

KENNEBEC:



Zelda

He groaned out that name again in the midst of his passion. I lay perfectly still. The bedsprings were squeaky. I didn't want Maryann to hear us.

"I'm not Zelda," I whispered after a moment. Not angrily, just impatiently.

My name isn't Zelda. My name is Ellen.

Not half so exciting, I suppose. But I have never been an overly exciting person. Unlike certain other members of my family, I had, in fact, never even come close to being accused of being exciting. Until I met Scott.

His name isn't Scott. I don't know what his name is. Probably something not half so exciting.

I met him on the front steps of the Gore House McDonald's. It was tourist season. It was hot. I had an hour for lunch before I had to return to the outlet store where I spent my time selling dowdy clothes to frumpy middle-aged women who arrived in town by the busload. I spent the first half of that hour wading through the crowds in front of L. L. Bean's and again in front of the counter at McDonald's. There were no seats, of course—I live here. I'm used to it. So—I sat on the great granite slab before the green door which bore a discrete brass plaque with the message "Please use side entrance."

He was wearing a virgin white suit. Three piece, white shirt, white tie, white shoes. He approached casually, dabbing at his brow with a white handkerchief.

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I tried not to stare, tried to keep my eyes on my waxy soda cup. But human nature being what it is, coupled with the fact that I had never seen anyone dressed so angelically outside of First Communion at St. Jude's or in "My Partner the Ghost" reruns, I just had to look up again.

Our eyes met. Or would have, if his look wasn't so vacant. As if he wasn't there. A non-person. Dressed entirely in a non-color. "May I?" he inquired. I shifted aside on the granite. He flipped open his handkerchief, spread it on the stoop, and sat.

I watched him out of the corner of my eye. He had lit a cigarette, white, of course, and was blowing filmy white clouds up toward the maple overhead. His empty eyes were on the street, taking into the vacuum the crowds of Saabs and Mercedes and Volvos and Jags, all with New York or New Jersey or Connecticut plates. I gurgled the end of my soda.

"I still think," he said suddenly, as if he were in the middle of some ongoing argument, "that St. Paul has changed for the worse. Minnesota in general. I hardly even recognize it anymore."

This is not St. Paul.

I wondered briefly if I should argue the point; he seemed to expect it of me, after all. But on the one hand, I knew that this was not St. Paul. On the other, I had never been to St. Paul: I didn't know if it had, in truth, changed at all, let alone for better or for worse.

I remained silent. I crushed my soiled napkin into my empty soda cup, snapped the plastic cover shut.

"Sometimes," he mused, closing his eyes wearily, "I think it would be better for us if we moved. Anywhere. New York. Europe. Hollywood."

I found myself nodding. New York. Europe. Hollywood. Anywhere free from frumpy middle-aged clothing. Anywhere free from waxy paper cups at lunch. "Yes," I agreed vaguely. "It would be better."

He was looking at me with those vacant eyes, his lips twisted into a small cynical smile, his head cocked. "That's what I like about you." He flicked my chin gently, familiarly, with a finger, before I could move away. "You always think the way I do, Zelda."

My name is not Zelda. It is Ellen. I have an older sister named Maryann. We were born with very normal names, to live very normal lives. And so we did, for the most part.

Until the summer when I was eleven, the summer when Maryann, who was seventeen, ran off with her Algebra teacher.

I knew she was going to do it. She came to me in the night, whispering tearful nonsense, bumping into furniture.

"Goodbye, Ellen," she gasped out melodramatically, throwing herself across the coverlet.

"Go to bed," I ordered, turning over, burying my head under the pillow.

"Goodbye, Ellen," she insisted a little impatiently. "Take care of Mom and Dad."

"Mmph," I replied.

"I'm sure Paul and I will be very happy."

She gave up after awhile, her efforts to talk to me through my sleep-fogged brain failing. I heard her banging her way out of the room, downstairs, out the door. If anyone else heard her, no one let on.

She and Paul may have been happy for those few months, but Mom and Dad were a different matter. Taking care of them proved to be nothing if not impossible. Dad burned her clothes in a huge bonfire in the backyard, inviting the neighbors over for a wienie roast. It was a strange gathering—they came out of curiosity, for it was a small town and everyone knew everyone else's business. They stayed for the hot dogs and the marshmallows, their talk brittle, their gaiety forced. They never knew what they were cooking over. They never knew that just that afternoon Dad had smashed every picture of Maryann he could find, from baby pictures right up to the latest, her graduation photo; in that one she was shaking hands with the principal, the staff, including her beloved Paul-Algebra-teacher, looking on. That photo particularly enraged Dad, so much that he got carried away and, having no more pictures of Maryann, went on to destroy the rest of us. Then he drove down to the South Freeport store to buy hot dogs.

Mom and I swept up the glass, and then she, exhausted, took to her bed. I could hear her moaning over and over to herself. "My baby. Oh, my baby. How could she do this to me?" I finally put on a record to cover the sound.

Quite frankly, I never did understand how Maryann had done it. She was not pretty. She was short, a bit on the heavy side. Her biggest asset was an oversized bust that had sprouted at about twelve. She was not very perceptive. She was clumsy, falling, bumping into things, breaking them. And yet she had somehow captured the imagination of one of her teachers, enough so that that middle-aged

man felt it imperative to leave his wife of fifteen years for her. Romantic, I thought. I had recently seen *My Fair Lady* on television.

Mom never did get out of bed. Poor woman, the neighbors would say when they asked about her. The Harrimans from down the street came to read to her from the Book of James, and to pray over her; then they decided that she needed to be anointed, but all I could find for them was a bottle of Mazola. They used that. It did not help.

It had become common knowledge by then that the wife of fifteen years, in a fit of despondency, had gulped down an entire bottle of barbituates, or aspirin, or Vitamin C—the account varied in the telling—but had not died. Instead, she had been whisked away by her relatives to a warm climate, Arizona or Florida maybe, to recover. The Harrimans revealed all this to my mother during their visit. She took it personally.

"To think a child of mine," she would begin, glaring at me as though it was I, and not Maryann, who had brought this curse down upon our house, "could actually drive a poor woman to such lengths. I'll never live it down. What did I do wrong?"

And when she finally forced herself to die a few months later—it was the only honorable course, in the face of such disgrace—we all knew the disease which killed her. Terminal embarrassment. To think a child of hers.

I thought I saw Maryann at the funeral, up back near the door. She was all in black, with a black net veil over her eyes. She looked, I thought, unhappy, but not particularly grieved. Before I could speak to her at the end of the service, she had disappeared.

He walked me back to the store, taking my arm as we crossed the street, keeping a careful distance once he had released me. His conversation was casual, observational, requiring no reply on my part. As I slowed, approaching the glass storefront, he stepped ahead to open the door for me. He bowed slightly over my hand, and was gone, fading into the crowds along the brick sidewalk in the direction of the First Parish Church.

Nancy and the girls, overpowered, no doubt (as I was) by the immaculate, unreal whiteness of my escort, were subdued. I had expected far more razzing from them than I got, more questions, more teasing—I had been mentally preparing myself for it all the way along Main Street. I guess this preparation was not entirely lost, for, by the end of lunch the following day, they had fully recovered and come after me with both guns blazing. Once again he opened the shop door for me, bowed and then kissed my cheek, and disappeared. The girls launched their attack.

Who was he? I didn't know. Where'd he come from? I didn't know. Were we serious? I didn't know. If he was the one wearing white at the wedding, would I wear a tux? Who did he think he was, anyway, Mark Twain?

I didn't know. Strangely, I found with the passing of a week or two, that I didn't care overly much, either. It had been some time for me, since the last guy had come and gone. It was Maryann, you see. Her increasingly bizarre behavior... it followed a set pattern: a few cool, uncomfortable meetings, one final frantic blowup, and my gentleman friends were off at a brisk pace. No, I didn't care that this man had yet to reveal his identity. I didn't care that among his idiosyncrasies were wearing pure white, criticizing the state of St. Paul today, and convincing himself that I was someone whom I surely was not. Just having him around was rather pleasant, just having him walk me back to work after lunch. I could live with his referring to me by the wrong name, just as long as it was me he was talking to.

Even when Nancy finally accosted him after our third lunch together, even when she demanded of him whether he thought he was Mark Twain and he replied no, looking surprised at the question, he was F. Scott Fitzgerald, even then I only thought, of course, how logical. I didn't care. At least it was I he had chosen to play the part of Zelda. After that third lunch, I kissed him in front of the store.

Still, I put off bringing this one home.

A few years after the funeral and Maryann was back with us. We seemed a much-reduced household without Mom. Reduced in size, reduced in cleanliness, reduced in meals, you name it. Hoping, I guess, for some reprieve from this constant reduction—I was less than good company even then—my father let Maryann back into the house, salvaging his principles by refusing to speak to her. It was always tell your sister this, or tell your sister that. She was no longer his daughter. She was my sister. Mine and mine alone.

She was withdrawn, and no longer bumped into things. She walked, in fact, as if she were on glass, broken, sharp bits of glass. After the first weeks, she and my

father avoided one another; just the sight of one was enough to turn the other in the opposite direction. Eventually I was no longer ordered to carry information between them. They separated, totally.

Dad was drinking now, too, I discovered. During the spring run-off the water table rose and flooded the septic system. Two bathrooms in the house, and we were forced to make use of the old two-holer in the barn. The first time I swung open the door, there was a brilliant crash, followed by the hollow sound of rolling bottles. He had acquired quite a collection, I found, pulling the chain on the bulb overhead. Bottles from peppermint schnapps which had formerly reposed in the china closet, coffee brandy, but mostly whiskey. Seagram's Seven. The smell was sour. I stacked the bottles again and prayed for an end to mud season.

Whereas my mother had felt her life destroyed by the absence of Maryann, my father was slowly eaten away by her reappearance. More and more, for longer periods of time, he would absent himself from us, disappearing into the barn or further. Sometimes he would be gone for days. At first we worried—or I assumed Maryann did; but soon we began to regard his disappearances as one does those of a tiger cat. No matter how long he was gone, he would, in the end, come back.

Thus it was, the fall I turned fifteen, that we didn't realize he had finally left us for good. Each night I would set three places at the table, the silver shining dully under the overhead fluorescent ring, three places in case he should return in time and expect to be fed. Each night Maryann would broil three pork chops or bake three potatoes or toss together three small salads. Each night we would divvy up the third. The days grew into weeks, then months. We began to write "return to sender" on his mail.

If Maryann was unduly alarmed at this desertion, she did not show it, and I took my cues from her. Or tried, for a while. But I couldn't help question. Had anything happened to him? Suppose he was dead. Should we call the police?

"No," Maryann ordered at last. "Let's just leave it be." Her silverware clinked purposefully against her plate. "He's made his choice. As long as I keep working and you keep collecting survivor's benefits, we'll be fine. He's made his choice, so we'll make it on our own."

I felt my gall rise, that she should take my fears so cavalierly. "Sure, he's made his choice. And we both know what the deciding factor was, don't we?"

Her reaction was swift and violent. It shook me. She snatched up her water glass and hurled it. It smashed against the wall below the clock, the shards clinking, unmindfully cheerful, into the sink. I stared at her.

"Why don't you just say it, then," she snarled, her eyes glittery in the wavering light. "That I'm the kind of woman to make men abandon their families and leave home."

True. But I was not fool enough, even then, to say it. I did not choose to live dangerously.

"I never should have come back," she said bitterly.

"Why did you?" I was curious. She never spoke of her leaving, let alone her coming back.

She shook her head, her pale hair loosening, falling about her face. "What choice did I have? After Cecile's grandstand play, swallowing those pills, and after Mom died, Paul totally withdrew from me. He went into a deep depression, and I couldn't do anything for him. At last he poured it all out—everything was all his fault, he had ruined so many lives. He had decided either to throw himself off a bridge, or to move to Europe and join a monastery. I suggested the bridge. He took the next plane out."

So it went. From time to time she would let loose some small grain of information about those three missing years, but not often enough for me to feel we were real confidantes. She returned, too, to her old childhood habit of sleepwalking. The first night I awoke to see her standing, dimly outlined, in the doorway to my room. The next time, several weeks later, I was surprised to wake and find her at the foot of the bed. The third time she was leaning over me, and she held a knife.

It was only a butter knife, and she handled it inexpertly, so that when I pushed her hand aside in my flight from the bed, she dropped it and it clattered to the floor. I shook her then, hard, screaming for answers, but she only mumbled sleepily, "I thought you were me," and tottered away down the hall. I spent the remainder of that night with one eye open, and the next night rigged a series of empty peppermint schnapps bottles before the door to serve as a warning system.

Only one time did I need it; she knocked over one bottle and retreated groggily before the noise. After that she avoided my room as she made her nightly rounds; sometimes, during a late night visit to the bathroom, I would pass her as she made her unconscious way through the darkened rooms. Sometimes I would speak to her, try to get her to go back to bed, but after awhile I simply left her alone.

Over the years her behavior grew increasingly strange. She quit her job at the library and rarely if ever left the house. She hardly spoke at all, to me or to anyone else. She took to dressing up and serving herself tea on the good china in the late afternoon, drinking mint juleps after dinner. Gradually I learned to ignore her, to go about my own business.

Except that she chased away all my gentlemen callers, as she referred to them in a contrived, over-cultured sort of way. I could not bring them home to her. She was too much for them.

Thus it was after a summer of walking to and from the Gore House with Scott, trying to temper his increasing passion with a kind of restraint—I wasn't Zelda, after all—that he arrived unexpectedly on the doorstep late one autumn afternoon. I had seen him earlier, had walked the length of Main Street at noon with him, had discussed the possibilities of our next meeting. Our courtship, as Nancy and the girls so saccharinely called it, had advanced comfortably beyond their imaginings; Scott and I had been experimenting passionately for weeks just about anywhere we could find a free and private place—which in this town was not the easiest thing to do. We had tried cars, the state park, everywhere. Yet never once had he taken me home to his house or apartment or family; but who was I to question? Neither had I done the same for him.

Naturally then I was surprised to scrape open the seldom-used front door at the knock to find him standing there, resplendent in his white suit. Maryann was down the hall in the kitchen, setting out her afternoon tea tray. I glanced over my shoulder warily, barely giving him a chance to whisper, "I couldn't wait to see you again," before dragging him bodily up the stairs and out of sight. I hoped I had made it in time.

Once inside my room, the door closed behind us, I turned on him. "What the hell are you doing here?"

He came to me then, his eyes deceptively empty, his smile cynical and sweet, and took me in his arms. His kisses were warm as he sunk back gently onto the bed, taking me down with him.

"My darling Zelda," he groaned in the midst of his passion. I lay perfectly still. The bedsprings were squeaky. I didn't want Maryann to hear us.

"I'm not Zelda," I whispered huskily after a few moments. Not angrily. Just impatiently.

"Shh, darling," he returned, his lips below my ear.

"I'm not Zelda," I repeated thickly. Then the knock came on the door.

I jerked up hurriedly, the bedsprings squealing painfully. Maryann stepped into the room, her smile bright.

"Aren't you going to invite our guest down for some tea?" she asked gaily, as if everything were perfectly normal, as if my face was not flushed, as if my hair was not mussed, as if my skirt was not pulled half-way up my thighs.

I opened my mouth to speak, but Scott was already up on his feet, straightening his tie. "Tea? Why, I'd be absolutely delighted!" Incredibly, before my very eyes, he took a step toward my sister; she held out her hand and he bowed over it ceremoniously. Then he took her arm. I heard them making their way down the front stairs, forgetting me entirely.

When I caught up to them in the front room, they were seated intimately together on the sofa. Maryann was pouring his tea, her fingers gentle and sure on the lid of the teapot, while Scott leaned toward her familiarly. I made a move to join them, oblivious as they were, but it was just this absorption which pulled me up short in my tracks.

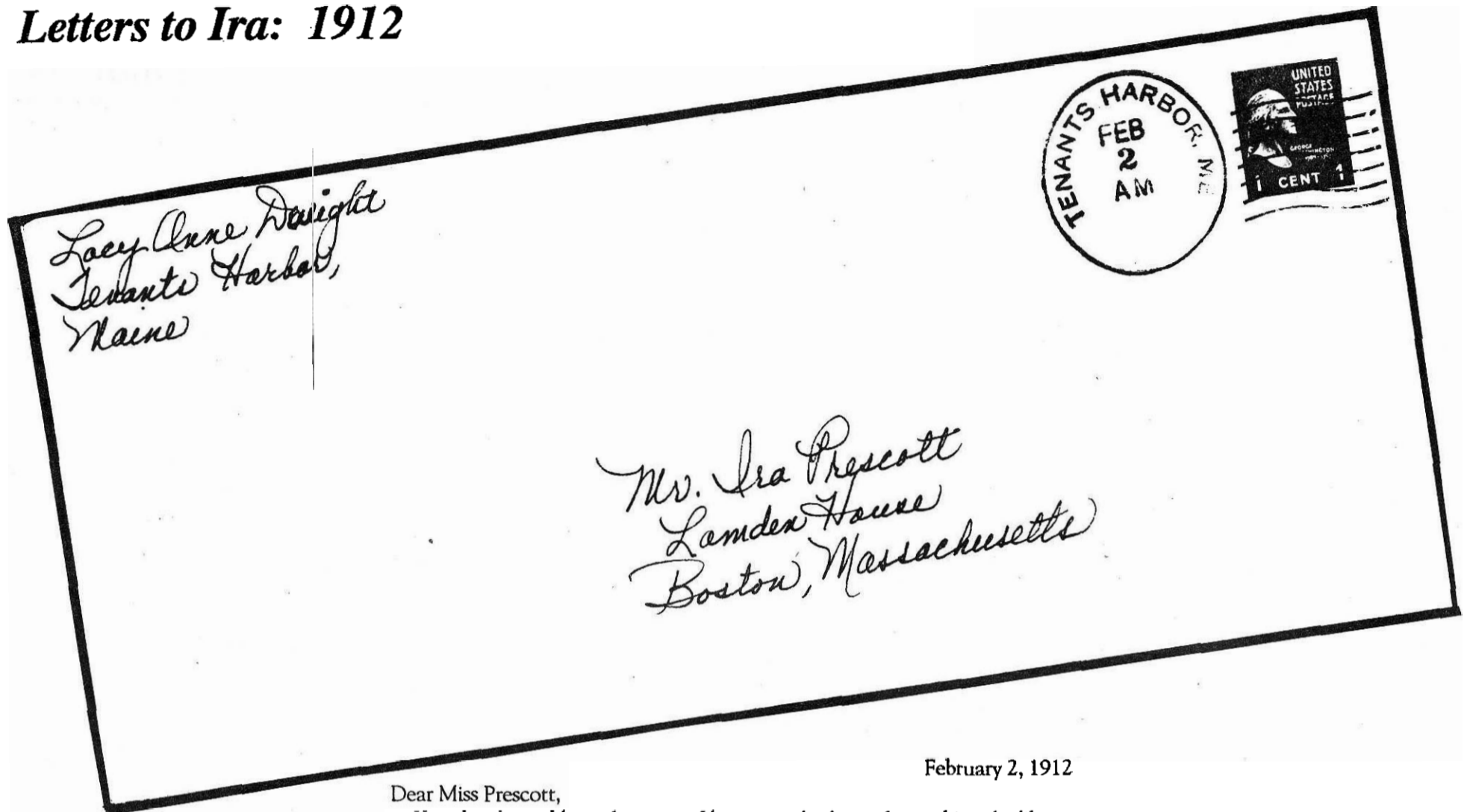
"Two lumps for you?" my sister asked breathlessly.

He laughed, the sound low and throaty. "You always know how I like my sugar, don't you, Zelda?"

"Oh, Scott," she murmured, touching his cheek with the flat of her palm in a gesture that made me catch my breath. "Oh, Scott. You're such a card."

Anne Britting Tobey
Belfast
teaches at Bangor H.S.

Letters to Ira: 1912



February 2, 1912

Dear Miss Prescott,

Your brother told me about you. I hope you don't mind my taking the liberty of writing to you, it's just that, well, I was taken with you (well, with what Peach said about you. Don't worry it was all good!) that I wanted to make your acquaintance. I thought you might want to write back, that we could be friends through the mail at least, you know, like pen pals. Maybe we could even meet sometime if Ma would let me go to Boston, or if you're ever working down east. I surely would like that.

First I guess I better explain something about myself so as you won't think I'm touched in the head. My full name is Lacy Anne Dwight and I was born and bred in Tenants Harbor, Maine, ten miles from Port Clyde. Ma and I live there now with our cow Bessie and Farley, the hired man. My birthday's in May and I'll be fourteen.

I work on the ferry boat, the *Island Queen*, that sails daily from Port Clyde to Monhegan Island, and twice weekly to Metinic Island. That's how I met your brother, maybe he told you? I'm a galley girl. I serve coffee, tea, cornbread, chowder, and biscuits. Sometimes they put me to selling tickets. I do other things too, but that's my job. The boat leaves Port Clyde at seven for the first run; I have to be there early to boil the water and make coffee and set up. I want to be a deckhand. I know how to heave a line, can even get a ringer most times when the boys let me try, but that's not often. Sometimes I'm able to go up in the wheelhouse to steer. The captain's kind of gruff though—and it's not just the kind of gruff that doesn't mean anything. I have to catch him on the right days. The days when he's sunny inside. Otherwise he'll just stand there and mutter to himself and then burst out like a steam engine, "This is no place for a young girl," and I'll just skedaddle out of there as fast as I can. No sense in riling him up unnecessarily. Sometimes he is nice to me though. Points out the islands on the chart—Ragged, Criehaven, Matinicus, Seal, and Wooden Ball. He'll explain how come Bird Rock sometimes looks like it's floating in the air like a mirage in the desert. He says it's called looming and has to do with the clarity of the air, and the reflection of the water and the light. I don't exactly understand it, but it sure is pretty up there, and I know I could find my way around the islands if they'd let me.

Don't tell anyone Ira, but when I get older, I want to be a captain. That's why I wanted to write to you. You seem to be doing what you like. What's it like dressing as a boy? Please give my regards to your brother Peach. I look forward most eagerly to hearing from you.

I am,
sincerely yours,
Lacy Anne Dwight
Tenants Harbor, Maine

February 3, 1912

Dear Ira, (I hope you don't mind my calling you that, Miss Prescott seems so formal.)

Horrors! I realized after I sent off the other letter that you might be angry with your brother Peach for having told me about you. I mean about you being a girl and all, when I know that you're working to keep that a secret. I want you to understand that it was me that was pressing him to talk about his life, and his family, and what he does and all. *It does get tiresome going back and forth all the time, and your brother did seem like a real nice fellow, and well, I guess it just slipped out, when I asked Peach who he worked with, and Ira, I wouldn't give your secret away for all the tea in China. Please don't let it come between you and Peach, I would hate to think that I could disrupt anything between you. Especially since meeting Peach was such a pleasant encounter. I hope it will only lead to good things, such as you and me becoming friends. I would like nothing better.*

Won't you tell me about your adventures? I'm sure you have many. My only experience with church steeples is using them as landmarks to steer towards on the boat, and once I saw in a stereopticon the story of a child who slid down a steeple and was hanging by his shirt until a young sailor climbed up and saved him. There must be a great amount of excitement in that trade.

Of course we get our fair share here too. Yesterday we followed a pod of humpback whales for almost an hour. They were singing and snorting and breaching all around the boat. They seemed to like us. If I could be something else in another life I think I would like to be a whale. They are such tremendous animals and I don't just mean their size. It's hard to believe that anyone would kill them just for oil. I guess it's a good thing that electricity was invented.

Well I must go to sleep now. My head is getting increasingly heavy. I just wanted to straighten out that area of potential misunderstanding. Now I'll be able to sleep.

A fond goodnight,
I am,
Lacy Anne Dwight
Tenants Harbor, Maine

February 8, 1912

Dear Ira,

Your brother Peach sure can tie one fine knot. That was how I first started talking to him you know. He'd tried a monkey's fist in the line blocking off the Purser's office, so when I went to go in there I saw it, and being as he was the closest one to it, I figured he must have tied it, and I asked him. That's when he told me about being a steeplejack. He said you and he learned the trade from your father, starting out when you were little tykes. I should think you'd get faint up there, from the height and the smell of paint and all. Then again, folks always ask if I get sick on board (they *never* ask the boys and I've seen Martin turn greener than cheese) and I don't, and never expect to either, so perhaps it's just what you're accustomed to.

There was quite a consternation on board today when it was discovered by Martin, (he's one of the newest deckhands,) that the line holding one of the heads shut was knotted into a monkey's fist and other intricate knots. It took Martin *half the morning to untie them. I had my suspicions of who tied the knots, but I held my tongue at Martin's griping. I did sneak him off a biscuit though. I mean who wants to spend half the morning in the head on such a glorious day. I hope you're having this same fine weather. You must be able to see half the world from your perch. Ever thought, Ira, of calling yourself a steeplejill?*

I hope you are receiving these letters. I racked my brain to remember what street Peach said the Lamden House was on, but couldn't. Since they haven't returned them to me, however, I assume that someone must be receiving them.

I am,
Lacy Anne Dwight
Tenants Harbor, Maine

February 12, 1912

Dear Ira,

I wonder if you might send me a picture of yourself. You see I have a terribly clear and definite picture of what you look like in my mind, but I would hate to have that so well established that when I did see you, I wouldn't know you from a hole in the wall.

Right now I picture you as rather small and red-haired like your brother. Your complexion is probably somewhat ruddy as is mine from being outdoors so much. You must wear shirts and jackets and trousers of course as disguise. What freedom! I am quite envious as you might have guessed. I imagine your hair is short, and curls against your head, and your eyes I think, are hazel. Quite a smart looking boy! I do hope this isn't far off as I like so well the picture I have of you.

Can you tie knots as well as your brother? He said he likes boats, and rigging. That he would like to get on a windjammer and set the sails. He told me that he's good with his hands, and by the way he moved his fingers in the line when he spoke I knew he meant what he said. Do you like boats too? Perhaps you would like to come for a ride up here someday. I could show you around Monhegan and if it was warm we could even go for a dip in the sea (*the water is very cold here*) or we could pick blueberries for jam.

I wonder as to why I haven't heard from you yet. Of course I am a terribly prolific letter writer. I sincerely hope I haven't frightened you off. Please don't think that I am being too bold. I am just kind of lonely sometimes and you seemed like the perfect friend and acquaintance.

Waiting patiently,
I am,
Lacy Dwight
Tenants Harbor, Maine

February 14, 1912

Dear Ira,

What a thrill!! I received your adorable Valentine's card and the picture of you and Peach today. You look just the way I thought you would. You've got that same grin of Peach's, in fact in the photograph it's hard to tell the two of you apart, except he's bigger of course. No wonder no one knows you're a girl.

Today was a real doozy. Captain Rowles let me steer the longest I ever have today. He even made Martin go below and watch the galley for me! And best of all, he went and stood out on deck, to feel the sun on his face he said, so I was *steering in the wheelhouse all by myself for a few minutes!* I kept wishing there was someone around to see me, but all we saw was a couple of harbor seals sunning themselves as we rounded Goat's Neck. Now more than ever I know that I want to be a captain.

My plan is to borrow some books on navigation from the library and study them at night so Ma won't know. I don't think she would like the idea, already she's a trifle worried because I haven't any beaux, but there is no one here who interests me in the least little bit, and besides I can't see that having a husband did Ma any good, so I can't understand why she should be pushing the same thing on me. The problem is I'm always so tired when I come home after work. The last boat gets into P.C. at four and it takes nearly an hour to wash up and swab out the galley. Really the boys are supposed to do that, but it takes longer if I wait for them, and I can't leave until it's done so most times I just do it. As long as Captain Rowles isn't around. And usually he isn't. Most times he can be found on the pier talking with some lady or other who's been on board that day, or he's down in the engine room checking to make sure everything's in order. At least that's what he says. Personally I think he goes down there to warm up with the heat from the engines, and maybe even to catch forty winks or so. Tied up as we are then, the *Queen* could lull anyone to sleep.

I am determined though, and as Ma says, when I get that determined look in my eye there's no stopping me. I have got to figure out a way to spend more time in the wheelhouse without rousing anyone's suspicions, and to ask more questions without being a pest. The captain told me I did a good job today steering, and that, coming from him is a great deal, but right after he'd taken the wheel and told me that, he started frowning and muttering to himself again so I left before he could even say anything about my being up there.

It's funny. Martin gets to be up in the wheelhouse all the time, but he doesn't like it. His father runs a tug and he's been around boats since he was a tot, but whenever it's his turn for a wheelwatch he's off in another direction, trying to hide. Strange kid, he'd rather be down selling coffee in my place. I'll have to see if we can make some kind of deal.

How do you and Peach work together? Do you each do a special part of the job, or do you share all the work? I'd love to hear any details of your life you might care to share with this interested party, and don't worry, whatever you say, my lips are sealed.

I'm enclosing a photo of me with our cow Bessie. I'm not really much of a farmer, but it's the only one I've got. You can see my skin is almost as dark as yours. The eyes come from my father I'm told, and is probably the same place "*whence comes my roving spirit...*" Ma's been after me to put my hair up, she says

I'm not a child any longer, but I'm perfectly happy to keep on with my unruly locks. What do you think? I'm of half a mind to chop them off and play the boy like you; but wouldn't Ma have a fit. Guess I won't shock her right off. My apologies for rattling on so. Hearing from you at last just set me going. You've got such interesting handwriting, would love to see more of it (hint, hint.)

Most affectionately yours,
and belated Valentine's wishes,
Lacy Dwight
Tenants Harbor, Maine

February 20, 1912

Dear Ira,

Do you ever read poetry? It was at church today that I was thinking—of you—and other things. Church always seems to me the best place for thinking. I hope you won't find that sacrilegious, but it's true and it's why I don't make a fuss when Ma sends me off even on the days her leg is bothering her so she can't go. Which is most Sundays as Ma gets no other day to rest it.

I was wondering if the outside of a church—if your steeples for instance—are as good for thinking as the inside of churches are. And is it different depending on the kind of church. Do you have a religion? I do, Presbyterian, but that's because that's where Ma and Pa were married. Ma thinks it's the only church I should go to, that it's the only church where God can be found, but I don't agree with her. One day I snuck into the Lutheran church on the other end of town. It was very still and dark and shadowed inside, but I found myself feeling the same way I feel when I go into my church. Quiet and at peace inside. As if someone were ironing me from the inside out. I could almost hear the hiss of the iron as my worries drifted away. Do you feel this on the tops of your steeples? Do you feel closer to the birds and the sky? I wonder if you ever feel as if you can fly? Sometimes I do. In dreams I can. I press my arms up and down—the air is thick like water and I can lift myself up and up. It is like being a bird. It is like being a fish.

Ma is calling me now. If I don't answer her she may think I have gone out to feed the cow, she will give up on me and go back to her shelling of beans. I wish you were here now. We could go up by Irwin's Ravine and collect slugs for fishing. I bet we could get a jar in no time it's so damp out. And even if we didn't catch any fish we could stand out on the end of the dock and talk and watch the rain making rings on the water, turning my hair into a ball of fuzz.

I am, yours,
Lacy Dwight
Tenants Harbor, Maine

March 1, 1912

Dear Ira,

I hadn't planned to write to you today, was going to get on with my studying. I borrowed a book from the library called *The Ways of Navigation*. It's slow going, but as I said before I'm determined. Still I wish I didn't have so many questions, and no one to answer them. I'm afraid to pester the captain with too many.

It's raining. It seems as if it's been raining for weeks, and though the first few days of rain are nice, it brings the fresh smells out of the earth and is nice even to walk in for a while, I'm getting tired of it. Today you could hardly make out any land at all what with the fog. The captain gets mean where there's fog, well not so much mean, but edgy. You can tell his nerves are on edge, wouldn't trust him if they weren't, but the last thing he wants is a girl around the wheelhouse, so on days when the fog is as thick as pea soup I don't even bother to go topside, and I send Martin up with the captain's coffee in the morning.

And so now I'm home. It's Sunday and it's raining. What a dismal combination. The streets are emptied and the harbor's still. Bessie's lowing in the barn, I guess the rain has even gotten to her, she's crying for the tender shoots of green just coming up.

I imagine you can't work at all in this kind of weather. I wonder what you do then. You certainly don't seem like the type of girl who'd sit and stew. Perhaps you and Peach go off to taverns and meet the sailors there. Wouldn't I give my bottom dollar to see that. There must be sailors in Boston from every port in the world. Up here all we see are fishermen, and occasionally a schooner that's been blown off course. Sometimes I like to imagine that Joshua Slocum came sailing into Port Clyde in the *Spray*, on his fabulous journey around the world. What a guy he must have been. Some of the scrapes he had.

Oh dear, it's late and I haven't yet ironed my uniform for tomorrow. Must be

shipshape and all that. I've pinned the picture of you and Peach on the wall by my bed. That way it's the last thing I see before I go to sleep at night, and the first thing I see in the morning. Ira, what do you think about at night before you fall asleep? I think of the world, round and great like a ball, I think of Christopher Columbus rounding it in his ships, and the porpoises that followed him, sending up white sheets of spray. As of late I think a lot about what you can see from your steeple. And I imagine conversations between us.

Goodnight dear,
Lacy Dwight
Tenants Harbor, Maine

March 5, 1912

Dear Ira,

The crocuses are in bloom out my window. Of course they close up at night and pretend to be sleeping, but I can hear them whispering to each other before I fall asleep. The stars are so bright out my window that my eyes begin to hurt from staring at them. I can see Casseopia without much trouble, and the Big Dipper, and by craning my head a little to the left I can just see Arcturus, the bear. Did you ever think about how long those stars have been there? It makes me filled with impatience to think that I can't know what they're saying. I can guess, the wind is thick with it, but I'm not sure. Do you ever wish you could climb your steeples at night?

Ma's downstairs cooking beans. She's been up and about today, her bad leg bothering her as much as ever. Mama went part deaf with the swine flue when she was a girl, about my age. Somehow she always manages to hear what I don't want her to, but let me try and convey something important, like that I need a nickel for a new pad of paper, and she won't hear a thing. As a point of interest I'm thirteen and three quarters though folks say I'm mature for my age. That's why I was able to leave school a year early and start work on the *Island Queen*. I pretended I was thirteen when the school examiners came, and the teacher, Miss Holloway, let me get away with it 'cause she knew Ma was hard up with leg and all, and needed me to help bring the bread and butter home. My Pa's a rover, Ma says; he tried to settle down with her and it lasted about a month. Ma says it was like trying to stick a fly's wings together with glue to get him to stick around. And that when he did stay he'd drink, and when he drank they quarreled. So Ma said she was almost relieved to have him go, until she realized she had a kid in the oven (that's me), and that she'd really have to buckle down to make ends meet. And she did. She's been taking in laundry ever since. She wanted me to do that with her, but I hemmed and hawed and pestered Mr. Lions down at the docks so much that he finally said he'd put me on the *Queen* for a week's trial run as a galley girl, even though he said I was awfully young. I told him I was thirteen too.

I guess it's not that different from you pretending to be a boy. I still wonder what that feels like. Do you ever feel as if you're really turning into one? I hope not, as I like girls ever so much better than boys. You, Ira, are probably just the perfect combination.

I am,
affectionately yours,
Lacy Dwight
Tenants Harbor, Maine

March 12, 1912

Dear Ira,

Still I haven't heard from you. I send all warm wishes nonetheless. As you sent the picture of you and Peach and the Valentine's card, I will make the assumption that you do regard me with affection and are just not one of the written word. I am sure you have many other loves and occupations to keep you happy and content. For myself, I wish it were more so. Ma's leg has been bothering her more and more. I think she would be advised to go to hospital, but she is unwilling, says the cost is too dear, which is true, but she is in pain much of the time, and does not believe what Doctor Horgood tells her. What I say is of no avail. She puts all her faith in Dr. Bonn's cure-all pills, and insists that I pray for her when I go to church on Sundays.

Aside from that (which means I am tired than ever these days), all is smooth sailing at work. The captain has been exceedingly pleasant these last days, and at last I know why. Martin confided to me that he saw the captain in Friendship, knocking at the door of Mr. Denbrook's house and being let in by his daughter, a blushing young lady of eighteen or so. So the captain has a young lady. Well,

I don't envy her in the least, but am glad as it makes the captain more docile. Today he pointed out Hawes Reef without my even asking, where at neap tide you can just make out the bowsprit of the *Avatar*, wrecked there not more than ten years ago. And not a single survivor to tell the tale.

I often wonder what lies beneath the sea. Sometimes the fishermen unload the strangest things with their catch. Sea anemones like stars, rocks crusted with slime and tiny weeds like flowers, odd flapping fish that struggle to escape from the nets like birds caught in a wire cage, beating their wings against the sides, rock crabs bigger than the ones I find in the tide pools at Andrew's Ledge, and lobsters, some with the largest claws imaginable, green and brown like kelp, dotted with pinpricks of red.

Sometimes I lie in bed at night and imagine the world reversed, the sea is the sky and I am looking up at sea anemones glowing like stars. I am floating underwater and the weeds of the sea hang down and brush me with their fluttering limbs. The sea is the sky and I am underwater, but it is not like death, not like drowning, there I can breathe and I am safe. I can swim and no one can catch me, not even the fishermen could catch me if I was a fish. Underwater the wild salt of the sea would keep me alive. I can fly by night underwater, a silverfish, a bead of light, in and among the green, the night, the dark, the sea soft as velvet. I can swim, seek out, look out, cut open all the nets swimming under the draggers, the seiners, the gillnetters, I can set all the fish free.

I am, yours,
Lacy Dwight
Tenants Harbor, Maine

March 19, 1912

Dear Ira,

Do you know I went to church today and afterwards heard Madie Ellen talking about her trip to Bangor last week. She's the minister's wife (though you'd never know it from the way she behaves) and so she attended the Ladies Guild Society's annual meeting there, and she came back with the silliest looking hat I've ever seen. A boater, but with a wide black band, and listen to this, a cloth bird perched on the brim. She says it's all the rage in Boston, so of course I wondered if you've seen these little hats that look as if they'll just lift off into the air at a given moment. And do they attract the pigeons I wonder. I have never seen pigeons before, but I hear they are fierce and dirty birds. You must have run into your fair share on the steepletops of Boston.

Have you ever painted the Old North Church? We studied about it in school and there's a picture of it in one of our books. It certainly looks awfully steep to climb. How do you balance? Do you put sticky stuff on the bottoms of your feet to stick like a fly? No doubt you will find me quite an ignoramus asking you these questions, but I hope you will humor me as I am sincerely interested and indebted to you for answering them.

Ma is calling thus I will leave you for now.

Truly yours,
Lacy Dwight
Tenants Harbor, Maine

March 26, 1912

Dear Ira,

What a scrumptious day. After all the rain of last week the woods are finally turning green. I walked across our pasture and over the stone wall into Ram's wood after breakfast. Skunk cabbage is coming up, you can see the shoots poking their way up through the ice, and everywhere water's running. My shoes got all muddy, clear over the button tops and Ma yelled at me, but I didn't care. Saw a great blue heron in the cut—a sure sign of spring—won't be long now before the trillium'll be out. I always did think trillium were the most mysterious flowers, don't you? All red and bloody the way they are. The kind of flower you wouldn't ever dream of picking.

Tomorrow I'll be back on the *Queen* again. They've had her hauled out for repairs and a good scraping of her hull. Spring cleaning. Unfortunately Ma's got the same idea. I wouldn't mind so much if it weren't for the dust getting up my nose and making me sneeze so.

Yesterday there was a big to do in the village. Mrs. Whaite picked up her husband—he's just a scrawny reed of a man—and threw him out. Really, she just picked him up and threw him out. The hullabaloo was later when Mr. Whaite came back to the house looking sheepish. His sister-in-law was dragging him along and muttering to herself, "She's got you even if she don't want you, and

sure as shooting you ain't my responsibility Alvin Whaite..." It was Saturday and the village was full of folks doing their shopping and visiting, it being so fine outside, and they all broke up laughing. I was coming out of the Misses Dawes' house having brought them their fresh laundry. I laughed along with everyone else when I found out what was going on. You should have seen the expression on that Alvin Whaite's face, and the two women squabbling over which of them was going to have to take charge of that sniveling red-faced fool. Hard to imagine that he even is a man. Guess you're more of a man than he, Ira, the way he just sets out in the sun all day with a piece of straw between his teeth. No wonder no one wants him.

Goodnight Ira,
I am,
Lacy Dwight
Tenants Harbor, Maine

April 3, 1912

Dear Ira,

Oh, Ira, I wouldn't have minded. You could have written to me any old way. I can't believe it. You—you were so careful to paint every spot. I got the letter from Peach. He said—I don't believe him. It can't be true. He sent another picture. He said you would have wanted me to have it. He said you loved my letters. That you would have answered back, but you were too embarrassed, you didn't know how to write to me—you didn't have the words the way I do.

I won't go to church anymore. I refuse. Ma doesn't know what's the matter with me. I don't answer her calling, and she hasn't made it upstairs for months now what with her leg. Oh, Ira, what shall I do?

your,
Lacy

April 3, 1912

Dear Ira,

How could you slip off the steeple? Why couldn't you hold on? Just a little longer. Why didn't Peach fall? Oh, Ira, I wanted to fly with you the way I do in my dreams, both of us perched, two green and red parrots, waiting to dive, light plumage under water, feathers, bubbles, learning to fly.

Ira, they must have discovered—you weren't a boy—the death certificate or something—your small white body, smooth as a little fish, eyes glazed like fish eyes, I see you there on the cobblestones, I want to touch you, tickle you awake, you are so still, there is a fly on your eye, I brush it away, I imagine your heart, there in the center of you, blood red and pulsing, I imagine your heart opening like a bird's wings—didn't I tell you, the great blue heron's in the cut—spring is on its way, didn't I—the harbor seals, the whales diving, they're calling. Didn't you, up there high in the air, look for a place for diving, not to drown, you were smiling, in your sleep, I was dreaming.

And you stepped into my side and I suddenly became you. Beside yourself. The other, you were inside me and I became a little boy. This is the way we go. Dressing up. In hats, in bird hats, little boaters, lifting up our dresses, finding our skirts, flinging our wings outstretched into the sand, the sea, the surf, salt flaking upon us like snow, the fish, the pier, the light—We were swimming we had found our way underwater, what I know is that that's where you are, you have found it, soon I will too.

Still and always yours,
Lacy

April 4, 1912

Dear Ira,

I've decided to keep writing to you. Tonight it is quiet. So still. Everything wrapped in a thick blanket of fog. It is like being in a nest of geese, like soft down, until you step outside. Then the night tugs at you with damp easy fingers and lures you out, out into the world.

Everything looks different tonight and I look at everything as if it were. The men on the pier silently tip their hats, even they seem becalmed by the fog. Pressed as if by some ancient stranger. The sea too, is still, rises and falls in silent swells, and no light falls upon it. The street lamps are lit, but shed almost no light, instead they are like cats' eyes gleaming golden in the dark. My footsteps are

muffled on the wide boards of the pier, I can't think what I'm doing down here, my head feels as thick as cotton wool. Down at the end of the pier a new boat is in. The *Dauntless*. She is a strange looking boat. A pretty, well-kept dragger, but there is something strange about her. It takes me a few minutes to realize what it is. And then I do. There is no rigging on the *Dauntless*, but what is particularly odd about that, is that the stern has a gaping hole in it; the deck where the rigging once was has been ripped out, and not by the looks of it, by the hands of fishermen.

I am, sadly, your,
Lacy

April 5, 1912

Dear Ira,

This morning I awoke feeling stiff all through my body. I didn't know why I felt so odd until I leaned over to look out the window, the sea appeared grey with spurts of white, a squall on the way, and then I remembered, Peach's letter, the photograph of you, my walk on the pier last night, the strange stillness and the splintered boards on the stern of the *Dauntless*. The fog that had come in and swaddled me had swaddled my brain as well. Now the wind's picking up. I don't know how I will survive without you. There's a hole in my heart. Ira, you aren't really gone are you?

There is a poem by a young woman named Edna St. Vincent Millay that I read last week. She won a prize for it recently, the librarian showed it to me. It's called "Renaissance," and funnily enough Miss Millay hails from Camden, less than sixty miles from P.C. And she's only seventeen. I think we might like her. I'd give anything to have written that poem. It makes me think of you—and the same sky stretching out around us—you on your steepletop, me on my boat. The last lines keep drifting through my head like clouds.

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

Your devoted,
Lacy

April 8, 1912

Dear Ira,

The suddenness of Spring was a deceit. Last night the snow began to fall, a wet and heavy snow, as if the sky too were shedding tears, and still it keeps on. I feel Tenants Harbor shrinking around me, squeezing me in its arms, casting a layer of white around me. I must find a way out of here. An old friend of Ma's, Sally Taylor, a schoolgirl friend who left Tenants Harbor with her peddler husband, has returned, her husband is dead, and she wants to settle here again. I think she will live with Ma. I intend to give her my room if she would like it. I must find a way out. I hear there are many boat lines in Boston.

Thinking of you,
Lacy

April 12, 1912

Dear Ira,

What excitement! Ma has given me her red and black valise, and twenty dollars from my earnings on the *Queen*. I'm to keep it pinned to the inside of my camisole throughout the journey. Yes, oh yes, I, Lacy Anne Dwight, am going on a journey! I am riding in a coach on the Boston & Maine railroad. My train is called "Star of the Sea." I will keep my eyes open and see everything. And I am leaving day after tomorrow. There is so much to get ready.

I will be staying with Sally Taylor's sister who has a room on Prospect Street. My heart's all a flutter and I don't know what all to do first. I must go and tell Mr.

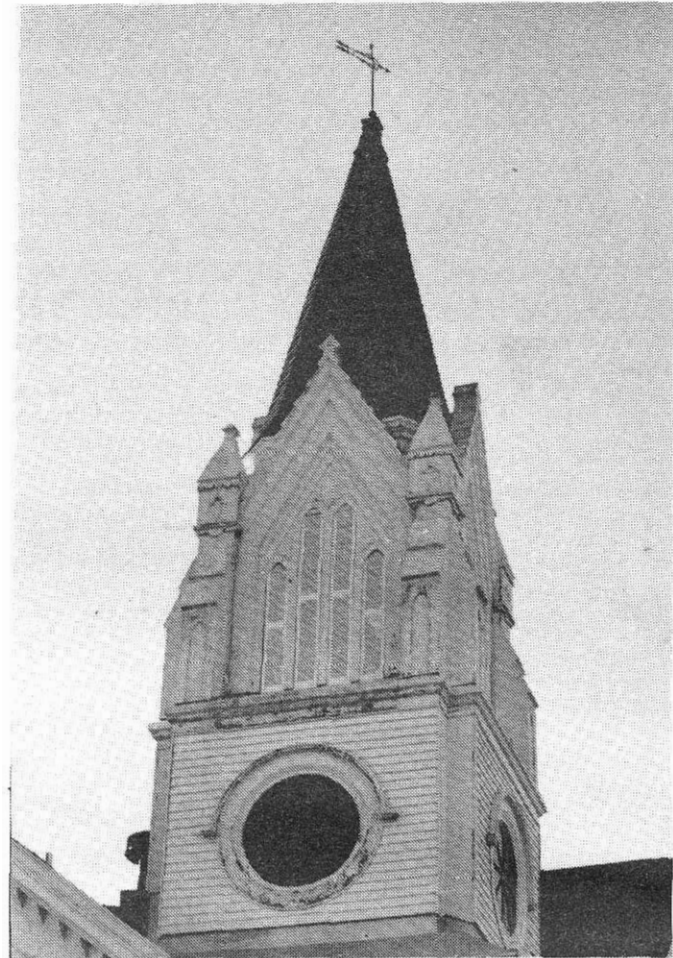


Photo by Melody York

Lions down at the pier, and ask him for a letter, so as to find a job with a boat line in Boston. I will hound the wharves to find a job there. Maybe I will meet Peach, and certainly I will think of you, Ira, perhaps you will be watching me, watching from one of your steepletops.

In fond haste,
I am,
Lacy

April 14, 1912

Dear Ira,

The train is a regular joy, although I will always remain partial to boats... I was so entranced with the Ladies room, hardly bigger than a closet, and the sink shone like a burnished moon in the shadows, the way the moon appeared out my window last night, the last night in my little bed. Sally, who is a dear, insisted that I sleep there my last night, that she would be fine in the fourposter with Ma for another night. Knowing how Ma snores, it was more than kind of her. I left a tiny vase of snowdrops beside the bed, after taking down the picture of you and Peach. I will carry both pictures of you with me wherever I go and if I feel a bit scared or anxious in this new and busy city, I will only have to look at your smiling face, Ira, to be reassured.

The sun is shining so hard it could break. We are speeding past brown and gold marshlands where hundreds of birds, geese and ducks and snowy herons, rest after their long journey. It is as if we were all on the wing.

Most affectionately yours,
I am,
Lacy
en route to Prospect Street
Boston, Massachusetts

Pamela Powell
Camden
*is a boat captain
& freelance writer*

Steeple Repairs

Last summer social workers knocked on doors of fundamentalist trailers.
Carpenters took down church steeples and put up scaffolding.
Even AA members nodded under the hungover sky.
I had never spent a summer in a town so small.
Preachers got married; small children frequented museums.
It rained seven Sundays in a row,
so the tourists who rode up in the rain, rode back in it too,
not noticing that Thomaston, Lincolnville, Searsport were decapitated--
or at least tilting heavily.
Three white churches seeking prosthetic rectitude along the swollen ocean,
one half torn down, one maimed, one unnervingly askew.
They'd ceased pointing at the sky,
fearful lest they'd scratch the heavily seeded heavens and precipitate
more of the same.
I must say I was slow in attending the steeple sermons;
strung out as they were along Route One,
all the tourists pointing North, and I was pointing
wherever, missing the essential notion of a summer that rained,
of a sky that asked us to wait for whatever might requite us.

Irene Cooper
Northport
is a teacher

Sequin Island Light

After the child died, rabbits
loped over granite outcroppings,
swarming through pine copses, across
the meadows and into the yard. When
they paused on silent haunches to peer
in the window, the lighthouse keeper's wife,
too long alone, though on clear days
she could see Phippsburg and Popham,
the colonies along Small Point, and smoke
curling from the cabin on Salter's,
stunned a slow one with a rock
and slit its throat, then stuffed it
bleeding into her husband's bed then killed
her husband then herself.

You sweep your arm across
Heal's Eddy, Bay Point, the river,
the lighthouse islands off the coast,
the clouds, the Atlantic, offering it
all to me. On Sequin, the light shines
unblinking and the foghorn groans
on automatic now, higher pitched
than the animal moan of the old
horn. The Coast Guard killed
the rabbits. But drowsy afternoons
after a morning sail, the abandoned
house listing in wind, clouds loping
over the waves, we're certain we hear them
thumping toward us with a sound
like the muffled beat of our hearts.

Nancy Arbuthnot
Washington, D.C.
teaches at U.S. Naval Academy

The Memory Doctor

She was losing her memory. After all, she *was* seventy-two. But having kept her age a secret her entire life, and not looking a day over sixty-three, she continued to hide it. "The doctor could not B-E-L-I-E-V-E my age," she'd say, encouraging the fib. That's all she needs, the daughter thought. It bugged her, that age was such a tragedy to her mother.

She called the daughter long distance on Saturdays. And in her Portuguese-Bostonian voice, would ask, "How are things?" An accent the daughter never really noticed, until some new friend would say, where is your mother from?

The mother always disrupted her thoughts in search of words, and this was not unusual. She reached for words like goods in the supermarket. Picking them out carefully and grumbling about their prices. Finally she'd end up saying, "Oh, you know--that thing." And the daughter would say, "What *thing*?" And eventually, she would think of it.

But it was when the mother repeated some long story that she told the daughter only moments ago--that the daughter noticed. It was hard not to. Even if the daughter was hardly listening, because the mother could go on and on about the neighbors or what they served at yet another wedding. With a sinking feeling, the daughter noticed. She wanted to point it out to her mother in a way so as not to alarm her. Or call up the great wall of denial. She thought of all possible ways to say, you just told me that. Don't you remember?

She soon found out that it was not only when the mother called long distance that she had trouble with her memory. The rest of the family noticed, too. The next time they spoke, the mother announced that she had an appointment with the memory doctor.

The memory doctor said, "I am going to give you a list of 4 things I want you to remember." And the mother listened carefully. "An apple, the number thirty-six, chicken soup and the color blue." Then they talked about other things until the doctor, cleverly, in the middle of a sentence would ask, "Now what was it I asked you to remember?" And the mother, worried at first, but now bursting with pride, remembered *everything*.

At the end of their meeting the doctor said, "I will see you again in November." And the mother, with one hand behind her back, quickly counted out all the months till November and said, "I will see you in 5 months, then." --"Well," the doctor exclaimed, "I can see you have no problem with *your* memory!"

The mother will tell this story over and over again. About how the memory doctor was so *surprised* that she knew *exactly* how many months it would be until her next appointment! It was the same trick she played with her age. And this aggravated the daughter. Surely the doctor realized she was playing a trick on him!

Sometimes the daughter, who is only thirty-five, completely blanks out in the middle of a thought. She will walk over to the refrigerator and stand there with the emptiest look. But the moment the daughter loses her memory, she knows she is simply stressed out. The brain is asked too many things, while working on something else completely.

At a second meeting, the memory doctor tells the mother a lengthy, detailed story, and then expects the mother to recall it. But the mother, back in her own home, admits she wasn't listening. She wasn't even listening! "Don't you get it Mom--" the daughter wants to shout, "That's why you're going in the first place!"

But the mother has made up her mind not to see the memory doctor again. He has nicked a sensitive spot in the mother's identity: her education. He makes her feel so terribly "stupid."

And when the mother tells her this, the daughter remembers the Alzheimer's patient on TV, sitting with another memory doctor. The Alzheimer's man recognizes the drawing of a harmonica on the table but cannot for the life of him, remember its name. Even when the doctor gives him a hint by pronouncing the first syllable--the man cannot remember. How humiliated the proud man feels being asked such child-like questions! He looks at the memory doctor and says, I do not want to do this again. --And it is not because he is tired.

Diane Ballon
Orono
is an artist

E. A. Robinson and Gardiner

**"Sometimes I wish the tiny town on the Kennebec
and all the people in it (myself included) could
be blown up among the Asterids."**

Poet E. A. Robinson's letters reveal he disliked the city of Gardiner, Maine, where he spent twenty-eight years of his early life. Yet the city he railed about so often was a major influence on his work. The perceptions and values Robinson developed during his early years shaped the viewpoint of the internationally noted poet.

In the 1870's when the Robinson family moved to Gardiner, it was a small industrial town undergoing many changes. There was lots of bustling and business: paper mills, brick yards, machine shops, tool companies, shipbuilding, a thriving ice-industry and a variety of shipping. Mill whistles, saw mill sounds, tugs and steamers, reminded residents daily of the activity and work. Merchants in the area kept long hours, many open from 6 am to 9 pm. Flour sold for six dollars a barrel, milk for six cents a quart and eggs a penny each. One's social position was affected by where the family traded.

Although most activity in Gardiner was devoted to work and moneymaking, there were religious, intellectual and social pursuits.

The Gardiner family and the Richards family, their friends, connections and guests provided examples of how the gentry lived. Gardiner had lectures, music, a library open to the public, and ready transportation to Boston and beyond. Some locals toured Europe, sent sons to Harvard, and furnished homes with foreign goods brought back by sea captains. Failure and success, work and leisure, wealth and poverty, knowledge and ignorance were all present in late nineteenth century Gardiner.

Edwin Robinson came to that city at six months old, when the Robinson family moved to a big, comfortable house on Lincoln Avenue. Robinson's father, Edward, had accumulated eighty thousand dollars buying and selling timber lands and keeping a general store in Head Tide, Maine. In 1870, Edward decided to invest in industries in Gardiner where his three sons would have better schooling. The children grew up in this community. The eldest, Dean, a bookish child, was expected to become a doctor. Herman, eight years younger, handsome and charming, was a logical successor to his businessman father. Edwin, the youngest, was a shy child, neither physically outstanding nor remarkably studious. He came home "tuckered" from playing with the neighborhood children, and at school he often gazed out the window. When he was eleven a teacher, annoyed at his inattention, struck him on the ear, causing an earache and a problem that was to recur at intervals. Strangely, this incident later played a part in deciding his years at Harvard.

*"I find it pretty hard to speak correctly in a town where
man, woman and child says 'ain't' and 'he don't'."*

Robinson's love of reading and his respect for language further set him apart from many of his peers and the local residents. As he grew older and developed an interest in poetry, he regarded himself as different from other boys his age. Early on he exhibited a fascination with words. At ten he played word games with neighbors Gus and Alice Jordan. Years later his letters reveal that he was "an incorrigible fisher of words who thought nothing of fishing for two weeks for a stanza, or even a line."

Edwin, influenced by his father took the "scientific" course in high school which disqualified him from college. But, here he discovered a love of literature, especially the classics. During his high school years, Robinson, through a neighbor and poet, Alanson Schumann, met with the Gardiner Poetry Society at the home of Caroline Swan, a former teacher and an early student at Radcliffe. Attendees at those meetings claim that the young Robinson was instructed and encouraged by the group throughout his high school years.

According to Gardiner author Laura E. Richards, no Robinson verse exists from this period because Robinson fed it to the furnace when students laughed at his reading in the cellar of the high school. So no juvenilia survives.

Robinson had an extra year at Gardiner when the principal found the instruction to be inferior and required another year. Robinson and his friends Arthur Gledhill and Ed Moore stayed on, calling themselves the "League of Three," wearing triangular insignia and meeting in the belfry to smoke and talk after school.

So, despite Robinson's claims of an unhappy youth in Gardiner, he found friends and mentors there. Two years later he defended this period by writing, "don't for God's sake labor under the delusion that those days were wasted. This

New England

*Here where the wind is always north-north-east
And children learn to walk on frozen toes,
Wonder begets an envy of all those
Who boil elsewhere with such a lyric yeast*

*Of love that you will hear them at a feast
Where demons would appeal for some repose,
Still clamoring where the chalice overflows
And crying wildest who have drunk the least.*

*Passion is here a soilure of the wits,
We're told, and Love a cross for them to bear;
Joy shivers in the corner where she knits
And Conscience always has the rocking-chair,
Cheerful as when she tortured into fits
The first cat that was ever killed by Care.*

E.A.R.



world is at best a diabolically practical place and if you are able to draw a little poetry somewhere out of the past, do it."

During the two years after graduation from high school, Edwin struggled with odd jobs, including keeping time for an ice company and assisting on a river survey, where he earned fifty dollars for a month's work.

"Dollars are convenient things to have, De Smith, but this diabolical, dirty race that men are running after them disgusts me. I shall probably outgrow this idea, but until I do I shall labor quite contented under the delusion that (there) is something to life outside 'business.' Business be damned."

For Robinson, that "something to life outside business" was literature. His letters from this period reveal great varieties of reading: the classics, poetic works, Thomas Hardy's novels, Tolstoi, Kipling, Stockton, Arnold, and Carlyle. Some of his correspondence reads like literary criticism. He apologized to his friend

Harry Smith for filling his correspondence with comments on books, but there was "little else to write about, situated as I am."

When his chronic ear condition recurred, Robinson was forced to make frequent trips to a specialist in Boston. His need to be in Boston, his desire to study at Harvard, and his brother Herman's intervention with their father, gained Edwin permission to become a special student at the University, where he remained until 1893.

Robinson was impatient to get away, but letters show that his ideas and themes were already taking shape, influenced by the town he was eager to leave.

"The truth is, I have lived in Gardiner for nearly twenty-two years, and metaphorically speaking, hardly been out of the yard. Now this is not right: the process tends to widen one's thoughts, or rather sympathies, to an unwholesome extent.... Solitude (in the broad sense of the word) tends to magnify one's ideas of individuality; it sharpens his sympathy with failure where fate has been abused and self-demoralized."

Robinson's two years at Harvard are detailed in many letters to Harry Smith and Arthur Gledhill. He dropped Anglo-Saxon, was disappointed in his Shakespeare course, did well in composition but disliked how it was taught. At Harvard, too, he found he was not suited to "sociability." He avoided large mixed groups, preferring there, as in Gardiner, the company of a few men with whom he felt comfortable. Gardiner friends occasionally visited him, including Alanson Shumann and Harry Smith. There were visits to the opera, concerts, museums and the theater. Always there was discussion of poetry and literature.

Robinson was rather depressed after his first year at Harvard, but returned in the fall, "this year to work," he wrote Gledhill. He read a lot the second year and worked harder, but declared himself "only moderately well-satisfied." His letters to Smith sum up his Harvard years this way: "I feel that I have got comparatively little from my two years, but still, more than I could get in Gardiner if I lived a century." His aversion to Gardiner, rather than fading with distance, seemed to grow. Yet, out of funds, he returned home that June.

"The trouble is not so much with Gardiner as with its population, that is, the size of it. A man is not supposed to think here; he is supposed to get a job; then he has acquired absolute respectability."

When Robinson returned, his letters reveal his difficulty in adjusting to the practical, commercial life, where reading and writing poetry were not respected by the common citizenry. His wish and need to write and to read were hampered by lack of funds to support himself. He wrote to Smith that he was dependent on his mother for every penny he spent. His father had died in 1892, his brother Horace Dean Robinson was struggling with morphine addiction, and Herman's investments were failing.

During this period E. A. had a series of odd jobs which were not easy to find. The booming prosperity had ended in 1893, when an industrial depression joined the depression in agriculture, worsening since 1887. July 1893 newspapers tell of railroad and commercial bankruptcies, strikes, bank failures and death by suicides because of lost funds; prices and wages were falling, and the numbers of unemployed rose. Mills shut down and fewer ships came up the Kennebec to Gardiner. Much of the Robinson family's savings was lost in western real estate. Edwin's brother Herman, who was managing the finances, began to drink.

Despite the despair in Robinson's letters, he found some kinship in Gardiner. He had three boyhood acquaintances and together they rented a room on the third floor over Brown's store on Water Street. The rent was two dollars a month including the temperamental stove. This "Quadruped Club," comprised of Robinson, the poet; Arthur Blair, the banker; Seth Ellis, designated the pedagogue; and Linville Robbins, the scientist; met almost every night to discuss books or ideas, to listen to Blair's fiddle music, and to explore general philosophies of life. The group often stayed past midnight, smoking, talking and reading Robinson's writing, done in fine difficult-to-decipher hand. Scraps of poems, their value not known, were subsequently lost; tossed out or scrunched in a pocket. This group, in a nearly bare, little heated, third floor room, likely gave the unestablished poet an acceptance important for the continuance of his writing.

"About (all) I find here in Gardiner to interest me is what I conjure up from my own fancy."

Robinson's first appearance in print was an essay, "Bores," published in the Gardiner High School literary journal, "The Amateur," in 1887. He wrote the class ode for graduation. His first published poems "THALIA" and, four months later, "The Galley Race," were printed in the *Gardiner Reporter Monthly*. Five contributions to the *Harvard Advocate* were printed during 1891 and 1892.

After the return from Harvard, several years were spent on writing projects that "came to naught." A Robinson letter comments, "my rejection slips must have been one of the largest and most comprehensive in literary history, with unnumberable duplicates." After more than two years, "the House on the Hill" and "The Miracle" appeared in the *Globe*, a New York magazine which offered no payment for the works.

After much worry, rejection and struggle, Robinson decided to publish his own manuscript of *The Torrent and the Night Before*, a collection of poems. A few weeks before the publication, Robinson's mother died. The unusual circumstances of her illness and death must have been traumatic for the family. Her doctor diagnosed black diphtheria and refused to return. No one would enter the house. Dean, the doctor son, addicted to morphine, often bedridden and delirious, pulled himself together enough to help. Herman and his wife Emma moved into the house, and together with Edwin they cared for Mary Robinson the few days before her death. The undertaker left the coffin on the porch; her minister, standing outside on the porch, read the funeral service through an open window. Lacking a hearse and driver, the Robinson brothers loaded their mother's coffin into an express wagon for the trip to the nearby cemetery. No one visited the house for five months.

Shortly after the funeral, the bundle containing the three hundred and twelve copies of *The Torrent and the Night Before* arrived. Robinson could not "take enough interest in them to open the package until evening." The publication was to have been a surprise for his mother.

While *The Torrent and the Night Before* was not widely reviewed by major critics, it did receive a review by *The Bookman*, a leading literary periodical. The review praised the poet's "fire," "swing," "passion" and noted that readers who "have any liking for poetry will read on to the end." One comment that his humor was "of a grim sort, and the world is not beautiful to him, but a prison-house," inspired a now famous reply from the poet:

"I am sorry to learn that I have painted myself in such lugubrious colors. The world is not a 'prison-house,' but a kind of spiritual kindergarten, where millions of bewildered infants are trying to spell God with the wrong blocks."

This was strong fodder to feed the opinions of critics who seized on Robinson's obsession with failure, his pessimism, and his bleak outlook.

Although there were many reviews of early Robinson work in the local *Gardiner Reporter Journal*, he was consistently referred to by his father's name, Edward, a fact that probably only added to his enmity for his home town.

Before Robinson left Gardiner in the fall of 1897, he wrote to Smith:

"Sometimes I feel a little queer about going, but I know it's the thing for me to do. I have lived this kind of life about as long as I can and my system - physical, intellectual, and spiritual - demands a change."

Except for the summer of 1898, Robinson never again remained in Gardiner for extended periods. He visited occasionally, and corresponded regularly with Gardiner friends, but he no longer considered it his residence.

Ironically, upon his death in 1935, he was buried in the Palmer-Robinson lot in Oak Grove Cemetery, two hundred and eighty-four steps from his old home, now forever part of the city he sought to leave.

*"Whether all towns and all who live in them
Are more or less the same, I leave to you."
"Tasker Norcross"*

**Glenna Nowell
Gardiner**
is the library director

"My worst and most persistent enemy... is a constant inclination to write poetry. Sometimes I am half afraid the damned stuff will kill what little ability I have."

Mr. Flood's Party

Old Eben Flood, climbing alone one night
Over the hill between the town below
And the forsaken upland hermitage
That held as much as he should ever know
On earth again of home, paused warily.
The road was his with not a native near;
And Eben, having leisure, said aloud,
For no man else in Tilbury Town to hear:

"Well, Mr. Flood, we have the harvest moon
Again, and we may not have many more;
The bird is on the wing, the poet says,
And you and I have said it here before.
Drink to the bird." He raised up to the light
The jug that he had gone so far to fill,
And answered huskily: "Well, Mr. Flood,
Since you propose it, I believe I will."

Alone, as if enduring to the end
A valiant armor of scarred hopes outworn,
He stood there in the middle of the road
Like Roland's ghost winding a silent horn.
Below him, in the town among the trees,
Where friends of other days had honored him,
A phantom salutation of the dead
Rang thinly till old Eben's eyes were dim.

Then, as a mother lays her sleeping child
Down tenderly, fearing it may awake,
He set the jug down slowly at his feet
With trembling care, knowing that most things break;
And only when assured that on firm earth
It stood, as the uncertain lives of men
Assuredly did not, he paced away,
And with his hand extended paused again:

"Well, Mr. Flood, we have not met like this
In a long time; and many a change has come
To both of us, I fear, since last it was
We had a drop together. Welcome home!"
Convivially returning with himself,
Again he raised the jug up to the light;
And with an acquiescent quaver said:
"Well, Mr. Flood, if you insist, I might.

"Only a very little, Mr. Flood—
For auld lang syne. No more, sir; that will do."
So, for the time, apparently it did,
And Eben evidently thought so too;
For soon amid the silver loneliness
Of night he lifted up his voice and sang,
Secure, with only two moons listening,
Until the whole harmonious landscape rang—

"For auld lang syne." The weary throat gave out;
The last word wavered, and the song was done.
He raised again the jug regretfully
And shook his head, and was again alone.
There was not much that was ahead of him,
And there was nothing in the town below—
Where strangers would have shut the many doors
That many friends had opened long ago.

E.A.R.

Richard Cory

Whenever Richard Cory went down town,
We people on the pavement looked at him:
He was a gentleman from sole to crown,
Clean favored, and imperially slim.

And he was always quietly arrayed,
And he was always human when he talked;
But still he fluttered pulses when he said,
"Good-morning," and he glittered when he walked.

And he was rich—yes, richer than a king—
And admirably schooled in every grace:
In fine, we thought that he was everything
To make us wish that we were in his place.

So on we worked, and waited for the light,
And went without the meat, and cursed the bread;
And Richard Cory, one calm summer night,
Went home and put a bullet through his head.

E.A.R.

"Roses thrown on marble stairs": the poetry of Edwin Arlington Robinson

**"... great oaks return
to acorns out of which they grew."
—EAR**

As graduate students of literature trying to take notes, we were given fits by the long-name fellows. Edgar Allen Poe quickly became EAP; Edwin Arlington Robinson became EAR. And they remain so today. When discussing EAR's classic poem (*printed here*) about a looped old man, "Mr. Flood's Party," everyone in the midwest—teachers and students alike—pronounced the character's first name, Eben, as EE-ben, just the way theatre groups said the name for a character in Eugene O'Neill's play, *Desire Under the Elms*. Imagine my surprise to hear it otherwise at a reading I organized of EAR's works one liting summer afternoon on the lawn of the house in Head Tide, where EAR was born. (Formerly owned by Colby; it bears a plaque.) Colby's then-President, Robert Strider, boomed out his favorite poem in his rich stentorian basso; "Old EBB-en Flood," he began, "climbing alone one night..." EBB-en. "He said EBB-en," I thought. And suddenly my familiar poem changed entirely; a richer, deeper meaning emerged. The desperation of a lonely old lush had an undertone of consolation, of acceptance of time's relentless passing: Flood, flood-tide, ebb, ebb and flow, Head-of-the-Tide. It fit.

How often did others who were not northern New Englanders "miss" EAR, I wondered. How often did more optimistic midwesterners and westerners, or southerners inhaling ambrosia of honeysuckle and Spanish moss, miss EAR's "cosmic chill," simply fail to grasp his hard-eyed disillusion, the gloom and doom surrounding his characters, his "children of the night," as he called them, those "scattered lives"? How many understood old Clavering, "who died because he couldn't laugh"? How many Americans, officially optimistic, "problem solvers" with the future spread in front of them as broad as my prairies, could "get" the late-19th c. desperation as Maine emptied out, as businesses closed and farmers fled? In EAR's sad poem, "The Mill," a husband turns to his wife and says, "There are no millers any more"; later, she finds him "hanging from a beam," whereupon she decides to plunge herself into the millpond. Upon reading this, a student from

Chicago said to me, "It's stupid. They both committed suicide, for heaven's sake. Why didn't they go get another job?"

So, in 1969, with new New England eyes I reread "Richard Cory," the poem about the guy who was "richer" than his fellow townspeople, but who "one calm summer night, / Went home and put a bullet through his head." I walked around downtown Gardiner, years before its fixing-up and brick sidewalk gentrification, pretending to be the man-on-the-street who narrates the poem. I listened again to the insipid song of the poem by Simon and Garfunkel. I discovered we flatlanders had been missing it all along. As does the song, we emphasized the shocking last line, "put a bullet through his head," and satisfied ourselves with the smug and utterly American interpretation that "money won't make you happy, just look at this poor dope," or something equally easy. What I had missed is that the speaker of the poem is a fool, a Gardiner hick, one of those slack-jawed gapers from small-town New England whom EAR hated. He talks like an idiot, saying Cory is "rich—yes, richer than a king"; I had missed the *tone* of EAR's poem, his mockery of the speaker's gee-whiz jealousy, and EAR's implied criticism of the speaker's self-indulgent self-dramatizing: "So on we worked," he pontificates, "and waited for the light, / And went without the meat, and cursed the bread." Cursed? Right. That's perfect, that's the kind of local who, sensing a conversation has moved beyond fishing shacks and the Gardiner Tigers, says, "Ain't you smart?" The poem is about stupidity and provincialism as much as it is about suicide. The last two lines are spoken coldly, without a trace of sympathy, even curiosity, and almost with satisfaction. That they are set right against the poor-me self-dramatizing makes EAR's indictment, though subtle, the more savage. As EAR says in his bitter sonnet, "New England," here "Wonder begets an envy of all those / who boil elsewhere with... a lyric yeast / of love." Envy, the vice of the small-minded. "Passion," EAR adds, "is here a soilure of the wits" and "Love a cross for them to bear."

EAR got himself from Gardiner to Greenwich Village just about as fast as he could. He returned rarely, preferring to spend twenty-five summers at the MacDowell Writers Colony in N.H. But he continued to draw upon his hometown, from memory or imagination, creating character after local character. EAR



AUTOGRAPH PRESENTATION TO CARL MARR

probably taught a few things to Edgar Lee Masters, in whose *Spoon River Anthology* (1915) dead smalltown midwesterners describe their twisted lives ("auto-epitaphs," the voices rise from their gravestones). In any event, EAR wrote squarely in the then-short tradition of those who attacked smalltown life, Hamlin Garland, E.W. Howe, and Joseph Kirkland. (Others were to come later—Sherwood Anderson, Sinclair Lewis, Thomas Wolfe.) EAR painted colorful portraits of people, alcoholic Miniver Cheevy, agnostic Tasker Norcross, who "knows more than he should have known," miserly Aaron Stark with "eyes like little dollars in the dark," John Evereldown, a "skirt-crazed reprobate," the butcher Rueben Bright who weeps all night, Cliff Klingenhagen who drinks wormwood rather than wine, and "broken" Bewick Finzer who, perhaps like EAR's own father, lost a pile of money "and something crumbled in his brain." One scholar, Wallace Anderson, says the portraits "are not highly individualized," mainly because EAR thought "basic human motivation... is pretty much alike everywhere." As an idea, this is simplistic; as a description of the portraits, it is rubbish. EAR's gallery is diverse, interesting, rich, striking. As Faulkner turned Oxford, Mississippi into mythical Yoknapatawpha County, EAR creates his "Tilbury Town," a not-cute materialistic place whose name suggests a "till," or cash register killing people, or again, the meaning "until dead." What EAR is doing is creating a Minority Report on American Optimism, its belief in Progress, and the cult of cash.

No wonder he is little read today. One standard college textbook on poetry contains but one of his poems ("Richard Cory"), another none. Folks from Yuppiesville condos can't imagine Tilbury, and don't want Minority Reports; they want their cash liquid, their dreams neon, and their journalism jejune. That he won three Pulitzer Prizes seems not to matter; that he was, arguably, the best American poet writing between 1900 and 1920 apparently does not either. As the cliché goes, EAR "celebrated the success of failure and the failure of success."

He was surrounded by it: his father lost all his money in a crash, his brother his in western speculation, and another doctor brother became an addict. Yet, in EAR's dissenting vision, he joins the great tradition of 19th c. nay-sayers, dark Poe, reclusive Thoreau, brooding Hawthorne, and the Melville who could "say no, in thunder!" (remember bleak Bartleby, who declined work and everything else by saying "I prefer not to?"). As EAR wrote to his Gardiner friend and fellow writer, Laura Richards, "... I am what I am, and therefore have my own paint-pots to dabble with. Blacks and grays and browns and blues for the most part—but also a trick, I hope, of letting the white come through in places" (1902). EAR struggled constantly, even in NYC, to hold on, to somehow keep writing.

And write he did, in almost every form available: ballades, rondeaus, triolets, villanelles, monologues, dialogues, portraits, lyrics, and meditations. He mastered them. His *Collected Poems* contains 89 sonnets—count 'em, 89—most in the Italian (or Petrarchan) mode, with its more meditative movement, its back-looking rhymes, the eight lines, then the finishing six, with no English-style wham-bam closing couplet. About half of these are superb things, and his rhymes are immaculate. EAR had a good ear, though he was somewhat deaf. On the other hand, he is also, perhaps, the only poet since Whitman devoted to the truly long poem; he wrote thirteen long straight narratives in blank verse, that difficult unrhymed iambic five-beat line in which, as Shelley once said, "there is no shelter for mediocrity."

Some poems, "Eros Turannos" (c.1916) for example, feel surprisingly contemporary. In it, a wife strives to keep a good opinion of her faithless husband, in the face of village gossip; he's a rotter, and she knows it, but she also knows she must somehow survive. "... home, where passion lived and died, / Becomes a place where she can hide," EAR writes, thankfully innocent of the word "agoraphobia." The poem is extraordinarily sensitive, psychologically subtle, and free of knee-jerk moralizing and reflexive feminist outrage. It is a poem about deception, the incredible complexities of marriage not easily abandoned, about how a woman's age shrinks her choices; she sees through her husband's "engaging mask" well enough, but EAR adds, "But what she meets and what she fears / Are less than are the downward years." It is a poem about how one's illusions are sometimes necessary, how they sometimes save us, and certainly shape us. EAR's enormous generosity and considerable understanding can be seen when he says of her "... for they / That with a god have striven, / ... Take what the god has given." And what has the god (the bastard husband? her fate? a life?) given? Well, maybe not much. And certainly not what she expected. Life is tough, he implies, but at least it's *our* life. Of the "gift," EAR says, "like waves breaking it may be," and he goes on to offer two other analogies, which, though depressing, are presented in powerfully charged language. The gift is

"... like a changed familiar tree,
Or like a stairway to the sea
Where down the blind are driven."

Continued next page

Oh, my. "Blind" by our illusions, in the play-out of our lives we are "driven" down "a stairway to the sea." In poems like this one, EAR's insight is simply amazing, and his ability to humanize his pessimism with compassion thoroughly admirable.

Curiously, EAR appears to write without using his five senses. The work sometimes feels barren, unsensuous. Not a nature poet, he is mainly interested in human personality. In poem after poem we find EAR, or a created speaking voice, telling complicated stories, or rather, *explaining* situations people have got themselves into. Usually the situation is fixed, the story over before we arrive in it, and not much happens beyond the explanation. EAR is not much of a narrator, but rather an *explainer*. In short, he is an *intellectual*. A man of the mind. As his best critic, the southerner James Dickey puts it, "in Robinson, the mind eats everything and converts it to part of a conflict with self..." As EAR's own couplet says:

*"We die of what we eat and drink,
But more we die of what we think."*

His mode is cerebral, analytical, his approach tentative, provisional. Conjectural, is what Dickey calls it, and explains that EAR does not hold ideas and defend them (as a propagandist or romantic would); Dickey notes that EAR's favorite words are *may* and *might*, which suggests a mind fascinated by alternatives, possibilities, doubts. His Maine critics, Louis Coxe of Bowdoin, and Richard Cary of Colby, use many of the same words—*cryptic, oracular, an intellectual puzzler, prolix, occasionally dull*. Dickey's list: *uncertainty, speculation, reticence, slightly morbid, pseudo-scholarly, profoundly contemplative, solitary, compassionate, stoical*. I would like to add that is a cast of mind I find to be peculiarly "New England," questioning, sometimes playful, distrustful of high-mindedness, leery perhaps of yet one more of Emerson's transcendencies—in short, just the kind of mind you can still sometimes find passing time around a woodstove in some country store. Or the kind of mind shaped in the nightly meetings of EAR's Quadruped Club as they huddled in a cold third floor on Gardiner's Water Street, matching their wits with the world. "The world," EAR once concluded, "is a hell of a place... but the universe is a fine thing." Well, that distinction eludes me. So sometimes I go down to Water Street, and I look up at what I hope is the correct building, and I stare at it, trying to imagine Gardiner then, the snow and the mud streets. Then I try to imagine that bunch from the boondocks, upstairs arguing all night about Liberalism and Democracy and God and people's lives. I say "Eben Flood" the right way. These moments, I think, get my midwestern mind a lot closer to the essential honesty and skeptical caution of the man himself. "Open your EARs," I want to say to people. Read him again. He may be right. "Passion" around here *may* be "a soilure of the wits." Or may not be. Over the stretch of our lives, we *may* be "blind" and driven down "a stairway to the sea." Or we may not be. But be assured, in EAR we do not have a romantic posturer, a faker of sensitivity; we have a local boy who had the courage to stand up and ask the serious questions while admitting he did not have the answers. "The Earth," he once wrote, is "a vast spiritual kindergarten where millions of bewildered infants are trying to spell God with the wrong blocks." Right blocks, anyone?

**Terry Plunkett
Hallowell**
teaches at UMA

How Annandale Went Out

*"They called it Annandale—and I was there
To flourish, to find words, and to attend:
Liar, physician, hypocrite, and friend,
I watched him; and the sight was not so fair
As one or two that I have seen elsewhere:
An apparatus not for me to mend—
A wreck, with hell between him and the end,
Remained of Annandale; and I was there.*

*"I knew the ruin as I knew the man;
So put the two together, if you can,
Remembering the worst you know of me.
Now view yourself as I was, on the spot—
With a slight kind of engine. Do you see?
Like this... You wouldn't hang me? I thought not."*

E.A.R.

EAR's brother Dean, twelve years his senior, was a Gardiner physician. Sadly addicted, he died in 1899, probably of an overdose of morphine. EAR was deeply upset. In 1960, EAR's grandnephew, David Nivison, wrote a compelling article in the *Colby Library Quarterly* (Series V, No. 8, December) arguing that EAR's sonnet, "How Annadale Went Out," is about Dean, about how a doctor sworn to preserve life could take his own. Ostensibly about euthanasia, the poem is narrated by a physician who is attending "it," or Annandale the patient. Nivison claims that the narrator and the "it" (line 1) are the same person, that is, the doctor and the dying (dead) man are one and the same. In effect, a dead man speaks the poem; a doctor (Dean?) confronts society's disapproval and justifies his treatment of himself with the method of suicide. Nivison's reading has convinced many, especially if the obscure "slight kind of engine" in line 13 is interpreted as a syringe.

T.P.

In New York City, EAR worked as a checker in the construction of the subway system. An awful job, underground, the atmosphere was damp and gaseous. President Theodore Roosevelt read his work and was so impressed he sought him out and offered him a sinecure in the Customs section of the Treasury Department. T.R. wrote him, "I want you to understand that I expect you to think poetry first and Treasury second." The job lasted from 1905 to Spring, 1909. Roosevelt even wrote a literary review of one of EAR's volumes. Years later, EAR wrote to T.R.'s son, Kermit Roosevelt: "I don't like to think of where I should be now if it had not been for your astonishing father. He fished me out of hell by the hair of the head."

Eros Turannos

She fears him, and will always ask
What fated her to choose him;
She meets in his engaging mask
All reasons to refuse him;
But what she meets and what she fears
Are less than are the downward years,
Drawn slowly to the foamless weirs
Of age, were she to lose him.

Between a blurred sagacity
That once had power to sound him,
And Love, that will not let him be
The Judas that she found him,
Her pride assuages her almost,
As if it were alone the cost. —
He sees that he will not be lost,
And waits and looks around him.

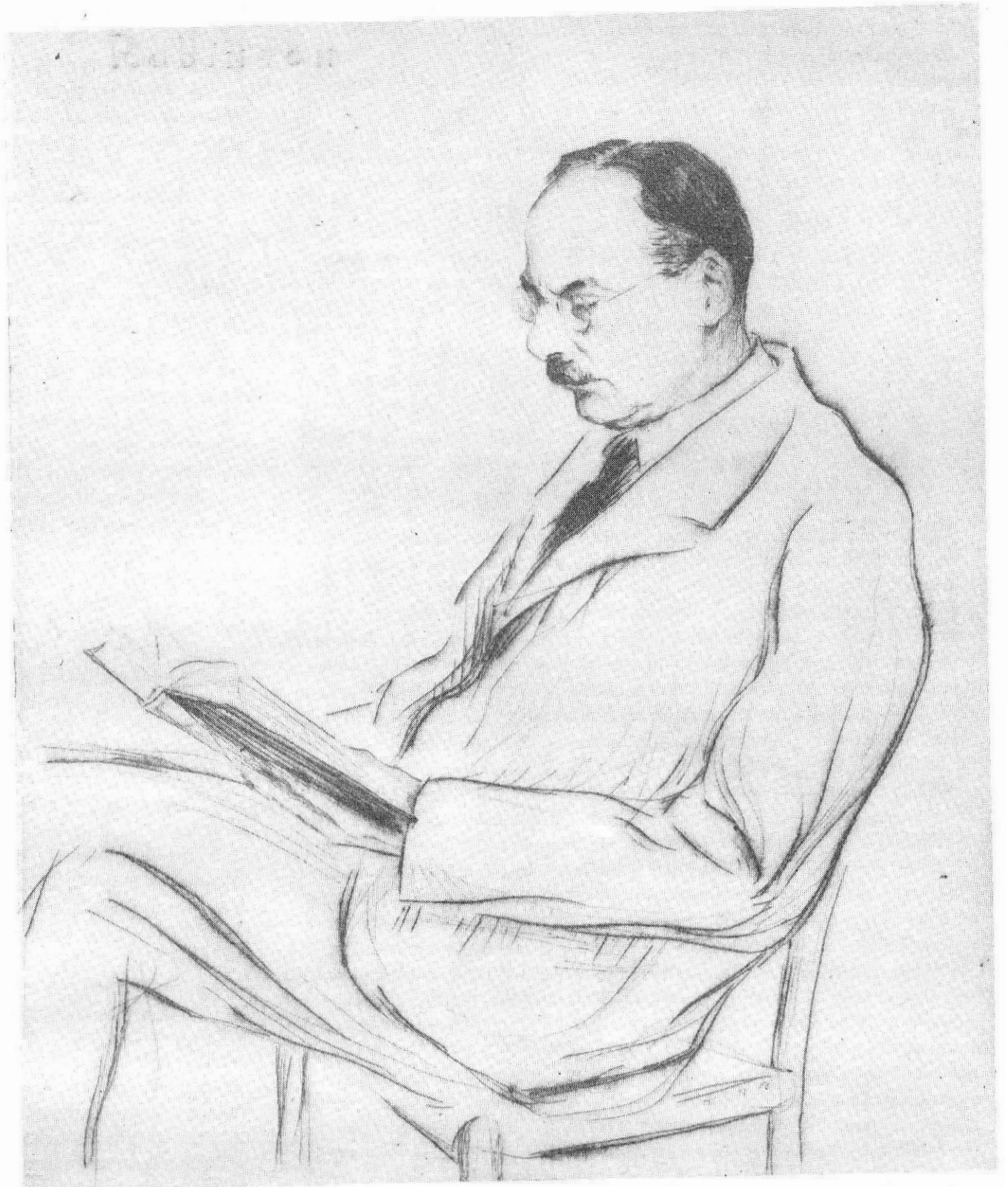
A sense of ocean and old trees
Envelops and allures him;
Tradition, touching all he sees,
Beguiles and reassures him;
And all her doubts of what he says
Are dimmed with what she knows of days—
Till even prejudice delays
And fades, and she secures him.

The falling leaf inaugurates
The reign of her confusion;
The pounding wave reverberates
The dirge of her illusion;
And home, where passion lived and died,
Becomes a place where she can hide,
While all the town and harbor side
Vibrate with her seclusion.

We tell you, tapping on our brows,
The story as it should be, —
As if the story of a house
Were told, or ever could be;
We'll have no kindly veil between
Her visions and those we have seen, —
As if we guessed what hers have been,
Or what they are or would be.

Meanwhile we do no harm; for they
That with a god have striven,
Not hearing much of what we say,
Take what the god has given;
Though like waves breaking it may be,
Or like a changed familiar tree,
Or like a stairway to the sea
Where down the blind are driven.

E.A.R.



When asked if his sense of humor lengthened his life: "I think my life has lengthened my sense of humor."

On the last day of school Buck Nix made his first stage appearance since muffing the line "Not for long was he alone!" in a Columbus Day play in the second grade. He had on a suit for the third time in his life. His mother had bought this particular suit for him—instead of the one he liked—because it would, she said, wear like iron. It was the color of iron, the weight of iron, as comfortable as iron. Buck had worn it first to the funeral of his grandfather. He had worn it again at Easter, then put the suit away without remembering to take from the coat pocket a hard-boiled egg. The egg had been discovered later and removed but a faint odor of vile incubation still clung to the suit.

"Hang up your suit," his mother called after him.

In his room Buck changed clothes, then took a pair of scissors and cut four inches off the sleeves of his suit coat. He sat on his bed, threaded a needle and began hemming the cuffs of the coat so that the alteration of the suit would be undetectable. This was the plan: the next time his mother insisted he wear the infamous suit for some special occasion he could tell her truthfully that it no longer fit, that he had outgrown it.

Buck had never sewn before, but he had seen it done, and on his way home from school he had rehearsed the job in detail in his imagination, had mastered

Thumped

When it was his turn to go on stage, Buck climbed the steps to the platform knowing he would not get through his memorized poem without disaster. The microphone had to be shortened considerably for him and the restless students seated in the dark auditorium sniggered pitilessly, then became very quiet, soothed by the expectation that the monotony of the program was at last going to be relieved by an incompetent performance.

Buck had the courage to face the audience and begin only because a spotlight shining in his eyes acted as a blindfold. Without using the dramatic gestures he had perfected in rehearsals in his bedroom, he made his way safely across the first lines of the poem about the blacksmith but then mispronounced a word. The mistake caused an avalanche of shouts and laughter that buried the rest of the poem. Suddenly teachers were walking up and down the aisles, trying to restore quiet. The houselights came on. Buck hadn't heard his mistake and at first thought the audience was laughing at something or someone else. Then an echo of his gaffe returned to him from the jubilant audience and informed him of what he'd done. He'd said "wiped the sweat from his fevered *bra*" instead of "brow".

At home, Buck's mother sat at a table in her living room, rereading the week's newspapers. In her choice of newspapers, the more preposterous and scurrilous the articles, the more garish and unflattering the photos, the more bellicose the editorials, the more inane the advice to readers—the more Mrs. Nix enjoyed them, the more they confirmed her contempt for ordinary people. As she read she held her glasses with the temple pieces folded, like a lorgnette. She frequently took a piece of hard candy from a jar, held it up to the light to examine it critically, as though it were a gem, then slipped it whole into her mouth. She had the vanity and the mannerisms of a queen without the bearing or the trappings. Very short, very plump, tanned brown as a nut—and often labeled one—growing daily more stout, confused and helpless, Mrs. Nix lived presently in a plain little house as modest as a birdhouse, provided for her and her son by charitable relatives.

A plume of smoke drifted into the house through the window at her elbow and Mrs. Nix looked at it peevishly. Earlier she had emptied her overfull ashtray out the window and apparently a smouldering cigarette butt had set fire to some of the tall dry grass that surrounded the house. Mrs. Nix couldn't see over the sill without getting up—and getting up was difficult for her—so she simply poured a pot of cold tea out the window and waited. The smoke stopped and—it had reminded her of something—Mrs. Nix began to cry. She wept several times a day, over memories, songs on the radio, tragedies in the news, a rust mark on a new towel. A human jukebox of emotions, she often laughed too, often became angry, often was moved to pity or scorn, often became bored or excited, often was clever or obtuse. She was, she maintained, a passionate woman, not—as others claimed—deranged. She stopped crying without drying her eyes and cheeks and uttered aloud the maxim that in her opinion was so profound and filled with wisdom that it must come from Shakespeare or the *Bible*: "The worst woman in the world is better than the best man."

When her son arrived home from school, Mrs. Nix looked closely at his suit to make sure he hadn't damaged it. "Why are you home so late? Did you remember my sandwich?"

Buck put a small white restaurant bag and some change on the table and slowly sat down. He was depressed. His mother unwrapped the sandwich mistrustfully. She lifted the top slice of bread and peeked squeamishly underneath. There were black flecks on the filling and with a look of disgust and disappointment she flung the sandwich out the window.

"It's pepper!" Buck shouted.

"Why didn't you warn me?" she shouted back. Exasperated, she made her hands into fists and kicked her feet, which did not quite reach the floor, against the chair legs.

Buck went upstairs to his room and slammed the door.

needle and thread, and the imagined result had been satisfactory. Now Buck sewed in reality, and with the first few stitches his confidence turned to panic. The neat alteration he had intended now appeared to be a hideous mutilation, a bizarre embroidery made up of little knots and loops that formed out of thin air and refused to go away. He persevered miserably, producing one unique stitch after another, each more reckless and harmful than the one before. He worked on the second cuff, applying stitches like frightened gunshots at something in the dark, shaping the cuff into some clever-looking thing, half hand puppet, half marionette, which changed expressions when certain threads were touched.

Buck stayed in his room all afternoon. When his mother called to him to come downstairs he noticed for the first time that it was getting dark outside. He wildly applied the last few stitches to the cuff and when he stood up to put the suit away he discovered he had sewn the sleeve of the coat to the lap of his jeans. He tried to separate the two garments by force but the thread was too strong. He looked for the scissors but they were lost. He tried to take off his jeans but discovered that the tail of his tee shirt too had been snagged by the stitches. Mrs. Nix called again and threatened to come upstairs.

Buck appeared before his mother just as she was rising from the table to go look for him.

"What do you want?" he asked impatiently. The coat was folded over his arm in front of him, neatly yet carelessly, as if he preferred because of the heat to carry rather than wear it. His mother had set down her glasses to rest her eyes, but now she picked them up again, held them to her face and stared at Buck's troubled expression, at the neck of his tee shirt which was pulled down so far in front that he actually stooped a little, at the inappropriate coat. She looked him up and down for a second time then simply stared at the whole picture as if it was one of those drawings in which the flower pot is upside down on the windowsill and the cat has only one ear and the viewer has to find these and eight other mistakes.

Buck, who had been looked at in this way many times already in his life, said vaguely, "I haven't hung up the suit yet."

"How did you do with your poem today?"

Buck was often confronted with the problem of concealing the truth without actually lying. "The kids seemed to enjoy it."

She nodded approvingly and motioned Buck to come closer. She was in an affectionate mood. Sometimes these moods lasted as long as a minute and made a remarkable contrast to her normal irascibility, like a sudden hush at a loud party.

"What's the matter?" Buck asked suspiciously.

"What's the matter with you?" she riposted testily. "Come here. There's a loose button."

Buck advanced stiffly until he stood before her. She turned in her chair to face him. Buck tightened his grip on the coat but she didn't try to take it from him. A long thread was hanging from the button on the front of the coat. She tested the button to see if it was loose, then took the end of the thread and began winding it around the stem of the button. This operation required both hands so she set down her glasses again. She squinted and bent her head closer and, as she worked, a ribbon of her hair fell unnoticed across the thread and joined it in being tightly wound out of sight behind the button.

"There," she said, then "Ow!" as she tried to raise her head and sit back. "My hair's caught," she reported tensely. "Go get me the scissors, quick." Overweight and sedentary, she was suffocating in this bent position. She held onto the edge of the table with both hands to keep from toppling forward. "Get scissors," she commanded hoarsely.

Buck took a tentative step backward. The long wisp of dark hair grew taut between the coat button and his mother's fevered brow. Mrs. Nix's face was turning red except for a small whitish bulge of skin at her hairline. Buck didn't know what to do. The scissors were upstairs in his room, somewhere but, under

the circumstances, even if they'd been a few feet away he would be unable to reach them without either pulling her hair out by the roots or confessing about the suit.

Mrs. Nix growled. "Leave the... the..." The distraction of the nagging little pain made her forget for a moment what it was called. "... the coat, you dope. Give me the coat. My hair's caught on the coat, you... you..."

"I can't."

"Why can't you? You'll be sorry for this." She raised her head to glare at him menacingly, but the gesture smarted and tears sprang into her eyes, and into Buck's too. This suit was having such an evil influence on his life that if he ever wrote his autobiography he'd have to devote a whole chapter to it.

"Let's go look for the scissors together," he suggested.

Mrs. Nix gave up trying to make Buck understand the situation and instead concentrated on maintaining some slack between them without losing her balance and falling off the chair. Buck could have helped by moving closer to his mother so she could sit back in the chair, but he was afraid she'd take advantage of his kindness to land a punch. He held the coat a little looser, mainly to disassociate himself from it. He tried changing the subject.

"Who are you writing to?" he asked, nodding at a pen and a page on the table.

"I'll show you," Mrs. Nix said with mocking politeness. She reached for the pen to poke him with it, but instantly lost her balance. "I don't know why you're treating me this way," she said pathetically as she slid forward off the edge of the chair. She grabbed hold of the coat to break her fall and Buck was dragged down to the floor too. She landed on her elbows, he on his knees.

"You okay, Mom?"

Lying on her stomach she held onto the coat with one hand and tried to unwind the snagged hair with the other. But in whichever direction she wound the hair it got more tangled.

"You know I don't like pepper," she said resentfully, through clenched teeth. Buck started to explain but she went on. "Thanks to you all I've had to eat today is jam sandwiches." Reluctantly they laughed together. A jam sandwich was one without a filling—two pieces of bread jammed together. They kept laughing, unwillingly, until Mrs. Nix reached up and, flicking her middle finger as if flicking a bug off a clean tablecloth, gave her son a hard thump on his forehead. When Buck raised his hands to smother the sting, his mother scrambled to her knees and pulled at the coat. The ruined coat fell open between them, like a body in a detective story. Mrs. Nix gaped at the coat, then picked up a cuff carefully as if to check the pulse. She examined the deformed cuff with an expression of curiosity, revulsion and incomprehension. She pulled on the other sleeve to bring the second cuff into plain view and discovered that it was bonded somehow to her son's clothing. Mrs. Nix had in the past so often boasted to Buck that she could read his mind that now she couldn't ask him what he had done to the suit or why he had done it, but clearly he deserved countless finger thumps all over his head. "I'm glad I named you Buck," she said grimly, "because you're worth about a dollar."

Even with the inspiration of fear Buck was unable to think of a misleading explanation that would shift the blame for the ruined suit away from him, so he simply let his mind go blank. But his mind had other ideas; it was not merciful; it had a way of inexorably providing thoughts whether he wanted them or not. So Buck found himself thinking about what he should do when he grew up. He didn't want to do any work that required a costume because he would feel self-conscious dressed up as a policeman, busdriver, baker, service station attendant, airline pilot, priest, postman, band musician, druggist, athlete, judge or clown.

He resented attempts to influence him, so whatever occupation was suggested by a family member, teacher, guest speaker at school or advertisement was automatically scorned and erased from the list of possibilities; most of the professions, trades, crafts and arts had been eliminated in this way.

He didn't want to follow in his father's footsteps so he couldn't be a salesman, cartoonist, skindiver, pinsetter, factory worker, alcoholic, wifebeater or child deserter.

He didn't want to do anything that could lead to public ridicule, imprisonment or burns.

Mrs. Nix had reached the boundary of her patience—a short trip for her. Her kind was famous for passion, not patience. She had been born in the former tiny Balkan kingdom called Skeezenia by the ancients because its inhabitants were always divided on every issue, forever quarreling about every little thing. Even now sailors from nearby lands, as they coasted by Skeezenia, reported hearing distant sounds of slaps, curses and thumps on the head, day and night. Whereas in most countries about ten percent of the population was mentally disturbed, in Skeezenia the percentage was reversed and only about ten percent of the people weren't furious nutcases.

Taking the coat in one hand and herself in the other, Mrs. Nix strained to break the cord of hair that bound them together. But her hair was too strong; it was tough black central-European hair, waxed to incredible strength by the same process of inbreeding that made the sanity of her race seem to hang by a thread. She leaped to her feet. The ravages of years of smoking, sweets and sloth were miraculously healed by a deep breath and a surge of hot blood. Muttering curses in the tongue of her ancestors—the *Hoxhani*: fierce, superstitious, shepherd-bandits who lived in stone huts in the mountains, slept in their clothing with their rifles beside them and in the morning had black bread, Turkish cigarettes and warm goat milk for breakfast—Mrs. Nix pulled her son to his feet and swung him about the room by the sleeve of the coat, alternately yanking him toward her and flinging him away in jitterbug style as she tried to tear the coat off of him. Whenever one of these maneuver caused Mrs. Nix a twinge of scalp pain she pulled Buck's hair to show him what it felt like.

Outdoors, below the back window, the little fire Mrs. Nix had doused earlier with tea, continued to burn secretly. For hours orange sparks had combed nervously, like a tingling feeling on the scalp, through a mat of dead grass, turning individual straws into gray curls, until all along the back of the house a mulch of warm ash covered the ground. A change in the wind brought the fire out of hiding. The tall weeds behind the house withered in a bright flash and sparks jumped onto the back wall. The fire easily got a grip on the house and quickly climbed from the sill to the peak using the dry clapboards as a trellis.

Mrs. Nix had succeeded in separating the coat from her son but still hadn't been able to disentangle her hair from the button. She paused to rest her eyes. Buck rested too. He looked around the room and thought he saw the light of the lamp reflected dazzlingly in the glass of the window. Then he realized the window was open.

"Mom—the house is on fire."

Mrs. Nix had burned down two other houses so she and Buck knew what to do. Holding hands they ran across the room, away from the smoke and fire, out into the night. The yard was brightly lit by flames consuming the back of the house with a chewing noise. Shadows writhed on the lawn. The pitch in the burning wood exploded like firecrackers and spewed orange sparks onto the ground. Buck and his mother and the burning house stood under a dome of light, cut off from the rest of the world by darkness and smoke. Mrs. Nix, dazed, disheveled and exhausted, a twisted garment wrapped around her neck like an absurd scarf, held onto Buck to keep from falling.

"This is all your fault," she said as she gathered her remaining strength into one hand, then belabored Buck's head with thumps until neighbors grabbed and took her away with them to call the fire department.

Buck sat down on the roots of a tree and watched the fire, feeling guilty and indignant. He sensed the truth—that he had been thumped once too often; that his skull had cracked like an eggshell, exposing what was developing inside to contamination by insults, misinformation and crazy ideas from movies and comic books; that there was no hope now of his ever engaging in a useful occupation like dentistry or carpentry; that it was inevitable now that he would grow up to be one more furious nutcase in a family—a world—full of them.

**James One
Rockland**
is a journalist

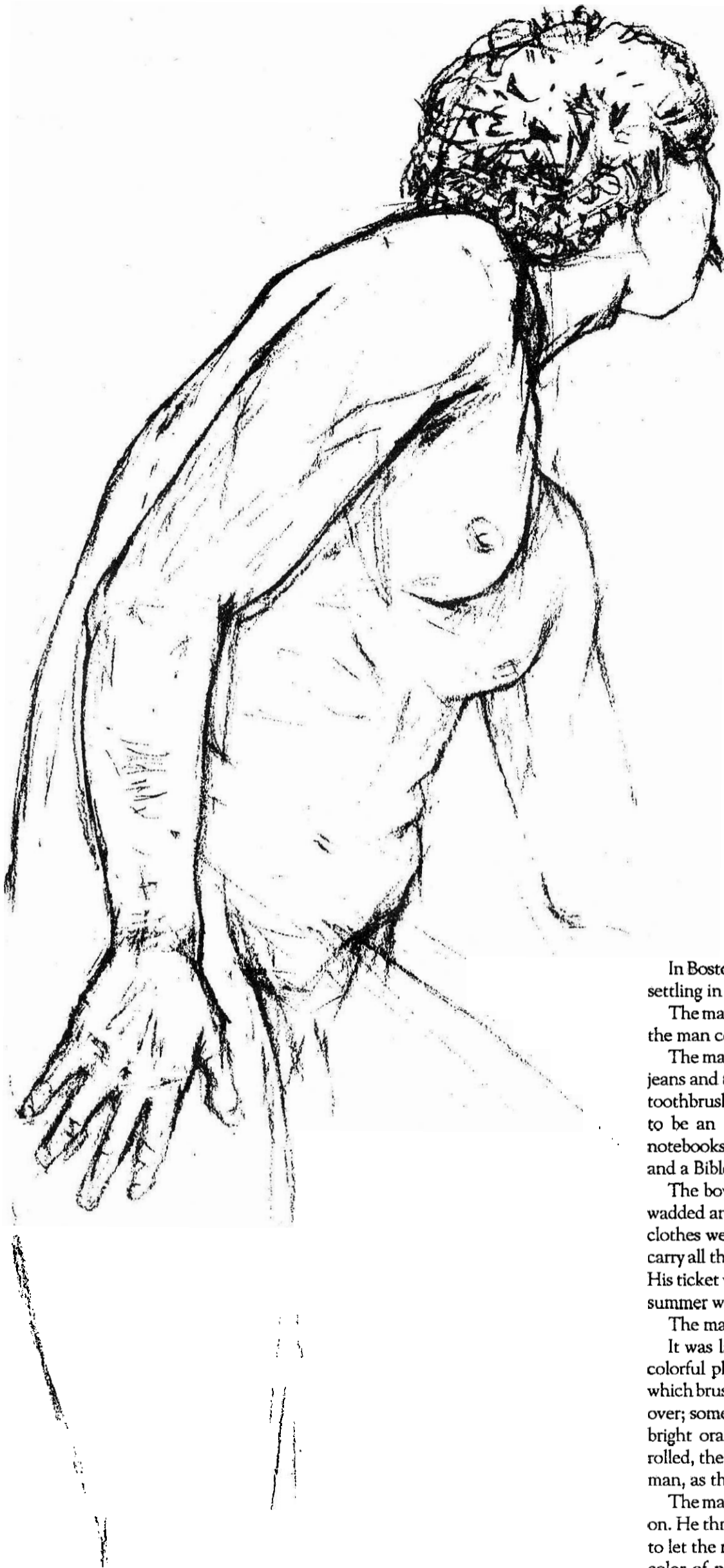
Eating Vanilla Ice Cream with Blueberries In It

*If all the world was scoops of tone
Like ice cream on a sugar cone*

*Then full of music would it be
Symphonically licked conically*

*Of intermingling cool surprise
Like spring and winter and Charles Ives*

**Richard Woodbridge
Deer Isle**
is a financial scientist & a lapidary



Graphic by Phil Paratore

That Which Is Desired

In Boston, the train faced west. Their backs to the ocean, the journeyers were settling in for a long haul.

The man took his seat. The boy took his near the man, across the aisle, so that the man could glance up at him periodically.

The man had only a few things folded into a shoulder bag and small suitcase: jeans and tee shirts for around town; a set of formal clothes, just in case; razors, toothbrush, all the necessary etceteras to carry him through what would turn out to be an indefinite time. He was hastily packed but well prepared, books, notebooks, medical pamphlets, folders of work to be done. Even prophylactics; and a Bible, just in case. His ticket was one-way.

The boy had packed everything imaginable that a boy can own, everything wadded and crumpled and stuffed into suitcases, duffelbags, boxes. Most of his clothes were unwashed and dingy with the shadow of his body. He could not carry all the pieces on board with him and had to pay extra for luggage handling. His ticket was one-way as well. The boy was on his way home after spending the summer with his father in Maine.

The man was on his way to be with a dying friend.

It was late August, and pitifully hot. Squads of wild purple loosestrife, the colorful plumes held aloft, marched aggressively into the fields and wetlands which brushed by the train in great, broad blurs. It seemed that plants were taking over; sometimes the man caught sight of utility poles completely engulfed with bright orange trumpet creepers. Among hills and industrial towns the train rolled, the scenery outside the window alternately enthralling and revolting the man, as the scenery of train rides will do.

The man kept looking up at the boy, chiding himself for it while egging himself on. He thrust a finger into the novel he had been reading, a novel good enough to let the man forget the side-to-side motion of the train. The boy had hair the color of newly-hulled buckeyes, growing shaggy over his ears and eyebrows, drawing the man's attention periodically up and away from the book and the

rocking train and the dying friend.

By sitting upright with his head flat against the headrest, the man could peer into the side of the boy's face without being detected. The boy was tender-faced and trying to grow a moustache. He seemed to be speeding in place in his seat; he thumped his leg and shifted around in his seat intermittently so that the man could see the dark hairs on his shapely thigh. The boy slid his hand down inside the back of his tee shirt and scratched himself. He had outgrown the shirt so that the sleeves curled back from his enlarging shoulders. He turned his head and looked over his shoulder to scratch; his eyes swung directly into the man's gaze. For an interval the man and the boy glanced wildly into each other. The man dashed his eyes down against his text before the boy grinned at him.

This recurred frequently and spasmodically through Worcester, Springfield, Pittsfield—the boy pretending to look around at nothing in particular, his eyes gradually reeled in by the man's eyes, the man pretending to look politely away.

The man hated these impossible frustrating circumstances. He decided that the boy did not even know what he was doing, then he threw himself into the novel the way desperate people will throw themselves down onto the tracks preceding a train. He read two lines of text, then started wondering how old the boy was. Seventeen? Sixteen? And was he just a fidgety lad waiting for someone to talk sports with him?

They pulled into Albany at night. In a few hours the man would move his things into the guest room of his friend's parents' house. He knew that it was going to be the most exhausting part of his life so far, but he had no idea how to brace himself for it. The friend was someone he had known for eight years, since his college days in New York. No one shared the man's confidence the way this friend had. The train, at a standstill on Albany tracks, suddenly went black. The fans and humming engines all gave out. The passengers sat in darkness and silence, waiting, each rustle and cough sounding clearly, as in a small, enclosed room.

There was no light for the man to read by, so he shut his book, the clap of it in the crisp new silence startling him. Across from him, silhouetted by the weird orange glare of the mercury lamps outside in the rail yard, lay the boy, lengthily reclined in his chair, a pair of headphones hooked to his head. The man could hear the music from where he sat—tinny, repetitive, micro-loud. Once a new locomotive had been connected to their car, the passengers were in the light again.

The new people from Albany settled into the brightly-lit, great-lakes-bound train. It was well into the night, so there was no scenery out the window, only the moving dots of color, red and star-white, of towns and traffic. The boy was sound asleep, clipped into his music box; the man looked at him, still furtively, out of caution and prudery. Every portion of the sleeping figure was worth the man's attention—bare kneecaps, silky blue gym shorts riding up on the thighs, the rhythmical tug and flow of his slow snores. The man clinched his eyes shut and kicked back in his own chair...

... "So what are we going to do?" came the woman's refrain. "How are we going to do this?"

The train had stopped somewhere. The woman and her husband waddled up the aisle as though older than they were, each with a sleeping child held up to the shoulder like a package. They stopped near the man, who watched them out of the most minute slit in his eyelid. *Please don't sit here*, he asked within himself.

"I have an idea," the child-encumbered man said. He nudged the boy in shorts awake and asked him if the seat beside him was taken. The boy leapt up out of his sleep, removed the headphones, and scooted over to the windowseat so that the father could have the aisle. "You sit over there," he motioned to his wife.

The woman took a seat beside the "sleeping" man. She tried making small talk once she realized the man was awake. The man was taciturn. He decided he could not sleep on trains and picked up where he left off in his book. It was near one o'clock. The father and mother spoke in audible whispers and swapped children across the aisle.

The boy rose up beside the father and child, stepped over them in one, lean, hairy stride, and disappeared to the front of the train. The man watched after him tragically.

The woman's package stirred and sprouted little fists and began to shriek; she shushed and cuddled and cooed; the man put his finger into the story and became severely depressed. He watched the woman produce a white, banana-nippled bottle from her purse and maneuver it deftly into the child's noisy mouth. He listened to the bubbles clicking away in the milky vacuum and took some comfort in this. When the mother turned and smiled at him, the man smiled back.

The boy returned tall and bobbing up the aisle, his hair moving in many directions at once. Again the man and boy exchanged looks.

The boy leaned over and spoke to the father quietly: "Hey, look—if you want,

you and your wife can have these seats together because I'm here by myself and can find another seat somewhere else."

"Oh that would be super," the father said, moving his things over to the window side and motioning for his wife to come join him.

"We can't thank you enough," the woman said.

"That's OK." The boy stood tall in the aisle and took in a sweeping glance of the rest of the train. It seemed to be packed. He sat down next to the man.

"Hi. Care if I—"

"Hi. No, not at all..."

The man learned that the boy's father owned a summer cottage near Sebago Lake in Maine. Through June, July, and August, the boy had helped his father insulate and shingle and paint the little house. They had fished together that summer as well and gone hiking in the White Mountains of New Hampshire. It had been the funnest summer of the boy's life. He was going home now to his mother in Ann Arbor and to school. He was happy with the arrangement—Dad in the summer, Mom the rest of the year. But he liked Maine the best. Too bad all year couldn't be a summer in Maine. He had grown close to the neighbors, other summer people whom he wouldn't see again until next summer, including a nice girl he met toward the end of his stay. They had exchanged addresses and begged each other to keep in touch.

He has a dirt bike that his father allows him to drive around on the property. He went to the hills of Michigan last winter with his mother's new husband and learned to ski. His favorite author is J. R. R. Tolkien. He loves animals, dolphins especially, and thinks he would like to go to college to be a veterinarian or a marine biologist, he can't decide which. He has no other brothers or sisters, though he has half siblings on both sides of the family from previous and subsequent marriages. He is fourteen years old.

The man leaned back in his chair and stared at the small glowing bulb of the reading lamp. He calculated: The kid was conceived right around the time the man was experiencing his first nocturnal emissions. It seemed too long ago, especially now that he had friends who were dead. He clicked off the light.

"So what time is it getting to be?" the boy asked.

The man looked at his watch. "Oh God—it's after two. Two-thirteen. You feeling sleepy?"

"Not really. I guess I'll try to sleep anyway. Two-thirteen. About where does that put us?"

"I'm not sure. Somewhere in the middle of the state."

"So you'll have to get off soon?"

"I'm afraid so."

The two curled up side-by-side in their fully-reclined chairs, their hands tucked between their knees, their faces toward one another. Usually passengers slept with their backs to each other, when they could sleep at all, or lying straight back in their chairs, their sleep fitful, on the stop and go. But not face to face. As the boy slept, the man lay there and blinked.

The boy opened his eyes, imperceptibly at first. He was alarmed by the man's staring, but very curious. He closed his eyes, then had to open them again, as though the man's look had pried them open. He tried to smile at the man, at the weird coincidence of them opening their eyes at the same moment, but the man only stared back quietly. There was no disdain or hostility in the stare, only quiet. So the boy stared back hard, as if it was a contest, ironically—but the man's strong, quiet stare eventually made the boy stare back quietly as well.

Then the man shut his eyes, knowing he had to end it this way.

Buffalo, Erie, Cleveland... The boy looked up groggily and stared into the empty seat beside him. The boy was disappointed that the man hadn't nudged him awake to say goodbye. Across the aisle, the children snored on their parents' breasts. Soon the boy was sound asleep again.

In Toledo in the morning, the boy perked up. He had to get off the train and board another for Michigan. He crammed his foot into his sneaker and met a slight resistance, a crinkling noise. A wayward candy wrapper? A leaf? He reached into his shoe and pulled out a slip of paper with a scrawl on it. An electrical feeling passed through the boy's groin and stomach. He shoved the paper into his pants pocket and got off the train. He would find out later what the note said.

On his way to Detroit he would pull the crumpled paper out of his pocket and pull it tight between his fists and he would secretly read with a strange passenger beside him: *You are a child of the universe, no less than the trees & stars; you have a right to be here. And whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should.*

Micky Thompson
Standish
lives on a small farm

The Piscarius Letters

(It is 1952: Scott Macleod, teaching at a rural grammar school. Piscarius Academy, in Piscarius, Maine, while searching for proof of a youthful love affair between Henry Thoreau and an Indian girl, is called back to Osceola College in Florida by the death of his mentor, Professor Byron Jenkins. By this time Scott has become aware that Jenkins conned him into his search with the intent of utilizing whatever academic gold Scott turns up to bolster his waning academic prestige.)

(An excerpt from a novel making the rounds.)

"I should have stayed in Maui and helped the old man with his pineapples," Harry Cooper shouted, whipping his convertible M.G. out of the stalled airport traffic onto the shoulder, racing ahead trailing an angry crescendo of horn blasts. He wove back in and out the other side, breaking clear in the center strip. "Jenkins' seminar this spring was a debacle. He'd turned into a fucking pineapple, pricking it into everyone. We didn't realize he was sick or thought - at least I did - that he was merely sick of us or at least the bunch of shit-heads who'd turned up for his seminar. Only reason I stuck with him was his idea about me doing research on Melville, making it big in the academic world."

"I've already been there," Scott said. "Sometime I'll tell you all about it."

"Anyway, last Tuesday evening he's slumped there in his house. The regular seminar evening session. But this time not even the offer of a glass of wine. Then all of a sudden he stands up and tells us all to get the hell out and the old lady, Lucy his aunt, comes in and helps him up the stairs. Next morning we hear he's dead." Harry snapped the M.G. back into a narrow gap in the regular traffic lane. "I've still got my same rooms. Told administration you could stay with me. How's the old Thoreau search coming? Think you'll eventually rate a footnote?"

"Fuck you. And if we make it to the college let me off at Administration. I'm supposed to see a Mr. Schultz."

"I stopped by Jenkins' house this morning." The traffic thinned and Harry gunned the M.G. "Maybe there was something I could do to help. Lucy met me at the door. Said nobody could come in. Orders from on high. Why don't we get old Lucy drunk, steal the Whitman first edition and start us a new college. Peddled anymore of your scribbling?"

"No time for scribbling. Watch it! You've got a red light!"

"Had one."

Ahead the chapel tower of Osceola College appeared above a canopy of live oaks. On a small lake beyond a point of palms, poles protruding from opposite ends of a rowboat, two fishermen huddled motionless.

"The town moors them out there every morning," Harry said, "Claims it's good for the tourist business. I stopped once and threw stones at them. They didn't even look up."

The following morning Lucy peered at Scott through the lace curtains covering the front door's beveled glass, then smiled and let him in.

"It's nice seeing you again, Mr. Macleod. Byron mentioned you quite often and just a few days ago talked about his visit with you in Maine during Christmas. Mr. Schultz from Administration called and said you had permission to come in and work at Byron's desk. It was about some books he left you."

"Thank you, Mrs. Ludwig. Mr. Schultz explained things yesterday afternoon. But that's not my main concern."

"Well, the package won't be delivered until tomorrow morning. They called and said around ten. I'm not quite sure how you want to arrange it."

"I'm not sure at all, Mrs. Ludwig. I'm sorry. The whole business must be quite a shock to you." Scott suddenly realized he couldn't remember ever having really spoken to her before, aside from a good evening or good night, a thank you when she passed around the sandwiches and wine at the end of the evening.

"No shock at all, Mr. Macleod. Byron knew for months it was coming. He never did take care of himself."

She turned and led the way down the central hall and pushed open a heavy stopped ringing. Already a musty odor held between the book-lined walls. He crossed the room and pulled the curtains aside, let the shades all the way up and forced the two windows open. A warm soft wind from the lake brushed through the rusted screens. The yard between water and house was unmown, ragged hibiscus flaring into bloom, the old boat house, long unused, leaned toward the dark water. Scott turned, rolled back the desk chair and sat down behind the cluttered desk.

Mr. Schultz had explained to him first that Professor Jenkins had left a few books and paper for Scott. It seemed Jenkins had been very precise regarding the disposal of his possessions. Mrs. Ludwig had, naturally, been given the house which she had already promised to sell to the college. There were too many

alligators in the lake and she was going back to Utah. Most of Jenkins' library had been left to the college, except those left for Scott and a few other friends. And some papers called *The Piscarius File*. Was Scott familiar with the file? Mr. Schultz said the library appeared in some disorder.

Scott took the list made out for him. No, he probably would have no trouble locating the books or the file. But surely the college had not brought him all the way to Florida just to pick up a few books and a file?

"You are correct, Mr. Macleod." For the first time Schultz emerged from his administrative reserve, leaning back and running a hand carefully through his clipped dark hair. A smile and the way he shook his head suggested the relish of some secret. "The fact of the matter is, Mr. Macleod, that you were asked to hurry down because Byron wanted you to bury him. No, not bury. The more appropriate word is *submerge*. He wants you to submerge him. Or I should say, his ashes. Here's what he wrote."

The note was centered in the middle of a sheet of typing paper, the lines printed carefully by hand in a flourish of capitals. Undated. A faint blot below his signature which could have been a smear of jelly.

Scott,

The thought of being confined in a box in the ground I find repulsive. Would you be kind enough to see my ashes are disposed of in the lake sans ceremony and false wailing. As for our dear Henry, forgive me my intrusion. The world was too much with me. Bon voyage.

Byron

"As a matter of fact," Schultz said, "I believe the transmutation is occurring just about now. They said the paperwork would be hurried through this afternoon and the ashes delivered around ten tomorrow morning."

"You'd have thought he would have wanted Mrs. Ludwig to do that, the disposal. Did you ask her?"

"No, I asked him. He sent your note over four days before he passed away. Byron was of a generation that believed in not taxing female sensibilities."

Scott turned from the desk and up at the bookshelves, then pulled open the desk drawers on each side of him. He found the Piscarius file immediately, neatly labelled and containing their correspondence, the manuscript of Jenkins' Thoreau article, a copy of Scott's monograph on Molly and Aunt Netty, the postcard from Molly, and neatly encased in a transparent envelope, the two papers Jenkins had stolen from the Bangor Library at Christmastime. He found his books on a shelf, tied together, and was about to go ask Mrs. Ludwig for a carton when he glanced up at the wall behind Jenkins' desk. The photograph of Henry Thoreau, the original, the one he had found at Morley Perch's store and sent to Jenkins. It was not on the list Schultz had given him. Neatly framed behind glass. Scott took it down, shoved it in his briefcase and went in search of a carton. Harry should be showing up any time.

The evening before he had waited until Harry had a couple of drinks before proposing his idea. Harry tended to react negatively to the facts of this world unless properly lubricated. Harry was delighted. Of course he would help with the immersion.

"Why, what a splendid idea!" he exclaimed. "We'll bring along sandwiches and a red, no, morning you said?, a white wine, Pouilly Fuissé, of course, Byron's favorite. And we mustn't forget a corkscrew. You could read one of your poems. No, I'll read one of mine. Mine go better with champagne even if they were not fully appreciated by the deceased."

Mrs. Ludwig found a carton for Scott in a back hall and Harry appeared at the study door just as Scott was closing it up. He carried a wicker hamper, his face white and beads of sweat glistening just below his fair hair. Scott glanced at his watch.

"The ashes should be here anytime now. Come on out front. We'll wait on the

walnut door. Byron's inner sanctum where he'd only been once. Jenkins wanted to show him a rare signed first—Stephen's *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan*.

Back up the hall a phone began ringing. "You remember the way he ate," Lucy went on. "And his blood pressure. Everything he shouldn't." Her eyes watered. The phone kept ringing. "I suppose I should answer it. Never stops ringing. You know what you're supposed to do. Call if you need any help."

Scott stepped into the room, leaving the door open. After a while the phone front porch."

"I think not, old man." Harry wiped feebly at his forehead. "I'll just step out back and catch a breath of cool air."

Scott went out and sat on the front steps. Just after ten a black sedan drew up. A thin, solemn man in black and wearing tri-focals got out, reached in the back seat and brought out a small wooden box, cradled it reverently in his arms and brought it up the walk, produced a pen and paper and held the box firmly for Scott's signature. The wood was unpainted and new, smelling freshly of pine.

Scott decided against walking through the house. The sight of the box might upset Lucy Ludwig. Pushing through the unpruned shrubbery that surrounded the house, he found Harry lying in the unmown lawn near the water's edge, his head propped on the wicker basket.

Scott put down the box and walked to the water's edge. The grass didn't seem to stop there, just change species, becoming tubular with a jelly-like substance clinging to it just below the surface. When he waded in his feet sank into a black ooze from which some kind of gray, pulpy life quivered and sought deeper water.

"No, not that way," Harry said behind him. "No lake-side rite and be sucked into that quagmire."

"The way you look it might be just the thing!"

Harry sat up. "A boat. I looked in the boathouse window. Let's get out where there's a breeze and the water clear."

The wide door on the inner end of the boathouse was not locked, merely jammed. A lower hinge pulled from the frame as they worked it open and back into the tangle of vines that climbed and clung to the sagging roof.

A lap-strake rowboat rested on its side, the varnish scabbing its hull. As they turned it over a slithering of mice skittered off into a heap of rotting deck chairs. The brass fittings, oarlocks, braces at the fine bow and stern corners, shone bright green.

"A classic," Scott said. "From the early twenties. Look, even the old oars and boaters are still here."

He reached up and took down the two slim oars. Harry took down the boaters and tried one on, his pale hair showing golden against the dark straw and faded cloth bands.

"None of us ever knew he had a boat," Harry said, adjusting his boater to a casual rake.

"And will it float?" Scott said. "That is the question."

"It's damn sure going to leak," Harry said.

The boat, athwart admidships for the oarsman and a narrow bow and stern seat, was light enough to drag easily across the grass to the water's edge. They slid it in. It rode high and gracefully. Scott waded in and examined where the planking met the keel. A few beads of water were already gathering but not enough to indicate a destroyed hull.

"Harry, go back to the house and ask Lucy for a pot, a pan, something flat we can bail with. This shouldn't take long. I'll check the oarlocks."

"It's alright, boys," Mrs. Ludwig said, close behind them. "Out in Utah we used to use an old pie plate."

She stood, hands on hips, smiling tentatively at them. Her stained sneakers were conspicuous below the large floral pattern of a long faded skirt. Her white blouse was fastened at the throat by a large cameo pin, her brocaded hat set with an egret plume. She turned back to the house before they could speak, but paused at the large trash can outside the back door under an aging pink-flowering mimosa tree and yanked out a rusted pie pan.

"Pans are best, boys," she said, returning, "that is unless one has a regular bailer. See, you can bend it flat on one edge." She demonstrated by wading in and attempting to scoop up the small pool gathering beneath the center thwart. Scott looked at Harry.

"It would be a pleasure, Mrs. Ludwig, if you'd like to come out with us."

"Thank you, boys. And please call me Lucy. You always did." She swung one foot up over the side. They both stepped forward and steadied the boat. "I'll sit in the stern and hold the box."

When they were clear of the shore, Scott rowing, noticed the water was now pooling more rapidly between the strakes. Harry sat in the bow, the wicker basket on his knees.

"How nice, a picnic," Lucy said, "just like on the lake in Utah when I was a girl. It certainly will be a pleasure to get back there."

The lake was small and soon they were at its center. Scott nodded to Lucy, reaching forward to take the box from her lap. She must have misunderstood him for both hands went up, the box leaving them, end over end into the lake where it bounced up, a high, square bobbing cockle-shell. Scott retrieved it with an oar.

"Oh dear," Lucy said.

"I'll open the box," Harry said.



Photo by Melody York

It proved impossible. The thin but hard boards were screwed firmly together and nothing to pry with. Scott rowed back to shore while Lucy bailed. Harry ran to the boathouse and returned with a rusty screwdriver.

Off again, Harry placed the picnic basket at his feet and the box on knees, pried and banged at it. By the time they regained the center of the lake the box was open. Harry passed back to Lucy the neatly tied, tin-foil wrapped package. Lucy took it and hurled it into the lake where it rode again, sunlight glittering from its silver hull. Quite slippery this time as Scott edged it alongside with an oar.

"We'll just have to untie the string," Lucy said.

She took the package in her lap and fumbled with the knots. Scott bailed. Harry opened the basket and removed the bottle of Pouilly Fuissé.

"There," Lucy said, and cast the string aside. Under the tinfoil another wrapping, a canvas-like material sealed on with what looked like electricians' tape which Lucy poked and gouged at with the screwdriver until it tore free and she sat staring down at a soft, white ball of cotton-like cloth from which a thin spurt of ash came as she lifted it and tossed. And once more it rode the surface but this time only briefly before sinking slowly until just below the surface where it hung suspended, a languid, pulsing jellyfish.

"Oh dear, dear, dear," Lucy murmured and looked as if she was about to cry. "Byron would be so angry with us."

Scott lifted an oar and swung, missing, but hitting it square on his second try. The cloth disintegrated, leaving a spreading, whitish cloud, a dissolving nimbus under which a few small fish rose, tested and vanished, unrepleted. Scott suddenly discovered the water had risen to his ankles.

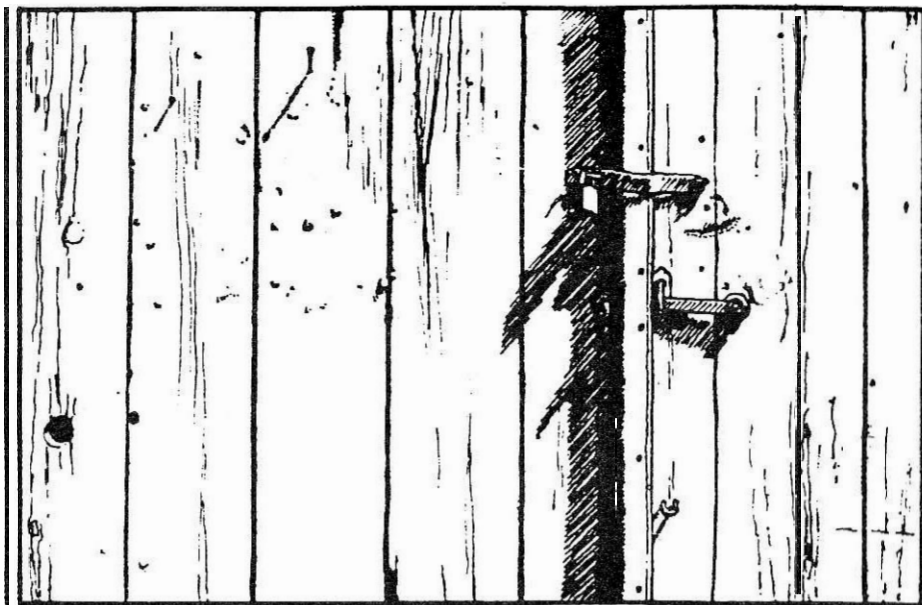
"We'd better get in," he said.

Lucy began bailing. Harry abruptly flourished the bottle of wine. "But first a toast to our old mentor!" He bent over the basket and straightened to fling a handful of dripping sandwiches into the lake. "The bottle opener! I forgot the god damned bottle opener! And my poem!"

He brought the neck of the bottle sharply down on the gunwale, rose with the explosion to let the spurting liquid arch hissing over them in a swift spray, then hurled the rest of the bottle out where Byron Jenkins' ashes had now disappeared. Though Lucy continued to bail they sank some six feet from shore. One on each side, they helped her to shore.

"Well," Lucy said, turning to stare out over the lake, "it isn't exactly like the picnics we used to have in Utah."

Gordon Clark
Inverness, FL
*is a retired UMA professor
& founder of Kennebec*



Graphic by Herb Parsons

Farm Scenes

Bull Calf

She'd died freakishly, my father said.

We found her dead as could be in the pasture with her bull calf beside her. We tried to shoo the bull calf to the barn, but he wouldn't go. My father got a rope from the barn and put it around the bull calf's neck and we pulled on the end of the rope, but the grass was wet from the rain and we couldn't set our feet. The bull calf pulled us along the grass and I fell in the grass and my father let go. The bull calf went around the other side of the cow and nuzzled her bag. My father got the end of the rope again and sent me around to push the bull calf from behind and I did and he pulled and I pushed and we got him off balance and he went over on his neck and my father dragged him a little way across the wet grass and then he got up and planted his feet, bellowing.

It was a muggy, hot evening and I was sweating and wet from the grass. I pushed him again and my father pulled again and the bull calf struggled and went over on his neck again and rolled back up and heaved himself at the rope and my father fell in the grass but he held on and the bull calf dragged him a little and then he got his feet again and got back up swearing and I pushed and he pulled and we got him near the back of the barn and my father ran the rope around a beam inside the door. The bull calf jumped around against the rope, but it was a big rope and my father had tied it solid to the beam.

I watched my father get a can of gas and take it out into the pasture and pour it on the dead cow and then I climbed up into the mow and into the hay so I could look out the broken window into the pasture at my father and the dead cow in the dusk and I watched my father throw a match and she went up in the middle all flames and black smoke rolled off in big shapes against the sky. The bull calf was jerking hard on his rope and I could hear the rope twanging, but it was heavy rope and my father had tied it solid to the eight-by-eight timber inside the door. My father stood back with the can of gas dangling in one hand, the other shielding his face, the light of the fire like anger or pain on his face.

Finishing the Chores

On the very last day you wouldn't have known it hurt him to see him going about his chores, chasing the cows up in the evening from the pasture and putting the rails back in the gate and going up into the barn and milking the cows and pouring the milk from the pails into the cooler and washing the pails with water from the spigot and standing them beside the milk room doorway and then washing his hands in the cold water from the spigot and coming slowly on in the house. He told me he wasn't hungry tonight and then he washed his hands again in the cast iron sink and dried them on the towel and on his shirt and then went quietly up stairs in the dark and I heard the door shut slowly and a little while later I heard the shotgun.

Jon P. Clark
Wiscasset
is a law student in Portland

The Exploding Man

(Part of a memoir)

After four weeks advising South Vietnamese troops in the paddies of the Mekong Delta, I was more than elated to join the American First Air Cavalry Division as it arrived in An Khe, its newly-designated home in the Central Highlands. Being a lowly lieutenant, I was almost immediately assigned to a rifle company in the Third Brigade (more specifically, the Second Battalion of the Seventh Cav—Custer's old outfit).

My brand new brethren were itching for a fight—after two months in a troopship, I might have been, too—but we had other chores before us. Our orders were simple enough—prepare the base camp for a long stay—but the job wasn't quite that easy. First, the heat was unbearable. The temperature hovered in the hundreds, and the humidity greeted us each morning with an almost drenching sweat that hung around all day. Second, behind every bush lurked the shadows of disaster. We were supposedly surrounded by Viet Cong, those devious little men in black pajamas. Whether we were, in fact, nobody really knew, but everyone was trigger-happy, especially at night, and you didn't want to wander out into the jungle all by your lonesome. Third, we didn't have much time. The Battalion Commander, in his thirst for recognition and praise, insisted that every man jack, "every swinging dick" as he so raptly put it, get out there and work on the line. So, every morning, after breakfast, the troops would grab their brush hooks, and their entrenching tools, and their axes, and their machetes, and march out onto the perimeter to cut and hack and pile brush on the fires that smoldered like garbage dumps all around us. And the men who had been "on the line," who had spent the night sitting in foxholes, staring into the darkness with all their senses keyed for enemy infiltration, they also got up, ate their C-rations, and reported to the officer in charge of the brush-clearing details to cut and hack at the undergrowth, all day, every day, until a dent could be seen in the jungle to our front.

Slowly but surely, the trees were all cut down and their branches lopped off and tossed onto the brush fires. Later, we would stake down concertina, set barbed wire, and dig intricate defensive positions, but in the early phase of our brush cutting, all we did was clear fields of fire, and burn everything.

On this particular day, I was in charge of our right flank detail. The troops were out in the field, scraping the area clean, and off in the distance, to the right, we could see the men of our sister battalion, men I'd never met, working on their own section of the line. I could see them clearly, five hundred yards away, small clusters of men with their own officers and their own sergeants, doing the same thing we were—with one exception.

I was standing with my radio operator and the First Sergeant, two men I would grow to love. It was mid-morning. The heat, as usual, was close to a hundred degrees, and the humidity stifling, if not unbearable. I observed the men to my front, good men all, working as steadily and hard as they could considering the time and place and conditions. I looked over at the nearest group of our neighbors—the First Battalion troops—and wondered if their morale was as low as ours, if their food was as bad, how their officers were, or their training. I saw a group of men working around a big brush fire, the kind you start up in the morning with a can of kerosene and nurse all day with brush. A gray wisp of smoke rose begrudgingly from it.

I saw, in the distance, a man with a five gallon can—perhaps it was a number ten can, open at the top, perhaps not—I saw the man take the can and toss something from it onto the fire, and then the man exploded in a ball of flame.

"Oh, my God," I said, already heading for that blazing pile of brush. As I ran to the site, other men were running there, too. By the time we arrived, someone had already radio'd for help, and it was on its way. Certainly, without that help, it would be too late.

The man, a lieutenant, impatient to get the fire burning hotter, had tossed an open can of gasoline on it. God knows how many years he had to suffer the consequences of that momentary lapse in judgment. And when I arrived at the scene, he was lying face down, his arms outstretched, fully conscious of what had happened. His shirt had been burned off his body, and his back was covered with charred bits of cloth. The hair was singed off his scalp, and his lips and face were puffy and blistering. Great blisters of burned skin had already peeled off his back and were hanging from his arms and shoulders. Two men knelt helplessly at his side. One of



All The Right Moves

Washington, D.C.
August 7, 1988

Your name I locate,
Thomas B. Duffy, Jr.
on the black marble wall
right above eye level.
I touch it like reading braille.
So many names and to each name
a death day. You died June 22, 1967.
We were born the same year
right after World War II.

I remember you Duffy.
You were a tailback.
On the sweaty bus in August,
packed three to a seat,
you told us linemen
about the time Karen
gave you a blow job.
When you came you lost control,
nearly toppled the car
in a ditch. Great reflexes,
quick moves of a tailback,
brought you back. And the night
the end of the season
the cop caught you drunk
in the phone booth.
You laid him out
with an uppercut,
the night the team was arrested,
the night we were all apprehended
you eluded them all,
the whole police force.
Amazing, just amazing moves.

You got away while we squatted in jail.
Those quick reflexes—you counted
on them to get you free and so did we
who threw blocks for you.
It was as it should always be.
Beneath the carnage of names
inscribed on the wall
like some huge plaque of a team
I stand and see
you never got away entirely.
The chiseled letters
DUFFY I touch lightly
again and again,
notice my own dark image
mirrored on the polished surface
and turn from it to walk away,
your warm flesh
on the tips of my fingers.

**Bruce Spang
Readfield**
educates adolescents
about substance abuse

them was holding his hand.

The burned man's eyes were open. He was conscious, but going into shock. He knew the gravity of his mistake, and his condition. He also knew help was on the way. Whether it arrived in time to save him I don't know. What I do remember, however, is that he lifted his head slightly, blinked his eyes, licked his blistered lips, and said, "Oh, shit."

"Hang in there, man," I said, feeling about as useless as you can and wondering how someone who had been burned all over the top half of his body could still be conscious. He nodded. He didn't seem to be in pain. Perhaps he was too close to shock. Both, I knew, would come with a vengeance later.

I looked up and saw a Red Cross jeep barreling towards us across the stump-studded field as fast as it could go.

"I've got it now, Lieutenant," an older sergeant said to me, kneeling at the burned man's side. I didn't know him, but his eyes told me he cared. I nodded and backed away.

"There's nothing we can do here," I said to my radioman, and we turned away and walked wordlessly back to our positions.

I looked back only once. The jeep was slowly wending its way back whence it had come, with the burned man, still face down, on a stretcher on the hood. A handful of shirtless G.I.'s walked beside it, holding the stretcher in place.

In recalling this flashback, I've often wondered why it sticks so clearly in my mind. I'd seen wounded men before, lots of them, but they'd all been ARVN, South Vietnamese troops, and as I'd watched their makeshift stretchers bouncing by, and the swarthy little men in them with their feet blown off or their chests crushed and bleeding, I'd felt as if I were watching a newsreel or a movie. They were just ARVN after all, Vietnamese soldiers who'd been in the wrong place at the wrong time—no one that I really knew or cared about—far removed from me.

That was then—down in the Delta. But here, in the Highlands, I'd just seen an American blow himself up, an American Army lieutenant just like me, and it shook me to the core.

I had yet to see men die. That came later, in the Ia Drang, where we lost half our people. That was when I steeled myself for the long haul. It was a long haul, too, and I was lucky. But back then, in that first month of my year in the jungle, seeing that man explode was enough.

Little did I know what a harbinger it was.

S. Lawrence Gwin, Jr.
Portland
is a lawyer, who taught
at Kents Hill School

Egan's Escape

Egan thought "Falling a thousand feet from a ledge on Tumbledown would be no different than slipping into a thousand-foot crevasse on the Matterhorn. In the end, a man would look the same in either case." He held on with both hands to a clump of scrub bushes and stared into the bowl-shaped valley; the forest changed shades before his eyes as clouds moved past the sun. He was where he liked best to be on a day in late June—by himself on a mountainside.

For all his experience with daytrips into the Carrabasset or Weld areas, at the moment he found himself in a genuine dilemma. Arriving at noon, he had followed an old woods road that led onto a false trail through marshland to a bare, untraveled side of the mountain. Confident in his ability to forge his way, he had tackled the forbidding cliff (alone and with little equipment, a "stupid thing to do," Ellen would say, and "not too wise" in the view of more tolerant friends), reached a narrow shelf a third of the way up the three-thousand-foot mountain, and discovered he could find no means of gaining another step, up or down. Not a single cleft or outgrowth allowed him purchase. He never believed it could happen, but the truth was that he was stranded.

Half an hour passed as he thrashed after a foothold he could use to move one way or another; he had paused several times to drink from the thermos he carried in his light shoulder pack. He gazed into the chasm. His water was gone and his tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth. Although he ran five miles a day and hiked at least once a week in summer, which he'd always thought not bad for a man just past forty, he knew that now he'd spent his energy and heightened his thirst through the flow of adrenaline induced by nerves or, he had to admit, stark fear.

He remembered five-year-old Annie asking Ellen, "Is Daddy going to climb Tumbledown up today?" when she'd seen him lacing his boots at the kitchen table four hours earlier. A case of cause and effect: whenever Annie felt the tension and heard the bitter words between her parents, too often of late, she sensed it was time for her father to head for the wild, to "climb Tumbledown up." That morning Ellen had looked over from the stove and smiled, without mirth (*he knew*), catching Annie's eye but very careful not to catch his. He was so sick of all that! The child's instincts were correct: by removing himself from Ellen, from his work, from the exasperating, boring malaise that had become his life, he entered an escape world more comfortable to him, more serene yet more stimulating, a world he often wished he could exchange for the battleground he shared with Ellen. It had come to the point where he feared for his stability...

He drew back from the edge and sat on a rock to consider his alternatives. It could not be possible he was actually at an impasse, alone there and without hope! He studied his bare thighs, which had begun to sting from a number of oozing cuts where he had scraped along the prickles of dead scrub.

Drained, his craving for water intensified by thoughts of thirst, he focused across the valley on another flank of the mountain and wondered if he might be able to attract the attention of hikers. "Help!" he yelled once—a feeble, parched sound—but then, in a kind of shame, he leaned back and rested his head on a rough stump. He envisioned a helicopter circling overhead, dangling its chain of salvation toward him, and he winced at the thought his escape might have to come in such a demeaning way.

And of course the fact that though Ellen knew he had gone to Tumbledown, no one would guess he had ventured so far from the hiking routes. It must be twenty; he would not even be missed (if at all, by her) until evening.

He sat in the crystalline afternoon and recalled the weather forecast he had read in the paper that morning. Clear, no humidity or wind, low to forty-five at night. Not cold enough to freeze certainly, but might uncomfortable for a man in shorts and flimsy polo shirt. He wished he'd paid more attention to articles he'd seen about hypothermia. He imagined himself curled up in the night, a helpless fetus—shivering, tingling from the hot needles burning his legs, tongue pasted to the top of his mouth. No sleep under such conditions, but that was all right. He could stand it for one night. But what about tomorrow? He could not picture Ellen becoming too excited when he failed to return. Of course she would not *gloat* exactly; she was too polished for it to dawn on her that at last she had her wish to be free of him. Yet, she might suppose in her quickness to perceive the worst in him that he was off carousing with the boys or perhaps in the arms of one of a half dozen women with whom she thought him obsessed.

He managed a wry grin at the course of his reflections. Wiping his gritty forearm across his mouth, he thought "What a nice route to freedom. Go to Sandy or Jean. Move to another state. Change my name and become a different man. While Ellen thinks I'm dead on a mountainside! Well..." Then he thought of Annie, dear golden Annie, and he realized the extent of his hallucinating. She knew he had gone "to climb Tumbledown up," and she would await his return; so he would return, by God, however rotten his life might be.

Standing abruptly, he knew he must have been absorbed in his reverie for at least half an hour. His senses opened to the calm, colorful majesty of the valley; it came to him that a portion of his stamina had been restored. "Hey!" he shouted. No echo. The cry faded before reaching the great green walls around him. "This is *bull!*" he screamed. He lifted his eyes to the hills. "I'm not dying out here!" He laughed, and repeated his challenge to... God, the gods, himself? Feisty in his regeneration, he would have flailed his way like a bear in a thicket.

But with the resurgence of physical vitality came an inclination to think, to plan, to take definite measures toward releasing himself from the predicament he regarded as not only life-threatening but also humiliating. He pushed inward through the brush and reached the sheer ledge. Since he could find no means of direct, head-on ascent, perhaps he could move laterally, edging upward all the time, making each small progression a little victory in itself, moving sideways again if blocked. One thing was sure: he could not go down the way he had come up. Because of a different, poorer perspective from above, an improvised ascent such as he had made could not be retraced; movements made tentatively on the approach became virtually impossible in the descent. Just don't look down! he commanded himself.

He selected cleavage in the rock for his starting point. The angle of the grade was at least seventy-five degrees. Extending his right arm above him as far as he could reach, he jammed his fingers into the slit, lifted his left leg along the face of the cliff, and clung there a moment before heaving his right leg from the shelf. All the while, conscious of the act, he hummed "Stranger in Paradise."

He poised like a fly on a wall for a minute or more. Above, he could see no cranny for hand, foot, or knee. Four feet below was the narrow ridge from which he had stepped; beneath that, the thousand feet of space to the forest floor. He could not have seen the spot more clearly had he eyes in the back of his head. "A thousand feet," he thought, "when a hundred feet, even fifty, would suffice." Closing his mind's eye with a fierce will, he hopped back and down, hands loose and ready to snatch at any protrusion. His soles landed unsteadily on the shelf. He rocked, then grabbed at a withered bush in the ledge, steadying himself gingerly without tugging at the bush, stilling his body and his heart—and survived. To the left he saw what seemed a more propitious route. Sidestepping in that direction, he noticed that beyond the scraggly bush at his rear was the blue void. Had he lost his balance in his jump back to the shelf...!

He did not dwell on it. A turbulence began to bubble within him, a kind of unfocused rage, stirring him to vigorous, quickened, mindless actions. A military march-tune subdued the ballad in his head. He seemed to be racing against a clock, with only minutes to gain the summit if he were to win the prize. Scrambling to some exalted level out of his sight became his passion. Salty sweat ran from his forehead into his eyes. His physical vision grew as uncertain as his concept of his location. Frantic, though barely conscious of his despair, he scurried and stabbed and grunted until he emerged onto another plateau many yards above his starting point, the memory of how he arrived there dissolving at the instant of his arrival. For a second he leaned his head against the mountain, gasping and perspiring. It would be sweet to pause, to rest, to figure his next move with the calm of a man playing chess; but, the ensuing segment of his journey a fifty-degree slab of red rock, he bent his weight to the incline and crabwalked upward.

Funny, he thought, that for all his attraction to mountain climbing, he was a man afraid of heights. He wouldn't be caught dead on a ladder or a roof. Yet, now he knew he was defying the odds of logic or sense with each step. One misjudgment would be the end. The great chasm into which he refused to glance, (but which was most assuredly there), seemed to await him with silent, eternal patience. Still, if he hurried he could rush for the safety of the summit and attain it before any misstep occurred. It was like running in the rain to avoid getting wet. He resumed his ascent, huffing with pride. His mind was on that aspect, that moment only, of his life. He had made the effort and would extricate himself; no ignominious rescue by a chain dangling from the sky for him. The chatter and song issuing from his lips was like the background drone of a radio to a man painting his house.

As he labored, he became increasingly reckless. Often he would swing his right arm like a grappling hook and claw with his fingers at crumbly ledge, hoping there would be some small roughness for him to seize; sometimes he gripped only the flaky scales of mountainside, but through prayer or blind fortune, he was always able to shift his weight across the fulcrum of his body's center, up and forward, before his grasp disintegrated to reveal the flimsiness of its substance. Once, after halting five minutes to arrange a tactic, water streaming into his eyes, he sucked in his breath and leaped to his right for a tiny rock-step barely large enough for the toe of his boot. The front edge of his foot struck six inches above the niche, ricocheted away and outward—and down—and caught the lip of the opening.

holding.

Throughout his struggle he could not define the dull rhythm that throbbed between his ears. A certain dire knowledge wedged into his mind, a knowledge conveyed in song, pieces of songs from a lifetime of songs, and established an attitude, a mood, of concurrent hope and despair. He had set out on his rush for the summit with a red face, but in his progress a dim reflection concerning his status in the world encroached upon his awareness. Images: Ellen, Annie, his workaday life, heartpains of regret revealed in dreamlike waves of vaporous heat. By the time he neared his goal the musical throb in his soul drove him onward, tirelessly at the end, toward a denouement, a cymbal crash of conclusion.

The sun loomed directly before him, half shielded by the western hills, and after he crossed the final ledge, twenty degrees or less, he came to rest in a patch of long grass. To the east, below him, he could see the ridge leading to where the familiar trails met near the pond. The access route to civilization, to the world where he lived. He had made it. For minutes a placid satisfaction comforted him, yet no song of triumph repressed the demanding, primeval rhythms in his sense.

No one would know the terror he had endured. It was true that he had accomplished his goal with a flair; he would not have to be airlifted from the mountain like a casualty of war.

Now, it appeared, his life would revert to normal. He had "climbed Tumbledown up"; thinking that, he thought of Annie. Hot tears eroded the grime on his face. No—his life would *not* be the way it had been before. The beat blared in his ears with the fury of native drums, the jumble of songs both familiar and improvised, accompaniment to his rushing thoughts. Slipping off his shoulder pack, he started to walk westward, away from the trails, the pond, and the world of safety.

He came to a narrow finger of rock hanging over the chasm. Pausing, he stared into the valley three thousand feet below. He placed his hands over his ears, pressing, trying to still the disharmony of sound.

"Annie... Annie!" he called, shouting to hear himself above the din. "Honey-girl, I did it! I climbed Tumbledown up, and I did it the hard way!" He rubbed the heels of his hands. He felt very weary and very sad.

Looking up, avoiding the prying sun with his gaze, he took a leaping step forward, cleared the ledge, and began the plunge that would quiet forever the roaring in his head.

Stewart Goodwin
Farmington
teaches at Mt. Blue H.S.



Tarry-Town

Oh, let us go to Tarry-Town,
To "come, let us be merry"-town,
To "come, and let us marry"-town;
It's but a mile or five;
And you will wear your crooked smile;
Your grimace of a crocodile
Who eats his young alive.

Yes, let us go to Tarry-Town,
And I will wear a linen gown
With dogwood garlands hanging down,
And life will be so fine:
We'll dance upon the cobbled street
With flashing eyes and flying feet:
The cannibals will saunter down
With saffron skin, and teeth of brown;
They'll laugh at dancing in their town,
And pickle us in brine.

Our smiles will curdle in a frown,
Our eyes turn up, our mouths turn down;
Though life is sweet in Tarry-Town,
Our flesh is sweeter still, they've found,
And we will die in Tarry-Town,
And so will all our kind.

**Hilda Grant Jones
Hallowell**
works in the field
of communications

David's Guitar

is of the shiniest wood
silver strings produce
chord after chord
of pure heaven, the
braided neck strap's
a harness, holding in
wild notes not suited
to this crowd, and it
bleeds down David's arm
dripping red and green
sweat onto jeans that
have seen better days
than this hot one that
causes the wood to melt
into his fingers, the
strings to flash colors
and man and instrument
to throb into one being
as the sun beats time
with David's ragged boots.

**Donna Carter
Orono**
teaches at UMO

A few before ten
and I'm in a cold antechamber
of Filene's in South Portland
with a strange pair of canary
yellow alligator
shoes and a green plastic slicker
on a bleached-blond doll who's in a tizzy over
being asked to wait a bit
by a security guard just inside
the door another
two minutes because he can't
open the joint until he gets
the nod.

And doesn't she have a choice
word or two for him—through me,
apparently.

**Mikael Larsson
Gorham**
penny whistles, juggles, watches stars

Rock Climbers

Weekends you'll look again
and see them on the face
of the cliff, the climbers

At such distance
they are just
legible.

Their fingers are keys,
their toes tools,
for thresholds,

and they whisper
open sesames
in braille.

They are unlike us.
They seek the sheer lover
who dares not forgive.

They seek the obdurate lover
whose passion
they must ponder.

**Daniel C. Bryant
Cape Elizabeth**
is a physician

Easter Monday

The sparrow in the bush sings into
The fog, pauses, and sings again,
Pauses, and sings, and pauses,

Hearing what unheard of
Sweetness pulling him or her
From the bush into the fog?

**Hugh Hennedy
Portsmouth, NH**
teaches at UNE

Best Western Blues

after a song by Bessie Smith

Third day, bathrooms first. That TV
commercial for the Negro College Fund,
some old mother on her knees all
night scrubbing floors. She's schooling
some kid. Makes it worth this.
Not exactly my story. You get a
young smart husband through. He
turns around, looks at you.
Nothing in common anymore he
apologizes. Some young girl from
one of his classes hanging on his
mind's arm, urging him away.
You're a college dropout for nothing. The
no credit course in irony. I
think about these things. Polish my
face faceless in the chrome.
Worry the scum away, corner of
my sponge, fingernail backup. Got to
push against something, see it move.
Offices next. Secretaries in
dancing dresses whisper away from my
vacuum. My big fat hose sucking
respectfully around their fuck me shoes.
Check for suction. Tug that heavy stupid
body behind this sweating one. Count
one condescending smile. I'm incognito. You
think you see me, pushing wet hair from my
face with a dusty hand. Lobby's next. You
don't see me. Once I told you a joke so funny
you cried. Looked so pretty you whistled.
Loved you so well you said you'd never leave.
First, empty ashtrays. Polish them
dirty with my smock. Out across the parking
lot last, looking for wind in my face, and
trash. My mind turns on my record now.
Song is waiting, needle comes down. "I'm as
good as any woman in your town."

**Therese Martin MacDonald
Portland**
runs on Munjoy Hill

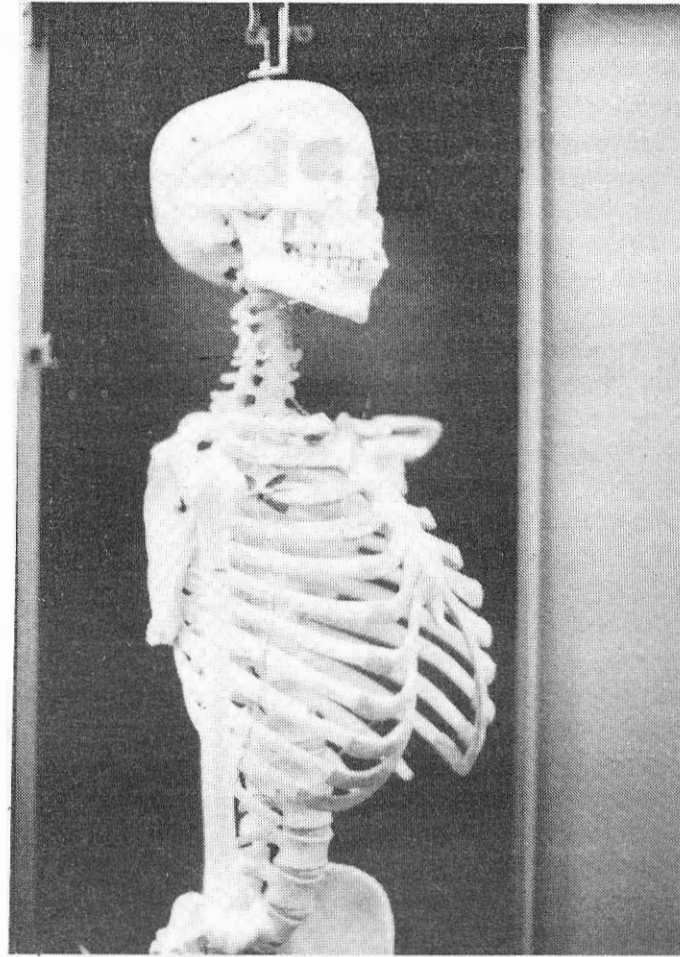


Photo by Melody York

The Skeleton in the Closet

(An Open Letter to a Friend)

You know, Bill, I've been thinking about that conversation we had after the skeleton was stolen from the Art Department. As you heard, they were very upset about it. For one thing, to replace it, her—Emily she'd been for years, though no one remembers why—would have cost thousands of dollars. For another thing, something about her loss made everyone very sad. Over the years each teacher, and most students, had come to have enormous respect for the delicacy of her bone-structure. She must have been slight, thin, proportionate to her five-foot height. The assumption was that she had come from India, though that may have been just a reading-in from her burnished surface—the tone of a Rembrandt like the last self-portrait, as we know it now, with the varnish darkening.

We started talking about that part, replacement costs, and the politics of that—how the dealers in Calcutta and Benares approach the poor and entice them to sign, not necessarily for themselves, and then how they keep in touch, toward the end following the walking skeleton until it drops in the street, when they cart it off quickly, before the family can renege and try to cremate or whatever.

Of course you're right, that whole side of it is just an ugly, embarrassing remnant of colonial exploitation, but I've been uneasy with your solution—a completely accurate and relatively inexpensive skeleton of plastic. I don't think it would work. The technology is there, no question. Any individual skeleton could be used to make a mold, or sculptors and anatomists could design a purer, more generic one that could be more accurate than the real thing, if you know what I mean.

I still don't think it would work. It seems to me that when the teacher brought Emily out of the closet for the drawing classes, anatomy was only the surface of the study. Let's not get into sign/signifier/signified; the world is confusing enough without semiotics, but it's not a new idea, nor a French one, that the confrontation of mortality deepens art. Sure, those kids, every generation, are singing, *sotto voce*, "Toe bone connected to the foot bone," but that's because they're damned uneasy. Plastic wouldn't do it.

Which is not to say we should be starving the third world for our students' benefit. It seems to me we must have plenty of skeletons right in this country—bums and bag-ladies obviously, frozen to death in doorways, though to deepen the effect I'd think an occasional stock-broker would be good, or maybe a painter who'd hanged himself.

Emily was returned, by the way. Whoever took her, for whatever purpose, must have felt something from those delicate bones, because he carefully undid all the little wire hooks-and-eyes, packed her disassembled in a cardboard box, and paid a fair amount of money to ship her back to Orono. The postmark was Brunswick—no return address. So she's home again, and back together, or if not home at least where generations remember her, draw her carefully, sing to her softly in a language she'll never understand.

Sylvester Pollet
E. Holden
teaches and edits at UMO



Monoprint by Karen Gilg

Woman With Bird

Love Poem

Because I asked,
You left
Your dress hanging
In my closet.

There's no door,
Just myself and air
And a dress shaped
Like a woman.

Your breasts have disappeared.
Your long legs
Walk naked
In other rooms.

You've pulled your hands
Inside your sleeves,
The closet is so cold,
So open.

My eyes grow thin
Looking for you.
What fine hands
Traced you into this cloth?

Doug Woodsum
Corea
works at Bread Loaf

November

Without his teeth the old man lies breathing with difficulty through his mouth. The family lounges about the bed. The ineffectual doctor checks for signs. The old man needs a shave. His grey cheeks suck, puff as his eyes hang onto me. His liver-spotted brow is grey and slick with sweat. I wipe his face, smooth the strands of grey hair back neatly on his head. His sweat has soaked the pillow. The nurse brings supper. I feed him only the vanilla ice cream. She comes again after the family leaves and changes the sheets and pillow case. At three-twenty a.m. he's gasping slowly, and I lean close, peering into his eyes to see what he sees.

Roland Burns
Fort Kent
teaches at UMFK

Muzak's Top Ten - # 3

Let's wait in this room forever.
The wallpaper music croons:
Hidden speakers surrounding us tactfully sounding
Insipidly calming tunes —
A gentleness, fondly cloying;
Dissolving our minds away;
So let's sit in these chairs, insulated from cares,
And wait while we slowly decay.

Let's wait in this room forever,
For "forever and a day,"
While the ceiling grows moss and the spiders spin dross
And the muted saxophones play:
For life's an eternal waiting
And death's a perpetual sleep;
And it feels just like years when you're bored unto tears —
So let's sit here, and wait, and weep.

Nick Humez
Portland
is a silversmith
(A setting for voice & piano
is available from composer Humez)

Generic Art

*She makes a poor copy of plain:
pockmarked, streaked hair
drooping to stooped shoulders,
skirt hem avoiding scarred shanks.*

*When I broke silence she talked
like I'd unleashed her tongue,
frenzied words lapping my ears,
eyes following mine as if game
were hiding behind my lashes.*

*Somehow the health food order
got totaled and she wanted
nineteen dollars and eighty-two
cents to settle up. She laid
the change in my palm,
knuckles of her middle finger
sliding along my outstretched
lifeline, telling me she had
time on her hands.*

*She makes a poor copy of plain:
silver cross bouncing over
what could be breasts,
sun-bleached fuzz cloaking
forearms like a nun's habit,
perhaps there is a waistline
beneath her apron strings.*

*She makes a poor copy of plain:
but I steal away with a fine
reproduction of her heat.*

Glenn McKee
Waterville
writes, travels & contemplates



Floaters

*She swims in a sea of faint paisleys,
loses herself in insubstantial snows.
Her ophthalmologist assures her they're harmless:
every eye holds cells we've shed
to let the living grow. They're not
dust motes caught in the lashes, not cobwebs
strung from the brows, not diatoms
alive on the eyes. Thin shadows
leap from ceiling, from walls.
Translucent ibis rise from crystalline trees.
Champagne bubbles settle; dandelion fuzz
catches a breeze. Inward vision
shimmers over the outer.*

Jennifer Lyons
Portland
processes insurance claims

Honoring Anger

*Beets! Their bright stain on the cutting board.
I chop them into pieces, bite-size, bring to a boil,
then simmer till tender. Easy to chew.
Easier to chew. But it's not easy chewing on anger.
So I spit out poison. Begin again from scratch.*

*I'm the alchemist, searching for a cure. Opened, these beets
anoint my palms, consecrating the root of my being.
I boil anger down to the source, listening for its urgent
message. Unvoiced, it could blow up in my face. I distill
one clear note from rising vapor. Then another. Lured
by a new song, I dive into the crimson broth.*

*It colors me to the bone.
I become blood, life, the sacred hearth.
I have many bowls, a cauldron of soup. It could consume
the muted world, give a tongue to all who need to speak.*

Nancy Devine
Waldoboro
is learning to draw

O-U-T

Ray didn't know about Edward; he didn't know about Billy, or maybe he did; maybe he knew too much about him to understand what might happen. But he understood about Billy's mom, Mrs. Thirst, and how she died eight months ago in the beginning of March, as if she couldn't stand to see the spring again, the April showers that seemed to wash everything away, give everyone, everything a new slate, one more chance.

But no one could blame her. It was hailing that night, and maybe she shouldn't have gone, but she did, because it was Wednesday, double-coupon night at the Village Market. Some thought she just fell into an old trap, trusting that habit was somehow more important than bad luck. Ray didn't know; he didn't even really care. All that mattered was that she went out for a gallon of 2% milk, some barbecue chips, two cartons of cigarettes, and the cat food she should have gotten the Wednesday before, and never did come back.

Ludlow was the only town in Maine where it would rain all day, then hail and snow all night on the first of March. Even on the north and west ends of town it had only rained, some fraction of a degree difference in temperature or air pressure, something. Chances were that slim.

Mrs. Thirst left at 7:30 that night, not saying a word on her way out the door, if there had been anything to say, anyways. By 10:00 pm, when Ray was getting ready to go home, George Thirst started to dial friends up, asking if his wife had stopped over on the way home from the market that had just closed three miles down the road. Billy jabbed Ray with his elbow, pointed to his father who was all in a huff after his second call, and smothered a laugh the same as Ray, who called over as he slipped on his yellow rain slicker and opened the door to leave: "Don't worry, Mr. Thirst, she'll turn up."

She did. They found her a week later, drowned in the stream that ran under the County Road one-eighth of a mile from her house, her car turned upside-down in the stream, busted through the surface ice. The heavy snow late that night piled up almost a foot, covering the Subaru's tracks over the bank, collecting on the boughs of the evergreens that overhung the stream, making a dome over the car that no one would see through until it melted; not even George Thirst, driving over the cement bridge that spanned the stream thirty seconds after he pulled out his driveway, passing his wife every day, going to the police station in town. It all started on a Sunday. That Thursday temperatures skyrocketed to almost fifty degrees, and everyone figured the winter had had it.

"Crumple!"

"Yeah, Coach!"

"Come on. Game's tomorrow. You can't stay in there all night."

The shower-room door closed back. Ray looked around the room. Except for the other showers, still pouring out hot water, he was alone. It was hard to believe, with the steam crammed into the room, and the heat, that on the other side of the cinder block walls was the late fall, and just on the other side of that, winter. Only basketball season reminded him of where the world was, the only thing the steam couldn't obliterate.

"Let's go, Crumple!"

"O.K., Coach!"

The door opened and shut again, Coach's bald head withdrawing into the outer room. Ray turned off the empty showers, and walked out.

It was cool in the locker room. A door 90 degrees from the shower room door, on the adjoining wall, opened onto the back parking lot. Everyone left through there when their rides swung into the lot, and tonight, when they did, the November wind blew in.

Long fluorescents sunk into the ceiling threw off artificial light that turned the green locker room into a lime. It was empty now, except for Billy Thirst, Coach, and the team's manager, Edward Tate, who was sitting in the middle of the floor beside a pile of uniforms and a black trunk, checking off numbers on the jerseys to make sure they were all there for tomorrow night's opener against Frye.

Billy stuffed his sneakers into a canvas gym bag. He glanced up, caught Ray's eye at the other end of the green bench, smiled a little, then glanced away. Ray smiled back. "Think you can keep it in tomorrow night?"

It was an old joke. Billy was always nervous, especially about basketball. He'd gotten sick the first time they ever played on a team together, in the fourth grade. They beat the fifth graders that afternoon. It had been sweet, all them together for the first time—Fridaye Lewis, Freddie Mctye, Blue Blue Martin, Ray, Billy—except for half-time. Billy's mom packed him a thermos of Campbell's Chicken-and-Stars for lunch, and during the half he blew tiny white stars all over their coach

and Language Arts teacher, Mr. Beasley, when he was right in Billy's face yelling at him to play better defense—a small liquidy Fourth of July, the stars perfect, like he never chewed them.

There had been other times. In the eighth grade, before their Jr. high school championship game; in the middle of his first high school practice, running for the locker room but only getting as far as the base-line; and always before the first game of the season, as if he had to inaugurate the new year, as if he couldn't stand it.

Last year he'd lost it before their chemistry mid-term. He and Ray studied hard for a week. Billy was pulling a straight D in the class, and needed at least that to keep from getting suspended from the team. When Mrs. Hess passed out the test and asked if there were any questions, Billy just shook his head no. When she was half-way through explaining that N₂, on page six, was really O₂, she stopped and walked over to him.

"Are you all right?"

He shook his head again.

"Billy?"

And that was that, all over page six so nobody could tell if it was N₂ or O₂ or what. A lot of kids ran out into the hall. Most just groaned. Ray laughed, threw his arm around Billy's shoulders before he'd finished, whispered in his ear, "typical, Thirst, this so typical." Billy had tried to laugh too, but instead spat a gob of his breakfast (oatmeal) out over his desk in the front row, onto Mrs. Hess' worn Earth shoes. She didn't seem too upset until then. Ray was crying for laughing.

They were in the seventh grade when they decided the future, walking home from practice one night. It was the fall, and everywhere around town the leaves had changed. The sun had just set, an orange tinge left on the rim of the sky. Ray and Billy could see their breath, faint in the early evening.

"Dave Cowens did it, didn't he," Ray said, shifting his gym bag from one hand to the other.

"How tall was he?" Billy asked

"Six-eight, and he started center for the Celtics for ten years."

"I'm five-eight."

"You're twelve. I bet Cowens wasn't that tall when he was twelve."

"What about you?"

Ray motioned an invisible shot, watched as it swished through an invisible net. "I'll never miss."

It had been so powerful a dream that it never lost its hold over them, even after Billy didn't grow as much as they had planned, and Ray turned out to be an excellent shot, but not an extraordinary one. It wasn't a question of believing in it so much as having it between them, like a pass hanging in mid-air, physical, a promise worth just watching.

They never talked about what had happened back in March, not even the week Mr. Thirst found his wife, *flipped upside-down in the Subaru, an eel curled inside her mouth*. Ray was going to call, but couldn't figure what to say, and maybe he didn't want the phone to ring and not have Mrs. Thirst answer in her booster club voice ("Hiii Ray! You coming over? Oh wait, here's Billy..."). He sent a card instead.

Ray never heard Billy say anything about it; never saw him break down at all. He seemed stronger. Ray wondered if Billy read the papers closely that week, about how there was no sign of resistance, the Subaru taking a direct path over the bank, and if he did, did he think about the afternoon before it happened the same as Ray had, about what only the three of them knew, and now only two of them.

"Huh?"

"Do you think you can keep it in tomorrow night?"

Billy was propped up against the lockers, his gym bag between his knees and the jersey to his uniform draped over the bench in front of him. He half-smiled. "I hope so."

Coach came out of his office. "You set, Billy?" He gave him rides home after practice some nights. Billy's dad worked late, and had the only car, now that the Subaru was gone.

Billy flicked his jersey over to where Edward Tate was sorting them in the middle of the floor. The uniform just missed Edward's oval head.

Coach went towards the back door, and Billy got up and followed. He looked tired, dragged his gym bag by the shoulder strap, his sneakers scuffing across the green rug.

Coach stopped in front of the door. "Night, Edward." Edward didn't answer, just nodded his big head. "Ray?"

"Yeah?"

"Get right home tonight. Get some sleep."

Beth was picking him up after she got out of work. Coach knew they'd been going out for almost a year. He understood the score.

"O.K." Ray watched him push out the door. "See you tomorrow, Billy." Billy looked back, rolled his eyes in a way that said *tomorrow*, then disappeared.

As soon as the door shut, Edward jammed the rest of the uniforms into the trunk without checking their numbers. Ray fumbled the combination to his locker—36 left, 11 right, 36 left. It fell open. Inside, his clothes sagged off the metal hooks. He didn't think he could make them look any different by getting into them. It seemed like too much of an effort to try. He wanted to crawl inside the locker, shut the door and wait for tomorrow night. Edward jumped up. He was here late tonight. Ray pulled on his sweatshirt. "You nervous?" He slid on his jeans.

Edward looked at him as if he was being accused. "About what?"

"Tomorrow." Ray stepped into a pair of old sneakers. "The game."

"No."

Everyone was nervous. "How come?"

"We'll win." He sounded sure.

"What do you figure the score'll..."

"Sixty-seven—forty-nine." The words spilled out. Edward looked away. He scuffed the rug with his Hush Puppies, drove his hands into the pockets of his loose corduroys.

Ray laced up his sneakers and looked back up to Edward. He was walking in small circles in the middle of the locker room floor now, picking up speed.

"Thought you weren't nervous?" Ray asked.

Edward stopped. "You wanna play?"

"What?"

"A game of OUT."

In the terms of Edward Tate's life all hell was breaking loose. Ray had never seen him play a game of one-on-one, or OUT, or even shoot a ball since he started managing the team back in the fifth grade. His father, Freddie Tate, held the Ludlow High scoring record since twenty-two years ago. With Edward it was one of those things, the needed gene never passed on. That he'd been born too skinny, too awkward, too passive to play was the luck of the draw. Ray was going to break Freddie Tate's scoring record before the end of the year. Edward knew all that. He knew it better than anyone.

"You got time, right?"

"Sure. Beth's picking me up at seven-thirty."

Edward led Ray into the gym. They were the last ones tonight, except for the janitors who were lost somewhere else in the high school. Ray liked the gym empty, bleachers rising up on either side like wings. He liked it quiet, the big fans revolving overhead, all the old games and the future ones together somehow, hanging with the dust stirred up in the first practice here some thirty years ago, never quite settling.

"Can I go first?" Edward had picked up an old ball. Its leather was thin, black instead of its original burnt-orange. It was smooth, nameless, perfect.

"Sure." Ray spoke quietly in the vacant gym. "Go ahead."

Edward stood at the foul line doing an awkward dribble, slapping the ball instead of using his fingertips. "When was the last time you lost a game?"

"How come?" It had been almost two years.

"I never saw you lose a game before," Edward said, then set himself square, his Hush Puppies up against the black restraining line. His arms started in motion to shoot, but he stopped then, turned around so it was the heels of Hush Puppies that were against the foul line. He was going to shoot the thing backwards.

"How to go, Ed!"

He threw the ball over his shoulder, without ever looking back to line it up, and before Ray could laugh, applaud Edward for the chance, it fell through the net.

"WHOOO!"

Edward didn't say anything, just hurried over to the side of the court while Ray got the ball and tried to copy the shot exactly. He missed everything, including the backboard.

Ray hesitated on the foul line, to hear Edward go nuts. He wanted to hear that. But Edward didn't even smile. He looked sick. "That's an O."

"Sure is." Ray grinned. "Nice shot."

Edward took the ball and went into the corner, ten feet out, fifteen, twenty until he was standing out of bounds in front of the bleachers. He climbed up one row, looked back, and kept going until he was one-third of the way to the top, then turned around and heaved the basketball, one-handed, at the hoop. It smashed through the net.

Ray picked it up, bouncing under the basket, and walked out into the corner. Edward passed him as they exchanged places. "That was something," Ray said. Edward looked away. He bit his fingernails. He never did that.

From up on the bleachers, Ray looked down on the hoop. It seemed small, impossible to ever fit the basketball in his hands through. Still, he let it fly, and actually it came pretty close, but caught the top of the backboard and sailed to the other side of the gym.

Ray climbed down from the stands, crossed to the top-of-the-key. Edward got the ball and carried it over. He looked at Ray. "U."

"We could use you for last second shots." Ray smiled. "Could make the difference in the tournaments, at the buzzer."

"We'll lose in the tournaments."

Ray laughed.

"We'll lose." Edward was looking all over the gym now, down at his feet, at the basket, the bleachers, the base-line. It looked as if he was going to start walking in circles again.

"Yeah? What round?"

"Semi-finals."

"To who?"

"Dover. One of their forwards," and now he considered for a second, "Willy McGuillicuddy'll hit a twenty-five footer."

"With how much time?"

"Three seconds." Edward was staring at the floor, like he was talking to himself, figuring things out. He shook his head. "It'll be something."

Ray laughed again and Edward jerked his head up. He looked bad, nervous, but Ray wanted to see how far he could push this.

"Am I going to play college ball, Ed?"

Edward dropped his eyes again. "For Hobekon."

"Yeah?" Hobekon was a small division III school in the southern end of the state that picked up the regional talent that couldn't give the game up, but weren't good enough to make the bigger schools.

"You'll be great." He didn't sound too excited.

"How about everyone else?"

Edward started biting his nails again, looking all around. His face was screwed up tight, his eyelids swollen a bit. "Don't think so."

He was winning. Ray kept thinking about that. He was winning and should have been high as a kite, but wasn't. That should have told Ray to quit asking questions that he knew Edward couldn't answer but had, to give up the game and go check for Beth. But he didn't. He couldn't walk away from a game, or Edward, acting like he was just back from tomorrow.

Edward was walking, herky-jerky, around the arc that made the top-of-the-key. Ray kept turning to face him. "How about Billy?"

Edward ran a hand through his wiry hair. He scratched his oval head. "No. Not Billy."

Ray handed him the ball. "Why not?"

Edward took it, then stepped away from Ray, bent down and loosened one of the laces of his Hush Puppies just to retie it. He did the other, then looked up. He was going to lose it. Ray could see the teardrops welling up in Edward's eyes. Edward stared back down at the floor, redid one of his shoes again, then whispered up to Ray, like he was making a confession: "Motorcycle crash."

They were both quiet then. Ray waited for him to laugh even though it looked as if he was going to cry. But Edward didn't do either, just stood back up and took another step away.

"Hey, Edward..."

He took another step.

"Edward?" Christ, he looked pale.

"Sorry, Ray."

He felt cold and hated Edward for that, for the chill going through him now, after the muggy shower.

"I... dreamt it, last night, about all of us."

"Billy?"

Edward nodded. The hand that wasn't holding the ball trembled. It wasn't true. Ray knew that. He threw a half smile at Edward. "Just a dream, right?"

"No..." Edward still whispered, as if they had a secret between them.

Ray forced another smile. He'd done that a lot tonight. "Dreams... make you believe, sometimes."

Edward looked worse. He shook. "Ray, it was... I saw. I know it."

"Jeez, take it easy, Ed. It was just a dream."

"I can't say anything to him."

"For Hobekon? Jeez, Ed, you know..." Edward stood four steps closer to half court than Ray, with the basketball tucked under one arm, his lips quivering. Ray

really wanted to leave now. "Hey, I'm sorry Edward, it's just, well, a dream."

Edward walked backwards to half court. "I beat you in a game of OUT." Without looking more than once he threw up a clumsy hook shot. Ray followed it until it banged off the backboard and went in. Edward looked at him for the last time. "Just threw 'em in from anywhere... couldn't miss."

The ball bounced back out, rolling by the time it reached Ray. He grabbed it up and went to half court. His hands were damp. He wiped them on his jeans and did his best to line up the shot. No one could really line up a half court hook. No one could line up any of the shots Edward had made.

He let it go, hard, to give it a chance. The ball looked on line most of the way, sailed up on a nice arc, but in the end came down a little to the right. It jammed itself between the rim and backboard, sounding, in the empty gym, like a small cannon. That was it. O-U-T. He'd never lost in three shots before. Never.

He looked over to Edward, who was near the sidelines now, watching the ball, his hands stuffed back into his pockets, and Ray was sure, finally crying.

"Nice game." He just wanted Edward to go home, or for Beth to come and get him. "O.K., Edward? Nice game." Edward wasn't blubbing, anyways. Ray wanted to thank him for that much. He wouldn't even mention anything in school tomorrow, if Edward would just leave. He even felt sorry for him, saying all those things, talking like some swami. Edward had beaten him. They'd make a deal. Mum's the word. "Listen, Ed..."

"Maybe he'll do it himself."

Ray stared at him while Edward stared at the floor. "What?"

Edward's shoulders heaved. They were hunched, and Ray could hear him grabbing small breaths between his sobs. "What if it's not an accident?"

It wasn't a question. Ray remembered that later in the night, when he couldn't sleep. Edward told him. He tried to say something else, but Ray cut him off, asked him "why?" probably just to shut him up. It didn't matter, Edward couldn't take it anymore, anyways. He ran through the orange locker room door. Ray looked up at the ball pinched between the rim and backboard, heard the door wheeze shut, the metal clicking against the frame, and wondered how come he'd asked the "why"; how come he was that stupid, to ask a question only two people could answer, Edward being neither of them.

He turned and ran into the locker room then, threw open the door, as if force might swing things his way. The room was empty, so he went out the back door and shoved that open. Out there, just going out of sight of the few arc-lamps, Edward was still running home.

"EDWARD!" but even then he was out of sight, "WHEN?" the wind blowing from different directions, gusting, scrambling his words. He let go of the door, watched the outline of thin birch trees beyond the parking lot, bare, being whipped around, holding up but in trouble, as if the chill wind hadn't decided how much damage it wanted to do on another night in November.

Ray waited in the locker room for Beth to pull into the lot. He turned out the fluorescent overheads, so he could see the car's headlights through a small window above the door when she swung in.

The room was nearly silent. Pipes settled behind the green walls, ticking. Sometimes he would hear the gym creak, like bones popping. He stayed put, propped up against the lockers, thinking back to the day of the accident, to that afternoon. School had gotten out early for teacher's conferences. He and Billy drove out to Billy's house to eat lunch and shoot some foul shots in his driveway.

Ray could see the two of them busting through the front door, up the pantry steps and into the kitchen, where they found Mrs. Thirst kneeling on the blue-tile floor, hundreds of pictures spread out in front of her in a long arc, all of them in black-and-white, of Billy before and during the different ball games he'd played as a kid, and as he got older, all the way up to last season. Ray was in them, too. She'd taken a picture of them together, before the first game every year since the fourth grade. Those were there, along with the rest, all different poses of Billy, shooting a foul shot or racing for a fast break he may or may not have scored. She would have known. It was like a colorless rainbow spread across the kitchen floor, Billy and Ray getting older as it curved towards the base of the refrigerator.

She stared up at them, her eyes red-rimmed, wiping her nose with the sleeve of her sweatshirt, and then looked back down at the pictures, and back up, and down as if she were trying to decide which was real.

"Get the hell out of here," she said, *dropping her head, touching the gloss on the photos, as if it were skin.* They crept backwards, went away for the rest of the afternoon, until supper, until that night.

"Hi!" Beth kissed him for a long while in the empty lot. "Miss me?"

"You know it." The car's fan blew hot air into his chest. The radio glowed green, spilled something soft into the front seat.

She kissed him again, her breath like spearmint, then threw the Nova into drive. It hauled them out of the lot. Beth slipped her hand over the top of his, steering with the other. "You have a chill."

"What?"

"Your hand is shaking."

"Yes."

Even before he knew it was hailing, it was. Small pellets bounced off the windshield in a soft picpicpic. Beth slowed to a crawl. He tried to remember if this had been in the forecast.

"God." She whispered the word. Ray loved her voice. It was soft as the glow from the radio.

"Hm?"

"It got so slippery...", she stared at the road ahead of her, the sleet coming in at an angle, "so fast."

He thought about that. He thought about tomorrow, the score of the game, about Willey McGuillicuddy throwing in a twenty-five footer at the buzzer to take them out of the tournaments in February. And though he tried not to, he drifted off to Mrs. Thirst, back to that afternoon, the way she looked, as if she couldn't go on with the day, not five more minutes, not one.

But whatever else her life had been, it had been all right. Ray believed that. There would have been other things, college friends for Billy to bring home; parent's weekends; long earned vacations with her husband; the slow decay of life, the sweetening. And they still had this last season to play yet. She wouldn't have missed that. That afternoon, one sad afternoon, her memories spread in a black-and-white rainbow, close enough to touch, to arrange, to reverse.

He saw it finally, while Beth eased over Route 3, Mrs. Thirst somehow believing, even while the Subaru sank under the ice, black water seeping in through tiny cracks no one knew about, that she would be all right, wanting it, because she was a young woman, not even forty yet, and unable to understand how she could get old so fast. Thirty-nine, fifty, eighty, one-hundred; she was aging that fast in the end, maybe not understanding it until there wasn't a thing left to figure out.

And Ray thought about Billy, how he wouldn't be on his motorcycle again until the spring. "Dammit."

"What?"

He looked over at Beth. She glanced at him, then they both stared out the front windshield, the hail coming down, picpicpic. "I hope this ends."

Edward didn't come to school. He didn't go to the game. Before they went out for warm-ups, Ray asked Billy how he was feeling.

"O.K."

He was quiet, under control.

Even tired, Ray played all right. By the end of it he had fifteen points. Billy netted twelve, and they were beating Frye by almost twenty. It was going to be some year.

With ten seconds left, Billy threw a pass to Ray at half court. He let a hook shot fly to end the game, which, to the pleasure of the home crowd, went in, making the final 67-49. Ray looked up to the scoreboard—67 (in electric red bulbs), to 49 (in electric blue). The crowd flowed from the bleachers. Billy ran up to him.

"Some shot!"

Ray hesitated, then put his arm around Billy's neck. "Your mom," and like Edward stared at the floor. "I'm sorry, Billy. Fucking accident."

Billy jerked to get away. Ray tightened his hold. Two Frye fans walked across the court past them. "Look at the faggots, Marve." Marve looked.

"I'm sorry." He had him good and tight now, squeezing Billy's neck so he had to bend over to Ray's height. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry."

Billy relaxed some, and so did Ray's hold. They looked at each other, the crowd brushing past, some of the Ludlow fans patting them on the back as they left. Billy had a look only Ray knew for sure, and he wanted to give a cheer before it became something and his best friend threw up all over him, giving everything he had.

Greg Palmer
Iowa City, Iowa
is from Carmel & UMO &
is at Iowa Writers' Workshop

Walking to the Moon

It floats a foot above the line of poplars
So familiarly pale, so accessible
they might go there, she prays,
"just crossing the gulf of air,
carefully upon the wings of fireflies."

It is their moon, these lovers,
lighting the blue hands of wheat,
the white asters he had braided in her hair
above the cape they wear as one
to clock their hands.

He slows to blend anew their steps
as playful chimes of voice
soften to no more than breath.
Turning into him, she feels the wool
slip off her shoulder,
the sudden feather of the night.

Near, a dog has rolled upon their path
and risen as a moment of ice,
believing what it sees.

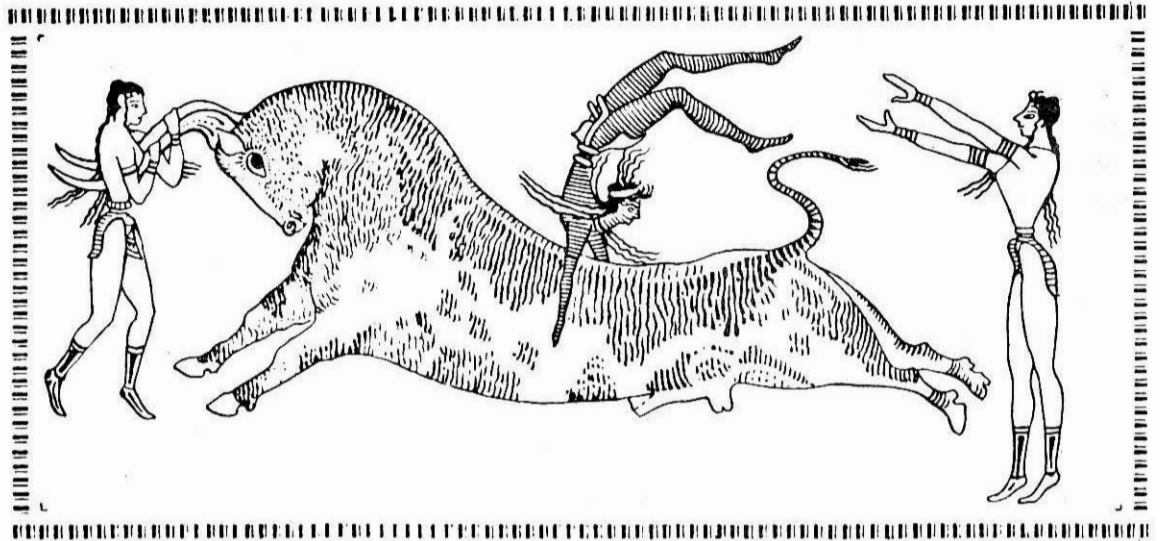
David Adams
Edinboro, PA
taught at UMO & UMF

Wheel Dreams

"If in some smothering dreams, you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face...."
Wilfred Owen

Each night of the full moon my dreams
reinvent Wilfred Owen's wagon wheel
only to hoist it up forged anew
above the fairgrounds
to carry our ripest youth
over the carnival and into the night air
where fingering the stars
and devouring the lusty fireworks
they never fail to feel too late
the wheel turn
to drop them off one by one
into some jungle
where the meat wheel squeals
like a buzz saw through green pine
devouring the moon and oiling its teeth
on their screams.

Doug Rawlings
Mt. Vernon
teaches at UMF



Bulldancing

Men and women don't bull dance together
in Crete anymore,
not since young Theseus, the coward,
slew their mother in her bed.
Their arms hang flaccid, their breasts sag
in dumb mourning.

Their brains, grown grotesquely huge,
clog rage in their throats.
Watching over shoulders for their parents' ghosts
they leer fearfully at each other
and curse themselves, dry tongued,
in the labyrinthine dark.

But lately there is guarded talk of some people
who shed their black clothes.
They practice leaps and vaults, no fear
of falling into the sea.
In the old palace remnants they are learning
to touch the bull as he turns.

Lyle Dennett
Rockport
builds houses

To The Collection Agency

I would answer your letters of
disappointment, but I have no
money to buy stamps, though I will
put this message in a bottle and
drop it off at sea. In a hundred
years the bottle will become
antique and be worth a lot more
money than I owe you. I have just
now emptied the bottle and am
proceeding as planned.

Pat Murphy
Portland
runs Out-of-Print Books

Stuck

The line between City and Country is vague but real. We city folk think we have Mother Nature under control. We've cut down the trees, paved over the earth, and lit up mile after mile of road. But the Old Lady isn't licked. She's waiting out there to tweak the nose of the unwary.

We headed for Maine and a woodlands vacation. Three cars, four adults, nine assorted children, two cats, innumerable sleeping bags, tents, fishing gear and enough chocolate to supply a regiment for a month. We were going to turn our backs on the City and come face to face with Nature. Live off the land. Nothing too extreme. We weren't trying to survive naked with only a compass and jack knife, just give the kids a taste of the great outdoors.

On an unpaved back road, a few miles off the highway, we rented a cabin on a hill and settled in. Our house was small, our group large, but all outdoors was our living room. We peered out across a stream down to a lake in which trout and whitefish played. The fields were green and verdant, the skies high, the sun bright. Heaven!

For two days we caught our supper in the streams, gathered nuts and berries, set snares for small game that we never caught, baked whole-wheat bread over a wood fire of hand hewn logs. The kids were metamorphosized into practically woodsmen, cool and confident, comfortable with the nameless terrors that thrashed about in the underbrush.

We were packing our tents for our first overnight camp-out in the forest, when the first few drops of rain splattered on the roof. Then a few more. Sometimes the hopes of Man and the game conditions set by Nature do not coincide.

Tropical weather arrived. The thermometer rose and the rain came down. And it rained - and it rained - and it rained. The camp-out was cancelled. We huddled together in the shelter of our cabin. Water crept in through unsuspected cracks and openings, filled every hollow and every crevice. It ran down the slopes and dripped from the trees. Every furrow in the ground became a stream. Sodden, sudden, wet, wind whipped, rain. Everywhere! Not since the family of Noah had anybody seen so much water.

After two days of soggy, rain-induced relaxation, the inmates of the cabin began getting restive. Wet firewood filled the cabin with smoke. The inexhaustible chocolate supply was almost gone. Only constant vigilance kept the kids from killing each other. In desperation, an evening expedition to the closest bowling alley, a scant thirty-five mile drive over wet, narrow, winding roads, was planned as a diversion. It was better than sitting in the cabin. Anything was better than sitting in the cabin.

The bowling group, four adults with five of the kids piled into two cars and slithered down our picturesque dirt road to the paved highway. Three days of rain, warm weather and big four-wheel drive vehicles had turned the road to mush in just enough spots to turn driving into a game of chance.

The bowling alley. The kids immediately dropped all interest in woodsmanship and clean living, and gorged themselves on Fritos, Cheetos, Doritos, hot dogs and Pepsi. In the few spare moments that their hands were not bringing junk food to their mouths they rolled bowling balls. My daughter tied the house record for consecutive gutter balls - which was not a true indication of her bowling ability. She could have broken the record if she hadn't been distracted by a re-run of Gilligan's Island. Everybody had a good time. By about midnight, we were ready to leave. It was still storming as we headed back.

My city-bred car reached the last of the paved road, the bottom of our muddy hill. I rolled the side window down, thrust my thumb in the air in a rakish gesture, got a running start, gunned the motor and roared up into the night. The kids hooted and howled. Fifty yards. One hundred yards. Right up the middle of the road, spinning, skidding, slipping, slithering from side to side. Bouncing from ridge to rut. Sliding from hard-packed dirt into the slime. Ten feet. Twenty feet. Thirty feet. Stop. The wheels spun. The engine screamed in anguish. The car refused to move another inch. I tried low gears. I tried reverse. I would have tried sideways if General Motors had provided one. The bottom of the car was pressed against the ground. The wheels were buried in mud to the hub caps.

STUCK!

Car Number Two stopped wisely behind me at a level, relatively clear spot fifty yards back. We waded out in the road and surveyed the situation. Rain, mud, more rain, more mud.

The Plan!

Women and children hike two miles back to the house and go to sleep. Car Number Two goes to get a tow truck. I stay with the car.

In the scale of disasters, being stuck in the mud on a back road, a short distance off a paved highway ranks very low. From the complaints, I could see the children didn't agree. Their thin coating of woodsmanship had already rusted through. City kids aren't accustomed to being attacked by the weather. It's not a major factor in their lives. Weather is an entertainment, two or three jolly minutes of sweeping colored arrows, plastic clouds and paper rain on the nightly news.

The hikers trudged off with blank faces, grumbling gracelessly in the storm, in the rain, in the dark, in disgust. Each of the kids had a pair of L. L. Bean's finest waterproof boots. Those boots, of course, were back at the cabin. The mud sucked at their sneakers. The wind plucked at their clothes. The night swallowed them as if by magic. They were gone.

The still movable car set off to find a tow truck at midnight on a Saturday night at the edge of the great north woods in the middle of a storm. I stayed in the car, the Captain going down with his ship. I turned off the lights to save the battery. There were no street lamps, no city lights, no stars, no moon. I waited alone in complete darkness, warm, peaceful, dry. Sooner or later someone would show up.

Headlights sliced the night behind me. Two cars ricocheted up the hill at suicidal speeds, wheels churning. Big, strong, high trucks with four-wheel drive. They hurtled by on the narrow sliver of road that I wasn't blocking and were gone. Darkness closed in again.

Sometime later, a pick-up truck with Maine license plates eased down the hill and stopped next to me, a confident country-ready vehicle, happy as a pig in the mud. Tires the size of ferris wheels. A ten point buck could have passed under its chassis without removing its antlers. A concerned neighbor rolled down his window and asked if I was alright. I assured him that help was on the way and he sped off.

Lesson Number One in Rules of the Great Outdoors was beginning to sink in to my Citified mind. I wasn't prepared. I had no business being out there in that car. I had regular tires, two-wheel drive, and the ground clearance of a dachshund. They were moving. I was stuck.

How long I sat there, I don't know. I was alone but not lonely. I resolved not to look at my watch and let time pass at its own pace. The resolution made me feel better, as if I were striking a blow for civilization against the wilderness. Exactly how, I'm not really sure.

The tow truck burst from the darkness, lights flashing like a runaway pinball machine, Car Number Two following sheepishly behind.

"Doesn't look too stuck to me," said the Country man. He had on a baseball cap and greasy one piece striped coveralls.

"Six strong men pushed while my wife sat behind the wheel," I quipped.

The tow truck driver didn't think that was funny. He didn't think anything was funny. He wasn't any happier to be called out in the middle of the night than I was to be there. He glared at me.

Lesson Number Two for surviving in the Wilderness: Never fool around with the man driving the tow truck.

"Not much reason to get stuck here," he said.

"I realize that," said City humbly.

He climbed into my car and fiddled with the gears, but the car wouldn't move for him either. (For which strangely enough I was grateful.)

"Believe me, I didn't want to do it. But believe me, I'm stuck. Maybe I'm not used to country driving."

"Maybe."

He set up his truck on stable ground a good distance back and uncoiled a thick steel cable. The truck man then lay down in the mud, fastened a hook under the rear bumper of my car and reeled me in like a great blue tin fish on a line. I signed the required papers, paid the bill and expressed my thanks.

"You ought to be able to turn around here. It's pretty solid." His red, white and blue lights flashed in the night and he was gone, like the Lone Ranger.

I've seen TV commercials in which the driver on a stormy night in the woods comes nose to nose with Mother Nature and is saved by a light that never fails - or - tires that grrrrrrrip the road. Those ads never meant much to me before. I never understood what that man was doing out there on that road, in that terrible weather, in the first place. Now I know.

He was coming home from bowling.

Richard Newman
NYC
is a building contractor

Little Boy Blue

It's a Miami Vice kinda world nowadays. You know, lotsa sun (Miami) and lots of screwing around (Vice). I can't quite decide which I like better. Probably more screwing around.

I met this woman at a company I used to work for. I say woman because I was around twenty-five and she was a little over thirty. At the time we kept it quiet. It was a time when old geezers could have dinner in public with barbie dolls and everyone laughed thinking about their sex life. An older woman seen looking admiringly at a younger guy got five years to life from her friends.

This woman used to straighten up the board rooms before and after these meetings we had. I called it the bored room. The room to decide on meetings about meetings. I used to doodle in the wet spots the ice water glasses left on the shiny table. She got stuck mopping it all up. Funny thing, too, she had a degree in something-or-other. Must have been Home-Ec.

I watched her putter, bustle, sit quietly, and sigh as she went about her routine. She had real sweet cheeks, that woman. Two sets of sweet cheeks as a matter of fact. I watched them coming and going, and the fantasies I'd dream up... well, I'll never tell.

My job was to report on the market. I noticed her watching me report. She had blue highlights in her hair it was so black. First woman I'd ever seen with navy blue hair, not counting my old granny who overdid the dye. Granny's eyesight wasn't so hot. But mine was.

I stayed around after one of the bored meetings. I found a small notebook under my chair, and I assumed one of the men had dropped his little black book. I sat back down in my chair to see if there was anything suitable for Saturday night. Her voice was quiet but penetrating.

"Give me the book, Arthur," she said in my ear. I handed it over. For a minute there I thought my mother had come back from the grave. My hands were sweaty, but that's nothing new. I think guys have perpetually sweaty palms until they are least forty. By then the glands start to dry up.

"Sorriry," I stammered. I lost my balance in trying to rise with the chair still pushed in, and plunked back down hard. The jolt banished my thoughts of fun in the sun with Ms. Right.

The woman started to walk away. "Wait," I called hesitantly. She turned and waited.

"I've worked here almost a year now and I don't even know your name. Ms. Laudnam, isn't it? What's your first name?" I tried to smile and wiped my hands on my pants hoping she wouldn't notice.

"Myla," she said and walked out of the room.

Myla, oh, Myla. Her name made circles in my head. Myla Laudnam. I wondered if she had a middle name but didn't dare to ask her, so I made one up. Myla Pearl Laudnam. Myla with the shiny long black hair, deep purplish eyes, and pinkish cheeks. I started thinking about her cheeks. They looked soft; touchable.

I tried to find her but she had left for the day. That night I searched the phone book for her number. No listing. The operator didn't have a listing either.

Myla followed me into sleep. She followed me into the bathroom the next morning and helped me shave. Naked, she held the razor to my slippery chin. White foam puffs fell to the floor. I drove to work with Myla in the bucket seat next to me. I imagined she'd smile that white-toothed smile I had decided to love.

I turned on my desk-top-computer-and-punched-in-my-code. The phone rang twice and died. Maybe it was Myla? Did she want me and not have the nerve to ask? I'd better make it easier for her. I loosened my tie. I wore my best white shirt and my gray slacks. The tie was silvery with little dotty designs. The socks were gray and the shoes shiny black. Not as black as Myla's hair. No blue tint glistened up at me.

Two hours until the first meeting. I buffed my nails. I do that when nobody's looking. Real men don't buff. I checked my little wallet mirror to see if my nose hair needed a trim. It didn't. My curly brown hair had just been cut stylishly. It fell a bit over my ears. I never liked my ears. Too small.

Myla was tall. I'd guess about five foot eight. I'm just five foot ten myself. Not too short, not too tall. Your average Joe. Or in my case Arty. Arthur was a neighbor's dog's name. When he died the old lady who owned him mourned so deeply that she ate her breakfast cereal out of his ceramic bowl. The bowl said ARTHUR.

My mother was young and impressionable at the time. She had me the day that Arthur went to doggy heaven. The old lady cried hard in her arms. So mom handed me to her and said, "I've named him Arthur." The old lady convulsed, as old ladies tend to do, hugged mom, and went home to recover.

Myla had set the water glasses an inch to the upper right of the yellow legal pads; a pen lay diagonally on each pad. The president had a pitcher of ice water to his left and there were four more in strategic places mid-table. The real strategy involved reaching one and pouring it into your glass without dripping onto the legal pad and smearing your notes.

Myla sat quietly in a plush chair near the door. Part of her job was to fetch forgotten files, notes, coffee, or aspirin. She sat with her feet crossed as ladies are taught to do. She had a red sweater on and a black tight skirt. Her pumps were black with very tiny satin bows at the heels. I always wondered why they called them pumps, but then all I know about pumping tells me nothing.

I gave Myla the eye. That night we had our first dinner. I took her to Snookie's Bar and Grill on the lower end of town where no one would be peeping at us. The place is so dark that you could munch out on a bowl of dead flies and never know the difference. Snookie died twelve years ago but the new owner kept the name in his memory. Actually, I think he kept the name so that if customers weren't satisfied he could just blame the non-present Snookie.

Myla ordered white wine and a fish fillet sandwich. I had a beer and a pepperoni pizza. We talked about the company mostly. What else did we have in common? She grew up in Suburbia and so did I. Everyone had a dog. We had me. The school had a playground. And every kid fell off each piece of equipment more than once. Myla broke her finger when she got flipped off the see-saw. I broke someone else's finger when he tried to push me off the slide.

We ended up in bed eventually. It's that old thing where you have a few dates, each time hoping that this will be the night, and it isn't. Then it is. I went to Myla's apartment.

For a woman over thirty Myla had quite a body. Her skin was olivvy, firm, yet soft. I do like that firmness in a woman. I remember hugging my Aunt Gretta. She was the fat sister of my father. She felt gooshy, like I could sink in forever and never get out. I think she gave me my only phobia. I hate marshmallows.

Around work things were the usual. Myla and I only snuck off to a vacant board room once and then we were both so nervous nothing happened. I had my hand way up on her thigh when something like the electric heater made a snapping noise and we both died a thousand deaths. I couldn't afford to get fired. I'd just bought a brand new convertible. The payments were more than my rent. But a guy's gotta have a good car, otherwise no woman would go out with him.

The affair went on for almost a year. We'd eat and sleep together whenever we could. Sometimes we brought the food right into bed with us. If we got around to eating it, it was usually off the covers and each other. I loved her toes, and even poured gravy on them once. I don't think she liked it, though.

Myla left the company just before our first anniversary. She was transferred to another branch a couple of hundred miles away. No promotion, which surprised me, just a transfer. I wondered then (and now) if she requested that transfer to get away from me. I told her I'd call and write and visit. I even think I cried the last night we stayed together. She patted my curls like I imagined that old lady patted her Arthur so long ago. But she left just the same.

Now I work for a company that has a woman president. In fact, there are only three men out of ten execs at the board meetings here. Some guy fills the water glasses and half the secretaries are men. It's hard to get used to. You can't tell which skirts have rank right off, and it's tricky business to mess with any of them anyway. There's some new law about sexual harassment.

I don't know if that law works for men, but I doubt I'd use it. The other day a pretty little thing from Receiving brought me up a personal package. She had twinkling I'll-Go-Anywhere-with-you eyes, and a mini skirt that barely covered her bottom. I almost pinched her cheeks, but decided against it.

The package was from Myla. I haven't seen her in ten years now. Miles kill a romance quicker than anything except farting in bed (which I never did). There was no note in the package. I dumped out the tissue wrapping and flattened it carefully, folding each piece. Looking for a note. I know it was from Myla by the handwriting on the box and the post mark.

I wondered if she had ever married, or had kids, or even lived with anyone. I married three years after Myla left. We have four boys. That's what I get with a Catholic wife. I love those kids, don't get me wrong. I take them camping and all that fatherly stuff. I want them to grow up understanding the wilderness and the big city.

Seven Year Itch. I'm going wild just thinking about and remembering Myla. She'd be fortyish. Does she still have pure raven hair with no gray? Does she still have that firm bodyswaddled in a chenille bathrobe? Would I care? Yes, I suppose I would.

Yes, yes, it is a Miami Vice world. Only now I'm just watching it on TV. With a wife and kids I don't get to have any more fun in the sun than mowing the lawn on Saturday, and my oldest kid will be doing that pretty soon. Vices? Let's see. I

Continued next page

still don't consider having a few brews a vice. It's not vice to have sex with your wife. Could I call a fling with a professional that I had two years ago while away on business a vice? I think not. I only did it on a dare, then I worried for six months about turning up with some disease. No, I guess I have no fun and no vices at all.

I set Myla's gift on my desk. It keeps me company. Everytime I get a little low I can look at it, or pick it up and turn it over in my hands. The blown glass is smooth, hard, and shiny. It reminds me of the way Myla felt lying naked in my arms. The glass bubble is tinted ever so slightly blue. Inside is a very tiny man. He hangs naked, suspended by the finest thread of glass I've ever seen. He's a little darker blue glass. Very blue, depressed blue. Middle-aged vein blue. The glass bubble has a small flat spot so it doesn't roll off the desk.

Karla, that's my wife, saw the glass ball the other day. She thought it was morbid; asked me where I picked it up. I told her in some gift shop last time I went to Detroit. I can still hear her saying, "God, it's a lonely man in his own little world, hanging naked by his neck tie... and he's blue! Why would you want a thing like that around?" I sloughed it off as no big deal.

I can't stand my tie tight around my neck. I've been thinking of getting a job where I don't have to wear a tie. Sometimes I feel as if I'm choking and I find the tie is already loose. The office is full of guys doing girl's work and girls doing guy's work. The computer is always down and the phone system is clogged.

I sat in the livingroom looking at Karla and the boys. She was doing the monthly bills at the diningroom table and the boys were watching the tube. I could look right through the doorway into the diningroom and see my brown haired beauty as though she were framed. Norman Rockwell at his best. We never did get a dog but if we did I think it would be a girl dog named Esther after my mother.

This morning I went to work long enough to clean out my desk and pick up my ice blue orb. I threw the box in the back seat of the stationwagon (how can you fit a family of six into a convertible along with fifteen bags of groceries?) and drove to the lower end of town. I went into Snookie's, which is now Bertie's, and ordered a beer. It was not as dark as I remembered because I could see very clearly all the ugly dirty faces of last night's patrons who had come back for a little hair of the dog.

I gave my tie, the silvery one with dotty designs, to the guy beside me at the bar. He smelled it! I wondered if it had smelled differently if he would have rejected it. He stuffed it in the baggy pocket of his used pea coat that smelled of oil and piss. I moved to a booth with a fresh beer, and took the blue glass bulb and set it on the peachy yellow formica table top. It became a crystal ball. I saw the man swing and clouds of pure white smoke swirl around his body.

I felt Myla's hand on my hair. Slow petting, smooth hands, with sweetly manicured nails of pink; and the fragrance of powder filled my nostrils. What is it about fragrances that takes you back in time? Beer takes me to the back porch where Pa swilled a few on those hot summer afternoons. But powder takes me to Myla. Karla uses only soap and some cologne when we go out.

I must have sat there for a long time. The afternoon crowd of happy hour hoodlums and sour-pussed hookers were trailing in. The damp of the clothing threatened to cover my imagined aromas with the dust and filth of the streets. Bags of goods were tucked protectively under chairs between the legs. It was like coming into a store that sells incense and spices, each lovely and unique, mingled into a stench that makes you resist buying any of them.

I felt strangled again and reached for my tie. It wasn't around my neck. I put the glass bauble in my pocket, paid the tab and headed towards my car. Dusk. Dusky. Dusk bin. Time to go home? Time to go... anywhere?

The house was empty when I got there. Karla was at a town meeting, having taken the two youngest with her, and the two older boys were at friend's. The note was propped against the toaster. As I bent down I could see my face reflected in distorting lumps from the silver surface. I stuck out my tongue. I licked the toaster. Now why would I do something like that? I shined it back up with a paper towel.

Karla said it was just midlife crisis and I shouldn't worry. Who me, worry? I managed to get another job. I have to wear a tie. No money without a tie unless you have some labor skills of the craftsman variety, which I do not. I'm a night auditor, believe it or not. When it's about two in the morning, and so quiet you can hear yourself breathing out of alternate nostrils, I get the blue glass ball out and roll it around on the carpet. The little man does somersaults while still attached to his tie.

**Linda Bartlett
Warren**
*is a columnist for Rockland
Courier-Gazette*

Paco's Passion

*When the whales come back to Punta de Mita
old Paco heads to the beach alone -
he is always alone. Ah ha! they say,
there he goes again, while
small boys sneak away from their mothers
to watch him watch the whales.
On the beach for days, he forgets to eat,
can't hear his skinny belly yowling for bread.
The whales the big horny bastards
are mating, and Paco
knows how it is for them.
He jumps around, rubbing his eyes at their
sweet wet backs
and licks the salty sea from his skin.
Yeow! She is rising, the old mama.
She rolls under and Paco hoots
because he knows her smile is for him.
His skin turns red in the sun,
his scraggly pants tear as he kicks the air.
He hollers mad love to the huge virgin
ah, he knows her - so come, swim closer.
In the crashing spray of white on blue
he moans and clutches his chest, grinds teeth.
Oh yes yes, he follows, grasping her flukes,
her dive, he can barely hold his breath -
My God! old Paco screams and heaves a fist of sand
into the leering eyes of the sky,
and the young boys rush home, their eyes glistening,
the surf throbbing in their loins.*

**Lyle Dennett
Rockport**
builds houses

Softball Game, Down East

*This is a town meeting.
Otis Ice Cream Palace vs. The Heron Chokers.
Lumpy field near Maggie's camp,
dead grass, cereal box bases,
junked car hood backstop.*

*Regulars pull up on bikes, cycles,
in pick ups, old vee-dubs.
Fifteen players, six gloves,
and a dog-chewed catcher's mitt.
A couple—three cases of beer.*

*Total equal opportunity.
One pitcher wears combat boots,
the bat's a cracked 34.
Talk about "Game of the Week" -
this is all beyond TV.*

**Paul Marion
Dracut, MA**
*plays on championship
softball team in MA*

Signs of Spring (March 21)

One fraction of a turn beyond
the equinox. Bach's birthday.
Eggs balanced yesterday
begin to fall. Now we try to find
Easter—as if this moveable feast,
an ancient chronologic beast,
must be driven into the fold
and rest its bleeding head on
Mary's breast while Rabbis sharpen
their knives, the soldiers loosen
their swords, disciples hide in
the shadows, and the Angels fly
higher, circle, keening, cry,
buzzard black against the sky.

Robert Chute
Poland Spring
teaches biology at Bates

A lacy bug floats up before my windshield
And prints himself on it.
The third dimension squeezed out of him
In two nanoseconds of slow motion in a tiny *whummp!*
He's invisible when viewed from the side.
Windshield wipers won't feel him.
He's a perfect blueprint, a printed circuit,
A schematic on file for a TV preacher's Day of Judgment,
A new Holocene fossil, his own monument.

J. C. Fant
Akron, OH
*an archaeologist who has
a permanent visa for Maine*

Graphic by Majo Keleshian

The Night I Was Raped

April, November - this I can't remember
I don't know why
I said No, I sobbed
I wanted to scream, but I didn't
I don't know why
he wouldn't stop
I remember the bones of my pelvis
the bones of his fingers
colliding
holding me down
the bone of his force
tearing the dark red fabric
of my soul.
The night I was raped
the blood dripped slowly
oozed like menses but it wasn't
I hemorrhaged for three days
I never told anyone, I didn't know the words
penis
vagina
hymen
the too heavy weight of his body
the frail craft of my hips
and all that blood for three days
until a black, black wound
formed a scar around my heart
but nothing
healed the pain.

Ardeana Hamlin
Winterport
is at work on a second novel



The Raid

Rufus Batés is collapsing, has now passed out; a useless, hulking, red-haired fatty mass; a large, clothed, rapidly breathing mound there on the floor of his home on Red Bog Road in Universe as the Blaine County sheriff's deputies gape at each other and incredulously wonder if this simple marijuana raid will turn into some kind of fatality or worse yet a suicide.

"Get an ambulance," Deputy Caleb Dawes finally directs his partner in what seems an eternity but is only about 30 seconds. "I'll get his old lady into the cruiser."

Flora Bates, who had told her husband that keeping those plants, growing them just during the winter for some friends in Bangor would be easy and make some money, has begun to cry. And not for poor, old Rufus lying there losing breath like a beached whale, but for herself and, of course, to make the deputies feel sorry for her. It had seemed so simple, she remembers, sobbing a little harder into the sleeve of her dirty sweatshirt, so little trouble for \$500. She doesn't smoke the stuff, neither does Rufus, he doesn't smoke anything and now look at him, the big slob.

"Will I go to jail?" she sniffs, picking nervously at her over-permed black hair, and looks over at Caleb as he reaches out, pulls her toward him and snaps handcuffs around her wrists.

"Not for me to say, Mrs. Bates," Caleb replies in a monotone as he guides her over to the cruiser. "You'll be going down to Belfast for booking just as soon as we take care of your husband."

"What about him? What'll happen to him?"

"Can't say about that either," Caleb shrugs, and then tries to reassure the short, pear-shaped woman, although he feels certain she really doesn't care. "He's breathing okay, Mrs. Bates, we didn't need to do CPR, his pulse is strong, a mite fast but strong. The medics will be here in..." and he looks over at his partner now sitting beside Flora Bates in the front seat.

"About 10 minutes, Cal, they're just back from another run, got 'em all together, be right over."

"Okay, now you sit tight with her, I'm going to see how Rufus is doing."

Rufus, who is now fully conscious and was never totally out, just sort of half in shock, shuts his eyes quickly as he sees Caleb approaching. How can it all have gone so wrong, he wonders. How did they find out? He doesn't want to go to jail. He's been there before, twice for poaching. The cells are not big enough for him, at least not the county jail, and the food stinks. He feels Caleb take his pulse again and check his mouth and windpipe for any obstruction. That damn Freddie Blake and his stupid ideas. Freddie doesn't care about jail; he is so blasted skinny he can slip through the bars, just about. And he never eats. Drinks, that's all, doesn't smoke any of this stuff either, but he sells it and it keeps him drinking. It was the lamps, all those damn lamps warming the plants, that's what tipped them off, Rufus concludes as he hears the ambulance pull in. No sirens out here. No need for sirens on these empty roads. That's one thing would be nice about getting sick in the city, lots of sirens going on around you.

It takes not only the three medics but Caleb and his partner to fill all 500 pounds of Rufus into the ambulance. And as the two deputies unbutton their jackets to cool off, even in the chill March day, they watch the ambulance swing onto the road, heading in the direction of Waterville, look at each other simultaneously and laugh. Then Caleb says, "Don't know which is worse, his size or his stink. Sure would hate to be those guys shut up inside with him for that far."

"Guess he doesn't clean himself much, huh, Cal?"

"Guess he can't. Imagine moving around dragging that kind of lard with you."

"Heard he broke the seat in a cruiser last year when Jack Warder picked him up for poaching."

"Yeah, I know, that was the first time. Jack got him again six months later. Wouldn't let him sit in the car. Called in for a truck to take him in."

"You think he's responsible for all these plants and stuff, I mean, you know..."

"Yeah, I know, but who can tell, I seen stranger. Come on, let's get her down to Belfast."

By the next morning, everyone in Universe knows about the drug raid at Rufus'. It makes sense to no one except that he is the fall guy, although they aren't real sure about his wife. No one is very surprised about drugs in Universe. Marijuana, hashish, then cocaine, some heroin have been creeping north from Boston for the past 20 years, and Maine is the perfect spot for running the stuff, with its long, crooked coastline full of small inlets and villages, not to mention the interior and its vast tracks of woods, lakes, sparse settlements and small remote airports. The state is made to order for drug dispersal, much in the way it was the perfect conduit for liquor smuggling from Canada during prohibition in the 1920s.

Marijuana, in particular, is nothing real new in Universe. It made its initial appearance during the late 1960s and early 1970s when the back-to-the-landers descended on the state in droves looking for cheap land, an easy life and escape from the Vietnam draft. Marijuana became a local crop grown for personal use only. Some may have sold it for profit, but most of it was consumed at large pot parties highlighted by nude dancing around enormous bonfires. The local people were always invited; some of them went, marveled at it all and wondered how many of these youngsters would survive their first winter. And, indeed, the group dwindled with each winter, until those remaining realized that earning their living from the land was near impossible, eased back into the mainstream and were gradually absorbed into more traditional occupations. But they continued to keep pot plots on the property until the police began picking off these crops with the aid of helicopters that could spot the plants' specific cylindrical shape from on high. Then suddenly all this hard stuff—coke, heroin—began popping up in town. That's what puzzles everyone. And that's why the morning talk at the post office and general store is concerned but relieved. At least it wasn't the real brutal drugs, but then again, what was Rufus Bates doing with it all? Rufus of all people. That's what is so troubling.

"Look," says Floyd Chase, the mechanic at the local garage, to postmaster Wendell Coffin, "Rufus has enough problems. What's he want to mess with drugs for? He's got heart problems; he's got lung problems; some days he can hardly breathe."

"Don't know," answers Wendell, as he separates out all the first class mail from the rest. "I don't recall that he's ever had that much respect for the law, neither him nor his old man."

"Yeah, but that's just poaching."

"Poaching's poaching," and Wendell looks up to grin at Floyd who he knows has tried his hand at out-of-season hunting once in a while, "the law's the law. He's not starving. He gets state money, so does his wife."

"That's something I never been able to figure."

"What?"

"How they get welfare?"

"Can't take care of themselves. Who knows? All kinds of ways to get it; it's easy to fool the state."

"Yeah, but that's how he got caught."

"What? What do you mean?" asks Wendell, interested in Floyd's gossip now as he moves up to the postal window with his stack of first class mail and begins sorting it into the postal boxes.

"Well, the electric company monitors his light bill because he's on welfare, so one month he runs up this \$800 bill because of those high intensity lights used to keep them plants warm enough."

"You're kidding, I mean \$800, Floyd, I mean I know Rufus is not too bright, but I didn't think he was totally brainless."

"Well, it looks like he is. That's why they got an informant in there."

"Who was that anyway? And where'd Rufus get the \$800?"

"Whoever owned the plants gave it to him, to Flora actually. The informant was some guy from over in Deerfield. He got cozy with Flora, started hanging around the house, playing cards with Rufus, you know how he likes to play cards."

"Yeah, and he's not too good at it either. Probably took his money and then turns him in at the same time."

"Wife's not from around here, is she?"

"I don't recall her, think she grew up somewhere around Bangor. But Rufus, now, I went to school with him, when we were still using that one room school house down on the Bowdoin Hill Road. Christ, Floyd, he was big then. His father worked in the woods all the time til he got hurt. Then they went on one form or another of welfare. Guess it gets in your blood. When I came back from Boston, he was like he is now."

Meanwhile, down the road about two miles, Jason Theriault, the assistant to Dr. Mooney in Deerfield, is grabbing a cup of coffee in the general store and trying, along with Jeff Bowdoin, the store owner, to figure out the Rufus-marijuana connection.

"Money, what else?" concludes Jeff as he rings up a Megabucks sale to Jason.

"But there's not enough money in that to make it worth it, Jeff."

"Depends on where you look at it from. Any extra money is something to Rufus. Got any idea what it takes to feed him? I'm just happy he pays something on his bill every month. Don't ever expect I'll ever get all of my money from him."

"Why give him credit then?"

"Now you know better than that, Jase. Half the people I hold here'll never pay me everything. What would they do if I didn't? Where would they go? Look, Rufus was in here a couple of weeks ago and bought lunch. Three pizzas, two

Italians and a six-pack of Pepsis. And he paid for that. Anyway, while I was ringing it up, you know what he says to me? He says, 'Hey Jeff, I think I need to lose weight, huh, what do you think?' And I say, sure, Rufus, why don't you eat two pizzas instead of three. So he thinks a minute and grins that sloppy grin of his and says, 'Hey, that's a good idea, I'll do it.'"

Jason laughs, shakes his big, blonde, bearded face and counters, "I got a better one for you, in fact, two better ones. I mean, I agree, food is very precious to him, it's all he thinks about. You make sense, Jeff, gotta be pot for money for food. Anyway, I had to stop by his house one evening to deliver a prescription he'd called up for and I caught him in the middle of dinner. Flora, I guess, had finished; he was at the table alone with a 25 pound turkey pan full of macaroni and cheese in front of him plus a loaf of bread and a half gallon jug of Pepsi."

"Did he eat it all?"

"Don't know, I left. Then about a month later, he was in the hospital for his heart problem, severe angina, I think. Anyway, Mooney had him on this low-calorie diet, and I guess he had withdrawals 'cause he started making a lot of noise, you know screaming for food. I happened to be looking in on another patient for Mooney down the hall when the head nurse grabbed me and asked for some help. I told her, hell, give him whatever he wants, if you don't, he'll disrupt the whole hospital. She did. And it worked."

"Can you eat yourself to death, Jase?"

"Oh, sure, one way or the other. And Rufus is on his way. Too bad, he's just about as nice as he can be. I don't expect to see him held long. He'll stay in the hospital as long as he needs and then be free on recognizance. He ain't going nowhere."

Rufus and his wife are arraigned the next day, he in absentia. He remains in the hospital through the following day and is released, as was Flora, on personal recognizance. She and Freddie Blake pick him up in Freddie's long, wide, two-tone, red, 1977 Plymouth station wagon and bring him home to Universe.

That evening when Flora tells Rufus that she's going to run up to the general store for some cigarettes, he sits comfortably sprawled on a couch which basically serves as his easy chair, rests his hands on his immense stomach that actually had subsided somewhat since his hospital stay and resultant weight loss, sighs and shakes his head, "I may be big and ugly, Flora, but I ain't dumb. You're going over to Freddie's. Oh, yeah, you'll get your ciggies, but then it'll be Freddie's. It's been Freddie's for about a year, hasn't it? That's how come we had all that crap in the house. You know, I don't mind going to jail for poaching or speeding or even stealing something, something like shoplifting, because then, it's me, I'm only hurting me. But I don't like being associated with drugs, mainly selling them. Wouldn't touch the stuff myself and I don't want to be known around here as the guy who gets it to the kids. That is serious stuff, Flora, you know, real hateful."

Flora stands by the door, jacket and purse clutched in her hand. She breathes deeply and heavily, not saying a word because she has no idea what to say, but even worse, she hasn't a notion of what Rufus might do since she's never really considered it. They've been married for about 10 years, out of convenience for each, and he's never questioned anything she did. Both have been married before, at about 18, and have children by former spouses, children grown now and on their own, none of whom have amounted to much. Flora had needed a place to live and Rufus someone to look after him. Freddie Blake had brought them together, and it was better than nothing. But she'd always had a thing for Freddie, and Rufus just kept eating and eating and growing fatter and fatter. Good sex became nearly impossible, if at all. Then came the sickness. And Rufus continued to gorge and make it worse. When Freddie told her about the pot scheme and the money they could make, it had sounded so easy. But now—then suddenly Flora finds her voice.

"Well, what do you want, Rufus? It's your call. I screwed up, maybe we both did. I'd say I'm sorry but I'm not. At least Freddie tries, you don't even do that," and she stops for a deep breath, surprised and relieved that she can say anything at all.

"Get out of here, Flora. Don't want to lay my eyes on you again—or Freddie. Just get out."

It is what she's been hoping he would say, would have said a long time ago. So she turns to leave, but then swings back around to say, "I've got to get my things, clothes and stuff, my radio and..."

"You can come back and take everything, take what you want, just get the hell out of here so I can have some peace and think."

About two months later Floyd Chase drops by the post office to buy some stamps and asks the postmaster, "Heard about that drug case, the one about Rufus?"

"Nope."

"His old lady got indicted."

"What about Rufus?"

"Nothing, not a thing, I guess he's excused."

"How come he wasn't at least an accomplice, although mainly out of stupidity?"

"Poor health, I hear, and circumstances, and I think they're going to pull Freddie Blake into it all and some guys from Bangor and Calais."

"Calais?"

"That's what I hear—running it up and down the Airline."

"Guess Rufus will just stick to poaching from now on."

"Yeah, but, you know, I've never figured out how he can go into the woods without scaring everything away."

"I read somewhere that fat people are supposed to be light on their feet."

"That's the trouble with you, Wendell, you read too much and don't think enough."

"That could be, Floyd."

C. Walker Mattson

Troy

has published widely



Graphic by Herb Parsons

Sitting Ducks

*The man and the woman, so brutally slain,
Had summered for years on an island in Maine,
Till a native discovered their bodies, with shock,
As cold as the mackerel that lie on the dock.
They'd often been seen on inflatable floats,
Exploring the waters—examining boats,
But their rafts were now punctured, as well as their lungs,
And something like lobster was found on their tongues,
Which wasn't surprising. They ate it a lot,
Though nobody knew where the lobster was bought.*

*They had drifted awhile, but had never been missed,
And the holes in their backs were as large as your fist.
When people collected, it captured the eye
Of two in a lobster boat, pottering by,
And one of them glanced at the point of his spear,
The other inspected his snorkeling gear
And peeked at the decoys he'd hidden from view—
A couple of ducks that the tubes fitted through.
They smiled in a way that was typically "Maine,"
With a quiet complacency hard to explain.*

*It smacked of a vengeance, unfitting, perhaps,
For a caper so small as the robbing of traps,
But those who are sure that the ocean is kind,
And all that's beneath it, should bear it in mind
That, in view of the manner the tragedy struck,
It's wise to be wary of trusting a duck.
There's also a moral. It's stupid to steal
The fruits of the lobsterman's pot, for a meal,
Since there's always a chance, in exchange for such gall,
He'll use you as bait on another day's haul.*

Katherine H. Brooks

Portland

is a summer island resident

Mill Street

When Yvette Cloutier noticed André Bédard on Mill Street, she shrank back from the greater to the lesser gloom of the Hironnelle. The ex-priest had already dodged into the factory office like a tarnished beetle, one shoulder higher than the other, his pants muddy from the autumn drizzle. André hadn't seen Yvette outlined in the window. During these weeks of angry turmoil, they hadn't even spoken. Vic Lenoir, who owned the Hironnelle, ambled over to her table and wiped the linoleum before joining Yvette.

"I guess there won't be no strike," he predicted.

"Don't bet on it," Yvette said. "Bet on Paul..."

As the factory whistle yelped and the hands emerged, Yvette and Vic watched the gate where Paul Bontemps stood with an armful of ballots. Most of the men and dozens of girls accepted ballots — until Omer Lejeune, Father Michel's protégé, graduated from excited argument to belligerent interference. When Omer swung at Paul, Yvette stood up, rocking the table. Her glass crashed to the floor, yet Paul, dodging the blow, knocked Omer down and went on passing out ballots. The whistle stopped. The bells of St. Anne's chimed noon. Vic looked skeptical.

"Maybe," he said. "Only how come you stayed away a whole month? Because of Paul — or because of André? Which, Yvette?"

"None of your damn business, Vic."

"Connie still comes," he went on. "Connie Drapeau, your roommate. Every night, almost."

"Sure!" Yvette admitted. "To drink your lousy beer."

"To pick up guys, rather. To earn a little easy money."

Spoiling her new resolution, Yvette cadged a Tareyton from Vic and puffed moodily. A wave of cynicism engulfed her. Her green eyes flickered under the cascade of titian hair.

"Well, then, we're just alike. Both our dads threw us out of the house the same year. Tramps, teen-age tramps..."

"Aw, see here, Yvette. I didn't mean no harm."

Viewing the scene at the factory gate, Yvette set her prominent chin on cupped hands. Her shapely legs in the navy tights felt numb with cold. Her feet ached.

"I love him, Vic. He's been wonderful to me. Maybe he don't know about the past, or maybe he knows and don't care. André? André hates us. We two never go to church. Never make confession. Won't drop a plugged nickel in the poor box.... So what? Heaven's here if it's anywhere, not up there among the angels."

"And here's your friend," Vic announced.

Thrusting into the Hironnelle followed by his admirers, Paul ignored Yvette. His thirst quenched, he supervised the counting of the strike ballots. Next came Omer Lejeune with his hold-outs. While Yvette shivered, the rival camps glowered at each other. Finally, Robert St. Onge put the question.

"Are we over the top?"

"No," Paul said. "We need one more 'yes'."

Yvette hunkered down in her chair. A year ago, before her baby died, she'd been a spindle in the factory bruising her pretty hands for a few miserable dollars — barely enough to support a kid who lacked a father, who couldn't digest her milk, who cried all night. The beauty parlor was clean. It paid twice what the factory paid. Connie Drapeau had gotten her in, taught her to wash and set and give manicures. Yvette was grateful to Connie. She wouldn't gossip about Connie's doings.

"One-more-vote" Paul's crowd began to chant, pounding on the tables. Vic appeared frightened, Omer nervous. When the chanting ended, a little Irishman from Omer's side wavered and defected. Paul welcomed him with a bear hug. When both groups filed out of the Hironnelle, Paul ordered sandwiches and carried them to Yvette.

"The sun's out again," he said. "And you promised me a walk. Your day off, isn't it?"

"Y-yes — but my shoes aren't right for walking."

"So!" he challenged, examining her spike heels. "You can change."

"I can change if you can wait."

"Wait here?"

"Here," she insisted.

She was ashamed of the flat she shared with Connie; of Connie's bed littered with gaudy trophies; of the exotic scent that pervaded the rooms. Thanks to the sisters of the convent, she was ashamed of her body too, but this afternoon would be different. Feeling younger, she replaced the cheap silk dress with a tartan mini-skirt and a cardigan. The tights gave way to comfortable green knee-socks, the tall heels to russet loafers. As she raced along Maine and into Mill Street, she was

conscious of appreciative male glances. When she entered the bar, Vic whistled but Paul seemed annoyed. Yvette paused at the door. Her cheeks went very pale beneath the rakish tan.

"I changed," she said.

"Just the trappings," Paul observed.

They quit the paved streets and climbed a rutted track to Barton's Woods. Trampling the leaves, they reached a windy knoll that overlooked town and river. From here they could make out the twin towers of the church and the factory. The breeze chilled her exposed thighs; Yvette hugged herself in the supple leather jacket she'd bought recently.

"Paul... What's the matter?"

Now she spoke in rapid, clicking Quebec French — her parents' language. The hollows in her cheeks were more noticeable. Her eyes became softer. She doffed the tam, tossed her head, pouted.

"You got the votes, Paul. You'll call a strike, then, I hope."

When he didn't answer, a single tear rolled toward her uncertain chin. She sniffled, fiddled with the tam. Why was Paul so cruelly withdrawn? He was worse than the sisters at the convent: stern, puritanical, disapproving. She nudged his arm.

"Look at me, honey. Please look at me."

When he moved abruptly, she retreated in fear. His mouth was a grim trench; his eyes were agates.

"If you visit that fake priest once more, we're through. Understand? He'd crucify me. He's got the foreman and half the workers in his pocket. He's the voice of Father Michel. When André talks, the whole town listens. And you, you can't have it both ways."

"Both ways?" Yvette couldn't even picture the last occasion. "Well, I visited him when Mom took sick, to arrange things... because we were busted. The parish gave her a funeral. Sure, I couldn't go direct to Father Michel. Could I?"

Paul was not convinced. Fine lines webbed his face, though he was hardly thirty, four years older than she.

"They tell me you two meet here, when I'm on the night shift."

"Never! Vic would poison his beer. Vic can't abide André."

"And you?" Paul demanded.

She gazed up so steadfastly that he relented. Their lips touched. A moment later they were clinging together on a blanket of moss, sheltered from the wind. But Paul had also taken holier vows. He did not tug at her clothes, as previously. Their kissing was enough, and when he lifted himself from the ground, he was smiling.

"See them towers below? That's what I mean by having to choose. The church or the mill, the past or the future. O.K.?"

"O.K.," Yvette said. "The future."

Sauntering home, they held hands. She danced nimbly along the bridge, her gay pleats whirling above the fetching socks. By the alley leading to her flat, however, Yvette dropped Paul's arm. Farther she couldn't trust herself. Besides, Connie might be in. Connie and Paul mustn't meet — not till the affair was settled, at least.

"A bientôt, Paul. Jusqu'à dimanche."

"Dimanche," he replied.

"Et la grève? The strike?"

"We'll know tomorrow, Yvette."

The rank odor tipped her off. It fouled the hall, the cramped living area André Bédard dominated: truly an excellent cigar. His muddy shoes on her worn carpet drove the wedge of apprehension deeper. The lamp was weak. She could hear only the thick wheeze that came from the full lips in his purple, congested face.

"Don't jump. Your landlady allowed me in."

"Father!"

"Not Michel, though," André corrected, shifting his bulk. "You look rosy. Rosy and fresh with exercise. Am I disturbing you, child? Good! But I shan't be good tonight."

The parcel clutched to his belly was wrapped in greasy brown paper. Recognizing the parcel, Yvette moved quickly to the wall switch and flooded the room with light from the ceiling.

"Where's Connie? Didn't she —"

"I bribed her, child. Sent her out for the evening. First, we'll have dinner. I'm famished, as usual. Steaks, wine, dessert. Everything de luxe..."

When she hesitated, André bolted the door and leaned against the frame,

ogling her. The pale eyes without lashes revolved above distended cheeks. His bald dome shone. An expression of fixed greed wreathed his mouth. He was wearing his priest's collar.

"Don't worry, my dear. I don't ask much—a bite and an hour's chat. A friendly communion, you could say."

Yvette huddled on the couch, covering her knees. It was nearly dark; in an hour, if she was lucky, André would go—as all the others had gone—into a dimness best forgotten. Next to her on its face lay the Kewpie doll Connie had won at the shooting gallery. The doll too was limp, cold, numbed. An hour.... When she'd mixed the salad, the meat was almost done. Kicking off her loafers and turning up the wide cuffs of her socks, Yvette crept from the kitchenette. In saying grace, Andre crossed himself.

"... for what we are about to receive, amen."

His steak was rare; the wine reddened his lips more. He wiped them daintily, hiccuped, blinked. His opening words were faintly apologetic.

"And now, our masquerade. It's only a joke. A matter of habit, eh?"

The pun tickled him vastly. His paunch and jowls quivered; Yvette wasn't amused. Perched on the bench opposite, she made up her mind.

"Sorry. No fun and games tonight."

"But my dear, nothing ever happens. Remember?"

"Sorry. Not after today."

"Your day off?" he asked blandly. "Your day in the woods with Paul Bontemps—eh, nymph? The trouble is, he hasn't found out. Yet!"

Already the ex-priest was unwrapping his parcel. True, nothing had ever happened; André had outlived his powers. Acceding suddenly, Yvette took the garments into the bedroom. A matter of habit.... The black stockings fitted snugly, as did the starched wimple. Only the gown hung loosely. When she reappeared, the lights were dim. She heard André's wheeze. She let him fondle her, pinch her, draw her toward him: nothing.

"You've always failed," she chided, lying inert on the couch. "Failed your god, failed your superiors, failed me. You disgust me, Father Bedard."

When he'd left, she bundled the nun's garments into the stove and put them to the ordeal by fire. Connie returned at eleven, tipsy and loquacious. They had a cup of tea, smoked, prepared for bed.

"Ça va?" Connie inquired.

"Ça marche," said Yvette with a sigh.

Next day from the window of the Hironnelle Yvette saw the strikers file out of the mill. Paul was leading them toward the railroad tracks that divided the town; toward the white mansions where the investors lived. Though she waved frantically and tapped loudly on the plate glass, Paul didn't pay heed. She considered dashing after him, but Vic, wiser than she, restrained Yvette.

"Can't you wait? What's ailing you, kid?"

"Nothing, Vic. Nothing that can't be cured."

Defying Yvette's sportive ensemble, the weather had turned ugly. Rain dripped into the empty street. The mill whistle blew dolefully.

"He'll come back to me. Won't he come back?"

Vic merely shrugged.

Lawrence P. Spingarn

Van Nuys, CA

*lived in various Maine towns,
graduated Bowdoin, '40*

Mill Town

*The carding room is furious with sound.
Men from the town bring in the massive bales
And break them open. Wool is drawn around
The huge, slowly revolving combing wheels
That pull each fiber strictly into line,
Making a blanket uniformly thick
That moves relentlessly through the machine,
Turning, compacting, shaping into a slick
Soft rope that's spooled and cut. The ready wool
Is taken to the spinning frame; the strands
Are carefully arranged and in the dull
Hum where bobbins whirr, by dexterous hands
Of women from the town, at last are led
Through guides, and spun into a strong, thin thread.*

Thomas Carper
Cornish
teaches at USM

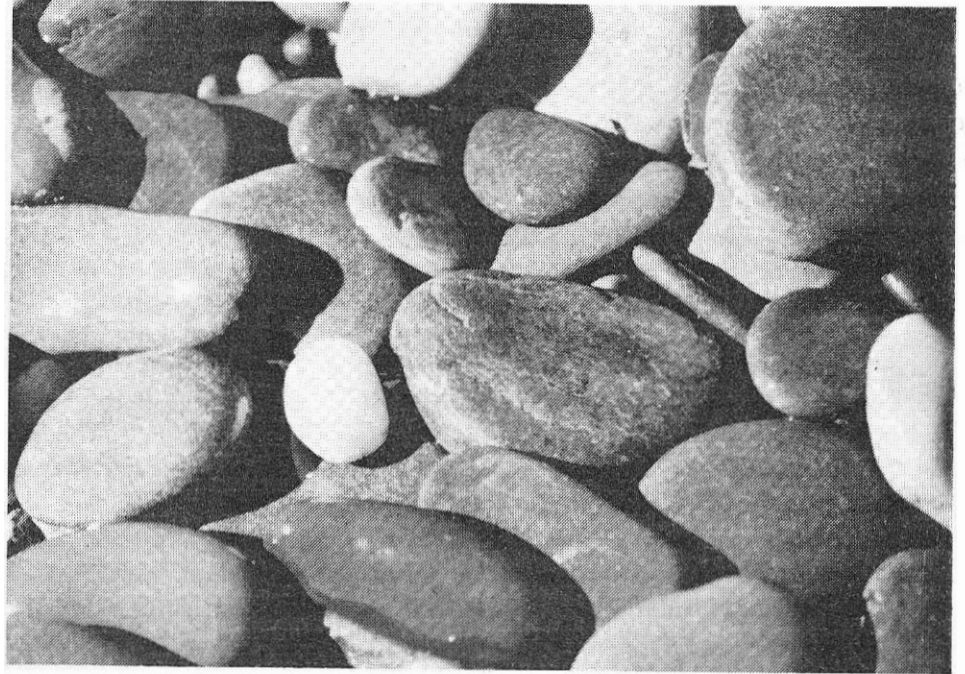


Photo by Melody York

*Skipping stones from a skipping place,
Round and perfect flat and smooth of edge,
Found on Prospect Beach where waves come white to shore.
Where is that in us that knows*

*A stone times ten, more than three at least,
And knows the weather ruined and the shore disordered,
And flings these against the sea
To watch the flight of water rubbed rock.*

*We've walked the sand with friends
To search the round and jagged
Rubble of constant ocean and erosion,
To find the one that fits the palm,*

*That will catapult from forefinger, index
And thumb. We've piled our rocks next to each
And challenged skimmers to make
The flight of stones, counting every*

*Skip to last the one before.
One swept motion of side arm
Swing, coattail yawning for wind,
(Like a sail caught in sudden reach),*

*And fingers find the flair
For air borne matter heavier
Than sea or sky or flesh,
This becomes the measure of us;*

*Swept we are upon the backs
Of stones from man to child
To man again, to be lost
Between the folds of each skimming
Place, to sink upon the edge.*

Michael Walsh
Brunswick
is a real estate agent

The Piano Player

I knew Gus Martins was something special from the first day he came to work at the Tri-City Mill. He was tall and had thick black hair, and the way he walked across the millyard—he kept his shoulders back and his head high, and he had a nod for everyone, even though he couldn't know anyone. He carried his lunchpail in one hand and under the other arm was a book. A lot of the men read *Le Journal*, the French newspaper in Troy, on their dinner breaks, but I never saw too many books at the Tri-City.

I was a weaver at that time and Gus was a loom fixer. That first day, one of Odelie Archambeault's looms got stuck. And in comes Fran Kelley, the second hand in our room, with Gus. My looms were whirring along, so I had time to watch Fran tell Odelie that Gus was new, that he had just come over from the Proctor Mill. I'd been in that weaving room three years, I could read lips pretty well.

I watched as he fixed the loom. He seemed very pleasant, talking and smiling at Odelie as he worked. I was not jealous. Rejean Lessard had been courting Odelie for nearly a year. He was going to have to marry her soon.

"He's a handsome one, isn't he?" I said to Odelie, when it was time for dinner. We took our lunchpails and sat in the corner of the room.

"For a Portugee," she said.

"He's Portuguese?"

"Augustinho Martins," Odelie said, making the s sound like a z. "Look at that hair. He's no Frenchman."

Gus was sitting on the other side of the room, reading his book.

"He's teaching himself to read English," I said. "That's what he's doing."

"He can speak English. Has an accent. I could hardly understand him."

"You have to be able to do better than that to get ahead in this place," I said. "He's trying to get ahead."

"There's a lot here before him. The French were here, first, Eva."

There were some times when I could not say what I wanted to Odelie, and that was one of them. She and I went to the Ste. Famille school together but she left when she was 13 and had been at the Tri-City ever since. I had gone to the convent school and graduated. I could speak English as well as anybody on Prospect Hill, where all the rich Yankees lived and I could read the *Troy Chronicle* and the *Register* too. Odelie could barely speak enough English to go shopping downtown, even though she loved nice clothes. She didn't understand that Rejean was never going to get to be overseer of the spinning room as he wanted to when my father retired because he couldn't speak English either. But if I said that, Odelie would never speak to me again.

So I said, "There are a lot of Portugees here now. Some of them are going to get the big jobs."

At that moment, Gus looked up and stared right at me. For a moment I thought maybe he could understand French. He had worked at the Proctor Mill where there were a lot of French people. But no—he smiled and lifted his hand in a wave. I smiled back, forgetting until it was too late not to pull my lips back too far because of the gold tooth on the upper righthand side. Dr. Lacasse had just put it in last week and I thought it made me look old and ugly.

"Mademoiselle, you've been noticed," Odelie said. "You'd better watch it, flirting with a Portugee."

"What does that mean?" I said. But the bell rang, and Odelie just gave me one of her looks.

Of course I knew what she meant. French people and Portuguese people did not get married to one another. That was just the way it was. French people married French people. I remembered one girl who got involved with a Polish fellow who swept the floors in the spinning room. They got married, but they had to move to Lowell. Her family wouldn't talk to her. I don't know what his family thought. I couldn't see it. Mama had not talked to me for three months after I said I didn't want to be a Sister of the Assumption. But she came around. I didn't want to see what would happen if I wanted to marry a Portugee, but on the other hand, I liked this Gus Martins.

I was tempted, that day and the next, to make one of my looms break down. I could do it. But it wasn't worth it. It would just make me look like a bad weaver. Besides, the things broke down often enough as it was.

And mine did. Of course Gus was not the only loom fixer and the first time one of mine broke down old Albert Ledoux came to fix it and the second time my cousin Laurent Thibeault did. But I was three times lucky, and it was Gus' turn.

He studied it closely. "Ah, there's the problem," he said.

"How do you like the Tri-City? Is it better than the Proctor?" I said, before he could get away.

He finished doing what he had to do and stood up. "They are all the same,

these mills." He looked at me with the same expression he had given my loom. "But you wouldn't know about that, Eva."

He had a wonderful deep voice and sounded like I imagined the Latin lovers in the movies would sound if they talked.

"You know my name."

"I've noticed you," he said.

That was all he needed to say. I knew the way Frenchmen courted and if they said something like that then you knew they'd be waiting to walk you home after work. But he was a Portugee, and I didn't know if he knew the rules.

I took a long time changing out of my work clothes that night. I was afraid Gus would not be there and I would be disappointed. And I wanted my father and my sister Blanche, who worked in the spinning room too, to leave before I did. At first it seemed as if I had waited too long—there didn't seem to be anyone in the darkening millyard. Then I saw Gus, leaning on the wall near the big door. He came away immediately and said, "May I walk you home, Eva Blais?"

I nodded. As we walked out of the millyard, a man came running up beside us. It was Baltazar Branco, who worked in the weaving room with me. He said something in Portuguese to Gus, who nodded, and then he ran off, panting a bit because he was rather stout.

"What did he say?"

Gus hesitated a moment. "He wants me to go to the club tonight. There's a few of us who get together and play music."

"You're a musician!"

"It's nothing, just a mandolin, some songs from the old country."

I took him to Dublin Street the long way, up London from the mill to Manchester Street then down the far end of Dublin. All the streets in that part of Troy were named after places in England, Scotland and Ireland. The nuns never liked that too much. The English people in Troy called the area Riverside, even though you couldn't see the river unless you went way down the end of London Street. But it was the only place in Troy you could see the Pocasset River because the rest of it was piped underground. Most French people never went down there because that was where a lot of Irish people lived. So we called our part of town Trois Villes, after the mill. That was something we saw every day.

Gus asked me a lot of questions that night, about my family and where I had gone to school. He told me that his family had come from the Azores islands when he was small and gone to Brazil, where his father ran a saloon in Rio de Janeiro. But then his father died of a fever, and his mother brought him and his two brothers to Troy, where her sister had come before them.

I thought it sounded very romantic. "These Azores, what are they like?"

"Jewels in the ocean," he said. "Beautiful, you would not believe."

"I'd like to go there, I think. I love the ocean. In the summer, every Sunday afternoon I go to Brixham on the trolley. Have you ever been there? There's a pier, and they sell salt water taffy."

"I would like to go there sometime."

"But you had an adventure in Brazil. Massachusetts must seem a dull place."

He stopped walking. "No, no. This is a beautiful place, too. You can make money here. My father thought he could make money in Brazil, but he was wrong. This is where you can become somebody. Somebody important."

"You're teaching yourself to read English," I said. "Aren't you?"

He held out his book. *Ivanhoe*. A boy's book, I thought, but he was very proud. "I go to the library and pick out books. Then I try to read them. Sometimes it's good, sometimes it's not. But every one I get it's a little bit better."

I had never met a man like Gus Martins. Papa, of course, got excited about music, and editorials in *Le Journal*. And he insisted that I graduate from school, even if Blanche didn't want to, even when he knew I'd never be a nun. But Gus was different. There was something burning inside. I could feel it and I liked it.

"What will you do now?" he said.

"Have supper and do some sewing. I'm making a dress. There's a dance—"

"Oh, I'm a very good dancer." He laughed. "I'll wait for you tomorrow."

I could see the lace curtain in the front door window move slightly as I came up the walk. It was perfectly clean, swept that way by Mama every morning after we went to work. The house was small, the bedrooms upstairs under the roof, but as Papa liked to say, he owned it.

Mama was waiting in the hallway. The house smelled of raisin pie and roast pork. "Who was that?" she whispered. "He's very handsome."

"He's a loom fixer at the Tri-City. He walked me home. Isn't that nice?"

"He must belong to St. Mathieu's. I've never seen him at Ste. Famille."

"I don't know what parish he belongs to," I said honestly.

Blanche came in then. "Eva," she said. "Was that a Portugee from the Tri-City I just saw you with?" She took off her peacock blue wool coat, which must have

cost her a total of three pays, and stroked it gently before hanging it in the little closet under the stairs.

Mama shrieked, not too loudly, then put a floury hand over her mouth. I had only seen that expression in her eyes once before, when Sister Jeanne Marie told her what I'd said. She went into the kitchen, slamming the door behind her.

Papa came out of the other side of the hall. He must have fallen asleep in the back parlor; his eyes were only half open and he was in his stockings. "What's there? Where's Mama?"

"Eva let a Portugee walk her home," Blanche said as she walked up the stairs.

Papa grabbed my hand and pulled me into the back parlor. He shut the door. "What's this?"

I told him. "You know who he is. He's very polite, very neat in his appearance, he's very smart--"

"I'm sure he is. I'm sure he'll make some Portuguese girl a fine husband. But I don't think he's the right one for you."

"--he's a musician. I don't see what the problem is."

"He's not one of us," Papa said. "He doesn't speak our language."

"We speak the same language. We speak English."

"Eva, Eva," Papa said. "You've already disappointed your mother once."

"You can't choose who you love, you know. Sometimes it just happens."

I went upstairs too, pushing past Mama, who was in the hallway ready to call us all to eat. I had broken so many rules already I might as well break another and not eat supper, I thought. As I reached the top of the stairs I could hear Mama tell Papa what my problem was: "All that education's no good if you're not going to become a nun. I would never have let her go on at the convent school if I had..."

When I got to work the next day, there was already a hum in the weaving room, even though the machines weren't going yet. A few of the women were standing together, whispering. Something was up. I did not see Odelie, and feared the worst. I did not want to ask; I would find out soon enough. I got going to work. Odelie, who worked in front of me, did not show up, and Fran Kelley came in to tell me and Rosie Vachon, who worked on the other side, that we'd have to take over for her.

We got all the machines going and there were no problems. Rosie stood close to me. "You heard?"

"I can guess," I said, "But tell me."

There had been a big fight at the Archambeaults' the night before. Rejean had come for supper and afterwards, as he and Odelie's father had sat and smoked, Phillippe Archambeault had said "So you're going to be asking my Odelie soon then?"

Rejean had said "Oh, I'm serious about Odelie, don't worry."

"I'm not worried. But it's been a year, you know that."

And then all hell broke loose. Rejean was accusing everyone of breathing down his neck, he felt like he was being watched all the time, he was a man, he could make up his own mind. It ended when Odelie's brother-in-law Roger Boissoneault arrived and Rejean bloodied his nose.

We could be sure this all happened because the Archambeaults lived in the mill tenements on London Street, and Agnes Bergeron lived right below them. She had stood in the hallway and listened to it all. As I listened, I could see her watching us from across the room as she paced among her looms, a grim smile on her face.

I shook my head. Only two things could happen now. Rejean would ask Odelie to marry him, or Rejean would not, in which case he would probably have to leave town. Odelie would be miserable. But even if he came around tonight, wouldn't last night be the one she remembered every time they had a fight? Maybe even when they weren't fighting.

I said this to Rosie. "What are you talking about?" she said. "She wants to get married and Rejean has to ask her. That's all there is to it."

My work went well that day, even though my thoughts weren't happy. I saw Gus several times as he came in and out to fix looms. He smiled each time he saw me. I knew he would be waiting for me after work. I wanted him to be waiting for me after work. And I knew, already, that it would not be a year before Gus Martins asked me to marry him. But I had problems of my own. If I did not care about my parents - and I knew some girls did not - I would not have a problem. Gus and I could get married and we could go to Lowell or Woonsocket or Manchester and get jobs. But I could not do that. I would be happy in one thing and miserable in another. I should feel sorry for Odelie? I began to feel sorry for myself.

I took time changing my clothes again that night and it was nearly dark again when I got outside. Gus was waiting. "You take a long time, don't you?" he said. "But it's worth the wait."

We started walking home as we did the night before, the long way. I told him about Odelie. He listened carefully as I talked. "So I better not walk you home every night or your father will be after me, is that it?"

"Only if you do it for a year."

We had reached the little park on Manchester Street, the one with the statue of Lafayette and the bench. I stopped. "I think I'd better walk on alone from here."

"What's wrong?"

I didn't want to say anything. It was not right to talk about my family, and I knew I was going to hurt Gus's feelings. But I couldn't lie, it was not in my nature. "My parents don't want me seeing a Portugee."

"A what?" There was a streetlight just in front of the park. It was dim, but I could still see Gus's face. "Eva Blais, don't ever use that word again. If your parents don't want you with a Portuguese man, that's one thing. But I am not a Portugee."

I turned and ran down Manchester Street, my shoes banging hard against the sidewalk. As I turned into Dublin Street I could hear Gus calling me. The door opened in the house on the corner, and I could see, fast as I was going, old Madame Dube peering out at me.

Of course I felt sick about the whole thing, like a big dumb cow all the way home. I had embarrassed myself, running off like that. That was the kind of thing Mama would do, and I hated it when she did. I was making Mama and Papa miserable and I had made a fool of myself in front of Gus and worse yet called him a Portugee which I didn't even know was a dirty word. Mama and Papa would never trust me again, and I wouldn't even have the love of Gus Martins to console me.

But in those days I was still very young, though I felt like I was going through the worst life had to offer. And when I got into bed, I fell right to sleep. Even Blanche, coming back from a night at the movies with Rene Champagne, didn't wake me up.

The next day was Sunday. At first I was relieved. I would not have to worry about how to act with Gus at work. The four of us walked down Glasgow Street to Ste. Famille together, Rene meeting us at the corner of London Street. In the past few months I had felt left out. Blanche would sit with Rene and I would usually see Odelie at the other side of the church, with Rejean. I could imagine people looking at me and thinking "She should have been a nun."

In the church I could see Odelie and Rejean, sitting near the front, happy as can be. Father Gamache announced their banns and Mama looked at me as if to say "There's a girl who does the right thing."

I walked out of church alone, looking for Odelie. They were standing on the rectory lawn, embracing and shaking hands with well wishers. I kissed Odelie and wished her luck. "All's well that ends well, eh?" She said to me with a wink. Then she said, "Now we'll have to start working on you."

Mama and Papa were talking and laughing with the Archambeaults, so I walked home alone too. I wondered what Gus was doing. The Portuguese were Catholic too, but I supposed Mama would say not as good Catholics as the French. I wondered if he went to the big church on Federal Street. Maybe he was getting out of the 10 o'clock Mass now, just like me. I suddenly knew exactly what I was going to do after dinner - for I did not dare miss Mama's Sunday dinner. I was going to go looking for Gus.

It was not hard to get away. Blanche and Rene left first as always, going probably to Columbus Park, where they could grope at each other in the beech grove. Papa was soon snoring in the parlor, and Mama waved me out of the kitchen with a dish cloth. She was a little happier, probably because I had arrived home alone the night before.

It was not a cold day, so I walked to the Tri-City and took a trolley from there. The mill looked sad and unwanted on Sundays, I thought, the only day it was not filled with people and happily humming and clacking, alive with work.

This was the Broad Street line, the one I took to Brixham in the warm months. I knew it well. It went down Quarry Street, where the old granite quarry was a gaping hole in the ground, a swimming hole in the summer, to East Main Street. There was nothing to see - triple decker after triple decker, children playing in the street, shouting at the trolley sometimes, and everywhere the mills - the Proctor, the Chase, the Merwin, the Larrabee. I suppose if you looked at each one closely they looked different, were different. But they all looked the same to me - they were big, they were made of the famous Troy granite, and they had wrought iron gates shut tight on a Sunday afternoon.

As soon as the trolley entered Federal Street, I felt I was in a different world. I imagined it smelled different, a little oilier, of fish rather than meat pie. But then I saw there were all the same stores, a dry goods store like Andre Picard's, except this was run by somebody named Aguiar. A bakery, where the breads looked just

like the ones Madame Desjardins made on London Street. A shoe shop run by somebody named A. Ferreira e filhos.

I wondered where Gus's club was. In Trois Villes too there were little clubs upstairs from the stores, clubs for men to meet and drink their homemade liquor. You had to be French to join those clubs; I wondered if Gus's club had its own rule.

The trolley stopped halfway down the street. I stood up to get off. I could see a group of men standing near a little restaurant, talking and laughing. Baltazar Branco was one of them, and standing next to him, with his back to me and holding a mandolin, was Gus. The trolley lurched and I fell into the seat on the other side of the aisle, startling an old lady. I thought I saw Baltazar point to the trolley, and Gus turn, but it all happened so fast I don't know now if that's the way it happened or the way I want to remember it happened.

I got off at Broad Street and took another trolley home. Mama and Papa were both sleeping in chairs in the living room when I got back. I went upstairs and lay on the bed in my clothes. I was the first one to hear the doorbell. Or so I thought.

I went downstairs in my rumpled dress, trying to pin up my hair and thinking that maybe I should have it cut short like some of the other girls were doing. No one was in the hall and the doors to the kitchen and parlor were closed.

I opened the front door. It was Gus Martins, holding his cap in his hand.

"Hello, Eva," he said. "Am I disturbing you?"

"No, no, come in." Then I whispered fiercely, "What are you doing here?"

"I've come to meet your parents," he said, in a regular tone of voice. "I thought it was time."

At that, the door to the parlor opened. Mama came out, still wearing her apron, a bad sign. Then Papa, in his jacket and tie. I introduced them to Gus in French, Gus to them in English.

"Pleased to meet you, Monsieur and Madame Blais," he said. Mama muttered something and disappeared into the kitchen. Papa gestured for us to go into the front parlor. No one ever sat here except company. The furniture was all made of this shiny cloth. The fat cushions looked soft and comfortable but were as stiff as the pews at Ste. Famille. Mama polished the woodwork every week and the room always smelled like lemons. There were heavy flowered curtains on the windows in the front and on the side and a big flowered rug on the floor.

Mama came back with a pot of coffee and the remains of a jam cake. Gus said he thought the house was very lovely and the neighborhood very quiet. He asked my father what the Tri-City was like in the old days. Papa knew quite a bit of English, and Mama knew a fair amount, but she kept looking at me to translate, even when he told her the cake was delicious.

When I wasn't telling Mama in French what Gus was saying in English, I watched Gus. He didn't seem to notice that my father looked as if he'd rather be listening to the Sunday afternoon concert on the radio, that my mother was looking him up and down and up again. He just kept smiling and talking, gesturing with his hands, telling a funny story or two. I was so nervous I was afraid to lift my coffee cup to my mouth. Gus drank three cups of coffee—"It's the Brazilian in me," he said—and ate two pieces of cake without dropping a crumb.

But after the coffee was gone, Gus seemed to realize he was doing all the talking. He looked around the room again, and spotted the ugly blue and red vase in the corner. It was Memere Coulombe's vase, and Mama insisted on displaying it. Papa hated it. Before Gus could say anything, I said "Gus is a musician."

Everyone looked at me.

"He plays the mandolin and he sings and..." I thought wildly, "He's very good. Very musical."

"I love music," Papa said. "It stirs my soul."

"It is life," Gus said. "Isn't it?"

"Eva cannot carry a tune," Papa said, as if I wasn't there. "But she does like to dance. Marie Blanche has the ear for music, but not the patience to learn."

At this Mama began to shake her head. Dangerous territory again. Papa had bought Blanche a piano 10 years ago. It was an expensive piano, bought when he first became overseer in the spinning room, the first Frenchman to hold the job ever in the Proctor Mill. Blanche had not played it for at least six years, since she discovered boys at 13.

I explained this to Gus. "Now it's in the back parlor, gathering dust."

"May I see it?" he asked.

Mama started shaking her head again, then picked up the tray and left the room. Papa looked surprised, but pushed open the oak sliding doors that separated the rooms. This was where we lived: the radio in the corner, the big pedestal table, the sideboard with the everyday dishes piled in neat stacks, Papa's piles of *Le Journals*, arranged by date, in the corner. In this room the heavy flowered drapes were pulled back, and the last of the afternoon sun poured in.

Gus ran his hand lightly over the keyboard. "May I?"

"Of course," Papa said. He was watching Gus intently. Also hopefully. Gus stretched his fingers and played "Alexander's Ragtime Band." Papa looked around, as if looking for Mama, to dance. And then Gus played something I knew was Beethoven. I knew it because it was something Papa always hummed.

I do not know how Gus knew that French people might not like him, might talk about him behind his back, but would never turn him out of their house. I don't know how he knew Papa liked Beethoven. Maybe he didn't know those things at all. It seemed like he must have.

I went into the front parlor and sat in the big chair. Mama came in and sat on the sofa. She had taken her apron off and re-pinned her hair. She didn't look at me, but sat staring straight ahead.

Gus was good. I could hear Papa talking over the music. Or maybe he was singing along. I closed my eyes. It was not the end of it all, I knew that then. But for that moment, I just listened to the music.

Liz Soares

Augusta

is a writer-editor



Homage to Rodin's "The Thinker"

Autumn Haiku

Pick-Bone

Dusk. Two crows wrangle
old cornstalks. Gone are green leaf,
silk tassel, ripe ear.

After-Wrath

October leaf-fall
bloodies the frostpatch. I walk
through the crisp slaughter.

Prism Enigma

Browns. Ominous light
fading. Cornfields gray—red smear
crossing?
Homebound fox.

In Season

Once hunters wore blood
for their victims. Now, orange.
Is death Hallow'een?

Deer Jack-O'-Lantern

Porch pumpkin grins. Back
of barn, a different trophy—
night-killed, bleaching skull.

David Walker
Freedom
teaches at USM

Geometry

I hate squares with equal
sized lines and angles.
They come in all sizes
but measure the same.

I dislike triangles
they can't be trusted.
Their names sound just
like the illness they are.

I abhor circles
they're too predictable.
They always begin at end
and always come 'round.

Lines go on forever in
either direction I
hate to meet points
like that: I never know
where they stand.

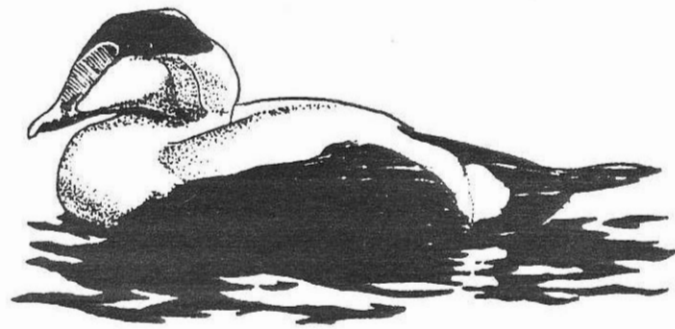
I prefer spirals, small
end at the bottom, coming
back to similar spaces.
They're dances in motion.

Kathy Thompson
Waldoboro
is a UMA student

the woman on the bridge

is as if remembering
something from her childhood
or something that happened
last night
an exchange between
the woman and her husband
or her lover
she is as if haunted
by something that happened long ago
or yesterday
something that happened
to the woman standing on the bridge
in that long dark coat
as though she is
for the moment
at peace
watching the ducks in the cool water

Wallace Seavey, Jr.
Winslow
psychiatric social worker
& UMA student



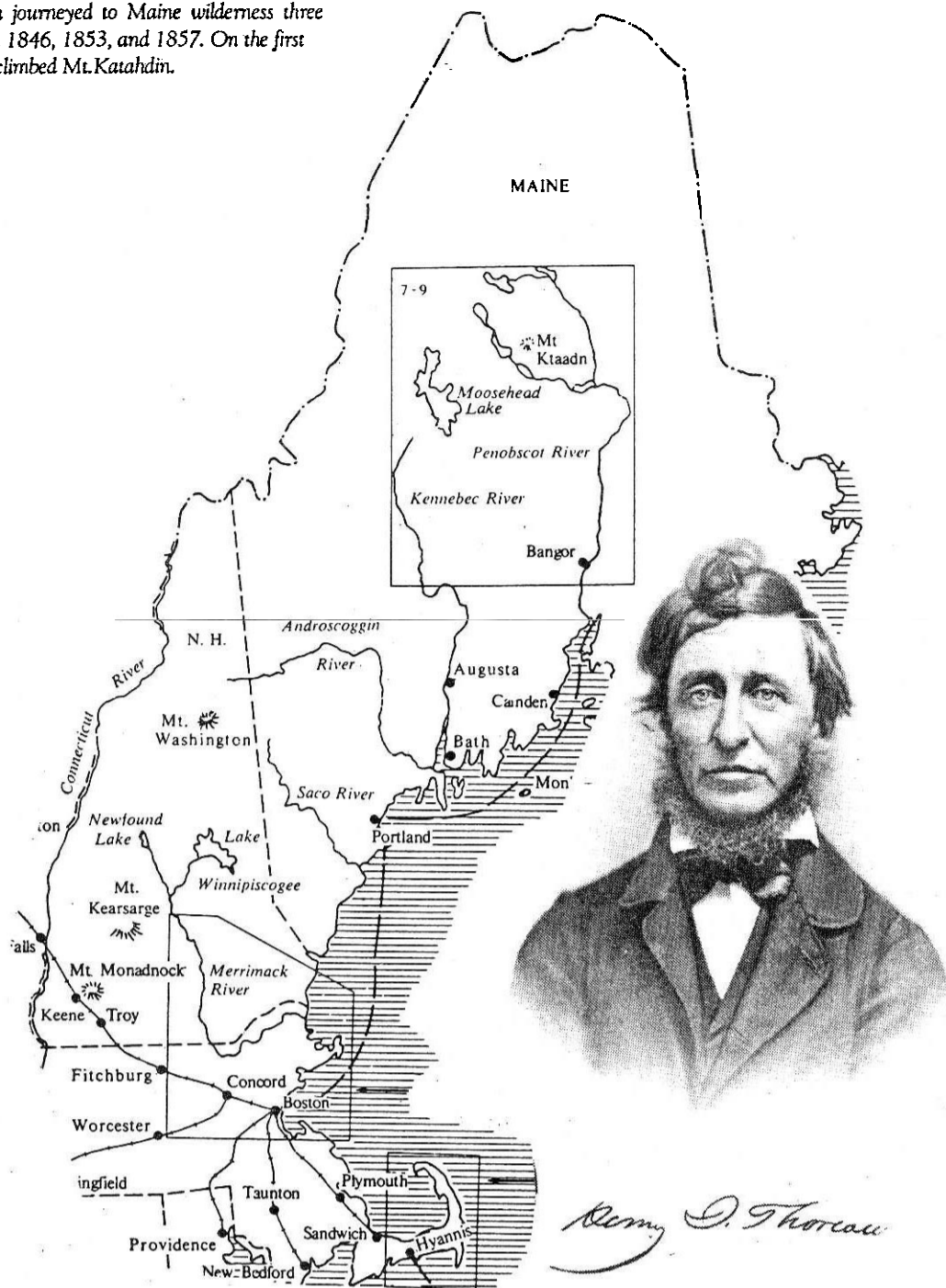
Graphic by Herb Parsons

Big Pond Poem

The bigger part of my imagination
takes things away and returns
them as food and drink.
I'm considering why a mountain
should be in this bottle,
or why when I pull out the cork
it doesn't all bubble over
and drown me in the lightest
avalanche in recorded history.
Things disappear and I don't
know why, nor do I know why
they do so precisely sometimes
like the angle slice of a knife
through flank steak. Or why
at other times they trumpet
out in painful stages
never quite giving in, like
that tubular dog of yours
who needed you to hold
up its tail as it "walked."
It's true, I forget the people
I remembered to thank
for feeding me by candlelight.
But I remember this:
this is all about commitment,
about what happens when you
drop something into a big pond
and stand silently at the shore
with your hands in your pockets
as if you had not dropped
anything at all.

Michael Brosnan
is Assoc. Editor
at Down East Magazine

Thoreau journeyed to Maine wilderness three times, in 1846, 1853, and 1857. On the first trip, he climbed Mt. Katahdin.



North

Chances are you haven't learned in school about Thoreau, how he passed 3 miles from where you live on his way north to Moosehead, Chesuncook, Katahdin; chances are you couldn't care less, since at your age life is right there with you, no looking back for it yet, not that far at least; since school sucks, and books mean school, so books suck, especially classics by men— with beards—faces like bark— three names—and reputations;

and even if it struck you to read old Henry's Maine Woods, you'd likely have a hard time finding quiet in the trailer; you'd piece out the pages next door at the homestead, your Uncle Rocky's old place, with the hairy tongues of hanging plaster, where your brothers board turkeys, pigeons, a calf, TVs, motorbikes, shoot at a nailed-up hoop and lift weights; where the hippies crashed one summer before your birth, as far north as they got.

**Peter Miller
Garland**
is an archaeologist

When Thoreau Passed Through My Uncles' Town: Olamon, Maine; August 3, 1857

I wish that the woodsmoke over the island had been thicker that afternoon or my uncle less hungry when he stepped from his store's porch toward his brother's house for dinner for then he would have stopped and looked at the gray cloth hung above the trees, and hearing Moses still clinking at the forge, have struck down through his field to the river.

Warm in his storekeeper's pants and waistcoat, he would have walked a cowpath through the alders and soon seen close-up how high the water was that summer, moving its dark plane across the field. When he saw the figures on the island move, my uncle would have halloped, and tried to wave the party in, hoping they would unload their hides before floating down to Old Town.

Or I wish that the island trio had not purchased sugar the previous day but, instead, had fed their fire with the drift flung up on shore, set their kettle in the blaze, unfolded pork strips in the long-handled pan, and pushed the smaller white man off toward shore in the birch canoe. Angling his way on a slight upstream course, he would have corrected against current like a fish, hit the bank near a deadwater tributary, pulled up in the alders, and stepped up the cowpath to the road and store for provisions.

Instead, the smoke was too thin or, if seen, meant Indians to Charles. He knew without thinking that Penobscots wouldn't buy supplies, would stretch and cure their hides in order to get full price, and turned to walk up the road to dinner. On the island the party was tired after ten days of black tea and sugar. The smaller white man, Henry, was asking the Indian the meaning of a native word: Olamon. Sick the day before, the Indian was quiet, having survived his own cure of gunpowder and tea. The high bell of a smith rang through the river's noise. Resigned to houses through the trees, Henry put his notebook back in its sack. Of the island he wrote, "It is large with an abundance of hemp-nettle." Like the water, his mood was flat.

Charles Weld
Whitney Point, N.Y.
earned an M.A. at UMO

Autumn Full of Apples

Clay got his first car that year—a black two-door with a pearl-handled gearshift below the steering wheel. He seemed to be able to suggest the shift into action rather than to push or press; the gears never groaned, and the car, Black Beauty, purred as he pampered it on our drives through the ribboning gold-lined streets of town and north on the straightaway Highway 1. All of us watched the live needle as it tilted past the fatherly mark of fifty down toward the dangerous zone of our desire—sixty, sixty-five, seventy! We giggled and yelled and whistled through our teeth, and Clay, with only the slightest of smiles, held his eyes straight ahead, a cigarette dangling expertly out of his mouth and one arm comfortably cocked out the window. He was as cool as a quarterback, as artful as any good sea captain holding the wheel of his ship. Clay came to life at the touch of his wheel the way that Mack did holding a football—long fingers feeling the skin in the delicate manner of a man reading braille, then finding the laces and setting it in his grip for a pass, conclusive and right as a final struck chord.

Our year began those days in the hot blaze of fall, the sun still bearing down too hard and moving back from summer's rule reluctantly, wanting still to be king and hating to watch his green work burn away into yellow and red and finally to smoke. Footballs exploded off practiced toes, lockers came clicking and rattling to life in the school's long-sealed and musty halls, and a gold blare of brass rose up to the windows from the marching band, reborn again. The season sang on streetcar tracks that crackled sparks under loads of bright sweaters and battered marked books ("I love You, Jeanie—Jim"... "G.E.N.T.S Club"), cymbals of lunch trays clanged to the counter at noisy noon, and glowing girls in skirts that flared and reached for the sky with a victory chant (eyes closed, knees out, hair lifted).

Out at Lilly's Orchard the apples blushed red from feeling so fat, and cider ran from wooden vats like the rich brown blood of the earth overflowing. On Saturday afternoons we drove there after a game of touch football in some vacant lot, and with pleasantly hurting breath and aching bones scrambled out of Clay's car and lined up to buy a paper cup filled with the foaming cider. Still breathing heavily, with head slightly bowed in order to watch the cup fill up, each of us received the season's sacrament. And sometimes we went back again in the chilly night, Clay turning the headlights off as we glided up the road, stealthy for stealing. The agile and brave ones scrambled over the black steel points of the fence and shook some stubborn tree until it rained down all the fruit we could carry, extra sweet for being forbidden.

That was the year we were juniors, sullen and ripe sixteen and ready to burst. We carried in the wallets that patted our thighs the black-and-white brand new driver's license, certificate of freedom, privacy and power—the state's official bar-mitzvah for all red-blooded boys, regardless of race. Clay had a car of his own and the rest of us had, with Mother's help, an important occasional crack at the family car, always with Father's warning: "Take care—insurance is costly, life is cheap."

"Hey, Dan, ya wanna double to the dance?"

"Don't have a date."

"Well, get one."

Clay slipped his cashmere arm around my slouching shoulders and smiled. "How about Lisa?"

"I dunno."

She was last year's girl, and the season demanded a bright new start—someone to match the lyrics of the songs like "Bewitched," "Blue Moon," "The Girl That I Marry" and the movie scenes (pert June Allyson standing by a stove in a frilly apron, Barbara Stanwyck in a Navaho dress). Or any of the already spoken for girls who haunted the halls of our school in sweaters soft as angel skin and skirts that rippled pleats as they walked, with white calves curving up out of the white wool socks and brown-and-white saddle shoes, stepping so light and sure it seemed they could surely do the same on water. Sue-Ann, tanned from swimming all summer, who showed pearl-perfect teeth when she laughed; Darcy, whose eyes were always flirting beneath the flowing blonde crown she wore; or Norma-Jean, tall, serene and stately, sitting in class like a captive and queen.

But then one day in the halls I saw one stumble, and never had I seen

one like her before. I picked up a freshman algebra book splayed in front of her flat toe and said, "Here," staring at the sparkle of a pair of blue eyes that tried to be serious but laughed instead. She was bony and thin, and instead of a sweater wore a white silk blouse that was pinned at the neck with a pearl, and her skirt was all flowers, gold and red.

"I drop things all the time," she said.

"Well, that's okay. Everyone does." I smiled and considered dropping my books.

"Oh, no," she said, as if guessing my plan. "But thank you, really." And she grinned, lifting her dimpled chin and then turning quickly, so that her chestnut hair swung as she went.

"Wait!"

"But I'm late," she called, and it seemed to me that the class bell shook the hall so hard that the world very slightly but surely tilted and let in an amber, apple glow.

I learned that her name was Katie Dorset and she lived north of town on Willow Road; if Clay hadn't been with me I never could have made it alone up the hill where her house, gold-eyed and solemn, stood in the midst of those towering oaks. Her father's great vest was sealed with a chain, and I trembled at his handshake and tried to smile. Her mother, all grace and gleaming eyes, told me to take a seat; but before I said, "Thanks" we turned to a sound on the long steep stairs and saw her—Katie. She came dancing down so fast that her mother burst out: "Slow!" Katie blushed, and her fine round face was the color of an apple.

All that fall we spent sitting on hillsides, looking into valleys that were filled with lakes of light, lying so close against the sweet-smelling ground that grass was an individual matter, and fields narrowed down to particular blades. The touch of shoulders made everything stop, and each of us had to concentrate, staring down at one blade of grass until it finally went awash in the blur of our gaze. Sometimes a hand would seek a hand and the two would be suddenly tangled and locked, as intricate and tight as if two giant oaks had bowed their winter heads together and let the million stripped limbs interlock to withstand any wind. Some nights we held tight in the back seat of Clay's humming car, our faces lighted by the cider glow that poured from the dashboard and the radio and the pale golden apple of the watching moon. At last we would stand a few hushed moments—how long, you can't measure on clocks—at the front door of her house, under the porch light, pressing our mouths together, and the only thing that broke us apart was a wonderful fear—or else the hooting of the owls in the oaks, or her brothers in the upstairs windows.

Cider ran and apples fell and soon the curbs of the sidewalks smoked as the season burned away. In Clay's car, with Bruce and Jerry and Joe and the boys, I sometimes sped past ordered fields so fast that they melted together. We cheered because we thought we had outrun everything—the day and the season and the year and all years—and we would never be caught by them, never pulled anywhere beyond this sixteenth sweet-and-sour apple autumn, cursing and kissing as if we had invented them both.

Don't ask me how or why it happened that one sunny Saturday November afternoon I lay on the carpet in Katie's long living room and had to insist on looking ahead, not to the next day or week or year, but just Ahead, that long shadow, I had to trouble Katie's clear eyes with the anxious question: "Will you love me then?"

• And she didn't ask, "When?" knowing it was unnameable, but only said softly, "How can we know?" Not knowing when to stop, I said, "Well, will you remember this moment, then?" She raised up off her elbows and crossed her legs underneath her and hunched down toward them, and even though the great windows were letting in a warm flood of light, her shoulders shivered and a diamond dropped from each of her eyes.

That night the first snow fell, and every last brown apple died. Cider stiffened in the vats, the smoke of leaves curled into frosty breath, and the hard joints of the season cracked till its great apple heart could pound no more—except in my mind, where it beats back this song a million years later, and laughs for love.

Mark Maxwell Dalton
Readfield
is a former radio journalist

Granny

They say that on Candlemas the winter is half over. There's been a thaw, and areas of tan, dun, and olive dapple the woods and fields. Ice is melting in the bay.

At night, though, the temperature drops well below freezing. Tucker feeds the fire in the big room, thick logs he took from the woods more than a year ago and sliced up with the chainsaw. Marilla is sewing elbow patches onto an old sweater. The girl, Marilla's daughter, has been with them nearly a month. One day she just arrived. She also is sewing something, but her fingers are clumsy on the material, cautiously poking the needle through. The thread she's working with is too long, even Tucker knows that. Tucker did his own mending for nineteen years, until he shacked up with Marilla. A long thread is bound to snake itself into knots.

He feels restless. He's in the mood to start something, pry their attention away from their busy-work. He lights a cigarette, makes a clatter of getting a glass ashtray down from a shelf. The girl, on the couch, stays hunched over her sewing and Marilla meditatively sticks her hand up the sleeve, under the hole. The logs crackle in the wood stove.

"I had this friend, Wally, up to Lubec," he says. "Told me a good story once."

"You and your stories," Marilla says, her eyes on the patch.

"What's the matter with my stories?"

"You never tell true ones."

"This one is true. Honest to God."

The girl, Hannah, glances at him, holding the needle out at the end of a long thread. Her turtleneck is taut across her breasts. They're small, puny, not like her mother's.

"Wally was just a kid when this happened. I mean little, five or six. His family went on a camping trip." To Hannah he says, "You ever been camping?"

The girl looks at her mother. "I don't like bugs," she says carefully.

"They went to Baxter State Park. The whole family: Wally, his little brother Phil, his sister, Mother, Daddy, old Granny, dog, cat."

"Must have been a tight squeeze," Marilla says, putting a knot in her thread. "They have a bus?"

"Station wagon. Camping gear in the back, big old canoe lashed to the roof. Cat in a cage on the floor. Dog jumping back and forth between the front seat and the rear seat. Everybody singing, except the cat, which is yowling."

"A hundred bottles of beer on the wall," Hannah says.

"You got it. Finally, after fourteen hours on the road, they make it to the camp site."

"Fourteen hours to Baxter from Lubec?" Marilla says.

"Rough going in those days. Lots of roads weren't even paved, you know. And they got lost a couple times. So they have to pitch their tents in the dark, and it's commencing to rain, and Wally and Phil and the girl are hungry and whining, and the dog is barking and running around in circles, waking up all the wildlife between East Millinocket and Houlton, and the mosquitoes are biting, and the old granny is wishing she'd never been born."

Hannah says, "That's how I always thought a camping trip would be." Her voice is low-pitched, it still surprises him sometimes.

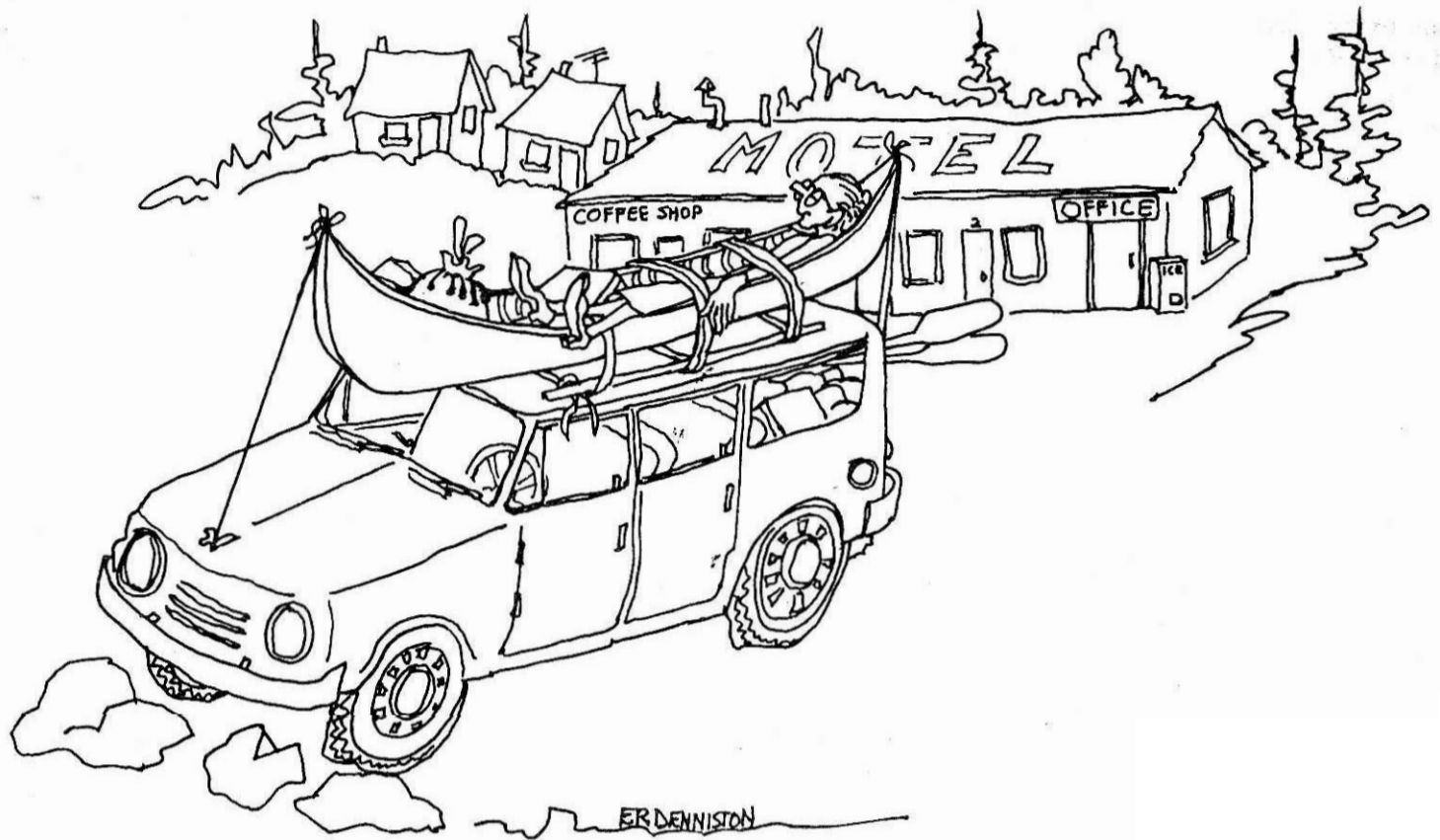
"Wait a minute," Tucker says. "So the next day the old granny gets her wish. She dies. Without any warning, just up and keels over."

"Stroke?" Marilla asks. "Heart attack?"

"Who knows? You think they've got an M.D. on the premises? Wally's daddy is madder'n hell, he didn't want the old lady along in the first place. But his wife got her own way, as usual. Now look at the mess they're in. A corpse on their hands, and Wally's daddy has to be back to work in the cannery Monday morning. If they start notifying authorities and filing death certificates they'll be stuck in the boonies for a month."

"A fate worse than death," Hannah says.





Drawing by Elizabeth Denniston

"He'll get fired and they'll all starve. So what they do is, they load the body into the canoe and tie it back onto the top of the station wagon and set out for home. They never even lay eyes on Mount Katahdin."

Hannah, smiling, puts the cloth she's sewing aside. It's the first time Tucker has seen her smile.

"But Wally's daddy," he continues, "can't drive as fast as on their way up. He's worried they're going to hit a pothole and the old lady will take off, flying, out of the canoe. So he takes it real slow and easy, and after fourteen hours they're still a long way from home. Everybody's bushed, including the dog. The cat had a nervous breakdown hours ago."

"Round about Baileyville they spot a motel, one of them Mom and Pop operations with the crummy little cabins, by the side of the road. It's got a coffee shop, it's even got TV."

"We wanna stay in the motel!" Hannah yells.

"You bet. Have a good time, too. Eat burgers and fries in the coffee shop, watch a Debbie Reynolds movie on the TV."

Marilla asks, "What about the granny in the canoe?"

Tucker takes the next part in his own time. "Next day they're all up bright and early to make the rest of the trip home. There they stand, blinking in the sunlight outside their cabin. They're just staring into space, because there isn't anything else to see. No station wagon, no canoe, no Granny."

"Oh, God," Hannah says.

"Wally's old man races over to a drop-off at the far side of the parking area — there's a landfill there they didn't notice the night before. Maybe he forgot to set the handbrake and the car rolled off the edge. He looks down on a heap of baked bean cans and bottles and busted baby buggies. No station wagon."

Hannah begins to laugh.

"Now Wally's daddy knows he's had it. An hour later he's explaining to the Baileyville constable that his car's been stolen and oh, by the way, there's a dead body in a canoe on the roof."

"Are you sure this is a true story?"

"Listen, that's not all. The funny part is, the state police never found a trace of the missing car. They had to have a closed casket funeral because there wasn't any body. Granny was just gone, vanished into thin air."

"So what is the point of the story?" Marilla asks.

"Point?" Tucker says, annoyed. "Since when does a true story have to have a point?"

**Elaine Ford
Milbridge**
*excerpt from Monkey Bay,
to be published 8/89, Viking-Penguin*

***The White Buffalo*/Kathleen Lignell**

(artwork by MaJo Keleshian. Upstart Eagle Press,
P.O. Bx 159, Orono, ME 04473, 1988, \$6.95)

Kathleen Lignell's prose allegory is clearly the most ambitious and challenging undertaking in fiction to emerge from our literary timber this year. It is not a sequel to *The Calamity Jane Poems* (this would imply a progression in linear thought), but rather an extension, an expansion on, *CJ*'s themes and imagery. The intent is similar: to charge full tilt into the herd of cluttering cowboy clichés that mill around in the West of our minds. *CJ* drew a bead on some of the dualities in our dream of the frontier: male/female, good hats/bad hats, winning/losing/& loving. *The White Buffalo* is not a gunbattle but a migration, a quest journey, with overtones of Don Quixote and the paladins of the Grail. At last sight we left Calamity Jane,

*"Bewildered by her steps
upon the land, how far
she must travel...
she is still coming and going."*

She is "... like Cody's last Wild West Show.../unable to leave the ring/blazing in darkness."

Now as we enter, the curtain opens again to reveal the great plain of the buffalo, quiet, covered with "a blanket over the prairies, woolly, thick and brown... An American scene, certainly." The stage is set: this new fiction is at once a play, an elegy, a mock-epic, an incantation, an exhortation to invent a new myth for the Western half of our minds.

Themes and images in *CJ* run parallel to the tracks of *WB*. There are differences beyond the obvious one of form. Female figures, central to the former are absent from the latter, except for the white bull's fleeting memory of a cow he had loved, a mention of the Plains Indian woman's role in using the buffalo, and the presence of a few white women on the train that meets the final stampede. This is not a poem about Mother Earth; the metaphors for the West, for the process of change, are male insofar as they are limited at all by any one construct such as sex. The horizon of the allegory becomes wide as all outdoors. If you are picking out mythic material for an era as complex as ours, with problems of survival as acute as ours, pick fabric with a lot of give. One buffalo hide fits all?

When Jane traversed the West, she was the main actor on her stage, rarely pausing to "... [s]ee the Future in the Past":

*"Pines drip sap, a handful of buffalo
still push on toward the setting sun.
Jane steps outside, looking in
at original man, a man
with memories and dreams
and all things perishing."*

She already had "Buffalos in the Backyard":

*"She moves on past buffalos
in the backyard,
their red eyes raging
as if these great humps
could be erased from history."*

But they cannot. For now, in this new book, their tracks tell how nature confronts history. Lignell has carried over language and imagery from Jane's arsenal; she lays out a drama of epic scale, beyond heroes and heroines.

No reader can identify with the buffalo. Unlike the protagonists of *Grendel*, *Animal Farm*, and *Huckleberry Finn*, which Lignell suggests as comparable allegories, this buffalo is truly superhuman, in fact suprahuman. Considering the variety of human voices woven into the storytelling, the reader could be excused for thinking that some superhero's voice will soon emerge, that the buffalo will turn out to be a Christ figure, and we'll have *The Narnia Tales* for eco-freaks. Thank literary goodness, no. The buffalo herd is "a hump on history," a vantage point, not a totem. Our buffalo watches humanity literally dismantling his species, ripping up carcasses, piling up bones; we are reminded that while it is all true, it is also a metaphor for humans' hunger for possession, for control of the natural world which yet controls us. We don't get to assume the white buffalo's robe. We're in the play, cast as humans like Buffalo Bill and Kit Carson.

The variorum of voices make reading *WB* an exercise in awareness. The voices are an integral part of the formal, tripartite structure of this work. Poetic form belongs to *CJ*, a photo album that ends with Jane's death. Poetic voice belongs to *The White Buffalo*. But it is one of at least five voices or styles interwoven in the

text, melodic lines in a symphony, scored for different instruments. The effect is to keep the reader from settling comfortably into that warm bath of predictable imagery that makes up a mystique. The reader encounters on the first page the incantatory, bardic style, reminiscent of Indian legend; the voices of the buffalo and the Indian are completely intertwined in the first three paragraphs. Immediately afterward, the style shifts to objective, natural-historical reporting, and then to a chatty, colloquial mode flavored with New Age observations:

"Buffaloes may seem invulnerable, but they are not really. In fact they would never choose to live all alone by themselves somewhere. They are typical Taurus children: Earth, fixed; Ruler, Venus." The herd appears more human than humans. Buffalo raise children, worry, discuss: *"Someone remarked that the grass seemed greener. After a while someone else said he felt full even though he hadn't eaten for hours."* The herd is "they," not "it"; they are compared to "newborn children... anxious for life." Yet they are not: "it was almost too much for a cud-chewing animal to comprehend," says a matter-of-fact narrative voice. And "as a rule, hooved animals have poor eyesight, with little focusing power."

These frequent changes of tone, voice and perspective are challenging.

The buff is bovine, magical, frightened, philosophical and credulous. Sometimes the language has a haunting familiarity: the white buffalo "had a sturdy heart, old friends somewhere, and a home on the range." Cowboy clichés, from old Westerns, engraved in our minds. *"My father and grandfather died on this range,"* he says, addressing the herd. *"And it was home again for all of us when we found each stream, each lake, each new grazing spot. When I found the quilt with rosebuds on it lying across my bed, I knew I was still in the same place."*

The Rosebud image is a holdover from *CJ* (published by Rosebud Press), and recurs. It is a good instance of what poets are up against in trying to reclaim images to fit new myths. Whenever I read "Rosebud," I see *Citizen Kane*. It's not an inappropriate connection, but it reminds us that we have a great deal of cultural baggage loaded into our train going West. As the white buffalo and Sitting Bull found, "it was difficult to speak without clichés."

In the section entitled "On The Range," there is a realistic diary account of buffalo-skinning pioneers. Then the buffalo hums "Home On The Range." Several paragraphs on, Buffalo Bill intones "I am just a butcher, delivering the daily meat... Each day, for the butcher who begins to build a world, the West begins." This section is then repeated word-for-word. Lignell later assures us, in "legends the characters always say things twice for emphasis." In my legends there's a threefold pattern, but hey, we're inventing the West here. We have fairy-tale poachers, Indian legends on how the buffalo got his hump, and Buffalo Bill chasing rainbows, while insisting, "What's so sacred 'bout a bunch of dumb buffler anyways?"

Lignell has scored so rich a mix of tones here that it is easy to become confused. Allegories traditionally have the moral fairly clearly drawn; in fables it is explicit. By the time the crisis of *WB* is reached, and the herd stampedes to meet the Union Pacific head on, the reader may well have suspended the usual categories of judgment. Buffalo Bill, yearning for his first dream of the rainbow, remembers, *"Each object isolated, dragged from its boundaries, relocated. And this tremor in the heart which no longer made sense."* At the end of his life, still troubled, he finally releases the white buffalo from his Wild West show. *"It was against himself surely, his own being, that Cody had been struggling all these years. He was already maimed by what he had torn away from the living frontier."*

It is we who must resolve this living sacrifice of the natural world to our exploitative imaginations. The white buffalo's mission is to point the way. *"Although limited, his impact was still in the making. One day, he was wishing, his life would be real as that iron horse steaming across the continent. It was curious, yet sure; it was not for himself that he wished this, but for the others."*

Lignell's ambition here is to wrestle our protean myths to the ground. She hopes that the form in which they next spring up will allow us to live in more harmony with the earth. In the project of myth-remaking she has joined a company of 20th c. writers, headed by James Joyce in *Ulysses*. Before a disgruntled reader rises to object, "Kathleen, you're no James Joyce," it is only fair to point out that her aim and perspective are quite different. In its way, however, *WB* aspires to remold the world in a new image, as *Ulysses* did. The white buffalo even gives his own epitaph: he *"had come to resemble heaven and earth and his wisdom embraced all things. Although he had suffered—they had made him suffer—he rejoiced in his knowledge of fate and was therefore free."*

The book covers great territory in 106 1/2 pages. Will we be willing to cover that ground over our own time-harrowed trails? Can we identify and protect the herd within us? Or will we keep riding that Union Pacific train to the end of the line, 'til we meet that last stampede? Readers, hit the trail.

**Catharine S. Baker
Spruce Head**
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Review

Sailing/Susan Kenney. 1988. Viking.

Randall Jarrell once defined a novel as "a long prose narrative that has something wrong with it." If that's true, then Susan Kenney has written an extraordinary novel. When she is at her best, as she is through the greater part of *Sailing*, she is a writer of astonishing power and penetrating vision, so that one is left wondering, "How could anyone put all this together as she does?"

Sailing emerges from some of the later episodes of Kenney's earlier book, *Another Country*, but it is not a sequel exactly. The point-of-view is altered and Sara and Phil Boyd move their marriage center stage, along with his deadly and elusive cancer and the sailing that becomes his obsessive release from its specter, and Sara's exhausting and tenacious struggle to keep life in place and hope alive.

The novel opens at a coastal boatyard in high autumn, with the writer's eye on Phil:

As he stares now across the bay at the surrounding hills and islands, the landscape takes on that flatness, that brittle luminous clarity of detail. He blinks. The sharpness dissolves. The truth is the foliage is already past its peak. The scarlet maples are mere remnants, the colors have faded, so that far away the land on the horizon lies curled around the water like a rusty chain.

And backs quickly to a mirror scene at home:

The mirror is old and makes him look more blue and fragile than he really is... He has lost no weight to speak of, only five pounds or so, is still strong, but there is a pallor to his complexion, as though someone had powdered his face with chalk and blown all but a bare residue away. He feels this paleness as a thin layer of ice water just beneath his skin.

And Sara moves into this world like weather. The narrative leaps around in time, joining the dots of Phil and Sara's emotional and physical history. And yet, there is nothing cloying or phony about this love; it's achingly real and as compelling as the rest of anyone's life.

By the time one has reached the end of this novel, it is no longer possible to imagine a world that doesn't hold Phil and Sara—the small domestic catastrophes or hilarities set against the grim plots of chemotherapy, surgery, the maddening postures of physicians—in scenes gaining sad currency for too many.

Sailing has its flaws, though with each reading they seem more and more negligible. The time shifts seem overdone, annoyingly so when one has to keep backing up to stay placed. Part of this is poor layout in which segments are not clearly spaced. Generally, there are more writer's devices than Susan Kenney's considerable talent requires. And Phil's character has, at rare times, an irritating opacity—as if he isn't really Phil; for example, his sexual musings on Sara that seem inexplicably juvenile.

But Sara! Sara is a pure diamond of character, at once powerfully complex and elusive, yet fibrous and clear. Sara with the will of a pit bull, the scourge of doctors. Sara the artist reborn. Sara capturing a bat in a chimney, adjusting to tragedy the gravities of domestic life. Sara fighting the sail she thought would join them. Men should read this book at the risk of facing the paltriness of their own love.

For Phil and Sara, mortality is their daily bread and, finally, their love feast. Whether under bright sail or the fragile shelter of home, they stay in the reader's senses long after the book is done.

In her Author's Note, Susan Kenney gives thanks for "one of the most painless editing sessions a writer ever enjoyed." Had it been a shade more painful, *Sailing* might have been one of those books that stands astride an age. As it is, Susan Kenney has produced a riveting and poetic tale of contemporary life, as relentless as its Sara. Read this book.

David Adams
Edinboro, PA
is a poet & teacher

Sailing... an excerpt

As if this weren't enough, she finds evidence of mice in the kitchen, trail of rice-sized turds like a tiny wagon train winding from under the stove, behind the refrigerator, along the underside of the dishwasher and into the broom closet. The cats are waiting for her to feed them, sitting on the kitchen counter smug as owls, watching a mouse saunter past with a crumb of doggy kibble in its mouth. They look at her, then back at each other, start to bat and hiss, fighting as usual over their food. She picks one up under each arm, struggling and swiping at each other, tosses them both down into the basement, muttering, "Catch mice. Chase frogs. Eat bugs."

The collie puppy they have recently acquired, even actually paid for, unlike the legendary but gratis Collie Cibber, it turns out does eat bugs. At night, tossing in her disturbed sleep, she hears the whine of a mosquito, then a snap of teeth, smacking of lips, and the mosquito whines no more. She watches the puppy snare houseflies and moths in mid-flight or as they flutter against the screens, his nose quivering like an anteater's. In the garage she finds him crunching on a June bug, which he shortly spits out with a disappointed expression indicating it tastes nasty. But he continues to relish mosquitoes, flies, and moths, bumping his long nose along the screens and windowsills to snap them up.

But even with the puppy's help, by Friday Sara is beginning to feel as though she's losing control of the whole house. First the washer starts lurching across the floor like a demented troll, then the dryer makes a noise like a helicopter coming in for landing. The dishwasher sends a river of sudsy water that pools in the middle of the sagging kitchen floor, and the refrigerator begins defrosting on the outside. None of the doors will shut, and the ones that are shut won't open. She imagines the whole house collapsing into its foundation. At least that will take care of the frogs.

Best Stories of Sarah Orne Jewett/

edited by Waugh, Greenberg, and Donovan.

Lance Tapley, publisher, 1988.

What's special about the new Sara Orne Jewett story collection? For one thing, this collection actually may live up to its title of Best. This particular collection has a remarkable variety of subject matter, settings, and characters.

Some stories, such as "Miss Sydney's Flowers," "Miss Tempy's Watchers," and "A Bit of Shore Life" could be categorized as character descriptions using a reminiscence framework, yet even they are unusual for their contrasting city, shore, and farm settings.

As for subject variety, this collection is remarkable for the "unmentionable" topics delicately presented. In "Autumn Holiday," the reader is treated to a nineteenth century look at a transvestite or dual personality—possibly a precursor to the infamous *Three Faces of Eve* a century later. Is it possible that nineteenth century males would tolerate the idea of a "house husband"? Jewett tested that idea in "Tom's Husband," in which the male stay-at-home displays some typical bored housewife's complaints. Cohabitation before marriage? Read "The Courting of Sister Wisby" to share a small Maine town's untypically tolerant reaction.

From the humor of a poor farm's elderly female inhabitant who gives in to wanderlust in "The Flight of Betsy Lane" to the dire effect of sin, retribution, and a curse "In Dark New England Days," this collection, which also includes the classic "A White Heron," is a must have, must read—not only for Sarah Orne Jewett fans but for anyone interested in New England literature.

Overall, the collection is delightful, affordable, and definitely appropriate for a college level New England Studies reading list or a Junior-Senior High unit on Maine literature.

Estelle Watson Sanders
Windham
teaches at Windham H.S.



Marguerite Yourcenar- Femme du Siecle

The "Immortelle" is dead, although a lengthy stay in Maine certainly preserved her well. Sole woman elected to the *Academie Francaise* (1981), Marguerite Yourcenar was a calm sort of Joan of Arc—reserved, very much the *philosophe*. Her nomination to the sacred club of the "Forty Immortals" stands as a step forward for all French women writers. Considered a master of the psychological analysis of history, Yourcenar distinguished herself by her capacity to remain detached from the emotion of a situation. Her evocations of the past illuminate the present. Follows a recapitulation of her life and detailing of her oeuvre.

Only child of Michel de Crayencour and Fernand de Marchienne, she was born in Brussels in 1903. A month after her birth, her mother, a Walloon, died. Educated by tutors and her father, she learned several languages. Her father, from an old family of French Flanders, was known for his romantic intrigues. He was inspiring. Her first three novels, as well as the first tome of her autobiography, involve family history. Her major works' subtlety recall the intricate tapestries of her *patrie*.

Yourcenar was reading Racine and the classics by age eight. At ten, she acquired Latin, at twelve Greek. During WW1, she traveled in England. Upon publication of two small collections of verse in the 20s, she took the *nom de plume* "Yourcenar," an imperfect anagram of Crayencour. Her father sponsored these "*oeuvres de jeunesse*"; she was scarcely twenty years of age. At his death, she found herself with a comfortable inheritance. She traveled in Europe and across the Mediterranean. In 1929, she wrote *Alexis* (novel), and in the course of the 30s she made long stays in Greece and translated several erudite Greek and Latin poets. Her interest ranged even to the Far East, which resulted in *Oriental Tales* (1938).

In 1937, to conduct research at Yale U., she came to the USA. The outbreak of WW11 persuaded her to stay. "Months stretched into years," she wrote, "as the war didn't end." She would live here in the Northeast for the next half-century. During the decade following her arrival she served as professor of comparative literature and lecturer on the history of art at Sarah Lawrence College. She translated into French *The Waves* by Virginia Woolf. In 1947, she accepted American nationality, but failed to advise the French authorities in the hope of preserving French citizenship, which she eventually lost.

Another reason for her decision to remain in the U.S. was her *amitie* with Grace Frick, a high school teacher who became Yourcenar's principal translator. They bought a small house on Mt. Desert Island, appropriately, a former colony founded by Champlain in the early 17th c. The house at Northeast Harbor needed renovation, so plumbing and central heating were installed. "As for my association with Grace Frick," she said in a *Paris Review* interview, "we met when we were both women of a certain age, and it went through different stages—first passionate friendship, then the usual story—two people living and traveling together for sake of convenience and because they have common literary interests." Then she speculates: "But what is love? This species of ardor, of warmth, that propels one inexorably towards another being? Why give so much importance to the genito-urinary system of people? What matters, as I said, concerns emotions, relationships. But *whom* you fall in love with depends largely on chance." Publication of *Memoirs of Hadrian* (1952) furnished Yourcenar with the means of concentrating on the novel. "I am without roots," she once said. "In order to steal from Hadrian, I must be at home in all places and nowhere."

Hadrian was her chef-d'oeuvre. Frick translated it, as well as *Coup de Grace*, and *The Abyss*. The two women lived together until the death of Grace Frick in 1979.

Cardinal Richelieu founded the *Academie Francaise* in 1634 for King Louis XIII. Centuries later, Yourcenar found herself the champion of a cabal. The academician, Jean d'Ormesson, proposed her as candidate for a chair. The earlier loss of French citizenship postponed nomination until she was awarded citizenship, only months before her election. Finally, in 1981, she achieved the rank of immortal, arbiter for life of French language and literature. She was elected, 20-12, despite her declaration that she would not wear the traditional costume of gold braid. She refused the customary gift of a saber but agreed to accept coins from the reign of Hadrian, with his motto: "Libertas, Humanitas, Felicitas." At that point, the first female "Immortel" was 78 years old. In her address, she remarked upon the exclusively male tradition of brotherhood she once described as a "club of elderly gentlemen." It bothered her. "This uncertain, floating me, whose existence I myself dispute, here it is, surrounded, accompanied by an invisible troupe of women who perhaps should have received this honor long before, so I'm tempted to stand aside to let their shadows pass." d'Ormesson, who presented the silver-haired, soft-spoken author as a fellow member of the Academy, said that after Jean-Paul Sartre and Louis Aragon, Yourcenar was the best representative of French literature in the world.

The nomination sparked a furor—not only a woman, but also a citizen of France and the USA at the same time. The truth is, she was the second American admitted to the Academy; Julian Green won election in 1971. Thanks to her new international reputation, she knew a period of success during the 1980s. English translations of at least eight books appeared, starting in 1981. The reedition of major works such as *Coup de Grace* assured her of a comfortable life in her small French country house in Maine. She lent her support to ecological campaigns, saying today is what humanity will leave for tomorrow.

“Books are not Life, just its ashes.”

M.Y.

Yourcenar amassed other accolades. She received the Medal of Commander of the Legion of Honor. French and Belgian governments decorated her; the Belgian Academy of the French language, the Dutch Academy, and the American Academy of Arts and Letters awarded her chairs as well; she received honorary diplomas from three New England colleges: Smith, Bowdoin and Colby. She won the Medal of Honor for Literature of the National Art Club. The Erasmus Institute of Arts and Letters bestowed a gift, half to be donated to charity; Yourcenar chose the World Wildlife Organization.

An attack of apoplexy hit in November, 1987. At the end of the month, she gave a final interview to Shusha Guppy of the *Paris Review*. The outcome is revealing. "I write everywhere," she said. "I could write here, as I am talking to you. When in Maine or elsewhere, when I am traveling, I write wherever I am or whenever I can. Writing doesn't require too much energy—it is a relaxation, a joy." And what about her reading? "I dislike all literary worlds," she said, "because they represent false values. A few great works and a few great books are important. They are aside and apart from any 'world' or 'society'." A few days later, she returned to Northeast Harbor, where she died December 17, 1987. Jacques Chirac, prime minister and mayor of Paris, honored her: "She offered a strong reflection on morality and power, on the strength of a classical and rigorous style with a personal tone." Cosmopolitan and universal, Yourcenar will be missed. The literary critic, Jacqueline Piatier, called her "an unabashed humanist with old-fashioned ideas." The manuscripts will be kept at Bowdoin. Her house will become a museum, her rich library preserved.

For a career that lasted fifty years, her oeuvre is not overwhelmingly big. But

“Writing is a way of going to the depth of Being.”

M.Y.

diverse and well-groomed. Best known for her fiction, she also wrote memoirs, essays, poetry and drama. She will be remembered as a classicist and literary stylist. She said she had "one foot in scholarship and the other in magic arts." She translated *The Waves* by Virginia Woolf and *What Masie Knew* by Henry James, both praised for overcoming stylistic difficulties, which one imagines were considerable given the originals. She translated the modern Greek poet, Constantin Cavafy, Thomas Mann, *The Amen Corner* by James Baldwin, and *Five Modern Noh Plays* of Yukio Mishima. *Mishima: Vision of the Void* is a treatise on the Japanese writer. She also translated into French many Negro spirituals she heard during a trip through the southern United States. In *Normal*, a quarterly, she explains what she looks for: "The books I like best are those where there is intelligence, goodness, and no injustice. These are very rare indeed. I think the reason there is so much bad literature, or at least one of the reasons, is that the average person who sets out to be a writer goes around looking for subjects to write about, and editors should have the effrontery to ask you, 'Could you not possibly write a novel about... or an essay on!... to which I always reply that I never write anything I have not chosen myself.'"

Memoirs of Hadrian is clearly her masterpiece. Not really an historical novel, but rather a monologue on the life of the Emperor, it is an imagined autobiography in the form of a letter from him to his successor, Marcus Aurelius. She examines history, humanism, and the psychology of power through the eyes of an emperor examining these same questions himself. She revels in the eloquence and splendor required of a "leader who has had the hubris to emulate a god." Reading the book, one has the impression of discovering a newly-found document. Yourcenar, however, accumulated notes for a quarter century.

Her settings are poignant. The different milieu stretch across western history—second century Hadrian's, a XVI c. Flemish philosopher's in *The Abyss*, to postwar Lithuania in *Coup de Grace*. In all these times and places, she delves into governing: what is the effect of power on those who exercise it? This analysis of the interior self makes her like her contemporaries, but she goes farther, outside the self, and asks about the use of power by man on his fellows. This sense of an external and eternal humanity is embedded in the heart of her works—from descriptive scenes of her childhood to the suspense of an assassination attempt against Benito Mussolini.

In *Fires*, prose poems from 1936, diverse classical figures speak monologues. Most are female: Phedre, Antigone, Clytemnestra, Lena, and Sappho. Three male voices: Achilles, Patroclus, and Phedros. In the novels, however, many of the protagonists are male homosexuals: Alexis, Eric, Hadrian, Zenon, Mishima. Racine may have had a strong influence on Yourcenar in this, for excepting Britannicus, all of Racine's protagonists are women. In *Coup de Grace*, for example, Yourcenar has Eric fall in love with the brother of Sophie—who falls madly in love with Eric in turn. Again, as in *Phedre* of Racine, passionate jealousy is a typical theme of French literature.

The Abyss will serve to guarantee her renown. A Belgian film director adapted the novel, with Gian Maria Volonte in the role of Zenon. I saw it last summer. Gripping. The philosopher hero, a priest in a life devoted to Reason, is persecuted by a Church in the throes of the Inquisition. For the moment, the only other film based on her novels is *Coup de Grace*, directed by the German Volker Schlöndorff (1976). That movie must be good too; the narrator finds himself obliged to kill with his own revolver the woman captive who has been his mistress.

Marguerite Yourcenar embraced our century. She knew 84 of its first 87 years. She was a veritable *femme du siecle*, representative of the strong tradition of classical study upon which Western society is based. Her place in history as an "Immortelle" is assured.

Duff Plunkett

Milford

is a poet, singer, student

Review

from *I Wanted to Tell You*

In a Strange Time

Trying to listen to
Bartok while the baby stands
in the corner and screams and
Julie watches George
of the Jungle and you wash
the dishes.

And it
all falls apart.

Last night the German doctor
said the demons are
again among us. They are
in the walls, that we
can't see through.
"Yes," I said. "It's a strange
time, as we
learn to live without
hope."

Still, the music comes
in, the strings, percussion,
and celeste. We all
hear some of it. So
you make a cake, you write
"Luv" on it, with
maraschino cherries, and put
it in the middle of the
table. It is
St. Valentine's day, if
it matters.

Burton Hatlen
Orono
teaches at UMO.

I Wanted to Tell You/Burton Hatlen.

National Poetry Foundation, Orono, ME 1988.

For those of us who have found Burt Hatlen's poems only in the here and there of literary journals, the publication of *I Wanted to Tell You* is a blessed event. The title, so close to Williams (Williams and Creeley seem the ghostly godfathers of his style), is a perfect description of the matter and manner of these poems. The book might also have been called *A Domestic Symphony*. For the musical eye of Hatlen's poetry falls on the close ingredients of life—parents, lovers, wives, children, landscapes walked through, the grey image of a current world—cast in tender, jazzy rhythms so precisely musical one can almost hear the bass line behind the words:

Sheldon, I want to
dream with you now,
for awhile, of the

white-muzzled antelope
as they walk, twenty
in a file, through

the grass, browning
under the July sun,
it shivers a little

—from "Crossing Altamont"

These poems are vulnerably human, filled with people just as witches' houses have familiars. People eating, making love, reading, aging, remembering a day's list of things to do.

For good or ill—vastly more for good—everything here is tethered to the poet, and we walk the images back into the poet's heart, as in "Night. Moline. Rain": a wonderful poem. I have other favorites—"The Leaf House," "A Phone Call From My Mother," "In a Strange Time," "March," "The War Comes Home," and two chillingly fine long poems that capture what it means to come to Maine from away and *live* here, "Maine: an Ode" and "A Walk in the Woods."

Over and over again, in wonder or pain or delight, Hatlen answers Karl Shapiro's question, "What is the poetry of *that*?" *I Wanted to Tell You* is a solid book, the trace of one person's poetic life, and thanks to the National Poetry Foundation for bringing it to us.

David Adams
Edinboro, PA
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The Hebrew Lion/Kenneth Rosen

(available soon through MWPA)

This year's winner of the Maine Arts and Humanities chapbook competition once again promotes and celebrates the high quality of creative writing prominent in this state. Ken Rosen's *The Hebrew Lion* is an intensely powerful collection of fifteen diverse poems, all exemplifying the talent and versatility of this writer.

Rosen is not an easy poet. He always demands as much of his reader as he apparently expects of himself. And this collection is no exception. Linking historic and literary images with contemporary issues, Rosen creates tension and immediacy in a stream-of-consciousness style characteristic of his previous work.

The opening poem "Monkey Zero," for instance, traces the deadly AIDS virus from an African jungle. Rosen concludes that "this is memory without history, and this snake-wave of death and hysteria our flooded planet's whole saga." The confrontation with our collective past makes us uncomfortable; the truth is painful. Yet, we seem destined to repeat the cycles.

Others, like "Caribou," "Stormy Night," "Crying Like a Child," and "White Dove," feature a prominent narrative style that engages the reader in the speaker's process of discovery. In the tradition of poet as storyteller, Rosen keeps intellect and emotion in balance, and resists the easy temptation to sound self-righteous or arrogant. Instead, each narrative is tightly constructed, carefully developed, and sharply focused.

One of the most poignant selections is the reminiscence "Forgetting Ogunquit" in remembrance of a friend dead five years. Without being gratuitously nostalgic, Rosen recaptures twenty years of experiences shared between two families,

putting the intersections of their lives into some kind of manageable recollection—only to let it go.

Forget it. For just as tossing itself with spray the sea forgets our every path and act, or a girl's portrait in a summer cottage forgets us totally, these misremembering glances are soon eclipsed. Luck in life, is a kind of carelessness, pointless as beauty, better than regret. Yet there was strangeness here, a light and life which taught my spirit and my eye, to which I said hello, and kindness, to which I'll say goodbye, and will forget.

The collection's title piece, "The Hebrew Lion," is a showcase for Rosen's ability to draw on powerful allusions and historical references. Like several others in the collection, "The Hebrew Lion" has a primitive setting—the African grasslands—which serves as backdrop for his detailed allegory. The poem is interspersed with Hebrew responses that thematically connect the interaction among a hungry old lion, an unsuspecting zebra, and a watchful gorilla. This is a powerful piece—and readers undoubtedly will react strongly to it.

Rosen's reputation as an eminent Maine poet is not news. But this collection confirms his place among contemporary Maine poets. Readers can look forward to this chapbook scheduled for publication in the spring.

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Windham
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Outward/David Gordon

(Part I of a Long Poem; The New York Monograph Society,
P.O. Box 20328, London Terrace Station, NYC 10011. 1988)

David Gordon's modest subject is merely 500 years of local history, inland explorations, sea trade, indian conflicts, tiny settlements up Maine's coastal rivers, and the Revolutionary War. The book is philosophical, in the sense of the Greek pundit who said that "history is philosophy learned from examples." Rife, rich with examples, *Outward* shows us what we are by showing us what we were. In a striking image that recurs, a boy named Linnie has a vision of history's flickering happenings as he is lowered by a rope down a well shaft; he "heard drone, far off voices,/ rasping flint throats,/ stringy old men, tough,/ bull-chest men, boys,/ scared whispers, screams, women,/ from close at hand/ as out of the stones/ along the well wall." Gordon uses this archetypal descent into the specific to set up his cornucopian outpouring; he returns to Linnie deep in the well near the end to suggest the rebirth that is possible, the ascent, the transformation that awaits us in the future—in short, his title. "And Linnie sank through/ humus, clay ooze/ till he/ sipped limpid cold wellspring,/ ... then felt rope winch him/ up into sun-quick light,/ and Carla/ of Linnie's kin/ saw Osiris rise/ from the dead,/ upgoing/ from his sires...." The image is arresting.

Vico, the 18th c. philosopher of history, wrote that "Man understands only what he makes, thus the center of man's reality must be history. This he has made." Gordon, of Sheepscot, has made an unusual, thoroughly original book here. It is not a collection of poems, as was Robert Chute's 1987 collection of sonnets about the historical figure, Samuel Sewall; *Outward* is one long piece of poetry in four sections. Three kinds of material woven together make the texture of this book, in which texture is all. First, excerpts from the log or journal of one David Porter, an early 19th c. captain of a frigate, are somehow transformed by Gordon into poetry. The book opens with a four-page quotation from Porter, which one assumes Gordon has edited and elided. Second, short flashing statements by settlers, indians, etc. over the centuries have been salvaged from town records, logs, and histories; these are placed next to each other on the page. Their beautiful broken English and wildly random spelling are oddly poetic, probably because of Gordon's great eye for selection and his judicious ellipses (three dots are everywhere). The effect is like looking into a kaleidoscope dropped by a child; the glass pieces are all there, but the pattern won't fall together quite right. One does not "read history" but is *immersed* in it, its back-and-forth wash, those moments when an event causes time to seem to freeze, as the light grows brighter and brighter. Time is not felt as chronological unravelling, but as little pieces of heroism, violence, confusion, somehow tumbling us to *this* moment, the act of reading, of considering "then" *now*.

The third kind of material is Gordon's own dazzling language. In his modernist mode of extreme condensation, compression, of the flashing detached image that just floats, and the startling unknotting of syntax, his freshness often feels like Ezra Pound's. (Gordon is a Pound scholar, and an editor of UMO's journal, *Sagetrieb*, among other things, such as a translator of T'ang and Sung poetry.) More precise comparisons might be to the taut phrasing of an under-known classic, *Briggflats*, by the British poet Basil Bunting. Or to the surprising verbal turns in Hart Crane's *The Bridge* (today sadly ignored). Gordon's is a verse of strong, unexpected verbs: the "night wind *grunts* in the oaks," he writes; or a "noon sun *clings*/ to glazed winter limbs." A star "quakes." It is a poetry of delicious assonance, not of contrived alliteration; consider how the *-a* sound links these lines: "the late moon *grapples*/ cold apple limbs." Or this *tour de force* on the same sound: a "fishhawk stands/ fanning azure air." To sense the lean, muscular energy possible in a poet who knows exactly what he is doing with every syllable, every sound, reflect on the excerpt (*printed below*). Note how "night leaped down" on the frigate at sea. Note how Gordon finds the thick *-uh* sounds of *hull* and *muskellunge* and immediately lightens them with the *n*-s and *ih*-s of "nibbling a minnow;/ now knew thinness." As the storm intensifies, the captain feels "the torque of sheer strakes"; for violence we get "seas' whip-lash sledge." This is poetry. This is a poet.

Yet more is going on here. Gordon's considerable achievement—half history, part document made vibrant, part vivid evocation—should be set in contrast to

the perhaps too-persistent lyric poetry that has dominated the 70s and 80s. The lyric's pronoun is singular, *me*, its subject *my emotion*, and (except for certain odes or elegies) the lyric houses us in the *now*; Gordon's pronoun is plural, *them* (and by implication, *us*), his tense pastness-made-present. We spend the first forty years of life proving how we are different from each other, and the next forty discovering how we are the same. Gordon's is the vision of maturity, of late middle-age, when Self has at last certified itself. The mind turns outwards to others, to where they have been, hoping to discover in that what we might become. *Outward* ends with an image of our evolution, of the "human embryo... voyaging, outward/ through fish, reptile, bird, mammal"; it ends with a call, a beautiful exhortation, to examine Self to get beyond Self, to come up from the well transformed, to "slough off/ ego husks, error,/ get clear to the core." That core should

league with hills,
streams, people, and as wind
in night pine limbs speaks,
give it speech, print,
to focus neighboring folk,
petition the chief.

Gordon wants to understand New England; he makes us want to. Whether we do or not, "mind thrusts into the unknown," he says. And he adds: "long voyage... prepare frigate."

**Terry Plunkett
Hallowell**
teaches at UMA

Excerpt from Outward, a frigate at sea

With wind's increase
night leaped down, wave-twist
rolled ship to deck's edge
in flaring night glow;
prow plunged into foam-
buried wave-lair,
two deep counter-force currents
seized the hull
like a muskellunge
nibbling a minnow;
now knew thinness
of a 5/8th plate;
felt torque of sheer strakes,
and as ship tried to rise
against pummelling
kettle-drum blows,
seas' whip-lash sledge
beat steel sheathed hull—
beams shuddered
from bar-keel to bilge.

**David Gordon
Sheepscot**

Cello suite, Bach

after a performance by Bernardine Khoo

The cello is producing sound, I tell myself,
through gill slits in its cheeks, but actually
the entire room is resonating
in a language that is no one's words,
astonishing itself. Improbable memories—
a sweater, angora, color of strawberry
ice, mine or somebody else's—
occur to me, as if my skull let loose
a shower of recondite cells that I might see
what's in storage. I'm trapped in stress and trash
until a call through three clefs
steals me. Bone-caged heart
flocks to passion
in the servant of the cello's
face, eyes track his left-hand
fingers, which know the notes for themselves.
How does our world allow this, so volatile,
mercurial, so deeply rummaged, cast
so it allows for no collusion?

And then the chords! I'm old enough
to roll my head, verge on pouring,
throat lung and clavicle, out, a soaring
barely to be endured by the poor
consciousness, whose changes replicate
the beast that came to rest,
her eyes now fire that all can read.

Lee Sharkey
So. China
is a teacher

Talisman

When I left your land I emptied
my pockets—ticket stubs,
centimes, the odd key.
I exposed the linings to light.
Later, years later, I put my hand
inside and touched the dark,
soft as the hollow of your elbow,
intact, welcoming. I carry it
with me everywhere I go.

Wendy Kindred
Ft. Kent
teaches at UMFK

KENNEBEC: A Portfolio of Maine Writing, Vol. XIII

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For thirteen years we have been printing the best Maine writing we can find. Typically, about half of the sixty writers have not appeared in these pages before. 5,000 copies are distributed free throughout the state as a service to the community in an effort to bring Maine writers to the attention of a wide public. We are supported by the UNIVERSITY OF MAINE AT AUGUSTA. Back issues, 1981-1988, are available upon request. Deadline for submissions for next year: 9/15/89-12/1/89. Send SASE. Copyright held by writers.

Editors: Carol Kontos
Terry Plunkett

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My ex-husband left this morning for Bermuda to play in a tennis tournament, leaving me his dog, who is too big for my house; our kids; and instructions on how to get into his house through a second-story window in case of an emergency.

I'm working on a sure-fire money maker: a story in less than fifty words. Typed onto index cards, stories like that could hang from the rear-view mirror in a car to read on freeway straightaways and then feed the imagination through traffic jams. Or against the Lavoris at the dentist's to work from between drillings. Or on the bathroom mirror for flossing time.

Well, look: from that one you know a lot about her. You know she's divorced and has kids. If you're paying attention, you know she shares custody because otherwise he wouldn't have left the kids with her, he would have just left.

You know her ex is rich. Relatively. I mean you don't exactly know that some weeks she doesn't have enough money to do the laundry, but you know she has a small house, and he's got a big one plus airplane tickets, and you could surmise that he survived the divorce nicely. You could assume he's got old money, since Bermuda's a place for preppies. And you'd be right.

You know he's an athlete. I mean he's old enough to have kids and he's still gallivanting off to play tennis. From the bit about the second-story window you could assume that she's an athlete, too. Or, you could assume that he's too much of a schmuck to have made a second key.

If you're still at it, you could wonder whether she always falls for preppies. Whether she's remarried or has a lover. You could wonder about the kids—sex, age, smarts. Are they preppies? Not without constant clean laundry.

But you know that she's a respectable person, because he doesn't expect her to steal stuff from his house or read his diary or anything.

Actually, he's an idiot. Because that's exactly what I'm going to do. There's probably some great material for my index cards up there.

Taffy Field
Bath
teaches people how to build houses

Psalm 23: An Update

The Lord is my role-model;
we have a good relationship.
He involves himself in my decision-making:
he is very supportive.
He gives me positive input:
he leadeth me to viable alternatives;
he makes me feel good.
Yea, even when things are not-OK,
I shall have no guilt-feelings: for you identify with me;
I am comfortable with your rod and staff.
You are basically a very warm person,
open and caring;
I am fulfilled.
Surely you will always fit me into your game-plan:
and I will grow as a person.

Deborah Nicklas
Falmouth