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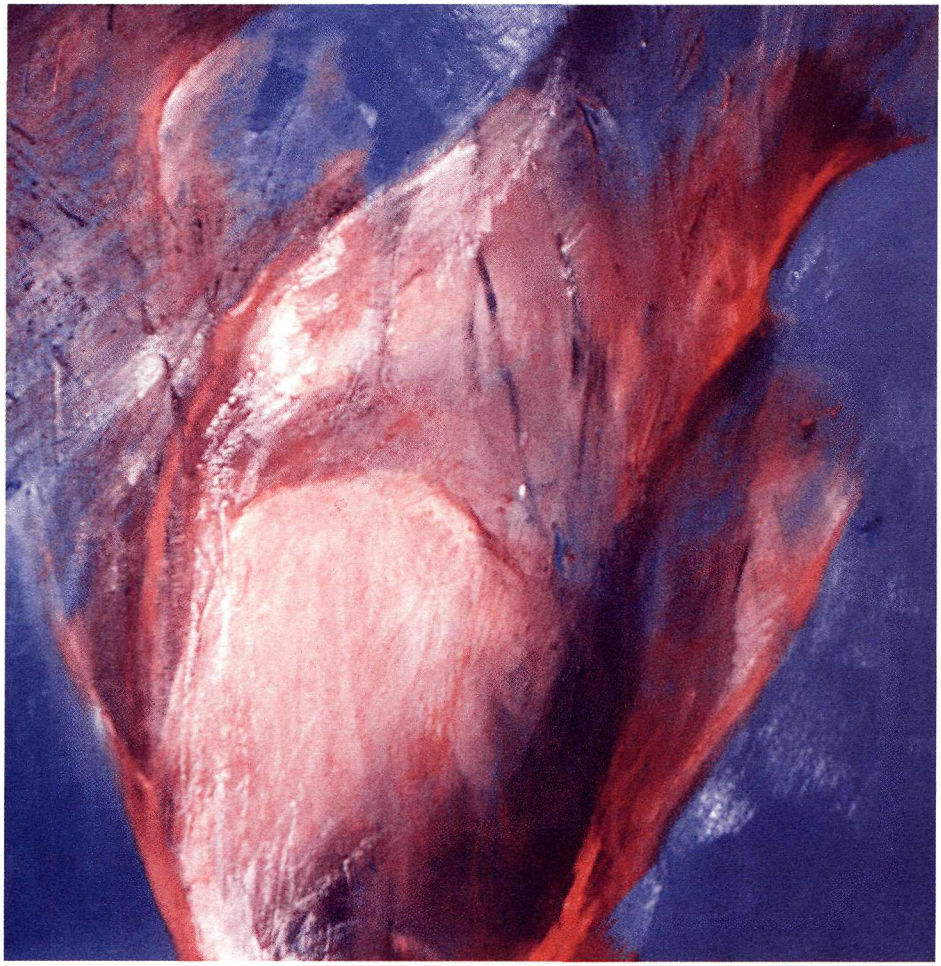

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Sea-Monkeys

James Morrison

The children want sea-monkeys. There are two of them and only one of me. My son has me in a head-lock. He's eleven, husky, and going through a wrestling phase. Give up? he asks me, his voice heavy and breathless, and when I say yes right away, he says it's too late and tightens his grip. My daughter holds a comic book and rattles the glossy back page in my entrapped, reddening face. Look, Daddy, she says. Look how cute they are. Ralphie, let him go, you butt.

The cavorting sea-monkeys take up the entire back page of the comic book in fanciful line drawings. They're waving their arms, frolicking in the delicate, ink-crested waves of the imaginary water they inhabit, sporting deep sea goggles and professor's caps and other mock-human accessories. Send money, is the upshot of this ad, and we'll let you in on the hidden mysteries of life itself to which otherwise only we have access: that's the message, and the sea-monkeys—irrepressible, guileless—are its inadvertent agent, and there's no way to tell my children that it's shameless, that you go in hopeful and open faced, believing everything they tell you, and you come out knowing the score, wised up, seeing finally that belief and hope are just two more shells in the game.

You're the butt, says Ralph. And you stink too, just like a big ugly butt.

No, I don't. You're the one who stinks. You stink more than I do. Letty's voice is sing-song matter-of-fact, almost scholarly in its pure conviction that who stinks more than whom is a real question, something that can be proven in a world where things generally make sense. She offers her evidence: Just go ahead and smell yourself if you can stand it. Promptly she loses interest in this sideline debate and turns her attention back to what really matters. Please can we get them, Daddy? She holds up the comic book.

Say *Uncle,* says my son.

Uncle. (I owe him this much at least.)

Now say *Bula Bula Bula.*

Ralphie, says Lettie. Quit it. Come on, Daddy, please? Can we?

Okay, okay, okay—I can barely get the words out—but brace yourself because it's going to break your heart.

After the children have safely gone, whisked away in their mother's car, Matthew appears. There's no suggestion that he's been waiting for them to leave, but I know he has. He knows what time they go home and he times the drive up from the city to where I live in the suburbs so that he arrives a few minutes after they've gone. If he mis-times it and gets here too soon, he browses the used-book stores in my neighborhood, choosing with grim appreciation from the collection of paperback self-help books of the mid-seventies, his favorite genre of disposable book. This is what's happened today, for he arrives with two new books he wants to show me. I figure it's just as well because the children's presence embarrasses him. He talks to them the way a moderator on public radio solicits opinions from groups of experts: stiff and doggedly formal and remote. When Matthew lets himself in with the key I've given him, I'm cooking dinner, and he kisses me and takes a seat in the kitchen, opening a can of beer. I won't give him a hard time for now, I decide, but I will soon, by some means I haven't yet come up with, if Matthew sticks around long enough (a doubtful proposition, really), bring together these halves of my life, Matthew and my children, pleasure and pain and pleasure, and the two halves will merge, and then my life will be seamless again, whole.

During dinner, Matthew fills me in on the latest books. The first has to do with methods of control, the second with a technique of meditation, centering. He rants on about them with his usual intense, gonzo irony, half taking it seriously. When he gets like this, I tune his voice out and mentally pour myself into him across the space of the room, latching onto one of his features—the small freckle under his left eye, the ridged skin of his forehead—and trying to get to the bottom of it. This is what I do, and he knows about this habit and says it's indicative of what he calls my *abstraction.* At the end of the meal, he holds a hand up in the air and snaps his fingers twice. "Hey," he says. "Earth to Jonathan. Have you been listening to what I've been saying?

No, I say. I've been looking at your teeth. They look the way teeth must have looked before there were dentists. You're gorgeously snaggle-toothed. You have medieval teeth.

Just for that, he says, I'm not spending the night.

I slip onto his lap as he folds his hands, and I manage to clamp his hands between my thighs. I like them, I say. I bet I can get my tongue between each of them. Like dental floss.

Yuck, says Matthew.

And you didn't intend to stay anyway, I tell him.

Where would you put yourself? What category? He frees his hands and picks up from the table in front of him the book he's been describing to me, *Control Demonology.* The front cover has been eaten into by two

fuzzy white interlocking rings, dazzling shadows of a past owner's coffee cup. The book's co-authors, a husband-and-wife team, gaze out from the cover with the crimped, steady smiles of self-conscious charlatans. What do you think? he asks. Are you aura-generative or hyper-gravitational? Or what?

I'm not theoretical, I say. And I reject the categories.

Magically, the dinner dishes vanish and we're in bed, the pillows and bedclothes heaped beside us on the floor, leaving us, only us in the center of the broad sheet with twinned limbs, clenching arms and legs. My head is pressed against the mattress, my face against his neck where, opening my eyes, I see a slightly raised mole I never noticed before, extruding a single hair in the shape of a question mark. Every time we do this, I tell him, I find something new. It's really amazing. Can you move a little? This is uncomfortable.

You can't, says Matthew, rolling over. You can't reject the categories. It's not allowed. You have to choose. It's important.

Okay. I'm on top of him; he's on top of me; we're on top of us. I'll do this, I say. I'll do this if I have to but then we're going to talk about something real. I mean it. Now what were the choices?

No chance, man. If you didn't listen before—before, when I was *telling* you—then you're shit out of luck. You'll just have to choose blind and take the consequences. He reaches over the side of the bed toward the television. He gropes in the patch of darkness next to the silent, glowing screen and changes the channel from a game show to a tabloid news show, the only choices at this time of the evening. Why don't you turn that off? I ask him. Because, he says, I can't concentrate on only one thing at a time. He slumps forward, his chin and spread arms hanging over the side of the mattress. Nothing in the world, he mumbles, is any more real than anything else.

I'm licking his back, and I reach forward, above my head, to take hold of one of his arms. I pull it back, readjust it, draping it over my own back, where it remains, heavy and flaccid. Let's talk about our lives before we met each other, I suggest. Tell me about the great love of your life. If you got really drunk, so drunk you didn't give a fuck what you said any more and you could tell someone for the first time you loved them, who would you call on the telephone. You don't have to give me a name right away. Give me an area code and let me guess. Make it interesting. His arm comes to life, scratches my back perfunctorily. I lift my face from his spit-wet back and look up at the back of his head. Matthew, I say. I want us to do something together. You and my children and me. Go to the zoo or something.

Matthew rises on all fours. He rears back, assuming a lotus position

with my head wedged between his legs. Now I'm going to center, he says. Watch me. You might learn something. It really gives you a sense of your place in the world, centering—gets rid of pride and vanity and anxiety.

The seven deadly sins, I say.

He looks at me severely, lifting himself from my head and repositioning himself on my chest. Don't mock, he says. A deadly sin is a deadly sin, no matter what the karma. He closes his eyes. So here's the scam. You position yourself, get it? You think about where you are. Like I am here, on this bed, in this room, in this house in this city in this world. And you think about what's in the world, and you think about what's around you—you're under me, and there's the TV and there's a wall and there's a wall and there's a wall and there's a ceiling—and then *in your mind* you make the two things, what's in the world and what's around you, into the *same thing.* Then you're ready. You look inside and find the center. And the center can be anything. It can be God, or the Self, or the fucking TV, or anything, but it has to be inside. And if it's outside you have to put it inside. And then you hover over it, over this center. *Your whole self.*

I can never tell if your jokes are bitter or just a sign of bad breeding, I tell him. It's a problem.

He opens his eyes. They reflect the image of the television screen. Everybody has to think of a way to live his own life, he says. A devotee has nothing to fear from the uninitiated. He lies back so that I can no longer see him, can only feel the blunt pressure of his legs against my legs. As I stare at the ceiling, I hear him whisper. The zoo, he says. The fucking zoo.

So we go to the zoo. It's Saturday, cold and drizzling, but the zoo's still crowded with divorced parents dutifully exercising their visiting rights. We wait in line an hour to see the koala. Matthew, however, refuses to wait with us, claiming he's not built that way, and he stations himself on a distant bench, refusing even to smile when our eyes decisively meet, his hair slick, diamond-dusted with beads of rain. We have one umbrella among the four of us. All day Matthew insists that he's the outsider, he's the one who should be left out in the cold, so there we are—the three of us, Ralph in his safety-patrol poncho and Letty in her too-heavy blue coat, pinned mittens suspended from the sleeves, the three of us huddled under the bright umbrella with Matthew bringing up the rear, grave, silent, a lonely watcher. Whenever Matthew is out of earshot, the children ask whose brother he is: if they're supposed to call him uncle he must be someone's brother, and finally he overhears them and says he's nobody's

brother and they don't have to call him uncle if they don't want to. The koala's not worth the wait. It sleeps sixteen hours a day, a sign tells us when we get close enough to read the sign. The koala is a quivering ball of hair pressed against the bars of its own cage. Letty says it's dumb and she's had it and she can't stand zoos anyway, all you do is watch a bunch of animals poop. She says it's all Ralph's fault, too, for making us stand in line to see the koala. Ralph tells her to stuff it; she looks like a freak in that big coat. She tells him his breath smells like pee. I ask them please not to call each other names, to remember that Matthew is with us—even though he's not with us at the moment and he hasn't really seemed to be with us much at all the whole day. Ralph objects he didn't call her a name. I tell him to be still. He says great, he doesn't call anyone names and he gets yelled at; he might as well call people names if he's going to get yelled at anyway.

Exiting the koala hutch, we're reunited with Matthew. How was it? he asks. Should I be sorry I didn't come?

If some of us have to stand in line, Letty says under her breath, I think all of us should have to stand in line.

Let's go see the birds, I suggest. They have a big cage full of birds from everywhere, birds you've never even heard of before.

Do they have bathrooms by there? asks Ralph.

As it turns out, they do. Ralph and Letty disappear into separate bathrooms, expressing uncomplicated happiness, knowing what to expect for the first time that day. Once they're gone Matthew brushes his palm against the back of my neck. Free, he whispers, for a minute.

I stiffen. I didn't know my children were such big trouble.

You know what I mean. You know how this feels. You've been here as long as I have. His hand leaves my neck, which goes on tingling, idiot nerve endings answering churlish synapses, confused by the dialectic of touching and not touching.

You're not helping much. You're not helping at all. You're acting like a bitter old man. They're afraid of you. I've been staring at the ground, but now I turn toward him, full into his face. He's flushed, opening and closing his mouth. And, I say, *why shouldn't they be afraid of you?*

He grabs my elbow, and as I feel his fingers digging into my arm, I see my son emerge from the bathroom, freeze in the doorway watching the two of us locked in this subtle intensity, another man gripping his father's arm in mute anger. Stop it, I whisper, he's back. Then: Hey Ralphie, over here, as if I don't know that he's seen us, as if everything can still be made harmless. There's a second in which I don't know if Matthew will let go of me, but as Ralph approaches he does let go, and as I shout to

Ralph something cheerful about all those birds we're about to see, I hear already above my own voice the future voices of friends, people I haven't even met yet, telling me how much better off I am without him.

The sea-monkeys have arrived, packaged in a small prefabricated plastic aquarium, but the children are more interested in the housekey that has been abandoned on the table. Did you know that man from work, Daddy? Was he somebody you work with? Letty turns upward at me her tiny, polished face, pinched with the astute energies of question-asking. I'm overwhelmed by generalities—the endurance of children, how the things one loses give advice to the things one keeps, what it's like to know more about the world than the small, earnest people whose lives you're responsible for—so I can't answer. Why did you give that man your key? And if you gave him your key why did he give it back?

The instructions for the sea-monkeys are painstaking, and we follow them painstakingly. What's supposed to happen is this: you're supposed to fill up the little aquarium with pure water, room-temperature, and then open the packet of freeze-dried sea-monkeys and pour them in. The little beads will come to life in the waster, burst forth, unfold into living, breathing miracles. *Isn't it,* the instruction booklet asks ardently, *the most wonderful thing you have ever seen in all of your life?* Ralph wants to be the one to drop in the contents of the packet and for once Letty doesn't argue. Instead, she sits with her arms folded, leaning forward avidly. I see her face through the aquarium, magnified and disproportionate. As Ralph reaches for the packet and I notice again the piercing otherness of scale of his hand and his not-quite-human wrist, I know this is my last chance to disillusion them the right way instead of the wrong way.

With a flourish Ralph overturns the packet. Its contents, like thick grains of pepper, fall through the air and hit the water, where some just float languorously on top but a few penetrate the surface, falling in slo-mo spirals to the bottom. Each grain remains stubbornly, fully itself, without much potential to become anything else, immutable. It becomes clear pretty fast that nothing much is going to happen here. The children exchange looks. Letty says, What a gyp, and then, unexpectedly, she laughs. Ralph leans back in his chair, laughing too, and slapping his knees he says it's a real knee-slapper. Both of them are doubled up; neither can stop laughing. I watch them for a minute. Slipping the key from the table into my pocket, I head out into the front yard, where it's dusk. The key feels first cool and tiny against my thigh, then, as it warms, as if it is just another part of what I'm wearing. I sit down in the middle of the lawn, listening to the laughter of the children from the kitchen. Then, as I stretch

out on my stomach, they're on the porch—laughing, laughing—and they ask me what I'm doing.

I'm centering, I tell them.

They stop laughing for a second, then start up again, not having heard what I said, playing with the word they didn't hear—celery, semolina, semi-colon—and doing a Chip-and-Dale act—After you my dear chap, no no I must insist, you first—as they go back through the door into the house.

I, meanwhile, am left here in the world. The world consists of figure and ground. I am the figure, lone and inert. The ground is part earth, part sky. Before me is the close earth with its cool layer of grass. At my back is the thickly-vested sky, which tries without success to conceal a bright moon in one of its threadbare pockets.

Mark Sanders

Anna Cernik's Diary: of Daughters and Sons

Papa came in this morning
angry at the winter.
He had been with one of his calving cows
most the night,
had to drive her to the barn through snow to his knees,
and the calf's hind legs coming first,
the wet of birth freezing.
Mama in the barn held the lantern for Papa
as he worked.
I held the cow's head to calm and steady her.
But Papa could not pull the calf himself,
it was lodged so.
Then the cow fell to her knees,
rolled over to her side,
her great belly heaving and heavy with her death.
Mama, feeding little Tina who slept through it,
said Papa would not drink his coffee,
eat his breakfast,
but went out early to chore.
Then he came back in, angry at the winter.
Said over and over he wished he'd had a son
to help him pull,
needed more muscle to do what last night
had to be done.
Over and over said he was angry at the winter.

Diana Hartog

Men

The variety in which the flesh clings to the stone
was never my mother's favorite
nor is it mine: less sweet, less shaggy with juice
(they require a knife), than if you wait

till later in the season, for the other kind to ripen
and fall into your lap,
fall open between your thumbs
and run down your chin and between your breasts.

These also dry best.

Women

High-strung, they're always transporting
this & that: the thorax of a compatriot
or some useful snip of leaf, or their Fate
in a grain of cooked rice.

And lighter stuff, a man, if it so amuses. A motif
of black, narrow-waisted notes might pulse through the
mind of a genius like Bach as a cantata

and then refuse, veer off the page to
vagaries—forgetting things
and doubling back, for instance, though never
the instinct to seize a man's tiniest fault

and hold it aloft between pincers.

Roo Borson

The Wind and the Rain

The room is a musty Long Island room we arrived in only yesterday, having crept through the eye of the needle which is the Lincoln Tunnel to what we imagine must be the city of self-loathing though it goes also by other names. Scrap of paper improvising a slow poised ballet at the base of a sign saying *The Taxpayers Pay For Littering,* the *The* crossed out and replaced by *Us,* which nobody reads. My father won't be coming back again, nobody does, eventually his atoms will suffuse the universe, on camelback, police car, fern, travelling to all the places he only read about—while my aunt, frightening herself again, makes a joke of her age, saying nowadays she hardly even dares buy unripe bananas. Somewhere in the middle of any argument the engine breaks down. No point continuing. The wind and the rain. I sleep beside a fellow for whom sleep and snoring are one, he growls gently like a hunting cat but wakes without remembrance. Nothing to report beyond the rare condition of togetherness, this side-by-sideness, part figment, part fruition. The list of complaints changes on the other side of the fence, but it's the same fence. A room in Long Island, the wind and the rain, America, where everyone's on a first-name basis, my father won't be coming back again.

Bed

There are whole days I would rather not leave you.
At coffee break and at
lunch break and in between,
in the split-seconds between adding up figures
for a moment I peel away the covers
and sit up, again,
to the inextinguishable day,
and your expanse gazes
up at me sadly
and the long limbs of the blankets' dishevelment
seduce me back.
There are days I would rather not leave you,
that intimate—
nothing to be said,
and no misunderstanding. Remember
the afternoon I first brought you here: the cat
jumped down in a huff
and sauntered off, showing us
his vertical tail, but you
grew wider,
and curious,
and very quiet.
There are whole days I would rather
not breathe, but you compose my dreams—
and when they turn,
when I'm at the edge of what I can bear, I
wake suddenly, held up by you.
Why do you taunt me so?
What does it matter what a human can
bear or not bear,
what is this
wish for measurement?
Warm sand you are,
and effortless
wanderings of ocean music,
a sea wall
where hurled bottles have smashed
at night. You are the night.

Jay Ruzesky

Some Time in November Maybe, Midnight

Glowing from the cold bulb
naked as a cantelope. Untouchable.

Why you
always left to purge
the sour milk, moulded rasberries?

I'm thinking of those people
in California in the 70s with
terminal problems.
Who paid to be
quick frozen in liquid nitrogen
before they died
kept in a vat for a cure.
I was going to mention pickles here

but I won't.
I'll talk about the cars
pneumatically assembled,
the buzzing line in Windsor
(Just a year ago I saw them,
the workers were ants at a picnic of
metal hulls)

and the heap of dead cars
down the block and across
the Gorge at West Coast Auto Wreckers.
The quick way some things
come to an end and
others never do.

Those people floating, waiting

as though all the problems
would be solved,
as though anything could be
that simple.

Why I lie here in the dark hoping everything
will be fine in the morning.
Listening to the sound of you

tossing gone bagels into the compost.

Vacation

Eric Horsting

The sun beat down on the island like flame.

The evening had been as cool as the blueberries we'd picked the day before; it had been a night of wandering with my friend, who'd pulled me along in the little red wagon we used to pick up groceries (the laws of the island forbade automobiles). My friend was blonde, straight-haired, and slender. I was small enough to sit with my knees up in the wagon, and she was old enough to want to pull me along.

Once, we stopped along the road in the coming dusk to watch a long black snake cross the road, and she offered me a cigarette. She'd stolen a pack of Luckies from her parents; it was then that I knew I was in love.

The party that night happened in a sandy plot among the dunes half way between the ocean and the bay. The stars were all over the sky and I saw one fall when my friend shouted at me to look up. Many people sat in the sand, listening as Tony Martin and Cyd Charisse played guitars and sang. My parents, meanwhile, waited back at the cottage, gently but with force squeezing three quarts of blueberries through linen handkerchiefs. They hoped to be making jelly from the juice.

We had made the crossing a week before, my parents and I, storing the old black Chevie with its Venetian blind at the rear window in a run-down garage on the mainland. We had a choice between the Artemis and the Oceola, one a sharp-prowed excursion vessel and the other a bathtub-hulled boat that looked like a few waves would topple it. My brother wasn't yet born, so four of us, my parents and my sister and I, settled on the foredeck for the trip over on the Artemis. My mother gave me a chocolate bar, and I wandered about the decks, a stranger visiting the ship's crew.

When we arrived, my friend was waiting for me at the slip. As she saw me, she waved, and, when we landed, she ran up to me and embraced me, one arm about me, her hand holding on to the wagon's tongue. My parents looked off into the sun and commented on the beautiful weather to the Stillwells, who were renting the cottage to us. So, off we went, my friend and I, my fair skin taking on a slow burn that in a week turned to a tan like hers. Strolling along through the sandy walks with the grains grit-

ting along the hard rubber wheels, I searched her eyes and knew at last that we would be beautiful, that the party, when it happened as we both knew it would, would be the time for everyone to be dazzles by us, to love us for how we looked to them, to make them more strange to ourselves than we could possibly have imagined.

So we sang along with Cyd and Tony, and all the women and the men sang too and drank beer from silver kegs. One by one they would drift over to us where we sat cross-legged in the sand. All of us were barely clothed, wearing swimming suits for the most part. The men were large and muscled, hairy and strong, and put their arms around the women, and when they drifted over like brown ghosts shaking the dune grass, my friend would motion me to stand, as we both then did, and my friend would spread her arms out wide, and one by one the men would embrace her and she would hold them tight and smooth as she kissed their nipples. Sooner or later, they would drift over to me and I would once again feel like a stranger, because my friend seemed to know what must be done, while I seemed lost, but fascinated, overwhelmed by the delicious odors of hair and sweat and perfume. The women would come to us too. They were more talkative than the men, and said we were Apollonian, and made us stand close to each other, so that they could caress our blonde hair, put their glistening arms about us and hold us tightly to their bodies still warm from the day's sun.

One woman in particular wore the slightest of clothes, what has come to be called a "bikini." Late in the evening, she approached us and took us by the hands off into the dune grasses, away from the others. We tagged along in what seemed an obedient way and she lay down on the sand and removed her clothes. My friend gasped and took my arm, pulling me down to the sand. For the rest of the evening, until we walked off into the darkness pulling the red wagon behind us, we lay there, one of us on each side of the woman's body, cradled in her arms.

It had taken a week for that night to come, and this day my friend and I felt new, and realized that it was time for us to head for the ocean beach, to set out in the sun's flames at a time we would agree upon, to change our previous habit of chance meetings and careless wandering.

For centuries the ocean had been eating away at the beach, carrying the sand away and sludging it down island in its strong currents where it piled up along the lee shore. Often the waves were enormous, six and eight feet high as they broke, and the noise they made was fearsome. The local residents had spent hours and money planting hard grass on the dunes to save their houses.

But today there was a marvelous silence, It was so great that, as we approached the beach, we wondered if the ocean would be there. It was,

but in a way we never could have imagined. Instead of its usual gray, the ocean gave us a pastoral green that was painful to look at, and the water's surface shimmered quietly, lapping softly at the shore, acting like a lake. For miles it stretched out, silent and lovely. Far off, we saw a trawler that seemed not to move.

The hours passed as we lay next to each other on the sand, and soon through the glare I saw a canoe working its way up the shoreline, gliding carefully and mysteriously red upon the green. The boat seemed headed our way, but it would, I thought, take days for it to reach us. But there was no doubt, even as we heard voices in the distance behind us, that the canoe would eventually arrive. So my patience was endless even as we awaited the visitors who were now upon us.

It wasn't Tony and Cyd, as we had at first suspected, but the woman we had lain with the night before; with her was her husband Sam, who wanted us to call him "Uncle." As they came near, we could see that the woman walked with her left arm around Sam's back, circling his waist, and her hand was deep inside the front of Sam's trunks. Sam was carrying a kite shaped like an eagle. When they reached us, they sat down and removed their clothes and rubbed each other and then us with oil.

After a while, Sam stood up and suggested he and I try to fly the kite. There was so little wind it seemed impossible we would do it, but Sam insisted, so off we ran, heading down the beach trailing the kite behind us on its string, running hard, playing it out. Somewhere a soft breeze must have arisen, so that slowly and gracefully the kite began to ascend. About a mile down the beach we stopped; the kite was drifting upward, becoming a spot in the sun. Sam gave me a piece of wood wrapped with the remaining string. The connection seemed vague to me. I couldn't see the string.

Soon we lay upon the sand, and I dozed, lightly holding the piece of wood. Hours later I felt a tug on the string and sprang up. Nothing had changed. The ocean still was green and smooth. The canoe was coming nearer, and off in the distance, I saw my friend and Sam's wife moving about, seeming close to each other. Somewhere far off the kite floated and began to pull me along. Soon I could not control it. The pull became so strong I knew I would have to let go. Sam still slept and I didn't want to wake him; I didn't want to free the kite either, so I held on more tightly. Gradually, the pull began to lift me off the ground and I started to sail up the beach, my body tense with fear and joy. As I floated along, the strangeness I'd felt all week began to disappear and soon I reached a height that made Sam a shadow on the beach. Eventually I reached my friend and woman, and I let go, settling slowly down upon the sand next to them.

That day seemed to go on forever, and when the canoe arrived with the man in it paddling steadily toward the shore, no one was surprised when I waded out to him and stepped into the craft, taking a paddle in my hands. I understood that we knew each other well and felt no shock as I left my friend upon the shore and headed out to the open sea.

Su Croll

the day after goat gloves

I'm not much on the receiving line
tight end of that
I mean tight ended
anyway I'm not the scraped now
I'm not but by god
some of the goat rubbed off
has been rubbing
off fine and mighty all over me
you know rubbed in good
w/a dye that won't wash
and those damn fine goat gloves
feel good and so what
if I'm goated I'm goated
good and goated
so what if everyone's goated
or monkeyed a little
when noone's looking I'm good
and goated now

and good god sometimes I think about somebody
rubbing me hard all over
with these good fine goats
and those good
goat gloves

sometimes I think and I can't stop thinking
I can't stop thinking about
those three billy goats gruff
all sneaking up the fire escape
and staying in my room with me
my two little men have found
a third for me

they're already setting up the ring
the girl is walking through with the round number
I don't care the room's not

paid for and I don't give a shit
we're pushing the little beds together
the way we always do
a whole family of men
ready to monkey with me getting me
ready to monkey

I'm waiting to get good and monkeyed
march twenty-first and he's got the best
damned goat gloves I've seen in many a year

they're setting up the tent and the goats are outside barking kate's in on the roulette wheel and you know what that means she's on the wheel and her hair's standing straight up end to end and her eyes are like red coals and she's been good and goated and she's been up the ferris wheel w/st. theresa burning up that heavenly flame of love he sends down once in a while he sends a good shock through our systems good god he's got a good pair

and george washington ferris is the man
w/katherine wheels in his head
all the goats line up good and ready
for our monkey helmets and we're waiting
and watching for the animal liberators
especially the young men in their salvation
army suits all pressed
and rolled out good and fine
they come carrying our tickets
and plenty of free feed
and all the go-back-to-where-you-came-in's

and the carnivalling is all around
and I let them bring me off
my horse and let them lead me
right to the limits of the grounds

but I end up back at the room anyway w/the tar baby fast and hard riding
fast and hard fast and hard on my tail that never stopping

Katherine Wheel

ONE YEAR I WORKED THE MIDWAY in the bingo tent I used to get a ride in with my friend kate we knew this guy who ran the bullet you know one of those rides where they strap you in so you can't move and they send you up higher and higher into these tight little circles higher and higher like a ferris wheel but faster and you can't turn your head and they hang you upside down you always lose all your change and your purse hanging from a bootstrap your hair standing on end because you're hanging upside down over the cattle castle or some greasy little fish and chip place and you can't breathe you can't breathe

ONE TIME THIS GUY OFFERED US A FREE RIDE we knew this guy who ran the bullet the midway wasn't even open yet he offered to let us ride for free it wasn't time for our shift so we said why not well this guy kept us going for forty five minutes we were up there screaming and begging him to stop all that time he had us going in these really fast spins and in tight little upside down circles and he kept us hanging our hair brushing the ground for a second before he flung us up into the sky again in that big black bullet of a machine he hung us and he spun us and I lost my wallet we ended up being late for work and getting into a lot of shit last time I ever take a free ride from anybody

Lies

Nawal El Saadawi

Translated from the Arabic by Peter Whelan

Suddenly, he became completely naked.

He didn't know how he had removed his clothes. But he wanted to present her with a *fait accompli.* With a naked man. Nakedness in itself would be guaranteed to further the relationship between him and her. His patience had run out. The present was risky; there was no insurance for the future. He had no time to lose, for youth had fled away and middle age was approaching as he left forty behind him. His fund of vigour had begun to dwindle, too, and often his body had failed him in moments when the heart had caught fire.

He was talking about something or other. Some dry subject. Science perhaps, or politics, or philosophy. And there was she, sitting opposite him wearing a fashionable dress. She wasn't gazing at him seductively or lustfully or with any of the lecherous enticements more properly clad women have perfected. On the contrary, her gaze repelled a man rather than invited him, repelled him, in fact, with a violence that left no room to consider advancing—just as we repell disease or death or anything whose attack, we feel, would be bound to devastate us.

"We are driven onward to death, willy nilly." He said this to himself when he caught sight of himself in the mirror, naked. Twenty years he had lived with the mother of his five children—his lawful wedded wife, a bashful virgin and passionately devoted to procreation without the body's ever being exposed.

He averted his face from the mirror, for his eyes had fallen on a chest as hairy as that of an ape, and a belly as prominent as a pregnant woman's. He hadn't thought his belly had swollen to that extent. Every day it swelled just a little, imperceptibly, and his trousers were just a bit tighter—not more than a millimeter, or half a millimeter. But it was cumulative. The accumulation of days, hundreds of days, thousands of days and of millimeters, little by little, bit by bit. Twenty years.

And she—she was sitting with a book in her hand. She knew he was sitting in his chair, utterly dignified, talking, the words emerging steadily from his mouth, one after the other, with no intermissions or silences, as

though he were masticating his own saliva and secreting it as a stream of letters stretched out like a viscous fluid or a thread dangling from his mouth, long and silky, endless and unbroken—perhaps wound and meshed upon itself like the cocoon of a silkworm. Perhaps a word could spontaneously detach itself and fly about in the air like a water droplet or a bubble that soon lands on some solid object.

She was paying attention to him; he was no ordinary guest. He had been a friend of her husband's for many more years than she had known her husband—more years than her husband had known anyone. He was a polite man. You could tell by the tension in the muscles of his face and neck, and the way the tie bound round his throat was tightly knotted. As though it never came untied, or never could come untied. As though he slept in it. Or rather, as though he had been born with it. And the blazer with two rows of buttons and the trousers, tight and buttoned precisely, and his thighs pressed together and his knees clenched. He sat like a bashful woman or a virgin girl. He really did have the virgin air of a man who looks as though he never takes his clothes off, or couldn't take his clothes off if he wanted to.

His presence in the house did not bother her in the least, even if her husband were out. She would leave him talking away in his chair and get on with whatever she wanted to do. She might write or she might read, and if her pen fell and rolled under the coffee table she would bend over and pick it up uninhibitedly. If her short, tight skirt suddenly rode up so that she was completely exposed from behind she didn't care. He couldn't possibly look at her. And if he did it would be a refined, cultured look, settling on her body innocuously, without ardor, just like the air. Even his incessant talking didn't bother her at all; perhaps it helped her pass the time, in fact, for whenever she was without it she switched on the radio.

He turned his back on the mirror and remained standing. She was sitting in front of him on a low chair, her thighs half naked and slightly parted. The natural position adopted by the thighs of a modern woman when she was seated. His eyes could easily penetrate between them, right to the top, with no difficulty at all. He had changed his topic from world politics to the origin of being to fatalism in religions. But the muscles of his neck—while he talked—tensed up, making an odd squeaking sound which he feared might be audible. As a result he was now talking louder than fashionable decorum prescribed. He felt slightly embarrassed, but his voice resonated in the room with its ultra-modern furniture and made the translucent curtains over the windows vibrate delicately and finely, tickling his ears. He was now so in love with the sound of his own voice that the mere articulation of words had him sensually enraptured.

The book was still in her hand, her eyes on a line of print on one of the pages. She was not moving her eyes from word to word. She loved books with a passion, but her hatred of reading was more passionate still. So now her eyes were dragging, despite herself, from the line of print to her long, silvery nails, sharp as a bird's beak. The fine smoothness of the superb paper passed into the fine smoothness of her fingertips, and she felt a sensuous bond between herself and culture.

He remained standing, his back to the mirror. She still hadn't raised her head from her book. All that happened when his voice suddenly broke off was that she reached out unconsciously to turn on the radio and the room was filled with a calm voice reciting the Koran. Probably, if it had been some other program, something less proper—an opera, for example, or a piece of music—probably, he would have moved from his place. But a recitation of the Koran in that dignified voice—it gave him no option but to remain standing where he was, motionless. It was winter—the last day of January, to be precise—and despite the solid, tightly fitting windows there was a cold draught blowing right on his spine. He thought about reaching down to pick up some of the discarded clothes at his feet, but he was afraid that if he moved he might attract her attention before the recitation was over. He could regard with some little distress his pullover with its expensive English wool spreading warmth over the tiled floor, and there beside it was his tie from Liberty's with its precise, impeccable knot and its long, slim, shining tail. And beside that—almost touching it—were the enormous underpants of coarse cotton, which betrayed the humiliating size of his stomach and the creases in his thighs, betrayed them mercilessly, shamelessly, regardless of decorum.

The recitation came to an end. He began thinking about the first movement he might make. It occurred to him that an arm movement might be more appropriate than another. Yes, perhaps he did move his arm, because the thick hair under his armpit became plainly visible. She, however, did not move a muscle. She was sitting reading her book, her thighs half naked and slightly parted, the normal position adopted by the thighs of a modern woman who is absorbed in a book—when she is in the state of absorption natural to any person of culture. But he had not thought—it had never occurred to him—that such absorption, however profound or cultured, could come between a woman and a naked man.

Her ears had picked up the voice reading the Koran, and she reached out unconsciously and turned the knob with a slight feeling of awe. Instead of recitation came the bellow of a newscaster. If she had been alone she would probably have reached out again to turn the knob, but she knew that he was sitting there in his chair, his neck tense and bound with his tie. His top half a box precisely fastened with two rows of buttons, his

thighs pressed tightly together for the sake of propriety. The natural position that the thighs of a modern man adopt when he is listening to the news. Her eyes had stolen furtively away from the line of print to her soft, smooth arm, but they soon lit upon a few coarse projecting hairs, and she remembered it was time she shaved.

He was beginning to feel perplexed. What could he do to get her out of her state of absorption? He put his fingers in his mouth to whistle, as he used to as a child playing in the alley barefoot and with naked rump. Perhaps he did actually put his fingers in his mouth, but he did not whistle. The muscles of his mouth were no longer capable of making those sounds so incompatible with good taste. He remained standing, frozen and naked as a statue. Silence fell suddenly on the room. It was probably a power cut. She raised her head from her book to find the room plunged into darkness. She would have collided with him on her way to the study if he had not taken a step back. By the time she returned with another book the power had come back on and he had sat down in his usual chair, fully clothed, and utterly dignified.

George Bowering

Smaro Kamboureli in the Foothills

The bus to the barbecue ranch was held up
by a passel of cowboys with kerchiefs up
to their eyes.

Most of them sat their hosses while one of
them entered the bus, his hogleg drawn, &
moseyed down the aisle, hot basalt in his
eyes.

Smaro leaned forward against her spaghetti
straps: "I'll do anything you want," she de-
clared.

& the desperado's eyes turned into panicked
frogs.

He retreated, his mask fallen around his neck
now, & he turned before he went down the
steps, a three-tooth gap in his lonely bunk-
house grin.

Carolyn Gammon

At the Female Ejaculation Workshop

Well—WHY THE HELL NOT?!
Of course we can ejaculate
or fountain, or gush, or hit-the-wall
or emit spontaneous urethral eruptions
whatever you want to *call* it
of *course* we can

Just because it's been hushed up for years
centuries, make that millenia
just because Hirschfeld and the boys ignored it
Kinsey denied it and Masters says it ain't so
doesn't mean we don't

So we're sitting around a tree at Michigan
about fifty dykes
and the workshop leader asks—
How many of you ejaculate?

Up go the hands
over half

How does it taste, smell, look, FEEL?
and how much and how often
and how?

More hands shot up

> "First it was with my husband
> I was ashamed to wet the bed
> and he didn't like it
> so for twenty years I held it back
> I didn't come for twenty years...
> Now I have a woman lover—she loves it

and I come every time
wet the bed every time"

"I'll tell you"
says another
"I thought I'd been around the block
I thought I was *really good*
but when this lover spurts all over me
I'm saying to myself:
Do I ignore it? play polite?
Do I drink it?
Like what do I do???

—My lover taught me
—I discovered it masturbating
—I need fingers on my G-spot, you know, reach in and up
—It takes a lot of pressure
—It takes a little
—Once I fountained with just nipple stimulation
—You've got to bear down
—I recommend Sears rubber sheets with flannel covers
—It's clear
—It doesn't taste
—It changes taste during the month
—It's *not* urine
—So what if it is?
—Once, it shot across the bed—and I mean *lengthwise*
—I love it running down my arm, I get soooo turned on

I'm sitting there
me, dyke-born, 1959
Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada
listening to maybe ten thousand years
of hidden lesbian herstory

asking myself WHY, WHY, WHY
was it so vital to hide?

Then a voice from the back
"I was thinking
maybe it's a vestige
of women being able to reproduce
among themselves
Maybe if we worked on it. . . "

Silence fell under the tree at Michigan

and I went home
to work on it

David P. Reiter

Energetic Ezra Falls on Hard Times

JERUSALEM: An Israeli bachelor
has been jailed for thirty days
because of his permanent erection.

A court in Tel Aviv ruled that Ezra Ezra
from Kiron in central Israel was a public
danger and must spend time behind bars.

He was a regular at Tel Barukh beach
a known haunt for Tel Aviv prostitutes
and went there up to six nights a week.

After doctors failed to cure his erection
his family sought help from a psychologist
and social worker, both women—but they

too fell victim to his amorous advances.

David Axelrod

Boy Scouting Rounds a Guy Out

Eros heard the prayer and figured that
love after all was love

One night before I knew to suspect anything,
I woke and looked out from my tent
at an old man and boy
hurrying across the grassy field at midnight.
In two years, the boy enlisted for the war
and that timid old man was found out—
trashed and shunned.
Drifting up from the coal marshes,
ground fog glowed green with foxfire,
and the Milky Way, glistering brightly
as a slug trail on wet bark,
cast blue light over the naked bodies of those two
now long dead, who were so near to me
I might have cried out their names.

When She Was Gone

Greg Hollingshead

The nurse in charge of Snider's wing is not the one you spoke to on the phone last night. She knows him though, everybody knows him. He's in the common room, sitting at an arborite table talking to a boy six or seven. According to his file, Snider has just turned seventy-four, but he looks more like sixty. His white hair is cropped, and he wears glasses now, to correct that squint. He is cleanshaven and pinker, fuller in the face.

"Oh look," the nurse whispers. "He's with the Gein boy. They're great pals," and in her nurse's singsong she calls, "Mr. Snider! You got a visitor!"

Snider takes one sharp look at you and says, "Eddie, go find your mama."

"Hello, Gordon," you say, and as you pull up a chair you remember the moment from twenty-five years ago, Snider across the table, the weight of the handcuffs in your palm.

*

It would not be true to say I am not bothered by the things that were done. I have thought about them a good deal, not worried so much as tried to understand. I would say that blowing through the world is a wind of destruction. People huddle and say, You can know this, you can't know that. Others see the thing for what it is: a simple matter of salvage.

*

A mile south of the Third Line, where the dump road cut off through diseased maples to loop at the edge of a trench bottomed with garbage under raw plywood signs in black aerosol that said *Dump Hear, Brush Only,* and *Mettal and HouseHold,* Cheryl Deinert swung the pickup into a lane that wound another mile through rock and low bush. If she kept going, the lane would cross a hydro cut line where defoliants had turned green balsams to burnt sienna, but she said,

"We'll leave the truck before the cut and circle the dump on foot. The

Snider place is half a mile past it down the Third."

There was no reply. This had been discussed. Like guerrillas they had studied a map.

"Hey," said Vicky Armitage from under the dash. "Can I come out yet?"

"Come out, come out," Cheryl said.

When they were planning this, Vicky had argued it would be crazy to walk a mile through this bush carrying two-and-a-half gallon tanks, but really they had no choice. Too much dump traffic past the Snider place.

The trek turned out to be only tiring. It was too late in the year for bugs, the ground was rock, and once they were past the ravens, the stink, and the invisible bears of the dump, they cut back close to the concession road and so did not, as Vicky had predicted they would, miss their target and wander off into seven thousand acres of crown bush.

It was Lynn who first glimpsed the tin roof through a screen of spruce. From there they could see the weedless, perfect circle of a pond so blue it should have had snow-white geese swimming in it; a cedar-railed compound containing a somehow orderly arrangement of damaged car and truck bodies; segregated engine parts; neat stacks of tires; rows of doors, bumpers, fenders; behind the house a freshly-painted outhouse; and the house itself: two storeys of faded Insulbrick with narrow windows.

Attached to the back of the house was a new addition, painted red.

"Neat as a pin," Vicky said.

"No flies on Gordon Snider." Cheryl indicated the outhouse. "Funny no plumbing."

"Maybe he didn't shit much."

"Grass needs cutting," Lynn noticed. "Where's the animals?"

"Impounded. He won't be coming back."

"You hope."

They stared at the silent property.

"Hey," Vicky said. "Maybe this is going too far."

Immediately Cheryl pushed a set of keys into Vicky's hand. "Vick. Don't worry. Go back to the truck. You already did more than enough. See you in one hour at the most. You too, Lynn."

"Which window," Lynn said.

Cheryl turned back to the house. "The one on the left—"

"I'll pass it in to you," Lynn said.

Vicky returned the keys. "I'm the one gets lost at the A & P, remember?"

"You wouldn't find that truck any better with me along," Lynn said kindly.

Taking care to keep the house between themselves and the road, they

carried the tanks to the back window. Tied to the knob of the addition door was a red police tag that said, "Break Enter & Theft of a dwelling could result in life imprisonment."

"Christ. That's worse than Snider got."

"Know what?" Cheryl said. "This addition's got no windows."

"What if there's an alarm?" Vicky asked.

"Why should there be an alarm?" Cheryl unfolded a Swiss army knife and slit the window screen. She pounded one side of the frame with a rock until the thing splintered and fell in. Lynn and Vicky made a stirrup by locking fingers, and Cheryl climbed inside.

"More guts than I'll ever have," Vicky said. She was showing Lynn her hands, which were shaking.

Cheryl stuck her head out the window. Briefly she examined a bit of sun-stained curtain before she looked at them again. "Won't be long," she said and was gone.

*

She was a good woman, one of the best. She was good in every way. A little stern maybe. I hated the way she suffered at the end there. The strokes and that. A man could turn away from God. Still, He knows best. Sometimes in certain sleep zones I would hear her voice. Once I had a dream about a forest that had the tops of all the trees sheared and vultures watching down from the branches that were left. It was hard to live in that house. I had plenty of spells of the blues.

*

Cheryl stepped aside from the window to let more light in and wait for her eyes to adjust to the darkness. Through the wall to the left she could hear rats scrabbling. She was in, as deep as the house and as still and abandoned as the yard outside. The air seemed fifty years old. Faded wallpaper, linoleum, hooked rugs. A stuffed chair and a sofa, soft with dust. In flight along the right-hand wall were five silver geese, jig-sawed from plywood. Otherwise the walls held faded prints in pasteboard frames: *Northern Lake Sunset, Storm at Sea, Parliament Buildings Ottawa.* Cheryl tried a lamp and a wall switch: nothing. She crossed to the one door, took a breath, and opened it—on a wall of plywood. Police, she thought at first, but the plywood was not new and dust lay in the corners of the space between it and the door. Must have been up before the police came through; they had put it back.

She returned to the window to tell Lynn and Vicky what to expect, went back and kicked at the plywood with the heel of her boot. Nailed

tight. She hit it with her shoulder, and again, harder. The nails shrieked free, and the panel fell against the opposite wall of a narrow hallway. To the right was the front door, to the left the second floor stairs. They too had been sealed, once. This time the police had pried off the plywood sheet and left it leaning against the wall. The floor had been carefully swept.

Cheryl climbed the stairs. Along the front of the house was a bedroom—his mother's. The bible by the bed, the hairbrush on the dresser, were half buried in dust. Except for the police again—scuffs in the dust, a drawer standing open—this room, like the living room, must not have been touched since the woman's death. Same with the bathroom. So he did have plumbing, had boarded it off too. The third and last upstairs room was abandoned, with hangers and dustballs scattered across the floor and a door standing open on an empty closet.

Downstairs, on the other side of the front hallway from the long parlour, was a cramped room contained a La-Z-Boy, a bed, a bureau, a wardrobe. The bureau was empty. In the wardrobe were wire hangers, on the walls pictures of movie stars, publicity stills, the kind that come in Woolworth frames: Ginger Rogers, Mitzi Gaynor, Judy Garland. In this room the floor was patterned with dust in a way that said things had been moved out. A lot of things. Police again.

The kitchen was a darkness into which light came only from a small window over the sink; a bigger window had been closed off by the new addition. The kitchen was where the rats had been busy: cupboard and pantry contents strewn across the floor.

The back door opened into the deeper darkness of the addition. Cheryl felt her way to the door next to where Lynn and Vicky waited, called to them, and unlocked it.

"Don't scare us like that," Vicky said as they crowded in with the light.

When Cheryl turned she saw a room painted red, a Milky Way of gold foil stars across the ceiling. She saw an iron clothesrack without hangers, a full-length mirror unsilvered along the edges, a wood cookstove, dark stains on the floor.

"Hey, come on guys," she said. "Let's just do it," and moved to push Lynn and Vicky back outside.

But Vicky had crouched to raise a floorboard.

"What's this?" she said, reaching to lift something into the light. It flew from her fingers, and she was screaming.

"Right," Cheryl said, shoving her. "Everybody out. Just get me the gasoline."

*

Once I did consider getting married. But I couldn't think how to start things rolling. We skated on the river in those days. "Hey, let's go skate, Mary" (or Beth, or whatever) stayed stuck on my tongue all one winter there. I never ice-skated in my life. Still haven't. One time my mother said to me, "If a woman is good enough for intercourse, she is good enough for marriage." That's pretty true I guess. Doris Cooney? She was nice all right, even if she did have that tongue. Some people used to take her for the resemblance of my mother. Her height and everything was different, though maybe she had resemblance in the cheekbones. But my mother sure never talked like that one.

*

On a cool April night, seventeen months before the Snider house burned, a Ford pickup splashed across a bare-earth parking lot to nose against a low windowless building alongside a Dodge sedan with its headlights burning amber. In neon lasso by the door of the building was the name *Countryman Restaurant and Lounge.* The sky was black with moving cloud, but down below the night was as dank and still as a basement. Everywhere except near the highway, where the diesel vapours drifted and eddied, and by the ventilation fan at the back of the building where two ten-year-old girls had dropped their bicycles and pressed their mouths against the mesh to get drunk on the fumes, the air had the perfume on it of wet balsam.

Inside the lounge an obese man named Orest Thoms presided over the one occupied table. He sat tipped complacently toward a smaller, crew-cut version of himself. This was his nephew Sy. Sy was hunched on the edge of his chair with his hands on his knees and with his elbows pivoted forward in a way suggesting that at any moment he would jump up and rush out. The third man, Albert Fennick, was gaunt and hollow-eyed. At those junctures Albert might be felt called upon to speak or laugh; he would cough instead down into his windbreaker.

The door opened, and the owner of the Ford pickup entered. Gordon Snider was a fox-faced man with a cast to his right eye that gave him an appearance of oblique private scrutiny. He was wearing a John Deere cap, a yellow plaid shirt buttoned to the neck, high-cut olive-green workpants, and running shoes. He nodded to the waitress who stood by the cash.

"Hey Snider," Thoms called. "Are you going to be sociable and hear some intelligent comment on what's been going on around here lately or sit by yourself and learn nothing?"

"The only thing I'll learn from you, Thoms," said Gordon Snider as he walked past Thoms' table, "is how to be a fool."

Thoms made I-told-you-so eyes for the others. "Just being friendly, Gordon."

Snider did not reply. He sat down at a table by himself, his back to the others. When the waitress came over he said,

"Little bit on the damp side."

"Almost prefer more snow than this piss," she replied.

"I'll have the hot turkey on white, mashed potatoes with a large Coke. No ice in the Coke."

*

There is a common streak to most women that my mother did not approve. I do not mind it so much myself, except that I wonder if their own thinking is there, or are they just trying to be like the rest. My standards got set too high maybe. It was a curse and an honour to know her. My mother was so intelligent you could never exactly tell what she meant. I know I got my brains from always trying to figure that one out.

*

The same morning a check-out girl found Snider's friend Little Jimmy stuffed in the shopping cart in the A & P lot, Doris Cooney went missing without a trace except some blood on the floors and walls. That night the Chief still wasn't back from holiday, so you drove out to Snider's place on your own. It was one of those black Spring nights. He wasn't there and you didn't go in, but coming back into town you spotted his pickup outside the Countryman.

Snider's neighbour he had the feud going with, Orest Thoms, was there with his nephew Sy and Sick Albert Fennick. Snider's latest grievance against Thoms was that Thoms was paying somebody that Snider also had a grievance against to take his hay off. Snider was sitting with his back to Orest's table as if Orest did not exist, arranging golf tees in one of those little wooden triangles while he ate.

You sat down across from Snider and said, "Gordon, I have to take a drive over to your place."

"Have to, eh McIntyre? Then I guess you better go ahead. But you won't find what you're looking for."

"I'd like you to come with me."

"You can see I'm eating. You go along. I'll wait right here."

"Give me your keys. Truck keys too."

He placed them on the table, watching you.

"You're just a dumb lunk, McIntyre," he said as you stood up. "You don't know what you're in for."

"Don't threaten me, Snider."

It wasn't a threat.

*

I always was one to know. Now you see it now you don't. If a person can't understand how a thing works how can he know what it is? Life isn't pictures on a wall however sometimes it might seem. A person has to walk in and wade around. Get their hands dirty if that is what it takes. Otherwise they might as well be asleep like everybody else. One day some people look around, say Pinch Me, and want to know.

*

When you got back to the lounge you were still shaking. In the parking lot you threw up again, to the amazement of a couple of girls standing with their bicycles.

Snider was inside, as promised, drinking coffee, playing the golf tee game. Orest, Sy, and Sick Albert were also still there, waiting to see what was going on.

You sat down across from Snider, as before.

He watched you, amused by your condition.

"Put your hands on the table," you said.

He placed both fists flat on the table, wrists together. Small hands. He smiled. "Pretty bad, was it?"

You could hardly get the handcuffs on him for shaking. The others were watching closely.

Suddenly Snider shouted, *"Thoms!"*

You jumped, everybody jumped.

"You talking to me, Gordon?" Orest said.

"You didn't leave your lights on, did you, Thoms?"

"Shut up, Snider!" you said.

"Don't think so, Gordon," Thoms said. "Did I?"

"Maybe you did."

"If so, thanks a lot for telling me right away."

Thomas was feeling for his keys.

"Let's go," you said.

"Maybe you should turn them off," Snider told Thoms as he stood up. "If you can find your keys, that is."

"Awful thoughtful of you, Gordon—" Thoms stopped patting his pockets. "Hey Gordon. What's those pretty bracelets Doug's put on you there?"

"Maybe you locked them inside the car."

Thoms was back checking his jacket pockets while watching the handcuffs as you walked Snider towards the door. You were almost abreast of Thoms when Snider's fists flicked up and something slapped hard into Thoms' chest and dropped to the floor. A set of car keys.

When Orest stooped for them, Snider made a kick at his face. You grabbed a handful of shirt and carried him straight out to the cruiser and threw him into the back. He was light as a cat.

Outside, on the edge of the parking lot, when they saw who it was, the two young girls laid down their bikes and stood with their arms around each other's necks. In the rearview Gordon Snider twisted in his seat to give those girls a fierce, happy smile. It was still fading when he turned back around, the radiance of his pleasure.

*

As I told them over and over, my girls all come from elsewheres. The Cooney woman was pure accident, a stroke of bad fortune. Something ordained to happen. The time comes it comes. There was no intention. It puzzles me. Even now it seems like a dream, impossible. No, anybody did it, that was somebody else. I definitely didn't, that I know of. Drifters would be my guess.

*

The night before Doug McIntyre arrested Gordon Snider, Gordon and his friend Little Jimmy were out in Snider's Ford pickup driving west out of town. This was the first time since October Snider had fetched Jimmy from Mrs. Afelski's and taken him home for a meal. But tonight Jimmy had not been himself. Instead of eating his stew he laid his arms on the table and rested his head now on one elbow and now on the other, sighing and yawning. When Snider, who as usual had promised Mrs. Afelski to have Jimmy back by eleven and was conscious of the work that lay before them, asked what the matter was, Jimmy would only say that he was not hungry. In three years Jimmy had never not been hungry for one of Gordon Snider's meals. Finished his own, chewing gum, Snider sat tipped back in his chair watching Jimmy poke at his food.

Later, out in the truck, Jimmy whispered. "'S too cold, Gordon."

"No bugs yet," Snider replied. "Ground's fresh-broke as well."

On arrival Jimmy refused to get out of the truck. Snider had to haul him out and press his fingers around the shovel.

"They get whole carloads of snivellers in here, Jimmy," he told him. "Make a difference."

At the site Jimmy stood and gazed at the gravestone. "What's her

name?" he asked finally, wiping his eyes.

"Fobbs."

There was a pause.

"Mary-Ellen!" Jimmy cried, in a kind of anguish. "Mary-Ellen *Fobbs!* She worked at the Roxy!"

"That was another one. This one here was a whore out at the Fifth Wheel. Cancer victim."

Jimmy kept shaking his head.

"Jimmy, do you realize how many she-Fobbses they have in this township?"

"Gordon, it's *her!*"

Snider repositioned his cap on his head. "Jimmy, am I your best friend or what?"

Jimmy was sobbing. "You can't if you're not Jesus Christ Our Lord and Saviour in Heaven!"

"Can't what?"

Jimmy did not reply.

Snider put an arm around his shoulder. He whispered in his ear. "You been talking to that new minister, Jimmy?"

The shovel fell from Jimmy's hand.

"Pick it up."

"Don't have to, Gordon. You're my best friend on the face of the earth, but Jesus is my Lord and Saviour in Heaven!"

Jimmy turned and started back to the truck.

Snider used the shovel he held in his own hands to hit Jimmy across the back of the head. He knelt at Jimmy's ear.

"And here I bought you new runners."

Jimmy moaned.

Snider dragged Jimmy to the truck and propped him in the passenger's seat. The shovels he had to go back for.

*

The thing about salvage—its time is after. Real life happens right now or it doesn't happen. In real life there is a person behind those eyes a man had better face with all the brains he's got because if he fails to, you better be careful. Hurricanes and ruby shoes is one thing. Taking them live is another.

*

Little Jimmy stirred when Snider pulled up in front of Cooney's General Store.

"Wha—?" Jimmy said as Snider got his rifle from the rack behind the seat.

"Almost there. Wait in the truck."

Doris Cooney came through a curtained doorway behind a long counter that ran the length of her store. She was a tall woman with painful hips that caused her to walk with a rolling, nautical motion. When she saw Snider she stopped to consider him the way she might have considered a drunk.

Snider nodded affably and wandered down a far aisle studying buns and sugar loaves. When he reached the end he looked up and saw her watching him in a convex mirror. He must have known that she could see the rifle, which he held in close to the right side of his body, because he came around the display rack with the barrel in his fist and leaned the weapon against the counter in front of her saying,

"Don't need this to shop, I guess."

"Early for bear," Mrs. Cooney said.

"Is that right."

Mrs. Cooney did not reply.

"Little bit on the cool side though," Snider said.

"What are you doing in here?"

"Any bandages?"

Snider touched his palms lightly against the edge of the counter.

Mrs. Cooney shook her head.

"Bandaids?"

"No."

Snider ran his fingers along the edge of the cash register, admiring the old machine.

"Sure like to get my hands on one of these beauties some day. How's about eye-oh-dine?"

"Go to the drugstore."

"Peroxide?"

"You got exactly ten minutes."

"For what."

Snider's eyes indicated the cash register.

"How does this work. Pretty complicated, I guess."

"Drugstore closes in ten minutes, as you well know."

Snider nodded. His eyes went to the curtains she had come through.

"The thing is, Doris, this is a first aid emergency—"

"Why?" Mrs. Cooney was interested. "What's happened?"

"My pet bear just got hit by a lad with a shovel."

"Bear?"

"Kind of shaggy? Walks on all fours?"

Mrs. Cooney's eyes were grey and cold.

Snider had been scratching at the back of his head, pushing his cap forward until the peak was all the way over his eyes. Now he pushed it high on his head and said, "Come on, Doris. Let's have a look."

"I don't keep bandages."

"You should."

Snider gripped the edge of the counter tightly, let go.

"You know," he said and grew thoughtful. "I go into a store and a woman comes out from someplace—I don't know what it is—I just have to find out how she's got it all arranged back in there. Little Barry the Bear can bleed to death all over my truck for what you or me care, Doris. I just want to crawl into your medicine chest and take a poke around."

"Get out of my store."

Snider seemed to consider this. Then he said, "I am driving along with Barry. He's my bear. Blood everywhere. Damn kids and their shovels. We see this here big brick house. Store. Whatever it is. I see it. Too much of the plasma ratazzma in Barry's eyes to see a damn thing. And this house here has this store sort of on the front but also sort of on the inside. And out of deeper inside this store comes a woman. Name? Doris Cooney. I know that, I knew it all my life, but who exactly is Doris Cooney?"

"Stop this right now. If your—"

"*Mother,* Doris? Are you going to start to talk about my mother? Go ahead. She talked enough about you. In fact she told me just about everything, and it was a very complicated story, Doris, you've had such a complicated life, but she didn't tell me the answer to one question:" —here Snider reached out as if to finger the material of Mrs. Cooney's sleeve— "What exactly is it like inside this here sensible old nylon dress?"

"Get your hands off me?"

Snider nodded sleepily.

"How does it go together, all this here skin and bone."

He reached to touch her flesh, but Mrs. Cooney was out of range, backed to the wall.

Snider picked up the rifle by holding the tip of the barrel between the thumb and forefinger of his left hand. He continued to talk.

"What's it like. That's what I want to know."

Snider held the rifle high. He let it drop and caught it in his right hand.

At the trial Snider insisted he was only fooling, it was an accident. Whatever it was, Snider, "in a kind of a dream," was immediately over the counter to drag the body outside and roll it into the box of the pickup. Next he was back for the cash register, which he empties before he carried it too out to the truck.

As Snider knelt on the seat of the cab to fasten the rifle in its rack, he

said, "Now Jimmy, see what you got me up to with your Jesus Lord and Saviour in Heaven?"

But Jimmy who had a cracked skull and a brain slowly filling up with blood, was slumped against the dash and did not hear.

*

Everybody has a place for salvage, whatever they might say or act like, and they watch over this place from day to day, protect it at any cost maybe. Different salvage might come and go, but it's always the same. A picture in a book or a magazine, a memory with a shine on it, or an actual souvenir of a person, it's a changing dream, that's all. Everywhere you look these days salvage is on display. It's like hair in a locket. Everybody knows this, everybody does it.

*

Jimmy's reluctance to help Gordon Snider had its origin the previous time he had been invited to dinner, four months earlier. On that evening a massive surprise snowstorm not only prevented them from going out but prevented Snider from delivering Jimmy back to Mrs. Afelski's that same night. And so after Snider had given Jimmy his meal and beaten him at checkers, he put him to bed, in a fold-up cot in Snider's own room. When Jimmy complained that he could not sleep without a light, Snider assured him there would be plenty from the snow. But there was no light from the snow, so Jimmy tiptoed to the door and opened it, to see Snider clearing the table from dinner and filling the sink to do the dishes. Jimmy left the door ajar for the light from the kitchen and fell asleep. Sometime later he woke up in darkness afraid. For a long while he listened but heard nothing. He crept to Snider's bed; it was still made. The door to the kitchen had been closed. Cautiously he opened it. The kitchen was dark, but light came from around the edges of the door to the new addition, where Jimmy had never been allowed. He crept across the kitchen to the addition door and looked in.

What Jimmy saw was Gordon Snider sitting naked in a chair, his back turned, leaning over to wrap his legs. As Jimmy watched, Snider went on to wrap his arms. The material was tawny and soft like oiled leather; he was using his teeth to fasten it with string. On the table beside Snider more of the tan stuff was laid out, in the shape of a girdle. When Snider stood to reach for something, half-turning, Jimmy ducked out of sight and hurried back to his cot, where he lay thinking about what he had just seen: Gordon Snider's eyes outlined in black, his lips in red.

After awhile Jimmy was no longer so sure that he had not been dreaming when he saw Gordon Snider looking so much like the devil. Again he listened for the sound of Snider's breathing and heard nothing. Again he crept out of the room and across the kitchen to the addition. This time what he saw was a creature in a black dress and bare feet, with bracelets that jangled. It had smooth tan skin and it prowled stiffly, like an animal awkward in a cage, tossing its shining hair. Sometimes it stopped to peer around into a long mirror at the hem of the dress, and the dress swirled and lifted as it turned.

Back in his bed Jimmy did not know what he had seen, but he knew something that it didn't know: It was not a woman. And when he knew that he understood. Gordon Snider was not Jesus. If Jesus had brought it back it would know what it was.

*

Sometimes a person might even think this whole world's a house of cards of pure salvage. And then there's TV and that's all it is, from start to finish. And everybody knows and nobody talks about it. As if the truth will bring too much down. It's like somebody speaks out about life and people say, What's your beef? As if this was treason. Get on side, mister. Think the good things. But what if some people's salvage has more of the stink of truth to it? What if some people's has been required from Day One to do more duty? What if some people are not satisfied with the usual apportion of knowledge?

*

The front door wasn't locked. You switched on the light, a forty-watt bulb on a wire. The front hall was filled with junk, in boxes and barrels. There were piles of clothes, papers, magazines, books. You could hardly squeeze in. You stumbled through the junk towards a door off the hall to the right. The one across from it had a sheet of greasy plywood nailed over it. What the hell? And so did the door straight ahead, probably to upstairs. The open door on the right led into Snider's own room, maybe eight by ten. There wasn't much light. Your eyes took some time to adjust. Aside from a foot-wide passageway from the bed to the kitchen, it was the same in there. Papers, books, rags, boxes. Junk to the ceiling, almost. A lot of it was old clothes. There was a stack of worn-out overalls four feet high. On the floor by the side of the bed was a pound coffee can filled to the brim with wads of gum. It was like the lair of an animal. A funny smell.

As soon as you saw the first one you saw them everywhere: bones, big raw bones with strips of withered fat and muscle still attached. There was a chair in the corner, made out of bones.

You made your way to the kitchen. It was the same in there. Something—probably seeing such a thing amongst all that junk—made you open a hatbox. Inside was a woman's head. After that it was all women. There was a bag made out of a pair of nylon underpants with half a dozen vulvas in it, one of them painted gold, a red ribbon tied to it, two turning green. Another head in a burlap sack in a cupboard. An apron with nipples stitched in a zero. On the wall, masks made from women's skinned faces, stretched on big crochet hoops. A heart in a saucepan on the stove. An ear ashtray, a cigarette stubbed in it.

In the back room you found the remains of Doris Cooney. He'd slipped a four-inch diameter wooden rod through the tendons at the back of her ankles and hung her upside down, headless, slit open, dressed out like a deer. The head you found in a bag under a mattress. You knew where to look because the back room was unheated, the mattress was steaming. There was an iron clothesrack. On the hangers, slips and dresses and the skins of women's torsos, tanned and oiled, slit down the front, with holes where the arms used to be. String for lacing up.

*

All in all I'm happy enough how things turned out. This place suits me fine. An institution's just a bunch of people doing their job along with the grain and against the odds. Some of these nurses just do what they're told, but some of them are pretty complicated. It's a full-time occupation to understand what is going on inside their heads, and the turnover's good. You get one figured, soon enough there's a new one to start on. It's a good life.

*

One day you call over to the hospital, and the nurse says,

"Gordon Snider? He's right here."

As if he's been waiting by the phone for twenty-five years.

"Would you like to speak to him?"

"No, no. I'll just show up. What's your visiting hours?"

So you show up and you talk to Snider and after that you go and see the head of the place, a guy with the most creased face you ever saw, sloppy grey hair, skin that clay pallor of two packs a day. As he's ushering you out of his office he takes you aside.

"What I'm saying, Mr. McIntyre, it's not that there aren't reasons for

the way he turned out, a logic, his mother, and so forth. I'm not denying it's an interesting case. But I'd want to question very closely indeed anybody who'd try to generalize from it. This is a very disturbed individual, and that's the bottom line. We've got plenty of his type in here, I'm unhappy to say, of both sexes. You understand what I'm getting at? You take my advice, you'll go home and put this whole thing out of your mind."

"I thought I did. It came back."

"People retire, and the past will do that. Especially after an active life like your own. The point is, a man like Snider, you'd be better off rummaging through garbage cans, you know what I'm saying?"

He starts you walking again.

"You play golf, Mr. McIntyre?"

"Not really. I never had the time."

"You have to make time. I play every day I can."

He stops again, and this time there's a hand on your shoulder.

"It's a fine game, McIntyre, a man's game. Precision. Patience. I recommend it."

You're standing at the front doors, and he's sighting through the glass down the softest, greenest, most dew-shining fairway there ever was on this earth. It's the end of the interview. Your hand's been shaken, and you're alone on the steps, and if he's watching you from the other side of the glass you can't see him, but you doubt it. You don't look back again until you reach your car. Then you take one last look up at the building, and you know that Gordon Snider is watching from one of those five hundred windows, but you can't see him either. You can't see anybody.

I Am Stealing Your Life

Peter McGehee

There is a man I watch from my apartment window. He lives on the same floor as I do, opposite building over. He is a skinny man who eats TV dinners, and late at night turns into Mr. Leather. I watch him pose in front of his mirror adjusting his chaps and dog collar necklace. He cruises the alley between our two buildings, then returns with a trick. Sometimes I know the men he catches. Sometimes I've seen them in the Superfresh. At the magazine rack. Thumbing through the latest copy of *Inches.*

I watch the dance of their instant courtship: a couple of hard-ons, a blow job, hand cuffs, maybe a well-condomed fuck. But tonight won't be just any night. And as soon as my neighbor kisses the man, the man grabs my neighbor's throat.

They fight, Struggle. Topple over furniture. Kick. Punch. Slap. My neighbor finally gets away from the man long enough to grab the closest thing he can, a lamp, and whacks him over the head, whacks him hard. The man crumples to the floor. I keep watching. The man doesn't move. My neighbor paces, panicking. Finally, he picks up the phone, has a short conversation, then goes into the bedroom to change into regular clothes.

Six police show up. They take pictures of the body; they take my neighbor's statement. Later, I see the story on the news. I follow it for weeks, in fact, right through my neighbor's acquittal.

His apartment is dark for the longest time. I figure he's gone away. I do not see him again until summer. Then there he is. In the courtyard. Sunbathing in an old pair of gym shorts. A cocker spaniel by his side. A Walkman on his head. And he is reading. He is reading my book.

Roxanne Power Hamilton

Park Slope With a Mind to Walk

Your red sweater sliding off your shoulder, you
spin these dark rap secular seductions.
This is as much an escape, no? As the bottles
that await you down the street. When trouble hits.
Trouble, simple. Like not knowing why
suddenly on the roof you stare over Brooklyn,
eyes hungry with ribfuls of questions.
Trouble. Simple. Feet on the stairwell. Knocks
on the floor. Steps of an unknown somebody wanting
something. Maybe, like you, to know why
down the stairs, down the street, in the bar,
there are men waiting to dance you into corners,
whisper what they would do, lift you blind
into the drumbeat. Til one finds you
fleetfooted inside the joint. Your unwritten desires.
Yes, these: could you but write them down,
to her, the woman at the table hiding sorrow
with her promises of wide-lipped cognac
(which you accept as a matter of course),
unknowing how she will invite him,
man in the corner with the loaded dream,
up to the apartment.

Wound tight as belts around the sun,
tonight she will not see the Northern Lights.
She will not undress you but wonder
in passing before she falls how she
will escape this. Visible barter.
His coat flung, an empty tent, on the floor.
Deflated off untouched shoulders
in its green pool. This could never be
an equal exchange. Just displacement. For her hands
rocking on your shoulders is what you've wanted

all along. Her lightning tongue, flickers, stars
falling into rivers underground
bearing fruit among the hard
plain roots of winter.

Kim Morrissey

from Poems For Men Who Dream of Lolita

for you there is only
the pushing down of a head
or a hand on your cock

the caress as you pull the hair back
from a face for the view

you make love without speaking
hold my hands from your lips
turn your shoulder away

when you turn from one girl to the next
you have no time for words
no memory of change

and yes, I agree
this is not seductive
this stripping naked
under the fleshy eyes of a man
who sees two arms two legs
two eyelids pressed down
two elbows bent over breasts
pale skin green in the light

this is not erotic
and you are obscene
as you sit, fully clothed
saying no

today you will tell me again
how ugly I am, your eyes
skimming over my breasts
to the bedclothes beyond
your flesh slapping hard
as you press my knees wide

today you will turn
back to back
reaching down from the bed
searching for the cigarette
we both know isn't there

you will leave without speaking
and then stand at the door
lighting your smoke with one motion
caressing the air

your words click over my body
quick as a cock's ruby beak
searching for scraps:
a finger, a toe-nail, an eye
it is best not to move

you strip skin with each line
and peck deeper, your smile
tilted and cocked, watching
my blood form on paper
drawing words from the bone

Al Purdy

Lovers

All those others
Pyramus and Thisbe cooing and billing
and I've forgotten the date when
their dust was somewhat more lively
of course Paris and Helen
but I'll get to them later
Hero and Leander—the latter
swimming a considerable body of water
to ease the itch
all men and women seem to have
or most do
—then we come to a sportive pair
whose names I can't remember
some time in the Middle Ages
she married but
in love with another guy
(maybe in *Beowulf?*)
anyway they slept in beds
on opposite sides of the room
flour sifted on the floor between
to keep track of boy and girl
shenanigans if any
but the athletic lover somehow
leaped across the telltale flour
(tough too—with all the armor
those guys wore
—maybe even in bed?)
Paris and Helen now:
see them on the antique Attic shore
before it got that way
and he to she and he to she:
"will you won't you will you won't you"
et cetera
(and just what the hell do you
think they were talking about?)
—and say at this point in time

they can't help us none
they're all dead
Class Dismissed

Reach down your hand
to guide me home
lift up your eyes
that we may voyage on together
—as time plays its little tricks
somersaults
leapfrogs
and we return to the antique shore
of all those others
bridged for god's sake
by the ritual exchange
of a few drops of fluid between us
a matter of pipes and opening valves
with exaggerated importance
—and a prolonged shudder
in which the hard core
of ourselves melts
there is a great silence
and such tenderness
My dear my dear
depend on this
for there is nothing else
the world remains outside
a clock ticks somewhere
quite irrelevantly
and we lie making maps
tracing the route
of where we have been
and making plans
to return there soon
your hand in my hand
your head upon my shoulder
we lie in this rumpled earth-place
lost in each other
transfixed and flummoxed and soon to die

teach me
what one can never learn alone
the dance of life
teach me
my love
teach me to be human

The Blue Hour

Elizabeth Graver

The pretty little night nurse Juanita takes all the get well cards, punches holes in them and strings them on a ribbon around the room. They flap whenever somebody comes in. The day nurse has no time for anything, all business and scrubbed, efficient hands. Juanita has a baby, six months old, and she shows me his picture shyly, cups it in the palm of her hand where I cannot see it, then slowly, ceremoniously turns her wrist. There: her son, framed by her fingers, fat and brown in his starched and ironed clothes. At night, though it is against regulations, she opens my window halfway to let in air. Then the cards touch covers in the breeze like a row of lightly clapping hands. People I hardly remember are sending me those cards: *Best Wishes, Heard You Were Under the Weather, May You Be Up and Around.*

"You have many friends, no?" Juanita says.

"I guess so," I say, though I am not sure at this point, for I have hardly any visitors, just this growing strip of cards.

Once in a story I heard somewhere, an old woman took some of her husband's ashes and put them in an egg timer, saying that he might as well do some work now that he was dead, having been a lazy oaf his whole life. I tell Juanita while she sponges me, and she says not to talk of such things, to be cheerful.

"I am cheerful," I say. "It's a funny story."

"One, two, three turn," says Juanita, and she flips me over as easily as if I were a baby and begins to clean my back.

I am not dying. This is what they tell me: "You're a strong and resilient lady, Mrs. Haven, and with a little rest you'll be out of here in no time." They are making two mistakes—first, I am no longer a Mrs., and second, I am nearing my seventy-seventh birthday and though it is true I do not feel as if I am dying, I cannot quite imagine what other event might be taking place. My symptoms, I am almost embarrassed to admit, are nearly pleasurable; I feel small, continual palpitations in my chest, legs and arms, as if a crew of gentle carpenters were tapping with rubber hammers on my bones. Also, I cannot get up. My legs buckle under me and the world spins black and gold before my eyes, but it is a giddy spin-

ning and I quite enjoy it, so that sometimes I raise myself up halfway just to get the beginning of the spin. The doctors say it is circulatory and heart trouble coupled with depression and exhaustion. They ask me if I live alone. I do not mind the hospital, not at night when Juanita is there. During the day I mind it terribly, and become, for the profit of the day nurse, a wretched, crotchety old hag.

Here is Juanita when she comes to work: a small girl, twenty-five last June, and she wears a coat passed down from her sister, black with a red collar and a Christmas brooch on the lapel. She always stops in my room first before she passes on to the nurses' station to leave her coat and purse. She would like to wear red fingernail polish, but the nurses are told not to be showy, so Juanita sneaks by with a pale coral. Her mother, she tells me when I ask, is Puerto Rican; her father is from New York. She has a tiny accent which gives curves to her words, but she has named her baby Robert James and has no interest in cultivating ethnicity. Her husband works as a postman, not an easy job, she tells me—such pressure to move fast, and he has scars on his hands and legs from attacks by neighborhood dogs. Around her neck she wears a small gold crucifix and a green jade heart.

"I have another story for you," I tell her, and she wags her finger and says, "Tell me happy, only happy stories, or you'll make me cry."

So I tell her about the time, as a young woman ushering at the theater, I found a pearl and gold bracelet wedged in the crack of a velvet seat. I turned the bracelet in at the box office and in three months nobody had claimed it, so I took it home.

"Yes?" she says, her hands busy dropping pills into paper cups.

"I wore it," I tell her, "for three years. It was a beautiful—it is a beautiful bracelet. But every time I wore it I expected someone to come running up to me and tell me it was theirs. I was nervous all the time, pulling down my cuff. You can't imagine."

"You could have left it home," she says sanely. She places the paper cups on a tray before me, and I begin to swallow between sentences, the blue and amber pills vanishing one by one.

"Anyway, one day it really happened. I was walking up an aisle in the market, buying vegetables, and a young woman ran up, grabbed my wrist and said, 'Excuse me, but I think that's my bracelet you're wearing.'"

"It was hers!" says Juanita

"She said it was hers, and I believed her—why wouldn't I believe her? Only you know what?"

She shakes her head almost imperceptibly, and when I wait for more of a reaction, shakes it harder until the red hoops in her ears begin to sway.

"It wasn't hers and never had been. She was trying to pick me up."

"My God," says Juanita, her hand flying to her mouth to suppress a giggle.

"But I didn't know, and so you know what I did—I gave her the bracelet, and then, as a reward for my finding it, she took me out to dinner."

Juanita is perched on my bed, leaning toward me. Her eyes dart to her watch, and she draws in her breath and straightens up.

"I have to go to 109, to Mr. Feldman," she says. "Tell me quick. How did the lady know it was lost? She must—"

"Wait—I'm getting there. So she took me to a very fancy French restaurant, and halfway through dinner she told me it wasn't her bracelet."

"Then you could keep it."

"No, I gave it to her."

She makes a tsk sound. "Oh, I would like to see it."

"You would, would you?" I say. I have been storing this up all week. "Charlotte died last year, and left the bracelet to me. I want to give it to you for being so kind to me in my last days. Charlotte would approve."

Juanita takes hold of my pale, blue-roped hands, presses them between her smaller brown ones.

"I—I mean, thank you but—"

I squeeze her hand. "It's what I want."

She strokes my hair, starts to say that I'm getting so much stronger and shouldn't talk that way, but I interrupt, unable to stand the thought of her fingers encountering my greasy hair.

"Don't, dear, it's not clean. They haven't let me have a shampoo in three days. Chills, they say. Really they don't want to waste the shampoo."

Sometimes I grow so tired of apologizing for the body. I am no longer a pretty woman. Once—if she could have seen me then—I was something to look at, almost six feet tall with a straight back, long fingers and thick, chestnut hair which curled up around my face in the heat. Some schoolteachers have to struggle to gain authority in the classroom, but my pupils seemed to have no concept of mischief, or perhaps I frightened them, though I never once raised my voice. At school, teaching French, I wore my hair pinned up behind me, but at night when I ushered at the theater or played tennis in the park, I let it down. For sixty years I washed my hair every day with a mild camomile rinse. Juanita's hair has a blue sheen like a blackbird's wing, each strand as thick and strong as upholstery thread. By looking at a person's hair and fingernails, you can tell the quality of their bones. I tell her I think of her as a daughter, which is true some days, and she tilts her head and gives me a funny look.

Juanita does not know that I am leaving her not just the bracelet, but my entire fortune, which, though not enormous, is surely larger than

anything she has ever known. There is the inheritance from my grandfather, my savings from over the years, and the money which will come when my apartment and possessions are sold off. Left to the night nurse. It would infuriate my mother, who believed in keeping things in the family, but there is no one I can think of as more appropriate, Charlotte gone now, and the faces of all the people I have known over the years dissolved into one amorphous face—male or female, young or old, I cannot tell. Perhaps this is what I am losing, for they do say that at my age you are supposed to lose something—your teeth, your bladder control, your mind. I have not lost any of these things, but still somehow I seem to be losing track of the people I have known. Often during the day I feel more like an animal than a person, almost entirely self-possessed. I know I must remember to call a lawyer, change my will, but each day everything recedes except the drummings of my body, the bulky shapes of the room, my voice registering its automatic complaints to the stout day nurse.

And then at eleven each evening, Juanita, and I watch the black hands of my watch tense up as they near the symmetrical 11, and I cock my ear and learn to separate her footsteps from the other noises in the hall. As if I were eighteen, not over seventy. As if the world had shrunk to the size of a room and all human presence become contained in the clever body of this girl. At my age, falling in love seems out of the question, but I exhibit all the silly symptoms, down to the palpitations of the heart. Or perhaps one can convince oneself of anything, given the need. Getting better frightens me, for I am not sure what I would use to plump out my hours, back home surrounded by my stacks of books and extensive collection of herbal teas. I manufacture complaints, a few each day. "I'm dying," I tell the day nurse and doctors, and because I have plenty of money and really cannot get up, they have little choice but to contradict me firmly and let me stay.

Another night Juanita asks if I was ever married. I tell her yes, that it was nothing, and she wrinkles her nose.

"Nothing," she says, "how nothing?"

"He was a big newspaper reporter. He travelled a lot. We got divorced."

"You couldn't go with him travelling?"

I shake my head.

"Because of the children." She states it, leaves no room for argument.

"No children. We didn't get along. I had my job in the city."

"Why, then, did you marry him?" I am afraid she considers me wise and is looking to me for answers. Sometimes when she thinks I am sleeping, she lets down her guard and sits staring off into space or drumming her hands aggressively on her white-stockinged knees. Then I doubt her

happiness, with Robert James, with her husband the postman. She toys with the crucifix around her neck or stands in front of the mirror and sneers at herself. She looks years younger, then, a petulant child. Often she scrapes off her fingernail polish with her teeth and reapplies it with a small soft brush, spreading out her fingers and blowing hard until the polish dries.

"A mistake," I say, and Juanita runs her hand on the edge of the dresser, checking for dust. She turns away from me to look out the window.

"And no children," she repeats.

"What, does that seem a tragedy to you? It's no tragedy. I wouldn't have wanted to bring a child into that marriage."

She shrugs, gazing at something outside, and I almost tell her how, in the smallest, most buried way, in a way I had almost forgotten, she is right—I would have been a fine mother, I have a way with children. They like me because I don't talk to them as if they were furry and stuffed. She might have come to visit me in the hospital, my daughter, grown now, tall and level-headed, brown-haired. She might have brought me books. From the beginning, I would have taught her to read good literature, not junk like the pink and gold romances Juanita reads. You need to start early with an education, in the home. Juanita is not stupid, but she is happy reading trash, doesn't know the difference. It's not her fault, not her mother's fault, but my daughter would have been different.

Down beneath the sheets, somewhere in my womb, I feel a pain now—or hardly a pain, but a brief, forgotten cramping like that of my ancient periods, a fist expanding, a fist contracting.

"Aie," I say, but when Juanita turns, I tell her it is nothing, I am fine. I have learned that the individual parts of my body hurt most when I concentrate on them. As my thoughts leave my womb and travel up to my hands, my fingernails tingle and ache. As my thoughts leave my hands and climb to the roots of my hair, I feel each hair clinging to my dry skull like a determined weed. I tug, just a bit, and my hair comes away like gentle cobwebs in my hand.

I ask to see Juanita's wrist, to check it for size, and she perches next to me and places her arm on the covers like a gift. The bracelet will swim on her small brown wrist; we will have to get it altered. When I tell her so, she becomes gruff and hurried and says she is not accepting any bracelet. Right now, she says, she is going next door; I should get some sleep.

"Yes," I agree, but I close my fingers around her wrist, and for a long moment we sit there in silence, she and I, her quick pulse beating against my thumb.

"When do you have your nights off this week?" I ask her, then, and release her wrist.

"Tomorrow and Sunday," she says. I grab hold of her again.

"Tomorrow? Why didn't you tell me? Would you drop in and say hello to me? You know how much I miss you."

One day a few weeks ago, she left her purse in her locker, came in on her night off to pick it up. Now I pray for her forgetfulness. Leave your umbrella, I think. Leave your knitting, your muffler, your housekeys. It is not easy to think of things important enough to make her come back.

"We're going to my mother's," she says. "We take the train. It's not a short ride."

"You could stop on the way. I'll give you money for a cab. It must be impossible on that crowded train with a little baby."

"I'll be back on Thursday," she says.

"Thursday night, almost Friday."

"Yes, but still Thursday."

"You don't know how the other nurse turns me—like I was a log. If you could stop by on Wedne—"

"But I'll be with my mother."

"No, but on the—"

She cuts me off, makes her voice artificially bright, the tone she must have learned in nursing school.

"So on Thursday night, I'll see you again. I'll miss you, too. You tell the doctor if the nurse turns you hard, okay? They have girls who are better than me at that. I'm not so good."

"I'll wait up for you," I tell her. "I won't be sleeping when you get here."

She laughs. "You, sleeping? I'll never see it. You are a night owl."

She kisses my forehead and leaves.

It is true, most others sleep at night. It is why I have so much time with her; up and down the halls the others sleep hitched to respirators, or with a leg in traction, or breathing through one overworked lung. Juanita tends to these people, but it is a silent tending, and brief. They want nothing more, at night, than to be left alone. But I sleep during the day nurse's shift, or pretend to sleep, for I seem to need so little rest these days, as if the carpenters inside me cannot find it in themselves to stop tapping at my bones. Juanita used to read her romance novels at the nurse's station, but now she stays in my room and knits pale blue articles of clothing for Robert James. Hers is not a hard job, as nurses' jobs go, though the hours put a strain on her marriage; she has been working nights for the past few months and her husband is not pleased.

"Why don't you work days?" I ask her Thursday night, and she says something about saving money on day-care, and how when they are home for long periods together, they don't get along so well, the house too small. In her voice is something else, a tautness. Her fingers dart among the yarn, and she refuses to look up.

My revelation is swift and simple: Juanita stays working nights because of me.

Sometimes these things happen. Usually the timing is off, by a generation, by two or three. Usually nobody understands that anything could have been different. People get matched up with their next door neighbor, or their aunt's best friend's son, or the postman, and if they are not exactly overjoyed, they nonetheless have companionship and a body next to them at night. Most people assume, as they must, that this is enough, and treat their leftover yearnings—for the postman's sister, for the window cleaner, for a vague, luminous presence they have never seen but know must exist—as a kind of recurrent itch which will sink back into the skin for a while if only they can keep from scratching it.

But sometimes, through a hitch in the mechanism, people stumble upon each other, though the circumstances do not match at all. It happened with Charlotte and one of the guest teachers at the dance school. The Madame was old, gray and pitiful in her leotard, moving like a remnant of herself, but Charlotte came home that day with glazed eyes and broke down crying at the dinner table, saying she thought she had to leave me. The Madame was married, ill, long past her prime. They had talked about dance for hours; she had massaged Charlotte's temples with her knotty hands. Charlotte didn't leave me, couldn't abandon me for a shadow, though we both knew the two of us were operating over a gap that would never fill itself in, despite all the years. She should have been my sister, Charlotte. I loved her enormously from the minute she ran up to me in the grocery store, but she and the dance teacher were something else altogether. Or perhaps it is simply that we place our foolish hopes in the things we know we cannot have.

Juanita brings me small gifts, mostly snapshots of her son and herself; she has discovered the self-timer on her camera and taken roll upon roll of the two of them posed formally on the couch, staring the camera in the eye. Robert James wears something different in each photo, small changes—a baseball hat, blue booties, an embroidered bib. I can picture her dressing and undressing him like a doll. She does not bring me shots of her husband. We tack the photos to the bulletin board provided in every room, where most patients hang pictures of their families. The doctors don't give the board a second glance.

I teach her things—*bonsoir* and *à bientot,* which she rolls into the Spanish when she repeats after me. I teach her about what the French call *l'heure bleue,* the blue hour, how it's not an hour but a second, really, a hinge—that slivered moment when night is over, but day not yet begun. I want to show it to her out the window, point out the light so poorly described by the color blue, but the streetlamps in the parking lot stay on all night, and the sky is impossible to read in such a glare.

Perhaps she is planning something. I can almost read it into her smile, the way she starts to grin when she sees me, then pulls the corners of her mouth down into something more restrained. She asks me questions about my favorite foods and how my apartment is decorated. If only she would take me home. There, she might put the baby on the bed with me and I might hold him, sing to him, change him from one elaborate outfit to the next. She would not have to work if she would rather stay at home, for money would not be a problem. I could read to her from books, expand her horizons, gossip with her about the neighbors she has already told me so much about. She is having trouble with her house plants, and I could show her how to clip them back and wipe the leaves down with a sponge. I would arbitrate disputes between Juanita and her husband, arrange time for them to spend together, time for me to spend with her alone, for each day she would shampoo my hair and give me a long, hot bath.

It is not what it sounds like—I am beyond all that, would expect it neither of Juanita nor myself. Not baths like I used to take with Charlotte, when she sponged my back and leaned over me nibbling my skin like a silent, friendly fish, our hands slick and smooth with soap. Juanita is a nurse, and I, an old sickly woman. She would bathe me with little more than the dim recognition of missed opportunity—what we might have been in another place and time. That would be enough, her hands so capable and swift, and beads of water catching on her hair. In such a place, bathed by such hands, I would grow stronger every day, until she could leave the baby with me and go off shopping with her friends.

I tell Juanita about the money I am leaving her. I cannot help it. She has come in frantic with worry—her sister has begun to talk to her about preschools, how only the private ones are any good, how Robert James will never go anywhere in life if he starts out wrong. Robert James, says Juanita, may have something wrong with him. He's too happy; he never cries, just sits and drools and stares. She thinks perhaps he has a learning disability. He'll be crushed in the public schools.

"I'm going to take care of you," I tell her, and she nods dismissively and says her husband wants to have another baby, afraid Robert James will grow up spoiled and lonely. He wants a sister for him, says Juanita, to teach him how to share.

"You won't need to worry about money," I tell her. "Anyway, I could babysit."

Now she is growing impatient; her eyes dart to her watch. She will leave me any minute.

"Thank you, but I can't bring him to the hospital," she says.

"Juanita," I tell her, and something about my tone gets her to listen. "I have a good deal of money, and I don't need it. I'd like to help you out."

She takes a deep breath. "I can't do that."

"I want you to."

"Yes, but I can't."

"If you like," I say, trying to sound as if I just came up with the idea, "maybe I could come to your apartment some mornings and watch him. I'm feeling so much better lately."

She shakes her head and starts to walk away.

"Come here," I say. "Please." My head has begun spinning. I know there must be a thousand ways to convince her, a thousand ways to get her to sit for a few minutes longer, to accept my help, but if I open my mouth I am sure to say something wrong, and then she will go away. I cannot be alone in the room, not at night after waiting all day. I must make her see that or she will go stay with the others, who are sleeping and don't notice her sitting like an angel in the corner or bending over their charts. She turns around and stops several feet from my bed, her hands clasped behind her, her white shoes planted firmly on the ground. I pat on the cover for her to sit, and she backs away a few steps.

"What?" I say to her. "Did I do something? What did I do? Sit and talk to me for a minute."

She bows her head wearily, then perches next to me, her shoulders trembling, and begins to cry.

"Oh, little one," I say, but when I reach out, she slides away, inching further down the bed. "Shush now," I tell her, dropping my hand to the mattress. Exhaustion covers me like an extra blanket. "It'll be okay. He's a smart boy. I can tell from the pictures. He'll be fine."

She wears powdered blush on her cheeks, the tears weaving trails through the pink. I need to tell her how much she means to me, how miraculous it is, at this late date, to have stumbled upon her working here.

"I—" I begin, but she holds out her hand as if to wave my words away.

"Stop," she says, and there is such command in her voice that I obey.

And Juanita sits there, her small face turned away from me, and tells me she's been switched to days, and not on this floor. That's the way it happens, she says, sometimes they just switch you, and she needs Emergency Room experience anyway, which is what she'll get, and they've offered for a small raise.

Did *They* switch you, I want to ask, or did you ask to be switched? Instead I tell her I don't know how I'll manage without her.

She says she is sorry and hopes I will not leave her the bracelet or anything else, because she wouldn't know what to do.

I tell her to please look at me when she talks, and she turns her face toward me, the lines set stubbornly, an unyielding face grown hard already in its shape. She swipes at her cheeks, smudging the blush and erasing the lines of tears. Poor Juanita, already growing old. I look at the face—

such a stranger, so different from the face still glowing in my mind—and find that I, too, am crying. As the tears leave my eyes and begin to travel down my cheeks, her face relaxes and grows young again, swimming in liquid. She stands up when she sees me crying, puts a hand to her mouth and whispers, "Don't."

"I'm an old dying woman, and you have a need to be cruel to me," I hear myself say. It is the sort of self-pitying, overwrought statement I usually reserve for the day nurse, but I am clutching at straws, and what is more frightening is that suddenly it rings true: I am an old dying woman; she has a need to be cruel to me. The hammering in my body grows harder as if it has started sleeting inside my limbs, hailstones pelting the marrow of my bones.

She leans over me, whoever she is, this night nurse, this little Puerto Rican girl with an overdressed baby and a postman husband, and whispers that she is sorry, she never meant to be cruel. She manoeuvers me to a sitting position and holds me there, her cheek pressed up against my cheek.

"Stay, then, would you please?" I ask her, and she says no, she cannot stay, and lowers me down to the pillow. I try to sit, to say please again, but my head lolls like an overblown flower on a flimsy stem.

And then she is gone, and I am alone in the room with the string of cards clapping lightly in the breeze of her departure. For a moment I feel something smoldering in my bones like lit coals, a deep, indignant fury not so much against her as against all of them—the ones I have never met or couldn't have, the ones who spurned me, or loved me too slightly, or turned away from me before the disapproving face of the world. Against my sinking body, too, for its share in the abandonment, and my mind, for somehow allowing a limp version of my old desire to live on. I lift my head, stronger suddenly, and look across the room to the bulletin board, still covered with pictures of Juanita and Robert James. Someone must take them down.

Then everything goes slack in my body, the hammering subsides, and I feel an airy sense of relief that I no longer have anything to look forward to—nights now the same as days, my peevish complaints free to circulate at will, my body free to air its indignities and shed its skin. I think of Charlotte, for it is she, finally, who deserves my thoughts, and of the bracelet and money I will still leave to Juanita; she can use some help, and I can come up with no one else. I think of the old woman watching her husband's ashes flow. Such a small thing he became after a whole life—she could cup him in her palm.

I must have rung, for a nurse appears at my side, not Juanita, not the day nurse, but another woman altogether, her face as bland as hospital

food, her warm consoling voice asking, "Mrs. Haven, what can I do for you?"

"The pictures, there," I whisper. "Could you take them down?" I cannot seem to lift my head to watch her, but I know when she is through because her mouth appears above me saying she has put them in a pile on the nightstand. Someone will find them there and think, perhaps, that they are pictures of my daughter and grandson, though there is no resemblance between us. The nurse must have glanced down and recognized the face, because now she asks if she should return the photos to Juanita. No, I think. No, let them stay with me. So simple, photographs, so cooperative and flat—the beaming little night nurse and her son.

Out of the corner of my eye I see the hands of the new nurse tapping the edges of the photos on the nightstand, aligning them into a neat pile. Then she is gone from the room, the pictures with her, and I realize that I must have told her yes. In such ways we are stripped clean of everything we own. Even my own voice contradicts me, or perhaps I didn't answer and she took the photos anyway, thinking me asleep or close enough.

Dee Evetts

Six Weeks, Two Voices

Still not really knowing
much about the man
in your bed, maybe you decide
that this is not time
for keeping up appearances.
Forget limping quietly to and from
the wardrobe, cane in one hand,
clothes for a weekend in the country
in the other.
We shall find out soon enough.
Lobbed across the room: socks, swimsuit,
tampons, that paperback of short stories.

No longer really sleeping
beneath the soft bombardment
he turns a smile towards the wall.
Perhaps it has come to this:
finally, the possibility of knowing
a woman who reveals herself
as anything but disabled.

Scott Minar

Sausurre's Rain

The one cry language never had, a low hum
through thick fingers holding a woman's breast, the quiet
hiss of skin caroming off linen
and wool. My one
love's wish is to hear these sounds
and be free of meaning
like dogs wandering in circles after nothing
to be recognized.
I wish it too. And watch the rain
trip down a used world. What dotage this faith in words. I hide
in this skin feeling blue and peaceful
when there are storms
to look for, winds rising up in anti-synthetic sequence,

each act of love a cosmos of signs frangible
as the Rosetta Stone.

Jay Ruzesky

Edict #2: Sheep
for Bonnie

Tho you may be weary, let your parents take you on an impossibly straight drive across the prairie to a Ukrainian wedding. Kick your shoes off while the cruise control holds a steady ninety-five and sense your toes floating swiftly twelve inches above asphalt. Know your father well and be prepared for the next gas station because you won't be stopping long. If in transit you see a travelling circus, adore not the elephants, but the petting-zoo sheep; sink your fingers deeply into their wool. Then sleep if you can and dream, later smell lanolin on your fingers. Forget the sequined caps and tassels, the dazzling harnesses—the circus is going the other direction. Stay alert as you cross provincial boundaries and notice how driving east is like plunging under a patch-work blanket. At the celebration stand alone without costume or your own dance and consider where you came from. Do an awkward box-step with your cousin the bride and kiss her cheek the next day before getting into the car. When some oily smell triggers your memory years later, remember how comfortable the elephants seemed on the baked earth, how out of place the sheep, longing for a green field but standing on the prairie half-awake.

Stratís Paschális
Translated from the Greek by Yannis Goumas

Black Shadow

A shadow, one evening,
as the warm October breeze
scattered cigarette ends and leaves,
went through the mart and purlieus
—seedy places—
and onto the seafront
lined with houses and poplars.
Here it walked for a long time over seaweed
along the roadside
and when it reached the landscape's end
thus black and undulating
it stood and said:

"The sea is voices of the drowned.
A woman who years ago left traces
of her walk on a beach
woke up inside me and I feel
that I am meowing harshly in fetid darkness
with her own vocal chords
like a blinded animal troubling
the sleep of the dead who spent
a life of gloom inside their coffins,
leaving each time the cry lingers
an echo. Believing that I am her
observe now my body: breasts belly
hole and womb. In a while the moon will rise
from the depths of a bedroom, made up
like the face of an aged mistress—the dream of Hecate—
a spellbound sea will ripple
with a maiden's barren blood,
casting ashore a rotten reed
(of its own grass or the bone of a dead woman?).
And I shall make out of sand a woman to love
the very flesh that offered without fear

on a wretched bed to a cat-woman
the fruitless pleasure of a dog-lover."

Thus it spoke; and when the moon appeared in full
and slowly climbed the sky
the shadow plunged into the waves.
Next day they couldn't tell if the body they had dragged ashore
belonged to a man or a woman.

Stockholm, September 1989: The Sauna

Anita Roberts

A dozen fourteen year old Swedish girls sit naked and splay-legged around me on the warm wooden benches. I am surrounded by shrieks and giggles. Their breasts, with the palest of nipples, all have a swollen, pouty look. Their bodies seem as firm and rubbery as the dolls I used to get for Christmas and I imagine they would have the same brand new smell. Unlike my dolls they have little down-covered mounds between their legs. I can't look there. It would be a violation. They are so virginal. So powerful. Those pink little lips. Squeaky clean and hiding among the pale damp curls. They whisper precious secrets. They know things. If they were to speak aloud they would shout: *"How dare you!"*

Enfolded in nubile sensuality, I grieve for the loss of my own young body. Then a momentary panic and I think: "I can't possibly go around wearing this!" My naked body feels shabby and desperate like something from the Goodwill.

At once, as if on some secret cue, the bodies begin to tumble off the benches and spill out the door. Their laughter and foreign words come out in bursts and harmonies. They are birds chattering and shrieking. Their hands flap paraplegically, bent at the wrist in a universal adolescent gesture.

Only Freida remains. After a time she speaks to me in Swedish. I am shy—I only speak English. She brightens at this, seems curious. She begins to speak English to me in the most delicate accent, her lips forming around the words with exaggerated precision, as mine would do if I were to imitate a British princess—but each word held longer in the mouth and drawn out enticingly before finally being released. I am enchanted.

Freida is thirteen (twelve days ago). She wears her brand new breasts proudly. From time to time as we speak, she strokes the beads of sweat

down her chest and abdomen in a gesture of such innocence and grace that I am awed.

She announces that she will have five babies. Boys or girls, either would be okay. She is not surprised that I have a twenty-one year old son, although I am only thirty-seven. She says her father was in an accident and must wear a neck brace "perhaps for the rest of his life, but it is no so bad because he is old." How old? "Oh, he is 30." Laughter threatens but my respect is stronger.

In the shower we talk and talk. I find out that, like me, she is terrified of sharks and we have a long talk about that. She was recently in the Canary Islands where she refused to go in past her knees. I completely understand.

She knows how to say "I love you" in English, Norwegian and German. I teach her "Je t'aime" and she is pleased.

We share my shampoo and conditioner because she finds them more interesting than hers, but I don't offer to wash her hair. I know I must not touch her, must not teach her that being touched by strangers is okay. Her vulnerability terrifies me.

She glances from time to time at my pubic hair. I can tell that she has never seen any so black and I imagine it looks strange and exotic to her. I don't know why but I feel pleased by this.

She says, as we are leaving the shower, that she must go soon. She says it is not good to bicycle home in the dark because of the men who open their coats. She says this knowingly but not without fear. Her vulnerability fills me with desperation and rage.

As we are dressing, Freida tells me that she has no friends, that the others are mean to her. There is an uneven number on the swim team and it is always she who is without a partner. Her voice is thin with pain. Her mother, she says, insists that she must not care so much, must try harder. I have said the same helpless thing to my son but I know better now. I say: "It must be hard for you; it must hurt." Her tears brim. "Yes," she says, and as a few tears spill over she smiles. We both smile.

Three of her classmates come in then and look curiously at me. I am new. I am 'English'. I am prestige and Freida is proud of me.

Before we leave I dig in my bag and produce a little salamander brooch which I pin onto Freida's jacket. She looks at it with delight and strokes it, eyes wide, disbelieving. "It is for me? It is sooo lovely!"

I'm the one who received the gift. Freida; bright, open as a sky.

Connie Vivrett

Something That Feels Like Waiting

I have the patience of a snake
swallowing an egg.
I open myself wide
to take what comes.
It usually makes me happy.

My husband says I am soft.
This body is a good place
to grow a child
so I wait.
Women understand the waiting
waiting to become beautiful
waiting for a phone call
waiting for the dust to resettle
so we can wipe it away again.
I understand
that the stir to passion
takes time sometimes
and that the labor pains
must last no time at all
compared to the length of the life.

My patience becomes clear to me
when I think back on the night
my husband noticed my open eyes,
and he stopped his kisses
to rest his head upon my chest.
He said my eyes were distant
as if I were waiting
for a bus in the dark.
I laughed and placed his mouth
where it had been—
I'd be too afraid

to wait for a bus alone
and at night.

Instead, I was thinking of the snake,
imagining how it must feel
to have that swollen egg
moving so slowly through its body
stretching the skin almost to breaking.
I was thinking how good that must feel.

Notes On Contributors

David Axelrod lives in eastern Oregon near Hell's Canyon. His poems appear in *Crab Creek Review, Calapooya, Kentucky Poetry Review, The Malahat Review, and Poetry Northwest.*

Roo Borson's latest book is *Intent, Or The Weight Of The World,* published by McClelland & Stewart. She is currently living in Toronto, where she continues to write poems and essays.

George Bowering's most recent book is a novel, *Harry's Fragment,* from Coach House Press. He is one of the founding editors of *Tish* magazine, and has since published numerous books of fiction and poetry and criticism. He is perhaps best known for his long poems: 'Kerrisdale Elegies' and 'Allophanes'. Currently, he lives in Vancouver, and teaches English at Simon Fraser University.

Su Croll has a Master's degree in Creative Writing from Concordia University. Her most recent work has appeared in *The Antigonish Review, Poetry Canada Review,* and in *The Moosehead Anthology.* She is currently at work on a poetry manuscript about carnivals, twins, dwarfs, goats, and the bearded lady. "the day after goat gloves" and "Katherine Wheel" are from this work in progress.

Dee Evetts was born n England in 1943 and currently lives in New York city. A former teacher of Thai and English, he subsists as a freelance designer/carpenter. His poetry, written over the past 25 years, reflects an obsession as poet, teacher and critic with haiku and related forms.

Carolyn Gammon, Mistress of Arts, Concordia University, has been working for four years to see Lesbian Studies developed as an academic discipline. She would love to get paid for such work, but instead makes her living teaching lesbians and women how to pump iron.

Elizabeth Graver's work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Story, Southern Review, Seventeen, Southwest Review, Street Songs I: New Voices in Fiction,* and *Best Stories from New Writers: 1991.* She lives in Ithaca, New York.

Yannis Goumas is the author of six books of poetry, and has translated widely among contemporary and modern Greek writers. His original work and translations have appeared world-wide, including the *Malahat Review, London Magazine, Poetry Review, Shenandoah, Chelsea,* and *Contemporary Literature in Translation.* His poetry has been translated into five languages including Greek, Italian and Serbo-Crotian. He currently lives in Piraeus, Greece.

Diana Hartog lives in the Slocan Valley and is currently working on manuscripts of both fiction and poetry.

Greg Hollingshead has published stories in many literary magazines and anthologies in Canada and the U.S. His first collection, *Famous Players,* was published by Coach House Press. His second, *White Buick,* is appearing from Oolichan Books in 1991. He has finished a novel and is working on a third collection of stories. He teaches English literature and fiction writing at the University of Alberta. "When She Was Gone" is based on assorted published materials relating to Edward Gein, a Wisconsin Farmer.

Eric Horsting teaches at Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio. He was for several years poetry editor of *The Antioch Review.* His work has appeared in numerous journals.

Peter McGehee's latest book is a novel, *Boys Like Us* (St. Martin's and HarperCollins). He is also the author of two story collections: *Beyond Happiness* and *The I.Q. Zoo.* He lives in Toronto.

Scott Minar is the author of *The Nexus of Rain* (Ohio Review Books). He is the recipient of The Emerson Prize in Poetry from Ohio University, and is currently at work on a new book of poems tentatively titled *When There Are Storms.* He is Assistant Professor of English at Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, Ohio.

James Morrison teaches English and film studies at North Carolina State University. His work has appeared in such journals as *Centennial Review* and *New Orleans Review.* He is currently completing a collection of short stories.

Kim Morrissey's first collection of poetry, *Batoche,* (Coteau Books, 1989) placed third in the 1987 CBC Contest and won the SWG contest (judged by Gwendolyn MacEwen and D. G. Jones). The poems that appear here are from her second collection, *Poems For Men Who Dream of Lolita,* to be published this year by Coteau Books. She currently lives in Toronto.

Stratís Paschális was born in Athens in 1958, but grew up on the island of Lesbos where his family hails from. He is the author of three volumes of verse: *Anaktoria* (1977), *Excavations* (1984) and *Hermaphrodite's Night* (1989). His first book of poems won the Maria Ralli Prize for a first published author. His poems, studies, reviews and translations appear regularly in Greek literary magazines.

Roxanne Power Hamilton is a poet from Colorado currently teaching writing at Cornell University, working with *Epoch* magazine and finishing her book, *Cont (r) act.* Most recent work is in *The Black Warrior Review,* for which she won a 1990 AWP Intro Award. She is also a performer of Feminist theatre and performance poetry.

Al Purdy has arguably had more influence on Canadian Poetry than any other Canadian writer. His book, *Cariboo Horses* (1965), is noted for ushering in the convention of the 'prose lyric'. Recent collections include *Bursting into Song* (1982), *The Stone Bird* (1981), and *Piling Blood* (1984). He currently lives in Ameliasburgh, Ontario.

Anita Roberts lives in Vancouver and teaches sexual assault prevention to high school students. She wrote "The Sauna" while teaching her program in Scandinavian schools in the fall of 1989 and is currently working on a novel about a young girl growing up in a dysfunctional family.

Jay Ruzesky's poetry has appeared most recently in Event, and is forthcoming in *Saturday Night, BOGG, Queens Quarterly* and *Canadian Literature.* He currently lives in Victoria and teaches at Malaspina College in Duncan, B.C. He is a member of the editorial board of the *Malahat Review.*

David Reiter won the 1989 Queensland Premier's Poetry Prize. A book of poems, *The Snow in Us,* was recently published by Five Islands Press. His most recent book, *Voices from the Flood* is now being considered by University of Queensland Press. He currently lives in Queensland, Australia.

Nawal El Saadawi is a well-known Egyptian feminist and novelist, who has been described as "the Simone de Beauvoir of the Arab world." She was trained as a physician, and her first book, *Woman and Sex* (1971) cost her her job as director of education in Egypt's Ministry of Health. In 1981 she was briefly imprisoned for her outspokenness under the rule of Anwar Sadat. Her books have been banned from Egypt, though her work is freely available in Jordan and some other Arab countries. Some of her work has already been translated into English, the best known being the non-fiction *The Hidden Face of Eve* (Zed Books) and *Two Women in One* (Al Saqi Books) appeared in 1985.

Mark Sanders has published poems in the US, Canada, and Great Britain. His most recent chapbook is *The Suicide* (Cummington, 1988), and he is seeking a publisher for his first full-length collection. He teaches composition, literature, creative writing and film at Southwestern Oklahoma University in Weatherford, Oklahoma.

Connie Vivrett is a second year MFA student at Bowling Green State University in Ohio. She has received the Divine Fellowship in Poetry from this institution. This is the first time her work has appeared in PRISM.

Peter Whelan is a British academic whose background includes a Ph.D in English Literature and a B.A. in Arabic. His book on D. H. Lawrence appeared in 1988. He has taught and published essays and reviews on literature, applied linguistics, and translation in the USA, Britain, Spain, and Jordan. He currently teaches at the University of Mútah, Jordan.

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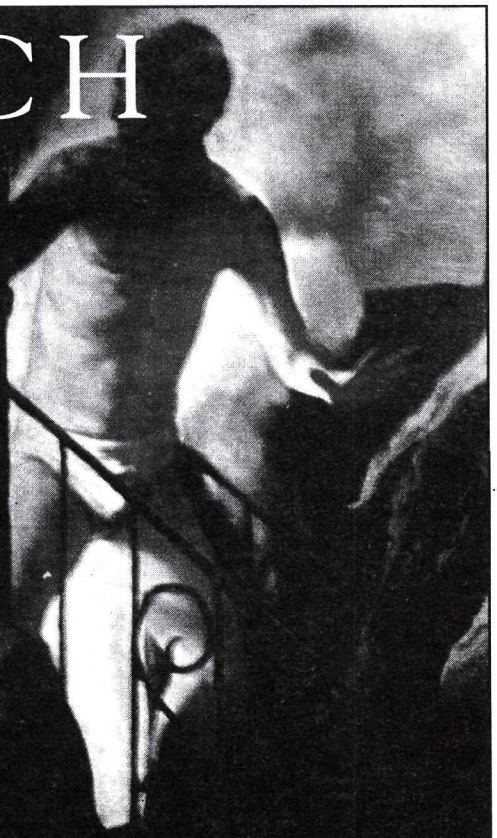

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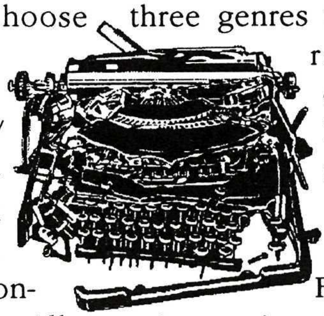

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