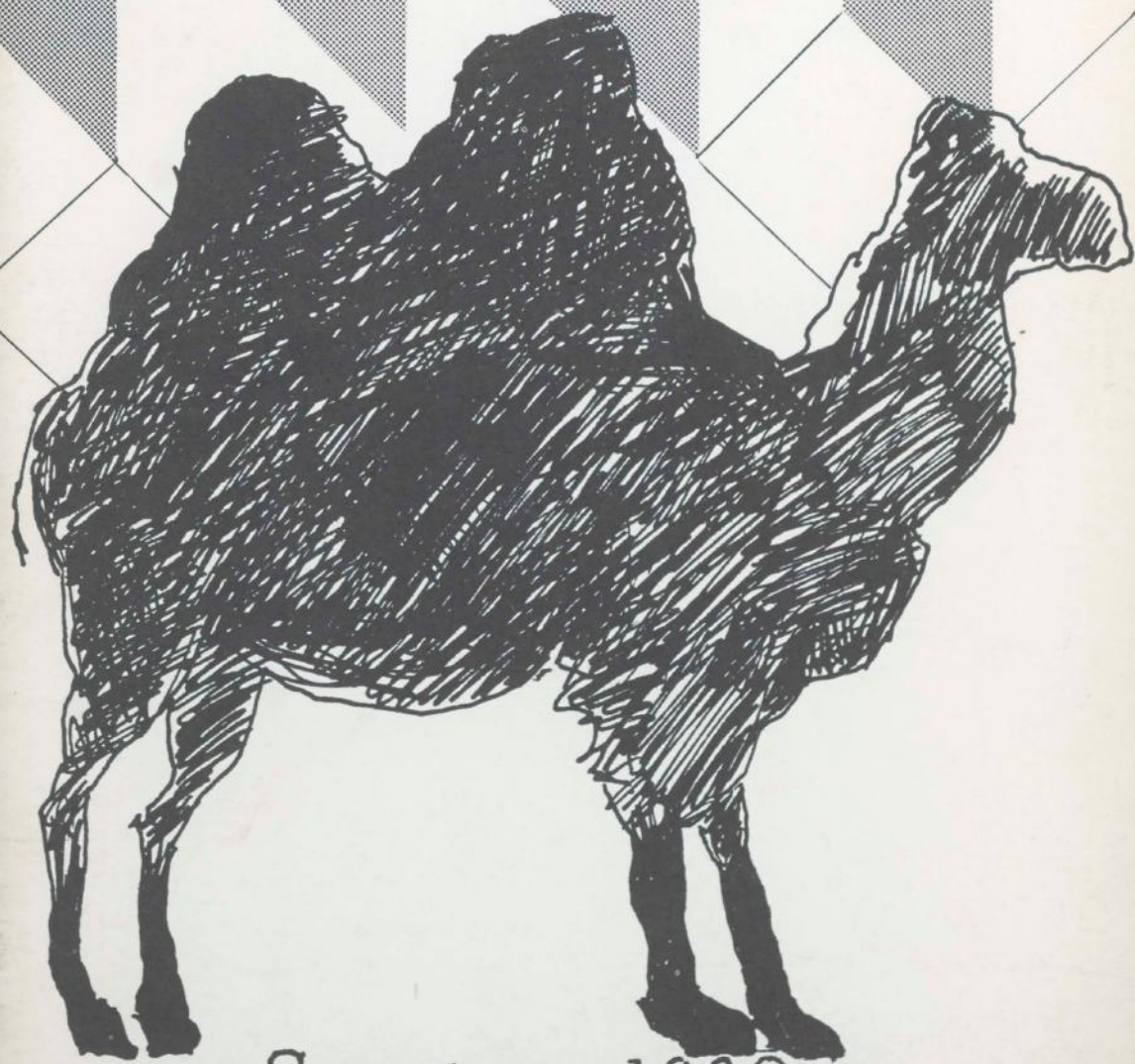


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Recipe

"Come here to me my son,
my elephant boy,
my velvet-grey one.

Climb into my kettle
I'll boil the tea,
I'll bathe you in peach-water spice.

I'll stir you in
with the cinnamon skin
and the swirl of cloves
and a peach-water rose.

Come home, my son, come home."

But,
he would not come
he did not come
to where his mother lay
in her deep smoke bed
in the velvet velvet grey.

"Slide here, my boy, slide here,
my silver-faced son,
my elephant dear.

Climb into my oven,
climb into the rice,
I'll bake you with parsley sere.

I'll coat you with oils,
I'll kiss you with spice.
Come sleep in my oven,
come rest in the rice."

Nickel bag and a fire engine
(To my father)

Porch sitting and sucking down
purple pinball wine.

I know. She had white skin and red
hair and a red kissed cigarette.
And she called you darling (in her snotty
psuedo-British Vassar way) in a bookstore.
She gave you one of those Mexican wool
jackets with the sleeves cut off. Your biceps
look big in the picture. I have your arms.

Porch sitting and sucking down
red pool hall wine.

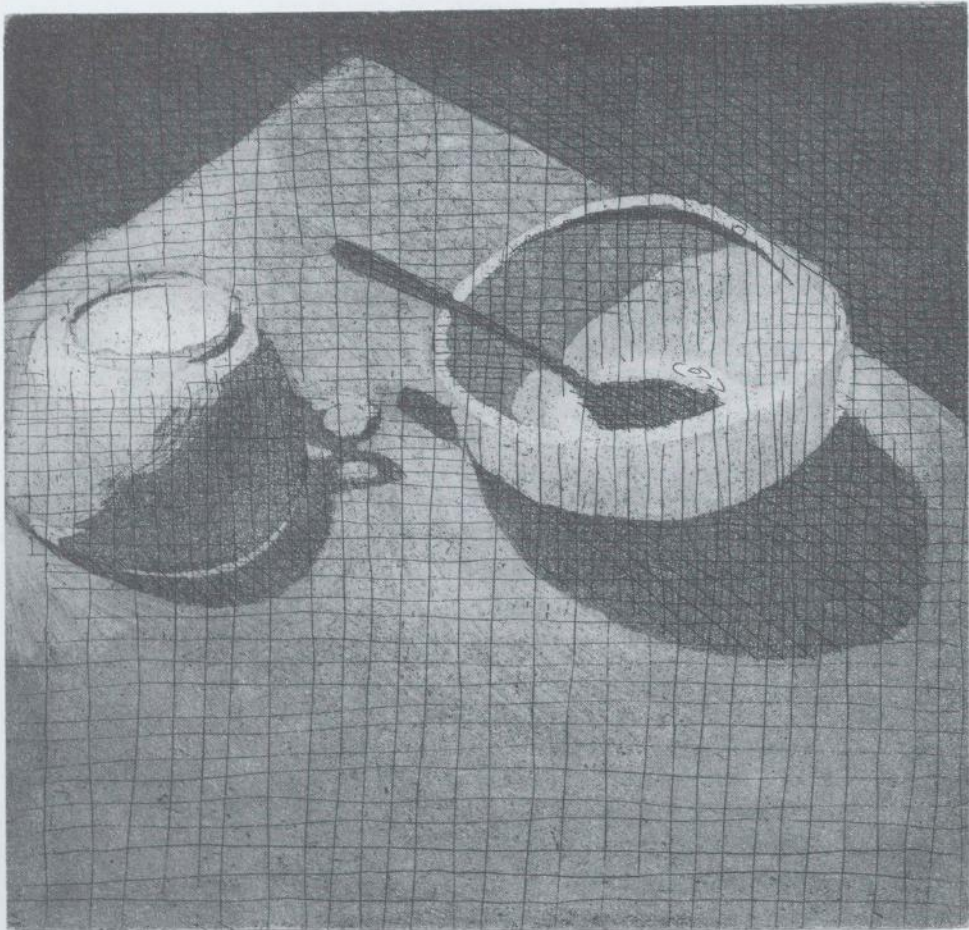
I wear it with a beret sometimes
and pretend I'm a beat poet.
She told me about Coffee and Confusion,
the poets, and the police (Imamu Baraka was
still Leroi Jones) I found a note of yours.
You said to buy a nickel bag with the money and
if there was some left over to buy me a fire engine.
You signed it 4½ buckets of love and I signed my
letters 4½ buckets of love for two years after.

Porch sitting and sucking down
cigarettes 65 cents sour wine.

She said the house was full of hookers and
heroin and your friends stole her heirloom
jewelry. It was no place for a kid
what with guns going off and stuff.
You were never sober so she said goodbye.
No darling this time.
Jailed in Spain and out west. I remember letters I think.

By the light of the neon, West Philly north star,
someone's ash grey son peruses our garbage.

The empty glass looms before me (Wallace Stevens style)
casting a shadow on the 1950's porch front
future shock blue vinyl couch.
And I think of your last drink.
Mother and I were in Morocco that summer.
I have nothing of yours but some pictures
and a poem. It's an elegy, too.



Raymond Rorke

The ship eased through the bottleneck, formed by two mountains, into the harbor of Vathi on the island of Ithaca. Late afternoon sun peered from behind the white houses and the pink tiled roofs. The men had left their glasses of beer or ouzo on the tables in the town square; the women had left their dinners simmering on the stoves, and all had walked to the pier at the first shriek of the ship's whistle. Every day, at the same time, the people would line up on the pier to see what new arrivals the ship would bring.

Among the Greeks walking down the plank were two foreign looking girls. Damayana, the school teacher, watched them; their blonde hair set them apart from the others. He saw them talking to one of the widows, dressed all in black, who rented rooms to strangers. They wore shorts and t-shirts, no bras he noticed, and on their backs they carried knapsacks. An old sea captain next to him also saw them. "They must be evil girls," he said shaking his grey head. Damayana did not answer but watched the girls as they walked past with the woman he knew would have a room to rent.

Damayana woke early the next morning, as he did every morning, and quickly got dressed in his best nylon flowered shirt. The sun was already hot as he walked to the town square and his sweat made his shirt stick to his stomach. He went to George's, his usual café, and chose a table in the corner, beneath the green canopy, to have breakfast. Carefully he scanned the tables at the other cafés but the girls were nowhere to be seen. He ate the hard toast and strained the thick muddy coffee between his teeth. He ate slowly, slower than on other mornings, and just as he was finishing he saw them walking to one of the tables. He noticed where they sat and, after taking a brief walk about the town, returned to the café and sat at the table next to them. There was lots of activity in the square; wood boats selling watermelon and an old man with his vegetable-laden donkey were the center of attraction. In the midst of the people was the town priest, dressed in a long black robe, his grey hair and beard blowing about his face. Damayana noticed the girls pointing to the old priest.

"That is papa," he said, leaning over the side of his chair. "He is the priest. He very good man. All the people like him. You English no? I hear you speak English."

"American" one of the girls said and continued to look straight ahead.

"Oh, American! I live America for awhile. Now I teach English on this island. My English not very good."

"I think it's good," the other one said and turned to look at him. Damayana stared at her with his tar black eyes. How fair her skin was! How blue her eyes! So unlike the dark Greek girls he knew. "Where did you live in America?" she asked.

"Astoria. You know where it is?"

"Yes, I'm from near there," she said.

"We were just wondering," the other one spoke, still not looking at him, "where all the good beaches are. Could you tell us?"

"Today because it is Saturday I can show you," Damayana said. "I know the best place on the island. I go there everyday after school. It's not far from here. You go with me. O.K.?"

"Sure" they both agreed.

"Good. My name is Damayana. What is your names?"

"I'm Sarah and she's Pam."

"OK Sarah and Pam. You come with me. I show you very good place."

Damayana felt the stares of the storekeepers and saw the smirks of his students as the three of them walked through the square together. It was already midday when they walked out of the town and on to the rocky path that led over one of the hills. The sun blazed down. It was a hundred degrees.

"Is the cove very far?" Sarah asked.

"About fifteen minute walk. Not far for me but others think it's far. That is why I always come alone. The others do not want to walk so far. Do you want to take a rest?"

"No we're OK" Sarah said.

"Good but if you want a rest just say so. I used to be track racer so this walk not far for me. Sometimes I run the whole way." He noticed the girls looking at him. "That was before I got big belly."

"Are you from this island?" Pam asked.

"No. I'm from Cyprus really but I like Greeks so I came here to teach. Very bad here if not married. The girls all very religious. They marry the men they grow up with. So I live alone. Very lonely. Do you live alone?"

"Well, we go to school, to a University," Sarah said.

"Oh, you have boyfriends?" Damayana asked. Neither of them answered. "You don't have to answer. I used to have girlfriend in Athens but she always say I rush her. Don't give her time. Greek girls very strange. Not like American girls, right?"

They laughed and walked past the grey green olive trees in silence. Damayana remembered the last time American girls had come to the island. They too carried knapsacks. There were two of them and one had become friendly with the religion teacher and had stayed a month on the island. The other one barely spoke to him. Now, here were two new American girls and they were coming with him.

When they arrived at the cove, Damayana stood to the side as the girls peeled off their t-shirts and ran into the turquoise blue water. He sat on the white sand and watched as Sarah splashed water at Pam and he heard their laughter. Quickly, Damayana swam to them and pushed Pam's head under the water. Blue green water splashing, brown hands sweeping over breasts. Damayana jumped and bobbed in the water—faster and faster—and suddenly he was alone. The splashing had stopped. The girls crouched near their towels on the sand, their white backs to the ocean. He stayed a few minutes in the cool water and slowly floated to shore.

"You like my cove?" he asked.

"Yes, it's very nice," Pam said.

"Of course it's nice. And I am the only one that comes here. Everyone else go to the other beach. So everyday I come here alone. It is nice to have others

here. American girls much nicer than Greek girls. Sarah, how come you no wear two piece suit like Pam?"

"I don't want to," she said.

"You can take bathing suit down. I don't mind," he said, grinning as he thought of the foreign girls he used to see sunbathing topless at one of the other beaches. "I'm only kidding. Relax." He put his tan hand on Pam's thigh. She moved away from him.

The afternoon passed. Damayana was the only one who talked and he rambled on as if he had not spoken to anyone in a long time. He spoke of his loneliness on the island, of the empty evenings spent talking to his one friend. He spoke of his student days in Athens and of his girlfriend, Ilyana. Ilyana and he had both studied English. She was very pretty, "in a Greek way," he said. He was younger then, and a good athlete, and they had spent a lot of time together. Suddenly they had stopped speaking and now, he told the girls, he could not remember why. But he did remember. He remembered trying to kiss Ilyana and the look in her eyes as she told him she no longer liked him. And he remembered the knot in his stomach when he saw her walking with one of his men friends. He had left Athens the next day.

The girls half listened as he spoke. Sometimes they pretended to fall asleep under the scorching sun, or they would suddenly run into the clear water and swim out past the rocks, refusing to come to him when he called.

After a few hours they said they had had enough of the beach. "It is early yet. Don't leave. It will be very hot in town," he told them.

"No, we have to go. We're getting really burned," Pam said.

"We meet for dinner then," he said.

"We don't know what we're doing for dinner."

"What do you mean? You're eating, no? So you eat with me. Please eat with me."

"We don't know what we're doing," Pam said. "We might not eat at all. We're still pretty tired from our trip."

"Besides," Sarah said, "we decided that we're not going to wear watches the whole week that we're on the island. We don't want to make plans or know what time it is. We're doing what we want when we want."

"What do you mean not wear watches?" Damayana laughed. "You are kidding. Why don't you want to know what time it is?"

"We're tired of living on schedules," Sarah explained. "We want to see if we can make time fit our schedules instead of letting our plans fit time. We want to exist on an inner time clock."

"I do not understand you."

"Sorry," she said, grabbed her towel and began walking on the path back to town. "Thanks for showing us the cove."

Damayana sat on the white sand after they left. He was confused. He did not understand what they had meant about time and watches. Americans confused him he thought, but they were nicer than Greek girls. When the sun had cooled he left the cove and walked back to his house to change for dinner. Hurriedly he chose another shirt, one that was left over from his days in America. They will like me if I look American, he thought. He combed his

fiercely curling black hair and cleaned his room before leaving. In town he did not go straight to dinner as he usually did. First, he sat at one of the tables in the square and then he went for a walk alongside the water. The girls were nowhere to be seen. He walked up the path to their room but half way there he turned around and went back to town. He went to dinner alone.

He sat by the window of the restaurant, hoping to see them, and ate his pastitsio and dipped dry bread into the pool of olive oil on the bottom of his plate. Afterwards he walked into the square. It was nearly dark; the string of lights draped above did little to brighten it, and it smelled of shish-kebab and grilled meat.

At first, he did not see them as they quietly drank their cold beer. He had walked past them for the third time when their blonde hair caught his eye. He debated a moment and then walked back to them. "May I join you for a drink?" he asked and sat down before they could answer. "I hope I do not bother you. Pam, do I bother you?"

"No" Pam said. "Let's just have a nice talk. Nothing about plans or anything. O.K.?"

"Sure" he laughed. "Sarah, what do you study?"

"Philosophy and literature. Pam studies history."

"Recite me a poem by Eliot or Pound," he demanded.

"I don't know any by heart."

"I see. Do you know what America did to Ezra Pound? They locked him up in a cage and shined a light on him. Kept shining a light on him and finally he went crazy. And why? Because they did not like Italians and he was a friend of Mussolini's and did radio broadcasts for him. What do you think of that?"

"I think that's sort of a simplified version of what happened," Sarah said. "After all he was a traitor."

"Ah! Of course you will stick up for America. You Americans are all alike."

"Look, I don't feel like being attacked by you," she said. "And besides, what do you mean we Americans are all alike?"

"I was only kidding."

"No, I don't think you were. I think you really meant something by that," she insisted.

"Let's not argue," Pam spoke up. "Why don't we seem to be able to have a pleasant talk?"

"OK, Pam. I will ask you. Who do you think is the best philosopher?"

"The best philosopher? I don't know. Nobody does."

"I know. It's Engels," Damayana said. "Why? Because he synthesises Marx, Einstein, math and everything. Makes everything a whole. And he proves there is no God. Do you believe in God?" he asked looking at Pam.

"No" she said. "But I'm not really sure. I don't think you can prove anything like that. It's impossible to really know."

"Engels proves it. Proves it scientifically and totally."

"He only surmises. He can't prove it," Pam said.

"Engels proves it," he demanded and slammed his fist on the table. A glass fell over. "He is the best philosopher!"

"The best?" Sarah laughed. "What about Aristotle and Plato—your Greek philosophers. What about Locke and Descartes? What about Woody Allen—now he's the best!" The girls laughed.

"Woody Allen? Who is that? The others I know of. I read them in school but they are not as good as Engels. Engels uses math to prove there is no God."

"If you don't believe in God, what do you believe in?" Sarah asked, "Do you believe in Satan or a universe governed by natural laws? I believe in Apollo and Neptune. In fact I thought I saw Neptune today by the cove. But you're the Greek. You should believe in them. Do you?"

"I think you are making fun of me. Are you making fun of me Sarah? I do not understand American humor. But Pam I understand," and under the table he put his hand on her knee. "And Pam understands me. Right?"

She jumped out of her seat. "No I don't understand you. We're going now."

"It is early yet. Stay and have another drink with me."

"No," Pam insisted. "We're tired and we've had enough."

"You come to my cove to tomorrow. We can all go together. Meet me here in the morning."

"We told you we're not making any plans," Sarah said. "We don't know what time it is and don't want to."

"But you will be up in the morning and want to go to the beach. No?"

"Maybe" they said and walked off to their room.

Damayana sat in the square a while longer. He ordered another ouzo and watched the boats in the harbor. Echoes of laughter from a sleek schooner filtered down to him. If only he was rich, he thought. Then he would have lots of friends, lots of girl friends. He finished his drink and left the town along the path leading to the girls' room. Their light was still on. He hid behind a tall cypress. Sarah was writing in some book and Pam seemed to be idly staring ahead. Perhaps she was thinking of him, he thought. But no, she would not think of him. Pam was the prettier one, and she almost seemed to like him. Maybe Sarah would leave the island and Pam would stay behind. But she was American and would get lonely and want to leave. Just like that other American girl had left his friend. No, this would be different. She would stay with him and if she thought of leaving he would stop her. He had read lots of American books where something like that happened. He would keep her in his house and she would not want to leave.

Suddenly he noticed the girls peering from behind the window. He quickly jumped behind the tree. He saw them laugh and return to their beds and he moved out from behind the cypress. Inside, the girls were motionless. Sarah crept to the door and Damayana heard the click of the lock and watched them pull the curtains closed. He waited outside in the dark a little longer and then went home.

It was a long night. He did not sleep much and there was no one to talk to so he sat up and read. He was afraid that if he went to sleep he would miss seeing them the next day. Towards morning, he dozed for an hour or two and was at the town square before the cafés opened. He sat along the water and watched the storekeepers prepare for the day. Eventually he went inside

the middle café, to a table from which he could observe the entire square, and had breakfast.

The girls finally came down, already dressed for the beach. "Look at them," the café owner said. "It is terrible. What if the girls here began to dress like that?" Damayana silently sipped his coffee and watched them from behind the window. They ate quickly and then started walking to the path leading to his cove. Maybe they were going to look for him, he thought, and did not wait long before following them.

He could hear them singing as they walked over the hills but when he got to his cove they were not there. In the distance he could see them still walking on the path. They have found out about the other beach, he thought. He knew that the few other tourists on the island would also be at that beach and that no Greeks ever went there. He was afraid to follow them and so spent the day alone at his cove.

That night he did not see them and the next day he had to go to school and was unable to follow them to the beach. In the afternoon an English yacht, Praxis, came into the harbor. At night he saw the girls talking to some of the crew from the ship. He walked over to their table.

"Hello," Sarah said. "Long time no see. Everyone this is . . . Teacher. I forgot your name."

"Damayana," he muttered.

"Right—Damayana. He's the teacher here," she told them.

They all said hello but nobody offered him a chair. He walked past and found a table alone.

Every night he saw the girls drinking and laughing with the English crew. Always they would say hello to him but never did they ask him to join them. He contented himself with following them to their room where he would stand behind the cypress and watch them until dawn. They had become used to the blackness of the nights and the sounds of the island and had stopped drawing their curtains or locking the door.

One night he saw the girls sitting alone in a café. He went up to them. "We're leaving tomorrow," Pam said.

"Will you have a drink with me before you leave?" Damayana asked. "Please. I won't bother you. I promise. Just one last drink."

"OK," Pam said and he sat at their table.

"I have not spoken to you in a long time. Have you enjoyed Ithaca?" he asked.

"Yes, very much," Pam said. "It is a beautiful island and we found an even nicer beach than you showed us."

"That is good. But tell me, why do you come to Ithaca? Surely it is not to meet Greek people, is it?"

"We came for lots of reasons," Pam said. "The beaches, the scenery and of course the people. We met lots of nice Greek people."

"No, you didn't," he insisted. "I see you everyday with those English men. I don't understand you. Why you no like Greeks? I ask you to go to dinner, to meet later, to go to the beach. And always you say no. But you go with them."

"It has nothing to do with nationality," Sarah said. "It's individuals. I don't care what country someone is from."

"No. You do not like Greeks. But you, Pam. You like Greeks. You like me, no?"

"I like Greeks. Sarah does too. But you never let us breathe! You just keep leaching on. And . . ."

"What do you mean leaching on? I no understand the word."

"You just wouldn't let us alone. Understand?," Sarah said. "But how do you know about the English men? Have you been watching us?"

"No. I don't watch you. But Pam you like me right? You will stay here with me?"

"What? Stay? We're leaving tomorrow," she said.

"OK. But I will write to you. If I come to America I will call you. Will we get together? I want to know if I have friends in America?"

"Yes. You can call," Pam said. "But don't expect us to spend all our time with you. We can get together once or so but that's all."

"Sure, I know" he said grinning. "I don't expect anything from you. I don't expect money, job, sex."

"What do you mean by that? How can you say that? Jesus, you really are something!" Pam said.

"Next week I am going on vacation. I take a boat and go to Athens and then to Cyprus where I am from. I go to visit my family. I have six brothers and three sisters. All of them are married. All but me. Pam, come to Cyprus with me."

"Go to Cyprus with you!" she shouted. "Are you kidding? What do you mean? I'm just going to go to Cyprus with you?" Pam stood up before he could answer. "I don't understand what's wrong with you."

Sarah followed her down to the pier. Damayana watched them disappear among the lights from the ship and the reflections from the stars on the water. He thought of himself and Pam in Cyprus. He thought of his brothers and sisters and nieces and nephews. Then he remembered Ilyana in Athens. Maybe she will still be there, he thought. He would look for her when he got there. It was not so many years ago that he had left. Not so many, he thought, and tried to remember just how many it had been. Maybe she will be alone and want to see me, he thought. She will come to Cyprus with me. He remembered his student days in Athens, the friends he had there. Why had he come to Ithaca? To write, he remembered. The city had been too noisy and he had thought that if he came to some quiet place he would be able to work. But the island had been too quiet for too many years, and he hated sitting alone in his house. He would move back to Athens and find Ilyana and she would be glad to see him. Greek girls were better for him; American girls were always leaving.

He sipped his glass of ouzo. Tomorrow, he thought, tomorrow he would see them before they went away. He would speak to Pam alone and she would stay with him. Tonight he would go to their room again and say good-bye and they would say they were coming with him. He watched the girls on the deck of Praxis. Yes, they would change their minds, he thought. He sipped his glass of ouzo.

Return from Russia for M. W.

She dances well
Foxtrots, mambos,
The cha-cha-cha
As well now as before the
Return
One can see beneath the
chiqueness that she was
moved, can catch the anguish in her
voice as she begins the narrative
yet another time, grasping for ever finer
details of men and happenings, cutting the
air with gestures of
futility
There are things to be done
This minute
Yesterday
Things to be changed
But as for now—
One voice
One pair of arms in anguished
waiting for the process to
unfold.

No longer at ease with
accustomed things, choked with
dank smells
How does one fill hours, as the
seconds scrape by
How does one eat well
Brush one's teeth
Embrace
Concentrate on children's cares

(Images of prisons slowly
filling & more slowly
emptying)
How does one live with
ordinary men when one has
shared the air with
martyrs
How is one to be liberated from the
guilt of never having to
come through.
Men celebrate here
(The shadows Gulag fill out
yet another decade)
Men celebrate the coming of age of
one fragile soul, nurtured in the
soil of freedom
Men celebrate
And a band plays
And if one is to dance at all
One should dance well
Foxtrots, mambos,
The cha-cha-cha
Rituals of affirmation
Hallowed rites of passage
Festiveness
(Even as the blood seeps deep inside
Even as the mind struggles to forget
Even as the music-riddled silence
echoes with names slowly filling
hollow prison cells
much more slowly
emptying.)

Occupied Territory

This long
This gray
And twisted way
Marked by festoons
Of broken flowers
Leads to a land
Where blood-soaked sand
Is raised
In monuments and towers

Here judgement's rendered
In a glance
Of lying levity, by clowns
Here means and ends
Are seen
As one
And executioners
Wear plastic crowns.



Tony Cuneo

The Hippo

A hippo at dusk doing classic hippo yawns,
face looking the part of an overly well-prepared
woman's pocketbook hovering open over what
could only be a hippo's body; suddenly growing
into a hillside crevice, or the entrance
to an indoor parking lot.

No gymnast could split any finer, like a tree stump
cut in two with both halves pushed away from each other,
backwards, to the ground, or an old-style steam shovel,
still working, closing even now on gathered dirt
and stones.

The failing light, dimming for the encore,
inspiring him to the fullness of his showmanship,
the legendary hippo holler rips outward
like water off a high falls;

the planets feeling unsafe near the open jaws,
till like a bank's vault it shuts for the last time on Friday,
and the hippo, amid the cheers and the roses,
sinks back into his waterhole.

American Dreamer

She is
sitting in the great bay of
a casement window,
careless of the fine
spills of soil lodged
in fissures of honey-hued paint,
the stains they will leave on her muslin day-skirt,
the tiny crenulations on soft
heedless flesh beneath.
She does not really see
the riot of dogwood and hawthorn
in the blue air outside,
crowding with mad beauty
upon the tall latticework
below which she is only a small shaded figure,
and yet she wearily looks,
so that I,
frozen, unnoticed,
rooms and doorways deep to her,
seem to see her lost in those
blossoms and myself lost in her
as she sits there,
half-reclined,
knees drawn up,
embraced,
sliver of eyelash,
wing of her mouth
just seen.
My mind is full of a summer morning,
of lukewarm waves of blossom-laden air
drifting through the rooms of
this broken-down countryseat.
She dreams and chafes,
she wearily looks.



Pamela Whitman

Saint Apollonia: Patron Saint of Dentistry

There is no figure in the hagiology and martyrology of dentistry that is more universally known and revered than Saint Apollonia. So great has become her fame throughout Christian lands that today she is venerated as a saint by the Roman Catholic Church, the feast of Saint Apollonia being celebrated on the 9th day of February. Her life and martyrdom were confirmed by Bishop Dionysis of Alexandria (4th Century A.D.).

During the early part of the third century A.D., a childless couple of Alexandria beseeched their heathen gods to grant them a child, without success. The wife turned to Christian pilgrims, begging them for help. They preached to her the merits of Christ and the Virgin Mother. The woman, being greatly moved, asked of them whether the Virgin Mother could grant her prayer to have a child. They answered: "without a doubt." Presently, her prayers were answered and she bore a girl to whom she gave the name of Apollonia.

As the child grew up her mother never ceased relating the wondrous miracle of her birth and thus she became a Christian at heart. She was baptized and as soon as this happened, there appeared an angel calling to her saying, "Apollonia, the servant of Jesus! Go now in Alexandria and preach the faith of Christ." She preached with eloquence and made converts, but her father being a heaven worshipper, denounced her to the authorities and she was seized by them.

The heathen governor ordered her to fall down and worship the idols in the city. She refused and he then ordered his lictors: "Beat upon her impious mouth with flint stones that she may stop provoking the Roman gods and divinities." This they did and she was thrown into a dungeon. While thus confined she prayed that all sufferers of toothache would appeal to her and she would bless them with prayers. A voice from heaven called to her: "O Bride of Christ, you have obtained that which you sought." Soon, her fate was sealed.

She was told: "Choose now whether to be burned, or to pour libations to our gods." She resorted to a stratagem and declared to her oppressors, "loose the bonds from my feet and remove the heavy chains from my hands that I may follow the orders of the consul." Upon releasing her, thinking that she would recant, she leaped without a moment's hesitation into the waiting flames. And so she met a martyr's fate.

For centuries the following prayer was commonly referred to:

O Lord, you who have awarded the celestial crown to the blessed Apollonia, glorious Virgin and martyr to you, and who for faith in your name suffered the striking out of her teeth, grant to all of us who piously observe her festival that we may enjoy enduring peace and freedom from toothache.

Medieval Painting Fragment

The Holy Ghost descending upon the faithful
with all the demons getting the hell out of the way
their skinny tails flail the now gold sky,
fear uglifying their faces

Oh they ran they did,
knew it was no place for them anymore,
France pure and ghostified

the people totally mystified

Canning Against Winter

Tomatoes slide from steamed skins,
Splatter my dress.
The smell of picalilli
Hangs on the room.
Everything is too heavy:
Air pressed under black clouds
Tomato plants lolling in the garden.
My mother's belly swells
Moves under her stained apron.
We push through heat
Canning against winter.
"Will there be enough?"
Hovers on steaming air.
I am still half in the dream
That stunned me to morning.

Now Michael's mother climbs the hill.
Her shadow strikes flowers and heaving asphalt
I feel her
Crossing Elm Street
Chamber Street
Past the Italian's market.
The butcher glances at her
Mutters "Mal occhio."
Blood blossoms red maroon brown on his apron.
Mother rinses her hands
Pours water from the icebox jar.

Michael's mother comes to our door.
She begs for grave flowers
From the snowball bush
Her eyes reproaching our cluttered house.
She tells us
She saw Michael

Dressed in his communion suit
And on Tuesday
The Virgin Mary told her Michael is happy.

My mother crosses the grey porch.
Heavy and flushed, her red-gold hair
Shining in the sun, she holds out the beaded glass.
Michael's mother chatters like a cicada
Her fingers flutter above white clusters
The only quickness in the afternoon.
Her hummingbird eyes dart
To mother's breast and belly.

Hot wind stirs the bush,
Lifts shingles and dust.
"Not enough," rustle the branches.
Michael's mother twists a strand of greying hair
And sighs, "Too much."
My mother leans against the porch pillar
Listening to the canner hiss.

I hug my knees,
Rock slowly on the warped step.
Water splashes the marble basin
In Holy Child Cemetery.
My brothers and sisters, drugged with afternoon sleep
Stir in the too-small beds.

Early that morning I dreamed
I saw Michael
White as a statue
Standing in our pantry
Near jars of tomatoes shattered by a hard freeze.
Crystals of glass and red pulp lay frozen on the shelves.

**After Reading Some
Young Women Poets**

The only thing useable in old age
is truth.

It may be the first time in your life
and it's free. So—

The irony of the young women poets
is sur-Plath value,
exploiting self-pity
with brand names
they pick up from nearby shelves.

My One-a-Day heart owes them nothing.

I will not buy their tears,
no matter what they're called.

I shop in neighborhood stores,
not supermarkets.

Facts vs. Cynicism

A particularly evil result of the Watergate- and Koreagate-related scandals is that too many young people have become cynical about the whole political process. When I was on a speaking tour for the NAACP, I tried to speak to college classes in the morning since our meetings for the NAACP branches are in the evening. A large majority of those students over eighteen were not enrolled as voters. Some said openly they did not think voting was any use. It is true that I have never known in sixty years of following politics a Secretary of the Interior taking \$200,000 in cash in a suitcase, and not reporting it. I have never known burglary attempted against political opponents. And I have never known one political party trying, by forgery, to control the nominee for president of another political party. Yet Nixon's Committee for the Re-Election of the President did all of these things.

We have discovered that both the C.I.A. and the F.B.I. knowingly committed illegal acts. That hatred by Hoover when he was head of the F.B.I. for Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. was almost an obsession.

Nonetheless, by using the political process very great advances have been made in my lifetime in both economic and racial justice. The disillusioned and cynical, both young and old, should know the facts.

When I was a young man there was no general public welfare relief. The poor starved or had to rely on private charity which was seldom adequate and always humiliating. Now we have such relief, except in Mississippi and in a few counties in some other Southern states. We had no old age pensions, no unemployment compensation, and no aid to mothers with dependent children. Now we have all these. There was no graduated personal Federal Income tax to help pay for these things. Now we have it.

There was no right for workers to get a union without having to strike for it. Now workers can get a union by petitioning for a labor board election. If the union wins the election the employer must bargain collectively with the union. This has made a tremendous improvement in our labor relations. We still have strikes, but they are over economic issues such as wages, hours, and fringe benefits like pensions and paid vacations. These are issues which can be compromised and always are compromised, so there is now relatively little violence in strikes. But when a strike was over the right to organize before the Wagner Labor Relations Law was passed, that is an issue which cannot be compromised. One side or the other must be completely defeated. So before the Wagner Labor Relations Act, which set up labor board elections to determine the right to form a union, strikes for this purpose often involved violence and even killings.

There was until recently, no protection for consumers or borrowers. Now we have a Truth in Packaging Law and a Truth in Lending Law to protect

consumers. A Truth In Lending Law protects borrowers by giving the true rate of interest on loans which are paid back in installments.

There was no protection against wage exploitation. Now we have for employees of companies with 25 or more workers, a Federal minimum wage law, and in most states this is backed up by a state minimum wage law, applying to smaller employers. The law has become inadequate with the increase in the cost of living. But, a law to increase the minimum by stages to \$3.35 an hour has already been passed.

On racial issues there have been similar substantial gains. When I was a young man and when the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was first formed in 1909, there were no black elected officials in the whole of our country. Now we have over 4,200 of them. They include a U.S. Senator, 16 Congressmen—all of them Democrats, mayors of over 120 cities, including such large cities as Atlanta, Los Angeles and Detroit, with a substantial majority of white voters. There are 292 Negroes in state legislatures, nearly all Democrats.

Not many years ago, it was dangerous for a Negro to try to vote in many parts of the South. Blacks had been killed or lynched for doing that. Now we have Federal protection for the right to register and vote. This has resulted in a tremendous addition to the number of Negro voters. About half of the elected Negro officials are from the South. We are electing black people to political office from places where only fifteen years ago it was dangerous for a Negro to try to vote.

We have a Federal Fair Employment Practice law, reinforced by state laws in over half the states, to provide equal employment opportunities for Negroes. There is still discrimination in advancement and upgrading. Herbert Hill, recently secretary of the NAACP, has received many complaints about violating the law, but that is not so many considering it covers the whole country. Many black people now have jobs both in all levels of government and in private industry, that were not open to them until recently. There is a small but growing number of Negroes in decision-making positions in private industry, including a member of the Board of Directors of General Motors and International Telegraph and Telephone Co., Inc.

Not many years ago there were no Negroes in the Marine Corps, the Air Force, and only in the mess department in the Navy. President Truman ordered segregation and discrimination ended in all the armed forces, so that today the armed forces are the best integrated sectors of our public life. Negroes show they think they suffer from less discrimination in the armed forces than in civilian life by a rate of reenlistment double that for whites.

We had until recently a long long list of unpublished murders and even lynchings of civil rights workers and Negroes trying to exercise their rights, so far as the state courts of the South were concerned. Now we have made it a Federal crime to assault or kill civil rights workers or Negroes trying to exercise their rights. It is or was easier to get justice in the Federal courts than in the state courts of the Southern states. Since then there have been no such outrages except for the killing of two black students at Jackson State College in Mississippi. This was only partly racial. Four white students were

killed at about the same time by members of the national guard at Kent State College in Ohio. These killings were in part prompted by President Nixon's contemptuous description of students demonstrating against the Vietnam War as "bums." This was not racial. And public opinion now overwhelmingly recognizes that the students' opposition to the war was right.

School desegregation has been advancing steadily. The cases where there is opposition, such as South Boston and Louisville, Ky., are well publicized. The cases where school desegregation has gone ahead quietly are not publicized. What remains is due largely to housing segregation.

It is now contrary to Federal law, and to state laws in twenty-five of the states, to discriminate against Negroes or other racial minorities in the sale or rental of housing. Enforcement of this law is poor, but partly this is due to failure of Negroes to complain. In my state of Connecticut every complaint brought to court under our state law has been won by the Negro complainant.

Every hitherto all-white state and private college in the Southern states has been desegregated at least to some extent. At least two such colleges with only about 15% of Negro students have elected a black student as head of the student government association, and a black girl was elected homecoming queen in Alabama State University, with an overwhelmingly white student body. These events have taken place because prejudice is the daughter of ignorance. As more and more whites have come to know Negroes with the breaking down of segregation in education, employment and public accommodation, prejudice, especially in the South, has diminished.

I can give only some examples of this diminished prejudice because of lack of space. In Brookhaven, Mississippi, an NAACP activist, Lamar Smith, was leading a group of black people to the court house to register to vote. He was shot and killed in broad daylight. Nothing ever happened to his killers in the state court, and it was before the law which made such killings a Federal crime. I spoke in Brookhaven about ten years ago. Our NAACP branch president there, Rev. Stanton, slept with a rifle under his bed, because the people who killed Lamar Smith were boasting about it. I spoke there again early in 1973 and asked him if he still needed the rifle. "No," he said, "The climate of opinion among whites has changed greatly for the better."

By persistent effort you can make real and substantial advances in eliminating or at least greatly reducing racial and economic injustice. But it can't and won't be done overnight. Too many young people expect to be able to end racial discrimination in one big push. Many of them, both men and women, white and Negro, went to Mississippi in 1964 and thought they could get rid of racial discrimination in that state in one year's effort. Of course they did not do so, though they did make a dent in it. Too many of them quit because they did not succeed completely in one year.

The thing that separates the men from the boys in the struggle against these twin evils of racial discrimination and economic exploitation is that the boys expect to do it all in one big battle. The men know that you must enlist in what may be a lifetime struggle against these evils. But they know that if you do so and keep at it, it can be done. It is being done. The facts prove it.

King Ethelraed [the "Ill-Advised," of England] fled to Normandy. His son, a skillful and courageous young prince named Edmund Ironside, fought on for a season but was killed in 1016, whereupon the English [council] concurred in the accession of a Danish king to the throne . . .

—C. Warren Hollister,
The Making of England

Edmund Ironside

Now, with darkness covering like a shroud
These princes' bodies, thrown upon the ground,
Profess to know me, dusty little clerks,
Historians, tell me how my spirit works.
"Skillful and courageous" so you say,
And Edmund Ironside has had his day.

Well, gentlemen, there is more; the slow approach
Of night, stars bloodied by the moon
Carrying a sword. The field is wet
With living pieces strewn to mark the graves
Of raining curses. Sweat of arms and men,
The hairy tough resistance of their flesh
To the punch of arrows steady in the hand—
They fell not. Standing in a ragged line
That stretched across to block the fading sky,
They listened. Eyes the color of pure hate,
The hairy bastards, wolves deprived of meat,
They listened to the pounding of our brains.
(Our hearts had fled us long before that time.)
Advance, cut, murder, by the force, the chance
Governing us.

Why fought I for my father,
Who never cared a damn if I was warm,

Or steady with a bow, or versed in school?
I trained myself, to spite his mindless stare.
I found him with a chambermaid one night,
I was but seven, creeping in my shirt
Across the stones, for hunger made me walk,
I found the open door, I heard the cries
That came within; the stupid girl was trembling
With a grin like his.

Upon the field
He pierced me, with an arrow, through my side.
I fell upon my stomach to the ground.
The mud is cold against my chest and thighs
And I see but three fingers on this hand—
Sinking down, the meadow crawls apart
To offer me its cold concealed delights,
The sparkle of the mud, late sun, a rift,
A separation slowly forms two arms,
Down, deeper than I feared that I could go,
Deeper than anything I feared to know
In books, or in the tallow at the Mass,
Stop. But kept on spinning, down, down, round,
The body at the center of the earth,
The idea in the mind, blanked out at last,
The blank stare, open mouth to fill with sand,
The painful eyes, the softness of the whites
where sand-grains dot to form two peppered eggs,
Oh, the fingers, roots of another life—

My father stands alone in Norman fields
With daffodils and daisies underfoot.

Phaon

It rained that day.
From the sullen damp an old crone
Withered and gruesome,
Like my ancient bones,
Water running from her face
Like my own tears:
The other children had mocked
My humped nose,
Stumpy legs, bowed shoulders.

Ages of deformity,
On my long boat,
The hag walked in the rain,
Not an obol had she.
Of what use is my wretched back
If not to row across
Straits of Lesbos?
Her age and ugliness are as mine.
Let her board
To the solemn isle.



Michael Bragan

Three Poems

I topsoil
 who is it? telling animals to defecate
 evenly,
 plants to rot. painters to mix colors.
 standing under a sure footed bear
 sliding in a rock crevice
 gathering pigment, skin oils.

 he isn't old enough,
 he didn't learn art by searching
 between two mirrors.
 first he is the janitor
 learning to clean the dust from the glass.

II this old man
 he learned knik knak paddi wack
 crying to go home.

 a first grade teacher
 frightened
 "he licks the germs on and off the surface"
 he doesn't know surfaces—licking away the glass
 getting to the film of silver.
 mirror without glass
 he'll define surface
 pile surfaces
 live inside one.

III all images dissolve through red
red is the primary color, the color of film.
baked glass distorts red
white and black are only multiples of red.

he lies down and decays
returning
to chance
red topsoil

* * *

we are all comfortable
only in the future
stopped thinking long ago.

Because I cannot hope to turn again
soil
surface
red

still point

the source of the river
particles flow
the fire
where light begins.

Donna Bujnowski

The Wanderer

Phantom figment
In a scarecrow suit.
Dust devil's delusion.
Most of the riders now are dilettantes.
One whom I know plans to write a book.



Richard Johnson

Luna Transcends It All

(From a work in progress)

Nick Lovecraft heard the key turn in the lock first. He glanced around, counted three bodies, four with the cat, and quickly calculated his chances of escape.

But that is when the shit hit the fan and he just lay there, on his back, looking up at the ceiling, so that he wouldn't have to face her wrath immediately.

"Bitch!" he heard her scream.

"Bitch!" Luna heard herself yell, taking a moment to consider that she might have been in the wrong apartment.

"You want to hear an 'I can explain everything?' "

"Get out of my house."

"You should have seen me at noon—" he chuckled. Simultaneously—

"It's an apartment, Luna," emerged from Venus. "Lemme sleep."

"I just don't believe this," Luna mumbled, walking around the pile and throwing her purse on a chair.

"And who is that? The sphinx with the copious company drugs?"

"Meet my husband to be, Wyeth. Luna, Wyeth. Wyeth, Luna." The only acknowledgement came from Rama, the cat, pinned under Nick's outstretched arm. He jumped on Venus' stomach on the way to the kitchen.

"Congratulations, Nick, get the f - - - out of here."

"Who decided that?"

"Not you." She watched him stand, scratch his balls, and puzzle out the situation. She wondered, as his expression slowly changed to one of malevolent anger why she had ever bothered looking at the Hulk twice.

"You know I don't even want you to work for me any more. Go find another fl - - - NIICK!"

Nick pounced three feet toward Luna, who ran into the bathroom and locked it a moment before he got there.

"Goddammit," he yelled, and began steadily raining punches on the door.

"Who do you think you are? I mean, what has gotten into you?" He stopped pounding for a second, but heard no answer. "Look, what is your problem?"

Luna sat on the toilet eyeing the window as a possible means of escape. She flinched when Nick almost splintered a panel. She crossed her legs and picked at her lower lip. Her eyes darted from the medicine cabinet to the door and back to the window again. She realized she should jam the door with something heavy but a quick inspection pointed out that she was the only moveable heavy object in there. And she was sitting on the toilet. She watched the door.

"Hey open up in there," it was saying. "Have you gone nuts? Yesterday you hand up on me out of the blue and today you're dumping me and firing me. Now what the f - - - is your problem?" It was a considerable display for someone who had mixed Quaaludes and cocaine just three hours before.

Vincent at Saint-Rémy

He comes with the trickle of sunlight
which sprinkles the cypress grove.
He comes with the fibre of sunrise
which scratches the thistles,
which speckles the hay.

He paints and the bird-weed arches
in the itching ochre straw.
He sits in the massive sunlight
which parches the cornfield,
which shrivels the hay.

The heat-moistened oils,
the black bristled brush,
the slow sliding soft scraping sun.
He sits in the bleach blistered morning;
he sits in the butter white sun.

A green-black spray of cypress,
a distant rose-grey hill,
a corn-dry yellow obelisk,
and high in the cypress the cicadae trill,
and high in the cypress the cicadae trill.



Sami Khella

The Third Musician

I often sit in my room, in my white vinyl swivel chair, staring at Death. Death is the figure on the right in my tapestry reproduction of Picasso's *Three Musicians*. The other two are benign and for me, anonymous. Their abstract faces are formed with curving lines and light blue shades. They have no names. I knew Death for what he was from the first time I ever saw him. He is black and angular. Not a shiny black. It is a dull and absorbing color; ominous and utterly lifeless. His triangular head is a guillotine blade. His eyes are empty white circles that stare at me impersonally. He has no interest in me as an individual. His malevolent stare is for all of us. It is a contemptuous stare, for we are no challenge. He cannot lose and he appears to be bored with the game he must eternally play. I wonder why Picasso chose to put Death in his work. Music has always been a strong life force for me, and I resent Death being made one of the *Three Musicians*.

I have always had Death in my rooms. At our old house, Death stared at me from my closet door. By day she was a beautiful Jamaican girl standing hip deep in blue, blue water, her arms outstretched, beckoning. If she could talk she would have whispered, "Join me in Paradise." All of this was changed at night. Her toothy grin stood out in the shadowy moonlight and she was not afraid to reveal her true self. She was a vampire, leering at me and standing in a pool of blackened blood. Her nipples still pressed out against her wet t-shirt but her sexuality was mocking, full of deceit. I was young and naive then. I thought she had a special interest in me. Rather than face her stare, I buried myself under my covers and sweltered until I fell asleep. Though I thought about it, I never took her down. I never attacked her with a sharpened pencil, impaling her two-dimensional breast during the light of day.

That would have been breaking the rules. The night was hers, and the day was mine. And most important, I thought I was too old to take her down merely because she scared me. Although no one else would have ever known the real reason, it would have been an inexcusable display of childish weakness for the insecure thirteen year old I was at the time.

We moved when I was nineteen and at long last, I was finally rid of her. She had lost much of her deadly charm for me years before. I chose to replace her with Death himself. The Picasso tapestry was part of the huge mound of possessions that wouldn't fit anywhere in the new, smaller house, and were thus doomed to eternal storage in the basement. I rescued Death from that crypt and gave him an exalted position on the walls of my room. It is the only decoration on my walls, aside from the textured grasscloth wallpaper itself. My room is light, mostly creams and beiges and soft browns. There is an entire wall of brightly colored books, and a patchwork quilt covering my bed. The only black in the room is on the wall, staring unblinkingly.

My father died when I was five years old. He was hit by a skidding truck

on an icy expressway early one morning as he knelt by the side of our car, changing a flat tire. I often drive by the spot. It doesn't bother me anymore. When I was little, I always made my mother take a detour to avoid it. Our family has lived well off the insurance settlement ever since.

It never occurred to me, until I was around ten years old that I had perhaps gotten a raw deal of some sort. It was then that I began to take a special interest in my friends' relationships with their fathers. The special bond between father and son seemed magical to me, unlike any other. It was denied to me forever. I felt deep loss when I talked to a friend and he casually mentioned that Dad was taking him to a ballgame that night, or something like that. I felt very deprived and the feeling grew worse in my trying teen years when I longed for a man to instill in me the confidence that I was unable to generate on my own.

My brother, two years older than I, had a different reaction. He took his resentment, which was much more severe than mine, perhaps because of his two years of extra memories, and turned it into the fuel for a personality of total independence and confidence. He never allowed himself to slip into a position of needing someone. He used girls but never let them get close to him. His friendships were based almost entirely on sports. He didn't bare his soul to anyone. Whatever he felt, he bottled up and internalized. Through some mysterious inner process, all of his emotions were converted to energy for his astounding inner drive. He was also brilliant and perceptive enough to realize eventually what he was doing to himself. His intensity lasted all the way through college. He graduated number one in his class at Princeton. But earlier than that, during his junior year, he made the decision not to live his whole life like that. After graduation he put aside all future plans and went off to California to set about making himself human again. Now he speaks of love and happiness, but he's still afraid to be alone downstairs at night, in our house.

I dream of my father sometimes. I have had the same dream since I was seven or eight. In the dream I am always seven years old again. It is a bright spring morning, and I'm lying in bed. I've just awakened and I'm still in a luxurious state of half-sleep, lazily contemplating the activities of the day that lies ahead. It is Saturday and I'm looking forward to getting together with my friends and playing in someone's backyard. I hear a car pull up in front of our house, and a door slams. I climb out of bed to see who it is. There is plenty of parking space on our suburban street, and no one would stop in front of our house unless he was coming to see us. I pull up the shade and see the car in front of the house. It is our old blue chevrolet. The figure walking around the car towards the house is very tall and lean. There is a slight stoop in his walking posture, de-emphasizing his height. His face is hidden because he is wearing a hat and staring at his feet as he climbs the many steps to the porch. It doesn't matter—I know who it is, of course. I think to myself, No! You can't be here! You're not allowed to be here! I shout for my mother but I am alone in the house. In total panic I run around, looking for a hiding place. As I hear the front door creak open, I try to force open one of my second floor windows, but they are stuck again and I am too

small to force them open. He is in the house and I hear his footfalls on the stairs. Desperately, I yank open my closet and hide inside. I pull hanging clothes in front of me and cower against the rear wall, trying to push myself through it. He calls out to me, using my baby nickname. "Fearless Fafner, I'm home. Come give your old Dad a hug." He knows where I am and comes right to the closet. The door opens and he says in a mockingly reproachful tone, "Now what're you doing in here, Michael?" I slowly look up towards him. Sometimes I wake up before I see the face. It took years before I was able to do that; gain some control over the dream. Usually I see the face. It is truly hideous—a living composite of every monster movie and Tales of the Crypt horror that terrified a young boy. I can never go back to sleep after the dream. The face reappears whenever I shut my eyes. I must turn on all the lights, and the radio. I read, or watch TV; the more distractions, the better. Even here in the new house, the bumps and creaks take on special meaning. And I look anywhere but at the *Three Musicians*.

The old house was full of traces of death. Ghosts lurked in every corner, waiting. It was frightening to be alone there, even during the daytime. The house's creaks always seemed to have a weightiness, an ominous rhythm that suggested a supernatural presence lurking within the old stone walls.

Everything was much worse at night. None of us ever felt comfortable alone in the house after dark. My sister, a year younger than I, couldn't ever be left alone at night the whole time we lived there. She claimed she was fearful of intruders, masked dark men of violence who were patiently waiting until she was alone before they broke in to rape, rob, and destroy her. I cannot be sure exactly what she was so scared of. They are her private ghosts. Even my older brother, who was the walking embodiment of icy cold control would admit to feeling uneasy.

Just about the worst thing was to have to go downstairs at night after everyone was already upstairs and all the lights were off. When I was young, I always made Mom wait for me at the top of the steps until I safely returned. After making sure that Mom had no intention of sneaking away while I was down, I flicked the switch that turned on the downstairs hall light from upstairs. I slowly walked down the steps and then crept from room to room turning on all the lights although my errand was in one room only. The air always seemed heavier than it should; weighty with presence. All the rooms had large windows. I tried not to look at them. I didn't want to see any hideous dream faces peering in at me. After I found my school book, or whatever else it was that had prompted the journey, I quickly went back from room to room, turning off the lights. My pace grew quicker with each doused light. Then I arrived back in the hall. This was the worst time. If there was anything waiting to get me, it would do it now. As I sprinted up those steps to the sanctuary of the second floor, I could feel something behind me, racing after me in desperate effort to touch the back of my neck with its long, cold fingers, to make me smell its rank, fetid breath. Mom stared at me as I sprinted past her and then turned off the light. Nothing could make me go to the basement or attic after dark.

Our house had the most elaborate burglar alarm system I've ever seen, out-

side of mansions and museums. Not only were all the doors and windows wired, even on the second floor, the steps inside the house from the first floor to the second were also connected. This leads me to suspect that Mom suffered from the same sort of paranoia that we children were afflicted with. Once she made the mistake of seeing a horror movie and then returned to the house alone late at night. She sat in the car until dawn, afraid to come in because the house looked too much like the *House on Haunted Hill* she had just seen.

The burglar alarm was more trouble than it was worth. It never did detect any ghosts but it did frequently scare the hell out of us. It was constantly being set off accidentally. Someone would come in late at night and forget to disconnect the door. It would take him at least ten seconds to reach the cutoff switch in the closet. The alarm began as a loud, grating buzz before building up to the full wail of the siren. To be wakened by it was always shocking. Often someone would go downstairs in the early morning, half asleep, and forget to turn the system off at the top of the stairs. Then a wired step would set off the alarm. It was worst if my sister did it. The alarm literally paralyzed her. Even though she was fully aware that she had been responsible for setting it off, she was unable to stop it. She just stood on the steps, and sometimes she actually screamed. I never left my locked room to turn it off. That job usually fell to my older brother, who would never allow himself to show such weakness. Then Mom would have to get up to comfort my sister.

When my grandmother was alive she stayed with us every weekend. She was old and senile and never understood the technology behind the alarm. She was also a notorious early riser. She always got up before anyone else and went downstairs to make her morning coffee. Without fail she set off the burglar alarm. It wasn't nearly as frightening then because we expected it. I'm not sure how long it actually was, but in retrospect it seems like years passed before we decided that it was better to sleep without the alarm than to be wakened by the horrible noise every weekend morning. Our house was never broken into, and the burglar alarm never went off mysteriously on its own.

Our new house doesn't have a burglar alarm. It is much smaller, and presumably not much of a temptation to robbers. We left most of our ghosts behind when we moved, and the old alarm was never good at catching them anyway.

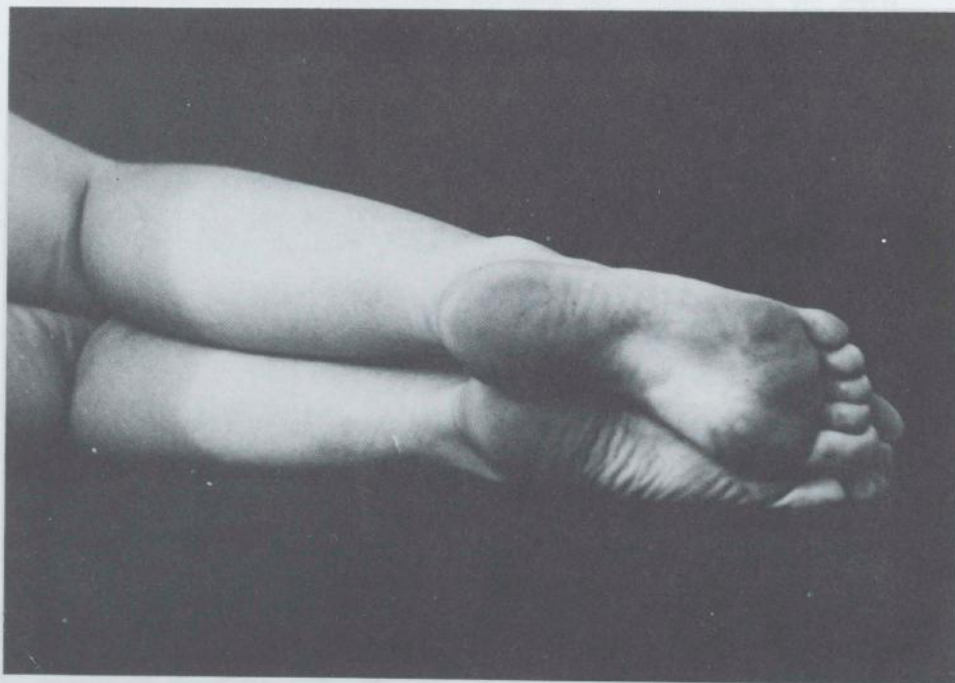
I've often wondered if our moving was the simple act of expedience it appeared to be, or if its real purpose was to serve as an act of exorcism. The old house was too big for us, once we started going away to college, but it wasn't enormous. It wasn't unmanageably huge. We were all moving on to new stages of our lives. My brother went to California. I was starting my Junior year of college, and my sister was preparing to go away to school for the first time. My mother was attempting to once again become a useful and creative person after remaining dormant for so many years after my father's death. The house was weighing all of us down. To live in it was to be constantly reminded of the horrors of the past.

To a large extent, our hopes for the new home were unfounded. You cannot move away from your fears. Fear of inanimate objects must be a mani-

festation of something larger. Some deeper neurosis or pathology. We are all susceptible to it in varying forms. My sister cannot stand to see or read anything related to the occult. Just a commercial on TV for a new horror movie can deprive her of sleep for days. Sometimes her fear of death is so strong that she weeps openly. I am fascinated by death. Repulsed and strangely attracted. I think about it often. I keep it on my wall.

I've grown accustomed to having Death watch over me. He is always staring, always vigilant. I am never alone. He is the ultimate in potency, for he is infallible. What does it mean to cheat Death? In the end there is only one possibility. He is omnipotent and he is entirely arbitrary. You cannot fight Death. There is no personality involved. He is Death at noon and midnight, without compromise.

I think that perhaps I shall one day fall down my stairs. The flight leading to my third floor bedroom is steep and the steps are very narrow. I am in the habit of leaving piles of magazines on the stairs' shag carpeting. The footing is treacherous even when I'm careful. One night, half asleep and in search of the bathroom, I might well take the final misstep. I will land in a heap at the bottom of the flight, my body now as oddly misshapen as any of Picasso's Musicians. And Death will be six feet above me, staring out as impassively as ever.



Michael Bragen

**A Young Girl
Forsees Her Death
For D.D.**

There is nothing beyond this—
The clicking of the needles
in firelight, a slowing of the blood
Wool growing underneath my hands
A tired chain of this and that.
No moment here weighs more than any other:
Firelight on my thin hands
The tongues of the needles clicking
Sing of the upcoming hollow winter.

No Wonder

I.

More black in the caterpillar this month.
 I shrug off signs of snow. I only trust feet
 That walk in the present, leading a pair of eyes
 Down a road. Grasshoppers escape from shoes
 To the slope where mushrooms camp under the pine,
 Hiding from heat that steals their water.
 I share private land with an unseen house,
 With brush on both sides, and with something
 Moving behind it, behind me as I
 Follow the tractor tracks away from the road,
 Past old washing machines and cars and something
 Moving behind a shack, startling a pheasant.
 It wants to know why I am here looking
 Between barren corn stalks. How long can they stand
 With more black than brown inching across the roads?
 I find the tractors and the coop and then
 I have come too far to the main houses
 Where voices hide behind the cars. I turn back,
 Afraid that I have no voice to match theirs.
 My eyes absorb the day in greedy silence.

II.

The airfield stretches beyond the black road,
 Three, four, five touchdowns long with a hangar
 And two small planes getting larger, and Ada,
 Who knows the boundary of her yard and will
 Not cross it for anything. Her bark follows
 Me down the field as though she was the stranger
 And the space was mine, now that the planes
 Are grounded for the harvest. Nothing to do
 But touch the far end and start walking back.
 I had forgotten curious eyes;
 Now the dog has them, sitting at the edge
 Of the lawn while I leave the landing strip.
 Down the road lined with fences to keep things in;
 Choosing somebody's yard to watch the sunset
 Because of the maroon in their field
 And the hex sign on the distant barn
 And the cars without tires sitting on blocks;
 Because of the chickens in the yard next door
 Squawking while the giant shrimp cloud rotates,
 Turning toward me with a darkening glance.

III.

There is terror in being on the road
When cars become speed vehicles at night
And approach with lights like unseeing eyes.
I know they do not see me, and I stand
On the far side of the ditch. Night is sudden.
A horse in a field where there was no horse,
Then two at the fence grazing; and store lights
Hidden low in the distance create a fog
From the presence of black and white in the sky.
Bicycles appear in front of me
And the riders look back at my surprise.
People empty from the church. They drive past.
I watch them speed around the curve, neighbors
Pulling into driveways next to each other.
I watch until the road is quiet
And I am alone outside the houses.
Each window frames a painting of the room
Inside, filled with color by living lights.
One house is a black canvas except
For the beacon of an orange doorbell.

IV.

The caterpillar is all black tonight.
Whatever is crawling at my feet
Is glowing. I see luminescent dots
Like stars on the road back to the farm.
There are more eyes watching in the country;
Not from a window reflecting light inside,
Showing the viewer his own dark face;
Not from a car with the driver straining
To see beyond the headlights' farthest reach.
The eyes come from the brush where I imagine
Someone keeping pace with my wandering,
Jabbing at my brain without a question.
He sidesteps with a taunting slowness
Because he is not keeping up with me,
He is waiting for me to understand.
He does not rustle leaves like the wind.
He motions in the corner of my eye,
So that I am always turning around
To catch just enough image to leave me
Wondering what I was hoping to find.

We wish to thank the alumni of the Philomathean Society whose generosity made this issue of ERA possible.

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