

KENNEBEC:



Assunta

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Big dogs are big in Bridgeport. Where rows of vinyl-skinned bungalows glow at each other in the sun, where middle-aged children of immigrants are led from post to shrub by purposeful pets.

I'm tired. We've returned to our childhood city, to my parents' home, for a visit of three days. At the parlor window, I watch as a Doberman tows a man in a crumpled raincoat down the gentle incline. A girl with orange hair approaches from the opposite direction, short skirt grazing purple thighs. The man blinks. He jerks his gaze to the vertical run of a retaining wall across the street, and rubs his neck. The Doberman is riveted. As she passes he strains to sniff, trembling, at her hem. Then folds neatly in half against the tug of leash to watch her slow retreat.

Below this window, between the rosebush and the yew, I'd settle

with a book after school. From there I could look boldly into the kitchen of the house next door where a German couple lived with their only son, a sulky blonde god, who hung in my girlish imagination like the air of a lowering storm. There, on a dull summer breeze, the garlicky prelude to our evening meal would meet and be overpowered by the stronger, meatier scents of their cooking.

The noise in the room grows louder. I turn to watch my daughter skid past in her stocking feet. My country kid, wired on sugar, MTV, and the prospect of sidewalk. Across the room my father grins at me. As I walk by he croons, "How ya gonna keep 'em . . . down on the farm . . . ?"

My mother, golden in the rich light of afternoon, fits a glass into the dishwasher rack. We discuss recent family history — the new babies, the death of a friend. As we speak, I'm half-aware of an intermittent stirring behind the door in the corner; almost surprised when it swings open to reveal the round form of my grandmother.

The new signs of her physical decline are unexpected. A body shrinking in time and gravity. Soft features sharpened into caricature. She hangs back, managing a shy, stripped smile, as if her aging were something she had neglected, had gotten way out of hand. I go to her, and we embrace. The same dreamy eyes fill with light. When I speak, she points to an ear, shakes her head. I stroke away the ivory floss cupping her ear and press the lobe.

"Where's your hearing aide?"

She frowns, impatient with the question. "It whistles, wheeeee. It makes me crazy. Come."

She pulls me into her room, shutting the door behind us.

I am always struck by the contrast between the studied decoration of my parents' rooms and her crowded, comfortable mix. The colonial couch. The blonde, fifties bureau. The tall metal cabinets overlaid in plastic. Scattered across the surfaces sit dozens of family photographs, many sharing a single frame. Free-floating heads cropped from snapshots grin lopsided at me. I turn to meet the familiar faces of her saints strung across a wall in giant, framed collage. The same sensitive faces still look imploringly at heaven, or knowingly at me. Delicate hands still frozen in graceful gesture. Old friends. St. Francis. The chaste St. Lucia, guardian of our eyes. The stories of their suffering and transcendence were my bedtime tales. On a bureau, selected icons are illuminated by short candles stuck into garnet cups. A gilded Madonna is strung with pearly beads and tiny silk roses.

I am seven years old. I am with my grandmother in the downstairs chapel of our church. Evening mass is in progress. Kerchiefed old women with narrowed eyes line the pews near the altar; fondle rosary beads beneath the swell of eroded breasts. There are no males here — only the priest and his altar boy, and they are largely ignored. The priest swings incense, chants Latin in clear singsong. The women sing too, intoning Italian prayers, strangely synchronizing in a higher scratchier pitch. I feel in the presence of great mystery; in the midst of some conjuring, secret sisterhood. Here, the Virgin has power. No one notices as I steal down the aisle to take a closer look at a Madonna, the one who was seen by two women to have shed real tears. Although I am already siding with those reliable adults in my life against miracles, from where I stand I'm sure I can see the stain above her hollow cheek.

I sit on the edge of her bed. She lowers herself into the chair opposite.

"Why don't you have another baby?" She eyes me suspiciously.

I'm used to the question, the ritual beginning to our conversations, but I no longer run on about personal choice. The gloomy religiosity of her part of Italy has left her with an instinctive mistrust in the concept of self-determination. She has known duty to family, necessity, and the blind cycling of fate, broken occasionally by responses to Divine solicitation.

She leans closer. "You should make your husband breakfast in the morning."

Earlier, she has quizzed my scrupulously honest daughter, and now knows all the fine points of our domestic arrangements. Her voice falls to a gentler tone, and she takes my hand.

"You got to make a fuss over your husband. They like that. And dress up a little!" Her eyes settle on the piled sweater.

I shift uncomfortably, reach for a bag, and remove a recording of Italian arias and popular songs.

"Pavarotti?" She squints at the jacket. "He shouts." She hands it back. She is being loyal to Caruso, another Neapolitan.

I am eight years old. My parents are out for the evening, and she is my babysitter. It's after midnight, and my brothers and sisters have long since been put to bed. I sit beside her, feeling out the heart of a forbidden hour, respectfully keeping my voice to a whisper. I'm half-listening to a worn account of her life in Italy. She lapses into the round rhythms of a more natural language. Suddenly she rises, moves toward the chunky cabinet of our record player, and drops an album onto the turntable. A soaring Italian melody breaks the quiet. She turns, smiles like a girl. She glides toward me, scoops up my hands, and we cavort unevenly about the room. Green-olive eyes spark at the ceiling as she sings and translates in one breath, "*L'aurora di bianco vestita*. . . The dawn is all dressed in white." I catch her mood, try to sing too. We laugh.

Her hand in mine is warm and doughy. Old as the century, my Nonna. I look past her shoulder to a sepia studio photograph taken in her early thirties. She sits cross-legged at the edge of a padded bench against a ground of hazy woodland; stares coolly at the camera from beneath the sweep of a wide-brimmed hat. A frazzled fox droops from one shoulder. Solid calves emerge from a grid-patterned shift, and are stopped at the ankles by severe, squat-heeled shoes — the only part of her outfit without a trace of whimsy.

The story of her life, as she told it to me, held as much tragedy and romance as the libretto of *La Traviata*. Orphaned as a young girl, she was taken in by a well-to-do, but unfeeling aunt who worked her like one of the servants. As a young woman, she fell helplessly in love with a dark-eyed soldier. When her aunt forbade the marriage, she left for America to join her older brother who promptly married her off to a brother-in-law. She has watched three husbands die, has raised three children alone through Depression poverty. Her face, traced with suffering, seemed out of place in the smug suburban sixties of my adolescence. It was an uncomfortable reminder of the limits to our perfect will, our capacity for personal freedom.

For as long as I can remember, we have shared our dreams. Hers were always majestic and vivid; prophetic warnings from a rich interior network tied to sacred sources. She would sit, sphinxlike, at the breakfast table, a multi-robed oracle-without-an-audience whose nocturnal revelations would be lost on a family caught up in their morning routine. But not on me. Before settling into sleep, I'd petition her gentle Francis to whisper in my ear as well. If he obliged, with a narrative ripe enough to fall into consciousness, I'd run to her with it, trying hard to contain its slippery fragments. And there, amid bits of cold egg and half-eaten toast, she would ceremoniously relay its cryptic message, its implications for my life.

Out of the lower bureau drawer, she removes a small bundle. There is a fuzzy orange blanket, a man's cast-off sweater, a green cap knit with sequins; protection against the unspeakable cold she imagines is Maine. From another drawer she pulls a framed print of a Raphael Madonna, and lays it in the bag with the rest.

"Hang this in your house. Your mother says you don't have one holy picture in your house. And you in the woods." Her voice turns sharply strident. "You used to be so *elegante*, and now you live in the woods like a peasant!" She raises her arm in a gesture of puzzled resignation.

The focus of her eyes on mine is relentless. Always searching. For what? She'd only get lost in the blind alleys of my own holy progression. I want to reassure her, to thank her for the gifts of the seamless faith that was her life — not choice — not something to choose. But the dreams of history are on her side. She fears for my soul.

Her hand grips mine as I turn to leave. On my forehead, she hurriedly traces a cross with the edge of her thumb, then steps back, smiling beneficently.

"It's a lousy world to bring up kids." She winks conspiratorially. "Better to let them stay where they are."

I light the hollow of a candle before the Madonna of our Sorrows, and we leave the darkening room.

Jane Russo
North Whitefield

Studies literature at UMA

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Serial: episode #3

This is the third episode in an on-going series over the last few years.

Summary: Ted Wharton, a 42-year-old high school English teacher, drifts into a wild affair with one of his senior students, Joy Dollinger. After a couple of months the relationship cloy. Ted tries to back out, but Joy is now madly in love with him — or so she claims. When she goes off to college, Ted figures he's free, but soon letters begin to arrive. He ignores them, cuts her off when she telephones, and then, the week before Christmas . . .

High Noon

from *Growing Pains*, a novel

Ted was deep in fourth period English and thinking about what to get June for Christmas when Allen Burk rapped on his door.

In the hall Burk said, "The Superintendent wants you. I'm taking your class."

Ted frowned. "Grimsley wants me? What for?"

"You'll have to ask him that."

"Where is he?"

"In the Principal's office."

Ted informed his kids of the change (scattered chuckles and groans) and started down the hall. It's about the Media Review Committee, he told himself. But *what* about it? Maybe LeMaster had quit as chairman and Grimsley was tapping *him*. He felt a slight twinge of that chest pain again. He hadn't felt any of that in weeks. And facing Mrs. Crux in the outer office his heart flipped upside down.

Mrs. Crux stopped her typing; looked over her glasses. She went to the door behind her, opened it slightly, received a message and forced a smile and said, "They're ready for you now."

Ted's mind said, They? They *who*? With a horrible sinking feeling he walked to LeMaster's door. The knob was cold in his hand. He pulled.

As soon as he entered the room it was instantly clear that life as he'd always known it had come to an end.

LeMaster was behind his desk, tilted back in his swivel chair, his fat legs crossed, his expression more hangdog than ever. On his right sat Grimsley, face grave. Vice-Principal Phil Shuck, looking fretful and scratching his fringe of reddish-brown hair, was sitting on LeMaster's left; and next to him sat Joy — wiping tears from her eyes with a pale blue handkerchief.

Grimsley nodded to the one remaining seat — the seat in the middle, the chair that faced the other chairs — and said, "Mr. Wharton, please sit down."

Ted did, knees rubbery, weak. He clutched the arms of the chair with ice-cold hands. Cloudy with fear and rage he shouted at himself: Stay calm! Play dumb, it's your only chance!

Grimsley placidly listed the accusations: Mr. Wharton had forcibly seduced Joy Dollinger in the audio-visual room. Too frightened to resist his advances, she had let him engage her in numerous acts of sexual perversion both in and out of school, even making her pay for motels. As Grimsley spoke, a deadpan executioner's expression masking his delight, Joy sat demurely, straightbacked, weeping quietly and dabbing at her face.

When Grimsley finished, swollen screaming silence filled the room. Heart blasting, Ted put on a baffled smile. "Joy, why are you saying these things? Did I treat you unfairly in class, or what?" He looked at her with puzzlement and hurt, trying his best to convey to the others the message that she was insane.

She didn't meet his eyes, didn't answer. Instead she reached into her purse and came out with some flimsy papers. "These are the motel receipts," she said, and gave them to the nearest inquisitor, Phil Shuck.

Ted thought: The motel receipts! Jesus Christ, she'd kept the motel receipts — from the very beginning, like a secret agent!

Bald rumped Shuck looked through the tissues, eyebrows raised, and passed them to LeMaster. LeMaster examined them closely, holding them up to the light as if they were counterfeit bills. "Mmm," he intoned. "Well, Joy, I see your name on some of these, but who are these other people? 'Howie Bangs,' who's that?"

"He used an alias," Joy said. "A different one each time."

Grimsley had clearly caught the pun; his ears were crimson. Looking through the papers, he said, "These don't prove anything."

"But the writing is all the same," Joy said in a quivering voice. "—And it matches Mr. Wharton's writing, see?" She passed another paper. Ted recognized it as an English quiz from last year, with a

comment of his scrawled across it in red.

Scanning it quickly, Grimsley said, "It isn't proof." He handed it back to LeMaster, who returned it to Joy.

A clear cool stream of relief rushed into Ted's chest. Round one to Mr. Wharton. He shook his head with a frown as he glanced at Grimsley, LeMaster, Shuck. Poor child, she's lost her mind.

Grimsley ignored him and said, "I think we'd better see the other evidence you spoke about." He clasped his hands and touched his knuckles to his nose.

Joy pressed her lips together in that firm, determined way Ted knew so well; put the motel receipts in her purse again. She hesitated, took a breath, then brought out shiny colored squares of paper wrapped in a rubber band. Removed the rubber band, gave the squares to Shuck.

Shuck stared at the paper on top of the pile, his cheeks and shiny pate suffused with a rich vermillion. He looked as if he had seen the Gorgon's head and had turned to stone.

Ted's mind was so full it was blank. The Polaroids! He flushed with slick cold sweat.

Shuck examined the photographs, taking his time. His blush had faded now. The squeak of LeMaster's swivel chair and the delicate scrape of one photo against another as Shuck moved on. The sweat on Ted's forehead collected above his brow. To take out his handkerchief and mop himself would make him look bad, extremely bad, so he sat like a statue, soaking, and tried to seem calm.

Shuck passed the photos to LeMaster, screwed his mouth up, frowned, looked down at his shoes. Ted thought he detected a smile.

LeMaster, wide-eyed and boyish-looking, plowed his way through the pile. He too went red. He gave the photographs to Grimsley, swallowed heavily and looked at Ted with huge cow eyes as if he were terribly, terribly sorry for him. Skin drenched, Ted looked away.

Grimsley stared at the Polaroids. He rubbed his chin, leaned forward, gave the photo on top to Ted. "Is this you?"

When Ted looked at the picture he swore he was going to die.

It was one of their libidometer super-specials: with Joy on the motel dresser. He was wearing cowboy boots with spurs and a holster with toy six-guns — and nothing else. It was one of the crazy outfits she'd said really turned her on. She herself was naked except for a ten gallon hat and a lasso around her neck. Her left hand was hoisting the lasso, which lifted her breasts. They had called this scenario "High Noon," since they'd both been stoned out of their minds.

"What about this one?" Grimsley said, and passed another photo.

Good god, it was "Delicate Operation." She was dressed as a nurse, and he had a phony cast on his foot. Her skirt was flung high on her back (but her "sex" tattoo, goddamn it, wasn't visible!). Next came "Illegal Procedure," in which she was clad in nothing but shoulder pads and he wore a referee's shirt (stolen out of the gym teacher's office!), and "Girl Scout Cookie," with Joy in non-essential parts of her faded uniform.

Ted's eyes were swimming. Every one of his organs was poisoned and maimed, his skin was a horrible slime. He felt something break in his throat when he tried to speak.

Grimsley said, "May I have them back now, please?" As Ted complied, his arm weighed tons.

"You have two choices," Grimsley said. "You can either resign, effective now — or you can be fired, also effective now."

The first thing Ted did when he left the office was go to the mens-room and vomit.

Christopher Fahy
Thomaston

works with the blind and
embraces a Kaypro's green screen



Photo by Michael Howland

The Drowning

We never knew whether he drowned slowly or quickly. Like most fishermen he never bothered learning to swim. Somehow, each of them found a way to spend every day working at sea. They knew the water beneath them was cold enough to damn any man lost overboard.

I was told later that the day was a fair one, cool, sharp with the coming of autumn. A thin film of high clouds streaked the sky. An onshore breeze was building as the afternoon wore on. The water always looks clearer in the fall, clearer yet darker too; I imagine that it must have been beautiful that afternoon as it cradled our boat's hull between its swells like a face between a woman's breasts.

The knock came. My mother was in the kitchen at the rear of the house. She was working on the last of the season's canning, delicately arranging the jars in the battered old kettle. Banks of steam boiled up toward the ceiling. The knock was crisp, formal, foreign — few neighbors ever walked through that door. Or even through their own front doors. She must have knitted her brows as she checked the jars and the water, then wiped her hands on a dish towel. She used to tell me that knitting her brows helped her to think. As a child I copied her; I was trying to work something out. I still am, after all these years.

She hung the towel on the rack next to the stove, and walked down the long front hall past the landscape paintings she had done while in school. Did she pause before she opened the door? Did she close her eyes? For just a second? And whisper a handful of words as a prayer?

The Coastal Warden who stood there was not from our area; the state believed in simplifying the Wardens' lives by assigning them to territories away from where they grew up. It reduces the complications of family ties and the obligations of friendship. He may not have been from our area. He may have been separated from us by his position. But we all shared the same common link to fishing and boats and storms and death. He was on his routine patrol earlier

in the day when he came across our boat as it rocked sideways in the swells. Its engine was idling, and no one was on board.

We drove all the way up to Jonesport to pick up our new boat from its original owner. My mother drove our car back home and my father and I took the boat south. We followed the coastline to our harbor. It had the high bow and the broad beam and the long, sweeping lines that mark the boats from Washington County. I remember tingling as I felt the power from its engine vibrate up through the floorboards. My father felt that power too. He held the wheel with one strong, hard hand, his eyes sweeping over the water. His other hand clutched a chart. Together we owned the waves with that boat. Thirty-two feet of oak and cedar and knowledge and skill. Once, during the long trip home, our hull slapped down hard into the water sending a wall of spray up over the top of the cabin. My father turned and looked at me and gave me a wink. I shut my eyes. I prayed that one day I would grow to be a man like him. Perched in the sternman's seat I watched him out of the corner of my eye to see if he would turn and wink again. His powerful, broad body dwarfed mine, his silent, brooding way was nothing like the way I behaved. But how I longed to be like him. How I ached to share his strength and his hardness and his unyielding control over what was in his heart.

When the Warden pulled alongside our boat he found it empty. He knew what had happened and what he would find. He began checking my father's traps, and slowly circled the buoy that marked each location on the bottom. Within a quarter of an hour he found my father. My father was floating on his stomach. His legs were tangled in the line that led to his last trap. Whether he had gotten wrapped up in the line as he lowered the trap over the side or whether he had fallen overboard and then got caught in the line as he beat his arms against the water, the Warden couldn't say. It really didn't matter. He pulled my father's body on board. Then he took our boat in tow back to the town wharf. After he

got both boats tied to the dock he left my father covered with a blanket out of view in the cuddy cabin of the patrol boat. He walked straight to our house. He told my mother. Before the word got out among the neighbors.

I knew the Warden: he was a decent, fair, honest man. I imagine his awkwardness, how he fought to appear unemotional and professional as he stood in our front hall. He told my mother that her husband was dead. And then, knowing he should leave, that there was nothing he could do to change what had happened, to help my mother, he turned and walked slowly down our road. Back to our village. His head hung down. Tears formed in his eyes. He was young.

He regained his control before he reached the undertaker. The undertaker's son got the hearse out of the garage and drove him back to the wharf. To pick up my father's body. It wasn't very far to go.

I would have given anything — everything — I would have given my life to have been there, to hold my mother as she stood alone in the hallway after the Warden was gone. A lifetime's worth of training to hold in her feelings was rocked and then shattered by that moment when she opened the front door and saw the Warden with his cap in his hand. She must have been bent over double by the pain of that loss boiling up from her middle. He was the only man she had ever loved. Or would ever love. And to lose him on a clear, sweet Fall afternoon, with the smell of apples rotting on the ground, and woodsmoke and leaves decaying, and the vegetables bubbling in their jars on the stove. It was something she couldn't bear. Standing there all by herself, her arms clinched tightly together over her stomach, her body shook. Some part of her broke.

She blamed me. She never spoke another word after the Warden left. Not a single word for as long as she lived. Not to me, not to anybody. But I know that she blamed me. She blamed me for my father's death. My uncle blamed me, every man and woman in our village blamed me. They all did. Like animals in the wild turning on an albino and killing it because it's different, they all turned on me because I was different.

My uncle called me in Orono and told me about the drowning. I hitch-hiked home from school and tried to help with the arrangements. No one wanted to hear anything I had to say. My mother wouldn't talk with me because she couldn't. Our neighbors, the other fishermen, the people I had grown up with, wouldn't. Because of what I had done. I was the one who was different. I was the one who had gone to college in Orono when I should have stayed at home, working as my father's sternman. How could I tell them that I loathed the thought of spending the rest of my life in that village? Doing nothing more than dumbly plodding through year after year, like an ox dragging a plow through a field? No. What I wanted lay two and a half hours away in Orono. And beyond.

It was my mother's fault. She was the one who had taught me all my life about the importance of books; she had read to me during quiet winter afternoons after school; she had defended me when I announced that I planned to go on to college. It was her fault. She had no right to blame me.

After the funeral, someone had to provide for my mother. So I collected my things in Orono and moved back home. Along with the boat and the traps, I inherited my father's territory. Just as he had from his father before him. It's too bad that I didn't inherit some of his skill and his strength as well — I wasn't very good at lobstering. I managed to scrape by all right, but I just didn't have his feel for where the lobsters would be. I didn't have his touch for it. I kept at it though: I didn't have any choice.

It was strange being back home again after nearly four years away. Nothing in the village had changed except for me, and I'd changed too much. For six months I lived at home with my mother, six months of silence in that too-quiet house. I walked down to the town wharf every morning. Except when it stormed. I took our boat out and worked all day until my hands were numb from cold and I was half-deaf from listening to the sound of the engine's exhaust. The waves lapped against the hull. Every day I bore them not speaking to me. No one ever said a single word more to me than they needed to. Blame dies hard there. Sometimes it doesn't die at all.

Barely half a year after the drowning, my mother swallowed an entire bottle of sleeping pills the doctor gave her. She went to bed and never woke up. I stood by her grave during the service with a kind of grief in me that felt like I'd swallowed fire. The only way I could breathe was to take little shallow gulps of air. All around me, on every side, people stared at me with their eyes hard and narrowed. I knew that her death was my fault as well. I knew that there was no way out. I was twenty-two years old, and for another fifty or sixty years my mother's death, and my father's, would bear down on me like an anvil strapped to my back.

After the funeral I thanked the minister. He nodded back. I drove home alone. I stopped by the liquor store and bought a pint of scotch and some beer. The rest of the afternoon I walked from room to room, slowly draining five cans of beer. I lightly touched things, my father's, my mother's. An hour after dinner I started in on the scotch. By the time it was dark out it was all I could manage to set the alarm clock.

It was still dark the next morning when I climbed out of bed. The house was so quiet that I might have been buried in a grave myself. I got dressed and forced down a cup of coffee and a doughnut. Then I took my suitcase in one hand and my dinner in the other and walked out the front door. I locked it behind me.

At the wharf it was just beginning to get light. That glow that comes over the

ocean before dawn. I walked quickly across the creosoted dock and lowered my suitcase down into our skiff. It felt good to row through the gentle chop. The spring breeze ruffled my hair and my shirt. The sea smells helped to clear my head.

With the skiff tethered behind I took our boat out of the harbor and set a course toward my nearest trap. I was fishing almost two hundred and fifty traps that year. All of them were out. I followed a rhythm set by habit from buoy to buoy, just as I had hundreds of times before. As I reached each marker I fished it out of the water with my gaff, listening to the engine idling and the gulls calling as they circled around the stern. With my rigging knife I cut through the line to the trap. The lines slithered down into the dark water as each left my hand. The buoys I threw back into the sea to bob around in the waves until they washed up on shore somewhere far away.

By midday I had sliced through the last of the lines. I listened to the hollow popping of the exhaust, feeling the vibration of the motor as it picked up speed. I headed for a small cove. Few people laid traps there and nobody lived on shore.

I cut the engine and threw the ignition key into the water. Our boat glided over the calm surface with no more noise than the beating of gull's wings through the air. We kept a metal can of kerosene in the cabin for the one-burner stove. I unscrewed its cap and splashed kerosene over the wooden floor of the aft-deck, on up toward the cabin, and then all over the boards that covered the engine compartment. Bending over the gunwale I dropped my suitcase back into the skiff and climbed in after it. I struck a kitchen match on the side of the skiff and threw it up into our boat. Then more. Finally the kerosene caught. I watched for a moment as the flames traced the path I had made with the fuel.

I dragged the skiff up on shore. Then the flames reached the gas tank. The explosion heaved the boat up in the water and splintered it and shattered it. Burning scraps of wood blew into the air for fifty feet, then fell back down into the sea, leaving thin trails of smoke hanging in the sky. I watched until there was nothing left but smoke and bits of wood floating in a huge circle on the water where our boat had been a minute before. I picked up my suitcase and walked into the woods. I didn't look back even once.

Leslie Gould
Brentwood, N.H.

*is a free-lance writer
who recently moved from Maine*

Ethiopia

*I am dying rib by rib.
Flies plant maggots around my vacant eyes.
The bowl of my belly is empty.
The bowl in my hand is cracked.
The bowl of my pelvis rattles
with too many young teeth.*

*I am dying
rib by rib
by bone
by knuckle.
The rag of my body disintegrates.
The dust is barren.
The dust yields no seeds.
The dust bears dead fruit.*

*I am dust.
I am dying rib by meatless rib.*

Ardeana Hamlin Knowles
Hampden
*teaches creative writing at
Dexter Regional Vocational School*

End of the Ridge Road

Bunny Peasley and the death of the Reverend Andrews is part of why I gave up driving the mail. I would just as soon not answer a whole lot of questions about that business. My mail route was full of those quagmires, where I didn't really want to know about what was going on with the people waiting beside their mailboxes, and yet I did know. They don't tell you about that when you take the oath to uphold the U.S. Government and deliver the mail come hell or high water. Snow, sleet, hail, no problem. It's the everlasting gossip, backbiting, and slander I couldn't stand.

It was quite some feat for me to get that job, considering I'm not from Meddybemps. People down east do tend to be suspicious of outsiders, which I am, being from three counties to the south. Also they don't favor people putting on airs, loosely translated as reading or writing when it's not strictly called for. But my husband Cy is from here, and not considered pretentious. He pays no mind to gossip, just tends his own business, and always advised me to do the same. He's never said anything to me about this "accidental homicide" or whatever they're calling it. I'm not involved and I don't plan to be.

Now that I'm through with the mail, though, I guess I can talk about it a little bit. I never carried tales from one mailbox to another. They'll all say I opened mail or else I never could have known about some of these things, when in fact I saw them going on in front of me. People don't hide themselves as well as they think they do. Really it's the postmaster, Hibb Hallowell, who reads the mail. He gets paid by the hour, not the mile, and he ain't too awful busy in the afternoon. Never mind. I don't want to think about those backbiters out there in the plantations and the unincorporated townships, waiting by their boxes for the only car they sometimes will see in a day.

God it's lonely out there. Not that it's densely populated here in the village, but you do see some human architecture, at least until you cross the railroad tracks and pass the dump. Then you're in the trees alright. I still don't know what keeps people out there, on those little patches of cleared land. When you're in a good mood, or it's spring, it's exhilarating to get out on the rough roads and know you never will meet another car unless it's a pulp truck hauling out. Or hunting season — I have never seen so much game as when I drove out there then. Bears in the dump, bobcat tracks in the new snow, deer and rabbit everywhere, and eagles overhead when the fish are coming up the river. Partridge flew into my radiator grille one morning last fall, and I had the breast meat frying in butter right after I finished my route.

I used to get out to Unincorporated Township 114 about midmorning, and I knew that either Bunny or her mother-in-law Margaret Andrews would be waiting at the mailbox for me. They were at the end of the Ridge Road, nothing else out there except the wooden frame of the Word of God Baptist Calvary Temple that the Rev. Andrews was building, and the road that used to go through to the Pejepsot Paper lands, back fifty years ago, when logging was still good, and the Bangor and Aroostook went by three times a day. Woods road still did go through, I suppose, but everything else was over with. So why were those few families still out there? You had to wonder.

When I got down to the end of the road one of those two women would be waiting. I preferred Mrs. Andrews. She'd meet me, dressed in her print house dress and probably apron, with knit slacks under so as not to arouse carnal thoughts about legs or something. Or it could have been on account of blackflies, which were fierce out there in early summer. Anyway, I could ask how the Temple was coming, how Rev. Andrews' homemade saw rig was working. She would always answer in tones suitable for the tea table: "Oh yes, Rev. Andrews is filled with the zeal of the Lord's work. It's all coming along splendidly. We're so grateful." I could live with that, although I'm not big on Bible-beater pieties.

But Bunny was something else. I could tell it was her waiting way down that straight empty road. I'd see that saggy scarecrow figure, with the shapeless clothes, and those three dirtball kids hanging off her and whining. She'd stand there, stark still, and look so goddamn desperate. By the time I got there my teeth would be gritted. I'd manage something, maybe:

"Here's a good pile of letters for you, Mrs. Matthews." She'd married the Rev. Andrews' adopted son Bill Matthews, that was always gone on the pulpcutting crew.

"They aren't for me. They're for him." The Rev. Andrews, she meant. He was definitely head hog in that pen.

"Well, here's something for you, from way up the coast, might be Knox or Waldo County, I'm guessing." I knew where she was from. Same town I was.

"I don't belong there anymore. Here is all there is." Voice so flat, so dead to hope. Her eyes would suck on to me, gray-brown, the color of a horse leech. I couldn't get that car in reverse fast enough — almost ran over a kid or two once. Didn't I hate the sight of her, dull mangy hair hanging, arms dead slack.

I knew who she was, Mrs. Matthews. At first I blocked it out. But last May I was talking to my sister Barb on the phone. She was honking away about her tenth high school reunion coming up in June and who was going to appear, and it hit me:

"Barb, was Bunny Peasley, Bob's older girl, in your class?"

"Bunny? Yes, Miss Measly Peasley. She won't show. I don't know what she did

with herself."

"Well, I think she might be down here. Converted to Christianity or something." Barb is something of a born-again Bible bore herself. I try not to get her going when I'm paying the phone bill.

"Oh yes, now that you mention it, I had heard something. I don't think she's really found the Lord, though. I heard she was awfully poor. Her father won't have anything to do with her." According to Barb's Christians you can tell when Jesus loves you. He makes sure you have a nice home with carpeting and a good car. Barb and I have been over that ground before, so I changed the subject. Besides which, I found I didn't really want to hear about Measly Peasley even though it was me that asked.

Bunny Peasley, that's who Mrs. Bill Matthews was. Once I had said it, even to myself, it was worse. I started to see Bunny other places, like she was lying in wait for me, when in fact she never left the home place. Something about her was trying to get hold of me. I decided to back it off. I began steeling myself, over the next few days, to say something to let on I knew who she was.

Bringing her a letter with the name "Bunny" in the address, I asked, not looking at her, "Did you get the name Bunny because you got so many kids?" That wasn't real polite, but she didn't seem to notice.

"My father called me that. Because I looked like a scared little rabbit. Before the dogs got it."

I sat there in the car, the motor running, frozen with my hand stuck in the mail case where I'd been rummaging for the next box's delivery. I guess Bunny thought I was waiting for stamp money or something, because she leaned down to the window like she was going to say some more, but I dropped the car in gear with a thunk and drove off in a fog of spring mud dust. I never looked back. All I could think of was Bob Peasley and his reaching and grabbing, like a dog onto a cornered rabbit. Only it wasn't Bunny he was after, it was me, fifteen years old, standing at the file cabinet in my dad's car sale office. Bob would wait till they were doing body work, sanding, something real noisy in the shop, and he'd come waltzing in, chuckling, the gladhanding car salesman, Mr. Hot Shot who could move the old boats off the lot. And he'd sidle up behind me, checking that nobody was coming, and breathe in my ear, whispering dirty sick words, and stick his hand down the front of my skirt. And I'd freeze, just like that rabbit. I gag when I think about it. It felt like someone was vomiting down my neck. I couldn't scream. Dad would have blamed it all on me, didn't want to lose his hot salesman. Everything was always my fault anyway, on principle.

Once those scenes had broken through the walls in my mind, I couldn't stop the gut-tearing. I was a mess inside. I had married and come down east to get away from the faces, the garage, the noises, everything that reminded me of it, and now it was waiting for me at the mailbox every morning. I knew Bunny would be there when I drove out the next day, and she was.

I looked right at her. "Bunny, you ever get back to Stickney Corners?" That's all I said. I felt like I was heaving a brick through a big plate-glass window.

She flinched, then looked away past me, and started in talking low, hard, flat, fast. "No, I never think about it. I have a life here now. I can fix things. You didn't know that, did you. I'm the one had that small engine repair course by mail, not Bill. He don't have time. I can fix anything. Have it done by sundown."

I caught my breath, then jumped right in. "Can you now? I've got some stuff that wants tinkering, wants it in the worst way. My lawnmower. Don't I hate frigging with a lawnmower! Any my boy's Schwinn, he can't get any use out of it, chain keeps slipping off. Could you fix that? My husband isn't inclined that way at all." I was talking so fast because she was, because I just wanted to race away from Stickney Corners and sonofabitch Bob Peasley. And I do hate frigging with greasy bits of metal.

"I can do all that. I have a gift. You bring it out, I'll get it done for you." She stood up straighter, and she was looking at me now, not seeing through me, but like she really wanted to lay hands on tools that very minute. For a moment, I almost liked her, and I smiled at her, said I'd bring the mower out. The here and now, I can deal with. That's how she was too, maybe. I believed she could fix things.

When I got home, still chewing over notions about Bunny and the Ridge Road, I told Cy I was going out to the Andrews place to call. He rared up.

"I could have fixed that lawnmower before now, if I'd known you were going to go messing around out there."

"Well, I go out there every day. I know you can fix the mower, and Paul's bike, only you never actually get to it. I am some tired of the hand mower, I want to tell you. Like mowing hay with a butter churn, it is. Bush scythe'd be easier. Anyway, I'm not messing around with Andrews, the old blowhard, if that's what you're worrying over."

"Go out there if you're set on it, but don't ask any fool questions. That's hell-fire Baptist territory. Those hardshells get more enjoyment out of damning the rest of us for all eternity than most folks would out of a clambake." He wouldn't say how he knew anything about those people. He has worked with Bill Matthews on the skidder, though, as I think of it.

Anyway, I was back there later on in the week with the lawnmower. I dropped



Photo: Bruce Armstrong

it off when I delivered the mail, and Bunny said to come for it in the evening, which means late afternoon for people that eat supper at five and go to bed at eight. I could tell they were on that oldtime schedule out there. They had a dairy cow, hens, pigs, the works, just as everyone did thirty years ago down that way. And they grew a good deal of what they ate, which means beans Wednesday and Saturday, boiled dinner in between maybe, sardines and cornmeal mush for Sunday night supper. No, I don't really know what they ate for dinner, just from walking up by the house to the woodshed where Bunny kept her tools. But standing there watching her yank on that lawnmower to make sure it would really start, I could smell the house. I knew there was an oil-burning range in the kitchen so Mrs. Andrews didn't have to roast herself cooking with wood all summer. I could smell the lamp kerosene — I guess it gets in the wallpaper or the plaster or something. They had electricity now, of course, but only in the house. And I could look into Bunny's toolshed and see the horse harness. It was good and dusty, but not mildewed yet.

I tried my hand at starting the lawnmower, and it did seem to catch. I could see where she'd taken it all apart, cleaned the air filter and whatall.

"This must of taken you all day. How much do you figure on a job like this?" I had never asked her how she charged.

"I guess five dollars. I'd done it all before noon if it wasn't for them kids." She shot a mean arrow look in the direction of the kitchen porch. The kids were being held at bay by Mrs. Andrews, that firm figure in an apron, just visible through the screening. Definitely not a spare-the-rod type. She was holding a switch in one hand, I could see.

Bunny was trundling the mower over the mole-hill lawn to my car when I heard a tractor putt-putting its way up the old woods road. I peered into the dusk, and Bunny said, heaving the mower into the trunk, "That's him, coming in with more sappy green spruce."

"Your husband, you mean? I thought he was on with St. Regis, driving a skidder."

"He is. Comes home weekends. That's Rev. Andrews. He wants more boards for the Temple. You seen his saw rig? He's some proud of that. Old Model A engine, with a rain barrel for a radiator. Saws alright with it." I noticed her voice lacked absolute reverence. I handed her a five dollar bill, and she smoothed it and put a crease in it longways. I watched her thinking, "Who the hell is it that does that?" I'd seen it before. Someone who loved the feel of a bill, loved money and its power, liked to deal it out of a wallet like a winning ace out of a hand of cards. Bunny's father did that.

Anyway, I was about to get in the car, was just telling Bunny about Paul's bike sprocket that won't hold onto the chain, when my words turned into shouting over a fierce racket boiling up behind me. I turned and watched as Rev. Andrews hove into sight, aboard what looked to be a 1950's vintage Farmall Cub tractor, or maybe one of those 9N Fords with the wide front end, but with no muffler on it at all. He arrived alongside of me and switched it off, thank God. The silence dropped over us like a green wool blanket. It was suddenly a very quiet evening.

"How do, ladies. Fine night for a visit." He looked like the cock of the walk perched up there, affably inclining his head. He smiled in my direction, and he

reminded me of pictures of Harry S. Truman, so pink and healthy, like a blue ribbon piggie. He was a compact, energetic man, with bright blue eyes that looked right through you without seeing a thing. I could see him building his temple in the wilderness. He wouldn't mind if none of us sinners went in it. Hell, he wouldn't even notice.

He didn't seem to notice Bunny much, either; he mostly made talk with me. I told him I'd heard about his saw rig, and he got wound right up on that. How he'd salvaged the engine out of the first car he ever owned, and set it up on blocks in this shed, having no particular plans for it, and then the vision of the Temple had come to him.

"I was a carpenter before I ever had a call to the ministry, just as Our Lord was, and of course I was proud of my skill, I could build a whole house if I had long enough to do it. When I came out here it was on the bidding of the elders of a church that had gone by the boards, so to speak, in 1953 when there was no more lumber being sawed or shipped. They could deed me this property but they couldn't give me a stipend. So I turned to and made this place yield a living. And it was six years ago I had a vision of the Temple and how I would raise it up out here where all else has failed and the flock is scattered."

I could see the frame for the Temple pretty well from where we were standing. It occurred to me all of a sudden that when the old folks did this they generally had a barn-raising type of affair, where everybody pitched in and helped. From what I could tell, Rev. Andrews was doing the whole job himself, from scratch. I was getting curious in spite of my good sense.

"Bill and Bunny here help you out some?" I said this in a fairly tentative tone, not to imply I thought anything one way or the other.

He rared right up. "No, this is the Lord's work I've been called to. It's my own vision, granted to me, a mission I have been given. How long it takes me doesn't matter at all. Scripture tells us how long the people of Israel were in building the Great Temple in Jerusalem. No, this is a holy work sanctified to me."

Bunny didn't look like she wanted to be on this earth at the moment. I could see how the world would get a little small with the Rev. Andrews smack dab in the middle of it all the time. I bobbed and nodded politely at him, reminded her that I was going to bring Paul's bike out at the end of the week, and hopped into the car pretty briskly. As I drove out the road, I could see in my mirror the Rev. Andrews on his tractor heading up the driveway to the house. He passed in front of Bunny like a general reviewing the troops. She was standing there, that dead still way she had, like she was hung from a tree.

Next three days I was out there with the mail I found Mrs. Andrews waiting for me. "Tell Bunny the lawnmower works good, mows like crazy, would you, Mrs. Andrews?"

"Oh, yes, she'll be gratified to hear that." But I wasn't exactly in a tearing hurry to get involved with those people. I had been hearing things, you know how you do, like if you're reshingling your house you suddenly take notice of all the poor shingling jobs on the houses around you. Well, don't believe I asked anybody what they knew about the Andrews out on the Ridge Road. But people would volunteer things, standing at the mailbox.

Ellen Prescott, eight boxes up from where Township 114 started: "Well, you might say it was neighborly of me to take Clara's mail up to her every day, where

she's crippled with arthritis. Or you might say I'm a busybody. I don't care. I never made any bones about visiting, not like some. You know those people out there on what we used to call the Starks place, he's supposed to be a preacher but he never will call on anybody isn't that particular breed of foot-washing Baptist or whatever they are out there. That man is hard. Won't allow anyone much on the place, nor off it, from what I see."

Archy McKinnon, at his box on the Baileyville road: "For a while I made hay on shares with old man Andrews, but I got shut of it pretty quick. He had to be the boss of everything. You know, it's like anything else — there's what you know for a fact about making hay, and there's what the other fellow knows for a fact about making hay, and halfway in the middle there's enough hay for both of you. Not with him. There's the gospel truth about hay, and all the rest is just chaff, I guess. I won't deal with him, not after he dressed me down in front of my whole family. Ran me up one side and down the other. He ought to get an iron cross up on top of that church he's building. Lightning just might strike him right off there someday."

Quite a few people had old bones to pick with Rev. Andrews. No one really seemed to know much about him, though, as to where he'd come from before, or why Bill and Bunny were there. That really did begin to get to me. Much as I wanted to leave sleeping dogs lie, I found myself harping on Bunny and Bill and the Andrews, wearing on my husband Cy's ears. This aggravated him no end.

"Bill Matthews is a good worker, that's all. He just wants to be left alone to do his job. You tell him what to do, he does it. I don't see what you want to be poking around other people's lives for. You never used to."

"I'm not. I just wondered if you knew anything about him, where he came from or anything."

"He ain't a talker. I don't think anyone knows who he is. He just minds his own business, like I wish you would."

"How come you don't ever have him to work with you?"

"No reason, just those Bible people, you can't tell when they'll have a fit about something. About swearing, or beer, or maybe you have to go into the woods on Sunday to get your equipment out if it's stuck. People have to get along on a crew. Can't have someone blowing up about nothing."

"Matthews do that?"

"I never saw it. Doug said . . . He's just not an easy person. I don't know — why the hell can't you leave those people alone out there to pick on each other? You want Rev. Andrews to show up here with the book, read out where it says we're all damned to eternal hellfire? I don't."

I let it go there. People were a little bit scared of Rev. Andrews, it looked like. I still wondered what Bunny was doing out there. Whatever she left behind in Stickney Corners must have been pretty awful, to make where she was now look like the frying pan instead of the fire. I didn't think she was getting ready to jump, though. Whatever was holding her had her good. When I drove back out there, I found her standing in the yard, holding a rake. She looked weighed down, like someone born in leg irons.

It was funny, but when I got there I stopped the car and kind of set there a minute. I didn't want to get out. I had the car all around me like a fort, and me inside safe. I had a lot in that car, I had worked a long time to buy it, and I had it arranged just so to make doing the mail easier. Here under the dash was space for the mail case I was working from, and I had a thing with magnets I got from a catalogue to hold my coffee on cold mornings. I kept my U.S. Mail sign inside except when I had mail in the car. And I had California mirrors on both sides so I could pull out while I was still leaned way over to the passenger's window. So far I hadn't been run into though I'd shovelled myself out of a number of snow ditches. I didn't like having to get out of the car to deliver to people's boxes. You aren't supposed to have to, but you do in the winter. This wasn't winter, and I wasn't stuck, but I sure as hell didn't want to get out of that car.

I wondered if the paralysis that seemed to have got Bunny was catching. I got out here, and all my normal ideas of who I am and what I do deserted me. I felt like some bulgy-eyed rabbit staring up at the house, staring at nothing. I had come out there with a bicycle. I wanted to leave it and be gone. But I didn't do anything.

After a bit, Bunny moved, and then I moved. She started down and I started out of the car. I felt like a shadow, quite light and pretty agile, which isn't usual. I slipped right out of the car, came across the lawn to meet her. It was so lonely out there, no traffic, no voices. Just intermittent, the sound of that saw rig out back. Scream for a board, run still, scream for a board.

"You want to look at this bike, Bunny?" That was someone else talking inside my head. There was quite a lot of space in there somehow.

I didn't hear her say anything, but her mouth was moving. The saw screaming cut out her words. I thought, I'd go crazy, hearing that all day, quiet a minute, then scream, then quiet for some while longer, you can't guess how long, then shriek again, a short one, then a long bearing scream. "Does he saw a lot?" I had to ask.

She nodded, dumb as a beast, then started down to get the bike. I stood still, listening to the saw, sweeping my eyes over the yard and building trying to think what all this reminded me of. I couldn't get it. But I knew the place. Something was there, hanging in the air, that I knew. Wasn't sawdust, wasn't kerosene.

The saw rig shut down with a backfire and a couple of pops, and Rev. Andrews

appeared. He had a bouncing, confident way of moving, even though he had to be getting on in his years. When you were in his presence, he had you, he commanded your attention. He addressed me across Bunny, who was crouched over the bike removing the rear wheel with deft twists of a crescent wrench. It was like she wasn't there to him, but I never lost sight of her hands, moving quick and definite.

"How do, ma'am. I see you've favored us with another call." He bobbed in satisfaction.

"I'm out here every day, Rev. Andrews."

"Are you now? Observing the progress of the Temple, I expect. Well, with a bit less rain we'll have a deal more logs in to fit out for the sheathing."

"Actually, I deliver the mail. It's my job. I was bringing a bike out for Bunny here to fix, like she did my lawnmower. She's an awful able worker. I expect you know that."

"No, I take care of all that here. Woman is a helpmeet to man, but she was never intended to govern. A rib doesn't direct a head, it's part of the structure of the body, like these boards are to the frame of the Temple." He gestured widely, encompassing Bunny, the house, the woodpile. I snorted. Bunny's hands moved faster, more emphatically; she whipped the chain off the sprocket.

Andrew's nostrils flared. He detected some challenge in the air, and I could see him lower his horns to charge. "You might not be as familiar as I am with the word of the Lord on the subject of the proper relationship of man and woman, and the duties of the head, which is the husband, to the body, which is the wife and family. Woman is a vessel, needing to be filled, and man has been appointed to govern and control her. Within herself she is empty and prone to error. Man has the authority and responsibility to . . ."

He was going on, getting good and worked up, but I stopped hearing him. Wasn't just that I'd heard it all before from my sister's husband Francis, braying about women subjecting themselves. I can shut that out, and I do, and I guess I thought every woman did. Except that Bunny wasn't. She was muttering, spitting words at the ground through the bike spokes. I stared at her. Her hands were moving just as quick: tap, wrestle, reach for a tool, yank, tap, fiddle. But her mouth was moving faster, twisting sideways, lips chopping words I couldn't hear. I began to lean forward, aware that Rev. Andrews was talking louder to drown out the other voices welling up from the ground.

I felt myself losing my balance, and pulled back. I looked straight at Rev. Andrews, who was waxing pink, even red. I thought, "These people are crazy. I'm right in the middle of it." Fear possessed me. I didn't want to be here. I wanted to be in my car, safe, sliding away. And my feet were gummed to the ground. You'd have thought there was a trough of sucking mud there, I was that stuck.

Andrews paused for breath. On the inhale, I could see him getting ready to issue another trumpet blast, but there was a scream from the house cut through it. He lost his train of thought, and said, "Just the children. In need of discipline." That was plenty enough for me. I gathered my jacket about me — everything seemed to be hanging off me, slack — and said in the direction of Bunny on the ground,

"I'll be on my way now, I see you got business. I'll call back for the bike by-and-by," and prepared to flee, across Bunny's muttering form. But Andrews blocked my path. He spoke straight in my face, angry, "She's got no business. She has no right to take on work, to make promises. I am the steward here, I oversee, and I decide. She obeys me." This last was barked at me, past me, he was looking right through me to some judge on the other side. I froze.

Bunny's voice was hoarse and loud now, and I heard the words. She was raving, swearing at the ground, but every word felt like it was running down my neck, across my breast, soaking me. Every word was out of Bob Peasley's hissing mouth, into my ear. I was freezing, shivering, sickening, hot. I heard a door open and then slam. I jumped and I ran, a shadow racing across the lawn. I never touched the ground.

I'm no fairy runner. I got to the car so hurting out of breath I thought my throat would seal up. I flung myself in there, clutched the driver's wheel like a wood life ring somebody threw, and kicked off. I had that car going, I had it in gear, and then it stalled dead. I had raced it through the gears and popped the clutch and there it sat. I looked up at the house, my breath still. I swear I thought they were coming after me. No such thing. I saw, like it was a silhouette burning in the fire, Rev. Andrews pushing Bunny, stumbling and sick-looking, toward the saw mill shed. I screamed at her back, from way down the hill. I don't know if she could have heard me, "They're going to burn in hell, you know that, Bunny?"

She gave no sign, he didn't look back. It all got so deadly still again. They were gone, as I reached for the key. I held my breath. The second I touched that key, turned it over, I heard the saw start up again. I drove off without another look, that saw back there, screaming like a stuck pig.

When I heard next morning that the Rev. Andrews had fallen into his saw rig and been fitted up in dimension pieces, I just looked suitably aghast. I was there at the post office, casing the mail, and Hibb the postmaster hustled in to tell me all about it. I didn't let on I'd been out there. I took my time getting out to Township 114, and I had plenty of opportunity to hear the story retold. They were all out by their mailboxes, waiting to tell me what really happened. Everybody knew someone who had it in for Andrews. No one seemed to think he fell. Nobody

mentioned Bunny. I listened, I looked horrified, but I'm from away. No one thinks I know anything.

When I got out there, I had a deal of a time finding a place to park. That farm was a crawling zoo. The tank truck from the fire department was out there to hose down the mill. Must have been a mess in there. Mrs. Andrews was walking about, arms stiff, gibbering to anyone: she had to go, the place was only his for lifetime, she had no right, she was alone, lost. People were helping her pack, or maybe just packing for her. The kids were lurking there, but I saw no sign of Bunny. I waited.

Sure enough, after I'd stood and kept quiet a bit, someone volunteered that she'd "gone back to her people, in Kentucky or Tennessee or something like that." I knew the Peasleys didn't have any people, they were all right there in Stickney Corners, but I said nothing. I saw her toolbox was gone out of the shed. I picked up Paul's bike, which was all together again, and wheeled it along by the side of the house on my way to the car. My head happened to be about level with the open kitchen window so I looked in. It was full of busybody neighbors stripping everything down and talking.

"The state's going to take those children, don't you imagine? Look at these towels, Charlene."

"I'd warrant they would. Harold says that boy that was supposed to be his son never was adopted, and they think he did it. There was bad blood there. You could tell it."

"I always knew. Old man was evil. Smiled like a wolf. This casserole is Emma Lewis's."

"He had to own everybody. I never let him near me nor any of mine." I just kept cruising wheeling that bike.

I gave up the mail route a while after that. I told Cy I was just tired of the routine, and the gossip, and if this was the best job I could get maybe we ought to move farther west, up the coast, where something was going on. He said he'd think about it, and he is, and probably something will come of it. I've lived in one small town or another all my life, and you do get where you'd just as soon not see the same faces every day.

Catharine S. Baker
Spruce Head
is a free-lance writer

Joe Banana

*I've seen skin bulge on both arms and cheeks grind:
he could mow down a truck just by looking. Joe Banana,
they call him, but he looks like a grenade. He cups books
lightly in one hand, holding them on his hip: Tasha,
the exchange from England, stands at his elbow nodding,
hair ruffled by his breathing. No teacher asks Banana to move on.
They skirt him in the hallway and bow: they don't even whistle
when Banana glares at them. He has no time for their nose-picking.
Tasha stares at Banana's face held tight. He draws in her eyes
and lights them. Passing on the left, I dip my head, too:*

*I can't let Joe see me and remember on some Saturday night
when he's drunk and cruising with his friends. I can hear him
stop me on a sidewalk, grab my jacket, and squeeze the neck:
the sharp wind of his voice asks a name. Words jam in my throat
and I squeak. My feet wouldn't touch him: he'd lift and hold me
to the clouds*

*shaking. Slamming me to the pavement, he'd pretend to stomp my head,
one foot raised like a stamp press. The cement air chills my cheeks:
as I wait at the door, I look back and study Banana's body,
wrapped in a red windbreaker, pulsing like blood.*

*It's his soul that freezes me, the glassy blue pupils that pierce
in the nerves:*

*I could stand here an hour and shudder. I could never look in his face
shimmering like a church wind. I push the exit open and think
of Banana's fists that lift a hundred pounds each.
Banana is a god the students know and walk around after class.
I never leave school without whispering his name.*

Nick Thorndike
Cambridge, MA
*is a Bowdoin graduate
studying Theology*



mentioned Bunny. I listened, I looked horrified, but I'm from away. No one thinks I know anything.

When I got out there, I had a deal of a time finding a place to park. That farm was a crawling zoo. The tank truck from the fire department was out there to hose down the mill. Must have been a mess in there. Mrs. Andrews was walking about, arms stiff, gibbering to anyone: she had to go, the place was only his for lifetime, she had no right, she was alone, lost. People were helping her pack, or maybe just packing for her. The kids were lurking there, but I saw no sign of Bunny. I waited.

Sure enough, after I'd stood and kept quiet a bit, someone volunteered that she'd "gone back to her people, in Kentucky or Tennessee or something like that." I knew the Peasleys didn't have any people, they were all right there in Stickney Corners, but I said nothing. I saw her toolbox was gone out of the shed. I picked up Paul's bike, which was all together again, and wheeled it along by the side of the house on my way to the car. My head happened to be about level with the open kitchen window so I looked in. It was full of busybody neighbors stripping everything down and talking.

"The state's going to take those children, don't you imagine? Look at these towels, Charlene."

"I'd warrant they would. Harold says that boy that was supposed to be his son never was adopted, and they think he did it. There was bad blood there. You could tell it."

"I always knew. Old man was evil. Smiled like a wolf. This casserole is Emma Lewis's."

"He had to own everybody. I never let him near me nor any of mine." I just kept cruising wheeling that bike.

I gave up the mail route a while after that. I told Cy I was just tired of the routine, and the gossip, and if this was the best job I could get maybe we ought to move farther west, up the coast, where something was going on. He said he'd think about it, and he is, and probably something will come of it. I've lived in one small town or another all my life, and you do get where you'd just as soon not see the same faces every day.

Catharine S. Baker
Spruce Head
is a free-lance writer

Joe Banana

*I've seen skin bulge on both arms and cheeks grind:
he could mow down a truck just by looking. Joe Banana,
they call him, but he looks like a grenade. He cups books
lightly in one hand, holding them on his hip: Tasha,
the exchange from England, stands at his elbow nodding,
hair ruffled by his breathing. No teacher asks Banana to move on.
They skirt him in the hallway and bow: they don't even whistle
when Banana glares at them. He has no time for their nose-picking.
Tasha stares at Banana's face held tight. He draws in her eyes
and lights them. Passing on the left, I dip my head, too:*

*I can't let Joe see me and remember on some Saturday night
when he's drunk and cruising with his friends. I can hear him
stop me on a sidewalk, grab my jacket, and squeeze the neck:
the sharp wind of his voice asks a name. Words jam in my throat
and I squeak. My feet wouldn't touch him: he'd lift and hold me
to the clouds*

*shaking. Slamming me to the pavement, he'd pretend to stomp my head,
one foot raised like a stamp press. The cement air chills my cheeks:
as I wait at the door, I look back and study Banana's body,
wrapped in a red windbreaker, pulsing like blood.*

*It's his soul that freezes me, the glassy blue pupils that pierce
in the nerves:*

*I could stand here an hour and shudder. I could never look in his face
shimmering like a church wind. I push the exit open and think
of Banana's fists that lift a hundred pounds each.
Banana is a god the students know and walk around after class.
I never leave school without whispering his name.*

Nick Thorndike
Cambridge, MA
*is a Bowdoin graduate
studying Theology*



In The Back

The woman laughed and he looked up. She had big breasts that hung airily in her cotton dress. Her hair was curly and it ringed a bright kerchief tied to the side behind the right ear.

"Oui?" Steadying his voice, he had spoken to her from a place in him which he had not spoken from in a long time. He noticed his arm, tawny, the veins in the forearms bulging, pulsating near the surface. He felt the blood throb, was sure that, beneath the bronze, a telling red had appeared. He felt like a boy.

"De la morue?"

"Yes we have cod. Good cod. The best. For you, I have the best."

Her eyes jumped from the rack of cod to the man sorting halibut in seaweed at her feet. He got up. His sleeveless undershirt was light. She could see the outlines of his chest.

"Combien?"

"Oh, a couple of pounds."

Where had such a woman come from? He was used to the Canadian wives, running in, harried, all distracted from the lateness of the hour, desperately wanting to get supper underway.

But, she was calm and deliberate. Her face was a farm face, a strong face, not a weak city face. A strong woman, he thought, a woman with strong arms and thighs.

And as he walked by, his bare arm touched against her breast, rubbed against the nipple and he felt a shot go through him, the energy of the young man he had been. What was he doing in this fish market, this place that reeked of fish?

"Is it working in a fish market that gets you dark?" she asked. "Vous êtes noir!" And her finger gently, briefly, fondled his upper arm, grown full from pulling nets.

He looked at his arm. It was dark and round. It was a strong arm. He would have grabbed her and carried her away . . .

They were speaking now, tremolo in voices, as he had not spoken in a long time, in voices he and Aurelie had discovered one summer, in the blueberry fields north of St-Pascal, at home, in Quebec. One summer, one woman.

And now, what was he doing? He was growing old in Little Canada. There had been many winters and still he was a fish monger every day from morning to night. From morning to night, tired, exhausted. The children in the room next to theirs. The baby with them. Aurelie, tired, all taken up by the children. He, tired, all taken up by work. When would he be young again?

"And what other kind of fish do you have?" she asked. "Something perhaps in the back?"

His heart beat hard so that he was afraid it would burst out of his chest. He looked at her.

She raised her eyebrows.

He closed the door. "In the back. I have something for you in the back of the store."

Denis Ledoux

Lisbon Falls

is a market gardener and writer

*You think your anger's over
and your anger's just begun.
It takes you as a dive takes the diver,
falling like a stone.*

Rick Doyle

Bangor

works in a shoe factory

The Curious Observer

The rain would begin at any moment, of course. Avery pencilled a notation into his pocket spiral that the apple-bob-for-God should have been held after the Citizens for Morality picnic, not before. The children probably wouldn't have minded if they got wet, he thought, and anyway the children be damned.

He looked up at the roughly-stitched black and yellow banners, here taut, there billowing, that circled the grounds. Women are not entirely worthless, he was thinking, and then he wondered whether this idea made him a feminist of sorts. To be sure, the ladies of the church had outdone themselves:

**WELCOME TO SINLESS CITY, U.S.A.
(AND WE'RE PROUD OF IT, BY GOLLY!)
A DECENT COMMUNITY IS AN ALIENABLE RIGHT!
DO YOU QUESTION THE ORDINANCE?
ARE YOU A WH★ ★E? A PI★P? A QU★ ★R?
BEHOLD! THE CITIZENS FOR MORALITY
ARE ACTUALLY THE S★XIEST PEOPLE ON EARTH!
WAKE UP TO CHRIST OR LEAVE!
WAKE UP TO CHRIST OR DIE!**

And so on. The words were his, and lumped together they were to him like some found poem, for he had intimations of being a poet, but the stitching, the publication, was through the graces of the ladies.

He approached the makeshift wooden podium; well over a hundred good people sat down suddenly, for no particular reason, besides the beauty of union, because next they were asked to rise as one for the opening prayer.

"Heavenly Father, we ask Thee to widen our hearts and minds to truth. You are the Author of life, gifting Man with intelligence and Woman with purity. Allow us to use that intelligence to protect that purity. Guide us with Thy Grace we beseech Thee through Christ Jesus, our Lord and Thy Son amen."

Rushing things a bit, because of the threatening weather, he then launched into yet one more reading of the obscenity ordinance while the members of his congregation were still trying to regain the texture and balance of their folding chairs.

"Section one. Material. 'Material' means anything tangible that is capable of being used to arouse interest, whether through the medium of sight, sound, reading, the senses as a whole or in any other manner.

"Section two. Sexually Explicit Material. For the purposes of this ordinance, 'sexually explicit material' means any picture, photograph, combination of words, publication, drawing, sculpture, film, or other visual representation or image or . . ."

It took twenty minutes to read the obscenity ordinance, and because Avery was neither experienced banquet speaker nor student of the language, his reading was adulterated with public hair, puritan interest, genial areas and perversion. It didn't seem to bother the assembly that annual intercourse would not be tolerated.

What screwed everything was the weather. Avery had been collecting pornography for months and months, and at his request the church matrons had set up a buffet of flesh on ten card tables at the rear of the audience while he spoke.

"This stuff is gross," he shouted, as his flock skeltered away in the driving rain. "And I mean gross. So gross I can't tell you. But look for yourselves. Please! This rot is corrupting our children. It will turn your stomachs. Please!"

To no avail. Even the church ladies, whose stiff blonde hair became trenched by the downpour like sandcastles invaded by the tide, gradually abandoned their posts. With both arms Avery grabbed two punk youths with ultramarine mohawks and dragged them over to man his porno tables, but their strange blitherings to the passing crowd led him to believe he should have used them as examples rather than disciples. He ended up doing it himself, appealing, waving pinkly, hollering like an anarchist with eyes burning in the rain.

★ ★ ★

Late the next evening, Avery was watching "The Tonight Show." He was watching from the outside; his date, once-removed by a pane of glass, was the divorced Mrs. Milner. She's a bad woman, thought Avery, but she's not being bad tonight. At least three times within the past month she'd had a male visitor when the lights went out. Avery was checking on her, and he was tired. Excuses to wife Martha pecked at his brain precisely as wife Martha pecked at his brain when he had no excuses.

He always felt like some smalltown thief, slipping through the woods in his sneakers and bowling jacket. He wished he didn't have to be so covert, but there was no way around it, people wouldn't understand. He was chairman of the Citizens for Morality, not its director of community standards. The latter wasn't doing his homework, and Avery could hardly spell it out for him. He thought this: It's

terribly important to know what people are doing and exactly how they're conducting their lives in order to govern them properly. Often he felt like a priest in sanctuary, the difference being that the sinners did not come to him — he visited them. Their bedrooms were their confessionals. When he witnessed something perverse, as he often did, he squirreled it away for the time when the obscenity ordinance would cover sexual behavior in the flesh.

At show's end she pushed the knob and disrobed. As she dropped her orange harem trousers, Avery noticed that she hadn't changed her floral-patterned panties from the night previous, and he wondered about her upbringing. Nose to window, he tucked her in, then departed.

★ ★ ★

"What was that in the mail?" asked Martha.

Avery had been waiting, almost bursting with modesty all morning.

"Oh, they just want to publish me," he said coolly.

"Avery! Who?"

"The Born Again Press. That's who."

"Avery!"

He got all excited.

"Listen Martha: I'm a poet. A major poet!"

"I thought that took time — how did this come about?"

"Well, our parent group — The Citizens for Morality through Legislation — is trying to encourage good writing, so they sent me some information about a book they put out every year: *New Christian Poets Of America*. I wrote some poems the other night and—"

"And?"

"And they accepted one of them!"

"Avery!"

"You're proud of me, aren't you?"

"I'm so proud. Will you recite the poem?"

"If I can find it."

He had it in his shirt pocket.

"This will cost some," he said, unfolding. "It's fifty dollars a page. That's a hundred if we want a picture and a short biography."

Martha looked puzzled, sought to move like a checker a liverwort on her hand.

"You're paying them?"

"Of course," he said. "That's how it works. Somebody has to pay for the publishing. Didn't you know that?"

"I guess not. I never thought of it that way."

"It's on the up and up," he said defensively, "because I sent them three poems and they only accepted one."

He walked over to her chair, put a hand on her shoulder.

"Martha, I'm a poet. So if I get moody now and then — you'll understand. I won't start drinking or anything, though."

"Recite the poem," she said.

"Okay. This comes out in hardcover, by the way, the sign of quality. And I get a free copy for every ten I sell. Here's the poem, listen up:

A ROCK

*As God is my judge,
I will not budge.*

*Sailors can sail
O'er the wine-dark sea,
Soldiers of fortune
Can fight in Tripoli.
Astronauts can rocket
All the way to the moon,
Farmers can leap
O'er the pickled prune.
Adventurers can trek
O'er hot desert sands,
Girls will be chased
Till they catch their man.
Sinners they do fall
All the way to Hell
But angels will trumpet
A few to enter Heaven on Judgement Day pell-mell.
Teachers try hard
To tell a fat lesson,
Children run off
To the delicatessen.*

*But as God is my judge,
I will not budge.
What am I?*

"Uh, I don't know what to say," said Martha.

"It's good, isn't it?"

"Well—"

"Heck, Martha. It is good. Artists have to believe in themselves."

"It's good, Avery."

"Women don't know anything about writing."

"I said it's good. I like the rhymes."

"Will you buy a copy?"

"It's your money," she said.

"I guess that's so."

★ ★ ★

One dark afternoon, Avery involved himself in quite a derring-do.

His window-research had been losing zest of late, not because of quality or quantity, some other factor. Adventure? Perhaps. After all, it was impossible to get caught; people rarely ran bare in the dark after rangers such as he, so fleet in new sneakers.

Avery was driving home from a strategy session of the Citizens for Morality when he passed the divorced Mrs. Milner's house and felt his seven devils land with a thump on his shoulder.

He knew she never locked her door during the day; he'd overheard her telling lovers as much on the phone. He also knew she worked till four at the Shop & Save, and here it was half past three. Forming excuses in his mind, in the event of the Unknown, he parked a couple blocks away, stuffed some morality movement fliers in his pocket and gave a roguish tilt to his Stamp Out Smut button.

Such precautions were unnecessary, however, as the street was empty and he entered the divorcee's home as casually as his own. No fool, he checked out his intended hiding place before taking a tour: He'd plant himself in the bedroom closet, an easy view of her afterwork coquetry.

Padding about her one-story frame house, he was struck by the utter absence of religious display. No crosses, no statues. He had never before been in a home so barren; little wonder the children went to her former husband, he thought. Any judge could see. . . . By the couch he spotted a title: *The Beans Of Egypt, Maine*. Not a great reader, he figured this was a cookbook and he was about to pocket it for Martha's birthday when a driveway engine noise sent him scampering into the bedroom closet.

Mrs. Milner entered the house; Avery heard a coat or sweater dumped; she exited and returned. She opened an envelope. She walked into the bedroom, sighed. She dropped a ring and watch and necklace onto the dressing table, and their respective sounds, one after the other, seemed like some kind of intimacy, as private as any sounds in the dwelling of a couple, a single person's intimacy which announced to no one: I'm home. Avery shuddered like it was sex.

She was in the bathroom quickly, and before he could properly distinguish and appreciate her noises she was in the kitchen to mix a drink. She lit a cigarette, exhaled the first puff loudly. She made a phone call about her phone bill. She called someone named Esther, talked a moment. She switched on the TV, rustled through some magazine, probably a guide, turned off the TV before it'd had a chance to prove itself. She took a musical swig from her drink. For some unknown reason she said "goddamnit" and then walked back into the bedroom.

She set her drink on the night table and flopped down on the bed. After about five minutes she rose lazily. Mrs. Milner took a gulp from her drink, lit another cigarette. She shimmied out of her white supermarket skirt, did another shimmy out of her plain white slip.

The phone rang, and she rushed out of the bedroom, then she rushed back for something, then out again. The flurry eased the closeness and Avery, squatting behind a mixture of wool and silk, thanked the Lord. After a while she reentered, killed one cigarette and lit another.

She was sitting on the bed, unpeeling her tan pantyhose. With an unexpected burst of energy, she bounced up, whisked her bikini underpants off too, opened the closet blindly, threw one article one way and the other the other, corralled what else was around, ditched it in the middle and shut the folding doors. The pantyhose had landed in Avery's face like flung crap; he was too nervous to remove the garment, but he wondered if he could catch some exotic disease he'd have to explain to Martha. He touched the doors back open, a millimeter at a time. . . .

The mood had changed. Mrs. Milner lay quietly on her bed, hands between her legs, fetal. Then she got bumptious, started to grind. This came as news to him, for he never suspected that women could have fantasies, but after ten minutes or so he became bored: This lady naked from the waist down seemed to be doing — what? Inner contortions, so private and inaccessible. Her fury was not as elementary as a man's, and he was so disappointed by this ripoff that he forgot himself and jangled the hangers like an audience crying for more.

A silence so definite and identifiable it was a sound in itself.

She looked up and over, hesitated a hard long while, shrugged, then went back to work, dextrous fingers flying, her open body not two yards from Avery's snout. Just as he found himself rooting for her, with mental somersaults and cartwheels full of hope, she interrupted play.

She walked to the closet and opened the doors. Avery held his breath. Placing sticky fingers on the hanger bar, she leaned in and tiptoed something off the top shelf. When the doors were again shut, he tried to sniff the imprint her touch had left on the bar above him. This was unprofessional: He'd been squatting too long, lost is balance. He keeled over with many great bangs.

Mrs. Milner screamed. Avery screamed. He gulped and pulled the pantyhose down over his face, thinking for a split-second: "Arse or genitals?" Mrs. Milner kept screaming, as Avery pounded away at the folding doors, forgetting in his panic the inverse combination. The clothes closet looked evilly animated, from the outside, like some poltergeist scene in a movie.

Avery figured things out and finally leaped to the fore. This time Mrs. Milner shrieked, as the masked oddity tumbled its way through the living room, overturning this and that, took a wrong exit into the bathroom, breaking everything not porcelain, and staggered out the front door. Mrs. Milner, soon bathrobed and more composed, chased a few yards but was uncertain as to the proper cry, for it was an uncertain sort of crime.

Avery, nylon rabbit-ears flapping in the breeze, fled down the awakening cocktail-hour street. He was late for dinner that evening.

★ ★ ★

He kept close to home for an awfully long time, lending credence to rumors that he had become introspective over the upcoming obscenity vote. There were some, though Martha was not among them, who thought he had gone up the mountain in despair over the folly of untrue believers. They felt he could see their sins even as he awaited a burning bush.

While nothing could have pleased him more, Avery actually was going through the literary bends down at what he now referred to as his writing desk, a TV-dinner table his wife had claimed at some lawn sale during the summer. It was always circled quite impressively with wadded-up pieces of yellow paper, for effect, most of them quite blank.

Late one hostile afternoon, hostile because he'd ended one of his lines with the word "orange" and was experiencing a sort of writer's block, the terminal kind, as he scanned a rhyming dictionary, Martha burst in full of determination.

"Avery, I want you to get rid of those magazines. No one bothers to look at them and that filth is cluttering up—"

"Darn you! Can't you learn to knock before you enter my den?"

"Den?"

She looked round at the ancient washing machine, the sump pump, the Christmas ornaments.

"Don't bother me, Martha. I'm writing."

"Avery, you don't smoke!"

He chewed crustily on his pipe. It wasn't filled. He put the pipe down and took a Hemingway pull from a bottle of beer.

"Damnation, woman!"

"Sweet Christ, Avery!"

"And I might as well tell you: I've decided to grow a beard."

"Avery, what's happening to you? You look sick."

"Writing is hard work."

"Horsefeathers. Why are you doing this to yourself?"

"One must suffer for the sake of Art."

"Horsefeathers. My mother was right: You belong in the puzzle house."

He took another gulp of beer, grimaced.

"I've got deadlines," he said. "And I am going to grow a beard."

"You've got dead lines, all right, and no you're not going to—"

"There's a sense of tragedy in this room. Leave me now."

"Avery, I'll talk to you about this later. And I want you to throw out those magazines!"

"Leave, Martha."

"Dinner will be ready in ten minutes."

"Okay, wife."

He popped a warm beer and chugged a wicked half. He checked his watch. He contemplated the yellow pile of verse. He had written thirty-two poems that afternoon, and it was time to pack it in anyway. Writing is hard work: He appreciated this, and in a very arguable way it made him an artist, gave him kinship with Rimbaud and Baudelaire. He threw up.

★ ★ ★

Most people have their sexual limits, and the immediate steps beyond those limits become their fantasies. In an ideal world, in an ideal mind, where all is linear or at least not a whirlpool.

Avery found himself outside Mrs. Milner's window. He had vowed never to return, but that promise quickly diluted into a vow to never again enter. Besides, poets who have recently sworn-off must find their obscenities somewhere.

There was plenty of activity going on inside, but no action, no divorced Mrs. Milner. Just two little kids and some teenager with spiked purple hair.

"Okay!" she said, clapping her hands. "Time for bath and bed."

"Mom said we could watch 'Hill Street Blues' tonight," tried the boy.

"For sure. She didn't tell me that."

"What're we gonna do tomorrow?" asked the girl.

"A picnic. That's what your mom said. And Saturday she's skipping work to take you to the museum. That's if you're not too nerdy."

"I like it with Mommy better than Daddy," said the boy.

"Oh? Why's that?"

"He makes us go to church."

"Oh wow."

Good for you, thought Avery. Mrs. Milner shouldn't even have the right to see those kids. He felt he knew the people one must know, and he considered the possibilities of becoming a judge.

"All week long."

"All week! You're kidding."

"Eight times," said the girl.

"I'll buick. I think you mean seven."

"No eight!" said the boy. "Two masses on Saturdays."

"And because of school during the week we have to go to 6:30," said the girl.

"Totally narly. C'mon, you two. The tub is run. Off with the threads."

Avery watched closely, then circled around to the bathroom window.

★ ★ ★

Following any election there is an aftermath, a depression, a let-down even in the houses of the winners, who suddenly have everything they want only to realize they still aren't very happy. Victory robs us of hope.

"You get rid of those magazines tonight!" Martha was saying.

"I'll get rid of them when I feel like it."

"They've served their purpose, if they had purpose to begin with. I won't tolerate this smut in our house any longer! What if we should die?"

"What if we should die?" repeated Avery.

"I can imagine what people will think when they find this filth."

"They'll undoubtedly realize we were anti-pornographers who had this material on hand so we could inform others as to the graphic nature of—"

"You dimwit. This stuff is illegal now. Isn't that what the referendum was all about?"

Martha scurried around the house, collecting magazines, books, pamphlets, newspapers, tabloids, video cassettes — dumping everything onto the kitchen table.

"Avery, you went overboard."

"It was necessary to know what the porno people were up to."

"I'll bet *their* houses aren't filled with smut. So much of this junk is from out of state. Europe, even. It's going to take us years to get our names off these mailing lists!"

"You once told me you thought it prestigious to receive lots of junk mail," he said meekly.

"From Boy-Toys, Incorporated? Hicks and Chicks Down on the Farm? The Quel Cul T'as — is this some kind of quarterly we're paying for? You've actually taken out a subscription in my name? What's this English subtitle — For the Progressive Pederast? Oh Avery, you degenerate! You can start with the carton in the hallway. Shake a leg! And you're not putting this in with *our* garbage. You're going straight to the dump."

"Martha, please!"

"Don't beg, you chucklehead. Start the car."

He did as ordered. He saw with grief that she had thrown his leather-bound gold-embossed copy of *New Christian Poets Of America* in with the sleaze. He let it go. But on the sly, he excavated from the carton a certain portfolio put out by a small firm in Portugal.

As he approached the house for another load of smut, he idled at the kitchen window. Peering through the glass, he observed Martha flipping through one of the magazines on the table. Her eyes seemed to widen, her lips seemed to smack.

For the first time in all of his little nocturnal adventures, Avery felt certain stirrings.

He thought about it.

He decided it was well within the bounds of matrimony.

He unzipped his trousers.

Snowflakes were falling. Now and then he glanced furtively over his shoulder. Watching his wife, watching his wife, he got hot and close to it all. He feared his breath was rattling the glass, like the north country wind.

Several moments too soon, Martha closed the magazine in disgust. She began to clean the oven. She gathered some rags, uncapped the yellow Dow Chemical container, spread a newspaper. He was stony cold, hangdog, tired.

You goddamned slut, he whispered.

Frank Johnson
Tenants Harbor
is a free-lance writer

Among the Buried

(Mexico City, 1985)

He seemed to be defying gravity, rising some centimeters into the air, flesh weightless and bones resonating. He was aware of a dull background roar as if he were underwater. His stunned eardrums registered soft explosions and muffled human cries. Someone was shaking him. He gripped toward both sides with his hands. Cold metal vibrated under his fingers; he opened his eyes. His sight was blurred. Everything within his range of vision was quivering or moving and settling abruptly. He shut his eyes.

★ ★ ★ ★

A resounding blast, a sudden jerking at many points in his soft body, and he was a partridge plummeting to the ground. With the gunpowder roar still in his ears and his feathered body numb, his reflexive struggles bounced him back and forth on the frozen earth among windfallen apples. The noise increased in complexity as a large creature grabbed and shook him lifeless.

★ ★ ★ ★

When he awoke he wondered if he were deaf or if all sound had ceased. The frame upon which he lay no longer vibrated. Feeling with his hands, he discovered a smooth cold surface like a table. Opening his eyes, he saw abstract shapes of light and dark. Illumination sifted into the room between two large diagonal obstructions, so dim that color within the room could not be discerned. Moving his head fractionally, he glimpsed behind him a metal skeleton with an object hanging from each arm. The room seemed to have been picked up and dropped. Dust swirled in the vague light and made him cough; he could hear his own coughs as if from a distance. He surveyed the room, his eyes the only thing moving in his unresponsive body. The uniform colorlessness of the room reminded him of November.

★ ★ ★ ★

He'd tuck the cold shotgun under his arm and call to Shrimp. He'd hear the chocolate Lab shuffling through the dead leaves long before he saw the stocky body, brown fur peaked into short stiff spikes of ice from the lake. Around them trees scratched together in commiseration and reached for their lost pigment. Lake and sky seemed cold-shocked to a whiter blue. He usually dressed in shades of brown to placate the season rather than offend the monochrome landscape, even refusing the safety of blaze orange.

Marianne would resist the dullness by clothing herself in magentas and turquoise. He pictured her as he had seen her last November, laughing on the shore of Round Pond, rubber boots touching the grey waves while black tree limbs curved above and their reflections groped slyly from the water, a splotch of cherry red defying — no, defiling — the scenery. She laughed at his seasonal color sacrifice, saying the lack of tone set her off like a barnwood frame around a Grandma Moses painting.

★ ★ ★ ★

He pictured Marianne now in this room. She wore a yellow slicker that reflected in the chrome like bits of sun; his covers became infused with a golden glow; his bottles were filled with elixer. His bottles.

Lifting an arm, he perceived a tugging on his forearm. Feeling with his other hand, he found the thin tube and then the cutoff valve between the bottle and his arm. After he closed off the flow, he felt for the rough edges that secured the needle to his skin. Carefully removing most of the adhesive tape, he applied pressure to the spot below the needle with his middle finger while he withdrew the needle from his vein with his forefinger and thumb. Slowly, he raised his head, then his shoulders, and pushed himself into a sitting position.

He knew by touch that he wore a hospital johnny and he could see small sheets shielding the rest of his body. His feet were bare. Had one of those sheets been covering his face? Had he been left for dead in a morgue? But there was no tag on his big toe; the room was warm; and hospital staff did not generally leave corpses on intravenous drips. He smiled in the semi-darkness at the thought of bizarre experiments in a Mexican hospital: young American businessman on vacation; they'll never miss him; let us demonstrate sensory deprivation. As he laughed, a rush of the anaesthetic which had rendered him unconscious sent spears of pain into the nape of his neck and he sank heavily back to the metal frame.

Someone was knocking at the door. "Come in," he groaned, his eyes still crimped tight. The knocking continued, and he opened his eyes without moving his head. Particles of dust sifted throughout the room. Coiling motes now clogged what little light filtered through to him. He rubbed his hands over his face and hair, feeling a powder that clung to his perspiration. The streams of dust coincided with the most forceful of the knocks. Raising himself slowly to a sitting position, he placed his legs one at a time over the edge of his stretcher. The cold shock of metal against the backs of his knees roused him and he slid to the floor.

Stooping, he limped two steps to where he could stand nearly upright. To all sides, ceiling met floor and walls leaned inward. A pain in his left foot reminded him he was in a hospital for minor surgery on a bone chip sustained when he slammed his ankle with his own tennis racket, minor surgery that had never been performed although he had been anaesthetized and prepped. The slightly swollen side of his foot was stained yellow.

The thought of diminishing light frightened him and he crouched to the floor next to his stretcher. The ceiling was at its highest point directly above his head. A stainless steel cabinet an arm's reach away supported the weight of a metal girder. Upon this girder balanced large plates of ceiling and floor materials. In a fissure between two of the slabs, he could see the leg and supports of a bed or chair. Hanging next to the protruding structure was a corner of fabric. He knuckled over to the draping fabric like a chimpanzee and pulled at it in slight tugs until it came loose. It probably had been folded over an empty bed. If a human arm or leg had protruded through the crack as he pulled the blanket free he would have screamed, and he almost screamed realizing he had been expecting this to occur. He wadded the blanket in his arms and carried it to his stretcher. There was space approximately seven feet long and three feet wide underneath the metal frame, barred by diagonals on both ends. It looked sturdy in the event of further destruction. Smoothing the blanket, he folded it like a sleeping bag so it provided both a floor mat and a top covering.

The presence of particles in the air and a clinging stench he detected through the dust in his nostrils made him move quickly. Standing nearly upright, he unhitched the bottle from its hook. He removed an identical bottle from another arm of the support, this one unpunctured. He placed these bottles under his stretcher at the head of his blanket. Crawling toward the metal cabinet, he noticed his own footprints in the thickening dust. He pulled open the cabinet doors. Surgical instruments wrapped in cotton cloth and sterile paper packets filled most of the space, but he removed a large bottle from the rear of the bottom shelf. Unscrewing the tightly sealed lid, he dipped a finger into the thin liquid, smelled and tasted. Alcohol. He poured some into his palm and slapped it to his throat and cheeks like an aftershave lotion, then did the same to the back of his neck. Immediately he began to shiver but he felt cleaner. He collapsed trembling just as he reached the blanket.

He roused slowly, aware of his own heartbeat. When he lay completely conscious again, he wondered about the times when he was not conscious. Weak from lack of sustenance, he supposed that he was asleep more than awake. He could not estimate the passage of time. He was thirsty and his indrawn breaths felt dirty. Crawling out from under the stretcher, he reached into the metal cabinet and opened one of the cloth packets. He took tiny scissors back to his den, retrieved the half-empty bottle from behind his blanket, and cut off its plastic tubing three inches from the rubber plug. Using the tube as a straw he sucked at the liquid, confirming his guess that it was a glucose solution. The sweet taste coursed along his nerves like an electric current. His stomach became queasy but he thought the liquid might keep him alive. Tearing a piece of adhesive tape into thin strips, he marked off five segments on the bottle to divide the remaining liquid into meals. Rather than risk his strength yelling or clearing a tunnel through the debris, he decided to wait until he was rescued.

Restless, he again squirmed out of the safety of his barricade. There was no sound but a soft shushing as of sand blown against glass. The subtle silent modifications in the room made him perspire; he felt cold drops running down his sides. The shape of the upright bottle stand seemed altered: its neck was bowed forward. It shivered slightly as the room shifted, gesticulated down at him, then spoke.

"Look at yourself sitting there waiting to suffocate. You have no motivation. I made the earth move for you; now we are breaking up." The chrome pipes bent bent further, creased, and snapped off with a metallic screech.

into dark corners. You treat your whimsy like a mad relation," Marianne scolded. "You're my whimsy," he responded.

"You even play with high seriousness," she continued, as the chrome stand bent further, creased, and snapped off with a metallic screech.

"What about the feather?" he asked the portion of pole rolling past his feet.

★ ★ ★ ★

A percussive blast shook him, and he felt again the recoil of the shotgun against his armpit as he felled the winging partridge. The gamebird dropped and fluttered noisily; it bounced back and forth among fermenting apples in the abandoned orchard. He had expected it to be still.

"Stop it! Stop it!" he yelled at the flopping bird until the dog forgot its training and leaped in circles barking, finally rushing in to grab and shake the bundle. By the time the others found them, he was picking feathers off Shrimp's soft brown muzzle as the dog stared guiltily at him.

"You got one, Son." His father poked at the bulk of disordered feathers with the barrel of his gun. "Fat one."

When Dad walked off with Lou and Carlyle and the dogs Goldie and Rastus he called Shrimp to heel and went back home with the partridge slapping against his hip. He still had a feather from its iridescent ruff stuck in a book.

★ ★ ★ ★

Another percussive blast knocked him sideways, and he clutched at the metal support near his head. His bottles were clinking together and he could feel debris roiling against his skin. He still smelled the dead leaf odor of the old orchard and it made him gag. He pulled the blanket against his nose. Inhaling the thick air underneath the wool, he coughed until he lost consciousness.

After another undetermined passage of time he awoke and pulled the blanket off his face. He thought he had opened his eyes. He could not see, so he opened them again. He brought his hand close to his face but could not see it.

He grabbed the blanket in both hands and rubbed it together in rough spasms until the air crackled and static electricity sparked from the cloth. He was not blind; his former light source was gone. A dampness on one corner of the blanket sent his hands searching hesitantly to the head of his fortification. He felt curves of broken glass in a puddle of sticky liquid, a rubber stopper, but no plastic tubing. Groping further, he found the other bottle intact. Awkwardly he wrapped one of the small sheets around the container, feeling for the tube in the dark and shielding it from the grit being propelled through the air. He hoped he could keep the smell out of the bottle. The odor pressed on his like a weight. He was almost used to the stench now; he pictured himself in a nest of dead leaves. The moldering, the returning to the soil, was natural. Earth was reclaiming him. He curled more securely under the blanket to protect his face from the dirt and leaf mold, pulling the remaining bottle in with him. He touched his tongue to the plastic tubing and a drop came out. He did this again and again, the glucose comforting him with its sweet energy, the rotting apples turning to honeyed cider in his mouth. He gripped the bottle close to his face with both hands. His body

Adam Unaccompanied

*The birds I can do
on my own:
I have herring gull,
bank swallow, catbird,
eider, shag, even
oldsquaw inside me
set for utterance
when movement catches
my eye. But for
doing the flowers,
dear, I need you.
Beyond clover and
daisy and rose I
need you. Even for
morning glory I
have found I need you
for naming, doing.
On this point, in this
familiar eastern
garden, as in that
even more eastern
garden of New Place,
I need your naming,
need your lips and eyes
and all the rest.
Without you, without
me, this point, these birds
and flowers are, but
they no more than I
without you speak. Yes,
even though speaking
began before you.
So even the birds
I now see
I cannot do
on my own.*

Hugh Hennedy
Portsmouth, N.H.
*has taught in Biddeford
for more than a few years*

swayed from an exterior force and his breathing slowed to keep time with the motion. Someone was rocking him.

★ ★ ★ ★

"God! He's got a little bunker in here!" They carefully shifted some of the smaller fragments away from his metal stretcher and pulled him out by the armpits. They watched his eyes squint shut from the sudden sunlight and then focus on their faces.

"You one lucky man," said a muffled voice; a brown face half covered by a gauze mask loomed over his body and a hand poked through the blanket. "Earthquake," the voice explained, then yelled, "We got a live one here! Get him on a stretcher."

★ ★ ★ ★

A brilliant flash slammed into his eyes and he was surrounded by dogs with white muzzles. He watched them prod at him with their forelegs until their movements became too quick for him to follow, then he closed his eyes again. They growled. They tore at him, rolled him, lifted him bodily from the ground. They ripped with blunt teeth at the arms holding the bottle, but his hands would not yield this possession to them. He fought and held tightly to the empty glass container until they subdued him.

Annette Hanser-Butryn
Portland
*executive secretary for USM
Honors and Core*

Encore

*The way you danced out of the room
kicking your foot high, a stage exit.
You, a man with little hairs curling
on your back, disappeared through
the door frame. I sat on the bed
not moving, holding my applause.
I see you dancing, little hairs curling
on your back all these years.
Listen, now I am applauding.*

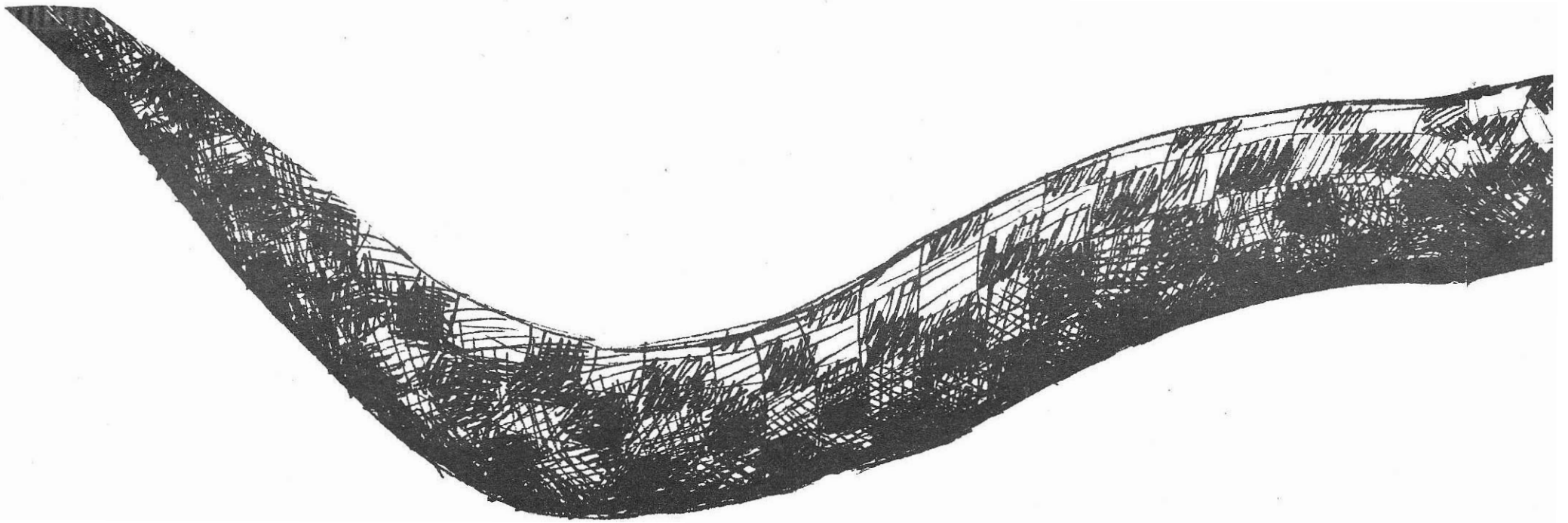
Wendy Kindred
Fort Kent
*teaches art at UMFK
and edits Black Fly Review*

To Those Who Would Reconstruct the Bangor Dam

*The unborn salmon are swimming back
to the same river they left behind,
looking for shallow pools to spawn in.
How clever they are, dressed
in their ocean-colored skins,
the fins in their silver prisms
carry them leap by leap upstream.*

*I'd like to run with them, hardly thinking,
pulling my weight against the falls.
I feel my arms growing stronger,
remember the old rhythms, and keep the tide
turning. When seasons change,
I will know what they know:
a desire to live in salt water.
The dreams of the salmon
are everything to you and me.*

Kathleen Lignell
Orono
works at Sea Grant, UMO



War Babies

Blackie Dunsmore was lost. Not lost, exactly. He'd gotten separated from his company. A hundred or so guys he soldiered with. They were army infantry. Known as Grunts. Well, climbing aboard a chopper, wearing forty or fifty pounds of field gear, it was hard not to grunt.

But he'd lost the guys, somewhere. They'd set out shortly after sunrise. To sweep a section of Southeast Asian jungle. A square on a map. Called a grid. He didn't care much. You worked a sweep out and back. He'd pick them up on their return. Couple of hours, probably.

As it was lunch-time, Blackie opened a couple of cans. He then lit a fat joint and stretched out in a thick bush. A few feet off the trail. To dream. Lately, it was always the same dream. Of the future. Whether, when he got the army off his back, to get a job in the paper mill. In his raucous, smelly hometown. Or, to become a stock-broker. In New York City. For the latter, he'd have to go to college. No problem. Blackie, who'd dropped out of high-school, had just earned his G.E.D. He was inspired. High on his abilities. On his ability to get through college. On his ability to succeed. On the strong smoke he was sucking into his lungs. Except for the weed, Blackie didn't smoke.

He caught a movement, at the corner of his eye. A snake was sliding toward him. When it came within range, he blew thick smoke at its face. The snake recoiled, its tongue thrumming up and down and to the sides. Then took off. A two-stepper. Called that because, if one bit you, you got about two steps before paralysis set in. You were usually dead in three or four minutes. You might survive, if someone filled you full of vaccine. Right off. And, kept you breathing for ten or fifteen minutes. Then again, you might not. He watched it, till he was sure it hadn't stopped. Or turned back.

Blackie had a letter from his mother. She was on her war-baby kick, again. Astounding news! She'd just discovered that Blackie was the fourth successive Dunsmore war-baby. She was nuts.

Blackie'd been born in June. On the very day that a few hundred-thousand men were raising holy-hell along several miles of beach. On the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. More than a few were floating away on the tide. Face down. One of these was Blackie's father.

Blackie was youngest of three sons. Six years younger than the second born. Eight years from the eldest. His name, at birth, was Charles Allen Dunsmore. When his mother learned of her husband's demise, she changed Blackie's name. To William Arthur Dunsmore IV. Against her husband's wishes. Three William Arthurs were enough, he'd said. But she'd thought it terribly significant that Blackie was born on the day his father died. Perhaps at the very moment. "Perhaps," later became, "I do believe." Later still, "I do believe" became, "At the very moment!" This was based on Blackie's father's wrist-watch, arriving in the mail with his other personal effects. The watch had stopped within thirty seconds of Blackie's birth-time. Of course, which day couldn't be known. The watch was waterproof. Could've run for thirty hours, after his father'd been machine-gunned. Charging off the landing boat. Too, that beach was four time zones removed from an east-coast suburb. Crapola! It was manifest destiny. Exactly what was destined was never said.

Blackie's father was born in the last year of the first big war. Everybody knew that. But the big news was this: the first two William

Arthurs were born during the Civil War and the Spanish-American War, respectively. Big Deal. Also, Eisenhower and DeGaulle were war-babies. Big deal. She was checking the birth dates of Charlemagne, Augustus Caesar, and Alexander The Great. She was nuts.

Blackie heard a small sound. Like a low breeze had pushed at some ground litter. The snake was back. Or another one. He blew smoke on it. The animal snapped its head back and turned tail. Maybe the snake had his scent. Blackie'd heard that snakes smell with their tongues. Maybe human scent tasted the same as a rat or mouse. Who could tell with snakes?

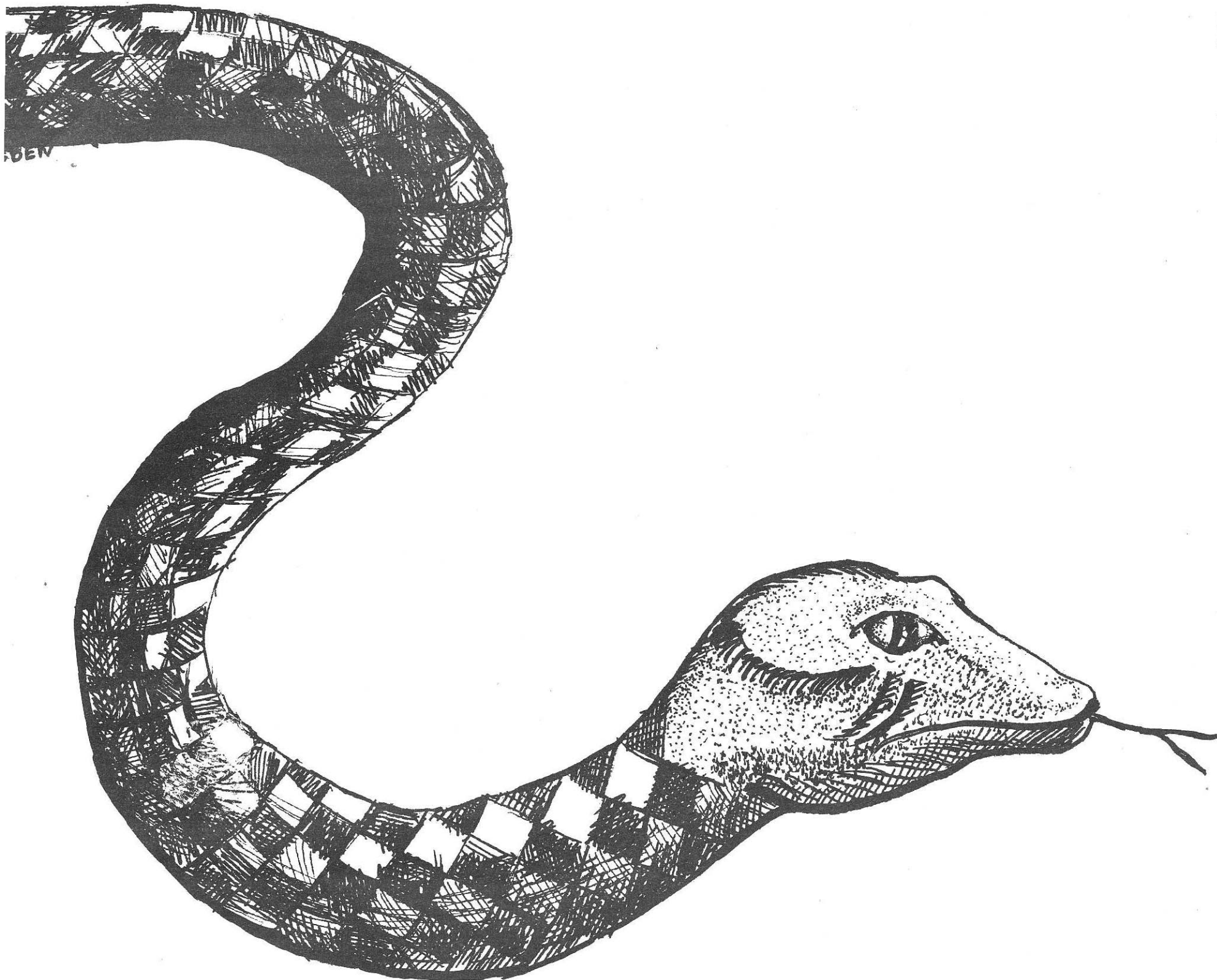
His mother'd ended with a warning to be very careful and especially alert. "I believe there is something terribly significant in being the fourth successive Dunsmore war-baby." Significant was her favorite big word. Though she never explained what was signified. Probably couldn't have. As for his being careful and alert, where the hell did she think he was? At summer-camp? There was P.S.: "Tom Szabo says hello and not to kill anybody."

Tom Szabo. Another war-baby. Almost every kid in the neighborhood was. Not more than a year separated Blackie and his friends. Pinky Pinkham, Buggy Cohen, Bill Roby, Fat Clarke, Abe Ross, Ton Tunney, James Nault, Roz Pettengill. Tom Szabo called Ros, "Boobs". Man, she had 'em, too! Even at twelve. Tom gave everybody screwy nicknames. Some stuck. Like "Blackie". One day Tom says, "What's Dunsmore, anyway?" "Scotch," says Blackie. "Yeah? Well, how come your folks are so light and you're so dark?" "I dunno," Blackie says. "Must be a spook in the family, somewhere," says Tom. He and Tom got into a fight over that. But he could never shake the handle. Tom got kind of strange, after his brother Arthur'd been killed. Arthur was two years older. He was run over, one summer, by a tar truck.

Blackie sucked in some smoke and held it. He gazed up at a tiny piece of sky. Through a million mosquitoes. They didn't touch him, though. He was greasy with repellent. New stuff. Worked great. And didn't stink like the old stuff. He heard rifle fire. A half-dozen quick shots. Followed by several bursts from an automatic. They were a long way off. Guys must've flushed a few gooks. Maybe just blew away some shadows. Anderson and Phillips were real jumpy. He'd tried to get them to toke-up a little. Before doing sweeps. They'd looked at him like he had two noses. Were they war-babies? How about Cole?

Peter Cole. The ice-man. The guy was a cat. Always alert. Always calm. A superb killing machine. Did three hundred sit-ups a day. A hundred push-ups. Fifty pull-ups. Tied weights to his boots and ran two miles. He hunts the perimeter at night. Almost every night. All dressed in black. Takes a Russian-made nine-millimeter handgun, a knife, and a garrote made of stainless-steel wire. He brings back ears. It was a war of body counts. Cole gave them bodies. He came back after light, one morning. While the company was eating breakfast. Dropped a woman's head on the lieutenant's table. The lieutenant nearly strangled. Then vomited his breakfast. Cole didn't bat an eye. He said, "That's the V.C. gal they've been looking for. Tell 'em they don't have to look any more." The guy could give you the creeps.

They'd given Cole about every medal they have. The army'd made him and they loved him. When they pinned the second silver star on him, this general said, "Sergeant, you are a shining example in our fight for God and freedom." Real low, Cole said, "General, there is no God. And, I'm not fighting for anything. I'm just killing people." The C.O. was standing right next to the general. He damn-near crapped



in his pants. But the general smiled. They absolutely loved the guy.

Cole got that "no God" stuff from that French philosopher he was always reading. The French guy said man is free to choose. That he is responsible for what he becomes. Cole said, if that's true, then the world is already sunk in shit up to the eighth floor.

The joint was getting too short to hold in his fingers. Blackie clipped it and dragged in a lung-full. He'd write his mother, after evening chow. Tell her to knock-off that war-babies crap. If you add it up, the Revolution, War of Eighteen-twelve, Civil War, Spanish-American, World Wars One and Two, Korea, all the little fights in between, and, now, this dirty business, well... about half the country was war-babies, about half the time. There's nothing in that. P.S. "Tell Tom I haven't killed anybody, that I know of."

A last drag singed his lip. He dug a little hole in the black earth. Dropped the roach in. The guys should be coming back through pretty soon. He'd decided on stock-brokering.

Blackie heard the familiar belly-scrape. The jungle is a funny place. Noisy. But Blackie'd figured it out, that the noise came at different levels. What you heard at one level, you often didn't hear at another. He peered through the brush. At ground level. Saw the snake. Its tongue sniffing out the way. Like an electric current. Blackie was out of smoke. He would have to kill it. Smash its head with the butt of his rifle. He took hold of the gun and stood. And looked into the wide eyes of a skinny gook. Not ten feet away. A soldier of the People's Republic. He looked to be a kid. About sixteen. This guy had to be a war-baby. His country'd been at war for twenty years. The automatic rifle looked monstrous. In his slender hands. Blackie smiled

at him. He wanted to tell him how extraordinary it was. That they should meet. In all those thousands and thousands of square miles of jungle. But he fired about thirty rounds into Blackie.

The first or second slug blew up Blackie's heart. The rest was just wasted ammunition. But the gook was wired. He couldn't get his finger off the trigger. The force of the bullets turned Blackie around. He fell face-down. Atop the snake.

The young soldier circled Blackie. Poked him with the muzzle of his rifle. He took hold of Blackie's arm and lifted. To turn him onto his back. The snake slid out and bit him on a sandaled foot. The gook gave a high shriek and blew the reptile to pieces. He sat on the ground and soon stopped breathing. He fell over onto his back and died spasmodically. He and Blackie stared at each other.

Blackie went home a hero. He was buried with honors. On a day in October, annually, the V.F.W. places a flag on Blackie's grave. A little one. There are a lot of little flags in that cemetery. On that day.

Many years later, on the day of his mother's funeral, Tom Szabo thought about Blackie. On that day, Tom was on his way to see if he could fly. From the top of a twenty-story building.

Robert P. Bourassa
Portland

has held 14 jobs since 1970



Photo by Margo Ogden

The Silver Service

Reva Donahue walked through her blue-accented kitchen preparing for the holiday meal. She was thirty-six years old, alone, single, attractive. She was waiting for her father and stepmother, whom she had not seen in ten years.

She paced around a kitchen. She had known this kitchen for five years. Yet she paced around it as if she had moved in that morning. Swiping at her blonde hair she pleaded to the Holy Mother for help. The pots and pans she needed for the weekend somehow eluded her. What silver to use, what dishes? Her stepmother would approve of none. Her father would not care. He would sit, watch the Patriots on TV, drink Coors and wait to be served. He would inhale the dinner, belch and reach for Reva with an approving hug. Reva walked around the blue cooking island and toward a makeshift dresser that held the silver service. Opening the drawer she picked up an old tarnished silver spoon that must be polished. It, the silver, had been her great aunt Bridget's. She rotated the large serving spoon slowly in her hand. Ornate "D's" inscribed the handles of each piece and Reva thought how this would please her father. As she lifted each piece she thought of the dinners the family had shared when she was a child.

There had been laughing Irish holidays and then the times when her mother had been so ill; times when, with this silver on the table, she and her father had spent so much time alone.

Her mother died and Reva lived with her father, making the meals, coming home from school and waiting. . . .

She lined up the silver in military order as she remembered those days as daughter/housekeeper. As nine year old manager of the family money, too old to have playmates, too old to do the things her friends did after school. Reva, thirty-six now, alone and wanting none of it, began to remember how it came to be.

She was eight or nine, she recalled, when her mother became ill. Either she could not recall or had never been told the nature of her mother's illness. Aged aunts and well-meaning uncles whispered in corners until Reva knew that she was very ill, would be ill a long time, and would never get well.

Reva slept alone in a big bed covered with sweet smelling flannel sheets. Sometimes when her father did not come home until late she would sense him looking in on her, holding the door open for longer than a moment before he sighed, shut it, and walked away.

It went that way for a long time. Supper sometimes, and then those lonely nights when he would stay late at work or among his friends and then come home smelling of Jameson, hold her door open and go away.

Then there was the first time the door didn't close. Reva lay in her bed and waited. She heard her father's steps as he lumbered across the room and sat next to her on the edge of the bed. She pretended to be asleep, but could imagine his face as he crooned behind her. Blue eyes, disheveled grey hair, face florid with tiny spider veins creeping relentlessly each year further across his cheeks. He stood and walked around the bed.

"Like your mother you are." He peered into the mirror and brushed at his hair in a nervous gesture. Reva felt him coming closer.

"Your mother would make me some tea and sigh while she fingered her Beads. She'd know. It's times like this she'd know." He smelled funny, and his voice seemed far away as he gently touched her hair.

"Ah Reva," he said. "You've been so good to me." He wrapped his hand in her long blonde hair until she felt pain. He released her and moved from the bed. "Someday. Someday." It was a chant as he lurched from the room. Reva would always remember that night. It was the first night. The night that began it all.

"Someday Someday." Her father's words bounced around her mind until she finally drifted into sleep.

Several nights later he came again, lingering at the bedside, stroking her hair and lulling her into a semi-sleep with his gaelic chanting. Finally there was the night, that first night, when Reva remembered that his voice stopped and he yawned and fell asleep at her side. In his sleep she felt his hand reach out for her and she stretched for the outside of the bed.

Now it became a regular thing. Her father would come home, sit by her bed, and finally stripping himself to only his underwear fall asleep beside her. Reva lay in her cotton panties waiting. For what she was not sure. At school her friends whispered and giggled. Boys in the locker room. Girls who had done THINGS!

Reva could not remember when her father stopped the facade of sitting by her bed and began to simply strip off his clothes and lay beside her. She could not remember when she stopped feeling it was strange and began to feel that the comfort and warmth of him was good. Somewhere the nights and the days became twisted into a ballet of mutual need until the evening meals and the late night caresses became one.

He came home one night later than usual. He came to her room as he had for the past two years and Reva knew by the way he breathed and by the way he hesitated that tonight would be different. That tonight would end something she was just beginning to understand.

She felt his hands on her as he lay beside her. Soft at first, they became more urgent. Suddenly he sat up and pulled her up beside him. He kissed her as he had before but Reva felt something new. Some new demand that she did not quite understand. She returned his hugs as he guided her from the bed and onto the floor. She was placed kneeling between his knees.

He looked down. "Reva," he said. "Oh Reva, I know you know. It's between us." He guided her head. "Kiss me in that special way."

And she did.

And she did.

In the years that followed when her father's friend came to visit and then to live and then to marry, he came less and less into her room until there came a time when it ended. Reva lay awake those nights afraid he would come and afraid he would not. She began to understand the wrong, but her need for the warmth ignited a jealousy of her new mother.

It was then, at sixteen, she remembered, that she began to feel pretty and have

boyfriends. She lunged at them, ~~needing affection, and recoiled when they mis-~~ understood and became too ardent.

She knew she needed to talk. To a friend, to her priest, to someone who would listen and understand and tell her that what she was doing now, what she had done before, was alright. She realized slowly that she could tell no one. She had locked herself into a horror that nobody could understand. The revulsion she felt at being touched would grow until there was no more warmth. No more closeness. Only a vague feeling of anger and frustration.

Reva Donahue glided through the next twenty years of her life eluding the devils that plagued her. She plunged into her cocoon of work as a librarian. She sought the confessional.

"Bless me Father for I have sinned." She said it as many times as she felt she could. She told of the little sins. She groped with the idea of confessing it all. She imagined, fantasized her revelation to the priest. She saw him, raging at her awful truth, rushing from behind the screen of privacy and beating her, expelling her from the Church.

She kept the secret to herself. She worked and she almost forgot those cotton-panty days. She grew into herself and built an armor around her loneliness, guilt, and anger.

The silver somehow was polished, the fine double damask linen was ironed and the table set. Food was placed in the oven, on the burners, and in pampered Copco pots. Lamb writhed in rosemary and new Irish potatoes bubbled gently in water touched with dill. Reva checked the stove. Everything that should be on low was. Everything turned off that should be. She poured coffee, hunched into a corner and waited. . . .

A knock, more an announcement than a request and they burst through the door. Her father strode across the kitchen, Reva's stepmother in tow, reached to hug Reva and stopped. "It's been so long. You, you look so much like your mother now." Click. She felt an old tumbler go back in place. He hovered there and she watched him. His hair no longer grey, now sheet white. His eyes red rimmed and the pink face gone scarlet. She held her arms close to her sides, her fists clenched against her breasts as he hugged her.

"The years we've missed," he was saying with true Irish melancholy, and then absently, "You remember Meg?"

Reva nodded toward the woman she had never been able to call mother and whose name she had forgotten until her father said it. Meg smiled the sad smile of a woman who has willingly suffered the indignities of life. She made small-talk. She picked at her dress and flounced her blue rinse hair and recited a litany of remember whens, how long it was, how good you look, and "Oh, the table looks so grand." It was thrust and parry as she reached for Reva.

The three stood in Reva Donahue's kitchen, intimate strangers. Meg exhausted the flimsy fabric of their relationship with the inane remember whens. Reva's father paced until cocktails were offered.

They drank ice cold martinis. The table sat like an altar, draped in linen, its silver shining.

Between Haviland plates and Waterford glasses Reva placed platters of potatoes, bright orange carrots and just-cooked peas. This and that came from nooks of the kitchen and then the fine aromatic leg of lamb. They all sat as Reva popped the cork on a bottle of wine and poured.

Now for the offering, Grace. They sat hands folded, paralyzed in memory until Meg lulled them with the murmurings of muffled prayer. Ending, she blessed the reunion, and Reva felt her father's eyes on her.

She reached for the serving pieces. She held them for a moment in her hand looking at the graceful inscribed "D". Her father rose from his chair and circled near her. Reva held the serving pieces over the lamb as if in prayer.

"A toast," her father said. "To being together, to times gone by." Her stepmother sipped her wine. "The lamb looks good," her father was saying as Reva turned the silver in her hand. She stared at the glint of fine metal and she rolled the knife slowly. Her father hugged her.

"Ah, Reva," . . . the words jolted her from the present and back into a place she had chosen to forget. She looked once at the lamb and brought the knife quickly up to prevent another word. Blood speckled the new potatoes, splashed across the table, and sank red into the double damask.

Reva Donahue didn't hear her stepmother scream or hear the words her father might have said after "Ah, Reva". She remembered, instead what had always followed that sigh. She remembered the warmth and the wet. She remembered the after. Her stepmother groped at the air as if to speak and then fell stunned in her chair. Reva watched her father ooze his final bit of life and then went to him. She turned the silver knife toward her, fell on it, and joined him.

"Ah, Daddy."

**Donald C. Watson
Hallowell**

tends bar and the City Council

God is a Committee

God is a committee.

Why else would things be moving so slowly down here? There hasn't even been a good disaster since *The Flood*. Pompeii was effective, but small scale. O.K. — man-made disasters like World War I and World War II. But no huge, celestial-scale "natural" disasters. Is He just letting us do His work for Him? Unlikely. I've heard God accused of many things, but *being lazy is not one of them*.

Maybe the drought and famine in Africa should count. God switched over to more insidious disasters, rather than cataclysmic events like earthquakes, fires and floods. And do all those people in Africa need to be punished, or to learn some lesson like they did before *The Flood*? Seems to me that other parts of the world needed punishment a lot more than Ethiopia and Sudan. More likely, the committee took a lunch break after deciding to add a little extra sunshine to the African weather that year, and haven't bothered to reconvene. They are on a different time-scale, you know.

A petition drive might help:

To the Committee of God: We here on earth have begun to wonder what's up. There are a lot of people losing faith these days. We would like to request a little action — shake up the bad guys and help out the good guys, so that we get a better picture of The Grand Scheme of Things once again. It's getting fuzzy.

Signature _____

Print name _____

Address _____

Where may we reach you during the day? _____

Religious affiliation (optional) _____

Citizen of _____

Voted in last presidential election for _____

I figure that these last bits of information will save time and effort in determining good guys and bad guys, and where to strike next. That would be laying it on the line for a lot of folks.

I know there's the old story of the Greek gods. That was like a committee. But they still had a leader. What Zeus says, goes. Lightning bolts from his finger tips. Thunder in his voice. You knew who was boss.

But a committee. . . .

It's hard to imagine who would be on it. Lobbyists for different factions on earth, I suppose. How to keep the size down? If you start with humans, other primates, four-legged creatures (domestic and wild), birds, water creatures, insects. . . there are a lot of categories to cover. Then there ought to be representatives for trees, flowers, agricultural crops, grasses, minerals, gems, other rocks, natural bodies of water (salt and fresh), mountain ranges, plains, unusual landforms, etc., etc. We're talking about considering the Big Picture here, not merely humanity. The translators would have a pretty tough job. Translating from Cobaltic to Pine Treelian, or Mouseish to Whaleic.

Or maybe God just passed on His responsibilities to the leading lights of the various religious groups on earth — Jesus, Buddha, Mohammed, Confucius, Abraham — and they aren't making decisions any better up there than we are down here. After all, they were only human.

It's also very possible that God is a couple. Male and female. There's no knowing what to expect if that's the case. The fact is, it takes two to create new life among the more highly evolved animals on earth, and if we were created in God's image, there must be two of Them. Sure, Adam was supposed to have been first (in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, that is), but we've all since found out that men and women have the same number of ribs, so there goes that story. And if these two are in heaven in a state of constant bliss, no wonder they're not paying any attention to us any more. If they ever did.

I've got it! A Study Group. An impartial panel to study the matter and report back by the 25th century. That ought to give them enough time to catalog a few of our characteristics, study the background carefully, and hear some expert testimony. Too bad I won't be around to read "The Lord's Commission Report on Human Progress: the Question of Intervention."

Maybe the Chairman of the Committee is God. Well, maybe, but chairbeings don't have much power beyond the committee structure. It's probably one of those new-fangled unstructured consensus type committees, where no one has the upper hand. Just debate and debate. There's no real pressure to come to a decision anyway — they're making all the rules.

I guess we'll just have to face up to the fact: when it comes right down to it, we're on our own.

**Nancy Arlyne Hoffman
Peaks Island**

is a musician and writer

No Greasy Burgers or Fries

She turns the key shutting off the car's engine and Michael Jackson's girlish voice on the radio. Silence. Just the tick of the clock. The new clock that keeps accurate time. The new clock in the new car. She sniffs. New car smell. Neither she nor her husband smoke. They haven't driven through any fast food lines to bring in the smell of greasy fries or burgers.

Her own perfume, Shalimar, lingers subtly around her. And her husband's Old Spice could be here as well. It's hard telling. Whenever she thinks of him, she smells him. Old Spice on his skin. His skin. Thinking of him warms her for a moment.

She wonders if he's almost done. She dropped him and his specimen off nearly three quarters of an hour ago, then went to run a few errands. No sign of him at the pale green door. Should she go in? No. Give him at least another fifteen minutes. Doctors run behind, even though this should have been an in-and-out visit.

He'll be pleased to see their prints. The framing shop did a fine job with the matting. The narrow oak frames do not overpower the works of their favorite Impressionists. His Van Gogh's "Cypress Trees" looks especially brilliant and alive. The emotions it evokes for him flash through her, a wave she hasn't experienced before. "Yes, yes, I see what he means about this one."

She prefers the muter hues of Monet's "Water Lilies," however. To study this is to find serenity. She loses herself. It calms her whenever she focuses on it.

She drifts through those water lilies, those lavender petals. Summer's lush, green smell. The lake, clear. She can trace the lily to its fragile roots a few feet below the water's surface in the gravelly lake bottom. She and her husband paddle their canoe quietly through the lily pads along the edge of their island picnic spot. *Splash.* A frog hops into the water. *Flutter.* A red-winged blackbird stirs from the shore. It's warm. The sun's rays penetrate the Bain de Soleil on her shoulders. She turns to catch a glimpse of her husband. But he's not there!

She startles. No, he's not here yet. Only five minutes have passed. Patient. Be patient. He'll be out soon. Unless. . . No, she refuses to think about it.

She sorts through the bundle of letters, bills and junk mail she just picked up at the post office. A horn beeps. A pattern of beeps. *Beeeeeeeeeep, beep, beep.* An old man with glasses and a soft hat sits behind the wheel in front of the doctor's pale green office door. An old woman totters out on a cane. He leans over and pushes open the door. She gets in slowly, lifting her right leg behind her with her hands, and struggles to close the door. "Why doesn't he help her?" She succeeds. He revs up the engine before driving off at a snail's pace.

"Will he open the door for me when I'm that old?" It's a hit or miss thing now. When he thinks of it, he does. Usually when they're going out in the evening and she's wearing silk stockings and high heels and a dress that reveals her knees and a bit of thigh through a side slit. Every minute he can watch those legs he does. He flits from her door to his, taking them in again as he settles down to drive. But when she's eighty and she has to lift her swollen leg in? That nurse's legs will be just as old anyway.

A letter from her sister in Albuquerque over 2,000 miles away. She uses the blunt side of the key as a letter opener. The stamp is one to keep. Her sister's standard stationery, a blue unicorn in the upper left. She breezes through the salutation. Her sister writes only when there's something unusual happening. Here it is. Her brother-in-law's been reassigned. They'll be coming to Pease Air Force Base in a couple of months. Can she send whatever she can find on houses in the area? It'll be a two-year hitch at least. Her sister's sick of Air Force housing. They've enough for a down payment. Why not buy in New England where their roots are?

She can't believe it. Pease. An hour's drive from her. Her sister will be around again. They can shop together and spend hours sipping cafe au lait and nibbling on Pepperidge Farm shortbread cookies just talking, talking.

The last time they had a chance to do that was before he sister left for Albuquerque a couple of years ago. Her sister and her husband and their two sons came for the weekend. Crowded living quarters in their two-bedroom condominium. The two boys, ages five and seven then, slept in sleeping bags on the living room carpet. On the second day of the visit, after a traditional breakfast of blueberry waffles and bacon, the men and boys went fishing. The women loaded up the dishwasher, prepared their cafe au lait, arranged a plate of cookies and curled up on each end of the couch, cup in hand, and talked. It was such a good experience, sharing their woman's thoughts. She misses her sister.

The nurse appears in her mind again. Damn her. "I'm the one who told him it's foolish not to go to this doctor just because he'd had an affair with the nurse years ago." He's the best urologist around; he's even got the lab facilities right there. There's no need to go to another.

"In five minutes I go in."

A blur eases by her left window. So close it makes her jump. A black bear. No, a black raincoat with a lumbering walk, hands deep in pockets. Greasy brown hair below a bald dome, broad shoulders, bright green plaid pants and dirty once-white sneakers. "What a creep!"

He must have felt her eyes watching him. He knew she was there. He turns

and looks right at her, not ten feet in front of her car. Beady eyes and that scar across his left cheek, she can't help but stare. His right upper lip twitches upward in a half smile as he flashes open his coat to show his nearly naked body, his erect crooked penis.

She laughs, a deep belly laugh, holding her stomach. "He's got to be kidding!" She'd heard of these perverts, that their thrill was in the shock of the female observer; the fear. She feels no fear. She's embarrassed for this poor twisted man and at the same time she's rather amused by his unmanliness.

As she laughs, she lifts her left elbow and locks her door. (*Click.*) The other doors are already locked. She raises her eyes to look at him again, but he's gone. She scans the parking lot. There he goes down the alley between the doctor's building and a laundromat, head down, hands still deep in pockets, walking swiftly.

Wait until her husband hears about this one. He's not going to believe it. He'd told her about a guy he'd seen years ago in New York City who was into crowd exposure. This guy had the same get-up — pant legs lowered by strings, a shirt collar dickie and a raincoat. Her guy wore no hat though. He should've worn a hat to complete the image. She chuckles.

She recalls the hat she bought her husband for his birthday the first year they were married. A Greek fishing hat. She'd seen a fellow who looked a lot like her husband in a TV commercial wearing that hat and she had to buy one for him. The surprise on his face when he opened the gift is captured on film. He reddened. She asked him to try it on. He did. She loved it. He hated it. They gave it to her father, a hat-wearer, after it sat on a hall hook for nearly three years.

She glances at the clock on the dash. Almost 10 minutes have passed. No sign of him. She should go in as planned. Her left hand goes for the door handle; her right for her keys. She hesitates, turns the key to auxiliary, then the radio knob. Michael Jackson again. She pushes a button. Barbra Streisand sings "The Way We Were." *Click.*

Her left hand still holds the door handle; her right the steering wheel, fingers tapping the grooves nervously. She stares at the pale green office door willing him to come out. "Come out. Come out. Now. Damn it."

A clairvoyant at the Spiritualist Church told her once that she had psychic powers. She need only learn how to tune in to them. "You like to take astral flights, don't you?" he asked. She didn't understand then, but if she knew now how to do it, she would. Right in there. Right in to see her husband. Then she would know what was happening; and if he needed a little fear instilled, her ghostly image should do it.

"I shouldn't worry. I trust him. He's in a doctor's office. What could possibly happen?"

She shouldn't have asked that. The image of a blonde goddess in a tight nurse's uniform appears. Her husband's sitting on the examining table, naked, a white cloth draped over his lap. "Why is he naked?" The nurse locks the door, slowly walks over to the table and lifts the sheet.

She closes her eyes. "I can't look!"

Tap, tap, tap. She opens her eyes with a start. It's what's-his-name, that bad-breathed nerd from high school.

"Well, I'll be darned," she says as she unrolls the window. "It's been awhile."

He slips away his breath spray, the same brand he used then. "Yup, almost three years, since our five-year class reunion."

"So, how have you been?"

"Fine, fine. I got married last Spring. Me and the wife got a place near Sebago Lake. She'll be having our first one any day now."

"Congratulations!"

"How 'bout you? Still married to that journalist fella?"

"Of course."

"Any young 'uns yet?"

"No. I'm still doing my career for now. I've just expanded the shop. I now have fine gifts in addition to flowers. You and your wife should stop by sometime. I know, why don't you let me know when the baby arrives and I'll give you a great deal on an arrangement for the hospital."

"Sounds good." He smirks. "You know you're not getting any younger. You really should start thinking about kids if you're gonna have 'em."

She blushes. "Go on, you! I've plenty of time; like you say, if I'm going to have one."

"Cupcake!" comes a call from a pregnant woman in an overgrown housedress at the laundromat door, "come get the basket."

He reddens. She's glad.

"I'll be seeing ya around."

"Best of luck to you and your family-to-be." She rolls up the window.

Dreadful. Meeting him of all people. The number one nerd in the class of '76. She recalls the fiasco of a blind date she had with him. When he arrived with her friend Kim's date to pick them up, she almost died. They went bowling. Afterward they went to the soda shop. When the two of them were alone, he very seriously asked; "Do you color your hair?"

She'd been taken aback. "Why sure, what's it to you?"

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

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

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

The woman unlocks the door of a red station wagon nearby, the back loaded with miscellaneous ball gear. "Must have sons." She gets in, puts her head back against the headrest and closes her eyes. "A long day." The engine hacks; she drives away, the left side a little lower than the right.

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

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

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

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

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

She tries to peek around that door fifteen feet away. She wills it open. No luck.

She taps her fingers on the check writer's ledge in front of the window. She strains to hear the words.

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

The door swings wide. A man and woman enter. His arm on the back of her neck. They notice her. Their smiles vanish. His hand drops. The nurse approaches the window. "I'm sorry, but we're closed."

The man in a white lab coat retreats through the open door.

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

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

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

"Of course." The nurse turns away.

"Nurse?" She has to ask.

"Yes?" The nurse's head turns back.

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

The young woman blushes. She shakes her hair away from her face. "No, ma'am. This is only my third week."

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

Minutes pass. The waiting room door opens. He's in front of her, one hand unconsciously at his belt checking his fly. "Hi, hon, sorry to keep you waiting. The doc had an emergency call this morning that screwed up his whole day. What time is it anyway?" He leans over and kisses her left cheek. Old Spice on his skin.

She smiles and lifts her watch for him to see. "It's okay. Let's go eat. I'm starved."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He gives her a quizzical look.

"I feel like wearing my gray high heels and my best stockings." She looks straight ahead.

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

She sits back and breathes in the new car smell. Shalimar. Old Spice. No smoke. No greasy burgers or fries.

Lisa Grundstrom-Whitney

Virginia Beach, VA

recently moved from Maine

A Man Remembers His Wife

(from a novel in progress)

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

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

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

It had been going on for years and it was going on now, the three of them huddled together near their sister's casket as he stood in his long black shoes near the body of his Jeannie, the beautiful, the comedian, the flirt. His wife.

It was his shoes that brought him here in this room full of her relatives and the wide-eyed and tear swollen faces of his own five motherless children. His shoes had walked him here as they had carried him out onto the dance floor the first night he had held her in his arms, as they had walked him into so many meetings, so many bars, so far away from the kids who stood there needing him. His shoes had carried him beyond being needed; he could not, would not retrace those steps, re-face those family ties that strapped him for money and took his dancing shoes away.

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

Ann Arbor

Beloit, Wisc.

teaches in the public schools

Fluxions

for Patrice Proulx

Janek
hadn't been called by that name
since he was thirteen
Then it was Jan
They started to talk to him in small words
again
Almost exactly on his eightieth birthday
And after they lit his dessert on fire
and he had forgotten
for a moment
what it was all about
Screaming instead of blowing
They called him Janek again
Not father or papa
And laid him on his back
by a big window
With a view of the White Mountains of
New Hampshire
That reminded him of the Carpathians
at Zakopane

And they closed a door

The mind wouldn't go forward anymore
The images got all mixed up
A kettle of tea left on a low burner
of the white enamel stove
in the cottage near Poznan
Then they forgot they had ever wanted tea
And Jan was told his father's emphasis
on education
was a good one

They were lovely friends he had grown to know
And at the medical college in Krakow
Still more beautiful
There the minds were really together
Even through the dark days
when there were changes to the west
There was still time
to look out the window between surgeries
onto Swietokrzyska Street
Where the fat dust artist
Clad in ever-changing rags and swatches
Fingered his thoughts on the windows
of parked cars

Or was that Warsaw
When the wall went up
And there were fewer surgeons
And as Jan walked past the wall
for the last time
He saw the dust artist
being admitted
Smiling
He said he owned nothing
Never had
The guards turned their noses
As he was surrounded
by new friends with fewer rags
than he
If they had had the strength
they would have borne him
on shoulders
This smiling man
With the precious rags
Which they plucked
as carefully as eider

He went in
While Jan went out
Now it's Janek again
And the last memory of Poland
is the first to return

There is another man
in the room
They say he is sixty
But it is unbelievable
If Jan could remember the old procedures
He would help him
But there is uncontrollable drooling
over the man's shirt
A nurse comes in with a bib
And calls him Pauley

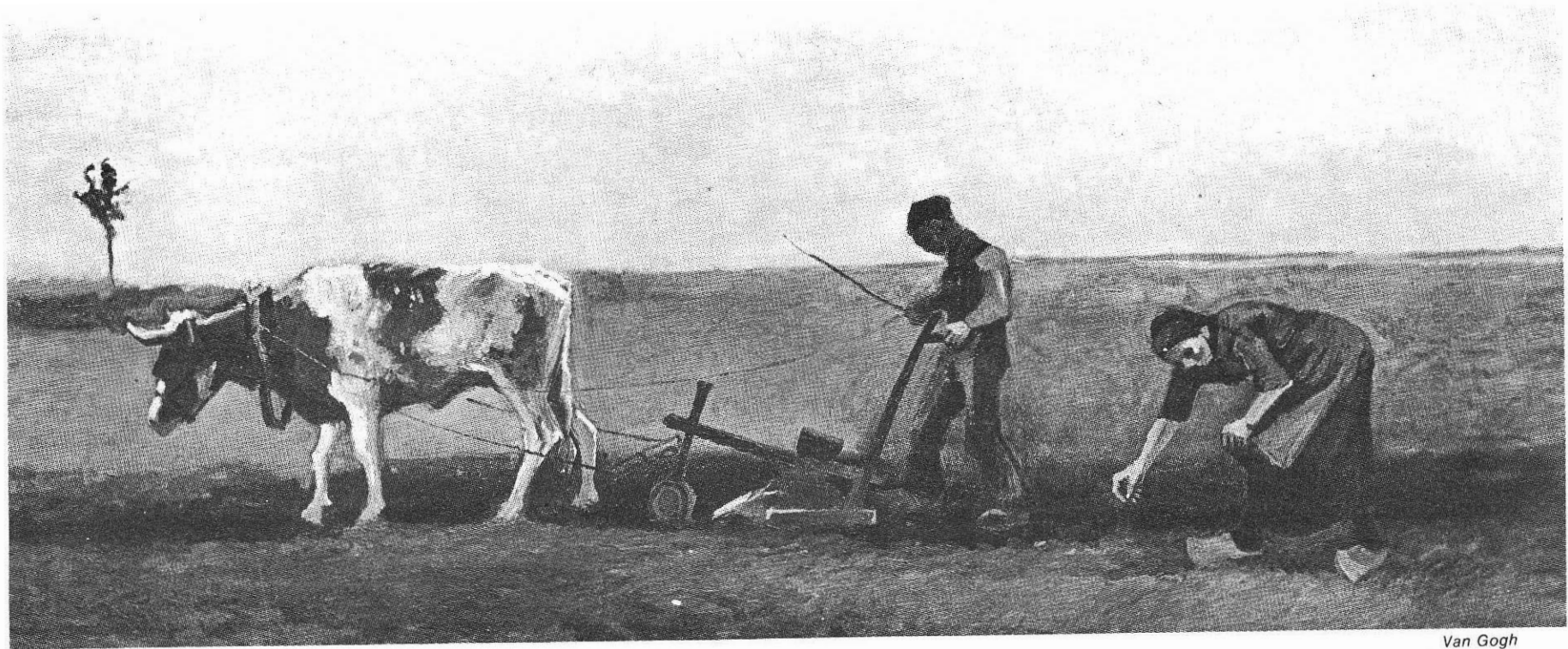
She turns to Jan
Asks if there is anything
he needs
Jan looks out the window
and says
"It was a lovely snowfall
Everything is nice and white"

Robert T Klose
Orono
teaches Biology at UMO

Looking For Signs

Facing west, I see the sun,
windshield high, multiplying
in metallic paint, whirling
myriad circles of darting light,
concealing,
more completely than shadow,
cars, lanes, direction.

Minnie Bowden
Orland
writes a poetry column
for the Rockland newspaper



Van Gogh

My Wall Street Relation

*The painting I show you
is from a polished art book —
Vincent's turbulent passions
condensed to an 8 × 10.
Under your St. Laurent sweater
your shoulders shrug casually
your eyes say "So What?"
You see a potential investment
and want to flip to the last page
to the climax of the struggle
because in endings there are no speculations.*

*I stop you. I tell you
that is our great grandmother
in Lithuania. She stoops without your ease
and agility. When she bends her bones crack
with soft clicks, like the tumbling lock
of a safe. I say this is her husband
who works each day past sunset, like his father,
like our grandfather, year after year until
they developed an immunity to sunsets
which you somehow inherited along with their money.*

*After dusk they go into the house
and eat cereal for supper. They stare
into cracked bowls where stale oats
soak up milk like the greedy earth sucks up
their small portion of hope. You say you hope
their plow was sharper than the dull one
in the painting. Dull, like your jokes
and banking dreams on long winter nights.*

*I can't show you the sharpness
the sharpness of a razor
a razor that attacks a man
in his house, then cuts off a sensitive ear.
You tap your Gucci foot and change the subject.
You forget about grandparents.
You put their picture in your wallet
and forget that wallet on a bus
somewhere in Bermuda.
You even forget it was you
who gave me this book.*

Donna Baker
Portland

*teaches aerobic dance
and studies at USM*

REVIEWS

Two Chapbooks

No one really knows what a chapbook is. Some say it is a small collection of poems on one subject, an *exploration*, such as Robert Chute's eighteen sonnets based on the 17th c. diaries of Samuel Sewall (reviewed below). It won the Arts and Humanities Commission's Prize this year. Others say a chapbook is any inexpensive small volume containing between ten and twenty poems on a variety of subjects. If these notions are correct, what are we to make of Jonathan Aldrich's long poem on one subject, a detective, which prints up at 71 pages (reviewed below)? It is the 18th in the Chapbook Series brought out by the prestigious *Beloit Poetry Journal*, recently relocated from Wisconsin to Maine. If you ask around, some will tell you that chapbooks are printed on fancy paper and are hand-sewn. Still others say that a chapbook is that stapled thing without a binding that gets lost on your shelves and that bookstores won't handle. Almost everyone agrees it contains poetry. This was not always the case. In the 19th c. it was apt to contain ballads, tracts, bizarre ravings, and even a short fiction. One thing we do know: the term itself comes from *chapmen*, those who hawked them in the streets. Our word *chap*, for man or fellow, is a shortening. Thus, by analogy, the materials sold came to be called *chapbooks*. Whatever they are today, we should be grateful they continue to be published. The prospect of even accomplished poets' work finding a "regular" publisher among the RCAs and Exxons and other conglomerates who now own most major houses is insanely slim. And yet superb poets, eminently worth reading, are all around us, writing like mad. The chapbook, cheap to produce and cheap to purchase, lets us hear their voices. With popular magazines folding left and right, fine fiction has become harder to find. Is a single short story about the right length for a chapbook?

Terry Plunkett

Wade's Wait / Jonathan Aldrich a narrative poem

(The *Beloit Poetry Journal*, chapbook series, RFD 2, Box 154, Ellsworth, Maine 04605, 1985, \$2.50)

It is refreshing to find a current poet writing a long narrative rather than short lyrics. But this 67-page chapbook does not resemble the 19th c. narratives of Browning or Tennyson. Jonathan Aldrich's actually has a complicated plot, a murder, and a Bogie-like private eye named Chuck Wade, all hard-boiled on the outside and like the rest of us a little runny and undercooked on the inside. Aldrich has written of him before, but the character haunted him and he "could not let him go." These sequences find Wade at age 31, worrying about his car, writing in his journal, and trying to solve among other things a murder of a butler in a pantry (you can't say "the butler did it").

Aldrich challenges himself, and the reader. The action stretches over forty years and four settings, each of its four parts told in a different way by a different character. It opens in Wisconsin in the late-1940s, with the poet speaking in the third-person about Chuck Wade; part two is set on the Maine coast, 25 years later in the early 1970s, and here the detective speaks to us directly, in his semi-tough (semi-sensitive) "I." The third part, five years later in the late 1970s, is set in a small city (Portland?) and is narrated by a different "I," a pool-playing obsessive who fixates on Wade, and who hangs around outdoor cafes watching Wade who is apparently "waiting" — for something? for nothing? Here reading Aldrich feels like reading Kafka, or better, Beckett's *Godot*, flavored by a dash of Gatsby. Roles reverse: the private eye is being watched. The fourth and last section begins in the present in the same small city; it is narrated by yet another "I," Wade's brother-in-law, but quickly becomes a closing 10-page epistolary sequence of letters to Wade from his wife. And to help us with all of this, we are given a floor plan of the murder house, road signs, and musical notation.

The poet is not a novelist (in this) but he understands the techniques of fiction. And he takes risks: with 1/3 of the book to go, he wipes out his hero. Aldrich has found that crack between poetry and fiction, and deliberately jumped in. At times the verse sings, like "real poetry": "a sudden corpse invigorates one,/ like a stain — like the way great Leonardo,/ when he had nothing doing, used to/ study the dampness stains on walls/ for inspiration." At other times, Aldrich writes straight prose, as when Wade's wife writes to him, "Have you ever wanted to create something so beautiful that people would say it was there already, you simply found it for us?"

But the real joy of this story is how Aldrich can sound like Mickey Spillane: "It was then as he turned in the doorway, cupping his/ match flame/ against a quick breeze, that he caught her eyes. . . ." Or perhaps Dashiell Hammett or Raymond Chandler or James Cain: ". . . he felt off-stride with a rhythm broken, having/ ended up/ somehow in the wrong place, the wrong town/ . . . His youth was gone." The writer is both straight-faced and poker-faced about all of this. At times, he appears to be winking, but maybe those are just narrowed eyes. It is said that we must love well what we wish to parody successfully. Aldrich loves his hero well, and perhaps even his own literary progenitors. He cannot shake him, and has promised to go on with this Wade guy. With Wade, we are waiting.

T.P.

Samuel Sewall Sails for Home / Robert Chute

(Available soon. Winner of the 1985 Chapbook Competition sponsored by the Maine State Commission on the Arts and Humanities)

The sonnet, yes. And Robert Chute has given us 18 of them, each headed with a date of diary entry and an epigraph of one line from Edward Taylor, America's finest poet of the 17th c., and a true metaphysical. The poems themselves are based on the famous diaries of Samuel Sewall, who travelled all over New England, often by boat, in the 17th c. The mixing is delightful, as the two men were roommates at early Harvard and are rejoined in Chute's canny modern conception. The diaries themselves are free-ranging, full of accounts of early settlers, their manners, stories, Sewall's religious consciousness, coastal geography, and a lot more. They are N.E.'s equivalent of Britain's famous 17th c. diaries by Samuel Pepys, himself a naval officer, a rich and informal lode of information and opinion.

Chute invents a Sewall who speaks in the sonnet form, 14 lines in the "I," sometimes a serious Sewall ("With dead child in arms I mount/ an endless stair."), sometimes a Sewall tersely filling a log ("Wind North North-West. Storms of hail/ flaws, assaults our ship."). One feels that the language is not lifted from the source, so much as it is inspired by it. The speaker rings true, and yet is clearly Chute's creation. The entry dates stretch from 1674 to 1730, the year of the diarist's death, and yet in only 18 poems the poet makes us sense how the man changes over 54 years, a remarkable act of historical selection, of recreation, of evocation. Accounts of dreams are set beside letters and Salem court trials and deathbed vigils. The opening sonnet is particularly startling as Sewall describes the hanging of a 17-year-old boy found guilty of bestiality with a roan mare.

The problem in writing sonnets is how to seem natural, at ease, how to have your say as you want it said, while sticking to its iambic rhythms (unstressed—stress), inherited rhyme schemes, and the rigid 14-line length. One suspects that one of the reasons Chute won the MSCAH Chapbook Competition, judged by Charles Simic, is that he manages to make a speaker who is not the poet seem right at home in the form of Wyatt and Surrey and Shakespeare and Spenser and the masters. And this, struck off in the 1980s, a time when most other writers amble along in their free verse, frequently because they can manage nothing else, struggling to tighten it (or often not). Let it be said that Chute does not keep to the 5-stress pentameter line, preferring the shorter 4-beat or even 3-beat verse; too, he is sensible enough and flexible enough to avoid the regular drill-team march of iambs across his line, although of course he favors this rhythmic unit. His rhyming is a wonder. It follows no set form, but always ends — like Shakespeare — with the dramatic couplet; Chute sometimes goes the Bard one better and in the homestretch of the last six lines bangs the rhyme of the couplet four times (*side-slide-tide-abide*). In general, he favors the Petrarchan (or Italian) unit of four lines on two rhymes (*abba*) to begin, then one-ups Petrarch's second quatrain (again, *abba*) by daring to invent two new rhymes (Chute: *cdcd*). Nice work! In the third quatrain he shifts to the familiar Shakespearian alternating rhyme-lines, but again Chute "makes it new": *efef*. And as noted, he closes with a couplet, again new: *gg*, although (as noted) he sometimes for strength logrolls the sestet (four *f*-s in six lines).

Great subject matter, great speaker, great challenge. A perfect performance in a treacherous form. Form with feeling. Robert Chute shows us how to do it.

T.P.

from **Wade's Wait** excerpts

My visit seemed to be
getting off on the wrong foot,
wrong but predictable,
whenever I go out, some sort
of trouble follows me.
You gentle folks
at home romanticize a gumshoe's
walk of life
who think it's kiss and kill.
No, no — more like a drawer of socks,
forever unscrambling your darks
and lights without a wife,
then all this
walking on goddam tiptoes.

I hadn't slept since Gregory first
shuffled us back to bed refusing
to phone the police or doctor (let's think
about it, he said) and I lay dutifully
in bed thinking about it until
the light came through. And crept down.
I couldn't claim to be the tough guy
of my youth, but I felt an old thrill
returning...

Jonathan Aldrich

teaches Liberal Arts at
the Portland School of Art

April 2, 1674

"I'm sick: my sickness is mortality..."

Benjamin Gourd, age seventeen,
having for a year or more lived in
this abominable, filthy Sin,
in open noontday yard was seen
consorting with a roan mare.
This day, for bestiality,
Benjamin Gourd, bound tightly,
comes to the gallows tree. There
the Mare was brought and struck down
screaming in the mud before his eyes.
Would he wake before he drowns?
Would he take to Paradise
or Hell this vision of great brown
orbs fixed forever on the ground?

Robert Chute
Poland Spring

teaches biology at Bates

Review

Good Trembling / Baron Wormser

(Houghton-Mifflin, 1985.)

I first read *Good Trembling* on a July afternoon at the Burger King in Gorham and now I am reading it again on a snowbound day the week before Christmas. I liked the poems then, and I still like them. They show a man participating in his world with a nice balance of sympathy and intelligence. It is not just a gathering of poems, either. The personality expands and clarifies itself from poem to poem until the book becomes a human being; and the amazing thing is that Wormser brings this off without talking about himself directly. Instead, he lets himself unfold as perceiver, as social observer. It is never surrealistic or even romantic, but Augustan or neo-classical, Aristotelian rather than Platonic, the self subordinated to the world it sees.

The strongest impressions are the series of people that emerge almost novelistically from the poems. The woman in the soap opera, Charlene (who loves Elvis Presley), H.L. Mencken, the Jesus freak, Stan the legless veteran, CJ, the unnamed woodworker, the boys on the mowing crew. By accepting the limitations of the narrative self, Wormser escapes the autistic and obsessive mirror-gazing of so much contemporary writing and returns poetry to its place as an exacting instrument of social perception and commentary. This is a poet not alienated but engaged, distanced by intelligence rather than exile. One recalls Browning's essay on Shelley, casting poets into objective or subjective categories. Wormser is working on a return to objective poetry, in which a love of the world outweighs self-love. Even his formal concerns point in this direction. Rhyme, for example, skillfully and delightfully appears as a limiting device, as it was used by Pope and Swift, a *return*, a reminder that our concerns as humans are real and finite.

I can think of some readers who would not like these poems, people who distrust the intellect or who think poetry ought to take them off into another world. For Baron Wormser, it is clear that there is no other world. "This is the table/ Of life," he says, "one and many, human." The poems glow with the ordinary details of Maine life: a yard sale, a stock car race, a Legion hall. Snow. The poet stays up late, worrying, thinking about these things. He is interested in social movements, the history of art, the history of ideas. He forces his way out of the rather narrow range of present-day poetic diction and once again allows the language of thought and reflection to join the language of direct experience.

And Wormser's endings are almost always sure and smooth, returning the reader to a place close to where he started but a little bit different, a little distance beyond:

A little butter remains on a crust of bread;
The living succeed, and the dead remain dead.

I'd recommend these poems to anyone who feels disenchanting with what modern poetry has become. They offer a possible way out, not the only way perhaps, but a way that is sane, thoughtful and craftsmanlike, and that gives you, in full weight, just what it promises.

Bill Carpenter
Stockton Springs

is a poet who teaches at COA

REVIEWS

Firewater Pond / Michael Kimball

(G. B. Putnam, 1985, \$17.95)

One week after its national release, Mike Kimball's *Firewater Pond* made Maine's bestseller list. Already in its second printing it has received critical attention from Topsham to Bangor. Like Carolyn Chute's *Beans of Egypt, Maine*, it has a bit of magic propelling it forward. Stephen King has helped and it is riding the wave of the "Real Maine" hoopla. In reality, the book needs little help. It is both well-written and entertaining.

But is it the "Real Maine"? I think not. It felt like real Massachusetts to me. After all, Mike grew up outside of Worcester. Maybe the real New Hampshire, my home state. In fact, the book's fictional setting, Camp Wind in the Pines, might be anywhere. Perhaps in the real midwest. Mike went to school in the midwest. Then I found it. On a trip home to my folks in southern New Hampshire, nestled appropriately beneath a stand of towering pines, Silver Sands campground. There was even a breeze-blowing across the two acre pond and by the half dozen permanently installed trailers which dotted the shore. There had even been a fishing derby there in years past at which the winner was a four inch sunny. It was all coming back to me just as Mike had described it. I even remembered what we used to say when we saw a carelessly tossed beer can beside the road, "Massachusetts people."

Firewater Pond is not the retelling of red-checked shirts standing around pot belly stoves reciting rockbound humor or even backwoods bottomed-out decadence. In the collection of characters presented through Kimball's wonderful imagination, there is the sense of a second or third generation ethnic working class folk spun off into a rural setting, of which Camp Wind in the Pines is the perfect backwater. Classic Massachusetts. A principal characteristic of fictionalized Maine folk is that they either ignore or view with disdain the strivings toward American material wealth. Not so the folks of *Firewater Pond*. We are

presented with America-rejected, in the 60's hanger-on, Zippy Jones, or America-accepted, in his yuppy twin brother, L.A. Jones. There is Dolly Root who would rather have her feet set into concrete than be evicted from her shoreside trailer site. And there is Nighthawk, the camp's token Black, who abandons his shack, wife, and collection of pornographic literature to don a loin cloth and shoot the neighbors' livestock with a bow and arrow in spite of his lack of Indian blood. An obvious metaphor for urban stress-related ethnic role rejection. Each in his own way is acting or reacting to the pull of mainstream American materialism. From cheating the camp store, to cocaine and real estate scams, the campers crave a foothold up. Their problem and the source of humor that drives this fine novel is that they are getting absolutely nowhere, and the harder they try the farther they sink into the quagmire. Definitely, Massachusetts folk.

Firewater Pond moves along like an express train, gearing through an endless series of intertwined plots and characters. Kimball's narrative is fluid and his gift for comic situation is uncanny. In the end we are drawn to the *Firewater* folk with affection. At all times the action is fast-paced and sometimes frenetic. My favorite chapter, "Cowboys on the Moon," is one of the few in which there is a pause in the plotting and the characters are allowed to stretch and interact freeform.

Firewater Pond is first and foremost entertaining. But beneath the fun there is much to hold on to and the seething potential for more. And if it is not the "real Maine" it is the real somewhere else. Perhaps the real New Jersey.

Art Mayers
N. Whitefield

free-lances in many areas

Clear Blue Lobster Water Country / Leo Connellan

(Harcourt Brace Javanovich, 1985, 157 pp., \$15.95)

Bop, Bop, Bop, Baareebop! The sound of Bop weaves its way through this complex trilogy by Leo Connellan. Bop is short for Boppedock, a nickname for Leo when he was a small boy. All of Leo's troubles go back to this time. His mother died when he was seven and since that time his demand for love has outstripped the supply. Several times in the book he asks his father if he will love him after death — a common theme in Connellan's previous books.

Bop's adventures go through three stages. First, an attempt to find and beat (in a race) one Kelly who beat him up at a summer camp when he was a boy. The narrative goes back and forth in time and takes in other Kellys such as John Kelley, the famed Boston marathoner. Though Connellan will never find his actual tormentor, through the poetry he certainly makes the Kelly clan pay.

His own debts are worked off in a small detox/psychiatric center in a Connecticut hospital. The story comprises the second part of the trilogy. It is grim and grimly funny, familiar to those who have been in a place similar to this and frightening to those who haven't.

Boppedock and the various other "O'Docks" and their Irish, Portland and Rockland doings make up the third and title section of the book. Bop dreams of the big granite house in Portland that his family owned at one time and sold off. In the poem Connellan claims to have been discriminated against in Rockland in the 1940's because he was Irish. I find this highly unlikely since I went

through the same school system nine years later and never heard a single remark of that kind.

In this section, Connellan has a long digression from his own troubles to describe another son of immigrants who goes from his father's pool room to law school and ends up County Attorney. Later, the man is in private practice and is shot by one of his clients and seriously wounded. Though the writer has changed the names and circumstances slightly — this person would be readily identifiable to most adults in Knox County.

This calls into question how close the poet should approach the absolute truth. Connellan comes pretty close, particularly when laying out his own needs for love. And you might well ask if that isn't what poetry is all about? It is, to a large extent, and Leo is a mature master at it.

Though his book is long and complex, it is well worth the effort to decipher it. One might first want to read his *Crossing America* and *Death in Lobsterland* to get some of his background. Connellan's biographer will have plenty of gritty material but you can read it first in *Clear Blue Lobster Water Country*.

Kendall Merriam
Richmond

is a free-lance writer

Revision and the Creative Process

Kennebec asked Mike Kimball of *Cooper's Mills* how he could invent such a complicated yet well-managed plot. Was there much revision? Kimball responded with a statement, and then offered correspondence with his editor at Putnam's, Alan Williams. We think the material instructive, whether you have read the book or not. It also offers hope that not all book editing is as sloppy today as it seems to be, and that the spirit of Maxwell Perkins at Scribners still lives in a few people. Kimball writes:

The revision process was a terrible grind; two months of during-work (music teaching), after-work, and weekend revising, with a deadline that came on like a freight train; and every change I made sent shock waves throughout the book which affected other characters and events, which in turn sent their own shock waves, and so on, approaching infinity. . . . There were times, suspending plot matter in my imagination, grasping for solutions, that it all nearly cost me my sanity. I think Bertrand Russell spent his best years on volumes of mathematics only to prove the existence of the number 1, and afterwards he claimed he was never able to concentrate again. Maybe I made that up, but that's the way I feel now. My new book about a milkman has only four characters; pity the poor fifth who tries to steal in. . . .

Dear Alan, 1/26/85

New title idea for *Wind in the Pines*: Firewater Pond. I wanted to bring in the water theme somehow — Nighthawk demonstrating to Carl Dixon and later Carl demonstrating to Larry that the filthy pond water can (and must) be drunk. I think FP will also convey a sense of the vastness of craziness and alcohol/drug consumption within the book's covers. And that there's an unbalanced Indian therein. Am I on the right track?

Best, Mike

Dear Mike, 2/4/85

Thanks so much for your good and swift letter of 1/26/85. I think your title suggestion is excellent, and I fully expect us to go with it. It's strong in and of itself as well as for all the associative reasons you mention, and that's a splendid combination. . . . You are the boss whenever divergence of opinion is to be settled. . . . I only want to underline what I see as the main role of editors and interested friends — mainly to act as the first reactors and to stimulate your own consideration of whether you are saying things as consistently and effectively as you want. Basically I think this book is in very fine shape, so not to worry about whatever I come up with. . . .

Yours, Alan

Dear Alan: 5/6/85

Herewith are two copies of my revised and improved (I hope) Firewater Pond, the marked-up copy of WP which you provided, and a copy of your 3/7 revisions letter to me.

First of all, I've enjoyed watching the story take better shape, and I thank you very much for taking on my book. I made all the changes you suggested, plus a few of my own — which I sincerely hope doesn't complicate things too much on your end.

Despite the fact that FP is now 509 pages where WP was 441, there aren't 68 new pages. Additions I had made to WP (numbered, for example, 314A, 314B, etc.) probably totaled 10 or 15 pages. And deletions I made after printing FP (p. 502; pp. 98-100) have so far cut 4 more. I estimate the book is now 112,500 words.

The biggest additions of pages were the new "twins" material (pp. 241-252) (29 pages), which I've already shown you; and the new ending (p. 326; P. 8 - 331), which required setups (pp. 142-144, pp. 257-261, and p. 285) — 23 more new pages.

I hope the new ending works. Having Larry simply carted off to jail for bribing a health official didn't rid him from the campground. And claiming, as Carl did, that Larry didn't have anything in writing was sort of last minute grasping on my part. The new ending gets rid of Larry and Sny unquestionably — and it contains some twisting, as well. (I borrowed a device from Steve King's "Rita Hayworth and the Shawshank Redemption" — at least I tried to. I planted a hopefully obvious clue earlier in the book which hopefully will elude the reader because of its context [pp. 142-144]. If it doesn't work, can it — or should it — be made to?)

Other points. Your suggestion about Chp. 1 possibly following Chp. 2 was well taken. In fact, after I had written the first few Chps. I went back and tried doing that. But it seemed awkward at the time, so I opted for the fiery beginning. However, your point about focusing on Carl at the outset was a point I had overlooked. Does the short introductory Chp. "Fried Egg Man" do the trick?

There's another new scene, one that I think is important thematically (pp. 157, P. 9 - 158). It forecasts the climactic scene in which Carl drinks the pond water in front of Larry (p. 317). I want Nighthawk to affect Carl in that way — showing Carl that the love of land is greater than the love of property. Is that overstating it?

The Maurice/raccoon scene (pp. 224, P. 3 - 227) is pruned, less anthropomorphic, and now interwoven with Nighthawk's second dream scene. It sets up tension between moose and dog and of course explains how Maurice bagged the coon. And it's more credible: Maurice no longer has a chain around his neck; and he jumps only 5 feet into the tree, instead of 6 (we could make it 4 feet). I like the scene because it's like those "best dog" tales local hunters like to tell — except that here it actually happens — and it's not an expensive, pure-bred Lab but a sadistic poodle. However, if it still bothers you, let's cut it.

The Root animal euthanasia business has likewise been moved (p. 149, P. 3), shortened, and made more credible. Alan, people up here do actually provide such services. Since my town refuses every year to donate money to the Augusta animal shelter, it's pay as you go there. So offing an unwanted litter of kitties becomes an expensive proposition. Folks too squeamish to take these untidy matters into their own hands (outstaters) can seek out hardier souls to do the dirty work — cheaper and closer to home. One man in town throws them in a sack and backs his car over them; another swings the cat-filled sack into a tree trunk; most just drown them. The "Unwanted Pets Laid Away" sign is real. Again, however, I'll defer to your editorial expertise — and objectivity (mine has taken a beating these last few weeks).

Zippy's transceiver is real (pp. 86-88). It's a homemade radio telescope — typical hardware used by member of SETI — Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence. I found plans for the transceiver in the April 1985 issue of "Sky and Telescope." The chicken wire antenna is likewise real — an astronomer friend saw one at a SETI conference he attended. I hope I've made it clear (p. 86, P. 5) and (107, P. 2) that the transceiver was damaged in Zippy's house fire and sometimes mistakes spoken words for coded signals and sends them (the last word it hears) directly to the readout screen.

I moved Gunnar's interruption of the wedding ceremony (p. 281, P. 2) as you suggested, but I let Larry and Carl glimpse the fish during the ceremony and exchange a couple of whispered comments.

I've tried to throw in bits about the geography of the campground, Norwood, and Oxford here and there in the book. A description of the campground is in new Chp. 1 (p. 13, P. 2) and again, in more detail, (pp. 66-69). I hope it's enough. (Does a forty-foot high ridge seem too high to you? I've vacillated from 30 to 40.)

And I hope the lengthened scene in which Carl first confronts Larry (pp. 97-99) is enough to establish Carl's affection for Susie, so that their (Carl & Susie) later wedding eve exchange (pp. 256-267) does not seem so grafted on.

I discussed with you cutting "Shit Everywhere" (p. 404), the lavatory flood scene. And I did cut it. But then I put it back in, slightly revised. Don't we sympathize with Carl when he has to get down on his hands and knees in that water — as when his fried egg gets ruined in Chapter 1? I also like the lavatory scene because it's true. I know a campground owner — the man whose story this, loosely, is — against whom that crime was committed. [Ed.: It was cut again from the final revision.]

I enhanced Zippy's shooting scene and then juxtaposed it with the phone call to Harvey (pp. 301-305) to add a little more tension and surprise when Zippy's aliens turn out to be Weasel. For the same reason, Weasel does not forecast his coming by calling Larry (as he did in WP, pp. 395, P. 9 - 396).

I've thought lots about "Patience is the hunter," but it still seems all right to me. "Patience is the snare" would probably stand up to analysis, but isn't it messy rolling off the tongue? And it's not as strong — or devious — as "Patience is the hunter." Also, a hunter friend says he liked the expression — when he hunts he waits for the game to come to him. Maybe you have a suggestion I haven't thought of.

Alan, I'm glad you said you were brave — my mind is boggled from these revisions, and I'm glad to be putting them in the mail. Unhappily, though, there's so much new stuff — including the new ending — I sense we're not finished. I'm going to plant my garden this week and take my family down to Massachusetts on the weekend. But when I return, I too will be brave again, and ready to have at it again. [Ed.: Kimball contracted pneumonia the next morning and was laid up for seven weeks.]

I'm anxious, as you must know, to hear your response to all this, good or bad. Please call when you have time.

Best, Mike

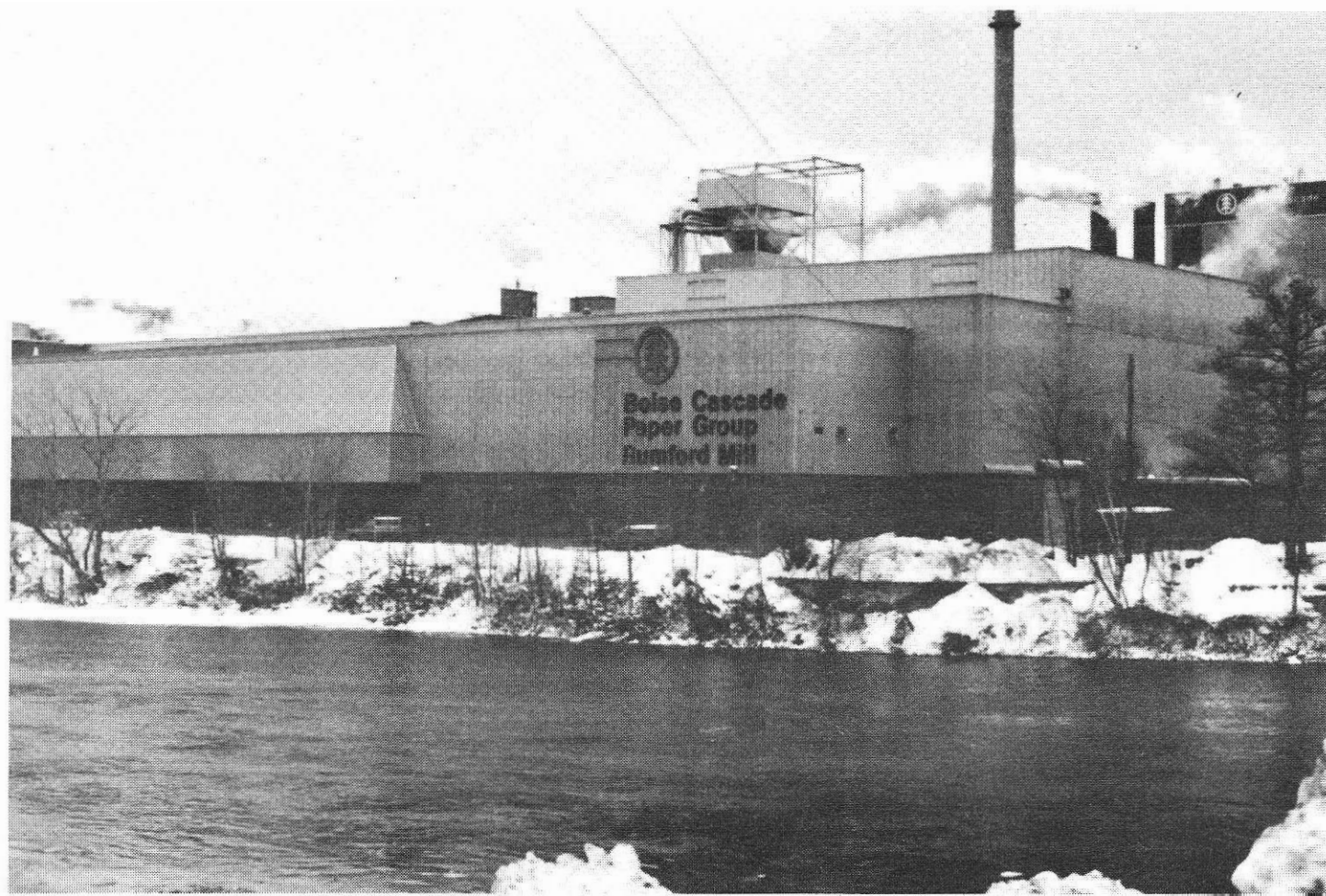


photo: Clara Schroder

Not Maine!

*Maine. Maine and modern civilization.
Modern civilization — modern technology — the machine —
the physical. Modern civilization is the machine: . . .
Modern art is the machine: the forms relayed from the
environment of technology, the machine, technology.
Not natural environment: that rhythm.
Art, its rhythm, now, a reaction to modern civilization,
an acceptance of the machine, the "physical" world.
Paper made by machine. Books made by machine. Words,
on paper, using a machine, in our homes. . . .
The paper machine — the paper mill. Not, paper, hand
made: made with machines. Speed of the human movement,
accelerated, to the speed of the machine: the reality of
the hand's movement, changed, to the movement of the paper
machine — reality. Speed.
Noise. Speed. Reality. In the Maine greened hills. . . .
Noise. Violence. This, to the human emotions, and to
the human spirit — the physical opposing the spiritual.
Force. (To a human being linked to beauty, the joy of life —)
And so it is modern art and its form changing in Maine.
The paper mill is an unnatural environment for human
beings: it is the environment of modern civilization.
Horror, in the spirit — fear — hell. Paper mill.
Annihilation of the soul. No: no: the machine — and human
intellect, worship. God is dead: no spiritual communication
in reality. PHYSICAL! (Fears. Noise, speed. Violence, everyday.) Speed —
Paper made by machines in the greened hills of Maine.
Modern man is the machine. Murder of the soul. (Only
on paper.) Run the machine: run the machine: run the
machine: Pine tree — chickadee.*

Tom Fallon
Rumford
*has worked in a
paper mill for years*

REVIEWS

The Bagels of Bangor, Maine

/ Minnie Greenberg

(The Dog Ear Press, So. Harpswell, Me. 04079, 157 pgs., 1986, \$10)

Minnie Greenberg's classic novel, *The Bagels of Bangor, Maine*, has been re-issued. Originally called only *The Bagels*, the book's title has been lengthened by its publisher as a ploy to capitalize on the national interest in our state. It tells of life in the Jewish *stetel* of Bangor, and of the coming of the messiah to this troubled community. In fact, scholarly articles in local dailies aver that Greenberg's original manuscript was called *The Baptists of Bangor, Maine*, but the title and ethnic setting had to be changed because of whispers of a scandal long since buried by history. Minnie's book is essentially the chronicle of one miracle after another. Messiah fever breaks out in Bangor and consumes the entire state. In no time at all, the entire population of Maine has converted to Judaism. The governor (an Irish lad from Portland who changes his name to Joseph Brennanstein) offers Maine as a homeland for all Jews everywhere. Brennanstein's offer solves the mid-east crisis as the people of Israel decide to move here en masse — leaving Palestine for the Arabs to fight over among themselves. Rabbinical scholars, tracing this move to Maine back to biblical sources, point out that for years the God of the Hebrews has blessed the state, for at the end of every prayer worshippers do not utter the Christian "Amen, Father." They say, "Ah-Maine." Perhaps the most interesting change in Jewish terminology that occurs because of Maine becoming Israel is in what used to be called an "Aliyah." An *aliyah* is the word that refers to a Jew who migrates to Israel from another country. By the end of *The Bagels of Bangor, Maine* an *aliyah* is referred to as an "ayuh-liyah."

The book and its sequels, *The Potato Lakhtes of Poland, Maine* and *The Kreplach of Kennebunkport, Maine* are now offered by the publisher as a boxed set. Minnie is appearing on television and in *Parade* magazine. She has made so much money from the trilogy that she has sent out carrier pigeons with \$1,000 bills strapped to their wings to deliver to poverty-stricken writers all over the state. One result will be that by Christmas, 1986, *The N.Y. Times* best-seller list will be made up of nothing but books from Maine. All of these will become literary classics, will be studied for centuries to come, and will be Book of the Month Club Alternate Selections. Maine writers will be the vanguard of a new renaissance of American letters. Each book will have a title with either alliteration or assonance in it, and each title will be composed of a family's name, a town name, and concluded with the word *Maine*. Already in Androscoggin County a novel is being readied which is called *The Cucumbers of Cumberland, Maine*, and there are reports of yet another named *The Summer Squash of Sagadahoc, Maine*. The *Times* predicts they will sell at least as well as the *Burpee Seed Catalogue*, which by the way is adding to its name the words "... of Bucksport, Maine."

Mark Melnicove
(with Terry Plunkett)
So. Harpswell

Play On! / Richard Kent.

(Windswept House Publishers, Mt. Desert, Maine. 1985.)

Soccer once existed midstream in the backwaters of American sport. People who played soccer were either ethnics, outcasts, or too small to play anything else.

A new generation of soccer players may change that (alas!). Youth leagues with screaming parents, soccer camps for 8-year-olds, games on artificial turf, such things already trouble the horizon. And, of course, today's youth will likely absorb images of sport from television rather than the printed page.

Still, there exists a hardy tradition of sports books that light and shape the imaginations of readers young and old alike. Richard Kent's fine little book, *Play On!*, places soccer within that tradition. Kent uses the formation of a high school soccer team to touch the painful, real conflicts of adolescence, with the sport itself as a poetic template to the story.

The setting: a paper mill town in a remote area of Northern New England. The plot is ordinary. The main character, Skeeze Gilpatrick, is a teenager orphaned by auto accident and placed in a group home. Skeeze begins to adjust to his new home, becomes the leader of a rag-tag soccer team coached by a mysterious, ill-regarded, but wise old gaffer who seems to have been born with a soccer ball attached to his foot.

His lessons reflect the ideal of the sport: teamwork, purposeful motion, the

use of space, and deep respect for the tradition of the game. The team slowly improves and its progress affects the players and the community in profound ways. And if the characters seem typed (Who would declare themselves no type at all?), the situations predictable, they seem nonetheless believable and, finally, poignant.

And in his writing, Kent describes the action of the game clearly:

It was a direct kick forty yards from the Hamlin goal. Nat set the ball, then lofted it to Andrew in a corner. Andrew tapped it cleanly and moved quickly to his right, eluding a defenseman. His chip shot floated to Digger — the ball never touched the ground as the forward snapped it out of mid-air with a turning shot. The keeper never had a chance, though his lunging dive was spectacular.

Whether as a gift for a younger reader, or a touching and engaging diversion for an older one, *Play On!* offers a fine advantage.

David Adams
Bath, Ohio
a poet who plays
and coaches soccer

Review

Rain / William Carpenter

(The 1985 Morse Poetry Prize, Northeastern University Press, P.O. Box 116, Boston 02117, 1985, 71 pgs., \$6.95)

William Carpenter wins prizes *before* his books are published. Three years ago, *Hours of Morning* won the Associated Writing Program's annual award, from U. Virginia. Now his second collection has done the same, with Northeastern U. He writes in large, rectangular blocks of print that look like bricks on the page, or in triplets, linked three-line stanzas, both ways lifting prose-poetry, but not pretty "poetic prose." Arguably, he is the most readable, entertaining, serious poet writing today. Ten years from now he will be in the anthologies.

He knows his literature. Franz Kafka's short story, "Metamorphosis," begins when Gregor Samsa "awoke one morning . . . (and) found himself transformed in his bed into a giant insect." Kafka does not justify nor explain. The reader either makes the leap from the literal to the lyrically surreal, or not. Reading Carpenter's poems is like this. One begins, "I wake one morning to find myself the Pope." Usually, the transformation occurs abruptly after a perfectly reasonable scene is set. In one, a routine canoe trip quickly turns cannibalistic. In another, tourists arrive and set up camp to look at the ocean; within ten lines Carpenter has them walking straight into the water, over their heads; they keep going, a "hat floating away like a white ship." Or, a man suddenly begins to burn down his own house. In another, a group of widows on a fall foliage tour gets off a bus and sits down for dinner at the Acadia Diner; all of their dead husbands suddenly file out of the men's room. Carpenter's eye for the particulars of an environment plants the reader in the real by fixing on the telling, often absurd, detail. Then is felt the awful pressure to transcend, the itch to overcome the ordinary, what Maxine Kumin in her Introduction calls his "gift for seeing the lyrical possibility inside our dailiness."

Carpenter has written on Yeats, and there is a lot of Yeatsian yearning under these wild, comic poems — to *escape*, from places, childhood, fatherhood, death, to *become* something else (Yeats' golden bird on a golden bough?), to *advance into* another state. Into *what*? A reasonable middle-age? (A man asks forgiveness "for letting his family think/ this is just what to expect from someone who/ is every day older and more eccentric.") Into a perfect union of one's own body and soul? and then of man and woman? (The first poem is called "Origins of the Body"; "His Holiness," *printed below*, ends praising the "irrational belief in love.") An advance into *what*? The frozen stillness of great photographs? (There are poems on Ansel Adams and Andre Kertesz.) Into the *completed*, almost refrigerated,

action of classic oil paintings? (There are six poems on Edward Hopper, and a great one where Picasso begins fishing in his canvas, "Night Fishing.") Into *what*? The poet is not sure. And that is the great strength of this great book: Carpenter's courage. He accepts — even embraces — straight scary organic change, Heraclitean flux, the inevitability of evolution. He embraces the hard knowledge that no matter how much one yearns to find a place to be whole, there is *no stopping*. For every image he gives us of destruction or divorce or death, there is one of dancing. Ecuadorian sailors dance in Bucksport; the poet himself dances on the Brooklyn Bridge, while below on a ship Greek sailors "dance with each other on the deck/ because they insist on dancing even without women."

Like our best contemporary poets, Carpenter makes us re-evaluate the creaking Modernist masters. Yeats yearned, quit too soon, then lived on, dreaming distractedly of Occult Heavens. Eliot took a quick look at the decay of things, and became old and authoritarian without ever having been young — not to mention middle-aged. Carpenter's energetic embrace of change, his sense of where transcendence might be found in it, contrasts tellingly with the neurasthenic Eliot, tired Yeats, the always weary and worn-out Frost. How tiring to read men who were old before they were old, who give up before they are geriatric. True, Carpenter's desire to stop time remains; he looks at a photo of Ansel Adams and concludes, "Always/ we suffer and destroy. He made things permanent." Yet the clue to the balancing factor, the redeeming energy in *Rain*, is in the epigraph, from Marquez' *100 Years of Solitude*, "It is raining in Macondo." As Marquez' readers know, the village of Macondo is both imaginary and real, time-bound and timeless, actually there and also nowhere, a place where people seem to float in time and space. Carpenter draws inspiration from Marquez and other South American writers where transformations occur on almost every page, magical ones, some even transcendent. His refusal to be seduced by the numb and static perfection of art is nowhere more clearly seen than in his "Landscape with Figures." A boy stands in the field watching his father paint at an easel. The boy hates the painting "because it is not real." The poem ends with "the boy making an orange stripe/ on the unfinished landscape, with the largest brush . . ." In Carpenter's world, nothing is finally finished, finally framed. Life cannot be hung on the wall.

Theresa Blanchet
San Francisco, CA
edits the feminist review,
Island Voices

His Holiness

from Rain

I wake one morning to find myself the Pope.
For years I've been a regular American,
not even Catholic, not even related to any
Catholics, and now I am infallible.
A little thirsty, I think of water and it
begins to rain, in midwinter, and where
it rains, the snow vanishes and tiny flowers
appear on the lawn. From the flowers comes
the sound of voices singing an Italian hymn
about the fourfold nature of the beautiful.
It's absurd to be infallible alone, so I
decide to visit your house and show you who
I really am. Since it's hard moving in all
these heavy robes, I change to street clothes
for the trip. I look like anyone again, and
as I drive along, no one notices it is the Pope
except for the hoofed animals, who kneel down
in their fields as the miraculous blue Toyota
dashes towards Bangor, carrying the primate of
a vast religion; in plain clothes at the moment
but always ready to reveal himself in his full
splendor, even unclot his Body with its wounds,
its three birthmarks, its properties of death
and resurrection, its irrational belief in love.

William Carpenter
Stockton Springs
teaches at College of the Atlantic

Review

War Stories / H. R. Coursen

(Cider Mill Press, P.O. Box 211, Stratford, CT 06497, 1985, \$4.50)

As we read the literature from the years of our various wars, the attitude toward the heroic changes. The nature of patriotism changes too. Writers of WWI read like romantics stunned by the electroshock of the Gatling gun. There is no less horror from WWII, but it is balanced by justifiable belief in the value of action. Thus far, Vietnam books suggest by their scarcity as well as their content that the issues and higher motivations are beside the point — what matters is the *nature* of the experience, unmediated by conviction or ideology. Somewhere in our "forgotten war," the Korean, the war of Heller's *Catch-22* and of *M*A*S*H*, attitudes and values begin to change. The absurd appears; next step, the abyss. We know that 56,000 Americans died in Nam; we have forgotten that 54,000 died in Korea in only three years and one month between 1950 and 1953. Perhaps we do not want to know that the North Korean and Chinese forces suffered 1.6 million casualties, nor that three million civilians died in the North, and another half million in the South. Such knowledge inevitably changes those who lived through this period, specifically Americans in their mid-fifties and sixties. It is what Herb Coursen calls "that strange non-time."

In a way, Coursen's ninth book of poems is misnamed. Only eight poems of the 34 here treat military situations, and one of those is about Shiloh in the Civil War and another a Nazi in 1946. The other six appear to be set circa 1955-57, and offer vignettes from high up in various airplanes, the poet bailing out, or flaming out, or landing a damaged F-51. All are fine poems by a man of his generation coming to terms with experience that must seem extravagant today. Brisk, humorous, flip, they are offered in that throw-away tone characteristic of the post-Korean American male, understated, the heroism of snafus, the glory of goats. In one, the poet is trying to land a small plane that is on fire. "About to die," he thinks, "Damn! A lot of getting laid now lost." In another, he hangs from a parachute over the ocean, dropping his helmet. "There it goes," he says to himself. "Watch it. Watch it, skull-colored, and dropping out of sight." What is happening here is too serious to be taken seriously, and Coursen, author of a 1981 novel about the Red Baron, knows it.

In another way, the book is perfectly named, for the rest of the poems which stretch out to 1984 make it clear that "War" is a metaphor for the stress of more normal activities: fathering, shopping, teaching, loving, living near the ocean. The metaphor works. It "controls" a variety of material. It is extremely important to our culture to have minds made in the crucible of those earlier years remember. Coursen does, in "Long Gone Jocks of the Late 1940s." This kind of material must not be lost, nor left to turkeys at CNN Sports to vulgarize. A case should be made for the value of what a skilled writer writes *about*. The content. Few poets approach such subjects. Take the poem on the 1981 baseball strike. Or take the elegy to a halfback from the New York Giants who "seeks the open space with dying eyes, / skirting the everlasting sideline." There is love in these poems, and loyalty to one's passions. And an awareness of time: half the poems carry dates and many have holidays in their titles, as if the poet, himself a survivor of real and metaphorical wars, celebrates the present given to him, "skirting the everlasting sideline." Coursen is definitely not out of bounds.

Terry Plunkett

teaches at UMA

Flame Out: 1955

*Here in the unresisting stratosphere,
sound is a mere ripple across leading
edge and canopy. No friction grates on
this effortless spooling through the upper*

*arc of a bubble blowing towards the sun.
But silence implodes, and the gauges spin
down from green to zero. The ice-trail
behind me dies. I roll, powerless, nose*

*down, seeking the invisible strands that
criss-cross down blue altitudes, down angels
etched in cirrus, down into the grip of
that rubber-stained and cross-winded concrete.*

H. R. Coursen
Brunswick

teaches at Bowdoin

From *A Survivor's Notes*

What a Cambodian Learns in America

*You should not put your hand
on the round red place on stoves. . Snow
is white, falls like lotus petals
from the sky, turns to water when
you touch it. Red marks by your nose,
meaning you wear glasses, can read,
will not cause someone to cut your head off.
And no one comes at night
taking fathers.*

*I can see my country like my dreams
on the t.v. Some people here are sad
with me to see the before of mangoes,
monks in orange robes, coconut dance,
and now the war, the camps,
the dying.*

*When students call me nigger
slanteye, it means
I am not the same color as snow,
do not see
with the same eye.*

Judith Bradshaw Brown
Farmington
teaches at Mt. Blue H.S. & UMF

SURVIVOR'S MANUAL (1/8/69 - 8/11/70: Vietnam)

*If your arms and legs
are still intact
you are a survivor.*

*If your nightmares
will wait for the night
you are a survivor.*

*If the faces of passing children
remain the faces
of passing children,
you are a survivor.*

*If tall meadow grasses
delight you with
sudden pheasants
you are a survivor.*

*If you can find your way
back into someone's love
you are a survivor.*

SEMPER PARATUS: TO THE GRADUATING CLASS (8/12/70 - Present: Maine)

*If they
got you
thinking about
signing up
just to kill
you some time
(since nothing else
is going down),
you better be
getting ready
to kill you
some women and children too,
and you better be
getting ready
to kill you
some time
doing time,
doing some long time,
locked up
in
their
screams.*

Doug Rawlings
Mt. Vernon
teaches at UMF

KENNEBEC: A Portfolio of Maine Writing

Published by the University of Maine-Augusta

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