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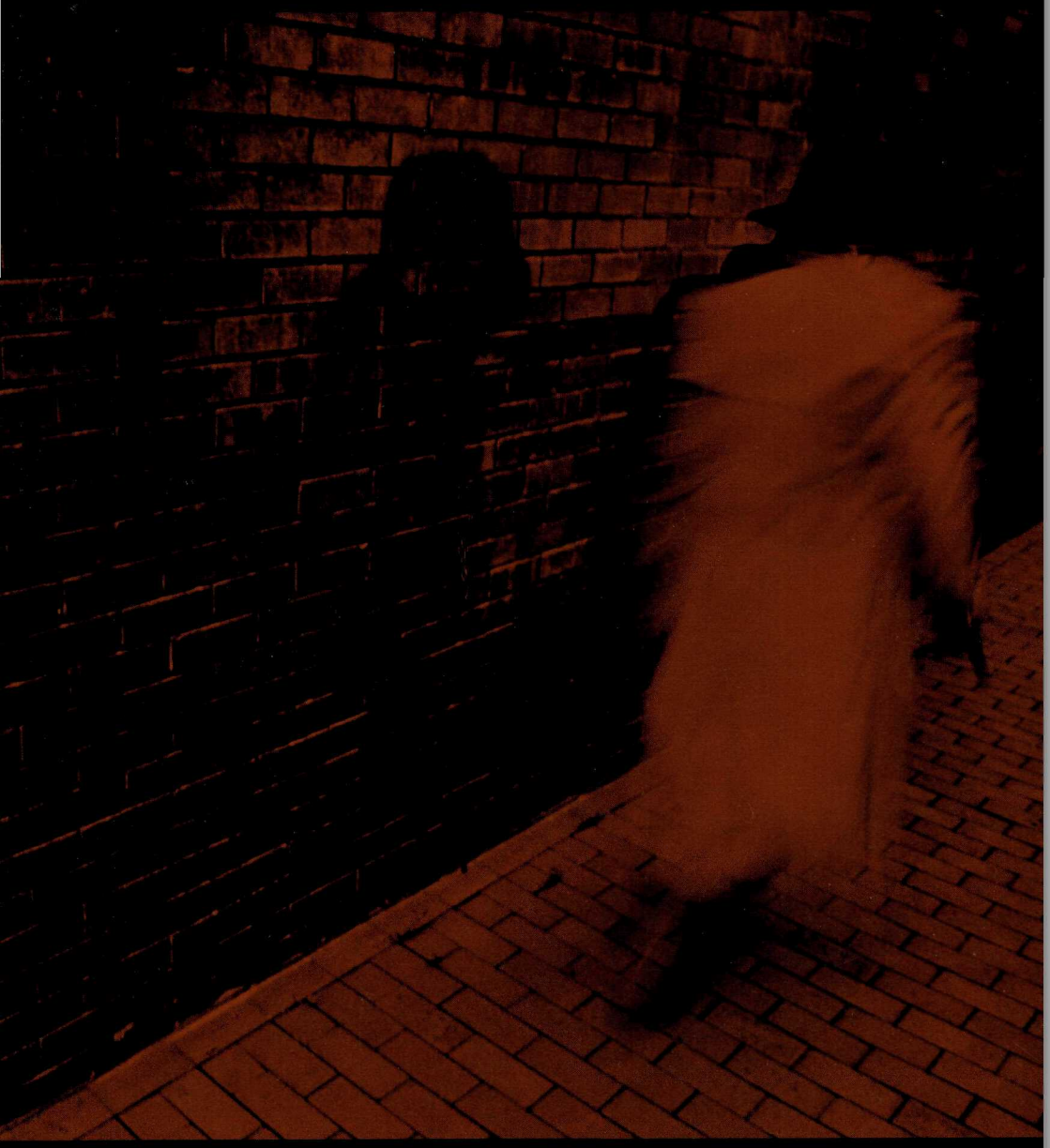

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Note: previously published material cannot be considered. Maximum length for submission is 5000 words, typed, double-spaced. Please include a self-addressed stamped envelope and a telephone number. (Contributors outside Canada, please send International Reply Coupons.)

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Prizes: Three winners will each receive $500, plus publication in **Event** 18/3, Fall 1989.

DEADLINE FOR ENTRIES: postmarked no later than April 15, 1989.

Notification: July, 1989.

Preliminary judging: by the editors of **Event.**

Final Judge: Howard White is the author of **Spilsbury's Coast** and **The Accidental Airline,** best-selling non-fiction, and **The Men There Were Then,** poems. He is also the editor of **Raincoast Chronicles** and the founder and president of Harbour Publishing.

douglas college

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Kathleen McCracken

Dante at Ravenna, 1320

One year before my death.

I look up at the grave
clock tower and see
the face of a girl,
her open mouth
filling with snow.

She is not thinking of dying.
Her poise is eternal, the green
mosaic of her eyes
luminous but turned
utterly inward.

I know that the poppy
and the dark red dove
were just that to her – a flower
and a bird. All my words
counterpoint in one general current of song.

Still no philosophy
can console the rich flame
that circumscribes my brittle
soul, leaves me calling
Bice, Bice
still

one year before my death.

Father Wang's Donkey

Ma Sen

Translated from the French by Michael Bullock

Before the Liberation the village of Hong, some twenty kilometres south of Peking, was the kingdom of Lord Hong. Landowner, moneylender, village mayor, head of the local militia, these were the functions accumulated by this great lord. Apart from a few well-to-do families who had managed to preserve a little land, all the rest of the inhabitants of the village were under the thumb of the one and only Lord Hong. It was his grain they ate, his land they lived on, his hemp they were dressed in and most certainly him they worked for. As for Lord Hong, he did whatever he wanted, whatever he liked, without having to answer to anyone. At this period no one liked him, but everyone respected him.

A year after the great flood of the Yellow River a refugee from the province of Henan named Wang had come to the village. As he was bald the villagers, with obvious contempt, nicknamed him Wang the Bald. He first took shelter in an old abandoned mill on the outskirts of the village that was part of Lord Hong's property, and worked as a day labourer for families who needed a hand. Alas, Lord Hong lost no time in sending someone to tell him he couldn't live like that on private property without a word to the owner. So Wang the Bald went and asked Lord Hong officially to perform an act of charity by lending him the old mill that could be of no use to a great lord like him. But although Lord Hong occasionally showed generosity to the poor, he certainly wasn't going so far as to lend his mill for nothing! Old as it was it was still a mill! He suggested another solution to Wang the Bald:

"I'll lend you my mill on condition that you mill my own grain free and on top of that, when you mill for other people you give me half your earnings."

"Then it won't be a loan but a rental and on harsh terms at that," protested Wang the Bald.

"Not at all, not at all. As far as I'm concerned this kind of arrangement is a loan. If you don't accept I'll leave the mill to go to rack and ruin," retorted Lord Hong.

As poor Wang the Bald had nowhere else to go, he was forced to accept these unjust conditions. Thanks to his enthusiasm for work, he managed to lived in the village for almost thirty years without dying of hunger. Not only did he not die of hunger, he even became the owner of a little donkey that took his place in turning the mill wheel.

But owning a donkey had not changed his social position. Without an inch of land he remained in other people's eyes poor Wang the Bald. He worked very hard to have enough to live on after giving half his earnings to Lord Hong. He rose very early in the morning and went to bed very late in the evening, never stopping work except to take his meals. All he could do was mill, mill, mill!

But one fine morning, like a thunderbolt, the Revolution broke out. From one day to the next the poor proletarians were no longer objects of contempt; on the contrary they were treated with honour. Naturally Lord Hong was killed and his possessions divided equally between all those he had exploited. Wang the Bald found himself the owner of the mill and kept his little donkey. And furthermore he acquired one of Lord Hong's best bed covers, a soft pink blanket, in which, well wrapped up and sheltered from all his past woes, for several nights he dreamed delicious dreams.

He was now completely happy, not only because he too had now become a landowner, but above all because no one now dared to despise him. All those who had called him Wang the Bald changed their tune and henceforth greeted him with a respectful "Good morning, Father Wang." He had never known such happiness in all his life. This sudden change made the poor man drunk with joy and overwhelmed him with an unexpected beatitude.

One evening, to celebrate this good fortune, he gave his donkey a double ration of soy beans. But the donkey remained motionless, disdaining the delicacy of which he was usually so fond. "Eat, little one, go on, eat," said Father Wang pulling on his halter. But the donkey turned his head away from the feeding-trough and Father Wang, completely surprised, caught sight of an eye blazing with anger. In spite of himself, Father Wang backed away.

"What's got into you?"

A marble statue, the donkey refused to budge.

"Are you sick?"

"I'm not sick," the donkey blurted out.

"You can talk?" Frightened out of his wits Father Wang fell back on his

seat as if he had been punched in the face.

"Why not? Don't I have the right to talk?"

"A talking donkey, that's the limit. I've never seen such a thing," muttered Father Wang, still on his backside.

"Times have changed," sneered the donkey.

"Times have changed?"

"Exactly, times have changed. Now the world belongs to the oppressed. Otherwise how could you own this mill? How could you sleep under Lord Hong's blanket?"

"Yes, you're right, times have changed. At last we poor people exploited by the landowners have been 'emancipated'! Do you know what that word means? If there hadn't been a revolution I would never have known that 'emancipated' meant," said Father Wang laughing as he thought of his luck since the Revolution. The discussion had cheered him up and he rose to his feet rubbing his back.

"That's great, so you're a progressive too now," mocked the donkey.

"Everyone has to be a progressive, don't they?"

"Of course. That's why I won't remain silent any longer."

"But all the same, it's not very usual for a donkey to speak."

"You know the Revolution can change everything, otherwise it wouldn't be a revolution."

"I know revolution can change social positions, hearts and all that... but from there to hearing a donkey speak... "

"What was usual before the Revolution isn't any more, and what wasn't usual before the Revolution is perfectly ordinary now!"

"Ah, so that's why a donkey like you starts talking," commented Father Wang unconvinced.

"I must draw your attention to one essential point: you show an obvious lack of respect towards the oppressed." As the donkey pronounced these words a growing anger blazed in his eyes.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha." Father Wang could not help bursting into laughter. "I owe you respect, do I? I'm supposed to respect a donkey?"

The donkey advanced threateningly on Father Wang. "Don't laugh like that. In spite of the Revolution you haven't learned your lesson. Before it you were just another proletarian, poor Wang the Bald. Why does everyone now respectfully call you 'Father Wang'? Why can you walk with your head up? Well, let me tell you again, it's because of the Revolution. As you said just now, the exploited class is at last emancipated. Well, why not me?"

"Do you also belong to the exploited class?"

"What else am I?" Full of anger, the donkey began to stamp his

hooves. Then he launched into an indictment. "Don't I keep the mill turning day and night while you hold the whip and strike my backside with it? Don't I eat hay out of this miserable trough while you feast on millet bread and sometimes on wheat bread? Don't I sleep in mud and manure, while you stretch out in comfort on a bed and even under Lord Hong's beautiful pink blanket?"

"According to you then I've maltreated you, I've oppressed you and I'm nothing but an abominable exploiter."

"Exactly."

"Oh, my poor little fellow, I'm not that bad. You understand the present situation. The word exploiter mustn't be pronounced lightly."

"Why not? I'm fed up with my condition. While all the other exploited poor are now emancipated, why should I remain a victim?"

"All the same, I'm not that bad a master. Don't I buy you soy beans from time to time? Don't I cover you with a hempen sack on cold winter nights? If I had a wife, I don't think I could treat her better."

"What sentimentality! You really make me bray. You know as well as I do that class hatred is stronger than anything. And you're trying to buy me with your damned bourgeois feelings. Isn't that the same game the lord played with you? I'm not that much of a silly ass."

"So what do you want me to do," asked Father Wang, who didn't feel very comfortable engaged in a conversation with his increasingly aggressive donkey.

"I want you to settle your debt, to pay what you owe me," hammered out the donkey taking two steps forward so suddenly that his muzzle almost bumped into Father Wang's bald pate.

"Settle what?"

"Settle your debt. I don't want to be exploited by you any longer. And you've go to pay your debts to me as Lord Hong paid his debts to you."

"Do you want to kill me too?" the poor man cried out in terror.

"No, I'm not that inhuman. Listen, this is what I want: from now on you will be the one to turn the mill, you who eat hay from the trough, you who sleep on the ground in the manure. I'll be the one who wields the whip, eats wheat bread and sleeps under Lord Hong's beautiful pink blanket."

As he spoke the animal's muzzle advanced more and more threateningly and poor Father Wang had to back away until he was wedged in a corner of the wall.

"And if I don't agree?" he enquired in a quavering voice.

"Then it will be your turn. I shall denounce you to the people's government and you will be condemned the same way all the exploiters, all

the landowners were. You will meet the same fate as Lord Hong. What an honour, eh?" Finally the donkey, free and victorious, let go of his prey.

From then on, Father Wang was rarely seen. He went into hiding and worked all the time behind closed doors. Nevertheless people noticed how thin he had become and how depressed he looked, but no one knew why the joy with which the Revolution had first filled his old heart had now completely deserted it.

Then no one saw him leave his mill for several days on end. One fine morning a few villagers accompanied by two militiamen broke down Father Wang's door. They found him filthy, emaciated, dead under the mill yoke. In the bed a blissful donkey was snoring heartily under a fine pink blanket.

Lu Chih

Translated from the Korean by Graeme Wilson

Happy Village

Number Three Brother comes sauntering back from his shrimping,
His bow-legs black with mud. The Old 'Un sits,
As a village-boss should, at ease in the shadow of willows
Thumping a melon till its red flesh splits.
How his wet mouth waters, that dirty little creature,
Number Two Brother, perched on a roller-stone
Strumming his crude guitar.
O look, just look
How the buckwheat blooms, how green the beans have grown.

This village life knows nothing of good or evil:
It is what it is, its happiness its own.

Pai Chen-fu
Translated from the Korean by Graeme Wilson

Autumn Landscape

Under the setting sun's blurred black and rose
A village rotting in its loneliness.
The ground-mist thinly rising. Seven crows
Perched in old trees at angles of distress.

A flight of cranes against the sun's wet light.
The mountains turning blue. Flat sheets of cold
Icy-green water. Grasses withered white
And flowers, their leaves gone purple, a dull gold.

Han Wei
Translated from the Korean by Graeme Wilson

Old Boys Dinner

Same school, same class, same graduation-year:
Some grey, some white, some bald as a bun of bread.
After three rounds, whatever the toast, they cheer
And wouldn't you? Thus old, and still not dead.

Lu Yu
Translated from the Korean by Graeme Wilson

Poverty

A bumper crop, rice cheap. It's only I
Whose hungers blight the richness of the year.

Today I scrounged this rice I could not buy,
But I still can't cook it: even dead wood's too dear.

Up there, who knows how distant, there's the sky:
But waste no prayers on heaven. It can't hear.

Su Tung-po
Translated from the Korean by Graeme Wilson

Apparitions of Grief

A sickle moon hangs trapped among scrawny branches.
The clocks have all dripped dry. The world's abed.

That stealthy shadow: some sort of skulking outcast
Or the darkness trailed by some wild-goose overhead?

Startled, it cocks its skull, whatever it is.
Whatever it is, unknown and unconsoled,
It lurks among ice-bright boughs but it settles on none.
And the sand-bars out in the river glint with cold.

Weapons

Anthony Crawford

Day 1

It has a name but we've always called it The Island. Like maybe it's the only one in the world? Legend has it that great grandpa Burke got it for a shinplaster off of some half-wit trapper more than a hundred years ago. Hard to believe it was only worth a quarter. I mean, this is A.Y. Jackson country—pinky granite, wind-blown pines. My dad says he could get twenty grand for it any day of the week. My mother says that my father comes from a long line of bullshit artists. An opinion she put into print during a short-lived silk-screen phase: "If you can't dazzle 'em with brilliance, baffle 'em with bullshit".

I used to think my mother was one of a kind until I saw the same logo for sale in a Rolling Stone magazine.

My dad's got a laugh like thunder maybe two, three miles away. The tee shirt's still good for a rumble every time he puts it on. Like today. To give his chest a break from yesterday's sun. We all tend to overdo it first day out.

We, in alphabetical order, are as follows: my sister Beth; Harry, my dad; my mother Mo (short for Maureen); Aunt Pearl and Uncle Russ; Tim, my cousin; and me.

Me has a name, but I've hated it since I was born. Suffice it to say (as Uncle Russ does at least ten times a day) that it starts with a V and the SPCA wouldn't let it be hung on a dog.

I blame my mother for that one. She has what my dad calls "artsy-fartsy ways". Before silk-screen it was stained glass, and before that, water colours. I bet I'm the only fourteen year old who can name the Group of Seven. That's because my mom was bent on becoming number eight. She drove us crazy for two or was it three summers in a row, banning us from sector after sector of The Island while she tried to capture what before our time must have been a pristine scene. My mother is what Uncle Russ likes to call obsessive.

Damn. I just realized I've screwed up this journal already. I called this DAY 1 when it should have been called DAY 2. That really bugs me. Beginnings are so important. Portentous. That's what they are. My career as a writer blown on the very first line.

Then again, I could try using a flashback. Maybe that's what I meant to do all along. Complete with a countdown (there's an original start). FIVE, FOUR, THREE, TWO, ONE. . . .

DAY 0

Chug-a-lug. Exactly the sound that Two Finger Long's thirty footer makes as it bulls its way across the inside channel. Two Finger because he lost the rest in the winch by which I stand. Makes me wonder about the colour of Indian blood.

Up front my mother leans over the bow, nosing into the wind, while the rest of us huddle behind a tarp-covered mountain of supplies. It's sunny but cool as it always is up here at the end of June.

And as always, my mother has let it be known that she thinks we're a bunch of wimps.

But my guess is she's now beginning to feel the chill. I can see that as she twists around to capture a strand of hair and tuck it back under the bright red kerchief she wears. Very embarrassing, seeing one's mother that way. I wish she looked more matronly like Aunt Pearl. Wife-of-Russ would never be seen in a skimpy top like that. Which is maybe why he's looking up front like me. But it's far more likely he's spotted a great blue heron dead ahead.

I check in on my dad to see if he's watching, but he's up to his nose in another Mickey Spillane. My father never was big on scenery. A view to him is whatever is back of whatever he's got in the sight of his 30/30.

Aunt Pearl's asleep in a lawn chair, her legs propped up on the rail. The trek to the boonies has already pooped her out. Aunt Pearl is a great believer in civilization. And civilization according to her comes with an AC power cord attached.

Beth has her eyes wide open but in her usual dreamy way. I doubt that she's seen a thing since we left the wharf.

And cousin Tim—he's almost sixteen—is too busy honing his bowie knife to care.

"Land ho," my mother cries. She's always the first to catch a glimpse of The Island.

We arrive to find the dock mostly under water. The winter ice has eaten away one of its rock-filled cribs. That ought to be good for two days slave labour at least.

Unloading supplies is like an insomniac's nightmare. To begin with, my dopey sister drops a couple of dozen eggs halfway up the granite slope that serves as the cabin's front yard. This prompts my dad's loud remark about mooning over Frank, the true love Beth's been forced to leave behind. Upon which my sister locks herself in the privy. Everyone

seems content to indulge "the lovesick little fool", to quote my dad. But I know my sister, and Beth is just down and out lazy.

Then Aunt Pearl, who's not all that agile, takes most of the skin off one knee when she tackles the water slide winter has made of the dock.

That's when my dad talks Two Finger into holding his boat on the rocks down at the point where the granite tapers into a bit of a ledge. It's there that we try to wrestle the new refrigerator ashore. The thing is a kerosene burning beast the size of a dinosaur. Halfway down the gangplank I have to let go. "Jesus Christ," my dad shouts, straining to keep our end in the air, "how could I have begat such a goddam runt?"

With my sister hogging the outhouse, what more could I do except swallow my pride and give it another try.

Most likely my dad didn't say begat at all. It's a five letter word and he usually sticks with four. I was so blown away my mind didn't get down exactly what he said. But begat is good. Reminds me of that story in the Bible, the one where this maniac's out to kill his son. Because the way I felt, I might as well have been dead.

DAY 1 (Continued)

Susan's arrived. Susan, said with a sigh. Her folks own the island a half mile east of here. She roared up in her father's Princecraft (35 HP) just in time to join our noonday swim.

Susan is my cousin's summer girl. Has been now for two years in a row. Susan is what you'd call the girl of my dreams. Wet dreams, dry dreams, any dream at all.

When Susan's around I feel like a troll a long way away from my cave. Small and ugly and dying for someplace to hide. And watch. Though I once heard her telling my mother she thought that her son was a very nice boy. I wish she'd said man. But you can't always get what you want. Except in a song like that one. Or another I heard on the same golden oldie show called Born Too Late. That one was written for me.

But there's no doubt that Tim and Susan were meant to share the towel they're on. They are both of them body beautiful all the way down to their fidgety toes. Of course, Tim is as dumb as a board. As for Susan, I really don't know. When she speaks to me all I can hear is this buzzing in my ears.

It strikes me though that brains have little to do with getting a girl as pretty as Susan or as beautiful as my mom.

Tim and Susan have wandered off into the cabin. The adults have beached themselves on the rocks and don't seem to give a damn. Beth is on page forty-six of her endless letter to Frank.

In I go to make sure they keep it clean. Susan and Tim are huddled in front of *our* dresser. (At The Island we all get to be one big, happy family).

"What's up," I say. Tim throws me a glower.

"Buzz off, kid. We're busy, can't you see?"

"Sure," I say. "That's why I asked. What's that you've got in your hand?"

"Something a milquetoast like you will never get to see. In the flesh," he adds and Susan stifles a giggle.

I make a grab and come up with something hard. Hard and ridgy. About as long as my thumb and half as wide.

"Rattlesnake rattle," he tells me, pretending he let me take it away. "Killed the son-of-a-bitch last year down at the end of the bay."

"Ooh," Susan coos. "I think that's just so brave." (That I heard and decide she's as dumb as the colour of her hair.)

"Bullshit," I tell him. "You bought it."

"No way," he says."The mainland's crawling with rattlers. You ask Two Finger. I gave him the rest of the snake for dinner that day."

"Then how come you never told us, great white hunter?"

"You crazy? My folks would have had a queen-sized bird. You're dad's the only one who would understand. There's some things a man has to do to prove he's a man."

He sounded ridiculous. Just like John Wayne. But Susan thought it was great. You could tell by the way she draped herself over Tim's arm. I tossed him his prize and went out to gaze at my navel under the sun.

DAY 2

Aunt Pearl baked us blueberry muffins for breakfast. Berries that Uncle Russ and I found in a hollow two islands down. It's super early for that kind of thing up here. We'd gone for a paddle hoping to catch the beaver kits at play. They've got this lodge, like I said, two islands away.

Dad stood on the dock when we left and boomed out this parting shot. "You tell them swimming rodents to keep their ratty teeth off of my land, or I'll blow them out of the water one fine day." He keeps a running count of the birches he figures the beavers have swiped. Six I think he said it was this year. Hardly reason enough to start a war.

Uncle Russ and I have a lot of fun together. He knows all there is to know about things like rocks and birds and trees. He may be a bit on the stuffy side (my dad prefers "pompous twit"), but I think he's great, and he sure can handle a paddle. So that's what we do—paddle a lot—when Tim and my father are out after walleyes or pike. Both Uncle Russ and I hate even so much as the smell of fish. Especially when dad wants it

served at the crack of dawn. But today it was our catch that made it to the table.

DAY 3

You wouldn't think that a kid could get bored up here. Believe me, it happens. My sister, for instance, looks that way every day. I only do when Uncle Russ decides that he wants to read, dad's asleep—siesta time he calls it; mom's doing decoupage, this year's artistic endeavour; Aunt Pearl is cooking dinner, and Tim and Susan are off in the bushes somewhere.

I find my sister moping on what I call her moping rock. I figure maybe it's time we had a chat. Not because I want to cheer her up. My sister and I have never been that close. The four years between us might just as well be ten. But because I've got this problem on my mind. My guess is, under the circumstances, it might be something we share.

"Horny?" I ask, sliding down beside her.

"You're so gross," she says. "You sound just like Tim."

There's a slap in the face. And all I was trying to do was communicate. Speak to her in her native tongue, so to speak. My sister has the IQ of a gnat. Which puts her twelve points up on the infamous Frank. Still, I decide to give it another shot.

"You really miss him, don't you."

"Oh, go away. Don't pretend you care."

"But I do, I do," I say.

Silence. My sister and I don't have a lot in common. She's a whiz at sports I don't even know how to play.

"Want to go for a paddle?" I try.

"No."

"Can I ask you something?"

"Can I stop you?"

"No." She shrugs which I assume means go ahead. "Have you and Frank ever done it?"

"Is that all you have on your seedy little mind?"

"Mostly, yes."

"Well, the answer is none of your business. Now, go away."

You have to be desperate to want to talk to your sister. But there you have it. I was horny. And worried too that I might have turned out as obsessive as my mom. I mean, I imagined it all the time. What it was like. How wonderful it would be. I pictured Tim and Susan going at it in a lagoon. Mom and dad. Uncle Russ and Pearl. Beth and Frank. Even the goddam beavers. I must be sick. I think I'm losing my mind.

DAY 4

I've been shanghaied to help my mom with the wash which is done in a couple of tubs down on the point. It's my sister's job, but my sister has called in sick. "Got the curse," as my mother would say. That makes three times over the past two weeks. But no one seems to be keeping track except me.

This is women's work, so I had to complain a lot. But really, you know, it isn't all that bad. Building a fire. Setting the tub on a trivet made of rocks. Filling her up and bring her to a boil. Then chucking this pile of clothes and soap powder in. Gave us a chance to talk. Me and my mom. Aunt Pearl is the chef. She doesn't have to do laundry. Division of labour even out here in the wilds. A pretty good move, seeing as my mom learned to cook off the side of a can.

So here I am stirring this underwear soup with a four foot board when my mothers says, "Beth tells me we should have a talk."

"Oh?" I say. "About what?"

"Sex."

Stir, stir.

"She told me you asked her yesterday if she was horny. That right?"

'Thanks, Beth,' I grumble to myself.

"Was that a yes or a no?"

"A yes."

"Why did you have to use a word like that?"

"Anything bigger she wouldn't understand."

That's not true. And it's also not very sensitive."

"Which means?"

"Meaning, she may not be brilliant, but that doesn't make her dumb. The same way that your not being a hulk doesn't make you less of a man."

"I get your point."

"Good. Now, about your vocabulary. Sexual desire, like sex, is a beautiful thing. Especially if it's accompanied by love. It deserves a better word."

"Lust?"

"I prefer passion."

Passion. Yes, that's the word for my mom. She's passionate about a tremendous whack of things. Art, music, Ethiopian relief. Even the NDP. I wonder if she's passionate with my dad. And how she feels when he tells her (and I'd bet my computer he does) that he's horny.

DAY 5

Something strange is going on around here. First off, we all ate cold

cereal for breakfast, topped with diluted canned milk, a barfo meal. All this thanks to Aunt Pearl who has gone out on strike. Don't ask why. I did and practically got my nose chewed off. Whatever's going on, I assume that my folks must have taken sides because no one is talking to anyone anymore.

Wait. It gets better.

Susan came over at noon. You should have seen the bikini she wore. I think that's what got Tim all bent out of shape. No doubt he thought she was showing too much of the parts only he should see.

They had some kind of argument down on the shore and when they came back, Susan flounced over to me. She offered to rub some Coppertone on my back and asked me about the plot of the book I was reading. I knew I was being used but I didn't care. On a day like this, anything was possible.

So there I am, in ecstasy, with Susan at work on my back, until Tim comes over to rain on my little parade. Wet from a swim he stands and lets his body drip on my head while he issues a challenge to race me out to the shoal.

"No way," I say. "I'm having fun right here."

"You're nothing but a chicken, *Virgil,*" he shouts, climbing an octave to sing out that horrible name.

"Virgil?" says Susan, pulling her hand away. "Virgil?" she laughs. "But everyone calls you Gil."

"Yes," I say, "except for the odd Neanderthal hanging around."

DAY 6

This morning I saw Uncle Russ give my mother a kiss. Not a brother-in-law type peck. This was a class A muckle. At six A.M. On the outhouse path. Where it rounds the storage shed. How did I feel? Mostly I felt betrayed. Uncle Russ and his endless preaching about respect for all living things. How about my dad? Wasn't he alive? And my mom with her mouthful of dignified talk about love and sex and passion. She was up on her toes, kissing him back. Plain old horny was how it looked to me.

DAY 6 ADDENDUM (written day 7)

Okay. So it may not have been the smartest move of my life. But I felt that I had more than enough good reasons at the time. None of which was the one my cousin supplied.

"What were you trying to do? Commit suicide?"

"No," I tell him.

"You went stomping through Two Finger's field armed with a geezly fish gaff, and you tell me you weren't fixing to do yourself in?"

"Yes."

"So, how come? Let's face it, man. Rattlesnakes aren't your style."

"Do you know what a MIRV is, cousin?" I ask him.

"Sure. It's a multiple warhead aimed at a whole mess of different things."

"Right. Well, that's what I guess it was."

"The rattlesnake hunt? A MIRV? I don't get it."

"Listen," I say, "I'm kind of tired. Could we do this later on?"

"But I want to know what the snake did after it bit you."

"I was in shock. Didn't see a thing."

"Do you remember Two Finger carving your leg and sucking the poison out?"

"No."

"Shit, man. You missed all the dynamite parts. What do you remember?

"I remember the stink of the mud flats where the creek meets up with the bay. Made me think about earthworms and how they all must have bad breath."

"You're weird. You know that?"

"I remember the heavy duty heat as I worked my way through the hay. Must have been thirty degrees and wicked dry. And how I jumped the first time a grasshopper took off with a click which sounded to me like the start up of a tail."

"Big deal."

"I remember the cute nurse who checked me out at the clinic in Horten's Cove."

"Now you're talking."

But really, I wasn't. You'd have to be pretty thick to spill your guts to a guy like Tim. What I do remember, after the fact, and what I remember best, is the way my father held me, with his arm around my shoulder, as he and Two Finger rushed me down the bay.

Sal Cetrano

Cave Birds

We draw the birds out with our torches,
clothy vultures that hung in other skies,
close in, shrunken earthward, close in,
gargoyles flattened in a tunnel ride.
They pick morsels from each other's talons,
blood clotted in epitaphs on their beaks.

Our flashlights have confused them,
though the daubed eyes betray no glimmer.
Red ocher, dusky yellow, slaughterhouse
purple, they are bulky apparitions
with only stiff suggested hops
to free them of the dank jet air.

Resolute and slow, divine exiles
from hunger, they swell in lordly swoop,
regarding us with gorged indifference.
Below, stained dominion of complacent prey:
felled mammoth, addled sheep, gutted hare,
filled with wisdom of the perfect pounce.

They converge on an old kill, wraiths called
to a summons that they have not known before,
frozen by perspective's chains, preening
in an ambered heaven, they are angels turned
inside out, feathered in an ebony creation.
They eat what dark eats, know what it knows.

Grandad's Shawl

Michael C. Kenyon

I remember things first started to betray me about the same time my heart began acting up. We'd moved from the south, Imogen and I, after sixteen years, our marriage in shreds, to find peace on the west coast. The day we moved into our house by the sea, I ripped a board from the window of a sealed room, and peered through the dirty glass. Grey cobwebs formed a cocoon over an old kitchen chair in the middle of the floor. I told Imogen about the chair, and next morning we broke in. We found the room empty but for spiders and mouse droppings. Also I'd noticed, when checking the house before buying, a thirty-foot log wedged under the floor joists corner to corner: the original foundation blocks were soft, rotten. Yet when that winter I bellied under to wrap the water pipes with insulation tape, I found no sign of the diagonal brace, not a trace of that monstrous log.

I'm on the highway again, soundlessly winding the scenery by. The blonde woman sleeps grinning in the arms of the man beside her. I am on a bus, long distance, driving the coast south toward the university where I last held tenure. I have had two wives, Sandra in Toronto, Imogen in Hattiesburg and Los Angeles, a life with each, a life before the dust flew, a life after it settled, one two three four. What a cat's cradle of longing. Now I've sold my last house and my fish collection, I desire only time and a new car.

"Through memory you can break causality," Sophie, my philosopher granddaughter tells me. "Wipe out past and future!"

I answer that I am as old as the brick house my father built for my mother in the Toronto suburbs, the house where I was born, the house Sandra and I bought years later from the folks my mother sold it to. Not only the house, but the whole street has been torn down to make room for a car lot. Last time I was in the neighbourhood I tried to figure the sequence of rooms, decided that my bedroom had become a red vintage Corvette. I watched strangers circle the place I used to sleep, summer browsers, potential buyers, all the ghosts I ever dreamt.

I've always loved automobiles, fast and sleek imports the best. As we slow to a stop at a light, I smile out the window, imagining myself a boy

waking in a red Corvette: the shift into first, how I'd punch my foot to the gas and burn rubber all the way to breakfast, snarling at the other cars.

But I will soon die, with my hands, my voice, my legs. I can do nothing to alter how things have turned out. My brain can't pose anymore.

"It's like the desert island question," Sophie tells me, "what would you choose to take? You can hold a fistful of moments"—static on the line—"let the rest go."

Sophie's an intense child, she phones from across the continent to lecture me. She reminds me of Imogen, isn't she just like her father's mother?

Anyway, I've answered my "desert island question." I've let every thing but one go.

And she's in Los Angeles, my beauty. She's been shipped across the sea and waits for me on the unmarred tiles, no doubt, of a bright showroom. Driven there by a dockside lout who has been bonded, washed and issued clean white coveralls for the purpose. The one I've waited for all my life, the one I promised myself. Every night for the past week a crowd has gathered outside the showroom to ogle her through the plate windows. The greedy one, she's taken all my savings, cost more than any house I ever bought. I cannot name her yet, will not think her model name: this decision made long ago. In fact, on rare occasions when I've come upon her title in some magazine, I could not see the words as words. The telegram announcing her arrival was otherwise incomprehensible. My ticker may give out when I set eyes on her, when I first ease the clutch, when we're released on the highway—Must think of something else, mustn't get excited.

Last time I saw my ex-wife Imogen was at the opening of her show *Tapestries.* We embraced with a grand display of warmth, between two enormous hangings, silk on cotton canvas: one a cellular habitation, like a honeycomb, in nacrous blue, the other the nose and cockpit of a jet in flight. The pilot—face composed of a million yellow micro-chips stitched together—was waving through his plexi-dome at the blue tapestry across the gallery.

Doesn't look friendly. I pointed to the saluting hand.

No, said Imogen. It's you, waving bye-bye to all things bright and beautiful.

I stared through the glitter of spray above Imogen's fluted champagne glass. She belonged in an ice palace, that woman. Beside her I felt lonely. Hadn't she left me? In the room full of her stuff I felt awkward, off balance. I recall gritting my teeth, sensing the green wave approach from a tapestry in an adjacent room, waiting for the anxiety to recede.

I'm still waiting. Night before I left on this trip I took a cab through town, picked myself a young woman to take home. She turned on the video, then began to remove her clothes. I looked at the white body, lit blue from the TV. I held up my hand to observe the veins below the knuckles, the moments escaping my own slack skin.

Cold in here, she complained. You ever turn up the heat in this house?

Her forehead furrowed in concentration—A great crash of hail on the roof—The video ended in snow.

Listen to that hail, she said. Popcorn will not be available tonight, she said. Jesus, mercy! Watch your elbow! Hey, where you going?

I shrugged, peered through the curtains at the sturdy *SOLD* sign in the lawn, at a car in the driveway across the street.

Fifty-seven Chevy.

Thought, maybe I should say something kind—as though I could say something she'd remember—something like: this means a lot to me you know, just being close to a young woman.

I'm still waiting for the green wave to crest. When it does, when it sucks back, it will leave me upright and concentrated, washed clean.

I just stood there, showing her my back, and watched that old Chevy fill the already-grey morning with smoke.

For a while now I've tried to look only at shapes and lines. It doesn't suit me to speculate, to think deeply about the things I imagine I feel or see. From the bus, I stare at things the way I looked at the plumes of exhaust: as if I've got my back to everybody. A house on a hill, a tall old mansion with a spire and two gables, a tiny windowed observatory atop its cedar roof; a bare tree hung with black garbage bags; a long narrow inlet by the near shore of which floats a small log boom; an orange winch hooked to a blue motor with a rusty chimney. Crows breaking puddle ice to drink. Riding bus is the easiest thing in the world.

That day last September with the angel fish, when I was hit by a Ford in the school zone on Baxter. Just a glancing blow, but the driver, jumping from his car, thinks I'm bleeding. And I, thinking I'm falling, minutes through the air, surprise myself on my feet.

No, no, no! I show the dripping plastic bag hidden beneath my coat. The bell rings and children catapult from the school doors, red-vested patrol kids taking position at the crossing; and I limp to the sidewalk. All right, all right, I call. The water on the road surface has already begun to shrink and evaporate. The dark patch steams in the warm afternoon. Between my fingers I feel the slender fish flip-flop against the sides of the punctured bag. I scan the running children—two girls are screaming at the tops of their voices—then turn to the motorist who still looks worried. OK! I back away. It's OK!

The kids suddenly halt, the scene freezes. Resumes at half speed. The man climbs behind the wheel, eases his car into drive and slowly accelerates. Then the patrols wave their red flags, and I hurry across Baxter.

I see myself, hunched, rushing, a thin old man, the grey epicentre of a kaleidoscope of bright T-shirts, dresses and lunch boxes.

At home, I float the collapsed bag in the aquarium, gingerly opening the mouth, separating the sides. Three striped discs slice into the water, two remained static. Suspended, they gradually sink toward the gravel bed. But the third revives, swims a circle, its wafer-body tilted, gills working, fins flashing silver. I breathe gently on the glass, rub at the mist, remove my wet coat.

People on the bus seem incompetent, soft, to be pitied. Not like the cluttered stacks, warehouses, chutes and funnels in cement and corrugated iron of a shut-down mill. The mill is wrapped in its own complex shadows. A boy wearing a white windbreaker peering from a motionless railcar turns out to be a length of wide masking tape, its unattached end fluttering from the open freight door in the breeze. I remain twisted round in my seat long after the rails and the car have passed from sight. For a minute I can't breathe, then I'm not sure whether I'll collapse with happiness, or simply faint in the aisle. Such a pain in my chest. I stop halfway and, when Sandra catches up, I feel I could almost take her arm.

That time I came home from the symposium in Milan.

Sandra there waiting in the airport passenger lounge: such a warm rush of love as I watch her recognize me. She slips from her seat and the distance between us closes. As we clumsily hug, a woman behind her falls to the floor: airport officials move in as if the moment has been rehearsed many times.

The Greyhound is crossing a bridge. An inbound tug draws a log boom over the water below. Although a cold day of low grey cloud, no snow falls. The logs must be white from last night's snow. A sensation. Wheels rattling across the bridge, the vibrating headrest, the black and white logs sliding away. I stare in disbelief. Everything's slipping to where I can't see. I grip both armrests, feel the motors turning the world. I really miss Sandra. The year is obliterated by dust.

*

I go to the back of the bus, to the toilet, lock the door behind me, and sit down. At first I believe the room to be empty. A pine tree burns in a corner, coloured boxes beneath hanging silver, the steel bands tighten round my chest, and somewhere crickets are singing, or boys, I've heard

it is sometimes only boys. Then I realize the place is wild with people, quick hugging, flinging their arms, spinning. The impression lasts a moment, I feel the pull, as on a high ledge you comprehend *down,* till my eyes come unstuck. Empty as a brick, the room, empty as love, each still corner enchanting as a cave.

When I find my seat again, I feel depleted. The woman across the aisle toying with an orange reminds me of the Yazoo City blonde.

That glorious day in Hattiesburg I was awarded tenure for the first time, everything but the sky in shades of red. A pink rollcall. I parked my Lotus at Tong's Groceteria, bought six chocolate bars from Mrs Tong, and ate five before reaching home. Imogen was away north, visiting her folks. In the apartment lobby, I confided to my neighbour, a robust blonde from Yazoo City, that I was on a sugar high headed for cloud nine. Don't celebrate alone! she said. Does you no good at all! We sang *On the Good Ship Lollipop* till we were inside her kitchen and nearly finished cooking shrimp creole. We shared the mars bar, frozen and sliced thin, with pears, for dessert, and before we'd done laughing that night we were head over heels, blind as bats, doing hootchy-kootchy in our skins, soaring, soaring, but with the kind of nerves that keep a drunken soul lucky with the wind.

When the woman picks the star tab from the navel of the orange, the flesh underneath is pure white. She begins to peel, the rind, then the pith. The pith comes off like lace edging. Tearing apart the segments, she arranges them in her lap in a circle. She closes her eyes. I inhale the sharp acid smell. Eating clockwise, beginning at one, she consumes the orange, hour by hour. I'm horrified. The man beside her grabs her arm, insists they leave the bus. Is he joking? We're really zooming down the highway, the aisle is full of young kids. I may pass out, I don't know. It sounds crazy, but I think she's watching me, that woman with the orange. She seems to be saying, You just sit there, you old shit, sit there and let this happen, you're good for that much.

Then I see myself, not young, but younger, on a calm sunny day in Toronto, limping from the back door of our house to the car; I look down at my bruised shin, up at the yellow sky, the curdled area where the sun should be. Next door's baby screams. An old Pontiac, radio blaring, bounces off the curb in front of me, swerves and crashes into the fence. I glance back at Sandra. She looks fat in her red bikini, and ridiculous.

I feel bored, can't get my thoughts on track, my thoughts. All these cars. I don't know what to think. So many accidents. In Toronto I laughed so hard, so hard that the whole world blurred. I don't know what to do.

Count my children. Five. Count my grandchildren. Three. Look at my

watch. Fifteen miles to Coos Bay, Oregon. Live twelve insane minutes of loving each wife, replaying the sweetness. Dismiss the Yazoo blonde.

When the bus stops I'm definitely hungry. Outside the coffee bar three boys kicking a can back and forth on the sidewalk block my way. None of the other passengers seem to notice. The harsh clanking sets my teeth on edge; I suck my lips into my mouth, bite down.

"You a detective?" one kid asks.

I take my hands from my pockets, look round as if I'm expecting somebody.

"Big man," another says. "What's your name?"

"Joiner, Alfred Joiner."

The boys stand shoulder to shoulder. Are they playing? Why should I tell them my name? The one who's not yet spoken lifts the can with his toe, tosses it across the road. "Wanna buy a phone book, Mr Joiner?" he says. I push past, lean against the door, release my lips from the pinch of teeth.

Shivering, I buy a packet of small donuts and reboard the Greyhound. Count the cars I've owned. Twenty-six. Cars. Chromed and finny, in all the colours of salt water tropicals, but bottom feeders every last one, noses in the dust. The beauty that awaits me will be different; together we'll soar across a world clear as a bubble.

I return to the stillness of the empty bus, to the near sound of foghorns, one bleating, one low and mournful, to the laughter of the kids playing outside the coffee bar, to dogs barking... I rub knuckles into dry sockets, squint against the sky's winter glare. With a slow smile, I remember I'm sixty-eight, that my son died last year. I believe I can smell the ebbing tide, the drying mud flats. Clarence. My voice sounds amazed. The donuts are dry; they crumble easily, releasing a powdery smell. No longer hungry, I recall how one midsummer day, I woke from a doze in the sunshine and forgot where I was. My yellow Spider skidded gracefully sideways into the intersection. Mouth full of sweet dough, I sigh through my nostrils, breath in, the steel binds me, but gently; my body expands to engulf the side street into which I stare: two dogs meet at the white line, the horns blow simultaneously, trees turn negative along the boulevard. The boys race shrieking between the bus and the coffee shop, through the passengers clutching their styrofoam cups. I will trap these screams. I push against small hedges and fences. They will last forever, recorded on the surface of my skin. Saliva dribbles from the corner of my mouth. I expect a stream to appear in the stark backyard over there.

In the yellow Spider a tremendous shattering accompanied the enfolding of my head and shoulders in a crystallized web, and silver cros-

shatching gave way to absolute clarity of vision: summer trees, sky, figures running on a crazy path.

On the good ship Lollipop / It's a short trip to the candy shop / Where the gum drops play. . . .

I want to be outside.

*

Across the road and down a bit from the bus depot I hit the tracks. The wind blows pretty hard here, and it smells tangy. Fresh kelp. I told the driver I'd be back in five and he shrugged, said he'd leave at one-thirty-seven no matter what. Can't believe just how good it feels to walk along, away from the bus. It's beautiful. Between houses I can see the Pacific, grey but kind of luminous, the sky's like that, too. I've an idea the world's purifying itself for when I drive my new car east from L.A. Some boats out, half-way to the horizon, all in a line, navy on manoeuvres, like a pearl necklace. Walking hurts, every step a dull pain, but it also feels great, shells on the ties crunching.

One night, soon after Imogen left me, I dreamt the beach house was falling as I slept. The collapse was slow. Bulging plaster, star-cracked glass. A small hole appeared in the wall above my bed, a trembling hand jutted out, pale fingers took hold of my toe, began to pull. My bones crunched as I was squeezed through into a room where a familiar child sat on an old fashioned straight-backed chair. You could say that's just a dream, but inside I can still feel the drag. The bands tighten, two of them. I know exactly when to take a pill.

There's a sandpiper chittering on the ground just ahead, one wing extended, flailing. She can't fool me: this is a healthy bird, faking, taunting me to follow. Allows me within six feet, then flies a couple of arm-spans north. Gold and milk coffee and whipped cream. Allows me close again, quick-stilts away, straight as the rails north. What I can't understand is all this trouble over nothing. The broken wing routine, to lead predators away from eggs on the ground, is for springtime, nesting season. It's winter, near enough, pretty cold anyhow; yesterday it snowed in some parts.

I'm freezing now. The sandpiper increases her flight distance each take-off. I'm on my father's lap, observing everything, everything. When he sets his cigarette on the crowded ashtray between the salt and pepper shakers, it rolls onto the table. The wood slowly darkens under the glow. He pours himself a bourbon, spills a little on the smouldering cigarette, picks up my hand again. Merry Christmas, Alf! Merry Christmas! I hear a woman's metallic voice speaking from another room:

What? My mother asking, What are you saying? Dad turns his head. Merry Christmas! he yells.

My father died in a supermarket.

Always at night I close my eyes, every morning open them.

My sandpiper propels herself north again, forgetting to drag her wing this time. No other birds in sight, though I can hear gulls crying somewhere over the water. Is she afraid of me for her own sake? That doesn't make sense, she could vanish quicker than I can blink. Perhaps she's not leading me, she's just going somewhere, the frequent landings mean something to her that I'll never guess.

Peet-weet-weet!

For a while after his death every time I went into a supermarket I'd wander the aisles of the vast store and be astounded by its emptiness. The wheels of my cart squeaking. Music settling like drugged bees over row after row of shelved produce. A door banging, somewhere way back of the meat section. I'd stop to look at a pyramid of baked beans, and would be caught by loneliness. What a wonderful flight! Aerial fish, soft, alive. Doesn't want to fly, maybe, but I'm pushing her on. Rage? Wants to attack and can't? Or can't quite bring herself to leave me completely? I give up. Icy sweat trickles down my spine. She could lift and turn any direction she chose, circle and circle.

Late one night in winter, I was bounced from a downtown bar. It was bitterly cold, cold as this, I'd no cash, couldn't remember where I'd parked the car. I had to walk across the river to a girlfriend's. I didn't want to, not really, I didn't want to see anyone. It's just I needed a place to stay. On the bridge a pretty woman in a skirt, hugging a shawl round her, was fumbling a cigarette, her hands shaking so badly that she couldn't get it lit. The shawl—a vibrant yellow with lurex threads—caught my eye as I approached. I walked quickly past, kept going. At the end of the bridge I turned. She threw the shawl over. I watched the fabric swoop, catching the lights, fold in on itself, and vanish. The woman was climbing the metal railing. A Volkswagen van gained the bridge from the city side, opposite to where I stood. Come on, come on, I whispered, blowing on my fingers.

I'm as cold now as I was then. Walking, stopping, walking, glancing back at the bus. I want the bird to fly, I mustn't stay here. My car!

A not-so-amazing thing happens: the clouds blow away to form distant hills in the east, and the sun comes out, and when I look the sandpiper has gone, and I can hear waves scooping stones down on the beach. Every breath I take is a little groan; the bus drives out to meet me.

"Mr Joiner," the driver admonishes.

When we're on the highway again, winding the scenery by, the orange woman sleeps grinning in the arms of the man beside her.

"Sweetheart, look," he says.

"Mmm," she says, nuzzling awake. "Oh, honey, what a beautiful sky, did you ever see such a blue? Did you?"

Mansel Robinson

C&W Haiku

Full moon grin on the 401
30's movie black and white
just me and the trucks.

Tom Wayman

Automotive

from the Vancouver phonebook

S & M Motors
Rear Ends Only
Swedish Service
Climax Motors
Silent Witness Auto Parts

Auto Spa
Auto-Medic Ltd.
Auto Mind Collision Repair

Sunlight Auto Repair
Fogg Motors Ltd.
Meteor Service
Galaxie Collision
Cosmos Autocare
Hubcap Heaven

Gennady Aygi

Four poems translated from the Russian by Elizabeth Ann Borda

People

For many nights
I have drawn the lines
of chairs and wardrobes,
the movements of
hands and shoulders
along their path,
continuous and

unknown.

I did not notice
how these were drawn from people.
But I confess: while I talked with someone
I would measure their fingers,

the lines of their eyebrows in my mind.

And they were everywhere,
so I would not forget
life in the shape of people,

and there were weeks and years
for me to mark them with farewells,

and there was the idea that they reflected
so that I knew
the circles of light on their piano
have parents

in hospitals and prisons.

Death

Without taking off her headscarf,
mama is dying,
and for this time only
I am crying at the pitiful sight

of her homespun clothes.

O, how still the snow is,
as though steered in
on the devil's wings
of our yesterdays,

O, how rich the snowdrifts are,
as though pyramids
of pagan offerings

lay beneath.

But the snowflakes
endlessly bear down upon
the ground

the hieroglyphs of God.

Day

and once again dreaming
in the glare of asphalt
here – an illuminated mound, there – dark pocks
as if great spirals of amphibial spawn
shimmered
in the tide of a colossal sea

by day this asphalt circus changes,
its bare base freshly rolled out
reminding one of a Shakespearian stage

and beyond each one – a lamp-post, pillar,
rivers, mountains, beacons

and the city turns once more
into a tide
the thawing snow and ice
are the only crests
upon this invisible sea,

and stormy
from tire tracks, children's sleighs, galoshes
this network of prints
accumulated in the year
become the growing currents
of the City-Sea

towards evening – city becomes city
people calling themselves people
and till dawn surpasses them
the blind alleyways of the Samoskvorechye
will radiate with a tranquil beam

a gleam only found in a child's room
where, when the time comes,
Andersen's tin soldiers will march.

I Give Myself Flowers

this sacred chasm is the destiny
he lives transfixed within

older, he dreamt suddenly
for the first time, like a joiner's rickety table,
that he understood his own forgotten daughter,
and then he arose and went toward the lamp
understanding himself and thinking clearly now
of the garden of his own salvation

he thought: how odd these walls are in the morning light
how perplexing to speak of seeing
everything is just a game shielded from the light
as one does one's eye

a thing lives only as long as it is protected
why not destroy what harbours me
even in fairytales how senseless it is to shelter the useless
I can't explain this urge to hide

and he keeps still, growing heavy on his feet
he has been an Atlas since childhood and feels the pain upon the shoulders
he knows something of the tangled growth
of thicket that besets him, outside and within
without camouflaging

and along the way in the hidden places
he gathers flowers for himself
beautiful as the memory of shots in the cellar
the cold of the moon has brought him up
by the school one night

and tenacious as the arctic that hangs like feather down in the air
he says to himself the word Aa on the sunken ground
from where the rivers flow as though tumbling downward
and where in a downy headscarf is
a woman – on – the banks
of the river – Aa.

Dalar Takes Revenge

Max Dauthendey

Translated from the German by Frieda Shütze

The wife of Dalar stood beside a street hydrant in one of the streets occupied by natives of Bombay. She turned on the spigot, held the head of her six-year-old son under it, and washed his head with her hands.

It was seven o'clock in the morning and the street was seething with Indians hurrying by like packs of native red deer. Herds of goats and flocks of turkeys were crossing the pavement alongside high, two-wheeled dray carts. Indians were sitting along the curb, being shaved, having their ears cleaned, and their bodies massaged. Itinerant hairdressers, their instruments tucked in their belts, and naked but for belt and turban, squatted beside their customers on the curbstone.

The wife of Dalar smoothed the boy's black hair so that his head shone like the patent leather slippers of Europeans. Then she loosened her own hair and held her head under the hydrant, letting the jet splash against it so that the water rebounded as from a glass flask.

In Dalar's open tailor shop two Indian workers who were sewing turban strips and veils on English sewing machines laughed about the gushing water, and Oliman, one of the helpers, called out a Brahmin saying to Dalar's wife: "Elida, take care that your head does not turn into water under the stream!"

Elida, the wife of Dalar, did not respond.

But when she had wrung out her hair and straightened up, her eyes signaled the boy to go to the man who had spoken. Oliman laid his hand for a moment on the glistening black hair of the boy, murmured a prayer over it, and let the boy go. Then he bent humbly over his sewing machine, let oil drip from a can onto the wheels, and went on sewing.

Every time the woman washed the boy's hair under the hydrant in front of her husband's shop she would send the child to Oliman and he would say a prayer over him. This had happened every morning since the boy was able to walk.

No one in the street wondered why Oliman blessed the boy every morning. Dalar, however, the owner of the sewing machines, had been

sitting for days in the silversmith's shop thinking things over. He would often let his water-pipe go out; then he would relight it and think some more. He could look over the tangle of zebu carts, the bazaar crowds and, surreptitiously, over the shoulders of his friend the silversmith, while observing his sewing machines, his wife at the hydrant, the boy, and Oliman.

This morning, after his wife had gone into the house with the boy, Dalar wiped the sweat from his forehead with the palm of his hand, got up, slipped into his scuffs and, his mind filled with black thoughts, stepped out into the crowded street. In the busy shop of the silversmith no one noticed his departure.

Dalar walked on until he came to a tent booth in a narrow street. In front of the tent flap sat Kali, the many-armed wooden goddess of revenge. Inside the tent stood all the vengeful Indian death gods that are borne through the streets in festival processions. Next to the goddess, at the entrance, stood a large tin box for offerings. Dalar threw in a silver coin and wished a vengeful thought. As he did so he cast a sinister glance at the black wooden figure of Kali sitting on a lemon-yellow tiger whose jaws dripped red oil paint for human blood. The many black arms of the goddess were swinging poisoned daggers, sabers, and spears. She held aloft a whole arsenal of gleaming weapons. The street people, as they passed, all greeted her, their eyes flaring up for a moment like rockets in the night. Dalar bowed three times and clapped his hands to attract the attention of the goddess.

Dalar knew now that his wife Elida had betrayed him with Oliman, for he saw it clearly in the child who was growing more like Oliman every day. Today he had finally made up his mind to take revenge on Elida.

Dalar had stepped inside the dusty tent temple to select a death for his wife. Rows of wooden images painted red, yellow, and green stood inside on long tables under the gray tent canvas. There one saw human beings tied to stakes studded with flaming arrows; British soldiers being trampled to death by an angry elephant god; the goddess Kali representing fire and pestilence mounted on animal figures; the blue monkey-god that makes humans insane with its grimaces and contortions. Men were being scourged by the goddess of revenge; a tiger was holding desperate beings in its claws and tearing out their entrails. The yellow tiger-god had green marble eyes and sacred, fierce tiger claws. Every conceivable form of torture and cruel death was represented here. And no amount of scarlet, purple, and red paint had been spared to depict spilled blood on the carved figures.

Dalar reflected. His eyes caressed the scarlet tortures as though he were gazing at the flowerbeds of paradise. But after he had walked twice

up and down the long rows and felt countless death agonies in his own body, he was unable, among all the brutal forms of death, to find one that was cruel enough for his wife. Not fire, the red death that consumes; not pestilence, the black death that rots; not blue death, insanity with its grimaces; nor yellow death, the tiger with entrails in its jaws. The death that Dalar sought for Elida was to be found among none of the three-hundred-and-sixty forms of death represented here.

As though offended by the goddess, Dalar was leaving the gray tent temple. Suddenly, under the exit, his turban was caught on a rusty nail. The cloth tore and Dalar's entire cash reserve which, like all the indigent Orientals he kept in his turban, rained down on silver coins over his shoulders, back, and chest, and fell before the feet of the many-armed goddess Kali.

Dalar listened astonished to the clinking coins as though he were hearing the pieces of silver speak.

Struck by a sudden thought, he bowed low and reverently three times before the idol, then left the tent and all his money behind at the feet of the goddess of revenge.

"The goddess Kali was spoken! The goddess Kali wishes you, Elida, to die the gray death of poverty!" And Dalar nodded gravely, approvingly. Then he disappeared in the street crowd.

Late that night, when the glittering tropical constellations hung over the city like spiked chains. Dalar crept to the door of his house and, with a bit of indigo, painted a blue circle on the door post, a sign that someone had died within. Then he walked on into the night.

His wife would discover the sign the next morning; she would believe he had collapsed on the threshold and, suspected of the plague, had been carried off by the British night patrol.

Under the chain of heavy stars Dalar strode through the night feeling as happy as though he had all the arms of the goddess Kali on his own body. Indeed, he was avenging himself with all the divine arms of vengeance. Tomorrow would be the first of the month when the money for the two sewing machines would have to be paid to the English manufacturers; tomorrow the house rent would be due. The miserable shop assistants would be of no help to Elida. Oliman would have to look for another job. Tomorrow Elida and the boy would have to go begging.

That night Dalar wandered as a pilgrim to Mt. Abu, to become a Jain. The Jains live naked on the mountain and believe that women have no souls.

Nabaneetā Dev Sen
Four poems translated from the Bengali by Pāramitā Banerjee and Carolyne Wright

First Confidence

Rain makes the curtains fly,
the curtains fly, a monsoon morning.
All doors open to the path leading back,
dry leaves dampening,
footprints covered with moss.

I turn my face to the rain,
cover my body with wet hair.
Now, my eyes turned upwards,
I utter my first confidence
in the unembarrassed weightless light:
—I've forgotten everything.

Mosquito Net

Are you in Amsterdam now, or Mexico? Are you
now in the Mediterranean sky, or does
the shadow of your wings
dance lightly on the Atlantic's waves?—
Or perhaps
you're lying down softly in Manhattan, on some
four-poster bed on the twenty-fifth floor?
Whatever the case, you're not now
in Calcutta. Not even in Shāntiniketan.
The fact is, I'm inside the mosquito net with
a whole cloud of blood-sucking mosquitos
going Buzz Buzz Bzzz Bzzz.

Sparrow Again

Don't ask me to be a nymph anymore.
I can't stand being a nymph, not even
for an hour.
Moonlight scares me, and solitude
is a tremendous load...
For God's sake!
There are no more moonbeams left in my heart,
my mind is all tied up in sunlight...
Let me
be a
sparrow.

Dismissal

What can't I do for you? My dear,
whatever is mine is all set neatly out for you.
Just to see you happy, what can't
I do, my dear!
You said you couldn't stand the smell
of *bakul* flowers,
so I chopped down my great-grandfather's
bakul tree
in the yard. Just to see
you happy.
Thinking that jewels might please you,
just look how I've uprooted
my child's heart from my bosom, for
your jewellery box. (Where would I get
any jewel more valuable than this!)
Just to see
you happy.

But, how weird, my dear, is the play
of the human heart!
In spite of all this, you've dismissed me.

The Sun

Marvyne Jenoff

Icarus liked his father's workshop well enough, with its models of castles, ports, labyrinths. He could make a thing or two himself. But no way was he going to follow in the old man's footsteps. He followed the sun and came upon an old woman with a similar workshop, where he felt at home.

She wasn't that old a woman, he saw when he looked again. She was an inventor of ornaments, toys and other fancies. He liked to stay in the yard or near the doorway of the workshop and watch her as she worked. With old friends visiting often she had never really paid attention to youth. She had a candy ready in her hand—that's what she gave to children when it was time for them to go home—when she noticed that Icarus was not so young.

Icarus saw the candy and ran away to hide his face. Then, when he was ready, he brought flowers and planted them in the yard. He brought a goat and milked it for her. He brought her honey in the comb. All the while she was forging something on her anvil—a trapeze, perhaps, a firefly cage, or part of a new, fanciful machine she called an airplane that worked with an elastic band. She knew he was watching her so she wielded her hammer more extravagantly, showing her strength, showing the many different sounds she could make. She forged exultantly into the night, and the glow, like a sun contained, drew him closer. And the closer he came the more she felt like feathers. She stopped her work. She touched his skin. And at the table where she worked with soft things—mushrooms, bubbles—out of tiny feathers and wax from the honeycomb she made him a little pair of ornamental wings.

Talking, they shared their passion for the sun and embraced in a solemn pact to honour it. They would make wings for each other, real ones they could fly with. Together they would build a high tower and jump from the top; buoyant, building momentum, they would soar in the sun and bow before it hand in hand.

Sun in their hearts, they hid the wings as they worked on them. At midday they would walk, showing each other off in the full light. They wore brighter and brighter colours. They devised daring physical feats

they might use for flying and practiced openly. Icarus was proud, for he had aimed high—a woman old enough to know everything but not too old. And she enjoyed her good fortune—a high-spirited youth intelligent enough to appreciate her. Their separate friends, skeptical at first, in time agreed with them.

Icarus finished her wings. He presented them wrapped in paper he had decorated himself. The wings, too, had a naive look to them. She felt shy—would their sweetness suit her? When she tried them on they pressed against her neck. A rough part irritated the skin on her ribs. And she feared they were unsafe. She suggested how he might fix them. She could show him how to align them better, how to smooth them. Tactful as she thought she was, Icarus was hurt to tears, so she hugged him and said no more. After that it took her a very long time to finish his wings. They needed only the strongest and largest feathers for serious flight. But she sat sullen at her table, not working, and he skirted around the workshop, not daring to disturb her, not daring to hint.

And so the tower became their focus. They drew plans, always happy to compromise, laughing at their preposterous suggestions. They brought home samples of what they might use to build it—bricks in rainbow colours, mortar made of sugar, petals, cobwebs. They found books and studied comparative towers. They talked of travelling to observe towers under different conditions of light and in different seasons. They talked about every possible and impossible detail of their tower. And they dreamed about talking about the tower.

They often went out to look for a building site but they never got very far. They would put on their wings, hers ill-fitting, his unfinished, and fly around a little, sometimes as high as a cottage roof, but, heavy with what remained unsaid, they flew mostly nearer the ground. Having to concentrate on what they were doing, they couldn't talk much when they were flying. And in their silence, in the failure of their wings, the lovers were at last able to feel despair. Their friends gathered at the shores of separate seas.

The tower was never begun. For, one day as they were flying they shouted at the same time, Why don't you finish/fix my wings? They didn't hear each other. Their words collided in mid-air, and the force of their breath propelled them in opposite directions. The wind easily bore them over the heads of their friends and released them into separate seas.

This is not a grand tragedy, at least not at this point. Since the lovers never managed to get very far up, they did not fall with much force, nor did they plunge dangerously deep. Their friends quite easily pulled them out and dried them off.

The woman retreated to her workshop, where she nursed her embarrassment for a time. Then she resumed her work. When she remembered him with joy she made little towers in glass and filigree to catch the sunlight. She called them Babel, Eiffel, CN. When she remembered him in anger she made fireworks, each more sun-like. She called them Atomic, Hydrogen, Nuclear. And so, joyful, angry, sometimes sad, she lived out her days.

Icarus had contempt for what she was doing. Did she think she could really honour the sun so easily? Icarus had more resolve than that. Fired with his plan he returned to his father's workshop, prepared to learn this time from someone he could trust. Real wings, a real tower—these were his life. This time he would go alone, look the sun straight in the eye and shake hands.

His father, alarmed, put together wings for himself and joined him. But Icarus got away. When they jumped from the tower Icarus soared straight up. The heat of the sun softened the wax in his wings. The wind dislodged the feathers. Icarus wondered, Why did the sun do that? Is it shocked by my audacity? Jealous that I've come so high? Is it careless in its loneliness? Next time I'll use platinum, acrylic, teflon, he said to himself as he fell to his death in the sea.

The woman's death was not remarkable. Her name is not remembered, though many of her fancies survive in some form. The death of Icarus is documented, interpreted, preserved in art. Sweet youth naked in the air, puzzled by feathers, he is known, and loved, for his folly.

G. Ébinyō Ogbowei
Two poems

Goshawks are Chanting

Here where the shining bridge arches
We dance a new dance, a rig dance.
Here where the dark shining oil bubbles;
Where the egrets gather for feast;
At how the electric clock chimes
We hug joy, dance upon a coral stool.

Goshawks are chanting,
Soaring. Swooping down
Snake-eagles grasp the snakes of our nightmares

Here where the spectres meet,
Where the children cannot throw stones
When the birds return to roost
And the sun, aflame, cuts into the womb of the sea,
We hug *Oru Agbani* – retrieve our bowls
Adrift in the outgoing tide.

Goshawks are chanting,
Soaring. Swooping down
Snake-eagles grasp the snakes of our nightmares

Here where the devilfish talks with the alcoholic;
Where the ancestors return with bat-hawk masks,
Silent out of the gloom, grabbing our winged frustation;
At the hour the guns speak
To the monkey-eagle, quarter watch, tireless on wings,
We do not rub our buttocks on the bridge.

Goshawks are chanting,
Soaring. Swooping down
Snake-eagles grasp the snakes of our nightmares

Woodpeckers and Saviours

These khaki green saviours
these woodpeckers
chiselling hollowing trees for remedy
fly up and down tree corridors
sentries neck through trunk windows
betray hollowed quarterings

Woodpecker woodpecker
hollowing forest trees
see the oxpecker
friend of the buffalo

These khaki green saviours
these woodpeckers
excavating new trees
abandoning old holes
to jackdaws and starlings
add to our old debts harlots' sweating coins

Woodpecker woodpecker
searching the bark of trees
watch the oxpecker
searching cows for ticks

These khaki green saviours
these orioles in decree songs
preying on caterpillars of government
these figbirds ravaging the farmland
are woodpeckers in trees
are woodpeckers in flight

Woodpecker woodpecker
pock-marking cable poles
hear the oxpecker's call
noisy alarming the herd

The Sword and Shield

Reinhard Filter

Prelude: Mr. Finletter Gets Paid

Mr. Finletter accepts his pay Thursday mornings at precisely 9:32. He accepts it with panache. Not for him, the greedy lunge, neither quiet hesitation, that hallmark of undeserving. He has earned this consolation through hard effort; through diligence and concentration. It has taken a week, and he devours it.

It is more than reward, more than signals of appreciation; more than an edifice. This moment and the way it is filled is Order, a putting together, a verification that all is as it should be; that one step follows another, that there is sequence and purpose. It is predictable as evening, as reassuring as snow. This is Structure.

Mr. Finletter lives Structure. He relishes harmony, his arrangements, his etched crevices, the footfalls in his cliff, the toe-holds where understanding triumphs over myth.

Even so, Thursdays are long and heavy, conspiring, focusing, beaming as through a magnifying glass, unease and heat (despite the season). Thursday mornings protrude, like fungus through a filigree, turning him inside out, tossing him, like a splinter, onto a shatter pile.

During strong daylight, he struggles against oppressive fragrances, from a history undiscardable. Every other day he cajoles, forcing faith that the day, like the one before (like the onebefore! !like theonebefore! !liketheonebefore!), is unconspiring, and another during which he works, is paid, gets richer.

He tries especially hard on Thursdays, telling himself, at least in the mornings, that all is as it should be.

A semi-truth which sometimes helps.

First Movement: Job

Others have asked about his job. He is cautious, never gambling more

than he could lose, answering questions obliquely. Smiles are free, he thinks—

he spends days polishing rows of crystal figurines
on a conveyor moving through filthy air, smudging
and blurring faster than they can be cleaned.

he stirs floors, forcing lint and dust.

the endless fragile stream, sharp and clean, for a
moment recognizable, slides disappearing into gloom.

each time a hard edge appears, glistens briefly,
dulls, and moves.

act creating need.

Of course, when they prod, he demures, adding coyly that he does not polish glass. But, he says, mindful of their need to see things usefully, it is a helpful metaphor.

After they leave, he confronts the dragon's teeth their friendly questions sew; the explanations which should come easily, lodge in his throat. Overlays of order and resolve contrive, take revenge, offer Form. (often a boy, fragile and thin, standing vulnerable, empty as a pail. a boy with persistent eyes.)

Second Movement: Tangential Memories

he is four. it is late in the evening, in the fall.
beneath his scuffed leather tie-up shoes, the cold steel
of the railway station platform trembles.
there are noises: a man in a greatcoat, hunched and coughing,
a blind man, huddled in a corner, sitting atop a stack
of newspapers, proclaiming "Thursday's Star! The only News.
The best News. Everything for a dime!"
people move, waiting.

sometimes he looks and sees nothing.

he stands in summer shorts.
shaking a little.

(earlier, his mother hung a placard round his
neck, saying it would help.
she did not say HOW and pushed him
through the gate, crumpled ticked in hand.)

he has never been on a train.

in the coach, he occupies a small space between two men.
one is huge, in a rough black coat, with a hat pulled
down—

the click of steel wheels
in the room.
the click of steel wheels
on the seat.
the click
(somewhere his mother sleeps)
of steel wheels.

—the other watches through narrow eyes.

(he saw her when she walked away. the brisk walk
of anger. the walk for turning corners,
determined. efficient.)

On the worst days, it is a woman, young and beautiful, brandishing teeth as white as snowbanks, with intentions even colder. It is Her. A face as white and smooth as alabaster handles.

Before noon, he retreats, locking his cubicle door, pulling the blind, softening noises (the dripping faucet, the tick tick tick thump of the electric clock) over which he retains small control. If he is not pushed, he will wait in the darkness and concentrate.

Third Movement: Thursday's Choices

It is not always so bad. There are interludes, even on this day, when the Structure holds, allowing Mr. Finletter to acknowledge obligations. Much of his pay will go into the savings account established when he joined the Company. It has grown full and ripe with black and blue potential. Imminent.

Certainly, he feels the money's pressures, but he has resisted, bidding logic and caution, ripening prospects like fruit. Instead of action he

(a) acknowledges it with bi-weekly queries at his bank,
(b) assesses present value and purchasing power,
(c) studies the impact disbursement might have on
    (i) life style,
    (ii) self and public perception
    (iii) taxes.

Not for him the Rash Decision. Action will not breed.

Afternoon will be gathering in heavy skirts around tall buildings, hanging from chrome and granite hips, teasing with shadows and reflections before sunlight finally acquiesces, and he can leave.

He pulls lapels to ears, huddling, pushing against the tight thighs of a lean wind.

Fourth Movement: Tangential Memories #2

These are not easy things.

Often, as he walks towards the Sword and Shield, his mind betrays him, coalescing fragments into a burden. A few unkempt moments, scattered like bird-seed upon the barren land—

Occasionally, the boy sees truth flickering on the screen of an old Imperial. After supper dishes are neatly stacked, after she-of-the-Children's-Aid, takes to knitting, after the set is tuned to Buffalo, OCCASIONALLY, there are glimpses of. . . .

Ed Sullivan.

Every time, he is shaken that simplicity could be so powerful—!dinner plates!—spinning on the tips of bamboo sticks; the endless row. Alive and precarious.

(Even then, he understood. When she ejected him like seed to wind, when he was alone and uncomforted, he travelled, alive and precarious, spinning)

They oscillate, threatening to fall. Forcing a rush. Forcing jerk and spin. Demanding momentum.

Fifth Movement: The Sword and Shield

When he stops his polishings, when he quits, bundles against the elements and presses to the Sword and Shield, it is compulsive; seeking

endings; if not these, intermissions, if not these, truces, if not these, reasons.

This is the time for recognitions: Boy as burden; as product offspring; as mistake; impediment.

For six days he is devoted to his task. He has brought energy to bear; all the clocks are running. All the stemware, clean and gleaming, plates spinning. Everything proceeds.

And here is why he goes:

these are the hands,
the hands that hold. . . .
she moves slowly, towering, sweeping
firm, resolute hands, showering
sparkles, a naked tinkerbell, cascading
effervescence, touching with hands,
applying pressures to a shoulder or a
thigh; sometimes swelling closer,
scooping air, with hands allowing
scent.

and with those eyes. . . .
there is no looking, even as she
unveils; no looking at breasts, or skin
arched with forces subtle as sighs; no
looking even as she stoops, draping
arms, hanging like a placard, yielding
nothing. and with those eyes, she
leaves.

upon the tongue. . . .
in the dark, wedged against the heavy
thump of guitar and boot, in the smell
and weight of beer, the flurry of coats
and jackets, there are only hands and
eyes; upon the tongue, they hang like
honey.

Need

He pushes through a dark washroom door, props against the ceramic wall, bridging wall and floor like a ladder.

He pisses; memories integrating with action.

in his pocket, bread from
before, bitter-sweet, stale and chocolatey.

he does not remember if he slept—he has to go pee!

and then it stops.
the clicking in the room, on the seat.
they fetch boxes from racks;
close coat buttons.

—somebody opens a door and he is on the
platform! for a moment he hopes he knows someone. . . .
but then, the warm trickle,
the growing pool around his shoe
destroying even that.

When he is done, Mr. Finletter steps back, as he does every Thursday, pulls the helter skelter scarf around his neck, adjusts his felt hat, fetches gloves (swaying slightly), and when he is certain that everything is as it should be, he makes for the door.

There is nothing, he mutters, nothing recognizable. In the decades since, the hands that hold; the eyes; everything is foreign. Again and Still.

He will leave, battle sleep and memory, stumble into the wintry night. He will visualize desolation; welcome the emptiness of duties and tasks. Through repetitions and chanting, he will fill his resevoirs.

Act creating need.

Harold Farmer

Two poems

Burning Ghats, Lucknow

I still haven't hit the centre –
the dead centre where I'm
no longer in control and a
procession of ghosts marches past
my windows intoning the savage
names, past the salt bush and the
laundry spread out over stones,
down to the bank of the river
where the bodies await burning.
I can hear them, though,
in the distance chanting as if
they were the mourners and not
the produce of the funeral.
They are carrying huge baskets down
to the river, and won't stop
for any traffic. They know
what it means to be on time.
The murky waters of the river
welcome them, the hot sun dropping
messages of despair on the
shrouded faces, on the
empty bodies and the hands
that are not hands but manacles
freed of their prisoners.

Flames burn in pockets in the dust.
Scorpions, lizards and geckoes
watch without a rumour
the soft swishing of sandals
through the heat waves over
the hollow, disappointed ground.

They keep on coming, the words which are
not words, the voices which are speechless,
like rifle shots on a May night,
unexplained, except I know
somewhere eye and finger have met
their immaterial target.

Dry Riverbed

An old pump palpitates dangerously
in acres of dry sand.
Near it some water still clings
to the sides of a hole.
We move away from the machinery,
having seen the flayed carcass,
inverse, suspended from poles,
nearby on the river bank.

Moving on, through the hot sand
running under the motor bridge,
we clap our hands – gunfire
crackles from pillar to pillar.
Far off, the ghost of an impala
kicks up driftwood
and disappears into the trees.

Whipping Boy

Piero Chiara

Translated from the Italian by Margaret Roberts and Marina Gros

The Hotel Rhinoceros, whose only door opened onto a steep, narrow street, halfway down a hill, came to life only once a week, on market days, when tradesmen and farmers from the villages scattered about the Natisone Valley and along the river Tagliamento converged on the town of Cividale.

On those days cooking pots steamed, from early morning, over the fireplaces, built in the style of Friuli in the middle of the room and surmounted by a wrought-iron crown and a funnel-shaped hood. On the floor of the hearth, standing eighteen inches above the ground, firewood and charcoal burned beneath pots of all sizes while the spit revolved on one side of the fireplace. Its motions were regulated by a bored boy, who turned his head constantly to view arriving guests, disregarding the admonitory slaps administered by the innkeeper's daughters as they passed. His name was Tommasino and apparently he was the son of a poor widow who lived behind the hotel.

The slaps which Tommasino came to accept without batting an eyelid soon attracted additional slaps from various patrons attracted by his soft round face, which felt pleasant to the touch, producing a smart report like a clap of applause. One would dispatch him, with an encouraging smack, to fetch a knife or fork or napkin, another would ask him to buy a packet of tobacco or light his pipe and also reward him with a smack. The aristocratic landowner Peregalli seemed to patronize the Rhinoceros for the sole purpose of whacking Tommasino. Even Canon Floreani, who lived on the same street and dropped in for a drink of wine on his way back from Mass, gave him a slap to remind him not to miss Catechism. Even transient visitors would, at the mere sight of Tommasino's chubby moon face, be tempted to give him a slap, just for fun.

The boy, whom I too, treated to an occasional cuff, had come to realize the inevitability of the greeting and didn't complain, and even smiled at some of the more resounding blows, as if pleased to have contributed to the success of the slap.

The people who slapped Tommasino were all used to making their

way in the world, in so far as they had made any headway at all, at the cost of deep humiliations or by paying a heavy toll. Farmers, craftsmen, dealers, tradesmen, and possibly even the Canon, had all had a difficult start in life. The apprenticeship was so long that in those days nobody attained any degree of independence before the age of thirty. And then only after suffering under harsh fathers, hard taskmasters or cruel teachers, prodigal not only with slaps but with canings and kicks which had left lasting scars on some and unforgettable memories in all of them. Having reached the point of earning their own living, these good people thought it only right and proper to put a beginner like Tommasino through some painful trial or initiation, which they thought necessary to harden him to life's difficulties.

But one day there appeared at the inn a man who disagreed with these principles. This was the lawyer Costamagna, one of the leading professionals in town who, dining with a client at the Rhinoceros, chanced to witness a succession of slaps inflicted on Tommasino, culminating in a powerful clout from the owner's daughter.

Lawyer Costamagna was known not as a philanthropist or crusader for poor orphans, but as a userer, enriched by loans and mortgages. Yet that day, at the sound of the slap given to Tommasino, he reddened as if he himself had been the victim. Jumping to his feet he seized the girl by the arm and prepared to deal her a backhander of a very different calibre, but stopped short. He then turned to the patrons, who had stopped eating and, as if he were in the middle of a law court instead of a restaurant, he dropped the girl's arm and delivered an indignant, angry harangue. "It's a disgrace," he said, "to take advantage of a weaker person. If the boy has no one to defend him, I'll protect him myself. And if anyone dares touch him again, he'll have to reckon with me."

The finale was received with a general laugh of derision. Even Canon Floreani who, passing by in the street and hearing the booming voice, had put his head round the door, was in time to join in.

The lawyer, deeply offended, threw down his napkin and left, without looking at the boy or even remembering to say goodbye to his client. "Just a pretext for not paying the bill," said the Canon.

But that was not true, for from that day on Costamagna came to the Rhinoceros a couple of times a week, sometimes at midday and sometimes in the evening, ordering lunch or dinner solely to observe the behavior of the owners and regular customers of the hostelry.

No one touched Tommasino now, but nor did anyone bother with him or call on his services. The boy, who had been relieved of his duties as turnspit, wandered about the inn, taking frequent refuge in the courtyard, where he would slip through a side door and make for home.

Deprived of his slaps he felt rejected and unwanted by all, scorned and accused, as if he had been the one to seek the lawyer's protection.

One market day while Costamagna, seated at a back table, was keeping an eye on the proceedings, Tommasino, entering softly from the courtyard, came and stood behind him. Slowly raising his arms, he mimicked with his little fingers two pairs of horns sprouting from the lawyer's head. One by one the diners saw him and paused to watch—without laughing, for fear that the lawyer would notice the trick.

Costamagna did not notice, and continued to glare at all the people who seemed to be observing him with incredible interest. But he must finally have sensed something or felt the tension in the air, because he suddenly turned and caught Tommasino with his arms outstretched, still as a statue. At the sight of him he stood up, took a step back, and dealt him two mighty slaps which the boy, dropping his arms to his sides, received with indifference. In the ensuing silence the lawyer made for the door and left the Rhinoceros forever.

Tommasino, applauded and fêted by patrons and employers, found that he had completed the first stage of his career with those two slaps, for he was promoted to dishwasher and assigned to the kitchen, where no one dreamed of slapping him and where only the cook gave him an occasional kick to remind him that the road to success, in any calling, is strewn with trials and tribulations.

Sarah Kirsch

Translated from the German by Charles Fishman and Marina Roscher

Fish and Chips

Already the gracious star when it dawns
Heavenly agitation in scarlet and
Gold is driving heat into the loins
One more moon and I'll be
On my knees before Gaea in
Green and violets and chives.

Dieter Weslowski

Disquietude

Linden blossoms water-
drop into the windless
heat of this eve
before my wedding:
a man returns from the desert,
wingless, a man lost at sea,
returns, bearing the green
trinkets of the shipwrecked.

Fred Johnston

Lines to an Old Friend

This is what we said others would do –
in a dark room drain glasses to things
unachieved, stare at each other
with an intimate strangeness
then take to the promenade surrounded
by other people's children

comfortable in our decisions, we
were a new breed
confident and callous, too cute
by far for the tricks of love
and the decayed sentiment –
the world would teach us nothing

now, love, lie and listen to the
turning universe, how raw and hollow
the sound
it drowns the will and goes on as
stubbornly as self-deceit –
my hand in yours, out of fear this time,
not love

grasp the North Star between forefinger
and thumb
dream us in a new place –
who, in honesty, would do what we have
done
or run a similar race?

Northernness

Catherine Bush

There are three daughters in my family and we all have boyfriends named Steven. It's not an impossible situation because when we're all together we call them by different variations of the name. Steven is my youngest sister Anya's boyfriend; Steve is my middle sister Kay's; and Stevie is mine. Although this weekend is the first time we have really tried this out, with all of us in one place, my parents' house in Toronto, at the same time. Because it is the end of the summer, and because if you counted all the miles it took for us to get here it would be in the thousands, we are having a barbecue.

My father would not let anyone else light the barbecue, although Steve insisted on carrying the charcoal from the back of the garage where my father stores it. He and Kay drove in from Montreal this morning. They are both biologists. Steve is the huskiest of the Stevens, light on his feet and muscular, and as he moves, tilting the bag of briquets over the grill, his flat black hair gleams. He is from Hong Kong. Many of his aunts and uncles still live there, although his parents emigrated when he was twelve. Sometimes he comes up to Kay, runs a hand through her bangs and says something to her in Chinese which makes her smile. Then she runs her knuckles over his chest, although she will not do this if my father is around.

My father sets his lighter to the coals. As the flames leap up, my mother lights three blue mosquito coils from them, which she sets in a row along the picnic table. They send up straight, steady lines of smoke like signal flares on hills in movies. She only likes barbecues at the end of the summer, as if they should by definition be nostalgic, and so we only have them when it is almost too late. By then they cannot be taken for granted, and in a way ours are more like campfires. The evenings grow cooler, not quite as long. This is the time of year when my mother grows most restless and when she wants her children to come home.

I can hear my father's voice from the kitchen, coming out in low rolls. I imagine the sound of it rolling sonorously across a lake at dusk. My father always makes the hamburgers and he uses his own special recipe, which includes eggs and wheatgerm and ketchup and green onions. Then

there's the lighter sound of Steven's voice, making my father laugh. Besides his bright green eyes, this is the most startling thing about Steven: he is not afraid of my father. Anya is in the kitchen with the two of them, making a dish with a kind of rice that she and Steven brought back from India, something she wants to put on the barbecue as well. They have been staying with my parents for the month they've been back in Canada, after travelling around India for two years. I only met Steven two days ago, and I saw Anya for the first time since she left. Anya looks the same, only a little thinner. Of course it is the superficial changes I notice first. They put so much pepper on their food that I choke when I taste it. Wasting food seems to terrify her. She wears Indian clothes sometimes, patterned cotton pants and tunics from Rajasthan, sometimes even on the subway, where people stare at her, because she is also tall and beautiful in a quiet, unusual way.

My father is tall, six five, and he looks like someone who used to play basketball, which he did after his family came over from Norway, and he was good at it. I told Stevie these things before we arrived, since this is the first time he has been here or met my parents. The three of us have never brought home three men at the same time before. We all know this, and it underlies every move we make, even if no one says anything about it.

In a way, the name Stevie suits him. He is small and boyish and convinced, half out of nervousness, that he has to charm everyone here, which he does by telling stories. "In the 1920s," he tells my mother, "there was this huge bout of sleeping sickness that killed thousands of people. There were a few people who didn't die but just kept sleeping and finally woke up thirty years later. And one of the women who woke up refused to accept that it was now the 1950s and she was sixty years old. Other people who woke up would have these attacks where they stood frozen in the same place for hours on end."

"It sounds a little like Sleeping Beauty," my mother says, "though I know it's not." I am not absolutely certain she believes him.

"It is kind of like Sleeping Beauty," I say, because I want her to.

We are sitting opposite my mother at the picnic table as the sun sets, chopping vegetables for a salad: tomatoes, carrots, mushrooms, avocados. And I keep thinking of all the things I am not going to tell my parents about Stevie; that the whole time he was in Paris training to be a chef, he was a junkie, that he was married at 21 to an artist named Sylvie who was ten years older than him and who was also a junkie. He did not shoot up so there are no track marks on his arms. He has told me some of these stories, about what he would do to get money, asking Sylvie's friends, stealing from Sylvie, stealing from the chefs he worked with.

That was seven years ago and he has been clean for four. It is not something my parents will guess about him. He works in a restaurant called Caribe in New York City and that is where I met him.

"When Anya and Steven first got back," my mothers says quietly, "the first thing Anya did was walk through the house, into every single room, while Steven sat down and ate two huge bowls of Cornflakes. He made us stop on the way home from the airport to buy some. He said it was what he had been dying to do as soon as he got back."

"What about Anya?" I ask.

"She said it wasn't things like that she craved," my mother says, "but more the smells of things." She looks quickly up toward the house, at the sun turning the windows red and at all the reflected trees. She is wearing a pair of overalls that she used to wear when she was thirteen and which she found again at the beginning of the summer when she was cleaning out her mother's house down near Niagara. Her family is old United Empire Loyalist stock that came north in the 18th century, fleeing the Americans.

The leaves that usually rush like a forest overhead fall still and we can hear sounds from the kitchen very clearly, the way at dusk you can sometimes here things for miles in the country. "There," my father says distinctly, "all done."

My mother looks across at the coals glowing in the barbecue. "They look ready too," she says. Then there is a crash. "Shit," my mother says.

"It's me," Kay yells.

"It's Kay," my father echoes. "Of course." Objects often fly away from Kay.

"I didn't break anything," Kay calls again. "I'm using plastic cups."

My father cooks the hamburgers, too, as he always does when we have barbecues, while the rest of us sit around the picnic table, wearing jackets, because the evening is already cool. There are so many of us. Mosquitos hum at a distance. High up, a jet scores a line in the pink sky, a white line like a little notch of longing. Everything seems far away.

My father's blond hair is silver now. He has not gained much weight as he has grown older. He still has a slight accent which gets stronger when he gets angry, although right now he is methodical, anxious to please, friendly but a little uneasy around the Stevens. He isn't used to all these men. He may even be a little frightened of them, not individually, but simply because there are three of them. When we were growing up, of course, there was only him. He flips the hamburgers deftly, like pancakes—a showman; and watches us.

"I wish we were on a lake," my mother says. "Up north. With loons."

"Listen," Steven says. He shakes back his sandy hair, presses his hands together and puts them to his lips. He imitates loon calls, which fly up through the air into the trees. The rest of us listen to that sad and lonely sound.

"Where's Anya?" Kay says quietly. "Is she still making those rice things?"

"I'll go see," I say. I touch Stevie's knee as I get up, because he has cut radishes and tomatoes to look like roses for the salad and they are beautiful.

"Is that Steven doing loon calls?" Anya asks, and I nod. She is standing at the counter in Rajasthani tunic and pants, fine, bright blue cotton shot through with silver threads that shimmer as the light catches them. Her shoulders are tightened, though, and she will barely look at me.

"Are they working?" I ask, and I'm worried that they're not, because I can tell she's upset.

"I don't know," she says. "I don't know if they're sticking together the way they're supposed to." She has her hands in a bowl of rice and coconut, only the rice is not white but inky purple. Her hands are covered with it and she rubs them distractedly back and forth. Beside her on a tray are three balls shaped out of the rice. Last night for dessert she made gulab jamen.

"You should come outside," I say as I look at her shoulders. I want to smooth them out. "We'll try them. And if they don't work, we can cook them another way." She is always so serious. "Come on," I say softly.

"I wanted to make something special," she says.

Outside, the sky is a deep, saturated blue, just before twilight. Cicadas are singing. At our house we always have barbecues late, when the light is already fading. I stand with Anya beside the barbecue, hoping that the rice balls will hold together for however long it takes to cook them, and I wonder where we are all going to sleep.

My father has finished two hamburgers, fast, and lit a cigarette. Steven stands up, walks over to Anya and puts his arms around her, as if it were the most straightforward gesture in the world. Then he pulls her tight against him. Steve is under the pear tree in the dark, searching for sticks to cook marshmallows. "You were a chef," my father says to Stevie, and Stevie nods.

There is no Stevie. That is what I have been meaning to say. I made him up just to see what would happen. All the rest of us are in the back yard having a barbecue as night is falling. It is the middle of September and

we have come home to Toronto for the weekend. There are two Stevens and still they make my father watchful. The coals make a sound like a small cough and settle again.

"Will someone turn on the porch lights?" my mother asks. "Kay?" Kay runs inside, flicks the lights on, and then I can hear her putting the kettle on the stove for coffee.

Steve appears out of the darkness, in the sudden light, carrying sticks. Steven is clearing plates, asking my mother a question about the time when she was young and almost drowned.

I have never brought any of my boyfriends back here, not since I left home. I have never wanted to bring anyone home. Sometimes I have even broken up with men over it, because I have always wanted to keep things separate and I have thought I was happiest that way. There was a man like Stevie, I did not make that up, but I did not bring him home.

When Kay and I were younger, the boys we knew didn't want to come home with us. When we were going out with them, we did just that, we went anywhere but here, we went to their houses. I always wanted to go to their houses. They have told me since then, when I come home and we get together for old times' sake, that they were terrified of my father. He was so tall, they'd say, and so silent. He had three daughters. When he spoke, he had an accent. When he answered the phone he said "Krahjek," his name; it came out in a burst and stopped their voices in their throats as if they had been pulled up by a man with a dog at the edge of his land. They heard something territorial, although back then they wouldn't have put it that way. Your father hates me, they would say.

I suppose in a way he was terrified of us. He could not stop what we were growing into. He would not touch us at all by then, even to say goodnight, and that felt like proof of our contamination. If we and the boys we were with did come home, he watched us from the other side of the room with the TV on and did not say anything. I was terrified of the boys, terrified to touch them.

Then there was the period when Anya locked herself in her room every day after school and refused to eat meals with us or talk to any of us. It went on for months. We would go on an usual eating dinner downstairs and listening, because it was impossible not to hear, every time she pushed back her chair or walked across her room. When she came downstairs, my parents tried to talk to her as if nothing were the matter. I left home before it ended. I went out looking for boys who talked, words pouring out of their mouths like water through sieves, some kind—any kind—of extreme. I looked for them anywhere. A year later, Kay went to Montreal to go to university, moved in after a month

with a boy named Tom, and for a year my father wouldn't speak to her. I think of it sometimes as being in his blood—not talking— because he is Norwegian, something northern, and then I am frightened that I also carry it inside me and there is no way to get it out, no matter what I do.

The cicadas are still singing in the dark. "In Ladak, when we lived on the houseboat," Anya says from across the picnic table, "we would get up in the morning and go outside and the water would be all misty and across it were the Himalayas. I'd get up every morning and I couldn't believe they were still there, the tallest mountains in the world. It was so calm."

"I'd love to live on a boat," Kay says.

"It wasn't like a boat at all inside," Anya says intently. "There were heavy carpets all over the walls and on the floor, with little pieces of mirror sewn into them. I think Ladak is maybe the most beautiful place I've ever been." Of the three of us, she is the one who looks most like him, the fairest, the one with the longest legs. She still sounds a little anxious. With her thin arms stretched out in front of her, silver bangles clinking from them, she shapes the great peaks of the Himalayas for us with her hands.

Under the porch light, Steve quietly whittles the ends of sticks into sharp points with a pen knife. He makes a soft, chuffing sound. Little bits of white wood flake into a pile at his feet, and I can see that he has carefully chosen enough sticks for all of us and that he wants them to be perfect. The coals in the barbecue glow like small red hearts. Even though Steve has been here a few times, he is still very shy. Kay picks up one of the sticks and grazes his leg with it gently, back and forth. My father is in the kitchen making coffee, dark black and freshly ground, the way he always makes it and wishes we would drink it. He thinks milk is an aberration.

"I'm thinking of moving again," I say to him from the other side of the kitchen, where I am loading the dishwasher.

"Where to?" he asks.

"An old schoolhouse in the country," I say. "I can rent it for the winter." Kay always tells me that I get too angry when I come home. I know that I am like him when I get like this and that I am always fighting him. It's in everything we don't say. Kay doesn't see the point in being angry at him now, or in wanting what you can't have or in wanting too much. She lets things fall away.

"Won't it be cold?" he asks as he stacks coffee cups on an old lacquered tray.

"There's a wood stove," I say. The thing is, I am often moving, moving house, moving countries. I have lived in Toronto, London,

Paris, Montreal, New York. There is something migratory in my family, in all of us; there is no sense of home that does not catch us between two places, where we are and somewhere else, and fill us with longing. Or maybe this is just what it's like to be an immigrant's child. You grow up believing you have to go somewhere else. I'm just as happy to be going to the schoolhouse on my own.

"What will you do there, Hilary?" he asks.

"Live," I say. "Teach cross-country skiing." That was the other thing he did when he first came to this country, besides play basketball. He skied cross-country. He raced.

Stars are coming out. The two Stevens are sitting one on each side of the picnic table. "Teach me to do a loon call," my mother says to Steven, and her voice sounds eager but restless, as if she really wishes to be on a lake farther north. She turns the collar of her summer jacket up. My father, who has roasted and eaten his marshmallow, picks up the stick that Steve gave him and runs his finger over the whittled end.

"Like this," Steven says, crouching down beside my mother. And he shows her, folding his hands one over the other, putting them to his lips and then fluttering his hands gently like wings, although when my mother tries, the sound that comes out is not like a loon but the wind.

"You all try," she says and points at us, shaking her head and laughing, coy and a little sad. "Come on." So Anya, Kay, Steve and I all try, and keep trying until my father lifts his hands to his lips and the sound that comes out is so exactly like a loon that we stop and stare at him. Long, rising slightly and wavering at the end, his cry is the loneliest sound in the world.

My father, Steven and I are the last ones up. We have turned off the lights except for the one in the kitchen that we always leave on through the night. The dishwasher is churning quietly as we lean against the kitchen counter and talk about basketball.

"So you don't even watch it on TV," Steven says. "Ever?"

"Never," my father says, laughing gently. He is too tall to lean comfortably against the counter so he leans against the refrigerator instead. There are lines around his eyes and under them that show up in the dim light. He still has the same cheekbones. I used to wish there were more pictures of my father from the days when he played basketball, during high school and university. There are a few pictures from the papers in an old album somewhere but none up anywhere in the house. I wanted to show the boys I knew how fast he had been and how handsome. He never talked about it. I remember as a kid that people would come up to him in airports because he was so tall and say that he must play basket-

ball, looking expectant, as if he ought to be someone famous.

"But you used to play," Steven says to him. "Anya's told me."

"He was really good," I say. "He could have gone on."

"I guess," my father says, "I guess maybe I was good. But I couldn't stand it."

"Why not?" Steven says. None of the boyfriends have ever asked my father a question like this before.

"Because if you are as tall as I am," my father says, "people assume you like basketball and I think that was what I hated. But I could not speak English very well and I needed to do something to prove myself. And when I did not *need* to play anymore, I stopped." These may not be extraordinary things to say but I have never heard my father say them, and I feel as if I'm watching him transform before my eyes.

He flicks his lighter and lights a cigarette; then he pinches it out between his fingers. "I've locked all the doors," he says abruptly, turns and heads upstairs.

The house is full of sleeping bodies. Steve is on the fold-out couch in the basement. Anya and Kay are in the skinny children's beds in their old rooms, an old bunk bed that came apart. Steven has been using the upstairs spare room and I have my old room, which my mother has redone and uses as a study, although the bed is still there. That has always been my joke about Stevie: there would be nowhere for him to sleep because we could not sleep together in my parents' house. So it really is easier this way.

As we have done the last two nights that I've been home, Steven and I turn on the old TV in the kitchen. Anya goes to bed earlier but Steven has been staying up late to watch TV, out of nostalgia, he says, because he couldn't do it in India. Last night we found an old movie from the sixties about couple-swapping in a college dorm. The two of us are almost exactly the same age and we could have been doing this together for years. We have been comparing all the different places we have lived. What I want to say to him sounds stupid but I mean it: he makes us feel like a family. Everything seems so sure and easy around him and I feel close to him and perhaps a little jealous but I'm not at all in love with him, because the men I'm drawn to are more difficult, with darker corners. I feel as if I'm laying things to rest. He sits beside me on the tiny old sofa in the corner of the kitchen and I lean forward, flicking the channels, but tonight there's not much that looks worth watching.

"He loves you three so much that not being able to say it is breaking his heart," Steven says.

"How do you know?" I say.

"I don't know," he says. "I'm guessing."

The wind is picking up outside. When I go over to the window, I can hear it clearly, making the trees sound huge. The night is cool, an autumn night, coming in where we have left the windows open. I think about my mother and wonder what she wants when she dreams about a lake up north.

"I used to make up families all the time," I tell Steven. "I used to make up brothers and sisters, different parents."

"Don't all kids do that?" he asks, looking at me out of his bright green eyes.

"I guess at some point they all do," I say. I realize how quiet the house is and that we're both talking in low voices. He leans forward, turns the TV off and we both head upstairs. I have to go through his room or Anya's room to get to the bathroom I used all the years I grew up in this house, because it is right at the back of the house, between those rooms, not off the hallway. We stop by the window in his room, the tiny spare room with an alcove to sleep in, and the wind is strong by now, bending the trees in the back yard. "You should hear what the wind sounds like in the jungle," Steven says softly, "blowing through the thick, tropical trees. It's a heavy, lush sound, as if it was constantly raining."

We stand there for a moment listening before he turns on the lamp and points to the bed and I can't tell if he's really surprised or if she's been quietly doing this every night that they have been staying here. But it takes me by surprise that Anya is the one to do this, that of the three of us she will in the end be the least afraid. I can see the long stretch of her legs under the bed clothes, the curve of her back, the side of her blonde head and I think she's asleep. Then it's my secret and Steven's, here in the heart of the house. He looks at me calmly and puts his finger to his lips.

Contributors

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Lu Yu lived and was prosperous from 1125 to 1210.

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