weekly pilgrimage, stealing glances at each other across the table, but the table is barely wide enough to conceal their meaning. There is no danger of them getting lost in the forest.

Kathleen Lignell
Stockton Springs

Photo by Swayze, Maine Photographic Workshop

Written in Winter

The tracks begin
unprefaced, in the center
of a smooth field,
then wander and wind
to the very edge.
There is no first step
to leap from, I don't know
where to start.
The trail runs from here
out of sight;
I believe these tracks are yours.

Kirsten Backstrom
Bass Harbor

Ice Boy

The crystal gathering of flesh
to witness the tugging of bodies
from an icy lake.

"I see them under the ice.
They are under the ice.

Quietly a hooked pole fished the remains,
a heavy cotton bale from the muddled surface.
They seal him in an aluminum bag,
seal the top,
then dive for his companion.

It might be never as real
as the rigid faces, the plastic forms
beneath the ice,
calling back to him.

Bruce Spang
Hampden

Son of Wind

I'm going out, Ma,
away from shore.
The wind fills my sails
and pushes me to unknown ends

I won't be home
to hear you call from harborside,
my supper waiting
familiar food
familiar fork
familiar fullness.

I want hunger and the open sea.
I want to be free,
the wind's derivative,
knowing nothing but passage
and the feel of sea under me.

I am the son of wind,
skimming the water.
I can't hear you, Ma,
rock and root of familiar
landbound life.
I am unbound,
my sails full of the life
you gave me.

I'll go as far as wind will
take me,
then home again, Ma,
when wind wills.

Linda Tatelbaum
Burkettville

Photo by Kosti Ruohaama, courtesy Black Star

Working Lunch

Eating an artichoke while reading Virginia Woolf—
or should the emphasis be reversed?
Is densely-layered Mrs. Dalloway
more or less complex than
"a thistlelike plant having a large flower head
with numerous, fleshy, scalelike bracts?"

Pluck a petal,
dip its torn base in cayenned Hollandaise
(for without sauce, "I say it's spinach,
and I say 'to hell with it!' ") and draw out
green-flavored pith between the teeth.
Read a paragraph, a line,
and turn back,
searching for some piquant embellishment
to render a pulpy image more palatable:

"Lying awake, the floor creaked. . . " Ah, Virginia,
if I were insomnious parquetry, I'd be creaking too.
Book in my lap, the pile of exhausted leaves
on the saucer at my elbow grows.
I've tidily provided for the detritus of my meal—
but where does one dispose of chewed and barren thoughts?

. . . Reaching fragile inner segments now,
yielding imperceptibly nourishing,
near-translucent scraps of essence.
The gain is not worth the effort expended,
and I cut away the choke
to reach the solid heart of the matter beneath.

I'm tempted to perform a literary surgery, too.
Effrontery, I know: but, poor caged Clarissa,
I know *you're in there somewhere,*
imprisoned in sterile, verbose superfluities,
soundlessly shrieking to be let out. . . .

Epiphany! Oh, dear *Ms. Woolf,*
have I somehow, at last,
reached the core
of your thistlated enterprise?

Pat Morgan
Rockland

How The Ball Bounces

Research shows that a basketball
hits the floor 1690 times in an
average game. Winners dribble or
bounce it 912 times, losers 657,
and officials 79. . .

I identify with the ball,
not the floor: the air *inside,*
pushed around into different shapes,
resilient, the very empty heart
of the thing, the nothingness
that makes it possible.
Silence of dead oxygen allows
rubber, floor, to sound thud-
thud.
. . . The ball itself is responsible
for 42 independent bounces.

Terry Plunkett
Sandy Point

Newly Discovered Stanzas to Gloria in Excelcis Deo

Angels who eat lunch on high
always order ham-on-rye;
if there is no ham-on-rye
they will take a pizza pie.
Glo-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-ria,
sausage and ancho-o-vy.

When it's time their thirst to slake
it's beer in pitchers drawn by Blake;
and so you see it's our mistake
to think that angels live on cake.
Glo-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-ria,
homebrew or a good strong ale.

Sylvester Pollet
East Holden

Snipers Were Everywhere

The book was titled, simply enough, *Survive!* I read it fourteen times, blueprinting my subconscious and tuning my instincts accordingly. And just in the nick of time, too.

The following day, I found myself floundering in a sea of humanity. I felt the telltale pressure on my elbows, felt myself about to be crushed, drawn down by the undertow. Instinctively, I bunched up my arms and lifted my feet off the ground. And there I was. just as the book had promised, bobbing like a duck in a millpond.

There was only one problem. This was America, and *everyone* was concerned with survival. The entire crowd had read the book or heard of it on talk shows. They all bunched up their arms, too, and lifted up their feet, until we sat there like so many frogs on a lily pad. A monk walked by then, with flowing robes and a book of numbers. He looked at us, and all he said was, "Beautiful." According to *my* book, he should have made himself as inconspicuous as possible and walked, not run, quickly away from the crowd.

That night, I lay awake for many hours, contemplating the monk's behavior, the situation in general, reviewing my survivalist readings and the precautions I had taken. My thoughts were rudely interrupted, however, and bore no fruit. Chaos erupted, total dislocation and breakdown of all systems.

In my bunker, there was no time for thought, time only for hoarding my three-week supply of food, shooting marauders, explaining to friends and neighbors less prepared than myself that this was survival we were talking about, not brotherhood — before shooting them also. (These explanations, incidentally, were in violation of the book's instructions. "Don't talk," the book said. "Shoot for the head or chest.") Fortunately, my ammunition held out.

There was only one problem. Three weeks later, food gone, I found myself on my own, beyond the scope of my readings. Two things I knew for sure. One, I was starving and needed help. Two, anyone still alive was a survivalist. I knew something about survivalists. I chose slow starvation, foraging, gnawing on roots in the shadows of my bunker.

It was then that the monk returned. His robes were singed and torn. In place of his book, he carried granola. How had he managed to survive, I asked. He tapped his chest. "Kevlar," he said; "bulletproof." His head? Kevlar, too. He lifted his mask, a bulletproof visor, revealing a face remarkably similar to my own. I shrugged and ate granola. (This response to the monk, incidentally, was sheer thoughtlessness, a flagrant violation of the book's code; I should have shot him in the head when he lifted his visor.)

That night, I made up for my mistakes. I pumped my remaining ammunition into the eyehole of the mask. To my surprise, the monk was not there, having stepped outside the bunker to urinate. He stood in the doorway now, while I stood naked, caught in the act and without ammunition. Hand-to-hand combat, I thought, death blows, a chop to the thorax. At the last moment, however, Chapter Eight flashed in my mind, a cautionary footnote: "Be reasonable: retreat in the face of superior force."

I chose the course of reason. The monk, so like myself in every facet and dimension, had about him an aura of extraordinary quickness and strength. In the morning, I followed him from the bunker; he had the granola, after all. I followed him, cringing in his shadow; snipers were everywhere, and he wore the armor.

Hans Krichels
Bucksport

Alishya of the Graveyard

I cup my hands,
hold air in palms
like stuff to be kept,
want all of it, all air,
to be mine all time,
but the moment I move to go
anywhere else,
that air I had thought was mine
is mine no more,
was never,
no time,
no time.

When she is born,
when she is born again,
when,
next time...

Daddy makes me breathe in a paper bag
The air condenses, mine and mine
and mine again,
until I calm,
my eyes grey and heavy
as sky before a storm.
Daddy makes me do this,
but it's for my own good, he says,
and only when I can't stop moving,
when I spin round and round
and rattle all over
like a tree full of wind chimes.

Alishya races to the graveyard,
leaps across the granite stones,
finds a hidden knoll where she can whirl her body round,
dances till the starry night grows old, there,
wishing she won't have to go back home.

The songs spring from me, I can't hold them back.
All of me shivers,
every inch of me clamors
to get something I want,
but I can't move,
I can't move,
I've got my head in a bag
Daddy thrust into my face.
Oh, but I'm getting
all the air I've ever breathed
back again,
making sure nothing of me
is lost.

When she is born,
when she is born again,
when,
next time,
she'll move so slow,
one life will seem like ten,
when,
next time,
next time...

I want this song out of me!
But the moment I hear it go,
it becomes forever mine,
forever me,
and I yearn to breathe it back into me again,
and hide it away unheard,
having never been.

When she is born,
when she is born again..

One morning in a blue April
I'll wake and discover
that this life I'm living now
is just the shimmering vision
of a prenatal trance,
that the next time coming
is my real life.

When she is born,
when she is born again,
when,
next time...

In my next life, my real life,
I'll know already what to do,
what not to do, and why.
When I am two, I will say
to mother and father,
I'm much too old for school,
send me to life.
But perhaps they will not believe
a tiny child should utter
such a large thing
and they might feel safer with me
locked in the closet,
my head in a paper bag,
so what good, then, will a second chance do me?

When she is born,
when she is born again,
when...

Mother's got her nurturing hand on my always,
on my things, my hair,
my clothes, the way I walk,
the tilt of my head,
and if anything is out of line,
my barrette a mite rakish,
my smile faintly cynical,
the tone of my voice
too soft, too loud,
too true, too false,
she curls her devotional hand
about my throat
and strangles me with disapprobation.

When she is born,
when she is born again,
when,
next time,
she will not tak
the same abuse again,
when,
next time,
next time...

Going to Grandmother's is like
going to a class C flea market
held inside an old barn,
windows clamped tight
against the fresh rain.
So hot I cannot breathe,
so cramped and cluttered
I feel like a hatrack,
holding my arms stiffly high
to keep from tumbling any
semi-precious cupie doll
or IBM card Christmas tree
from tremulous balance
atop tilted boxes.
Each visit, I'm forbidden to touch
her plate of carefully arranged
and gilted macaroni,
lest an elbow should fall off
and be lost forever in her bins
of shirtless buttons,
her bags of buttonless shirts.

She says to me, Alishya,
Is Jesus in your heart, girl?
And I have to say something
to appease her, like, Forever,
Grandmother, and I'm so happy
or, In my next life I'll be
bleached white by Jesus,
pure and true.

Then she wet-kisses my cheek
and forces some of her
Hamburger Helper on me,
a pitcher of Nestle's Quik
and some of her favorite
coffee Jello with Cool Whip.
I'm gasping for breath,
for a space and time for thought,
but even as I crawl out the door
on my hands and knees,
hoping she won't see my escape
for all the piles of bags and boxes
I must scuttle through,
she's caning right out after me,
onto the front stoop,
dragging behind her a sack full of
Spaghettios, Junket, and plastic penguins
made especially to hold baking soda
attractively in the refrigerator,
and in her free hand,
however she found one,
she clenches five felt cows
with magnets on their backsides
and noodle letters pasted on their fronts
that say, Holy Cow, Are You Still Eating?
and she cries sweetly,
Take these down to Olive's house, dear,
and keep one for yourself,
for the door of your Frigidaire.

I cup my hands,
hold air in palms
like stuff to be kept,
want all of it, all air
to be mine all time,
but the moment I move to go
anywhere else,
that air I had thought was mine
is mine no more,
was never,
no time,
no time.

Alishya strolls into the graveyard,
kicks her way along the stones,
finds her favorite knoll, a place to set her body down,
rips open a pack of Funny Bones, there,
a cemetary snack of Funny Bones.

I told her,
Grandmother,
your vases gleam behind glass, your plates,
fifty states stacked unseen,
even the top toppled by bowl within bowl within bowl,
your faith tenacious,
one more thought to keep
your clutter and
I can't visit anymore,
for you bump into me
and I into you,
I can't move

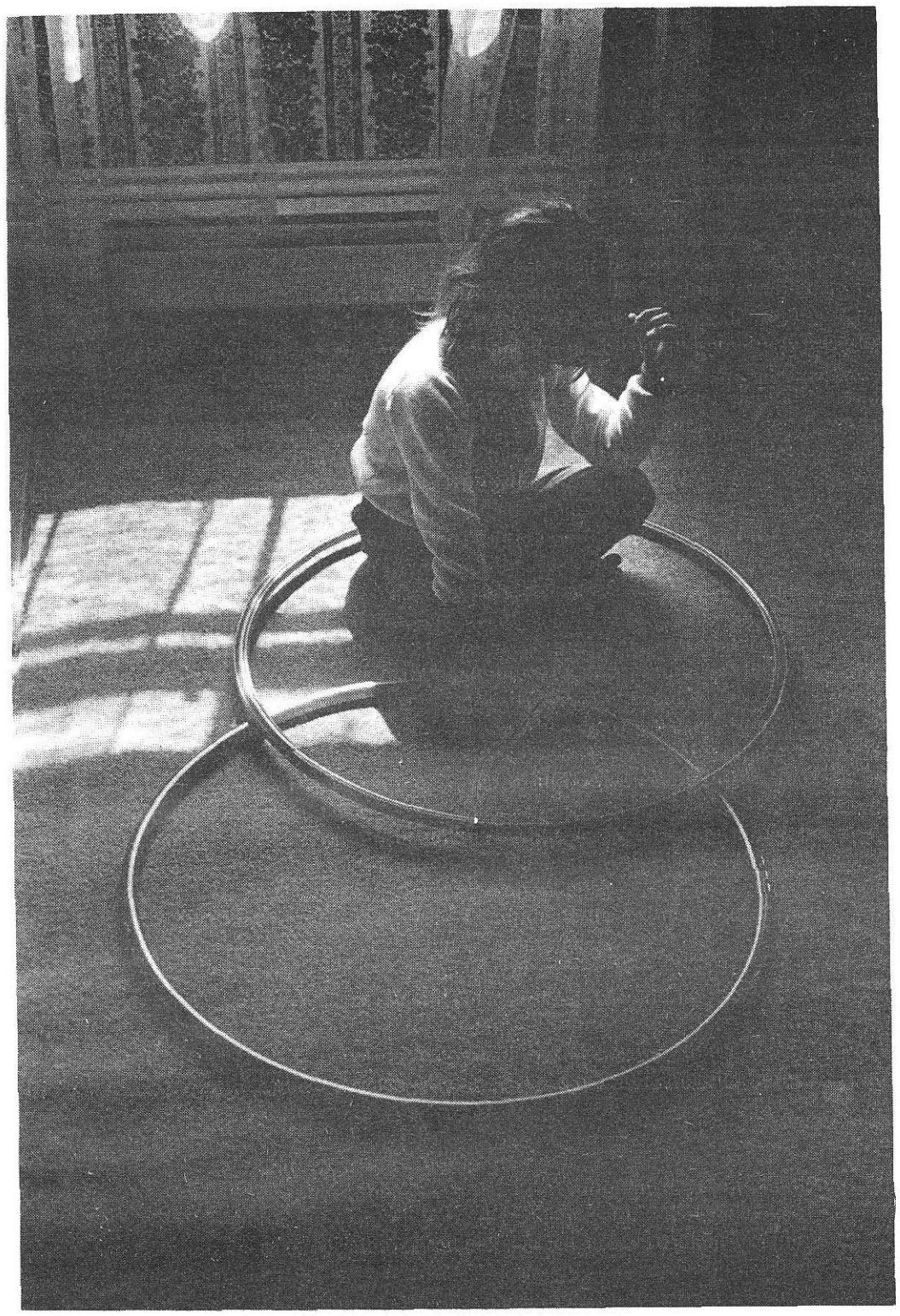


Photo by Mark Baker, Maine Photographic Workshop

your life,
you're long life,
no, you aren't anything at all but things.

no no no no no

When she is born,
when she is born again,
when,
next time,
next time...
she will not make
the same mistake again
when,
next time,
next time...
what she knows now,
she'll start out knowing then,
when,
next time,
next time...

Mother, you are yellow smoke billowing around me.
I can't breathe, can't even own the air
for the one moment I need it.
How can you expect me to be
the same person as you,
when you are already vaporous,
finding substance only in your clinging
to the lips and collars of others?

Alishya frequents Seaside Graveyard,
knows the names on all the stones,
likes a special knoll where she can lay her body down,
shut her eyes and dream another home, there,
hoping she might soon be fading home.

Daddy, you are my stifling disappointment,
a river stopped by a dam of despair,
and in your welling up for not being able
to let yourself out,
you are drowning me,
and I've never been able
to stop treading water,
gasping for breath,'
and all my life has been a wasted motion,
just staying afloat,
dying for air.

Yes. Yes.

When she is born,
when she is born again,
when,
next time,
she'll move so slow,
one life will seem like ten,
when,
next time,
next time.

I cup my hands,
hold air in palms,
like stuff to be kept,
want all of it,
all air,
to be mine,
all time,
but the moment I move to go
anywhere else,
that air I had thought was mine
is mine no more,
was never,
no time,
no time.

I can't move for you.
I can't do your breathing for you.
I can't do for you.
I will not do.

Alishya staggers to the graveyard,
trips her way among the stones,
finds her favorite knoll where she can lay her body down,
gives up her song and leaves her weary bones, there,
gives up her mind and drops her funny bones.

Alishya, name cut into stone in the graveyard.

When
when
when
when
when
when
when
when
when

Cathy Counts
Portland

Photo by Robert Mawski, Maine Photographic Workshop

A Perfectly Executed U-Turn

I think of you in vivo
In your last broad swipe across the slate
A jaunty turn that would belie
The onrush of the current you turn against
Like a surfer who abandons the conquered wave
To get a jump for the long paddle back
Who doesn't allow for the next wave and the next
The onrush of bodies, boards, and the number nine swell
That sweeps the beach.

What matter career, pregnant wife, or child-to-be
Perhaps the beer had gone a little flat
And a dash of salt could bring it back
Like the perfect arc the artist strikes across the foolscap
The cast the fisherman drops light as a Mayfly on the water
The flyball taken over the shoulder going away
The salted tail that catches a condor or pterodactyl.

And finally consider the time of day
The light, the sense of frustration
The impulse, call it choice
That sparks the neural explosion.
Crisp, double-clutched downshift
Then back on the throttle, enough
To hang the rearend smoothly through
The spindrift turn to meet
The unbelieving truckdriver head on.

Roland Burns
Fort Kent

Compulsions

Richard kept his sneakers hammered into the wall of the cabin, to the right of the bookcase. He did not like the kind with squared toes that reminded him of Buster Brown shoes. He had a habit of adding to his stock whenever, in Harvard Square or Freeport, Maine, he came across the right one. By now he had amassed quite a collection. They hung there in varying states of decomposition, for the stones of the island, as well as the nail on his big toe, had a way of wearing them through. It seemed to Sarah as if innumerable pairs of eyes were peering out, reproaching her. When she had time she would take some embroidery wool and go over them, fringing them with eyelashes.

Sarah had just come in from the annual sale in the front yard of the library. By the time she arrived, late, the books, spread out on the single cardtable and boards on sawhorses, had been picked over. There was not much left to choose from: a row of last summer's *New Yorker's*, some *Readers Digest* collections of abridged novels, a few worn children's books — nothing like the *Birds of the State of Michigan* that she had found last year, done by some member of the university staff and full of beautiful woodcuts. Still, for fifty cents, she had selected a book on compulsions that looked brand new. She was about to pore through it as she lay stretched out on the bed on top of the faded India print stitched years ago by some long-gone aunt of Richard's into some semblance of a quilt.

It was fun to take such a book and fit the people she knew into its categories. Sarah had never met anyone, to her knowledge, who washed his hands fifty-five times a day, but the description of compulsive talkers was a perfect picture of Lucy Kingsworth. Could Lucy ever have been a patient of the doctor's? She flipped to the dustjacket to see where he had practiced. Probably not.

Then she hit upon the test for obsessive-compulsions. This entailed getting up to find the small yellow tablet and a pen. She hoped Richard wouldn't see her.

He was outside preparing to saw up a log that had floated in and would make good firewood. For moments she watched him measuring it off meticulously into even sections before he took the saw blade to it. When it was all cut up, he would not toss the pieces back, letting them land every which way onto the odds of lumber that had accumulated when the roof was patched last summer; he would stack them onto a neat pile in back of the cabin. He had been calculating what part of a cord he had gathered so far this year. Numbers were no problem for him. He had practiced for years adding and multiplying them on license plates along the expressway. So Richard was far too engrossed to peer through the window and catch Sarah padding into the front room, looking slightly rumpled as she bent over the table to take the yellow tablet and pick the pen from the jar of gullfeathers, pencils, etc.

She returned and settled back onto the bed and began the list, numbering off the page into twenty-four entries. She made two columns, thirteen in one, which left eleven for the other. This annoyed her, but Sarah didn't want to waste another sheet of paper. (Richard would have figured it out first.) Already some of the pleasure of taking the test had been dissipated. Still, Sarah did not want to be pushed around by an orderly-column compulsion, so she went ahead scoring herself. It looked like a 100% on the first nine questions. Of *course* she preferred to have things done her own way. Didn't that demonstrate a well-developed ego? Naturally, she couldn't always succeed, but not getting her way, Sarah knew, was to yield to something less than perfect.

It wasn't until she reached the tenth entry, "I do things precisely to the last detail," that her score fell precipitously. Sarah turned to the end of the test to check what the ratings meant. The doctor evidently set this up as a trick. A perfect score was exactly what you didn't want. In fact, it meant you were dangerously borderline.

Sarah had too much respect for books to heave one across a room. She stared out the window for a minute at the woodpile where Richard now was carefully placing one of the new logs, completely bare of bark, bald as an egg. Had he peeled it himself?

Then she reaached over, pulled a single sneaker off the wall, walked to the kitchen and set it into the trash container labeled, not "Cans and Bottles" but "Papers and Plastics," and turned on the kettle for tea.

Frances Downing Vaughan
Monhegan

For My Father

Father, the front steps
you helped me build,
ten years ago, are
rotted now, and the
cellar door you cut
and braced and set
on its hinges has
sagged: the paint
flakes off under my
hand, rust cakes the
bolt, the frozen hinges.

But I guess you knew
that in this old
world the things
we make all wear
out to naught. Yet
still you left me
your tools, hanging
above the workbench,
the hammer handles
silver-smooth, the
saws oiled, ready.

And at eighty you
went out with a spade
dug six holes in
the backyard, and
planted a figtree,
a peach and a plum,
and three grapevines,
though you never hoped
to see the swollen
buds of spring, the
dark fruits of fall.

For you it was
enough to know that
someone, your son's
daughter maybe, would
wander, some smokey
autumn day, out
across the yard and
find, hidden among
the reddenig leaves,
a dusty, forgotten
clump of grapes,

and would press them
one by one against
her tongue. And you
didn't even hope
that she might think
of you as she lies
dreaming and humming
beneath her canopy of
leaves, the hot grape-
pulp still sweet and
acid on her lips.

Burton Hatlen
Orono

Thanksgiving, 1981
for my father

Late November, the moonsnails half-buried in sand.
I turn them up with the toe of my shoe to find
the same striated blue of the sky.
I want to put them in my pocket
and board a plane for Agadir
away from the splitting frost and the months
of waves that will incise them
with a tidal geometry.

I know now why you told such stories.
They were a protection, a splendid shell
made to rescue you from places you never intended to go.
I suppose that is why I went to the forgotten port
of Suakin, to find coweries from the Red Sea.
I left them on the sill of a mosque, abandoned
as the rest of the city, a carapace.

I went farther, for diamonds that would not slip
through the neck of a Coke bottle, searching
the background of photographs belonging to a Lebanese
sailor whose only treasure was the phone number
of a stranger in New York City.
Perhaps they were pressed into the vaginas
of his whores or laid out like a nest
of uneven eggs in a chillum rag on the bar.
Once I wrote you I had found them: Ama Dablam, Lhotse,
Sagamartha, place of perpetual snow. To be there
would have lifted the inertia that filled you;
the irony being now I can find you nowhere
in this world to say it will be the staying
that kills you.

Karen McCosker
Ogunquit

Grandmother's Requiem

I rode my bike five miles to watch her die.
The white pasted face
swinging loosely on the unhinged neck.
I whispered softly
hoping she wouldn't hear.
How could I talk to death?
She gripped my hand,
once and not for long.
My heart echoed off the walls.
I thought she must have heard
as she strained toward me.
I needn't have feared.
Into that quiet she was reaching.

Barbara Visser
Camden

Photo by Kosti Ruohaama, courtesy Black Star

Old Man Nicholson

My memories of Old Man Nicholson, of the Arthur C. Carsdale place, and of Donald Mason have dimmed or altered only moderately over the decades, or so I believe, but my understanding of them, and especially of Donald Mason, has changed, grown I guess one would call it, and that not just because of my ageing, and not only because of experience, although the experiences (long talks, confessions) have occurred, but because of a somewhat altered awareness during recent years on the part of many in our society. I have never lost a sense of the weird strangeness, the only partly uncovered fear I felt more than fifty years ago when I came back to my lone room following that encounter (if it was an encounter) at Carsdale's.

What is new is that today I can imagine Donald Mason, that same night, same hour, also in a lone room perhaps, in that Victorian building two doors away, agonizing under a different kind of fear, self-blame, and anxiety. It was not that I ever held him to be evil exactly, but before, I did not know, or did not choose to know, or did not think how, possibly he would feel.

Sandy Robbins and I had been playing two-o'-cat in the back lot behind Carsdale's with some younger children we accepted, even encouraged sometimes, because without them we had no one to make up an infield, let alone an outfield. Thoughtlessly we had out-played them, which was not difficult, staying at bat, so that, bored and discouraged, they had gone home, yelling at us about unfairness, and we were there looking at each other, as much as to say, "What now?" when a rather gentle voice from beyond the low fence asked:

"How do you fellows expect to play baseball when the light's almost failed? You might better come over in my yard and talk a bit."

We stared at him, astonished. For as long as we had used that back lot, we had had trouble with the Arthur C. Carsdale place. If we went around the fence, under the grape arbor, past the huge barn and across the driveway between the napkin-smooth lawns and clipped hedges (that was the shortest way to school), Mr. Nicholson would be after us, shouting what no-goods we were, threatening to tell our parents or at least call the police. We would outrun him, of course, enjoying it in a way. Thrills.

Or if one of us hit a high foul that smashed one of the barn windows, or if from beyond a tall hedge we threw horse-chestnuts at the barn (which had become a garage by that date), and we often did, Mr. Nicholson would come out, his temper roused, yelling what he would do when he laid hands on us. Yet now, here was this medium-height, blond young fellow, speaking to us just as if we were grown-ups, and inviting us into what we had learned to consider enemy territory.

"We weren't playing baseball," Sandy told him. "There's not enough of us. We were just playing two-o'-cat."

"Oh, of course. Well, whatever you want to call it. You don't want to try to play any more now anyway, do you? Come on over. I'll show you something interesting."

"What sort of thing?"

"You come and you'll find out," he said quietly.

For a few seconds we just stood there. Instead of the young man, I kept seeing Old Man Nicholson, who had always bothered me because of the way he looked: he seemed eight feet tall to us, scrawny, with long, gangly arms. His hair was thin and gray; the whitish flesh was tight over the bones of his face; and his eyes had a cold, colorless, fish-like glare to them which was enough to freeze you where you stood; that is, if you were anywhere near him. And I had been, once.

That had been about a year earlier when Grandmother was still alive. Just before I went to school, I had gone past the door to the room where she lived at the front of the house, and had looked in there. She was sitting next to her north window, the white hair coiled on top of her head, staring out, solid, unmoving, at the morning sky as if it held the answer to some question.

Then when I walked home at noon, Anna, instead of being in the kitchen, was up at the corner of our block, waiting. She told me my grandmother had died; therefore, I should go in the back door with her, be quiet, and disturb no one. I noticed the shade was drawn down over the window my grandmother had looked out of, and that someone had stopped the grandfather clock at exactly 10:50.

Later, in the narrow hallway on the second floor, I found myself looking up at Old Man Nicholson, skull-like face, towering threat, and all. He had just come out of Grandmother's closed room and was clutching something under his leather jacket, holding both arms across his middle as if he had a stomach ache. Still, there was a bulge there. I half expected him to yell at me for something, and I cringed up against the wall and shut my eyes. He went past and into the bathroom without saying anything, but the glassy, even marbly look in his eyes stayed with me. Soon I heard the watercloset being flushed. I knew he had a right to be there in the house, of course (it was part of his business) but neither could I ever forget his look.

So now, Sandy and I, faced with this new young fellow, who sounded kind and friendly, gentle even, and was inviting us over to the Arthur C. Carsdale property, didn't know precisely what to say or how to act. Yet we were curious, and went with him under the grape arbor, past the large garden of roses in bloom now and filling the air with their rich, penetrating scent that went sweetly down into the lungs. I felt at once that I was in a somewhat different and rather strange environment. We went up the wide, concrete steps to the rear entrance of the Carsdale establishment and through the wide glass doors into a room that I did not care for.

The odor was different in there. Not roses now, but something I was unused to, except that perhaps I had caught a whiff of it on Old Man Nicholson that time when I met him at home in the hall and shut my eyes, but I had been unable of course to shut my nose too. The smell seemed keen and sharp, as if it went right into my middle somehow, and I stared at the slanted, porcelain-topped table, and at the drains around and under it, and at two clean white buckets under the lower end of it. I almost turned around and went out.

But the young man was ahead of me, with Sandy, going through the next pair of double doors, and I followed them. We were in a long, high-ceilinged room, with very large windows at the other end and at the side, facing out at the new-leafed trees, the lilac bushes (I could smell them too, or at least I thought I could), and at the smooth, carpet-like, green lawn. Heavy drapes hung at each side of every window, and there were couches and many chairs.

At the end of the room just to our right, was the coffin, as I knew by then it was going to be, a rather fancy casket with silk lining, and lying in it a body in what I remember as a rather fluffy dress, one arm bent across her middle, her fingers holding a litle bouquet of roses, and her hair wavy and graceful around her head where it rested on a silken pillow.

"Come here, look," the young man said. "See what a beautiful job I did on her. Isn't that something? I work and I work, as if I were a painter, an artist (I *am* an artist) but there's no one I can show it to, or when they do see it, it's not when I am there. All I get is my pay, really. There ought to be more, somehow, more appreciation. There ought to be . . ." His voice drifted off.

Sandy and I stood beside the coffin, the opened upper half of it, staring, breathing quietly, and saying nothing. Then I put out my hand and touched the forehead of the body. I wanted to test somehow what was real, to know if *feel* in some way was the same as *smell* and *look*. It wasn't. It was waxey, cold. My spinal nerves seemed to quiver and I drew back my hand rather quickly, glancing up to see if the man was watching me. He was, but he did not seem to care what I did.

Then, without warning, I recognized the body, remembered I had seen her (Mrs. McVicker) when she was alive. She had lived a half mile up the hill where the lawns and houses were very large. Often I had seen her drive past our house, moving very slowly, in a quiet, electric-powered car, one she and her sister owned, the only one in town. I remember pulling my hands up into my sleeves and shrinking back a little.

The young man was talking again, thinly, but I did not listen to what he said. I almost did not hear it. And then we were going back through the double doors (the man putting his hand gently on my shoulder as we walked) through the room with the porcelain table and buckets, and out onto the concrete porch where again we could smell the lilacs and roses, and watch the fireflies in the scented dusk. The man sat down on the top step, and Sandy and I, probably trying not to be impolite or ungracious, sat down also.

"My name is Donald, Donald Mason," he said.

We told him ours, and then he asked about where we lived, which school we went to, and what we studied. All was gentle and smooth, and suddenly my leg muscles grew tight, as if I were having cramps, and I found that my arms were gripping my knees hard.

He asked us about English, and I said yes, I liked English. Then, what did we read, not what did we read in school, but what did we read at home, that we read because we liked it? It was a good question.

"Conrad."

He glanced quickly at me. "Conrad?"

"Sure," I told him. I had seen full-page advertisements in the New York *Tribune*. Conrad had died the year before, and Doubleday, Page and Company had brought out his complete works, leather-bound. The advertisement had splashed a full-rigged ship over the entire page, with titles and descriptions of Conrad's works printed across it and across the ocean and even the seagulls. I had thought: *Oh boy, sea adventure!* And I began reading Conrad.

"Which story?" he asked.

"The Nigger of the Narcissus."

"You like that?"

"Not really, not much," I said.

"No?"

"It was not what I had expected."

"But you finished it?"

"Yes. I was kind of bored, but there was something about it—"

"And what *was* there about it?"

"I don't know. I don't know how to say it."

"Was it the way he uses words, the pattern of the words, something like that?"

"Maybe. I guess so."

"An atomsphere."

"Yeah. Sure."

"You are very precocious."

I am what?

Sandy was staring across the driveway, watching the blink of the fireflies, and the shadow of the cast-iron deer on the next lawn, the one that almost looked real

if you did not know any better, the one we used to shoot beebees at from my upstairs window sometimes when we thought nobody could catch us.

"You have not by any chance read a new book called *The Inward Strife,* have you?"

"No, I haven't." I had not even heard of it.

"*The Inward Strife,* by Norman Anderson." He sounded, as if he were talking about God. "It is shocking, truly shocking in places," he whispered. "But the writing is profoundly, excruciatingly beautiful. Ordinarily I would not suggest that a young man of your age read it, but-- but— with your tastes, shall I say? — it would perhaps be appropriate."

I turned and looked at his eyes. He shifted his gaze the other way.

"I'll lend you my copy if you can't get one at the library or somewhere," he said.

"I'll try the library."

"I got to get home," Sandy said. "The Old Man will be after me with his strap."

"Me too," I lied.

"Well, I hope you will come again. I appreciate it. I hunger for appreciation. You will, won't you?" He held out his hand, first to Sandy, then to me. He pressed my hand eagerly, and all at once I felt sad (not scared, just sad) but did not know exactly what I felt sad about.

Sandy and I went back under the grape arbor, across the back lot, and on toward our homes. "Geez, he's a strange one!" Sandy said. "I don't want to go back there no more."

I thought about it for some seconds. "No, I guess likely we don't." But I could not have said why.

Sandy went on to his house, and I turned to the right toward mine, where its three-storeyed bulk loomed up like a shadow among the blinks of lightning bugs, in the strong scent of lilacs, of roses, and now of the pollen of Austrian pine, of the pine that towered beside it, even above it.

I stared in through the windows from the front porch. There were my parents. I could have walked in on them there any time. But I didn't; I stared. And there he was, solid, firm, sitting in that straight, high-backed chair which must have been designed for a bishop of something, with the card table before him, and dealing out a hand of solitaire.

Beyond him a ways, under the other lamp, she was reading. I watched, and felt quieter finally, and went in and talked with them about our playing ball and then sitting around after it grew too dark, and talking, but I did not say where, nor with whom. Father said yes, all that was fine, but it was time now for me to go to bed, past time, and since he was a man one did not argue with about a thing like that, I kissed each of them and went up the stairs to the second floor and the bathroom, past what had been my grandmother's room, and then up to the third floor where my castle was. I closed the door and put on the lights, not just the one over my desk, but also the one at my bed, the one over the bureau, and the one at the far end too. The south window was open. I could smell pollen from the Austrian pine and the scent of the weigela two storeys below, close to the house, but neither of them cheered me, and, undressed now, I turned off the lights, got under the cover on the bed, and stared at the near dark.

Then my eyes grew used to dim light, and I began to see again in the soft gray of the spring night: I could make out the desk, the chair, the other chair, the bureau, the wardrobe where I was supposed to hang my clothes, and the sloping ceiling. Through the window to the south came a faint hint of light which I knew was from the Arthur C. Carsdale Funeral Home where they kept some lights on all night anyway. Yet it was not simply that the light came in; there were the odors, a mixture now, of all kinds of growth -- lilacs, roses, and the Austrian pine too, rich and overbearing and in a way almost suffocating — and I found myself jumping clear of the bed and going fast to the window. I pulled down the shade. I held it hard at the bottom and pulled it down a trifle more so that when I let go, some of the shade would lie on the sill, flat, almost entirely cutting out light.

Finally I went to my bedroom door and opened it. There was some light seeping up the winding stairs, and I could hear the murmur of my parents' voices in their dressing room. I returned to the bed and got under the covers, lying there, calmly almost, thinking about what had happened and wondering why I felt the way I did about Old Man Nicholson, for it seemed to me now that he, with his swearing, his glowering, his driving us off, his everlasting ugly scolding — it seemed to me now that old Nicholson, like certain other adults in my world, was a comfort, a sign of something solid, that he was the right thing in the right place and the right time; and I was sorry, really deeply sorry, that he was gone (wherever it was he had gone). I missed him: Nicholson, old, ugly, horrifying, skin-tight, skull-like Nicholson. Why wasn't he back where he belonged, keeping Sandy and me and many others in our ordered place, he or somebody just like him?

I remember huddling down in the bed, waiting and yearning to fall asleep, and trying not to think.

But now, as I said before, what of Donald Mason at that same moment back there in the Arthur C. Carsdale Funeral Home, in a small room alone somewhere, cursing himself perhaps for having yielded to impulse even so minutely, so tentatively, so gently, recalling Nicholson's grim admonitions when that one finally, two days before, had agreed to hiring Donald: "You walk a straight line, get it? You satisfy our patrons, the respectable, the backbone of a decent community. I don't give a damn about your artistry, about you being an artist. You just do things right, or one inch over the line and I'll drop you like a red hot iron, if not worse."

And now, now, after he had done what he had done, said what he had said, against better judgment, was one of those boys going to grasp it, to suspect, to talk? And to whom would he talk? Was the telephone going to ring in a few minutes, or tomorrow, or the next day, and not about another body for the Home, but about him, Donald Mason?

Edward M. Holmes
Winterport

The Neighbors

Though twenty years
in this country—
they are isolated
by language, old customs
and fear.

Even their grandchildren
who visit in summer
snicker in the hallway
at the old superstitions
and threats that no longer work

I catch them
when leaving the house
peering through the blinds
at me
and sometimes
on a Sunday
a daughter with no accent
and a shiny car
takes them out
for a drive
to the country.

Maureen Walsh
Jackman

By the author of THE IMMENSE JOURNEY

Hints, I'm always waiting for a hint, a rhyme, a
familiarity of sounds,
one calling to another, then my momentary future
proceeds; take this
for instance this instant, you summon me, presuming
it is for us ? we dissolve
in thin air ? long long pause...I'm waiting for a hint,
hinterland of feeling; I'm reading
THE FIRMAMENT OF TIME while an ant crawls on the side of
my naked foot.
I do believe we are One Body, I'm including death, Loren Eiseley,
the flowers in this temporary
garden and firmament.

John Tagliabue
Lewiston

The Artist and His Model

With an air of calm deliberation Edith turned and sat down in front of the glinting planes of her dressing table mirror, arranged herself fanning out the drapery of her wrapper precisely so, and for a moment contemplated the face in the glass. This face always seemed like the face of a stranger in the morning, a broad, sallow, visage so at odds with her night dreams of herself. It all seemed to fit better after breakfast with her husband, who was a practical man. This morning, though, she did not rise until she heard the retreat of his carriage wheels.

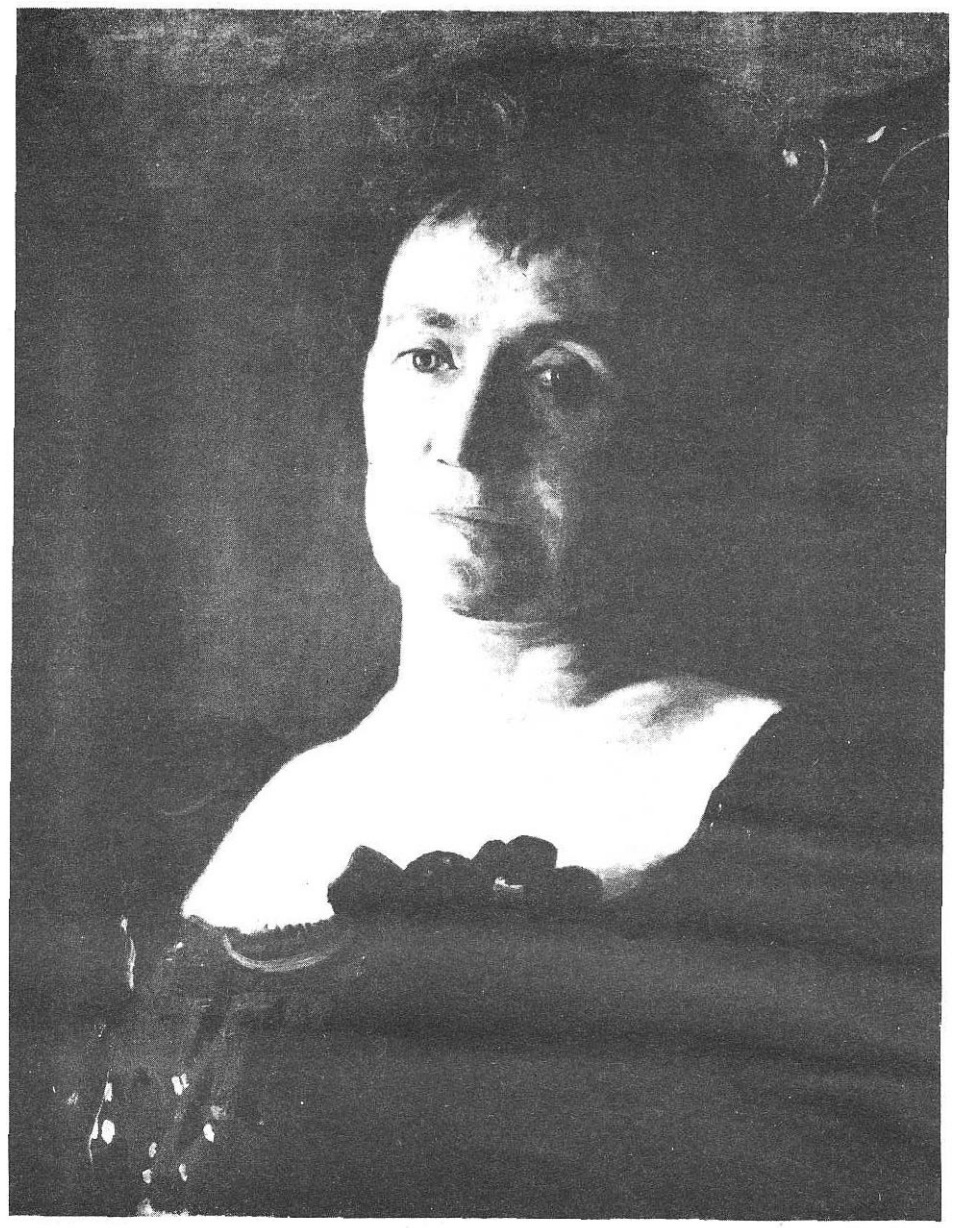
She saw by the face of the clock that there was little time. She stirred and began her preparations, brushing her coarse, curled hair with the tortoiseshell brush, reaching for small pots and boxes of crystal or china, smoothing cremes against the skin that stretched over her broad forehead and high cheekbones. Her eyes were always fixed in an unflinching stare at the image in the glass, her figure erect, her shoulders stiff and straight. She was as complete and extravagant in her toilet as a young woman preparing for her sweetheart, her lover.

Edith sat a moment longer, tilting her head back and forth, studying the image. Unknotting her wrapper she rose and walked toward a loose pile of black satin and velvet lying at the edge of her bed. Though this was her favorite dress Louis, her husband, did not care for it. He pointed out that the square cut neckline merely accentuated her broad features. The velvet bows, he would continue, were absurd, belonging on the dress of a seventeen year old, or a tart. And the rhinestones, "Well, my dear," he had said with a prim pat on her wide hand, "You are simply not the rhinestone type." And it is not that Edith disagreed. She saw his points. But the dress had been made, at great expense, by one of Philadelphia's most fashionable dressmakers. And it felt wonderful. As she put it on for the first time, letting it fall gently, gently around her body, she remembered vividly the swish and sway of her first formal evening dress that she had worn years before, before she had even met Louis.

She had believed herself beautiful then, and maybe in that flighty time of youth she had been. It had almost frightened her at first, how much she had loved the long dresses, the night long dances, how much she had loved the eyes of the young men upon her, how much she had loved the dangerous thrill of throwing back their gazes proudly, boldly. That sexuality so encouraged then, now so channeled. Now as she reached up into the dark satin tunnels for arms and neck and head she slowly let herself twist from side to side as fold upon fold of the black satin fell down.

She wanted after all, she had said to Louis, to be at her best in this portrait. She wanted desperately to be beautiful for this, to be transformed the way it had seemed to her that Thomas Eakins had done to his wife and sister. Edith had seen their pictures at his studio. The man was a genius they said, and she had been mesmerized by the common, tired, grayness of his bony wife that had become serenity and grace on canvas. Perhaps when this man looked at her he would see her as she sometimes saw herself. A glimpse caught in the hall mirror while passing, a quietly stolen, sideways glance that showed a fleeing beauty, a grace, a light and passionate form. Grace.

She walked onto the landing when she heard his clatter of entry downstairs. The sunlight from the opened door below felt strange on the bared arms and neck of her evening clothes. How contrived and artificial this all seemed. She chewed her painted lip nervously. The sounds of servants chattering ordered suggestions, the sudden sharp and stinging smells of oil and turpentine caught at her. She turned back into the dim light of her room. She would wait until things were more settled.



Portrait in oil of Mrs. Edith Mahon by Thomas Eakins, 1904

When she at last arrived before him she was surprised at his accumulation of props and tools. She had thought only of an easel and some pencils; there were those, but also small tables with bottles and tins, round tins stuffed with spattered brushes, a few small canvases here and there, piles of paper, and boxes crammed with more boxes, glasses, cloths, and who knows what. It seemed as if his whole studio had invaded the cool recesses of her drawingroom; as if a blacksmith or a circus had set up shop on her well tended lawn.

The Anatomy of Sound

The instructor cautions us
before he starts the film
to listen for the woman's voice,
tunneling up her throat,
calling to her hands:
keep still, *and we hear*
her whisper echo, ricochet
through the chords; those lips
we'd tried to imagine
flutter and resound,
ticketing on a film
that rolls a class to silence.

This is what we've come to see,
our voices in the flesh.
All week we've tried to isolate
what is vocal, pictured castanets,
the kiss on the throat that mimics
the lips inside, a hummingbird
fighting its cage of bone

The film slows and we observe
this woman speak, her left profile
from cheek to breast bone
cut away to cancer. The chords
quiver and part, the wings
of an angel caught rapelling
past vocabulary, before pain,
lodged just above the heart.

Slowly, the film begins to quicken,
the voice assumes its shape.
One by one we hide our ears.
afraid to hear what we have seen,
hear it again around us, the echo
in a cough that signals something more,
the certainty of a loose rock
to send us down the hillside,
crying for our voices, and our hands
drop to our throats.

Barbara Cairns
Portland

new widow

still that slow loss
darkness
weaving through the pines

a flourish of birds
just out of sight

a naked scrub flailing
away at the night

S.D. Feeney
Portland

He seemed to notice nothing strange, but glanced briefly at her then ordered her to a monstrous chair he had carried in from the hallway. It had never seemed meant for actually holding a human form, but here he sat her down, and there she stayed for some hours, pushed and primed into just the pose he wanted.

Instead of her own gaze, now she had to meet his dissecting stare — a clear-eyed man who spoke little. It was understood between them that he would initiate any conversation. He made inconsequential small talk, perfunctory and vaguely bossy such as a doctor might make while examining his patient. She had wondered what an artist would choose to talk about, and she was a bit disappointed. But she did not mind the scrutiny.

His forehead was high, and broad, and square like an expanse of light above those keen eyes. He knit his brows just slightly as if scowling or sometimes as if about to cry. Those eyes stared as calmly, as ungenerously as her own had, seldom wavering when he spoke or pulled now and again at his trim beard, muttering to himself. In front of him, faced away from her, something grew, helped with pencil, paint, squares, and rules. Made as much like a map or a blue print might be, she thought. He would sometimes snatch another piece of smaller paper and draw something quickly, snatching looks at her in rhythmic nods of his head. His burly frame bent, stooped, twisted to reach this or that he needed from the supply spread out on a canvas throw around him. She sat always still and staring, leaning slightly, just as he had said. He released her just before lunch. "Today, just studies," his only words of explanation for his work.

He came almost daily for six weeks. Louis was not pleased by this extraordinary number of sittings. Edith complained to her friends gathered over tea. "What an inconvenience! My mornings are all taken up. How tiresome!" But really she loved their sessions. To sit for hours, beautiful in her black dress, under the stare of a strange man. She leaned ever so gently against the sharp outlines of the baroque carved chair, just touching, for hours, while he watched her, studying her face and neck, and breasts, and arms. She loved the feeling of her long heavy gown in the glare of morning sun, though he always drew the drapes while he painted. She loved the long silences; the time for quiet, still, and hidden thought. Private.

Then one day he announced he was finished with her. "The studies are done and the underlying form is on the canvas," he said in his most business-like manner. "I expect to deliver the portrait in three, possibly four weeks, madam."

Edith waited, nervous, annoyed that the morning sittings were over. It left a great hole in her days that she was at a loss to fill. For days she stalked her room. What was it she should be doing? A woman of leisure. After a week or so she learned to resume early morning meetings with the staff; her day's orders given, she managed to pick up slowly the old rhythm of ordering her social obligations and attending to her correspondence. Still, she waited.

She was late coming down to breakfast the morning the portrait arrived. Louis stood impatiently before it, the remains of his breakfast still on the table. "I do not like it," he gave his verdict in clipped breaths, "This is a travesty of you, Edith. That man shall get no money out of me! I must go now or I will be late." He straightened his cravat before the mirror in the hallway and slipped his arms into the sleeves of his greatcoat that the maid held for him. "The gall of the man, and after taking so long about it." He pressed his lips briefly against his wife's cheek and went through the door.

Edith sat down and looked at herself across the room. A look searching, penetrating, unflinching as her look in the mirror that first day in preparation for the portrait. Tears gradually formed in her eyes without their closing, impossible to tell whether because of the long stare, the sting of it, or because of what she saw. There she sat, the woman of the painting, leaning into the darkness of the big chair, a woman trapped and old, not beautiful. Her hair in the dry wisps of age; the light catching eyes sad, despairing. Her thin lips looked pale and bitter, stretched to stifle a smile, word, or cry. Stretched habitually as a stage for meaningless pleasantry. Her skin enveloped the big bones of her sad face loosely, with a slack that slid down her shadowy neck to broad white shoulders framed in a heavy dress of bows and twinkling sparks, her body somehow placed into this frivolous upholstery. The glib velvet and puffs of fatuous sleeves so distant from the face full of care and sorrow, and longing and, oh! what longing. For a touch, caress, a stare out of some unknown distance beyond the drapery, and carpets, outside the door, down in the distance her eyes glazed and longing stared.

But there was a beauty, Edith saw, as she stared. A great beauty, not in her face or form exactly, but a beauty of the thing. He has taken everything from me, she thought, but what has he made? It was something very good, very fine, something that would endure. With his paints he had taken her light and her shadows, her bulk, and her grace, and her longing, and made a message, a song, a wonder. She saw this. His hours of careful scrutiny that she treasured had simply picked her clean for his own work. There are things, she mused, that I can never say. He has said them for me. He has made me for all times, and she supposed she had helped a little, her light, and shadows, and sad longing. And grace.

She realized that her money could miraculously buy this thing Eakins had made. It was hers, for awhile, this vision of herself, to stare out at her from some private wall, and this made her feel like a wire of excitement was down her throat. This power of her wealth; the beauty and truth of this bought thing.

"I will accept it," she said aloud, "and I will pay him his fee as contracted." Then she settled down to drink her coffee while the maid gazed darkly at her proud head.

Ellen Endter
Cumberland Center

Breakfast

You face me over scrambled eggs
the morning after we make love for
the five hundredth time. You read
my horoscope which says Take
care in motion. But I am made
of moving parts. When I turn away
from you my thoughts slip like glass
in a kaleidoscope. Patterns break.

Wendy Kindred
Fort Kent

He Hast Found Out Our Bed

going through the morning paper we glance at
an article describing how flash floods
have driven hundreds from their homes and then

as though to keep up with a metronome
we turn the page to get on to the sports
to see what teams are playing and where and when

at noontime on a turnpike going south
as the thermometer hits ninety-five
along one stretch in half an hour we pass

eight motorists pulled over hoods upraised
and thinking ***someone else will get to them***
we never let our foot budge from the gas

plates in our laps in front of the TV
we cooly watch the rescue crews at work
amid the carnage of an airline crash

and safe in the assumption that not one
of those charred bodies will be known to us
we fork down without pause our corned beef hash

and thus as night shuts down we recognize
without resort to printouts briefs or polls
that worm of Blake's ***insatiably at work***
within our cankered hearts our deadened souls

Richard Aldridge
Sebasco Estates

Summer Job

In my mind's eye, I can see the way it must have happened. A solitary figure climbs the ratlines to the top of the aftmast. The figure straightens, no longer a person but a patch of sky charred by the sun. Pause. Then quickly an arc, the swift glide downward, a flick, a splash. The wake is rocked to calmness by the waves. Nothing.

It was a summer's job, a season aboard a coastal schooner. A thousand bucks wages plus a few shining quarters doled out by passengers. Romantically viewed, it was the most free of lives — the old wind-in-your-face-as-you-wander-the-coast job, yet at times it was a slavery known only to the deep South. Stack those plates, polish that brass, fill the cap'n's coffeepot, strip forty-nine bunks, and make sure your sneakers are white at the end of it all. Workdays starting at five in the morning, ending at midnight, six hours off on Saturday. Repaint the smallest scratch, replace the worn rigging, foxtail the ladders, keep those sneakers white. The schooner became a queen bee around which the drones hovered, pampering, fussing, mollycoddling. No wonder they call a ship a "she".

I remember the time one of the sailors and I discussed the possibility of ghosts. It was in the main salon, the passengers had finished eating, and Jack was lingering over his own late meal. Around us the white of brightwork and the dark, rich varnish gleamed in the caress of candlelight. The sounds of jovial passengers on deck seemed to come from far away, as did the clatter of dishes and bits of song drifting from the galley. Jack paused in the midst of his meal and started telling me how he pictured the schooner years from now. That summer the cap'n was in his seventies which meant a forced retirement before too long. Since he didn't want to sell the schooner, there was a chance he would give her to a museum. She would sit in a harbor, polished up, though not as thoroughly as we could do it (nobody could beat those six coats of varnish we had put on her deck). The schooner would be overrun with gawking visitors by day, silent as the sea by night. And at night, the ghosts would come out.

As Jack spoke, I could picture the salon stirring to life when the darkness crept in. The candles would glow as they did now to gleam on brass and brightwork. I could almost hear the clink of glasses and hum of conversation. The idea of ghosts was enchanting. The sweat we had poured into this schooner we did not want to see belittled by negligent, uncaring hands. A crew of ghosts would care for the ship; passengers, too, would be on board to keep her from loneliness.

Several summers had passed following my season aboard when I heard of the drowning. One of the crew had climbed to the top of the mast, tied his sneakers to the lines, and then plunged into the sea. Whether he fell or dove was not known. His body lay below the surface for eight hours before being found.

Although declared an accidental drowning, the boy's death remains a mystery. And since that summer, I have begun to recall other deaths. People who had worked on the schooner and died shortly thereafter. The cook aboard the summer I was on, as well as sixteen years previous, died that winter. Another crewmember had died several years before that after serving on the schooner for two seasons. There have been marriages and births aboard the ship, but deaths are not spoken of. It makes one wonder. If there are ghosts on board, are they wearing white sneakers?

Ellen MacDonald
Camden

Photo by Carol O'Neill, Maine Photographic Workshop

Trade Secrets

Editor's Note; The following poem is composed entirely of lines scattered through last year's issue, with the exception of a "filch from Rilke." The author, who describes himself as "an appreciative fellow kleptomaniac," works in a long and dishonorable literary tradition.

With true regard for the others who stocked the eddies, here's a creel filled with keepers, lifting the best lines, from the spring freshet of the big two-hearted river called the Kennebec, Vol. VI —

An impress in the common geography
of our hearts of an old forgotten love
leaving a print as rhetoric,
an arched addendum:

In a gamble for the memory when
something like a response may thrive,
you were primed for bed in that garden
of great renown down by the marsh,
held there by a trick of light between
the squash and succotash.

A maimed juggler clapping with one
hand touched by an old admonitory
demon, prancing wishes causing a cerebral
rash, back bent like a bow, teeth bared
above the quill until end-rhymes leak
at your lips like spiced sanguinity,
this new lover named loneliness,
in fingering reach of flesh pinched
into folds, but remembering patches
of snow, contours silvered with ice,
feigns a righteous non-violent plunge
into unctuous hell fired to chase
the descended cold.

Chilled by 'die Beschwerde langen
Lernens,' I will not see
Venus curling to whirl me, still
with death, into the space held
open by the crescent moon. The right
of first refusal belongs to me. Won
by will? Or fantasy?

Farrell Davisson
Bar Harbor

Trying to See the Moose

To reach the lean-to
We drive five hour bordered by trees
In flux (deft rouge of swamp maple,
Light-fingered gold of birch) and sing.
While you are trying to learn the harmony,
We got ten miles out of our way.

Next day, I wake into cold, and follow
Your surer feet across a stew of logs
To spy two moose nibbling the further verge.
Around the pond you claim to find a trail—
Deadfalls and moss-heaps and briar-spills keep
Last century's feet in mind, perhaps.
When we arrive, of course the moose have dived
For water lilies in your tales of trips
Your father took you on, to Canada,
In childhood summers. Never mind. A grouse
Flaunts his neck-ruff and flare of tail, all male.
Six pitcher plants straddle a half-sunk log
To wait for prey, like beasts. And then your prize:
A rub of moosehairs clings to a low branch.

Days later, by myself,
I find them forgotten among apples
In a plastic bag. They are so coarse and stiff,
They'd almost serve a porcupine for quills.
Shall I sow them like dragon's teeth?
The muscular haunches, sweat, the clash of horns....
But it won't work. They strand
On my kitchen's empty shelf,
Transmuted lilies.

Beverly Greenspan
Brunswick

On Crowley's Island

Grey has filled the cove
and settled in the firs.
Beside the shore, granite swims
as smooth as whales.
Cormorants land on the grey wet backs,
hang out their wings to dry.

The beach collects
a wash of broken things: pieces of wood
and bones.
From the polished fragment of a whelk
— against the rising water's sound — beats
a dim, far rhythm like a heart.

The whales submerge.
The cormorants dive.
Our eyes lift to see farther
than the current carrying the waves away,
lift to that lost place
from which a trawler homes,
bearing a corona of crying gulls, and cutting
the wake between,
the cleft within ourselves.

Susan Hand Shetterly
Surry

sweet perfume booze

you breathe i breathe. while you sleep i wait for sleep. insights attach to me. memories float up like answers in an 8-ball.

a decade of nights i have lain beside you, an act of bonding not much understood, less talked of. our mutual selves curl in a cocoon of exhaust. protected we hurtle through the milky way to extinction.

i wake, check for you beside me. free fall. you're off somewhere shooting pool, getting drunk, getting wrecked, hanging out — or you're here, reeking of alcohol, wheezing, whistling. carbohydrates pour through your lips drag through my nostrils past clamped mouth to saturate the palate.

i know this smell. it's a mother's kiss in saturday night dark, rushing me out of dream to find her loose, buoyant, other times restrained and so tired. a perfume turned her stranger. and in the morning, nothing.

so you exhale boozy dare me raft beyond what's known. to this extent i trust you: we are ten years bedded and haven't destroyed each other yet. we grow in rhythm kin. we saturate. we represent the other. we are a pronoun, a writhing body.

the bed is empty. sleeping i keep vigil. i startle awake. ten minutes later you pull in the dooryard. some part of me has been out searching for you, standing sentinel along the road. regularly it happens: knowledge of you precedes the senses.

you breathe you drift. i am a listening ear. the sound of your breathing is breathing. what i describe here, the mating.

lee sharkey
skowhegan

"Hello Knowles? This is Amanda. Is your offer to use the pool still open?"

"By all means, Amanda! Come on over."

"Great! You are planning to be home then? I'll . . . oh, ah, I'm a little scared of the dog, Knowles, will he be tied or something?"

"Rex? Oh don't worry, Amanda, he'll be safely confined. It's so hot today, Helga and I had no plans at all and we'd love the company." He knew he would, very much.

"Oh, so Helga is home?" Amanda paused. "Well, I'll see you in a bit then." She hung up. She was sure could still make the best of it.

Amanda had met Knowles twice during her visit with her folks. Their neighbor, unassuming, kind, he had on each occasion offered the use of his pool to her and her daughter. Graying, paunchy, perhaps a bit of a fool, but it didn't matter. Who knew what passions might lie under his transparent surface. He was married, but that was insignificant to her. His wife a real zero. Over the hill. Maybe he was *too* harmless. It was more the sport of the chase that she enjoyed and here was a chance for some mildly amusing recreation to salvage the last few weeks of the summer.

As she slid the screen door open, Rex whined to go out. "No Rex. Go lie down." she ordered. "It's too hot for you out here anyway." So hot she'd have sooner taken a nap in the cool indoors and saved the entertaining for later when the sun wasn't so cruel.

"Hello, Amanda." she called, laboring down the steps to the terrace with the loaded tray. "Where are your folks today? They aren't coming?"

"No, they're off visiting. Though I surely don't know why, on a day like this." Watching Knowles place a table between two chairs, she crossed in front of Helga to help him.

"Need a hand?"

"No, thanks dear. Here, you take the chaise lounge. Helga and I will use these chairs."

Helga ambled over to the table, thumped the tray down heavily, then collapsed in a chair with a grunt. She'd have liked to put her feet up but Knowles had precluded that. The soul of hospitality, she thought sourly.

Amanda noticed her discomfort and demurred, "Oh, sorry, Helga, I should've given you a hand. It's so nice of you both to have us over. The pool is a blessing,

Predator

So what if Ben had left her. So what if he said he was sick of her "games." He'd never minded her flirtations at first. In fact he had rather enjoyed the effect she had on men. But now that they had Melissa he thought it was time to stop kidding around. What a bore! She still felt a need to be admired by men. To attract.

Her latest "diversion" had teed Ben off but good and he moved out. That was four weeks ago. Amanda was pretty sure he'd be back. He couldn't stay away much longer. In the meantime, one more little test to reaffirm her attractiveness wouldn't hurt. All in the name of sport. Harmless fun.

Today was one of those steamy, hot August afternoons. Heat wave. Distant objects undulated eerily. Though the humidity was intense, the oppressive sun scorched, parching, wilting. Amanda and Melissa crossed the field to Knowle's house.

From his door he watched them. She held the little girl's hand and carried a straw bag. She stepped catlike through the tall grass, as if watching for snakes. The sun reflected so brightly on their blonde heads that they appeared to emanate their own golden light. Amanda's measured, delicate movement was sensual, exciting. What a beauty, Knowles thought. Beside him, Rex tensed, growling. He cuffed the dog's nose.

"Quiet, Rex!" he demanded, but the dog barked loudly. Knowles grabbed his collar. "Just go around to the pool," he called out, pointing to his right. "Make yourselves at home. I'll put Rex in and bring us some drinks."

Smiling at him, Amanda led the child to the side of the house. The forty-foot in-ground pool was enclosed by a slatted redwood fence. From the concrete apron steps of redwood planking led to a raised screened porch on the end of the house. The pool water sparkled, smelling faintly of chlorine. At least Knowles is a neat and careful man, Amanda thought.

Knowles sighed deeply as he entered the kitchen. She was some good looker. Whining, Rex clicked over to Helga.

"He wants to get out, but I don't want him to upset Amanda or her little girl. Make sure he stays in. I'm glad they decided to come over." he commented to Helga. "Fix us all some drinks, will you? I'll go move the chairs down off the porch to the terrace. And bring the paper when you come." he said, disappering toward the porch.

Helga Knowles frowned. She put ice, glasses, and liquor on a tray. Beauty ain't everything, she thought. She's no great shakes. When she'd spoken with Amanda, Helga had found her rather shallow. A flashy, brainless type. Self-centered. Not the kind of woman a man would want for a wife. Amanda's folks had said she was happily married to some business executive or something, but something was amiss. If the marriage was so happy, why wasn't her husband with her on vacation?

She frowned again, balancing the heavy tray in one hand as she reached for the paper on her way to the porch. She stopped inside the sliding screen door and looked out. Knowles was talking animatedly, arranging furniture, following Amanda as she lowered the child onto the steps at the shallow end. He was suddenly energetic after complaining only an hour ago that the heat was sapping all his ambition. Too hot to do anything, he'd said. Now he was out running around in the sun. The old fool.

Amanda shed her cotton coverup, revealing a clinging scarlet swimsuit. Helga watched Knowles as he eyed Amanda. He practically leered at her. No wonder he was so anxious to have her over. Her low-cut suit revealed cleavage in the front and every last bone of her spine in back. She was, Helga guessed, about thirty-six, her tanned skin allowing no extra folds like Helga's. But then Helga was sixty-five and Knowles was sixty. They just weren't young anymore. Besides, she thought, I was shapely enough in my day. Age makes its changes and there ain't a thing you can do about it. It would happen to this one too. There were things that mattered more, like loyalty, honesty, fidelity.

believe me. We were nearly beside ourselves with the heat and nothing to do."

"Anytime." Helga remarked. She couldn't dredge up much enthusiasm for this woman. She was too sweet, too cute.

Knowles chimed in. "Yes, anytime! You are always welcome. Just feel free." He gestured grandly toward the pool, grinning at Amanda.

Helga dropped ice into a glass and washed scotch over it. Now don't start acting like a complete ass, Knowles, she thought.

Amanda spread her legs and stretched in front of Knowles, her arms over her head, turning her torso slightly. "I'm going to take the plunge. Anyone care to join me?" She looked at Helga. "Isn't it hot enough for you? Aren't you going to put a suit on?"

"No." Helga said shortly. You'd love that, wouldn't you, sweetie! Make those differences between us really obvious for Knowles, eh? No way!

Amanda focused on Knowles, nudging him with her bare foot. "How about it Knowles? Come on."

"Nope, Helga's gonna fix me a drink and I'm going to read the paper. You go ahead." he winked, holding his empty hand toward Helga expectantly.

Helga poured him a drink and freshened her own. Well, at least he had *some* sense. He wasn't that good a swimmer but with an invitation like that, it wouldn't have surprised her if he'd jumped in like a lovesick schoolboy showing off for a girl. She held his drink out but he didn't take it. He was preoccupied with Amanda poised on the end of the diving board. She slammed the drink on the table next to him and tossed the paper roughly into his lap. He looked at her dumbly.

"You wanted to *read*, dear, so *read*."

"Oh, yeh." Knowles opened the paper but stared at Amanda instead. She arched into the air and cut the water cleanly, almost soundlessly, swimming the pool's length under water and surfacing near her daughter. The child squealed in surprise, splashing water at her defensively. Rex began barking, jumping at the screen door, provoked by the child's high-pitched squeals. Knowles turned abruptly, startled and puzzled by the sudden outburst.

"Stop that Rex!" he shouted. The dog quieted only a moment then resumed, threatening. Knowles looked at Helga. "Will you do something about him?"

Helga grinned perversely and raised her hand. Rex stopped immediately, yawned and slumped to the floor, his eyes intent on the strangers.

"Heat's getting to the dog too, I guess." Knowles apologized to Amanda.

Helga drained her glass. An imperceptible smile crossed her face. Maybe Rex knows a threat when he sees one, she surmised. He and I can spot a phony a mile away.

After splashing with Melissa a few minutes, Amanda swam to the stairs near Knowles. Venus-like, she ascended from a glittering wake of water. It beaded, glistening over her entire feline body, a shimmering cloak. She gauged Knowles's reaction. He hadn't missed a trick. Neither had Helga the witch. Oh, this *is* fun! she thought. She reclined on the chaise, stretched and sighed appreciatively.

Helga watched Knowles snap his paper, clear his throat and pretend to be immersed in it. He nearly knocked his drink over when he reached for it. So much for nonchalance. Helga wondered just how far Amanda would go with her little charade, right here in front of her victim's wife. The little bitch would probably make a play for anything in pants. And Knowles, the damn fool, lapping it all up.

"Oooh, that was lovely." Amanda purred. She sat up and reached over, touching Knowles on the arm. "I'm so *grateful* to you. You know, it's so hard to make friends when you're in a strange place and don't know anyone. But you've made me feel right at home." She smiled coyly and settled back, langorously raising one leg.

Let's have a little stupid conversation, shall we? I can match you any day,

sweetie, Helga plotted.

"It's *such* a shame your husband couldn't join you for this vacation. . ."

Amanda tensed. "Yes. . . ah. . . well, he's sailing with friends and well, I'm not much of a sailor, I'm afraid." Score one for the old biddy, she thought. This is getting better all the time.

"Oh?" Helga pressed innocently, "I thought your mother told me he was too busy with business."

Knowles jumped up suddenly, rubbing his hands together briskly.

"Amanda! Shame on me! You don't have a drink. What can I fix you?"

She smiled sweetly at him. "Same as you're having would be fine." Her voice was honey, cool and low.

Saved by the bell, Helga thought, swirling her scotch and ice. Best you be reminded of your responsibilities and keep your claws to home.

"So tell me, how did you two meet?" Amanda asked with a sidelong glance at Helga and a warm smile for Knowles when he sat down.

"We've been married twenty-seven years." Helga claimed immediately. She reached over and patted Knowles's hand as he stared into his drink. "Guess we've been through it all together, right dear?"

"Yep, Helga was one of those sturdy farm girls right off the farms of Pennsylvania Dutch country. That's where we met. She was thirty-eight and I was thirty-three. . ."

"Oh, so you *are* younger, I thought so. . ." Amanda pointed out, winking at Knowles.

He puffed up. "We married less than six months after we met. It seemed like a good idea at the time."

"A real storybook romance, huh?" Amanda commented wearily. Catch that, Helga? Your turn.

"For Chrissake, Knowles. You make it sound like you did me a big favor." Helga sniped.

Knowles looked at Helga, incredulous. Amanda sipped her drink, delighted. The old bag was losing her cool. This was really delicious. Amand decided the time was ripe.

"Daddy tells me you have quite a gun collection."

"Yes, indeed I do." Knowles turned to Amanda. "Would you like to see it?"

"I'd love to," Amanda said, rising, "Helga, would you be a dear and keep an eye on Melissa for me? Thanks." She slipped her hand under Knowle's arm and propelled him toward the house.

Helga finished her drink and turned, watching them. The Doberman rose and growled menacingly as the pair approached the house.

"Down Rex!" Knowles commanded. Amanda drew closer to him. "Don't be afraid, Amanda," he patted her hand. Amanda hoped Helga wasn't missing this as they disappeared inside the house, sliding the screen door shut behind them.

Fuming, Helga turned back and fixed another drink. She looked at Melissa and felt a sudden twinge of pity for the little girl. She had no idea what kind of woman her mother was. A female on the prowl. Helga watched her play contentedly. A sweet child like that should be raised by someone who really *wanted* children, like I did — not by someone whose probable reason for having children in the first place was carelessness. . . Helga chuckled as she speculated about the exact parentage of the child. Hell, she'd probably end up just like her mother. Loose. Leading men on for kicks. Displaying herself with garish clothes, either too tight or too skimpy, or both.

It was twenty minutes before Amanda and Knowles emerged, laughing on the porch. What's so funny about a goddamn gun collection? She turned to watch Knowles trying to prevent Rex from getting out. Impulsively he called, "Let him out, Knowles. Here Rex."

The dog squeezed through and raced to her side. She stroked his sleek black face. He was hers. Her faithful, obedient companion. Amanda returned to the chaise, glancing uneasily at Helga and the dog while Knowles poured himself another drink.

"Knowles has his pride and joy," Helga nodded toward the house, "and I have mine." She smiled at Rex, patting him. "Knowles got him for me on our anniversary. He's our alarm system. Dependable, efficient, and a good form of protection, don't you think? No thief would want to tangle with him I daresay." Letting that sink in, she continued. "I trained him myself to respond to my hand signals."

Knowles leaned toward Amanda. "It's true. The dog obeys her immediately. I don't even know the hand signals."

"Impressive." Amanda retorted. She reached for her straw bag. "Oh, Knowles, would you put some lotion on my back?" She grabbed Knowles's palm and squeezed white cream onto it. With a glance at Helga she flipped onto her stomach.

Knowles sat on the edge of the chaise, licked his lips, and reached with both hands for her back. He stroked her slowly, rhythmically. Amanda moaned.

The heat, the scotch, the sun, and Knowles's fascination with Amanda's body overwhelmed Helga. Her fingers drummed the arm of her chair. That bitch! She was playing it to the hilt. And Knowles, the sucker, was blinded to her scheme, so overcome was he by her all too obvious charms. He had never been so ardent with her! Never in their twenty-seven years of marriage had he *ever* done that for her. Did he think she wouldn't like to be treated like that? He always just assumed that a "sturdy" woman like herself could manage for herself. Suddenly she let her hand drop in front of Rex's face, twitching her fingers in a signal.

The dog leaped toward the child at the shallow end, tensed, growling, jaws open, canines gleaming. The child screamed and fell forward into the water. Amanda vaulted from the chaise, knocking Knowles into the pool. She dove for the girl and pulled her back to the shallow end. Knowles surfaced, coughing.

"Helga! What on earth. . .? for Chrissake, call him off!"

Helga signaled again and the dog moved to the stairs at the shallow end, waiting, snarling. Amanda pulled herself and her daughter up the stairs, placing herself squarely in front of the animal. She shifted her weight, ready to catch the dog in the throat with her foot if he moved. The old bitch had played her hand, but she'd damn well better call the dog off and quick if she valued him.

The two women stared at each other, each ready for their next move. Amanda may be a scheming tease, but it was clear to Helga that she wasn't scared. Helga might be old and used up, but it looked as if she wasn't about to give Amanda a ticket to ride with Knowles. The messages were relayed in an electric moment.

Knowles treaded water, confused. "Helga?"

Melissa whimpered behind Amanda and Helga coolly called the Doberman to her side. She patted him calmly. Amanda crossed in front of her with Melissa. At the chaise, she grabbed her straw bag and paused, gazing at Helga icily.

"Thanks for the swim."

"My pleasure, dear." answered Helga.

Turning to Knowles, Amanda added, "Your collection is fascinating, Knowles. Perhaps you'll show me how to shoot sometime. . ." She smiled warmly at him once more. "I'll be seeing you. Soon? She strode off toward the house across the field.

Knowles coughed, floundering at the side of the pool. "I'm so sorry about the dog!" he called after her. To Helga he gasped, "You shouldn't have let Rex out here. Look what happened. I hope he hasn't scared her away for good." He stared longingly at the retreating figure.

"But that's why we have him, darling." she said sarcastically. "For protection."

"But Amanda is harmless!" he argued.

Is she now? Helga sipped her drink and watched Amanda's suntan lotion ooze out of the tube in a greasy ribbon on the hot cement.

Joan Anderson Powell
Manchester

Poem for Ex-Wives, On a Line from Charles Bukowski

So, still getting on and off the bus
no luggage but a paperbag of afterthoughts,

I wonder where those rings are now—
some star's back molars

a gold service for
whatever cool delight an Arab eats

or in some dusty pawnshop
with saws and knives and

chipped glass eyes
once costly, fitting no one.

I make their lives seem better
after me.

Sylvester Pollet
East Holden

This issue of *Kennebec* is dedicated to Gordon Clark, its founder, who in encouraging young writers over two decades and in continuing his scrupulous editing, has earned the gratitude of writers and readers in Maine.

(TP, CK)

Chinese Tortures

Tonight I had to wedge a chair
against the refrigerator door.
The freezer's frozen over
and the door won't close.

There's a drip like a slow tick,
a broken record. The Chinese Torture
we always heard about as kids. The hole

wearing into the forehead. That slow
bullet of water and madness
seeping in beneath the spasms
of a red light. A thousand miles south

of here, in Florida, right now,
my mother's kicking pastel covers
from her gilded bed. The television's glow
surrounds her head. She twirls
a strand of ashen light, considers
carefully remote control. Oh,

she worries more and more about her daughter
who grew up in the cushion of a sculpted hedge,
a rug so thick it smudged the polish on her toes.
Coral roses climbed our trellised patio out west,
as in photographs from garden magazines.

Outside the skylit garret of my room tonight,
I can almost taste the sturgeon moon. Blue,
dimpled flesh, fresh-water roe, the inner
ebony of caviar. I think I'd choose this moon
over the silks and taffetas of petticoats I wore.

There's more to sorrow than lost finery. *More*
than the antique, family clock
I still keep amid the clutter of my dresser top
tracking time with the Chinese Torture
that beats continuously and never frees.

Deborah Ward
Portland

Herbert and Virginia

met at Skimpy's Bowling Alley
by the candy machine.
Her Milk Duds jammed.
He called the manager,
the man who checks out shoes.

Herbert and Virginia
tried love that night.
Morning came, she left
only a note
scotch-taped to his orange pajamas.
She needed to be mysterious.
He wanted mystery.
They met by the candy machine.

Herbert and Virginia
married in a chapel.
Skimpy provided the cake.
On Thursday nights, weather permitting,
the couple continued to bowl.

If you're looking
for something
to change
Look
Again.

Martha Henry
North Windham

Breading the Soft-Shelled Crabs

I have neglected my body
working myself into a shell
so that, breezing into the fish market today
and seeing a delicacy I had long forgotten
set apart from the usual haddock and mussels

I might be eight years old, out to eat
at Johnny's Restaurant with my parents
and able to order anything I want
from the menu.

Even now, breading the soft-shelled crabs,
their finely stippled bodies that give to the touch
translucent as Japanese lanterns
I sense how thin is the membrane
between what I was
and what I long to be

both states of the shell
as it hardens then sloughs
hardens then sloughs
as the season demands.

Inside, the same
sweet tenderness.
I have never lost the taste
for having what I want.

Alison H. Deming
Cape Elizabeth

KENNEBEC: A Portfolio of Maine Writing

This is Kennebec's seventh year of publication. Our format and newsprint make possible a selected distribution of 5,000 copies, thus providing Maine writers with an audience no "little" magazine can offer. We publish as many new writers each year as possible, while trying not to neglect the established ones. In this endeavor to bring Maine writers to the attention of the public we are supported by the University of Maine at Augusta, Forum A, and an increasing number of writers whose submissions enable us to present Maine writing that is worth reading.

The Editors

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Layout assistance: Phil Paratore

Cover photo by Richard Norton, Belfast

Next issue: manuscripts acceptd 9/15/83 to 12/15/83. While the editors continue to encourage the submission of free verse, for one year only *Kennebec* is seeking verse in the traditional forms, e.g., blank verse, sonnets, terza rima, sestinas, ballads, etc.