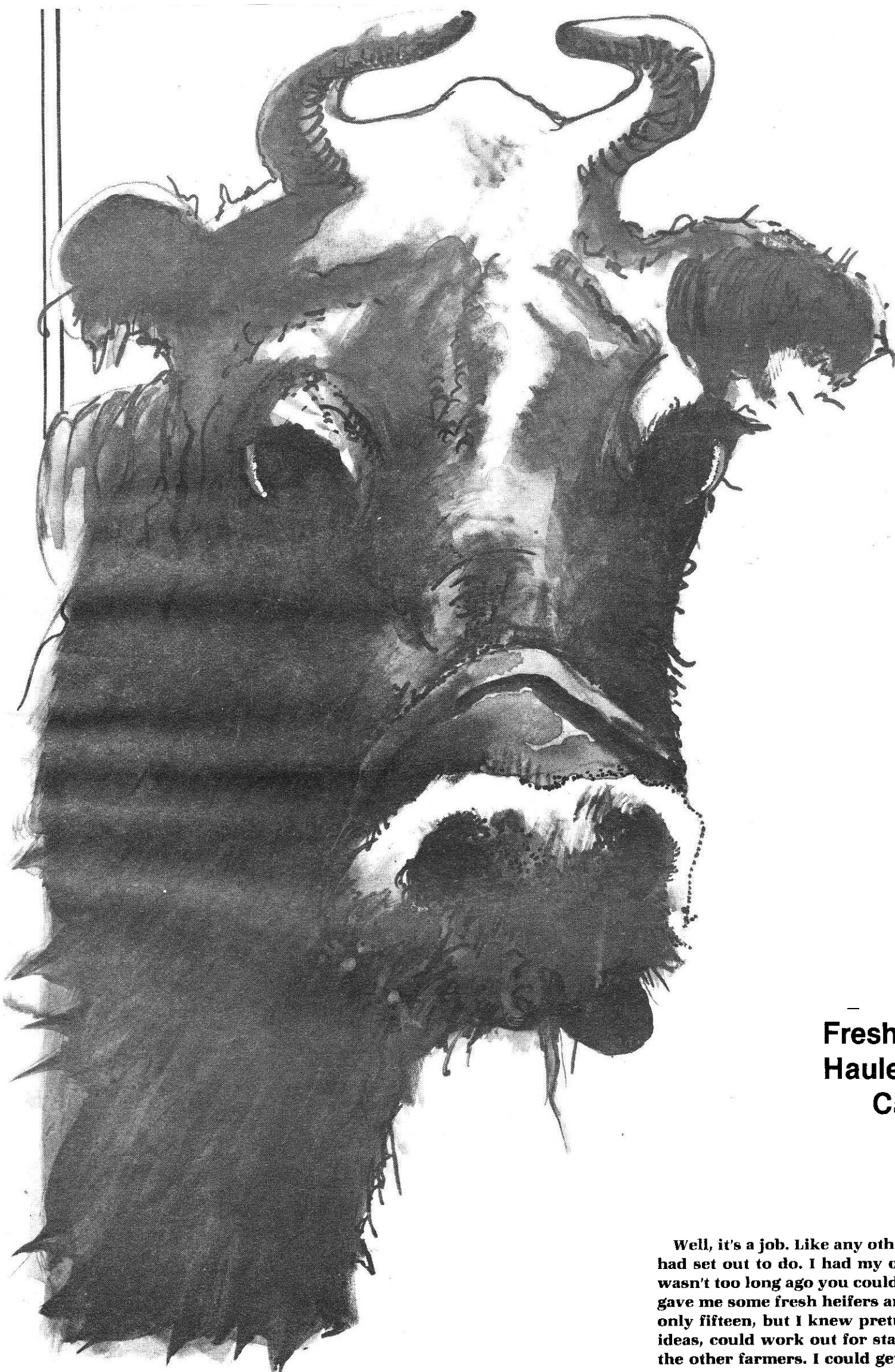


KENNEBEC: A PORTFOLIO OF MAINE WRITING

Vol IX - 1985

Published by
University of Maine-Augusta



**Fresh Dead or Down
Hauled Day or Night
Call 555-3256**

Well, it's a job. Like any other kind of work, I guess. It's not what I had set out to do. I had my own herd, good stock I built myself. It wasn't too long ago you could make a decent living at it. My old man gave me some fresh heifers and the use of his bull, you know. I was only fifteen, but I knew pretty much how to set about it, had good ideas, could work out for starting-up money. Used to make hay for the other farmers. I could get their hay in for them twice as fast as

they did with their own families working, so they let me have the whole job, and I wasn't eighteen yet. I had one job regular before I even had a driver's license, old man had to drop me off. I was making money good, had my eye on a nice piece of ground near the home place but not too near, you know. I didn't want to be right under the old hen's wing.

The war was on then. I was all het up to go but I was way too young. My older brother did go. He didn't come back. Whatever he saw out there looked better to him, I guess. He wasn't hot to farm anyway, like I was. I had some pretty clear notions then, I tell you.

But in my spare time I had gone and started a family, you might say, and I had to get married, and that was that. Kids, God I had more kids than cattle sometimes. Anyway, I started hauling stock in the winter, for a little extra money, and I had a good truck, an old Ford that my uncle had cut down for a farm truck, just hauled his hay and firewood on it, so I built it up. It had some low gears, I want to tell you. I could ease it out of those damn muddy cowyards and not get stuck, so people would call me. I moved a lot of cattle those years, and I don't mean anything like this. No, those bastards was all standing, and when I got them there they were still standing. I never did any rough driving. I was so good, for a while there I was hauling horses. I took some trotters up to the Bangor fair, and you know horsemen is awful fussy. I like horses but they are a pain to move. Throw fits for the fun of it, some of them. I don't mean draft horses. I still move them sometimes. I have a good flatbed and I can put the sides up. A good team, hell, they jump on the truck. You think I'm lying, but you should see them, all rared up, they're dying to get to work. Not like this business — they're dying to lie down, you might say.

Hell, I hate this kind of stuff. The things I see. 'Course I don't go yelling to the Be Kind To The Piggies League or anything, but God the way people use their animals. I think it's worse than it used to be. Too many poor bastards just scraping along, and they push their stock too hard. It's pitiful. Then after they've starved or scoured the beast to death, they want to turn a profit on it, see, so they get me up at two AM to get it up to the hot dog man in Bangor, live or some semblance to that. They get a much better price, see, if it's not dead. How the hell they can tell with some of these buggers, I don't know.

You know, if you don't pass this on, I can tell you, I get so mad at some of these mean bastards, never should have had livestock because they don't look after them at all. I tell you what I've done sometimes. Not often, mind you. They call me to come lug away something that's down, like I did a few months ago. I won't tell you who, but he blows himself up to be quite the modern stockman, Mr. Efficiency. Well, he had a cow calving, and she was down for the count, all right, and the calf was dead, pretty long dead. It was a mess, I want to tell you. So he figures she's going, see, and he's going to get the full live weight from the knacker, calf and all. God, that animal was suffering. Now, they don't as a rule. Nature is kind

to dumb beasts, the way it ain't to us. I mean, some women have an awful hard time of it with a baby. Not my old woman, you understand, she can just pop 'em out, no sweat, and does, and that's why we have such a damn yardful. But cattle, well, you can get into a mess if you don't pay attention, and this son-of-a-bitch wasn't going to lose any sleep over this old cow.

So I got her on the truck and took delivery, and I started out. Well, that cow was on there, no protection or anything, and she was suffering. I mean, it was too dark to see, and she wasn't making much noise, didn't have the strength. But I knew she was, see. I was getting madder by the mile. I was swearing, I want to tell you, every time I hit a rough place in the road. I could feel her move. I know cattle. Know how they feel. And I got so ripping, pretty soon I was shouting at the son-of-a-bitch and his squinty-eyed look and his "Now you get her there fast, you hear, and I want that live weight," and never a word about how it was fifteen degrees and I was up in the middle of the night and some of his stock he got from my father when he had to sell out.

Then I saw this nose pointing up in my mirror. I have a window through to the back so I can see whether things are still standing. I saw this muzzle and I knew that cow was in agony, she was trying to raise herself up. I couldn't stand it. I shifted down one, two, three gears and coasted right off into somebody's yard. It was three in the morning, right when my mother died, and there wasn't a soul about. I got out, just aboiling and quaking all over, and I came to that cow and I took her under the chin, like I always handled my own, you know, I never thrashed them around by the ear, and I talked to her. *Soooo cow cow cow, soooooh boss*, you know, and she relaxed for a bit. Then the agony came on her again and she kicked, not like she meant to, and I couldn't bear it, and I killed her with my fist. I mean it, I broke that cow's skull with my own hand, using it just like it was a maul, which is what that son-of-a-bitch should have used instead of having me haul her that way.

Well, she died like that. I'd say it was better than the knacker's hammer. Bang, she was gone, suffering no more. Wasn't better for my hand, though. I broke it. I'm right-handed, too, and I had to get back in that truck and drive to Bangor and unload and get the receipt, all the while pretending there wasn't anything wrong. See, you couldn't tell how that cow died. There wasn't a mark on her. *So Mr. Efficiency got dead weight, and I got a broken hand and it hasn't worked right since.* I don't regret it a bit. Like I say, though, this is an awful job. Dead and down, that don't tell you the half of it.

Catharine S. Baker
Spruce Head

is a free-lance writer

Glass Eater

This sweetskinned woman lifts the glass,
centers her small nose within the rim.
Her tongue runs the edge.
She takes the glass between her teeth
and bites. Steadily chews
glass to sand and swallows.

This sweetskinned woman holds a mirror
to eye, to cheek, examines pores of chin
and nose, bares even rows of teeth.
She studies nap of tongue, throat lining,
licks the cool mirror surface. Catlike,
laps reflections from the glass.

This sweetskinned woman stalks the window,
takes measure of its height, its width.
Beyond the glass the driveway feeds
the road. She breathes against the pane,
fastens lips to its cold surface, draws
the road that pulls away from her.

Wendy Kindred
Fort Kent

*teaches art at UMFK & edits
Black Fly Review*

Two Kings through a Glass Darkly

Interesting research is being done on the West Coast. Sarnoff Mednick, professor of psychology at the University of Southern California, has shown in recent years that some people have a genetic predisposition to violent behavior. While this is not a surprising conclusion, or even necessarily a new conclusion, his scientific technique is far more exacting than that of past theorists.

Mednick has been measuring the heart rates, brain waves and electrical properties of the skin in 9,000 children; he has been watching those children as they grow. Linking the three measurements with sharply-detailed family history — and therein lies the complicated key — he has been predicting the onset of violence as much as ten years in advance.

My subject matter here is not so precise as the good professor's, though I draw my inspiration from him. I wish to consider a sort of mystical genetics, a genetics across the ages. I am a simple man. My measures are the electrical properties of dusty volumes, the brain waves of cloistered poets long dead, the heart rates of mothers who whisper stories to infants listening not with their ears.

I write of two Irish kings, Boru and O'Neill. For the sake of mystical genetics, keep in mind that — according to DeBrett's Peerage — Ronald Reagan is a descendant of Brian Boru. And I am a descendant of Hugh O'Neill (according to the whisperings of my mother).

* * * *

The tenth century. With battleaxe and sword, Boru reigned over Ireland for thirty years. He succeeded his murdered brother, who was somewhat a dove and didn't fit the dangerous age; historians are hazy about the machinations behind the murder itself. The new king was regarded as a deliverer from the Norsemen, long the dread enemy of the Irish tribes. He is on record for his political dexterity, his mastery of administration, his military finesse, his sense of law and order, the reforms he brought in ecclesiastical affairs. He was also a regular body-hacker.

The Battle of Clontarf, in 1014, was the bloodiest in all of Irish history. It took place on Good Friday, and the pagan Norsemen figured Brian Boru would not give fight on a holy day. At age 73, however, he was beyond such personal dilemma: he watched his last victory from a hilltop. Although he saw his children and nephews slain on the battlefield, the Vikings were massacred into the sea and this was probably his last satisfaction.

In the heat of war, the ancient Brian was left unattended by his kerns and gallowglasses. One of the Norsemen — Brodar was his name — crept miserably up the hill. He slew the king, after which he fled deep into the woods. The minions of Boru found what had been done; full of rage, reflecting their mentor even in his death, they hunted the assassin down. They delicately slit his stomach, and fastened his live entrails to an oak tree. They then led him, quivering, around and around that oak until his body was empty.

* * * *

The sixteenth century. Out of Boru's grave in the North rose my own ancestor, Hugh O'Neill. He had flaming red hair, a red spadebeard, broad shoulders, shoulders strong enough to carry Ireland during the precipitous time of Queen

Elizabeth. He was a patron of the arts, a healer of quarrels, a connoisseur of the modern, the king of the mad mountain all too briefly. I was soothed to learn that he was the one royal rebel to aid the wretched survivors of the Spanish Armada, as they washed ashore in Donegal.

I'm tempted to think of him as a complete Renaissance man, for the purposes of this essay at least, but that would be historically unsound. By the age of fourteen he had already strangled a cousin with his bare hands. Given my research, I'm surprised it took him that long to wreak havoc. He may have been a sojourn-lover of Queen Elizabeth's (here historians blush discreet); in later life, she referred to him as My Running Beast. Her fantasies aside, she had just cause.

In essence, Hugh O'Neill was a body-hacker just like Brian Boru. They thrilled to the same enemies, for enemies are always alike, and they fought the same battles, which Ireland is sorrowfully fighting still.

But listen now: when O'Neill was a young man, he worked a fishing ship; he was one of many, not yet a king. He loved a fair Donegal woman named Clandeboyne. However, he had mean competition — another sailor, same vessel, same status in the heart. And Clandeboyne couldn't decide.

One twilight, when the fishermen were returning from the main boat in their individual dories, Clandeboyne saw her solution. O'Neill and his rival were rowing toward her, separate and even, as she stood on a mild heather cliff. She called out: "He whose hand first touches shore, I shall thee wed."

The two men rowed furiously. Victory is never quite so easily recognized, despite what winners say, but there is a flashpoint in any race where one can smell defeat like gunpowder. O'Neill sensed that this was practically a lost cause — O'Neill sad and maniacal at the prospect of losing Clandeboyne — he pulled out his fishknife, whacked off his left hand and flung it to the shore.

* * * *

Ronald Reagan and I are both descendants of violent Irish kings: our skins are jumping with blood, everywhere. The difference is what comes down through the ages, through the centuries, those selective genes. Those violent selective genes. After all these years, all these hundreds of years, I still believe in romance, over hate, sacrificing the hand in a desperate white sea, not sending my battle-axed gallowglasses through the fog, not teaching others to disentrail my enemy. That is what has come down to me. I speak of different violences.

This season of my journey finds me violently in love with existence, and violently in love with a woman full of light. My nightmare, realized, is that my counterpart king-descendant is in power, and that his innate violence will take another direction. I live in a fishing village, one of scores of fishing villages on the coast of Maine: he is encastled in Washington. My rage is that his hatred will deprive me of my violent love; I see it coming, like a ship from the past.

Frank Johnson
Tenants Harbor

*waits and writes on a tidal cove
in the woods*

Ice Statues

*Some people think when ice statues
touch they shatter.
Some people believe that they melt.
I like to imagine them at the instant
between the idea, the longing and the motion.*

Margo Boyd
Belfast

searches abstracts in a law office

Grief

*Did I know
when I rose at dawn,
pulled on clean longjohns,
that at noon I would rock by the stove
bereft?*

*Did I know
when I put the beans to soak,
that my heart would swell like a bean
with grief?*

Death is so.

*You never know
when it comes to tea*

Linda Tatelbaum
Burkettville

teaches part-time at Colby

Big Fish/Little Fish

Chapter One of the novel

I first met Betty in the Pre-Natal Clinic waiting room, but somehow the story had always started a half-hour earlier, at Mrs. Bodwell's desk, Out-Patient Admissions, G - L. At least the two events — meeting Betty, answering Mrs. Bodwell's in-take questionnaire — have fused so completely in my mind that they might be laminated to opposite sides of the Out-Patient Red Card I soon carried upstairs to the Clinic.

Mrs. Bodwell was prying tunafish out of her partial — I could smell it — as she rolled my form into her typewriter.

"Name, please?"

"Rosemary Kidd."

"Age?" She wiped her front tooth with a Kleenex.

"Thirty-two."

"Are you responsible for yourself?"

I hesitated, then, on principle, having no idea what she was talking about, answered yes.

"Employer?"

"I'm a photographer — self-employed — but I'm covered under my husband's policy." I unzipped the portfolio I was carrying instead of a purse — I had an appointment with a newspaper editor after the Clinic — and fumbled disconcertedly for the Blue Cross/Blue Shield card Charlie had given me that morning.

Mrs. Bodwell, reaching for Wite-Out, breathed tunafish ominously. "Then you're not," she said, "responsible."

As I handed my Red Card to the Pre-Natal Clinic receptionist and took the only empty chair, I was still replaying the conversation so I'd remember it exactly for Charlie. The logic of the insurance mind was dazzling and I was just beginning to wonder, uneasily, what my own definition of responsibility might be — something my mother once told me I either had too much or none of — when a loud voice cut in.

"Nice suitcase," shouted the woman next to me, bouncing up and down in her seat and staring at my portfolio. "You just walk from Trailways?"

The idea struck me funny. "No, it's not a suitcase," I smiled. "It's for photographs."

The woman bounced to the edge of her moulded plastic chair, close to the portfolio, and almost slipped off. "That's what I thought," she blasted, bouncing like the inflatable clowns we used to punch as kids and could never flatten.

She was blinking at me, a smile like a wide-mouthed jar, but it wasn't the smile I noticed or the eagerness, but how much her face reminded me of a building facade. There were no shadows, and I was intrigued, as if the broad, flat planes were some natural curiosity, like a waterfall appearing to flow up instead of down.

"I like pictures, too," she went on, wiggling back in her chair so her white vinyl boots no longer touched the floor. "Me and Junior just been down to Bradlees getting some took. They got a two-for-one special this week. She always comes out good."

She paused, smiling proudly as she took over my arm rest. "I'm Betty. And that's Junior—" she pointed to a three-year-old in a granny dress and Dr. School sandals, playing at the receptionist's feet — "Betty, Jr.," she added. "I named her for me."

Betty, Jr. was dropping plastic firemen, one by one, down the hole in a Play-Skool Fire Station and chanting, "Fire, Fire, Fire!" When Betty, Sr. told her to shut up, she did, but kept on with the game silently, adding spins and hops, so that the red and white flowered dress fluffed up to her knees, like Henny Penny shaking her feathers before the sky falls.

But this Henny Penny didn't look flustered or worried or any of the other things a grown-up Henny Penny might. I couldn't imagine what she was thinking. Unlike her mother, Junior's expression was fiercely private while each fireman plunked, while her dress billowed, while a fist-sized tangle of hair, like the fur balls cats throw up, levitated three inches from her ear.

"You married?" asked Betty, toeing my portfolio with her boot.

"Yes," I answered and then "Please don't", as I angrily pushed the case under my chair, out of range.

"I ain't. I used to be, but I got it numbed. I got a new one picked out though," she said, innocently swinging her legs under her own chair. "He's still boyfriends and girlfriends with Darlene, but her mother hates him, and she's epileptic. She wears a helmet."

My annoyance melted as Betty chattered on — everything loud, cheerful, sing-song — as if each subject, no matter how trivial or personal or painful, carried equal weight, as if all people and events had value. She was laying siege to me. Between the talking and the bouncing it was almost impossible to think. But I was grateful. I didn't want to think. After a euphoric summer — moving to Maine, marrying, getting pregnant, all between the Summer Solstice and Columbus Day — I had suddenly lost my nerve. How good a mother would I be? How good a baby would I get? I loved Charlie, but we didn't know each other very

well, and what about the photographic business I'd left behind, what I sometimes called my art?

As Betty talked on, I paid less and less attention, craning my head around to survey the other women in the waiting room. There were thirteen of us, although our numbers shrank each time the receptionist read off a name. Teenagers with sweet, lip-chewed faces and quiet hands. I was oldest, except for Betty, and, apparently, the only one who was nervous.

Betty had stopped talking and was staring longingly at the portfolio through the space between our chairs, as if peering into a tankful of rainbow trout. I stared at her, picking out details to drop at Charlie's feet that night, like a cat swinging a dead mouse home by the tail — the orange plaid miniskirt, creeping up to her underpants, the boar hairs on her upper thighs, the way she spread from her own chair into half of mine.

Finally, Betty couldn't stand it any longer. "Can I see a picture?" she bounced.

I didn't want her pawing my work, but I was curious to know what she would say. "Sure," I said, sounding nonchalant as I unzipped the case, although my heart was pounding.

There, carefully stacked inside, lay the past ten years of my life. Black-and-white photographs of buildings — Boston, Cleveland, Los Angeles, New York. Close-ups of doorways and window frames, stone and plaster, walls of glass. I slipped one out and held it up for Betty, the last in a series of steps. Yes, I had a passion for steps, had photographed nothing else — except commission work — for the last two years. Steps in sunlight, bright as bones, wet steps like jungle cataracts, steps breaking in waves before Government Center, steps after an earthquake, leading nowhere, like the ladders in a dream.

I'd shot this particular photo outside a two-family frame house in Cambridge, next door to my apartment, and it was my favorite. Stark shadows, cold fall light cannibalizing narrative. Pure geometry, I liked to think.

"It's steps," I explained, not sure Betty would figure it out.

"Nice place to sit," she nodded, sucking noisily on her bottom lip. "Me and Junior sit out a lot, but I don't come out good black-and-white. I'm better full color."

She glanced over at Junior, who had curled herself around the fire station and was preening a fireman with two wet fingers. "You gotta watch out for steps when you got kids," she warned. "Junior fell down and busted her head open. My old landlord never shoveled so it was his fault, but he says I didn't take good enough care. She bled wicked bad."

Betty darted a watchful look at Junior, as if the bleeding had only just now stopped. Satisfied, she turned back to me. "This is your first?"

"Yes," I said, slipping the magnificent steps back into my case. She had forgotten them.

"Him or a She?"

When I shrugged, she smiled, wider than the wide-mouthed jar, and circled one hand on her belly. "This is Elmo. I finally got my boy."

She had stopped bouncing. Nothing moved but her hand. A simple gesture, full of all the maternal calm, the joyfulness I felt so far from. I wanted a child — theoretically. I didn't love it yet, I hadn't picked out a name.

Just then the receptionist read off "Betty Bundt". Betty smacked my hand and bopped to her feet. "Come on, Honey, let's go listen for Elmo," she sang to Junior. To me she said, "See ya next time, Lady."

Junior dropped one last fireman down the hole, crooning, "Ding, ding, Stinky!" at no one in particular. They were starting down the corridor to the examining rooms, hand in hand.

Had I seen the two of them from behind on the street, I might have laughed or shaken my head. If I hadn't already been hooked, if Mrs. Bodwell's question — Are you responsible for yourself — hadn't surfaced, like a splinter working up through the skin. From behind, Betty was even more outlandish than front-on — barely five feet tall, with a bottom like an institutional salad bowl on a table for one. I might have laughed or shrugged or not even noticed. Instead I called out, "Good-bye, Betty," more plaintively than I realized.

She turned and waved. "Good-bye, what did you say your name was?"

"Rosemary."

"Yeah, Rosemary." She was bopping back toward me, tugging on Junior and pulling down her skirt. "We do the whole thing together — us girls —" she swept her hand over the empty waiting room. "Next time we got the Four Food Loops. I done it before, but it don't matter. They make you do it every time."

At the word "They", Betty stiffened. She scooped Junior up in her arms and squeezed so tightly the little girl squeaked. Betty's pupils retreated to the corners of her eyes — a horse smelling fire — some distant calamity which I could neither see nor touch, something hanging over us and ready to fall, like Henny Penny's sky.

"You gotta eat just right, Rose-Mary. You gotta take good care of yourself," she whispered close to my ear, "or they take your baby away."

Gone the bop, the sing-song. She stood still, absently smoothing Junior's hair-

Spending Time at Augusta

*The grey sky seems right enough
But the air too warm for late November
The grass on the madhouse lawn too thick and green
Where a dozen starving river gulls
Scattered like cast-off golfballs on the turf
Dream, I suppose, of salad days before landfill
Open dump, pickings sweet and plenty*

*They are motionless
Quiet as popcorn on a theatre rug*

*Behind his window
(the one in the middle of the brick wall
facing the lawn)
The madman, too, is dreaming
Hanging his latest painting*

*Soon he will run out of space
Only one spot left on his wall
He is not worried, though,
There is sky enough to hang them on
Nicely grey, clear of gulls and dumpsmoke*

*The madman lies on his back
Motionless, his paintings still glowing
After so many years
He paints more slowly now
Relishing each stroke
The bright oils oozing through the bristles
The canvas quivering in the light*

*At first they took away his paints
But he found them
When the blackness at the fringes cleared
But that was much later
After he had learned to be still
To hide, relinquishing his body*

*To save care, they pulled his teeth
Like cutting off my cock, he said
You may as well
A man might as well be cockless*

*To silence him, they wired his jaws
Feeding him through a tube
Draining him through another
Then they cut a hole in his side
To collect his shit in a bag*

Now you'll learn to be quiet

*In the morning they came early
To change his bag and bottles
Give him a bath and a walk in the hallway
Then they strapped him to his bed again
Leaving him alone to paint and dream*

**Robert Alan Burns
Gardiner**

ball. Grief and incomprehension had pulled her features together into a look I had seen only once, in a photograph.

A Vietnamese woman, smoke rising, a cloud of pearls around her knees, but she doesn't notice it or the charred remains of her home or the photographer, close enough to touch her. She is holding a dead child about Junior's age drooped against her chest. She is combing the child's hair.

**Kate Kennedy
Portland**

teaches at Portland H.S.

The Boy Who Wrote Science Fiction

Some teachers have a way of getting in close. They amaze me with the web of detail they have amassed about each of their students and the insights they reveal. What I have to say about a student in trouble always strikes me as painfully obvious. So-and-so has the ability but isn't trying hard enough. So-and-so is chronically absent. Other teachers talk eloquent volumes, and I can't figure out whether they just have more gumption than me to base a whole theory on five facts or whether I missed out on some psychology course the rest of them took.

We were all pretty soft-spoken, though, when we met to puzzle out Hilmar Adams's disappearance. His parents were as bewildered as we were. The mother, steely grey and gaunt from a lifetime of farm labor, seemed apologetic, as if she sensed the school was blaming her for her son's disappearance. The father, a giant of a pig farmer, drummed his fists in frustration on the conference table, red wrists thick as fenceposts.

"Can't say why he left," Hilmar's father said. "Worked his butt off at the farm, but I can't say as he complained any more than you ought to expect from a fifteen-year-old. You know. He'd rather take his dirt bike up into the woods than feed the chickens and such."

Hilmar was an indifferent student. You noticed him mostly because he grew about an inch every couple of days. The other kids made fun of his hands in an admiring kind of way; they were so big he could hide his whole face in one of them. He played football. He always came to school. He liked his share of messing around, but, like most of the kids who came in off the farms, he had a solid base of respect — whether for education or for authority or for what his father would do to him if he got in trouble, I don't know, but it kept him closer to a 'C' than an 'F.'

Usually when a kid runs away, there are half a dozen of his friends who know where he went, and invariably this gets around to the teachers. The kids actually want to tell. They aren't any more comfortable with the idea of a kid gone than we are. But this time no clues came up, even though the assistant principal called in half the football team. I made my undistinguished observations at the meeting, wished Hilmar's parents the best of luck, and retreated to my desk. Hilmar Adams. Hell, I wasn't going to be the one to find him. I don't have all that much to say to the football types — if he let slip a word to one of the teachers, it surely wasn't to me. Just before I left school, I slipped Hilmar's folder into my briefcase. At the very least, I figured, I could look over his work for some idea of what was on his mind.

Before bed that night I leafed through Hilmar's folder. Like most kids, Hilmar did best when he knew what he was talking about and worst when he was responding to some abstract assignment that he neither understood nor cared for. He got a 'B+' on a "how to" paper about slaughtering and butchering a pig, notable especially for the illustration and, for gruesome authenticity, signed in pig's blood. He wrote the standard paper on how he got his first deer and what would have been a decent research paper on edible wild plants of New England if he hadn't more or less copied it right out of Ewell Gibbons. The rest was mostly junk — hasty, brief, ill-conceived notions passed in for the sake of not flunking. Except for his science fiction project.

Hilmar's science fiction project was thick. Just holding it, I was glad I'd given him an 'A.' I could picture him staying up for nights compiling the details of his story, getting it down in his slow, methodical, pencil-licking sort of way, knowing he'd have to be up by five anyhow for his morning chores.

It was called "Adam Two," and from the title alone you could predict the not so very original plot. The world explodes in nuclear holocaust. Everybody's dead, so it seems, but a kid who happens to be named Adam. He lives in an earth-sheltered hollow dug into a hill. For a month he stays inside his shelter, rationing himself strictly on the cans of food and water he has providently stored. Then he ventures out, travelling light, toward the population centers, foraging and trapping, on a search for other human life. He gets to a city, apparently Washington, but everything is rubble, everyone dead. He sees a strange light in the ruin of the Capitol. Approaching the blinding light, he finds an alien ship and, almost against his will, he walks into it. A voice, soothing and gentle, tells him, "I have been waiting for you. You are the survivor, father of a new human race."

The end.

It was a good combination of *Z for Zachariah*, *Childhood's End*, and *By the Waters of Babylon*, the three pieces we read in our science fiction unit, with a splash of the videotape we'd rented — *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* — thrown in for extra measure. I could tell Hilmar had paid attention and probably managed at least some of the required reading. Even though it was derivative, the plot impressed me simply because it took so many pages to get it all down. From some kids I don't expect invention.

But what got me most was the detail. The only part of "Adam Two" that wasn't just plot being mindlessly rolled forward was the account of Adam's survival techniques. Here Hilmar knew what he was talking about and lovingly described the construction of his hero's shelter, the making of traps, the skinning

and roasting of animals, the identification and preparation of edible roots and plants.

What Hilmar had done was transform the details of his own life's experiences into fiction. That fall, he had been invited along with five other boys from our school up to Rangeley, Maine, where the Navy runs a survival school. There's a Naval Air Station in our district which flies spy planes over the Atlantic keeping tabs on the Soviet submarine fleet. The school in Rangeley, out in the western mountains of our state, teaches the men what to do if they survive a crash. They learn how to use a parachute about as thoroughly as the Indians used buffalo, how to trap, and how to forage. They build snow huts in the winter and pine bough shelters the rest of the year. For two days of the course they are cast off in pairs into the wilderness with parachutes, pocket knives, the emergency kits each one carries on the plane, and the clothes on their backs. For good public relations, the Navy invites local kids on modified courses, and that's how Hilmar got to go. It was, I'm sure, the high point of his year, more so than his part in our first winning football season in a decade. And it set me to thinking.

The next day I talked to Ben Graffam, Hilmar's social studies teacher. I had an idea Hilmar was obsessed by survival and I wanted to see if another teacher would have noticed this, too.

"No," Ben told me, sucking on a cigarette between classes. "We didn't exactly study survival techniques this year. We did talk about fallout shelters some, but not a whole lot. The 'Issues in American History' class has a section on nuclear war."

"Hilmar wrote a story about nuclear war," I began.

"Didn't everybody?" Ben asked.

"Nearly everybody. But I'm thinking about Hilmar now. Did he show any unusual interest when you studied nuclear war? Did he bring up survival and stuff like that?"

"Yes, I suppose he was interested. It's probably the liveliest part of the year in that course, and kids tend to speak up a whole lot more than the rest of the time, when they're yawning into textbooks and asking if they need to know this or that for the test. In general, the kids get pretty angry. Nuclear war seems both so inevitable and so terrible that they can't believe that their parents' generation would allow it to exist. They vow they won't leave the world in the same mess for their children."

"Did Hilmar say that?"

"Probably. Most of the kids say something like that. You ought to come in some year when it's going on."

I thanked Ben and returned to my classes. Later in the day, I found a paper of Hilmar's which Ben had left in my box. It read: "I think it sucks that nuclear bombs can destroy us all. I don't think they should have been invented. A lot of the kids have been saying that, if the Bomb is dropped, they hope they are one of the first to go. That it wouldn't be good to survive when all your friends and your family is dead. I think they are wrong. And irresponsible. The human race has to continue. That's a basic law of nature. Even if I was the only one left I would need to find a way to survive."

That evening I went back to "Adam Two" with renewed interest. Since I'd already figured that Hilmar had built his fictions on things he really knew, I had a hunch that maybe the story would tell me where to find him.

"Adam Two" meticulously described the location and construction of the survivor's shelter and, as I predicted, the details added up: the fictional town was our own Bowdoinham, a quiet farm village which had once loaded the holds of clipper ships with ice that sailed as far as China; the shelter itself was located into the side of a hill near a big clearing that used to be a town called "Grassville." In the story, that is. Locals called the place "Egypt," a prime deer hunting spot that also happened to lie on one of my favorite cross-country ski routes. I figured if I wandered a wide enough bunch of circles north of the clearing I might find Hilmar, though I was sure if he'd put himself there he'd be fairly well hidden.

Why I decided to go it alone is beyond me. Glory, I guess. I figured I'd solved the puzzle and deserved the glory of it, or else maybe I wasn't so sure and didn't want to drag another body on a fool's errand. I had no particular plan of what to do if I did find Hilmar, though I suppose I'd seen enough movies to know that all you really need to do is to talk reason into a megaphone and eventually your man will come out with his hands up. I think that was the best my imagination could come up with that Saturday morning when I set off.

I parked on the road, about half a mile down from a sheep farm which might have been the one Hilmar described in his story. The path to Egypt was less than a mile through muddy woods, which had been recently cut for firewood, the trail now a wide and battered skidder road. I headed north when I hit the open field, squinting my way into the thickets of bush, poplar, and stripe maple that had grown over what, not long ago, had been thriving farmland. I flushed a partridge, and the beat of its wings sounded like my own heart jumping out of its cage. I peered at every hillock and pile of leaves, looking for clues. One particular rise looked likely to me and I began to circle it, hoping for some sort of entrance. A patch of leaves and boughs looking too neat to have just happened here attracted me, but as I headed toward it I found myself stumbling, and then down.

Hilmar had dug a pit, a sort of moat, then chickenwired it and covered it back up with a couple inches of rotten leaves. It was an effective trap, if you weren't wary of it, and it effectively trapped me.

I saw the end of Hilmar's rifle before I saw his face.

"Don't shoot, don't shoot," I hollered.

"Mr. Atherton," Hilmar spoke. "Jeesum."

The pit was about six feet deep and six across, easy enough to scramble out of if there wasn't a rifle in my face maybe, but I felt trapped. Again, I asked him not to shoot.

"You scared or something?"

"Shitless," I told Hilmar, "scared shitless. What are you going to do to me?"

"You looking for me or taking a Sunday stroll?"

"Looking, Hilmar. A lot of people have been worried about you."

"How'd you find me?"

"You told me how to get here."

"I didn't tell nobody. Nobody knows about this place."

"In your story. You must have been making this place the same time you were making your story."

"Jesus," he said, "takes an English teacher to believe something you read's real." He reached his enormous hand down to me and yanked me out of the pit. "Well, it's better than the story," he said, leading me through a woven reed door that had been camouflaged with leaves and fir boughs. "I can do a whole lot better than I can write. It's wicked comfortable in here."

Comfortable I wouldn't have called it, but surely impressive. We crawled on our hands and knees through a short entryway, which then opened into a larger room that was kerosene lit. Hilmar had fashioned a chimney which vented the cave and let in some light, by stacking chimney tiles and taping the seams with duct tape. One corner was piled with canned foods; another had an old



Photo: Shan Cotta Maine Photographic Workshop

horsehair mattress and a sleeping bag. Around the perimeter of the room was a ditch, maybe three inches deep, which helped keep the floor dry.

"Did you find this or make it?" I asked him. "It's quite a place."

"A little of both. The basic hollow was there for me. It's rock. Pretty solid. I stove it in from the top for the chimney. Carried the blocks in one by one. Some I stole, some I paid for out of my own money. Carried the food in, a sackful of cans at a time. Some I stole, some I paid for out of my own money." He put his hand up before I could say anything. "Now I don't want no speech about taking what's not mine," he said firmly. "I know it ain't right, but in surviving anything's fair."

"Surviving?"

"Just what I said. Everything I need to stay alive you see right here in front of you."

"What are you rehearsing for?"

"Huh?"

"What are you practicing? What's going to happen?"

"I'm not practicing nothing. This is it."

"Hilmar, start all over. I don't understand what you mean."

Hilmar sighed and sat on the edge of his bed. "Now you tell me," he said with great patience, "when the bomb's gonna drop."

"The bomb? I don't know. I don't think today, Hilmar."

"Why not today?"

"Well, I don't think it would come without warning. I mean, nothing's happening in the world that serious that someone might drop the bomb."

"Warn somebody and he gets you first. Remember that clock you drew us on the board?"

"Clock?"

"Yes." Hilmar scratched a circle on the floor of his cave. "You said some kind of scientists had a magazine with a picture of a clock on it. At midnight it meant the bomb was going to go off. Now you tell me. What would you do if everything was going to explode at twelve midnight and you saw it was five of? What would you do?"

"I guess, Hilmar, I'd jump on the minute hand of that clock and hang on. And ask someone to hang onto his ankles, until we weighed so much we dragged the clock backwards so it wasn't five of anymore."

"I don't follow," said Hilmar, and he snorted. "Sounds like English class talk to me."

"What I mean is, the clock is at five of because people are crazy enough in this world to build bombs and then threaten to use them. Hanging onto the clock means getting people together to stop being crazy, to listen to reason."

"You ever try that?"

"I base my life on it."

"Does it work?"

I didn't answer that one right away.

"Does it work?" he repeated.

"I've got to believe it does."

"Well, that's good. That's very good. Cause we certainly need people in the world who believe the things they read in books, who believe it when they tell us on Sunday that the lion shall lay down with the lamb. But not me. I've been to town meeting in this town and listened to people argue for three hours over whether we need a xerox machine in the town office. Think the whole world's gonna agree to love everybody and put our weapons down? I have a neighbor who everytime a baseball or a football lands on his property he keeps it and calls up the county sheriff to complain about the kids. I have an aunt my father hasn't spoken to for twenty years because of what she said when my father came home from the army with a Japanese wife. You know what I do when it's five of twelve? You want to know what I do? I get the hell out, that's what. I leave everybody jabbering about the xerox machine, walk out the back door, and figure out how to take care of me."

It was a fine speech, more words than I guessed Hilmar had spoken in a lifetime, and it left me breathless. I didn't know what to say next, so I just asked Hilmar about the arrangements for his shelter, how he got water, what preparations he'd made for winter, how he'd keep himself hidden in hunting season when these woods were much busier. Hilmar continued his tour, showing me the spring that was his chief supply of water, and which ran fast enough that it didn't freeze except for the coldest week or two in February. We visited a small trout brook and the sites of half a dozen or so string traps, one of which had a live rabbit snared in it. The rabbit froze as we approached it, all its frantic energy concentrated in a wild dilating of the nostrils. Hilmar squeezed it tightly by the neck and with a stout maple branch whacked it solidly on the head. The rabbit quivered, its legs stretching stiffly, then died.

"Wanna try my rabbit stew?" Hilmar asked. He loosened the cord from around the rabbit's neck and reset the trap.

"Sure," I told him. I was impressed. I was used to a kid who seemed too big for the desk I sat him in, who played the dumb farmer willingly in class, who spoke plainly and briefly, only when he had to. Here he was relaxed, at home, in command. I told him so.

"I guess this is where I belong," he said, peeling back the rabbit skin and pulling off the meat like he was turning the sleeve of his jacket inside out. "This is what

I know."

"Yes," I agreed. "How long did it take you to fix up this place?"

"Depends on what you mean. The cave itself I've known about since I was maybe thirteen. Fixed it up back then with some of this furniture you see. Don't know why I never told nobody, but I just didn't. Since maybe this fall I've been fixing it to be my shelter."

"It looks like a lot of work went into it. How long you figure you could stay here?"

"Long as I like. Long as you can stay in your house over in the east village. Longer, if the war comes."

I watched Hilmar get a fire going. He put some water to boil in a leather sack, and explained that as long as it had water in it, it couldn't heat past 220 degrees, so it wouldn't burn up. He put the whole rabbit in the water, along with some dried wild herb he had collected and some salt.

"My mom would've made this with carrots and potatoes," he said. "I suppose next thing to work on is making a garden that won't be found."

By the time we were through eating it was close to dark. I realized that Hilmar had probably been as hungry for company as he was for rabbit stew. Now I was ready to leave.

"One more problem to solve, Hilmar," I said rising.

"What's that?"

"Me. I'm going to leave now, and, much as I hate to, I'm going to have to tell your father how to find you."

Hilmar's brow tightened and his jaw fell. He looked at me hard, reaching out to his side with a blind hand for the rifle.

"Rifle's over in the corner," I told him, "where you put it when you invited me in." I got to it before he did, inspected it a moment, then handed it to him. Haven't the slightest idea how to use one of these things."

Hilmar took the rifle and held it at his side. He didn't point it at me or anything.

"You see, Hilmar," I explained. "I respect what you've done here, I really do. But there's a whole bunch of people just a couple miles from here who are worried sick about you. I just can't sit on a piece of information like this."

"What are you going to do?"

"No," I said, "what are you going to do? You're the one with the gun. You're the one with a year's worth of work here to protect. You going to shoot me so I won't tell?"

Hilmar stared.

"Because if you shoot me," I continued, "there'll be others to shoot. Lots of graves to dig in the woods, you know what I mean? And I'll tell you something, Hilmar. There isn't a war on now, so you can't just go popping off intruders in the interests of your survival."

"Who said I would shoot you?"

Hilmar propped up his rifle in the corner and squatted by the fire. He put a new log on and poked at it, staring into the coals. A couple of minutes passed in silence.

"Good-bye, Mr. Atherton," he said, choking back tears of confusion. "Why don't you go now? Why don't you beat it the hell out of here and go tell everybody in Christ's creation how to find me. Go on."

I squatted next to him and found myself a stick to poke the fire. "Tell you what," I said finally. "I'll make you a deal."

Hilmar said nothing.

"You've put a lot of work into this shelter, Hilmar. As far as I see it, that's what's most at stake — keeping it. I'll give you two days. You do what you want. Sit here and watch the fire glow, take off for deeper woods, or busy yourself hiding this place so no one who's never been here before can find it. In two days I expect to see you in school. If you're there, fine. You can tell everybody you ran off to Paris, France, for all I care. I won't say a word. But if you're not, I'm coming back here with a bunch of people to get you."

Hilmar poked at the fire. I could tell he was thinking it over.

"Got it Hilmar?" I said, and left.

That was Saturday. Monday at school I was in the hallway at 7:30 before homeroom, instead of, as usual, pushing papers at my desk and trying to figure out what to say to the twenty-five kids who were about to engage me in a staring contest. Being in the halls between classes, always intimidates me, and I worry that I'll feel bound to do something unpleasant, like break up a fight or pull apart a pair of shamelessly entangled lovers. But I was after Hilmar, searching over the heads of the moving crowd for his home-cut dark hair and his bulkiness. Finally I spotted him, leaning against the wall on the stairs so that he stood a head taller than the gathering of other farm kids whose attention he obviously commanded. I edged closer.

"And did you get to the Combat Zone?" I heard one of the boys ask, creating a

Practice Makes Perfect

*Groundhogs, skunks, are heaped on the roadside
Frost's death mask, a white wax,
melts on the last leaves.
Houses wall in heat,
padded by straw and plastic.
This cold: its signature
silence, voices smothered.
Is it any wonder I want to die?
The sun has given up too:
no point in mourning.
It is not death really,
it is living with less to hide.
No flowers delirious with color.
It is life without rhetoric:
stark surprise in leftovers.
The sky is veined with twigs,
flushed with storms
that grip the ground.
It is life when nothing is left.
A stuffed man, a sheet hung by a rope.
I learn to defy all signs.
To take a full breath.*

Bruce P. Spang
Readfield

October

*Even the evergreens are turning this
year, rusting on the leading edge of wind.
The pond that flooded in April is a
swamp now, rotting black stumps and floating what
debris spins out from the blue spruce and pine.
Yesterday the season rattled with the
fall of beech leaves through sunset, expected
where we are this year of time. But not this
decay of trees that gathered snow last March
on ample arms in still mornings before the
rise of wind fingered flurries to the ice.
This death of constant green touches the edge
of sleepy eyes with semaphores of earth's
falling back once more to its molten core.*

H. R. Coursen
Brunswick
teaches at Bowdoin

What

*When the moment comes
you'll say what.*

*What will fill the space
until it bursts
leaving a wet balloon.*

*You'll say what again.
This time the word
fizzles like a match.*

*As the score stands
you have one what left
and no men anywhere.*

*You could save it for a rainy day
but those are so often
it might be tomorrow.*

Martha Henry
North Windham

flurry of laughter and obscene comments.

"Jeezum," said Hilmar, "the Combat Zone? You shoulda seen them whores. One of them — she had a green stripe down the middle of her hair, I swear it, and her fingernails and lips were painted black — she pretty near dragged me inside with her. I was sweatin' to break out of her grip."

The other boys hooted.

"Sure."

"I bet ya pulled away from her real hard, Hilmar."

"I bet it turned out it was a guy. One of them Boston quee-ars."

I neared the group to join the bantering, but as soon as I spoke, all faces turned towards me stonily, a teacher in their midst.

"Don't believe a word of him, fellows," I said with a smile. "A country hick like Hilmar? I bet he wasn't in the Big City for fifteen minutes before he lost every cent in his wallet to some hustler or pickpocket, and spent the rest of his week eating stale doughnuts at the back of some church. What do you say, Hilmar?"

The boys teased him, agreeing in their raucous comments that he probably had been taken for a ride. Hilmar blushed a deep red and I caught his eye just once, before I started up the stairs to my first class of the week.

Jeff Fischer
Bowdoinham
*is a free-lance writer and
part-time grade school teacher*

It Helps Sometimes to Remember Galileo

from Galileo Series

(1)

*It helps sometimes to remember Galileo,
the way his truth
seemed to shake the universe.*

*Nothing changed
except awareness.*

*Even now
like some medieval peasant
I watch the sun
rise in the east
and set in the west
staining the sky
with the blood of Gods.*

*And so it is
while my private revelations
seem to shake foundations,
still the tomatoes continue to ripen,
the grapes turn purple on the vine,
rains come and go,*

*nothing has changed
except awareness.*

(4)

*They brought the news of Galileo's heresy
into his ninth-form math class.
He glanced at the communique absentmindedly,
thinking it routine schedule changes,
realigned his notes,
was ready to begin again,
when he understood,
and he, the most conscientious of teachers,
fled from the room
to stand alone in the hall
in the pink stickiness of his humiliation.*

*He knew now how long
he'd hid that knowledge from himself.
He remembered clues
that seeped through the self-deceit.*

*"I could have let just myself know
I could have let myself know."*

*Sooty gargoyles, half hidden in shadow,
watch, a silent inquisition.
The priest shivers
as fear seeps through humiliation
the way the cold
of the empty hall
seeps through the coarse brown robe.*

*He sags into the window seat,
closes his eyes,
knows he can slide back
into not knowing.*

*He is up,
pacing the hall,
pounding his fist
on the carved oak table*

*Already formulas
begin to float
half-formed into his mind.
He can use that knowledge.*

*He remembers again
nothing has changed.
He can walk back
into the room as before.
The thought is like satin
against his cheek.
He longs to stop his pacing
and lean against the satin,
that satin, he remembers,
like the pillow in rich men's coffins.*

*Meanwhile the earth
relentlessly
moves around the sun*

**Ruth W. Evans
Portland**

does garden design & runs a B&B



Photo by Kate Carter

Lucia's Book

"RODERICK, YOU PILL-PILL. IT'S ON THE SHELF BELOW THE MIRROR."

It's four in the morning. June. Just getting light. Lucia is in the upstairs bathroom, getting ready. They're flying to Paris at seven.

She is a tall, athletic-looking woman of about 50 with high hips and large feet, wearing a bra and a wristwatch. She yanks out the electric toothbrush and reaches for the mouthwash.

Downstairs, razor in hand, bald Roderick, formerly professor of Classics at Eureka (the famous women's college), is staring hopelessly in the mirror at his face, half-shaven, half in lather. Recently he had a little nervous breakdown and had to resign. The doctor says it's important that he not miss his morning pill.

Hearing Lucia calling down the hot-air duct, Roderick slowly raises his hand to the shelf, but he catches sight of himself again and resumes gazing, lost in gloom and amazement.

He had forgotten his pill.

Ordinarily Lucia would guess.

When he first came home from the hospital it was feared he might try to harm himself. Lucia had to monitor him constantly. She's become quite an expert on Roderick's noises.

But Lucia is gargling when she should be listening for him to run the tap and fill a glass. She gargles for a full minute, tilting her head back, holding her hand out like a singer holding a note, clowning. She's rather excited this morning.

She spits, takes another pull on the mouthwash, swallows. "Aaah." Slapping her belly, she grabs a pair of hairbrushes and starts brushing her hair. She stops, cocking an ear to the register.

Silence.

Staring at himself again, she concludes. He's been doing this since she took him to have his three-month-old beard removed last week. Having deep thoughts. The right side of his face is the left of his reflection. And vice versa. And other important matters, doubtless.

"YOOHOO, RODERICK! WHAT ARE YOU DOING DOWN THERE?" she sings into the register.

Roderick answers by flushing the toilet. This annoys her. It gets tiresome. If he can't have the common courtesy to . . . Bah, now he's got her playing his game.

"R-R-RODERICK!" she bawls, tapping her big foot. She plucks a few hairs out of the gap between her eyebrows. Hairs, hairs, she has a million hairs. After a minute she hears him rinsing his razor. Good, he's getting on with it.

She goes into the bedroom and comes back five minutes later in a lightweight grey suit and a frilly off-white moiré blouse and high heels.

"I LAID YOUR CLOTHES OUT FOR YOU IN THE STUDY."

She starts applying make-up. First she likes to lay down a good foundation.

She hears the toilet seat rattle downstairs. On the potty again. Lord Roderick contemplating the void. She looks at her watch. 4:30. Give him five minutes.

This potty-sitting started last winter when he completed his new book on Parmenides' cosmogony, an important and even perhaps (he dared hope) major work he'd been drudging away on for ten years. He had a firm verbal agreement to publish it from the director of the Eureka College Press. Then suddenly last year, this person, who happened to be a man, died and his place was taken by a committee of professors from the Women Studies Department.

At first Roderick was not alarmed. After all, Eureka, or Urethra as Roderick calls it, is number one in the nation in Women's Studies. What Roderick calls Female Complaints. A rapidly growing field. Young women seeking knowledge, hairy-legged autodidacts from all over the world come to Eureka for Women's Studies. Women's Studies supports Eureka. So it was fitting the new directors should be from Women's Studies.

They refused to honor their predecessor's commitment. They claimed they'd never heard of it. We don't keep records of verbal agreements. As for Parmenides, who reads Parmenides? Girls these days don't care to spend years learning dead sexist languages. The purpose of Eureka College Press is to produce books that *women* will read.

Poor Roderick. It was most unfair. Nor was any other publisher even slightly interested in the book.

Roderick began retreating to the toilet, having quiet time, brooding. At first just Saturday afternoon, then Sunday too, at the end he spent whole weekends sitting there hermit-like, drinking and reading Westerns, locking the door and not answering. Flushing the toilet at her.

Lucia looks at her watch. Five minutes.

"BOO, GOOSE!" she yells into the register. "GET MOVING!"

Flush goes the toilet. She hears him shuffle off into the study.

She's finished the foundation. Now comes the creative part, the blusher and the eye-shadow.

One Monday morning in March he didn't come out. She spent the day calling, cooing to him through the door. She'd like to forget that day. On Tuesday she called a hospital, an ambulance came, men in white coats opened the door and took him away. Stinking drunk.

They dried him out, got him stabilized and sent him home at the end of a month. However, it was thought unwise for him to return to work.

Good riddance, Lucia thinks. She'd been trying to get him to quit ever since Papa finally died three years ago, but would he give up his silly little job and do what *she* wanted, now that she had the money? No. He wanted to preserve his piddling little independence. Also, he hates traveling.

So this little breakdown of his has been a blessing in disguise. She sold the house, their things are going into storage, she took him for a shave, and now she's going to see the world.

As far as she can see, they're never coming back. Remove him from past associations, the doctor said. Roderick can visit the world's Johns, if such is his desire. That could take a long time.

She looks at her watch.

"RODERICK, COME HERE."

Silence. He's not coming. Wishes to be excused. Goddammit, she hates to yell, it hurts her ears, but how could she have raised four children if she allowed them to dawdle in the morning? Life must go on.

"RODERICK!"

After he came home from the hospital, she put her foot down. She told him she wasn't going to be his nurse-maid unless she had complete cooperation. When she called he was to come. Otherwise he was going to a place where they have persons called orderlies who are paid to wrestle. Did he understand her?

A most effective threat — almost too effective. He believed her. Poor Roderick. However, the weapon of fear, when it has been successful once, is so convenient. Other rules were soon laid down in similar fashion.

1. There was to be no booze. Period.
2. No locking the bathroom door.
3. No books or TV in the bathroom (He took the TV in sometimes.)

This last rule was a sound tactic, in theory. Obviously, in practice it's had limited success. Why Roderick's spending time thus should annoy her Lucia doesn't know, but it does. It's rude! It's lacking in respect! She'll be talking to him sometimes, in the middle of a sentence he'll go into the toilet.

"RODERICK, NOW!" Lucia stamps her big foot, furious.

Finally she hears him coming.

As he enters the bathroom she glares at him, this tall, slow-moving baldy with impervious eyes and wads of cotton wool in his ears, who is her husband — Great Roderick, the preeminent Parmenides scholar of his generation. Indeed of all time, for all Lucia knows. She's chosen his seersucker suit for him today. As a concession she's letting him wear cowboy boots. His tie hangs about his neck, untied.

Poor Roderick. Her temper subsides abruptly.

"Be with you in a minute," she says benevolently. She is putting mascara on. This demands total concentration. Next, lipstick. Roderick is good at waiting. She leers at herself critically in the mirror, then glancing flirtatiously at Roderick, leans forward.

"You a rich woman, Lucia," she says. "You beautiful." She kisses her reflection. "And you sexy."

Roderick gazes woodenly at these antics. *Stupido*. She grabs her camera off the counter, fits a flashcube on and shoots Roderick looking at her in the mirror over her shoulder.

"*Voilà*," she says, twirling around. "How do I look?"

"How? How?" he mutters woefully. "Like an Indian chief. One who has successfully made the transition to civilization, but has chosen to dress as a woman, women's clothing being more satisfying to his sense of display." He shows his teeth. "Chief Bigfoot."

Lucia guffaws. "That's the spirit." A flash of the old Rod, not bad. She leers at herself in the mirror. "I look a little fierce this morning?"

Indeed she does with her beak of a nose, wide arrogant mouth, large theatrical black eyes, and her long black hair held back by a headband.

It's the eye-shadow, she decides, simpering. She's still beautiful. Big and fierce and beautiful. She's a lovely lady.

"*Eh, bien*," she says, beaming. "Let's have a look at you."

The shirt is a little sloppy. She tucks it in evenly all round and then ties his tie. "So, how's my handsome husband this morning?"

He doesn't respond, staring at the floor.

"Not talking, *mon chou*?" Taking his jaw between her thumb and forefinger, she peers into his face with exaggerated sympathy and concern. "Did Wodwick have a bad night? Can Wodwick tell Lucia?"

"I had my bad dream again. I feel like a D.P.," he croaks miserably.

"Oh, Wodwick, Wodwick, what are we going to do with you?"

Playfully, she pats blusher on his cheeks and kisses him.

"Okay, you can take my other bag down to the door, *s'il-vous plaît*."

He does so.

God knows what goes on inside his head these days. Lucia no longer tries to

understand. There are too many other things in the world to think about. Suffice it to say he's having a bad day.

She hears him go into the study downstairs, closing the door. No doubt rummaging around in the boxes of his stuff packed for storage. She told him she didn't want him doing that any more. Bah. Six boxes. Some mementoes and pictures, his chess trophies, clothes. Six boxes! His whole life in six boxes! Lucia has more than 100. Men are such paltry creatures.

She sweeps her stuff off the sink counter into a capacious canvas camera-bag, toothbrush, razor, hairbrushes, make-up gear all higgledy-piggledy, hangs her camera round her neck, and goes downstairs. Before she forgets she must collect his shaving gear.

In her haste she doesn't notice the pill on the shelf where she put it the night before.

She goes into the kitchen and gets the food she prepared last night so they won't have to eat the airplane food. She turns off the air-conditioning, goes around checking doors and windows. At 5:05 she hears a car pull into the driveway. She goes into the study. Roderick is sitting with his face in his hands.

"The taxi's here."

The taxi-driver is a fat, black woman in slacks and a man's white shirt with the tails hanging out. She is chewing gum.

"Hey, how you doin'?" Name is Edwina," she says without looking at Roderick, grabbing his hand, quickly releasing it and taking the bags. Open-mouthed, he lifts his hand and looks at the palm. *Cretino*.

Lucia wishes she had a picture of that. You have to be alert all the time. It's so easy to let good shots go by.

They're off. The sun is rising over suburbia, shining between treetops and roofs. Ta-ta-ta! A new beginning.

Recently she began taking pictures of Roderick. He looks so ludicrous walking around out there in the real world. She hasn't told anyone but her friend Dolly, but she's thinking of making a book of them, with amusing subtitles. *Roderick*, the book will be called.

Mentally she flips through her snapshots. She has some beauts. There's a real cute one of Roderick at his retirement banquet looking dismal, surrounded by women who, collectively, look like the Praesidium of the USSR in drag. **RODERICK ABOUT TO BITE.**

A vacant-faced Roderick with his finger in the air and his mouth open, playing checkers with his five-year-old grandson Nino. "YOU KNOW HOW MANY OF THE 485 CURRENT CHESS GRAND MASTERS ARE WOMEN? NOT ONE."

A wonderful low-angled shot of Roderick staring at himself shaving the day after she took him to the barbers. It has an eerie quality. **RODERICK MEETS AN HISTORICAL PERSONAGE.**

Also the one she took in the bathroom this morning. **IF ONLY WE DIDN'T NEED THEM FOR SEX** maybe.

Cackling, she glances sideways at Roderick. Oh-oh, Roderick is not amused.

She leers into her compact, snaps it shut and turns her big, beautiful, rather haggard eyes on Roderick, trying to make them soft. She's high as a kite.

Time for Roderick's therapy.

"Roderick, you dear man, you know I do love you, don't you?" Roderick's face takes on an expression even more doleful. One of these days she'll have to stop teasing him. But not today. "You needn't look so tragic. This trip is for your own good too. We have to take care of you." She leers tenderly. "You're going to love those *pissoirs*."

He heaves a woeful sigh.

"You know, *mon ami*, if you kept a more cheerful expression on your face,



Photo by Elliott Healy

you'd look better. And *feel*."

She reaches over and pulls his cheeks up with her thumb and forefinger. Roderick shudders.

"You're like a mortician, adjusting my face," he croaks. "And what do I have to be cheerful about?"

"You hear that?" Lucia says, addressing an invisible multitude. "Lord Roderick greets the day. 'What do I have to be cheerful about?' It's pathetic. For the love of God, Roderick, you could have anything you want, if you'd stop feeling sorry for yourself!"

Roderick is cringing in the corner, staring at her in horror. Lucia discovers that unconsciously she has raised her fists at him. She lowers her voice. "I'm sorry to nag. I get so frustrated sometimes, seeing you like this. Relax. I love you even though you're sick."

He closes his eyes and groans. He seems to be in pain. What else is new?

The taxi-driver is studying Roderick in the mirror. Lucia clears her throat and glares, and the woman returns her glance to the road.

After a while Roderick opens his eyes. He notices a copy of *The Intentional Liar* on the rear window shelf. He takes it down and flips through it. Suddenly he's holding it in her face.

"Read that."

Lucia sees a headline: "WIFE KILLS HUSBAND. SAYS HE RAPED HER."

"I don't want to know about it." She pushes the magazine away. "And put that magazine back! I won't have you reading that magazine. Here, eat this." She gives him a Mars bar.

Coldly, feigning boredom, she closes her eyes, thinks pleasant thoughts, and falls asleep. She wakes when the cab stops at the airport. Roderick is muttering something about terminal departures, she doesn't hear it all.

"You take care of him," the taxi-driver says contemptuously after Lucia pays her, not overtipping.

Ignoring her, Lucia sets up the collapsible cart they brought along. Roderick loads.

They go through the pneumatic doors and Lucia discovers the cabby has let them off at the wrong terminal, damn her to hell. It's the next one down they want.

She clacks along crossly in her high heels through the ticket lobby into the covered walkway connecting the terminals. It's a long way and not air-conditioned. Roderick is pulling the cart, huffing and puffing. He keeps lagging. She pulls him by the wrist. Twice he stumbles when the cart catches his heel. The second time, he lurches into her, and her elbow swings into his gut, knocking his breath out.

In the next terminal, Lucia notices that people are staring at them.

"Ma, that man's crying. Why is he crying?" a little boy yells.

Lucia glances round, stops. Tears are streaming down Roderick's face.

"Hell's bells. I should have guessed. You forgot your pill. Roderick, you bad boy," she says not unkindly. She is a little annoyed, but it is her fault, really. She should have checked up on him.

She leads him to a bubbler 20 yards in front of them, pulling the cart herself. She takes a collapsible cup from her camera bag and a bottle of pills, taps one out, hesitates, decides on two, fills the cup. Rigidly, Roderick swallows the pills, staring at her in terror.

"You're going to get rid of me," he croaks. "You are, aren't you?"

Lucia giggles. She knows she shouldn't, but it's too ridiculous, he's crazy as a coot.

"No, no, no."

"You swear?" he asks piteously.

She crosses her heart. "Till death do us part."

He doesn't like the sound of this. To hell with him. She can't be bothered to refute his idiotic allegations. She wipes his tears with a tissue and puts his dark glasses on him.

"I'm sorry I hit you. It was an accident." She hugs him. "Come on now."

They're off again, Roderick pulling. Her annoyance is past. Nothing can dampen her spirits today. She feels wonderful, almost feverish, as always at the beginning of a trip.

The buzzer sounds as Roderick passes through the security station at the entrance to the gates. Going through his pockets, she finds one of his chess trophies, a small replica of Rodin's *The Thinker*. He must have sneaked it from a box in his study.

"I'll put that in my bag," she says, trying to take it from him. He puts it behind his back and she desists. Let him have his toy.

People are still staring at them, but Lucia is not self-conscious, being of Italian heritage. She takes it for admiration. They can whistle for all she cares. She glances at her reflection in the windows. There's nothing so exhilarating as to be a big beautiful woman all dolled up serenely striding through an airport with her head high and her hips swinging and her husband in tow and heads turning. Even if the husband is a zombie.

That happens.

C'est la guerre.

Noblesse oblige.

We being the tougher breed and all that.

Burdens we all have to bear.

Besides, he's still good at carrying things. Joke. Cruel. Lucia laughs. But it is good for him to have something to do.

They reach their gate. Roderick is still weeping. Lucia hands over the tickets to one of the agents. He glances at Roderick and immediately looks again, professionally.

"Are you going to be all right, sir?"

"He'll be all right," Lucia answers. "He's harmless. He forgot his pill this morning."

The agent takes their bags, except the carry-on, and returns the tickets.

Lucia turns to Roderick. "Why don't you go potty. You've had a difficult time this morning. I'm proud of you. But I want you back in 30 minutes, at 6:30. Enjoy yourself."

Fondly, she watches him shuffle off to the Men's room down the hall on the other side from the waiting area. Poor bald Roderick, God bless him! He deserves a little treat.

She goes back into the waiting area and sits down. Rapidly reorganizing her camera bag, she then takes out her knitting. She feels happy. Proud. She has a real good feeling about herself these days. This so-called illness of Roderick's has shown her her true strength. She is constantly surprised at her ability to grow and change. Sometimes she thinks her life is entering a whole new phase, and she doesn't mean menopause. God didn't put us on earth to feel sorry for ourselves, dammit! Life is too short. She intends to live it to the full.

6:30 comes and goes. Roderick doesn't return. When boarding in five minutes is announced, Lucia goes to the door of the Men's room.

"Roderick," she calls in a singsong, opening it a crack. No answer. She stamps. "Roderick, you come out this instant!" No answer. She hears a toilet flushing continuously. She is gripped by a terrible fear. WHAT HAS HE DONE?

Trying to remain calm, she hurries to the counter. Halfway there she slips and sprawls on the floor. She recovers herself and continues running.

"My husband is in the Men's room," she says breathlessly to one of the agents. "He doesn't come out. I wonder if you could reconnoitre for me."

The agent rolls his eyes around to his partner, then shrugs and follows Lucia. Biting her lips, she waits outside while he goes in. A moment later he comes out.

"The cowboy boots? Go on in. It's all yours."

She goes in and looks under the doors of the stalls. Roderick is in the fourth. She grabs the top of the door and jumps, pulling and then quickly pushing until her arms are up straight, like a gymnast's on the bar.

Roderick is sitting with his pants down, holding his trophy, sound asleep. His head has fallen back against the flush button. The water roars monotonously. On his face is an expression of vacancy.

Lucia feels a wave of tenderness. He looks so innocent. Twisting sideways, she fits a flashcube on her camera and snaps him, chuckling. She could title it *A HUMANIST. Or THE FREE WORLD.*

Bending from the waist, she reaches down inside the door and lifts the latch, then jumps back and enters the stall.

So that's what two pills does to him. Worth remembering.

She drops the trophy in her camera bag. She pats his cheek gently. He continues sleeping. She slaps him across the face quite hard four times.

"We have to board."

"Waah!"

He puts his arms around her, pressing his cheek against her belly. She lets him hold her for a minute. Then she gently pulls him to his feet, pulls his pants up, tucks him in, buttons him, zips him. She's practically ambidextrous.

"Lucia, I must say, you're an amazing woman," she says to herself, winching his belt in a couple of notches.

He looks better now, she thinks happily as she walks him out to the waiting area. More color in his cheeks. A little groggy, but quite steady on his feet. Definitely ambulatory. Though she does have to carry the bag on herself.

As the plane rolls down the runway, she playfully reaches over and pulls the corners of his mouth up.

"Smile, Roderick. Smile."

Paul Kleene
near Camden
voted for ERA



Photo by Kate Carter

For Julie, My Daughter

Today, in this brown Maine December, I thought of Karl, my father's friend (dead last year, at 90 — "I'll live 'til I die," he said the last time I saw him, "and I guess that's long enough") and the grapefruit tree that grew in his front yard, in California, 20 years ago, and I saw again the

iron green leaves, the fat yellow globes, cool in my hands, and the grey bucket, where I put them, one by one.

Some- day, when I am dead, I want you to hold this poem, for a moment, cool in your woman's hands.

**Burton Hatlen
Orono**
teaches at UMO

Time Lapse Both Ways

For Emma, on her Tenth Birthday

*Some day you'll fill
heart's garden—
long rows
neat or ragged, many-colored
or black at dawn. . . . If they flourish
it's for darkness before light, it's for roots'
gangling patience — forcing you
into yourself, a slow
explosion of love, tissue, perennial
plotting.*

*My daughter, my true
spring-ground of clay, toads
and wan weeds, bittersweet
fatherly sowing—*

*time then
for you to learn how ten
reaches back to one
or none, how earth and night
breed light.*

**David Walker
Freedom**
teaches part-time at USM

Interview

Writing for me is not an art nor a craft. It's a runaway beast that I'm on the back of. No saddle. I've just got him by the hair of his hump. And he charges through woods and weeds...and branches beat me...and he makes ugly noises and I NEVER know WHERE I am. Pain and blindness are involved...and mystery.

Thus, Carolyn Chute explains her writing process — and in her description we hear the same vivid imagery, feel the same unbridled energy, that we find in her first novel, *The Beans of Egypt, Maine*.

By now much has been written about this Maine writer — her husband Michael, her daughter and grandson, the poverty they all have endured. When I met with her at her Gorham home in October, her book was not yet published. She had not yet received her celebrity status. She was receiving frequent letters from her publisher finalizing details about distribution. But she and Michael were more excited about the possibility of buying sixty acres way up north in Saint Francis, where they could farm and live undisturbed. She seemed to have little concern for the publicity her book was bound to generate in November.

Before our meeting we had exchanged several letters. She shared her uncorrected proofs for me to read before our interview. Yet even these introductions did not prepare me for this engaging, unassuming woman. Her warmth and honesty were disarming, her unpretentiousness, captivating. Moments after our greetings, she and Michael and I were discussing the politics of poverty; in no time I realized how legitimate were the roots of her story, how raw were the sources for her characters.

After a variety of unsatisfying jobs, Carolyn decided a couple of years ago that she must write all the time if she wanted to make any money at it. (She and Michael had no money.) She literally was prompted by hunger to write the novel. Now she describes that time as a period of involuntary research: "the frustration and the rage of poverty were real. My dreams were filled with the unfairness of it." But somehow she was able to transpose those nightmares into a powerful story with characters whose rage resembled hers.

And it was those characters I was most curious about, the folks she claims "are not anybody Reagan would shake hands with, let alone provide for in any way. But they're the only people I really know much about; I don't really know much about the upper class."

I questioned her about how she could write male characters so convincingly. She revealed a personal discovery:

The best time I can work on men characters is two days before ovulation. I become violent — I don't mean crazy violent — I mean more aggressive, very passionate, very interested in men, and I feel like I am noticing every little thing they do — how they operate — even if they're not real but in my mind. I can almost see them...they're very vivid to me during that time. And I also have so much energy during that time — my best writing time, especially for writing about men, violent scenes, or anything to do with men. And I don't mean to say I get violent because I'm not at all. If anything, I'm just really tuned in. I noticed it because I write eight to ten hours every day except when things come up. And since I write so much I was trying to figure out certain patterns. Boy, I tell you, this Rubie guy. I would drag that part of the manuscript out every time and work on that and I thought, why am I doing this? I figured it out that it was that time of the month.

Her characters have a lot of her frustration. But they are not imitations of actual people she has known. Rather they are representations of the fury she has felt. They are almost surrealistic. She knows her characters, controls them completely, then loves them, even the mean ones, because "until they breathe, they just sit and groan" waiting for her.

She is interested in psychology. "I write more from emotions than from conceptualization. Like this." She scrunches up and holds her cheek with her left hand. "Not this." She gazes dreamily up at the ceiling. Clearly, she writes from the inside out but asserts,

It's a lot of work. It isn't like I sit down and write it out. I have to go over it and over it. I revise hundreds of times — I revise so much that what's left can only be what is truly me.

For over three years Carolyn had been trying to work these particular characters into short stories, but that wasn't working out so she set them aside. By the time the ideas developed into a novel, the characters were people she'd been working with for a long time, their story written by hand into about 200 pages of a notebook, which, she admits, was a child-like version of the final story with different stress on different characters.

Our morning drew to a close. I asked Carolyn how she thought her book would be received, wondering whether she feared readers would be repulsed by the surly Bean family and their violent lives. One of her greatest wishes was for

Review

The Beans of Egypt, Maine / Carolyn Chute

(Ticknor & Fields, New York, 1985, 215 pages, \$7.95)

Carolyn Chute read sections of this novel at the Stone Coast writers' conference in the summers of 1983 and 1984, so I already knew how hilarious her style can be and how exquisitely she can recreate the tropes and rhythms of Maine speech. The real delight, as I sat down with the whole book (in proofs) was its masterful overall architecture. It begins with what seems like a scattering of stories about a backwoods Maine family that approximately resembles the Primal Horde from Freud's *Totem and Taboo*: a dominant male, a young challenger, a raft of interchangeable women and babies. Then the sprawling comic vision of the early chapters is pulled tauter and tauter by the intensifying consciousness of Earlene Pomerleau Bean, a chainsmoking born-again with uncanny powers of observation and a gift for metaphor that makes the whole book into a sustained lyric of poverty.

In the framework of superb survival comedy Chute has set the serious themes of the culture of disenfranchisement. Incest, battered women, macho violence, child abuse, substance abuse, weapons abuse, vehicle abuse, malnutrition, rape, dyslexia, illiteracy, depression and absentee fatherhood are but a few of the social problems. They are not handled with the bourgeois pedantry of social science but transformed through Chute's spacious and lucid narrative sympathy which is neither judgmental nor voyeuristic.

At this time, the most vigorous fiction is coming not from middle-class Europe or America but from the Third World, with its passionate and imaginative struggle towards life. We devour the literature of Colombia, Peru, Brazil, Czechoslovakia. Well, here it is in Maine, the same unrepressed, raucous, muscular vitality right in the little towns you pass driving to Sugarloaf or North Conway.

Closing *The Beans of Egypt* this Sunday afternoon, the first day of Standard Time, I feel a closer knowledge of Maine, the details of its seasons and beliefs, the structure of the complex grief and weird laughter of its people. It's one of the best novels I've found in years. There is not a single break or fault in the sustained arc of its vision. My glee in remembering some of these scenes is like what I feel remembering scenes from Fellini's *Amarcord*. A man leaving a plastic bag of rabbit meat nailed to a man's door. A man shoveling American Chop Suey into his mouth, the individual noodles falling from his mustache. A little girl growing huge mold cultures from Dunkin Donuts in glass jars. The round of the seasons in Maine — Thanksgiving, Christmas, mud time, black fly season — is punctuated by moments of intense, gothic revelation.

I look over to the row of lights across the river in West Penobscot, and I finally understand who lives there. Rueben and Roberta Bean, Pa Bean and Lee Pomerleau and Uncle Loren the pig farmer and Beal Bean and Virginia Bean and Bonnie Loo Bean and the dogs Otis and Jet and Kaiser. I had always known them. It's just the first time I've ever seen them written down.

Bill Carpenter
Stockton Springs

teaches at College of the Atlantic

people to understand what it's like to come from that end of the social spectrum.

But if someone thinks those people who are 'the humble and the meek' and who always wind up at the bottom get what they deserve, then that's what they'll believe. Maybe my wish won't come true in that respect, but I don't think the book will set us back.

And with that I turned off my tape recorder. It was time to talk of other things — the cotton doll couple she had sewn out of old baby clothes and suspended gaily over their hearth, the snapshots of her beautiful grandson, the drawings for the book cover, her plans for her second novel, this one set in a junkyard. And then I left Carolyn Chute, knowing I had just spent two delightful hours with an exceptional writer whose work may well become a major addition to contemporary American fiction.

Carol Kontos
Windham
teaches at UMA

Rainmakers / Deborah Ward

(Coyote Love Press, 1984, \$10)

A small car breaks down late one winter night. A woman writes in lipstick on a bathroom mirror, "I still love you." A mother touches her son's sunburnt skin, leaving "the swollen aureole around the soul." Deborah Ward knows how to get inside such things, our desperate or crazy or tender moments. As she puts it, "We're all victims when it comes/ to the same dry facts."

In this, her long-awaited first collection, she offers us only fifteen poems, six of them one page or less. But they burn on the paper. She does not include any of her well-known series of "Jennie" poems, vivid and painful Plath-like pieces. In moving beyond that persona, she deals with herself more directly, sometimes in cauterizing ways. Family is everywhere: in the dedication, in a poem to her mother, to her son, and in a loving and heartbreaking remembrance of her deceased father. Not yet at middle age, the writer is at once a daughter and mother, a lover and in one poem, a loser. She looks to learn the roles life has not taught her, yet observes "how old roles/ wrinkling, become indelible."

Mainly, this is a book about desire. How to connect with others, how to accept as authentic and satisfying what is experienced as merely real. "Desire is a precious coin," she writes, "illegal tender." And a poem called "Desire" opens: "It begins when your one hand lets loose/ from its other." You stay up all night, and "it ends/ when both halves of the brain fold themselves" together. You could go mad with such desire, but the poet's voice is tough, the stance snappy. The title poem concludes as the speaker turns to a lover in bed on a hot night, and quotes Burt Lancaster to Katherine Hepburn: "You gotta take my deal/ because it's gonna be a hot night./ And the world goes crazy on a hot night."

Ward's "deal" is sometimes struck against a background of the swank language of *New Yorker* ads: swans, caviar, chenille, chemise, tiger lilies, Max Factor makeup. Or desperate surrealism: "stars cremate in our different skies." It is struck in NYC, Maine, Florida, on beaches, in beds, bathrooms, in the wash of a TV's glow. But the deal is struck: you give me life, she seems to say, and I'll show you the desire for more.

Take it.

**Terry Plunkett
Hallowell**
teaches at UMA

***On Finding My Father's
Medical School Yearbook
1937***

-from *Rainmakers*

*How handsome you were in your slick, Sinatra hair,
your collar pinned under the thin knot of your tie,
both my brothers' hollowed cheeks, the sincere
Neopolitan eyes. "Member of the Poetry Society"
it says beneath your chin. When I throw back
my head to cry, I laugh like a waterfall.*

*I knew you too well. For just half my lifetime.
Yet you gave me the lyrics to life, like birds
uplifting my life, all my life, all of Broadway!
Marian the Librarian, Henery Higgins, Officer Krupke,
Gypsy Rose Lee — and all of Al Jolson in black face*

*down on one knee at the annual Country Club Fair.
I can see hundred dollar bills in the air
when you aced the Steeplechase at Roosevelt Raceway.
Those clan-like birthday parties in ballrooms
with beaded curtains, floating accordians, the gaudy
rented spaces of Astoria, Queens. You jammed*

*six of us in your bed Sunday nights
to watch Gunsmoke. You commanded us
to kiss the ground of each state
when you drove us cross-country. Oh*

*high-strung Italian ancestors from Brooklyn,
you raised this man into my destiny! This man
whose father carted oranges and avocados
through Little Italy. This man who practiced*

*surgery as an art — and I start in remembering
that ordinary day in our suburban backyard
not six months from the sudden end. He stopped me
and held me, telling me Loyalty and Truth
were the only virtues worth knowing. Not knowing*

*himself, all the time, they conflicted
like fire and ice, like liquor and pills,
the impossible compromises I wouldn't realize*

*for fifteen years—
that would corner and claim him
and kill him and take him*

from me.

**Deborah Ward
Portland**
operates Anastasias Books in Portland

Review

North Into Love / David Adams

(Quarry Press, Box 176, Hallowell, Maine 04347, 1984, \$5.95)

Back when I was poetry editor of the *Maine Sunday Telegram* I accepted every poem that David Adams submitted. As I read *North Into Love*, lovingly produced by Quarry Press, I get that seldom-given chance to celebrate my own good judgement.

The book is divided into two sections: I, *The Unterurban Lines*, and II, *North Into Love*. While part I is ostensibly about Ohio, a lot of memory flows from other places down the silver trolley-lines, and while part II is usually about Maine, a lot of Ohio crosses over into Adams's stark milltown glimpses. And it couldn't be otherwise. Those of us not from Maine impose our visions of where we grew up upon where we try to grow, or just stay alive.

Ohio is where I remember being and wanting to get away from — the simultaneous disasters of the Sam Shepherd trial, the '54 Series, and the ignition of the Cuyahoga River. But then one reads Sherwood Anderson, or David Adams. Here is Adams's Ohio:

"There are no visible lives/ in the map of the lines./ Those who hoped to go somewhere more quickly. . . sleep dreamless in the silent groves." "empty tracks . . . plated with red earth and cinders/ and the dead rust of pine needles." "the sun . . . a stuttering film/ setting on the black couplings. . . in the mustard light of an old caboose." "Everything sweats out the heat. . . the grey land/ spread out like a door knocked down. . . Ohio going by like a grey sea . . . cold Erie sensed as wind . . . thin Doppler songs/ or semis on an interstate hidden by trees."

That is a pastiche of many poems, but it may give a sense of the uncanny accuracy, the "Erieness" with which David Adams captures his Ohio. It may still seem a place to get away from, but it is a place where a poet finds images, and communicates the life of the place, forcing us to return or just to be there.

Then there is everyone's enemy — love — invented by a satan known as God to keep poets starving just beyond the borders of Plato's Reich. Adams's touch is

delicate, often androgynous, as in another pastiche: "we have disengaged our flesh and weighed/ the silent accumulation of distaste/ into what is yours, what is mine,/ and what is left. . . I am/ what I see, as you were never." (Note the power of "you were never.") "The way my hands shrink/ to January dryness/ and my finger moves/ in its cold ring." (The gestapo-like cell of marriage). And Ophelia, drifting drowned among the reeds: "your wild song/ only for the water to learn your flesh/ men would not learn." And in Maine, a fisherman's wife, doing the dishes as she waits for his return from the slatey chop of the ocean — "Her hands stilled in gray water." And in Maine, a marriage pulled apart by those differing points of view: "Stoney read the skies all spring, predicting tourists like grain. Cecile saw winter beyond all that, her own blank dreams." And because Cecile dreams her blankness, she wins, but at the price of that sacrifice wherein patience preys on itself and all the others close to the web, "as if they had left the night from different ends." Yes, but then, "As I cannot solve the gentleness/ of you stepping out of your slacks." And, yes, "you held your coffee cup in both hands,/ leaning forward about to say something./ You became the only sound for miles." Yes, one guesses, to that rare woman willing to forgive a man for being one. And yes to "Winter Laundry" which I leave to the reader for her or his absolute wonder.

Sometimes, David Adams does not know when his poem is over. "To J. Robert Oppenheimer, Sept. 4, 1983" ends powerfully with "When did you understand?"

But we, at least, will understand more about ourselves from these poems, no matter where we are, where we have been. The photograph on the back cover shows David Adams, wind-swept, looking out upon stormy waves. The coast of Maine! No — look more closely. It is a breakwater overlooking Lake Erie. Like the photograph, the poems insist, as good poems always do, that we look more closely.

H. R. Coursen
Brunswick

teaches at Bowdoin

North Into Love

*"If only I knew how to tell you,
Someday I may know how."*

—James Wright

*Here is distance. This north I came to
is not Ohio for a long time. North.
Summer has boiled the early evening,
and the fleshy hands of maples
hang damp green around us.*

*We walk the paths of the university,
beyond the cluster of drowsy halls,
up new asphalt towards the gardens.*

*Climb a little into the late sun
that gives no sign of having leaned to winter.
Mosquitoes tourney with the wind for us.
Breeze, sun, always find a way
in you to simply stop themselves.
Where you are the world adjusts.*

*So the glass fabric of the air trades light
with your eyes, grey dreams that burn
my tongue at the root of words.
My hand finds a fly to wave away
from your temple.*

*Language burned to silent crust.
Still your name tastes
like nothing else I've ever loved.
Not Ohio. Something else.
Distance.*

*A little on we inspect the ponds for frogs,
guess at the names of shrubs,
transversing a green geometry, like
a dream through a dream.*

*There is something I want to say to you.
Remember that. So I lift a branch
amazed to see the endless fields flying by
the summer road where the sun is a red star
sleeping in the corn, burning the wheat
to a dark sea, burning the ponds to black ash*

*It is only a dream from Ohio
that is lost. Here,
I give you my lost, luminous Ohio dream
which I loved because I was alone,
because I was falling to you more quickly
than the light of the dream.*

*And here I am. I step into your shadow
a little more like making love;
I think the sun is not sufficient
to be a clock of the lights I tell you of,*

*how a boy in a boatneck collar and plaid shorts
waiting at the reindeer, makes his first
northern wish. A smile, now.*

*The sun is in your hair, and the breeze
plays in your hair.
We walk silently away, an imprint
of your sandal on the moist grass.
So I give you these unperfected lights,
my dreams caught up at last.*

*My language, my wish, my real words
to tell you wait in the warm soil,
in your shadow, upon a season. Here.
The way I lean to you.*

David Adams
Strongsville, OH

taught at UMF, currently a
technical writer in Cleveland

REVIEWS

The Great Day / John Tagliabue

Poems, 1962-1983

(Alembic Press, Plainfield, Indiana 46168, 1984, \$7)

Some writers are so thoroughly themselves that their work should be read carefully and deeply, but not imitated. Joyce was one. Hemingway another. And John Tagliabue. His amazing emotional openness, expressed in an equally amazing openness of form, feels friendly, funny, easy-going, but in the end may be a risky model for younger writers. Reading through this collection is like going with the writer to one of the scores of airport baggage pickups he has passed through, and watching the suitcases go round and round — each a different size, shape, color, with stickers from around the world, each packed with surprising, off-beat personal stuff. The problem for us is that he is such a *good* writer he makes making poems seem easy. You just pick your suitcase and pack it with almost anything that is engaging you at the moment. It is not a problem for Tagliabue; it is his strength. The thing is, most people are simply not as *interesting* as he, as buoyant, as educated, as varied. His forms *follow* his ideas. They are like those expandable suitcases — as big, as open, as accommodating as the materials at hand. Not a cluttered attic, not Fibber McGee's closet. The forms stretch to hold the content exactly, and not a whit more.

Inevitably, he recalls Whitman. But also Blake, Charles Olson, Williams, and in his wit, in what he admits into his work, and in the Oriental influence, Gary Snyder. As with these writers, often it is hard to tell where prose ends and poetry begins; the reader lives in a poetic "atmosphere," and the poet skips along with one foot on each side of the line. He quotes Yeats: "The purpose of rhythm... is to prolong the moment of contemplation..." A world traveller, Tagliabue asks us to contemplate with him the wonders of life almost everywhere, in Mexico, Colombia, Greek islands, even Androscoggin County; he asks us to "arrive at the breezy condition of taoist old wanderers." He has been willing to go everywhere to find out what life is; he risks, he takes chances. In one poem, he quotes Theodore Roethke, "To write poetry one must be prepared to die." Can we ask for more? He has gone out to the world in order to let it in. "My wife and I," he writes, "travel in love." Everywhere, he searches for "the newness of the poem that is in any person."

The Great Day is not just a superb book; it is an event. These 157 pieces of writing represent a culling of 21 years of work, and are an incredible buy at \$7. Tagliabue, now 61, is a professor of English at Bates College. Has a professor ever written less academic poems? He carried his considerable learning lightly; it illumines his considerable living. The living, in turn, humanizes the learning. It is what we should all grow toward. Everywhere there is the joy, the joke, the *joie de vivre*. Amidst all the risk, he seems incapable of despair, a quality all the more impressive in some of the later poems flecked with darker touches of age. "Like a primitive person," he says, "I must follow my prayer wherever it goes/... I cannot let it get away from me/ otherwise we would die."

Terry Plunkett
Hallowell
teaches at UMA

John Tagliabue has just returned from seven months in China, where he was a Fulbright professor at Fudan University in Shanghai.

Concerning the Ancient Silk Route

For a long time keeping the silk worm a secret and
not even knowing
the secret itself of the silk worm or the self, the conniving
and imaginative and playful
Chinese merchants made up stories to send off to foreigners
in different directions,
some saying silk grew on trees, some saying it resulted
from coupling waves and
tall grass at certain moments during moonlit nights,
other stories have been forgotten;
nevertheless the silk worms in their multiplying mulberry
leaves munched, proceeded,
millions of Chinese had lunch and laughter, Marco Polo
returned to fabulous Italy
with more fables.

John Tagliabue
Lewiston
teaches at Bates

E. B. White: A Biography / Scott Elledge

(W. W. Norton, New York, 1984, 400 pages, \$22.50)

Biography, the historian Phillip Guedalla wrote "... is like big game hunting, is one of the recognized forms of the sport, and is unfair as only a sport can be." Unfortunately Elledge is not unfair. This at least might have given focus to his biography. He just never decided what it was he was hunting. We are entangled in thickets of trivia, follow him as he discharges his air-rifle in all directions, and end up with our quarry escaped. This first biography of E. B. White is a gentle bore and will satisfy only those who like to go walking in the evening in middle-class suburbs in order to peer into the lighted windows of their neighbors.

Granted we read biographies for a number of reasons — for an historical perspective, as a social document, as esthetic criticism. And there is, of course, the voyeur in all of us. The trouble with this biography is that lack of a personal response to a writer and his works which must underlie all good biography. One recalls Bowen on Oliver Wendell Holmes, Ellmann on Joyce, Boswell on Johnson, Bolitho's *Twelve Against the Gods*. It is not a question of the literary stature of E. B. White. He is a consummate writer. But surely in 400 pages we could be given a trifle more than the minutiae of a man who, his writing aside, lived a remarkably uneventful life. Indeed, White's life here becomes a social document on a way of life not uncommon for the well-to-do American male of our century. However, that not being Elledge's intent, the social aspect remains peripheral.

E. B. White's real biography is in his writing, in *One Man's Meat*, *Stuart Little*, *Charlotte's Web*, *The Second Tree From the Corner*, in all the pieces we've read over the years in "The New Yorker." *The Elements of Style* is part of his metaphysics. Too infrequently in this homely biography do we hear the sound of crockery shattered or the strident overlay of human voices engaged in being human.

Gordon B. Clark
Pemaquid

is a retired editor of Kennebec

The Maine Massacre / Janwillem van de Wetering

(Pocket Books, New York)

When I came across a review of *The Maine Massacre* by the Dutch mystery writer Janwillem van de Wetering, I was intrigued. I only knew his wonderful book on Zen, *The Empty Mirror*. A Dutch buddhist who lives in Surry, Maine, writing about heinous crimes?

While browsing in a bookstore I found his trilogy, *The Mind Murders*, and set a weekend aside to read about murderous deeds in the city of my birth. I was delighted! Few books use the Amsterdam I know so well as background. I loved running behind the battered old Volkswagen of the city police; every street name was familiar; even the characters I seemed to know. Sargeant de Gier could have been modeled on a high school friend of mine who right now is one of Amsterdam's finest and vainest. I was hooked! Being a Dutch woman who had lived for years in Maine, it was impossible not to go on to *The Maine Massacre*.

Suzanne Opdijk has recently lost her husband. Long-suffering, and self-centered, she asks her brother, chief of the municipal homicide division, to come to Maine's (fictional) Woodcock County to settle her estate. She wants to go HOME. Her whole life in America, decades it appears, has been one of cultivated homesickness: a danger known to all immigrants. It is safer to hold on to the past than to embrace a new country. De Gier, playing "nurse maid" to his ailing boss, follows him to Maine.

The policemen learn more about Cape Orca in a few weeks than Suzanne has learned in years. She does not know her neighbors nor seems to have noticed the wild beauty. Maps show Maine to lay on Spain's latitude, but when they arrive in December they discover right away that their clothing is pitifully inadequate. They cannot drive on snow and ice. They realize that Maine has everything the Netherlands does not. "A bay. Hills. Mountains even. Gun-toters. Corpses. Lawmen in outdated uniforms." They meet a drunken French Canadian woodcutter; a crooked real estate agent; a hermit on an island (Manana?). They speak Dutch to each other in a clothing store and are asked "did I hear you speak Canadian just now?" They are bewildered by the redundancies of the Maine idiom, the BMF gang, for example. The chief asks de Gier, "Do you know what BMF stands for?" "B is for bad, sir. M is mother." "And F?" "A four letter word." "Ah... I see. How interesting. To have intercourse with the mother would be the ultimate bad thing to do, I suppose... but to name the worst and then to add bad..."

The Maine Massacre is not only a very satisfying mystery story, it is also a story about adaptation to a foreign land. And, in some ways, an explanation of why a Dutchman would want to settle here.

Clara Shroder
Hallowell

works at Dept. of Human Services



Photo by Elliott Healy

To Ken 1974-1980

*Under the Christmas tree
He was found
Gasping, singed
As a scalded, unwrapped present.
Biting flames, yellow tongues
Licking the flooring.
Flesh stinking and charred
The odor oppressing.
Outside the slight, scarred bundle
Was delivered to the trembling arms
Of his sobbing father
Leaning on the now splintered door.
Townfolk gathered, curious
Cops too numb to keep them calm.*

*In school there was one
Vacant, acned chair.
Like a silent gong,
The classroom resounded tragedy
On empty walls.
Children entered, re-echoing
The hideous affair.
Discussing Heaven, their seats pulled
Into the Magic Circle
Like a giant, veined halo.
Their only concern now—
“Who will open our thermos bottles?”*

**Carla Lake
Auburn**

teaches kindergarten

Car Poems

Starting the Subaru at Five Below

After 6 Maine winters and 100,000 miles,
when we take it to be inspected

we search for gas stations where they
just say beep the horn and don't ask us to

put it on the lift, exposing its soft
rusted underbelly. Inside is the record

of commuting: apple cores, a bag from
McDonald's, crushed Dunkin' Donuts cups,

a flashlight that doesn't work and one
that does, gas receipts blurred beyond

recognition. Finger tips numb, nose
hair frozen, I pump the accelerator

and turn the key. The battery cranks,
the engine gives 2 or 3 low groans and

starts. My God it starts. And unlike
my family in the house, the job I'm

headed towards, the poems in my briefcase,
the dreams I had last night, there is

no question about what makes sense.
White exhaust billowing from the tail pipe,

heater blowing, this car is going to
move me, it's going to take me places.

Stuart Kestenbaum
Portland, Maine

*staff member of Maine State Commission
on Arts and Humanities*

'51 Ford — In Reverse

Feel like

*I touched the moon
And she touched me back.
The night my brother
brought home*

the '51 Ford:

*no sticker;
tail lights the size of pen lights;
interior ripped away
ripping away*

*years of memories
opening a rusty back door
to childhood:*

*a yard full of tripods,
and engines, and tools.*

*I'm a backseat driver
in my own dreams
saying "turn left, turn right,
yield."*

*In a '51 Ford with no brakes.
In a memory with only tail lights
showing.*

*I keep hearing the dream downshifting
into the past.*

*I keep seeing tail lights sliding
just out of view.*

Jan Johnston
Winthrop

is the car laureate of Maine

A Friendly Church Where Christ Is Exalted

I used to hitchhike a lot when I was in my late teens and going to college in a remote, northern spot in New England, and I would always curse, politely, people who would not stop to pick me up. Now I'm in my thirties, and I have a nice car, and I don't usually stop either. My wife does. She still gets letters from a young Georgian who fell in love with her in one five-hour trip. And she and I both get letters, at odd intervals from around the globe, from a nineteen-year-old woman my wife brought home for what turned out to be a really enjoyable week. Still, usually, I don't stop. I've had other experiences.

But the woman struggling through the snowdrifts — I felt sorry for her. The wind was strong across the blueberry fields and it was snowing hard, and there was no town and no buildings for shelter save a chicken farm along the highway. So I stopped. But I sort of cursed myself when I did. There was a program of Scottish music on the Maine Public Radio station that morning; it's music and singing that's in my blood, but my wife and son, who are one-hundred percent and fifty percent Puerto Rican respectively, find Scottish music mournful and irritating, and I don't often listen to it — at least, in peace — at home.

"Thanks awful much," the woman said, plunking herself into the front seat, huffing a little from running for the car. She pulled the hem of her long, black coat inside, to the floor, and slammed and locked the door. I winced a little. "The car is nearly brand-new," I tell my son, "and the doors don't need slamming."

The woman had on stretch polyester pants, with a gray and black lightning pattern, and a brown wool hat that she was wearing low and square across her forehead. She looked a little like a Ukrainian peasant woman, solid and red-cheeked, like Nina Khrushchev in her forties maybe, although this woman was probably really closer to thirty. But her hair was already gray, and curly, almost wild as it escaped the severe line of her hat.

"Oh, what lovely music," she said, "very nice. Yes, very nice. Nice car."

"Ah," I murmured, and I pulled back onto the slippery, snowy highway. "It's Scottish, it must be Robert the Something's birthday today. How far are you going?"

"It's very nice. It sounds Oriental."

"Yes, that's true, I'd never thought of that. The bagpipes, that wailing kind of sound."

Then there was an awkward silence; she drew herself back into her coat and burrowed her chin down into her thick neck. There was something distinctly charged about the silence, as if I'd made a wholly unwelcome proposition — which maybe I had. God knows, I'm not much different from the next man.

But then I thought, "Oh, no, another live wire." The last woman I'd picked up hitchhiking had started poking me in the ribs and screaming at me when I'd asked her where she was going, convinced I was meaning to steal her welfare check once I got her to the post office. I grew wary.

"How far are you going?" my rider startled me.

"Bangor," I blurted out and then regretted saying it. What if she was just too weird and I wanted to dump her? How did I handle that one? "Well, Ellsworth first," I added. Which, in fact, I was.

"That's how far I'm going, Bangor," she said and opened her coat. "Yes, that's lovely. Lovely."

"That's sixty miles, at least," I thought gloomily. "How far have you come this morning?" I asked.

She just laughed a little and settled her chin down again.

"Do you live in Bangor?" I asked. There was no answer. "That's pretty gutsy, to be hitching this morning, in this weather," I persevered. I did want to get a handle on who I had beside me in the car. But we rode in silence until we passed by a church in a little settlement in the spruces. A sign hanging from a white wooden arm beside the road proclaimed: "A Friendly Church Where Christ Is Exalted".

"I belong to the Pentecostals," my rider volunteered, still looking straight ahead out the windshield. "My mother's a Catholic. I used to be a Catholic. But now I'm Pentecostal."

"Oh, why's that? Did you like the people better? Or the doctrine?" I'm usually — especially — wary, also, of born-again Christians. But I did want her to talk. And the Scottish music had faded, and I was tense and bored with the driving. I wanted diversion.

"No, no. It was the name, I liked the name. Course I still like Catholic church. I go once in a while. Catholic church! They're just like a family, y'know. A father church. And a mother church. And baby churches. Or sister churches. Or I suppose it's sister and brother churches, really — there's men that go to church too. But . . . no. Sister churches, that's really what it is. Even with the men."

"Let me guess. The Catholic church is the mother, right?" I laughed.

"And the Pentecostal, that's the father. The Baptists, they're sisters."

"I know a couple of Pentecostals," I said, "from work."

"Pentecostals love animals," she said firmly. "Worship animals. It's a sin to kill animals."

"Not the Pentecostals I know," I said. "In fact, one of them raises pigs."

"Yes," was all she said.

"So, are you vegetarian?" I asked.

"Yes," she smiled broadly. "No."

"Is that a joke?" I asked. "I don't understand." She didn't answer. "But how do you eat meat? If it's a sin."

"By eating the meat, you forgive the man who killed the animal, you forgive him his sin. And by loving him. You make it all right."

"Hunh," I mumbled. When I mentioned this to my son later, he saw it as a "rationalization" — he's very advanced for twelve, my son. "She just wants to eat meat," he said. But I saw the sense of it. "So what else can Pentecostals eat?" I asked. The road continued to be slippery and snowy; the sky looked like a dingy reflection of the dizzying ground.

"Bread," she said, "it's all right to eat bread."

"And what else? The Bible says we don't live by bread alone."

"And wine. And meat — y'know, if an animal dies. With the wine, it depends on what brand you drink. You know, like Chablees. But what I like, I like a good Burgundy. You don't have a cigarette, do you?"

"No, I don't. I don't let people smoke in my car anyway. I used to smoke, but then I gave it up, and now the smoke just makes me feel sick."

"That's the paint. The paint they put in cigarettes. And the paper. It's so thick. You burn that, one a day's enough. That paper!" She paused and then laughed.

"What?" I asked, but she didn't answer right away, and I decided to let it drop.

"Oh, just thinking about something that happened in the bar last night," she said. "What is it? Thursday? Yup, they'll all be in the bars tonight. Drinking. Drinking's all right, though. Wine. It's medicine."

"Wine makes glad the hearts of men, right?"

"Milk, that's what's bad for you. Good for cows. What you got to do is drink three or four glasses of wine, till you throw up. Get rid of all that milk. It comes right out the ends of your hair. Makes your hair grow, milk. That's all it's good for. Breast-feeding. Wine is good for babies. That's what I fed mine. Wine. They're good. I've got two of them. David and Robin. We call him Bobby, for short. They're lovely. So smart. Yup. Kids are better than their parents. They don't make the same mistakes."

"No, just different ones," I said. "And not even new ones, necessarily." I thought of my parents. And their parents and their parents. When my thoughts collided with Eve, and Adam, I laughed.

"Nope. They're better. Richer anyway. Smarter." She shifted in her seat. "Mine are so smart. I just tell them all my troubles. They help me, they see things in a different way."

I thought, "That's not fair, to burden a kid with your troubles." But then I thought of what I shared with mine. "So how old are your kids?" I asked.

"Two and one."

"Oh, babies," I laughed.

"Yeah. They're a blast, my kids." She shook her head. The road was now going around whipcord bends, and spruce and boulders and snow were all we could see. "Beautiful. I'm going to have more. Not right now, though."

"No, that's a good idea." I felt some kind of societal responsibility to dissuade her. "Hard to support them. And they're all sorts of work, kids." I could hear my wife's tones in my words, and I was thinking of this woman and her sons.

"No, not mine. They're so sweet. Heavy, though. I let them live with the other side of the family now. I was afraid I'd drop them. Their father, now, he can pick them up, better than I can. I just got terrified. I might drop 'em, see? But they worship me, my kids. They love me and I love them."

"Was that who you were visiting Downeast?" I asked; of course I felt sad.

"You know, water, that's bad for you too. Too heavy."

I laughed.

"Jesus had oils in his hands," she said. "He could purify the water into wine."

"That's a pretty good chemistry trick, purifying water into wine with oil."

"It was no trick," she said, and she fell silent. After a few miles she perked up. "Astrology, do you know astrology? I'm Aquarius. What are you?"

"Libra."

"Ah, scales, an air sign, yes. Good with music. Very talented. Yes. Let me see your fingers." I held out my right hand. "Yes," she said. My fingers were a lardy yellow-white from clenching the steering wheel; I told myself to relax, that it was the tires, not my hands, that were going to hold the car on the road. "I can see you're a piano-ist," she said. "Good fingers like that. I can't play the piano, my fingers are too short. Oooooh, ladies play the piano, they got such lovely long fingers, I bet they don't even know what they got."

"To tell you the truth," I said, "I can't even remember five notes in a row. Not even to whistle or hum."

"I can. I'm good with clarinet. I picked it up, and it was like I already knew how in my fingers. Like I was born with it." She chuckled. "Fact, I was born with it. Air sign, see?"

"No, Aquarius is the water-bearer, you must be a water sign," I said.

"Oh, no I'm not. I just work with the water. Carry it. But I'm air, January the thirteenth, that's my birthday."

Then I thought of my sister. That had been her birthday, too. Or the thirty-first. And she'd been an Aquarius, of course, my sister who'd been studying in India and becoming a Sanskrit scholar until she died, young, of cancer.

"My, ah, sis. . ."

"I'm not like Cancer," the woman interrupted. "I just work with the water. Carry it. They live in it." There was a long silence. "They all meet in Hell. Grab people with their claws."

"Cancers?"

"They're heavy people. Them and Sagittarius, they meet in Hell. Make love. Except Cancer's too heavy. Unless Cancer's a woman. So she can be underneath. Cancers. I don't like Cancers. They pick them up with their claws, crush them. Then they send them back to earth."

"Other people, you mean?"

"Cancers and Sagittarius. He likes murder in the night-time. She likes it in the day. Murder with knives. In the day and in the night."

I knew she wasn't talking about us, and in fact fear wasn't my first reaction — but suddenly I was afraid. I'd had a knife pulled on me once before, when I'd been hitchhiking, and had to jump out of a moving car. I looked across at the red and blue canvas bag that she had kept between her knees. But she kept on looking straight ahead.

"Astrology. I'm just learning all this stuff. Chess. Cards. Cards is all astrology."

"How's that? With the different suits, you mean?"

"No, no. I don't know. Chess. You know. Those are all the games astrologers say they play. This is a nice little car. What is this, a Subaru? That's nice little car, a Subaru. My cousins have one. Four-wheel drive. They go skiing up in the mountains all the time. My mother's got a Mustang. Me, I like little cars more. Good for the city."

"Yeah, they're easier to park and they're cheaper."

"No, my mother don't have to worry I'd steal her car. She could leave the keys right in it, I don't even want it. I used to have a car. But I lent it to a friend. And the transmission came up into the back seat. Course he didn't know. He asked could he borrow the car. And I said yes, I didn't know. I knew he was a good driver."

"Did he take off too fast? Or hit a bump or something?"

"No. Course he didn't know. Just sat down. He didn't know the floor wouldn't hold him. It's in the shop still. I just don't have the money to get it out. When I do, I'll get my car back again. It's an Opel."

"A friend of mine had an Opel, and she loved it. She said you could drive five hundred miles in a day and still be comfortable. But her son wrecked it. He took the car, he was fifteen, and he went drinking with some friends, and they went off the road at nearly a hundred miles an hour."

"Yes, there are some people love the speed limit. Other people drive fast. That's their limit, I guess. You, I can tell you drive fast."

"Not me," I laughed. "My wife does, though. Eighty or ninety, that's how fast she likes to go."

"My mother, she drives twelve miles an hour. And that's best for her. Course she's got that big car. On these little roads."

"So it's your mother who lives Downeast?" I guessed.

"Yes." She chuckled and then was silent.

"So, how was your visit? Was her house warm enough? It's been pretty cold all this past week."

"Oh, yes, it's all new. New electric heat. With thermostats. One in every room. My mother. She's either always complaining about the cold. Or about the heat, you know, that I left it on. I can't keep up with my mother. I love her. But I can't keep up with her. Aren't the trees pretty, all that snow on the branches? She's got a beautiful ceramic Christmas tree looks like that. I'd love to have that. Little bulbs, you know, pretty. I'd ask her for that tree. Next Christmas."

"You'd better tie a knot in your Christmas stocking. Or you might forget. Or she might. She might not even know you want it, unless you ask."

"Oh, she knows. I've been asking for that tree for years." She stopped talking for a minute. "If I get a lovely house, I'll ask her to come live with me. Just so I can have that tree."

"You must love it," I teased. "I thought you couldn't stand living with her."

"Oh, I can if I'm the boss. I've got to be the boss. I can't live with her except in my house, where I'm the boss. My parents, I tell you. One of them sweats you right to death, the other leaves you so lonesome you could cry."

"So your mother and father both live Downeast?"

"Oh, no. She's got a lovely husband. They do everything together. Have fun. They'll live a long time."

"So where does your father live?" I asked.

"Oh. Yeah." She hummed a little. "He's a Cancer, y'know." Her eyes fixated on a car coming toward us in the other lane, both cars trying to keep one set of wheels on the clearer pavement in the middle. "Yup, ooooh, we almost made love with that car."

I unclenched my hands. "Love at forty miles an hour isn't much fun, though," I quipped. Again that uncomfortably charged silence fell. "What exactly in hell are

you trying to provoke here?" I thought to myself. And I concentrated on my driving.

"Yes, my mother," she laughed, "she doesn't need me, she's got lots of friends."

"Does she say that to you? I mean, you can have lots of friends and still really need your family." I thought of my sister's bedside and the people she'd been with till the end.

"No, she doesn't say that."

We drove on in silence and negotiated five or six sharp turns along the shores of a small boulder-littered lake.

"Yes. Children, they cry for their mothers," she said.

I drove around another turn before saying, "And mothers sometimes cry for their children."

"Not me. No. Mine are so smart. I love 'em. They got my eyes. Lovely eyes. Dark-brown. And my mother's hair. Raven-black. And long and curly."

"Where do they live?" I asked. It was true; her eyes were dark-brown. But I couldn't see whether they were lovely — they were still looking straight ahead.

"In New Hampshire," she said. "I told you that. With the other side of the family. I got a girlfriend down there I stay with."

"And you hitchhiked all the way up here from New Hampshire? In this kind of weather?"

"No, I took a bus," she explained. "I'd buy that tree from my mother. But it took all my money to get up here. It's either take a bus up here. Or take one back. It's either one way or the other. It doesn't make much difference." She was quiet. We were coming into small towns along the highway; Ellsworth was only a few miles ahead. "I'll have to get a job, I suppose. Factory work. I like factory work, it's nice. It's good work."

"Listen," I said, "I'm going to have to let you out pretty soon. Do you know that corner, that Bar Harbor corner with that great, big American flag in Ellsworth, at the Ford dealer's. I'm going to have to let you out there. I'm going the other way, to the Subaru dealer's. It'll be a couple of hours, for a tune-up."

"Oh, that's all right," she said, "it's been lovely." She started shifting around in her seat, getting ready. "You have any change for some coffee?"

"Just those pennies on the dash there. There must be enough there. That's all the change I've got. Or small bills. My kid cleaned me out for his school lunch this morning." I thought: "Why not give her the twenty?" But something stopped me.

"No, then, I'll just spend the last of mine." She opened her blue and red bag. I could see a half-eaten bag of potato chips on top. I didn't look any more. "I spent almost all I got left on wine last night," she said.

"Well, it's medicine," I laughed. "The Pentecostals I know drank so much medicine before they joined the church that it nearly killed them. So they gave that up, and cigarettes, and swearing too. But not meat."

"Boy, the heat in here." She reopened her coat and sighed heavily. "Cook you right to death. Oh, look, that's lovely. There's a McDonald's. I can get my coffee right there."

I stopped at the red light, across the street from the huge flag, which was billowing out at least twenty feet in the snowy wind.

"Lovely," she said, and she pulled her coat tight again and picked her bag up into her lap. For the first time I noticed her boots were on the wrong feet. She opened the door. "Thanks now," she said, and she pushed herself off the seat and out of the car.

"Take care," I called out.

She leaned back in. "And may God bless you," she said slowly, firmly. Her brown eyes seemed to focus right through me, and I still couldn't tell if they were lovely. She slammed the door hard, and then pushed against it with her hip a little.

She crossed the street against the red light and tried, without success, to climb over the snowbank to the sidewalk. The stream of traffic slowed, then crept along behind her as she turned and walked down the middle of the lane toward McDonald's. A big, yellow backhoe was parked in the middle of the road, digging a hole and blocking traffic from passing around her. A pump was blating away beside the hole and muddy water, mixed with snow, was running deep along the curb to a storm drain. She gathered up her coat and her bag and splashed along in her black, plastic boots. I could see her lips moving as she talked to herself. She turned and walked up the McDonald's driveway, and the cars started to speed up and pull on past. She pulled open the heavy, shiny door, and, behind the tinted brown glass, she disappeared.

**William Love
Lubec**

is a free-lance writer and stevedore

A Children's Story . . .

Your Word Against Mine

In Diggle Spoon County one summer morning a trader with a turban and a popcorn laugh came driving his cowcart up the lane. He was eating black pickles dipped in salt, so even the crows knew he was up to no good.

(Two crows take off from carrion-eating at the side of the road and fly to a tree limb. They follow along in the distance through the whole story.)

The trader is bullyish-looking, with a bristly black beard, flamboyant knee boots and a gruff voice. He wears a knife in his belt, and a comb in the folds of his turban.

In his cart, pulled by a swayback cow, are many things, including a racked old bulletin board on legs, a blunderbuss, a waste barrel strapped to one side. A crude sign on the cart says:

but mostly
BUY, SELL ~~OR~~ SWAP
your word against mine
no refunds all sales final

At a crossroads schoolhouse, he met a serious young schoolteacher holding a fine old book of plays for the theater. The book was bound in dark red leather and the edges of the pages shone gold in the sunlight.

"Hullo, my educated young friend!" hailed the trader gruffly, eyeing the book through narrowed lids. "Perhaps you would like to have a nice bulletin board for your eager young students yonder?"

"Oh, indeed I would," answered the schoolteacher politely, "but alas, the school has no money for such things. The parents will buy only chalk and coal for the stove, and not enough of that."

"Perhaps you have something you would like to trade?" growled the trader in a voice like boards being pried up. "Some old . . . book, perhaps?"

"Oh, not my beloved Shakespeare plays!"

"But you've read them already?"

"Well . . . yes, but—"

"You would eat your dinner twice?"

"But . . . no, but—"

"My horse (sic) is impatient to be off," grumped the trader. "I'm offering you a fine bulletin board for a single dusty, musty old book, but maybe you think you can do better elsewhere. . . ." and, so saying, he lifted his whip—

"All right!" cried the schoolteacher hurriedly. "Here's the book, though it hurts me deeply to part with it. I'm only doing this for my students. Now, if you'd please put the bulletin board right over there by the schoolhouse door. . . ."

"With pleasure!" laughed the trader like popcorn crackling over a hot fire, and reached behind himself in the cart, pulled out a terrifying-looking blunderbuss and fired it straight at the schoolhouse wall. BULOOM!!

"There's your . . . bullet in board! And no charge for delivery!" laughed the trader cruelly, and with a crack of his whip he clattered away from the poor dumbfounded schoolteacher.

A little way down the road the trader came upon another young man, an actor with wild tangled hair and bow legs. He was standing on a stump waving his arms like long banners and speaking in a loud voice to an audience of fat puppies in a basket below him. One of them kept barking at the young man as if the pup were either near-sighted or had no love of the theater.

"Hullo, my dramatic young friend!" called the trader, stopping beside the stump. "What play are you rehearsing?"

"Oh, none, I fear," answered the young man sadly, his limbs held aloft still like those of an oak in winter. "The people of the county will pay only to see jugglers and tumblers and buglers and jesters and wrestlers. They want only to laugh and are afraid to go to a real play where they might feel sadness, or hope, or fear."

"You would like a good part, then?" rasped the trader softly. And as he spoke, he tenderly caressed the book of plays on his knee.

"Are those Shakespeare plays?" asked the fellow, suddenly excited. "Do you have a company of actors?"

"I have . . . my own company," replied the trader with a secret smile, "and these are indeed Shakespeare plays. Would you like a good part? Have you anything to trade?"

"Oh, I would give anything for a part, but I have nothing but these puppies," sighed the actor, "and they are also my only audience."

"Perhaps, if you traded them for a good part, you would be able to find a new audience," said the trader, his eyes narrowing and his hand reaching for the whip. "But my horse is eager to be going—"

"No, wait!" cried the actor, sweeping up the basket with both hands. "Here, take the puppies. Oh, I absolutely *must* have a good part. . . ."

"And a good part you shall have!" cackled the trader like popcorn in a covered skillet. With which he pulled a rough wooden comb from his turban and attacked the actor's wild hair, yanking this way and that until he had made a straight part down the middle of his head. Then, even before the fellow could protest, the cowcart was rumbling far up the lane.

Around a turn in the road, the trader approached a little girl sucking her knuckle and driving a flock of ducks, geese and chickens.

"Hullo, my thirsty young friend!" spoke the trader in a voice like a quill pen scratching paper. "Where are you going with so many dogs?"

"But, misser, 'ese are not dogs," answered the girl before removing her knuckle from her mouth.

"But they're wagging their tails," said the trader, quietly taking one of the puppies onto his lap. "Can they run after a ball?"

"No," said the little girl.

"Well, can they do any tricks?"

She shook her head slowly.

"Surely you can play with them on a lonely morning such as this?"

The girl only looked yearningly at the puppy on the trader's lap as it wagged its tail and pawed at a fold in his trousers.

"How would you like," whispered the trader suddenly, and putting his finger in the puppy's mouth for a playful chew, "the pick of the litter?"

The little girl's eyes widened.

"Do you have something to trade?"

"Nothing . . . of my own," she replied, downcast.

The trader gave his knuckle to the puppy to chew. "A dog will live longer than any old bird. . . and you can give it a name, and call it. . . and hold it."

The little girl looked longingly into the basket at the other puppies.

"Tell you what: I'll give you the pick of the litter for those dirty old birds there. Mind you: pick of the litter."

The little girl hesitated, turned away, then looked from the flocks to the basket and back. Suddenly, as she saw the trader reaching for his whip, she handed him her slender ash driving stick. In no time at all, he had swept up all the birds into a large canvas bag, which he threw roughly onto the cowcart. Then, looking at the little girl through eyes no wider than the edge of a penny, he growled: "So you want the pick of the litter now, eh?" And with that, he pulled out his knife, cut the rope holding a wooden hogshead to the cart, and spilled its contents of garbage and trash all over the road at the little girl's feet.

"Pick of the litter! Ha-ha! Ha-ha-ha!" he laughed like popcorn exploding in an open fire. And as the little girl began sobbing, he was away down the road like a whirlwind chasing a pig across a pasture.

It was not long before he came to a miller pulling a handcart loaded with a heavy turbine wheel. The man was sweating so much he was cursing, and cursing so much he was sweating.

"Hullo, my tired good friend!" called the trader, stopping. "Is something wrong?"

"Is snow white? Is yesterday gone? Oh, you see before you a miller ground down to dust finer than from the finest millstone. There is no rain, and so no water to turn my turbine, which is broken anyway, and now my back is nearly broken. Oh, what I would not give to be a farmer right now, to be always in the fresh air, and just resting while the corn grew."

"A farmer, eh?" said the trader, and gave the bag of birds a kick so that the air was filled with honks, quacks and clucks.

"What have you there?" asked the miller, his face brightening.

"Some . . . flocks, I suspect," replied the trader through a smile that could have cut hard cheese.

"To sell?" asked the miller.

"Or trade. Say, that wheel of yours might be worth a little for junk." And once again his boot jerked and the bag fluttered and made the sounds the miller found so pleasant. "What say," the trader continued in a voice keen and shiny, "we swap flocks for turbine? A straight trade."

"But my wheel is broken. It is not fair to you—"

"Never mind. I can make good use of it just as it is. But the sun grows high and my horse begins to long for some noon shade—"

"Oh, yes, yes, of course. Oh, certainly, let us trade then. Here, let me tie my turbine cart to the back of your wagon."

"Good. And let me give to you," howled the trader, springing suddenly down to the side of the road where he swiftly gathered several handfuls of purple flowers, "your flox!" Then as he whipped his cow down the road, the sound of his laughter ricocheted like popcorn in a large tin pot.

Over the next hill, the trader found a farmer standing with his work horse at the edge of his field. While the horse stretched his neck to nibble a clump of lupine, the farmer was examining his broken plow.

"Hullo, my soldier of the sod!" cried the trader. "Have you found misfortune, or has she found you?"

"Oh, I am surely ruined," answered the farmer, "for this is the third plow I have broken this spring, and it is well past planting time. I shall never get my seed into the ground in time to harvest it in the fall. What I wouldn't give to be a miller right now, napping in the cool basement of my mill while the corn grew."

"A miller, eh?" remarked the trader, giving a slow sidelong glance at the turbine

behind him. "Maybe I can help you. Do you have a stream nearby?"

"In fact, I do."

"One that runs even in the dry season?"

"Even so. I watered my horse there this very morning."

"Then it would seem," said the trader, and his eyes glowed with a faint green fire, "that you lack only a turbine. What will you swap for mine?"

"I have only this horse with which I farm."

"As a miller, you would not farm, or need the horse, any longer."

"Why, you are right about that! And as a miller, I would still have time to get ready for the farmers' harvest." At this, the man began to dance a little jig for joy.

"So it is a deal, then," crowed the trader through a smile that could freeze blood on a summer day, "your horse in exchange for my turbine."

"Agreed. Here, let me hitch my horse up to pull your cart." And together they removed the trader's cow from the harness and tied her on behind and put the horse in her place. Only then did the farmer suddenly see his predicament: "But how shall I move my new turbine to the stream? It is so heavy."

"What? Heavy?" crackled the trader, unwinding the cloth from around his head. "Surely you can lift this turban with only one hand!" With which he hurled the limp material to the farmer's feet and, laughing like popcorn trying to flee its hot oil, he trundled away up the road out of sight.

Not far beyond the next bend, the trader found a captain of the guards resting in the shade of an overhanging tree. When he saw the trader's new horse, the captain leaped to his feet and pulled off his great fur hat in a gesture of greeting.

"Hullo, my enemy of my enemies!" countered the trader. "I can see in your eagerness that you want something I have."

"You must be a good trader, for you are correct," observed the captain. "I am traveling the countryside to buy horses for the army."

"And you need just such as I have?" suggested the trader.

"Just such."

"Perhaps I can do even better for you. Would you like a . . . pair?" And as he spoke, the trader made of his eyes two buttonholes.

"Do you have a pair, then?" asked the captain, growing excited.

"Within easy reach," replied the trader in a voice like bones cracking.

"Then what do you ask in return? The Queen's army will pay fairly."

"Only the captain's fur hat, which I fancy," said the trader.

"It is as good as done. Here is the hat. Now show me this fine, fine pair."

"Without delay!" shouted the trader, and, curling back his whip, he sent it snapping into the tree branch directly above the captain's head. Out fell a ripe yellow teardrop-shaped fruit: "Your fine, fine pear, Commander! Ha-ha! Git up there! Ha-ha-ha!" he cried and laughed with the sound of popcorn spitting loudly inside a hollow cauldron. And before the captain could recover, the trader had disappeared up the road in a cloud of dust.

Only a mile further on, he stopped abruptly when he encountered a beautiful old woman in a small dark wood. She was wearing a grass-green robe, an orange hat and had a mole on her cheek. But what caught the trader's greedy eye was a gorgeous antique emerald ring which sparkled like a green star upon her finger.

"Hullo, my lady of the leaves," said the trader in a voice for the first time quiet. "To whom have I the pleasure of speaking?"

The woman smiled sweetly. "Some have called me Often. Some have called me Seldom. Some have even called me Never. You may call me . . . Which . . . ever you please. May I help you in any way?"

The trader had never seen anything so beautiful — or valuable — as the brilliant gem in her ring. His eyes grew as still as snakes. "I'm just a poor trader, Your Worship, traveling here and there, trying to make out as best I can. . . . You don't need a . . . book of plays, perhaps?"

The woman giggled at the trader in a way that made him begin to grow nervous.

"Maybe you'd like a nice fur hat? There's always a winter coming sometime. And I have some cute little puppies. With the fur still on them."

Yet the woman just smiled and said nothing.

"I see you're alone way out here without a carriage. Perhaps you need a horse? I've a fine fast Arabian I'll trade."

"What would you want in return?" asked the woman softly, holding the emerald up to a tiny shaft of light that fell through the leaves above.

"Well, seeing as you don't appear to have anything else, I guess I'd have to settle for that old . . . chip of rock on your finger there. I mean I'd never wear such a thing, but since it's about all you have—"

"You *do* like my emerald ring. Why, how nice," said the woman, "but really, I think it's worth more than that old plow horse, don't you?"

"I'll give you these puppies as well, then, and the basket for nothing."

The woman looked fondly at her ring. "Oh, I don't know. I've had it so long, I've grown kind of attached to it, you see."

"You can have these fine flocks of birds, then. And the hat. And the book of plays as well." The trader's eyes had become rigidly fixed on the shining ring.

"It was my mother's ring before that, you understand—"

"Take the turbine, too, then, and the bulletin board. And the gun."

"But what would I ever want with an ugly gun? Why, I'll bet it's already been fired."

Mount Waldo (10)

(from the series)

This music has measures that are miles wide.

A rest may last a century.

A mountain is a note.

Its black circle comes from nowhere

to break the white and endless paper

that is space with an

outline that does not quiver.

Something this certain defies

narrative completely.

When other contours appear,

The connection is tenuous

thus difficult to hear.

Young mountains fly their peaks like pennants,

white triangles snapping the blue air

with shot.

The old exist next to nothing

without remark.

They have long ago lost their native language.

Their history is ice,

gone so far north that now

it is visible only from great height.

Within this silence each object preserves coherence,

a form that burns words away like string.

Charles Weld

Whitney Point, N.Y.

*moved recently from Frankfort
where he contemplated the mountain*

The trader suddenly stood up and began pleading. "Well, what *do* you want, then, pray tell? I've offered you everything except the cart and the cow."

The woman smiled. "Those, too. The cart would be nice, if only to carry everything else in."

The trader appeared ready to explode and collapse at the same time. He looked at all he had offered, that he had swindled from others. Then he gazed at the ring once more. It seemed larger than ever. It shone like a miniature sun. Abruptly, he jumped down from the cart. "There, take it! Take it all! It's yours! It's worth it! Now give me my beautiful emerald ring!"

"Why, certainly," answered the old woman, almost whispering. And she reached inside her robe and drew out a small wooden box. From the box she took a tiny rusty circle of iron and held it out to the trader.

"What is *this*?" he cried, shaking. "That's not an emerald ring!"

"Why, whatever do you mean? How can you say such a thing? Why, you'll see it is just like the other one. In fact, I've a whole boxful just alike. Here, look inside."

And slowly she turned the box around so the trader could see a dozen rusty iron rings inside.

"See, my quick-witted fellow: 'em are old rings!"

(The last two pages — open-book style — are simply an illustration: the long road back past all who were swindled, with the old woman just finishing returning to each that which he or she lost. Back in the woods, the trader sits dazed and empty-handed, with the crows on a limb overhead.)

Bernard Huebner

Skowhegan

*teaches grade school, writes children's
stories and is completing a novel*

Review

KAISA KILPONEN / Rebecca Cummings

(Available, 1985) Winner of the 1984 Fiction Chapbook Competition sponsored by the Maine State Commission on the Arts and the Humanities

As D. H. Lawrence and William Carlos Williams have informed us, there is a "spirit of place." Behind most literature there is a landscape, partly idealized, perhaps, upon which the human figure acts out a part of its life. That place may be an outer place or a place that is within the person herself. And often an interior place, formed out of dream and fantasy and intense imagination, finds its counterpart in a physical landscape. Many of our best American women writers have written out of this perspective, notably Elizabeth Bishop, Willa Cather, and Sarah Orne Jewett.

Like Cather and Jewett before her, Rebecca Cummings' two short stories in *Kaisa Kilponen* enhance the place and the conditions by which we live and define ourselves. Cummings also asks some large questions in her work. Both "The Legacy" and "Berrying" consider the issue of how long it might take a people living in America, and recently immigrated in the early twentieth century, to be at home in their new landscape. Cummings wonders how close you need to get to the mainstream culture, how long you must live in one place, how much daring and risk it takes in order to maintain your individuality and to assume new roots in the adopted culture.

In "The Legacy," Kaisa Kilponen and her husband Matti surrender their Finnish citizenship but retain their "good name" Kilponen the day Matti becomes an American citizen. Largely due to his wife's disapproval, Matti rejects the suggestion to change his name to Matt Kilton, a name that would assure Matti's easy assimilation into the culture of this magnificent free country. Like Cather's Antonia Shimerda in *My Antonia*, Kaisa is a defiant, energetic, hard working woman, nostalgic for her homeland. We are meeting a woman in the first painful stages of exile and immigration, at the turning point of acceptance and accommodation.

It is worth recalling here that few women ever welcomed the uprooting of home and family to make the move westward. That was

generally the choice of men, and the women followed, doing their best for the sake of affection, but too often in hearsickness and weariness. The tension in these stories, therefore, is not so much in Cummings' thin and often predictable plot but in the change of attitude experienced by the central character, Kaisa.

The location of these stories, which I suspect to be Maine with its blueberry fields, references to Yankees, alder copses, elm-lined streets, and the granite quarries at the coast, invades the spirit of the characters and the action. Basically conservative in the way that Sarah Orne Jewett's characters of Dunnet Landing in *The Country of the Pointed Firs* are quick to gossip and find fault with their neighbors, this tendency in Cummings' work allows Kaisa to discover herself by bumping up against the anxieties of a new landscape and a new culture. Her conservatism does not let her see the advantages of citizenship except as a denial of her past and does not let her consider the strengths in Lena's character because she had already dismissed her as immoral for living out of wedlock with a man. Like Jewett, Cummings relies on a series of loosely connected sketches to achieve a structure independent of a tightly developed plot, or so it seems from the two chapters of the longer work included in the chapbook. As an American realist, Cummings impels us to look at the structure in terms of place, of identity, and of a search for something.

Placing the main character in her own backyard and forcing her to come to terms with herself, Cummings contrives an accident which finally brings Kaisa to her "senses." Slowly through her recuperation from an encounter with a bull in her neighbor's pasture, Kaisa's vision of herself, Matti, Lena, and the interior landscape of her house widens and moves beyond convention. In the process of recuperation, she discovers new values both in the possibilities of her new country and in the lives of women.

Kathleen Lignell
Stockton Springs
works at Sea Grant, UMO

The Wedding

(Not from the prizewinning chapbook, Kaisa Kilponen)

1916

After *Komia Nestori* came for Lena Hakola, the house was strangely quiet. Kaisa Kilponen recovered from her misadventure with the bull more quickly than one would have expected and was soon up and about, but the days were long as she settled listlessly into her old routine. Even the brightness of autumn went with Lena, and already in early November, the earth was frozen and hollow-sounding underfoot.

Kaisa, clutching the thick collar of her heavy black coat, scuttled a step or two ahead of her husband. The fire in the church that Sunday morning had been started late, and its warmth never reached beyond the front pews. Kaisa was chilled through and through. Now she couldn't walk fast enough. All she could think about was getting home and building up the fires in her own kitchen and sitting room. Gravel crunched under her hard shoes. The sun was thin in a cold November sky.

A spindly red geranium on the front windowsill of the kitchen quivered. "Ooo—" Kaisa sighed as the heat from the cook stove at last penetrated the back of her plain dark skirt. "It's already winter. And only November." At last the scent of strong coffee bubbling warmed her enough so that she could once again think about the good news.

Erkki and Mari Seilonen's oldest daughter Este was to be married to Lauri Marttinen, just six weeks from this very Sunday. And Lauri, being at least ten years older than Este and a steady, hard worker, had already put enough aside to buy a farm where he and his bride would set up housekeeping. What especially excited Kaisa was that this farm was on the very road on which she and Matti lived, just beyond George Pottle's. For years the house had stood empty. But now it would be the home of neighbors. Finnish neighbors.

"Imagine!" Kaisa said to her husband as she fanned the back of her skirt in front of the open oven door. "Este and Lauri. It will be like having relatives close-by." And after a long moment's thought, she added, "And don't you suppose that

next year there might not be a little one? And when he's big enough, he'll come here to visit. I'll pour coffee for him. Just a little. With plenty of milk. And give him *nisu*. Or a cracker. Do you remember those two tiny cups Hilja Kyllönen gave me? I'll use those. And he'll think those cups are just for him. What do you suppose they'll name him?" Kaisa bustled to the pantry for two white mugs. "Erkki probably. Just like his grandfather."

"Woman! Lauri and Este aren't even married, and already you've named their first son!" Matti shouted, feigning annoyance so that the dog named Karhu, who drowsed in the corner, raised his head to look.

"Let's have a little something to eat and go to the Seilonen's this afternoon," Kaisa suggested. "We haven't been to visit for a long while. And then we can find out more about this wedding."

"On such a cold day?"

"It's not so cold."

"You complained all the way to church."

"That was earlier. It's much warmer now."

As reluctant as Matti was on that cold Sunday afternoon to leave the coziness of the house as well as the long nap he had been looking forward to, he succumbed to his wife's wheedling and harnessed one of the big brown horses to the express for the ride to the Seilonen's. The husband and wife sat beside each other on the high seat, a heavy buffalo robe wrapped over them.

The prospect of a wedding excited a romantic feeling in Kaisa that she, even as a young bride, had never indulged in. Times had been grim when she had arrived in America, uprooted from her homeland and thrust nearly penniless into a strange culture and even stranger language. Marriage had been a matter of necessity. For her, it had been one more aspect of the hard work of life.

But for Este, who had come to this country in her mother's arms, it was different. She had grown up in Edom. With her brothers, she had gone to one of the little schools that dotted the countryside. And Este could speak English, although she seldom did.

The other Seilonen offspring were visiting neighbors that afternoon, but Este was at home with her mother and father. It was she who made and served the coffee.

"What a good worker!" Kaisa exclaimed as Este came around the table to pour more coffee, first for the men and then for the women. Kaisa reached out and



Photo by Kate Carter,
1946-1984, R.I.P.
Maine Photographic Workshop

embraced Este around the hips, squeezing the folds of the voluminous white apron. "And so nicely rounded, too."

"And strong," Erkki said, pride glowing in his blue eyes. "She can pitch a load of hay as well as any man."

"Este's always been a big help," said Mari.

"Lauri is smart to take a Finnish wife. These American women don't know how to work. Not like a Finn," Matti remarked, his head bobbing.

Este, her back to the praise, stacked little sweet cakes onto a plate. A blush crept up the back of her neck and into the tight part that separated the two coils of white-blond hair.

"A good cook, too," Mari added, sliding the flowered plate of cakes closer to the men. "She's the one who made these. My Este! Never has she given me trouble. Not like the boys."

When the cakes were no more than a few last crumbs on the plate, and the talk was turning to the price of pulpwood, Mari urged Kaisa into the parlor. The room was crowded with heavy dark furniture. Bric-a-brac overspread the two oval tables, covered with long fringed cloths. A small desk stood in the corner, its closed front decorated with a gracefully carved swirling filigree. Sober sepia-tinted photographs were mounted on the flowered walls. A warm fire crackled in the parlor stove, and pale afternoon light filtered through lace curtains.

"Your parlor is so comfortable. I could easily sit here all day. Now where's Este?" Kaisa said, stepping back into the shadowy little hallway. "Este," she called, "come now."

Kaisa settled back on one side of the stiff mounded cushion of the horsehair sofa. "Right here, Este," she insisted, patting the shiny seat beside her. "You come sit with me. I want to hear about your arrangements."

Este's round cheeks flushed as she perched next to Kaisa.

Edging closer, Kaisa demanded, "Well?"

"Go on, Este," Mari prompted from the low-backed oak rocker next to the heat of the parlor stove. "Tell Kaisa."

"Yes, tell me."

Este's white fingers flicked to her rosy cheek. Her eyes darted to her mother and then to the floor and back to her mother again. "We will. . . um. . . marry," she stammered. "And live near you. In that house." She exhaled, greatly interested in the flower and leaf design of the hooked rug at her feet.

"That's all?" Kaisa asked. "That's all?"

Este nodded, her eyes miserable.

Mari rocked, the caning in the chair creaking. *She* apparently saw nothing amiss in Este's plans.

"But this will be a big occasion!" Kaisa blurted. "So many people. Think about the food. What are you going to do about food?"

"Mother and I—"

"You and your mother have far too much to think about," Kaisa said in growing excitement. "You let me take care of the food. I'll see to everything. Tomorrow I'll go to Hilja Kyllönen's. She's sometimes lazy, but I'll tell her what to do. And there are plenty of others who can work. They just need to be told. There!" She leaned into the prickly horsehair. "Tell me what you intend to wear. A wedding is an important affair. What you wear could well influence the remainder of your days."

"Mother and I—"

"Of course Este will have something new to wear," Mari interrupted. "I plan to help her make a new skirt. We already have some nice navy blue serge. And she has a piece of lace that her godmother gave her on the day she was born. To decorate the shirtwaist."

"Oh?" said Kaisa, sitting tall on the edge of the sofa. "Oh? But this is America. In America women wear white gowns when they marry. Don't you think that would be nice for Este? Now, Mari — I should not have to tell you this — Este is your oldest. You and Erkki have done well here. Better than most. Este should have a white wedding gown. Surely, you and I could make one. And you even have that nice new Singer!" Kaisa wagged her stubby finger at Mari. "Este, run and get the Sears-Roebuck catalog so we can see what they have for material."

"But, Kaisa *täti*—" Este called Kaisa "aunt" as all the Seilonen children did. "I—"

"I'll hear no words of protest!" Kaisa insisted, her eyes closed. "It's the least that I can do. Now get the catalog."

In the waning glow of late afternoon, the horse plodded along the hard gravel road. Kaisa smiled, snuggling into the heavy buffalo robe wrapped over them.

After some time, Matti said, "Don't you think you're interfering a little too much?"

"Interfering? I'm not interfering!" Kaisa said in surprise. "I'm helping."

It was the muffled quiet the morning after Lauri's and Este's wedding that woke Kaisa. Snow was falling, and already the earth was blanketed in white.

"What a good thing the wedding was yesterday and not today," Kaisa said,

Four Generations in the New World

*In a far field
my father stands
moving toward the wall.
Stones, grey white and silver
as his wintered oceanic hair,
piled neatly in a wall
press into the farmland.*

*My letters to him now,
are the unopened wooden gates
closed for the season,
his heart half dead
seized up at sixty two.*

*In this field
I work with my oldest son.
We walk on the green
frozen winter rye November ground.
We stop and pick up handfuls
of stones, spilling them into
dziadziu's rotting trailer,
their dulling coldness
charging at us
before they will fall
onto the growing stone wall.*

**Thomas Jamrog
Lincolntonville**

teaches at Rockland H.S.

The Elm

**Many trees shade
this old house
but tallest is the elm.
A hard wood
bearing flowers,
it roots deeply,
supports free-flowing branches.
Best split when frozen,
burning hot when dry,
a thing of extremes,
the elm is dying
in America.**

**JoAnne Zywna Kerr
Weld**

happily writes and tends the dump

staring out the kitchen window, glazed with crystals of frost as delicate as the lace that had graced Este's white wedding dress. "Not many would have wanted to venture out on a day like this."

"Not many." Matti worked a patch onto the toe of a rubber boot.

"God was with them." Kaisa was recalling the feel of Mari Seilonen's hand in hers as they sat together on the women's side of the church. And as clearly as though it were occurring again in front of her, she saw Lauri and Este before the altar rail, just as they had stood the day before. "Do you think they're warm enough?" she suddenly asked.

"Who?"

"Este and Lauri! Do you think they're warm enough in that house?"

"They have plenty of firewood."

"But the wind is sure to come up. Their stoves might not draw."

"Lauri has lived there for over a month. Don't you think he could tell whether or not the stoves draw?"

All morning as Kaisa mixed and kneaded and baked bread, she fretted about Este and Lauri. Were they warm enough? Was Este lonely? Did they have enough food?

"Enough food?" Matti scoffed. "You were the one who put all the leftover food into Lauri's wagon. They have enough food for the whole winter, even if it doesn't melt until June." He went back to reading his week-old edition of *The County Observer*, rattling the pages and ignoring his wife, who cleared a small round spot on the frosty window with the tip of her finger to peer anxiously at the deepening snow.

Kaisa switched the flat bread pans from top to bottom and from bottom to top. Pushing the oven door closed, she said, "Este is used to having a big family about. That house must seem quiet to her now. Maybe she misses her mother."

Matti peered over the top of the newspaper. "You're not thinking of going there, are you?"

"Maybe they need something. Or they might want company."

"Company? They don't want company! Don't you remember, Kaisa, the day after we were married?"

At noon they had potato soup and bread. Matti repaired harness in the shed, and when his fingers grew numb with cold, he brought his work into the kitchen. Finally, that chore was through, and he stretched on the tufted bed couch in the sitting room, close to the crackling stove for an afternoon nap.

When he was comfortably sleeping, Kaisa wrapped two of the cooled loaves of crusty bread in a clean towel and tucked them snugly into a knapsack made of woven birch. She pulled heavy stockings over her feet and fastened her sturdy boots. She shrugged the knapsack over the bulky material of her black coat, tied a woolen kerchief over her head and picked a pair of warm coarse mittens from the box behind the kitchen stove. She moved so stealthily through the kitchen that the only sound was the click of the outside door as she closed it. In the shed she found the narrow pointed skis that Matti had made many winters before and carried them out into the softly falling snow.

Silently, she pushed off with the long poles, gliding towards the snow-covered field rather than towards the road. The brushy coffee-colored dog Karhu barked twice and pranced beside her, stopping to roll in the fluffy white. Kaisa breathed the sharp cold air and glanced back over her shoulder as though to see whether or not Matti were watching. The trail she had left was straight. The house, her house, loomed through the soft puffy flakes. She hesitated and then started again, her skis swishing as she, in her long black coat and kerchief, crossed through the expanse of white towards the forest.

The woods were dark with fir and spruce and pine. Snow-covered branches drooped heavily over the tote road. Karhu, with his nose to the snow, scurried off into the brush, leaving a messy trail behind him. Kaisa clambered over a little stream, the water gurgling steel gray and cold against the pure white snow.

Her skis swooshed, a pleasant sound in the deep stillness. Not a squirrel, not a bird, not even the wind broke the silence. There was only the sound of her skis.

She left the tote road, gliding into a small ravine and then made her way uphill, over and through clumps of trees and fallen limbs and brush. At last she skied out of the woods, on the road beyond George Pottle's.

She blinked in the unexpected brightness, for the clouds had parted and a weak sun shone through the falling snow. Snowflakes, fat and wet, caught on the black wool of her coat. Tomorrow, she knew, would be cold. The wind was sure to howl around the corners of the house and sift through the window sashes and flail the new snow across open fields. But for today, the world was still, a gentle quiet land of clean white.

She skimmed over the fresh snow until she came up to a small rise where she could look down on the weathered house and aged barn, the home now of Lauri and Este. Lauri had his work before him. The barn and house cried for repair. Fences were down. Fields were growing over. Their own farm had been no better. But Matti had worked hard, clearing hay fields and adding new land as he could.

Kaisa leaned on her poles, shrugging the pack on her back to balance it. She watched a wisp of smoke wafting from the chimney, the late afternoon sun glinting golden from the four windows to the west, and snow like a bed of down around the ramshackle buildings.

A chickadee sounded close by, breaking into her thoughts and flitted past to perch on a slender twig, bejeweled with small red berries. A last wet flake landed on her warm cheek and melted. The gray shingled house was snug and secret.

The corners of Kaisa's mouth rounded into a smile. And then, as quietly as she had come, she turned to glide back towards the deep stillness of the forest.

**Rebecca Cummings
South Paris**

won 1984 MSCAH Fiction Chapbook competition

That's What They Say

Inside Knight's Old Country Store, the shadows from the sashes made a checked pattern of light on the oak floor. The wood stove, between the counter and George's chair, threw a long black shadow that stretched under the penny candy counter and broke the checked pattern into distinct halves. Past the rocking chair were the beer coolers, and past the beer coolers were the wine shelves to the right; to the left a Budweiser sign hung in a small window. When the sun poured in through the neon sign, flecks of red light would reflect between the burgundy and roses, and if I was back stocking the shelves the dust on the bottles would show like grey moss.

When I opened the store in the morning, George would be waiting on the front steps. He reserved two newspapers each day — *The Portland Press Herald* and *The Boston Globe* — and he read them cover to cover in his rocking chair by the front window. The slanted shadows seemed to make him blend with the floor as he read and as he rocked back and forth the lines would move about him. He wore a brimmed cap, slightly cocked, and one lens on his black horned-rimmed glasses was much thicker than the other. Sometimes while reading he would remove his glasses to use the thick lens as a magnifying glass. The shadow from his cap divided his face into distinct tones with no gradient, and if I stood close to him, the white fuzz covering his neck glistened slightly.

George stooped a little as he walked and scuffed his feet on the floor when he moved from the counter to his chair while clutching his papers. Then he would move his lips while he read and habitually lick them as he turned the pages; his tongue had weathered his lips brown. Almost every night he bought bananas, a can of condensed milk, a can of Campbell's Chicken Gumbo, and a Snicker bar although occasionally he splurged and bought a box of Fig Newtons. He first spoke with me when I started working the store alone, on Sundays and Mondays, the two days the Knights chose not to work.

"What time you close tonight?"

"Eight o'clock."

"Eight, you say?"

"Yep."

"They say workin' a stowah's a good job for a young feller. Know why?"

"Why's that?"

"You're meetin' people."

"Is that right?"

"That's what they say."

He looked back to his paper, the chair moving back and forth as he read. I dusted the wine bottles and then came back behind the counter.

"So how you like tendin' stowah?"

"It's all right."

"Knights is good people, ain't they?"

"They seem pleasant enough."

"Said you was a college feller from Mich'gan."

"I never finished."

"What's that, you say?"

"I used to spend summers not too far from here. Thought I'd be happier in the country with a pile of wood to split. So I quit."

"Mich'gan don't have country stowahs like Knight's do they?"

"Not as old as this one."

"T'was here 'fore the Revolution, you know."

"I saw the date stamped in the foundation."

Later a hard rain knocked down most of the fall color from the trees. In the morning I thought about the morning papers I'd have to prepare as I walked down the hill into the village. In the top right hand corner I'd print the name of each person who reserved one. Most of the faces were familiar, but having never been very good with names, people would often come to the counter with a quart of milk and say, "and my paper"; I would have to ask: "What's the name?" They'd grown impatient so I tried to fit the right name with each face. George was waiting on the steps.

"Good morning, George."

"Quite a rain last night, wern't it."

"Cats and dogs."

We went inside. I unwrapped two bundles of papers and printed "George" in the upper right hand corner of a *Globe* and a *Press* while he stood over the counter licking his lips.

"How much is that?"

"Forty-five cents."

"Fotty-five, you say?"

"Yep."

"That's a lot to pay for a paper, in' it."



Photo by Elliott Healy

"I guess so, George."

"How much you s'pose I get for social secur'try?"

"I don't know."

"Three hundred and nine dollars. Man can live pretty good on that."

"I guess he can."

Outside, a small crevice of sunlight seeped through the cloud cover spreading faint shadows across George's flannel shirt as he scuffed over to his chair. I finished the papers and began stocking the milk cooler while he read. Then I wiped the fingerprints from the antique glass case filled with penny candy in various cut glass dishes.

"How long have you lived in Center Sweyzer, George?"

"Since 1918. Fifty-two years."

"Sixty-two."

"Sixty-two, you say?" He counted the decades on his fingers. "Ay-uh, sixty-two."

"Where'd you live before that?"

"Sweyzer's where I was born. Moved up to Center in 1918."

"Ever married?"

"No. Never was."

He looked back to his paper so I began rewiping the glass and thinking that perhaps I'd been too personal.

"You a married feller?"

"Nope."

"They say workin' a stowah's a good job for a young feller. Know why?"

"Why's that?"

"You're meetin' people."

"That makes sense."

"That's what they say."

Joe King wheeled in for his paper and box of Muriel Coronellas and I laid them on the counter before he entered the store. He was a thin unshaven man who was missing the top joints of his middle three fingers on his right hand.

"Hi Jawge."

"Mornin' Joe. Quite a rain last night, wern't it."

"I guess, Jawge."

"Bout an inch n' half, they say."

"That much?"

He paid for his paper and cigars with the exact change and left. George began reading his paper and I went to the meat cooler to slice six pieces of bacon before Mr. Bishop came at quarter to ten. I cut them thick, weighed them, and printed the price on the freezer wrap before laying them on the counter as he walked into the store. He was a fat man who wore a knit orange cap tilted to one side.

"Mornin' Jawge."

"Frank. Quite a rain last night, wern't it."

"Y'sah."

"Inch n' half, they say."

"Inch n' half, Jawge?"

"That's what they say."

He turned to me and said, "put it on my slip"; I had to ask the account number: "Bishop. Fotty-fowah." He waved goodbye to George as I subtotaled his bacon and paper, reached in the file drawer, pulled out a white piece of paper under forty-four, added the amount to his account with the date, and pressed the charge key on the register. George folded his papers, walked over to the fruits, and brought two bananas for me to weigh.

"Thirty-six cents, George."

"Thirty-six, you say?"

"Yep."

"That's a lot to pay for two bananas, in' it."

"I guess it is."

"What time you close tonight?"

"Eight o'clock."

"Eight, you say?"

"Yep. Eight."

He never said goodbye when he left. Maybe he felt there was no reason for it since he'd be back at four-thirty. But if I said goodbye out of habit, he'd raise his hand above his shoulder as he walked out to be polite.

The snow lay in thick clumps on the tree branches and as I walked down the hill to open the store most all the chimneys were billowing wood smoke. George was on the steps flapping his arms back and forth.

"Morning George."

"Quite a snow last night wern't it."

"First one's the best."

"How much you s'pose we got, 'bout ten inches?"

"Maybe. You ought to be wearing a coat, George."

"I got two shirts and wrap my scarf tight around my neck. They say if a man's

got a good scarf he'll stay plenty warm."

"A coat couldn't hurt."

"Back when there was sleds the drivers wore sheepskin coats. With big collars so's they could fold 'em up 'gainst the wind." He pretended to fold up a collar.

"Did you ever drive a sled?"

"No. Never did."

Inside, after I'd prepared the papers and stocked the milk cooler, George was in his chair reading. The shadows from the sashes moved across him as he rocked back and forth. Joe King pulled in for his paper and Muriel Coronellas; I laid them on the counter before he entered.

"Hi, Jawge."

"Quite a snow last night, wern't it, Joe."

"You bet, Jawge."

"Bout ten inches they say."

"Hard tellin' with the wind kicked up like it is."

"You know where the highest wind was recorded, Joe?"

"Right here on Mount Washington, wern't it?"

"Two hundred thitty-one miles p'owah, they say."

"That's quite a wind, in' it, Jawge."

He put the exact change on the counter, waved to George and left. I went over to the meat counter, sliced six pieces of bacon for Mr. Bishop, wrapped it, weighed it, and printed the price in the upper right hand corner of the white freezing wrap. It wasn't quite quarter to ten, so I left the bacon on the counter and walked over to wipe the penny candy case with a Windexed paper towel.

"Heard you were on T.V. last year, George." He started licking his lips. "On a news section, 'Mary's People,' wasn't it?"

"I guess that was it."

"What did you think about it?"

"Not too much."

"She do an interview?"

"She come in the stowah and took my picture sittin' right where I'm at."

"Ask you a bunch of questions?"

"Told her she must be pretty hard up to be takin' my picture."

He began reading his paper and I walked up back behind the counter. The shadows in the store were becoming fainter as the sun rose and clouds were gathering on the horizon. Mr. Bishop left his car running when he came inside.

"Mornin' Jawge."

"Frank. Quite a snow last night, wern't it."

"Bout ten inches, they say."

"Got a new haircut, Jawge."

"Still got my hair." He pulled off his cap showing his white pate. "Say, Frank. They say if a man's got a good cap and a scarf to wrap tight around his neck, he'll stay plenty warm."

He turned to me and said: "Put it on my slip." I charged his bacon and paper without asking the account number. After he'd left, George folded up his papers, picked out two ripe bananas, and brought them to the counter for me to weigh.

"Thirty-nine cents, George."

"Thitty-nine, you say?"

"Yep."

"That's a lot to pay for two bananers, in' it?"

"I guess it is."

"How much you s'pose I get for social secur'try?"

"How much?"

"Three hundred and nine dollars. Man can live pretty good on that."

"I guess he can."

"T'was Roosevelt stut social secur'try, you know."

"I knew that."

"Dem'crats are helpin' people. You a dem'crat?"

"Nope."

"Republikin?"

"I vote for the loser."

"He, he. Say, what time you close tonight?"

"Eight o'clock."

"Eight, you say?"

"Yep."

I remembered not to say goodbye when he left. By noon it was overcast, and by four-thirty, when George came back, it looked as though it might snow again. I flicked on the lights inside the frozen food cooler and then pulled the chain on the Budweiser sign; the lights inside the beer and soda coolers were always on, and always hummed slightly. Now the store was brighter as the evening twilight moved in.

By seven the store was quiet and George watched me refill the coolers and sweep the dust on the oak floor. Then I bundled the papers that hadn't sold after I cut the date and title off of the front page so the store would receive credit. At quarter to eight George had not bought his dinner because he was sleeping in his chair, but when I opened the front door to bring in the wooden sign that advertised specials, he woke. George laid his bananas, condensed milk, soup, and a Snicker bar on the counter at five after eight. Then he bundled his scarf tight

around his neck. I forgot and said goodnight; he raised his arm above his shoulder as he left to be polite.

In mid-January, after a Nor'easter had dumped over two feet of snow, I walked down to open the store and was a little surprised that George wasn't waiting on the steps. Inside, it was pale grey so I turned on all the lights in the coolers before I prepared the papers and I noticed George hadn't picked his up in two days. When someone who reserved a paper did not show, it was still saved, and I would clip the day old paper and the new one with a wooden clothespin. People generally scowled about having to buy a day old paper, but it was store policy, and if they didn't like it, they could stop reserving and just take their chances that the papers wouldn't all be sold. The papers rarely were gone. When I finished dusting the wine bottles Joe King pulled in and I put his paper and Muriel Coronellas on the counter.

"Morning."

"Jawge ain't in today."

"Hasn't picked up his papers in a couple of days. Maybe he went somewhere."

"Jawge? He got no place to go. He's a funny feller. Never had no car. Sleeps in a cold room."

"Is that right?"

"Y'sah. When I stut up to the mill, Jawge was there. Asked me to his place to stut up his stove. Propane. Pilot went out. Fore he goes to bed, shuts it right down."

"Really."

"He's tight as a clam, Jawge is. Don't know what fowah. Can't take it to the grave. One day Charlie MacRook n' Jawge stut up. Know Charlie?"

"Must not come in much."

"Charlie was sittin' in George's chair one day and Jawge tells him to git. Says Charlie, 'Why's you so tight,' and gives Jawge a shove. 'Least I can pay my bills,' says Jawge. Y'sah, Jawge, he's a funny feller."

He paid with the exact change and left. I went back to the meat cooler to slice Mr. Bishop's bacon. He came at quarter to ten, looked at George's chair then at me and said: "Put it on my slip."

The rest of the day dragged because few people bothered to come out in the lousy weather. I read both the *Press* and the *Globe* from cover to cover. At three-thirty I read the "Help Wanted" in the *Globe*; there were a few jobs. At four I read "Automobiles For Sale or Trade" in the *Press*. Around four-thirty I threw them away so I wouldn't reread old news.

I began closing at eight knowing that if I didn't check on George I'd lay awake wondering how long an old man like him might lay dead before someone would come by. And besides, if I were George, I'd want me to come take a look. After all the lights were off except the lamp over the register I stood under the pool of light counting the change out to the nearest dollar. Then I put it into four paper cups labeled Pennies, Nickels, Dimes, and Quarters. I added to the change whatever bills it took to make an even sixty and placed them in with the pennies. The rest went in a green cloth bag that had a picture of Casco Bank on both sides. I spun the lock on the safe and stoked the wood stove before I left.

Although I'd never been to his house, he told me some time ago that it was across from the old church that had been closed up — a short walk from the old country store. When I reached the church, I looked back down the street. I'd passed three houses: two on the left and one on the right. The two on the left had lights on, and the square window frames were yellow. There were four yellow squares of light in the first house and one upstairs in the second.

If George had answered his door when I knocked, I'd have been surprised, but I knocked much harder the second time because he was a little hard of hearing. The cold weather had heaved the door so that I had to strike the upper right hand corner of it to enter, and then I hesitated for a moment before going inside. I stood in the kitchen and the steam from breath was thick. George had been rocking in the doorway of his kitchen. Next to him was a wood stove that I touched and my fingers stuck slightly. I knew he liked to rock by wood heat and I walked by him into the next room, unfurnished except for a couch and a propane furnace, the blue pilot light still burning. I listened to the pilot hiss. He'd died with his cap and glasses on. A Bean blanket was wrapped around his feet. Next to the blanket were two neatly folded papers and his scarf. I laid a blanket over him that covered a tattered cushion on the couch, and left.

Outside, I wondered why I'd covered George with a blanket as I walked back to the store. The first house on the left had one yellow square of light on upstairs and the second house was dark. When I opened the store, the snow from boots beaded like rain on glass on the oak floor, and one of the beads rolled into a crack between the boards. Then I went to the cooler, opened a beer, and called the sheriff. Center Sweyzer didn't have one so I called Fryeburg.

"Is this the sheriff?"

"Ay-uh."

"Do you know a man named George. . . I don't know his last name."

"There's lots of old men."

"He's lived in Center Sweyzer most all his life."

"Jawge Hale?"

"Maybe. He sits in Knight's Country Store a lot."

"That's Jawge Hale."

"He's dead."

"Dead?"

"I didn't know who to call. I just went to check on him because he hadn't picked up his papers in a couple of days."

"Got to have your name."

"Shamus. Paul Shamus."

I could hear him shuffling some paper. "Capitol SHAMUS?"

"Yep."

"I'll call Russ up to the hospital."

"You want me to wait here at the store?"

"What fowah? I'll get Russ over to pick him up."

I was watching the froth run down the neck of the bottle and there was a bubble on the mouth's edge that looked like it should burst but stubbornly clung to the lip. Then I walked over to the cooler, grabbed another beer, and sat in George's chair. Perhaps I was afraid he'd walk in or maybe I just never cared to sit in before. As I sipped my beer I looked out on the sleeping street, moving back and forth by the stove while the coolers hummed and hummed.

Two weeks after George was buried I walked down to open the store, hoping the ground hog would see its shadow. Frost was on the hardwood for the third day running, and I wondered if superstition would prove true and we would receive a winter rain. After I'd prepared the papers and stocked the milk cooler, I made a cup of coffee and picked up a *Globe*. The Celtics beat the Pistons, the Wings lost as usual, Zonker was featured in "Doonesbury," an ad was selling air fare from Boston to London for ninety-nine dollars. Joe King pulled in and I laid his paper and Muriel Coronellas on the counter.

"Morning."

"Hog gonna see his shadow?"

"Ninety-nine dollars?"

"What's that, you say?"

"Oh, I guess I was talking to myself."

"Frost been three days runnin'."

"I guess it has."

"Charlie MacRook says we got to have six weeks more winter."

He paid for his papers and cigars with the exact change and sat in George's chair. I went back to the meat cooler to slice six thick pieces of bacon for Mr. Bishop. Then I doubled up a Windexed paper towel and began wiping fingerprints from the glass covering the penny candy.

"You like tendin' stowah?"

"It's all right, I guess."

"I tended stowah, you know."

"Is that right?"

"Y'sah. Right here back when Sam Pawnett ran it."

"Really?"

"Sam, he was tight as a clam. Don't know what fowah. Can't take it to the grave."

With a sudden shudder I let go of the paper towel and went for the *Globe*. He sat in his chair smoking while he read

Doug Carey
So. Penobscot

teaches part-time at UMO

Serial: episode #2

In last year's episode, "Stardust Rain," Ted Wharton ("Bear") is struggling to extricate himself from an affair with Joy. He is her high school teacher. Ted and his wife chaperone the senior prom; Joy attends with a date. While dancing with Ted, she whispers that she is pregnant. The story continues.

Blue Notes

from *Growing Pains*, a novel

Ted struggled not to meet Joy's eyes as he lectured on Monday morning. As the class was leaving he said, "Joy, I'd like to see you a minute." He had her wait at the desk until everyone else was gone and then he said softly, "Well?"

"Well what?" she said. Her face was impassive, her eyes cool gray — yet with something hurt and imploring in them.

"Well what? Well what do you think?"

"Is that all you care about?"

"Of course it's not all I care about, but Jesus Christ!"

She shook her head. "I'm six days overdue now, Bear."

His heart took a sickening plunge.

She asked: "Can you meet me tonight?"

"What time?"

"The usual, Bear. Under the 'J' at the mall."

They were back in the Blue Note Motel again. Through a rip in the musty, dark blue drape he could see the flashing red Vacancy sign, and imagined the rooms around him, the various acts of perversion they housed. Toilets flushed, cars screeched and roared away, trucks whined on General Hays Boulevard, highway of hell.

For half an hour they sat on the bed, fully clothed. They shared a joint, she smoked a second one by herself and lit a third; got halfway through it, snuffed it out. —Then looked at him with sad and sorry eyes and said, "What's happening to us, Bear?"

No reply. The room — gray shaggy rug, harsh ticking air-conditioner, headboard of plastic walnut attached to the wall — revolved to the cellular reefer tune in his brain. Her lips and chin were speckled with threads of gold.

"It's your wife, I can tell. You have to leave her, Bear."

Her hand was soothing his cheek and he wanted to tear it away — yet he liked it, he liked it. In spite of the air-conditioning the room was stuffy, suffocating, dead. "I will," he said.

"But I mean soon."

He stroked her hair — as if she were an animal, a pet. "I will."

He felt her tremble, saw tears in her eyes. "I've only been close to one other person in my life," she said. "Just one, and I need you so much."

He took a sad, deep breath. "Joy, look . . . you're only seventeen." Which was, after all, the impossible truth.

Her quivering lips. "Who cares? What difference does that make? Is that the problem?" Her eyes were smeary now, and pleading. "All I know is I love you, you just can't leave me alone. It can't happen twice, not so soon."

He looked away: at the hole in the drapes and the Vacancy sign. He stood up and went to the window, pushed the fabric around so the slit was hidden, and returned. Sat down on the bed again. "Rod?" he said. "Was he the other person?"

She sucked mucous into her throat, a sneer. "That creep? Are you kidding?"

"Well who—?"

"It's not important, you don't want to know."

She was probably right. Some pustular crud even worse than Rod who made teaching torture, no doubt. Let it ride.

Her tongue on the gap in her teeth; her troubled eyes. "You're the only person I really feel with," she said. "Without you I'm all alone. I can't stand to be alone! My father . . . Christ! I have his ice inside me, I can't burn it out!" Moisture rushed to her eyes, spilled over. She said, "My brother's dead. He was only two years older than I am now when he died, do you understand?" She stared at him with frightening intensity. "Death's in the rug, it's in the walls, it's coming through the door! I'm scared!"

She was starting that horrible shaking. He held her. She said, "We're living in the earth's last days! The dark is coming down! It's too late to go back, it's too late to disarm, we're going to blow ourselves to bits by accident no matter what we do, it's too late!"

A heavy tremor shook her. He said, "Joy, no, it's okay. You're all

right, we're all right, no one's going to die."

Her face was twisted painfully and her eyes were closed. "No, nobody beats death, you said it yourself." Staring at him again, her eyes suddenly wide, she said, "The whole world's going to die!" Then she wrenched herself out of his arms and ran to the bathroom.

Retching: violent and loud.

He found her on her knees in the bare bright light. She clung to the toilet, her face in the bowl, the bowl full of yellowish gruel. She heaved again; more liquid erupted and plopped; strands hung from her lips.

He held her shoulder, felt her chills, heard the click of her shivering teeth. She spasmed again with a horrible rasping sound.

Sad eyes on the toilet, sad hand on her back, he thought: Now isn't this a pretty piece of porn? There was no doubt a section he'd overlooked on those decadent bookstore racks she'd sent him to that catered to just this thing: VOMITING VIXENS. BARFING BEAUTIES. UPCHUCKING CHICKS. He held her as she jerked and groaned again. The dazzle of light on porcelain tank and fiberglass tub; the shower curtain, torn at the top, a haze of fungus at its base; the thin cold twitch of her flesh.

Then all at once with a pitiful cry she said; "Tell me you love me! Promise you'll never leave me!"

He stared at her. He shook his head. "Joy . . ."

"Promise! Promise me now!" White fire was in her eyes.

He wet his hot numb lips. "I . . . promise."

She retched again, but nothing came up; leaned back; her gasping breath. She said, "Oh Christ," and ripped a wad of toilet paper off the roll. Wiped her mouth. Hung, head over soiled bowl, eyes closed, and time stood still, eternity trapped in the fixtured glare. It was just the two of them, alone in all the universe.

Slowly she got to her feet and tripped the lever. The contents of her guts disappeared with a gurgle and swirl. She washed her face and rinsed her mouth, the toilet sighed, he helped her to the bed.

His thoughts were scattered sparks. "Do you want anything? Can I get you some Coke?" He was thinking of Kim, his twelve-year-old, and that virus she'd had before Christmas: thirteen hours of throwing up and then Coke, good old Coke, had at last done the trick.

"Okay," she said. "Yeah, Coke."

Into the dark satanic night with the plastic bowl, the growl and headlight rush of the road in front of him. Bright pinkorange crook-necked lamps, gas stations across the way. A car pulling up to the Blue Note office; two muscular T-shirted toughs jumping out with a shout.

He went to the breezeway, plunged his arm into the ice chest, filled the bowl. Stuck the coins in the soda machine, heard the hollow deep crunch and collected the can of Coke. Looked out at the nightmare night: Joy's Honda in the lot, its red distorted, bloodied by the lamps; the swish and rip of traffic in his eyes; exhaust smell, diesel roar. A slamming door, a woman's loud coarse laugh. He went back to the room, a cable of tension tight and sharp in his chest.

Joy was leaning against the headboard. The color was coming back into her face, but her eyes didn't look quite right.

"Feeling better?"

She nodded. "Yeah."

He iced the plastic cup and snapped the Coke: quick fizz, brown liquid hiss, tan foam. She took two tentative sips and said, "it's good. Thanks, Bear."

He watched her drink. Her hand was shaking as she raised the cup.

"You want me to pour some more?"

"No, that's enough." Her funny eyes. She set the cup on the brown formica night stand, smiling wanly. "Come here."

He sat beside her.

"Put your arms around me. Hold me."

He did: felt her tremor; diminished, sporadic. He said, "Joy, maybe that doctor could help you. —That therapist you said you saw last year."

A scornful sniff. "That guy? Forget it." She stared with adoring, blurry eyes. "No, all I need is you." A silence. She continued to stare. She said: "Say you love me."

"I love you."

"Tell me again that you'll never leave me."

"Till . . . never leave you."

"Oh Bear, my wonderful Bear." She leaned her head against his chest.

It burned him, melted him down. He held her for long and mournful minutes and didn't know what to do. Oh this was a blue, blue note all right. He breathed her sad soft hair.

Her shaking stopped. She kissed his ear and smiled and said, "I'm

Deer-Crossing Signs

*Only bucks jump.
The rack of four horns,
the stretched body leaping diagonally
from right to left
as if into and out of the sign itself.
Left is always into the road.*

*No one has ever seen a deer
cross in these places.
The signs are a conspiracy
of New England's governors to encourage tourism.
It is history. Rockefeller and Curtis
and the others got together and agreed
about deer and how they need to be protected,
how landscape is dull
and deer would be good. They agreed
the prisoners in prison who make road signs
needed work and the illusion of freedom.*

*Tourists wait for weeks, you can see them.
All summer long they come.
They set up actual camps by the signs, cook on the roadside,
and pee in the ditches. During daytime
they sleep wakefully in their Winnebagos,
and at night they grow tense
and wait with huge halogen spotlights
on thin extension cords plugged into their cigarette lighters.
Sometimes they shine their lights on each other,
splashing their beams back and forth
on each other's bodies, across their genitals,
and into their faces, looking for two eyes
that glow wildly in the night.
But no one from New Jersey has glowing eyes.
Their tails do not twitch.
They grow bored. Where are the deer?
They yearn for deer, for a flash of ankle,
a chocolate flickering shape.
They compare slogans on their license plates
and find them dull: Wander Indiana, one says,
another The Heartland, another The Garden State,
which they've escaped in the growth season.
They wish theirs said something romantic,
like Vacationland, or stirring, like Live Free Or Die.
The natives whiz by, not looking,
in old cars made of Bond-o and tape,
with Vacationland on their license plates.
They know where the deer are.*

*The deer are all gathered silently in the woods,
fifty yards from these signs.
Hundreds of deer are behind each sign.
They instruct their young:
"Never, ever, cross here.
They have signs warning us.
The governor is good to us."*

*The deer know everything.
They know the difference between Winnebagos and Chippewas,
they can read license plates and know all the slogans.
They watch men from Florida, the Sunshine State,
try to find them with binoculars that see in the dark.
They hear men from Wisconsin, America's Dairyland,
speak of milking horned animals
that are three times the size of deer
and sluggish as mud.
They see men in moustaches from Washington, D.C.,
Our Nation's Capitol, park their Renegades side by side
and speak to each other over CB radios about their fantasies
of wilderness, their yearning for deer.*

*One young buck, his rack itching with fresh velvet,
also yearns: to be seen, to be immortal before November,
a flash of brown, a blur, a white tail twitching,
to become exactly like the sign, to leap out diagonally
from right to left in the exact angle onto the road,
hooves sparking, and then another leap up,
up over the guardrail, and gone.
He will not do it.
He yearns, but no.
No deer has ever done it.*

**Terry Plunkett
Hallowell**
teaches at UMA

Ice Out: International Bridge Fort Kent, Maine

*The winter brings gray cranial wind,
the choral sighs of guilty men, condemned,
impatient for the noose, as boredom's frigid
fever seizes thoughts, makes them seep, long
as frozen rivers through transcontinental
sewer pipes: drip-drip, drip-drip. Then madness,
vernal and divine. The floes of ice
groan like dreaming dogs and lift on river-swell,
snap frenzy-free to rage, rage I tell you,
rushing the flume like alabaster bulls
they charge abutments, stampede past,
exhilarate the future. Go now; go stand
like a giant once again, immerse yourself
and swallow deep, swallow everything.*

**Curtis Derrick
Fort Kent**
raised in the Deep South, & is
a school administrator

better now. When will I ever learn not to smoke so much when I'm having my period?"

He stared at her. "Your . . . period?"

"I checked while you were getting the Coke. I figured that's why I got sick."

The cable inside his chest unravelled and snapped.

"I guess you're glad," she said.

"Glad?" he said, his heart on wings. "Yeah, I guess I am."

She said she was totally gross and needed a shower, and disappeared into the bathroom again. He watched TV without any sound, his mind a blank.

The door clicked open with a rush of steam and she came at him naked, her skin aglow. She sat beside him on the bed and said, "Make love to me."

"What? Joy, you're . . . sick."

"Oh no," she said, "I feel wonderful now."

**Christopher Fahy
Thomaston**

fixes old houses & manuscripts

Memorial

Awake and Trying to Get a Whole Dream Back

*is like trying to chase
a windblown piece of paper down*

*it lies right there in front of you
you stoop and grab
it slides and curls
you run and stamp
it flips and scoots*

*with chance and time both running out
you edge up close
you corner it
it billows up
flies out of sight.*

Richard Aldridge
Sebasco Estates

teaches at Morse H.S. in Bath

Well, Emma, we buried two of them today. Gorry, but I'm all hymned out. Albert took up the better part of the morning, and we didn't get poor Snowball under the daylilies 'til just before the rain come back.

Odd about them two dyin' just three days apart like that. But leave it to that old cat to be so stubborn as to hold on and let old Bert go first. I expect no one but me knowed how sick they was. We'll put Bert's ashes around that big azalea bush out back o' the garden.

I got a good look at Doc's face today as he come back up the aisle after readin' the Twenty-third Psalm. I came that close to cryin' right then. Doc will sure miss Bert at the poker game down to the fish-house. He liked to take Bert's money home. Said Bert never come by it honest anyway, so he shouldn't miss it none.

You know that brass Roll Call they got up on the north wall there, the one from the War. I always mean to take a closer look at it, see if I still remember all the names on it. But it seems like every time I think to look, I'm settin' there for a weddin' or a funeral, and I don't get to it.

Well, we'll miss them two all right.

Didn't they both love birds, though? Bert got his exercise shakin' his cane after that cat at the birdfeeder. What a sight!

And the cat. He'd never let me walk past his dish if it was empty without he'd grab me 'round the ankle and give me a mighty cuff.

I was settin' there in church listenin' to the service, and I looked down and picked a white hair off my sweater. You know, I had to smile, Emma. He was a shedder, that one.

Sandra Dickson
Port Clyde

free-lances in video and writing

The Feast

*A wax pilgrim woman stood on the table
and took the place of my name
when we sat down to turkey dinner.
I was only eight and I stole a match
from my grandfather's snuff box
and waited to set that lady's hair
on fire. It was easy to melt her head
into that stiff white collar.
Motionless, I must have watched her burn
for a long time, at that festive table.
I wanted to understand suffering,
more than the harmless passing
of a finger through a flame,
but her grief was indecipherable
and I had no language for pain.
Now, far from the old horror
of childhood, I want to remember a feast
but think only of that austere lady
dressed in black, her hair in flames.*

Kathleen Lignell
Stockton Springs

works at Sea Grant, UMO

KENNEBEC: A Portfolio of Maine Writing

This is Kennebec's ninth annual publication. Because of the unusual amount of excellent fiction, this issue is expanded to 32 pages, printed in our usual run of 5,000 copies, distributed free as a service to the community. In this effort to bring Maine writers to the attention of a wide public, we are supported by the UNIVERSITY OF MAINE AT AUGUSTA. Of the forty writers, half appear in these pages for the first time. Back issues, 1981-84, are available upon request.

*Deadline for submissions for next year:
9/15/85 - 12/1/85. Send SASE.
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*Editors: Carol Kontos
Terry Plunkett*

Typesetting: The Comp Shop

Cover: Acrylic by Tim Beal



Non-Profit Organization
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Augusta, Maine 04330
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