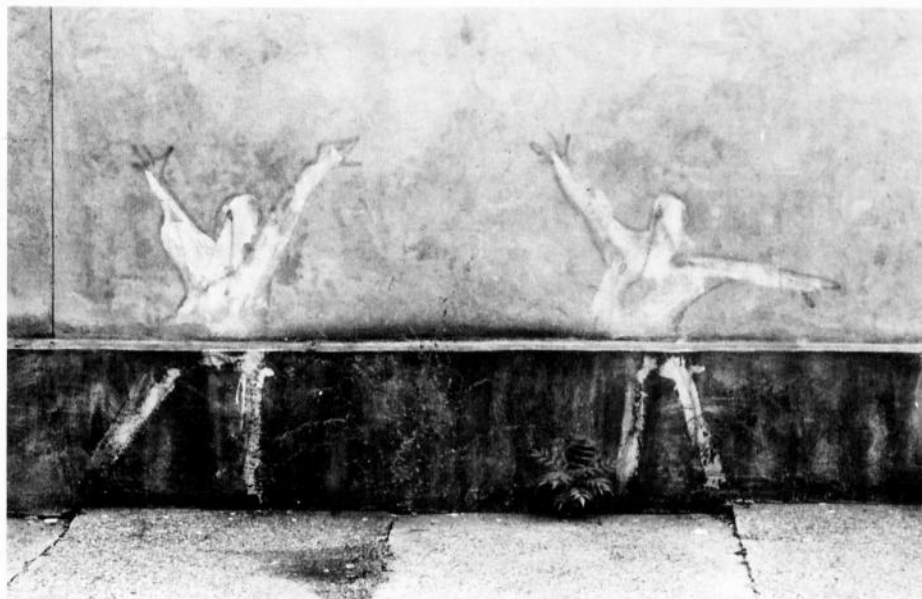


philomel



VOLUME XXVII
SPRING 1992

PHILOMEL

THE LITERARY MAGAZINE OF THE PHILOMATHEAN SOCIETY

SPRING 1992

VOLUME XXVII

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ABOUT THE SOCIETY

The Philomathean Society of the University of Pennsylvania is the oldest continuously-existing collegiate literary society in the United States. As a non-profit, undergraduate-run organization, the Society endeavors to promote the learning of its members and to increase the academic prestige of the University. Over the past 179 years, the accomplishments of the Society have included the publication of the first complete English translation of the Rosetta Stone in 1858 and the staging of dramatic productions such as *The Masque of the American Drama* in 1916, which incorporated over 1,000 students and 1,500 costumes.

Philo was instrumental in founding the University's departments of History and Sociology of Science, Comparative Literature, and American Civilization, as well as numerous student organizations, including the *Daily Pennsylvanian* and the Debate Council. The first American History lecture ever given in the United States was presented by the Society soon after its founding.

Today, the Society's activities include lectures, poetry and fiction readings, art gallery exhibits, concerts, symposia, and the publication of the literary magazine, *Philomel*.

All of the Society's activities are open to the public, and contributions are welcome. *Sic itur ad astra.* Φ

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*This issue of Philomel is dedicated to the memory of Scott R. Laing
and everything that he represented.*

ELECTRIC

marianne w. c. park

Crossing the soupy Schuylkill River

I saw a thick skin
on the water, a rainbow
of electric blue,
green, and fuchsia, frosted
like nailpolish.

It oozed along the bank's curve,
a line on a heart monitor
jumping at any vibration
in the flow, the colors
meshing jaggedly.

A bubble opened the surface,
some upwelling of organic gas
from below.

I imagined the body
being lifted from the tide,
glittering rainbow
like a fish,
turning on the hook.

CHRISTMAS EVE

m.j. warrender

I was alone.
It was twenty miles
outside Albuquerque
on the road to Santa Fe where
I was to meet some people
I had never met before.
The luminarias twinkled
in the outskirts
of the city I had just left,
leaving a lingering feeling
of romance, repose.
I pulled into an old filling station
that dotted the landscape
like a lantern
amidst a vast, dark ocean.
I could not get the cap off
on that stiff and bleak automatic—
everything had buttons to make it go—
and you appeared
from nowhere
in your blue pick-up truck.

You smiled and took over;
your ponytail, blue eyes, blue jeans
and blue smile made me feel
as if I should let you,
and we talked of the steam locomotive
that trails through neighboring mountains,
of the luminarias that are
only lit this time of year,
of the possibility of gnomes in
the surrounding wooded areas.
Then the bleak automatic filled,
you capped it slowly, thoughtfully,
turned, facing behind me, alongside me
and whispered marry me
please marry me
and in my surprise and shyness
I said nothing
and watched you drive away.

CAPITALIZATION

john paul deley

Feel sorry for the **of**
in Boy Scouts **of** America or
for the **yours** that follows
Sincerely.
Not being sentence beginners
or proper enough to snuggle in
with Queen Victoria or Xerox
they hold spaces, wedgelike
and cummings was their only friend.
When Aunt Marie got married
she was still my aunt.
When the Democratic party had a
party it wasn't democratic.
What about the **and** in Parsley, Sage,
Rosemary **and** Thyme? Comfort
the little voices
acknowledge all favorite **thes**
and award them ribbons for performances
noble, neat, necessary.
If only all service could be as
large, correct, certain.
The pope In rome Would Be A catholic.



alexander ludwig

FEEDING THE DEAD

lara naughton

I

Hideko visits headless statues of saints,
daily brings them tea, rice, flowers to share
with the dead. She has a habit of staring,
one by one, at where the saints' eyes would be.

Long before the statues' rock heads shattered,
Hideko's grandmother brought her to the saints.
Hideko thought they were trapped in stone,
and shut her eyes tight.

Her grandmother said saints are never alone—
they are joined by souls of Catholics,
who together with them watch over the living through stone eyes.

II

Hideko was standing among the statues
in front of a glass cathedral door
when 22 kilotons of dynamite dropped
in the heart of Nagasaki's Christian district,
heating the ground, the twin cathedral towers, the saints.

The soles of Hideko's feet burned,
glass splintered, sinking deep, touching bone,
gums bled, hair fell out,
one breast was exposed and one eye gouged.

46 years later when Hideko scratches her skin
glass still emerges from beneath scars.
The decapitated statues have never been rebuilt.
Her grandmother's soul has joined saints in damp stone.

III

Every day Hideko enters the cathedral,
feeds the dead,
places flowers on each statue
where the rock necks have hollowed,
stares the saints, her grandmother in the eye,
tells them, *these are my days*,
pretends they can look back.

For 46 years she has stood by the saints,
her skin brushing against the statues,
her glass, like glitter, rubbing onto stone.

A CEMETERY KISS

w. b. keckler

Your breath
On my neck,
A little pennant
Of musk
When the sky
Pours bloodlight
Delicately
Over ferns
That brush
The massive trunk
Of a cedar. Kiss
Now, with black
Flicker breath,
Trunk of my body—
Gooseflesh before
The eternal cold
& clod break
Apart. The sky
Bowl flickers, like a
Conflagration in water.
Then mad spiderwebs
Of jet trails,
Caul of something
Hopelessly born to hear
The sable paintbrush
Between your thighs.

UNTITLED

ethel rackin

All day she had been dreaming of rain.
Birds seemed to insist that wet leaves moved.
The one door in her mind was chipped
Fire-engine-red wood.
It swung open to nothing.

At night it poured like orgasm
Or a vision broke loose and wild.
She painted flowers open and opening...
The unfolding yielded light, saturation.

She dreamed of canvases the size of oceans,
Representation and hands... repetition.

Trapped somewhere within the matter,
Trapped within a sea of eye.

* * *

Maybe there were a thousand strokes of color.
She wanted to move closer, extend farther
Along that awfully grey line of infinity.

BIRD

mary hahn

SHE FLITTED like a bird from tree to tree. Standing barely five feet tall in her heelless alligator flats with her brightly painted face, she looked like a bizarre, exotically plumed swan, a species more flamboyant than its regal white skin. Her flaming mouth chattered unceasingly while her eyes tirelessly circulated around the room. Her glossy lacquered hair was parted too far on the side of her head and she had to constantly flip her head, twisting her long white neck.

I was standing next to a rubber tree plant with my back pressed up against the wall. Parties like these always disappoint, but somehow the enticement of snatched conversational phrases and the tinkle of glassware were difficult to resist. One does not go to these parties to enlarge the mind and the palate, but just to be seen. The rush of being in a

room full of dazzling luminaries of unreadable literature and obscure films excites the senses as nothing else except alcohol.

"Hi," she said. It was the bird creature. I was surprised she singled me out. "I haven't seen you around here before. I'm Antoinette Volee. A mouthful, huh? You can just call me Toni. I only use Antoinette when I'm in a martyr mode."

She stopped then and took a sip from her glass, her brightly painted lips oh-so-carefully lipping the rim so as not to mar their color or their shape. It didn't matter what I was called. It didn't matter if I was present or not. No feedback or comment was necessary and I might as well have been the potted plant next to me.

"Look at that girl over there. I don't know why the guys like her so much. She has a big ass and her arms are flabby. And the one with the red hair looks like a grandmother dressed like a clown. I'll never understand men as long as I live." She sighed and pouted prettily.

She didn't get a chance to start up again, because a certain ambiguous artist/poet/writer/*enfant terrible* had engaged her in a battle of drawling tones and affected accents. The last thing I heard before they floated out of my party plot was the glorification of ennui.

The next time I saw the Bird, as I christened her, was at Mark W—'s party. The majority of partygoers had consumed toxic amounts of alcohol and the gathering was getting increasingly volatile and raucous.

I pushed roughly past the tightly packed crowd looking for a bathroom. In each room, most of the oh-so-jolly partygoers were in various states of undress, with carefully coiffed extravaganzas violently astrew. I glanced in one room and then the next. I was wasting my time. I should have headed for the most crowded part of the apartment. The entrance to the bathroom was always decorated with a long line and was usually the most popular room at a party.

As I stood in line, a few people passed out in front of me. I saw the Bird, propped up against the wall with an extremely handsome young man glued to her body. He was in the process of licking her neck and fondling her left breast with a great show of passion and display of animal arousal. Bird just propped her head back, exposing that glorious white neck, languidly closing her eyes. Her lick, believing this action to be the first signs of blissful, melting passion, renewed his ardor. Bird popped her eyes open and a snarl of disgust curled those plump lips. She turned her head to avoid the onslaught of her gorgeous young man and caught sight of me. She smiled a crocodile smile, displaying a row of the whitest, sharpest teeth I had ever seen. She beckoned violently, which successfully dislodged the gorgeous young man from her body.

I pushed my way ahead in line, hearing various black curses and withstanding venomous glares from the people I had passed. When I reached her place in line, she turned to her gorgeous young man and sweetly requested him to fetch her another drink.

"But you have to use the john. You can't drink when you have to go," the gorgeous young man snapped back.

"Darling, I can always have a drink under any situation. We'll do anything you want after this party," she replied.

The gorgeous young man brooded away, muttering under his breath.

Bird turned to me with a seeming look of appreciation. "What luck! He was mauling me. I hate public displays of sex. Actually, I hate sex *period*, but don't let that get around. A rumor like that could ruin a girl."

There were ten people ahead of her.

"Hey, why don't we go outside and piss behind the bushes. It's faster."

I murmured my agreement as she grabbed my arm and headed for the front door. She dragged me bodily down the flight of stairs. A row of hedges surrounded the building and we fought our way behind them. She lifted her scanty little black skirt and squatted down. She looked even more like a bird than ever.

"I never wear underwear to parties. People think it's because I'm a slut, but I only do it so I can do this easily. I always end up pissing behind a bush."

I let her unceasing chatter occupy her mind while I did my business. She didn't comment on the fact that I too was not wearing any underwear.

It was several weeks later when I ran into her again. It was at Deidre C—'s birthday bash. She looked so beautiful it made me catch my breath. The liquid composition of her slender limbs belied the existence of joints and angular bone. A tall, young man was speaking softly in her ear, and in the midst of all the raucous

laughter and violent gyrations, the picture of the two young beautiful creatures created a poignant scene rarely seen in this day and age.

She saw me and gracefully flew over to my side with her young man in tow.

"Hi! I'm so glad you're here. I want you to meet someone."

Her young man smiled and offered me his hand. The handshake was firm and the eyes behind the wire-rim spectacles were the warmest blue I had ever felt. He excused himself to refill Bird's glass and find a new one for me.

"Well, what do you think? Isn't he just fabulous? He's a doctoral student of English at Princeton—Ivy League and all. I'm tired of all these fake degreed people that I run into. He's 100% real through and through. I'm so happy. I think this is it. I think he's the one." And throughout her chatter, the sheer joy and happiness of her love made her pale skin even paler until it seemed to glow of its own accord.

There wasn't much I could say to add to her happiness, so I didn't. I left the party a few minutes later.

The door was flung open with a violence that shook the walls. Light poured in from the doorway. It was Bird. Her mouth was an angry distorted slash of red and vile noises streamed out in loud gasps. I felt him start and shield his eyes from the sudden glare, leaning over to grab his wire-rim spectacles. Bird stopped screaming and looked down at us. I sat up, bringing the covers with me. The light behind her silhouetted her beautiful figure, heaving with every breath. Then in a movement too swift for the human eye, she twirled around and ran out of the room, leaving the abused door wide open.

Bird should know one doesn't go to these parties to enlarge the mind.

SCREAM

marianne w. c. park

You feel it as soon as you turn
out of bed, that ache travelling
the length of your neck,
behind your ears.
You wear it on your face,
in the shadows of your eyes
turned toward the ground,
the muscle lines moving
beneath your cheeks, your teeth
grinding together.
Maybe if you could put
your groping finger on it,
it would disappear,
actually dissolve—
but until you can
the air still feels
heavy on your shoulders,
thick when your lungs take it.
If only you could pull
yourself together enough
just to cry,
or scream.



gregory cohn

JEANNE WITH AN
UMBRELLA

b. z. niditch

The feckless sunlight
with its high passions
on scattered fauna
never forgets the lilacs
near the sea windy bench
an unexpressible weariness
overtakes the rain
clears away the June heat
in the verge of laziness
from warm ash grey skies
a child's lightening
opens an unclosed umbrella.

Jeanne laughs at transfigurations
from blinking thunder
she separates a purple springboard
when one is no longer wounded.

UNTITLED

loren chasse

A wish hung in the delicate air between them,
it was for the tracing of a space of flesh never seen
and it was for water on one side,
and stone on the other.

Two pedestals of earth rose side by side from a sea
of cloud running cold
into a horizon of illimitable blue.
Each unfolded itself into a palm, upturned
and infused with blood-green.

On one, a woman hung her head in the grass by the water,
and the dust of small flowers blew across the surface,
stirring the motion of liquid stars
in the depth of the stream.

Here she would sleep and strum notes on the water,
pulling away the leaves as they made to curl
through the silvered glass.

The banks rose up in gentle swells from the edge
of the pool, and ran out from softer ground
into a thick entanglement of berried-vines,
damp fingers sweeping
veils from face in the sea.

And on the other pedestal of earth,
more than two arm-lengths, so,
an *eternity* away,
the man would draw his fingers through
knots of slender branches,
and shape supple bracelets
for her arms.

He was fond of creating things from the tired forms
of trees. He folded leaves until they cracked and slid
into the sunshine spilled from the wind,
he wove a mantle for her shoulders,
and he built for her a god.

Where she had been given water,
he had been given a stone,
and by this he would arrange his tools in the long grass
and conceal his thoughts and eyes.

Sometimes she would raise her breasts from their place
in the pale reeds and pull her hair upon her shoulders.
When she moved to the higher ground
and slid against the berries,
he would already be on the other side,
wearing a crown or holding a shield
against the blue bridge almost between them.

The tongue, the seed, the sound, and the birth:
everyday they would meet in air above the sea of clouds
and by folding up into the seams of their eyes,
they would wish for the pool and the stone and each other.
The woman and the man could not weep
as they had never touched another.
They could not laugh, as they could not trust their dreams.
They could only stand, each upon soft green earth,
and contemplate a moment of ever reaching
the other side.

Neither had ever been frightened of the edge,
of the unknowable underside,
and the
plunging
air.

But each could see the twisted column of the other,
the muscled roots and packed earth descending deep
into the white throat of a dream,
and neither could repress the
hope
for where it might lead below.
Perhaps a common earth, a bounded sea,
or only
a region of spells
sealed in a mirror.

Time turned over in its sleep,
and when she could no longer stand the silvering
of her hair by the water,
when she could no longer keep the wish from taking shape
in her eye,
she drew her gold from the water,
and hung lazuli
in sky.
in the

STOLEN

rod farmer

Immature poets imitate;
mature poets steal.
And I stole this.

FEET OF
DUST

lara naughton

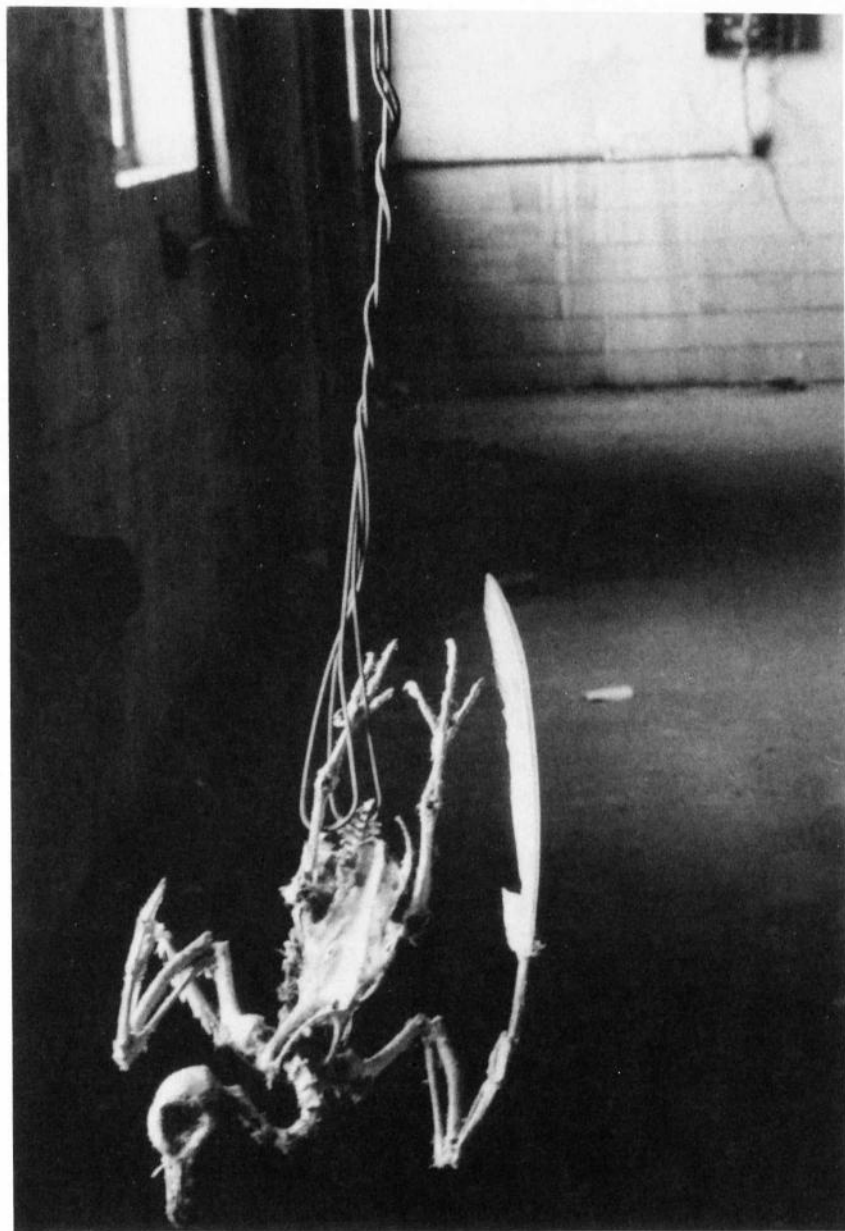
The man took gravecloths from his eyes.
His sisters soothed with perfume, tears, their hair,
the dusty feet of a friend who followed
mourners parade to where the man had lain
four days, stood outside the cave closed by a stone
and called for the dead to rise.

This story has traveled the world
by every means necessary.

Evangelists, stiff-backed in the desert,
watch Samburu boys with Christian names
dance, like spirit ancestors, over rocks and acacia thorns—
the boys' legs fire, their arms spitting cobras
to chase away a curse, heal sores,
set the sky in motion.

Still no sign of rain in the torch-lit night. Strong wind.
The missionaries' leather heels dig sand holes;
their church steeple takes the place of the fifth star
 in the Southern Cross;
watermelons they have taught children to plant
sit plump at the edge of the drying oasis.
Women in the church practice how to pray.

The disciples shield their mouths and eyes with cloths
against desert wind. They dig their heels in blowing dust.



gregory cohn

TO MALBECCO,
THE CAVE-DWELLER

brandon paul

A hand's length away from the satyr's back
you could almost touch his harsh giggles
and feel in your ribs her crescendos,
as a wet wrap of human love around a tree.

Then the running silence soon after,
in a jealous putrefaction of skin
hair and bones, you found a crack
in the rock of the ocean-rimmed land
and dissolved in a toad-swallowing sweat.

We followed your progress
as we followed your flight.
The ingestion became a cloud
on the panes of your memory,
and you became a dim habit
flitting through the mushroom air.

But the sudden black that yellowed
in your eyes, we kept for ourselves
because it fed our imaginations.

And still there is the memory
of our queen running through us,
wild as new juice in an old bottle,
and how there was the smell of fresh skulls
behind the bud and flower of her breath.

**BEYOND THE
INFLUENCE**

david sumner

Out beyond the influence
of my parents, there is a world
in which words unsay themselves,
where every mistake undoes itself
as simply as a child climbs
out of bed, where my parents touch
each other again in wonder, father
untangling his limbs from those
of the baby sitter, mother, feeling
an inexplicable desire, pulling her
thick flannel nightgown
over her shoulders, exposing her
breasts until the sigh of it falling
draws my tutor to her flesh.

I write all the words they say
between moans on my slate, and
then I make them disappear.
The plastic sheet I lift
is a window, under it a grey dawn
as blank as the one I wake up to.

HANDS

robert cooperman

I think of the barber's
hummingbird darting;
the dental hygienist's
self-righteous scraping;
the dentist's cold strength
when he pulled my wisdom teeth,
warning me, with fingers
gripping the forceps,
he might have to break my jaw.

I remember my father hiding
his hands behind his back
with a small toy tucked
like a bird in his palm;
when we played "Flinch,"
he let me slap
those rope-burned monsters
like a huge, indulgent dog.
I still feel his kneading away
my migraines with fingers
gentle as the nose of a doe,
his forehead crumpled with worry
that I had inherited the pain
that turned his nights
into a wolf's caged pacing.

Now, there are your hands,
delicate, patient
when you tease splinters
from my fingers and arms;
sure, when you knot my tie
that threatens to strangle me.
The first time you held my face
stars exploded in my chest.
And when you gripped my waist
I wanted to gloat at passersby.
And now, when you reach for me—
before sleep, when we wake—
I know for an electric certainty
what hands are really for.

THE TWENTY-
EIGHTH SHADE

jennifer dowling

What was the least painful?
You could ask.
I could answer, for shame acquaints me poorly
when my tongue abounds,
that in the instant
there is naught but the tranquility of motion
in moments of fury
in tiled kingdoms
of tiny kings
in diminutive oceans
of Neptunes unnamed
before the car arrives
before the clock strikes two
before
even before the bubbles surface in the blood.

What hurts?
You could ask.
I could answer, for the paint is on my fingers
and the copies are so close to the original
even masters at their craft are stunned,
riot and rawness
and the loam hidden in every one of the
twenty-seven shades
of brown:
beaver pelt
and oiled leather,
chocolate stain,
warped wood and
Colombian cream wrapped
smoking and dripping
on spindly gold and copper rails sprawled
across
the desert to the stone.

Why?
You could not ask.
I could not answer in time or time
for dark mornings and a hollowed stare
over rocks and bumps
over wheeled woods
through tones of red
and dry lightning and
the distant scent of copper
and the damp memory of
sleep
have been explained to all but you.

ELEPHANTS
PASSING
karen sharp

Cargo train lumbers by in the highway light
like a line of lonely elephants, holding trunks
(of battered cloth and bruises) and tails
(of misdirection) laden heavy with their burden
my memories
my life
each beast a leathered compartment
container
containment
I watch.
If a tear forms,
and is allowed to fall
the burden lightens
a little, for a time.
The caravan trudges on, all trembling steel
sinew, and purpose.
One animal, huge and female, turns to me
Do you weep, she asks,
for what I carry
for what I have not carried
or for what you fear I will not ever carry?
Easy, I say, all three.

I think I see a smile under massive trunk
and a slight shake of her glorious head.
Startled, I ask,
Mother?
Another shake, slower, ears sway, eyes stay
on mine
it is me who turns away.
On the light catches faces lined with age, grace,
pain
I watch from the relative safety of my own
leather seat
not quite trampled.
I fear losing my way
for watching the train glitter by in the weeds.
I drive on.
But I know it is there
anyway, that beast
it groans behind my eyes
across my shoulders
in every corner
of every moment
of every day.
Slow, lonely elephants.
Reminders.

MODELS

a. c. brocki

I have tried being serious
but find the pose tiresome.
Besides, death goes on
whether I worry or not,
and I strongly suspect
a connection between the two,
so I search out silly people—
sun-brown children pretending
to break a leg for no reason,
well-dressed middle-aged women
doing funny walking in cafés,
old men playing dead
by dropping their head
or grabbing their throat,
rolling their faded eyes up,
and gasping e-yah!
after their second bite of quiche.

UPON LEAVING
THE BAR

m.j. warrender

I reached out
and struggled away
from a substance that felt like quicksand,
tar

A star
has haunted me
ever since I could speak
And my words floated by you like lily pads
while I watched from underneath
rationing my every breath

At times
it seems as though
what is vowed
is simply a plan;
plans being pranksters
that finally reveal
their real names:

Promises dropped in muddled pools,
Frames painted with blues and greys,
Faces sketched with positions resumed,
Lives devoted to whatever remains.

VISITS FROM JIM

careen lissner

JAMES THREW OPEN his sister's door, leaned posingly in the doorway, and grinned slyly. "Hey, sis," he said. "I got a new question for ya."

Kerry looked up from her desk and recognized the pose. He was doing his I-don't-care-but-I-do look. If James thought himself debonair, he wasn't supposed to show it. What he was supposed to show was modesty, a sheepishness at all the attention he was given and a longing to duck it.

"Great," Kerry mumbled, and went back to her work.

James smiled and sauntered into the room. "I knew you'd be happy," he sang. "Now, answer this. Okay, same as always, imagine that a genie appeared—"

"—And he said that I have two choices, and if I don't pick one or the other, I'll die."

James feigned surprise. "Ve-ry good," he said. "Now, here's today's question. You either have to shoot the president, or stand on top of the Capitol building in the cold for two days, singing all of Frank Sinatra's greatest hits."

Kerry put down her pen. "That's obvious," she said. "Of course I'd rather do that than kill the President."

"Maybe," Jim said. "But say you'd be okay, because no one would ever find out you shot the President."

"Still the Sinatra thing," Kerry said.

"Okay," James said, "But what if. . ."

"Do you mind?" Kerry said. "I'm trying to write a paper."

"Paper, schmaper," James said, grinning. "There are still ten days of break left. You've got some time."

Kerry was not in a good mood. She didn't want to be inside writing about poetry, and she certainly didn't need a Cheshire cat looming above her when she wanted to let off steam.

"I hate poetry," Kerry said. "I despise poetry. I couldn't even look at a Dr. Seuss book right now. It might take me ten days to finish this. So I'm not trying to be a. . . I'm not trying to be a bitch, but please let me do this."

"Oh, all right," James said. He started toward the door, then stopped and turned on his heel. "You know, you could change majors."

Kerry managed a weak smile. She knew she really couldn't. But did Jim know? He had to know. Maybe he really didn't. Life was so simple for him.

"Maybe," she said.

SCENE I. *Dinner at the Kane Household.*

The four actors eat their ham and sweet potatoes in silence. Prince James swallows and speaks.

"Very good, Mom," he says.

The father beams and looks around. "Anyone do any work today?"

"Yes," Kerry announces, "and I've discovered that I really hate poetry."

"Well, bear with it," says the father. "You've always liked your other English courses."

"I know," Kerry says.

"You're not gonna need poetry to write my speeches," James says jokingly.

"Sure she will," Dad says. "She might want to throw in an allusion or random quotation, to make you look smart."

Mom smiles.

"I do not like green eggs and ham."

Kerry quotes.

James laughs, and looks around.

No one else gets it.

"I didn't make eggs," Mom says.

Kerry was still hunched over her notebook at her desk at midnight. Only the desk light was on, leaving the rest of her room dark and preventing distractions. She stared at the words on a page of her poetry anthology. Kerry had to somehow link the passage to weather. Coleridge was obsessed with weather—that was her thesis. Next step: link everything in every other Coleridge poem to weather. *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*—well, what was rime but frost? Otherwise, he would have spelled it r-h-y-m-e, unless—

The door creaked open. "Ker?"

Kerry shook her head as James entered. "This is such a joke," she said.

James, always glad to hear a good joke, bent over his sister's slumped form to read. "What is?" he asked.

"Well, everything," she said, "but especially this paper."

"Rime" is defined by *Webster's Dictionary* as... he began to read. "Whoa," his eyes scanned her scrawled page. "Pretty deep."

"I'm totally stretching it," Kerry said. "I got an A on my last one this way. It was on Browning and religion. You know, if your last name started with a C instead of a K, and you were in a story, your initials would render you a Christ-figure."

"Wow," James said. "Who knew?"

"Exactly," Kerry said. "Anyway, what brings you here during the wee hours of the morning?"

He got serious. "I was wondering," he asked, "do you still have the Mrs. Gordon stories?"

Kerry laughed. "Mrs. Gordon," she said. "I haven't thought about her in a long time."

"Do you have the stories?" he asked. "Do you remember saving them at all?"

Kerry remembered saving them all right. She'd meticulously stored all of their childhood collaborations in boxes in her walk-in closet, along with diaries, school book reports, and other remnants of their not-so-distant youth. It was just a question of finding the right box. Kerry went through them often, when she was bored, and they brought back memories of snow days and bike races.

"I... I don't know," Kerry stammered. "I don't think I'd have kept those." She forced herself to laugh. "They were pretty awful."



mariah bowen

James appeared relieved. "I know," he said. He paused. "Uh, could you, when you're not busy, make sure?"

Kerry laughed. "What is this all of the sudden?" she asked. "That was eight years ago. It's silly."

"I... just wouldn't want anyone to read them," he said. "I mean... they'd think we were really like that. They were pretty bad."

"Nobody cares if we were weird when we were twelve," Kerry said. "Besides, it's not like I'd show anyone."

"I know," Jim said. "Well, I'm just curious to see them anyway. I mean, they were like thirty pages long."

"I'll check," Kerry said. "But you can't save everything."

SCENE II. *The Dinner Table.*

"This is really good, Mom," grins Lord Jim, stuffing a forkful of mashed potatoes into his face. "The dining halls at school don't even come close."

"Thank you," Mrs. Kane says. "Carrots, Kerry?"

"Mmmm, have some," Dad says.

"No thanks," Kerry says. "I'm not that hungry."

"Hey, Jim," Dad says. "Did you call any departments for your grades yet?"

"Yeah, history and legal studies," James replies. "I got an A in history, and a B plus in legal studies. I was really psyched."

"A B plus?" Dad says. "Wow. You hated that class. How'd you pull that off?"

Jim stuffs his mouth again and shrugs. "Idunno," he says, with his mouth full.

"Well, Kerry, how's that poetry paper?" Dad asks.

"It's fake, Dad," Kerry answers. "Just like this conversation."

"The shock-line of the night," Mom chides. "It used to take her much longer to get to it."

"Because she's in college now," Dad says. "Good schools breed cynics. Better school than we went to, so she's more cynical."

"It's not that much better," Kerry says.

"Smith isn't that much better?" Dad asks. "Smith? Don't you know what it means, when I tell people that my daughter's a Smith girl?"

"It means you grew up in the fifties," Kerry says, "when people actually said that. Women's schools only used to be good because we couldn't go to men's."

"They're still good," James says, letting his fork hang in limbo between his mouth and the plate. "They just don't get as much recognition."

"It's a shame," Dad says. "We used to all go down to the girl's schools, it was exciting. Nowadays they live next door. I mean, I'm progressive," he looked at James, "you know we're progressive, but there was so much more... order in those days. Really, I know this sounds conservative, and you know we're not, but really, sometimes things are better when you don't have so many choices."

"I guess," James says.

"It might just be—" Dad pauses to swallow a sip of water. "—Maybe that's why America's so much looser now: co-ed colleges."

"Yeah," Kerry says. "But co-ed colleges are only partly to blame. Don't forget about MTV."

"Two shockers tonight," Mother says.

"Maybe I should've gone to West Point," James muses for no apparent reason. It's probably just been on his mind. West Point would suit him perfectly—the nice, clean haircut, duty above all—

"You're happy at Brown," Dad says. "You're an Ivy Leaguer, that'll look just as good."

Kerry clears her throat. Cough—"Fifties"—cough—

James laughs.

Kerry smiles and turns to Dad. "You picked two schools with great names to send your kids to," she tells him. "Smith and Brown. You should have had a third kid, so you could send him to Jones."

James shakes his head.

"But there's no—" Mom starts.

"Eggs," Kerry says.

It was late at night. The poetry assignment, written on eight pieces of torn-out notebook paper, lay on the keyboard of Kerry's computer. Typing would only take a few hours. She could leave it for now.

She sat Indian-style inside her closet on the rug, with the light on. It was one of those lights consisting solely of a bulb and a thin, beaded metal string hanging down.

Kerry was going through some boxes of stuff from when she and James were kids. Some of it she'd collected from his metal garbage pail, the one that had pictures of football players on it, which he'd kept to the left of his door. She'd checked it every day for a month after reading *Harriet the Spy* at age 11. It had started her on a spying spree that only ended when her father caught her bringing home the two old

Playboys from their neighbor's garbage can. Most of what she'd found in James' trash was more innocent—mostly school assignments that she'd thought were pretty good but he'd obviously stopped caring about.

One of her favorites was from fourth grade. Against their parents' orders, the twins had mistakenly been put into the same classroom for homeroom. They both liked the teacher, though, so when their parents' attempts to get approval to move one of them to a different homeroom succeeded, they both refused to switch. Thus, Kerry got to see much of what James produced in fourth grade.

The assignment she looked at now had been to write titles for the short passages that appeared on a ditto. One of the passages was, "Petey was John's dog. Petey told John lots of things. He wagged his tail to tell John he was happy. He brought him a ball to tell him that he wanted to play. And he licked John's face to tell him that he loved him."

On the ditto, it said, "What title would you give this story?"

Kerry had called it, "Petey and John."

But James had written down something else.

He'd written down, "Pestering Dog."

He'd thought it was pretty funny, and he'd showed it to everyone whose desk was near his.

It was a shame that that wouldn't happen today.

"I keep having these dinner conversations in my mind," Kerry told her visiting high school friend Lisa, who was now a psych major at Temple. "They're based on

real conversations we've had at dinner, only they're exaggerated, and everyone's funnier."

"So you rehash old conversations and make them more interesting?" Lisa asked.

"Well, sort of. Sometimes they're an amalgam of things we said at one point or another. The difference is in the retorts. I always make the funniest ones, and I always say the best stuff."

"Who's in these daydreams?" Lisa asked.

"Just your mom, dad and Jim?"

"Yup," Kerry said. "All of us. Mostly these are the status conversations, where Dad heaps nauseating praise upon us and we have to try to get him to shut up."

"But don't you usually have political conversations at dinner?"

"Well, we have those too. But those I really do have clever answers for, so I don't have to fantasize afterwards. I study newspapers when I should be doing my schoolwork. Jim doesn't have to—he can skim the stuff and remember it all, or appear to—but I've got to prepare my remarks in advance or I'll lose the race. If all of our conversations were written, I'd do fine."

"So these daydreams are like wish-fulfillment," Lisa concluded. "You wish you could be more witty at dinner."

"Maybe," Kerry said. "This family is just—you know that it's like a competition sometimes."

"Yeah, I know," Lisa said. "And Jim usually wins."

"Yup," Kerry said.

Jim stuck his head in the door and found the two sitting on the bed. "Hi, Lisa," he grinned. Kerry detected an immediate brightening on the part of her friend. "Hey, Ker, did you have a chance to look for the

old... you-know-whats yet?"

"No, uh... I will later," Kerry lied.

"Okay," Jim smiled. "See you later."

The door closed.

"There isn't a guy at college like him," Lisa sighed, leaning back on the bed and grabbing Kerry's pillow to hug.

"Tough old life," Kerry said.

Kerry was used to this, this attraction of her high school friends to Jim, whom they'd occasionally called Citizen Kane. He was good-looking, neat, charming, smart, nice and—this was the kicker—*didn't act like he knew it*.

That's what Kerry's friends said about Jim. "He's so shy," they said. "Well, he's not really shy but... he's *so nice and so cute*, and *he doesn't even know it*."

Were they blind? How could he not know? He'd have to be stupid to be oblivious to the effect he had on people. Even some of his teachers acted like they had crushes on him.

The worst of it was, being "nice" and "modest" were his natural attributes. It was so easy for him. Even dressing up was easy; all men's suits looked basically the same, and Kerry had frequently cast jealous glances at Jim during church when they were little and she was stuck in an uncomfortable dress and itchy tights.

Nice. He was *so nice*. Kerry could have been *so nice*, or fat Andy who moved up junior year from Florida could have been *so nice*, or any of Kerry's friends could have been *so nice*, but it wouldn't cause legions of members of the opposite sex to fall in love with them. Jim had to know. He had to think that it was a joke that by doing what he *should* do, he could win the world's admiration. It was so unfair.

So why didn't every guy know the secret? They hadn't been trained from day one by dear old Dad. Dad, married in the sixties, deciding to have a son or two who would get America back. Unfortunately, his female counterpart couldn't have any more children after her twins, so it was up to Jim. Dad thought he himself had made the wrong choice by going into the business world. It would be so easy to own the world through politics.

But who watched the news everyday starting in sixth grade? Kerry. Jim had to be prodded a little to catch up. But of course, he eventually did, and surpassed her with a passion.

The killer was, Jim really was a good guy. Kerry had given up trying to find reasons to hate him long ago. It was best for her to just be herself and hope that she could continue riding on his wave of enthusiasm.

That night, as Kerry was revising her paper on the computer, Jim came in.

"Guess what?" he said. "Time for a new question."

"Oh, no," Kerry groaned. She was in better spirits now. The paper would be perfected tonight, and there were still six days left of break.

"Okay, you have to pick one, or you'll die. And remember, both the questions and answers are to be kept in the strictest confidence, for national security purposes."

Kerry sighed. He often said that during their conversations; ostensibly as a joke, but she was sure he really meant it.

"Okay." Jim sat down on the crate next to the dresser. "You either have to, well, you-know-what with a goat..."

"Gross," Kerry said simply. "Well, before you continue, I pick choice two."

"Or..." Jim put up his pointer finger, "Or... with Dad."

"Oh, sick," Kerry said.

"Now, come one," Jim prodded.

"I refuse to answer that," Kerry said.

Ugh, Kerry groaned. Sometimes she wondered if he was just trying to work on her mind, to make it explode, thus reducing the competition for the 100 available Senate seats. Of course, she knew this wasn't true. Jim was pretty earnest, despite the fact that he'd been purposely christened with the most common presidential first name. These questions were just brotherly teasing, as sisters have endured from their brothers for thousands of years. Kerry figured that she was the best target because she was part of the family. She would never tell the *National Enquirer* about James' occasional off-color jokes when he won the nation's highest office. Sometimes Kerry felt honored to be the closest confidante of the man who would save the world, or at least the Democratic party.

Kerry weighed the options. "The goat," she decided.

"Why?" James asked.

"Well, Dad..." Kerry grimaced. "Dad's our dad. But I'd never have to see the goat again."

"True," Jim said. "Well, okay then: Dad or Cousin Bob?"

Kerry gave him a nasty look, then decided. "Bob," she said. Then she added, "Well, okay, what about you? Mom or a sheep?"

Jim smiled. "Well, that's just disgusting," he said. "Frankly, I'm shocked that you would even think of it." Then he walked out.

"Jerk!" Kerry yelled.

Later, Kerry pulled the string of the light in her walk-in closet and sat Indian-style on the rug. She rummaged through some papers in a file and pulled out a grey wirebound notebook, "MRS. GORDON GROWS UP," she'd written on the front.

On rainy days, she and Jim had sat either in her closet or on the old toybox in his room and continued the tales of Mrs. Gordon. Mrs. Gordon was the most feared teacher in the sixth grade. Jim was in her homeroom and they both had had her for reading. She was old, angry and nasty. She also played favorites. Little, quiet, sweet girls were usually chosen as her favorites. Kerry and Jim were not.

The first story was entitled "Mrs. Gordon is Born." It said, in Jim's handwriting:
MRS. GORDON'S MOM DRUCILLA
LAYED ON THE TABLE AND
PUSHED. OUT CAME A LITTLE
BABY THING.

THE DOCTOR SAID, "IT'S A... A...
WELL, I'M NOT SURE, BUT IT
LOOKS REALLY MEAN."

THEN MRS. GORDON MADE ON
THE DOCTOR'S HAND.

"SHE MADE ON ME! SHE MADE ON
ME!" THE DOCTOR YELLED!
THEN HE THREW MRS. GOR-
DON ACROSS THE ROOM. SHE
SMASHED ON A WALL. BLOOD
SPURTEDEVERYWHERE!

The handwriting switched to Kerry's.
"Now you are cursed," the mother said.

*And if you ever have any kids,
and if they ever go to the Thaddeus
Lincoln School,
and if they have this baby for a teacher,
she shall yell at them for wrong answers and
punish the whole class because one kid talked*

*out, and make reading absolutely no fun
whatsoever!*

Jim resumed with:

AND YOU HAVE TO LICK THE
BLOOD OFF THE WALL, TOO! YA
HA HA HA !!!!!

Kerry smiled when she read this. She had to admit that not only were the stories sophomoric and immature, they were just *bad*. But they did make her laugh, and they had served to entertain the twins and occasional visiting friends back in the days when things were good.

Kerry knew why Jim wanted the stories. Oh, sure, he'd pretend he was just curious to see them again, but in reality, Dad was making him paranoid. Mr. Kane's favorite saying was, "It'll all come out when you run for office." (This maxim was followed by a close second, "It's hard to run in high heels," which Mr. Kane had said a couple of times jokingly. But, Kerry thought, he probably really meant it. And he was probably right.) Jim's off-beat but harmless sense of humor was great as long as nothing was written down. What if someone found vicious and disgusting stories the President had written about his teacher when he was twelve? Actually, they weren't that bad, but the public might be convinced just the same.

Kerry didn't want to give the Mrs. Gordon stories up. Jim hadn't really changed much since then, but he was so much more cautious now. Maybe that was what really bugged her, besides her envy of his status in life. Maybe some day her brother's personality as she knew it would cease to exist.

Kerry decided to talk to him. She'd show him the stories, but not give them up. She'd saved them; they were hers. And she'd tell him that she'd never stab him in the back.

Even if she did, and the stories got out, so what? Everyone had probably written dumb things when they were twelve.

Kerry closed the book and went next door. Jim's door was open, but he wasn't in his room. Kerry went to his desk, tore off a piece of yellow Post-It, and wrote a note saying she wanted the book back when he was through with it, that he needed to trust her more, and that she wanted to talk to him.

As Kerry was about to leave, she noticed that two of his old exams were sitting on top of the desk. There was something strange about one of them. Kerry looked closer. On the front of the bluebook he'd filled in the blanks: James Kane, Legal Studies 101: Introduction to Law, 11-3-91, Professor Pascher.

But it wasn't his handwriting.

Kerry stared at the bluebook for a mistake, then carefully positioned it under her Post-It note and on top of the Mrs. Gordon Stories and walked out.

Kerry was staring blankly at her computer screen when James walked in.

"Hi," he said.

She looked at him kind of sadly and went back to her computer.

"Which would you rather do," he asked. "Write ten poetry papers..."

She forced a grimace. If he was just going to pretend everything was normal, she'd have to go along with it for now.

"Or... find out I cheated on an exam?"

Kerry tried to stir up a sympathetic smile, but all she could do was breathe deeply, on the inside.

"It was..." he said. "It was Legal Studies. I don't like law. I like events and issues. I

like debating, I like the *show* of it. The stuff was just... all memorization. All these meaningless cases."

"Those are important," Kerry said. "That's the law. Civil rights laws, drunk driving laws, they're all part of the government."

"I know," Jim said. "It's..." he sighed. "I'm not gonna make excuses. I mean, I can say it's been a hard semester. It's hard to adjust to being up until three a.m. in heated discussions with your hallmates and then getting up for a nine o'clock class every day. I would've failed. I would've *looked* bad. But it was stupid. I have things most kids would dream about. Everyone else on my floor is on financial aid. I don't really have to struggle for anything. I was a jerk."

"Did you take the final yourself?" Kerry asked.

"Yeah, I did. I knew I did something stupid. I'll never do it again. It's just..."

Kerry waited.

"I was selfish. At the time I thought my life was *so hard*."

Kerry tried to smile again. "I know," she said.

"Listen," he said, running his fingers through his hair. "That stuff Dad says, about writing speeches for me or being my secretary... you don't have to. You can be my Secretary of State. Or I could be yours. It doesn't matter. And if you really don't like English, change majors. We can both be PoliSci. There's nothing wrong with that."

"I like writing," Kerry said. "I really do. It's okay."

"Hey," he kidded, "let's write some gross stories about your poetry professor. You can even keep them for yourself."

Kerry laughed.

"Welcome back," she said.

Too

a. c. brocki

Three a.m. Slowly awakening.
Body unmovable, mouth dry
from breathing hard
during rock-dead sleep.
That brown speckled hawk
feather-hunched in discontent
on a freeway exit sign last night
must pay the price of awareness too
by feeling as alien
on earth and in its hawk dreams
as I do in mine.



alexander ludwig

NOT WEARING
A WRIST WATCH

thomas kretz

This Sardinian blue sky
recalls the history of its sea:
 the time myths and legends sailed;
 the time of shipwrecked dreams;
 the time of litanies: songs of
Phoenicians, Ionians, Carthaginians;
 the time of titanic battles;
 the time apostles used the waves;
 the time docile dolphins pulled
scallop shells of Venus and Galatea.
Now swept clear of war clouds,
beat and rattle of slave galleys,
barges big enough for elephants
too seasick to enjoy the ride,
U-boats sticking up the finger.
Nothing but heat and reflection,
profound and bright, azure empty
of the confrontation of races.
Suddenly a shade appears,
a woman black in silhouette,
bending over me, asking time:
 All you want, my dear;
 light or dark, centuries fly.

HUMBLE GRAVES IN PAXTON CEMETERY

w. b. keckler

As if all plague angels
hidden beneath tulle
morning mists did not
guess the weight—
those gravid clusters
of grapes a father hung
beneath scarlet rhododendrons
Greek wedding flames
a child bride's veil
seen through an unpainted
simple square window
& the child's grief
could outdo the weeping willow
illiterate artisans carved
on stones with piety
now cracked & cemented
along lightning fissures:
as if consumptive blood
spat on a china doll's hand
could help them (& us)
through pastry thin & yellow
pages of The Word

& it does; their joy seeps in
like our world's carbon monoxides
that crack their ancient tombstones.

LOVE SUCKS
avery h. schwindel

shyly, i ask her to dance
"i am a poet," i say
"take a haiku, jerk."

IF I KNEW

b. z. niditch

If I knew loneliness
would only grow
griefs identical
to black and blues
each stalking lilac
I call Whitman
would remain inside
benched forever.

If I knew
every civil war
would have no angel
to walk by sloping beds
of bruised men,
I'd call on Walt
to visit every bough
and replace a rose
on every hopeless chest.

If I suspected
love would lie haphazard
without Paradise twice,
I would murder this bread
overturn tabled eiderdown
mute my manifestos
forsake parables for survival
and burn *Leaves of Grass*.

A SKETCH LEFT BY
A GIRL WHO
SHARED MY ROOM

walt franklin

Today I know she's less to me and
I am less to her than this
sketch from our single night together
in the mesh of being that ejects us
each to our own world. And yet
two shadows dance skin to skin
in fullness of a penciled lamp-post,
bed-post, and sneaker overturned.

MY CARELESS
FATHER

david sumner

He is too heavy and careless, my father,
always leaving me at rest-stops, coffee shops,
some wide spot in the road. I come out,
rubbing my hands on my pants or levitating
two foam cups of coffee, and I can't find him
anywhere, that beat-up Ford gone.

It's the trip itself that blinds him,
black highway like a funeral ribbon
leading to the mesmerizing end,
his hands like Vise Grips on the wheel
and following, until he misses me,
steers wide on the graveled shoulders,
and turns around.

This time he's been gone so long
I've settled in here—married, built a house,
started a family, stopped wanting to see him
pull into the driveway though the wind
sometimes makes a highway roar high up
in the branches,
and I stop whatever I'm doing and look up.



alexander ludwig

ASTRONOMER'S
MAD LOGIC

archibald henderson

I saw the hands of the clock revolve
and then I saw time fall flat on its face.
The stream, as if its flow had turned through and through
pure ice, no longer rippled in its banks,
a casualty of winter's rich breath.
The blossom on the flower, half in bloom,
never petaled out into full glory.
Likewise the egg in the heavy nest of thatch
hung above the planter's box; the mother bird,
on brood but momentarily at limb's end
to trill its surprise, lapsed into silence.

The astronomer plumbing the sea of space
peered as though transfixed by his discovery:
the originals of the universe
stopped winking in his lens to tell their story.
A swirling crowd doing a "wave" turned to stone.
The spinning football in its kickoff arch
never settled in the return man's arms;
zebraed officials, caught, whistle in mouth,
never piped a tweet, and the replay man,
suffocating behind his glass, could not push
the button to slowmotion the last play
and decide the action.

A little girl
leaned to put a bite to eat on the plate
for the watching cat to feed on, held her hand
curved just so in dainty, dainty gesture.
That set of lovers, arcing to interlock,
lay arrested in their sexual ballet.
The physician, about to misprescribe
for lovely patient, stood apoise to spill
the paper into her waiting fingers.

Time picks itself up and faces backward:
the figures caught in geometric outrage
liven up enough to drop their pose—except
that now they swing the opposite way: brook
winds back to its source, passion flower shrinks
into bud again, egg reenters bird
that hops from bough's end back into its nest;
the astronomer breaks his freeze and, shuffling,
returns to half-lit quarters, each eye full
of calculations ending where they started;
the crowd, turned to stone in its "wave," refluories;
football flies back to tee; officials, players,
to locker room undress and thence to buses.
The little girl withdraws her hand from the plate;
hot lovers reverse into their warmups
and exotic foreplay, much against their will.
The physician's gesture gracefully reverts
and lifts to scrawl his hieroglyphics backward.

Time has done them all wrong. The astronomer
alone, ever at pains to decipher
the origin of things from bursts of light
in the deepest universe, retracing steps,
best grasps the logic of the clock's reversal
and even smiles at his participation.

A GOOD
DAY'S WORK
patrick hartigan

*And the road to adventures of the mind
Sweeping straight up
One pause at once it becomes a bushy tangle.*
—Breton

Yes of course, that's how it is.
If you'd admit having made the first move of your journey,
then we might have an opening
for speaking clearly of what should happen next.

Inevitably, you made the first move;
cluttering about one day filled with options
and/or faces value-laden pushing into you,
your first flight signaled by having to choose.

It's a fine long highway which spreads before.
Sparse acacia twenty rod from the road
wave separately to each other... passing it along
that travelers there might be on a single path.

Birds have eyes which look to each side,
so muscle of neck is piano string strong,
resilience of red fiber nourished by solitary seeds
plucked from the wait for wind and/or chance.

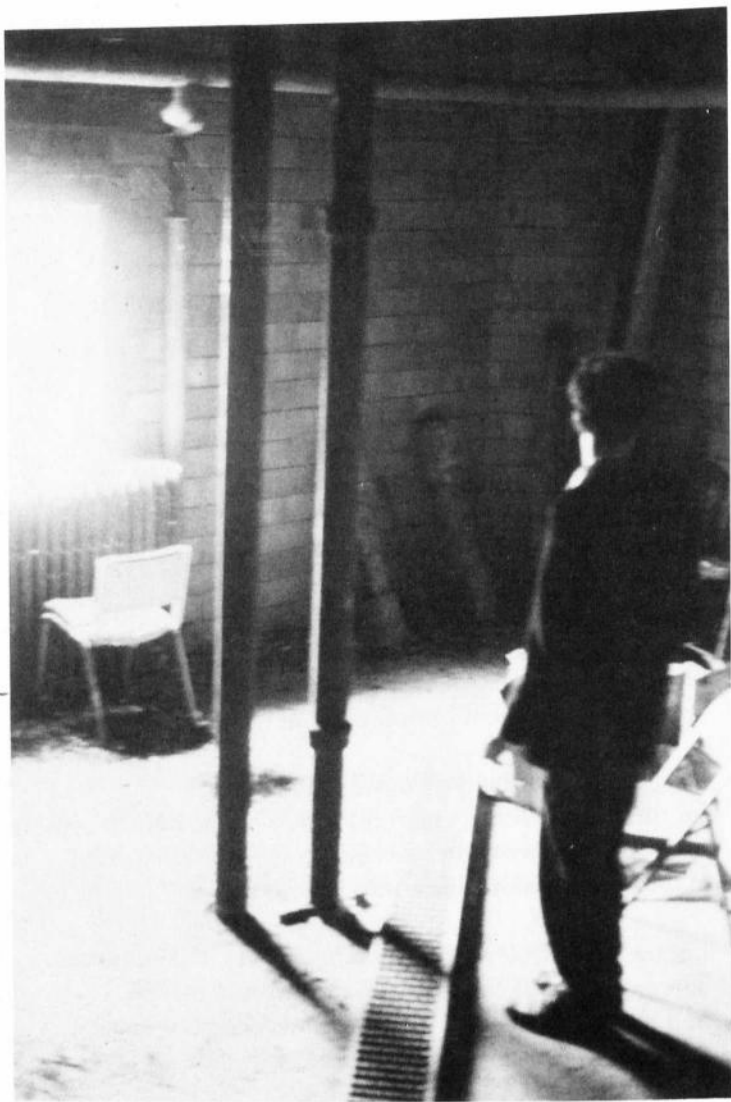
And when you've paused, and when you've
tangled in your making of being forced to stop—
for surely the laws of momentum are at work here,
surely you might finally have sprung off the map...

You'll need new force to get along;
and can you signal, in your frozen state,
for conveyance or at least a push;
or would you even have the mind for calling for help,

Or for listening... as at the garden gate you've ached
for a lover being home, as if the house were paper-thin
or had such character of face and form
for revealing without option the cast of its mind...

I ask if you would have a mind to listening
for the many-colored creatures which might stumble into you
or even sweep toward you as messenger-hawks to push
and/or lift you along back into your journey.

Let me say... that as you listen for a lover one will come.
The horizon will collapse into the point of an eye,
and the dark will come as if it had needed your name
for unfolding itself into the release of its rain.



alexander ludwig

LAST WALK
BEFORE MOVING

robert hutter

(to E.)

Put some garbage in the grass—
Let the cars, dumb as buffaloes,
Have their way. This place is now abandoned,
And theirs shall be the kingdom
Leaving, among the broken glass
And the refuse of the nighttime ghosts
The shadow of the last pedestrian
Doing his part for extinction.

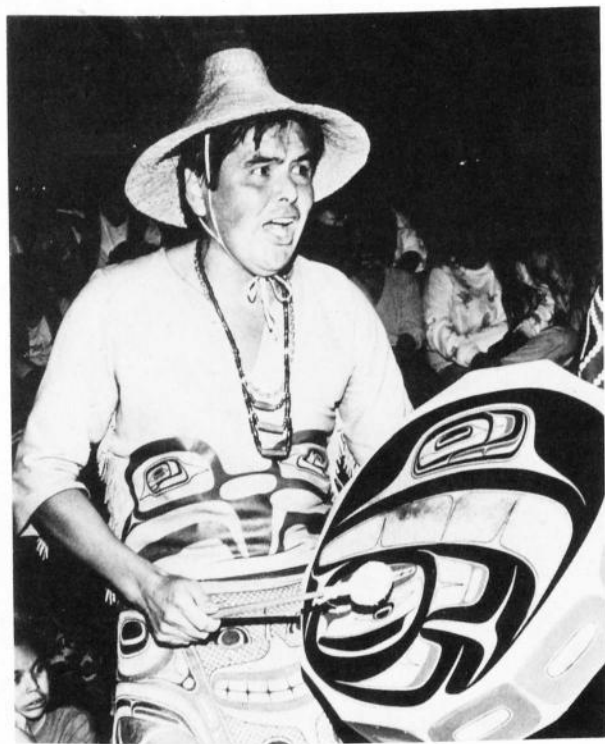
Unemployed, I endure the pleasure
Of couples going about their business
In the park—I stage-whisper a reminder
That it's too late now to join them
They are henceforth stupid strangers
And I alone will endure the sadness
Of my last breakfast at this diner—
The waitress has no suspicion.

Either I or this city ran out of luck
When the years forced me to conceive
Of doing without its windows or bricks,
When I'd be too busy living to miss them;
Now my life's going away in a truck
And I shall begin to believe
That any place is nice, if you're rich—
That, from now on, is wisdom.

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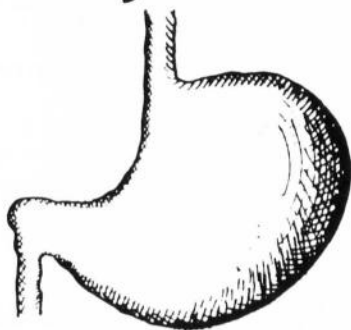
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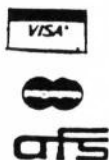
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