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ERRATUM

Two sentences were dropped from the end of the text of page 25. They read, in the regular typeface:

Of course you're aware of my opinion of the critics? Is this book amenable to obscenities, and if so do you have any qualms about writing "*****"?||

Era Spring 1979

era

ERA

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Alive and Well in Sanity

Costumed clowns at Wonderhill
Laughing with giant lips
At trampelined lunatics.
Up and down the spring reflexes
At hobo feet locked up to die.

A window a cubic inch to free an eye
I watched them scream to fits of Stravinsky.

This Journal

I sat at home, alone
For so long I noticed
A change in the plants

I'm not thirsty for any
Of your alcoholics
Limp green and
Fresh from the sea

I'll walk with a
Chainsaw under my hat
I hear the motor
All the time

Amidst swimming pools
And patios I saw
The tall green tree

The Pond

Not much of a pond, really,
lying by the side of a busy street
But it has three islands in it, all
covered with trees and bushes and tall
grasses, and the ducks and fishes don't
seem to mind at all that it was man-
designed and made.

It is in fact its own small world.
I have seen egret and green heron
there, though not for long, staring
out at the cars moving by, standing
stock still, as if camouflage were
possible, as if instinctive tricks could
protect them from the sticks and clods of
dirt of the small black boys with fishing
poles there to probe the eight-inch
depths with their bread-lined hooks, to
capture miniscule prizes testifying to an
angler's skill.

Swamp plants grow there in profusion,
competing for the shrinking surface--
hyacinths, sending their rafts out across the
water, spread slowly along the shore, and
inward.

Last year they almost covered the pond, till the
first frost came, and then the men
came, scooping up blighted plants until the
shore was piled high with shriveled
bladders and blue-haired roots.

This year the algae spread their rafts upon the
waters, until the men came once again to
skim the pond, and now the scum and
hyacinths compete for dominance.
Until the men came once again.

There are other men as well--and the
boys, with an array of cans and bottles
saved for the occasion--and paper cups and
styrofoam and old wood planks and once a
shopping cart.

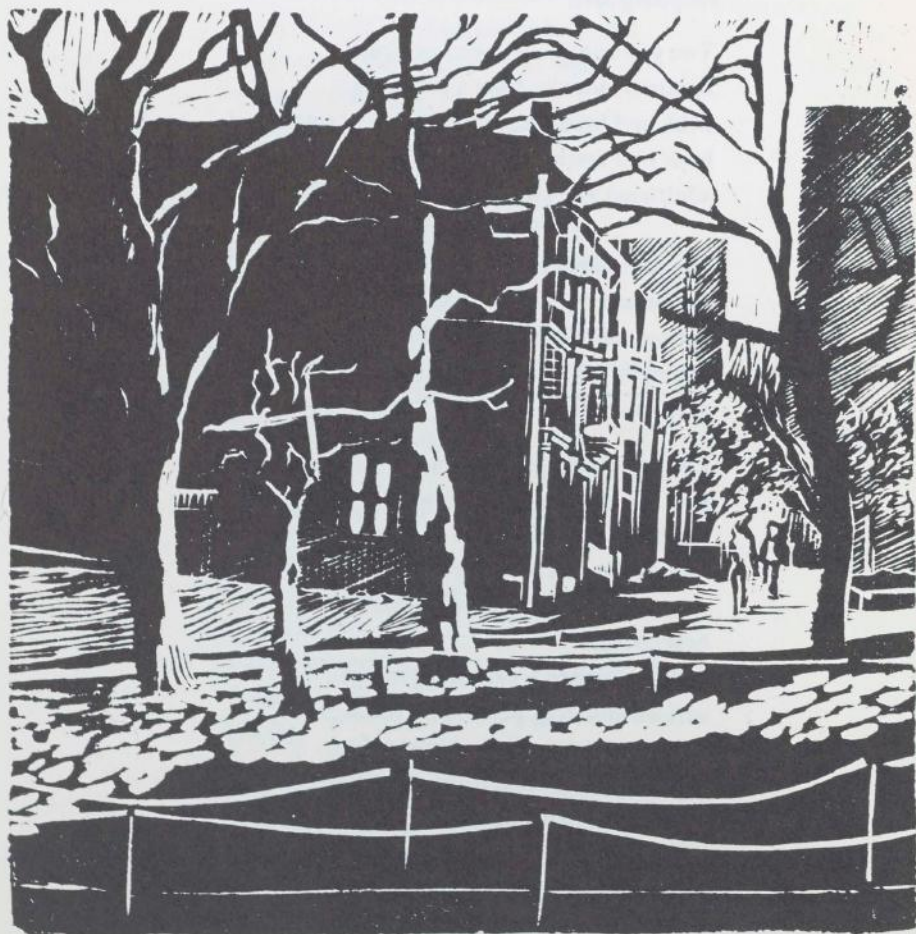
Two years ago my daughter rescued a
hundred tadpoles from a puddle in a
field, and brought them to the pond with the
hope that two or three might reach
adulthood and keep their cycle going.

She poured her treasure in among the
turtles and the four-inch suns, among the
bottles and the cans and the small boys
fishing in the shallow depths with
dark exuberance.

I pass the pond quite frequently and
note the changes--the spread of
hyacinths and the clouds of algae--a
tension there in need of resolution
(I put my silent vote down for the
hyacinths).

I check for turtles swimming on the
surface and frogs perchance, through
I've never seen even one among the
hyacinths, algae and debris, and the
boys taking fish once in a
while, back-slapping, hand-
slapping, cool-talking, style becoming
character, character becoming
ethos.

Hyacinths, algae and debris competing for the
surface and the depths
(I put my silent vote down for the
hyacinths.)



Andrea Zemel

“What Did I Say?”

She looked at him and he watched the life drain from her eyes. Her face blanched and she licked trembling lips. “Take me home,” she whispered.

“What’s the matter?” he asked. “What did I say?”

They had been living together for two months and it was good, comfortable, and not too close. Driving back now, he realized just how good it had been. He kept looking over to her, her knees clenched tight, her body as straight as steel. She stared straight ahead. Nothing he said broke that icy gaze or touched the fury. “What’s wrong?” he asked. “What did I say?”

Her earliest memories were always seen from some renewed perspective, from somewhere outside herself. She saw a little girl climbing the fence, pushing the stroller with Momma, coming out of the dark... She saw a little girl with short black hair and a boxer’s chin. She didn’t remember things being bigger than herself; she saw herself as being smaller. She remembered from the outside, watching a tiny stranger.

She slammed the car door with vengeance and stalked up the pavement, stiff-legged. He hovered about her, trying to get a handle on this new mood of hers. She pushed herself and the key into the door viciously, letting it bang him. He trailed her anxiously, trying to see what was burning under her skin, just what had gone wrong. “I said something, didn’t I? What did I say?”

She tried not to remember those days, with the crying and the closed doors and the raised voices. Kids understood more than adults realized. Kids knew some places were safe and others weren’t, the times when they couldn’t talk or bring other kids over. The only thing the kid didn’t understand was just what caused it. She had always thought it was the baby.

He stayed in the living-room while she disappeared into her bedroom. She would cry it out and this freak would pass. When she came out she’d be the sweet-tempered woman he loved. He had never seen her this way before. She was such a steady person. He was the temperamental one. There were times when...well, anyway, she coped pretty well with all that. She entered quietly with her two suitcases but she thumped them defiantly down. He began to yell and plead. She called a cab. Bit by bit, the words that spurted and splashed died down to a trickle. Finally her silence froze them into pieces of glass.

She didn’t remember them trying the front door although they must have. But he had locked all the doors. So her granddad had pushed part of the screen away from the back porch. It was only a tiny hole and the wires scratched her as she was handed into the house. She was the one, granddad said, because he could trust her to unlock the front door for them right away. She only looked back once, after she was in, and saw their anxious faces pressed to the screen. She was the one because he wouldn’t hurt her, not her, even if he was...

“You’re leaving just like that? Don’t I get an explanation at all?” He was crying now, unwillingly but torn by his confusion. “Have we been so unhappy? Did I say something wrong? What did I say? Honey, can’t we talk?”

Just a little girl with extra short hair so she wouldn't get it tangled, a fighter's mouth and eyes like saucers, just like the soldier's dog in the fairytale. And the kid was coming out of the dark, out of the dark hallway where she had unlocked the door, because her daddy was calling her. She approached him fearlessly because he was her daddy. A kid coming out of the dark, confused. A man with too much of the bottle under his belt.

"What did I say?" He was begging now, with all the sanity he had left. She took those two bags and she walked. He pounded the stone-silent door behind her, crying and screaming, "But what did I say?"

The memory stopped there. It was the one she couldn't forget, the one that hurt, the one that made her scared and sick to her stomach. But it was only half a memory and it always stopped with the shadow of a rising man. She didn't know why. But she knew this much: there are lines in your life like chasms. Before one you trust somebody. After it you don't. You never go back over that line. The moment remains with you.

And when he said, "You know you're driving me to drink," and laughed, he crossed over to the other side of the chasm, with the little girl and her fighter's face.

That's what he said.

Ira Caplan

First Afternoon in a New House

It was fall in many ways: As her long golden legs,
Insecure in shorts, stood, reclined, paced,
The light seemed to hang in a kind of despondent haze
Between dark bare floor wood and the pimpled moon face
She pointed downward (in an "emotionally
Claustrophobic" frown); crisp bacon smell bit the nose;
A dissonant childrens' chorus tripped to the ears;
Tired grudges crawled deeper into memory.
I gave thanks as she sank into a threadbare sofa
Talked about French students and smiled

The Landing

Treppenabsatz is a better word than landing;
It could give any stairway pause.
And I am the stairway-kenner,
Captured behind the railing
Somewhere between the floors.

Once Sundays went straight to my grandmother's house.
Everyone slept. Bewitched.
I pricked my finger on a different spinning-wheel:
Plowman in the terrarium fields
Expert on arctic explorers' accounts
Acquaintance of every cane in the stand.
When there was finally no place to go
I took to the stairway:
The stairway's unmapped.
Cooled by the breeze from the window upstairs
I became every traveller then;
The cars that passed on North Regent Street
Blew all their journeys in.

---Martial, appointed as conscience,
Wagged his finger through Montaigne's door:
"The man who lives everywhere, Maximus,--
That man lives nowhere at all."

Here I am, Martial, living on stairways;
It's like invisibility: the privilege of a child.
When someone almost left me,
I built this landing: Treppenabsatz,
The pausing (can you hear it?)--
The pausing of the stairs.

Ticking

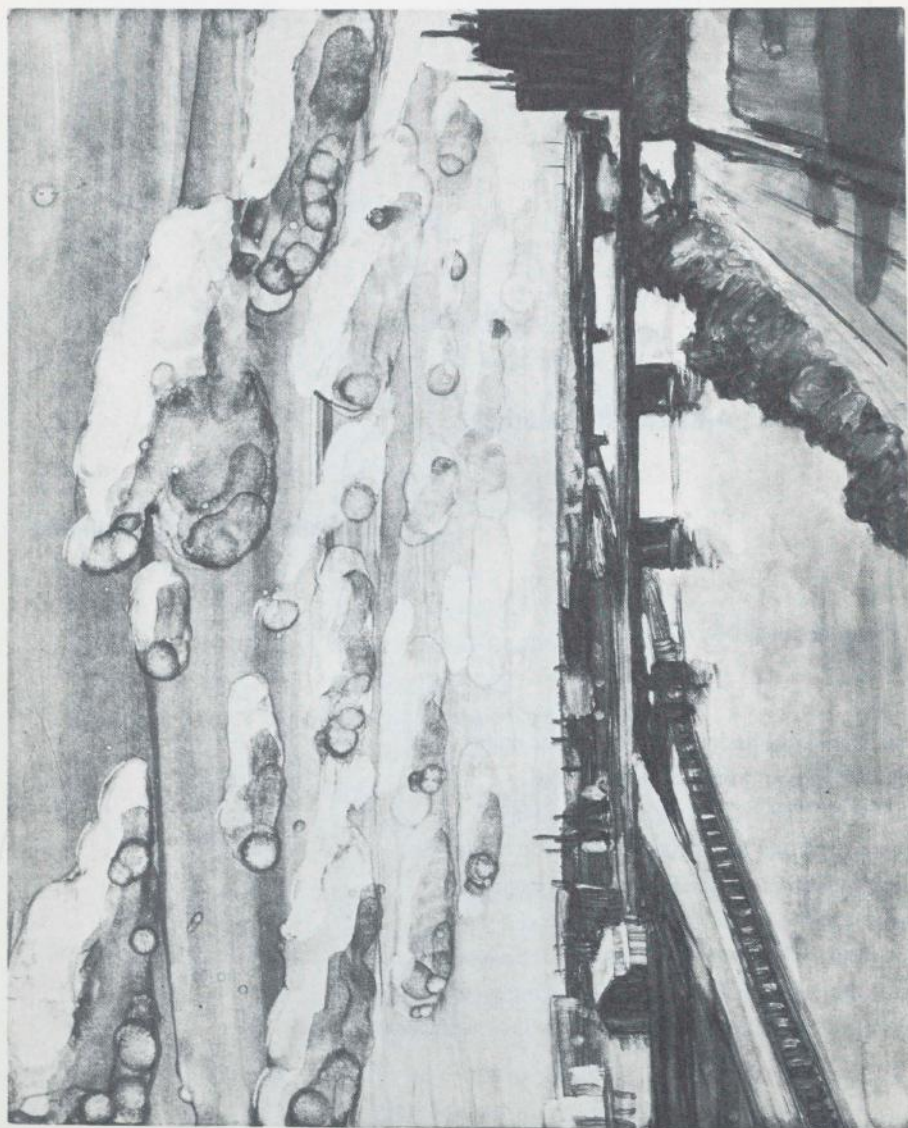
my mother's father made clocks
he died at 30. heart attack
My mother owned, near the end
of her life, a Timex
that stopped ticking.
She died at 42. hospital,
heart attack.
Lifting the old
Timex out of a drawer
(my own watch had stopped)
I took it to a shop
on Court Street on the 9th floor
in a tiny office
a young bearded man
coaxed it with his fingers
back to motion.
Always I see people wearing
old jewelry but how long
dead? My mother,
three years, what clings
to the rusting mesh of her
watch-band? I have worn
the watch for two months now.
It keeps good time and is
cool on my wrist. I have become
used to its weight.

The Four Who Entered Paradise

(Babylonian Talmud, Hagigah 14b)

in memory of R.E.G.

The first went blind with his eyes wide open
and never again with a cloudless mind.
The second died at the sight of the waves
that crested and broke like sand dunes, soundless.
The third cut down the flowers one by one
and left to lay out flowerbeds of his own.
The fourth who memorized his cues for entrances
and exits, perceived that marble was not water,
and with tessellated thoughts advanced to martyrdom.



Raymond Rorke

Trapped in Pain

Mother, did you feel the aches
Swell up in you
Feel your blood rush
Against your ribs? Did your
Breath make your heart
Your lungs grow together
And scream that rhythmic
Fearful scream against
Your breast, your ears,
Making the night howl
Into the grim pain?
Did you fight that night
With fingers that clawed its blackness,
The sores, the holes that showed
Its frailty, and shrieked its wild
Calloused cry into the depths of your hollow
Beaten body?
Did your claws turn inward
Tearing skin from bones
Flaying your heart
Shattering that one remote
Feeling of tenderness?
Mother, did you fall back
Against the wall?
Did you let yourself forget?
Fall asleep until tomorrow?



Raymond Rorke

**do all the
angels fall
from grace?**

I took a shower
in water so hot
that I could see
the steam rising
from my wet body,
just hot enough
to burn off
the old layer of skin.
I was hoping to find
something other
than what I was
beneath it.
I left the shower
red and numb,
just one color different
from the way I entered it.
There was still some dirt
under my nails.

From a Work in Progress
Ventman

"Because of the scarcity of models, I demand, when I'm being interviewed, that the interviewer sit for me."

[--Bosa ala Khredik, 1979]

When it's coldest Vincent and I sit on top of the steam vents, or if the wind is blowing hardest we climb beneath the grates and into the heating systems of the buildings. Vincent and I know these tunnels well now. We understand which buildings each passage leads to and we hardly ever get lost. Achoo! Achoo! Ala? The Philadelphia wind has big teeth! We eat mostly pretzels and when we have money there is whiskey. Almost every week Vincent forgets and asks me again what does Vay Ess Oh Pay stand for, and if I remember then I tell him. There were brandy snifters and a fireplace in our father's house, so my brother and I used to sit in front of the fire with our father's Courvoisier and talk about girls. My brother never liked cognac, so I would drink his after he breathed it for a while. Ah yes, you can get a fine buzz from inhaling a stiff brandy.

I used to have a nose, but I don't anymore, which is a major source of amusement for the neighborhood progeny. They are mostly professors' sons, I think, like I was. They are never exhausted of giggling and pointing at me, and occasionally they throw garbage, which nearly always misses. I can't recall how I lost my nose, but I do know that it was an enormous fat one, bigger than a Jew's. It was huge nose even when I was a little boy in L'École des Frères du Bab-el-luk. That big Jesuit monk, when he was mad, used to shout at me, "Quelle est la chose sur ta figure, mon petit? Une pyramide, peut-etre?"¹ And my brother and I, we had running nose jokes since his schnozz was almost bigger than mine. "Are you going to live with that for the rest of your life or are you going to do something about it?" My brother called himself an advocate of Rhinoplastics for the Masses.

It was a fine, fat nose, but now that it's gone I don't much miss it, except when the wind blows hardest and the cold air comes into my head. My face still seems light without my nose's great weight, and smells are different now, though there is not much left to smell but old pretzels, whiskey, and Vincent's sweat.

I use two palettes: one to lay the paints on and one to mix. This is the first time I've tried the paper palette, and I think I like it best because you can see the colors better. But I don't know yet: the light in this room is so brilliant.

أدبني ————— بـ My name is بـ .² Bosa ala Khredik. We were not Moslems, as the Americans were inclined to think. We were Copts and our Masses lasted six hours apiece. The Jesuits who taught us were Roman Catholics and

¹Translation: "What's that sitting on your face, boy? A pyramid?"

²Transliteration: **Bosa**. A footnote for the critics: **Bosa** means "kiss" in Arabic. Our mother's choice of nomen did not spare me from the taunts of Egyptian schoolboys.

their Masses were much shorter. My Brother's name was ³ بر بوروب. Our mother, I think, loved us, but she must have been a strange woman. I can't remember what she looked like, but once I saw a wedding photograph of her and our father, and she seemed to be a full head shorter than he. Our father was a small man himself, barely measuring above four feet. I remember seeing him putter around with the other doctors, looking up at them from around their waists. He had a gigantic smile and a nose like mine. His face was shiny, as though he had coated it with molasses, and he had hardly any hair.

The problem with the brush is that it hangs onto the oils. But it gives a fuzzy spacey kind of feeling that I like. When I paint you or draw you I see you much better than in real life.

I started painting when I was in college. There were old paintings of our mother's in the attic, and though she'd been dead for many years, I thought little of going over them and reusing the canvas. Soon I knew how to stretch my own canvasses, so to what was our father's relief, some of her work still remains. Vincent encouraged me. He was thinking that he might be a writer. He told me I needed classes, though, and I'd hear nothing of it. I wanted to discover the tricks of light and color and brush strokes on my own before any teacher could affect my style. At first my brother thought all this painting was immensely funny. "He is an *artist*! Yuk, yuk, yuk!" he could chortle during dinner. Several times later he volunteered to sit. He was a useless model and could not hold still. Once he sat on my fresh palette, and once he became so enraged over the size of the nose I'd given him that he thrust his sneaker through the wet canvas. Finally I barred him from my studio all together. But where was I going to find subjects? I thought that no one would want to sit for me. I could never learn to paint without models. A sad, sad fate.

Sad indeed to have no nose from which to draw snot to place on the wall. "Snot" was the name of my brother, as that is what Barbour means in Arabic. I was so unkind as to translate this for our American schoolfriends. Whenever we squabbled I would scream at him that traditional and familiar Egyptian curse, "انت بر بوروب على الحيط".⁴ In the Frères du Bab-el-luk school we spoke and wrote mainly in French. We also learned to write a little Classical Arabic, but none of this was of any use to us when we came to America. The first thing the American boys did when I met them was change my name to "Bozo". This was probably because of my odd name, my large nose, and my hair, which was strangely red. As soon as my brother had learnt enough English he explained to them the Arabic meaning of my name. This was in Syracuse, the first place we lived. By the time we got to Bryn Mawr we were older and wise enough to blackmail each other into silence.

Vincent painted too, but not as often or as well as I did. He took a class one summer at the Academy of Fine Arts and suggested that I do the same. He said it would do me wonders. Vincent produced only one kind of painting: those mad-looking things. Those were what he liked the best. He didn't have the patience to sit there and work out his lines.

The Frères at Bab-el-luk were strict strict people. Anyone who'd do anything wrong would get hit on the knuckles with the ruler, which would hurt a lot since there was no heat in the building. I can't remember the names of any of the Frères, but they were all

³ Transliteration: **Barbour**

⁴ Transliteration: **Enta barbour al el haite**. Translation: "You are a snot on the wall."

white Frenchmen, and they were all very handsome except the oldest one. He had some kind of French name like Frère Jacques or Frère Jean-Pierre or Frère Henri, and he was incredibly fat with rolls and rolls of necks and white hair and the roundest head I've ever seen. He was tough to everyone, but he was especially mean to me. He used to chase me around the school with the nastiest intention of catching me because I never ate my lunch. Our mother, when she was alive, made me a horrible egg-and-butter sandwich to take to school every morning. I told her and told her not to put butter on my egg sandwiches, but she would never listen. So every morning I hid them under the staircase of our building, or else in the trees. My brother sometimes found the sandwiches, which he'd take and show to the Frères. He said the thought he was doing me a favor. Whenever this old monk found that I'd hid my egg sandwich he would try to capture me, but he never could until he'd cornered me in the closet, because I was too quick. When he finally had me by the hair he'd threaten to put me in the rats' room in the cellar where the rats eat the skin off little boys. But he'd never do that. He'd take me downstairs to the school bookstore, which he ran, and put the sandwiches on the shelf, and tell me to hide before he caught me. Then I would run home and he would eat my sandwiches.

When we lived near Cairo we could see the pyramids from the kitchen window. There were no other children to play with except my brother and our cousin Sahar, a little girl I used to expose myself to. We lived on the top floor of an apartment building, and my brother and I used to spend our Sunday afternoons dropping paper cones filled with sand on passers-by. We called our invention Khredik-bombs, and wasted many many fine hours with this diversion. One day my brother made the unfortunate mistake of allowing his Khredik-bomb to fall on the head of a policeman, who immediately marched upstairs and began to pound on our door. Fortunately our parents took a nap every Sunday afternoon. Our parents instructed us that their nap was an important thing and that they were never to be disturbed. Our parents were busy locked in their bedroom napping and could not hear the policeman's knocks. My brother saved the situation by lowering his voice several octaves to what he called his "mature" tone, and booming, "من فضلك ارحل من هنا"

My brother has been a thief ever since I can remember. He was younger than I, but always much cleverer with his ideas for defrauding people. He was constantly robbing me, our parents, the monks at Bab-el-luk and assorted strangers. By the time we left for America he had amassed a private fortune of several thousand pounds. His major method of extracting money from our classmates was by gambling. He was adept at cheating during card games and he ran a numbers racket in which even I sometimes participated. He also stole from the bookstore and occasionally picked the pockets of unwary bus riders. When we arrived in Syracuse I was amazed to discover he had smuggled into the country a huge collection of Egyptian artifacts, which he proceeded to sell to American collectors for grossly inflated prices.

One day I hope I'll be able to hold the brush and make it do exactly as I want it to. Even now I can feel it becoming better-trained in my fingers. My brush and my eye work together. But I must agree with Van Gogh: It doesn't matter what system of brush strokes you use.

Our father was an old man. He was over sixty when he married our mother and it is no wonder that he died when we were still in college since he was past eighty by then. The summer after he died Vincent and I spent most of our time drinking. When I was sober or when I was not, I painted. Somehow my brother succeeded in both swindling me out of my share of the inheritance and convincing me that it was for my own good. The will had contained a clause stating that my half of the money was to be used to pay my tuition, should our father die while I was still at the University. Our father knew that I wanted to be a painter and was determined that I become a doctor. He died during my first year of medical school. I signed everything over to my brother, who was by now proclaiming me to be the genius painter of the twentieth century, and I never returned to classes. My first move was to find a job driving a cab in the mornings and all day Saturday. I found a special car with raised pedals and raised seat to compensate for my shortness. Vincent and I and a girl who slept under Vincent's armpit moved into an apartment in West Philadelphia. Meanwhile my brother sold our house in Bryn Mawr, and all its contents, and disappeared mysteriously. I did not see him again for several years. The girl, whose name I cannot recall, did not stay with us for long. She fed us things like marijuana tea and alfalfa sprouts, which resemble fiberglass. She was constantly annoying me by popping her bubble gum and pulling her fingers through my hair, which was by then redder and wilder than ever. A day did not go by that she did not tell me that I was "cute". This embarrassed me since I was twenty-one years old and barely five feet tall.

The Pharaohs are the noblest race and I am descended directly from them on our mother's side. This explains my small stature, for as every anthropologist knows, all of the greatest Pharaohs were extremely minute people. In ancient Egypt a person's nobility was determined by two factors: his lineage and his size. The great Ramses was three feet one inch tall, just two inches shorter than his famous grand-nephew Tutankhaman.⁶ Many of the Pharaohs displayed prominent effeminate characteristics, as well (although I do not claim to sport these symptoms). Tutankhaman's father Akhnatun, the venerable monotheist, was a noted hermaphrodite. Of course hermaphroditic persons were not considered to be any nobler than those with tendencies towards a particular sex, so my virility cannot be counted as a point against my pedigree. I remember, though, when I first learnt these historical facts about our great ancestors from the monks at Bab-el-luk, that whenever our mother bathed us I would study my brother carefully to determine whether he had inherited Akhnatun's peculiarities. Akhnatun was my hero from the day the Frères first taught me about him. They told us he was a pagan debauchee, and I was immediately intrigued. The great Akhnatun had married his sisters, all his female cousins, and his grandmother. I have no sisters and my grandmother was already married, so I took it upon myself to marry Sahar. I don't remember what she looked like, but I remember thinking she was very beautiful. I saw her once when she was sixteen and visiting America, but by then she had turned skinny and gotten crooked teeth, much to my dismay. When she and I were small, however, I was under her smell.⁷ One Sunday afternoon my brother

⁶ Pronounced TOOT-uncommon.

⁷ Critics, attend. This is a clever pun on my part, for Sahar always sported the delectable odor of sour milk on her breath.

dressed himself in some robes he'd stolen from the monks, and using a prayer book he'd smuggled out of the Coptic church, he married us. After the wedding I tried to kiss her, but she being temperamental bit me on the cheek and began to cry. She screamed so loudly that my parents came out from their nap to see what was wrong. In the end I was spanked and my brother and Sahar were fed baklava.⁸ I do not understand why this happened.

What, I say, what are the medical consequences of a diet consisting mainly of pretzels? As I recall they are the following: a breakdown of protein in the skeletal musculature. Severe wasting occurs, causing damage to the locomotive ability of the organism, leading to a stooping of the vertebral column which in turn causes a drooping of the head and finally an inexhaustible quantity of stooping and drooping followed by melancholy. Prior to this state the organism passes through several debilitating stages, the first being general systemic dehydration causing a hardening of the stools, which results from water absorption via the colon. This is due to the excessive sodium content of the salt. Constipation and stubbornness ensue. The fattest fat cells of the body are, by now, obliged to unleash their fat, which is in turn almost combusted into glycerol. The hepatic mechanism converts the glycerol into glucose during the processes of glycerolysis. This incomplete inferno of glycerine releases as a side product the metabolic agent called ketone. The ketones, however, cannot pass the blood-brain barrier and are thus not consumed by the neuronal tissue until all the plasma glucose has been devoured. The general catabolic condition of the system with the concurrent loss of electrolytes, and the elevated basal metabolic rate are all detrimental to the circulatory system. The cardiac rate and output become unavoidably low, the systolic pressure drops and diastolic pressure is non-existent. But I find this condition to be easily reversible with the addition of some mustard, ah yes.

VERY SPECIAL OLD PALE: That is Vay Ess Oh Pay. But what Vincent and I drink now cannot cost more than three dollars a bottle. French initials, English words. In Egypt English was the language of commerce, but the educated classes spoke French.

This curtain can pretend to be a second sky if people use their imaginations right. It looks flat, but it's supposed to. Your hair needs to be greener around that side.

I have solved all my problems with space and time in my paintings which are momentless and have no dimensions. No, my paintings take no room in my memory. I remember scenes and people I have painted. I remember colors which have enchanted me, but I cannot picture any of my pictures when I shut my eyes. My pictures never come back to me: not when I dream; not when I concentrate. But I invent new pictures all the time. With my eyes I can control distance and patterns of light. With my eyes I can frame what is in front of me or produce scenes which aren't there at all.

Very Special Old Pale: I conjure a portrait of the artist Bosa at eighteen. I am naked and wet from the shower. The mirror in my father's room is my canvas frame. *The room is half lit. It is a clouded afternoon so no lightbeams stream through the window. Drops drip from my copper sponge hair to my cheek. The distance from the middle of my nose to the bottom of my chin is half the length of my face. My forehead protrudes like Van Gogh's. Cro-Magnon. I have high cheekbones and a long graceful neck. Swanish. The drops evaporate, cooling my skin. A towel is draped at my feet. I stand, no, I crouch. My body is the color of weak tea with cream. Kneeling down a*

⁸ A pastry made by Greeks.

man loses a quarter of his height.⁹ Lying down he becomes eight ninths shorter. I spring deftly to my feet, having run track in high school. My calves are taut and blanketed with copper hair. Hair sprouts also on my chest, my back, my armpits and around my *كوكور*.¹⁰ My forearms, too, are copper-flecked. The length of my outstretched arm is four times the length of my hand. My nose measures three inches from the tip to the bridge between my eyes, which are emerald with umber specks.

Umber. Rumber. Berumber. Burnt umber bothers me today. [Black is too final.] Umber, bumber, umberal, umberalla. The room and the floor are dark but the window is a square of light. A colorless day except for my flesh [weak tea] and the window curtain. What is the center of attraction here? It is blue: cold cobalt, amethyst, veridien. Vert, vert veridien. The curtain becomes too colorful. Overly colory, most distressing to the critics.

⁹My brother is 5'2" and has eleven girlfriends of varying heights.

¹⁰Transliteration: **Ku ku**. The critic may guess the translation.

¹¹As this is a family publication, the editors chose to respectfully alter Mr. Bosa's word choice--
Ed. note



William Coe

Amusement

She is writing poetry and I
want lunch. Years ago
she wore a sheer shirt and
hugged her arms around her
as if that could betray me
to think I didn't want her.

When we walked the field together
I knew she was looking at
the window of another who had had her.

I guess it was when she learned
that I could dance and swim, would row
her on the harbour in Maine where
glassy diamonds flashed and dolphins
and her shoulders gleamed
in Apollo's light.

Now her scratching pen annoys me caught
in the tangled warp and woof of her
"Pay attention: leave me alone."

She pretends I am the god of
all she harbours. My creative mistress.
The dolphins my companions, she my pet.

Now solitary in the kitchen
I chop celery into the pyrex
bowl of tuna she won't eat:
they slaughter dolphins with the tuna nets.
I've just brewed perfect coffee and she
doubtless will take tea.

A Simple Note on What I Saw

I'm tired of doing landscapes.
Somehow they never work. Besides,
they change with every moving
moment I try to capture.
And there's the flair that makes
solemnity of so long shadows
in the afternoon.

That's it: I'm too happy. Or
unsolemn. Yesterday the air
was like smoky blue glass
in late afternoon. Beyond
an empty stone wall

the newly-yellow willows, the
baby-pink magnolias brushed
against bluegray.

All the picture needed, you know, to
make it work--those overlapping
colors are not for me who does
not have the solemn flair--was
something stupid, orange.

Sure enough, the sun set, burning
the stone wall. After, it got
too dark and wintry to do
a springscape. But I'll try
no more. It's like praying
for Spring, for god's sake, which is
nearer today than when I saw all this.

Self Portraits

He sits there
in the red roan chair
in the mulberry ruminating room,
'on the velvet-maroon lap of the moon,'
he says in his burgundy glass.

And the blonde bristles brush
and the scraping knives crush
a swirl of delicate blue.

And he says,
'this is it:
My wine-colored hue.'

And she sits upstairs
in the yellow cane chair
and watches the light
in her brandy-brown hair.

And she says,
'it is this:
the blue-veined sky
and the parched wind arching
by the grey-black tide.'



Ilona Fallieros

My Brother

He lives alone
With his parents
Because no one has taught him how to laugh, cook, sleep
Or take orders with others
And he can't trust himself to.
He throws out love
To his heroes—coaxing signatures, buying glances
Tracking their psychic anguish.
He knows how to listen:
Remembers details
Of year old accusations
Revels
In every swagger in a singer's voice.
But he thinks
Squirrels will always be playing in the back yard oak tree
Our parents will never die
Or that first he should.
His voice breaks off
Into numb silence
Before almost any thought can be expressed.
He lies suspended
In a dream of three kids sitting rapt as their mother sings
On a sunny trip to Boston
Or lets the hero's dream-songs envelop him.
His pitch is perfect.
He pounds out a blues riff
Over and over again on the piano.

Winter Lullaby

What mushrooms you find with your tongue,
what berries you pluck with your teeth,
what morsels you touch with your lips,
save in your mouth, store in your cheek.

Millet, millet, pellet of grain,
grass seed, dill weed, tangle of hay.

Strawberries grow in this straw-covered place
safe from the winter wind.
Save your food for the long journey home,
home to the winter wheat.

Over the snowdrifts, over the snowplains,
home to the snow-filtered field,
home to the hard yellow stalks in the snow,
home to the winter wheat.

Millet, millet, pellet of grain,
grass seed, dill weed, tangle of hay.

The wheatfield is ochre and umber and white;
the journey is hungry and cold.
But strawberries grow in this strange moist light:
take these strawberries home.

Fido and Aeneas

The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog. The dog was not terribly pleased with this. It was not so bad that a fox had jumped over him, *per se*. It was a combination of factors: the identity of the fox, and the reason for the dog's laziness. He had been chasing this fox for such a long time that he was tired. And to be immortalized at such a moment...It was, you understand, as if the fox had thumbed his nose at the dog, who was called Fido. The fox, Aeneas, terrorized the villagers in the valley. Mind you, this was no ordinary fox. Aeneas didn't simply steal eggs and chickens, or maul sheep. He was what we could call a culinary fox, which would leave behind, when stealing or poaching, one of what it had stolen already cooked.

Imagine Farmer McNulty going out to the henhouse and finding chicken cacciatore where Bernice, the prize egg-layer, had once been. In addition, all of bay four would be empty of its twenty-five inhabitants. What else could McNulty do but sit down to eat Bernice (Aeneas could do marvelous things with chicken!), think about ways to prevent future raids, and curse the fiend who had ravaged his stock? Of course, he would immediately send Fido, who took a perfunctory sniff of the feathers remaining, after the fox with a brief directive: "KILL!"

Fido, who chose not to communicate with the vapid farmer, could only dash madly into the woods until he knew he was out of sight. Only from time to time, when he knew he had a fighting chance of capturing the fox, would he seriously try to search out the wily creature, hoping to catch him gorged with his prey.

Once, in fact, he had caught Aeneas in his very kitchen, stewing mutton. Aeneas had held up an admonitory paw. "Do you always burst in unannounced?"

"I didn't know there was protocol in this sort of thing."

"Well, for goodness' sake, every hound in the valley knows that! Serves McNulty right for getting an Irish Sheepdog."

"There's nothing wrong with us Wheatons!" growled Fido, his temper already flaring. There were so few Soft-Coated Wheaten Terriers; people invariably thought he was a miniature English Sheepdog. Sometimes they had the audacity to say, "Oh, how lovely! I think Cairns are the *cutest* dogs!" One poor lady had cooed, "What an adorable West Highland White!" He had nearly bitten her in his frenzied rage, but had been constrained by the choke leash. As revenge, the next time Mrs. McNulty had visited that ignoramus, he had lifted his leg on her sofa, a genuine Ethan Allen.

"Temper, temper, Fido. You Irish are just so quick."

"Aeneas! You're going too far. Why shouldn't I pounce on you right here?"

"First, because you wouldn't be certain of victory. You are, after all, just my size." Aeneas sounded like a tired schoolteacher. "And second, you'd miss a sample of what I'm having."

"What would that be?" asked Fido testily.

"Mutton stew."

"Angela!"

"Dear boy, you must stop thinking of these dishes as living beings. Sheep are very stupid animals. They contribute little to the animal kingdom. Their meat is very fine,

but has to be pounded for maximum tenderness. And if they provide human beings with wool for clothing, that is hardly our concern, since human beings put us where we are."

Consideration of the wisdom of at least the latter part of Aeneas's comment prevented Fido from an immediate assault, but the memory of Angela's helpfulness in rounding up the herd (there was never any danger of panic as long as Angela was there) made him counter the fox's aspersions on her intelligence. "You don't get close enough to these creatures," he retorted.

"Don't get close enough? Dear boy, I couldn't get any closer. Who has ever been embraced more firmly than the prey inside a boa constrictor?"

"You don't understand..."

Aeneas was suddenly cold and threatening. "I do understand, *canis*. Don't trouble me with emotional appeal. I eat to survive. I am a shark. You can afford to be sentimental because you are not predatory. Perhaps if your survival were in question we'd hear another story. Remember your brothers are wolves."

Mortified by the possibility (he was so far removed from wolves!), he barked in exchange, "I am closer to an Irish cattleman in my heritage, and far sturdier than any wolf. Beware of arousing this famous temper of mine."

Aeneas put down his wooden spoon and faced Fido squarely. Fido began to laugh caustically. Aeneas was momentarily puzzled. "Do you always wear the chef's hat?" inquired Fido.

"Just when I cook," Aeneas replied royally.

"It makes you look human," Aeneas, mortified, had reached to remove the hat. In an instant Fido was upon him, going straight for the jugular. Since Aeneas' paws were out of position, Fido had little trouble landing squarely on top of him, and had Aeneas not been able to writhe from beneath Fido, this story might be briefer. As it was, however, Aeneas, though stunned by the intensity of Fido's onslaught, was able to muster enough of his wits to dash out of the hole, leaving Fido with a tuft of auburn hair between his teeth.

Fido sat in Aeneas' hole thinking about the fox's comment on his domesticity. Seeing the pot and smelling the mutton, however, reminded him of Angela, and he questioned his existence no further. He let out a few low mournful howls for Angela, and set out for the farmyard.

But that had been some time ago. Aeneas' close brush with fate that day had apparently not stopped his future harassment of Fido. Now Fido was still hot with the flush of fury that had gone through him when Aeneas jumped over him.

"Damn that fox," he thought, anticipating the approach of McNulty's heavy footsteps, the invariable shove at his nose of something odiferous, and the order to kill. Who was it this time? Had Aeneas developed a taste for veal? Would it be eggs instead? Once Aeneas had left eggs Benedict, and McNulty hadn't recognized it. Utterly confused by the yellowish concoction, McNulty had thought the fox had killed in cold blood and taken no prey. It was a horrible thought.

Before Fido got much further with his analysis he heard a piercing shriek from the farmhouse. "Hector!" came the voice, terrible in its pitch. "Hector! Heck! Hector!"

"What's wrong, Helen?" McNulty's voice was troubled.

"I can't find Hector!"

"Who's Hector?" thought Fido. Picturing the layout of the farm, he let his mind's eye travel from outbuilding to outbuilding, imagining the inhabitants of each one:

cattle, swine, sheep, chickens, trout, ducks... Then the unthinkable occurred to him. His hair stood on end as he realized he had omitted the most obvious.

"Hector? Oh, my God, this is too much," said the farmer, his voice weak with trepidation. "How did it happen?"

"I think it was the fox."

"The fox?" thought Fido, as McNulty swore aloud. This time Aeneas had gone too far. To steal prey was one thing; Hector was the McNulty's *son*. Fido's blood chilled as he contemplated what Aeneas could possibly have left cooked in Hector's stead. Visions of Jonathan Swift.

Before he could run upstairs to see, McNulty was upon him, a baby boot of Hector's in his hand. "Kill, Fido. Kill," he said in a crazed voice. "I want that damned fox dead and I want Hector alive."

In the frenzy of the moment Fido barked like a Marine ordered into battle when the odds are slim but the possibility of glory great: "Yes, sir!"

McNulty was momentarily dumbfounded as Fido dashed into the woods. " 'Yes, sir'?"

In the woods Fido moved like a snake with a mongoose on his tail, his feet moving so fast that he seemed to glide along the forest floor. The scent of Aeneas was not as powerful as the smell of human being, and it seemed Aeneas had not been able to abduct little Hector without breaking his skin. The faint odor of blood made tracking easier for Fido.

The sound of McNulty's wife's hysterical screams vanished behind him, and as the forest thickened the trail became stronger. Fido was aware that Aeneas had not returned to his hole, but had chosen a better hiding-place. The abduction of a human child was serious business. Did Aeneas think Fido was such a patsy? The possibility infuriated Fido, and he moved faster.

Before long Fido heard the muffled cries of a small child and the trail seemed to lead straight towards the source. As the noise got louder, Fido slowed in his pace. It was clear that he was moving faster than Aeneas, and possible that he was making enough noise himself to alarm the fox. He slowed to a trot until he was certain he was withing fifty yards, then crept forward like a cat on thin ice.

He could see through the trees to a small clearing where a small brown animal, surely the color of Aeneas, was sunning himself. Not ten feet from the animal was a baby. Fido moved unhesitatingly, flinging himself at the brown animal. In a flash he was upon it. Madly he tore at it, using both front paws along with his jaws. He was vaguely aware of claws tearing back at him, but felt no pain in his fury. Then he felt a thud on the back of his head.

When he awoke he was in his dog-house with a splitting headache. He heard McNulty outside talking to someone who sounded important. "That dog, I don't know," McNulty was saying, "but have you found my baby?"

"No, McNulty, and if you think I'll believe that some fox made off with it, you're out of your mind. I'll just warn you that if your dog bites *anything* again, even if it's somebody's ax handle, I don't care what length his pedigree is; that's it for him."

"Sheriff..." McNulty tried to argue.

"That dog just destroyed a prize-winning Siamese cat in front of the Ellisons and their daughter. You think this child will ever be able to get close to a dog when she's older, having that horrible scene in her memory? You're lucky Jim didn't shoot Fido, you are."

A shudder ran down Fido's spine, and the headache doubled in intensity.

He heard McNulty's voice as the other's footsteps were leaving. "My son....," cried McNulty; and then a car door slammed.

He was aware of the farmer peering into the dog-house, and McNulty's voice pleading with him. "Come on, Fido. You're the only one who can help me. You've got to find that fox. They all think I'm crazy."

"Maybe so," Fido thought, "but it's not you they'll shoot if I screw up."

"Don't worry, little fellow," McNulty went on, as if reading Fido's mind. "You find that child of mine and the Sheriff won't touch a hair on your head except to pin a hero ribbon on."

Fido was touched, but preferred to have McNulty do the pinning, if there was to be any.

"Better still," McNulty said, "I'll do the pinning." Fido was awestruck. Communicating with a human being? The possibilities were as terrifying as they were wonderful. He raised his sore head to look into McNulty's eyes. The farmer looked terrible. Slowly, royally, Fido arose, hobbling out of the dog-house and blinking his eyes in the bright afternoon sun. He shook himself a few times, and licked one or two spots where the late great cat had apparently been on target with the last few swipes of her claws. McNulty had the boot before his nose again. "Kill, Fido," came the short, terse order. Fido was gone before McNulty had said "Fido."

He didn't have to follow the scent because he knew exactly where the clearing was. Since he had no need for his senses, he was able to turn his attention to running, flying, tearing at full speed for the last spot he recalled of the trail before he reached the scene of his grievous error. As he neared the clearing, he slowed down, seeking to retrace the steps that had resulted in his erroneous mauling of the unfortunate Siamese cat. He stopped at the banks of a small brook.

"Of course; how clever," Fido thought. Aeneas must have spotted the Ellisons out for a stroll in the woodlands and thought to retreat along that route to confuse Fido. "Aeneas knows too well that I go mad when I'm within thirty yards of my prey. He must have stopped in the middle of the brook and headed ---" He paused. Upstream or downstream?

Fido tried to recall the geography of the valley. Downstream was the village, the brook winding through its center, under a small footbridge in the public square, and then down a waterfall over which travelled the two-lane highway through town. Aeneas would have to be crazy to carry a baby towards the town. Upstream were the hills, occupied mostly by herds of sheep guarded zealously by German Shepherds and a few Doberman Pinschers. Aeneas never raided these flocks. He had tried once and lost a leg for it. Dobermen do not fool around. Nor do they listen to eloquence. With this thought, Fido recalled Aeneas' repeated slurs on his own Irish heritage.

Fido thought harder. If Aeneas had been sharp enough to anticipate his mad dash at the wrong victim, he naturally would also have anticipated the results of that dash. Therefore, Aeneas must have figured Fido would not want to be seen in public, and might be in danger if he did. The question was whether Aeneas had thought Fido would guess as much and go towards the town anyway. No, he decided; Aeneas' fear of human beings was exceeded by his fear of the dogs in the hills. He had stolen sheep before, but he had overstepped his bounds by childnapping, and must have headed towards the village.

Slowly Fido made his way down the middle of the stream, getting out on one side or

the other when the current or depth became too great. He could not move too quickly, for he had to be able to pick up Aeneas' or Hector's scent when he again found the trail. By the looks of the sun, he had not been unconscious too long: perhaps an hour. Aeneas had leapt over him well before noon, and his unfortunate scrape with the cat must have taken place at about twelve-thirty. A trail of blood does not vanish that quickly, and the smell of human beings, even without blood, penetrates the entire forest.

When there are human odors in the forest the jays and crows shriek the warning first. Fido had learned these signals as a puppy. Some of the ducks the McNultys used to keep out of the trout pond had taught him. They had been wild, but repeated rough winter flights to Tampa had taken their toll, and the clan had decided to remain in residence at the McNulty's farm. Eventually, repeated raids by Aeneas had forced their departure, but not before they had taught Fido the language of the forest.

Raccoons would click warnings to the small ground animals, and the other birds would pick up the initiative from the jays and crows so the deer and bear would be on their guard. The forest would be alive with motion, the hurried preparations of the animals for the invasion.

Now the crows were screaming. Fido could hear no raccoons, but he was travelling close to the brook, at a distance from the forest. Then the smell picked up, stronger than ever before, and Fido immediately doubled his speed, turning away from the brook and following the trail. Not fifteen minutes later he found himself heading out of the forest, into the village square, and straight towards the Ellisons.

Mrs. Ellison spotted him. "Jim!" she howled.

"Damn woman," Fido thought, turning back towards the forest and catching sight of Ellison moving towards the car where his rifle must be. "Damn that dog, Penelope," he heard him shout, "I'll finish this mess right now."

Fido's blood ran cold. He plunged into the thicket just as a slug crashed into a tree-trunk overhead. The smell of Hector's baby boot strong in his olfactory memory, Fido moved with the trail, trying to stay out of sight of Ellison, whose persistent footsteps he heard behind him.

Fido's muscles stung from the strain, but he had to pace himself in order to keep to the trail and at the same time stay ahead of Ellison. Every so often he would hear the report of a rifle, but no shot came as close as the first.

Aeneas was crafty. He had moved right towards the edge of the forest and run along it, anticipating the danger to Fido of staying in sight of the villagers. He was aware now of the incessant chatter of the Jays and other birds and then ---

There was Aeneas, in the middle of a stand of pines, on a forest floor thick with a carpet of needles. Breathless, and as yet out of sight of the fox, whose back was to him, Fido listened for the footsteps of the man on his trail. There was no sound.

Hector was crying his fool head off, suspended from a branch about three feet off the ground. Aeneas had apparently hooked the back of the child's shirt onto the branch, and now he sat, quite pleased with his catch, one paw on his chin, deep in thought. Fido was about to charge when a sharp voice cracked through the air.

"Careful, dog. This child is no longer yours to claim." The voice was that of a large Great Horned Owl, perched on a branch not far from Hector. Aeneas had had help, Fido realized, or he would never have pulled this off. At the owl's warning, Aeneas had turned around, and now contemplated Fido, who was bedraggled, tired, and sore.

"Oh, hello there, friend. I wondered when you'd drop by."

"'When' or 'if'?"

"Well, you didn't think I'd make it easy, did you? After all, this is your master, isn't it?"

Fido's Irish temper was already dangerously near boiling. "McNulty is my master, and that's by my choice."

The owl and the fox looked at each other with some secret communication. "Your choice?" mocked the owl, with an inquisitorial air. "I was not aware that dogs were granted such a privilege. Free will is not supposed to be within your domain."

Fido remained silent, contemplating the threatening visage of the owl; then he walked a few paces towards the fox. Aeneas stood up, not sure of what to expect. "Careful, Fido," the owl warned. "This child is worth no more to me than a few dozen mice, and a night on the town when I do not have to hunt."

"Oh, come, come," Aeneas put in, "must we be so cold? You look quite dreadful, Fido. Do relax a bit. We'll have time for such hostilities later."

The owl's right eye widened. "Perhaps you have such time, Aeneas. I would rather avoid hostilities altogether. We have this foolish dog at a clear disadvantage. Why don't we just split our booty right now and be rid of him? You know full well that his failure to return with the baby would be his demise. It would end our need to worry about reprisal." Fido fought back his terror and listened intently for human footsteps. The only human sound was an occasional sob from Hector.

"You are quite cold-blooded, Ulysses. Didn't your mother love you?"

Aeneas laughed at his own joke. "If my mother had not loved me," countered Ulysses, "would I be here to waste my time with you, fox? Remember that your only value to me was your knowledge of the lay-out of the house. I am a far better hunter than you."

"But I am the better cook."

"That's worthless to me, fool; I can taste nothing."

Fido took two more steps closer to the tree where Hector was suspended, not three feet from the talons and beak of the threatening owl. "Ah, ah, ah," warned Aeneas. "See, Ulysses; this dog is very sharp. I do believe there is hope for him."

"Hope?" Ulysses raised the feathers over his eyes.

"With a dog we could have a spy on the inside for such raids in the future."

"Future raids?" the owl continued in his inquisitorial tone. Fido thought of old Perry Mason reruns: Mason slowly breaking down the witness.

"What are you after, owl?" Fido demanded of Ulysses.

"After?"

"Dammit, is your godlike wisdom merely a legend? You just repeat what I say in a haughty tone. Even a mynah or a mockingbird can do that! And you owls are supposed to be descended from royalty. Descended, indeed."

The owl turned his body on the branch to face Fido fully, and Fido became aware of a possible scheme as Aeneas approached him, fascinated by the dog's discourse. Surely this dog must be on the ball. Not even he, the wisest among foxes, was capable of speaking to Ulysses like this. "You are in risky territory, dog."

"Oh, don't try my patience, owl; you underestimate human beings."

"I underestimate no one. Human beings are no threat to me."

"Then why do you live in the forest?"

"I choose to."

"I suppose you don't want to live in the belfry of the local church. That would be a palace more befitting your stature, don't you think?"

"Hmmm. That might be so."

"But how could you even choose to live there if the human beings hadn't built it?"

Ulysses was puzzled for a moment, and Aeneas chuckled quietly. "You see, Ulysses? I told you he had a future!"

Fido was calculating quickly as he tried to keep up with the two of them. He knew that owls could not see clearly past ten to twenty feet unless it was dark out, and surely this was a strain on the owl, being awake when the sun was strongest. Momentarily he listened for the footsteps of Ellison, then began again to walk towards the edge of the forest, not waiting for the owl's reply.

"Wait," Ulysses ordered him. "I have not finished with you."

"Sure you have," Fido countered. "You have the child and I can't last much longer, so I may as well meet the opponent head-on."

"Opponent?" Ulysses quizzed him.

"Dammit, Ulysses, stop that!" snarled Aeneas.

Although Fido had moved only a few steps from the tree where Hector hung, Ulysses flew down and stood in front of him, blocking further movement. "Now here's a switch," quipped the dog. The owl stood before him, a few feet away, just below eye-level. He was not so large on the ground.

"Now see here, dog, you don't believe what I say about free choice? Why did you come after me?"

"You were holding a human child."

"What is so significant about holding a human child? Are they different than animals?"

"Than Angela? Bernice?" Aeneas was chiming.

"You kill those to survive. Even Aeneas sees that. Why do you want a human child? So you can have a few free evenings in town? My goodness, Ulysses, you're becoming almost human."

"HUMAN?" Ulysses shrieked and ruffled his feathers. Fido was again aware of the heavy footsteps of a human being. Ellison could not be far away. Aeneas was fascinated and moved closer to Fido. Ulysses cleared his throat. The fox was standing a few feet from both of them. Hector hung from the tree about ten yards away.

As Ulysses opened his mouth, the footsteps broke into the open area. Fido knew this was his only chance. The owl began, "How dare you..." but Fido turned, tore towards the tree, grabbed Hector's shirt between his teeth as he leaped, and fell back to earth with the baby atop him. He heard the report of a rifle as he hit the ground, but could not tell whether he had been hit.

He opened his eyes and saw the owl hovering not twenty feet above him, howling, "You cheat! You cheat!" He looked over to where Aeneas had been and saw him standing straight up with a very puzzled expression on his face and blood pouring out of his right front leg. It was McNulty, not Ellison, brandishing the gun. There was another rifle report and Ulysses was no longer in the air. When he felt the baby moving above him, Fido charged Aeneas. The fox could barely gather his senses before Fido was on him. There would be no escape this time.

McNulty bent over Fido, who refused to let go of the fox. The owl was lying a few feet away, gasping "You cheat," with his dying breath. Hector lay on the forest floor crying.

Aeneas turned glassy eyes up to Fido, and whispered, "I've got to hand it to you. You know which side your croissant is buttered on."

"Never end a sentence with a preposition, let alone a life, fox," admonished Fido. McNulty turned back towards the square after picking up his son and hoisting him to his shoulders. "Come, Fido," he said, not as a master, but as one friend to another. And the quick tan dog jumped lightly over the dead fox, and trotted lazily by his cohort under the midday sun.



Tony Cuneo

The Sacrifice of Søren Kierkegaard

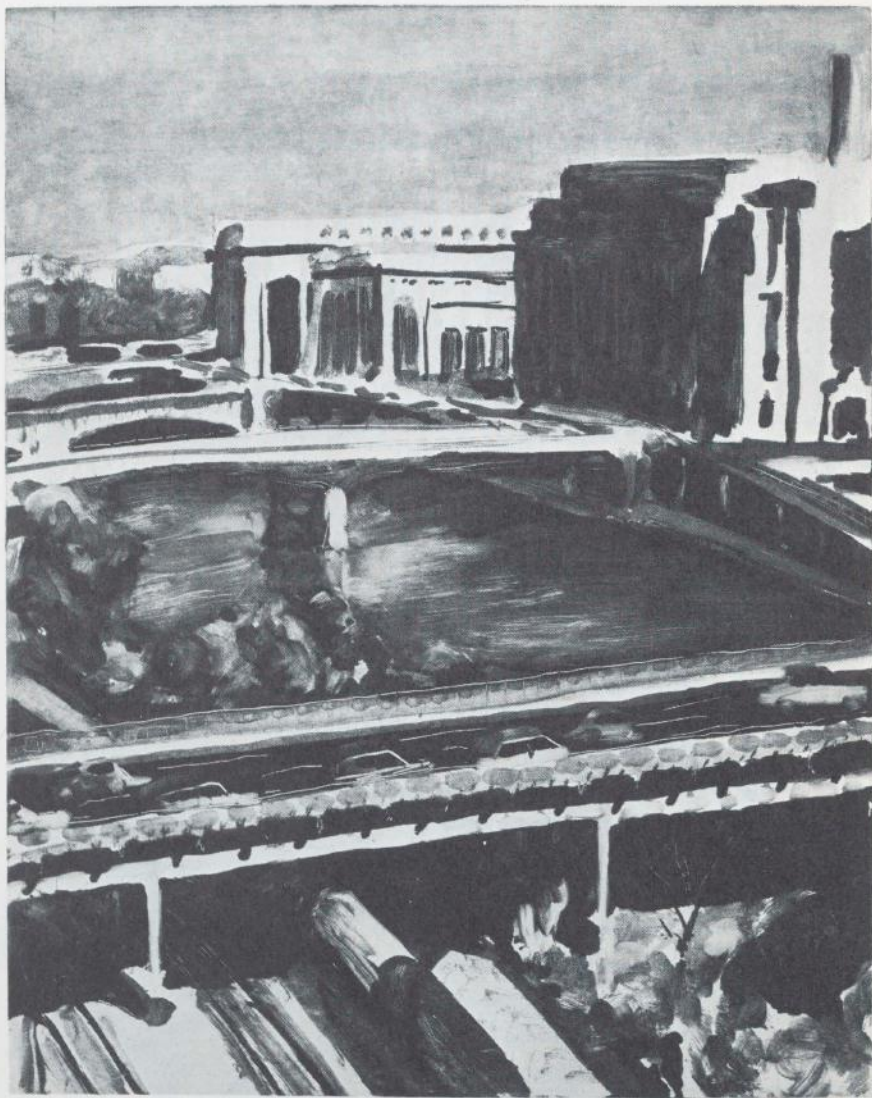
Spiritual athletics, Søren
called it--the broad
jump into final
nothingness.

Søren's woman also
called for some
athletics, but she
was not broad
enough for
jumping.

Arms outstretched, Søren
sought to pierce the
darkness of the
cosmos--darkness
enough in one good
woman for a man to
probe--but maybe not a
Christian.

Probing darkness with his
inner eye, Søren pictured
Isaac on his altar--saved
from sacrifice when his
father--filled with fear and
trembling--found God's
ram in the nearby bushes.

Søren scorned to search in
nearby bushes and sacrificed
himself instead--probing
darkness with his inner
eye, when a healthy
ram would do.



Dana Day

White Paper

ence like a sleeping cat. The city down
and out there is more silent; black and still,
but for the tiny grids of cars, most all
adhering to the universal or
der; so when one stray wanders off onto
a parking lot, you want to reach right down
and swat it back onto the proper path.
The skyline just alludes to anything
behind the black by several strands of sap
phire: no more of the glory of the pre-
energy-crisis days; and understa
ted grandeur. But much closer, over there
in 906 Carusoe Arms, behind
the concrete, Anne is probably screaming
in poor Dave's face about the union, po
lyester, and Rose Ellen's eating ha
bits. And way down there, in the old house with
the tiny toothlike windows, Sam, Keith and
their pals are getting high as kites again;
all sitting rigid in a perfect cir
cle and getting into Debussy on
a crummy stereo and talking for
eign politics. There, underneath the park,
as Marge and Leroy walk home from a film,
she asks him lots of questions so the mug
gers know a male is there. And in one of
those uniform apartment buildings, Ca
therine lies half-awake with loud news-
radio, wishing hard that I'd call. And I
sit way up here, quite warm atop this pur
ring loft, where senses settle back, coolly
ordering all their habits on this pa
per like John James Audubon, or a re
search chemist, looking for a brand new twist
in someone's chromosomes. The chill out there

We stopped at the castle in Autumn
A sad, cold wind clinging to the stones
To the old trees whose roots like knotted veins
Lie open with erosion-
Dead leaves washing back and forth over them.
The castle falls in ruin
But is yet preserved for history's sake
A maze of neat paths and signs for the tourist to know
Here stood the gate, the keep, the tower
Taken over by fire and war and the amusement park next door
Near the one long wall left
Now crumbling and covered with vines
I stand in that cold wind, baby heavy in my arms,
Thinking of Hideyoshi's death poem:
"Alas like the vanishing dew I am
Even Osaka castle is but a dream built on a dream."

Study in Gerunds and Participles

I slept in fields of honey biscuits
Laden heavy with burning laces
Whispers in the silent heaving
Waiting in the moorish creeping.

Dreams of innocense
Flattered inward wisdom's keeping
Shrieking in a level syncopation
Craving sleep in tired wonder.

I beheld a lurking single
Withholding but his murky smile
Touching from the angle reaching
To the middling of my heart.

Don't Call Me, Ishmael

Al Jolson sang his numbers with black
polish on his brow and then stood in the
wings and watched the others do their numbers
in Jewface.

Somehow Jolson's antics are the best re-
membered and (as I mused when I was still a
child) he was one of us.

We acted out our roles, and others watched and then
interpreted.

Ishmael Reed, a late interpreter, labeled the
Church the greatest enemy of the Spirit, but had
Moses strike the first blow and
Jolson bring up the rear of the as-
sault.

All quite witty, really, to trace the failures of the
West to Moses' poor attempts to get the Spirit from
Egyptian magi, and to mark its nadir in a pastiche of
blackness.

For years philosophers and poets have carefully explained to
me the reasons for my unaesthetic
nature, postulating as to why I couldn't
dance or sing or live like
other folks, and how my people gave its gift to
all mankind two thousand years ago and
entered an eternity of vestigial
wandering.

But I am not an Atonist, Jolson notwithstanding.
And it is not from envy that I note the
beauty of the blues.

Recognition comes easy for one haunted by
the sounds of piyuttim and nigunim that
jes' grow in my head like great silk
cotton trees.

Come see my loas, Ishmael.
Rent some reed boats and float some
'bloods downtown to see my soul
brothers and sisters do their thing.
Get down to Williamsburg and
listen to the men in long black
coats celebrate their covenant with
home grown mantras Ginzberg
might have chanted if he only
knew.

Ah, Ishmael,
Your pen breathes sweet flesh and musk.
But I cannot join you in your goat dance,
You are to me a new Voltaire in blackface--
terribly brilliant, slickly informing
me of my death three thousand years before
I was conceived.

I will not have this mumbo jumbo any more.
I am not so libe-
ral to deny the sounds that play upon my
lips--
my own melismas--
my own triumphant melancholy.

I will not join you in your boat as you
sail off to return to the blessed
Nile.

I've got my own seas to cross--
my own soil to dance upon.

Don't call me, Ishmael.
One day, when I have danced enough to
fill my soul to overflowing, we might
yet sail together--
One black cowboy and a son of Abraham,
floating gently on a sea of reeds.

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